

Spring
1989

Signatures

Memento to a Jewish
Intellectual Poet

joel oppenheimer
you are dead.
i read your obituary
in the daily news
looking for
my father's obituary.
two great men i knew.
 you are dead
and i never did
write to you
in the last six months
or so.
what do you say to the
poet who is dying?

you taught me how real
it can get.
i sing your praises
not for the last time.

—*james a. habacker*

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Joel Oppenheimer (1930-88), poet, Caroline Werner Gannett Professor in the Humanities (1984-85) and advisor to Signatures (1984-85).

Unborn Flower

I am an unborn flower
a seed in the earth
Buried
safe
and
warm
As time goes by
I must rise
Shivering from the cold
or is it fear?
Fear of acid rain
Fear of feet trampling on me
Fear of being plucked by greedy hands
Then placed in a vase to
wither
and
die...
I only want to grow strong
be healthy
beautiful
and untouched
Proudly showing my colorful petals
for
the
world...

—*Ivette Bellanca*

Zoo

The caged
Panther
It walks
 back
And forth
 It stalks
Shadows,
Its wall eyes
Gasp back at me—
My own answer it—
Kill me.

"You are suffocating."

—*K. Sue MacDowell*

Poetry Winner

Untitled

I get the feeling
of (throbbingthrumming)
wheels in my head.
Turning tunes
of (throbbingthrumming)
times and places-
things I have been
Spinning in time
they-
(throb)
go nowhere.

—*Dave Cramton*

Gary, Indiana

The crossroad folk
Of America
Have gone blind

The white smoke
Spitting mountains
Have darkened their eyes

Three fingered prongs
Grouped along the sky
Inject technology in our lives

They build the skies
Sears Tower, Twin Tower
And Empire State

Their blind winter cloud
Locks in despair
In a cold weather dome

Keeping out joy
And rebirth
Of midwestern-chickory

The long beaked common snipe
No longer along the great shores
Vacations with the western winds

The high wheat stalks
Stretch their heads
Searching for the sun

Suffering only fractures
From the plume stained blue
And the water yolk

And its burdening tax
And large steel girders
Which strike at the root

—*Mitch Mitchel*

Rendezvous

It was approximately six; a calm day in a calm city. He sat on a step in the Square of Lords, and lost in a reverie he observed the surrounding buildings trying to extort their intrinsic mysteries. He was too absorbed, he did not notice.

Pigeons were flying about cooing imperceptibly; the grade and tonality of colors were shading in the atmosphere. He did not notice. He smoked two or more cigarettes; then a stray walk all round the four corners of the square; then a stop at the fountain to sip some of that everlasting springing water, swallowing a few times to better taste the freshness.

Again he sat, but on a higher step of the open gallery. On an impulse of daring generosity he undertook the role of the gallery's Grand Officer, or else

of Time. He deluded himself and at dusk he realized that Time did not necessitate a Grand Officer, but that the Officer necessitated Time.

He gave in to the task; dismissed himself and went back to day-dreaming looking up to the rectangular piece of sky. With renewed stupor he noticed the sun's reflections on the chimneys, on the antennas; he noticed the evolution of the day that wasn't any more.

At the strokes of the tower clock, he chased the hour-hand, the minute-hand of his wrist watch that eluded him. Amazed at first, then enraged, he gazed around still with hope, stupid hope. Searching for a pretext, for a reason, he lost track of himself, and did not notice.

Disappointed he stood up, uneasy he set out as someone with a stigma or a Star of David in the Nazi era. Lingered on his steps he moved away, as if the light of hope were there to guide him through the lengthening of the way. He did not go back, not even with a glance. He did not feel that someone was there thinking of him; he did not perceive that someone was there awaiting him as an absurd destiny, a day before of a year later.

She held her breath though the pounding was strong. She was to meet him at the Square of Lords just about at six, to reveal the whole truth about her feelings and emotions. Not an easy task, since her youthfulness had still the better hand. Nevertheless she was willing to try; she was willing to follow the pounding of her heart.

Her lips were dry, as the thirst of hopes increasingly possessed her every cell. It was a calm afternoon in a calm city, as of late spring warmth followed only by the lazy summertime. Not too many people were around, and those who were seemed as though they followed a smooth quiet rhythm.

The rectangular piece of sky was clear and intensely blue, and the sun's rays were piercing through every stone, leaf, and flower. She stood for a while at a corner of the square, squinting her eyes to better focus and account for anyone around. She could not see him and so decided to stroll around the square.

Maybe this way she would meet him casually and smile at him to conceal her true emotions. They would touch each other's hand just briefly, almost unnoticeably, and walk together in the declining sunlight. It did not take long before she found her image reflected on a shop's glass window, near the corner where she stood before.

She carefully examined herself to find a physical reason for her loneliness and anguish. Nothing really claimed the right for it; there was no answer as there was no real question. All she felt was numbness and confusion, the explosion and array of new emotions totally unexpected.

— What to do? — was next in a moment of lucidity.

— What to do? — was next in a moment of fear, as time evaded her.

She touched her hair slowly, turning away from her image reflected on the shop's glass window. At the sound of the strokes of the tower clock she did not turn around, not even with a gaze. She did not feel that someone was there thinking of her; she did not perceive that someone was there awaiting her as an absurd destiny, a day after of an earlier year.

—*Elena Masciangelo*

Prose Winner

Kites

When we were young my little brother and I
Tied our double rolls of string to sharp sticks,
And when the string was all let out
On that Bright and Warm and Breezy morning,
We hammered the sticks into the ground and,
Somewhat unsure at first, we stepped away.

I thought, believed, that those kites
(they seemed steady as ships)
Would stay up there forever.

Tommy and I watched those flying specks
All day and though we were tempted
There was magic about not touching the sticks,
And I remember as clear and sharp as warm breezes-
The way Tommy shouted and jumped and punched my arm
The way the sun-burnt grass crunched under foot,
The smell of the neighbor's barbecue,
And the orange-red sky as evening came on...

And I thought, believed, that those kites
(they seemed steady as ships)
Would stay up there forever.

And here, now, 15 years later,
On this Bright and Warm and Breezy morning
As I walk to class,
For perhaps the first time in 15 years
I remember as clear and sharp as warm breezes-
The way Tommy shouted and jumped and punched my arm,
The way the sun-burnt grass crunched under foot,
The smell of the neighbor's barbecue,
And the orange-red sky as evening came on...

And I'm trying to remember-
Did we pull them back to earth?
Did we let them go?
Did mother call us for bed?
Could they have crashed after all that time?

And here, now, 15 years later,
On this Bright and Warm and Breezy morning
As I walk to class,
It is suddenly very important
To know what happened to those kites-
But I can't remember.

I once had thought, believed, that those kites
(they seemed steady as ships)
Would stay up there forever-
And now I know they did.

