

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

CCF&d

v180
January '08

table of contents

poetry (the passionate stuff)

Lisa Frederiksen	2
Brian Hosey <i>art</i>	3
James Sackett	4
Jennifer Veevers.	4
Shelley Little	5
Ronda Scheerer	6
Aaron Wilder <i>art</i>	7
Andrew H. Oerke	8
Michael Lee Johnson	8
Christopher Thomas	9
Marshall Fant	10
Christine Sorich <i>art</i>	10
Cheryl Townsend <i>art</i>	11
Edward Michael O'durr Supranowicz <i>art</i>	12
Chris Silverberg	13
Tanya Rucosky Noakes	13
Mark Alan Murray	13
Daniel Walton	14
David Lawrence	15
Christopher Barnes, UK	15
Jason Alan Wilkinson	16
Paul Sohar	18
Eric Bonholtzer <i>art</i>	19
Katie Dean	20
John Yotko <i>art</i>	20
Nadine Najjar	20

prose (the meat & potatoes stuff)

Mel Waldman.....	21
G.A. Scheinoha	22
Pat Dixon	23
Stephen Mead <i>art</i>	33
Kenneth DiMaggio <i>art</i>	36
Toy Davis	36
Robert D. Wenger	37
Jay Marvin <i>art</i>	38
Adrian Ludens	39

Scars art

5 (giraffe, photographed 05/30/06). Cover art of the Great Wall of China, photographed outside of Beijing.

What for Heat?

from Awake!, August 2007

The German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagzeitung* explains that with the price of grain falling and that of fuel oil rising, it is more cost-effective for a farmer to burn his wheat for heat than to sell it to buy oil. Six pounds of wheat costs him 20¢ to grow, but if burned, that quantity of wheat would produce about the same heat as a quart of fuel oil, which costs 60¢.



artwork by Nicole
Aimiee Macaluso

Why That Day?

Lisa Frederiksen

They'd been fighting for years; even threatened divorce from time-to-time; always about "the drinking." But something kept their marriage going until that one day in June.

He couldn't understand what made that day different from the day before or the three thousand two hundred forty one days before that. Okay, okay, so this time he hit her and tried to choke her; bent her like Gumby over the second floor balcony railing.

But, it wouldn't have happened had the wife not gone and grabbed the daughter and ran her upstairs to her room, hissing, "Don't you dare come out!" as she shut her door.

The husband was just trying to discipline the girl and charged up the stairs after them but the wife was blocking the girl's doorway — all 120 pounds of her fear and fury filling the space. And the girl, she was so scared;

She'd never seen her daddy so crazy mad and her mom? something in her mom's voice made the girl dare not turn that doorknob. And then the sister - she was just 4 -

She started coming up the stairs, trying to give the father her teddy bear, sobbing, "Daddy, Daddy, *pleeease* take Teddy-Bell, *pleeease* take Teddy-Bell," and the mother started screaming at the sister, "Don't you dare come any further, stay downstairis, s t a y d o w n s t a i r s!"



One Shrub Hill

art by Brian Hosey

But the wife had made him mad, real mad, and he just snapped and grabbed the wife. Okay, okay so this time he hit her and tried to choke her; bent her like Gumby over the second floor balcony railing.

But he had a right to discipline his daughter. His daughter had ignored him when he'd yelled at her to "shut the FUCKING TV off; **NOW**, God Dammit!" The daughter had just sat there, watching *The Little Mermaid* as if her life depended on it.

It really was the wife's fault, you know. He wasn't going to hit the girl; he'd never hit his daughter - ever, but the wife went and butted in like she always did when he tried to discipline the girls ——— at night.

And then the wife would go on about it the next day, about how he'd done this or that, nagging him, always nagging him to stop the drinking.

The wife was wrong, though. Boy was she wrong. The drinking had nothing to do with it; It was the wife; she had *pro-voked* him and now look what she'd done;

Gone and wrecked a perfectly happy family. Well *he* wasn't taking her back, no siree. Unless of course she apologized for making him mad, mad enough to hit her; choke her; bend her like Gumby over the second floor balcony railing.

Memories of his Dead Japanese Wife in a Cardboard Box

James Sackett

He held a box of ash,
it should have been an urn,
but he remembers her in terms
of weight and grief.
He had made her a cardboard
coffin, and thought his struggle
to hold the dulling corners had
something to do with his dead wife.
A woman who he is reminded by
half-moonlit nights and slumbering
horses. He holds her ashes
with pale, bloodless arms, his
white knuckles stress to finger
the edges of this woman, who rests
dead and empty in the weight
of this heavy box against his chest.

Tears

Jennifer Veevers.

They fall one by one,
Too slowly for the immense pain they conceal.
Each one, the body's useless defence,
To a pain that can't simply be washed away.

They fall one by one,
A salty sensation on the tongue.
A salt that no matter how many times it's tasted,
It never heals the wound.

They fall one by one,
But they are not alone.
Each one takes the same path as the last,
Encasing the face in an invisible veil of grief.

They fall one by one,
No need for dust or other irritant.
They are born from something you can't wipe away in a second,
A pain that can't be erased from the depths of once carefree eyes.

Eyes are the pathway to the soul, aren't they?
Then is each tear drop a piece of that soul?
Its journey over,
Cut short by the cruel injustice of the world.

The good catholic girl

Shelley Little

Dressed in Sunday's best
Black shoes
A new dress
Every Sunday
the monotony
sit
pray
The priest talks of Lent
Interest sparks
a young girl's imagination
Carries her to the
ark

Herded onto the vessel
She is a libertine
female
giraffe
Male seed
still on conception's path
from her tryst before the ark
As if a leper
she dismisses her current male companion
Preferring the fight
Aroused by male necks
wrapped in war for her flesh

Hooves beating
as the incessant rain on the roof
His mating
fox trot
Nowhere to bolt
His heaviness
forcing her
Thrusting his maleness
in unison with the crashing water
Lip curls with male satisfaction



Fantasy-turned nightmare
The good catholic girl
awakens
Turning an untrusting eye toward the
good catholic boys
Their eyes dancing over her body
like the giraffe's hooves
Relief washing over her
as the rain on the ark
At least there is more than one
to choose from

Five Years Later

Ronda Scheerer

I have been accused of burying myself beneath layers of fear and uncertainty
obscured from a world created outside the realm of my own
I ask that you allow me this brief indulgence
although your accusations may not be denied
neither will my skin be bared
exposed to the stones that you might throw

Permit me instead to argue my lucidity
describing a world with no necessity for war
where mothers need not fear the thought of sons becoming men
A moment when we did not crave an explanation of our existence
wondering why we fought so arduously for other worlds and people
while ignoring our own slowly crumbling at its edges

At the risk of imitating lecture
I would remind you of the way a child views the world,
of how we once were able to view it as well
until it exploded in a matter of minutes
and terror seeped from our pores
thick as black, billowing smoke
obscuring blue skies
clouding our own definition of liberty
robbing even our children of innocence and purity that day

We once possessed a confidence some now consider ignorance
a confidence now replaced by doubt, suspicion, and condescendence
Religion or race, it does not matter, difference is condemnation once again

I do stand guilty of tuning out a world which screams in my face of duty and rights
while it whispers revenge and Armageddon from behind a shadowed hand
Yet, before you doubt that I am listening
or believe I have been living in oblivion
trust that I hear it all, observe it all
every nuance is stored behind these eyes
You cannot charge me with nescience, nor indict me for turning away

You can keep your world of hate and indiscretion
wallow in it and believe that you are just and true
From the safety of my walls, I will watch as carnage rips it at its seams
Struggling to keep the realm of my world intact, no matter how small it may be

My children will know innocence and objectivity, for I will teach them each
They will also be wise to the ways of this world we now inhabit
without allowing it to poison their hearts, minds, or souls
They will understand the definition of equality, not just by rote, but by influence

Mere layers separate your world from mine, thin as parchment and just as fragile
created not out of fear or uncertainty, but knowledge, promise, and something else,
a word it seems we have all forgotten...

