



# CURARE

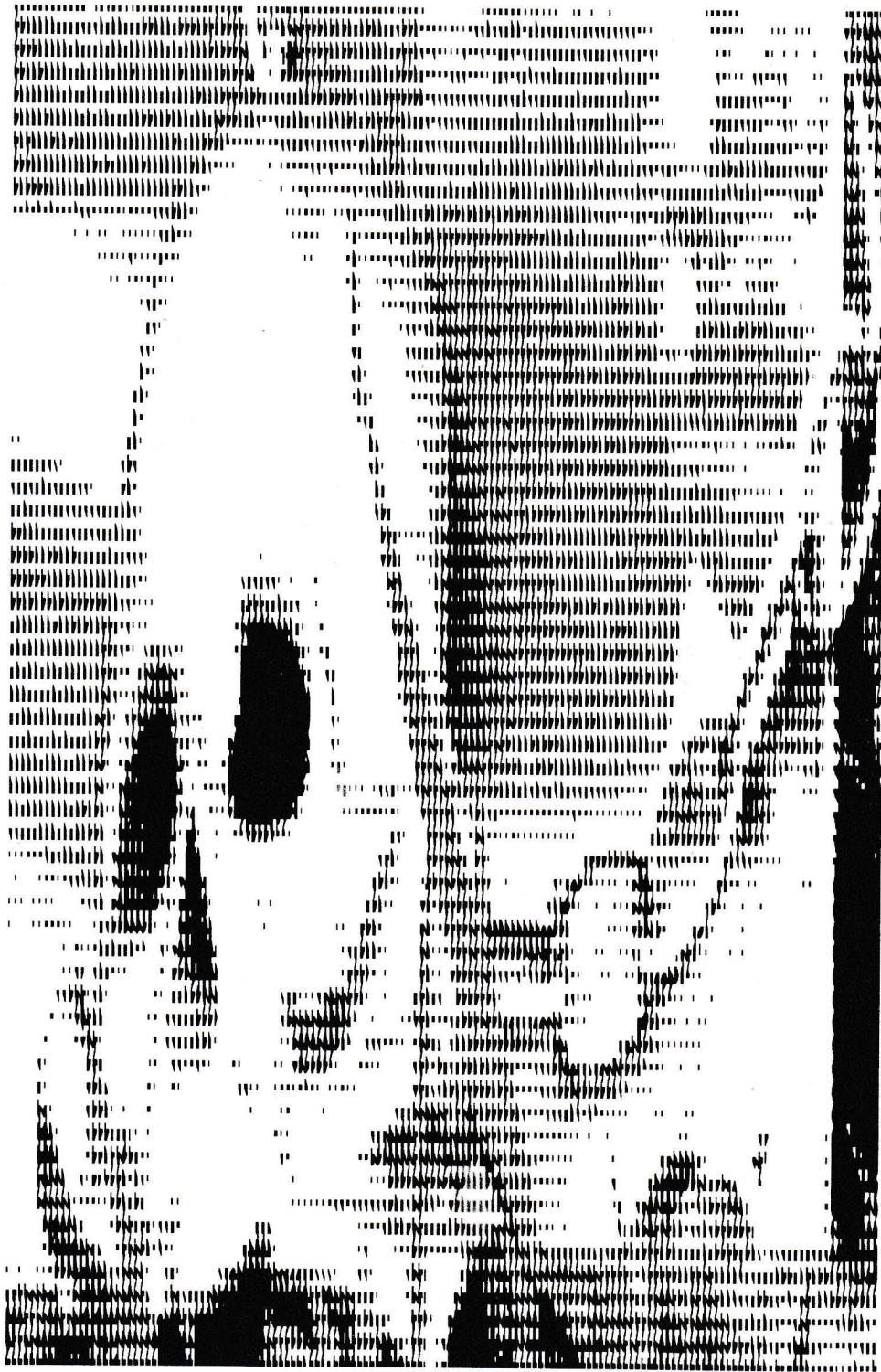
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# C U R A R E



## Rage-O-Rama - A Column for the No Future by J.D. Rage

Finally we have issue #6 of CURARE. A lot has happened in the interim. Sickness and death - Anthony and Monica to name a few - and Marco who OD'ed and what is this country without its apparent grandfather and God George Burns? I have been thinking too much about death lately and I have been engaging it in a game of chicken. Enough desolation. Now I'll give a word of warning to those writers seeking an agent like I half-heartedly am. I received an unsolicited letter in the mail from an agent called Alex Kamaroff asking me to submit my novel. Of course he erroneously addressed me as Mr. Rage, so I was already suspicious and of course as a certified paranoid and champion sceptic I wasn't even going to answer. I did though, because there's still that little inside part that believes in me, that believes I am a good enough writer to have an agent -- to have a novel published even. So I wrack my brain about which of my novels to send, completed or not completed and so on. I give my chapters to Jan Schmidt to make sure they are perfect for submission. Then I put them in the mail, after shelling out money for postage and return postage. In three days I have it back - with a letter telling me how much promise Mr. Rage shows and asking for the rest of the novel along with a \$95.00 reading fee. Need I say more??? Then, an unnamed NY Press writer did a truly disgusting article about tattooed people. He also, or if not him another writer just like him, did a stupid treatise on drug addiction where he basically told the youth of our city that it was just fine to use heroin. I held numerous discussions about that article with addicts who viewed the article as permission to sink back into the depravity they had only so recently crawled out of. The tattoo thing made me so mad that one evening I wrote about ten responses to it, but never sent one in, because I didn't want to contribute to the kind of controversy that always winds up making idiots like this quote unquote writer famous. It wouldn't have mattered - I don't think the Press ever got so many letters as in response to both the tattoo and addiction pieces. They printed responses for weeks. What horrified me was that there were some sickos out there that fully agreed with the bullshit that was excreted on us in print. Anyhow, I will reprint a few favorite unsent responses of mine: "Dear Mr. X, Finally!! My search has ended. I have found someone more judgmental than my Mom. I think I am in love, although I usually restrict my dating to the mentally challenged and you are way too bright for me. But even so - will you marry me?" "Dear Mr. X, I understand they have a new over-the-counter drug to reduce stomach acid. If that doesn't work, may I recommend a prescription for Prilosec? Try it, it might help. If all else fails, there's always suicide." "Dear, Dear Mr. X, Although your obvious brilliance, high IQ and insightful unbiased assessment of tattooed persons has not gone unnoticed, as an outspoken representative for the morons, idiots and imbeciles of this great city, I must object to your use of the word "tattools" to describe us. Don't you think it makes us sound a lot sexier than we really are? Love & Kisses, J.D. Rage" "Dear Editor, I guess I will have to stop using The NY Press to line Elvis' birdcage if you continue to print articles that offend him." That's enough of that, but oh how I wish I could find someone *cool* to inspire me. I am on a new kick -- anything to avoid the harder work of novel writing -- of writing poems on the bus. I hope this will accomplish two goals, first to make me write shorter poems as my bus ride is often less than five minutes, and second to rev up my brain. The best advice for anyone who begins to think everything they create is stupid/maudlin/juvenile is to continue with it and even step up your efforts. Before you know it, you'll realize that you are a genius and can even bring a fresh meaning to the stupid, maudlin and juvenile. That's what they say, but what do I know? I cried my heart out watching the movie Come Back, Little Sheba recently. I identified with Shirley Booth as the middle-aged slovenly frump and with Burt Lancaster as the violent disgusted alcoholic. They both had lives that were over before they got a handle on them and were trying to make do with the disappointments they had become to themselves. Just like me. I even had a dog that ran away forever when an alcoholic boyfriend of mine passed out and left the door to my apartment open. Come back, Little Alex. Finally, Will Inman has written a brilliant review of Thad Rutkowski's Venom Press release Sex-Fiend Monologues that appeared in the March 1996 issue of small press review. He is of the opinion, as am I, that Thad is a genius, and that the monologues are "...a howling spoof of the S&M scene." If some of our would be contributors realized this, they might think twice about sending in pictures of their sexual appendages. I, and I speak only for myself, am a confirmed prude. My great grandmother took baths in the dark. But I am bombarded with explicit sexual material from males who think that CURARE will be the forum for their nacissism. Fat chance. Some advice -- wash at least. That's cutting I know, but in this case better to cut with words than with a knife -- LUV J.D. Rage.





## Poison Pen - by Jan Schmidt

These last few months since Issue 5 of Curare was released has been a time of confusion, isolation, mistrust and self-doubt. But otherwise things are fine - here on the edge of the millennia, on the brink of extinction by lies, hatred, greed, and iron-willed intolerance.

On the up side. At my job I had the great fortune to do some exploratory talks with a gentleman from West Africa about videotaping African dance as it is done in New York City today. He was a very handsome young man, totally adept in English, which I took to be at least his third language. He was impeccably dressed in an exquisite suit and tie. He spoke with calmness and serenity about how such a thing might be accomplished. He suggested that it be done in an African context, like a festival, have the music and dance community involved from the beginning. As he described his idea, he stopped. "But it must have structure, choices must be made. It cannot be chaotic." We nodded, the head of our department and I, in agreement and tribute at his stating what we knew but were not yet capable of articulating there. It dawned on me in that moment that one of the things an unhealthy mind does is confuse control for structure and chaos for community.

Control is rigid, forcing one's will whether it is fitting or not. Structure is planning, making arrangements, getting the basics down first. Though I have been a great admirer of chaos and believe that many good things can come out of it, including structure, most often, when not already created by accident or for some vicious intent, it is chosen out of some misguided idea of tolerance and freedom. Sure, have an event and invite everybody, we're all equal. But then only the same few who know the sponsors show up, the pushiest get to perform, and there are so many who want to get on stage the time gets cut down to three seconds. Ultimately, no one gets heard, no one is served.

Anyway, as we talked, he asked for my opinion. I spoke briefly on my prosaic concerns about the details of videotaping, but then emboldened by his mention of spiritual values I told him how I came to love that kind of dancing. I, like him, had seen the small studios hidden all over New York where folks gathered to do African and African related dancing. I described my surprise at walking downstairs to Fareta's basement studios or riding up the poky elevator at Djoniba's and first hearing the immediately captivating rhythms of the drums and then seeing the dancers, white and black, dancing in a circle and one by one entering the center and dancing in a full-out explosion of energy to the drums. It's passionate, sweaty, sexual, and alive.

