we’re nice people...
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This magazine is made possible by funds provided by the Student Association and by the efforts of the students of the State University of New York at Oswego.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

the illustrious staff
all who submitted -- keep up the good work
Mitchell Printing
Leigh Wilson -- for the positive reinforcement
the Funnelle Hall crew (Tom, Joe, Mel, Ed and Chris)
Betsy McTernin -- for forgoing her daily swim to do a little last minute editing

OFFICE: downstairs in Hewitt Union-Room 46
MEETINGS: every Thursday at 6:00pm

WE ARE NOW ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR
--SPRING 1997--

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JULY
by Nancy Taylor

Remember when the woman next door lit fire to her house, and ran naked screaming, two blocks to the police station? She was swinging her baseball bat, hoping for a straight jacket. No more food payments or electric bills. No more Laverne and Shirley reruns.

This is how July has been. You in Death Valley, marching rings around cactuses and scorpions. Me here, picking dimes off the sidewalks, stealing bank pens to write poetry.

Thanks for the dime in your letter.

BECOMING
by John Acerra

The night had a cold cast to it. From this height I had a clear view of the stars above me. There was a chill to the air, and a strange quality that for a while I mistook as a wetness, but it wasn’t. I realize now that the air was heavy; the darkness and the rushing layers of silence made the night leaden.

I was on the highest vantage, Shane was below me on a second building across the way. Cannibal and Jake were on the street. From this distance I could not see them, for we had all donned the Old War night camouflage. I could hear them each breathing, though, as I am sure they could hear me. Each lung full of air was euphoric. Each long line and swirl that made up the pads of my fingers was a worn mountain range.

Looking up, I saw the stars again, braced in constellations I could not name. As I gazed, the pinpoints of cold light began to move, as if reflected off a sliding ocean of black oil. The drug was beginning to work its strange, deep magic again.

The slow convoy announced itself as no more than a whisper. This one would have no human guards, just the animated killing machines with their slow, artificial intelligence. After studying the way they moved, attack patterns and whatnot, we were confident in our superiority. It was up to Cannibal and Jake to destroy their communication links. Shane and I would then break them the easiest way we knew, by sending long jacketed bullets straight through their armored forms from above.

That night went easily enough. We gave the food to the outlanders, who chattered away their appreciations to us in their strange forgotten tongue. The weapons of the Com we spread amongst our various caches.

Coming home with our booty in the dawn in open-mouthed snarls of exhilaration was always a good time. The purple drug sap dried on our jowls and leaked from our eyes like whore-paint. We gave ourselves to methadone and the women of our clan.

I remember a time when I was young.

This was back when my eyes could stand the light of the sun. Green grass and red roses on the path, water shining like white diamonds as it flowed under the canal. The yellow bird my father pointed out to me
as we walked. I remember that moment so clearly; he crouched down to
my height, so lithe for a man his size, and he held me close with one arm
lightly across my shoulders, pointing with the other. His face was rough
with stubble, but it was his smell I remember the best: an old house,
freshly scrubbed clean and dry, with the windows open wide, and the
summer sun pouring in with the breeze against my face. It was a clean
smell, but there were memories in that old house. Memories and knowl­
der edge in that face, and there was love too, a love so strong and so fierce. I
loved him then, too, a feeling that made me giddy with pure joy. That
was the last time I ever felt a sense of joy so overwhelming.

I remember his sometimes, I remember the feeling of his
presence. The line of his nose and his jaw are things I see in the wide­
eyed corpse of my reflection. But that is all. Time has made him a
shadow that my mind will not set light to. My eyes are alien to me, a gift
of a mother I never knew. Dad never talked to her, but I knew that she
was long dead, and I knew that she died giving birth to me.

He died in the war; the years after his death and our fall came
with a tidal wave of chaos. I saw the great cities crumble into disarray as
the civil rebellions grew. The old ones died first, their lungs could not
cope with the dying placed in the air by the Com. The Com was a new
faction, a last stand against an onslaught of turmoil. Com was bad. Com
killed our families. Com was the enslaver of mens' minds. We fought to
kill the Com.

We pirated their convoy shipments of food shipped to the new
republicans who sit fat with sloth on the power thrones built with our
blood. We learned quickly that we could beat them with the killing tools
of the Old War.

The orphans of today had gradually broken into their own
groups of convenience. We govern ourselves. We have no civilization.
There is no money to squabble over. What we have we either found or
stole from the Com.

The women of our clan were like the rest of us, lost, found,
taken in. They did not fight with each other, but there was a sexual
hierarchy that captivated me in its subtlety. Their secret political
agendas, overthrow, and victories over one another were expressed with
the occasional furrowed grimace or snarl.

