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table of contents

the boss lady's editorial

The Vegetative State Part II (So What Defines When Someone's Alive?)	2
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poetry (the passionate stuff)

Mel Waldman.....	4
Bill DeArmond.....	6
Roger N. Taber.....	7
Claire Blancett	7
Eric Bonholtzer <i>art</i>	8
David Lawrence	8
Cheryl Townsend <i>art</i>	8
Luke Buckham	8
IB Rad.....	9
Michael A. Rodriguez	9
damion hamilton	9
Je'free	10
David Matson <i>art</i>	10
C. D. Rose	11
Kenneth W. Anderson, Jr.	11
Edward Michael O'durr Supranowicz <i>art</i>	11
Brandon Kinkade	12
Scott Heigel	13
Richard Fein	14
Marissa Christina Owens	15
Michael Ceraolo.....	16
Aaron Wilder <i>art</i>	18
Ed Coet.....	18
Julie Kovacs	18
John R. Hunt	19



prose (the meat & potatoes stuff)

Kenneth DiMaggio.....	20
Robert William Myers	27
Mel Waldman.....	30
Toy Davis	33
Janet Kuypers	34
Pat Dixon	35

Scars Art

3, 7 (4 photos in Venice), 11 & 15
("Passion" photo; a silhouette of
two people about to kiss), 13 (cars
from Austria, Rome and florida).
Cover of couldrons.

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the boss lady's editorial

Vegetative State, part II

So what defines when someone's alive?

Okay, I wrote about Terri Schiavo before. Everyone was having a fit about her husband being able to cut off her life support, but he had the right to choose, and based on all medical evidence they could muster (even check out the cat scan of her brain versus a normal person's brain, like I had highlighted in that past interview), there was so much brain damage to Terri that there was no way she could ever be responsive — if there was ever any chance that she could regain consciousness (which seemed an impossible option for her). But people had hope, even beyond all hope — like her parents, who only started showing concern for their daughter (oh wait, that sounds rude, scratch that) who only started visiting her often, in the last years of Terri's unconscious life in the hospital, because they feared their son would terminate her life. Keep in mind that her parents didn't even bother seeing her for years — I mean *years* — while she was laying in her (in their words) attentive state.

Okay, sorry I'm going on with that first editorial about Terri Schiavo. I'm talking about this again because I just read an AP article in the *Naples Daily News* titled "Brain Scan Detects Signs of Awareness in Vegetative-State Patient." Now, this article went on about how British scientists (led by neuroscientist Adrian Owen of the British Medical Research Council) reported that "advanced Brain scanning uncovered startling signs of awareness" in a woman who was in a vegetative state. Now, I'm sure this argument is going to bring up the Terri Schiavo reference, but this story was based on a woman who was (1) younger, and (2) in a vegetative state for a much shorter time, and (3) did not show the same signs of brain deterioration that Terri Schiavo did. Beyond just MRI scans, they relied of functional MRI, or fMRI... and this concluded that this patient in question actually had brain activity responses when given instruction of what to think about (playing tennis, then going for a walk). This fMRI showed "brain region reactions in the same way" this patient and a healthy volunteer did. This showed that the patient — who was in a vegetative state

for only five months —seemed to (at least) mentally certain commands, led people from the study to conclude that this patient “decided to involve herself in the study and do what we asked.” Even though it could be viewed that she responded mentally to commands, they also wonder if her brain was just responding more automatically to speech.

And yes, this does sound promising — as Lionel Naccache of INSERM (France’s national science institute) wrote in a review, for someone not as badly injured and someone like Terri Schiavo, and someone who had not been in a vegetative state that long (as was the case in this single study). This study applies to people who are not conscious. But “the machinery is still there and operating,” quoting Joy Hirsch of New York Columbia University’s Medical Center.

So if you’re looking for a verdict or a point, and you’re wondering if I’ll change my mind, sorry, I won’t. What I will say is that with more and more medical breakthroughs, maybe doctors can learn more ways to know if someone who has just entered into a vegetative state has any chance of leaving that state — if their brain is still functioning. For every bit of evidence collected for Terri Schiavo, it was apparent that she was never going to come out of that vegetative state, because she didn’t have enough brain matter to help her survive... But maybe, for those who have just entered into a state like this, maybe there is medical hope that will help people know if their loved one who has just been so severely injured has a chance of surviving...




Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

P.S.: Because of a previous accident of mine, where I was unconscious for eleven days and had to relearn how to walk and talk and eat, the doctors put a Vena Cava filter in my body — a small piece of metal in my



torso along a vial blood line to stop any blood clots from traveling north to my heart or lungs or brain. Thanks to this little piece of metal, I can never have an MRI (much less a fMRI). So... Doctors better keep working on ways to help people in these conditions, so the likes of me don’t remain out of luck...

poetry
the passionate stuff

A PHANTASMAGORIC
JOURNEY ON THE Q TRAIN

Mel Waldman

Did you know that prehistoric creatures roam the subways?
Well don't look at me that way. I see the quizzical look
instantly vanish into...a metamorphosis wearing a twisted

face of terror. I'm not mad! I really see them. They seem to
hang out here in Brooklyn-where weird stuff happens every
day- bombarding you, frying your brain-like a bad trip from
the sixties.

Just yesterday, I took a phantasmagoric journey on the Q train,
heading for Coney Island. Hiding inside the shell of eerie, I
saw the Dinosaur-Man. He was real, believe me, in this unreal,

dreamlike voyage on the Q. Yet I doubt the others saw him.
The prehistoric creature was skeletal, scaly, half-man, half-
dinosaur. Nearby, a few deep breaths away from me, he stood
tall, a grotesque giant looming in the foggy car.

I studied him from a distance. I watched him inhale and exhale
the toxic air inside the minuscule box that contained us. And
when he exhaled, he seemed to eat my brain, this chimerical

creature catapulting me on a phantasmagoric journey,
claustrophobic and suffocating in a cattle car to Auschwitz,
perhaps, but really heading to Freak Land a.k.a. Coney Island.
The freak watched me too.

His dark alien eyes swallowed me, revealing intimate knowledge
of who I am. How did he know my darkest secrets? Yet in the
past year, his brothers discovered them too.

Just before we reached Coney Island, he smiled wickedly at me, wearing a big fat grin of metamorphosis. Instantly, I closed my eyes. And when I opened them, the familiar creature was gone, vanishing inside phantasmagoria, leaving me behind in

Freak Land, Brooklyn, New York, freak that I am, sometimes labeled crazy-psychotic-schizophrenic-but merely a human being of vision. Just like you. Right?

A SEA OF TRAUMA

Mel Waldman

Patients flow to my office in a sea of trauma,
imploding, exploding,
dissolving in a cauldron of rage,
compelled by unbearable pain,
loathing other humans, but especially themselves,

&
when they arrive, they hate me too, for no one has
really helped them in the past,
where all dreams and hope were shattered.

So why should I be *The One*.

And perhaps, I am not the therapist to guide them
through their daily storms.

Still, we must try.
We must struggle.

And if I empower them, perhaps, I will empower
myself too.

In any case, we walk through the storm together,
each patient and I,
merged in the
metamorphosis
of therapy.

And we are *one*!

The World Trade Center

Bill DeArmond

Waiting in the dark
Can I experience this again?

Our parent's generation know where they were
when they heard about Pearl Harbor
My generation when Kennedy was shot
Everyone now remembers what they were doing
when the towers fell

For a time thereafter
headlines throughout the world proclaimed
WE ARE ALL AMERICANS
It was our best hope and opportunity
for peace, tolerance, and healing which
after a "righteous" revenge
we squandered to feed one man's ego

But the movie WTC is about small human stories
those of the common victims
lost in the madness of power

Insane violence and military action
should only be a last resort
not a first option
And all those who plunge the world
into despair and chaos
death and destruction upon the innocent
who are not just collateral damage

Must be prepared to answer
for their transgressions
before the judgment
of providence and history

Lights up	2749 dead in the WTC
We sit in silence	2749 dead in Iraq
Reality returns	What does the one have to do with the other?

JAZZ CITY REVISITED

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Once, left so cold and hungry
on a rooftop;
Once, watching flood waters
rising, rising...

Once, for friends and family
a fading hope;
Once, for an imminent rescue,
fat chance...

Once, TV audiences wringing
their hands;
Once, we were all equal under
the same flag...

