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children
churches
& daddies

the **UN**religious, **NON**family-oriented literary & art mag

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Scars art pages 14, 15 (repelling in Urbana, and cannons at Gettysburg, PA), 17, 40 (cars from Rome, Austria and Florida). Cover art; photo of the Status of Liberty (New Jersey).

let's all give a shout-out for free speech...

Tracing journalists calls from **The Week**, the week of 05/19/06

The FBI has been tracing reporters' phone calls as part of an investigation into classified information leaks, ABC News reported this week. The network said records of the calls made by two of its reporters, along with reporters from The New York Times and The Washington Post, were obtained in connection with an investigation into leaks about the CIA's use of overseas prisons. Under Justice Department regulations, prosecutors must get a subpoena to receive a journalist's phone records, plus inform the news organization. None of the three news organizations have been told of any subpoenas. However, under the Patriot Act, the government can obtain certain records by using "national security letters" instead of subpoenas.

DARWIN awards

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

According to police in Windsor, Ontario, Daniel Kolta, 27, and Randy Taylor, 33, died in a head-on collision, thus earning a tie in the game of chicken they were playing with their Snowmobiles.

In Detroit, a 41-year-old man got stuck and drowned in two feet of water after squeezing head first through an 18-inch-wide sewer grate to retrieve his car keys.

A 49-year-old San Francisco stockbroker, who “totally zoned when he ran,” accidentally jogged off a 100-foot-high cliff on his daily run.

Buston, NC, a man died on a beach when an 8-foot-deep hole he had dug into the sand caved in as he sat inside it. Beach-goers said Daniel Jones, 21, dug the hole for fun, or protection from the wind, and had been sitting in a beach chair at the bottom Thursday afternoon when it collapsed, burying him beneath 5 feet of sand. People on the beach, on the outer banks, used their hands and shovels, trying to claw their way to Jones, a resident of Woodbridge, VA, but could not reach him. It took rescue workers using heavy equipment almost an hour to free him while about 200 people looked on. Jones was pronounced dead at a hospital.

Santiago Alvarado, 24, was killed in Lompoc, CA, as he fell face-first through the ceiling of a bicycle shop he was burglarizing. Death was caused when the long flashlight he had placed in his mouth (to keep his hands free) rammed into the base of his skull as he hit the floor.

According to police in Dahlonga, GA, ROTC cadet Nick Berrena, 20, was stabbed to death in January by fellow cadet Jeffrey Hoffman, 23, who was trying to prove that a knife could not penetrate the flak vest Berrena was wearing.

Sylvester Briddell, Jr., 26, was killed in Selbyville, Delaware, as he won a bet with friends who said he would not put a revolver loaded with four bullets into his mouth and pull the trigger.

In Guthrie, OK, In October, Jason Heck tried to kill a millipede with a shot from his 22 caliber rifle, but the bullet ricocheted off a rock near the hole and hit pal Antonio Martinez in the head, fracturing his skull.

In Elyria, Ohio, in October, Martyn Eskins, attempting to clean out cobwebs in his basement, declined to use a broom in favor of a propane torch and caused a fire that burned the first and second floors of his house.

Paul Stiller, 47, was hospitalized in Andover Township, NJ, and his wife Bonnie was also injured, when a quarter-stick of dynamite blew up in their car. While driving around at 2 AM, the bored couple lit the dynamite and tried to toss it out the window to see what would happen, but apparently failed to notice the window was closed.

RUNNERS UP:

Tacoma, WA, Kerry Bingham had been drinking with several friends when one of them said they knew a person who had bungee-jumped from the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in the middle of traffic. The conversation grew more heated and at least 10 men trooped along the walkway of the bridge at 4:30 am. Upon arrival at the midpoint of the bridge they discovered that no one had brought a bungee rope. Bingham, who had continued drinking, volunteered and pointed out that a coil of lineman's cable lay nearby. One end of the cable was secured around Bingham's leg and the other end was tied to the bridge. His fall lasted 40 feet before the cable tightened and tore his foot off at the ankle. He miraculously survived his fall into the icy river water and was rescued by two nearby fishermen. "All I can say," said Bingham, "is that God was watching out for me on that night. There's just no other explanation for it." Bingham's foot as never located.

AND THE WINNER:

Overzealous zookeeper Friedrich Riesfeldt (Paderborn, Germany) fed his constipated elephant Stefan 22 doses of animal laxative and more than a bushel of berries, figs and prunes before the plugged-up pachyderm finally let it fly, and suffocated the keeper under 200 pounds of poop. Investigators say ill-fated Friedrich, 46, was attempting to give the ailing elephant an olive oil enema when the relieved beast unloaded on him. "The sheer force of the elephant's unexpected defecation knocked Mr. Riesfeldt to the ground, where he struck his head on a rock and lay unconscious as the elephant continued to evacuate his bowels on top of him" said flabbergasted Paderborn police detective Erik Dern. With no one there to help him, he lay under all that dung for at least an hour before a watchman came along, and during that time he suffocated. It seems to be just one of those freak accidents where "\$%#& just happens."

poetry
the passionate stuff

How to Make Life

Robert Lee Brewer

The various codes and passwords have converged
on one pure unifying theory, character-based,
living alive like life, unchanged
and changing into new code, new logic,
without regard to past upgrades,
upheavals, or future combinations
and probabilities—Chuck it!

Now is the moment that it all
comes together and breaks apart
and repeats together—apart
so much that it hurts
to love or make babies or feel
hope has a place in a land
not found in a book filled
with passages and a never-ending happiness.



Final Frank 09
art by David Matson

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD OF PASSING

Ryan Downey

The man I just saw
Was a ghost of sorts
Though not from the past
With eyes that pierced me
And thus revoked my license
To hope.
As I passed my future
On that shabby wooden bench
The taste of failure lingered.
My mouth stale like death
I saw pain take shape
To awaken.
But the sun was dropping
And the day was done.
Nearly as exhausted as he
I wept tears of solitude
To have died so young
To decay.
Skin fell to the earth
Mixed with soil and alcohol
Forming a yet undiscovered element
Known only as certain despair.
A harbinger of fallout
To me.



The Free art by
Nick Brazinsky

Back into It

Damion Hamilton

This man had been a monk for years
And came back into the civilized streets
His beard was down to his knees
His eyes were wild,
His clothes very worn
And he smelled very bad
And he staggered as he walked

But he went off into the woods to think during
Those years, but he became curious about everyone
So he went back into it

When he approached the city, he was in
A stupor, with all the cars, and the people and the noise
And the smells which came from the city,
He remembered cars before he went away,
But when he came back—the cars seemed strange and
Dangerous to him

Then he noticed the clothes people were wearing,
And it all seemed so strange, and the hair styles,
He was startled, by how alike everyone seemed,
For when he was in the jungle, he had time to style
His own hair, and make his own clothes

The faces of the people seemed nervous and anxious
And cruel, and the way the building were made
Seemed horrible, like a womb upon the earth

The people moved fast, and the cars moved fast, or
If they were not moving fast, the faces and the bodies
Seemed lost, or out of place, and crippled
He remembered those days, were he would stare
At his thumb or foot, for hours,
And the thoughts and feelings this awakened in him

He saw the people moving, and one could see that they
Did not have the time to think or feel, things must be done
And there was little thought or feeling from generation to
Generation, and people would only know what their parents knew,

If they learned that much, progress didn't seem to be very much,
To him in the city

He walked along the various streets and whenever
He saw a cluster of crowds, he saw people talking
On portable phones, he wondered what
Could everyone be talking about, probably
Nothing too deep, things moved so fast
In the city

Then a policeman approached him, and he talked
Very fast, and he saw him wandering around for hours
And asked him for his ID, but he didn't have any,
So they put him in handcuffs, and took him to jail,
Then remembered why he left the city

He waited for hours in jail, and the wait was
Horrible, then he thought that they might
Keep him in those walls forever, and this seemed
Too grotesque to him, and he had forgotten how
To tell time, and when you can't tell time,
What's the difference between an hour and eternity?
So he began banging his head on the wall to kill himself,
And this is the horror of jails

When the head doctors came in, they asked him his name
And about his personal history, asked was he depressed
Or anxious, and then gave various pills, then they wanted
To know why he was away for so long, after all civilization
Is so advanced and people were living longer, and we had the
Highest standard of living, and one will never get bored with
All the entertainment that we have: the movies, television, stereos,
The Internet, cars, baseball, football games, why would anyone
Want to leave all of this?