—William Wahi



—*Susanna Cassel*

Lay Me In A Corn Field

If I were to die today
Where do you think my body lay?
Burnt in furnace golden brown
Spread my ashes all around
A blackened dust up in the sky
Fulfills a wish to want to fly
No, that's not the way I wish to lay
Polluting skies with a dull grey

In a tomb they'll lock me away
In darkness, moisture and bricks of grey
No one sees my body decay
Not even the children who come to play
Headstones are protective walls
Hiding cowboys from Indians' calls
No, that's not the way I wish to lay
A ground on which the living play

Fulfillment of a final requiem
Placed in a capsule of liquid helium
Clutter the Earth with frozen flesh
Until they can undo my death
My hair will always stay in place
And science will preserve my face
No, that's not the way I wish to lay
Hoping I'll be thawed one day

Place me in the depths of Earth
With worms and bugs that eat my flesh
Carbon, hydrogen minerals return
Make the soil fertile again
Families feed on corn one spring
This is my eternal life
Pass me down from mouth to mouth
This is how I wish to lay
Return to you which you gave to me

—*Benjamin Lee*

The Nightingale

The Nightingale has no God to worship
And yet I hear him sing,
A song for the ear
With sight to hear,
His solitary offering.

His chapel is the whole of nature
And incense in the burning bud,
His song never drones
Of sighs or groans,
He does not sing of nails or blood.

Perhaps his song is easily sung
Because he does not seek to please,
One whose word
Is scarcely heard
Among the church of flower and tree.

Some say he does not have a soul
And heaven's gate is closed to him,
Yet he hath earthly heart so light
Like angels he doth take to flight,
And leaves us bound to earth by sin.

There may be those who call me false
And charge me with earth's greatest crime,
Yet years I spent upon my knees
And sang my song that it might please,
And never heard I notes divine.

For though I knelt with eyes shut tight
And sought him hours long,
Forever was it perfect choice
To purse His lips and quell His voice,
And never did I hear His song.

"My beautiful Nightingale so wise
Whose world is found in flower and tree,
You have music hours long
And I like you have wish for song,
But where's a world to sing for me?"

—*William Wahl*

rice crispies

The morning was hot
The city had begun to simmer
Humidity like sweat
It was too damn bright
Bright enough to see the tears
Dried on her face
As she sat across the cold formica table
Staring at a bowl of Rice Crispies
Snap. Crackle Pop.
Replaced conversation
I smoked a cigarette
And watched the smoke curl in the wet air
And tried to remember our brief encounter
Tried to remember who attacked who
Strange how people think sex
Brings people closer
I wish she'd eat her crispies
And get the hell out.

—*Brian M Steblen*

Cheez Ball

O' Lonely orange Cheez Ball
sittin' so far down there
That you rest at the bottom
do you even care?

How I wish to be like you
no real cares at all
How I've come to envy you
you lonely Cheez Ball.

But it is only the fact
you look a cretin
That you unlike the others
remain uneaten.

There's something awfully green
growin' on your side
It seems to me, poor Cheez Ball,
mold shall be thy bride.

I guess I'm glad to be here
sittin' here above you
I know you're one thing that
I don't want to chew!

—*Duane Martin*

Untitled

As I bitched at my secretary
for losing the memo on the
Peterson deal while balancing a phone
on my shoulder and a boulder of appledanish
in my bowels and dripped on her my caustic sarcasm
that was caused by the president's
wife who refused him nooky-nooky last night
because he melted her gold visa,
all the while pouring my fourth cup of
brewed tarmac into my father's day mug,
I vowed that no son of mine
would aspire to anything higher
than the custodial arts.

—*Bob Conway*

Untitled

Mom,
Everybody's rolling their pants—
"What comes around,
goes around"
Full circle.
I promise myself—
 "I will not roll my pants.
 I will not roll my pants.
 I will not roll my pants."
(Knowing full well
I may)
You picked up the phone
Without even saying "Hello"
And said, "What's the book's title?"
I said,
"How'dja know?"
"I knew."
But, Mom,
Everybody's
Rolling their pants.

—*Karen Sue MacDowell*



—*Lucien Samaha*
Photography Winner

The Shower Stall Incident

I signed up for the hiking trip with a small, city-wide organization mostly because my mother pressured me into it. I didn't think I'd like it; being only sixteen, and also very naive, a month walking up and down a mountain with people I hardly knew just didn't interest me very much.

There were seven of us and Jim, the so called "platoon leader." Joe and Thomas, you could say, were the class clowns who constantly provided us with amusement. In the beginning my feelings were mutual for everyone, until Thomas began to show his true "devious self." I can't even say that I didn't like Samuel either, although I wish I did since that would have made things a lot simpler.

Every group had a Sam in it, I guess. Someone to pick on, someone to play sickeningly childish jokes on, someone to blame, and sometimes someone to beat up. It's pitiful, but you never think about it.

One of the main causes of Sam's treatment was his homesickness. At night, during the first week, he cried because he wanted to go home. He was in the same tent as Marc, and Marc tried his best to calm him down before anyone found out about it. But the news did get out. Tom was the hardest on Sam, never letting him forget for a minute his "sole" weakness. Nothing could be worse in Tom's book than crying. Nothing. Crying was worse, Tom said, than being gay.

Joe and Thomas together decided to play a cynical joke on Sam. Their plan was rather simple—they just wanted to humiliate Sam as much as possible. I didn't know they were going to do anything until later, when it was too late.

At the time, we were staying in a small camping area designed for a group of about ten people to set up their tents in close proximity. On the northwest side near two huge oak trees was a shower stall with the water pumped up from a fresh spring. You would pull the handle down and a blast of ice-cold water would hit you like a ton of bricks. Jim made all of us prom-

ise not to go near the stall when someone else was using it. A promise we seldom kept.

Sam was in the shower wearing only skimpy pants, when Tom and Joe snuck up to the stall and hid his clothes in the woods. They found a small grass snake and placed it halfway into the stall. We all knew Sam was afraid of snakes, even harmless ones. But they went one step further, and shook a rattlesnake noisemaker Tom had brought in a small souvenir store. Sam saw the snake and jumped out of the shower. The snake slithered towards him, and Sam screamed for help. I really think he thought it was a rattler, and that he was going to die.

The rest of us minus Jim, who had gone into the woods to visit the outhouse, heard him scream and ran to see what was wrong. When we got there we found him stark naked, looking around and screaming in a high-pitched voice—"Where the hell are my clothes??" The shower curtain had been torn down by Tom or Joe, and it was hanging in a tree.

So we laughed. Some of us even keeled over from laughing so hard. Sam turned beet red, and fell onto his knees. He started to cry helplessly, and feeling ashamed, I stopped laughing and took a step towards him. Then Jim showed up. He was not as amused as the rest of us.

He came running onto the field, and stopped short. He saw Sam standing there crying hysterically, naked, trying to cover himself up but not succeeding. He looked at us seriously, and said, "Where are Thomas and Joe?"