The Drug made animals of us all.

MODELED AFTER "THIS IS JUST TO SAY" BY
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
by alex deal

I just bought
the dress
the brown silk one
that was on sale
the one
I knew you wanted
to buy
for the dance

Forgive me
it looked so good on
so pretty
and so soft
WINTER MORNING SHOWER
by Kate Elliott

Throw covers back, throw dreams away,
rise from the warmth habitually.

Shiver sweetly from the cold,
curse the night the morning stole.

Softly moan and stretch out arms,
nipples stiffen from the charms
of light caressing by the air:
Lover that won't lie or leave.

Naked feet on naked floor,
give naked body like a whore
to warming streams of liquid life,
to liquid fingers clinging tight.

Slicked back hair and back is slick,
it is through them the cloth is slipped.

Down rounded legs, up rounded breasts,
over rounded face, then rest.

Open mouth and taste metallic drops
of water. Smile and swallow heat.

Push back curtain, take up robe
and shiver sweetly from the cold.
**THE DIFFERENCE**
by Jana Kaplan

the peaceful twilight brings
heaven and nature together
as one.
the sun still shows its face through the wooded brush.
i walk carefully through the muddy grass
as the wind whips through my sweater
softly stinging my skin.
reaching him i stand
contemplate.
the sky is sending clouds across rather quickly as they
disappear behind the lone tree on the green hill
a single brown leaf
dancing
shoved on by the wind
flip flop, and it's off to
another time
another place
he is not here to witness the passing of time
nature surrounds me
the wind
the leaves
the tree on the hill
twilight signifies the end to another day
in some distant time, another age, no one will know
and the passing of time will not make the slightest
difference

to the ignorant
to the oblivious
to the greedy
to the blind.

staring at the white cement i sit with him for awhile observing
the stillness of the moment

**DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL**
by Michelle Carini

Ellie lay there, clutched tightly by her daddy, his fingers
entwined with hers. She was wide awake, unaware of the time,
hoping he would remain still beside her. She could feel his thick
beard scratching her face as he breathed closely into her ear. Ellie's
mind was free from thought, although from time to time fragments
of what had happened drifted past her face. The question she
always asked herself was, "Why." Why couldn't he leave her alone,
sleeping peacefully between her own sheets? "Daddy doesn't like
to be alone," he had whispered to her late one night. "Daddy likes
to be with his little girl -- won't you stay with me tonight?" She
was only eight at the time, barely aware of the things he had
planned for her. It was scary, but nice, as he tucked her in so close
to his body underneath the woolen blanket covering his bed.
"Mommy won't mind," he had said. "Mommy's fast asleep, she
never has to know." Ellie trusted her daddy, even when his hands
betrayed the loving smile on his face.

But last night was different. She had heard voices
downstairs -- happy, loud ones that floated up to her room.
Curious, Ellie had tip-toed silently to the kitchen, where she saw
her mother and father and a strange man she didn't recognize.
They were sitting around the table, loudly discussing grown-up
things.

"Ellie," her mother called out sharply, being the first one to
notice her peering around the doorway. "Go back to bed -- now."
"Hey, it's okay," her father said. "Ellie, there's someone I
want you to meet." He held out his arm and motioned for her to
come closer. Ellie held back, always a little wary of her father's
friends. He motioned to her again, this time more impatiently. She
moved forward slowly, her bare feet tapping softly on the cold
linoleum floor.

"This is Mr. Hassel. He's a very good friend of mine." Mr.
Hassel looked down at Ellie from behind blood-shot eyes. He had
a crooked yellow grin, and Ellie could see that his thin hands were
shaking slightly.

"Hello there, Ellie," he said, nodding his head in her
direction. Ellie couldn't speak; she just stood there, staring into his
sallow face.
Then her gaze shifted over to the table where she saw little clear bags filled with a fine white powder. Her mother was pouring some of it onto a tiny mirror and was moving it around to make thin lines. Ellie moved closer, looking up at Mr. Hassel, who was saying how beautiful her golden hair was.

Her father smiled. "Yes. She's very beautiful. Just like her mother." He glanced at his wife, who was bent over the mirror. She flipped her hair back and wiped at her nose, sniffing slightly. He looked back over at Ellie, gently passed his hand over Ellie's head. Mr. Hassel whispered something to him, something Ellie didn't understand.

"Well Ellie," her father said, "it seems that Mr. Hassel wants to be your friend, too. How does that sound?"

Ellie peered at her father and then at Mr. Hassel. The looks on their faces made her uneasy, and she had a bad feeling about what they meant. Mr. Hassel took her hand in his pressing it tightly.