Hope.



The Definition of Regression

art by Aaron Wilder

Catch On The Fly

Michael Lee Johnson

Full barrel up 53 north,
heading to Lake Zurich, IL,
Christian talk radio 1660
on the radio dial,
crisp winter day
sunbeams dancing down
on the pavement like midgets.
85 mph in a 65 mph zone,
just to aggravate the police,
black Chevy S10 pick up,
shows what a deviant I am
in dark colors.

Running late for a client appointment,
creating poems on a small hand held recorder
knowing there is not payment for this madness
in this litte captured taped area of words.
Headlights down the highway for a legacy
into the future, day dreaming like a fool obsessed.
Working out the layout of this poem or getting my ego in place,
I will catch up with the imagery when I get back home.
This is my life, a poem in the middle of the highway.
Scampering, no one catches me when I'm speeding
like this.

on the beach

Andrew H. Oerke

Beneath the crystal slap
n dash of the waves
our fingertips tap
n shift the shingle
like humping crabs
as they scabble for pebbles
n miscellaneous shells to remember
or lift home with us
from the shuck of the sun
to a shoebox
holding a scrambled index
to the beaches on which we have heard
the antique drum of the sea
beckoning us
to a reckoning of bones
n skipping stones
that blink over shipwreck n sea-chime
n bubble back to the shores of yore
by the fleshy saltlick of remembered time.

Letter to Champy About Being Gay in the USA

Christopher Thomas

Dear Dale: Just as English pilgrims had to leave Great Britain and immigrate to Holland in order

to enjoy the privilege of worshipping God in their own way, today's American pilgrims are its gay

men and women who must immigrate or travel to Canada to enjoy the full privileges of their faith,

the sacrament of matrimony. Did you know that citizens of nations that still imprison or use the

death penalty on homosexuals can obtain political asylum in Canada and other nations but not in

the United States of America? Gay couples have not real rights unless they spend small fortunes

in the courts to either adopt one another or form partnerships that keep them from being taxed out

of their homes should their partner die before them. And who leads the battle against our full sharing

in the rights given to citizens living under our constitution? Fundamentalist Christians. That's

why we don't want our rights put to the vote. We want judges to decide. We do not want the most

intimate moments of our lives voted upon by those who are not only strangers but who hate us as well.

'ball

Marshall Fant

I

Driving past the old home
I saw my basketball goal
Dad installed when I was two-years-old
Still clinging to its half-rotten pole.
With age, the broad backboard
That began its life
Fastened five feet above freshly-laid concrete
Became dirty and unstable—
The once clean net now a shade of uneventful brown
Anchored to a blood red rim
Against the board
Against the pole
Against the knee-high brick wall.

Shortly after my basket was finally raised
To the height of ten feet,
My father
(One night after dinner)
Joined me in the driveway
Wearing his comically short bright orange running shorts.
In this arena he explained
Th' intricate rules of
one-on-one,
Father-versus-son
Basketball:

Rules demand a foul line, he said,
And pointed to the nail that was
Accidentally poured with the cement
Exactly fifteen feet from our pole.
(But fouls are for wimps
And the girls needing extra points.)



Side Road West

Christine Sorich

Blood must be tasted
For fouls to be counted.
That night, we played 'ball
Till the bright red rim melted into the night sky.

The *ritual* poured into the autumn months,
And the games stopped sooner as the evenings
Lost their light.
My father mounted a bulb to the corner
Of the roof
So we could continue to show our love
By crushing each other into the pavement.

II

After finishing the dinner dishes
I slap-dry my hands
And pick up the ball on my way out the front door.
Out of college now,
I don't come often.
But here—
In the outside cold,
Of the new home
We have an elegant motion-sensing flood light,
And the new goal is one of those exquisite
Machines
That has a black rim and comes in a box.

I roll up the sleeves
Of my nice business shirt,
Spin the ball
On my finger,
Back up to the end of my narrow, long driveway,
And take a shot.
Perfect.
My father had missed dinner
To counsel a broken home.
I take one more shot—and this time, though less perfect, I still get the roll.
Two for two.
Finally I hear



Planted Steps
Cheryl Townsend

His big black car
And turn to see him come
Down the driveway.
He climbs out of it and says *hi* to me,
His suit and shirt still pressed as neatly
As when he picked it up
From the cleaners.

I smile and
Toss the ball without saying a word.
He catches it with those same *soft* hands.

My bursitis,
He reminds me through a clenched smile.
Tosses the ball back underhand.

Of course,
I tell myself.
The youthful father who taught me—
To
Crash the boards,
Take it to the hoop,
Pull up for two
Drive the hole,
Dribble with y' head up,
Jump-stop shot,
Three fouls minimum,
And be a man,
Suck it up—
Grimaced as he carried his heavy briefcase
Up the steps
Into the house.

My father,
I remind myself,
Is more of a man than I ever hope to be.

Then
he
watched



Crowd

Edward Michael
O'durr Supranowicz

From the third story look out
(And I pretended not to see him)

as I
played

'ball
And he cradled my child.

I only hope he still remembers how
to teach young boys to dribble.

Consumerism

Chris Silverberg

Silvery water rippled prettily;
I drank it; it was quicksilver;
My insides disappeared.

Suddenly, I was nothing,
Shocking! I was air.
Could I fly, then?

Then I realized it would eat
More than just my heart.
I would lose my eyes

My ears would cease
To function. Hollow fingers
Could not touch.

As the water rippled,
Rose to my eyeballs,
Finally, hid me from myself

My hollow shell crumbled.
Did I ever wonder why
I drank the pretty water

When it was taking my soul?

In the Marrow

Tanya Rucosky Noakes

My guilty secret—
tangled in scrabbling;
Christmas greenery,
baking and sneaking,
a rotten pig head,
chestnuts gone moldy,
transmission fluid,
vacuuming, dusting—
you broke my heart.
After our weeping...
clambering for words...
that could help such news...
hanging up the phone—
I looked around again,
too see only joy.

We Drove through the Morning (for D__)

Mark Alan Murray

In Litchfield County there is a mountain
Which we drove to through the morning—
Once on top we sat on a rock...
There in the shade fighting
Off insects... and drank
The water we had carried.
The cigarette that I smoked
Assisted in that fight and more,
Helped in my battle... your heart
Did the rest of the work, letting me know
That I was wanted and needed in the world,
There on top of a mountain
Somewhere in good old Litchfield County.

Hunt for the Last Mediavore

Daniel Walton

I snap my eyelids down and up
Ripping them into the banquet before me and
Shoving it down the gullet of the camera eye:
Hogwash, bull, and a sow's ear.
A beauty queen is the evening's entertainment
Caution tape drapes from her sash:
A fence is made, but it's not my concern
Whether it is keeping in or out.

Lo, here comes the Pomp and Circumstance
The marching band and the media parade
A giant pair of scissors drips the blood of the innocent
Wielded by four hundred thirty-five statesmen
 as they rend the marked yellow line
Grating metal fills my ears and I run like hell
But the weight of the world is in my belly.
I'm slowed to the speed of the Wall Street tickertape.