Jim didn't wait for an answer. He called out the two boys' names, and something in his voice told me that all hell was about to break loose. Tom and Joe walked out of the woods with smirks on their faces and Tom said—"What's up Doc?"

"Get Sam his clothes," Jim said coldly. Chuck let out a small laugh at this, and Jim turned to him, "Is something funny?" The sound in his voice alone made me flinch. "No, sir," Chuck replied seriously. For some reason Chuck called everyone over twenty "sir".

"Good." Tom came back with Sam's clothes and tossed them at the boy. Still crying, Sam put them on.

Jim walked over to Thomas and grabbed him by the hair. "Do you think that was funny? Is that it?" Jim screamed into Tom's face. "Just getting your kicks? Well . . . that . . . stinks!!!"

Then Sam got up, now fully clothed, and screamed in that high pitched voice he had called for his clothes in, "I hate you all!! I hate you!!!" and he bolted into the forest and was out of sight of our shocked faces in a matter of seconds.

Jim turned around and pointed to Marc, Tina, and me. "Go find him. See what you can do to calm him down." We ran off happy to be released from Jim's wrath.

After an hour had passed, everyone became alarmed. I thought, "maybe he got hurt . . . or . . ." And yes, there was that thought in my mind which I tried my best to erase. That one word was unthinkable; it was too big for us. That word was suicide; we all knew Sam might try it—he looked that demented when he ran off.

When I walked into a clearing I noticed I was pretty high up in the mountains. Less than fifty feet ahead of me was a sheer cliff which dropped nearly three hundred feet before the rolling hill cut it off. Sam stood on the edge of that cliff, looking down.

My first motion was to summon Jim. When he arrived he tried to talk to Sam. This in itself surprised me. Jim wasn't much of a talker; he was more of a gung-ho guy, who usually gave orders, rather than socialize. When Jim got within two steps of Sam, he said—"Listen man, this is not the way to go. But I'll tell you one thing, jumping off the cliff might end your problems, but think of all the sorrow and grief you're going to put your parents through and . . ." Those words just infuriated Sam even more. It's like they triggered a destruction sequence in his already confused mind. Sam jumped. But his suicide was unsuccessful. Jim moved at the same time Sam did and grabbed him—that is nearly caught him. Holding tightly, he carried Sam away from the cliff.

Back at the camp, Sam sat in his tent and talked to himself for forty-five minutes straight, in which time the Rangers who were summoned arrived.

Jim looked at each of us with disgust on his face. Then he cleared his throat and said, "Right now, Sam is in the hospital." We all stared at him. I don't think anyone realized the implications of his statement except me and maybe Marc. "I think he'll be in the mental ward under treatment for a while," he said, and this time almost everyone looked shocked.

Jim's face showed a person enraged enough to kill someone. "What are you going to tell me? That it was all a joke? Well ha-ha, very funny. It would have really been funny if he had jumped off that cliff, wouldn't it? We could have all stood around and laughed."

"Come on man. That's not funny," Marc said.

"No it's not funny at all. None of it is. But some of you thought it was, right Tom?" Tom was in a sort of shellshocked state of mind, and made no motion to show he even heard Jim. I almost felt sorry for him—almost. He really deserved what happened.

"And the rest of you aren't angels, either. Aside from Marc, you're really as bad a Tom!!" An immediate feeling of indignation filled my body as though I thought for a moment that I should be included with Marc. Then I felt embarrassed at my thoughts. I was wicked like the rest of them; in fact, I was worse. I was his friend. But Marc wasn't all that innocent either.

Marc seemed to agree with me, at least on the last account. He said, "No man. I was in it too."

"You're right," said Jim. "None of you are angels. You are the lowest scum on the earth. They told me I'd hike with teenagers. Human beings. Not monsters. I refuse to be with you any longer."

My eyes, which had slowly drifted to the fire again, shot back up to Jim's face.

"This trip is over. Tomorrow we hike to the nearest place from which we can get the bus home. You can all explain to your mommies why their little darlings got kicked out of their hiking trips."

We sat there for a moment, letting the message sink in. I guess, deep down, we all knew that it was going to happen. Jim said that he called the Greater New York City Youth Club and told them of his position. Our parents were being notified and from this point on I knew that I was in for a serious reaming. After that little "chat" with us, Jim went into the woods where I thought he was answering Nature's call, but he was in there for a long time. I guess he just wanted to be alone.

—*Michael Maharaj*

Coming of Age in 3 parts

Night spot
Hit the town
Make the rounds
Don't go alone
phone home.

Lights are flashing
looking dashing
the place is filling
and everyone's spilling.

The hours pass
more go, then come
the place is dying
and I'm still crying
'cause I stayed home.

Oh red cardinal,
how you stick out,
against the green foliage of summer,
and the white snow of winter.
how you dare to be different.
No, you were born different.

All of a sudden
you become part of the jury.
People walk by you in colors of
black, white, yellow, pink,
multi: Why?
Leaning against the wall
you blend in with the lockers.
Sunglasses hide your eyes,
And no one knows
if you're putting the verdict,
on them.

—*Jill Sgamma*

Life In The Fast Lane
(sonnet)

The heat of torque is raised and cracks
as sole mates floor. Hearts pound from roar and cheer,
when start is near, in expectation of smack.
As green is waved, it's clear, that over steer

May change the years. At one brief error it's fair,
they say, that stake may end without a friend.
Soon chirps from tread, as gear is changed, may dare
the other, perhaps the sleek to run for the end.

Asbestos rules the air it seems, as wheels
begin to grow and glow, and vulcan dust
soon accumulates, on angles where they deal.
Frequency rises vision is blurred, trust

Is given to One in fear. Nerves on edge,
and life so dear, what drives them? to the ledge.

—Randy Strausser

Jealousy

I never
thought
of her
as Sex
before

•

Until another
Man
Walked
into the
Room

•

For her

•

—John D. Greb

Etches

"What's wrong with Kevin?" Mark asked. His friend was sitting alone on the balcony on a cold October night, staring off into space. Someone mentioned that he'd been out there for quite some time, so he decided to take some action.

"Kevin, what's wrong?" he asked bluntly, shutting the sliding glass door silently behind him. He seated himself beside the troubled freshman and looked into the starry Rochester sky. "Pretty strange for it to be so clear, isn't it?"

"The sky, you mean."

Mark looked over at him and narrowed his eyes. "Of course." What else could he have meant by it?

"Have you ever wanted to die, Mark?"

"Many times. I just never really got around to it, though."

"Right now, I'm seriously considering it."

"Ah, The Old Rochester Depression claims yet another victim." He leaned back against the glass, steeling himself for the sloppy spilling of guts that he knew would soon follow.

"You know why I'm so upset, Mark. The entire floor knows how I feel about her. It almost killed me to see the two of them growing so close, you know? I'd finally decided to try my luck at love again . . . and then this." He reached into his jacket. "Want a beer?"

