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Children, Churches and Daddies Magazine
Scars Publications, Janet Kuypers, Editor

technical (boring)
stuff:

Children, Churches and Daddies is a magazine published as often as possible, so submit early and often (kind of like voting in Chicago). Current rate of publishing: one every three weeks to a month. • No racist or sexist material is allowed; we accept work of almost any genre of poetry, prose or artwork. • Don't send originals; include a SASE & bio with each submission. • No restrictions as to how much you may submit at a time or whether or not the work can be previously published. • All material is eligible for printing not only in Children, Churches and Daddies, but also in "the burning" poetry mini-books, collection volumes, or in our poetry datebook and wall calendar. • Other chapbooks/books/computer programs printed by Scars Publications: hope chest in the attic (chapbook and book), the gallery, knife, people today, dysfunctional family greeting cards, slate and marrow, dreaming of dandelions and ice cubes, addicted, new world order, gasoline and reason, the written word, the printed gallery, right there by your heart, rendering us, gabriel, magnolia christmas, how you looked then, paper backbone, winter prayers. Well, there are probably a few other in there that we've forgotten about, but who really cares,

So what's a
poetry
collection
volume?

It's when you send 100 copies of an 11 x 8.5" page (that's a page turned sideways, like these) with 4 poems on them, so they could fold up to be a book like this one, to us here at cc+d. All you little kiddies out there have to do is send those pages in to us, and we'll put them into collection volumes. Make sure the work is taste-

STILL FOR
SALE (for all
you
poets with
money to
burn)

- Hope Chest in the Attic
a 200 page collection of poems from our one and only Janet Kuypers. Perfect bound (not this

children

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& daddies

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featured
writers:

Hobo
Janet Kuypers
Kurt Nimmo
Valerie Radek
Cheryl Townsend

children

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Like when the Grossman's German shepherd bit the inside of my knee. I was babysitting two girls and a dog named "Rosco." I remember being pushed to the floor by the dog, I was on my back, kicking, as this dog was gnawing on my leg, and I remember thinking, "I can't believe a dog named Rosco is attacking me." And I was thinking that I had to be strong for those two little girls, who were watching it all. I couldn't cry.

Or when I stepped off Scott's motorcycle at 2:00 a.m. and burned my calf on the exhaust pipe. I was drunk when he was driving and I was careless when I swung my leg over the back. It didn't even hurt when I did it, but the next day it blistered and peeled; it looked inhuman. I had to bandage it for weeks. It hurt like hell.

When I was little, roller skating in my driveway, and I fell. My parents yelled at me, "Did you crack the sidewalk?"

When I was kissing someone, and I scraped my right knee against the wall. Or maybe it was the carpet. When someone asks me what that scar is from, I tell them I fell.

Or when I was riding my bicycle and I fell when my front wheel skidded in the gravel. I had to walk home. Blood was dripping from my elbow to my wrist; I remember thinking that the blood looked thick, but that nothing hurt. I sat on the toilet seat cover while my sister cleaned me up. It was a small bathroom. I felt like the walls could have fallen in on me at any time. Years later, and I can still see the dirt under my skin on my elbows.

Or when I was five years old and my dad called me an ass-hole because I made a mess in the living room. I didn't.

volume 11: prose

a microcosm of society janet kuypers

No one appeared in the back half of the courtroom. Thoughts raced through Steven Kohl's mind as his eyes darted across the room. How did this happen? Was he really to blame? Will the jury members decide whether there is enough evidence against him to warrant a trial? Why are there cuts on his hands? Why can't he remember the last three weeks of his life?

Steve thought he might wake up soon, and discover that none of this had ever happened. That he wasn't trying to defend himself. That Erica wasn't dead.

He shifted in his chair. The wet cotton of his shirt collar burned against his neck. Like the branches of the trees in the ravine where Erica was found, the wool of his suit scratched his legs, his hands. He wanted to wipe the sweat from his forehead, but he was afraid that he would seem too nervous to the jury if he moved. He wanted to run out of the courtroom, stand in the February snow and feel his tears freeze as they rolled down his face.

He looked over at the papers in front of his lawyer. The names Stonum, Smith and Manchester embossed the top of the page. Steve couldn't bring himself to look at Stonum's face.

Stonum's face was chiseled and sharp. There was no room for emotion, unless closing remarks in a case called for a strong emotional appeal. The same thought kept going through Stonum's head: this boy couldn't remember who he was, much less where he was, for the last three weeks of his life. When Stonum suggested that Steve go to Dr. Litmann for a psychological examination, Steve broke down. He told Stonum that his cocaine use became daily about six weeks ago, and he started mixing drugs shortly before he lost his memory.

It was the beginning of the fourth day. The prosecutor stood.

"I would like to call to the stand a Miss Kathleen O'Connor."

Stonum jumped. "We have testimony from a Doctor Litmann, with whom she has been seeking therapy, that Miss O'Connor should not be able to testify in this case. I submit his report to you, your Honor, which outlines the fact that Miss O'Connor has been known to compulsively lie and that her perception of the truth is often distorted. We believe that it would be inappropriate and possibly detrimental if Miss O'Connor testified."

The testimony for the case was beginning to rely on character witnesses, and because no specific reason was mentioned for having Kathleen O'Connor testify, the judge said he would review the report and decide whether or not to allow her to testify the next day.