The truth bounces off a wall of tripod lenses,
The setting sun and all it surveys are just red rubber balls.
Chop-chop comes the ever advancing throng!
One step ahead of the dead-line am I
As each gradation made rends apart the record
And the cold rain of this tickertape parade
Covers up all tracks of their pursuit.

I cast a dirty look back over my shoulder;
The hook of the crook of my pointed finger hits a snag
In the paper jungle arisen from the rainfall.
I reel what's been cast, I reel, I reel in horror
To find complete conversion of the material
The past I once saved is saved again.
It's as if the glass bottle I was keeping time in
Was transmuted under heat and pressure to a brilliant white snowglobe
Selling for a five-spot in a Washington knickknack shop.

The pound of my feet is amplified to the audience inside my skull,
But the pursuers have donned their earmuffs
And sing “The Star Spangled Banner” off-key to any bystanders.
Everything’s dampened by the paper tigers newly come from the newsprint jungle
Their bodies take vibrations as their mouths reverberate new gibberish.
The seal of my book is broken,
The rest of the books are burned.

Stop Signs at Columbine

David Lawrence

The temperature fell to a whisper
And silence snowed
On the banister where your fingers
Were forgotten.

Enough
Is never enough
And the antique in the garden
Is simply old.

I have collected enough intuitions
To hunch a conclusion
But find that answers
Are misnomers
For fearing the unknown occasion
Of stop signs on alert
At Columbine.

Inheritance

Christopher Barnes, UK

What a weight
Moans into a microphone
A downstairs tremor
Like platform shoes
Dissolving into dust

Koko Berkley is a blues mama
One gold tooth richer than a maid
Washbasin wide hip-handles
Pull the world around her
Like Democritus playing blackjacks
With atoms

Her daddy upped and died
Beleaguered to the last
By daughters and barflies
Now she sings
Songs bractletted in gold

Untitled

Jason Alan Wilkinson

This is not about a wonderful new psychic
that your best friend's cousin visited recently.

Or the life changing results that ensued from the inner wonders broached.

It's not about a police force that has taken to shooting defenceless men
or the belief that shooting certain defenceless men is somehow reasonable.

This is not about urging consumers to worry their heads over gas economy
while affluent, wooden suits use barrels of petrol to ignite their barbeques.

It's not a revolutionary gadget designed to monitor cholesterol, prepare rice
in minutes,
or make you sound like Gilbert Godfried.

This is in no way an attempt to decry the character of Gilbert Godfried
nor his exceptional voice.

It's not that special place in your mind
that you go when no one is around.

Not a methodic strain of eloquent drivél
issued by a writer whose pretensions often get the better of him.

Nor is it a best seller drowning in fourth grade English.

This is not about The Priory Of Sion,
The Da Vinci Code,
The fact that Jesus never actually had any children,
Or why a cult symbol should appear on American money.

It's not about the spare change that minimum wage earners
are guilted into throwing at the coffers of big business
under the pretence of charity.

how big business never loses a penny in the transaction.

It's not about trying to convince your grandmother
that her bingo habit has slowly destroyed the family.

This is not about how many rich people have to die of a fucked-up new disease
before anybody decides to invest interest in researching a cure
for said fucked-up new disease.

How only rich people can afford it.

No, this is not about Richard Bey
or the fact that Springer ought to send him half of his check every year.

At no juncture shall this piece delve into the horrors of a bygone era.
It's not about the mysterious death of a gold-digger
who, at times bore a striking resemblance to a famous actor
that was murdered for screwing a president,
who, in turn, was murdered by the government he represented.

This is not a street anthem, played at ten decibels or greater
making ostensible drug and gang references
that you would prefer your children to abstain from downloading.

Surely, this is not about all the acid that you dropped at Woodstock
or that sitting around naked and holding hands in a circle
never stopped anybody from picking up a gun.

That spitting on a soldier is revolting.

It's not about internet fraud
or video games where police officers are the primary target of a player's angst.

This is not about the Sphinx
or why the Smithsonian continues to lie about its age
and who actually built it.

This is not confused, omnificent, or hygienic.

It's not about a fortune teller who recently came under scrutiny for practicing witchcraft without a license.

Hallelujah, this is not about the devil!

This is not about global warming, imminent nuclear aggression, the other things one talked prosaically about in the 1980's, or why Sacco and Vanzetti were framed.

It's not a vain attempt to reconstruct History.

Nor is it a strong argument against correcting it.

This is not the last thing that you ought to read before taking a nap.

This is not about to end.

DEUS EX MACHINA: DAY ZERO

Paul Sohar

On day zero before the whole thing got started
god created himself plus all the things
he needed for the process, a mirror, makeup,
wigs and costumes, etc; he spent a day
trying on different shapes and sizes,
varying gender and race and color and age

until finally he had a whole closet full of roles
he could choose from when doing an appearance
on earth later for the benefit and edification of
his lesser creatures, us humans;



Eric
Bonholtzer
art

he still reserves the right to change the script,
the degree of his involvement on stage and
the way he jumps out of the machina
to scare or comfort agonists and protagonists alike.

Time means nothing to him,
his limits are also self-defined and set inside
our minds, how much of him we are capable
of seeing and willing to put up with;

day zero is all over the calendar, it blissfully co-exists
for him with doomsday; he keeps re-inventing
himself but keeps a door open to day zero for those
who can follow him there through his liquid eyes
that serve as mirrors for us:

to know thyself is to
partake in the day zero festivities;

let the divine sparks fly even if they mess up
the mirror with smudges of temporal existence,
let the soul dance the fire of creation,
throw away the costumes and masks to see
what they have made of you,

and if you don't like what you see
take a bath in make-believe;
let faith sparkle on your skin!



Statue

art by John Yotko

Leave me be

Nadine Najjar

the way in which you say something
is as crucial as what you say
but I've never had the meter right.
I'm hyper- sensitive and quick to cry
you can tell by the shortness of breath
that lowers my voice to a quiver.

I'm quick to fight, so easily enraged
you can tell by the growling that raises my voice to a shout
if i was a grizzly bear it'd be like the gravelly howling coming out
of my mouth.

my emotions snap my voice like an elastic
that once it's broken can't be fixed
but secretly, I wish that I could talk like this
so small and steady, never betraying the feelings
spraying out of me with the rushing urgency of a hose on a hot day
As the fast, strong water hits my skin I slowly begin to cool off from within
you always tell me "it's not what you say but how you say it"
but I don't mean to yell, cry, or laugh
I feel detached from the things that I utter
like a doll full of automated phrases, set off when you pull the
string in my back
but even if I never uttered a sound
my damn eyes would say it all

While you sleep

Katie Dean

In these hazy hours of sleep
Through hues of pitch
I hear each hushed breath
Whispered as a hymn,
Heavy and slow,
In harmony with the night.
I slide toward his silent song
Where wind caresses skin
With each exhale
A subtle humid heat
Against the chilled flesh exposed.
Every breath a beat
Hanging in my head
I am hypnotized,
Drifting further
Into heaven

prose
the meat and potatoes stuff

No Exit From Hell

Mel Waldman

I

The boy's father murdered the kid's half-sister, only a few weeks old. Before he killed the baby girl, he took her to see the young man and the boy's sister, who was also the killer's daughter.

The 12 year old, tall, thin dark Hispanic boy, who looks much older, is strikingly good looking and bright, as is his sister. When his father visited him in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, he felt deep love for him, although the man was an ex-con. The father had been released only a few months before from prison.

"My father always treated me with love and respect," he informed me. "The drugs made him into a beast!"

