

children *churches* & daddies

issn #1068-5154



scarsuonpejqqnd

MATTHEW BEHIND THE COUNTER

JENNIFER ROWAN

He stands behind the counter,
His dirty hands in his pockets
Glaring at me from behind shadowed eyes.
He doesn't want to be here
Anymore than I do.
Out of his parched lips is stated
A price I think I can handle.
And as I count out the change
I carry in my over-laden pockets
He rubs his nose with a swollen
Wrist before packing my donuts.
I thank him for his superior service
And turn away.
He must wonder if he'll ever see
Me again.
Even if he did, I probably
Wouldn't recognize him as he
Is yet another of the faceless
Youth who try so hard to get
Ahead, but fall back with every
Baby step, in this world of bitter
Tears and warm beer.

IN HIDING

JESSICA ARLUCK

I listen to the music
And it's the only thing I hear
I'm always so mental

Why did you have to speak my name
Couldn't you just babble about Sunday's snow
If you had to speak at all

You touched my face
I touched your ass

I didn't want you to feel my fat back
With the ripples
And my big ass
Beneath my tight jeans

I didn't want you to suck my chapped lips
Or taste my dry, smoky tongue
That smelled of coffee

I didn't want you to see my runny nose
I didn't want you to see my mascara running

If I had food on my teeth
I didn't want you to see it
I didn't want you to see

MAGIC AIR

DAVE OAKES

A bird floated overhead with widespread wings
Clouds hanging like cotton balls ready to drop
Air so fresh and pure it must be magic perfume
Every breath makes me want to live and never stop.

GOOD STEVE YOUMANS

For the time
Being, I am
A good man
To her. Kind,
Beloved,
Good
With punctuality,
Pretty, caring
Truthful, to an extent
A dream come
True.
And I plan to stay
That way
For
As long as
She laughs
At my
Jokes...

THE HUNGRY MADISON CABBIE, 1958

J. QUINN BRISBEN

(FOR S.H.)

The sign on Atwood Avenue says
HUNGRY, HUNGRY, HUNGRY! And he is
For old memories in books, for movies
He has head about but never seen,
For the pizza awaiting him at State and Lake,
For his pregnant wife on Johnson Street,
For the dead hours when he can read
C. Wright Mills and Kerouac with light
From street lamps on the square
Before the Sunday morning shuttle
Of drunks to the bar on Packers Avenue
Allowed to open at eight a.m. and the good
Though non-tipping communicants going
To early mass in the center of town;
There is a fare at the 400 Bar,
And he speeds down Williamson to get it,
Taking a generous drunk who wants no change
For his dollar when he gets to Regent Street,
Then back for pizza, then a short haul
To the Belmont where he can munch

And leave greasy stains on The Power Elite
And look up now and them at the dome
With Miss Forward on top and recalling
Jane Adams writing about her girlfriend
And seeing Old Abe there, a famous
Bird, the stuffed remains of the
Eagle mascot of the Wisconsin militia
At Shiloh and later, the effigy admired
By nostalgic veterans, but there no longer,
Destroyed by fire decades ago,
For old Abe was no phoenix;
But the scholar cabbie can see it
Along with the small bent girl
And aging men with tear-wet beards;
The cabbie's mind shifts sideways
As he wonders whether Frank Lloyd Wright
Looked on Old Abe and envied the dome
So well-sited and how early he thought
Of complimenting it with a circular
Sweep into Lake Monona, a plan
Recently scuttled but seen anyhow
Spreading east over Dotty Street by
A cabbie possessed with past and future
Already wanting to be home listening
For life in his wife's belly while
Watching Camera Three on a round tube
Echoing past dome and future terrace,
Staying hungry in all dimensions.

THE MEANING OF NAMES

ANGI BECKER

When I was a little kid, eight or nine, I had loved to look through my parents' old baby-name books. I made up people in my head to go along with the meanings of the names: Abner, "paternal," was a kind father of ten. Barbara, "shy," was a quiet girl who couldn't make friends at school. And my name, I naively thought, had the best meaning of all: unknown. In my youth, I only assumed that line in the book meant that I was mysterious, that no one really knew me. I was around nine when Diana looked over my shoulder and sweetly asked if I knew what her name meant.

"It means 'perfect,'" she said, with her twelve-year old mock grown-up voice. "And 'goddess'. Your name doesn't mean anything."

