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• P U L S E •



PULSE

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AWARDS

Eleanor Poetry Award
 "Unemployed Floyd" by Andrew B. Preslar

Professor's Poetry Award
 "Disciplina Deserta" by Mack Hall

Pulse Poetry Award
 "Chula Vista" by Brent Anthony Snyder

Pulse Staff Poetry Award
 "Self-Portrait" by Andrew B. Preslar

Pulse Fiction Award
 "First Night Out" by Ann Maureen Jones

Pulse Cover Competition Award
 "Memories of Light" by Dal James

JUDGES

Poetry
 Roger D. Jones
 Robin Latimer
 Jake De Ste. Croix

Fiction

Phillip Sharp
 Annette Platt
 R. C. Reynolds

Eleanor Poetry Award

UNEMPLOYED FLOYD

To hell with what they say, he mutters,
sitting on the bed, and puts his pants on
both legs at a time. He shaves;
his hard-lined face, wreathed in the clouds
of winter bathroom steam, peers Frost-like
on itself, his chin tipped back, drawing
the old skin tight to take the knife
without the benefit of shaving cream--
he is a man,
and welcomes the distraction of a razor burn.
There being no mountains left, he climbs
into a pickup truck, waves to the woman,
and ventures out, the great western philosopher,
to glean the frozen fields of finance
while she goes inside, too old to weep
for him, or even for herself.

Andrew B. Preslar

WAKING AT THREE

Consciousness opens to him like petals
of a hungry meat-digesting flower.
Rats run through the attic, thumping,
squealing, thudding in the walls,
mating, no doubt; the single purpose
in the teaspoon of a brain they have between them
mocks him as they wrestle through the ritual
that lets no priest preside.
Silence...resting?
Quivering noses poked
into each other's flea-infested fur?
His teeth hurt from the clenching,
muscles humming through the bones;
they move, scratching
like nausea on an empty stomach.
Jealous of their closeness,
he could crush their heads
with his bare feet and throw them
by their hairless tails into a ditch,
or be one of them, heedless
of thought, goaded on
by glands to do
what he could not do
as an ugly, bitter man.

Andrew B. Preslar

Staff Award

SELF-PORTRAIT

On afternoons when sun comes through the window,
and we have about us wine, tobacco, scraps of food
from meals just finished, music, paper, books,
and all the marks of, if not affluence, then plenty,
and we think to turn ourselves to poetry,
we gather to us all our little trifles,
and we train our minds on art, and, self-possessed,
approach the doors of the most holy inner temple
of Apollo, portals wrought of ancient cypress,
finished by the master craftsmen,
and we knock, authoritatively,
expectantly, and hear
no sound...we wait;
no answer comes...
and, by the gods,
we are surprised!

Andrew B. Preslar

DAYMARE

Bright day swims yellow through closed lids; blubbery fat
vacationer, sunning, drooping past down the sound
of laughter, shrieks of play; he dozes, great grey yankee,
warm sweat tickling; stupid with heat, smiling, fatly
floating on glittering sand, thinking
I am the walrus, listening
to white pups romp in the Florida surf,
barking in brilliant sun, remembering
six months of lessons twice a week,
the heated indoor pool, four small certificates,
declaring, yes, they all can swim, quite well.

bark!

What? Some...something...snap to blindness,
up up struggling into wakefulness, heave
up in fear, to shrieking, daddy, daddy!
dreamslow thighs, faster, feet thudding,
faster, frightened, to the water,
splash and jump, heart tearing, faster,
flabby arms fighting faster the moving water--

far out,

pale arms, little feet flailing
beneath the laughing sun,
blue-bright cool droplets
flying over garbled fearscream
dying into horrid silence
under floating, peaceful clouds.

Andrew B. Preslar

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT

-to someone who has gone

Leaf at a time they fell away,
my hopes, bits of my ego; I tried to hold them--
they were all I had, paper defenses, shards of warmth,
and every day grew colder still. Today cruel Boreas,
with his icy-whiskered grin, would be more welcome
than the sight of you walking away from me indifferently
across a meadow with a man; I would know how
to deal with winds and frosts. I would shiver and curse.
But I could never curse you, though I could curse myself
and tremble in impotent rage at my inadequacies, shake
with jealousies that hold my head in slender, soft-cool hands
and squeeze until the blood runs from the corners
of the two red-rimmed eyes that cannot even look directly at you.
"What is this?" you say, and let the warm breeze blow you away
to lie on dew-damp grass and watch zinc clouds
chasing and fleeing, vaporous lovers hiding stars,
while I go home with even less than what I came here with.