II

The boy took pictures of his new sister. Now, that's all he has left to prove she existed. They captured the last vestige of her existence. She was real. But she died.

III

The boy's my patient. I hadn't seen him in months. And after his mother, sister, and he visited over a month ago, he hasn't returned.

Perhaps, I hold his pain. He came and disgorged it into the miasma of my office in Sheepshead Bay. Then he left-vanished! I called his home and his mother's cell phone many times. No one answered. He's gone.

IV

Back in January, in Queens, the father and common-law wife were high. The man held his little girl in his arms. But she cried incessantly.

Maybe it was the drugs. Maybe it was his inherent evil. Perhaps, a metamorphosis occurred, and the beast emerged. Perhaps, he was always the beast.

Suddenly, filled with rage by his child's endless crying, he flung her to the cold floor, crushing her skull.

Together, he and his woman gazed at the dead girl. Apparently without guilt, they were focused on one thing: How would they get rid of *it*? (That's what they told the police during the interrogation.)

They wrapped *it* in a plastic garbage bag and took a bus and a couple of trains to Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

They dumped the tiny, doll-like corpse in a dumpster near an abandoned building, not far from the main gate of Green-Wood Cemetery at 5th Avenue and 25th Street. (They said it was about a 15 minute walk to the cemetery.) The Gowanus Expressway is nearby, as well as the Lutheran Medical Center.

They left *it* behind and continued to get high. Indeed, they were constantly stoned for days. (When questioned later, they expressed no guilt-only concern about being caught.)

V

The police caught them a week later. A neighbor had heard them arguing one night. During the altercation, they mentioned murdering the little girl. The courageous neighbor called 911.

VI

Before he vanished, he showed me her pictures. Such a beautiful baby! She lives in my mind and soul! The pain's intolerable, but I am a container—a seething cauldron of dark emotions rising from Hell.

I feel. And I wait for the boy to return.

In the meantime, is there no escape—no exit from Hell? Is there?

DISCONNECTIONS

G.A. Scheinoha

Think of the truth as a lead umbrella. It protects us from the fallout of lies which rain down like subatomic particles from the stratosphere of our dreams, pierces the frail, punctures the weak, alters this spring we've enjoyed, thrust into the midst of nuclear winter.

Yet whose arms are strong enough to do the heavy lifting, bear its weight aloft? Nobody you know wrenches the drapery aside to reveal the wizard is just an odd little man who never kept both soles on the ground. 99 luft balloons indeed!

Go ahead. Soar like a dirigible out over the lowlands of the heart. Ropes untied, cut cleanly by these whistling winds of change. Sail into your future with nothing between you and earth below but a thin skin of pride. Unable to do anything except watch the scenery pass by.

This is more a matter of carry us forward to that half life which radiates beyond the one ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingy, no one's answering in the onion-skin dome at the other end, so might as well hang up the red phone.

Elegy Written in a Connecticut Senior Living Facility

Pat Dixon

1

"If you're going to be seeing your father soon, Marian, kindly take him his mail. The least the old bastard could do is have the consideration to notify those post office people where to forward it."

"Wha—? What are you talking about, Mother?"

"His mail, of course—his mail—your father's mail. I thought I made that totally plain. Weren't you listening to me—again?"

"Mother—I—it can't be forwarded to Father. Father is dead."

"Are you sure? This big envelope, for one thing, is addressed to him in his own handwriting. I should know it after forty-odd years. See?"

"Yes, Mother. I'm sure Father's dead. He died two months ago, right there in the bathroom of this apartment. He was sitting on the toilet, and suddenly you heard him groan—or whoop or something. You called the—the front desk yourself, and Mr. Babson came right up and did CPR until the fire medics arrived. They almost revived him—twice. Don't you remember? And you held Father's hand to comfort him till Mr. Babson got here."

"I did?"

"Indeed. And just last week we sorted through his clothes and donated them to your new synagogue for their rummage sale next month."

"Hunh—I thought the ol' bastard ran off—with that Becky Meyerson—you know her—that floozy that was flirting with anything in pants. I thought he'd left me. Well, this is news. He died, you say?"

"Yes, Mother. And we had a lovely funeral for him. Ten people came down from Storrs special for it, and condolences are still coming in from some of his former students. Three of his friends from Yale even attended the service."

"Interesting. How could I forget a thing like that, I wonder?"

"Well, maybe—maybe because it was a very stressful time. It was awfully sudden, too. Father'd been to have a physical just two days before, and they told him his EKG looked great and his heart should be good for another—another fifteen or twenty years."

"Hunh. Well, then tell me if you can, Miss Smarty, how he sent this to himself. It's postmarked just—just three days ago."

"Well—it's—it's one of these 'self-addressed stamped envelopes,'

Mother—the sort of thing a person uses when sending out scholarly articles to professional journals—except that after Father retired and you both moved to New Haven, he used this as his address instead UConn’s French Department. Sometimes it takes a scholarly journal six months—or even a year—to go through the process of deciding if they want to publish an article or not. Did you know that he was still sending out research articles, Mother?”

“When we were living in Storrs, he always had them addressed to ‘Mister.’”

“What? What do you mean?”

“Mr. David Greenwood.’ Never ‘Dr. David Greenwood.’ All the older professors took pride in using ‘mister.’ I always thought it was reverse snob-bism—affected modesty. That was how they asked students to call them.”

“What does it say on this envelope? Doctor?”

“He wrote ‘Prof. David Greenwood.’ Maybe he got over his modesty. That Meyerson slut was always calling him Professor—and grabbing his arm or patting his shoulder—and standing too close when she talked to him. I think he liked being called Professor. He seemed to work it into conversations a lot—like ‘when I was professor of French at the university, X and Y and Z were far better than they are nowadays,’ and he never would say ‘at UConn’ or ‘at the University of Connecticut’ but just ‘the university’—as if he taught at Yale or some such place.”

“Maybe when he was using stationery and envelopes with his academic address preprinted on them he knew that people knew what he was, Mother. After you both moved down here and had to make all new friends from scratch, maybe he felt a little—at loose ends—after thirty-six years of everyone knowing who he was. I think men might be that way sometimes—about their identities—when they retire.”

“Well—you can have this if you want, Marian. I have no interest in early French poetry—or even in recent—or middle—French poetry—or French prose, for that matter. Or French cooking either.”

Marian Poggioli leaned forward and took the large manila envelope which her mother extended toward her. She looked at her father’s somewhat shaky handwriting on the outside, addressing the material to himself with his favorite blue-black ink. In the upper left corner he had also written the name of the journal—*The Eye Blink Review*—and its academic address—some college in Indiana which she had never heard of. On top of these words, with the help of a rubber stamp, some officious person had redundantly printed the same information in smudged black ink.

Her father’s letters were large and clear, written with his broad-nibbed fountain pen. She smiled slightly, recalling that he had never once permitted himself to use a ballpoint pen, even in restaurants when using a credit card.

For a moment she stared at the photograph of her father that was hung on the wall near the kitchenette. He was robust looking, with his large mane of white hair. “Mr. Dandelion-Head” was her nickname for him thirty years ago—invented one morning by himself after showering and blow-drying his hair. The photograph was at least a dozen years old. Marian pictured her father as he had become in the past year—thinner, slower, stiffer, with larger pouches below his eyes, which more and more seemed unfocused or bewildered. Her smile faded, and with a small sigh she slowly tugged open the adhesive flap of the envelope and removed the contents.