I told him about a time, years ago, when I accidentally attended a performance of Aboriginal Peoples from Australia at the land fill at the lower end of Manhattan by the Hudson River. First the musicians came out blowing in their long tubular circular breath instruments, creating a haunting chantlike melody. Their brown skin was tattooed and painted and they wore feathers and plant parts. Then the dancers filed out and formed a circle, stomping on the ground in unison beat to the music. They were also plumed and feathered and painted. They were not young, they were not typically beautiful and they all did the same step that at first seemed a little too repetitive to my Western mind. Nice, but I wanted some wild, outrageous primitives by a fire, dancing madly in a trance.



As I watched, the sounds got more and more enveloping, the feet hitting the earth more and more definite, precise and exact. Each of them in the circle together in perfect sync with each other. Then it happened, suddenly the whole world shifted on its axis. I could feel the energy being released from the earth into the dancers through the musicians and back again to the soil. The unison steps were no longer boring repetitions but a connection to the boundless energy of nature and I could actually feel it being released. I, in my place in the grass, felt the breath of the earth. I felt it rising up to meet the feet of the dancers and they were no longer a series of individuals but one body linked by the unison steps, connected to the musicians with the low rumbling tones of the didgeridoos, and all bound together with the earth. I looked past them to the dunes surrounding them, and up to the windy evening, with the clouds moving quickly across the twilight sky and there were the two monoliths, the twin towers of the World Trade Center. I was blown away.

Of course I didn't say all this in the meeting. I stuttered something about seeing it and being completely awestruck and amazed. "Tell me what you felt," he asked, peering into my eyes with his steady, intense gaze.

"What I felt?" People didn't ask me that question. I was stunned, but I was compelled to try and find in myself what I felt. I stumbled, the language of emotions not being familiar to me even after years of therapy. But I think in my groping manner I conveyed that energy I felt go through me that day.

This is not the first time people have found me lacking in feeling. They complain about it in my writing workshop, "What is your character feeling?" Isn't it obvious, I think. Why should I have to use words? We didn't need to when I was a child. In fact we were taught not to. Now my therapist complains about it in therapy, "But how do you feel?" he says. "I don't know, how should I feel?" I ask.

So I'm out there in the world, a character in search of a feeling. Or maybe it's just a language of feeling I am missing? What do I know? Is it any wonder that I'm full of confusion, isolation, mistrust and self-doubt? On the other hand, I have felt the earth move.





A decorative header featuring the title "Rantin' & Ravin'" in a bold, serif font. The title is surrounded by several musical notes of varying sizes and orientations, some above and some below the text, creating a whimsical, musical theme.

# Rantin' & Ravin'

SUSAN SHERMAN

## SOME CALIFORNIA MEMORIES, GOING HOME

No, I didn't grow up in New York where I now live, Lower East Side streets, I grew up in Southern California. Sun and palm trees and dry gray days, smog and fog and wind and not much rain. (It rains more now, in those days it averaged about seven inches a year.) I've been here, Manhattan, LES since 1961. Until this November, in more than thirty years, I had been back to LA only three times. The first time was after seventeen years absence; then two years after that when my mother had a stroke; and a couple of years later when my stepfather died. That was in the early 80s, and after that there really was no reason for me to return. I never liked LA much. I found the climate—the one good thing about the city—monotonous. I was traumatized by an earthquake when I was very young and had no desire to repeat the experience. (4 AM: All sounds from the outside go dead, and then the loud rumble of thunder, except from the earth not the sky, and then slow, steady shaking as I lie terrified watching cracks snake down from ceiling to floor, floor to ceiling.)

But then, last November, I was invited to LA to do a couple of readings which would pay, at least, for my airfare. So, why not? I'm working on this memory of times past, so it seemed like a good idea to refresh my memory, jot down some details I could stick in appropriate places to make people think I remember a lot more than I really do.

But it was a wash-out, like most of my trips home. The one day I got someone to drive me down the streets of childhood, my back went out. It all seemed distant, not emotionally fraught with remembrance/reminiscence/recollection. Just a fairly painful ride through pleasant if empty and uninviting streets. I realized I would have to use more than a little imagination to bring back a past that had truly passed.

Hollywood. California. 1943.

From the outside our new home seems small, hardly noticeable, not like the great house my mother had described in such minute detail—even though she had never seen it, only imagined it through the enticing photographs my future stepfather had waved before her voracious gaze—as we nervously bounced across the breadth of the US, seeing city after city flash past the tiny rectangle that was our train window. 803 North Bedford Drive. A row of giant palm trees lines the street like wary sentinels, making the sidewalks seem familiar, like the streets in the working class neighborhood in Florida my mother and I had left only days before. But our home there was a three room bungalow attached to a long row of bungalows, sided by other identical rows of bungalows, indistinguishable in structure, each individualized by paint and pride.

This California house is set back from the street, its face partially veiled by a large tree, as if it were hiding, defending itself from the intrusive eyes of the houses which border it. It is a house detached, isolate. Even the small sparrows that perch on the branches of the Weeping Willow standing constant vigil in the front yard look as if they know they have their places marked out for them, boundaries across which they cannot sing or fly.

803 North Bedford Drive. I don't like the street. I can't see any other people around, any children, only building after building, separated by grass, plants, and trees. In Miami there were always people sitting around chatting in white steel lawn chairs; there were always children anxious to play. But this house *is* pretty. There are red flowers lining the well manicured bushes adjacent to the front door. The Spanish facade, covered with white stucco paint, preens in the midday sun, accented by arched doors and a gently sloping red tile roof. Everything looks new, unused—the neatly trimmed bushes, lawn, even the wide stone pathway that leads up to a side gate.



As I follow my mother through the gate, space seems to expand, stretching first into stone arbors and bushes, a concrete drive and then metamorphosing into room upon room upon room, as we finally enter the main house. I have never seen a house with so many rooms. Every time I turn a corner, I am afraid I will get lost. I am afraid unless I am very careful I will make a wrong turn and no one will ever be able to find me again. I feel disconnected, like the house itself. I think I know how the house feels, and I feel sorry for it. I know it must be homesick too.

Children don't move; adults move them. If I had been older, I might have been more impressed with our new found fortune, but I was barely four. I was too young to understand what a movie star was or what Hollywood and glamour meant. I only knew that every time it seemed like my world was settling in, becoming a comforting, a familiar place, everything would change.

To her credit, my mother did not walk into a household wanting in problems. My stepfather's first wife had for reasons unknown wound up in a mental institution and the two children she and my stepfather had adopted had been regularly punished by being forced to eat in the bathroom and locked in the cellar. My mother did try to take charge and treat them, for better or worse, as her own children. At least, they never suffered blatant punishment or abuse at her hands. I never remember her striking or even yelling at anyone. Even though in language and gesture she could be coldly cruel.

"If you had been older, maybe you would have understood me. But even so you could never have known what it was like to be where I was from. The poverty. The dead end streets and lives. Finally I was having fun. California was fun. It was exciting. It was a brand new world."

I might not have understood you, mother, but I understood how hard it was to eat at night listening to you in the other room, the way you and my stepfather spoke to each other, the tone of your voices, suddenly low, the way animals growl, the way animals pace, circling each other, ominous and angry. I understood the night everyone was out of the house except the two of you and me. Suddenly I heard you scream and the door slam and I found you on the floor of your dressing room, a room that had always scared me, lined as it was from floor to ceiling with mirrors. It looked like there were hundreds of you lying on the floor, pounding the floor, screaming—he had left with a gun and he was going to kill himself. I held you and tried to comfort you. I was five-years-old.

For years I thought you never loved him. I thought you stayed with him for his position, his money. And when he lost both, I thought you stayed because you had no where else to go. I was wrong. One year after he died, you died too. What else did you have to live for besides the bitter, twisted thing that had become your love.

Some California memories, going home.













## **jurado**

### THE SECRET NAME OF GOURDS

Carrying my water,  
the yellow gourd sings  
to the Curandero,  
putting him in touch  
with the nature of plants,  
why they are so alive  
in the sunlight.

With a smooth white stone  
and the black hardwood  
from the Mpingo tree,  
this man shakes a black gourd;  
its pure rattling sound  
can tell you the weather  
for next week.

Dropping a red gourd  
with black zebra stripes  
down a thousand foot waterfall  
can tell you  
how many headaches  
make up a lifetime.

The Curandero empties his mind  
with the thumping sound of a blue gourd,  
until his head makes a hollow sound  
that night,  
dreaming.

After birth, a child's umbilical chord  
is put into a green gourd,  
marked with four white circles in chalk;  
and it is hung from a coffee tree  
for three days drying,  
away from animals and bad dreamers,  
the child heals his insides  
as he enters the new world.

Curanderos work with gourds of all shapes  
and sizes. The most powerful spirit  
is found in those gourds over 200 pounds,  
which he dries into yellow-white powder.

This he uses by brushing his teeth  
and blowing the powder  
through his lips.

When a person dances before a fire,  
if you whisper  
the secret name of any gourd,  
you can see the color of a person's aura  
around his head and body,  
like the way fire turns green  
when you throw a copper penny  
into its flames.



A sick person  
has a feeble aura,  
because there is a hole  
in the white gourd  
of the inner soul.

The Curandero can cure this aura,  
with green gourds of  
hot chile peppers,  
Yarrow and herbs,  
tuning forks,  
and jewels as musicians of light  
to vibrate and soothe and caress.

In one ritual,  
the Curandero will split  
an orange and yellow gourd,  
all covered with gnarled warts,  
representing the skull of a man,  
and put bone-white wind chimes  
made of coral, sea-shells, and crab  
inside the skullcap  
so that swinging it in the air,  
pulling it hard with centrifugal force,  
the gourd makes a high pitched sound  
over the sick man's bed,  
capturing the imagination  
of the demon within him,  
and sending the sickness away.

After Cousin's funeral,  
the Curandero hangs up the grey gourd,  
with a hole on its side,  
carrier of the dead man's ashes  
as he smokes his sacred cigar,  
waiting for the gate to open.

Then, there is a fragrance  
of fresh papaya blossoms.

And for a few days,  
we get Cousin to speak  
with the relatives  
from the other side,  
poking through the hole of the gourd,  
whistling to each other,  
bringing us altogether for awhile.

We ritualize the gourds,  
filled with rice and beans,  
Chicken liver, fried pork skin,  
soup made from dried, salted cod,  
sweet potato, cabbage, and fried banana,  
fermented mango, juicy guayaba sticks,  
red beets, string beans, yucca chips,  
peanuts, and plenty of yerba mata,  
coconut milk, and guanabana drink  
as we sing like roots, shaking  
all night long by the bonfires,  
making love with our gourds.