Kathleen looked at Doctor Litmann seated next to her, then bowed her head. Her letters to him were in a pile on his lap. She stood up, adjusted her dress and

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biographies:

As a child **Hobo** spent weekdays in a Catholic boarding school for discards, and weekends in Times Square hotel with old vaudevillians. Hobo currently lives beside a park in D.C. and continues to be grateful to Moondog's presence on the corner of 6th and 57th, and Stuart.

Janet Kuypers is a computer artist and designs a giftware magazine in Chicago for a living. In her spare time she writes, edits cc+d, and generally goes crazy. Shameless plug: her book, *Hope Chest in the Attic*, is available through cc+d.

Kurt Nimmo was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1952. He lived in Georgia and Florida in the 1970s, and now makes Canton, Michigan his home. In the late 1970s he co-edited the successful literary magazine *The Smudge*. In the 1980s he edited *Planet Detroit*. Kurt Nimmo has been nominated for three Pushcart Prizes for fiction, and two of his books were selected as "Modern Classics" in 1992 by *The Wormwood Review*. A selection of poetry appeared in the anthology *A New Geography Of Poets* (The University of Arkansas Press) in 1992. His fiction, poetry, and reviews appear in periodicals in America, Canada, and England. Recent book titles include: *All the Trees Are Dead* (Zerx Press, 1991), *Catholic Girls* (Translucent Tendency Press, 1991), *Susan Atkins* (PNG Books, 1991), *Stories From the Single Life* (PNG Books, 1991), and *Criminal Class* (Translucent Tendency Press, 1993). His poetry manuscript, *Shock Treatment*, won the 1993 SLIPSTREAM poetry competition. Another poetry manuscript, *The New Dark Ages*, will be published by BLEED-NG HEART PRESS later this year. His novella, *Tioga Pass*, was selected in September of 1993 as a SMALL PRESS REVIEW pick of the month.

We are cc+d don't know a damn thing about **Valerie Radek**.

Cheryl Townsend, published in scads of magazines, is the editor of *Impetus* magazine. The red-haired beauty is thinking about starting her own bookstore in Ohio, where she is currently living.

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dirty to them, not knowing they knew he was a murderer with no balls and they laughed and made fun of him and told him they knew, and he hung up the phone and never called them back. True story, swear to God. Can you just imagine him wondering how they knew? Or were they just making a joke, or...

Did you know that I write? I figured that if they won't let me read anything, maybe I could put stuff down on paper and read it to myself, I guess. I try to write poetry, but it just don't come out right, but I've been trying to write a thing about what I went through, you know what I'm talking about? Well, I just figure that if other people that are in prison can get best sellers and make a ton of money, then so can I, I mean, my story is better than half the stuff that's out there, and I know there are a lot of women who have a little part of them that wants to do what I did. I think all women feel it, but the most of them are taught to suppress it, to keep it all bottled in like that. But now that I think of it, what am I going to do with a bunch of money anyway? I'm never going to get out of here to enjoy it or anything. Anyway, how would I get someone to want to read it in the first place, now that everyone thinks that I'm crazy?

Sometimes I get so depressed. It's like I'm never going to get out of here. I think I wanted to have kids one day. It's easier, I guess, not having to see kids, I guess then I don't miss them too much, but...

For the longest time they tried to get doctors to come in here and talk to me, and you know what they did? They got men doctors - one after another - and then they wondered why the Hell I didn't want to talk to them. Amazing. People really just don't think, do they?

I guess it's hard, being in here and all, I mean. I was going to go back to school, I had already taken the GED and graduated high school, and I was going to go to the local community college. It was going to be different. Sometimes I wonder, you know, why this had to happen to me, why I had to snap. I really don't think I could have controlled it, I don't think any of this could have happened any other way. It's hard. I have to find stuff to do, because otherwise all I'd want to do is sleep all day and night, and I suppose I could, but then what would happen to me? At least if I write a book about my life, about this whole stupid world, then maybe everyone would at least understand. It wasn't really my fault, I mean, I think we women have enough to deal with just in our regular lives and then they keep piling on this sexism crap on us, and then expect us not to be angry about it because we were taught to deal with it all of our lives. Maybe this guy was just the straw that broke the camel's back or something, maybe he was just another rapist, maybe he was just another drunk guy who thought that he could do whatever he wanted with me because he was the man and I was his girl, or just some chick that didn't matter or whatever, but shit, it does matter, at least to me it does.

I know I've got a lot of healing to do, but I haven't really thought about doing it. I mean, what have I got to heal for anyway? To get out of here and go to prison? Then I'll just get abused by guards over there, have to watch my back every second of the day. At least here people watch my back for me. They think everything and anything in the world could harm me, even myself, so they're so overprotective that nothing can go wrong, unless it goes wrong in my own mind.

solemnly walked away.

Dr. Litmann stared at the chair where she had sat. When he gained the strength, he looked at the letter at the top of the pile.

Dear Doctor Litmann:

I just had a session with you, and you asked me to start writing letters to a friend every day so that I could start to open myself up and understand myself more. Well, I don't have any friends. I don't know if I'll ever let you see these letters, but I'll write them to you.

You were asking me about my childhood in session today. Do all doctors ask about a person's childhood? I guess you must figure that any patient of theirs must have been abused by their father or wanted to kill their mother or something. No, I wasn't beaten, or starved, and I didn't even know what the word "incest" was until I was checking the spelling of "insect" in the dictionary.

I know, I know, I'm avoiding the subject. Open up, you said. Open up, God-damnit.

Fine.

As a child I wasn't liked by other kids. I was too smart, you see, and I had been taught at an early age to respect authority. Actually, I don't think I was ever taught that, because my parents didn't seem to teach me much of anything. I just knew I had to listen to them when they yelled at me.