"Why don't I take you two upstairs, so you can play together," her father said. "Doesn't that sound like fun?"

Ellie shook her head and tried to pull free from Mr. Hassel's grasp. "Oh, no you don't," her father grumbled, catching her by the arm. Mr. Hassel tightened his grip on her and pulled her to the doorway.

"Do as he says."

Ellie pleaded him, saying, "Please don't make me-please!"

But he ignored her, turning away.

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RELIGION
by Alana Smith

Sing those pretty church songs
while little white mice
eat out of the hands of popes
and odd looking men
force bread down your throat
in some foreign attempt
to make you holy
EL CAMELLO SALVA
by Jill Chmelko

my weakened mind festers
within the familiar ache
of smoky remnants.

swirling, gathering,
lingering on my pasty lips,
i welcome the disced fumes.

my slender savior numbs me
into blissful submission
and beautiful denial

carefully creeping into
the flaring remainder
of my weakened mind.

CHANGING PHASES
by Terry Mason

The headlights of the other cars blurred in the streams of water on the windshield; she found it hard to judge their distance or decipher forms. Storms like these were what kept most people home, sitting by a fire and reading a good book. The only literature Mary would be reading today would be the fine print on the backside of her bills. As they rounded the corner near Waldbaum’s supermarket, she began looking at the immense mounds of dirty snow standing in the parking lot, each hill masking five or ten spots that she might have parked in, were she to shop there. But as for now the lot was a mess. The houses on the side streets had lawns that were also decorated with the old white piles, slowly melting under the cold downpour. She looked over at Malcolm, who was staring out the window at the same sights along his side of the road.

“Do you think it’ll snow later, Ma?” he asked.

“I really don’t know, Malcolm,” she said. “I hope it doesn’t because I’ll be the one shoveling, while you and your brother have snowball fights.”

“If it snows, why don’t you come sleigh riding with us?” he said. “Then after Bill will shovel the walkway.” He was smiling widely at her.

“No, I think I’ll pass on that offer, thanks.” she said. “Now hurry up. I want to be back before one-thirty.” She put the car into park and stared straight ahead as he grabbed an armful of papers, closed the door, and began jogging up the block. She leaned her head closer to the windshield to get a better view of the sky. It was a frightening shade of gray, with dangling tubes of nimbostratus zipping over, so low they could have touched the tops of the tangled oaks beside her. The trees, darkened by the ubiquitous torrents of rain, looked like bundles of thorns that formed a ceiling for the flat road, which her and her car were idling on. The sight almost scared her for some reason. Mary switched her gaze to the sidewalk and could see Malcolm at the other end of the block, tossing one of his projectiles that landed on the top step of a customer’s house, and slid over just below their storm door. Nice throw, she thought. Then, almost running, he crossed the street and started back toward her end. Another perfectly dry package went soaring through the air, but unfortunately nailed another customer’s aluminum door.
He looked towards her -- sitting dry and comfortable in her steel fortress -- while he raced with wet sneakers and clothes and flashed her the appropriate smile for overshooting his mark. A wave of guilt suddenly washed over her body, as she sat staring at the bundle of soaking wet wonder that was now leaping over bushes and piles of snow, taking a route of the grass rather than the sidewalk. She saw the last paper leave his right hand, his throwing hand, and deliver itself perfectly, landing on end and testing against number thirty eight's siding, just next to the front door. The kid would make thirty dollars this week, and would be happy with what it could get him. All of these strange things we do for money, she thought, and so few of them bring us the slightest bit of pleasure. I don't have to wallow in self pity just because I don't make enough money, she thought, as she watched Malcolm trotting towards the car. I should get a loan. When the boys get a little older, I can sell the house, and we can move to a place where the taxes aren't so god-damned high. And if it's hard to pay back, it doesn't matter, she thought.

When he climbed back into the car, his cheeks were bright red and his hair was soaked, but those ordinary discomforts were not enough to kill his spirit. "Did you see that one hit the door?" he said, completely out of breath, "I always hit that one for some reason." He laughed as he gazed back towards the house. "Well at least they can't complain about a wet paper." He moved around a bit to get comfortable. "Did you hear it, Ma? Did you hear how loud it was?" he said breathlessly, "I hope they don't call Newsday."

She shook her head and hugged Malcolm as hard as she could without keeping him from breathing. "You know I love you, don't you?" she said, with her mouth pressed firmly against his dark hair.

"Of course I do, Mom," he said, cringing slightly.