**jurado**

THE PRAYER OF THE APPLE

This is the apple tree that thinks  
a man  
is its soul.

You can make a door  
from this apple tree  
upon which you knock but once  
and leave your philosophical treatises  
concerning the nature of God.

You can make a strong bed  
from this apple tree  
upon which you can make love to a woman  
who wears appleseed earrings.

It is written:  
"I am the apple that eats the worm."

She says:  
"My skin is spinning all along my body."

Taking her first bite, she whispered:  
"I belong to the skin of an apple."

It is written:  
"Eat only the seed, and throw away the apple."

She says:  
"But I want to live  
inside this apple seed."

After she showed me her breasts,  
I knew too much.

We once lived in a tree-house  
in paradise.



## **Laurie Calhoun**

### **eruption**

he walked though the dried out  
mud broken into puzzle pieces  
by the hot sun with each step  
dozens of lizards scurried  
through the dehydrated brush  
alarmed by the sound of loud feet  
reverberating loudly through their house,  
the ground, the crust of this earth

## **Roy Lucianna**

### **YOUR DOG**

I wish I was your dog.  
I would stick my head  
between your legs,  
without shame or second-thought,  
anywhere -- anytime.

You would feed me nice.  
I would not bark ---- nice.  
You would pet me.  
Occasionally, you would hug me,  
anywhere -- anytime.



# David Huberman

## DESPERATE MEN

No!  
No!  
Death is coming for me,  
I can feel its icy hand on my throat.  
It's coming like a comet  
cutting through the stratosphere  
It's coming like a crashing car,  
smashing into a pedestrian.  
I don't move a muscle.  
Nothing I can do,  
Just sit there.  
Just stand there.  
Try to relax.  
Try not to think about it.  
No big deal.  
Nothing but a chicken wing. Right?  
People die every day.  
Ain't no big deal.  
You read about it in the newspapers all the time.  
"Five people die in four-story house in Queens.  
It was a flaming inferno.  
Evidence of a child playing with matches."  
Oh, how sad, you say to yourself.  
Then you have your coffee and you don't  
think about it.  
You dismiss it from your mind.  
But did you ever wonder what  
those people were like in their last moments?  
What were they thinking about  
in those last precious seconds of their lives?  
Fear!  
Oh, you're pissing in your pants.  
Panic!  
Oh, you're defecating on yourself.



Pain!  
Oh, it hurts so bad.  
Think of it, the taking of the life-force.  
Ooh baby!  
Ooh baby!  
Laying down with death.  
Another headline:  
"One hundred and thirty-one people die  
in Omaha plane crash."  
What were those poor people's last five  
seconds like, when they knew there was  
no getting out of this disaster?  
Tick, tock  
Tick, tock.  
Ever watch the sand of an hourglass go by?  
that's how fast life goes by.  
One day you wake up and you're  
thirty-eight years old.  
Another day goes by, you wake up  
and you're fifty-seven.  
Time passes  
Oh! does time pass.  
Then you ask yourself the Big question.  
The Only question.  
What did you do with your life?  
If the answer you get is just  
uneasiness in your shoulder blades,  
then you might feel anxiety setting in,  
until it becomes a full blown panic attack.  
Desperate.  
That's the word that will define your life.  
You're one of the breed of countless desperate men.  
Oh yes.  
I see them everywhere.  
Men crashing through windows,  
Robbing cars, bodegas, banks.  
Shooting drugs.  
Drinking that last sip of Thunderbird.



Catching that last look at the peepshows.  
Men crawling around in rags.  
I put on the radio.  
A song comes on.  
The voice wails, "Don't fear the reaper."  
But I do. I do.  
I have the fear, man.  
Men stuck in their little jobs, their  
little safe niches, their little prisons.  
I learned a long time ago that  
prison doesn't necessarily have to have bars.  
I've said it before and I'll say it again.  
It's the same day, every day for forty years straight.  
Despair sets in.  
Late at night, I wake up screaming,  
Not even knowing why.  
On other nights, I wake up with a demon  
on top of my chest.  
If I don't break the paralyzing grip it has on me,  
I will die within seconds.  
I can't move, if only I could cry out  
and grab my Narcotics Anonymous text.  
The demon is drawing the last breath from me,  
taking my life.  
It's a silent struggle.  
My hand somehow grabs the Narcotics Anonymous text,  
the heavy weight on my chest leaves me,  
the gray demon disappears.  
Next thing I know, I'm like my  
favorite cartoon character.  
I'm Daffy Duck.  
I want to run out in the streets  
screaming my crazy head off.  
I want the authorities that be to cart  
me away to Bellevue Hospital,  
then shoot Demerol into my veins,  
so I can go to sleep and not have the Fear.



## Gina Bonati

Nothing takes me  
anywhere that he does,  
it is nothing  
he does: he was born,  
her body unwilling, she followed  
loving, and I love him.  
I love him: I am  
following. I was born,  
a victim of existence,  
making the most of it.

The air of the world  
suctioned around  
the intrusion of my head  
between flesh and that  
oncoming  
reality of separation:  
a violent minute I kicked toward  
the way he will come  
into my unwillingness.

Dark eyes  
-invented child,  
I have stumbled forward,  
back, then I wait:  
he will run bringing  
a handled bloom  
unwillingly:  
he cannot stop  
his beauty hands: he will  
make the most of it:  
he was born, a woman  
-took him close.  
She didn't ask for him,  
or for her disappearance:  
that is why

I will come,  
go, and return,  
close, open, and breathe,  
like a living thing

in love with him.











## Sarah Patton

### A Beautiful Corpse

The greasy stain of day-old Danish pastry on the obituary page. She thinks, this is the true bottom. Looking for her missing lover under "derelicts dead, downtown, east side." No luck. After that, there isn't too much to recommend the day aside from excessively well-done hamburgers at Sue's BYOB baby shower. She notices that the curtains all have an unpleasant stain, and even now are blowing in and out with abandon, in and out the narrow kitchen windows. Somebody's kid had stolen the screens and moved out of town. Found a house with good ventilation and no fruit flies, she figured. So the weather has stained the Woolworth's curtains thumbtacked to the frame and not necessarily blocking or shading the room from the shockingly normal outside world.

Day six, and no sign of David's corpse in the news. It would of course, be a beautiful stiff. Just tanned enough to not look blue and the genuine imitation Piaget ticking faithfully along on his wrist, exactly 5 minutes fast. He never could get anywhere on time. His pitted hands trying to hold down the earth which never failed to move too fast, or too irregularly under those big poetic feet. Moving on in the treadmill of each segmented unit of time. His day's perforation left funny shadows in coffee shop windows and reflected off the polished bellies of old espresso machines. The image reminded her of someone he probably groped in the back room of a nightclub, but she had managed to get used to his nice watch and cheap moves. The endearing way he had of jumping out of taxis, leaving her to foot the bill on the \$2 left from a binge night of beer and coffee.

She looks again at the stained curtains thinking, I wouldn't change them, unless for orange and red madras, like those little boys' shorts from the 1950's. She was always thinking about that fabric on warm days. All sun-faded tones, unavailable now except through pretentious mail order catalogues which provide the wear and fade, no extra charge. She tried to cheer herself up by planning a shopping spree to Woolworth's. Plastic earrings and a parakeet without too long to live; one of those commitment-free tuberculoid budgies.

But she missed him anyhow, and Thursdays, how they'd get a buzz on and take a bath. He would wash her back and tell the same story about getting lost in the K Mart on a bad trip. After a while she'd stop listening and fantasize about throwing the hair dryer in just to make him stop talking. But like old rain-faded curtains, you never get around to those little things that will nag at you for years. The idea of teaching the parakeet to talk got less and less appealing.



## Steven Hartman

### The Post-Hendrix Experience

Hey, you long-haired

Grizzly bear

pill poppin' acid droppin'

potheaded unemployed

psychic Woodstock over 40

folk song singin' vegetarian

pony-tailed yoga Bisenstock

bearded boy wearing brown baggy corduroys

& a pro-peace

anti-nuclear

tye-died psychedelic t-shirt

what's happening

in Nirvana,

man?

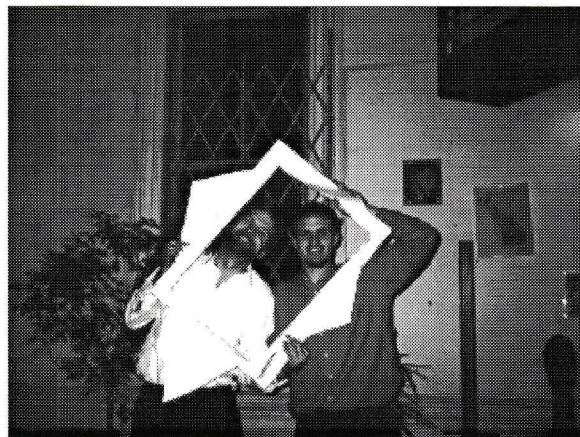
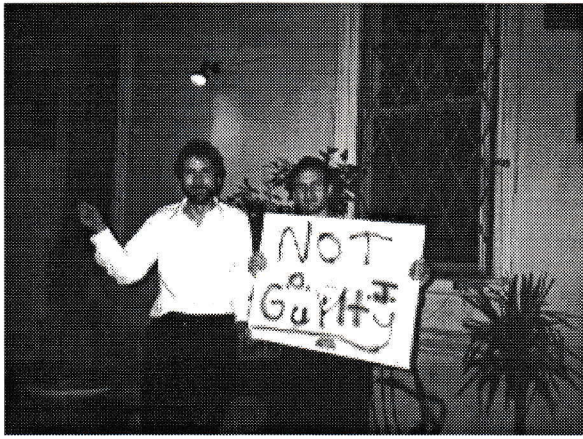


## Jushi

### THE DEVIL IN YOU

Sister, daughter, what's gotten into you?  
It looks like I see the devil peeking through.  
Your eyes look red, your breath smells stale,  
for goodness sake chile,  
Is you growin' a tail?  
That's a frenzied kind of dance. a strange kind of jig;  
Well, bless my soul, your feet looks like a pig.  
What's that you say?  
What's that you grumblin'?  
Oh, you say it's your empty stomach rumblin'.  
Well it's not lunch time,  
I'm sorry to say.  
So you and the devil better go outside and play.