"To those who have, more shall be given.

To those who have not, yet the little

that they have shall be taken from them."

"What will you be when you get big?" grandmother asked.

At least I'll never have to answer that one.

Lear? Not me, not even his poor fool, but change the play,

and Caliban, half-beast in awe of wine, ah, yes...

a wretched worshipper of an indifferent goddess

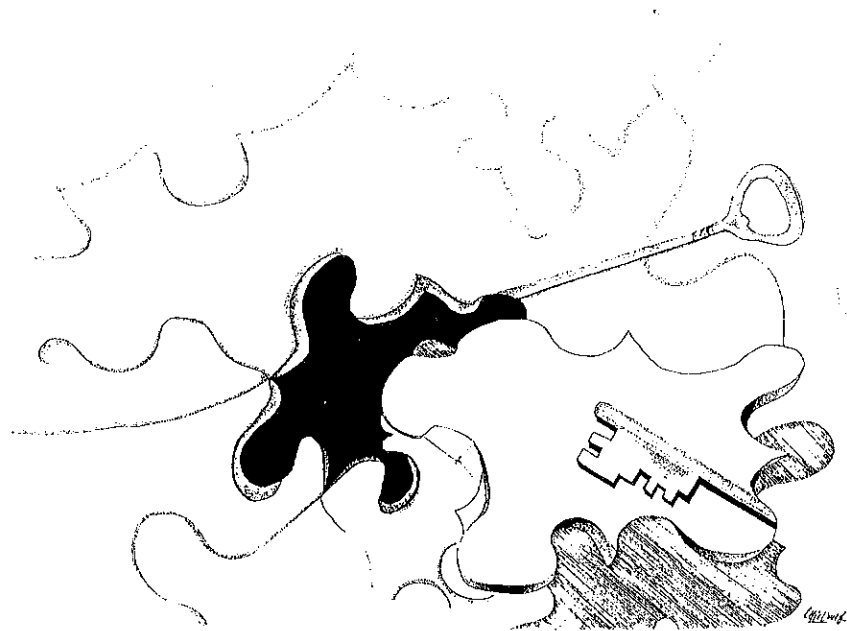
who could only hold him in contempt

if she could stomach holding him at all,

and never with a lover's gentle forcefulness,

under running, sightless clouds.

Andrew B. Preslar



Drawing by Chin Dang

Professor's Prize

The following is an excerpt from "Disciplina Deserta," a tale of the travels of Pilgrim. In this excerpt, he has stumbled onto a strange place called "Middle School," and is conversing with "The Principal."

DISCIPLINA DESERTA

A Lost Chapter From Something or Other...

... Books: Oh, they were such
A bother that we got rid of them. They
Were very unhygienic, and hard to
Keep straight on the shelves. And can you believe
That kids were always coming in here and
Annoying the librarian? Asking
For books, that sort of nonsense. We have a
Very expensive librarian and
We certainly can't afford to lose her.
So we got rid of the kids by getting
Rid of the books. Now the librarian
Is free to keep the library clean and quiet."
"But what about books and reading? Without
Books, how do your children learn?" asked Pilgrim.
"Books are basic to their education,"
Responded the Principal. "Come outside,
And I'll show you." They walked outside to where
Some children were, between fist fights, playing
Baseball. Pilgrim saw with horror that books
Were being used as the bases! The Principal
Continued. "Once we used Paradise Lost
As our home plate, but then our courts ruled that
Milton's works are a violation of
Church and state separation. We replaced him
With Susan Polis Shultz. Same for Kipling.
Puck of Pook's Hill was first base. The court didn't
Mind the fairies, elves, or magic, but held
That the one Jew and the one Chinese were
Stereotypes, and said that the
Viking long ship should be integrated
To be socially redeeming. The board
Spent two years (and a long weekend at the
Persepolis Hilton) studying the
Matter. They decided that Puck of Pook's
Hill would be replaced by Haley's
Roots, in which, of course, there are no racial
Stereotypes. C.S. Lewis's Narnia
was and remains second base. The court ruled
That the books could stay if the names Peter,
Susan, Edmund, and Lucy were changed to
Pedro, Mei Ling, Muhammed, and Ludmilla.
Third base used to be Winston Churchill's A
History of the English Speaking Peoples.
The court was shocked, dismayed, and outraged
By this insensitivity. White hairs