"Yes it does!" I protested. "It means 'unknown.' It means I'm mysterious," I declared proudly.

"No, stupid," she corrected. "Unknown means that no one knows what it means, so it doesn't mean anything."

"You're a liar!" I spat, but deep down, I knew she was right. After all, she was twelve. And it made sense.

From then on, I renamed myself frequently, writing my new identities in sloppy cursive on notebook pages. Sometimes I was Willa, "desired." Sometimes I was Tonia, "beyond praise," or Manda, "lovable." Anything but Adria, the name without a meaning. My favorite name was always Ginger. "Gaining poise and power." I figured a definition like that at least meant I was headed in the right direction.

Time went by, the way time does, and Diana lived up to her name, and I lived up to mine. When she was in eighth grade, she already wore a D cup, the rest of her was popsicle-stick thin. When I was in eighth grade, I stole her bras and stuffed them with socks, and got caught when they fell

out in the locker room after gym class. In high school, everyone knew her name and no one knew mine. She was a varsity cheerleader; I fell down at tryouts and broke my ankle. Only three people signed my cast, my parents and a girl in my homeroom with lots of pimples and thick glasses. At dances, I stood against the back wall while boys crowded around my sister, waiting for the honor of a few minutes when their bodies could be allowed to come in contact with hers. Only the luckiest ones got slow songs. I stayed at home the night she was crowned homecoming queen. When I was fifteen and my parents caught me making myself throw up after dinner and sent me to therapy, Diana told me, in her syrup-sweet voice, "You can puke it up all you want, but you'll always know the truth, that this body came naturally for me and not you. Besides, you'll probably just lose what little tits you've got and keep those rolls everywhere else."

By the time I was turning sixteen, I had finally found myself a good group of people. Of course they weren't the popular crowd, but they were friends. They meant plenty of phone calls and things to go out and do on Saturday nights. And then there was Tony, with his olive complexion and dark wavy hair. I knew he saw the way I watched him, the way I blushed if his hand happened to brush against mine, the way I always tried to arrange it so that I just coincidentally wound up next to him when we all went out to see movies. And the amazing thing was, he actually seemed to like it.

I had a pool party for my sixteenth birthday. Diana talked my parents into going out for the day, promising she'd look after things. I'd have rather she left and they stayed, but my friends were impressed, so I accepted it. It was a gorgeous day in spite of Diana, watching Tony in his black swimsuit, admiring the definition of his chest. Diana even agreed not to parade around in her skimpy bikini. Kindness from my sister was always cause for suspicion, but I took what I could get. She walked over to me once during the party and whispered "so, which guy is it that you're after?"

"Leave me alone," I muttered.

"Come on, Adria," she whined. "I know I haven't always been the best,

but we are sisters. We're supposed to talk about that sort of thing, right?" I sighed.

"Him," I said, pointing. "In the black shorts."

"Hmm," she said, thoughtfully. "Not my type. Nice bod, though." I was relieved when she went back in the house.

About an hour later, Tony went in to get something to drink and was taking an unusually long time coming back out. I walked into the kitchen and it was empty, so I started down the hall to the bathroom, hoping that he hadn't gotten sick or anything. And that's when I saw the wet, black bathing suit crumpled on the hall floor, right outside Diana's closed door. I flung the door open, and she was sitting up on top of him, her grotesquely large breasts bouncing up and down. It was at least a full minute before either of them noticed me, and I watched them with a mixture of awe and disgust. Finally, Diana turned her head and saw me standing there. And she grinned.

Before I even knew what I was doing, I was pulling her off of him and throwing her onto the floor. Her smile faded just before my fist smashed into her face, breaking her perfect nose, chipping two of her straight, white teeth, smearing blood on her flawless skin. She never even screamed, just stared up at me with pain in her eyes, knowing she deserved every blow.

I didn't exactly walk away unscathed. I broke two of my knuckles and needed twelve stitches from hitting Diana's teeth, got sent back to therapy, and I doubt my parents are going to let me out of the house before I'm 21. But it's all worth it for the way Diana cowers away from me now, the way she walks with her head down to hide the crook in her nose. When people who don't know the whole story ask me what happened to her, I tell them she fell off her high horse onto her face. I figure that's pretty close to the truth.

I've also decided I don't mind being Adria. I've realized we can transcend the meaning of names. I can steal Ginger's definition, whether it's on my birth certificate or not. I may not have all the poise and power just yet, but when Diana shrinks away from me and averts her eyes, I know I'm gaining, I'm gaining all the time.