Approximately a dozen pages were secured together with a large paper clip. The top sheet was pale green and looked as if it were a fifth- or sixth-generation photocopy of something that had been typed on an old Underwood or Royal manual typewriter—the machines owned by her parents before they married and conceived her and which she had played with for hundreds of hours when she was a small girl. Below the typed name and address of the journal was an undated, unsigned message:

Dear Author—we regret that the high volumn of submissions to THE EYE BLINK REVIEW precludes us from responding with a personal reply. Believe us when we say that our Editorial Staff have given your mss. a VERY careful and thorough reading, and have determined that your submission does not suit our needs now at the present time. Be assured that this does not reflect negatively upon your writing ability or upon the merits of this submission. Very likely it will find itself a good home in some other quality journal! We DO invite you at this time to subscribe to THE EYE BLINK REVIEW so that you will have a clearer ieda as to what our editorial preferences are—AND we strongly encourage you to submit other additional writings of yours to TEBR in the future when you have done this. The lower half of this sheet contains a conveyinent form for subscribing for one, tow, or even three years.

With our very best wishes: THE EYE BLINK EDITORIAL STAFF

Marian glanced up at her mother, who had fallen asleep on the sofa with some piece of open mail on her lap. Sarah Greenwood’s mouth was half open, and she was snoring softly. Marian glanced at the lower half of the greenish sheet of paper and pursed her lips as she read the amounts listed on the subscription form: \$18.00 for one year, \$35.00 for two years, and \$50.00 for three.

This might, she thought, explain partly why, about three years ago, her father had begun subscribing to a fairly large array of small literary magazines and journals. She frowned and recalled that once his articles had been eagerly accepted by four or five of the better journals in his field.

Marian Poggioli lifted the green sheet and found that her father's cover letter, dated more than eight months earlier, had been returned with his submission. Its first paragraph identified his work as a "longish poetic elegy, titled 'Golden Girl,'" its second paragraph summarized in two sentences his academic career and the nature of his previous publications—four books, forty-three articles, "over 150 book reviews," and seven poems—and its third paragraph offered to make revisions and/or cuts to accommodate the needs of the journal. Below his signature was a list of the poems published—all of them within the past three years, and all of them in periodicals whose names were unknown to her.

She reflected briefly that her father had never mentioned to her that he had any interest in or talent for writing poems. Further, Marian was fairly certain that he had not mentioned it to her mother, either. She glanced up, saw that her mother was still sleeping with her mouth still open, and turned to the next page. Her father's full name and home address, phone number, and e-mail address were in the upper left corner of the page, and an estimated word count was in the upper right corner: "Approximately 1800 words." Halfway down the page was the title, followed by a pair of dates, and then, roughly centered, the poem began.

Sarah Greenwood snorted suddenly, waking herself, and blinked at Marian. "Did you ask me something?" she said, smiling.

Marian pushed the pages back inside the envelope and wet her upper lip with the tip of her tongue.

"No, Mother. I think I must have coughed or cleared my throat. But if we're going to go out for seafood tonight, I supposed we'd better go powder our noses now and get our coats on soon. Our reservation is for 6:15, so it would be a good idea to get the show on the road pretty soon—don't you agree?"

Mrs. Greenwood looked at her watch, then glanced up at her living room clock. Together, they told her it was approximately 4:50 p.m. She nodded in agreement and began struggling to her feet, waving off her daughter's offer of a helping hand.

While her mother was in the bathroom, Marian tucked the manila envelope down inside her canvas tote bag. "Golden Girl," she had decided, would get her attention some time after she got back to Willamantic. She took several deep breaths, sucked on her lips, gently bit the lower one from the inside, and then wet them both twice with the tip of her tongue. Rising, she tapped on the bathroom door.

“Mother—I’ll be out on your balcony—enjoying the fresh air for about five minutes.”

“All right dear,” came the muffled reply. “Don’t burn down the building.”

Marian smiled without mirth. She took one of her cigarets and a book of matches from her purse, stepped outside, and shut the door behind her. Five stories below, traffic moved by fits and starts at the intersection. She wondered what her father had thought of this living arrangement after spending most of his life in houses made to hold five or more people. She had never thought to ask him, and he had never commented on it per se, though he had frequently expressed his dismay at the quality of the meals they were served in the dining room and at the annual jumps in the rent he paid. She lighted her cigaret and leaned over the balcony to see if anyone was directly below, where the ashes might fall on this windless afternoon.

“Is *your* mom driving you nuts, Marian?”

Turning to the left, Marian squinted and saw the daughter of the widow next door, seated alone on the next balcony, drinking some sort of pale iced beverage in a tall glass.

“Tom Collins—Kate?” she asked.

“I wish. Just lemonade—with a jigger of vodka—well, two jiggers, maybe.”

“If I didn’t have to drive my mother to a restaurant tonight, I’d probably be doing the same—instead of smoking out here.”

After slightly more than a minute of silence, Marian spoke again.

“You teach literature or something, don’t you? I think you said—Witherspoon? Am I remembering right—rightly?”

“Quitey rightly,” said Kate. “Witherspoon goest, so wilt knife follow. Yes—at Witherspoon ‘Cademy—for the Writing Impaired—and the Right-Wing Impaired.”

After another silence, Kate spoke: “Why did you ask—Miriam?”

“Marian. Mmm—no special reason. I happened to see the word ‘Witherspoon’ recently—in a poem of all places—and I guess—oh—literature and Witherspoon both together—and then seeing you out here—it just seemed like a coincidence.”

“Well—yes. What was the poem? I can’t imagine anyone putting Witherspoon Academy into verse—but I suppose Wordsworth did worse words than that—when he wrote about a stuffed owl in one of his poems. Where did you see it—Mmmarian?”

“Oh—I’m not sure. I don’t even think it was published. It might be something a friend showed me—recently—like typed up for sending out—to magazines?”

A loud rapid rapping on the glass of the balcony door startled Marian but gave her an excuse to avoid further questions about the poem. She

turned toward the window and waved and then bent down to place her half-finished cigaret into a styrofoam cup of water between the door sill and the sheltered inner corner of the balcony.

"Well—Kate—Duty calls."

"I knew it wasn't Opportunity—'cause that only knocks but once. See you next weekend, maybe—Marian."

"You, too—Kate."

She squinted again at Kate, recalling that she had an Irish-type name of some sort as well as reddish-auburn hair. *And yet*, she thought, *she doesn't LOOK Irish*. Shrugging, she went into her mother's apartment. She wet her lower lip and sniffed twice, rapidly. *I guess we're all mongrels—of some sort.*

"I'm going to have a quick powder, Mother, and then we'll head out, okay?"

"Just leave a quarter on the back of the toilet, dear," said her mother with a small grin. After forty-seven years, this line still amused her.

2

At 9:37 the next morning, Sunday, Marian remembered her father's poem and pulled the manila envelope out of her tote bag and tossed it on her coffee table. Then she refilled her coffee cup, set it on the table too, and plopped down onto her over-stuffed sofa. She had already read the first three pages of her Hartford *Courant* and had checked her e-mail to see what needed attention today and what could wait.

After nibbling her upper lip for several seconds, she drew the paper-clipped pages from the envelope and glanced with annoyance at the green sheet with its thinly veiled and probably duplicitous implication that a subscription would ensure future acceptances by the "editorial staff."

It's probably a staff of just one person—operating in his parents' garage—or basement—despite the academic address, she thought, bitterly. She wondered how many other similar rejection slips her father had received, for this and for other poems, and what *his* thoughts about them had been. He once had been a rather satirical and witty person—at least as far as the knaves and fools of the world were concerned—but in recent years he seemed to have softened or mellowed—or gotten too tired to care, she knew not which. One of his final jokes had been to refer the senior living facility he was in as The Last Hurrah. He had been her favorite parent since early childhood, and she had sorrowfully watched his decline following her parents' move to New Haven.