All of my life I was afraid of my father. He never really was a father to me, for he wasn't home often, but when he was home, all he seemed to do was yell at me. I always figured that I must have done something wrong, because he was never happy with me. Hence the self-esteem problem, I guess. I think that's why I got messed up with all those other men, too, doc. But you said we'd get to that in a later session.

The thing is, they always told me that I had to act a certain way, and that I had to do all of these things, but I never knew why I had to do them. If it was to be a good person, then I wanted to know who the hell decided what was good. From what I understood, good wasn't fun. It wasn't even self-fulfilling.

But I was going to do what they wanted. I got into a good school, and decided to study in a field that I didn't like. But, you see, that would get me a job with good pay — even if I didn't like it — and would make everyone in society think that everything was good in my life. If I just went through the motions, people would think I was happy, and then they might leave me alone.

But that didn't work.

Doc, I'm tired. The medication you make me take at night really knocks me out. I'll write later.

She never signed her letters, and she always typed them so that they could never be traced to her. She made sure she covered all of her bases.

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Litmann pressed his right hand over his eyes, almost in an effort to hold his face together.

Dear Doctor—

Hi. I'm back. It's night again. I like writing at night. I write at the desk in my room by two candles. I could turn on the lights, but the candles make shadows on the walls. I like the shadows. They make me think of everything out there that I'm not supposed to do.

In our session today you wanted me to tell you about the turning point of my life. You figured out that there was some sort of event in my life that made me want to rebel against all the empty values my parents tried to shove down my throat. That event was a man.

You see, he was a boyfriend of mine — a boring one that fit into my plan of having a boring future. I'd get a boring job, and I'd marry that boring man and we'd live in a boring house with boring children and act happy. I thought it would all be simple enough — I mean, the man seemed harmless and all. But he wasn't.

He went away to school with me, and at the first chance he got, he got me drunk. And he raped me.

It occurred to me then that my boring life wasn't going to happen. Doc, I thought I could just float by life, going through the motions without feeling anything, whether it be pain or happiness. The rape tore me apart inside. This man was supposed to be the security in life, and he killed any security I thought I could ever feel. I knew that what he did wasn't right, but I also knew that there was nothing I could really do about it, because society seemed to ignore things like rape. Nothing seemed right anymore.

I looked into different religions. I read the new testament, and I tried to go through the old one, but the reading was just too dry. God just seemed like a joke to me. I deduced that religion was just a means to keep the masses in their place. But it wouldn't hold me down.

I wonder why I don't tell you all of these things while I'm in session with you. Maybe it's because you're trying to make me "normal" again — normal in the eyes of society. Well, their rules don't make sense.

Dear Doc —

I can't love unconditionally.

I think everyone thinks I'm just very cold. But it's just that I can't love someone that I can't respect or admire. I don't think I love my family, because I can't respect their values, and I can't love other people because I can't trust them. That's where my value system comes in. I decided that the only person I could trust and love is myself. So my goals should be to make myself happy, right? If I do that,

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these boyfriends coming in and hitting you or touching you or whatever, you know it's got to mess you up. Yeah, I know, people try to use the my-parents-beat-me line and it's getting to the point where no one really believes it anymore, but if a person goes through all their life suppressing something that they shouldn't have to suppress then one day it's going to just come up to them and punch them in the face, it's going to make them go crazy, even if it's just for a little while.

Society's kind of weird, you know. It's like they teach you to do things that aren't normal, that don't feel right down deep in your bones, but you have to do them anyway, because someone somewhere decided that this would be normal. Everyone around you suppresses stuff, and when you see that it tells you that you're supposed to be hiding it from the rest of the world, too, like if we all just hide it for a while, it will all go away. Maybe it does, until someone like me blows up and can't take hiding all that stuff anymore, but then the rest of the world can just say that we're crazy and therefore it's unexplainable why we went crazy and then they can just brush it all off and everything is back to normal again. It's like emotion. People are taught to hide their emotions. Men are taught not to cry, women are taught to be emotional and men are told to think that it's crazy. So when something really shitty happens to someone - like a guy loses his job or something - and he just sits in front of a friend and breaks down and cries, the other guy just thinks this guy is crazy for crying. Then the guy rejects the guy that's crying, making him feel even worse, making the guy bottle it back up inside of him.

I think people are like Pepsi bottles. You remember those glass bottles? Pop always tasted better in those bottles, you could just like swig it down easier, your lips fit around the glass neck better or something. I wonder why people don't use them anymore? Well, I think people are like Pepsi bottles, like they have the potential for all of this energy, and the whole world keeps shaking them up, and some people lose their heads and the top goes off and all of this icky stuff comes shooting all around and other Pepsi bottles want to hide from it and then the poor guy has no Pepsi left. And how can you do anything when you have no Pepsi left? Or maybe you do lose it, but you still have some Pepsi left in you, and people keep thinking that you don't have any left, and then they treat you like you shouldn't be allowed to tie your own shoelaces or you should be watched while you're getting dressed.

Can't you turn those cameras off?

I heard this story in here sometime about Tony, this guy that was in here for murder, and after he was in here he went crazy and cut off his own scrotum. I don't know how a man survives something like that, but I guess he did, because he was in here, and from what I hear he was using the pay phones to call 1-800 numbers to prank whoever answered at the other end. Well, I guess he kept calling this one place where these women would answer the phone, and they got fed up with it, I guess, and traced it or something. They got the number for this hospital, and talked to his doctor. I think he told them that Tony cut his balls off, now I thought doctor-patient records were private, but I suppose it doesn't matter, because we're just crazy prisoners, killers who don't matter anyway, but he told these girls that Tony cut his balls off a whole two months ago. And then he called them back, talking

that as long as you know what you're doing and you actually think about it, you can win. The odds are better.