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A COOKIE AND A GLASS OF WINE
by Donica L. Ouckama

Is there any man alive in this land of blue and green who is strong enough to pick a flower and bring it home to me can he cut a piece of construction paper and fold it into a simple heart can he write for me a song even if it were no work of art can he dance with me in the rain even if he had two left feet can he walk me home at night even if it was just across the street can he entertain my soul with the laughter in his eyes can he smile when he sees me and make each kiss a small surprise can he bring to me his sadness and know I'd brighten up his day can he bring to me his tears and know I'd wipe them all away can he paint for me a picture even if he didn't know red from green can he travel around the world and tell me everything he's seen can he be honest with his heart and never play a game can he trust me with his mind and know I'd always do the same can he tell me that he loves me even if it was just one time can he make me dinner with a candle even if it's just a cookie and a glass of wine.
The bugs escape in shadows, crawl in hollow corners and yield to light, but wake in my sleep to slither out of hung pictures and rings of dirt in the bathtub. Around circles the bodies falling drunken in drains to wash with hair I brush into the basin. I gaze into the mirror holding a brush, I gaze and brush with thoughts as tangled as hair, hollow and brown as a bug sinking into knots I wash away. The bugs dance and I cannot sleep: the noise of light and sound flash, the circle of thoughts too vivid to keep or kill, the ring of television drowning silence, ringing desperate to be heard, a sound. I gaze into the mirror, let the brush circle the sink and clatter down, making a hollow echo. The noises I make protect my sleep, distracting silence that swallows, washing over the emptiness, the hole, washes over the place you laid into rings of dust, of dissolved dreams put to sleep. I am filthy with matted hair, I gaze into the mirror until my figure hollows, becomes ghostly and haunted, dances, circles.

and separates. I cannot brush the circle of regret falling into the basin. I wash away the bugs and drown down hollow drains of dreams dissolved, I rise from rings of dirt in the bathtub. Around I gaze and drunken fall from drains into sleep.

The noise in water parts, recedes, I sleep. The water in the basin swirls in circles, the thoughts in silence slips from fingers. I gaze in darkness turning to light, I wash the night into day. With the bugs in rings I silently wake from my icy hollow.

The day falls and I sleep, the light washes the dark circle of emptiness in rings. In night I gaze in bug's eyes hollow.
Heaven, Without a Head
by Laura Kate Taylor

A week later, when James returned from the hospital, he found his front lawn had been mowed. James didn’t particularly like the look of a mowed lawn. He had theories about letting things grow, and he preferred his lawn overgrown like his beard. “Either kill it completely or let it run its course,” he would say, “You shouldn’t try an shackle nature, it’ll getcha nothin’ but a bite in the ass.” When James entered his house, he found more of the same. His sink was scoured, his floor swept, and a large pan of casserole accompanied by an apple tart sat regally on top of his kitchen table. The table had been missing a leg, but was now neatly repaired. Suspicious of the whole deal, James stood and stared for a while. It was then that he saw the envelope. He carefully tore it open and read its contents:

Dear Mr. Joy,

We were sorry to hear of your condition and hope that you are feeling better. The enclosed check is the money left over after we returned the cans and paid your hospital bills. Please take care of yourself, and don’t be afraid to contact us if there is anything you need.

Sincerely
The Friendly Neighbor Community Group
Founder -- Ernest Sams

James clenched the letter into a ball and ran upstairs. He knew what he would find. He fell to his knobby knees and began to whimper. James felt that those cans were a part of him. Like the rings in a tree, they told his story. Each faded, sticky can separated the days of his monotonous life. Like his own personal monument, the cans reflected his time here. Fifteen long, grueling years he had been working on this piece of art, and his body could feel the effects. Every ring of his tree was gone. Every day of the past fifteen years began to melt into one boring memory. The empty space where the cans had once been piled created an empty space in his soul. He lied there on the sticky floor for hours, trying to recall what it all meant. He couldn’t remember -- his memories had been stolen.

James collected himself and walked down the creaking staircase. His suspicions had been confirmed. Not only had Ernie Sams knocked him out cold, landing him in a hospital for a week and a half, Ernie had built an army to steal his cans. Ernie had stolen fifteen years of his life. James sauntered up to his front door, opened it and stepped out. He stared across the street at the smiling bloated face of Ernie Sams. He bleated out the only words he could muster.

“Ernie Sams -- may you go to heaven without a head!” James turned and walked back inside, slamming the door. Those were the last words he ever spoke to Ernie.

It was at that moment that Ernie looked up into the window. He had been completely unaware of the circumstances. It took a while, but gradually everything fell into place. Ernie, who never knew the connotation of the cans, thought James had lost it. He never tried to reconcile, because he rather liked having an enemy. He found that being enemies with James was much more exciting than being friends.