Ode to O.J. -- Cafe Nico 1/96      Photos: Joe Rivera



## Larry Jones

### Mausoleum

First I leave the job, then decide to leave Cafe Nico with you, a few days before you and I decide to leave one another, alone. How is it all this has flared up in me again? Should I be thankful or remorseful (I am both)? Picking up the hottest trick in the bar is not the same thing as falling in love with someone (v. anyone).

Paulette writes "My stepfathers seem to be getting younger." Your father, "Bubba," did not grant me your hand in marriage. ("But you're such a fine, upstanding gentleman." -- Todd) I called: I love you. I want you (to want me, too). You don't. I won't (want you that much longer). That "Princeton rub," a dub on Edward.

I'm sorry I never got to see you in the new "Turkish Tile" Speedo swimsuit I bought you at Herman's. I hope that you will call if you ever feel you would like to "humiliate" me, again. And at this point I am ready to blow the South Carolinian cop who broke your arm after you'd assaulted his partner and resisted arrest in a late night "Zoo Story."

Now I want to call to confirm again that you are ruined in the East Village, that word is out on your scrawny dick. That must have been the original trauma, some kid's comments on your tiny wee-wee, your tiny wee-wee. You were more than big enough for me. The phone is still ringing off the hook. Why haven't you changed your number by now, had it unlisted?

Intimacy is an inherently shared problem. Matt, who was raped by big blonde Jewish Margo, is meeting her for brunch as we speak, or do not. And my trousseau's still packed, ready to check into that double mausoleum a la Zefferelli in Myrtle Beach, room service by already with a couple of gallons of "Wild Turkey," anytime.



## Mike Halchin

### IF I SLASHED MY THROAT W/A STRAIGHT RAZOR

would you  
    hold my hand  
    use an icepak  
    call 911  
    or maybe hack your own thorax  
    to show your understanding of my  
    pain and frustration?  
  
or would you  
    drink my blood  
    and sell my organs on the black market?

### KICKING OVER THE FLESH GRAVESTONE

When i got up this morning  
my heart fell out  
and bounced off my foot. i put  
it in a plastic bag  
and left it on the table  
while i ate breakfast.  
i figured i could  
stuff it back inside on the bus.  
  
as i got near the bench outside  
i tripped over a rock and my heart  
dropped straight into the gutter.  
i gulped at first but then thought  
hell yes, fucker.  
now i can be the cold cruel eye-gouging  
bastard i was always meant to be.

### HEY PAL, THAT AIN'T KETCHUP!

It was about 3 am Monday when Chuck walked into the local greasy spoon. He pulled out his elephant gun and aimed at the first person to step within range. The bullet hit with such force that it tore the passerby's head clean off. The detached cranium hit the floor like a basketball and landed in Mrs. Oglivie's lap on the first bounce. She promptly became Edward Munch and vomited into her husband's face from across the table. While his skin peeled off like decaying wallpaper, the head rolled into the aisle and a waitress carrying a full tray 3-stooged over it. The blue plate specials were exhuming their contents everywhere.

As the Oglivies' and the waitress cleaned themselves up, everyone laughed uneasily, then clapped. Mr. Oglivie was the proud owner of a skinless skull upon leaving the establishment, but was presented with a washer/dryer as a consolation prize. Two years later he strangled his wife with the telephone cord.

After that night at the diner, the body was dumped in the trash bin out back. Or so they say; the corpse never did turn up. The head was then placed in the front window. This was to encourage future customers to imitate Chuck's actions and make the dining experience more unpredictable and therefore pleasure-able (ka-ching!) Soon the demand for elephant guns could no longer be met. People would just bring severed heads into diners either under their arm or in a bowling bag. Upon checking the dental records of the heads in question, it was determined that the customers had not killed the people once attached to the heads, much less used an elephant gun. Nonetheless, the severed-head industry has now made New Guinea a world power.



## J.D. Rage

### THE UNHOLY LAND

Jade left Manhattan at 5:30 AM. The Port Authority Bus Station wasn't open when her cab dropped her off. She stood and waited with the morning dregs of the city. Wearing her dark sunglasses even now, she avoided the ravaged eyes around her, glowing as they did like those of large black evil rats in the night. Finally the gates were unlocked and she proceeded down the escalator to the underground bus terminal. There would be another half-hour wait for the bus to be made ready for its passengers. Jade was hoping for a light ridership, seeing as it was too early for even God to be awake. The line grew long behind her. She was glad she was early. She could get a good seat and would not get stuck behind people who didn't know how to look like they were standing in line. When new passengers arrived, they would always get on line in front of these types, who wouldn't even notice, pushing Jade further back and irritating the hell of of her.

The bus ride was horrible as usual. Just the thought of having some stranger so close in the next seat made Jade's skin crawl, the way it used to in the old days when she was hooked on junk. Jade could not even allow water touch her back then, even that smooth clean caress was pure torture. The only time she would step into that crummy old shower stall and lean up against its rusted walls inscribed with the graffitied message "out of the blue and into the black," was when she was lucky enough to have scored some tuinal.

Today in the bus line, she listened to a Fight tape on her walkman and stared into thin air, so if people were looking at her, she didn't care. It was copesthetic as long as she didn't see them doing it, didn't notice them gawking at her like she was some kind of disgusting growth sprouting from the industrial tile floor. She grabbed a window seat, holding her breath and hoping that no one would sit with her. Ordinarily, they didn't, not by choice. She was about to relax, settle down in her new long black leather coat behind her dark glasses and look out the window in peace all the way to Connecticut, when the late arrivals began swarming onto the bus. With only one seat left in the whole bus, Jade realized that the latest stragglers, a young yuppie mother and her squirming ponytailed child would both be sitting with her. The child flopped around in her mother's lap like a trout in the bottom of an aluminum boat. Immediately after spying Jade, the kid whispered to the mother, "why is Madonna sitting with us?" As she said this she peeked shyly at Jade over her parent's shoulder. Jade checked to see if the mother was watching her. The coast was clear, so she sneered viciously at the kid and mumbled to herself, "kill all children. Kill them before they turn into me."

It was difficult to ignore these seat mates who took off their sweaters, rooted through crumpled bags full of pink clothing and cheap children's books, crayons, toys and food, taking things out, putting things back in, taking clothes off, putting them back on, in a restless uncomfortable perpetual motion. Jade pressed her face against the bus window. The few trees of Manhattan, some with red leaves or empty branches or green leaves turning straight to black, flew by as the driver breezed through every light with perfect timing. Now a band seemed to be singing in her headphones, "Slayer, you are my hat trick," but that couldn't be, maybe she was thinking of magic hats because she was on her way to Salem, Massachusetts.

Soon things outside the bus began to change from the rich city of Alice Tully Hall to rotting stoops, graffitied metal gates, wall murals of a black Jesus, garbage spilling into the street, bricked-up entrances and charred burned-out interiors framed behind jagged glass in gaping windows. Rapidly, that decaying scene rolled into walls of trees with castle towers rising from great criss-crossing highways. Jade felt good in her new antique velvet dress. The price tag stated the dress was vintage Roaring Twenties and it had two sexy wings of fabric going down the back of it. The loud music in her walkman, the loud voices in her head and the screaming babies in the back of the bus seemed to join in a chorus praising the beauty of death, indescribable out there washing over her eyes with withering leaves going up in flames.

The mother and girl next to her were impossible. Jade thought about Salem and considered casting a spell. If she hadn't always wound up suffering more than her intended victim every single time, she would have turned them to stone. "Just until they reach their destination," she dreamed, as the arm of a pink sweater slapped her in the face. She prayed that they were only going a short way, like White Plains, but for the whole trip they didn't give any indication of



leaving, and of course, they got up at Jade's stop. She ran a comb through her blond hair while impatiently waiting for them to gather their infinite numbers of pastel bags, so she could leave the bus. She hoped the streak of red in her hair was shockingly visible, as she strained to see if Steel was waiting for her at the station. There he was, tall and thin, his lion's mane of dyed black hair and black leather garb giving him away for the metal freak he was. Everything was fine now; all inconvenient indignities melted into the past when Jade realized that they were really going to do it -- to visit the place her friend Peter had called "the scene of your crime."

The highway was exciting. Steel maneuvered through a few near crashes; wild Connecticut drivers metamorphosed into Massachusetts madmen as they crossed the state line. His driving became erratic when he slapped a metal band on the tape deck, and he began to jerk around when they started to rip out the words "Hey motherfucker, let's go now." Jade imagined him pulling down on the steering wheel causing the car to rise and soar above the tangled traffic. Somehow, despite the confusing maps and standstill traffic jams, Jade and Steel cruised right into Salem, with no problem.

They stopped in MacDonald's for lunch. As Steel often sarcastically reminded her, he only took her to the best places. That's why she was still standing on line when he returned from the john, five minutes later. And, still standing on line ten minutes and twenty minutes later while the cretinous pimply teenage countergirl brought the family of writhing atomic particles in front of Jade its twelve sodas, twelve burgers, twelve fries and twelve apple pies to their trays, one item at a time. Steel was imitating a saint, hardly complaining as he patiently surveyed the fast food restaurant, looking for someone like them, some other radical punked-out metalhead anarchists who had come to Salem on a pilgrimage to the unholy land. He almost jumped in the air with glee when he spotted a big trucker wearing a black leather jacket with western fringes. Jade was doing a slow burn, watching the MacDonald's restaurant manager as she tried to whip the wait people into shape. She could see only the top of the manager's head, a deformed midget who clearly had no leadership qualities, who was now emitting ear piercing little screeches at Jade's counter person, ordering her to hold casual conversations about her seamy love life after she finished serving her growing snaking line of angry customers.

Can this really be Salem, Massachusetts, Jade asked herself, while chomping down her quarter pounder. Everyone seemed to have a little something wrong with them, a withered limb, a clawed hand, a strange hump to the back, a dragging leg. But that wasn't all, it was the look in their eyes, kind of blank and empty, touched with unfocused desperation. She decided she would just leave her coat on, the sight of her tattoos may be enough to send these fragile mentalities right over the edge.

"It'll get better," Steel told her.

They left MacDonald's and headed to a parking garage in the center of Salem. The tape deck was now blasting as loud as it would go and the car was shaking with choruses blasting "Hey motherfucker, let's go down." The window was open and the music cut through the air, making the tourists scowl at them. Something in the town ahead was calling them like the Last Temptation, promising macabre delusions, evil incantations and spirits walking in broad daylight. Jade herself was a witch. She had chanted the Lord's Prayer backward three nights in a row and since then everything had changed. She had thrown spells, called up fiery demonic entities and buried turkey legs in her backyard under a full moon. All efforts to recant this decision had failed, it was sort of like trying to have never been born.