I think people just forget to watch the cards. Half the time the reason why you lose is because you forget something so obvious. You're looking for a card through the deck and the whole time it's sitting on another pile, just waiting to be moved over, and the whole time you forget to move it. People just forget to pay attention. They got to pay attention.

You know, I'd like to see the news. I hate t.v., but I'd like to see what acts other people are doing. Anything like mine? Has anyone else lost it like me? You know, I'll bet my story wasn't even on the news for more than thirty seconds. And I'll bet the news person had a tone to their voice that was just like "oh, the poor crazy thing," like, "that's what happens when you lose it, I guess."

But I want to see what's happening in the real world. I just wanna watch to see what, you know, the weather is like, even though I haven't seen the sun in a year or two. Or, or to hear sports scores. They won't let me have a t.v. in the room. I think they think that I'm gonna hot-wire it or something, like I'm going to try to electrocute the whole building with a stupid television set. They let me have a lamp in the room, like I can't hurt someone with that, but no t.v. They won't even let me have a newspaper. What can a person do with a newspaper? Light in on fire or something? If I had matches or something. But it's like this: I've never been violent to nobody in all of the time I've been in here. I haven't laid a hand on a guard, even though they're tried too many time to lay a hand on me, and I haven't cause one single little problem in this whole damn place, and this is what I get - I don't even get a t.v. or a newspaper.

You know, I don't really have a Southern accent. See? Don't I sound different with my regular voice? I picked it up when I started sounding crazy. See, I'm not really crazy, I just know the kind of shit they do to you in prison. I think it's bad enough here, I would've had the shit kicked out of me, I'd've been sodomized before I knew what hit me. I think this voice makes me sound a little more strange. I'm actually from New York, but I mean, changing the voice a little just to save me from going to prison, well, I can do that. Here it's kind of nice, I don't have to deal with people that often, and all the crazy people around here think I'm some sort of tough bitch because I mutilated someone who was raping me. Oh, you didn't hear that part of the story, did you? Those damn lawyers thought that since I wasn't a virgin I must have been wanting him. And he wasn't even my boyfriend - he was just some guy I knew, we'd go out every couple of weeks, and I never even slept with him before.

What a fucked up place. You see, I gotta think of it this way: I really had no choice but to do what I did. In a way it was self-defense, because I didn't want that little piece of shit to try to do that to me, I mean, what the Hell makes him think he can do that? Where does he get off trying to take me like that, like I'm some butcher-shop piece of meat he can buy and abuse or whatever? Well anyway, I know part of it all was self defense and all, but at the same time I know I flipped, but its because of, well shit that happened in my past. I never came from any rich family like you, I never even came from a family with a dad, and when you got all

what more could I want? Why should I want to please others?

And I liked having those one night stands. I liked the power I felt when I could make a man want me so much and I had the power to do with him whatever I wanted. You could say that I wanted to get back at the man who raped me, you could say that I was looking for someone to care for me the way I wanted my father to when I was a child — but I wanted the power. I wanted the control of others — and it was an emotional control, which was even stronger than a physical control. I felt an emotional high from making them weak. I don't know which high was stronger.

Dear Doc—

I'm not afraid to tell you the next part, for even if I do give you these letters, you can't tell anyone about them. I've checked into the laws, and because of the nature of the case and client confidentiality privileges, you couldn't utter a word.

Now, I never got into drugs. I drank a lot, which I guess I get from my father, but I never touched drugs. But I had ways of getting a hold of them, and cheap. So I started selling stuff to some of the college students — particularly the good looking men. If my plan was going to work, I had to pick the right kinds of people. I'd go to the men in the elite fraternity houses — the ones that you needed not only good looks, but also a lot of money and a lot of connections to get in to.

Then I found the man. Steve. Gullable bastard, isn't he? Then I found the woman. A typical bitch — bleach blond, sorority, stupid as all hell. The type that makes me look like something is wrong with me for not wearing designer clothes. I knew I could make Steve do something he normally wouldn't — and maybe this would be my little way of destroying a microcosm of the society. It's destroying Steve. And it destroyed Erica.

Litmann looked up. He pulled his glasses from his face. He didn't know if the steam on the glass was from his sweat or his tears. He got up, clenching the letters. He left the room.

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another psychiatrist story

kurt nimmo

I can't stay away from the shrinks.

One night I'd accidentally banged my knee and suddenly things began to come apart. I had this idea that the universe was put together with cheap glue and this cheap, unreliable glue had somehow lost its adhesive properties and now everything was flying right at me. It was admittedly a fantastic, somewhat cracked idea. But I couldn't get it out of my head.

Next morning I called the shrink.

So there I was in his office. It was a nice office with a big clean plate glass window that looked out on everything. Out there everybody calmly moved around like they hadn't noticed that the glue of the universe had failed on them.

This particular shrink happened to be an Arab. He is from some Arab country and so it stands to reason that his office was decorated in the Arab style—tapestries, goat skin furniture, even a jewel encrusted dagger or two nailed to the white American wall. I especially liked the daggers. Even though it seemed dangerous what with all the potential psychopaths and suicides that shuffle in and out of a shrink's office.