were all aflutter for weeks until they
 Resolved the matter in an atmosphere
 Of sweet reason. The court decreed that if
 Equal Opportunity could be granted
 To other groups, then Churchill could stay. The
 Court compromised on one hundred and sixteen
 world languages, and for a while it looked
 As if baseball, for the sake of equal
 Educational opportunity
 Would have a hundred and sixteen bases.
 However, there was no A History of
The Urdu Speaking Peoples, and so the
 Idea was dropped, along with Churchill. We
 Replaced him with a Houston homosexual
 who writes free verse with a liquid marker
 On the walls of bus station restrooms.
 We also see books as fundamental
 To our daily lives. I just love to sit on
 The King James Bible while watching t.v.,
 And my wife diapers little Junior with
 Leaves from a world atlas. In our bathroom
 we use pages from Edmund Burke to...you know."

Mack Hall

PULSE Poetry Award

CHULA VISTA

after cheap margaritas
 in a pre-fab Mexican restaurant
 she points to a plastic flower
 in a display box
 and says
 this flower
 always trips me up
 from a distance
 it looks like a bunch
 of chips

Brent Anthony Snyder



"Contemplating"

Thelma Jones

HAYFIELDS

my pipe lies in a hayfield somewhere where it was dropped
 in rain never moving nor shivering the chill
 nor strain-panting blazing sun, where it was dropped
 once before where balers pass never seeing it nor
 it staring upward at greased steel, my pouch sits on its
 shelf dusty, untouched, half used without so much as a
 spark, I never smoked another pipe nor loaded another bale

Steven J. Cropper

NOTHING PERSONAL

The light shines from the yard outside,
the sun glowing on the falling shed
of red-edged tin reflects blindness to us.
And as we sit in the blue-lit kitchen,
our figures look flat and black
against the bright behind the window.

I see that I am shaped into an image
reflected on the lenses
in the wire frames of her glasses,
made a warped and swollen faced young woman.
She is looking through me at me now.
Looking with her frosty, aged eyes.

And I can hear her asking me "Why?
How Come you weren't with me there?"
Caught between the maple arms
of her almost ancient kitchen chair,
I can see the strange form of my face
begin to grimace in the glasses
as I search for my excuse.

As I sit I think of what I didn't see:
the red dirt road that climbs the hill
where pines and the once white steeple
are set into the embracing blue sky,
the grass grown to darker autumn tones
around the stones that grow a mossy fur,
the cold air the bright sky the thick red
clotted dirt thudding

-why,

she must understand that work
or anything is better than,
than standing by places where...
Anyway what good does it do?
I twist my hair, her eyes are frosty blue.

Far off from us, in the cemetery
on the pine covered hill where flowers
grow, and fade and die on graves,
an old man moves the flower stands.
He moves the three chairs left behind,
struggles with the canopy, gives up,
sits down, and slowly eats his lunch.

Rene LeBlanc

AN INTERVAL SPENT

She had waited there all day
watching babies, mothers, joggers,
and the pale grey daylight shadows
as they shifted and moved across the concrete walkways.
For a time her feet had simmered in a pool of light
that poured between the wrinkled arms
the live oak stretched behind her bench
as if to catch and cradle the sky.

Midmorning and she had given up the looking at her watch,
but waited as the lunch crowd rushed before her on the walk,
filling minutes with the garbled, chuckling sounds
of voices boiling and tumbling like water flowing.
She heard the noises that they made subside,
until the people ebbed away to work.

And in the hours after noon
she saw the world through beads of light
slid upon her lashes by the westward movement of the sun;
distinguishing the slow meanders of the old ones
on the silvered concrete towards the splintered benches
where they sat and dozed,
or talked unceasing to each other
pouring streams of words in waves of sound that lapped
against the stiffened skins of old eardrums.

She watched them as she and the light and they wore out,
noticed them leave leaning on their walkers,
or gripping wooden sticks in mirror gestures
of their tenacious hold on life;
watched them leave as ghosts now
in the grey silhouettes they wore
as they passed between her and the light.

So she waits for him
as day and night are stirred together
by the branches of the trees above her
into the indefinite color of twilight.
And she does not leave until the dark of night
is greater than the color of day.
When, rising to walk to the bus stop,
shadowed by the power of the moon
she lets go of what she cannot hold.
She knows that though she goes
she is not leaving now,
for she has already left
his heart.

Rene LeBlanc

Near Natchitoches

Her eyes were light and full of blue
surrounded by a bag-brown face
eyes pale and smudged like window glass
through which I saw a private sky.

