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**children
churches
& daddies**

the unreligious, nonfamily-oriented literary and art rag

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Scars *art*:.....covers, 6, 26, 31-35, 37-44

cover image: The statue just outside of the Dachau Concentration Camp memorial, in Dachau, Germany. Photographed May 2003.

the boss lady's editorial

WHICH WORLD WILL WE BE?

I'm not much of a history buff (I don't even remember much from my high school American history classes), but when I think back to our history, I know that in America we decided to take charge in the Industrial Revolution, and we decided to be the first to fly an airplane, and we excelled in car production, and we excelled in many markets to push us ahead to become one of the most powerful economic countries in the world.

Wow, we're pretty powerful.

And I look around me now, and I consider things like our high health costs... Well, I don't know if malpractice suits drive up the cost for seeing a doctor, and I don't know if different prices for people with health insurance and people without health insurance make a difference in the price of health care, and I don't know if people who *have* health insurance go to the doctor more because, Hell, their health insurance pays for it, well, I don't know if any of that drives the cost of health care up. People complain that prescription drug costs are too high, and I see that drug manufactures (first of all) spend billions of dollars in research just to *create* the drug. But then these drug manufacturers are expected by our government to give some of their drugs away freely to third world countries who can't afford these drugs.

How will they be compensated for their billions of dollars in investment, if they can't rely on the customers in the most productive country in the world to help them cover costs?

I don't know. All I **do** know is that there are many sides to any issue, and there are always more victims than we claim to see with every problem. We have to see every side to come to a rational conclusion.

I know we have an insanely high poverty rate in this country (you know, for being the productive country that we're supposed to be). I also know that even the poorest homes living off welfare in this country still have on average two television sets in their homes. I know that the majority of teens in America now apparently expect to have their own cell phone (hmmm... I know I grew up in the age before cell phones seemed to be glued to everyone's head, but I was raised without talking on

the phone all the time to everyone, probably because my parents had rules that restricted me as I grew up so I could be a rational adult).

I also know that the standard of living has risen *so dramatically* in this country, that everyone seems to expect everything handed to them on a silver platter.

What does this have to do with solving our problems in America?

Well, all I keep thinking is that we keep asking for more, and people aren't willing to work for more.

Okay, you think I'm nuts for thinking that. But let me give an example. John told me he heard that teens complain about not being able to get a job out of school. But the career counselors have told these teens that it might be easier for them to get a job if they remove all of the metal from piercings in their face, that they need to project the appropriate business image to get jobs. And the teens seem to be saying, 'If they can't accept me for who I am, then I don't want a job for them.'

Fine, kids. At that rate, *nobody* will offer you a job.

And they wonder why jobs are so hard to find.

Let me give you another example: President Bush wants to protect our borders from potential terrorists, and at the same time he wants to grant temporary work visas to illegal immigrants, so they can work in our country and he can keep tabs on them. (Apparently he doesn't mind Mexicans coming to the States to work jobs and mail half of the money they make back to Mexico, all without having to pay any taxes to our government.) Maybe, if people are unwilling to get a job, we shouldn't pay them government benefits for being unemployed, and we can make those low-paying jobs available that people will be forced to take (you know, because they need the money). Maybe if young Americans stopped expecting the world to love them the way they were and pay them a lot of money, they'd be willing to really start *working* for a living.

I know, I'm ranting. Sorry.

No, actually, I'm not sorry, because I've been trying to look at the direction our country is going, and I've been trying to make sense out of what little history I know, and what I'm learning is starting to scare me. I think over time we have become much more expectant of things we may not deserve, because we haven't worked for it. I see jobs being outsourced to other countries because companies are actually getting tax benefits from our government to help third world countries by employing people there. At the same time I hear people say that they know that used American cars seems to have more problems than used foreign cars, that even the quality of American automobiles has comparatively gone down-

hill. And at the same time, I look at the electronics we purchase and see they're not made by U.S. companies. Listen to your stereo with your Sony electronics, or watch videos or television with your Panasonic. Use your LaMachine to prepare your food. Hell, don't even drink water from the States, but from Evian (I'm sure the French liked calling their company the word "naive" spelled backwards...).

Maybe we *have* been naive, and maybe we can't see the price of the Euro is rising against the dollar, and that Japan has taken over in the electronics market.

And we sit here and think that we can get people back to work when the economy is doing poorly after people without investing experience dropped their live savings into a dot com market that was walking on a high tight rope wire with no net when it fell in the late 1990s. But we're doing things right now like getting rid of excess metals used for our building and manufacturing (which we think would cost too much to melt down to reuse), which is often shipped to China, where they melt it down so they can build high rises.

China in part is building more high rises with America's excess materials. Because they're willing to work with it, instead of being snotty and saying it would be too much work.

Wasn't it America's work ethic that got us so far ahead in the first place?

Now it seems we have become the overweight uncle you see once a year at family Christmas get-togethers, who wants to lean back in the easy chair after stuffing his face with decadent food they didn't prepare (because, of course, someone else prepared it *for* them), and talk between commercial breaks from the football game about how they were once the high school quarterback and they led their team to victory and were so popular - back then.

We as Americans are getting to the point where we're not producing all of the materials and products to keep our economy moving ahead of everyone else, but we're shipping our refuse to other countries (who use it to get ahead), and we're educating students from other countries here with Visas so they can take their American-educated brains back to their home country to charge us high prices for the products they've created.

We're seeing ourselves lose jobs in the world economy, we're *training* people from other countries so they can get ahead of us, and because we seem to expect every material possession in life, we're purchasing things from outside this country, beyond our means. We're letting what money we have slowly trickle out of this country.

And then we're putting ourselves in debt, to get more material pos-

sessions.

We're complaining that we want more, but we haven't earned it.

In the title of this editorial, I was asking which "world" this country would be. I was asking, because I was wondering if we were going to be a leading country, or if we would become like the third world countries, who have been taking our refuse to get ahead. I asked, because at the rate we're going, with our inability to compete in the world market and our inability to work (ah, let the illegal Mexicans do the work we don't want to do for cheaper, so we get cheaper produce in the grocery store...), with the government losing tax revenue because of illegal immigrants working in the United States, we're on a slippery slope that could slide our country downhill.

How far downhill? Well, if we can't produce, it won't be long before we become a third world country.

Yes, it is possible

I know, I know, you just heard me say that poor families with a home (or a crappy government apartment) still has access to television (and probably access to all the liquor and all the smokes and all of the illegal drugs they want), but we could become a country of people who have the basics, but not much else, because we don't have jobs and can't afford it. And don't have the drive to get out of the downward cycle we've gotten ourselves into.

Yes, it is possible

But if it *is* an eventual possibility, how do we get off that path down the mountainside and into the canyon hole?

I don't know.

Maybe we start by not credit carding ourselves into debt so our kids can have their own cell phones that they go over their minutes with every month. Maybe we just stop credit carding ourselves into debt, to have everything that we always want and can't afford (whatever happened to people using credit cards as 30 day interest-free loans, and paying the balance in full every month?). And, maybe we start *really* valuing things we can produce in this country, instead of letting our hard-earned money go to businesses from other countries instead of keeping our money in our economy.

Maybe we stop expecting our government to do everything for us. As I've said before:

You keep asking everyone to wipe your noses for you.

Well, pick up the dam tissue and do it yourself.
We have to stop *asking* for things and start *working* for things.

We didn't get to the moon first because we didn't work. The Wright brothers didn't learn to fly because they didn't work. And yeah, we wouldn't have drugs to help people with arthritis like Celebrex if drug companies didn't put up the resources - and do a lot of work (yeah, even the drug companies want to be paid for all of their hard work, if we want to continue getting all the things we could ever want...).