He told them about why he left and he told them about
How when the police officer had him in the back of the car,
How when they were driving along the neighborhoods,
With all the little houses, lawns and roads, and how every
Street looked the same, and how the walls cut people off
From each other, and how the long dull tasks one had to do
For years to own them, taxes that one had to pay, the envy
Which came from one's neighbors, the gossip, rumors of war,
Schools, work and leisure
It all seemed too much for him

He began to weep, and told them, that he just wanted to go back
In the wilderness, where he was free to do what he wanted,
And couldn't hurt anyone, and spend his days the way he wanted
To spend them, without any obligations to fulfill
They all looked at him very solemnly: a head doctor, a policeman,
A nurse, a social worker
They knew they would have to take him to the mental ward

Weakness and Chance

Melanie Monterey

With pain comes great suffering
And the suffering implies endurance
Perhaps strength, courage, bravery
But really only weakness and chance.

& art by Melanie Monterey



My Brother's House

Alison Heppard

Against sunset colors
my brother glows green -
a taller me with lighter hair
same brow, same mouth
sucking in the weather like
an invitation
'Mom, Zach's touching me.'
Now I'm wearing sunglasses
in the bathtub, drunk on a bottle of wine
and smoking cigarettes
and my brother is in the other room
fucking his girlfriend

listening to Ohio
as if it were a song
and the world were flat again
and Lake Erie was the end of it.
My brother

taps out morse code
on the wall,
battle plans for some imaginary
holy war. His skin
is moist with sweat.
He forgets that
there is no such thing as a level
playing field.

HEIR

Chris Major

The ones here
have no faith,
no religion,
science gave them answers.
They lie
shaven headed
to mask identity,
and gape a chest
or spill innards from an open belly.
Medics and nurses
hold hearts,
unravel intestines
and marvel at the size of livers-
as those donated
become nothing but 'aids'.

In fact,
don't think of them as human,
cover the face,
ignore odd tattoos
naming loved ones,
and those lungs that wheeze,
sigh,
when lifted from a chest.....

There is no air up there

String theorists say there are eleven dimensions
And possibly an infinite number of universes
Some could be parallel to ours
Like celebrity look-a-likes
Similar at first glance, but odd on closer inspection
I imagine different versions of me, or maybe I don't exist in them
The math works, if you can follow it
11 dimensions—an infinity of universes
And none of it has anything to do with me

There is no air up there
Blood boils from the lack of gravity
As I live, Earth rotates as fast as a jet flies
But I cannot feel it
Our sister planets spin around the sun without our push—in their own track
There are more than a hundred billion stars—perhaps 500 billion
In our neighborhood, the Milky Way
And our house with its eight additions
And those last weird little add-ons is nothing special
Other homes in our neighborhood have additions too
More than 100 billion stars on our corner
At least 100 billion galaxies occupy our nation universe
A 1 with many zeroes behind it is the number of possible planets
And none of them have anything to do with me

I am made of the Earth
And the Earth is made of the stars
And the stars are made of other stars
Perhaps from matter born in other dimensions
It has been said that black holes are tunnels to other universes
And none of that has anything to do with me
I am human
There is no air up there for me to breathe
The universe is not for my use

What Jim Stark Really Meant In 'Rebel Without A Cause'

Doug Draime

No one's hands
are
clean
in the ageless
subhuman
web of
politics and
militarism
commerce and
acquisition
domination and
genocide

"We are all part of it,
Dad, we are all involved"

No one is immune
to the fatal
afflictions
of greed and
tribal warfare
wherever
you might be
contemplating
peace
(or your navel)
in some
corner
of this
barbaric and dark
world

"We are all part of it, Dad, we are all involved"



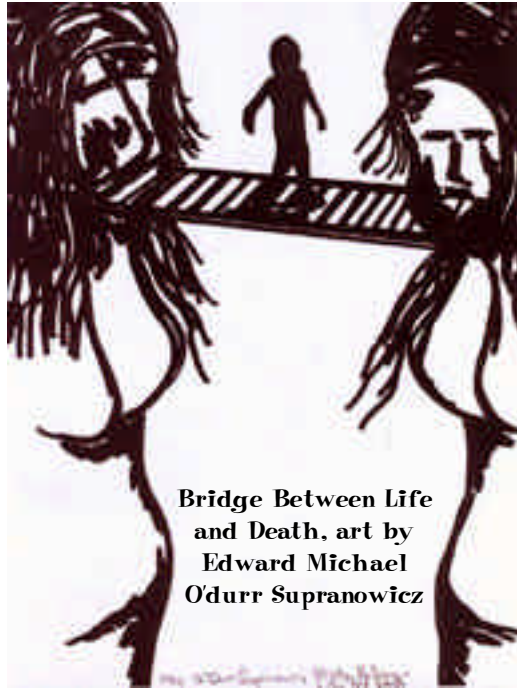
**Cut Your Hair, art
by Cheryl Townsend**

First published in
Unlikely Stories

TELL ME ABOUT COMPASSION, AMERICA

Belinda Subraman

I know a child
who misses school
for lack of clothes.
It's winter.
A fire is outside the tent
she stays close to.
She tells no one
where she lives
but describes a home,
normal, unimposing, average,
hoping no one will notice
newspaper patches
in her shoes,
holes in her clothes
she covers with
a fourth hand sweater.
Sometimes her mother
is gone for days
but she knows to fetch
firewood,
to fill plastic milk jugs
with water
from gas station restrooms,
to ask for spare change
in the far end of town.



She's eight years old
and Indian.
You turn away
when you see her.

But occasionally a man
touches her body
for the price of a warm meal,
a night's sleep
in a bed
in an ordinary house
like she dreams of.

RECANTATION

Kathryn Alison Graves

It takes a breakthrough
of perception
acuity and reason
to turn oneself out

to knife open the painted shut window
of social responsibility
and ignore the bullshit it represents

within the pull of the beat
and what keeps me breathing
is what also sets me apart
from what now exists

and it takes me in
to a world where words are thinking
a slow procession of completing
what the page has a hold of

and the stone is now rolled away
and it is welcome
but to whom do I owe this pleasure?
it's now Monday

forget it
I take it all back



Climb... art by
Aaron Wilder

FOR BERNIE

a.d. winans

survivor, old timer
in search of a fix
burned spoon hovering
over hot flame
like a moth drawn
to a lightbulb
arm stretched tight
with rubber band
liquid death riding
sunken vein
resembling a cowboy
looking forward
to the last trail
drive

GARBLED SIGNAL

T. Allen Culpepper

He's sitting alone at a corner table
on the terrace of a Cherry Street restaurant,
and what gets noticed first is the brilliant haircut,
a number-one buzz at the back and sides,
fading up gradually to a spiky top.
It looks hip, sexy, and very gay—whether he is or not—
and he clearly tips his stylist well
or offers his own services in kind.
Shiny silver hoops dangle from both ears;
a stubbly goatee completes the look.
A soft gray muscle tee, frayed denim shorts, and flip-flops
show off hairless arms and smooth tanned legs
as he sprawls in the sun on the patio chair.
A sweating bottle of beer and a pack
of cigarettes rest on the tabletop,
but he's not drinking or smoking,
just chain-calling on his cell phone,
nearly oblivious of his surroundings,
certainly of the pedestrian voyeur who,
despite a brave attempt to move on,
can't turn his eyes away and keeps
walking past just one more time,
hoping to get Cell Stud's attention
but unable to distract him from his phone.
Finally overcome by lust, Voyeur
licks his dry lips, summons his courage,
steps up onto the terrace behind Cell Stud,
brushes an arm across his shoulder,
and whispers, "You are so fucking hot!"
A slight delay and then Cell Stud, stunned,
lowers his phone a couple of inches, turns,
and demands, "What did you say?!"
Voyeur, fearing a right good bashing,
panics, chickens, responds, "I just asked,
'Are you doing all right,'" and retreats



down the sidewalk to his car.
He just knows Cell Stud, homophobic and
taken by surprise, is back on the phone,
telling a bud about “some fag who just hit on me.”
But as he opens the door to climb in,
he takes one last look over his shoulder
and sees Cell Stud doing the same.