When he asked about my problem I told him about the universe and its faulty glue. It was, I said, like a metaphor, a simple way to describe all the chaos and anxiety I was experiencing. But the shrink took me literally. He said, "So the universe is held, um, together with this, ah, glue and the glue has come apart?" He sat there behind his Arabesque desk doodling on a pad of paper. Probably notating my loss of reality. "Not exactly," I said. "It's just that the glue of my universe has come unstuck. It's like a figure of speech. Where a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of thing is used in place of another thing to suggest a likeness or analogy between them."

"Oh," said the shrink. "Continue."

"Last night I banged my knee and that's when it occurred to me that everything is all mixed up, an irretrievable mess, and that nothing I do will put it back together again. I call it the 'Humpty Dumpty Syndrome.'"

"Humpty Dum—"

"Like in the fairy tale," I explained.

"I see. Like in the fairy, um, tale?"

"Yes. 'All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty back together again.'"

"So you feel that no matter what you do, no matter how hard you try, things will remain, uh—"

"Broken. Unstuck. Irrevocable."

"I see," said the shrink. He scribbled something across the face of his pad. "Have you any other problems? Lack of sleep, loss of appetite, impotence?"

"Sleep is often difficult," I answered.

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c r a z y

Janet Kuypers

This dialogue is transcribed from repeated visits with a patient in Aaronsville Correctional Center in West Virginia. Madeline*, a thirty-six year old woman, was sentenced to life imprisonment after the brutal slaying of her boyfriend during sexual intercourse. According to police reports, Madeline sat with the remains of the man for three days after the murder until police arrived on the scene. They found her in the same room as the body, still coated with blood and malnourished. Three doctors studied her behavior for a total period of eight months, and the unanimous conclusion they reached was that Madeline was not of sound mind when she committed the act, which involved an ice pick, an oak board from the back of a chair, and eventually a chef's knife. Furthermore, she continued to show signs of both paranoia and delusions of grandeur long after the murder, swaying back and forth between the two, much like manic depression.

For three and a half years Madeline has stayed at the Aaronsville Correctional Center, and she has shown no signs of behavioral improvement. She stays in a room by herself, usually playing solitaire on her bed. She talks to herself regularly and out loud, usually in a slight Southern accent, although not in a very loud tone, according to surveillance videotape. Her family abandoned her after the murder. Occasionally she requests newspapers to read, but she is usually denied them. She never received visitors, until these sessions with myself.

The following excerpts are from dialogues I have had with her, although I am tempted to say that they are monologues. She wasn't very interested in speaking with me, rather, she was more interested in opening herself up to someone for the first time in years, someone who was willing to listen. At times I began to feel like a surrogate parent. I try not to think of what will happen when our sessions end.

* Madeline is not her real name.

I know they're watching me. They've got these stupid cameras everywhere - see, there's one behind the air vent there, hi there, and there's one where the window used to be. They've probably got them behind the mirrors, too. It wouldn't be so bad, I guess, I mean, there's not much for me to be doing in here anyway, but they watch me dress, too, I mean, they're watching me when I'm naked, now what's that going to do to a person? I don't know what they're watching for anyway, it's not like I can do anything in here. I eat everything with a spoon, I've never been violent, all I do, almost every day, is sit on this bed and play solitaire.

Solitaire is really relaxing, you know, and I think it keeps your brain alive, too. Most people think you can't win at solitaire, that the chances of winning are like two percent or something. But the thing is, you can win at this game like over half the time. I think that's the key, too - knowing you can win half the time. I mean, the last four rounds I played, I won twice. Now I'm not saying that's good or anything, like praise me because I won two rounds of solitaire, but it makes a point

My father is watching TV in the other room.

Kurt, he says. Is that you?

Yeah, I say. It's me. Has Mary gone? Mary is the hospice woman.

Yeah, he answers. She's gone...

His voice trails off, lost in the sound of the movie he's watching on HBO. I hear guns, screams, the urgent and angry sound of machinery.

I go to the liquor cabinet and bring down the good scotch — it's almost gone. Later my father will go to the drug store and buy another quart. When he does I will go in the bedroom and tap out three yellow valiums in my hand and I will take them and the pills will do nothing. Or nothing that I can ascertain through the heavy nearblindness of imported alcohol.

Maybe the valium will make me calm...

I find two ice cubes and put them in the glass with the scotch. I lightly swish the scotch around to get it cold and then I walk out in the backyard where it is hot and unbearable and something maybe like a privatized segment of hell.

I close my eyes and listen to the gulls.

"Is there anything else bothering you?"

"Yes. Work."

"Work?"

"You see, I cannot understand why everybody has to work. Oh, I understand that people have to work at something to make society run and all. But I'd rather lay around and enjoy sunlight, fresh air, the animal kingdom, naked lovers. But it's unheard of, even considered sinful. You have to be employed. It's the only way. If you're not employed you're expected to spend every waking minute pouring over the want ads, being interviewed and probed, or going to school to learn a trade. If you waste one day, or even a few hours, you're looked upon as a sluggard, scum of the earth, a parasite, an unproductive member of society. Best to go out and off yourself posthaste. I don't get it. Life is cruel and meaningless at seven o'clock in the morning. Life is the zoo of rush-hour traffic, depraved bosses, moronic and cowardly coworkers, income taxes, senility in retirement, and a pile of debts beyond the grave. I can't accept it." "I see," said the shrink. "Do you have any friends?" "Some. A few. But they're from another planet." "I don't understand." "They think so much differently than me that it wouldn't surprise me if they were from another planet." "How are they different from you?" "They believe in things." "Such as?" "Government. Love. Religion. Hope." "And your family?" "I don't see them." "Why is that?" "Same reasons. Only they look something like me and that makes it all the more painful." "Are you married? Or have a girlfriend?" "No. Women run away from me screaming." "Why?" "Pyrrhonism."