Short and youthful persons like myself
would ask her questions as I did:
Where did you get your light, your eyes?
And can I ride your pony?

We rode her blue-grey painted mare
across her mother's red dirt fields
which had been shorn of cotton fleece.
We went to lines which cut the sky
with carefully twisted rust hued barbs
that speared escaping cotton bits.

And when we reaching the field's edge
we turned the pony towards her home.
We saw her mother's clothesline there,
where caught by wooden barbs and pins,
the snowy sheets and clothing waved
as though to ask us for a truce.

Rene LeBlanc

STIRRING DUST

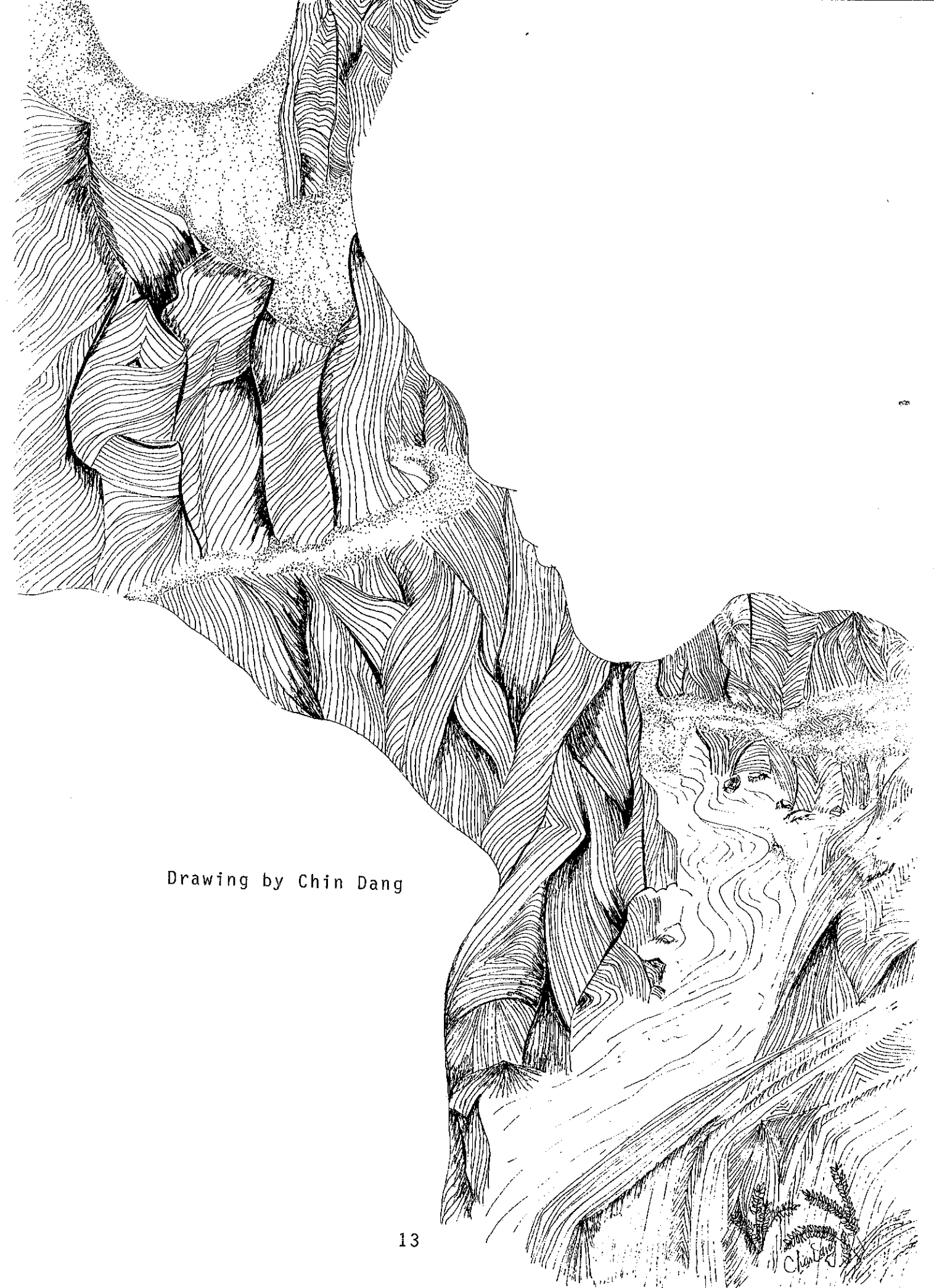
I saw God hanging in the air
disguised as old cathedral dust,
Being what glows silver moving
through the hollow space that's stirred
by feet of tourists touring.