NOW IRAQ, WHAT NEXT?

Roger N. Taber

A pile of rubble, all that's left of a home
once lived, once loved

Bloody bodies and belongings, scattered
like discarded toys

By the road, angry hands make light work
of planting bombs

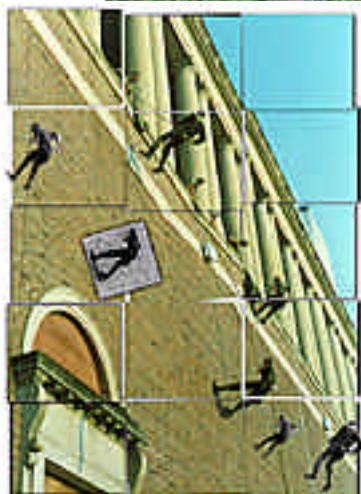
In hearts the world over, politics on trial for
crimes against humanity

At whose grave next, left kneeling, asking
bitter questions?

On the head of whose leader next, heaping
a rage to live?

To whose God next run scared, praying any
future mark us well?

No matter history next re-written, in vain its
books kept clean





Two Great
Wall of China
photos by
John Yotko

CALYPSO

MeI Waldman

And I know not where I go
released from Calypso's womb
after 7 years
a fetus in search
of his soul
the sea-nymph let me go

sometimes I listened to
a lively ballad
in loose rhyme
calypso time

not in Trinidad though
sung by the natives
man
in a dark place
sung by the natives
yes
deep
deep within
where there
ain't no sin
not there
not yet
man
still it's a dark place
where I come from

I used to see
Calypso-flowers
pure white
man
with purple or yellow
markings-through the
eyes

of
my

little soul
used to touch them too
with my min-u-scule
fingers-feathers
in
Calypso's womb
man

feelin' a calypso beat
yes
seein' Calypso-flowers
yes

I come from a dark
&
beautiful place
&
I know not where I go



Biohazard

Michael Ray Monson

Disillusioned soul
Of torment and heartache
With this encounter I do nothing more
Than try to embrace purity

Soul seclusion before,
Reality reigns free
From this demented dream
Of sexual fantasy

Set me free from
This disillusion of my core
My being, my reality

Beginnings and ends
I engulf in these sensuous pretensions
Saturate my fluid

Set me free to be more than
CHEMICAL



**Grace Jones II, art
by Mark Graham**



Roses

Benjamin Schealke

Roses are red, I gave my love
A handful yesterday, among
Friends and chaps of old, days
Pondering, wither women and their
Dresses, up the wind blows, as I
Hold these stems tight, and
Massage my forehead, and go
On, my day, pausing throughout,
And bring to water, roses for
My love.

Untitled

Aaron Sutherlin

A young man's eyes burn blue with Nordic fire;
his off-blond waves hang dirty on his neck.
A hail of screams and drums and riffs flies quick
from speakers black as he fills in the gaps.

"The rage we hear is not confined to run
across raw throats, taut skins, and fingerboards,
but manifests itself in primal love
of him whose side was first bled out with spear.

"Of him whose blood could not atone the sins
of those who slew and raped and burned for him
on ev'ry coast to which they came," he said,
and claimed, "Some still do violence in his name."

"Asked why he ate the brain of one fresh Dead,
another said he'd always had a dream
of eating human flesh, and simply thought
the suicide his opportunity.

"One murdered two, three burned a church apiece;
their heaven was all others' hell on earth,
the pure antitheses of right and good
and only blasphemy was sacrosanct."

But his fire fades as he concludes the tale,
and apathy displaces savage glee,
for he knows he will never follow these:
his soul belongs to Israel.

The Adventure

Jason Barnett

A rusting minivan winds up the mountain
Icy wind gushes in through gaping windows
All the while Johnny Cash lectures us on life

Finally we arrive
Snow and ice break our backs, literally
Flat plastic caskets are dragged behind us
We lie and glide on the ocean of cocaine

No one is badly hurt
This is good
The shadows swallow everything
Time for mashed potatoes and applesauce
This is also good

As the stars brighten
Our tent rises
It seems reasonably like it should
Cozy and reminiscent of a sauna
This is good
Outside we hear a pack of wolves
This is not good



Awareness, art by Melissa Reid

Fireplace Analysis

Joshua Copeland

It is inscribed on some tombstone
That anger takes root in depression and hopelessness.
Sadness indulges the spleen
With torched fervor and flaming ordnance.
The terror, the wrinkles of it,
Are ironed out; the shivers are stilled,
Ashes in the atmosphere dissolve.

Dilapidation run amok,
Architecture crumbling like cake, structural degradation,
This is how I have always lived,
My flesh indented by fiery hooves.

It should never, and I mean never, come down to one man,
Barely even a silhouette,
He the cold soul of the universe,
Its celestial clockwork spiraling about him.

In the end, all that matters
Is that there's some spike of land left
Though surf smashes and explodes around it,
That the ocean, with its ten thousand wavy paws,
Doesn't swallow it and digest it into its blinding depths.

Just as spring births summer, it is epigrammatic
To script that wrath stems from despondence,
That there's a reciprocal joust,
An unsheathed reply.
I hate all dialogue;
I dream of wasps stinging those that scream.

If I sublimated my dearth of heart
Into unbound, stormy ire,
Torrents let loose from The Kingdom,
That would be true revenge.

I demand corpses.
From this city, this country, this planet,
I demand corpses.

I am not just an extinguished, airy herd of ashes
A current of misdirected sear.
I am fruitful with the blood of ruin and havoc.

And I will live on.
I will live on to devour your kin,
Your fetuses pocketed in bellies of warmth.

This chapter of my life will be written with
Silvery etched verse Inked with starlight.
This era will be endowed With steep numerals unheard of,
With degrees of centigrade above the rims of imagination;
The giving and the collapse
Has reached its nascence, In stalwart, capital letters.

I have made promise after promise,
Oath after oath,
That this eschatology, yours and mine,
Will be the study of
The material, the particular, the grainy, and the distinct, no
Of unsung winds and invisible breath.
It will be a science, and
Not a garbled history,
Nor ruminations in the dark,
Nor opinionated metaphysics,
Nor a hologram blown about in a gale.

Sledgehammer to brick,
I will deliver.

Gas Bill

Jesse Rosen

His heterosexuality was a pilot light.