Marian took the paperclip off the pages and set the green sheet face down on the table.

"No—let's do this right, Marian," she suddenly said, standing. She balled up the green sheet and dropped it into the waste can in her kitchen.

Then she took two lemon tarts out of her refrigerator, put them on a dinner plate, and warmed them for twenty seconds in her microwave oven. Back in her living room, she set her father's poem on the cushion to her right, put her coffee on the end table to her left, placed the plate on her lap, and rested her fuzzy-slippered feet on her coffee table.

"Okay, Dad—let's see what you were up to," she said in a soft voice. She put her right hand on the poem and felt her heart seem to race. Her jaw muscles were tense and a little painful. She swallowed half of the thick saliva in her mouth and took a sip of her coffee. In the darkened gray screen of the television set opposite her, she could see her reflection.

"How bad can it be?" she whispered, shrugging long and hard to stretch her tense shoulders, then looked far to the left and far to the right to stretch her tense neck muscles. She took a deep breath, pushing it down into her abdomen, held it for seven seconds, and let it slowly out. "We shall see."

She took a bite from one lemon tart, set it down, and picked up the poem.

"Golden Girl," she said in a soft voice that was not a whisper. Then she read:

Golden Girl
(1965?-2001)

At the eighth ring, one of her co-workers
Picked up: "Witherspoon Library—how may
I help you?"

"Elena, please," I said, singing her name
Playfully with a continental "A"
In its first syllable—instead of "E"
As she—and all the rest—were wont to do.

For fifteen seconds the woman said nothing, then
". . . He wants to talk to . . ." was muffled—then a pause
Of half a minute, then a solemn man asked
Who this was—then said:

"Elaine is dead."

Petite, pretty, witty, bright, and brave. And—gone.

Elaine was a union maid—we'd joked about
That category from the very start
When, ten years before, we'd met at Georgetown U.
Our conference half filled five floors of one

Huge dorm with union delegates, and she
And I, opposite each other for three nights,
Roomed at the top. Long dark hair, long narrow face,
Slender, short, sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued—and fun.

She spoke with ice and fire to groups and spoke
With gentle humor and with wistfulness
During breakfasts, lunches, one dinner, and two walks
With me. “The male ‘members’ of my union
Have,” she said, “one testicle among ‘em,
But never has one ever tried it on.
They keep it under triple lock and speak
Of it in whispered tones with downcast eyes—
When,” she laughed, “they dare to mention it at all.”

One lunch was interrupted by a woman
From Elaine’s own school—brunette, slender, small—
Who loudly greeted her with smiles and a kiss.
Silent, with pursed lips and a neutral face,
A tall, athletic man stood eight feet off,
Gazing past my head, waiting patiently.
Elaine’s bright smile remained in place until
This pair—she leading, with his hand in hers—
Had crossed the room and sat down with their trays.
“Let’s eat outdoors,” she hissed between her teeth.
“I see he still likes women ‘bout my size. . . .
We were—he and”

“Best actress of the year,”

I broke in, tapping the bridge of her long nose.
“You had me certain she’s your dearest friend.”
Elaine blinked hard, then shook her head and laughed.

Later, during a cocktail hour on the terrace
A short, white-maned man from Yale poked the name badge
Pinned to her halter top. “Golden,” he grinned
Proudly, poking again. “Your name is—Golden.”
And Elaine, sipping her fourth mint julep,
Nodded unsteadily, blinked, and whispered, “Yes.”

That evening she had plans to dine with friends
Who lived nearby. I walked her sixteen blocks

To find a cab and put her in, still 'faced.
We wished each other well—then I walked back
And climbed the stairs, alone, to read Lao Tsu.
The one a.m. commotion in the hall—
Giggling, stumbling, thumping 'gainst my door—
Caused me to toss my favorite book aside.
Elaine, with two female friends assisting, was back.
I helped unlock her room, the three went in,
Half an hour's giggling more, and then her friends
Grinned in my door and said she was asleep.

Eight-twenty-five, a gorgeous, cloudless day—
"I'm up," she said, responding to my tap.
"'Tis I—be not afraid," I joked. "Are ye
Up fer breakfast? They cease serving at nine."
She unlatched the door and padded barefoot
To her tall, half open sunlit window.
Outside, Japanese cherry petals blew
Gently in the bright sun. The same breeze stirred
Her loose white cotton gown, through which light shone.
I smiled, pleased by her slender silhouette.
Elena slowly smiled back. "Could you," she asked,
Tossing long dark hair, "bring two buns, one coffee—black,
And one peach to our nine-fifteen meeting?
My hair's a fright, after last . . . a shower
Is what I really dearly right now need."

Georgetown in the spring—
 behind your sheer white nightgown—
 pink cherry blossoms

During lunch, a little picnic on some steps,
Elena told me about unlucky Lucky,
Her elderly toy white poodle whose leg
Was in a cast. "He jumped to my table
From a chair and was eating my supper.
I swept him off—without thinking—and feel
So guilty now. I cook him special steaks—
And I'm, you know, a vegetarian."
She asked what I'd been reading and showed me
A small book by Kübler-Ross on dying

That she'd brought with her. Then, proud, she opened
The large briefcase she carried and unrolled
A piece of needlepoint—a rural scene
Less than a quarter done. “You see these clouds?
They weren't pre-printed on the cloth—they're mine,
Completely. Quite creative of me, huh?”

“Cray-ative, nothin'! It wuh puhfick,” I drawled,
Parodying the union man from Maine,
Whose jokes in bogus Down-East dialect
Had failed to captivate our morning group.

Breakfast next day was farewell time for us.
And while she watched the grinning couple feed
Each other French toast and pineapple chunks,
I tapped her bare shoulder. “Entr' ourselves, lady,
You are vivacious, witty, smart, pretty, cute,
Young, bright, radiant, and—and, if this weren't
A cruddy blue time fer you, this ol' guy
Would've made a pass at this neat li'l gal.”
Her eyes slowly filled up. “Thank you,” she whispered.
“And that's the truth,” I said. “Be very afraid!”

Six and a half months later, in New York
At a teachers' conference, I phoned her home.
Lucky's leg had healed, though his heart was weak.
We laughed about the school she worked at—
And mine—for twenty, twenty-five minutes
And agreed, say, once a year, to stay in touch.

Eighteen months thereafter, she saved her job
In court when singled out by management
For staff reduction. “I was,” she said, “alone—
My union, less than useless, granted them
That program, not seniority, should rule.
In fact, they called me ‘too aggressive’—code
For ‘pushy bitch’ or worse—and management
And they, I think, agreed I'd get the ax.
But I had files of memos, theirs and mine,
And judges here think differently from yours
In eastern Kansas—where you once lost a job.”

Next year, we met for lunch to celebrate
 Her victory, in part, and luck in landing
 A better job near me. “‘Aggressive’ was
 The word I fought—with black-rimmed glasses and
 A high-neck blouse, a dark blue woman’s suit
 That cost a week’s pay, and all this long hair
 Put up très guindément in a schoolmarm’s bun
 On top. You thought my act was good before—
 This victim looked and played the victim’s part,
 Meek, respectful—but with her documents.
 The judge chewed off their heads for what they’d done
 And wished I’d asked for damages as well.
 ‘Arbitrary’ and ‘capricious’ were used
 Several times to beat them up—and down.”
 With laughing eyes, she tossed her waist-length hair.

from
Heroines
Unlikely
 art by
 Stephen
 Mead

Never would I see “Elena” again, though she
 Left Queens to work at nearby Witherspoon.
 At intervals by phone she often spoke
 Of her plans to change careers. “A Ph.D.
 In sociology—or social psych
 Would suit me best,” she said, and detailed what
 Her night-school courses covered and how great
 It felt to study and to learn. “Not like
 The first time, when I thought I knew it all.”