Ernie began the battle by trying to repay James for the cans. He sent the money to him in installments of exactly two thousand pennies. Ernie fancied the idea of James counting all those pennies, his face tied up with frustration. Ernie was trying to be an ass.

James knew what Ernie was doing, and began to build a new story, a new monument, of buried pennies. It would not be nearly as magnificent as the cans, but it would have to do. James had little time left.
"Off with his head!"

Jack awoke with a start to the maniacal, booming voice that echoed through the room. He was lying on his back on a cold, hard floor. Standing above him was a clown, with a long, thin face painted like the symbol of the Ying and Yang, half black and half white. The clown was dressed in flowing black robes, and was wearing a black and white coxcomb. He was brandishing a large wooden mallet. With a comical flourish, he swung the mallet over his head, like a barbarian showing off his swordplay, ended the performance by setting the mallet head on the ground and leaning over the handle to stare Jack directly in the face. "Sorry Jackie. I'm putting the carriage before the horse, don't you agree? Why don't you get up off the floor and let us begin?" Jack accepted the hand he held out and stood up.

The room they were in was dark. It was as if a spotlight were all the two of them. Even though Jack had never seen his surroundings, something about them seemed familiar. As Jack turned his head to take a look, he winced in pain. He had a headache. In a rush of jumbled thoughts, he remembered. "Hey, where am I, and who the hell are you?"

The clown laughed, an odd hooting call that rang in Jack's ears. "Oh, we brought you here, Jack. Come, let me show you around before the fun starts." He began to dance down the hallway.

"What do you mean, 'We brought you here?' Who's we?" Jack called as he chased the clown. The clown had stopped in front of a thick wooden door. Behind the door some kind of animal was rageing and tearing at the door. The clown giggled and said, "He's Lust. We never let him out anymore; otherwise he'd tear the place apart."

Turning to his right the clown gestured, conjuring a spotlight upon another section of wall. Jack walked over to inspect the door that was revealed by the intense white light. The door had a tiny glass peephole through which Jack peered. Inside this room was a man pacing back and forth, waving his hands wildly, and muttering to himself. "Yes, and that's Confusion." the clown called.

Jack faced the clown. "Who are you? Where am I, and what the hell is going on?"

The clown turned to his left. Signaling the light, he walked up to the revealed door. "I'm Stress. Haven't you figured anything out yet, Jackie?"

"No, and quit calling me Jackie. The only person to...

"Call you Jackie is dead now," interrupted Stress. "I know that. In fact, I know everything about you. I'm part of you. All this, " he waved his hands about the hallway, "is part of you."

He turned back to the door and opened it. From behind the door came the buzzing of an audience. "This is your mind, Jack. We're all a part of your mind, and we don't like the way you've been running things. We brought you here to change things."

Stress grabbed Jack and began to drag him through the door. Cheers erupted from the crowd that had gathered as Jack fought the grip of the clown. Stress laughed and, with malice in his voice, said, "Welcome to your mind, Jack. Expect sickness."

As Jack was forced into the room, he snuck a glance at what he was entering. The room they entered was a large courtroom. The crowd that had gathered was strange to say the least. Freaks, dwarves, animals and other things were all jeering at him, shaking their fists, and bleating obscenities. Sitting at the table in front of the bench was an enormous man, hunched over a typewriter, furiously tapping at the keys, as if to record every word of the event. With a start, Jack recognized his mother. standing facing the bench. Standing to her right was... Well, Jack didn't have the words for it. It was male, with a long snake-like body coiled under it like a spring. Its upper body was human, with a business jacket covering its torso and broad shoulders. Its face looked like Jack's in a warped sort of way. From what Jack could see, it was covered in fine green scales, and every moment a tongue would peek out from the mouth. The thing had a very cold expression on its face, and Jack felt a tinge of fear as it favored him with a slow gaze.

Stress grabbed him by the chin and wagged his head back and forth. "Now Jackie let's meet tonight's contestants." He releases his hold on Jack, and started twirling his mallet like a baton.

"We're everything about you Jack. Your hopes, your fears, your dreams." With a dramatic flourish Stress bowed deeply.

When he resumed his stance, there was a mask in his left hand. Holding the mask to his face, Stress spoke with a different voice. The mask and new voice bore a resemblance to one of the nameless bullies that plagued had Jack when he was young. "Like I
said before Jack, I'm Stress. You've given me many faces over the years."