Mission Statement and List of Grievances

Rangzen Shanti

The saints of my time
Scorned by the common people
Heroes, often persecuted, think Jesus
Hair long, bandanna on
Rocking to folk, examining jazz
Strung out on pot and LSD
Yes we take drugs, we're not sorry
Dangerously deadly drugs came with Nixon
All natural, the way to go
Peyote and our minds dance
Don't tell us it's wrong
We think for ourselves
Better to dive into a lake of acid than one of fire
You call us Judas, but we prefer Brutus
Betrayed Caesar, but faithful to the people
You say terrorists are evil
We don't deny it
One terrorist has enough WMDs to destroy the world several times
Money money money money money money
All you care about, all you think about
We got more on our minds than green paper
We threaten your aristocratic rule
So you hate us, and tell others to hate us
We act like the ultimate patriots
We vote with more than the stroke of a pen
Or the punch of a hole, or whatever the hell you do
We vote with our bodies and our minds
Without us, nukes would end you all
You beat us with the Bible Belt
The Belt of hypocrisy
You make us wear a scarlet L on our breasts
We do nothing wrong
You, the killers, the close-minded scum
Have done the sinning
You force your puritanical bullshit on us
But we find solace
In the holiness of the 'gasm
In the holiness of psychedelic dreams
In the holiness of the moment
In the holiness of ourselves

-Washington D.C., fall, 2005



**Ashes To Ashes, art by
Nicole Aimiee Macaluso**

He's No Genie-us

Gerald E. Sheagren

Conrad Barnes strolled along the beach, wet sand squishing between his toes, the tide lapping gently against his ankles. Gulls squawked overhead. A trawler crept along the far horizon. Since the five-mile-long beach was extremely private, there were few sun-worshippers. To his right, huge cottages of glass, cedar shakes and stucco stretched for as far as the eye could see; multi-million dollar monuments to the rich and famous.

Conrad was in his element here, for just last week he had officially become a billionaire. He had downsized yet another company, moving its operations to Mexico and China, and putting another two thousand people out of work. In return, he had gotten a seven-digit bonus, a portfolio of stock options and a Mercedes straight off the assembly line, with his choice of color and interior. And along with this very generous package, he had acquired a new moniker – Cutthroat Connie. He'd experienced a small pang of guilt for adding so many people to the unemployment lines; a pang that lasted all of fifteen seconds.

Laughing giddily, he broke into a jog, letting the salty breeze muss his helmet of very sexy, silver-colored hair. God, he felt exhilarated. A billionaire! A do-as-you-please, no-holds-barred, nothing's-too-expensive billionaire! He jogged for nearly a mile, slowing once to give a bathing beauty a look at his trim, well-tanned body. Finally, starting to huff, he came to a stop near a haphazard expanse of rocks, slimy green with algae and a roosting place for the gulls.

And that's when he saw it; a bottle bobbing on the water's surface, perhaps twenty feet from shore. A wine bottle by the looks, with its label long washed away and its cork still in place. As he wondered whether he should go out to retrieve it, a wave hurled it ashore, smashing it against a rock. There was a whooshing noise, followed by a puff of smoke; a puff of smoke that slowly, ever so slowly, began to take the shape of a — of a — of a frigging genie! He closed his eyes in disbelief and opened them a few seconds later, but the genie was still there; short and roly-poly, with a

ruby-set turban, white shirt, purple pantaloons and golden slippers with upturned-toes and tassels.

“Jesus H.! You’re a — a — a goddamn genie!”

“I must say, sir; you are extremely observant.”

Conrad glanced around to see if there were others to bear witness to what he was seeing, but the beach was empty.

The genie regarded his surroundings, obviously displeased. “Of all places; I wind up in a spot like this. Gull shit and slime and what’s that over there — a used condom! No, no, this won’t due, at all!”

“This is some sort of joke, right? No, wait; I’ll bet it’s a movie.”

Conrad turned in a complete circle. “Where’s the camera crew?”

Ignoring him, the genie tweaked his nose and three ugly crones appeared; scraggly hair and warts, beggars’ clothes hanging on their scrawny bodies. They smiled in tandem, their teeth gnarled and gapped and yellowed with age.

The genie groaned, shaking his head in despair. “I’m a wee bit out of practice. Nearly a hundred years in a bottle will do that. He tried again, and, this time, three buxom, raven-haired virgins appeared, milky-skinned, breasts nearly bouncing out of their tasseled tethers “Ah; now that’s a lot better!”

Right before Conrad’s unbelieving eyes, the three virgins led the genie away from the rocks, and, with another tweak of his nose, a large, red-satin blanket appeared on the sand. A few more tweaks and he was lounging against a pile of plush velvet pillows, as two of the beauties fanned him with red ostrich plumes, the other plucking grapes from a cluster and popping them into his greedy mouth. Soon, his slippers were off and his shirt unbuttoned to his plump midsection.

Although shaken by the happenings, Conrad was still able to grasp the extraordinary opportunities. “Uh — I was wondering; do you think you’d be able to grant me three wishes? I mean; that’s what genies do, right?”

“Mister Barnes, isn’t it? Mister Conrad Barnes.”

“This is absolutely amazing! That is my name.”

“It appears, Mister Barnes; enough is never enough.”

“Well, that is the American way.”

The genie pondered for a few moments, stroking his double chin. “I suppose I can do that for you. But, I must warn you; I am extremely out of practice. When that happens, I can get a little mixed up with words.”

“Hey! I’m more than willing to take the chance.”

“The risk will be yours, sir.” The genie giggled as one of the virgins began to tickle his belly. “Actually, I can grant more than three wishes if

you desire; ten, twelve, twenty, whatever.”

Conrad’s mouth fell open at the possibilities. Bushel baskets; no, dump trucks full of money! A manor house in England and a chalet in the south of France! A yacht the size of the Queen Mary! Oh no, genie-boy; enough was never enough.

The genie’s eyes grew wide, glimmering more than the ruby in his turban. “Well, sir; your wishes are my commands. What — pray tell — shall be your first?”

Conrad decided to keep the bigger and better for last. “Well —.”

Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, he found himself surrounded by darkness, water up to nearly his knees. He reached out blindly, his fingers roaming over moss-covered stones. Far above, he could see a pinprick of light. Suddenly, something stung his hand and he pulled it back, hugging it against his chest. A spider! It had been a spider, for sure! Where in the hell was he; the darkness, the water?

“Genie! What in the hell have you done to me? Where — Where am I? Genie!”

“You did say ‘well’, sir; so I gave you a well.”

“I didn’t mean a water-well, you idiot! I was only using the word as an expression! You know; as in ‘well, let me see.’”

“There’s no need to get testy. I told you I might have a little problem with words.”

“Okay, okay! Get me the hell out of here! Give me a break!”

Suddenly, Conrad was transported from darkness to eye-blinking brightness. There were lots of people from the way it sounded; shouting and cat-calling and stomping their feet in unison. Finally, adjusting his eyes to the glare; he spotted hundreds, perhaps three, four thousand people seated on all four sides of a — of a wrestling ring, of which he was right in the middle! Some were jumping and waving signs, others, wild-eyed and waving their fists in the air!

And, then, he saw him, standing in the far corner of the ring; a huge, shaven-headed man, with rings in his ears and a scraggly, chest-length beard, his python-like arms festooned with tattoos! Then the giant started to move in his direction; a slow, steady thump, each footfall vibrating the canvas flooring!

“Genie! These aren’t wishes, they’re frigging nightmares! Get me out of here! Get me out of here, right now!”

Before Conrad could realize or react to what was happening, the goliath sprang forward, grabbing hold of him and hoisting him high across his shoulders in an airplane spin! Round and round and round he went,

followed by a mighty slam to the canvas. As he struggled to catch his breath, he was flipped over onto his stomach, an excruciating pain shooting down his arm, a feeling as though it was being ripped from its socket!

“Aaaahhhh! Ah, ah, ah! Get me out of here! Why are you doing this to me?”

“If my memory serves me correctly; you did say ‘give me a break.’” And that’s what Crusher Rockwell is about to do.”