God was also filling in
the air of a church nursery, there
posing once again as dust,
floating in the rays of light
and snowing through my fingers.

Then I thought the motes I saw
were glowing pieces of the sun
even thought they shared with us
the appellation: sunbeams.
I was wrong.

Where God was is the church service
I sat in at age three or so,
to feel a voice or something in me,
words that moved like feet or fingers
stirring in the dust.

by Rene LeBlanc



Drawing by Chin Dang

[UNFOLDING]

unfolding
the mystery
of a lifetime
walking through the looking glass
and realizing
that it is all done with mirrors
picking up the pieces
and watching them fall
princes to frogs...
frogs to princes

Elizabeth Claire Hooper

ADMIT ONE

admit one
to
the story of my life
cast of thousands
special effects
black and white
bold images
coming in
and out of focus
vivid colors
instant replays
blurry picture
no clear plot
admit one
to the story of my life

Elizabeth Claire Hooper

[NOTHING]

nothing
nothing left now
except bloodstains
and memories...
and that impalpable feeling
that has lodged itself in my heart
in my throat
and in the back of my mind

Elizabeth Claire Hooper

SMALL FLOWERS

It was, indeed,
a sad procession
of gray and black and feeling.
They carried him up
on their shoulders,
and as the box walked by
I could not help remembering how
the man inside was wrong.
Yet they carried him
and held him high, as in
some attempt to glorify the remains
or perhaps the past
of a soul who's now a spirit.
They planted him among the granite
and marked his with his name.
There are small flowers growing near it.

Jim Peterson

RAIN CLOUDS

Great gray giants
huge hanging
move so slowly
over the cold, wet January ground.
Full-bodied sky king faces
change their appearance at
a windy whim.
Vapor villains
dressed in black
with distant, booming voices.

Jim Peterson

EMERSON'S DIVE

I become a
transparent eyeball
before a backdrop
of leaves, trees and
chili stains. I
feel a mystical
experience approaching.
The tap Miller and a
pimento cheese add
warmth to an otherwise
dull experience. The
clamor of a Mexican
waiter breaks the
mood, and the
trees lose their
leaves in a host
of golden pastel.

Anthony LaRose

THE QUEST

The waters foam as the waves mount high;
The stiff gale makes our staunch craft sigh
And strain as she twists in the trough of the sea.
Sails, filled to bursting, are wet as are we.

Our hearts fill with prayers to the Pilot above.
Our thoughts are of home and the ones that we love.
The ones, who love us who are waiting at home,
Turn again to the sea and search over the foam.

Though sturdy, our craft seems so small as she rolls,
And the waves break high o'er the nearby shoals
That threaten to tear with fingers of stone
Our craft that is struggling to carry us home.

Now the fog is closing in, more danger to bring,
But strangely enough we begin to sing.
The worst would not be to go down with our ship;
The worst would have been in not starting the trip.

James G. Smith

MINDI

You enter my thoughts again;
 like a rushing train you explode in me.
I can still remember when
 you used to make my insides cringe
 and my fingertips tingle.
So long now I have tried
 to undress the garment shrouding you.
Now only memories flutter and fill my mind,
 until I can no longer see.

Jeanie Lisenby

POSSESSION

I have a penny
in my pocket;
a copper face
of a man
I never knew
with words inscribed
of trusting God.

I also have a hole
in my pocket
of which so many
of my pretty things
pass through
to the other side.

I try keeping you...
far from the hole
in my pocket.

Galia Harrington

A WEDDING SONG

The rings, the rice, the roses,
One hundred album poses,

Clashes

Crashes

We all fall down.

Anita Donatto

AT MIDNIGHT

If the dog would not bark
I could shadow through the house,
a glass of cognac in my hand,
silently
moving things
an inch this way or that,
to see whether
anyone, on waking,
would be disturbed.
It is one form of many madnesses.

A glass of diet gingerale
with a dash of lime in hand,
I am no minx.

I live my life
observed by the invisible audience.
One of those women
who might have been bewitched,
instead, was only born.

Chrystal

HAIKUS OF THE LAST STARCHILD

I ask if we
twisted something precious
in our clumsy human hands.

. . .

Even if time passing wrenches Right,
and we were somehow Wrong,
weep not.

. . .