Stress lowered the mask, pranced over to the giant man.
"He's Repression. We call him 'The Wall.' You have to love him don't you?" Like a lumberjack splitting wood, Stress wielded his mallet over his head and smashed the typewriter that the big man was using. Stress danced out of reach, giggling, as the man scowled and swept away the fragments of the machine. Reaching under the table, the giant pulled out another typewriter. He placed it on the table and began to type away as if nothing unusual had happened. The clown now skipped around the snake. "Jackie, now I'd like you to meet Reason. He's even more of a boring lout than Repression is." If reason felt any resentment about the antics of the clown, he hid it well. His forked tongue flickered in the air towards Jack. Losing interest in an unresponsive target, the clown motioned over to the woman.

It was his mother, but changed. She hadn't had her accident, and she was just as Jack remembered her. She looked like she had just stepped out of the kitchen. She wore the same plain blue dress and the same bleached white apron. She smiled, and Jack could smell fresh baked cookies wafting from her direction. Stress began his introduction. "Now here's our surprise guest. Direct from Jack's brain is..."

"Mom." Jack said weakly.

"These Strawberries"
by Alex Deal

Response to Abbie Barnes Kirkpatrick's still life,
"Strawberries, Box and a Bowl" (1905)

These strawberries he sent me were not yet ripe
He had picked them, he said, by hand
No wonder. I thought

I bit into one, expecting sweet juice
I was startled by the taste
Of the hard, pink flesh

It tasted green
And the sides were not quite the shiny red
Of a succulent strawberry

Dip them in sugar, he suggested
But I merely "hmph"d"
What a horrible idea

And what a horrible gift, this unripe fruit
How unthoughtful, how vindictive!
I shoved the basket, tipping it over

Nature was not done with these strawberries
She had not yet sweetened or softened them
She hadn't wanted to let them go

But he picked them selfishly
These strawberries
I despised them... and him
Carousel
by Debbie Leone

The brilliance of the flame imprisoned my control
ignited my world with innocence and light
Shaded scheme, enchantment, kaleidoscopes of magic
A carnival of deception and the intrigues of the night

Ghosts of illusion and magicians of wonder
captivated with rides of disguise
parades of fantasy and displays of dream
betrayed the innocent by song and rhyme

Manipulated by mazes of confusion
A wicked funhouse of lost beliefs and desire
Their mirrors reflect ribbons of memory
and they echo, destroyed by fire

His carousel fascinated
As its melodies captured my heart
But the clowns and colors completed the spell
and the games diminished in the dark

Haunted by a rollercoaster of illusion
abandoned by my spirit of the night
Unforgettable recollections of his carousel
now gone, replaced by awakened light.

Elegy For Marion Donovan
by Dan Finn

Grandma died today. After
Dinner she turned pale.
The nurse then checked her pulse to see
If her heart had gone and failed.
My Father called on the telephone
And told me she was gone.
"Don't feel too sad," he said glumly,
"Her life was happy and long."
I bent to my knees and folded my hands
And said the Lord's Prayer,
And hoped that Grandma was safe and happy
In Heaven with God who'd care.
I thought of recent years and how
Her body had withered away
To just a shadow of her former self
In a world where she couldn't stay.
My job was mowing Grandma's lawn.
I'd ride my bike up the hill
And cut the grass at twilight, when
The air was cool and still.
She'd sit under the awning with Red
And wait until I was done.
We'd talk about her thoughts on life
And watch the setting sun.
I know now how to remember her:
In the calm, grass scented air,
With Red in the garden on the hill,
And a breeze that's soft and fair.
Late October in an Empty Town
by Andrew McSorley

Clearly he knew we would come back for him when we started off that Sunday. We never would have left him. He sat blinking, there on the stool. "I just can't sit here and listen to this any longer," I told him when I pushed myself up unsteadily and went for my coat. "You just can't hang," he said. He had been spouting off, then the three of us got into it about the money. I paid the bartender before I went to leak.

The men's room was cool and quiet, but stank of urine and vomit. I breathed as I emptied my bladder. My face was hot. I could hear their voices echoing around inside the taproom. Johnny's was the loudest.

I could tell he was annoyed by the way he twirled the ashtray on the slick, black bar. After we left, it would be just he and Fred, the bartender, again. Maybe someone might stop in for a quick one on the way home for dinner, after the game, but probably not. It was quiet. I don't think Johnny even liked Fred, though he sat in his bar day and night. All Fred ever wanted to talk was racing, which bored Johnny, but he would throw in just the same to keep the conversation going. He was like that, a talker, once you got him going after he'd had a few. He didn't have much to say to us then though. He just looked over his bottle of Bud at me and nodded as he swigged it. It was Johnny's way of showing his contempt. We had let him down, slipping out on him on an empty Sunday afternoon, leaving him to kill time with Fred, who always smoked up his cigarettes while he bored him about the racing. No, Johnny was certainly not happy.