“You frigging jerk! Aaaahhhh! Ow, ow, ow! I didn’t mean it literally!” Conrad screamed in pain, pounding the canvas with his fist. “Aaaahhhh! Damn, damn-it-all, damn!”

In an instant, Conrad found himself on his back, staring up at an angry gray sky; lightening flashing, thunder rolling, rain slashing at his face. What in the name of God has the genie gotten him into, now? He tried to sit up, a jolt of pain shooting from his shoulder clear down to the tips of his fingers. Had the Crusher indeed broken his arm? Groaning, he sat up and looked around, finding that he was only inches from a wall of sandbags. Thunder boomed like a kettle drum, lightening snapping and crackling overhead. Someone laid a hand on his shoulder and he looked up to see a man dressed in a yellow construction helmet and rain slicker.

“C’mon, pal! You aren’t doing us any good just sitting around!” The man shielded his face with a hand to ward off the rain. “The river’s rising and we need more sandbags!”

“Huh?”

Disgusted, the man turned and shouted over the din. “If one more layer of bags doesn’t work, we better get the hell out of here before we all drown like rats!”

Alarmed, Conrad struggled to his feet, just as a surge of brown water sent a sandbag flying past his head. There was a mighty clap of thunder, strong enough to shake the soggy ground beneath his feet. More sandbags toppled, men shouting frantically! Nearby, water shot through a hole in the barrier, bowling over two men as if they were nothing but rag dolls! Lightening snapped like bull whips.

“Jesus Christ, Genie; get me the hell out of here! Are you out of your mythological mind?”

“It is you, sir, who is out of your mind. I distinctly heard you say ‘dam-it, dam-it-all.’”

“I meant ‘damn’ not ‘dam’! DAM!”

“You must be more specific. Otherwise, we won’t accomplish anything.”

“You half-ass, idiot!”

“Uh-uh-uh. Sticks and stones, sir. Sticks and stones.”

Suddenly the whole wall of sandbags began to sway, water spouting through more and more holes! The workers began to retreat, scurrying like scared rabbits toward high ground.

“Genieeee!”

Just as bags began to fly like ten pins, Conrad found himself on the beach, his piercing scream startling gulls to flight. He laid there for a long time, trying to catch his breath, his heart feeling as though it was being squeezed by a giant fist. Shit, that was close! He had nearly drowned!

“Well, sir, I must say; you look a might worse for wear.”

“You’re no genie; you’re a fat, fucking —!”

“Please, sir; would you refrain from such language around the ladies.”

Conrad had never felt so bad in his life. His arm was throbbing with pain; he was soaking wet from head-to-foot; and the spider bite on his hand was starting to swell and itch! He struggled to his feet, groaning at the exertion, and found the genie smiling at him, as one of the virgins rubbed oil onto his plump belly..

“What kind of an idiot genie are you, anyways? I wanted wishes and you gave me nightmares!”

“Well, sir; I did explain to you that I was a bit out of practice. I haven’t been out of that bottle in ninety-eight years.” One of the virgins held out a date and the genie plucked it from her fingers with his teeth. “Give me a little time and I’ll be as good as new.”

Conrad looked down to see that the spider bite had turned flaming red. “You know something; I should be committed to a loony-bin for having anything to do with you.” Realizing what he had just said, he started to wave frantically. “No, no, no! I didn’t mean that!”

In a second, he found himself standing in the middle of a room, people shuffling all around, mumbling and laughing to themselves and pulling at their clothes. A wild-eyed, spike-haired man, clad in a food-stained robe, reached out and grabbed hold of his arm, babbling something that only he could decipher.

“Leave me alone, you moron!” Conrad gave the man a mighty shove, sending him flying head-over-heels. “Genie! Enough is enough!”

“Hey!” A burly, white-clad attendant rushed over, subduing Conrad with a bear hug. “We’re not going to have any of your crap.”

“Let me go! Release me this instant, or I’ll sue your ass!” Conrad squirmed and kicked, but to no avail. “You have no idea the trouble I can cause you!”

“Oh yes I do. Hey, Tom, get over here and give me a hand with this guy!”

Another attendant joined the fray, grabbing Conrad's feet and pulling them out from under him. "Who is this dude, anyways? I've never seen him before. What's with these beach duds, all soaking wet?"

"I told the doctors never to admit anyone without giving us the heads-up. We best get him to one of the padded rooms before he hurts someone."

"Get your hands off me, you imbeciles!" shouted Conrad, as he was carried down a sterling-white corridor. "Genieeee! I'll shove your turban up your bung-hole for this!"

There was no answer.

One of the attendants laughed. "Man, he's really gone. What did he say about a genie?"

"Genieeee!"

Still no answer.

BODY LANGUAGE

Gerald E. Sheagren

What jewels are found in the crown of your head?
Can you drive across the bridge of your nose?
If you have to patch the roof of your mouth,
Why not with the nails of your toes?

Can you fall into the pit of your stomach,
Or beat the drums of your ears?
If the corn on your big toe has no taste,
Would you add the salt of your tears?

Can you sharpen the blades of your shoulders,
Or bake your Adam's apple into a pie?
If you would like to teach math or geography,
Why not to the pupil of your eye?

If you think this poem sounds crazy
And I might be a tad insane,
Take a long look in the mirror
And lock those thoughts up in the cells of your brain.

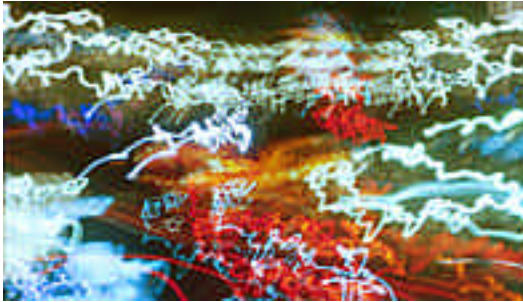
BUTTONED DOWN

G.A. Scheimoha

What if buttons are tender and to sew them on unleashes a primal scream? Then a walk past the tailor shop must be a study in medieval torture; a thousand howls of pain echo within.

Some have four eyes, others merely two. We've long since regarded them as holes because of their woefully empty stare. But how'd you feel if somebody plunged a needle into one of yours?

Of course, there's a hierarchy. "You're not our kind," scoff the bourgeois buttons; those whose bodies are never penetrated with thread, only attached by a loop on their backs. Though even here, recompense comes with the fact they're usually the first to fall off.



**Street, art
by Mike
Hovancsek**

Union

Walker Manning Hughes

It's a nimble little foreign coupe, electric blue and too sly to snare. So I pedal a little farther each day. From the A&P to the photo shop on Tuesday. Flea market to country store Wednesday. At the blinking light I catch a glimpse of silken chestnut hair. Near the water tower the almond sweetness of perfume whispers candied promises.

I draw closer and closer to our union.

Friday fathers a cozy brick house where glazed windows radiate patient invitation. On anxious tiptoes I gaze towards forever. There is a plush velvet sofa and a soft artificial fire, half-drained glasses of Burgundy balanced over piled pearl carpet, a man not too unlike me. And even without the tidy starched apron or worn silver nametag, I know her. Nadine.

Only, this man knows her more.

I swallow and decide. I am too late.

Overhead, a pinprick star twitters, struggling against the oppressive flood of night, preaching courage in the face of failure. I lurch away, remembering a cross-town hamburger stand where ash blond hair beckons, and where even over the fries and onion rings there reigns a bright flowery aroma.

Marigolds Proper

Pat Dixon

Susan Brown sits with Wednesday afternoon's mail beside her on the worn sofa.—oh goddammit jesus christ Mrs. B.—no goddammit Mrs. B. goddammit goddammit Mrs. B.—oh christ no no no no—no thanks no thank you no thank you no thank you no thank you no thank you thank you thank you—no thank you—She looks down at the contours of her eight-months-pregnant body and feels tired and thirsty. Rubbing the muscles at the back of her neck, she pads to the tiny under-the-counter refrigerator and gets out the half-empty bottle of her prune juice.