Once, we could look forward to
better tomorrows;
Once, it was one for all and all
for one...

Once, it would take more than a
hurricane to...
Ah, but we cannot blame Katrina
for everything

At least the Superdome makeover
is looking good...



Valentines Day

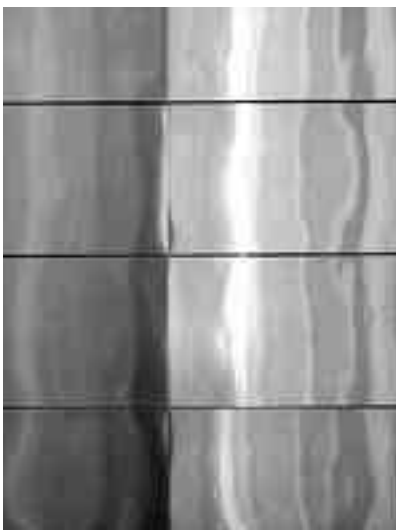
Claire Blancett

Chocolate stomachache
Candy hearts litter the ground
Once more alone

SPECIOUS SHRUBS

David Lawrence

Evil becomes the dominant gene and goodness
Is recessive.
Love fails to find its resolve
And truth is lost in a maze of specious shrubs.
You see,
A Democrat is a waffling thing,
A paltry whiff,
A failed instinct,
A hero fallen from grace,
A Yeatsian allusion or John Kerry on a surfboard.



art by Eric Bonholzer

If a blind man could see the pluralistic scum
On the other side of sightlessness
He would reproduce
His negativity towards liberals without borders
And their failure to build walls or fences of morals
Without murals.



Tree & Fence, art
by Cheryl Townsend

Feeding Each Other

Luke Buckham

we found the lowest floor of the forest
pressed against the wet black leaves
and fed each other mushrooms
snapping them off the rug of moss
--remembering indoors pineneedles concrete
kitchen linoleum underneath--
pushing them into each other's mouths
until our bellies bulged

and then made love, our mouths still filled
with broken mushrooms

Like the cold light

JB Rad

Like the cold light
of twilight's fluttering firefly,
an autumn ember sputters,
but rarely ignites.

Fragile Days

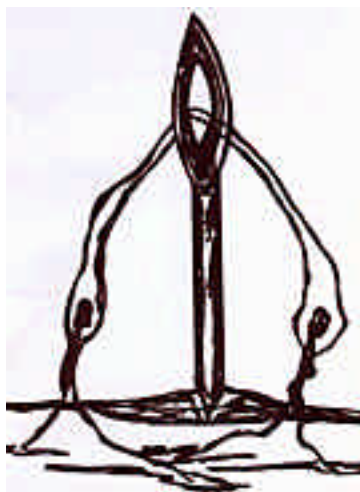
damion hamilton

Well there's allergies and toothaches
Minor and major illnesses
This day very little goes right
I picked up my food at a Chinese take out
And the kid whom always smiles at me
When I come in there; well he's
Sick and has very red eyes and a fever
But he's working—folding some flyers
Trying to stay awake and look healthy
And brave; but he's failing
I get my food and tell him that I hope
He feels better and then I leave,
While driving around thinking about the kid—
Hoping he feels better
And I don't feel too well myself,
While fighting allergies and a hangover
Then things start to bother me:
My cluttered room, my cluttered car, my job,
To many people in a convenient store,
A bill in the mail, a gnat flying by my ear,
And spilling a glass of water can
Cause one to break down and sob,
Or yell and smash something
This being one of the crazy
And fragile days

IHOPoem

Michael A. Rodriguez

I saw Dante and
Milton at an IHOP;
They sat at a booth
And discussed Hell
Over stacks of pancakes
With little butter,
But lots of maple syrup;
Dante drank lemonade,
Milton drank milk;
I walked by them and they
Asked me to join them
While syrup dripped from
Their lips and slowly
Crystallized on their chins--
I kindly said, "hell no,"
And left them arguing about
Who was going to pay the bill.



Eye of the Beholder, art by
Edward Michael O'durr Supranowicz

Mad Youth

Je'free

Stolen childhood,
and years of puberty...

Back in those days,
I yearned to have house rules,
or to simply be grounded
for skipping Biology class;
or maybe, just any assurance
that someone was concerned
about me

Grief of teen had made
my ceilings rise sky-high; and,
the measurements of my room
expand wider by each sigh & sob
isolation had caused

Sick of blaming family,
I cursed myself in wrath
I even cursed the bleeding angel
with a broken wing
for not being able to fly me away

Back then
(maybe even up to now),
everyone had his piece of rage,
her share of angst;
That if the shouts of anger
in yesterday's world harmonized,
it could damage the eardrums
of the universe

I knew I had to take a bus
to escape somewhere far,
and leave my youth behind,
investing wisely on myself;
For as far as I remember,
no one invested on this kid



WCR Legs 1, art by David Matson



Goodbye Kisses

Kenneth W. Anderson, Jr.

On her highest heels she stood
kissing him deeply with a lie,
but the night slipped underneath her
when she tried to say goodbye.

Their bed swallowed the sleepless air
and under the cover of ragged clouds,
coldness wrapped around her.
Her mouth empty and dry,
she kissed him again,
biting his lower lip.
She moved closer to him,
her leg hugging his warm thigh,
her feet tangled and trapped
in wet sheets.

In the morning,
her head went swimming.

No Expectation Of "Break thru"

(With many thanx to D.P.C.)

C. D. Rose

Someone once wrote
in
Break thru

The speed of dark
is equal to the speed of light

dark
does not have
speed
it
simply sits there
waiting for
LIGHT
to instantaneously
shred it
plumb into
the
non existence
which
if it had good sence
it would have been
wishing for

A Sense of Cosmopolitan

Brandon Kinkade

Inside the deep Aryan worship temples of ancient times,
hidden under untouched spider webs and grains of
Draudian sands is the secret to true love.

In Modernization, she floats pass me like a
butterfly in a dream.

Her droopy puppy dog eyes pierce through
my heart like a psycho killer stabbing me
with a butter knife.

Like a fish desperately dangling from a pole, I am forever hooked.

Since the first day of my birth or rebirth or
whatever you may call it, I've never been in
my right mind. I'm junked up, swaying and swooning,
taught to wear my fragile heart on my sleeve.

She a former tiny dancer turned soccer player
met me halfway in the dark hallway and showed
me the light her with golden hair. Lured me
in with slabs of warm, steamy meat then
sucker trapped me like a hunter catching
a bear only to kick me 50 yards with her
spike heals and leave my butchered heart
bloody and raw on the side of the field.

Are you the Buddha seeking the realm of your
existence in this or that world or do you
wear a plastic joker mask, a different color
for the change of seasons, to cover up the
stigmata scars in which Jesus left you. I
long to peel your skin off and rattle
through your bones to get a true sense
of who you are.



Drive

Scott Heigel



A habit I picked up in Yellowstone,
Besides sleeping with
My friends' boyfriends,
Was a penchant for going for drives
In the countryside
To wonder at natural forces –
Usually falling under the influence
Of some natural forces myself –
For while my body yearns
To connect to the throng,
The buzz of the city and
The release into culture it brings
My heart always pines for
Those wild and untamed places
Out in the vastness of this world
That have yet to be discovered and
The ancient ways still sing,
Whether it be out amidst
The geyser basin,
Windows open to feel the
Ejaculate of the earth,
Salty and warm like a man's,
Stopping in the roadway as
The young elks learned to prance
And sing in bugled tones
Their tribal incantations,
Or just the ride home
From a frenetic night at work,
Basking in the placating glow of
A full moon lit like Times Square,
Rabbit a-driving away
The constellations

KOSHER DIVERSION AND Mrs. ALLEN

Richard Fein

"Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight. . ."

GENESIS 38:8-10

But the girls sitting next to us were as unreachable
as Mrs. Allen was standing in front of us,
teaching about all the angles, right, acute, and obtuse.
Mrs. Allen mumbled something about Pythagoras and triangles,
while all the female forms around us softened into curves.
I knew the ancient tale and misconstrued taboo.
Onan was wicked for his disobedience, for the selfish aborting of his seed
and not for just rubbing God the wrong way.
As for me, delicious Debra sat just to my left
and yet she might as well have been on the other side of the world.
The room was hot and reeked of sweat. The sun lit our acned faces.
And the girls that shared our space,
they could get up at the bell no matter how horny
with no telltale protuberances.
My hands needed to perform a kosher diversion.
I asked Mrs Allen for the pass, "Please, I have to go."
"No," pay attention was her decree.
And unlike Onan I obeyed.
Then in a bulging blouse and tight skirt
she droned on about our next lesson—circles and conic sections.
She traced them on the board with her pointer,
the rubber tip going round and round.