BLONDE ECSTASY

ADAM PERRY

There's a place I want to live -
where a peaceful thunderbolt will sear my true heart
and give birth
to silent control.

Where fragments of frenzied feelings warm sober shadows and the
future disappears in flames of burning acid.

"And to see everything else is to become an understanding molecule
in evolution."

Be grateful your memories don't reach this far back.

"But what's the reason for living if you know what'll happen when you
die?"

This place is a promise of passion and an absence of self-made scars -
not absolution, but an end of reality.

Self-consuming begins at the wrists, your soulmate's brains scattered
all over the pavement -

and desire lives in constant construction, throwing stones at the win-
dow that is forever and dancing in a pool of blonde ecstasy.

Are you growling because you're annoyed or because you want me to
stop trying to smooth things with my empty advice?

They've started a fire that can only be put out with an atom bomb.

Can you look at a beautiful evening sky and forget about what man
has created?

This place is a pulse across the stars, a tool of the universe that express-
es disdain for Eros' tranquil search - and I'm waiting for another love-
light to fall from the rays of the blinding sun.

I wish I could whisper your name to you,

over the trees in your backyard,

under the waves that are the ocean of your death,

and through the crackling fire we make love next to.
Let's start deep in the shallow waters
and forget ourselves and remember everything else.
This madness is deafening -
but

“we know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that there's more out there than anybody ever let on.”

We know we must find the ashes and start all over with a shot to be heard round the world.

For that, she sweeps my very throat, dry and disgusting, and paints a picture of my loving arms.

My fingers are swollen tonight - things have been a little unbalanced.
Fantasy hangs from a perpetual tempered age when you stopped talking me.

HANDS

BEN TANZER

Stories

So, I'm sitting in bed late one night, tired and dirty, grass stained and mud streaked. It's been another long day mowing lawns and I find myself staring at my hands. At first I'm not sure why. It's not like I'm a musician or a surgeon or something. They're not even my favorite body part. And yet there I am staring, lost in their twists and turns and scars.

As I continue to stare I begin to fixate on the scars. I once read somewhere how Stephen King had said that you always know a writer because they can tell you stories about every scar on their body. I don't know about the writer part, but I sure know all the stories written across my hands. There is the long gash across my palm, induced by the furious tumble I took when fossil hunting at summer camp. And the snaking scar on my ring finger, left after the finger dislocated and sliced through the skin like a shark in low waters. Your hands I realize, and particularly their scars, come to define who you are in many ways because they reflect everywhere you've ever been, good, bad, and otherwise.

I also realize that my hands have come to define me in ways I never expected, and this is really why I find myself so lost in them in the first place. My daily existence, you see, has become one of dread and confusion, and this dread, not only dominates my thoughts, but smothers and imprisons me as well. I know I want out, no, need out of the life I find myself living, yet I don't know how to do it. And so instead I just stare at my hands, my scarred lawn mowing hands, the tools of my trade.

The Trap

A friend knew I needed to earn some money. He also knew that Jack was looking for some workers to join his landscaping crew. So, he introduced us. From jump Jack seemed to offer something different, something enticing, a gingerbread house if you will. He would buy us lunch and offer to get us stoned. He listened to the Grateful Dead and regaled us with stories about the local girls he was banging. We could come and go as we pleased just like he did. On top of all that, he offered to pay us top dollar just to mow lawns.

And so, just like that the trap was set. I mean visions of freedom and money, and the chance, maybe, somehow, for pussy. What else is there? And how many chances does a fifteen-year old have to obtain any of that?

But you see that was just the vision, or projection, or whatever the psychologists call it. The reality is long days, with lunch in the truck as you rush from one site to the next. And banal stories about young girls and sex that scares you with their excessive depravity.

“So I grabbed her right there between the front door and the entrance to the bar. You know, the fucking foyer or whatever they call it. Anyway, I grabbed her and shoved my hands down her pants,” he says. “Then I’m fingering her right there in the fucking foyer thing, can you believe it?”

You just nod. What can you say, he’s talking about another world. You’ve never fingered anyone. Hell, you’ve never even stood in the foyer thing of a bar.

“Yeah, and then when I pulled my finger out there was a piece of skin on it or something. It was fucking crazy.”

You may never finger someone now.