—two-fifteen—Tom'll be home in an hour and twenty minutes and then I can lie down for an hour or so while he takes care of Tony and does a load of clothes up in the central building—maybe two loads—and then maybe I'll feel better—and maybe we can all go out for a pizza and some vanilla cones—

She pours herself a second small glass of her juice and looks at the letters on the sofa—the one from Tom's sister-in-law offering to send back the used baby clothes they had given her two years ago, and the one from the G.I. Bill office saying that the allotments would be increased during the fall semester, and the one she had opened last announcing that Tom's mother would be arriving from Connecticut on Monday to help run their apartment “during this most difficult and crucial time.”

Susan goes to the rear bedroom and turns the air conditioner's dial two settings cooler.

—a two-bedroom student apartment—hardly room for the three of us already and now she wants to play the loving granny again after all those years of massive guilt trips and crap and oh god in what a sweet voice she'll list all of the dozens of things I'm doing wrong and Tom's doing wrong and Tony's doing wrong and why don't I correct Tony and why don't I teach him to eat properly and hold a fork properly and talk properly and play properly and he got the message right when she gave him that big stuffed blue bunny last spring—that SHE got FREE when she opened a new bank account—and Tony named it “Proper” and now he talks to it and tells Proper what is proper and—un—

Susan catches her breath as “Joey-Jenny” the mystery fetus suddenly begins to kick and push inside her. Then she slowly pads back to the front room.

—better check on Tony—he’s been outside with his old spoon and tractor since we got the mail—probably would like a glass of the new fruit punch—

She opens the heavy door of the ground-level apartment and stops with her hand on the screen. For ten full seconds no words will come.

“Tony!”

Tony looks up at her blankly. He sits in the foot-high grass outside their door, six feet from her. His stainless steel sandbox spoon is clutched in his right fist, and his small red plastic tractor—“trac-toot”—is waiting nearby on the new yellow dirt road which now runs through the right corner of her twelve-foot-long marigold bed.

“Momma’s flowers!” She jerks Tony to his feet, across the sidewalk between the grass and the door, and into the apartment. Gripping his arm, she slams the apartment door. Then she slaps Tony’s face twice, shakes him, and pulls him into the front bedroom next to the living room.

“You stay on your bed till your daddy gets home, mister! You’ve been a—a rotten boy! You—you’ve ruined all of mommy’s flowers. When your daddy gets home, he’ll teach you! You just sit there and think about that!”

She closes Tony’s door loudly and sits heavily down on the worn, stained beige sofa. Her right hand covers her tightly closed eyes.

—just not fair not fair not fair—took two days to dig that flower bed with a trowel and then prepare that rotten hard lumpy yellow-clay Kansas soil and then the planting and all the watering—and even Tony tried to help me—goddammit—it’s not fair it’s not fair it’s never fair—none of it is ever fair—oh god oh god oh god—

She pulls herself to her feet, aware of the muffled sound of a distant tractor coming from behind the living room’s heavy beige drapes and closed windows.

—about goddamn time—goddamn grass here gets almost goddamn butt-high before that goddamn B&G crews gets around to cutting it—they’re all so goddamn stupid and Tom is right—they make sure they cut the goddam main campus grass once a week but they only do the student housing grass four times a year—“whether it needs it or not”—goddamn perverts and morons—as Tom says, “The GOOD news is, if the enemy ever capture them, they’ll never get anything out of ‘em!”

Susan smiles slightly, recalling Tom’s sarcastic tone of voice as she grips the handle of the small refrigerator. Then she freezes as she hears a muffled thumping sound and Tony’s shrill voice coming through his closed door.

“Stop it! Stop it!” he screams.

She runs to his room as best she can with her hips working improperly. Tony is standing on his bed with the blind fully up, pounding on the glass with both fists.

“Stop it! Don’t cut my mommy’s flowers! Don’t cut my mommy’s flowers! Stop it! Stop it!”

Susan sees a large yellow B&G tractor slowly go past the front of their apartment. Tony pounds harder on the glass. Kneeling on his bed, she seizes his arms and pulls him towards her. Together they watch while a blank-faced young man drives the mower blades over the whole length of the flower bed. Shards of red plastic—the remains of a toy tractor—fly up with grass stalks, leafy stems, and hundreds of gold and bronze marigold heads.

“Stop it, stop it,” Tony sobs after the young man has passed. “Don’t cut her flowers, don’t, don’t. . . .”

Susan Brown clutches Tony’s slender two-and-a-half-year-old body tightly against her own pear-shaped form and strokes his hair and shoulders. Large tears run down her face, now tightly pressed against Tony’s neck.

—oh god I love him—I AM a good mother—I am I am—oh god I love him so much—oh god—so much—



Eminent Domain, art by Aaron Wilder

part three of
THE DRIVE

Kenneth DiMaggio

And when I'm not in my car, I'm on a couch in the basement of my old man's house, or in a sleeping bag on the floor of my best friend's house. The ranch that already has a pink flamingo in front. The house he bought after he cashed in his degree in English for an M.B.A. future, an M.B.A. wife, and now that they have a kid, probably an M.B.A. baby. Believe me, I get less flack from the old man.

Still that squinty pause.

"Besides, I'm going to New York. My friend—the one who did not sell out his English degree—well, that's because he never finished it—well, he managed to get this big rent control loft in the East Village. His place is a performance space. It's become a magnet for me and a bunch of other writers and artists. I suppose you could say our school of art is defined by coffins, decay, rehab. Hey, if your professor doesn't like your coffins, you can always bring them to my friend's loft. Besides, he's going to let me stay on his couch rent free while I work on my book—and also until the school year begins. Then I can work as a substitute teacher in the New York City public school system."

"That part about a book sounds like a plan," she said.

"Yeah, I feel the same way too. But this is the first time that doing Art over a job seemed like the more logical and practical choice. So instead of doing something that makes sense, what do you say we go look for art project material while we explore Holy Land."

And that was just a beer bottle's throw away from the semi burned out cove where my half rusted out car was parked. Just to make sure there's no confusion, I'm talking about the Holy Land on a hill above a mostly welfare-cased, formerly factory city in the Northeast U.S.A. A city close enough to make the drive to New York City, but in terms of tapping into New York's culture, it was only able to tap into its crack and other hard street drugs. Thus some of the anonymous history behind Holy Land's scars. Holy Land U.S.A., this gutted, battered, knee-high relic of Old and New Testament Jerusalem was a creation of a very religious Italian Catholic lawyer. He may have been able to hear legal briefs, but he still had enough Italian in him to slap a trowel full of wet cement down on rocky New England soil and build an extension of his backyard garden —but this one plastered over to look like an ancient crenellated city from some 1960s Hollywood sword and sandal epic. The "official" history of Holy Land has not yet been written, and with the way it has been left to deteriorate and remain as an open invitation for vandals (in my opinion, the wrong kind of vandalism) it will probably never be written. We have to rely then on local gossip and believe what you will.

From the late fifties until the early seventies, Holy Land was a hot destina-

tion for the holy roller circuit. Dozens of yellow school buses with names like “First Assembly of God Church” painted on the side, made the journey to this kitsch village. Back then, Holy Land was kept up. It was like a well painted miniature golf course, but with mangers and grottos instead of waterfalls and windmills. Even then, Holy Land was still considered a bit hokey, and you could see why in what ruins remained.

Picture a rocky soiled peak the size of an elementary school playground. The entrance was a knee length crenellated wall except for the center, which was an arch tall enough for an adult and wide enough for a 2.2. point American family to enter. On top of the arch were the painted plaster words: Welcome to the City of God. Which soon began to look like the reconstructed detritus of 20th century American blue collar culture.