Nothing is accomplished without an extraordinary amount of work. We didn't excel in the world without a lot of work. And to stay ahead, we have to work - either to get better in these existing markets, or in creating new markets - so that we can still excel and stay on top.



Janet Kuypers
Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

SÆRLIG FOR FROKOST

(Especially at Breakfast)

Norwegian translation by Jacob Best

mom var alltid koke saker , spising det
rart saker, særlig for frokost
noe morgen, falle til jorden særlig groggy i'd
skritte av trappetrinnene å finner mom spising en
tallerken av kulden pigs' feet. bare meg moder.

AN HONEST CONFLICT

Frank Anthony Ph.D.

What is this “conflict of interest” we are hearing about more and more these days? Simply stated, it is: if there is the appearance that a public official has an interest, including monetary, in a matter before a town board he should “recuse” himself by stepping down during the proceeding. Not only at the local level, of town governance, is conflict of interest becoming more a matter of “news”, even the prestigious United Nations is in the news with a multi million dollar oil-for-food scandal. This is based on the idea that a UN executive had been awarding contracts to someone he “knew”.

Think about it. What kind of democracy is there in a system where lobbyists, for most of the large corporations, wine, dine and put big money in the campaigns of senators and representatives? Israel, the most powerful lobby, gets whatever they ask for.

The Supreme Court, highest legislative body in a so-called democracy, makes waves in the news, when certain members are invited on hunting or fishing trips, by big money people or companies who may be in future conflict of interest before the Court.

How does it appear, to the rest of the world, when the President of the United States spends millions of our tax dollars to change Medicare? The trade off is Wall Street brokers, and the companies that paid his way into office shall benefit. When anyone uses or abuses public property, including a good name, to benefit his or her own interest, there is conflict. What sense is there in touting “democracy” to the world unless we begin to practice honesty at all levels of government?

(Rhode Island Is Neither A Road Nor An Island)

a Danish translation by Jimbo Breen

RHODE Ø ER INGEN EN VEJ HELLER IKKE EN Ø

der er en grunden til at

hvor kan det være at Jeg er nedrig , og grusom og unjust

den har et eller andet hen til lave hos capitalizing

folk nyde altid blevet capitalizing oven på mig

og Jeg er fik ked af er der nemlig enhver

poetry
the passionate stuff

NEVER FOREVER

Michelle Greenblatt

this morning just died
for the third time & a blossoming
forever still looms forevering
above my head rearranging
itself, trying to look
pretty.

but forever lost its pizzazz
after it threw the party
I got so drunk
at I vomited
for weeks & couldn't see anything
but black
holes, occasionally the vortex
of nothing would appear; finally
that's what made me
sober up—

since then I've preferred never
so draw me
a picture of that—I'm still mopping
up vomit, rinsing
my mouth out & praying
forever never
invites me
out again.

2.17.2005

NO LEAST

Michelle Greenblatt

He lives
 in the mud but
only because
 he wants to.
Make no mistake. He put
 himself there.

When we are together he talks
of nothing but the mud. I noticed
his snout one night but he didn't be / come
unbeautiful. I was afraid
I still mirrored
him, thought I knew nothing

of mud; by name he was [in]famous—by reputation,
he re
plied, even more so. but girlandboy eventually sp / lit
& splintered, unbreathing on my side
all the time—I did hope
to drown but never even came
close—after little else

but floundering I watched
him sunder then sink
below the surface of the puddle until at least
no least mattered: not even a quark
dared move
as he stretched his dirty
arm out to say goodbye.

2.24.2005

KILLING DEGAS

Mark Gaudet

Paint
on my pallet

Pretty
yellows
cyan
burnt
sienna

Mash together
biting the brush
not knowing
waiting

Horses over steeple chase
pretty
ballerinas glide
across
his paintings
Burbon and pills
hues
of vomit
green
and yellow
spew
across my
canvas
Voluptuous
women
bathing
in a tub
Slit
wrists
grasp
the shower tiles
French
Impressionist
American
Depressionist

A NIGHT OF IMPOTENCE

Mark Gaudet

It must have been
the Vicodin
that made it
asleep

I thought
of every
sexual
encounter

my head is numb
my mind is
racing

slit skirts
high heels
the night we
fucked
in the Oldsmobile

I'd give anything
for an 18 year old
hard-on again
one that can
drive nails
through
teak

looking
at it
shriveled
reminds me
of
a tortoise
hiding in it's shell
"WAKE UP YOU
FUCKING
COWARD!!"
I just keep telling
her
it's not you baby
it's just the vicodin

THE BUDDHA WILL NOT FIT INSIDE YOUR BRIEFCASE

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis

“Nobody sees a flower, really, it is so small.
We haven’t time—and to see takes time,
like to have a friend takes time.”

--Georgia O’Keeffe

though you are
greedy to be more spiritual,
you seem unable to appreciate
the perfection of the chipped plate,
the harmonies of the cicadas,
the gloriousness
of a flock of crows in flight.

what Van Gogh saw, you cannot see.
or if you can,
then only in a museum,
through a glass darkly.

you’ve stepped right past—
or worse, stepped on!
so many dandelions and daffodils
that grew where flowers were not expected,
that disobeyed the rules
to just be beautiful
exactly where they are.

THE KILLING

Matthew James Babcock

Monday morning in mid-May
we wake to find our prize array
of pink and gold tulips
lambasted by a tyrant frost

whose stealthy Sunday night blitzkrieg
left their innocent heads
mangled in sickening starbursts
that remind me in fits and starts

of the urban bombings I keep
hearing about in Riyadh and the Gaza Strip.
Some, magically, still stagger
in the breeze, stares as blank as sunlight

in the shrapnel of cedar chips.
You are not consoled
by my allusions to Pope's
crucial *Essay on Criticism*

and gardening in the eighteenth century,
how the labor of planting
is its own sustenance
for the soul. Invariably,

nature prunes us, I say,
and you answer that it nevertheless
amounts to time wasted,
that your hands feel useless

now. The thought I don't share:
In November, when we tucked
them into sockets of cramped soil, it struck
me as both birth and burial there.

Later, I shuttle our two oldest girls
to their dress rehearsal
at Dance Unlimited, kittycorner
across the alley from Lorin's Auto Repair,

and watch them tighten up
the step-ball-changes in
a hopped up Little Richard's "Hokey Pokey."
The studio's décor is low key

kitsch, brash mauve and turquoise
walls bearing Degas reprints
and Gertrude Käsebier black and whites.
Our second oldest, who pranced

into our lives unplanned, comes in
ten steps too soon
for "Bop 'Til You Drop"
on a sickle breeze of petal-red leotards

and pigtails, the hardy bulb
of her girlhood already cached
sans rites in the earth's vault, stashed
along with the mass graves

of souls in Kosovo and Mazar-e-Sharif
who wait in black fifth position
to rise and traipse across time
on tiptoe to boogie to "Musicbox Dancer"