Petite, pretty, witty, bright, and brave. And—gone.

I was calling after a five-month gap
 To ask Elena out to lunch again.
 At the brutal word “dead,” my skull went numb.
 I know I did my appointed rounds that day,
 Somehow teaching two more classes. Cogently?
 Perhaps. And then an hour-long meeting
 About curricular revisions—numbing
 Topics on the best of days. And then the drive
 Home. Somehow my unreal car followed the
 Road. Somehow it did not hit the other
 Cars. Or the trees. All unreal somehow or
 Newly real. Pretty. Witty. Bright. Brave. Gone.
 On the third day I met with one of her friends.



Elena had been dead one week when I
Called. A month before a diesel garbage truck
Hit and dragged her, breaking her jaw, tearing
Her throat, putting her into a coma.
After two weeks, I was told, she awoke.
Conscious, able to write but not to speak,
Elena continued her studies in bed.
A tube went down her damaged throat with air,
And, all unknown to me, bright and brave and
Witty Elena continued to improve.
On her final night, it's said, the night nurse
Was busy reading romance magazines,
Never noticing that a plug of thick
Mucus had closed off her tube's lower end
Until lack of oxygen had sealed her fate—
Permanent, massive brain damage. If "she"
Had lived (they said), she would not still be she.
A blessing that (they said) she died instead.

Anger? At the unknown truck driver and nurse
And doctors. Anger at myself—who called
Too late to change a tiny part of anything.
With the numbness gone, I wondered bitterly
If her library colleagues and the staff
Of her whole school appreciated what
They'd lost. Did the campus paper publish
Some memoir? Would they plant a tree for her?
Did some secretly—or not so secretly—
Rejoice? And what might I "do" now for her?

And what for me? What buries that anger?
What blunts this grief? Draw back and try to view
Them now as actors in some play seen long
Ago that somehow gives poignant pleasure with
Some subtly hidden counterpoint of justice—
Some balancing, some redress. I might try this:

Nearly two years after her unlucky
Accident, her more unlucky loss of air,
Her death, I feel honored to have known her
Even distantly and briefly. Elena,

Petite at first sight, petite in her gown
In her Georgetown room and her gown in her
Hospital room, petite by choice as “victim”
To her judge, was larger than the couple
Who tried to hurt her, larger than the men
Of her own union, larger than management
And doctors and the nurse, and larger than
The driver and even his truck that struck her down.
Where are they now? Have they forgotten her?
How have they shrunk inside, or grown, since then?
What tests of character have they failed or passed?

No. These serried fancies of her victories
In death cannot serve as sutures—or salves.
They feel bogus. At best they barely half touch
My brain and not at all can reach my heart.
Such words, like pieces on a chequer board,
Share symmetry and game-like logic
Removed from death, life, fear, hate, anger, love,
Flesh, nerves, blood, bone—hunger now, in guts here.

Instead, perhaps, a tête-à-tête. Perhaps, instead.

Elena, barely five feet tall in shoes,
Growing to the end and larger than I am,
Larger than I hope to be—you were my friend,
My brave, bright, golden friend. I used to take
For granted that you were, that you had time
To chat and laugh or talk with me. You taught
Me—as keenly as the Tao te Ching—ways
Of being by how you carried your Self.
I trust you thought I was your friend. I hope
You would think, if you had lived, I am one still.

For nearly twelve minutes, Marian Greenwood Poggioli sat staring through her side window at distant trees below her apartment, clutching tightly her father’s typescript. Gradually, she became aware that her ears, and chiefly the left one, felt very warm, almost as if she had been blushing. She noted that she needed more oxygen. With conscious determination, she took a deeper breath and slowly let the air out. She repeated this process thrice more, then shrugged her cramped shoulders, stood and shrugged again.

Her eyes filled, and the room became blurry.

“Bastard—bastard—bastard! Bastard—bastard—bastard—bastard—bastard! *You—old—bastard!*”

She wet both lips with the tip of her tongue and took yet another deep breath.

“Men,” she whispered, shutting her eyes tightly.

She blinked rapidly as the first tear ran down her right cheek. Then she tore his typescript in half and scattered it across her living room floor.

Mali Scene

art by Kenneth

DiMaggio

Not Today

Toy Davis



Janet stared into the unknown wondering if she should go out. No she would tell herself when the urge was too great. It might be dangerous. Someday she would care. Someday she would be brave and run out into the unknown to face the world she now belongs to. Someday, but not today.

Closing her window she sat back on her bed and closed her eyes. She plugged her ears. She became deaf and blind to all that was around her, and ignored the shame that filled her. This was her life. Her choice. Why should she be ashamed? Feeling cold inside she wrapped herself in her blanket. This would warm her; heal her. It would make her feel strong again. This was all she could do to feel normal and right.

What had made her this way? She didnt remember. Had it been the lovers that abandoned her after the harsh ways they used her body? Or was it the insults her family so easily threw at her in their drunken state? She really didnt know. But she did know that this was not the day she was willing to find out.

Ducking her head in the covers she closed herself off. Someday she would care. Someday she really would be brave and forgive, but that was not this day.

A Survivor or Not?

Robert D. Wenger

Johnny lay on the ground with his head resting on a rock and stares at an old swing set. He woke suddenly with a jerk as the morning sun baked him. His head is pounding. Laying on a rock doesn't help.

"Where am I?" he wonders.

He slowly sits up and looks around.

He is sitting in an old school yard that's overgrown with brush and grass. Birds are twittering in the nearby woods and the wind is rustling the tops of the trees.

The last thing he remembers before waking and seeing the swing set is sitting at the bar in an Old Town saloon. He can't remember the name. He thinks he had just had an argument with some bikers about a game of pool. He was sitting at the bar having another beer to calm himself when he remembers seeing the bartender's eyes widen and look beyond Johnny at something or someone. Johnny tried to turn around and.....well, that's the last thing he remembers.

Of course, being in that bar could have happened five years ago. He's been having weird thoughts lately, thinking things have just happened then realizing that those things actually happened years ago.

He feels the back of his head and winces as the headache pain increases. He feels a scab and decides a pool cue had bounced off his head, either thrown or swung. It could have been a beer bottle.

As his head clears, memories begin to return. He'd been in the bar and getting drunk because his life is absolutely going down the drain. He knows getting drunk isn't the answer but it's a lot better than suicide, which has crossed his mind recently.

Auditors are looking at the books at the company where he worked in downtown New York. John Madison, Johnny, is the chief accountant, or was, as of yesterday. He had been fired suddenly with no explanation from the owner. Johnny assumed that the owner hadn't liked the report from the auditors.

Along with work problems, he'd been served with divorce papers a week ago. Being separated from Amy was bad and he always hoped they would reconcile. Being served with papers put an end to that hope.

Once again, these thoughts drifted in and out. Had this just happened or was it years ago?



Aquatic Lunch

Jay Marvin

“What do I do now?” Johnny speaks out loud to the swing set.

Suddenly, a thought flashes into his mind. He remembers how he always thought it possible that a survivor of the World Trade Center disaster could simply disappear. The numbers of people unaccounted for were staggering. A person could just drift away. Go somewhere new. That person could create a new identity and no one would ever know.