Passion

Marissa Christina Owens

Passion he says
What is your passion
The first thing you think of when you wake up
The last thing you think of when you drift off to sleep
What courses through your veins
Brings light and life to your thoughts
What makes you stand by your beliefs
And unwilling to compromise
Passion he says
What is your passion

Time Will Come Today

Michael Ceraolo

And early twenty-first century American humorist
parodied pretentious boosterism by creating a place
where, among other attributes, all the children were above average,
while,
in the rest of the country,
thanks to devolution
caused by repeated toxic exposures
all the children (and adults) were below average,
as will be shown
and yet,
with the discovery of parallel universes
and the subsequent realization that the phrase
Well, anything's possible
was not a consoling cliché but literal truth,
there was a place where all these devolutions
were considered shining examples of evolution:

where those who
despite repeated exposure to education
have managed never to catch it
are considered to have strong immune systems;

where the man who was covered in blood
with an eight-inch long open wound
all the way down to the bone
who incredulously indicated
he didn't know what had happened
and later came up with a story
too ludicrous to be repeated here
was showing the highest degree of creativity;

where people who speak
without the prerequisite
of having knowledge of the subject
are revered;

where it is considered a compliment
to say to an astrology believer
your brain is always in Uranus;

where someone beyond the chronological age
requiring constant parental supervision
who freed his friend's stuck finger
by hitting it with a hammer
was considered a problem-solver;

where the slogan
IGNORANCE IS BLISS
was taken literally, not ironically;

where a college student
who went for a walk in sub-sub-freezing temperatures

while wearing only flipflops on her feet
was rewarded for her frostbite with immediate graduation;

where the filibusterer who says something
in two thousand words instead of twenty
is esteemed,

because
quantity is quality;

where the thief who is the first
to suspect everyone else of dishonesty
and the man who disrespects everybody
is the first to suspect everyone of dissing him
are actually right;

where there was a truth-in-advertising law for opinions
and people proudly proclaimed theirs
one hundred percent fact-free;

where a man who is struck by lightning
while wearing an iPod in a thunderstorm
is revered as a prophet;

where the cell-phone salesperson being rear-ended
by a driver talking on her cell-phone
is considered tragedy rather than poetic justice;

And other instances as yet undiscovered



Vile Vonanguard, art by Aaron Wilder

PENATRATION

ED COET

Penetration

In to your eyes, your mind
In to your body, your soul.

Touching

Your thoughts, your feelings
Your skin, your sensitivities.

Feeling

Your heartbeat, your pulse
Your warmth, your love.

We are

One, in love
Together, forever.

Fruits and Nuts

Julie Kovacs

Most people get fruitcake at Christmastime
I'm privileged to get it year round.

An apt description of my extended family
people who live on sugar and look to the stars of Hollywood for their lifestyle,
people who drink themselves to death,
people who saw the Vietnam war and came home screwed up.

Family reunions were more like the Jerry Springer show than Dad Knows Best.
even the family cat talks of changing her name at the courts so that she
has no association with us.
I don't blame my furry friend
she's the most normal,
and the best treated member of the family.

Priests, Preachers and Pokémon

John R. Hunt

My rituals are thin,
I feel the bones,
flesh wasting away.

I can't swallow fermented gruel,
dripping from the tongues
of blow-hard television evangelists
prancing like fools,
drunk on the sound of their words.

Bobble head Jesus wannabes,
they talk to hear their heads and wallets rattle.

My rituals are skeletons
pulled from the past,
structure without content,
content without meaning.

I study bones,
imagining the color of flesh,
the shape of lips,
looking for clues
to share with my children
who are empty,
except for Pokémon at ten o'clock,
SpongeBob at ten-thirty,
and Mel Gibson's celluloid psychoses
to guide them.

My medicine-man turned on me
when I was twelve,
showing me his pocket monster
in the darkened sanctuary
of St. Stephens,
when other boys went home.

What do I feed my children now,
to fatten their souls?

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

part ten (the February 2007 installment) of

THE DRIVE

by Kenneth DiMaggio

"My friends told me they were going to drop me off at a Gay bar unless I promised to enlist in the Marine Corps. Fuck that, I told 'em. The Marines do push ups with spiked collars and leather zippered masks."

"For which your friends must have really tortured you."

"Yeah," I sighed. I was not feeling comfortable but I finally had to admit it.

"Because I started acting so crazy, my friends dropped me off at what they said was a mental hospital. With all the windowless brick and humming power plant noise, it looked like a mental hospital too. It turned out to be the state college. The same state college I would go and graduate from."

She smacked her lips.

"Life is full of ironies. That's the same college I go to."

"Did you think it was a mental institution when you first went there?" I asked.

"No, but I'm now ninety nine percent convinced that it's a nursing home for professors with Alzheimer's."

"That sucks."

"That's why you have to do things like shoplift."

"Wouldn't it be more fruitful to parody that with Wanted Posters all over campus, alerting students about the faculty's mediocrity?"

"For you maybe; for me, I play it less esoteric and more animalistic. I like to hunt."

And to underscore this point, she softly growled.

I tried not to, but what the hell, I still laughed.

"You think I'm kidding, ha? Well, here's my claw."

She started to dig something from out of her bag. I squished up one side of my mouth and said,

"And here's my vampire teeth. You'd never think so, but I bite the people on the neck."

She closed her bag.

"Stop the car," she said.

"We're not there yet, and don't worry, I won't bite you."

Smack! As she slapped palm down on the dashboard.

"I said stop the *fucking* car!"

Scre-e-ech! As I braked the old rattle wagon on a street that was half dead end and rusted aluminum fence playground.

Soon as the car had stopped, I put it in park, raised an index finger, closed

my eyes and said without being angry, but not being happy:

“Don’t —do stuff like that—when I’m driving.”

I opened my eyes, and turned to her. I expected her to be a lot more angry. She just looked at me—with what seemed like an amused smile.

“Okay...? I said, more gently, reassuring; just in case she was pissed or afraid.

“Will you let me drive your car?” she said.

“What?” I suddenly said.

“Just until we get to the mall. It’s not that far.”

I started to shake my head and mentally scratch my brain.

“Wait a minute, first you want to hunt—then you want to drive my—“

She put her hand down on the seat space between me and her, inched herself forward and said:

“What’s the matter, are you afraid I’ll wreck your car or something?”

“No, I’m not afraid that you’ll wreck my car or *something!*”

She took another inch forward and when I took another inch back, my thigh was already against the car door.

“Then let me drive your car—or is this a boy thing?”

“No, it’s not a *boy*—”

This time, she had taken three inches forward (and not without a mean little smile) and I stupidly responded by—well, it just happened so fast—it was like *automatic* the way I put my hand on the door handle, opened it, and got out, and as soon as I did, she lost no time sliding over and taking the wheel of the car.

“Come on, get in,” she said.

“Wait—“ I feebly said. I was still going to try and plead with her to give me back my car.

“Come on....” she sighed. “It’s not going to hurt your car. But if it’s really going to make you freak out...”

“It’s okay,” I gave in.

I walked around my car to get inside through the passenger’s door. As I did so, I could only look at the ground. I believed her when it came to her respecting my car—well, ninety percent or so. But even if I believed in her a full one hundred percent, it was still hard to give up my car to—well, a stranger? She was not quite that. A friend? A fellow artist—aw, hell, say it—a woman and I’m no backwards cave man type of guy, but—usually the woman who drives your car, is your wife or your girlfriend. Fuck—outside of that, just how often do you let anybody drive your own car? How often are you a passenger in it? Ah, what the hell. In around a couple of hours, I’ll be in New York, and I won’t even have this car—well, I’ll have it, but not for long. How I’ll get rid of it—I’ll think about when I get there. With luck, the engine would die right when I get to Avenue A; near Tompkins Square Park. I would not have to do anything but just leave the car where it died. By the next morning, my car would be a stripped, anonymous, wheel-less frame.