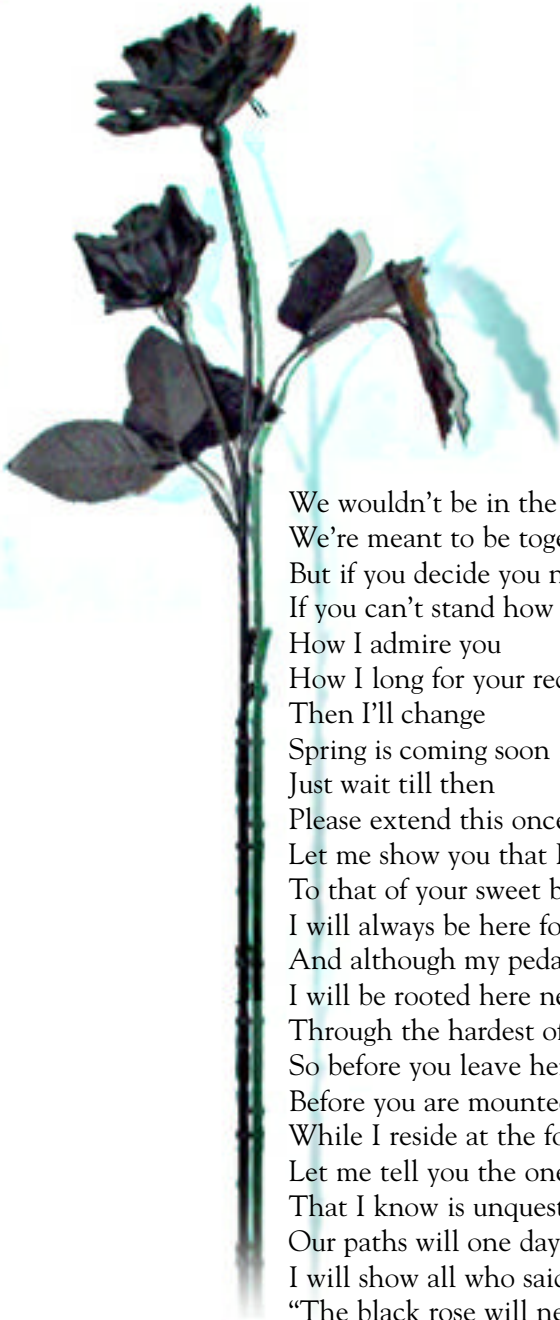
with the woman our girl will be,
her haggard head arching naturally
toward the everlasting stems of light
in an elegant query,

joining us with useful hands
in killing the things we bury.

THE BLACK ROSE

Adam Flomenbaum

If you left, I'd leave too
You're not the one who's suppose to be the strong one
Yet you are.
My follies and my falters
Would be detrimental
To even the prettiest rose in the bouquet
Yet you hold still,
Nourished,
Not gaunt like the black rose I've become;
Dehydrated by the desiccated juices of misery
Left depleted of my most attainable needs
How could I live without you?
Feeding me your pride,
Your strength,
Through our interlocking stems.
You are the root
I know you are.
I know you love me.
I know you need me.
I know you care about me.
But the black rose has to die someday
Doesn't it?
The man walking by the other day saw us together
He saw us in the same dirt
Being rained on by the same life
Leaning on each other
For the unilateral support I admit to
He said we could never last together.
You can't leave me
I won't let you go
No seed that grows next to me
Will develop into anything nearly as pretty as you
Sheer coincidence has no place in this world;
If you weren't meant for me



We wouldn't be in the same garden.
We're meant to be together forever
But if you decide you need to go
If you can't stand how I depend on you
How I admire you
How I long for your red soul
Then I'll change
Spring is coming soon
Just wait till then
Please extend this once in a lifetime opportunity
Let me show you that I can change colors
To that of your sweet blood.
I will always be here for you
And although my pedals will fall in snow
I will be rooted here next to you
Through the hardest of times
So before you leave here
Before you are mounted on the plaques of the great
While I reside at the foot of a tombstone
Let me tell you the one thing
That I know is unquestionably true
Our paths will one day cross again.
I will show all who said:
"The black rose will never survive"
That my love for you takes precedence
Over life and death.

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE TALKING TO A "COSMO GIRL"

R. Kimm

Hair color
Hair style
Hair length
Nails
Body image
Bulimia
Diets (while munching junk food)
How much weight she's lost
How much weight she's gained
Extramarital affairs
Marital problems
Contact lenses
Her doctor
Her psychiatrist
Her poodle
Her furniture, rugs, windows.

**AN IDEA THERE
IS A GOD
IS A DREAM**

(c) 2005 Frank Anthony

If life becomes a test
to see how many answer
correctly the question
and the game is rigged
so you cannot find out
last part is no answer
section all confusions
only full of illusions
why dig more solutions
there are no ablutions
unless we can catch on
No one is watched here
cannot find conclusion

DOCTOR KENNEDY, i THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Patricia L. Jones

You spoke instead of listening,
to tell me he wasn't going to live through the night.
Dying, like the bright yellow flowers in the vase
beside your ice cold hand.

On the television they always say I'm Sorry.
I remember thinking you should say it too,
and how I despise yellow,
with all it's false cheer.

I couldn't go to him because my neck was broken
cracked like a dry reed
is what you said.
Well what about my heart?

What year was it? What was my name?
You demanded answers and
I didn't no, I couldn't care.
Not about you. Not me. Not then.

Those hours stretched into days.
He didn't die.
He's here with me now,
as alive as the night he came screaming
from his mother's womb.

You should have said I'm sorry,
You should have meant the words.

I can still taste the blood when I see the bright yellow flowers.

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

**DICKENSIAN FICTION 14:
POET POPULAR AS FASHION STAR:
AN INTERVIEW WITH POET MARY B. SODA**

David Spiering

American poetry in recent years has tail spun like a wounded dragonfly and has threatened to make a lightweight puff-crash and disappear altogether inside rap music, comics, popular song, rock & roll, the blues music and rub itself into the long malleable ocean of prose. American poetry has taken a kindly midwestern neighborly tone to it — sort of like a polite backyard talk over a prim white picket fence about nice kindly kinfolkish things.

Gone are the days of Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Muriel Rukeyser, Etheridge Knight, Aaron Kramer, Robert Bly, William Stafford, Kenneth Rexroth, Robinson Jeffers, Carl Sandberg, Vachel Lindsey, Andre Lorde, and Denise Levertov; their lines were bricks put against many sociopolitical and environmental hypocrisies; they explained it so well that it didn't need a name or title to know or to call it by.

Today in the post 9/11 twilight fade down to darkness, American poetry has wandered rabbit like into the tall grass to hide from the rap-rich night cats, from being spot lit by a smooth prosy moon, to hide from horn-rimmed innocent bending into scurrilous behavior of rock & rollers and blues artists, breathing whiskey and tobacco smoke like a flammable fuel wide spread over the night. American poetry hunkers down afraid it'll burn down to be forgotten along with the rest of the little remains of Saturday night in America.

Hold all that in abeyance to consider poet Mary B. Soda, whose works have risen in popularity in the last two years especially, with university English faculty nation wide.

Soda possessing a carbonated personality teaches at the Upper Mississippi State University [UMSU] in North Country. She has the

Franz Erling Wassenburg chair and the endowment coupled with it. [Wassenburg and surviving family were the chief brewers of North Country form 1850 to 1990, when they sold the brewery. Now Wassenburg Lager is contracted out to a brewer outside the North Country and the quality badly down-slipped.]

Soda lives in an ole prairie style house on a flattop hill west of the UMSU Campus. She has two rottweilers named Morvis and Mervin. The dogs set themselves defensively and bark tough as verbal field artillery while Soda tries to quiet them on her way to the door. She puts them in a pen in the side yard.

She makes a pot of green tea and arranges pecan sandies on a glass plate. Her home is remarkably unadorned with books, a computer sits on a desk covered with a large plastic bag, a ream of paper sits next to it with its end flaps tucked and taped neatly. She carried the teapot and the sandies, then returns with napkins and cups. The phone rings. She cups the receiver between her shoulder and her ear as she talks she hands me a copy of The Upper Atlantic Poetry Monthly, her glamour shot's on the cover. The zine is a straight-through glossy. Her photo make her resemble a famous Hollywood starlet. Her lips gleam like sun lit ice, a fan blows her hair as if wind inflating a bird's wing feathers at the initiation of flight. Her cheeks are a makeup artists airbrushed artsy seashells. Her eyes have a current-Hollywood-hero prowling cat glow to them. Just like a Hollywood diva teasing a North Country farm boy into thinking even he can take her to the Friday high school dance.