I said we might stop by if we came back this way. Johnny said, "Don't bother, lightweights." But he was grinning. As we shuffled out he turned and hammered his empty down with an echo. "Reload!" he called to Fred, who was standing right in front of him with a fresh bottle anyway.

I was too drunk, plus I had lost my licence anyway, so Joe had to drive. It was cold and getting dark early already. The sky was smoky orange, and headlights were twinkling meteors, whizzing past in a blur. I didn't know where to go; I just wanted to drive. I figured Joe didn't care either.

The way Joe drove scared me. He always followed too closely, or cut corners too quickly, for me to relax in his car. I said, "Let's head down to Fortunata's and get something to eat, maybe pick up some smokes." It was the shortest trip, plus Angela would be there working. He said alright, then pulled into traffic, chirping the tires.

Angela had a job behind the counter at Fortunata's Deli because her first cousin ran the place for her grandmother. It was a good thing because I liked to keep track of her. It was no secret I had been after her since the seventh grade, when she was the first girl I noticed with bumps on her chest.

"An-Ge-La," we chanted as we clomped into the store, clanging the bell on the door. The inside of the store was brightly lit by long tubes of fluorescent lights hanging from the white ceiling tiles. I went right up to the counter white Joe looked for sandwiches in the cooler. "How is my pastrami princess?" I said to her. I meant to wink, but it was still bright so I guess I was squinting.

"You guys are polluted. You stink," she said, shaking her head. But she smiled a little and fumbled with her cigarettes. I used my best smile on her.

"Hey Angela," I said, "When are you going out with me?" I always asked. She expected it; she liked it.

"Maybe when you do something for a change. Like maybe when you get a job, Tony," she said and laughed. She had a merry, nervous laugh.

"They only got bologna, but I got you one anyway. Hi Angela." Joe said as he strode up with the food. I hated bologna, and I knew it. He handed me the sandwich.

"Hi Joey, where you been? I haven't seen you," Angela said. Lately, she talked to him like that -- Joey this and Joey that. I think she liked him, but Joe would never do anything because he knew I was going for her. Joe was nothing if he wasn't reliable.

"Bye guy," she said as we carried our food out to the car. We ate in the dark.

Joe dropped me outside Smith's, where they play serious pool sometimes. It was cold enough that we steamed when we talked. I kicked around a bottle that was lying on the sidewalk. He said he needed to do something and he'd be back later. Just before he drove off I remember him saying to me, "We've got to go get Johnny and take him home later." I noticed he had a tail light out as his Impala sped away.

I ran into some guys I knew there, at Smith's. Nobody was really doing anything. Some of them were waiting to watch a
coupe of guys play a game over a hundred dollar bet, but the one
guy never showed. Then there was some excitement, a fistfight.
Some drunk kid nobody knew got into a hassle with this one guy
over something or other. It was hard to sort out after it was over.
He seemed to get the worst of it though; he was pretty bloody.
Anyway, they both were barred and thrown out.

We were still there, playing cut-throat, when somebody
came in and said something had happened down at Creeks Ford
bridge. We heard the siren going and then the fire trucks moving
down the hill. Just then Joe was back, the Impala rattling and
smoking. "Get in," he said. We followed the commotion to just off
the road around the bend form the bridge. There was a rescue
squad there, but the lights weren't on. I saw them collecting the
body way down in the ravine. The whole thing seemed strange.
He had no business being there.

The cops were shining flashlights at the road, looking for
skids. They were all shaking their heads. Joe climbed back up.
He looked sweaty and scared. "It's Johnny," was all he said to me.
I thought I was going to vomit.

I don't know what he was doing up there. It was stupid of
him. He should have known that we would have come back for
him. We usually did. He should have waited. The cops figured he
might have been walking down the road and maybe he was hit.
There are no skid marks though, which makes it confusing. I don't
know why he didn't wait. I know he didn't jump.
Ravenna
(a monologue)
by Michael Angel Mendoza

Then he talks to me about children. Jesus Christ. You wouldn't believe what this guy was talkin' about. Five or six kids. (beat) FIVE OR SIX KIDS. Shit, maybe he was to pump 'em out his ass, five or six kids. Who the- Well this was just the beginnin'. Picture this. We go to this restaurant, we go to sit down. He excuses himself. He's got to go to the john. All right I says to him. So I sit down. Check myself out in, you know, my compact. Checkin' to see if any lipstick is on my teetb or anything. I hate that when someone's talkin' to you and they got lipstick all over their teeth. Whaddaya say to them? "Hey, your teeth are looking a little red?" No. You- WHAT? Why you looking at me like that? Oh Shit. Your right. O.K.