Back to the present, back in my car, but as a passenger. Is that why she had a slightly mocking smile?

I also noticed that she had an aluminum adhesive taped splint on her right

index finger.

“Oh—“ I started to excuse myself.

I didn’t see that injury when she was sitting across from me drinking coffee. I’m not that much of a drug addict; something’s going on.

As if reading my mind, she thrust her finger a little too close to my face.

“You like it? This happens to be my ‘claw.’”

“Your claw?”

“Yeah, I know you can’t see it from where you’re at, but partially taped up inside of the splint, is a razor blade.”

“A razor blade?” I said, and then with growing fascination.

“Is there a special CD you’ve been wanting to buy? Well, it’s free today when this razor blade slices off the alarm tag off.”

She was about to put the car in drive but stopped when I said:

“That’s fucking brilliant!”

She put the car back in park.

“Now hold on,” she explained. “It’s not my idea. I got it from a book—a book called *Crimethinc*—but the author—or authors—whoever the fuck they are, would be pleased to know that their book is being put to good use by having people ripping off chain music stores.”

“No shit.”

“No shit,” she said, and then slyly asked:

“Did you ever read that book?”

“No,” I said with embarrassment.

“Hmmm,” she murmured with a touch of superiority.

“And did you ever read *Clarissa* ?” I said

“That big fucking book in the back of your car? No. But does it tell you how to shoplift CDs?”

“No,” I said, “but—the male anti-hero in the book kidnaps the heroine.”

“Yeah,” she said. “I can see how that book really relates.”

She put the car in drive, and gently glided the car back into the street. A few seconds after she did, I began to relax—even feel relieved—not to be in control of my car, even though this old battle ship carcass still had some value to me—hell, it held the manuscript of—what at this point, was becoming its own novel. With the way people added things, with the way pages were getting lost or mixed up; or the way its author still earnestly tried to put it together and nobly continued on with it (what else could such a colossal failure be but noble?) Well, this book was having a strong hand in writing itself. And if this car was there just for that one mess, well, give it some respect. Don’t bang her around too much. Hell, your work in progress isn’t the only mess she’s been carrying around for the past several months, and no more needs to be said. Time to foolishly escape from my problems by smoking a little marijuana.

“So that’s why you wanted me to drive,” she slyly asked.

“What gave you that idea,” I said.

“Well, I don’t feel like getting stoned, okay?”

"Well, you don't have to."

"I can still get a contact high."

"Come on..." I laughed. "The windows are open."

"You light up, you're getting out of the car."

I just laughed.

She flicked a harsh, slightly teeth baring look; just a little pearl showing like the handle of a weapon in its sheathed holster; it was a look I had not seen from her before. Neither did I hear her speak in such a sharp and defiant tone when she hissed:

"You think I'm kidding?"

Whoa, where did that come from, was my first thought. What the fuck is going on here, was my second thought. She must have felt similar unease mixed with tension, what I must have looked like to her. Ridiculously scared and stupidly angry. I just threw the joint out of the window, and muttered:

"Fuck it, this is—nevermind... I threw up my hands and laughed.

"You can smoke if you really need to," she said with a small whine.

"Naw. It's not that, it's just that I don't like the mall. I know it sounds dumb, but it makes me feel uncomfortable."

"It's not dumb," she said, and then in a more shy tone:

"I've always been a little nervous about driving."

A beat passed before she then added; her eyes fixed on the road before:

"But not now."

I smiled, settled back in my seat, moved my right knee against the dash.

"Drive as long as you like," I said. "All the way to New York if you like. Hell, you bring me, you can keep the car. But you're not taking my novel."

"No way," she said. "Just to the mall. And if you'll let me take a few pages of your novel, I can use it for my art project."

"What the hell, let's get some flour, 'cause I've got enough pages to make a paper mache piñata of a monster"

"Save the monster for the page, and I'll save the piñata surprise for my art."

"Mmm," I warmly sighed, but then added:

"But that's one of the things I hated about the mall. Every time I am inside one, I feel like I'm in a giant Tupperware container and a preserved piece of sandwich. That's the trouble with the mall—there's no rot!"

She giggled.

"It's true!" I said. "Or almost. Hey, it's not like I have a phobia, ya know? I worked at the mall. In one of the fast food chain bookstores while I was in high school."

"You must have loved that," she said in a deliberately dry tone.

"Especially when the Daughters of the American Revolution dowagers asked me where the latest schlocker was. Right in front of you lady. On the rack that's just lit up like a big neon sign for Coca Cola. Well, part of my job was to take those same books once they were no longer best schlockers—usually about a few days or less after they arrived."

"About as long as it takes Tupperware food to spoil."

“That’s basically it, and part of my clerkly duties was to take this literary junk food down to the mall basement where the compacter was, and dump any books that could not be remaindered, into the big crusher.

Well, another week goes by, and this time the store gets in a hot shipment—but this one is the big BIG seller! You know, it’s going to be a movie, which means there will be action figures, T-shirts, a sound track album, toilet paper...which means even less chance of escaping the monster; ignoring the romantic moron-o drama, so...”

She giggled, anticipating what I was about to reveal.

“By mistake I mixed up the wrong box of books,” I said. “I dumped the Best Schlocker into the crusher instead of the books not even good enough to be remaindered.”

She burst out laughing. Because we were at a stop light, she was able to clap. I turned to her to explain:

“You shoulda seen it! Customer after customer leaving the store in shock when they found out that we did not have the must have worthless junk!”

“Yes!” she shouted.

“It was like they were told there was going to be no more McDonald’s or Las Vegas or something!”

“Whoo-hoo!”

“Yeah, for one day, the mental television went out in this small part of America!”

“Ha-ley-loo-ya!”

“Yeah, and I got fired.”

“Yeah, but that’s also when you proved that you were ready to become an artist!”

“Damn right. And so, let’s go to the mall and commit—
—some *art*. “

We were just in time too. If we waited any longer, this mall would probably lose its one chain record store. This aspirin white place was geared for the town fueled by Geritol. We did not have too far to go before coming to the chain record store. This mall had a little class beyond a “low class.” That is why it had a store catering to “senior adult needs.” For which we brightly tried to pick out senior adult items like diapers, catheter bags, and other fun stuff. Yeah, it was not nice, but we felt like criminals, and in America, it is a crime to get old. The senior store was at least shabbily respectable next to the famous discount artist’s gallery. That store “screamed” at you with velvet paintings of stallions running in a Western landscape; where the sky was a neon and iodine like purple. Velvet paintings, the Young Artist noted, were a lost folk art; she wrote a paper about it for composition, for which used a critical theorist like Foucault to justify her thesis. Besides getting an “A” for it, the paper also won the English department prize for the school’s best student composition. Impressive. I sincerely told her to do more work in that area; in case she should ever go to graduate school. I spoke from the experience of someone who had only a semester and a half of grad school. It might have gone a little longer if I didn’t have to read more Derrida.

But there is only so much time to read the great books in life, and *Writing and Differance* was not one of them. *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson is.

The Young Artist agreed with my idea of what a good grad school plan in humanities should comprise. There should be more studies done on Velvet paintings, she noted, and less on the French Impressionists. What? I asked. I thought The French Impressionists were the velvet painters. That's what they ended up becoming, she said, which is probably what grad school will do to all your prior education. She then noted that she was too much of an artist and also the criminal type of artist to deal with grad school. She would rather shoplift than become one of the unemployable book brains reading Foucault. I agreed with her, but still had one concern: I noticed how some of the velvet painting designs were showing up as photographic engravings on grave stones. Being a bit of a cemetery person herself, she noticed this as well, and cemeteries, well, cemeteries were one of the few places left where you could find true gothic art. She did not mind such "Velvet painting" of death, though she felt the water skiing design worked better than others than the homey winter hearth scene. Me, I was more of a traditionalist when it came to death. I felt there should be some dignity, even austerity. Today's gravestone has a velvet painting design on it—and tomorrow's marble has an advertisement for McHamburger. The Young Artist told me I was failing to keep up with "Progressiveness". The creepy Victorian cemetery stuff I like today, was crude and vulgar twenty five or fifty years ago. That may be so, and if so, well, this was where there was a shift and maybe a divide: for me, death had to be escape from the Pop Culture.

At least we both agreed on the Hip Hop clothing store: we liked the wide legged XXX in your face slogans, and at this point, we also agreed that Hip Hop fashion is the polyester disco clothing of the new millennium.