“They sent a professional model photographer up here to do the shoot — it was done in the art department, it took all morning, he had me in all types of costumes— it was a whirl wind of his commands and flash bulbs and silky garments. Jay Frisbee's the editor and thinks this mag is a watershed project to bring poetry to people who normally read People, Cosmopolitan, and other popular fashion and culture magazines. He wants poetry that's what he calls post-modern — or poetry that is not in any sense convoluted or filled with figurative or what he calls drunken language— if you mean a straight line then write a straight line. He does not want feelings and does things through liquored-up double speak or contemplating how a jet fuel stream is a flat line compared to the ground — minus the effects on gravity —” she said.

“What about people that still like Sylvia Plath, Ezra Pound, Yeats, The English Romantics, Herman Melville, Alex Pope, W.C. Williams and Emerson?”

“In my view they clotted their abilities to see this dark world for what it is — and by calling it something it’s not, to me and Fribee that’s a type of lying — calling a atomic blast an electronic mushroom makes no sense to me, saying our polluted water bodies and water ways have a permanent chemical memory is a way of adding sugar to make the bitter poison we and our offspring must deal and live with more digestible.”

“It seems poetry has fallen into quite a slump...”

“That’s because it’s too sub textual — and evergreen bush when the bird in the bush is more important than the bush.”

“How did you arrive at poetry?”

“I was a drama major and I needed an upper level division elective and I took a poetry workshop class — I knew nothing about poetry — I still don’t know anything about it and I have a Ph.D. In its practice — I went on my teacher’s praise — he told me that he liked to talk about my poems because he could say smart things that other people couldn’t challenge — couldn’t find evidence rolled in the poems convoluted layers to justify their opinions.”

“Your latest book, *Black Anvil* — the jacket blurbs said ‘straight shooting as black ink on white paper — and these poems can only mean one way.’”

“Hank Winegaard was my first workshop teacher — he made the other people in class angry because he said he could say such intelligent things about my poems — when I wanted to go to graduate school, Hank wrote me such nice letters that after I arrived, my new teachers said I should thank him for the nice letters. I kept on with my non-imagist non-figurative non-sub textual language poetry — although I had problems with teachers, who for the sake of their lack of enlightenment — maybe that’s too mean — but they were upset I didn’t have reverence for W.B. Yeats or T.S. Eliot. I told them before the class I’ve never read them and I’m not reading them now — let them collect dust on the bookstore and library bookshelves. To make a long story short, I told them I thought most of all poetry written up until I came up with my plain speaking lines stunk and was unreadable — they gasped at me — I said the only writing I trust are essays — I told them — I have bookshelves full of them. I did want them drawing black circles around me — I mean I didn’t want them to not take me too seriously. I was barely able to finish the degree. I had problems getting the Ph.D. Too; though, I had to deal with less people — but they thought better to let me finish than get in my way — and there-by having me as a perpetual problem.”

The green tea cooled enough to drink and pecan sandies crumbled

like dandruff down shirtfronts and stuck like white flecks on sweaters.

“How do you think your work will be viewed in 50 to 100 years?”

“That’s not for me to say [she said taking a slim Henry Clay cigar from a wooden humidor, V-notching it, and rolling the tip slowly over a butane lighter’s flame until the tip was red and gray — she put it in her mouth and puffed until a Bob Marleyan-like smoke plum engulfed her head — she motioned her hand at the box for gestured directly; she received affirmative nods and the cigar was put in a shirt pocket for later] after I’m gone they can say what they want — but I think in a hundred years my work will be the granite headstone holding all English language poetry coming before it under the green grass. I get letters every day from college and high school teachers thanking me for writing poetry that they can say concrete intelligent things about — you see, teachers on all levels don’t like to be embarrassed by reading Yeats and Eliot and euh ... Water Closet Williams too for that matter and having students come back to them with different ideas that can be proved textually — teachers need a strong pulpit from where they are always in control and have mental mastery over students — my poetry will be remembered and read for hundreds and hundreds of years because teachers can say intelligent things about them.”

“What do you really think of the glamour shot of you on the zine cover?”

She dumps the gray ash in a convenient wine glass, and takes a long draw, making the tip glow bright red, then blowing a long gray smoke stream. The sandies, for their part, were buttery tasting and probably alive and seeded with pib fat shortening, something from science and medical science making the supply pipes to the poet’s heart issue grave quiet tocsins heard only in dreams and deep solitude. She hopes [as do many green tea drinkers] that the green tea’s antioxidants are inside her blood dog fighting the particles of heart disease, bladder walling them before spewing them out dead into the toilet water.

“You really want to know — I hope the photo ends up on Life magazine’s issue of the decade’s most influential people — I hope I’m on the cover.”

“Have you considered smoking a 52inch ring gauge — I find they draw better.”

She sat back and leaned forward and had a tea sip.

“You see, when you have a nose as long and thin as mine, you just have to match your stogies to fit its general overall length.”

“Have you read any of the lines of Dylan Thomas?”

“No. Who the Hell is Dylan Thomas?”

The green tea circles the cup like a river current bending around a

boulder.

“What about Ann Sexton and Sylvia Plath?”

“What about them. You don’t seem to understand — all poetry in the English language stunk until I started writing — now I’m training poets to write like me and they’ll train poets to write like me to completely negate and disarm the terrible misleading convoluted poetry of the past — if there’s a god, I can’t believe it has an ego or will stronger than mine.”

“What do you think of verbal melodies?”

“Stop trying to confuse me with the language of the past.”

“See that loud up there — what does it look like to you?”

“It’s just water vapor gathered together in the correct atmospheric conditions to create itself — science has it covered, I don’t need to say anything.”

“That cloud reminds me of my deep emotional heart.”

“Have another cookie. I’ll bet you’re a Pound-Yeats fan — think of it like this — when you’re in the receiving area to a place of commerce, when you hear a certain name or word — say you say to an average working class person, “golden apples of the sun” when they hand you a golden delicious apple, and you’re thinking of Yeats’ line from “The Song of Wandering Aengus” — they look at you like there’s something wrong with you — you hear a name like Marcia come over the intercom and most people say, “Marcia, Marcia, Marcia.” My point is that what’s great about my poetry is once people hear my lines they’ll stick there like the name “Marcia” they think of Jan Brady’s sulky plaintive remark. Average people will quote my lines.”

How can you be so certain of yourself — isn’t that something for someone else to decide, maybe 50 to 75 years down the line—”

“They may wither correctly or incorrectly,” Soda popped, poured and fizzed into sun-brighten almost crystal surrounding daylight.

“But to survive 100 years, poetry has to be champagne like, well kept to preserve its effervescence. Or it needed to be kept well corked and mitigated by extensive praise before its opened.

The steno book was flipped shut and dropped in a coat pocket. The photographer showed to take some photos at the departure time. Soda popped and spun smiles and whirled he hair like a fashionable helicopter’s chopping blades.

Soda hand-loaded her dogs in the house as the car engine caught. The car moved away from her “historic” curb. The notebook rumbled like a small volcano in the suit coat pocket beside the cigar.

But a deep thinking person well ensconced the art’s disciples must

consider this —

In three months it'll be cold enough that no one with good sense will go to bed naked. The snow and the cold will put a lid of white and ice on this land tight enough that no clarion cry of "rosebud" will provide no Hollywood-1950s-styled-pipe-smoke-tinged-wing tip-wearer any warm freedom — it's all hoe big the imagination makes the warm cozy feelings, until after Valentine's Day, when the ice and cold often give way to the beginning string moderation.