"I've never heard of it. Is it, uh, a physiological condition?"

"Not exactly. It's entirely mental. Or, more accurately, it's a philosophical state of mind."

"I'm not sure I understand."

"Pyrrhonism is the doctrine where you suspend judgement on everything. It's intense skepticism. Named after Pyrrho, a Greek philosopher out of the 4th century B.C."

"Hmm. Do you read many books?"

"I read everything. I read the ingredient list on frozen dinners, the warning labels on aspirin bottles, every centimeter of newspaper type. I'm the only person I know who actually reads the small type on a car insurance policy. When I'm bored I read the dictionary, the phonebook, old TV guides from three years ago."

"Are you bored very often?"

"Always. Constantly."

"Are you bothered by morbid thoughts?"

"As in abnormally susceptible to or characterized by gloomy or unwholesome feelings?"

"Precisely."

"Only when I watch television. Or fall in love."

"Do you feel a hostility toward women?"

"Yes. But only as members of the human race."

“So you mistrust mankind?”

“History and personal experience has radically narrowed the field. Anything good that has come out of humanity has been far overshadowed by the bad, evil, pernicious things—like war, religion, genocide, greed! starvation, torture, saturation bombing, endless and inexhaustible malfeasance, sadism, politics, malice, ignominy—”

“I get the picture,” said the shrink.

“That’s only a small part of the picture,” I said.

I wanted to mention slavery, crib robbery, medical experimentation under socialism, lobotomy, pollution, murder, the rat race, forced sterilization, communism, the two party system, Mormonism, all of the isms, the bottom line, recession, financial speculation, gentrification, situation comedies, exhumation, the erosion of the Ozone Layer, cronyism, celibacy, landlords, attack dogs, summit meetings, baptism, institutional racism, assassination, presidential speeches, SWAT teams, the veneration of saints, Yahweh, transubstantiation of ordinary bread and wine, drug laws, the prison system, homosexual rape, revisionism, pantheism, patriotism, all the goddamn isms, Richard Nixon, cops, wiretaps, multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles, mob rule, coterminous states, secret Sicilian criminal societies, bacteriological warfare, national flags, toxic waste and medical refuse, telephone solicitation, taxes, pornography laws, the 40 hour work week, the abortion debate, illiteracy, willful stupidity, and everything on television, not to mention a few dozen other things... but there was no time.

“I’m writing a prescription,” said the shrink.

“Drugs, then? Drugs will help me?”

“This drug is to help you sleep.”

“Ah, yes. Maybe a little Thorazine too?”

“Thorazine is for the suppression of more flagrant symptoms,” said my Arab shrink. “I have not detected any schizophrenia.”

No, I hadn’t yet lost contact with the environment. If anything I was far too aware of it. Drugs would help numb the frenzied input. I’d banged my knee and a fantastic and eccentric notion came to me—the universe is unhinged, unhitched, and nothing can put it back together again. We are adrift in a vortex of primordial chaos and confusion. Most people, like a horse with two flaps on its bridle, cannot see the disordered mess all around.

But hell. What’d I know?

Maybe there was a unity, a simple cohesion of things, something like molecular attraction, which I was too stupid and mule-headed to understand. Who knows? Most people don’t think about this kind of shit.

So there I was. With my script for a few capsules of some especially strong sleeping formula. I wanted to get one in me forthwith.

Naturally, I walked right over to the pharmacy and had that mother filled pronto. At least, if I banged my knee again, I wouldn’t care because I’d be incuriously sedated.

Or fast asleep.

children
CHURCHES
& daddies

children
CHURCHES
& daddies

c a n c e r kurt nimmo

I'm in Florida.

My mother is in a house five miles away and she has a tumor in her brain and she is dying very slowly.

I park my father's BMW in the parking lot at a shopping center. I sit there looking out the window at the palm trees, at the blue sky with its puffy white clouds, and then I light a cigarette and get out of the car.

It's hot outside. I walk over to the stores.

I throw down the cigarette.

I go in the drugstore. I don't know why I go in the drugstore but I do and the air conditioning is on high and it is suddenly cold like a freezer and there are these seniors walking around buying things like umbrellas and prescription drugs.

I think: My mother is only 56 and she is dying from cancer.

I walk over to where they have the magazines. I pick up a magazine. I don't know what magazine it is because I don't look at the cover. I simply turn the pages and think that it's too cold and that everything is weird and distant and I can't feel anything, no emotion, nothing, I think that this must be what it's like to be dead. I'm in a place where I don't know anybody and I'm dead.

I'd taken a valium from my father's prescription before I left. I can't feel it. I'd drank about half a fifth of good expensive scotch earlier in the day. It's three o'clock in the afternoon and I'm not drunk. I'm high but not drunk. I flip the pages of the magazine and I focus on a photograph of a woman — she is one of those female body builders with obscene muscles and dark brown skin. I think this is strange because she has this beautiful head with curly blond hair and nice features but it's all ruined by the ridiculous almost male looking muscled body.

I put the magazine back.

I walk around the store for a minute. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not thinking about anything in particular.