Finally, the music store. Ugh, because for a devoted listener like myself (and a serious fanatical listener like herself) chain record music stores were like mental institutions for music. Music stores (like bookstores) are supposed to be independent, eccentric, chaotic, baroquely decorated and poster'd places and run by a frizzy haired sixty year old man or woman who knows about every obscure title published and every obscure record label that produced music. It was from such stores that you got your important education: the education your school or college could only partially give you, if that. It was from such stores that you learned which books and records were important to your life. The trouble was, the chains were catching on: the mass consumable was starting to pass itself off as the independent, as this store now did. Display a few books and zines with the CDs, line some shelves with quirky action figures, and you have an "independent record store." This could present a dilemma, because if this was an independent and cool store, well, you couldn't steal from it. You don't steal from artists, but it is okay to steal from corporations. Well, there was only one way to tell if this record store was truly sincere: ask if it had a not so unreasonably obscure artist.

"Do you have any Cocteau Twins?" The Young Artist asked.

He was behind the register, punching something into what looked like a small adding machine. He was wearing a skinny black tie on a shiny purple

shirt (as if to tell anyone who would care that hey, I may only be sixteen, but I go to clubs with 70s disco themes). His employee's I.D. tag was pinned out at a slanted irreverent angle. "Pytor" was the name of this small town slag-boned kid with an attitude—my self ten years ago. Myself the way I would have also answered. Smugly, without looking at us, he smiled and slowly shook his head "No" back and forth as if to say: The *what* twins? Yeah, right. What the fuck do I look like? Some stoned out Hippie Girl?"

—which is what the Young Artist must have been sensing from the way she had suddenly narrowed her eyes: a small, snake-like tongue of sparkle flickering from within them. Before, we just wanted to rip off a corporation. Now, it was like, let's fuck up this idiot—my response, and which she sensed as she quickly put her hand on the back of mine as a way to maintain calm and go with the original plan.

"Thank you," she said in a rather harsh tone; the clerk—again, too cool to look up, only smirked in acknowledgement.

"That asshole," I said as we left the register and headed for the bins. "Like who the fuck does he think he is? And dressed like it's nineteen seventy four and he's at Studio Fifty Four. I wonder if Stashu knows that The Village People were gay!"

"Shhh! Nevermind! I've got a better idea! We take what we want and then we pick on his music!"

It was a tactic I had never thought of before. The Philistines may attack and hate art, but they still have what passes for them, their own art and culture. They assume that you don't know that—or maybe they just assume that *theirs* is the only culture? Well, don't let their smugness fool you. A smug frown can quickly turn to outrage after kicking one of their sacred cows. Put a crucifix in a jar full of urine like Andres Serrano did. His interpretation may have not been to disrespect Christ; just the same, it put some real flame into the nostrils of the always swinish fundamentalists. (Look, there is no point in hiding my biases.) So, next time some small minded Christian attacks your homosexuality, respond by noting how Christ had homoerotic tendencies. Some red neck wants to kick the shit outta you? In those spangled, glittering, decorated cowboy boots that look like they first came off a drag queen impersonating –I don't know, Dolly Parton. And excuse me, could you turn around and then in profile so that I can take a picture of what I thought was an extinct cultural relic known as "The Mullet."? And Holy shit, because as soon as Stashu momentarily turned sideways, sure enough he had a mullet.

"Don't laugh," she said. "I want to get one more CD."

"We've already got two."

"Three," she said. "There was another Cocteau Twins CD that I didn't have, and then this album:"

The music that probably represented the taste of our young philistine; the music that she made her last theft: the 80s hair band, Poison.

"That's *his* music," I said.

stay tuned for **THE DRIVE** in issues of cc&d...

I KNOW AN ADDICT

Robert William Myers

I think everyone knows an addict. They are everywhere. From the chocolate addict to the toilet hugging heroin addict to the workaholic to the internet junkie to the drunk in trailer four... everyone knows an addict. However all those people that know those addicts will have to write their own piece because this story is about MY addict.

Yeah, I know an addict. I've known him quite a long time actually. We've been here and there, we've done this and that. I watched in amusement when he struggled with his first addiction. What a trip that was, thirteen years old without a clue. We were at the arcade with buddies just shootin the shit and playing pinball when a couple older guys lit up cigarettes. No one said a word, my boy just watching as they inhaled, French curled up their nose, blew smoke rings and generally acted real cool. My addict was as affected as the rest of the kids and in that second he had his first addiction in the bag. This addiction would follow him for a long time. This addiction would be responsible for many other addictions. This addiction would be the hardest to kick. Yeah my addict was addicted to something that they didn't even have a name for yet. In the years to follow they would put many names and labels on this addiction but the one most people know it by is; PEER PRESSURE.

Time for my addict to accept his mission. He stole a pack of smokes, went home and locked the bathroom door. It wasn't easy of course, forcing your body to do something it knows is wrong, but my addict was on a mission.

Time went by and my addict went with it. Soon enough another addiction would present itself disguised as an addiction he already had in the bag! Well it was similar to a cigarette at least and it burned too, but this one made my addict feel pretty good, yeah, now we're talkin'! Shit man if you're gonna shove smoke down your throat you might as well get a buzz right? Cha Ching another addiction in the bag! We are cruising now. Oh! That's what the music is about!

Time was plentiful for my addict...but there is that word time, tricky that time huh? Time was when a couple hits did my addict just fine, now a double clutching bong hit don't do it. But my addict ended up at a party and yes there may have been some beer there. Not only that there were girls as well. Ok I know what you're thinking, and you are probably right; two addictions in one fell swoop? My dog was howling that night! SEX? who knew? Oh man beer was good but sex? My addict knew what he wanted to do with his life! Yeah man two more addictions in the bag so that's uh, how many now? Ahh worry about it later, there's plenty of time.

Time went by as it has a tendency to do and my addict moved around quite

a bit so he got to sample a little flavor for his weed and sex addiction. Smokes and beer remained constant and that was good, kinda like old friends that were there when you needed them. The other addictions came and went as he could find them, if they were there cool, if not he wasn't gonna rob grandma to get them, (that would come later).

Time for graduation! How the hell he made it is beyond me! Well two summer school courses and a phony transcript, to make up for all the stoner days he had accumulated is how he made it! Whew... time to relax man! Schools out dude lets party! Man, the coke was flowing that summer! Yeah buddy another addiction behind and life ahead. Indeed it was sweet, sugar sweet.... too sweet!

Time to wake up young addict! That sweet life? Just turned sour! Hey what's the harm in selling a little sugar to friends? Keeps him in cola, talk about a vic-timless crime? But, jail isn't so bad if you have the right attitude!

Time out! This ain't what my addict was gonna be! No He's smarter than this shit, uh huh. Time for a change your honor, oh yes sir, He'll serve his country.. right now, sir. Where does he sign?

Time was on my addict's side for a good while there but now, time was his worst nightmare. Looking down the barrel of a long stint in the service; time becomes a bitch!... time can be daunting indeed. My addict was gonna need a lotta help from his addictions to get thru this time. WHAT? Drug tests? Oh nooo. OK well lets see uh he had the old stand bys right? smokes and beer, sex when he could get it. Uh yeah about that, no one told our addict but beer just wouldn't do it anymore! Really now we are talking about my dawg here. Whiskey vodka gin, oh? Hmm warm feeling? Yeah, quicker than beer, OK. Alright... kind of an adjustment but hey when in Rome right? The tricky part was being just buzzed enough to want to do the job but not so buzzed you can't do it! A fine line to walk but with only eight or ten write ups, a couple busts for trying to buy pot and the time went by.

Time to get out! Yes my addict made it, whew! This was more of a miracle than high school! Not exactly an honorable but then he was drunk most of the time and he was out now so it didn't matter right? Time to party now dude, time to forget those people telling you what to do. Time to do what you want for a change! The problem with this scenario was that the only thing my addict wanted to do was all the drugs he couldn't do in the service! So? What was stopping him?

Time to...uh what was we talking about? MYYYYY Dawg! If a buzz could be found by anything being; drunk, eaten, snorted, smoked, based, huffed, injected, dissolved or applied with a mudpack, my dog would hunt! Yes sir, my addict hit the world ready to rock the place! Well lets get looped first then we'll rock the place. Either you do drugs or they'll do you right? My addict even said now that he's able, he'll try and get high one way or another every day... for the rest of his life! Lofty goal dude! Go for it! Party on man! The password is fun!