LAUNDROMAT SONNET (5)

Michael Ceraolo

The people who profited from the machines
had decreed they deserved more for doing nothing;
the greed of leeches keeps no bounds:
the machines would no longer take coins;
they would be converted to take a card
for which all residents would be charged
an upfront three-dollar fee;

and

there was also a seventy-five cent fee
hidden on every card-

seventy-five cents

that would never pay for a load and was thus useless
to the residents if not the owners
And the machines keep leaking

BLESS ME FATHER

David B. Reid

Bless me Father for I have sinned: A plea John Michael Brennan longed to hear from the other side of a confessional screen. The authority to forgive another's sins—a privilege sanctioned by Christ himself—that was power. For as long as he could remember, John Michael Brennan desired that kind of power. The same kind of power that comes from being a cop, a judge, the President of the United States, or a Roman Catholic Priest.

“It’s a Calling from God,” Father Sullivan once explained to him. But to a nine-year-old altar boy, the thought of the Almighty calling him was not at all comforting. It was terrifying. What would I say? What would I do? How would I know it wasn’t the voice of the Devil tricking me?

Father Sullivan laughed at the last question. “Don’t you worry about that John Michael. Satan’s not in the business of doing God’s recruiting.”

John Michael didn’t quite know what the pastor meant by God’s recruiting, but the message was clear enough: don’t sweat it.

So he didn’t.

He was never certain if his was exactly a calling, but the day he was ordained a priest, and henceforth referred to himself as Father John Brennan, he felt the power.

Over the past three years, as the pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Essex, Maryland, Father Brennan felt his power fade. Like a flickering fluorescent bulb on the verge of its last kilowatt-hour, he sensed the power was about to leave him. It was nothing more than an illusion, he thought. He reconsidered his vows, wondered if he even had a calling. Maybe he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe he wasn’t meant to be a priest. Maybe that power wasn’t meant to be his.

Fatima had been Father John Brennan’s baby—more like a wild child that no foster-parent could tame, truth-be-told. Archbishop Murphy was direct with him about Fatima. It was a church in serious disarray, and in dire need of a steadfast leader who could unite the misguided and disgruntled parishioners. The Archbishop forewarned him: three of his predecessors had been chewed up and spat out like bad pieces of meat.

Through gritted teeth his mentor added, “Watch your back, John. Fatima goes through priests like a defecating newborn goes through diapers.”

Unlike the dejected priests preceding him, when he arrived at Fatima, Father Brennan ignored the dysfunctional church-family dynamics, and instead immediately embarked upon a beautification project involving the painting of all parish buildings. The two-story Rectory, Elementary School building, and original church structure erected in 1917 were all in need of a fresh coat of paint to cover the blemishes caused by years of acid rain and scorching ultraviolet rays. Hoping to unite the squabbling members of Our Lady of Fatima, the new pastor took advantage of a much needed paint job, and enlisted the assistance of the parishioners for one common goal: giving OUR church home a new look.

His empowering strategy worked. Before he knew it, Church committees were sprouting and multiplying like dandelions on a bright spring morning. The buildings were painted in a matter of three weeks. The only snagging point during the entire process was the Beautification Committee's unanimous choice of color: Passion Pink. Church bylaws forbid a Pastor veto, but even if permitted, Father Brennan would have let the decision stand. He wasn't about to rock the boat and risk becoming another Fatima castoff. Not this soon. Passion Pink it was.

By the time the first coat of paint dried, the uniformed, plaid-clad elementary school children boldly expressed their immediate disapproval of their newly face-lifted school, and aptly christened it "The Pink Prison." Like the acrylic paint sprayed onto the concrete walls, the name stuck.

Despite that minor glitch, momentum was building; people were working together; the stewing hostility was cooling. But Father Brennan wasn't so naïve to believe a prettied-up church home was the answer to all of Fatima's problems. After all, even a Mary Kay makeover couldn't transform the Mona Lisa into a Sports Illustrated swimsuit model.

The level of emotional disturbance within the parish became abundantly clear within the first two weeks after his arrival. During that time, Father Brennan received more complaints about the dishonest, backstabbing, two-faced hypocrites of Fatima than he did welcome packages of brownies, cakes, and floral arrangements from well-wishers. One self-anointed whistleblower went so far as to generate a list of Counterfeit Catholics whom she snidely reported talked the talk but failed to walk the walk. "Each and every one of them, a disgrace to Christ and His passion," the note read. The most reprehensible of these, according to the castigator, was Maggie Deavers.

Maggie Deavers, past-president of the Ladies of Sodality, apparently had a propensity for swilling sacramental wine and helping herself to the stash of communion wafers stored in a locked cabinet in the sanctuary.

The anonymous tipster indicated that Maggie believed consuming the body of Christ brought her closer to her Lord and Savior. What puzzled Father Brennan, of course, was how the author of the note was privy to Maggie's delusional dietary habits. Did the two of them picnic on a box of whole-wheat altar bread and cheap bottle of Cabernet?

With the indictment list and other whispered and written finger-pointing FYIs, Father Brennan offered his congregation a gentle reminder about the seventh verse of the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to John: "He who is without sin shall cast the first stone."

Initially, the homily seemed to be going well (at least no one tossed a rock his way). All eyes were on him, shifting left then right and back again as he casually paced before them, sharing the Good Word. In a matter of minutes, as if mesmerized by a stage magician, the attentive eyes turned to a collection of blank stares. They were biding time, he thought. To them, Mass was nothing more than a weigh station where tickets were punched before making that final trip through the Pearly Gates.

And so it was, Sunday after Sunday, baptism after baptism, confession after confession: the good members of Our Lady of Fatima, like Maggie Deavers, talked the talk but didn't walk the walk.

To his surprise, his Friday evening Penance service remained popular. Most evenings he was there until at least 8:00 PM. One by one, they'd enter the confessional, kneel before him, and from the other side of a private partition speak the words that granted him the power: Bless me Father for I have sinned . . . And in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, he forgave them. Every last one of them: the little white lies to parents, the shoplifted baseball cards at Wal-Mart, the angry curse words, the pornographic perusing, the taking of the Lord's name in vain, and even the coveting of Miss Perry's hooters (Ryan Sanders couldn't help himself. He was in the fifth grade, and fact was, Miss Perry was stacked).

Eventually, he realized the service was nothing more than a good conscience cleaner for those planning to receive the Eucharist the following Sunday. Their lame revelations were an insult to his holy robe.

There were no affairs, no murders, no sexual molestations, no closet homosexuals seeking the Lord's forgiveness. It was all rather silly. There simply was no power in forgiving Timmy Robinson for copping a look up his Aunt Jennifer's skirt, or absolving Julie Frazer (whose lisp always gave her away) for failing to feed her pet goldfish.

Penance wasn't living up to his voyeuristic expectations. There was no clout in granting forgiveness for the mundane venial sins these people confessed. He craved the mortal violations. Then he could decide if the

penitent expressing remorse deserved absolution. Then and only then would he have the power.

And at approximately 8:45 PM on Friday April the 13th, three years to the day after taking the helm at Our Lady of Fatima, life fortuitously changed for Father John Michael Brennan. The opportunity to seize the power came after Penance Service when he walked into the Rectory and discovered that someone had paid him an unexpected and most uninvited visit. Unfortunately, his guest or guests didn't hang around long enough for proper introductions. But before slipping out the back door, they helped themselves to a number of his personal possessions including his Dell Inspiron laptop, a flat screen TV, surround sound stereo system, three bottles of Chianti, and his collection of John Wayne DVDs. There was little evidence left behind from what he could gather, but he was pretty certain he saw Carl Belanger's Ford Taurus pulling off the church parking lot posthaste just seconds before he entered the Rectory.