So he goes to the john. I'm checkin' out the menu. It looks pretty good. Italian. I bet it's nothin' like Gianni's on the corner of Eighteenth and Eighty-thoid, but you know, I had no choice in the matter. (beat) O.K., Menu looked good. Then I see him comin' back, and, I swear to gawd, this sonofabitch had this... this, pee stain on the front of his pants the size of a golf ball. No Shit. I just stared at- What? Why are you lookin' at me like that again? Jesus. I wasn't starin' at his crotch. It was hard to miss. He was wearing khaki pants for gawd's sake. What do you think of me? MOM, HE'S JEWISH. I just wanted to go for dinner anna movie. Mom, I'm serious, you must think your daughter's a hooker or somcthin'. The way you look at me. I'm a good girl.

O.K., so I wasn't always an angel, but neither was Tony. But, Tooony, always got away with murder when Mama was concerned. Now you look away. I see. You know mom, it's just that kind'attitude that drives me crazy. I come here to have a cup of cafffee with you and what do I get? You look at me like I'm some kinda whore. If that don't beat all. How often does Tony come and visit mama? Not so often I guess, SINCE HE'S LOCKED UP IN JAIL. (beat) I'm sorry mom. No. Don't cry, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell or nothin'. But shit, you know you could approve of my dates sometimes. Tony dated mostly hookers. They came over for dinner sometimes. I date a Jewish guy or two. All of a sudden, I'm Judas. I don't get it. I don't understand.

You know mom this conversation would probably go a lot smoother if you were to one day, you know, say somethin' back to me. But hey, I'm not gonna pray for it. Sometimes it's nice this way. Hey what time is it? Lemme see. SHIT. Gotta run, mom. I'm supposed to meet Luigi at the festival in an hour. Gotta get ready. Go home- WHAT? What now? You know Luigi, he's Italian. He works at the garage on Thoiteenth Avenue. Yeah, the tall one. Smilin' now are you? Well good thing. Gotta go. Love ya. See you tomarrow.
one and a two and a three
finger pops
and we're grovin'
in smoky darkness.
liquer and laughter
and sweaty bodies
grandin' in salty
darkness. sin and gin
and bodies bubblin' in
the dim-lit dark.
we opened at
the second hippest
jazz joint in town.
the key club,
a black and tan club
a night club for whole
and half notes. they're
sittin' and drinkin'
and dancin' and smokin'
and listenin' in front
of the bandstand like
notes on sheet music,
lettin' the music
turn the page. nuthin' but
half and whole notes
being fused together by
the beauty of music.
cymbals were tappin'
people were clappin'
and i was working hard
for my bread. gigs
seven nights, for five
weeks straight. and
i was workin' hard for
eighty five dollars
a week, tax free.
more money than i
had made at one time.

and the ladies were fine.
and i knew who i'd
be takin' home with me by
the end of the night.
and then there were
the shake dancers.
we played behind
black velvet and
sandra fields
the body beautiful
their half naked
bodies glistened
under the light like
bright jewels, precious
black jewels and they
were music in flesh.
\n
sun goddesses dancin' in
artificial light
shakin' tits and ass
like the ten cent
vibratin' beds in the
roach motels we stayed in.
Midnight Rte. 17 Blues
by Brian Gill

Alone with the rhythmic thumping of the wheels.
Alone but for the whistle-spin of my wheels,
And the depth of the deep red moon, that nightly feels
The heavy breath of air and moist wet mist.
The breath of night: all air and dark and mist,
Ran about the sides of the car and hissed.
The truck light's foggy night and distant glare,
The truck light's angry searching spectral glare,
Leave me sadly behind their spectral stare.
The night song roles off the radio tinny and long.
The trucks rumble off on the road so long.
The trucks, the wind and wheels all make the song,
And leave, the road, the moon, and me and more,
Like the color of a dried apple core.
We are a Student Association-funded organization which has for over 25 years showcased the artistic and literary works of the SUNY Oswego community. Every semester we publish and distribute a new magazine.

We are democratic in our editing procedure. As a staff composed of students only, we seek work with an original, uncompromising voice represented in a wide array of writing disciplines – playwriting, poetry, fiction, essays, commentary. The harder it shakes us by our proverbial lapels, the more likely we are to accept it.

We take any kind of artwork, but usually gravitate toward black and white photos, computer graphics and ink drawings, due to monetary restrictions. Full color everything is out of our league.

As a staff member, one has the choice to help with editing, advertising and layout, but we stray from the bureaucracy most organizations use to survive. Therefore, no egomaniacs need apply. Everyone else is welcome.

If you love to write, or feel you want to become familiar with working on a magazine staff, join us. The more the merrier. But if you just want to submit stuff, that’s fine, too.