Occasionally I flash on my mother in bed. Her head's shaved from the operation. She can't walk. She's in this bed with wheels on it in the back bedroom of my father's house. Once a day a woman from the hospice organization comes in and does things — the things my mother did before the cancer and the operation. I sleep in the room with my mother. I listen to her talk nonsense, a kind of baby talk. Cancer is slowly eating away her brain and she talks like a little girl, or a senile old woman. About fifty percent of the time she does not know who I am.

Sometimes she thinks I'm her brother.

I drive along until I reach a toll bridge. I slow, reach in my pocket, and find some coins. There is a uniformed woman inside a small toll booth. She has on sunglasses and I can't tell if she is looking at me or not. She turns her head a little as I give her two quarters. She has dark hair and thin lips. Then I put the BMW in first gear and continue across the toll bridge.

I pass the cream-colored building where Burt Reynolds has a condo. My father had pointed it out a few days before. We were driving down along the Gulf. The hospice woman was at the house with my mother. As we drove past I looked for Burt Reynolds but I didn't see him. I saw a few old people walking around but not Burt Reynolds.

Now I pull up at the county park and get out of the car and walk over to the beach. I stand there in my shoes, long pants, and short sleeved shirt. It's hot. It's like the sun has something against me, against everybody. I look at the water, at the sun, at the people walking and swimming and doing nothing at three o'clock in the afternoon on a day in the middle of the week. I cross over to where water meets sand and I start walking south. I watch my feet sink into the wet sand as I walk and I think that Florida is a horrible, terrible place — the weather, the sun, the water does not make life any less meaningless and inequitable.

I notice a woman in a bikini.

It's a hot pink color and the sun makes it look like it's on fire. I stop, move away from the water, sit down in the warm sand and look at the woman in the hot pink bathing suit. She seems unaware that I am staring at her. Usually I'm careful not to stare at people but today I don't care about anything. I stare at her for a long time. I like looking at her short brown hair, the slender and graceful length of her neck, the rich brownness of her skin, the longness of her legs, the narrowness of her hips, and the cool whiteness at the bottom of her feet as she flattens herself out on a green and yellow beach towel and lets the sun lay on her.

Finally I get up, brush the sand off my pants, head back to the car.

On my way back to the car I see a dead fish.

It is big and partially rotted and it lays there in the sun with its fish mouth open and its fish eyes clouded over and slightly sunken.

Death always looks about the same.

I drive up the highway, past Burt Reynolds' condo, over the long bridge, and back to my father's house. I park his BMW in the garage. I sit in the car for a long time, in the darkness of the garage, and I don't think about much of anything. I don't concentrate on any one thing for very long.

Inside the house I can hear my father's grandfather clock ticking and the murmur of the TV. He'd bought the grandfather clock for my mother three years before. When they'd first detected the cancer. Now it counts the hours, minutes, and seconds.

babe's (by hobo)

so here I am thirty-two and walking down cary street when my best friend says "babe's yeah that's a lesbian bar kinda nice you know they let k.m. in just for kicks" I thought it was cause he'd screwed a lot of lesbians before but if they were with him I guess they were bi anyway I could kinda see him sitting there at the bar wearing one of his three-closets-full-of leather jackets drinking himself into some kinda crazy state picking up a couple of chicks from babe's and going home to his house mostly newspapers and porno comics and screwing in six or seven different positions two chicks one who was definitely gay yeah lesbian the other one just long blonde-and wondering babe's got a lot of the wondering types some of them sincere some of them experimenting with a way to overcome some kind of childhood sex thing at least that's what they'd say

take me back ten years and I had a bunch of friends turn gay overnight but they did it for political reasons a lot of that was going around in the seventies it was gay or marxist or some kind of a cappella women's group black but they had this one woman (no chick, she was a woman) who was white but she had the sweetest voice so she was in it too anyway

that was the seventies you know but it was before that really I mean it was my mom who started me in on the whole thing cause she had tons of gay friends male but she lived in fear that some woman would turn on her and I guess someone did anyway I think it gave me some weird angle on the whole thing and well now

I hedge down cary street I just think that me and diana we could stop in one night test the waters see how gutsy I'd be (cause basically I'm chicken and even though I love Diana she's just my best friend if you know what I mean) and I'm not really into any gay scene not that I haven't done a thing or two but

that was years ago which is to say it doesn't count I guess well not really anyway see my very very best friend peggy who stopped being called peggy so she could be margaret when

we turned seventeen and we both lost our virginity (god that's a corny phrase) no come to think of it it was before we'd slept with anyone anyway she'd fallen in love with me so she said and she wanted it all so there

was margaret (I hope I'm remembering this right) then there was that beautiful a cappella woman in d.c. who had a couple of kids was a lot older but I think she was gay too and she knew

I just could not keep my eyes off her and God she was beautiful! she must have thought this twenty-year-old was just so sweet cause she never touched me not even once never except one day on the street out of nowhere she leans over and gives me a soft kiss and I must have died cause she said "God you really are blushing" she laughed at that too oh well I guess

that's it well no actually there was the thing with my boyfriend's first lover but that doesn't count does it? anyway we only did things cause he wanted to watch I guess that's a big thing with guys watching even my husband thinks watching would be a turnon but not guys just chicks cause it's supposed to be artistic yeah I guess so and then there's

my super-straight friend who follows the virgin mary now and marches against abortion and the whole bit and she actually is very happily married really but she used to be straight gay I'm talking dyke guess that's a common term I guess

that's the end of my list as far as I recall so we would be just a couple of dykes me and my friend diana if we left our lovers guys for a night and just went into babe's together for a drink I mean I guess that's what dykes do or is there something more to it? don't ask me I'm as straight as my mom was and I figure she did about as much as I've done don't you? except

there really are a few women in my life I love so there

Growing Up

Valerie Radek

Nothing in my life has changed me more than my father. He sat in a wheelchair most of the time. His weight continually dropped. Mom had to feed him dinner and friends came over to bathe him. He never did anything on his own; he usually required assistance of some sort. I never remember him working. He spent most of his time watching t.v. He always helped with homework by explaining things I did not understand. He spent three months in the hospital. I went to the hospital every night, but because of hospital regulations, I only saw him once or twice.