A police officer and two crime scene unit agents arrived ten minutes after Father Brennan placed the 911 call. An Officer Phillips took his statement and itemized list of missing valuables, while the two CSU agents initiated a quick dusting of doorknobs, countertops, and light switches. As the agents twirled their powdered brushes and scoured the carpet one last time for any sliver of evidence, Officer Phillips asked Father Brennan if there was anything else he needed to report. The priest paused. He who is without sin . . . Hell with that, he thought. One way or the other, Father John Brennan would lay claim to the power he craved, yet had foolishly squandered over the past three years. If he couldn't garner his power through the forgiveness of sins, he would summon it through the accusation of a sinner.

And so, with the speed of a Clark Kent phone booth clothes-change, Father Brennan reclaimed his power. With a proverbial rock in one hand and an accusatory finger extended from the other, Father John Michael Brennan felt a surge of power course through every living cell in his body.

"Yes, officer come to think of it, there is one other thing. I'm pretty sure I saw Carl Belanger's car speeding off the church lot tonight. I don't mean to point fingers, but I have a feeling he may be responsible for this."

Pushing the bill of his hat with the end of a capped pen, the officer replied, "Belanger? Is that with an E-R or A-R?"

"I believe it's E-R," he replied. "I don't know the man very well, but I've always had this sneaking suspicion that he's up to no good."

What he failed to tell Officer Phillips was that sneaking suspicion of his came from the same list he received three years ago that indicted that

no-good Maggie Deavers and 43 other Counterfeit Catholics including Carl Belanger. Carl Belanger has sticky fingers, the note read.

“We’ll look into it, Father. Is there anything else we can do for you before we take off?”

“I don’t think so, son. I thank you for all your help tonight.”

“That’s no problem, Father,” he said. Turning to leave, Officer Phillips stopped in mid-stride and with the trademark afterthought questioning of Lieutenant Columbo asked, “You know Father, if this fella Belanger is responsible for this, the District Attorney will be pressing charges and he could go to jail.”

A sinister grin grew beneath the priest’s nose. “As well he should.”

The accusation by Father Brennan cost Carl Belanger three hours of his life, and the embarrassment of a messy fingerprinting. By Sunday service, word had spread around the congregation that Carl Belanger broke into the Rectory and managed to steal most of Father Brennan’s personal belongings. The list of stolen goods grew as the days went by. Father Brennan half-expected his anonymous rumormonger, who over the years kept him apprised of any Counterfeit Catholic Club happenings, to post a list of additional Carl Belanger accusations, not to mention a scolding told-you-so note. That memo never arrived.

In the meantime, a revitalized Father Brennan capitalized upon his victimization by subjecting his congregation to an ample helping of forced guilt. He’d call them out—every last one of them. Make them accountable for their behaviors. One way or another he’d force them to bended knee and coerce them into revealing their daily evil misdoings. Then they would need his forgiveness. By God, he would have his power.

He found his crinkled Counterfeit Catholic list, and started with Carl Belanger. Though never mentioning him by name, anyone tuning into his Sunday sermons knew exactly whom he was referring to when ranting about The Thief amongst them who shamefully hides behind Satan’s cape. He made a point to let them know that all sins can be forgiven. But no sin shall go unpunished if the sinner lacks genuine remorse, or is too fearful to confess.

Every Sunday, he selected an unwitting suspect from the dirty laundry list and publicly denounced their sinful behavior. Like a parent warning a misbehaving child with the Santa won’t bring you any toys proclamation, Father John Brennan held his people hostage with the threat that they would be damned to Hell or, at best, waylaid in Purgatory while the souls of practicing Catholics who made good use of the confessional passed them by on angels’ wings. Soon enough, the confessional lines

lengthened, as did time spent in the musty box where his coerced subjects bore their darkest secrets. Finally, he was hearing the smut. Finally, he was able to grant forgiveness, knowing he had good reason not to. Finally, he was able to impose a punishment to fit the crime. Usually it was no more than a couple decades of the Rosary, but on occasion he happily mandated forty hours of community service at the local soup kitchen. Either way, Father John Michael Brennan had the power.

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end. And after six months of delivering fire and damnation from his bully pulpit, the tides of Our Lady of Fatima once again turned on Father Brennan. All charges against Carl Belanger were dropped. Mr. Belanger was off the hook, and found himself a new church home two counties away where no one would know of the crimes he apparently didn't commit. Several dedicated parishioners went with him. The congregation was talking. Father Brennan now had the staying power of a wet noodle.

Penance service was a bust. Attendance was down, and those seeking forgiveness reverted to confessing the silly secrets no one really cared about. With his power fast fading, he knew he had few opportunities left to revitalize his authority. He knew it would require the manipulation of the most vulnerable, impressionable and defenseless of them all: the children.

His timing couldn't have been better. The second and third graders were in the midst of diligently preparing for First Holy Communion and the sacrament of Penance. This time, unlike Baptism, where a Godparent vouched for them, they were on their own. Their active participation in the sanctioned ceremonies was required. Hitler had his junior Nazis; Father Brennan his captive sacramental lambs.

For the next four weeks, Father John Brennan manipulated their malleable minds, planting and fertilization in each of them, a guilty conscience that would take years of psychotherapy to uproot.

He convinced them that life without confession wasn't a life worth living. God was keeping tally, he informed them, and if they let the numbers get away from them, they would find themselves on a one-way fast track to Hell. That got their attention. But that wasn't quite enough. They needed to know their secrets were safe with him. Without this assurance, they'd never spill the beans on their dastardly deeds. Just then, as if pre-ordained, and on perfect cue, a freckle-faced, strawberry blonde in the back threw an arm in the air and asked the question. It was the perfect set-up.

Wanting to ensure that her sins wouldn't be blabbed across the schoolyard, nine-year-old Kelli Metts sought a verbal guarantee from Father Brennan that her confession was a cross your heart, hope to die,

stick a needle in your eye secret. He explained to her and the other children that confession was a bond with God: A sacred promise between a priest and confessor that all disclosed sins are protected. They could never to be revealed to anyone.

“Not even your parents,” he whispered through a cupped hand. “That’s the agreement we make with God,” he said. “When a priest hears your confession, he can’t ever tell anyone anything about what you confess. Your secret is always safe in the confessional.”

“What if you’ve killed somebody,” Jacob Welsh boldly inquired.

“Still can’t tell anyone. Not even the police. It’s stays between you, the priest, and God.”

A collective “WOW” filled the classroom.

“But that doesn’t guarantee that the sin will be forgiven,” he cautioned. “Breaking one of the Ten Commandments is serious business, children. And if a priest believes he can’t forgive the sin, he won’t. He’ll leave it up to God.”

Gearing their minds to the importance of telling all, even at the expense of personal embarrassment, he added, “It’s very important to confess all your sins. Otherwise, you take the chance that God won’t let you into Heaven. If the priest says your sins are forgiven, then they’re forgiven.”

Little did he know that while meeting with these children, a conflicted parishioner was wrestling with her own thoughts of confessing a sin that has plagued her for the past several months.

Later that evening, as he leaned in to tend to the service’s first confession, he sensed a pained hesitation on the other side of the obstructive screen. He waited patiently, knowing forced confessions never yield productive results.

“Take your time, my child,” he whispered. “God is patient.”

“Bless me Father . . . for I have sinned,” the shaky voice started. She could be no more than twelve or thirteen years old, he estimated. “It’s been . . . four months since my last confession.”

Four months, he thought. This should be a good one. Ample time for the Devil to make due with a vulnerable soul. “Go ahead my child. You may confess your sins. God’s compassion is with you.”

“Father, I’m not sure how to say this,” she said with a heavy sigh.

The voice was unfamiliar. “Say it anyway you like. Your God is a forgiving God.”