Steel didn't pretend to be a sorcerer, but he was enchanted by the dark side of existence. On the way into town, they had passed a medieval facade, a castle abandoned while under construction, empty behind its turreted brick walls, its windows displaying a view of the clear sky. It smelled of decay and Steel now rushed towards it, drawn by the veneer of nothingness and a need to survey any damage he could find. He stood before the structure as delighted with its half-finished state as if it had been a fresh bomb site.

Other than that strange facade and a small eerie graveyard with weathered-to-thin headstones, the town was nothing to speak of. They walked around with the hordes of other tourists. They took pictures of each other posing with an old cigar store wooden Indian, saw the line of people going around the block waiting to visit the Official Town Witch and looked at the wall around the House of Seven Gables, put there to prevent free viewing.



It was about then, as she was photographing Steel standing under the sign for Hawthorn's inspiration to prove they had been there, while thinking about how the house looked like an old barn so what was the big deal, that Jade noticed again that everything was a little weird, a little off. Yes, everything was becoming ever more strange.

She saw an older lady pointing a camera at the roof of the House of Seven Gables, the little bit you could see of it above the wall. Jade didn't want to walk in front of the woman while she was snapping the shot. As Jade waited to pass, it seemed that the matron was taking an extremely long time to frame her picture. That lady just stood there like the dead with her finger poised above the camera's button. And why, Jade asked herself as she ducked under the motionless camera, is everyone, from teenyboppers to purple-haired or balding gray panthers, smoking a cigarette, and 90% of them unfiltered so that each of them was shrouded inside their own private clouds of smoke. And why was everyone's head too big in all the wrong places and why did they all seem to be drooling down their shirts in-between puffs on their roll-your-own cigarettes as they stared vacantly off into space even as they strolled in tight little troglodyte family groups. Jade was lost in her wondering about the odd sightseers around them, when Steel pointed to an historical sign on which someone had scrawled over protective Plexiglas the words: Tourist Suck.

When they went to buy souvenir T-shirts, Jade was puzzled about why the sidewalk vendor seemed so concerned about the shirts not fitting. He repeated over and over that they could return the shirts, even though Jade had overheard the real vendor, who had been there when they passed by before, offer this guy five dollars to watch his T-shirt hut for an hour. She decided that previous complaints had been registered because nobody had been able to get the shirts on over their incredibly big heads.

Steel bought a sweatshirt sporting a Salem witch and another with a pantherish demon and they walked on until they came to a strange-looking wall. It seemed bewitching now, though it hadn't caught her eye when they first came down the street. She contemplated an expanse of black material, sparkling with mica particles and embedded with three skulls, through the viewfinder of her camera. After a taking a few pictures, the camera ran out of film. She turned away from the wall and noticed Steel striking up a conversation with two strangers, a man and a woman.

"Where are you from?" asked the guy, a classic red neck type in a red and black lumberjack shirt and straw-like dirty blonde hair that might have been trimmed with an ax blade.

"New York City," she heard Steel lie, as she clearly remembered being the only one who had to take a stupid bus from the forty-deuce to get here today. Jade hated talking so she busied herself loading more film, while the woman, who wore a faded blue parka and sported blackened front teeth, commented on Steel's leather jacket.

"I like leather, but why do you wear all those silly decorations?" she asked, smiling at her clever question. Her voice was that of a ten-year-old and it seemed more incongruous when you saw her rotten teeth. The woman was referring to the dozens of small silver skulls, iron crosses and Harley Davidson insignia pinned to the lapels, and to the rows of pointed studs lining the collar of Steel's MC jacket. The straw-haired guy began to laugh convulsively, doubling over in a fit of glee at his girlfriend's humor. When he rose again and opened his mouth, Jade wasn't surprised to see that he had matching rot on his incisors. She dragged Steel away from them and posed his head among the skulls on the black mica wall at a gruesome angle. The two hillbillies departed, Steel graciously declining an offer by the guy to crush beer cans on his head for the photograph.

As soon as they had vanished, Steel told her, "the guy asked me if we could still go to Staten Island."

Jade quickly forgot the two bumpkins as she faced another onslaught of smoking grotesques. They all seemed to be staring at her Motorhead necklace like it was a satanic oracle and they were assigned to exorcise it. She could feel them concentrating, trying to stamp her out. They were even sucking out Steel's intelligence to use against her. She threw up an invisible shield and began dispensing withering scowls.

"Walk faster," she ordered Steel. They raced through a town square now rampant with the fake witches and imitation costumed devils who were trying to scare the small warped mutant children in honor of Halloween, only a week away. The children were unimpressed and all turned their bulging eyes in the direction of Steel and Jade with the intensity of the monster kids from the movie "The Village of the Damned".



"I have to go," Jade muttered and she went into one of the horrendous white Portasans that lined the edge of the square. When she sat down on the aluminum shelf, it seemed a little hot. Before leaving, she decided to fix her lipstick even though she was so drained of energy that it was hard to lift her hand up to her face. She peered into the streaked funhouse mirror. With all these mutations staring me down, I have to look my best, she thought. Looking back to survey the results, Jade stifled a scream. Behind her head in the mirror was a halo of dancing orangey blue flames. She grabbed the Portasan door knob and burned her hand. Badly jittered but operating well under emergency conditions, she pulled the sleeve of her new leather coat down over her fingers and opened the scalding door. After slamming it shut in anger, she turned back to the ugly structure. There was now a large sign on the door that read: Out of Order.

"Steel," she called, "did you notice a sign on this thing before?"

"No," he answered, "but I wasn't paying attention."

"Well, I don't remember one," she sputtered.

"Look," Steel told her, pointing across the square, "isn't that the guy we talked to near the wall of skulls?"

"You're right," she said, "that's him. I thought he was a hick from the sticks, but it looks like he works here. See, he's emptying one of the town trash cans into a big black garbage bag."

"So the two of them, him and his dopey girlfriend, were pulling our legs before, pretending to be farmers," Steel realized.

"Yeah, that's right. This town is starting to seem as rotten as their teeth. Hey, do you think those were fake, too?" Jade pulled her coat tight around her, and shivered. She decided not to tell Steel about the Portasan fire yet. She hadn't known him that long, and didn't want to come off like a complete wacko.

"It's going to get dark soon, Jade. We should think about leaving," Steel said. Jade thought that his brown eyes were open a little too wide, like he was spooked or something.

They decided to take one last look for witchly souvenirs before heading back to the parking garage. Steel stopped at a stand selling T-shirts adorned with those death head angels often carved into old gravestones. While he was bargaining with a big-headed salesgirl, who seemed way too young to be selling such morbid wares, Jade looked over her shoulder in the direction from which they had come. There he was, the impostor redneck hillbilly, looking right at her, shooting her an evil grin. He began to empty another Salem Village trash receptacle into a giant shiny black Hefty bag. He moved from garbage can to garbage can without ever taking his glinting eyes off of her.

"Let's get out of here," Jade said nervously, "that guy is back again. It looks like he really is following us."

Steel looked around. "I don't see him now." He bought the most deathly T-shirt of the lot.

"He was there a second ago, he's either stalking us, or they put LSD in our water at MacDonald's."

"It's time to leave anyway," he said, "but I'm not being pushed out by some town prankster. We'll leave because we want to."

"Good thinking," Jade agreed, humoring him so he would get a move on.

They walked to the parking garage in the center of Salem at a good clip. After finding the car, they drove it down a few levels, and Steel handed the ticket and money to the garage attendant without paying attention.

"Have a nice trip home, now," the attendant said. When they looked up to thank him, they were faced with a familiar grin. "Say hi to Staten Island for me," he laughed hysterically. Steel stepped on the gas and zoomed out of the garage.

He cranked up the tape deck and suddenly swerved the car around in the road. "Hell, Jade," he said, "Did you see that? We're gonna get killed." Jade looked out of the car and saw only the quiet horizon of a small little town before her.

"No, I didn't see anything this time, but I've seen enough, thank you very much."

"Oh it was nothing, I just thought I saw a 20 foot geyser of flame shooting up in the middle of the road in front of us," he told her, "Here, why don't you clean my glasses for me real quick." He handed them to her and drove blind, asking her, "What did you see?"



"What did I feel, is more like it," she said, quickly cleaning his glasses and handing them back. She looked at the palm of her hand and decided against showing it to him when she saw that the blisters she got when trying to open the scalding door were gone. "In the Portasan, it was very hot. I almost scorched my ass on the seat and my hand on the door, and I saw blue flames in the mirror behind my hair. I thought I was about to burn to death."

Salem, Massachusetts faded behind them in the dusk. Through the outside rearview mirror, Jade hallucinated a mob of smoke-shrouded buffoons racing after the car, waving what could have been either pitch tar torches or handmade brooms. As that vision passed, she thought she saw their lumber-jacketed friend lurking behind a lamppost at the corner where they caught a red traffic signal. At the next light, she was startled by the sight of the pink-sweatered mother and small wiggly child that had tortured her on the bus ride up from New York City. She blinked her eyes rapidly, hoping to shake off these unsettling illusions. Finally, as Salem completely disappeared into the twilight, she began to relax and admire the bloody looking sunset spreading itself before them. But the clouds suddenly arranged themselves into the features of a man whose hair might have been cut with a buzzsaw behind the barn. The cloud man faked a smile, one of those big wide goofy ones. He held out a bag. It was a shiny black Hefty trash bag and he was gesturing for Jade to get in.

"I saw that," Steel gasped, turning the music up past ten. He peered over the wheel and asked her, "Babe, do you have a cigarette?"

"You know I don't smoke and since when do you?" she exclaimed. Jade shut her eyes tight, reminding herself that things would probably be okay as soon as she was standing in a cold deserted graveyard in the middle of the night. That's where they were headed now. To a cold deserted graveyard. She silently vowed to keep her eyes closed until they were at least one hundred miles away from Salem. That way she wouldn't have to keep noticing the way Steel's head seemed to be getting just a little bit too big.





## **huggy-bear ferris**

### **MY DRESSING ROOM**

MY DRESSING ROOM IS CROWDED WITH COSTUMES...AND ROBES..AND  
ILL-FITTING UNIFORMS.