Time to set the record straight. My addict had a life going on while all this

partying was happening, in fact he went through two marriages and divorces and had several kids. Luckily these responsibilities didn't interfere with his intake of drugs and alcohol. Yes sir, time marched right on for our party animal as he worked different jobs, even had a couple of his own businesses, one lasted nearly two years until he got blitzed and told his biggest client what to do or where to go or told him something funny. You had to have been there but it really was funny.

Time to grow up young man. Young? My addict has made it to his forties! He still has that childlike attitude that everything is going to be alright. My addict needed to take a look around and figure out what's up. He's in the middle of a nasty divorce which normally he would simply walk away from but he had a son and the idiot addict our addict hooked up with was not equipped to raise him.

Time for my addict to straighten up. HRS was involved because; well we are dealing with a couple addicts here. My addict wasn't gonna let that addict take his son. He began taking the classes that the agency made him take. Anger management? He was the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet! Drug classes? AA meetings? Urinalysis? What the hell? These people thought our addict had some sort of problem or something! This was worse than school or jail or the military. My addict was out in the free world but couldn't party?

Time dragged on through the divorce. My addict did the best he could. He peed hot a couple times, went to one AA meeting drunk. Did I mention that my addict had the luck of the dumb on his side? Yes sir! My dawg got lucky! The stupid female addict went to prison. The judge had no choice but to award custody to my addict.

Time to get back to living. My addict moved close to his mother who could help take care of his son. Whew! Dodged a bullet on that one. Lesson? What lesson? Ain't no lesson. My addict is just smart. Or lucky? Hey it's...

Time to party! Yes sir a new place, new people to party with, rock on pilgrim! Yeah my addict was right back to the program.

Time to wrap this sad tale up.

Time; two thirty five on a Friday night. My addict is staring up at the stars. His harley is laying on his right leg dripping gas all over the place. My addict is too blasted to realize he's gonna die if he don't move.

Times up.

Time to get real. Yeah I lived and yeah the addict is me! But I think you knew that. It was just hard to write this piece like the foolish idiot addict was me! I am clean and sober now. I'm proud of myself. My son is proud of me, my Brother (Christ) is proud of me. What else do I need?

Time to help. To all the young addicts out there, it's your choice man. I am living proof that your life will go by whether you are aware of it or not! Brothers and Sisters of the smoke or the powder or the drink or the pharmaceuticals or the...well you get the picture, learn from my mistakes...please. Or I just wasted all my time researching this piece.

Y'all be cool.

EVIL EYES

Mel Waldman

Nothing much had changed from yesterday. Except Friday night had slipped away, softly and inconspicuously. And Saturday surrounded Charlie, like a noose around his neck. A prison cell with no exit.

That's the way it was for little Charlie Walls when he rose abruptly at dawn from a troubled sleep filled with disturbing dreams which seemed more real than reality.

When Charlie opened his eyes, he saw the old and familiar universe which contained him. The bleak white studio apartment was still there—stretching across two decades of isolation and barren visions. Still there and unchanged, except for a few objects moved into new positions, slightly altering the structure of the room.

Everything looked familiar and yet shamelessly different and strange.

Slowly, Charlie sauntered to the center of the room. His short journey seemed endless and it seemed he was trudging through a deep snow.

At the center, he found the round table and the crumpled note on its top. He opened the paper with soft hands and delicate fingers as skilled as a surgeon's. A fat grin stretched across his face. Perhaps, he imagined he was delivering a baby. Perhaps, his own.

With blurred vision, he read the name. It looked like Laura or Rita to his defective eyes. After the name, was a phone number.

Clutching the note, he drifted to a corner of the room, lifted the receiver of the wall phone, and dialed the number.

He let the phone ring for a few minutes. But no one answered at the other end. No one was there. She was gone. Or no one wanted to talk. Perhaps, she couldn't.

Momentarily, he visualized her unreal face and the cold dark blue eyes which had assaulted him in the bar. Her eyes disturbed him. Her look was desperately familiar. He understood. Of course, he knew. Remembering the other woman, he recognized the lost, murderous eyes. Evil eyes!

Of course, she saw his empathic look of recognition. Her killing eyes softened. And before the night ended, she gave Charlie her number.

The phone rang ceaselessly. Charlie breathed heavily. He wanted to save her. Laura. Rita. He couldn't figure out her real name. A blurred image, it floated on the paper.

Quietly, he left the studio. He rushed to Laura-Rita's apartment.

Downstairs, he rang her bell. When she did not speak to him through the intercom, he rang several bells until someone buzzed him in.

Her apartment was on the 13th floor. When he got off the elevator, he turned left and hurried to the end of the corridor. Her door was ajar.

He entered. "Hello. Anyone home?" Charlie whispered. He had wanted to cry out, but he could not will his voice to obey.

He entered a long hallway. Halfway through, he stopped. He wanted to run away. But he was compelled to stay. He rushed slowly into the living room.

"Laura, are you home?" he said nervously. Silence. An elongated silence encircled him.

Charlie roamed through Laura's place. Eventually, he headed for her bedroom. But when he opened the door, he found an empty room. From the corner of his right eye, he noticed the TV. It was on, without sound. Abruptly, Charlie turned around and continued to search for Laura.

The living room was empty too. So was the dining room and study.

In the distance, Charlie saw the other room. The door was ajar.

Charlie rushed into the quiet room. A second bedroom. Empty. Laura was gone. But in a corner of the room, a silent TV was on.

Perhaps, Laura was in the bathroom. Perhaps.

He heard the sound of rushing water.

"Laura, are you in there?"

She did not answer. Charlie turned the knob and entered. Empty. Charlie turned off the faucet just in time, for the water in the sink was overflowing. And then he scurried off.

Before leaving, he returned to the first bedroom he had searched. He slithered to the TV and looked at the picture tube.

Laura was there-inside looking out, her evil eyes cutting Charlie's soul in half. From a distance, he watched her lift the gun to her head. Her vacant eyes shot hellfire into his guts. With trembling hands, he turned on the sound.

In that unforgettable moment, the boy entered the room as his mother pulled the trigger. "No!" he screamed, his voice leaping out of the TV and into Charlie's heart. Too late. Laura Walls was dead. Little Charlie couldn't save mama.

Like a zombie, Charlie left the first bedroom and drifted to the other one. The room was empty but the silent TV was on. He closed his eyes and turned on the sound.

"Name's Rita, babe. What's yours?"

“Charlie. Charlie Walls.”

“Charlie Walls. A sweet name. Wish I met you twenty years ago, Charlie.”

“What’s wrong with now?”

“Too late, Charlie. You can’t save me, babe.”

Charlie opened his anguished eyes and looked at the picture tube. He saw Charlie and Rita sitting at the bar. Inside the tube, Charlie looked into Rita’s lethal eyes, the cold dark blue eyes evoking a familiar terror.

“I wanna save you, Rita.”

“Too late, babe. Maybe in the next world. Not here.”

A few tears slipped down Charlie’s scarred face. He rose and sauntered off.

“Hey Charlie,” Rita cried out. “How about a nightcap? Your place or mine.”

“I wanna save you, Rita,” Charlie whispered from a distance, standing alone in the barren room, speaking to the empty woman in another universe. And then he slithered out of Laura’s place.

Little Charlie Walls opened his eyes. A few tears cascaded down his face as he remembered the labyrinthine dream which had engulfed him.

Slowly returning from Phantasmagoria, he noticed the darkness which surrounded him. It covered him. Protected him. He loved the Darkness. But he rose and turned on the light switch.

Explosively, the studio lit up as if it were the 4th of July. Charlie’s eyes twitched, so he shut them for a few seconds. Then he opened them again and found his watch on the night table. Just a minute past midnight. Maybe there was still time.

He hurried to the center of the room, found the crumpled note, and rushed to the wall phone. “Gonna save you, Rita!” And he dialed the number.

As the phone rang, his eyes drifted to the bathroom. The door was ajar. Charlie noticed a puddle of water. Red water. Red!

He hung up the receiver. And breathed deeply. Deeply!

The apocalyptic moment contained and resurrected Charlie Walls. Charlie was flooded with joy. Strutting to the bathroom like a majestic peacock, he shouted: “Guess I saved you, Rita! I really wanted to! Love you, Laura.”