Rest assured,
it wasn't we who turned the glass,
nor we who spilled the sand.

Chrystal

[THE MOURNFUL CRY OF THE LOON]

The mournful cry of the loon,
it echoes in our souls
and speaks to us of wilderness,
of places far, untamed,
of places lost, no man has named.
That cornerstone of cinematography,
the soundtrack, in a thousand films,
has embraced you: in the jungle,
in the desert,
and in the faraway regions of the highland moors.
A few have come to know you, Loon,
lovely, lonely loon with
black face and bowtie;
the water has created you, and
sleek as a ship, you cannot stand.
We who know your habitat
can mark your woeful cry,
haunting fiord and waterfall alike,
floating through the theatres;
and we are touched by a deep
amusement of the heart
to discover the voice of one so familiar
plaintively gracing places so strange:
an amusement which shatters
and supercedes
the very mood of melancholy mien
you were chosen to bestow.

Chrystal

THE WOLVES OF DAWN

Night has come to a serene standstill.
The wolves
are not in their den.
The wolves
are standing in the shimmering grasses,
sharp before the morning mist.
The wolves
are clean and alive.
Birdsong, holy like their howling,
sanctifies the morning:
the only sound.

I could touch you.
I remember
what it is
to be
the wolves at dawn.

Chrystal

WITHIN THE HEART

Gather in your arms
your brass emotions.
Calm them with whispering
subtly.
The kiss of caution often places
love within the seeker's grasp.
What is love but
the peace of mind that few can
reach along. The certainty of youth
can stain
mature love.
Like the words that are never
said and yet are known while one is speaking, love
has an intense meaning.
Warm sleep,
golden sun, ocean breezes, as you feel these
things that you see
and take them to be your own
in memories let
love be as frail,
to be held with grace, keeping its place
within the heart.

Deidre Moore

YAMAHA LOVE

Today,
after weeks of sweat,
she started at the push of a button
and ran screamin' mad;
a thousand bats on a sharp brittle night,
no thought f' tonsils, like a nasty stepchild.
I clawed f' life
through streaks of windtears,
m' throat clappin' thunderous with exultation.

No magical zoom, this 'un, m' boy;
this 's sheer electric tragedy; a rabid cat;
glad to be woken; avaricious f' revenge.
But I got a chain on er
and a plan to subdue.
Gonna dress er in black n brushed silver,
soothe er reelin' mind, teach er t purr
and only scream when I say.
When you see er she'll be contented anguish.

O my lethal sweetheart.

T. J. Wills

MISPLACED SALTWATER

Last night I slept
and woke, it seemed
On the beach at dusk
'neath skies that teemed
with sea gulls

crying

And there amidst
their woeful cries
I met a ghost
with Adrienne's eyes
in dancing feet

weeping

She whirled and swayed
and tossed her head
Dotting the sand
with tears she shed
in the lonesome twilight

fading

Perplexed I watched
the grieving sprite
Dance before
the coming night
through troubled eyes

asking

She moaned "Of course
you couldn't know
Where souls of plain girls
often go
at sunset

thinking"

With dull regret
I began to dread
She'd ailed for things
I should've said
when we were young

playing

If now I cry
o foolish spirit
That you were beautiful
Will you hear it
and leave this place

living?

As if surprised
her whirling slowed
Upon her cheek
a lone tear showed
in the fallen darkness

glowing

She smiled
and disappeared

O the ways
that young boys play
And leave the things
they'd like to say
to young girls

waiting

Yes, Adrienne,
you are beautiful

T.J. Wills

SESTINA OF ABSTRACTION

I look around and wonder what happened to faith
the 60's movement in search of the universal soul
Seems everyone's forgotten that revolutionary spirit
settled for a more materialistic type life
No longer is there sense of hope
forgotten is the quest for truth/love

Forgotten is knowledge of what is love
lost to the winds of a dying faith
That past century may have held some hope
if only more had touched the soul
Tapped into the meaning of inner life
found strength to carry on spirit

Now people wonder what was the spirit
forget their thoughts/feelings of love
Fool themselves into content life
unable to remember much of faith
Laugh when they hear of the universal soul
have only rusty memories of what was hope

Rusty memories of what offered hope
ignorant of the loss of spirit
Separated from wisdom and knowledge of the soul
seeing only false and jaded love
Living carelessly without faith
throwing away the gifts of life

No longer fighting to live fully this life
nor keep alive the few glimmers of hope
No one tries to rediscover faith
find strength to carry the spirit
Search for the truer essence of love
look into the individual soul