CLUTTERED WITH MAKE-UP...AND WIGS...AND PRETENSE.

ALL ARE VITAL FOR MY ACT....FOR THE CHARACTERS I PORTRAY..  
THE ROLES I ASSUME.

“WHO SHALL I BE TODAY?”

MORNING LIGHT KNOCKS ON MY DOOR LIKE A STAGEHAND...  
GIVING ME WARNING...

“WAKE UP!! WAKE UP NOW!!! FIVE MINUTES!! YOU'RE ON!”

THE WARMTH OF LIMELIGHT NOURISHES ME.  
ON STAGE.... I SPARKLE....I DAZZLE.  
I WEAR MASK.....I AM MASK.

“HE PLAYS THE PART SO WELL” THEY WHISPER.

I BOW GRACIOUSLY...ABSORBING THEIR APPLAUSE...  
WAITING FOR THE LAST FAINT CLAP OF HANDS.

SILENTLY..I RETURN TO MY ROOM...TO SHED THE COSTUME AND  
THE SMILE.

I CAN FEEL A CHILL DRIFT THROUGH MY WINDOWLESS SPACE.  
I SHIVER...SITTING MOTIONLESS....

THERE IS NOTHING IN MY WARDROBE TO KEEP ME WARM.











**bruce weber**

**CUT ME CLOSE**

cut me close  
remove all my body hairs  
strip my skin down to nothing  
eliminate mother nature's protection from the cold  
slide this blade against my neck  
and spring a leak in my adam's apple  
make me speechless  
make me mute  
i'll stop embarrassing you in public  
i'll stop screaming at you at the shopping mall  
i'll stop begging you to rescue me from boredom  
just  
stop fluctuating your opinion of me like the weather  
stop emasculating me in front of my mother  
stop emitting radiation so i light up like xmas  
stop demanding i own up to my failures  
stop reminding me i never could persuade you  
to heal the scars from my adolescence  
when my attitude taunted every imperfection  
when the truth made me write long poems without form  
to reach the trembling voice in my head  
wanting  
to find love on your doorstep  
to be taken in like an orphan  
to be cared for by your beauty  
to make love with you in your parents bedroom  
while they were trimming the hedges  
yeah  
peel off my epidermal layer  
start from my forehead  
and  
work down to my penis  
recircumsize me  
donate the useless skin to the homeless shelter  
to plug up the holes in their roof  
here's my underarm hair  
weave each follicle into a mask  
scaring away the children  
running in circles  
making me dizzy  
making me angry  
making me want to exercise my trigger finger  
come  
strip away my defenses  
so that i can't put up my dukes  
against your curses



i won't say anything  
to the police  
to the fbi  
to the talk shows  
i swear on my parakeet's grave  
i swear on my diploma from high school  
i swear on all the wrongs i've committed to memory  
i swear on all the excuses i've made to avoid you  
i swear on all the ghosts haunting my bedroom  
i swear  
i swear  
i swear  
just take this blade and experiment with my eyelids  
until i agree to do anything you ask for  
i'm easy  
i'm flexible  
i'm adaptable  
i'm like a chameleon  
come on use this blade to your advantage  
make my adrenaline flow like you've struck oil  
use my body as a deferent against reason  
help me learn to dance with death  
guide this blade across my face  
and  
don't be gentle

**Thaddeus Rutkowski**

### BIRDSONG IN DRIZZLE

duh doodoodoo da dee  
turr cheechee  
deedeedee doo  
wee oo, woo ee  
duh doodoodoodoo  
see oo



## **paul skiff**

your cunt bathes me with spirit.  
flies me through your heart.  
there i embrace the struggle  
that fucked you all apart.

heaven is made from your warm,  
salty, fragrant, staunched blood  
that drowned your heart beneath hate  
and purified my life with love.

here love is sawed in the slaughterhouse.  
the word that made the city bleed to dust.  
among cracked towers angels load their plates,  
to feed my salvation the juice of your cunt.

when will you return to yourself?

broomrape chokes the hemlock.  
crow's foot would dry the sky.  
these are fulfillments that never leave me  
whose meanings eat the truth.

when i have to leave this world  
i want to be so full of light  
when it all comes spilling out  
it will burn away the fights of life.

(c) p. skiff

## **mark hartenbach**

### **CALIFORNIA**

thinking of ivory colored california from 4th grade  
geography textbook. no gray photos of steel mill  
or assembly line gloom. just sun, surf, milk &  
honey, double dosing in the lap of luxury while  
wild eyed flower children lurk in hedges with bowie  
knives strapped to skinny waist. high powered long  
range rifles are situated about the house & i feel  
so warm inside.



## Errol Miller

### Poetry

For the fugitives, of course, those  
who died young and those who've chosen  
to fragment their lives with the burden  
of collective myth and somewhat truth: can  
we believe the private images of the wordsmith,  
trained in a little hickory college in  
the Shenandoah Valley or foraging about on  
the back streets of San Francisco, he  
is of a particular crowd of renegades appointed  
and anointed, a single lineage of immigrants  
from Atlantis and the Southland demurely weaving  
dual legends of life and death and death and decay  
into wormwood sonnets of last night, his  
dead father, his divorced wife, his lost son.  
Like Lee in the mountains he must come down  
one day to the valley of reality and examine  
Sylvia Plath's "Crossing The Water," he  
must examine his writing arm for cuts and bruises  
and his brain's reaction to mayor events,  
that post-dramatic stress syndrome  
where barns burn and red-clay authors  
from the 50's catch the bus to California,  
where vague blue vowels and remote sporelike  
nouns and verbs tumble out upon the 20th Century.  
This is Rock City, its aftermath, a really big  
"slam" where the hero scribbles lantern-lit ballads  
of sad hotels and lost love and Detroit City  
and imaginary cottonfields back home



# Lady Helena

## IMMIGRATION

-- An organization where you are forced to learn being patient, to take humiliation, deal with unexpected situations, without losing ever your cool! Putting up, treated shitty, don't ever count on their pity! Using their little power to make you feel helpless and lower.

All you want, is enter this country, instead, you are waiting in line, to reach the booth, where they decide, what will be your next move.

Understand, if they want you to brain fuck, you are totally out of any luck. And there is nothing you possibly could do, to influence what will happen next to you.

Now here you are, helpless and insecure, all of a sudden you really feel lost and poor. After presenting your papers, you don't get rid of this feeling, it might get pretty tense, and it is taken off your hands.

If your name, in the Computer comes up, or, they don't like your face, you already lost the race.

Instead of entering the PROMISED LAND, you are ordered to their office, no doubt, you start feeling sick, now you are dealing with real dick.

Now here you are, they start searching for dirt, searching mercilessly for something, that might hurt you -- humiliated and treated like shit, forced to wait and sit, for hours kept in the dark, not letting you know what they have in store for you, for their next part.

They might search your luggage, read your private thoughts, digging for secrets, and dirt. Fear slowly takes over, all of a sudden you understand the meaning of not having any rights, trust me, it's not going to help, to fight for your rights, - because the law isn't on your side.

Absolutely, nothing you can do, other than trying hard to keep down your rage.

You are a victim of this system, brutal and unfair, but hey, nobody really cares.

Soon or later, the torture comes to an end, either you get the green light, or they send you back, with the next available flight. On top of it, they let you pay, that's the SYSTEM , hurray, hurray!

Let me tell you , Immigration is some sick cruel organization. Their Officers are skilled to put people down, trust me, they don't feel any guilt.

Again and again, I went through this routine, being humiliated, discriminated, handcuffed, verbally abused, questioned and played -- good God -- I started feeling hate.

Strange enough, but once you pass, nobody cares, but just the try to pass these bastards often ends tragic, as a disaster, destroying your dreams, stealing your hopes, leaving you behind, pretty broke -- telling you, you don't belong, so they send you back home!,

That's the end of the AMERICAN DREAM and the end of this scene.



## Ken DiMaggio

### EPIPHANY OF EMILY

Your stem-long fingered hands is what I wanted to  
write about and not the meta-  
physics of your poetry your hands slight-  
ly awkward stiffly posed but in  
spite of it coming into their own  
unique blossom just like the object  
they were holding a rose

Your hands in spite of their black  
school girl sleeves your hands so  
genuine and warm your hands un-  
pretentious and strong your  
hands Emily Dickinson in the only  
photograph taken of you a teen-  
age student at Mt. Holyoke is  
what I wanted to write about

and not a safe unoriginal critical  
piece about your poetry for the  
test that was necessary for me to  
pass

Your hands Emily Dickinson

But right now I can't right now I have to  
pass this test right now I have to be a  
school teacher and not a  
poet right now and much as I  
try to write about the sound of a  
fly buzzing when someone  
died I see your hands and then  
your lips and then your eyes and then I  
know why I will never be able to forgive my-  
self for having to say the safe the pre-  
tentious the pedantic the ex-  
pected but when I look at my  
hands more feminine than  
yours and when I look at how I try to  
disguise them in caricatured rough  
pose that ends up like awkward fitting  
gloves then O I know why they  
could never like you hold a  
flower that you could just as  
easily without sentiment dis-  
pose in a closed window'd room and a trapped  
fly's buzz and even though these are the  
things I'm not supposed to write  
about these are still the things I will  
think because I will still do  
that Emily I will still welcome  
delicacy as well as grace



And as I do

I close my eyes

and prepare to leave this room

with you Emily

And before we do

I turn to you and ask    May I

and after a small smile and a nod

you give me your awkward but strong    long-  
fingered stems

And together we walk

across the rusted   graffiti'd   dis-  
carded junkie-needle'd Williams-  
burg bridge

because this is where your hands  
have brought me this is where

the flower you are holding radiates  
strength as well as beauty

here on a bridge

haunted by homeless HIV

positive junkies

here

on the cable'd rusted and skele-  
tal that ends in the desolation of a  
dead brick waterfront in Brook-  
lyn

here

because this is where I can be  
most genuine    unpretentious    graceful

and honest

here

and not back taking some  
test where your poetry means a  
compromise a career a secure future and  
a pair of embarrassing ill-fitting gloves



I don't know what your poems mean

Emily

But I know they are genuine    grace-  
ful    honest    and unpretentious

And because they are

is why    instead of taking this  
test

I'm now looking at my hands

O my hands Emily my hands!