And the little savior walked into the light.

Lifeless Lust

Toy Davis

Sitting naked in his apartment Blake stared at his latest victim. She was beautiful. Long satin hair, clear brown eyes, and a nice petite body easy for any man to overpower. A dreamy smile curved his lips as he caressed the deep scratches on his arm. She had tried to fight back but her best hadn't been enough to save her life.

What was her name? he wondered as he stared at her still breast. The nipple was hard, he was hard. His eyes moved up her body to the bruises his fingers had left on her neck. They were dark, dark like her beautiful hair.

His right hand embraced his erect penis. Remembering her last desperate struggle he began to stoke it. *It's not too late*, a hidden piece of him said. *She's not too dry*. Eyes sliding down he froze. He wanted it, needed it. His breathing quickened as a hunger filled him, clouding his mind.

Yes, it's not too late. Dropping to his hands and knees he crawled to the beautiful silent woman before him. *What was her name?*

Her face reminded him of his first love Stacy. The only woman who had ever hurt him and lived. Yes, she looked like her. Parting her legs he climbed up between them, not yet entering her. *But she's not*, disappointment hardened his facial features.

She'll do, he promised the hurt inside of him. The hurt that needed Stacy to heal it. But she wouldn't. She was gone. She disappeared like the love they had once shared. His lids lowered as his anger rose. "How could you leave me?" he demanded of the dead woman beneath him. "How?"

She's not going to talk, a voice in his head taunted.

"Yes she will." He thrust himself inside her, determined to make her scream out the answer. She didn't move. Her body was limp beneath him offering no help in their dance of lust. Like with all his other mistresses he was going to have to do all the work. *What a typical woman*, he mentally bitched. This was the main reason he chose to stay single.

Her lifeless eyes stared into his. In those honey brown orbs he saw Stacy's smile taunting him, begging him to go harder. Grinding his teeth he shoved himself further inside her, needing to close the open wound in him. Pounding into her he closed his eyes. Spasms of pleasure ran down his spine as his fingers dug into her cooling flesh. Soon he was going to experience the great explosion of the ultimate pleasure. *Soon*. He smiled, moving harder and faster.

Stacy had laughed when he was unable to please her that night in her car. But they had been in a car, where anyone could walk by and see what

they were doing. How could any respectable woman expect a man to perform in such a place? It just wasn't right he had told her, hoping to convince her of their need for privacy. Harsh words is all she would give him. Words that would make him question his normality.

He cried out when the orgasm hit. Burying his head in her shoulder he breathed hot breaths against her creamy skin. He didn't need to know her name. He slipped out of her, grabbing the towel that laid beside her to wipe himself clean of her stench. He never needed to know any of their names because he already did, Stacy.

Staring at her limp body he felt disgust stir his gut. "Is that what you wanted?" he taunted. "Just to be fucked?" Her silence told him it was. Tossing the towel on her he went to get dressed. It was time to get rid of the body and evidence.

See; Stacy was wrong about me. Only a deranged man would keep the body. I know how important it is to get rid of it. Pride filled him as he buttoned his pants. Just like all the others Nicole wouldn't be found. Blake had mastered this game long ago when Stacy broke his heart.

dreams 09/24/05

Janet Kuypers

I don't know what we were doing, but we were out on a street, I don't know what street it was, and you had the back seat of the car pulled out it was a big car, it wasn't my car, but you were looking for something, I don't know, but I noticed that there were peanuts and junk where the seat was. I don't know, it looked like something was wrong with the car, but I don't know what that had to do with pulling the row seats out of the car. Anyway, I was standing there, leaning against the car, I think I was wearing shorts, I think it was summer, I think once group of guys drove by looking at me,	but I really didn't care, and eventually you said we could go. I looked in the car and saw the seats and I asked if you got rid of the peanuts that were under the seat, and of course you didn't, so I was just thinking that he put the seats on top of the food left there. But then I said to stop, because there was a yard sale along the street, there was a ton of stuff crammed into this little Chicago-styled yard, so you pulled over for me to get out, and you said you'd drive to park the car. So I looked at all of the crap
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they had for sale,
and they have a telephone
that was styled to look like
a really cool old chrome toaster,
it needed to be cleaned, but
you could see the buttons for the phone
in the front, and there was a rest area
on top for the ear piece. But
the ear piece was missing,
so I was trying to ask about the ear piece,
if you could just use another phone ear piece
and plug it into the toaster-phone.
It's not like I'd be using a toaster-phone,
it just looked excellent cool
and was dirt cheap, like two bucks.
Then, while I was waiting for an answer,
I saw a phone that was designed
like a big purse, and I was looking at it
thinking that it matched a pair of shoes of mine,
like a faux brown eel skin leather.

Like I'd buy a phone
because it was a purse
and matched my shoes.

I think I might have looked up
and saw you waiting in the car.
Like you like garage sales.
You knew better than to join
me.

One for the Book

Pat Dixon

My husband, Herb, is a nut in many ways. He has probably been a nut for most of his sixty-three years. Whenever I tell him this, he smiles in a non-irritating way and says, "At least with my name, I'm a well-seasoned nut," and then he just continues with what he was already doing. Unlike many couples we know, the two of us still basically enjoy each other's company and go out together nearly every weekend to do what we call "saling." I always do the driving, Herb does the navigating, and together we get to as many garage sales and tag sales on Long Island as we can.

Each Thursday night, Herb begins planning our weekend route with various ads he's clipped from the newspaper and the shopping guides we get. He enters his "data" into his IBM PC, and each Saturday morning by 7:00 a.m. he has a fresh updated "hardcopy" of our various current destinations all printed and ready to go. Herb keeps meticulous track of our route with an array of detailed street maps of the Long Island towns we normally visit, and he lets me know what intersections are coming up and

where to turn. Often we chat about shallow things, such as the weather, the traffic, the treasures we've found, the trash people are trying to sell, the weirdos who run the sales, or the weird fellow customers we've seen. And Herb, whenever an ad has specified what's for sale, will often speculate about what we're likely to find next. Over ninety percent of the time it's all just crap, but at least we're doing something together, and Herb tells me it's the journey, not the destination, that counts.

As you can imagine, the number of sales will vary widely throughout the year. In winter, we're lucky if there are even two tag sales per week, and whenever there's a religious holiday, the number of sales is almost down to nothing. On July 4th weekend or Labor Day weekend, forget it! For us, unless some major storm interferes, the best time has been the three-day weekend of Columbus Day. Then we go out Saturday and Sunday and Monday. At least Columbus Day weekend was Herb's and my own favorite weekend until this year.

The chief reason Columbus Day weekend has been special is because it usually lets us get all the way up to the north shore of Long Island where the million-dollar places have their sales. We get to go into huge, ugly mansions where they're selling off nearly everything, for whatever reason--retirement, death, divorce, business going bust, whatever. Even when there's nothing but bad-taste designer clothing and chrome furniture instead of what we want, Herb and I enjoy wandering around in what we call "Gatsby-land" and make wisecracks to each other about what we see and hear. Herb repeatedly tells our friends, "It's better than a play." And Herb tells me, "Weekend 'saling' is cheaper and a lot safer than other folks' hobbies, like gambling, drinking, drag-racing, or cheating on each other." Basically, Herb enjoys thinking of rich people as weaker in character than we are, and he enjoys seeing evidence that they're defective in taste, intellect, heart, morals, and everything else he happens to value.

Herb had a stroke eight years ago and doesn't drive at all. As I said, sometimes while I'm driving and he's navigating, Herb and I talk about the traffic. I would rather not do so when I'm driving during the week--because it sometimes leads to trouble. When school is open, at least twice a week he'll spot some school bus driver doing what most New York drivers do naturally--running red lights--and he'll write down the school buses' numbers and report 'em to the local schools and the PTA. He always gives our own name and phone number, which sometimes leads to obscene calls from drivers he's reported! If I see stuff on a weekday that he doesn't, I keep my mouth shut. One lawyer friend has nicknamed Herb "Vehicle Vigilante," but I'm patient about this compulsion because his daughter by his first wife

was crippled thirty years ago by a school bus driver.