Why would anyone do such a thing? Johnny asks himself again. If that person had seemingly unsolvable problems at home or at work, like Johnny, disappearing would be a viable option to suicide or going to jail.

Why would he think of that all of a sudden? Maybe he should do that exact same thing.

Johnny slowly stands up. He checks his wallet and sees the \$300 is still there. He must have come to this old school yard on his own. If someone brought him here and dumped him, he probably wouldn’t have any money.

I can buy a bus ticket to somewhere down south. I can start over. I’m a good accountant. I can work for a temp agency and get a bookkeeper job until I’m established and then find a real accountant job. Surely I can buy a fake I.D., maybe a new social security card.

Johnny starts walking back to town. He will go to the bus station and be out of here today.

“Las Vegas sounds interesting,” he mumbles to himself.

Johnny walks out of the woods and notices a red and white ambulance parked in the old school’s parking lot. There are people dressed in white looking at him.

“Where have you been, Johnny?” one of them calls. “We’ve been looking for you. Were you trying to get away again?”

One attendant speaks to the other, “We found him wandering the streets of New York right after the disaster. He’s crazy and insists he’s a survivor of the collapse. He was dressed in a tattered suit. He had no I. D. or anything to convince anyone he’d survived the buildings coming down. He’s nothing but a homeless person that’s always lived on the street.”

“Get in the van Johnny. We’re taking you home.”

Making The World A Better Place

Adrian Ludens

“This used to be a decent part of town,” Doreen murmured.

Doreen crossed her arms protectively over her purse and glanced furtively at the other people who were waiting at the bus station. She took a deep breath, tried to relax, but couldn’t.

Doreen abruptly pawed through her purse, rapaciously pulling her sunglasses from their case and jabbing them onto her face. This helped soothe her mood. No one could see where she was looking now. Anyone who might be planning to mug her would be wise to think twice; she might be looking right at them and be on her guard.

Emboldened, Doreen let her eyes wander suspiciously over the group. Across from where she stood was a tall man. Doreen could tell by his prissy haircut that he was queer. On her left two Chinese girls were chattering back and forth in what sounded to Doreen like gibberish.

“Learn to speak American,” Doreen muttered under her breath.

Doreen cast a sidelong glance at pale girl with dyed black hair and enough junk in her face to set off an airport metal detector. A black youth in a Timberwolves jersey ambled up to the bus stop. Doreen wondered if he was carrying a gun.

“The cream of the crop here today,” Doreen observed snidely.

She started violently as a grizzled homeless man jostled past her.

“He nearly knocked me over!” Doreen shrieked, scanning the group for a sympathetic face. A man she hadn’t noticed before was smiling at her. He was white, he was well dressed, and he was Doreen’s new best friend.

“Are you all right?” he asked amiably.

“I’m fine. I just wish people like that would find someplace else to go and leave decent people alone,” Doreen fumed.

“My grandmother used to say that God created everyone equal,” the stranger gently reprimanded.

Doreen’s face flushed and her lips tightened.

“Take a look around. Some people are just a waste of oxygen.”

The man’s eyes took on a faraway look.

“There may be something to what you say,” he murmured.

The rumble of the transit bus shook the man from his reverie and he held out his arm like an usher.

“Ladies first,” he smiled.

Doreen elbowed her way toward the front of the group. She wanted to pick whom she sat next to.

Strong arms shoved Doreen from behind and she toppled forward, arms flailing, into the street.

As Doreen's life came to a surprise ending under the black front tire of a metro transit bus, one particular gentleman in the crowd suppressed a smile.

He felt confident that he'd done his part to make the world a better place.

A Bad Idea of Biblical Proportions

Adrian Ludens

I've never been a religious man. Despite my overly zealous Grandmother's constant preaching and praying, I've remained fairly neutral on Biblical matters. I just tune her out whenever she starts in.

So last Thursday I was wheeling her along the nature trail that runs beside Dry Prong Creek, and she's sermonizing as usual. My headphones set her off this time.

"When you listen to rock music, you're inviting the Devil into your heart," she says to me.

"Yes Gramma," I mumbled automatically.

"You need to be ready for the day when the wicked are punished for their sins!" Her voice rose and cracked with emotion.

I sighed and glanced skyward at the sound of flapping wings. A flock of migrating birds was darkening the sky above us.

"Gramma look!" I teased. "The Great Tribulation is at hand! It's a plague of giant locusts!"

Poor Gramma gave a terrified look toward the sky, grabbed her chest and died right there in her wheelchair! I didn't even know she had a weak heart! None of us did.

Now the family has gathered for Gramma's funeral and I'm feeling really jittery.

It wasn't intentional, I swear. It was just a joke! How am I supposed to explain that to my folks? So I've just kept it to myself, but it's really starting to get to me.

My eyelid keeps twitching, my hands are shaking. Now even my ears are ringing...

Sounds like locusts singing.

children churches & daddies

ISSN 1555-1555



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

the unreligious, non-family oriented literary and art magazine

Produced By Scars Publications and Design

Editorial Offices Children, Churches and Daddies; Scars Publications and Design
829 Brian Court, Gurnee, IL 60031-3155 USA

Internet ccandd96@scars.tv ▶ <http://scars.tv>

Publishers/Designers Of Children, Churches and Daddies magazine; cc-d Ezines; Scars Internet Radio (SIR); TheBurning mini poem books; God Eyes mini poem books; The Poetry Wall Calendar; The Poetry Box; The Poetry Sampler; Mom's Favorite Vase Newsletters; Reverberate Music Magazine; Down in The Dirt magazine; Freedom and Strength Press forum; assorted chapbooks and books; music, poetry compact discs; live performances of songs and readings

Sponsors Of past editions; chapbooks; books; past Poetry Chapbook Contest; past Poetry Book Contest; past Prose Chapbook Contest; past Prose Book Contest; Poetry Calendar Contest; Editor's Choice Award (writing and web sites); Collection Volumes

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (founded 1993) has been written and researched by political groups and writers from the United States, Canada, Australia, Belgium, England, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malta, Norway, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey (as well as input from both Japan and Slovenia). Regular features provide coverage of environmental, political and social issues (via news and philosophy) as well as fiction and poetry, and act as an information and education source. Children, Churches and Daddies is the leading magazine for this combination of information, education and entertainment.

• **Children, Churches and Daddies** (ISSN 1068-5154) is published monthly by **Scars Publications and Design** Janet Kuypers.

• To contributors: No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material. No originals; if mailed, include SASE 6 bio. Work sent on disks or through e-mail preferred. Previously published work accepted. Authors always retain rights to their own work. All magazine rights reserved. Reproduction of cc&d without publisher permission is forbidden.

Copyright © 1993-2008 **Scars Publications & Design,**

Children, Churches & Daddies Janet Kuypers. U.S. Government

copyright © 2004 Janet Kuypers on the logos for **Scars Publications and**

Children, Churches & Daddies. All rights of pieces for written

pieces and artwork remain with their authors.

subscribe, or i'll have to kill you.

get a **Children, Churches and Daddies** subscription 4 only \$50.00/year (issues are \$5.00 each, + \$1.00 s&h, so \$6.00 per issue... so a subscription is like getting 4 issue free!). Order issues on line with a credit card (via PayPal) through the issues link at **cc&d** mag, or mail checks for issues or subscriptions made out to "Janet Kuypers" **only** (not to Scars or cc&d) to the address in our masthead. Get a subscription. You'll thank us for it.