even if

they have to pick up the pen

and write down the things

Never

the  
less

the ill-fitting    caricatured    clown-  
ish gloves

I've thrown them away

I've thrown them off the side of a  
bridge

I have only my hands now Emily

I have only my awkwardness    my in-  
security    my delicacy

my strength

\*



# Larissa Shmailo

## LOVE IS BLUE

I remember my father's green Ford shaped like a pig

I remember Dyadya Esprokofim his body like a rooster big stomach veiny legs  
he owned a gas station people left dogs there

I remember Esprokofim fixed a car with a potato he sliced it thin and put it on the  
radiator he survived four camps my mother explained

I remember I had a rooster named Happy

I remember Tetya Ida Esprokofim's wife she was thin Esprokofim liked my mother  
she was fat he is not your uncle she explained he is my cum your sister's godfather I  
am his cuma

I remember I had a hamster named Happy

I remember Esprokofim driving to the beach buying us food hot doggie he'd ask you  
wannit hot doggie

I remember the ring of men

I remember Tetya Ida said that Mama had a son Vova died in Germany  
she banged her head on the grave every day till it bled

I remember Vanya Vanya the junkie Tetya Ida's son Esprokofim used to beat him he  
took me to the woods wrote my name with a stick run away he whispered  
run away

I remember the klieg lights at Esprokofims house the camera and the klieg lights and  
the ring of men watching

I remember Esprokofim was a kapo Olya said it Papa heard her he put his hands on  
her throat for a very long time then let go

I remember my father smoking in the basement lying on the couch and staring at the  
ceiling

I remember when my aunt Ida killed herself she jumped from the window her apron got  
caught in the telephone wire it hung from the cable for months

I remember my father called me troublemaker

I remember my mother putting things in my mouth keep quiet she said just stay calm

I remember the men I am in a garage there are ants there are men I am covered with  
ants on the ground

I remember the knots in my shoulders the hands on my back pushing down on my  
shoulders holding me still

I remember the smell of Lucky Strike cigarettes



I remember my jaw clenched my jaw tight a man pries my mouth open pours water on my head I open my mouth

I remember my mother standing over my bed she is holding a pillow she is thinking thinking hard

I remember Vanya whispering to me whispering call the police call the police

I remember my father in the basement drinking and reading he looks up from his paper don't blame me for your problems my dearest don't blame me

I remember my mother's eyes blank and empty are you sorry poor mama are you sorry I ask and the dark insane eyes stare back  
I say please crazy mama oh please don't go to hell

I remember Vanya screaming at Esprokofim you can't do anything to survive you can't do anything to survive some times you just have to die but I said oh no Vanya oh no Vanya I know what it is to want to live

I remember my father's green ford Mama opens the window look up she says look up

I remember Esprokofim's face in the window thin and pale my mother saying wave good bye he sees you wave goodbye they don't let children in the hospital

I remember how I got my own radio that summer the number one song was Love is Blue



## Bonnie Hoag

### Turning Inward to Open An Interview with A Young Crone

I - Interviewer and YC = Young Crone

I How does someone become a crone?

YC It's really a lifelong occupation. No one confers the title on you. It's a self-appointment, a self-discovery. You choose it and it chooses you. Accumulated circumstances inform you, things happen that get your attention, You are keenly aware of being alive, like a free-fall, and you feel the responsibility and the joy of that predicament. No more time to procrastinate. This is it. Embrace reality. Step right in and skip that rope.

I Does menopause have anything to do with becoming a crone?

YC Let's step back a few years first, to the onset of menstruation. I was socialized to believe that The Hag, The Witch, The Crone is ugly, inside and out. She knows dark secrets and can twist your soul. She is denigrated for her power, for the perceived threat she poses. My enculturation also taught that menstruation would be an awful experience "gollywobbles," "the curse" -- something to be endured in a womanly way, but certainly not to be celebrated. It was something to be hidden, something of the moon. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, menstruation was unclean. What does that do for your self-esteem? If our dis-eases come from "nurture" as well as "nature," then the surprise is that so few women die of reproductive tract cancer or lop off a breast to it, like perverse Amazons. For many years my relationship with the mirror was one of vanity. Rarely did I look into my own eyes. My attention was on the embellishments, the decorations. Occasionally I would scrunch up my face to examine how I might look with wrinkles. I was taught, though obliquely, that I could use my body, wield it like a weapon, or a tool -- depending on my mood -- for carving out my niche. Now, years and years later, I believe that every time young women use their bodies to wield power --power over -- we end up suffering for it. If the young body is a weapon then the aging body is a rude teacher. Suddenly my skin did develop tiny wrinkles. I wondered why no one had warned me. Evidence does not always suffice. When you have only had young skin, the change is both too slow and overnight. Sometimes when I look in the mirror now -- before I settle on my eyes -- I take a tuck in my jowls or assess that new and tender wattle which I can still erase if I hold my head "just so." Now I choose to focus on my eyes. I wonder if I do this to avoid confronting the loss.

I What loss are you referring to?

YC There are many. Right now I'm referring to the loss of smooth skin. Loss needs to be acknowledged and mourned, but there is a gift here, too: finally taking the time to look into your own eyes. That option is always waiting for us, except that we're too busy dressing for the world, or dressing our little ones for the world. It takes more than time. It takes courage to turn inward. We have to face fear. Of change, of decay, and of the eventual loss of consciousness. I fear that death might be the eternal loss of consciousness. I have squandered it plenty -- don't get me wrong -- but to be permanently stripped of it is an unacceptable reality. I don't mind if my death results in expanded consciousness. That fits snugly with my preferred mythology. But I do not want the lights turned out! I note already how they have begun to dim. Just when I finally look into my own eyes, the focusing muscles lose elasticity. There's poetry in that, no doubt. We surrender our sight and become visionaries. As for my own mortality, I don't so much come to terms as I -- ultimately -- reject it.

I So you see menopause as a time for coming to terms with life?

YC That seems to be an important part of it. Really looking into our own eyes, going inward to see what stuff we're made of. Acknowledging our individual existence viscerally and mystically, is a profound moment. Nothing is now taken for granted, yet everything is possible. We prepare for the next stage of our work, using our knowledge for the highest good of the community, whatever you perceive that to be. Mine is rather large, it includes every weed and toad and rock. Equally important is comprehending that we are all, each of us, the other. Humanity is not a mass of discreet packets. We are inextricably bound, each of us an expression of the whole.

I What do you mean, "everything is possible?"

YC If, as the physicists tell us, everything is energy, the principle is that it cannot be destroyed. It can only change form. That is reassuring to me. It helps me examine my mortality and breathe through it. As with my introduction to the menstrual cycle, everything I heard about the cessation of menses guaranteed me it wasn't going to be much fun either. That rotten Eve had



ruined everything by cavorting with a serpent. It didn't do much for the serpent's reputation either. Long ago I absolved Eve of responsibility for the "fall of the house of Man" -- and yes, in this case I do mean M-a-n. The man-centric view. Woman as seductress and general, all-around trouble-maker. Even as a young woman I could see that Eve got a bum rap. She was at worst -- and at best -- curious. Why wouldn't she want the knowledge of the creator? It was darned spunky of her to pursue it. And as for that creator, I concluded that if he were the kind of father I'd want to embrace theologically, he wouldn't be withholding knowledge. Such behavior puts him in the realm of that playful Zeus and not the kind of god I was looking for. We are taught that we ought to be punished for being women. We buy into the idea that we ought to suffer for invented transgressions and primordial jealousies. I met a woman of French-Abenaki descent who taught me that menopause would be a time of discovering and implementing new skills. And greater power. We're not talking CEO power but a more important kind of power. She told me that at the time of menstruation a woman has increased intuition and the ability to manipulate energy as medicine. Menstruation itself is a cleansing process. Menstruating women are not allowed in a mixed purification -- sweat -- lodge because they are purifying already. They might be vulnerable to the rigors or too much excite the energies in the lodge. In short, menstruating women are potent. Not evil. Potent. The power of the womb. If you have ever felt a jet of energy -- maybe you experienced it as light -- emanating from your vagina, then you begin to appreciate one aspect of this power of the womb. It's not only the ability to incubate a new life; it is also the residence of chi, or ki, like a geyser of potential healing. That's why so-called crotch shot pornography is like spilling gold into the sewer. When menopause begins to occur, so said my French-Abenaki friend, that same power for good which is released in the menstrual flow is, instead, held inside - the turning inward begins - and heightened awareness is available as an ongoing tool for our work in the community. I liked this attitude toward menopause. It seemed an altogether equitable arrangement. There was grace, dignity and purpose. But not without recurring existential fears. One Vernal Equinox, I decided I would choose to be fearless.

I Why do you emphasize the word "choose?"

YC I observe that the act of choosing, perceiving there to be a choice, is liberating. Deciding there is a choice is an important revelation at any age but I think it's crucial for an aspiring crone. She knows that practically speaking there is little enough time left, no more time to be wasted on self-doubts or fear. As I practiced fearlessness, I observed that my heart was flooding with compassion for humanity. Compassion for our human fear and the greed, the violence that comes of these. I saw through the veil of our ignorance, the armor of our arrogance. I felt the deep sorrow, the pain of being human. I knew my own already. Now I knew everyone's. Menopause is full of such discoveries. Maintaining them, grooming them, is the challenge.

I How does one maintain fearlessness?

YC At the time of the Autumnal Equinox, I decided that being fearless was like trying to step outside the circle that holds the paradox. I realized that I could -- and should -- choose to be fearless within specific circumstances, but fear is integral, as is joy, to the human condition and to the circumstance of "being." I decided it wasn't healthy to try to exclude what I actually cannot exclude anyway. I think when we feel our fears and reflect on them simultaneously we can derive the cautionary value and still choose how we will respond. We have to forgive ourselves for being human and we have to bask in the paradox, the glorious uncertainty of being.

I What does the "turning inward" feel like?

YC For me it is like finding the nest, the soft place, the comfort of a refuge. A safe place in which we can discover and invent ourselves. The recluse as revolutionary. Spiraling inward to find a place of solitude, where you can really hear. I am, as all of us are, sometimes uncomfortable with solitude, especially if I have a dance-card full of demons hankering to cut-a-rug with me. Solitude is hard if we don't enjoy our own company. The crone must enjoy her own company, bearing in mind that when the whole of reality is animate, you're never really alone. I like the company of a candle, some sage to burn, my windchimes and a pot of catnip-basil-anise tea. All of these contribute to a sense of ceremony, which is a large part of the crone's work, for healing, for expressing sorrow or gratitude or intentions. For clarifying our fears. For comforting ourselves. Others might think of it as a form of prayer. Unfortunately when I think of prayer I think of organized religions and they make me very uncomfortable. They quote god too much for my taste -- it seems terribly presumptuous to me -- and they don't much like women. You have noticed they still don't want us on the altar? Part of my work as a crone is to return to women their rightful power in the community.