“Yes Father, I know. It’s just . . . well, I just wanted you to know that . . . it was me who took your stuff a few months ago. Not just me, but some of my friends too. We saw the light on in the Rectory, and knew you’d be

over here for the Penance service. We knocked anyway, and when no one answered, we checked the door to see if it was unlocked, and when the knob turned, we walked in. That's when Kenny and Billy took the flat screen TV and I grabbed your laptop. J.J. took some other stuff, but I'm not sure what all he got."

The confessional fell silent.

"I feel kinda bad about it," she continued, "but I knew if I came here tonight and confessed what happened, you would at least know who stole your stuff. And knowing you're not allowed to tell anyone, I knew I wouldn't get into any trouble."

The lingering incense from a funeral service hours earlier filled his nostrils. Looking to his closed Bible, her voice grew faint; the walls of the dark booth crowded him. Gripping the Good Book, bringing it to his chest, trying to silence his pounding heart and racing mind, he sensed the lid closing on his casket.

"I guess it kinda it works for both of us," he heard her say. "I'm off the hook, and now you know it wasn't that Carl dude who ripped you off. I suppose that's the cool thing about confession, isn't it? It has to stay between you and me."

"And God," he said, finally speaking.

"What's that?" she asked.

"And God. It's between you and me and God."

"Whatever," she smirked.

Before he could inquire about her intentions of returning his belongings, he heard the door to the confessional creak open then slam shut. He didn't have the chance to absolve her sins. He didn't give her the obligatory penance. No Hail Marys. No Our Fathers. No decades of the Rosary. He sat there alone in the dark. Powerless.



performance art

live in Chicago 02/15/05

HOW DO I GET THERE?

excuse me. I've been driving for a while.

This gas station is the first sign of life I've seen.

We've been looking for

196 North Macintosh court for a while. The directions said we had to take a left on the street we were just on a few miles ago, but Macintosh court isn't there. There's a Macintosh street, and Mapquest told me of a Macintosh Avenue, but an avenue would be going the wrong way. I... I'm really confused.

You're the only attendant, here... You're the only one that can help me. This is the address.

How do I get there?



I just got out of college a few months ago. Just got my degree. I feel important now. I know the career I've studied for. Now I've got to get the job of my dreams.

I filled out a ton of resumes. Got a few calls back. Now i've got my first interview. I've got my interview jacket on. I answer all of the questions right.

I see the offices. I think:

excuse me.

This is what I should have.

Am I doing this right?

How do I get there?

I am a 28 year old woman.

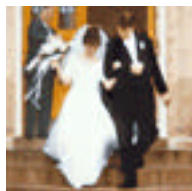
I am doing well on my own.

I'm the one with the car. I'm the one with the plan.

People always look to me for answers.

I look around me. I am pleased.

And then I see my high school friends, married, sometimes with their high school sweetheart, and with a kid or two.



Different life from me.

I've been the beacon all along, but here I am, on top of the mountain, the one with the answers, alone.

And I think: hey, I'm a girl. Maybe I should want that. Maybe I should want that white paicket fence and the two point three kids, and that man I can lean on so I don't have to be the beacon.

I look down at myself, and I think: this is what I am. I look at these suburban families, & I think: is this what I should want? My clock is ticking. See this? This should be my plan. Who will sweep me off my feet? Where is my man? Where is that dream? How do I get there?

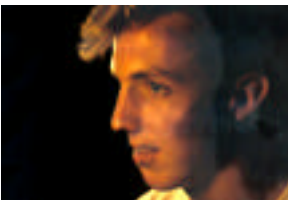
tall man

I can feel your presence across the room
a movement a stir

your long shadow stretches across the walls

an occasional glance
I'll take whatever I can take

a stranger
yet I feel I know you all too well



high roller

I long to see you sitting again
cigarette in hand
walkman on the table

I want to be able to walk up behind you
rest my hands on your shoulders
lean my head next to your face

I long to have my cheek near yours
not touching
but so close
that I could still feel your warmth
your desire

our skin wouldn't touch
but I would still feel the rush
from your presence

there I sit

there I sit

I sit alone
separated
isolated
away from my only love
my obsession

I pull out
a fountain pen
I look
at the lines
the contours
of his face



defining
the piercing
eyes
the pointed
nose
the tender
lips

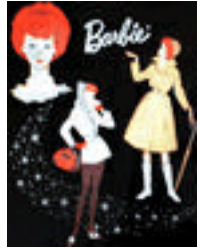
I feverishly
draw
I sketch
I capture
his image

I stare
I gaze
I memorize his every detail
but he never looks back

so I will draw
until my
fountain pen
runs dry

Writing Your Name

I sat there
in the shade
I took
a stick
I wrote
your name
in the ground
preacher says
the number one
sin is lust
then I am
condemned
to Hell
for
I
want
you
and I
don't care
what
preacher says
for if
the elements
wash away
your name tonight
I will
be back
tomorrow
to write it
again.



I look out my window and see that insanely tall man walking down the street with the girlfriend that's five foot two, & I wonder if this girl has a father-figure complex, & I wonder if this guy needs a small girl that he can break into two pieces, or if he needs to feel dominant over everything in his life...

Isn't the tall white male dominant over everything already?

So I wonder: why is this insanely short girl dating this insanely tall man? Why are they taking from the gene pool these (albeit neanderthal) men from us tall women? Is this fair? How do I have a chance at a tall man when these short barbie doll women stop me before I can start?

I see these images, these people, walking down the street hand in hand, and I wonder: how do I get that image I dream of, how do I get the dozen roses, how do I get that box of chocolates on Valentine's Day, Hell, I'll settle for Sweetest Day, how do I get those generic symbols of love? How do I get there?

the fourteenth

grade school, lace and construction paper cut outs -
mimicking our hearts with school glue, a
sixty-four pack of crayons,
a doily, perhaps, and a child's scribblings,
"Be My Valentine." The beginning of every cold February
the classes of children are taught to make enough little hearts
for everyone, so that no one may be disappointed,
so that everyone can be your Valentine.
Nonetheless, one little child's construction paper mailbox
come February fourteenth
always had less than everyone else's.

And then it gets easier as the years go on
mommies buy little packs of Valentine cards
for their children to sign and give away to all the little
children at school. Saves them from having to
make all those cards,
the glue and the glitter and the cut-outs are messy.

Every fourteenth, second month
when I was little



I remember daddy bringing heart-shaped boxes
home for all the girls -
myself, my sister, my mother. I can remember mother now,
her candy box on her ironing board, thanking him once again
for the lovely gift. And so it goes.

And the card shops get fuller this time every year
husbands saying “my wife will kill me
if I don’t get her a card” or young women complaining
“my boss told me to get a card for his wife”

And the flowers seem the same, don’t they? Carnations
arranged in a big ball atop a little basket. Red,
yellow, pink, white. Lovely.
All the adornments of the holiday. Don’t stop short of the best.

A girlfriend said to me once
she’s sure boyfriends break up with you by the
beginning of February so they don’t have to
buy you anything. So they don’t have to say they love you.
Last year I spent Valentine’s Day
taking those chalky hearts with messages on them
and scribbling my own on the back.
“Screw You”, “Go Away”, “Leave Me Alone.” I never
liked the taste of those candies.
And the Valentine’s Day party,
where all the single people were thinking,
“Please give me someone to go home with. Don’t let me
be alone tonight.”