Reach out for the universal soul
towards an even greater life
Risk the chances taken to really love
spread the message for new hope
Share the knowledge in the spirit
strengthen the diminishing faith

For faith in the soul
is the spirit of life
our only hope for love

by Shannon Crane

WINTER PICNIC

I remember how the sun shone through the trees
and a green bug found a home in your hair
I remember seeing monkey's faces on a leaf
and laughing with you about
things to do on a picnic

You,
with your cool, dark shades
and your classy glass of wine
Laying with your head downhill
so that the blood ran to your brain

You,
with your easy, light laugh
and your sparkling blue eyes
Laughing and loving life
losing yourself in the moment

I remember how the time stood still
and the birds sang us a love song
I remember looking out across the country
and thinking that moment was all that existed
you and me there, exposing wounds

Me,
with my shoes kicked off
and my jeans rolled up
Laying with me head uphill
so that my brain would remain clear

Me,
with my deep, husky laugh
and my searching, questioning eyes
Laughing and loving you
grasping onto that moment

Shannon Crane

SPIDER

He begins his ascent up the wall
crawling carefully along its rough surface
he looks for a way into the darker room

I watch him as he struggles
moving slowly across the barriers
he fights for access to unknown territories

At the top of the wall he pauses
surveying critically the other side
he lets out his silken thread and falls

Shannon Crane

HEART ACT TO FOLLOW

What a kidder...
I heard you say
you just wanted to play
rock and roll
it's so easy - music
but so difficult
being a human being.
I can imagine you
somewhere in Ohio now
finally settled in
sifting through the bag
of stolen hearts
brought in the back
of your El Camino
piled high with
remnants of Texas
beginning a new
journey, north this time,
feeling guilty
you had to exit
like that -
some kind of responsibility
to your audience.
And, finding a heart
missing, you remember
liberally investing
time with that one
you couldn't bring
recounting over
and over all the reasons
you ended up alone.
There's laughter
in the wake
from your one-liners
...then silence
because this time
your line was goodbye
and there's nothing
funny about that.

Christy Branch



Drawing by Chin Dang

FIRST NIGHT OUT

I love to save people. My friends say, "Ann, we never have to worry, because you do it for us!" I can usually solve anyone's problems, but not my own.

So it was only natural that when Linda came to work at Hop 'N Shop, she divulged details of her personal life to me. Of course, people do that, but with this girl, it was like a dam bursting. Between customers I learned of her dreary, sixteen-year marriage to a man who paid her no more attention than if she had been a broomstick, a man, it seems, who lived solely for television. I shook my head disgustedly when she told me of thousands of meals served in front of the set, and of how she was invariably forbidden to speak even during certain commercials. From what she told me, I gathered that their son, Robert, was a pint-sized couch potato.

Linda had left her husband shortly before she started working at Hop 'N Shop, and she was staying with her mother until she could afford her own place. She had separated the clones, and brought Robert with her. Most of the time I just let her talk--that's very therapeutic for people--but I had interjected early in our acquaintance the facts that I had gone to college for two years and do read a lot. I don't like for people to think I'm just a convenience store clerk.

After a few weeks of listening to Linda, I decided what she needed was to get out one night and have some fun. One morning as we were stocking the coolers, I broached the subject. "Linda, do you think you might like to get out of the house one night?"

"Get out?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "Get out and buy toothpaste; wouldn't that be nifty?" She swatted at me with a rag, and I continued. "You've been sitting home for years, playing poor second fiddle to a television. You need to get out one night, listen to music, talk, dance, laugh."

"I would like to," she said. "But mother wouldn't like it."

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Thirty-four," she answered.

"I'll pick you up at eight o'clock tonight," I told her. "We'll go to Jerry Mack's. It's not fancy, country western. There's a jukebox and usually a crowd of people."

I was a little late getting to Linda's that night, and I hoped she hadn't changed her mind. I knocked, and she opened the door right away.

"Ann," she said, "Come in. I'd like you to meet my mother, Louise Johnson. Mother, this is Ann Meredith." I came further into the living room, stepping over Robert. He was sprawled on the floor in front of his grandmother's chair.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," I said to Mrs. Johnson. She was cutting her toenails.

Without looking up, she replied, "Glad to know you."

"Robert, I'd like you to meet a friend of mine," Linda said to the boy. The slug did not respond. He was totally enveloped in "The Dukes of Hazzard."

"Well, are you ready?" I asked Linda.