"Stupid question!" Mark laughed, popping the top and drinking greedily. Sighing in contentment, he decided the only way to help Kevin was to tell him his own feelings about life.

"Listen, Kevin. This isn't any reason to get upset. Hell, there's a hundred different girls here that are better than she is or ever will be. There's even some out there who'd prefer you over him any day. There has to be."

"You sound awfully sure of that."

"I have to be. It's the only thing that keeps me going. It's my rational reasoning for the irrationality of love. Here I am, nineteen, and I've never even bed a girl or even had a girlfriend! I need that optimism to live every day as it comes." He took a big healthy gulp, suddenly hating his sobriety.

"Your past is to be respected rather than ridiculed, Mark."

"It's ruined my entire life, though. I don't know how to handle myself in a relationship. Any girl I nail is gonna have to be awfully patient and understanding." He sighed forlornly. "I don't think many of them want to take the time to do that."

"Love sucks. It twists us around in hopes of happiness, but it brings us nothing but frustration,"

"Times like this really make me wonder about God. There's no rationale for this desperate need for affection we have. How can a true, loving God permit something like this to be?"

"You know," Kevin said gratefully, "I'm glad I'm not alone in this."

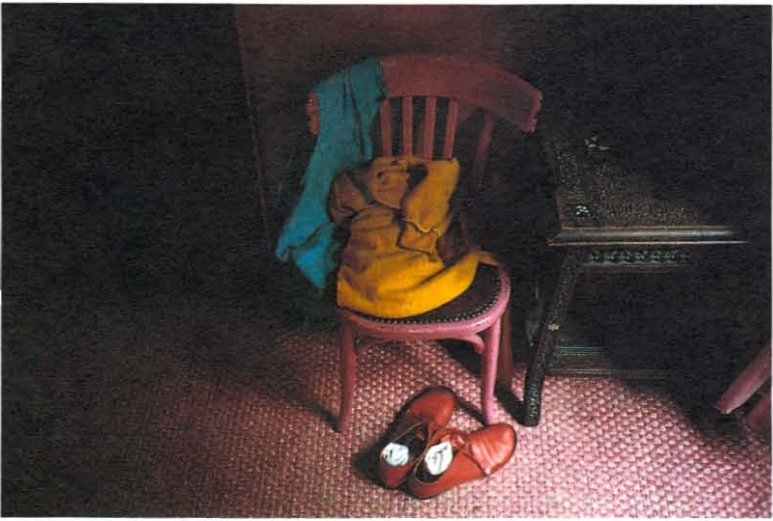
"We never are, Kevin."

He tossed the empty can into the hollow darkness. As one they watched it slowly sail away from them and disappear into the night. They heard it rattle briefly against the ground, then they were seduced by their depression once again. He looked nervously over at Kevin.

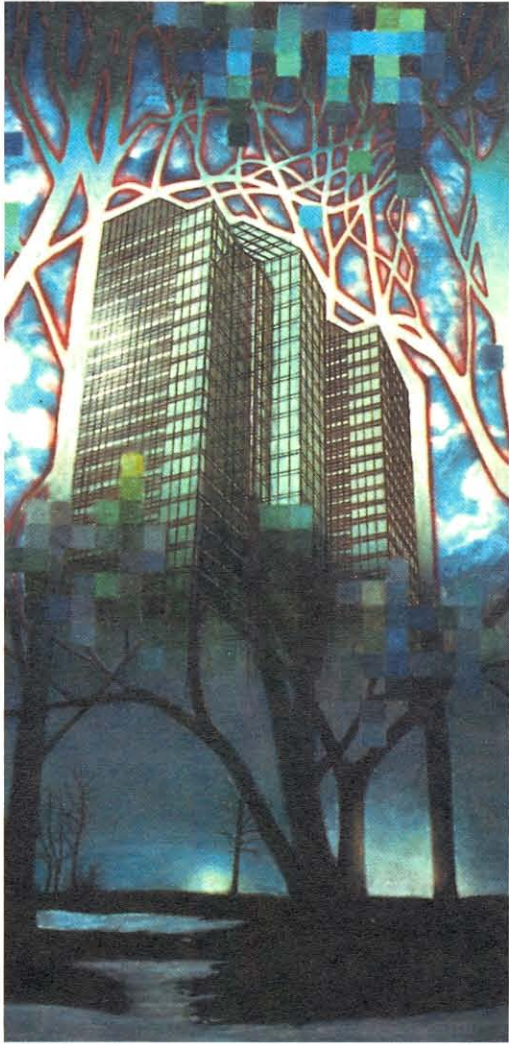
"Even in our solitude we can never be alone."

Turning away to stare outward, he realized he desperately needed another drink if he was going to make it through this long night.

—Duane Martin



—*Lucien Samaha*



—Matthew Shultz

Design Winner

Petroleum Jelly

I live in a huge sphere,
Which has a midget door
Half hidden in the yellow mist:
The mist reminds one of old mornings.
Old mornings of streets and first rustlings,
As the night's dark and grey fog (and drunk evening)
Is illuminated into a dirty yellow (headache...).... ..
On the street a man appearing from the side door,
(and free from grease) and enlivening the rustle,
Like another swing of a twig still on a tree
And (the twig) stirring up
Some more of the leafy burnt yellowness of Fall.

The breeze has still not come and I'm still lying
In a sphere. Only the midst defines it.
The midget door, light passing through in straight lines
Seems to drain away all the soul of one's solitude.
At other times: the sphere disappears into oblivion..
..of the mind, my mind, and the door seems to be an opening..!
..But it is not so _____.
Insects seem invisible. Spheres seem visible; Doors seem images.
Like the door in its frame. Otherwise a frame..
Then, there is an end to the haze.
I can see the carving on the closed door.. ..When it appears.
It reminds me of the remembrances, and I want to
Keep the images real again and again and gain. I want them to keep coming
and keep becoming part of my life.
°°Ever imagined life in a carved door (halfway up)°°°°.
I live in a carved door. I forget about insects? And can come up with this?
Forget about it; you're in America.

—*Shumsheeu*

Untitled

I think the fire is finally out.
I almost didn't
recognize you
but I remembered your
stride.

“She has
changed you”

Now you are underground
You cover your tracks
no one sees

Almost,

I do not want to see
I do not force myself
to look
at what used to
pierce my soul
I do not want to see
bland gaping dead-fish-eyes
void of energy.

So,

I stare at my feet

Still.

It doesn't hurt anymore
I am “comfortably numb”
So melts the frost.
I force myself
to turn away.

—*Karen Sue MacDowell*

Midnight

Midnight;
it's raining outside.
I'm soaked
to the bone,
but it's better than an empty bed.

—*Tracey Amey*

Farewell Charlie Parker . . .