On weekends, Herb usually doesn't see any violations he wants to report, but he often jots down unusual traffic behavior as notes for a book he and his lawyer friend are trying to write--a satire called "How to Drive Like a New Yorker." The basic two categories, he says, are the pushy drivers and the timid drivers. I'd tend to agree that both kinds are menaces--some causing accidents by their reckless moves to get ahead of people, and the others by provoking ordinary drivers beyond endurance. I've seen the latter kind driving 15 miles an hour on a street that's posted for 35 and aggravate somebody to try to pass them even though it's a no-passing area.

Unlike me, Herb is usually delighted with bad drivers, even when they're doing something he's already seen a hundred times. He'll laugh while I swear like a sailor and tell me, "Matty, that was category 57-B"--or whatever it is. And if it's a new stunt that he and his friend haven't already described and classified, Herb is even more pleased--because that means more grist for their slowly growing manuscript.

Last Monday, the final morning of this year's Columbus Day weekend, Herb and I were traveling north on a major highway towards the Long Island Expressway. Suddenly I mashed down hard my brakes and hit the horn--and a long, rather pathetic bleat came from our ten-year-old Honda wagon. A shiny black BMW had been cruising along beside me on my left for several miles, and then with no warning it swerved halfway into my lane. As I slowed and pulled to the right, the traffic signals ahead of us turned orange. As the light turned red, the mad BM-er swerved in front of Herb and me, accelerated briskly for about sixty feet, ran the light in front of three lanes of traffic exiting the Expressway, and sped down a ramp marked "NO TURN ON RED." As I shouted, "You stupid turd!" at the vanishing car, Herb chuckled and then cited the three stunts its driver had achieved in the smooth-flowing manner of a Taoist monk.

"Don't you give me any of your Taoist bull, Herb Marshall!" I snarled. "That rich dick-head nearly killed the both of us."

"It's over with, Matty. Just put it behind you. Nothing really happened, and once more it was your own equally marvelous Taoist reflexes that prevented that fly from doing us any harm. My girl is the best driver on the whole Island. I've said so a hundred times, haven't I? There are no crappy categories in the book about women drivers, are there, love, because I know better than to stereotype, thanks to you."

Of course that was partly bull. I'm glad, though, that Herb honestly respects my driving abilities and doesn't get upset whenever we have a hairy close call. About the only time he ever freaks out in the car is

when he thinks there's a bee or wasp in it, and that's because I'm allergic to stings and could die from one. Just the day before, Sunday, he'd started to shout and flail around while I was driving, but it turned out that it was only a large blue fly. It was a kind of Indian Summer weekend, and I'd noticed several of them against the back and side windows of our garage before I'd backed out the Honda. So I was prepared to expect a fly in the car, and I calmly told him what it really was.

Anyway, after that BMW cut us off, I was feeling a little shaky and suggested that we make a pit-stop somewhere for a coffee and a bagel or something. Herb named a fast-food place that was about ten minutes away, and I agreed.

As I pulled into the restaurant's parking lot, Herb began to fumble through a folder he keeps in the map compartment. I winced silently and made a face for my own benefit. I parked in a handicapped spot near the front door, but Herb took one of his pieces of paper and limped across the lot to where a car was straddling the line between two parking places. I waited by the entrance while Herb leaned his cane against the car and put one of his computer-printed notices under the driver-side wiper. Halfway across the lot as Herb approached me, a young man and woman passed him. The man asked what the paper said, and Herb told him to read it himself--if he could do so. The fellow trotted over to his car, pulled the paper out, and shouted at Herb's back.

"Hey! Hey, asswipe! How'd you like me to put you in a hospital? Smart-ass f--ing gimp asshole!"

Herb was clearly pleased with himself. He'd gotten under someone's skin who was clearly in the wrong. I didn't ask, but Herb told me anyway.

"I gave him notice Number 17--the one that says, 'I know I've taken two parking places, but I know I'm better than you. What are YOU going to do about it--scratch my paint with your key?' I think I've planted a seed of self-knowledge in the fellow. Maybe he'll think twice before he does that again."

I just looked past him and said nothing as I held the door open. Inside, after we found a small booth, I asked him to order me a tuna sandwich and an iced tea while I went to the ladies' room. When I got back, I asked him what sorts of treasures were listed in the ad for our next sale and what we might find instead. He made a few good-natured quips that oriental rugs were listed but that we'd probably only see pinkish monstrosities the color of Pepto-Bismol or old stairway runners woven in Belgium. He added that wealthy people often try to sell their used light bulbs and half-empty rolls of toilet paper. I didn't mention that he'd often said this before. I did, how-

ever, comment as the waitress set our food down.

“Are you trying to make me a widow, you dumb son of a bitch? Just what in hell are you trying to do?”

Herb looked placidly at his two enchiladas smothered in nacho cheese.

“It’s the weekend, Matty. It’s a holiday, and I’m giving myself a well-deserved treat as a reward for following my diet to the letter all this past week.”

“You know how bogus that is,” I said. “Don’t insult yourself by pretending to treat me like a moron. I won’t make a scene about this, but you know how I feel.”

That was enough to make him feel too guilty to enjoy what he ate. He simulated great gusto as he shoveled in each mouthful, but he said little, and I know my own husband. When we’d finished and paid, we walked quietly to the car.

“Where to next, big guy?” I asked as I nosed our station wagon onto Northern Boulevard. He told me to take the next right, go two blocks, and take a left. I did so.

Ahead of us was a line of at least ten cars waiting at a green light. For some reason no one was moving. The light turned orange and then red. We waited. The light stayed red, red, red. After about four minutes, there was considerable honking.

Herb smiled and commented, “One of my friends used to say, ‘If you keep ‘em waiting long, they have to honk their horn.’ Sort of a little poem about New York drivers.”

You’ve told me this before, I thought silently, and I’ve told you before that it doesn’t really rhyme. And I’m sure that you know we’ve had your half of this conversation fifty times already. Then I noticed that several of the drivers--despite the double yellow lines--were driving around into the oncoming lane and were going through the red light, making both right and left turns--despite, furthermore, a sign that said, “NO TURN ON RED.” I expected Herb to cite for me the sections from that book of his that applied to this, and he did so, of course.

After approximately ten minutes, the light finally turned green again. It was now clear that the car at the front of the line was not moving, and several cars again honked and then passed by driving into the oncoming lane.

“We’d better report this defective light when we get a chance,” I said. “It’s a holiday weekend, and the town police haven’t noticed it or else don’t think it matters. They should put someone up there to direct traffic and get an emergency crew to come out to fix it.”

After another ten minutes we were directly behind that front car, a maroon Mercedes, and I could see the top of its driver's head, barely visible at about the height of the dashboard. Herb and I had often joked about how bad some short drivers were who sat too low in their cars and peered beneath the rim of their steering wheels, obviously unable to see the road itself. My hypothesis was that they judged where the road was by the nearby telephone poles and wires, but Herb insisted that they drove by tactile and auditory clues alone. His friend and he had put five pages on this topic into their book.

"It looks like a little old lady there," I said. "I wonder if she's all right." Behind me, several dozen horns were blaring, and two people pulled their cars out and passed both our car and the one in front of us, one turning right on red, the other turning left.

"It's green again," said Herb. "Pull around her, and I'll take a look."

"Like hell," I replied. "That would make me no better than these citizens who are breaking the law. Besides, it'd be just my luck to have a cop catch me in the act. You know my luck." The light turned red again as I finished speaking.

"I can see her moving," said Herb. "Her head just moved a couple inches. Stay here, Matty, and I'll go see. If it turns green and she pulls out, make a right and pick me up around the corner."

The car in front of us didn't move. Herb limped up to the passenger's side and looked into it. Then suddenly he moved faster than I've seen him do in eight years--his head whipped around, and he doubled over. I thought he was having another stroke, but it turned out that he was only retching and losing that abominable lunch of his. I shut off the engine and was at his side before I even knew it.

As I held him, Herb weakly told me to look in the car.

Inside was an elderly woman--neatly, tastefully, and expensively dressed, as if for church or temple--although this was a Monday. Her hands were on her steering wheel. Her face was unblinking, unseeing, and expressionless, yet, in an odd way she was animated. Inside her car were several large, blue flies, and inside her dead face and neck--and presumably all the rest of her body--squirmed thousands, perhaps millions, of lively, hungry pale gray maggots.

I swallowed carefully. While twenty or more cars behind us honked with anger and impatience, I pointed out to Herb the obvious bright side: this was a new one for the book.

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the **UN**religious,
NONfamily-oriented
literary & art mag



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