An old basement oil heating tank was now a tower in one of ancient Jerusalem’s walls. Half of an old U-shaped ceramic bath tub with a prominent layering lip, now became the stable where Jesus was born; as for Jesus and company, he was a ceramic statue that you saw before the altar of your Catholic church. Nevertheless, Jesus was at least realistic if not slightly oversized to his lodgings. Mary, Joseph, the Magi, and the animals were mismatched and even an embarrassment. One of the Magi was an African American nineteen fifties lawn ornament whose re-painting did nothing to take away his wide Uncle Remus-like grin. The donkey that shared Jesus’ manger had a big open space on its back: perfect for your potted plant. At least the donkey managed to retain some dignity its non-obtrusive color. Not Jesus’ mother Mary. She would always remain hot neon pink because that was the color used in the mold that shaped her plastic. Such was the three dimensional “quilting” that made up Holy Land. Drain pipes, plaster, and chicken wire became ancient insula; the corrugated steel of old shipping containers topped off with repainted ceramic oval bird baths, became King Herod’s palace. Other important biblical institutions were made up from cut away oil drums. The more humble dwellings drew their material from clay flower pots, old coffee cans, torn apart and re-constructed chicken coops, and a wide variety of ceramic animals and figurines from the garden center at Sears. Nevertheless, such architectural incongruity evoked a sad, even pathetic presence after years of abandonment and decay. The donkey’s head was gone. Some of the figures in the manger were also decapitated. The vandalized folk art topography was now heavily littered with rusted empty beer cans or broken beer bottle glass. The old oil drum that was supposed to represent a citadel that could withstand an attack from the ancient Philistines, did not fare so well with their modern counterparts. This tower had been pulled down, kicked in, and soon filled with decades worth of trash and dried muck. What had once been an impregnable citadel, was now a twisted dried out sewer pipe. The most battered and disgraced of all, however, was not a piece. It was a figure and one its creator would not want us to feel sympathy for.

Satan.

You would not know he was the horned devil unless you grew up with fanatics who reminded you about him. Holy Land’s Lucifer was a three foot tall stat-

ue of a Victorian looking man with long-sideburns and a contemplative face. In fact, he had a slight resemblance to Emerson. Yet the transcendentalist never had a pair of dull shaped horns on his head. Neither do I recall a picture of him dressed in a long choir robe, or having two small wings extending from his shoulders. My guess is that this Satan was originally an ornament –if I dare say, angel—meant for some Victorian crypt; the creator of Holy Land must have found this unused marble seraphim at some auction or tag sale. The Polacks, Wops, and Micks of this city would have no idea that this demonic figure was really a Victorian gentleman; or maybe it was just some kind of cosmic irony. Yesterday’s aristocracy was perceived as today’s evil.

Well, at least this 19th century devil was given respect—but only so long as the rest of Holy Land was complete. So long as there were bus loads of religious pilgrims visiting this site, Mephistopheles—like the Virgin Mary, and Jesus—had no reason to fear being vandalized. Once Holy Land was abandoned, however, the no-vandalized rule was no longer observed.

But Satan was singled out for extra abuse.

What saved him from immediate destruction was his stature in Holy Land. He was placed on top of a six-foot high painted metal dome: not easy to kick or whack with a hammer unless you made a special climb. But eventually people did, and so much that folks who once had a connection with Holy Land—stepped in to try and preserve this one piece of sculpture which had already lost its wings. To preserve what was left of History’s first nihilist and rebel, they built a special chicken wire cage around him for his protection.

It still did not stop.

Some folks got at the statue through their pellet guns or even 22 caliber rifles. However, the morally outraged target practice soon got tiresome. Somebody had ripped off half of the cage and whacked off Satan’s head. Once his evil visage was decapitated, there was a pause in completing his final destruction. How could a headless basket case like that evoke anything but pity?

And so his half ripped away protection wire, soon beaded with rust, and the locals soon forgot about this mutilated Satan. I still felt obligated to perpetuate memories of his abuse for his brief time here in Rustville. Even though he was supposed to be an evil man, today he was not even a that.

“He looks pathetic, not dangerous,” said the latest visitor to Holy Land under my tutelage.

“I think it makes us look more pathetic,” I said. “It was only after our world got flushed down the toilet, that we went berserk on him. If anything, it makes Satan look like a scapegoat.”

“Well, it didn’t help,” she said. “The rest of this place looks just as bad. And I don’t mean just Holy Land.”

“I know what you mean,” I said, “and much as people here can be small minded, I feel sorry for them.”

She raised an eyebrow at me; the younger one surprised at the naivety of the older one.

“Yeah? Well, don’t feel too sorry,” she said. “You’re—“

She then paused, even though a word like “weird” “misfit” or “geek” almost popped out.

“Even though I haven’t known you that long,” she tried to explain, “you’re not like most people here.”

“You’re kidding?” I said.

“Don’t get smart,” she said. “There are people who would think that both of us represent the devil.”

“Too many people,” I sighed.

It was getting harder to condemn such people. I would always have a strong attachment to the soil that I shared with bowling alley philistines. And each day one more neon piece of that gritty and blue collar soil was disappearing.

“Come on,” I said, “this isn’t the end of Holy Land—almost—but not quite.”

She put one palm against the corroded metal dome that this cracked statue crookedly stood upon.

“Wait,” she said.

She gently scraped her hand against the bumpy metal surface; an artist feeling her material.

“I want to get up there,” she said.

“You want a closer look?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “This might be the material I am looking for.”

“You want me to help you take down the statue?” I asked.

“Yes—no—I don’t know—“ she quickly said. “After all he went through, he belongs up there.”

I softly nodded, and then muttered:

“Damn.”

I then took a brief look to my right, and then to my left, and then looked up, which made her raise her eyebrows in wonder and confusion.

“Don’t worry,” I said, “you’ve got plenty of ruins to sift through. Look around.”

“I have—I will,” she said. “But what was the—“

She paused as she mimicked my look up.

“—look up for?”

“Hell,” I said with a smile. “that was for Heaven. Because Heaven is now in ruins too.”

She shook her head.

“You’re nuts,” she said. “But now I know why you have your car like that. And in the back seat, a novel that looks like Holy Land.”

“No—I’m going to finish it,” I quickly said.

“Don’t,” she said. “At least not all of it. Leave some of it—in ruins.”

“Hmmm,” I said. I began to consider the idea. “Leave some of your movie? In ruins? Yes—or abandoned or criminally taken over—like a crack house.”

“Just remember that you promised.”

“Promised what?” I asked.

“To help me find my materials for my art project.”

“Hell, you should get what you need here. I gotta go to New York.”

She now crossed her arms.

“Bull shit! I still need to explore more!” she said. “I didn’t go to class on account of you!”

“Hey, don’t go putting that on me,” I said.

“Oh no? Well, didn’t you tell me that no one goes to class on Fridays, unless they’re some naïve freshman?”

“Alright, let’s just look around; we’re wasting time here arguing.”

“You’re the one who’s arguing,” she said under her breath.

“You don’t know what the hell you’re looking for; that’s your prob—“ I started to say under my breath.

“What?” she said.

“We need to go that way,” I said. I pointed to a hilly path that led up through the crumbling knee-high grotto, temples, and inns of Holy Land.

Which had ended once we climbed up that little path. We now arrived at the top of this hill: an acre of raw, gray, undulating rock that seemed to be the peak of one giant boulder. Broken beer bottle glass and old cigarette butts now clogged up its crags. An old gray stalk that seemed half dead, popped through a hole in this slate-colored surface. Here and there was an inexplicable and odd fragment brought up from the broken world below. A rusted bicycle frame, a twisted piece of metal that could have been an old water pipe, a gray, rotted window frame. I picked up the latter with both hands and held it before me. My face stood in the center of the frame.