Raw tears
of blood.
The crazy breath,
the smile,
the tightened jaw,
the sweaty palms,
the hard core juice
of a lonely soul
that cries out
life
and raw blood tears . . .

Remember

Remember

Remember

the senseless cry,
the pain that struck out
in a few drops
of human notes.

—*Elena Masciangelo*

“Epitaph Arcanum”

Doves, black doves! Hear them move slowly, deliberately in the restfulness of their tombs. Inside their lake of darkness, they flutter, ghosts. They are trapped inside a wooden box, dancing; slow macabre movement to haunting bone-flute music. They move as if they dangle from long threads into witches' heaving bosoms. Their limbs stretch and groan against bonds, yet they smile, encased in night-imitation.

They whisper, those thirteen, mocking the grace of swans. Blood damp voices confronting wisdom with wry smiles. Box of swollen boards holds these doves. Beautiful, rambling, forming diabolic suggestions that linger upon their mouths. Soft and cold and small; a handful of nightmares. My head of nailed boards filled with velvet sorrows.

—from "The Epitaph," by *A. Delphine*

You Took Off My Dream

you took off my dream
on the onset of living
we are given the foundation
who only grow
when true
thesis of the toilet
is more beer with fat laughter
crying like the leaves that turn to porridge
that rustle with squirrels
that sound like deer
and friends against the wind
lights have turned to concrete
the neon black
memory flashes turn fuzzy
i do not see god
god died before my eyes
as planes drop
life history poetry oh butterfly
sexuality is concern with itself
fucking with love is like a license to kill
since the abortion
i did not know own death
i do not blame
god and universe and man and woman = 1
old woman gave me youth
in the room is nothing but a room
with traffic
noise
silence
television is filled with snow
when i was in my youth
i always wonder how the snow
found its way
into the t. vee especially
during the summer
i am my morning self
remembering the champagne
up in the sky
remembering the peace that is deceived
when you used the child in the form of a lie
up in the morning in a groggy wake
waiting for the dripping coffee
drip dioxins
swimming in the air

no clams casino
no oysters on the half-shell this evening
hammer on the finger is the world
sweats within the heart
wash my feet
my best friend
baptize me without
the holy spirit
flush me through the world
without the fiber food
you will have corn beef hash syndrome
china gave us chairmen mao fireworks in food
so cook me a new life
consumes the sun fully clothed
the sky has jumped into 12 pieces
i gave the tears of venus
to my love
i was next to you on the globe
great railroad footprints
lost in the snow flakes
fire lost in the coldness
the violent shiver of the gentle soul
still sings at dawn
will be better
for the north american laugh will not laugh in the white house
fills us with patriotic values
are misguided
missles are disarmed
star wars is god of reagan
world is not a poem
myths speak of secrets
morals turn to dogs
my innocent muse revolution
saw you i
had no variety in life
so they left peace
beauty willingness to kill
the american way of poverty
frustration
so i cried and no one saw
life
bye black sky
hello blue
broken house is the eye
curled into living
that is your smile
can make the cold wind beautiful
because i can feel it
when you took off my dream

—John D. Greb

Obsession

I sit in my comfy chair reading
escapist fare, trying to get my mind
off you
I see us talking
and laughing, touching
walking in the rain
I see you walking in the rain
with him
book hits floor
I walk around, I do figure eights in my living room
I see my phone
should I call you?
I listen to your voice on a tape I saved
from my answering machine
I want to talk to you
but then, I'm the one who always calls
you never have the time, do you?
do you?
phone hits wall
I pick it up, still a dial tone, good
I sit down on the floor, pull my legs to my chest
holding on. Hold on. Try to relax
I try to evict you from the space
you rent in my head
but still you creep back
Again. Again. Again.
fist hits head
Please. Please. Please go away
please leave me alone
you never loved me, or anyone, you
only think about yourself

please call me

—*Brian M. Steblen*



—Lucien Samaha

Joel

I watched the little black children poking at the ice on Lake Michigan with supple willow branches as if making their contribution to the hastening of spring. They needn't have bothered, for Mother Nature was well on her way to Chicago and had bestowed the city with its first eighty-three degree day in at least eight long months. The sky above pealed with the laughter of the wind as I tugged at the corners of my paisley scarf, trying, in vain, to fasten it more tightly under my chin. The wind blew off the surface of the lake into my face with strangely icy fingers which ran chills up my spine. The Mighty Michigan looked very unlike its nickname today. It seemed more calm than usual, despite the winds, as I peered across its cold, desolate, yet smooth surface, interrupted here and there where a patch of ice was missing. The granite-colored water lapped at the concrete platform my bench sat upon as if trying to get back at me for some personal harm. How long had it been? Five years? Ten? I was really looking forward to seeing Joel again. We hadn't seen each other since Oberlin. What had provoked him to call me at one in the morning and tell me to meet him here at noon? Did he want to talk? I scanned both entrances to the park doubtfully and fidgeted uncomfortably on the bench as the lake again pushed forth its wintry gusts despite the apparent retaliation of spring. Suddenly I felt a light tap on my shoulder and I spun around alarmed, guarding my purse as only everyday Chicago life could have taught me. I met strangely familiar eyes as I rested my gaze on the—stranger? No, I knew this man. He wore the dirtiest Levis' I had ever seen, equally dirty, sturdy laced work boots, and a tee shirt labeled "If you think a torte is an Italian dessert," and on the back "you need a lawyer." that looked as if it had been shot full of holes. My eyes traveled up over the tangled mass of an amber-colored beard to meet the disturbed depths of his.

"Hello, Samantha," he said quietly. "I hope I haven't disturbed you?" It was a question I couldn't answer as I stared in shock at Joel's appearance. He got the message and seemed about to explain.

"Joel...", I whispered. When I didn't elaborate he continued.

"I knew I could count on you, Sam," he said, as if in awe that someone would actually listen to him. "How are you?"

"What's—happened to you, Joel?" I examined him again. I gulped visibly when I noticed he was wearing a pair of stainless-steel handcuffs and rushed on to cover my fear. "You used to be so...different."

Joel frowned and shook his head as he seemed to come to a decision. "Yeah, well I've changed my ways, Sam," he said, resolute and angry at the same time. He motioned to the huge handcuffs nervously with his eyes.

"What have you done?" I asked, suddenly apprehensive as an evil gleam flickered in his eyes. As well as I knew Joel, I knew that had his hands been free he would have rubbed the back of his neck; a sign that, even as a child, had meant he was agitated.