And the women getting lonely
and the married couples arguing
and the suicide rate going up

And the woman looking at the carnations on her
dining room table
holding the card in her hand that says “love, Jake”
wondering why it doesn’t feel good yet



I see all of this harked at a time that is supposed to be good & I wonder where that light at the end of the tunnel is & I wonder where that cloud's silver lining is. & I try to remember what love is like, & I try to remember the hearts and candies and flowers and sunsets & all that other crap that is supposed to make you happy. & I try to remember those Harlequin romance novels that I never read, where someone is rescuing the damsel, riding away on a white horse in to the sunset & I wonder, Where is that in real life? How do I get there? How do I get out of this cycle? How do I get out of this downward spiral?



at least i have this

how far will we push each other? i wonder
as we sit in the living room, waging this
emotional battle, knowing that in the end
it will still be with you having your sex
with me, leaving me when you're through
with me. that is what i'm here for. that is
my function. but at least i have this, at least
i can make you fight me a little more for
it. i know you'll win in the end, but at least
for these few moments, these few fleeting
moments, i have this control over you.
and then the pain of being with you comes
back, and you win. but let me have this.
just this. i know i'll get no more. please.

that's not what i'm here for

every once in a while
i want to talk to one of them

see if they'll actually listen

but i've learned by now
they're not interested in

what i have to say
that's not what i'm here for

they think they're using me
i guess they are

but what they don't realize
is that i'm using them, too

maybe that's why
they don't feel the pain i feel

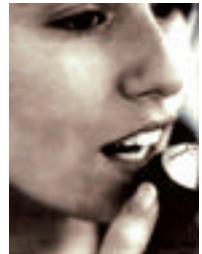
but i still use them, they use me
but i do it anyway

they never ask me

i get up to find my clothes
sometimes they stay asleep
sometimes they wake up

"why are you getting dressed"
they ask, and i tell them
that i have to get going

they never ask me to stay



You see, I've got this road map. I've seen how families work. My mom and dad are still together. People want to hook up, people want to get together, people want to procreate. It's human nature.

Spread the seed. Tend to the flock.

Hallmark even added Sweeteat day to the holiday mix, in a different season than Valentine's Day, so that people'd have another time of year to be mushy and gushy and romantic with one another.

Anything to boost sales of flowers, and candies, and cards.

Anything to increase sales.

And you know, I see these generic stereotypes about love, and sometimes I feel like I should be a part of that, that I should get those bonbons, or truffles, or whatever candy you're normally supposed to get on Valentine's Day, and you know, I don't even really like eating candies, but damnit, the sentiment is there, and I want that sentiment. I want to know how to find love, cause damnit, I've been looking. And I don't know what to tell myself any longer. How do I get there?



What do we say

What do we tell our youth
when we let them out on probation
for violent crimes
because there's no room in our jails

What does it say of us
when a painting of a clown
by John Wayne Gasey
sells for millions

What does it say of our self-esteem
when hundreds of women write letters
to Charles Manson
asking for his hand in marriage

What does it say of our media
when it glorifies these
dark heroes

Dear

Hero

I want to know how your mind works

I want to know why you did it

I want to know how you feel about politics, and love, and marriage

I hope you're not suffering too much

I love you



What rights do we really take away
from those who take our rights from us?

Richard Speck, convicted of killing
eight nurses, was videotaped in his
prison cell by cell mates with his
male lover, counting hundred
dollar bills, snorting mounds of
cocaine,
showing off his hormonally-
induced shapely breasts



When a member of society commits a crime
they relinquish the rights
they have taken from others

in theory

One man in prison filed a lawsuit
against the state
for serving peas to him too many
days in a row

One man in prison filed a lawsuit
against Ann Landers
because she published his letter
where he wrote he killed his wife

One man in prison filed lawsuit
after lawsuit against the state
solely because he felt a great joy
in uselessly spending
the taxpayers' money

What do we say to all of this

What do we say

What do I say to this? How do I get away from those who like to kill?
What should I say, ***If you can't lead, then follow? If you can't beat them, join them*** ? How can you get to that point? How do I get there?

Lambs to Heaven's Gate

They tell you the meek shall inherit the earth.
Then they lead their lambs to the slaughter
as I do, to the ones who will follow.
You see, the meek wouldn't know what to do
with their inheritance. They know nothing
of property, ownership, power. I teach them
not to understand these values but to fear them.
To sacrifice. To stay meek. I'm the one
who tells them how to dress, how to walk,
how to kill themselves. All they need is a reason
as long as they don't have to think it through.



People will believe anything if you
tell it to them the right way. Give them a few
tokens and they'll create icons out of you.
But not everyone can guide, can lead the lost.
Give themselves to the followers who need them,
with nothing in return. Like the stars,
which seem so small, so meek from here
yet are unfathomable, uncontrollable.
Like the shepherd, quietly guiding his flock
but holding a stick all the while. I'm the one
who guides them, who guides them to their destiny.

Consider the stars, so small, so unfathomable. So beautiful in the
night sky. How do we understand this love for what we always see in the
stars, what is always just out of reach? How do we get there?

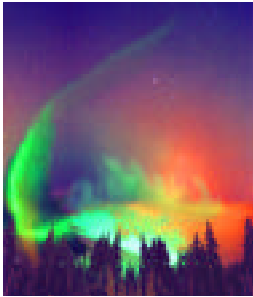
We go to the moon, and try to learn, We send rockets to Saturn's
moon Titan, to learn what our planet might
have been like when this solar system was cre-
ated. We want to learn. We want to under-
stand. Because we are in love.



moonlight

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to

I think everyone loves the moon. We hear of romance under the moonlight. I remember looking at the moon through a telescope when I was 6 years old. And historically, scientifically, I think everyone was transfixed to their televisions or radios when man first landed on the moon, there seemed to be a moment of awe, and inspiration, and amazement when there was that one small step for man, that one giant leap for mankind.



Scientists have deduced (in trying to guess how this planet got a moon, and how necessary it is for our weather patterns), that when the moon was first formed (one theory was that it was formed off a rogue planet they call Orpheus), that the moon was first much, much closer to Earth when it was first formed than it is today, that it may have been only 14,000 miles away, and not at the current almost 240,000 mile distance it's at now.

Astronomers now estimate that because of gravity's change, the moon, every year, is a mile and a half farther away from the earth. If you remember the moon looking so big when you looked at the night sky when you were little, well, you may have been right.

Laurie Anderson, while studying with NASA as their Artist-in-Residence, learned from scientists at



NASA during the cold war and during this country's desire for nuclear testing, they considered setting off nuclear bombs on the dark side of the moon. Because, you see, no one sees that side of the moon, and the radiation would be a safe distance from the Earth.

When I heard that, I thought: what would setting nuclear explosions on half of the moon do to it's orbit? What would that do to it's effect on our weather? And consider the earthquake that caused the Tsunami in Asia a few months ago slowed the rotation of the planet for a second - so would these explosions on the moon affect our rotation, or possibly our orbit?

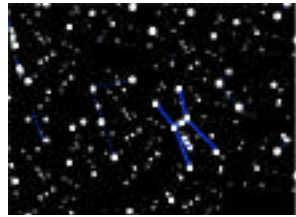


And then I thought: why would anyone, ever, want to destroy a heavenly body we so need and don't know enough about? Why would anyone want to destroy something that so many people are so infatuated with, that so many people revere?

Astronomy is like a forbidden love affair, something you can never reach, but something you can always hope for, something you can always admire from afar. Something whose constancy can give you hope, even if only when you're standing outside in the night and looking up at its perennial beauty.

orion

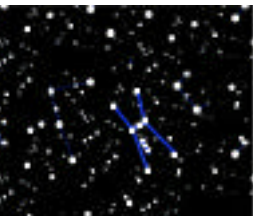
Winter evenings I would look for you.
Dancing along the horizon. You were
always fighting; the great bear to the
north, the bull in the winter.



You were my favorite. whenever I
could I would look for you: out my
window, in my driveway. I remember
a nebula lived in the center of your sword.

You, spending millennia fighting. You
have taught me well. The other night, I
looked out my window again; you were
there. Receiving strength from me,

as I did so many years in you.





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