Once his condition became stable, the doctors allowed him to come home. Vitamins, bandages, ointments and other medical supply boxes filled the basement. We had a car with a lift that allowed dad to sit in his wheelchair in the car. For a few years, mom worked and dad stayed home to raise us. To me, this was a part of my life and nothing out of the ordinary. He never moved unless someone moved him. I would go see him every day after school and tell him about my day. In his eyes, I could see the pain just lying there caused him. The tubes running in and out of him to help with breathing and eating never appeared to bother him. By now, I knew, mom fed him through a tube in his side. He no longer had the ability to swallow food. When I asked him a question, he did his best to answer using words or sounds. Otherwise I would say the alphabet and he would make a gesture or sound when I got to the letter he was looking for. After repeating this process several times, we were able to spell out what he needed.

As I watched him, I missed the days passed and hoped for better ones. I remembered the days of walking home from kindergarten and making lunch for the two of us. We usually had peanut butter sandwiches on "elephant" bread. After the sandwiches were made, we smushed them down and made them paper thin. We would laugh, enjoy lunch, and talk about school. We spent many evenings in my parents' bedroom watching television. If dad was lying in his bed or sitting in his lazy-boy, my brother Dan, my sister Sheryl or I would get to sit in his wheelchair. If we had behaved, dad would give us a piece of candy from the stash mom had for him in his drawer.

As the days went by, he never appeared to change much, until I came home from school on the first day of fourth grade. When Dan and I arrived home, we found a note on the table telling us to go to the neighbor's house. The neighbor took us to the hospital. At the hospital, they allowed Dan and me to see my father. He looked the same as I remembered him except his eyes were closed. I stood there wondering how long he would be in the hospital this time. Dan and I left mom at the hospital. When she returned, she called Dan, Sheryl and me into Dan's room. Annoyed that she had interrupted my television show, I trudged upstairs. Mom sat us down in Dan's room. The only light was the reflection from the kitchen for the shades were down in Dan's room. Mom gathered us together and gently told us dad had died. At this point, Sheryl, Dan and mom all began to cry. It took a few seconds to register with me, but then I began to cry too.

The days that followed were a blur. People filled the kitchen. Friends and relatives were on the phone to talking amongst themselves. I did not go back to school for a week. I spent hours in a funeral home listening to people tell me how sorry they were and if I needed anything just call. At the cemetery, a prayer was said, but I heard none of it. The dark skies and muggy weather fit the somber mood of the day. I just stared at that little tin can with my father's ashes in it realizing what his death really meant. He would miss the graduations, weddings, and grandchildren still to come. My father would never get the chance to walk me down the aisle or give me away in marriage. No more hugs and kisses goodnight. He would never know what it was like to hold his grandchildren. He would be at all of these events in spirit, but it would not be the same. His death took a part of my childhood with him. Not a day goes by when I do not think of him and how special he was.

Looking back now, I realize that as I grew up and became more independent, my father had become more dependent. His life slowly faded away before his eyes and there was not a thing anyone could do to stop it. His death shocked me.

I had known he was sick but never thought of him as dying.

forecasts

Cheryl Townsend

The first snow of winter 93/94 is promised today. 2-4 inches. I'm on a 6am flight to Baltimore. My tits are bouncing to the "first-flight-of-the-day-out-of-round-tire-oscillation". I'm having a hard time writing this, Captain Neal. We have taken flight and I look down on my sleepy Cleveland. The city looks so Eiberace. Lights in rows and intricacies. Our plane is phallus, impregnating the clouds that will abort snow over Northeastern Ohio. They are forecasting rain in Baltimore. The man in the seat next to the seat next to me is filling the void with his newspapers. He is encroaching a no-man's-land. He is being manly, taking, controlling. I will be woman. I wait until he unwraps his danish, opens his orange juice, and gets his coffee ready. I excuse myself to go to the bathroom. He looks Jewish. I let him see my long red nails. Captain Neal says we have a 50 mph tail wind. We are descending at over 600 mph. I wonder if this is safe. I'm glad I put this flight on American Express, Jerry can collect the insurance. 600 plus mph. The Jewish man is not married, or maybe he was too cheap to get the ring? Of course he is reading the business section of his newspaper. He is wearing a suit. Charcoal grey pin stripe. His burgundy tie matches the stripes. I wonder if he has a perm. He looks like he showers immediately after sex. It is 7:40am. We are descending 20 minutes too early. 150 mph tail wind. I look out the window. Row 13, seat A. I have the window seat. The Jew has the aisle seat, and the one between. Maybe he's Italian? His olive skin is characteristic. There are only clouds outside. I look into the vast grayness. My ears are plugged. I hold my nose and blow. The pop feels good. The pop always feels good. Our plane is phallus again, popping through the soft folds of clouds. We are sperm. Sperm in this giant cock that is plunging into Baltimore. We will meet our eggs at the gate. Some will penetrate. Captain Neal says we will land in 10 minutes. It's 48 degrees and raining. Up in Cleveland, they're gonna get snow.