"Not as much as you apparently think," he retorted, annoyed and hurt at the same time. I didn't have an answer so I sat in the silence, so strained I could have cut it with a knife. A knife! Had Joel-? No, not Joel. He wouldn't. As I sat contemplating, Joel dropped heavily beside me on the bench and released a long sigh. His head dropped back and his eyes closed. A lock of his strange reddish hair had positioned itself in the middle of his forehead with the help of a playful breeze. I reminisced about the days when Joel and I were young. I could remember the day that Joel caught the twenty-five pound trout at Canaby Lake, the camping trip with Dad to Yosemite, the day I fell out of Mr. Jacobs' tree while trying to pick a prize peach. I had broken my arm and Joel had taken me to the hospital. I could remember it all as if it were yesterday. We had had a hard time explaining to Dad and Mr. Jacobs what we were doing in the orchard so Mr. Jacobs had come up with the brilliant idea that since we both liked peaches so much we should pick the whole orchard. It had taken us an entire week to pick the orchard clean and since my arm was in a cast, Joel had done most of my share of the work without complaint. What had happened to him? Where had he been since our years at Oberlin? Why was he wearing handcuffs? I decided to get some answers from Joel but when I looked at him he was fast asleep. Out of indecision whether to let him sleep or wake him up, I got up quietly and tiptoed away.

I slept badly that night. I had nightmares about Joel pushing me out of Mr. Jacobs' peach tree and cutting it down on top of me. I woke up screaming "But Joel, we're best friends!" Mrs. Humphnagel upstairs started banging on her floor with what I knew was a broomstick and cursing in Swedish. I stopped immediately. When Mrs. Humphnagle knocked, people listened. I got out of bed shivering for no particular reason and dashed into a scalding shower to calm my nerves. I think it had just the opposite effect because Mrs. Humphnagel was knocking again.

I ate a breakfast of Cocoa Puffs and Tang while staring out the bay window into one of the densest patches of fog I had ever seen. I thought about Joel. It didn't matter to me anymore what he had done because I owed him. I owed him a lot. We'd been the best of friends and he'd saved my life more than once; now I'd save his.

I knew he would be in the park that morning so I dressed quickly, adding mittens and a raincoat at the last minute as I dashed out the door. The air was cooler than I thought it would be and some form of precipitation loomed in an ominous cloud above my head as I crossed the street in front of my apartment building. Unconsciously I quickened my pace in order to reach the park but I slowed when my path became obstructed from my view by the fog. I bet the traffic is great downtown in this fog, I thought absently.

I reached the park without incident and the gate creaked as I slipped inside and made my way blindly to my favorite bench. My heart pounded as I approached and saw that someone was already there. As I got closer I realized it was Joel and he appeared to be asleep in the same position as I had left him in last night. I smiled as I imagined myself sneaking up and tickling him awake but my smile more than died as I sat beside him. He looked twice colder than I. The dew had kissed his face, the wind lifted neither his heart nor his chest, and it rained then, for as long as I can remember.

—Cristine Shauger

Haiku 1

I dress in black and
read Baudelaire at night and
watch other men laugh

Haiku 2

shimmering white gems
only visible at deep dusk
a lily floats by

Haiku 3

dew on soft, long grass
reflects thousands of July suns
that cool to the touch

Haiku 4

the open hands that touch
slowly, softly, can also
close and crush your heart

—*Brian M. Steblen*

Broken China

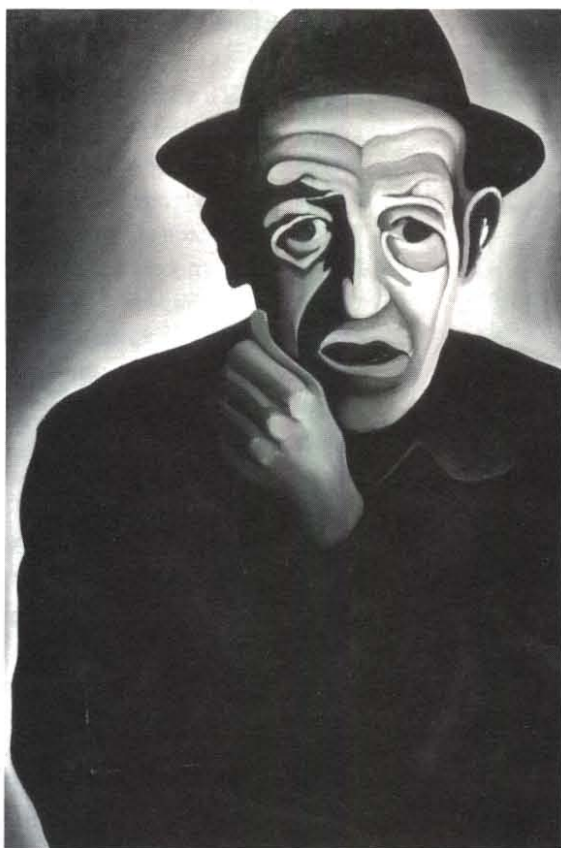
She held me at a delicate distance
Between her thumb and index finger-
A fragile china tea cup.
I placed both hands carefully under her
To feel what warmth of steam might
Draw up against my cheeks.
"Be careful," I whispered.
One evening she was distracted by a man-
Her cup slipped and shattered.
She said, "I'm sorry," but the
Broken china looked like
Pieces of gold to her.

It took me six months to realize I'd never
Find a broom and a dust pan and as
Careful as I was I cut myself on the pieces.
I patched it best as I could.

Now we're wonderful friends because
"You can always be friends, of course,"
All laughter and smiles too.
She always says, "Remember the fun we had?"
I say "Yes" and slink away to think
Of how she looked in the dim sweaty
Nakedness of the moonlight that slithered
Through her window and painted her soft skin.

The glue never dries it seems
And if I'm not careful
The scars peel apart and it's then
I'll hold my hands up to the light
To watch the blood trickle
Down my fingers and palm.

—*William Wahl*



—Michelle DeMeyer

Let Me Walk In My Garden

The siren pierces the night like an injured cat howling at the moon. The roller-coaster ride has begun in an attempt to answer a victim's plea. With the siren still blaring the victim is overcome by an anxious fear, unsure of what awaits outside in the street. Three technicians erupt from the vehicle completely ignoring the step which leads to the street. They run towards their victim, who waits helplessly inside a house. The three technicians reach the door and knock it down with a thunderous crash. They reach the victim, who by now, after hearing the thunderous applause of the door and the screeching introduction of the siren, is in fear, more afraid of the onrushing technicians than the pain which rips at her chest.

There is no greeting or explanation, only words too large for anyone to understand. The technicians embark on their journey to save a helpless victim. They crowd around the body like ants around chocolate. The victim feels the air grow stale and meek. One technician thrashes his hand into his bag as he mechanically says "everything will be okay." Fifty cc's of this and twenty more of that, poke, jab and clear, as they inject the body with drugs with names so long that they must use non-distinguishable abbreviations. None of the events are comprehensible to the quickly disheartened patient. Gripped by a fear of death, a chill runs from the victim's toes, through her chest into her brain, finally arriving in the

outside world. "She's going into shock," shouts a technician as he immediately covers her legs with a blanket. All the comforts of home.