The reality is also a stoned, angry boss screaming and crying at you daily about your slowness, technique, and the short length of the grass. Short grass you see leads to less mowing. Less mowing of course leads to less drug money.

children churches & daddies

“Are you trying to fucking put me out of business? Are you trying to kill me? I mean Jesus Christ, raise the wheels. Raise the fucking wheels,” he screams for the millionth time.

You just nod. You’ve already raised the wheels.

“And why the fuck is it taking you so long. I can mow twice as fucking fast as you guys.”

He then proceeds to push one mower in front of him while he pulls another behind him.

“Now how hard is that. Jesus. My dad would have fucking killed me if I mowed as slow as you fucking guys. Are you even trying?”

You just nod. You know you’re busting your ass. You also know you can never bust it fast enough, or mow straight enough. It’s really kind of pointless to try.

You see the reality is, this job is not cool or fun. And you wonder what happened to that vision. Soon all you have is the money to think about and the feeling that there really isn’t anywhere else to get it. I mean it’s not like anyone else is offering you work. And it’s not like you have any connections.

Ultimately you wonder if you should just quit. Just run off. The problem though is that lately Jack hasn’t been paying you all that regularly. Check that, he has never paid you regularly, but now it’s added up to a fairly substantial amount. You see he can’t pay his workers all that often because he’s too busy spending it on the drugs and the girls. So, what are you supposed to do, quit with him owing you money? Then what? You’ll never get paid.

And so the trap draws tighter. Now it’s not just that you’ve been sucked in, but you can’t even fight for your freedom because that freedom comes with a cost. And with such a cost, does it even qualify as freedom? Such questions come to dominate your days and nights. There are no answers or end in sight.

Closure

And then one day the grass is real high and wet and the wheels too

low. And the mower blade is getting blocked with all the jagged, soggy clippings. I begin to picture the screaming and the crying that is soon to come, and I wonder yet again what the hell I'm even doing here. I mean is this how I want to spend my days? Is this how I want to live my life? How did I ever get here? At this point I don't know what to do or what to think. It's all just too confusing.

So, I flip the mower over, and I'm sure I turned it off, well I'm sure I think I did. But who knows at this point, I'm fucking spinning. And then there's the blade and its still rotating. And for just a moment I am mesmerized by it, lost in its motion. And a moment's distraction is all it really takes you know, because my fingers are right there in the way, and then there's blood, and it's everywhere. Then it all fades to black.

And then I'm sitting up again in bed late one night and I'm staring at my hands. One fully formed and whole, the other mangled and covered with bandages. And as I stare at them, and the stories they will tell, one thought comes through over and over again, I'm free, and that's how they will define me now.

That's my story.

KING FREEDOM

MARK GRAHAM

At the party, we all assembled in
celebration of the night where
Freedom reigned as king.
All of us who gathered in
the Kin's castle of carelessness
lost our old shackles to
his light rule.

Wild and unconcerned, we
chewed through our repressive
ropes of self-restraint with
teeth sharpened by
laughs and drinks.
Sober society quivered from
fear of our King's new army, but
he would make no
public statements of apology for
his soldier's "inappropriate" happiness.

In the morning, when we
awoke, we all felt like
fools and sluts.

Freedom as fun while it lasted.

Now back to self-tyranny.

THE BUSINESS END OF TWO
BOTTLES OF MERLOT
(AND WHY I'M BETTER OFF SOBER)

RAYMOND M. FREMONT JR.

My childhood a sham
since then the emptiness
the rotten fruit of a father's dream

Awakened I am sick
and wish to be blind
Ah ha ha — the cliché!
and only such
because its beautiful truth is best ignored

Fuck off — I'm angry,
and wish to die,
because I'm tired of living life
as though there may be another to live later...

Later...
Later I'll be better.
Later I'll need more wine,
or something to pass the time

That's what I really want to say —
What everybody actually has is
simply something to pass the time -
life as a good book

**children
churches
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I know it's been said before
and in much better verse
but it's ignored and I'm angry!

Fuck. I've got to make something of myself.

Fuck. I long to be out of my head.

Mad,
and therefore
excusably lethargic.

children
churches
& daddies

we are begging you...

we want your writing, and we want to put it in
magazines like this and in collection books that scars publica-
tions and design does, as well as on the internet. so i **beg** of you...

send your writing (in the e-mail letter or as an attachment) and your
art to us, please!!!

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