“Hello from the fourth dimension,” I called out. “What dimension are you in?”

Her own—which she was getting lost in Holy Land. She had discovered Holy Land’s Trinity. Three, tall gray metal crosses: the one in the middle had a lead or copper Christ hanging from it; this savior, however, was missing one arm. Yet he still held on. What made his one arm crucifixion less odd, was the pipe-like space left behind when he lost his arm or when someone yanked it off. This was not a garden center bought Christ, but one made to order. After the several pieces of his body were cast, they were put in place by being screwed together. Thus the curved grooves around the fitting that connected a crucified arm to a crucified shoulder. This particular Christ was more like a series of pipes or machinery parts; in a way, he was the first Jesus who seemed to fit this community. This was a Christ that came off the assembly line and because he was missing a piece and also showing rust, he also fit into the present.

Even more fitting was where this Trinity stood. For that steel industrial Christ, a patch of stony lead-colored surface that could have been the topography of the moon. Not too much damage could be done to Christ on the moon.

I gently put down the window frame. I did not want to break the reverie that this young artist was holding with this....piece of found art? Sacred object? Kitsch? All three?

All three. Had to be. That is the only way Art seemed to come to fruition here. Fine art, religion, kitsch—they were also the ingredients for becoming an

artist. At least they were for me; determined to create beauty in a place where aesthetics are defined by velvet paintings of bullfights, and neon candy flake colors on the cars rebuilt by menacing teenage gear heads. I find the homely object more sincere than the well crafted but pretentious work of art. The slick Broadway bedroom farce—I'll take an early sit come like "The Honeymooners" any day where fat Jackie Gleason is a bus driver named Ralph Kramden—someone trying to keep afloat in a very tacky series of flats that is supposed to be his railroad flat in Brooklyn. (The real beauty of those old shows ; where they were filmed live, and where sometimes you could catch some rich, lovable, human screw ups.) Yet the most important thing about art (and why I am compelled to write) is the way it lets you be the craft maker—there is no assembly line, no corporate enterprise, no mega spectacular Hollywood production committee. There is just you, and no more than a few tools before you. Just like it was with the work bench down the cellar, where you made everything from a baby's crib to a backyard shed. Or the folding card table, where you made plastic flower armatures stuck on large blocks of Styrofoam, to knitting blankets which always turned out to be the most appreciated wedding gifts. The plastic flower arrangement may seem embarrassing, the back yard shed, functional and boring and now rotting.

But it was in one basement workbench, and it was from one back porch with a fold out card table, that a great work of art called Holy Land, was born.

"You could speak," she said. "You're not interrupting anything. But thanks for thinking of me anyways."

I now joined her, looking up at this simple but stark steel arrangement and said: "Industrial Christ—that's what I call it."

"Memorial for Western civilization," she said, "is what I call it."

I smiled and nodded.

"Nice," I said.

I made a brief gesture to the right with my arm.

"Allow me to show where this civilization ends," I said. "It's just right this way through the wasteland."

And then through a cove of dark green semi dead stalks incongruously sprouting from thick gray rock. And then beneath an archway and trestle made from a yanked out, but not quite pulled out fence. And then along a surface of what seemed like a spill of nails half melted together with metal shavings, (Thank God for the Doc Martens.) And then past the twisted mangled coat hanger like remains of a car chassis.

(All the way up here?) Finally, there was a steady rise of dirt speckled with gravel, glass, cans, a few trees, an overturned shopping cart and then a fenced off square cement platform that held up a hundred or more foot high cross. The same cross that motorists could see from a few miles in either direction on the interstate. It may not have been Holy Land's intention, but Jesus' crucifixion was there to spiritually inspire rush hour traffic leaving the suburbs, or if you were lucky, this state. In some ways, it was a waste of a good monument—whether sacred or kitsch or both. In another way, this giant cross at least let this part of

the state have one memorable roadside attraction and a piece of art you would expect to find in the Bible Belt, not the Rust Belt. But perhaps because this plastic hunk of religion was in the latter, is why there were no large neon words like, “Jesus Saves” along side of the cross. In this neck of the tundra, religious drama tended to be left to the melodramatic cemetery angels or gory, grotesque religious statues in old Catholic churches. This New England soil was still a little too Puritan to accept any jumping, thumping, or testifying religion.

The cross seemed to reflect the austerity of the Puritans, the power of the former industrial age, and the cheesiness of the recent pop culture that melted down most of this land’s previous history.

The cross was made out of fiber glass panels that had a frosty surface. (Think of the frosted panel doors of your shower.) The panels were inserted within six inch metal frames which were held in by rivets. Like the industrial trinity, this giant cross above seemed to come off the assembly line. But only the local, tactless, blue collar culture could give it a lime green paint job; now streaked or weathered with the black from soot, acid ran, and bird shit. The thick metal on the iron base that this cross was hoisted upon, had a three-by-four feet padlocked door on the side.

“That’s where the troll lives,” I explained to The Young Artist. She was agog-eyed fascinated at this giant cross sitting on top of what was small mountain.

It didn’t take much—just a look up—and it felt like you were in the cockpit of a small plane taking off on a frosty runway. You could barely see the top of this cross, and with the way the clouds drifted by, it seemed as if this giant cross was slightly swaying in the wind. It was better to experience this cross at night; when the green illumination made it seem like you were looking up at a giant Popsicle. I always wondered about whose job it was to “turn on” this cross. No one seemed to know; hence, the mythical “crucifix keeper” became a troll, because only a troll could live in the base of this cross.

“Yeah, the troll takes care of the cross,” I explained, “and lights it up at night, sees that it is kept up.”

“I thought trolls were pagans,” she said.

She got me again.

“Oh, I mean leprechaun. It’s a leprechaun who lives in there, and they can’t be pagan because they’re Irish. They’re Catholic, so don’t use any foul language. Or else, he’ll come out and slap your hand with a ruler.”

She giggled and then pointed to the graffiti scrawled all over the metal base. Etched on it were the usual lovers’ names, but also the profanity that in a Catholic school would get you hit by a two by four.

“Ahhhh.....” I intoned in mock sadness. “The leprechaun must have died.”

“But someone must light up this cross at night. I’ve seen it zillions of times.”

“I don’t know who does it,” I said. “But I think it would be a fun job. ‘Cross Keeper.’ I’d love to have that on my resume.”

“Under ‘duties’ you could put: ‘In charge of deciding what primary color to plug into this cross,’” noted The Young Artist.

“Other duties would include feeding the troll who lives in the base of the

cross,” I added.

“You could also use that for any supervisory duties,” said The Young Artist. “Supervised one troll.”

“Don’t forget that word, *utilized*. A resume is not a resume until it has the word *utilized*. “

“Supervised one troll,” The Young Artist said in an official voice. “Utilized ‘special pagan skills to supervise troll.’”

“Well, shall we go see if he is in?”

I held my arm out and made a slight bow for her to go up the steps. After a nod, a smile, and a “thank you” she went up. I then followed and soon grabbed the rail on the platform. Something she had already done, along with visually drinking in the brick, clapboard, and smokestack valley that was below.

Because we were so high up, along with the morning still being cool, there was a slight wind. It was enough to make her scarves “frolic”, for which I could not help but laugh.

“What’s funny?” she asked.

There was a slight bite to her lips; she knew what sparked the laughter.

I shook my head with a faint trace of a smile.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” I said.

I swept my hand as far as it could go to my left.

“Look,” I said. “It’s not the Grand Canyon, or the Amazon, but from up here, there’s curves and colors and perspectives and all that neat picture making stuff.”

She giggled.

My grand gesture collapsed into a shrug.

“What the hell,” I apologetically said. “My only art course was Introduction to Art 110. But...”

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