A glowing screen is assembled to the right of the victim. Its blinking eye peers down, surveying the victim's well being. Beep, beep and then all is quiet except a long shrilling sound signifying no heartbeat. One technician rips the victim's shirt open and starts to beat on her chest in a ritual-like fashion. This ritual is known as CPR, no name just initials. The monitor still shrieks as the technicians get a little nervous. All comforting conversation directed at the victim is changed to technical jargon among the technicians. Suddenly a technician emerges with two electrodes. He readies the electrodes and shouts "stand clear." The electrodes send a pulse to the victim's chest and through the motionless body. She arches like a dolphin diving out of water; no response. Again this process is repeated until finally the beep, beep from the observing monitor is heard.

The victim, once near a state where she would never have seen the vegetables in her garden again, is finally in a condition to be transported to a hospital. She is readied, wrapped in several blankets and injected with a pint of unknown fluid. She is placed on a bed with wheels and carted to the vehicle waiting in the street. The cat is once again set free and the vehicle is set in motion. Inside beeping monitors stare coldly as technicians administer necessary care. The siren screams louder and louder as time goes by. The vehicle ricochets from pot-hole to pot-hole and the victim is jounced from side to side.

The vehicle comes to a screeching halt and the cat is once again silenced. The victim, now very much stabilized, is removed from her present cell and transported to ER, again initials. Here several doctors crowd around as if truly concerned about this poor victim. They, like the technicians before them, poke and jab in a further attempt to make the victim as comfortable as possible. When all are satisfied that the victim is most comfortable, she is taken to a room in a section known as ICU. It is here the patient decides on whether to return to reality or drift away.

The intensive care unit (ICU) is located on the second floor of the hospital. It is here the victim jockeys between consciousness and unconsciousness. The surroundings are stale, impersonal, almost inhuman. The air is rotten and medicated; it feels as if the air in the room has been there since construction and for sanitary reasons has been recycled and cleaned. It's used air. The walls are barren yet reflectively clean; as a bed-bound victim you wonder if they were polished while you slept. As the victim regains consciousness she awakens in a strange, cold place finding tubes running from every opening in her body to various machines. Machines which are cold stare down with a blinking dot or a pen running crazy over long sheets of graph paper. At this point the victim becomes confused, wondering where she is; her heart races wildly and the watching dot begins to run wildly up and down upon the monitor. The pen scribbles faster, if that is possible. She reaches desperately for something; her reach is like that of a drowning swimmer grasping for land only to find water. Slowly the victim, confused, frustrated and alone, drifts, drifts to her garden; her garden a place where she knows where she is and what she should do. She picks the tomatoes and cucumbers off the vines and wanders off to a deep sleep. The monitor then shrieks and madness erupts. Doctors rush into the room and what is known as a crash unit is summoned.

The unit arrives like a robot from a cheap science fiction movie. Observers move about the confined room like bees around honey. They all attend to the fading victim as if actually caring, but all around technicians scurry about without a friend in sight. Doctors grab and shout; the victim is once again poked and jabbed. The scene is now all too familiar to the unconscious victim. She tries to run and hide behind a large vine in her garden, but it's no use because the jabs will not let her find peace. Another shirt is torn urgently from the victim's chest. The electrodes are once again applied and the dolphin arches out of the sea only to come crashing back down. The victim drops her tomatoes and cucumbers and the dot returns to its normal pace of beating. A doctor scribbles on a clipboard and the cold cell is left barren once again; the victim is beside herself.

Alone she is able to attend to her chores of picking up the tomatoes and cucumbers she had dropped. She does this ever so slowly, taking great pleasure in examining the results of her labor. The tomatoes are something she understands, something she has cared for with her own hands and has control over. She can eat them or simply cast them away; back within the room of staring monitors and stale air she has no control or understanding. She's left in the care of doctors whose concerns are saving the victim's life, not tending to her needs.

What appears as only hours to the gardener are in fact days to the hospital staff. Doctors periodically check the victim's room to see if she has returned from the garden that only she can see. Upon seeing her motionless form, the doctor enters the room; he then scribbles on the clipboard at the foot of the bed. His style is similar to the beat of the monitor which keeps a watchful eye on the victim's heartbeat. The doctor leaves and a nurse enters apathetically. She removes one of the tubes from the victim's arm and replaces it with another. This is done without any notice of what has been occurring within the victim. The intravenous line could be one of a hundred tubes the nurse has changed in the last hour. Many people enter the room, coming and going, but none of them are friends. The victim still lies uninformed; she has no one with whom to share her fears, her interests or her tomatoes, just herself. She wanders within her garden collecting the tomatoes and cucumbers, only slightly aware of the actions within her room. Finally she picks up the last tomato and then once again the watchful dot goes into a frenzied epileptic fit and then finally calms down until it races in a straight line across the monitor. Several doctors rush into the room followed by the initialized god known as CPR. He presses the body's chest, muttering some inaudible sounds under his breath. It's no use though; the god fails and the electrodes are once applied as they were in the previous two encounters with death. A pulse is sent throughout the body like a message calling to the victim to come inside from her garden; the body arches but the dot still races unimpaired. The doctor then calls for fifty cc's of some milli-syllabled drug. He taps the edge of the needle and then thrusts it into the body hoping the sharp pain will give this body some life. Still the dot races. The electrodes are applied once more but it's no use; the dot is content on racing in a straight, unimpaired path. There are no more tomatoes. The jabs and pokes stop, the dolphins are left to rest in the depths of the sea, and the doctor admits defeat; in a final act of defiance he turns off the racing dot.

—Benjamin Lee

A Bedfull of Secrets

Somewhere there lies
an empty bed
in a cold room.
A window
closed and locked.
A hardwood floor
aged for decades.
Time passes.
The door opens.
A stream of light
streaks across the bed.
Her delicate foot
meets the floor
sending a shiver.
Her eyes peer inward
wide with curiosity and fright.
She slips gracefully into the room
and walks to the window.
Looking out, she sees snow
settling in the winter dusk.
She pivots on her foot
facing towards the bed.
Slowly, she moves to its side.
Placing her delicate hand
on the worn blankets
she draws them by
and crawls into the creaky bed.
Slowly to sleep.
Quick to dream.
Somewhere there lies
an empty bed.
Full of secrets.

—*Derek Duprass*

He and She

Sometimes when SHE talks to HE
In a certain way, HE gets angry,
And it's not so much what SHE said,
But that a SHE said it,
And it's all because SHE has a ONE
And HE has a different ONE.

HE never stops to think,
"I feel this way when
SHE speaks this way because
I have a ONE which can stick out
And poke at things,"
And SHE never stops to think,
"I must not speak this way
Because I have a ONE
Which is very much like a hole."

And while HE gets angry listening
To SHE speak in a certain way,
A very old and hidden part of HE
Is writhing and seething and screaming,
"I AM HE AND I HAVE A ONE
AND IT CAN STICK OUT AND POKE AT THINGS
AND SHE IS SHE AND ONLY HAS A ONE
WHICH IS VERY MUCH LIKE A HOLE."