"What movie are you going to?" Mrs. Johnson directed this question to me. Her tone was laden with undisguised suspicion.

I looked at Linda for prompting, but she only shrugged helplessly, so I said the first innocent-sounding movie title which popped into my mind: "Howard the Duck." Mrs. Louise Johnson stared at me as if I had just fallen out of a boxcar.

"Well, it's been nice meeting you, Mrs. Johnson, Robert. Let's go, Linda. We'll miss the first part." I edged toward the door. "I hate to miss the first part."

On the drive to Jerry Mack's, I filled her in on how to act, what to expect, things to watch out for.

"I don't know if I can remember all this," Linda said.

"Be cool," I told her. "Say what I say, do what I do. Feel free to ask questions."

She laughed. I was gratified to see she was developing a sense of humor.

We reached Jerry Mack's, and she almost balked, saying, "I can't go in that place, Ann! That's a dive!"

"Calm down," I told her. "You can't judge by outside appearances."

Just as we went inside, a couple left, and we were able to slither over and get their table.

"Don't dance with a guy if he's real drunk, and don't turn anyone down because he's a fossil. Sometimes the old men are the best dancers." I looked around for the waitress.

"What about someone like that guy at the bar?" she asked.

A man wearing a baby blue leisure suit and several chains was beaming at us. I sputtered out, "Linda, please! We are talking nerd! Don't look at him! He'll think we're interested!"

The waitress came over and I ordered a beer. I turned to ask Linda what she wanted to drink, but a rather good-looking guy was escorting her to the dance floor. When the dance was over, the guy brought Linda back to the table, and I immediately said, "I forgot to tell you, if a man asks you if you're married, that usually means he's married himself."

"Well, he just said I was sweet, and that he'd like to dance with me again," she told me.

"File it away for future reference," I stated. She was now smiling demurely at the same man, who was back for another dance. I went to the bathroom and killed the remainder of the song in there. When the music stopped, I went back to the table. I was taken aback by the difference in Linda's general demeanor. She was radiating confidence and self-esteem. Gone was the colorless, downtrodden woman, the female Casper Milquetoast. Another song came over the jukebox, and this time two men at once approached her. She was a bit flustered as she was forced to choose between them; but she handled it graciously, saying to the rejected suitor, "Please ask me again."

The spurned admirer had headed away, but abruptly turned back to me and commented, "How about you?"

"I don't believe," was my cool reply. I knew what Linda was going to say when she came back, and I couldn't wait to explain.

"Why didn't you dance with that man?" she asked. "He seemed nice. Was he drunk?"

"Because," I said with dignity, "You never dance with a man if someone else turned him down." I wanted to elaborate on this further, but before I could, Linda was up again and headed to the floor. I felt awkward and very bored. This wasn't my night. I considered another trip to the ladies' room, but resolved instead to concoct a headache.

The moment she sat down, I blurted out, "Linda, I'm sorry, but I have a really bad headache." She did not hear me.

"I'm so happy," she gushed. "My first night to go out, and I'm having a blast. I owe it all to you. Excuse me, I'm rattling on. What did you say, Ann?" She was already getting out of the chair. I felt as if I were watching a vertical tennis match. I just barely managed a benign smile.

I drank far more than I should have that night. As I sat there in a boozy reverie, the thought came to me that Linda was Cinderella, and I was a tipsy, disgruntled fairy godmother. The metaphor was very annoying.

Toward the latter part of the evening, I danced with the gent in the leisure suit. Somehow, his attire had become symbolic of an admirable, blase attitude toward fashion. However, his chains kept snagging on my blouse, and I sobered up considerably when he told me he liked big women because, "You don't have to hunt

all over for 'em!" He yuk-yuked heartily as he shared this repugnant philosophy.

Finally, the lights flipped on and the waitress unplugged the jukebox. One of Linda's boyfriends walked with us to the car, and I had to wait while they said good night. All the way home I listened to an excited recap of the evening. By the time we got to Linda's driveway, I discovered I desperately needed to use the restroom.

We tiptoed inside the house. The television was still on, but Louise and Robert were sound asleep in front of it. Dr. Ruth was explaining intimacy. As I was leaving, Linda whispered, "Thanks, Ann! I can't wait till we go out again!"

"I really don't go out that much," I told her. She was dejected when I said this, and for a moment--just for a moment--I felt good, powerful. Then deep shame overcame me and I added hastily, "Only on weekdays and weekends." Godmothers can never be jealous.

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