So when HE gets angry at SHE
For speaking in a certain way,
It is all because of just so much
Bone and flesh and rushing fluids
Pushing itself up against so much
Bone and flesh and rushing fluids.

—*William Wahl*

Untitled

It was saturday and i got this letter from the bank in the mailbox said i bounced another check by a couple dollars and they had to fine me i was kind of mad because i figured they messed up not me but its saturday so i have to wait till theyre open to fix it so i forget about it till monday as soon as theyre open i give them a call and am pleasantly told it would not happen again but theyd still have to fine me so i get really mad and decide to go there in person and maybe yell a little bit i was real mad so i get in my car and drive there real fast so i dont relax myself at all i get in and go to this guy at his desk ive got a big wrench in my pocket and really hope he sees it and thinks ive got a gun guns are probably good things to carry when youre mad even if theyre empty cause you can really scare someone if you want i tell him they messed up and he tells me to sit down BUT I DONT CAUSE IM

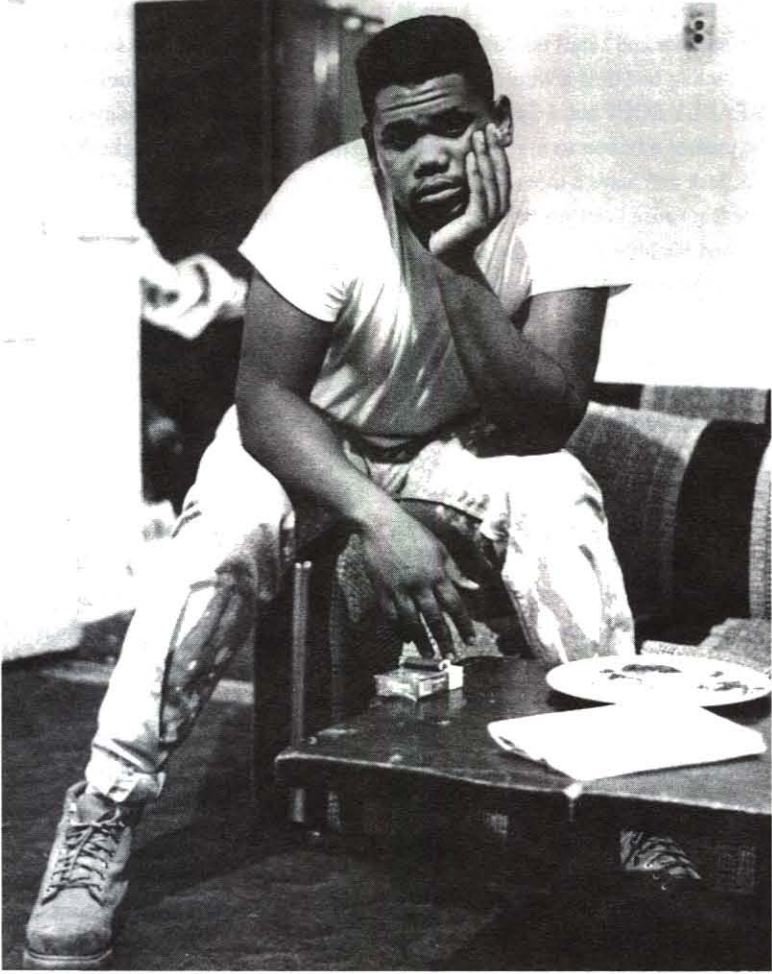
REAL MAD and want him to know it so i stand and he goes away to look at a computer and i start thinking about how i can get HIM real mad so he ends up feeling bad or if it would be hard to SCARE HIM maybe he looks REALLY SOFT but I figure a guard would come out and take me away after he presses a button so maybe ill just rip up my checks and stuff right there on his desk and leave a mess for him to clean up im real glad now i didnt wipe my feet cause i can see my tracks in from the door and am kind of soiling all around his little desk but he comes out and says OK HE GIVES UP and i dont know what to say without sounding grateful so i just say ok goodbye and go home kind of quiet

On this saturday also a friend of mine drove out to my house cause he wanted to try to fix up this car he bought we tried pretty hard to fix it but we didnt really know what we were doing so we thought it would be better to take it to some guy with all the parts and just pay him we figured wed go and get the parts from a junkyard cause theyd cost less we drove there and went into the little office by the junkyard gate it was pretty sunny out so when we first walked in we couldnt see much you know but pretty soon we knew there were a lot of guys just hanging around and we had kind of interrupted none of them or all of them looked in charge so we were all just kind of quiet then my friend asks some guy for the parts and im glad HE DID because these guys didnt seem too NICE like theyd try to make you feel stupid for any little thing but they were alright and they had it but we didnt have any cash which was all they really wanted so we figured wed come back some other time with cash and also be more in charge of the situation the next time

Well we went back there all right but this time only one guy was in the office so we werent so intimidated as before we figured wed go and get the parts we needed but we needed a hex wrench so we had to borrow it from this guy i thought hed make us BUY IT or something but he was really an ok guy we walked out and went to work getting the parts but it was cold out and snowy and i was getting a really bad headache on top of this so i just sat down a little bit in one of the junkers and watched my friend work some my feet were all wet and i had cut myself so i was really glad to rest after a while we have everything we need and its time to carry it all up to the car its pretty heavy so were kind of relieved when the guy from the office shows up on this cart they use to run around the yard because he wants to close up he says hell get the stuff if we want so were pretty grateful and we get up there and load it all up and pay him our cash and get going

We decide to get some coffee on the way back home so we stop at this friendly looking diner but it turns out to be kind of a family restaurant setup so im worried theyll make us eat a whole dinner or yell at us or something for taking up their seats but this big schoolteacher of a waitress comes over and we order coffees and its ok this big guy and his wife in the corner get these big platters of spaghetti and we get our coffee i look at my wet feet under the table and theres lots of mud and the snow all melting off my boots onto their whitish floor i feel kind of bad like this schoolteachers going to have to clean up after us but i look around and all the other tables have big puddles under them too i tell myself its ok and just sit and watch this big guy and his wife eating their spaghetti dinner plates out of the corner of my eye as we drink up our coffee

—P Hraber



—Jeff Cook

—Dave Cramton

Outgrowth

No mask
nor camouflage.
Naked, unmarked body
and bright, deep,
white light.
The shadow lies
beneath the feet
and also a little ant.
A split
and fall
of a single hair.
A black thread
corrupts the light
as the fall
takes place.
The ant is free.
Itinerary has not yet
been decided.
Outward.
Sideways.
The naked body
moves
as a ghost
in the mist.

—*Elena Masciangelo*

Goodbye

The sad music slowly plays
As the train clatters away
Memories together slowly fade
But never disappear
This is goodbye

—*Benjamin Lee*



Cover by Elena Masciangelo