I Aren't you taking this awfully personally?

YC Yes. How else can it be taken? Human beings are never going to grow to their full potential when denigrated and subject to self-deprecation. We are afraid of our power, so we pretend we don't have any, men and women alike. We confuse political power with true power. Shame on us. We give our power away. A crone must, responsibly, explore and use her power. And she must be cautious because we still live in a world where the crone, the hag, the witch are portrayed as dark and treacherous.

I For a moment I'd like to return to menopause.

YC But we never left menopause.

I Yes, but I'd like to know about typical menopausal experiences, like hot flashes.

YC Whoa! The Hot Flash. Now there is a compelling message. It has a life of its own. It occupies you. All-consuming. I was impressed!

I How did you cope?

YC For one thing I decided to call them power surges, which is truly what mine felt like. I didn't want to be told what they are. I wanted to feel them for myself. I chose to consider those power surges as physical expressions of this radical, clarifying experience.

I Are you saying you actually enjoyed having hot flashes?

YC Power surges. At first, yes, I did. But when I started having one an hour they got a little annoying. I discovered they diminished -- and then completely disappeared --when I changed my diet. Alcohol and caffeine are open invitations to a power surge. Are we willing to break cultural habits? Are we willing to open? Oh no, please don't make me do that! That's what we say. Don't make me be whole and happy. How will I function in society?!

I You are a Reiki practitioner. How do you use that system as a crone?

YC With more clarity. Mindfulness is always an asset. Reiki is an ancient system of positions on the body which provides a direct connection with universal energy. It's much easier to comprehend when experienced. I combine Reiki with other techniques as I think they will serve my client. Breathing, guided visualization, sound. I note that this system, at least the way I use it, is especially helpful for emotionally and spiritually based dis-ease.

I Do you think of nature as being intelligent?

YC Yes. Certainly. And funny. And generous. Full of personalities. Including those who are present but unseen.

I Does this awareness help you with your work as a crone?

YC Yes. Probably the most important aspect is that a crone has to trust her awareness in order to be effective. Then the whole of reality becomes animate. A swirling tapestry of comings and goings. With the confidence gained from this kind of awareness, all of the other beings can become helpers.

I You mean like spirit guides?

YC Yes, spirit guides and everyone else. The spiders and rocks and feathers and leaves. Everything, which the crone sees as everyone.

I Can you be more specific about how this works? An example, please?

YC I realized that I have a very useful relationship with the wild plants. That relationship deepened when I began basing my diet on them. Last summer I changed my diet completely and felt nourished for the first time in my life. I found myself much more cognizant of the plants, of their personalities and dispositions.

I What plants are you talking about?

YC The plants in my yard. I have been harvesting wild plants for years, for medicine, for food, for beauty -- which is both food and medicine to me. Last summer I really noticed who had come into my yard: catnip, motherwort, nettles, burdock, yellow dock, thistle, St. Joanswort, heal-all. I really began to pay attention and their personalities became apparent. Some were playful, some stern, some pedantic. All were audible.

I You can hear them?

YC Let me put it this way, they communicate.

I And in winter?

YC They turn inward just before the first snow. I see their energy disappearing into their roots. I always want to follow. That's appropriate for the crone to want to travel underground, Hekate's turf, or sub-turf, the unconscious, the land of the sleeping.



I You mentioned feathers. How do you use them?

YC This kind of work is not done by formula or recipe. It's done by feel. The situation is never twice the same. Our biggest obligation is to pay attention and to trust what we see and hear and intuit. If we can cease our prescriptions and our expectations, so much the better. They get in the way of what is really there. You might try holding the feather. Sense its beauty. Its purpose. Observe how the sunlight explores its iridescence. Pay attention. Try not to dictate. It's hard, because control is so important to us. Feeling safe is hard work. Experience the feather, offer it your complete attention, your awareness. If it occurs to you that this is insanity, make a note of it and return your attention to the feather. It will speak, if you let it. Medicine comes in many forms.

I Like in rocks? You mentioned them earlier. How do you use them?

YC Every rock is different. As with the feather, I fully engage with the rock in question. Have you ever picked up a stone, when you've been out for a walk, and put it in your pocket? That is a form of engagement. Do not assume that the rock is inanimate. When you get past that you're more than half way home. When we don't fully engage life I think it's because we're afraid. We drink and smoke and "do sugar." Our cynicism makes magic less available. It's a mask we wear to hide our fear. Being joyful is the courageous state. Allowing ourselves to be unashamedly delighted. Conversing with rocks is a joyful enterprise. We're so afraid of being thought insane. The crone accepts insanity as a "given" -- after all, existence is a pretty wacky concept when you begin to consider it. If then, as I hypothesize, we are all insane, why not choose a joyful insanity?

I Could we get back to the rocks?

YC One must allow for the possibility of a very slow and dense intelligence and listen more carefully, with a "third ear," as it were. I'll tell you a true story. I was on my hands and knees, weeding -- something I do although not so proudly. After all, as I've already mentioned, some of my best friends are weeds. And a weed is just an opinion. I noticed a rock about three or four inches long. It said -- now bear in mind this is inaudible -- it's heard in your head. It said, "Here. Pay attention." Several times I responded by saying, "Please. I'm doing my busy human, control thing." But this rock was really persistent. Finally it was yelling at me -- inaudibly. I picked it up. It had the porosity of old bone. "Turn me over," it said. I obeyed. It felt good in my palm. When something feels good that should be a cue to us. We've effectively deadened our sensitivity so a lot of these cues go right by. I wish we could regain it before we pulverize every rock into macadam. "Well, yes," we'll say, "we used to have mountains. But look at our handsome roads."

I The rock? Then what happened?

YC Sorry. I was genuinely impressed and grateful it had been so persistent. Talk about dense; who's denser? The rocks or us? It told me that if I slept with it under my pillow I would have great learning dreams. It said it was my hag stone. I did it, you know, rocks can be very bossy. Just as it had promised, it gave me learning dreams. Splendid, colorful, loud dreams. The kind that wake you up, literally and symbolically. I don't remember them. I'm not sure that everything has to be dragged back to our wakeful state in order to be useful. I suspect that dreams do their work whether we remember them consciously or not. At one point the dreams became so raucous that I awoke in the wee hours and removed the rock from under my pillow. "Enough already," I said. "I have to get some restful sleep." Not to seem unappreciative, mind you.

I Is there anything else you'd like to add, in conclusion?

YC Expressing gratitude is fairly foreign to us humans. Perhaps especially for us Americans. When I see a deer has been killed and the demeanor of the hunter is arrogant, I might say a small, silent thank-you to that animal for giving its life. This is really the responsibility of the hunter. He or she should be expressing gratitude, but maybe they were never shown how. I'm convinced that being in a state of gratitude is to be in a state of grace. I'm not talking about fawning or pretense or what can this gratitude get me. Gratitude is like feeling joy and open-heartedness. It blesses everyone and further expands our aperture.





*Drawing by BeBe Bullet*





*BeBe Bullet & Axel*

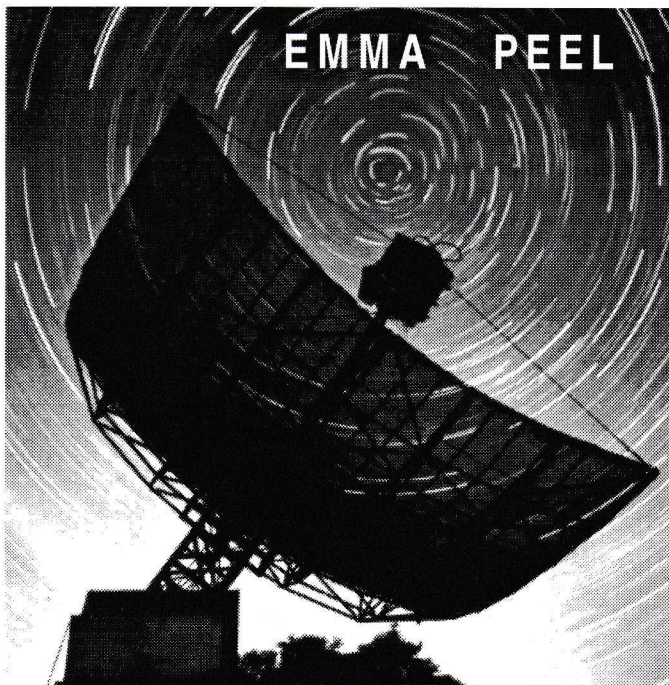




PHOTO: TESSA HUGHES-FREELAND

# EMMA PEEL

GOOD COP BOOKING 415-255-0498







*Regan Comstock*

Photograph by Sarah McCarthy



**Cheryl A Townsend**

**MY HUSBAND**

is watching some HBO  
sex show downstairs as  
I nearly sit in our bed  
with both our pillows up  
behind me reading and  
writing poetry Wishing  
he'd come upstairs and  
help me fill in between  
the lines

**Michael Estabrook**

**Read Jack's Book**

again about him  
& Neal  
going  
back & forth  
back  
& forth  
across the  
country  
& I wanted  
to go  
too.



## Bob Hart

### INTENSITY OF PURPLE

Is that ceramic so purple  
because my lightning  
feels imprisoned by my blood  
but boils it in golden flowers anyway?  
Intensity! -- is it  
a baking in a tomb of beauty?  
a swelling heat from a candled death of gravity?  
an impulse in a different vein?  
what dreamplum dyes the sky  
drawing tears to rise into  
a singing stream of immortality?  
why are you so ugly?  
why are you so beautiful?  
why do I want to dance in you?  
why are you clotted into my space?

#### Mountain:

lets one upward trek its snow;  
throws one outward into wind;  
bride-entices with  
the moon or sun of distances. To climb  
a flower could be softly terrible as well  
given body of sufficient tinyness  
and eye of sufficient awe.

One could be drowned in a dew  
that gleamed as a globe  
giant as a moon in morning.

#### Garden grandeur:

grapeshade haunts below the glow.  
That ceramic is so purple  
because I am so purple when  
I choose to be.



## Jennifer Blowdryer

Excerpts from NEVER EXPLAIN, NEVER APOLOGIZE

I have a new technique  
it's called  
waiting for the end

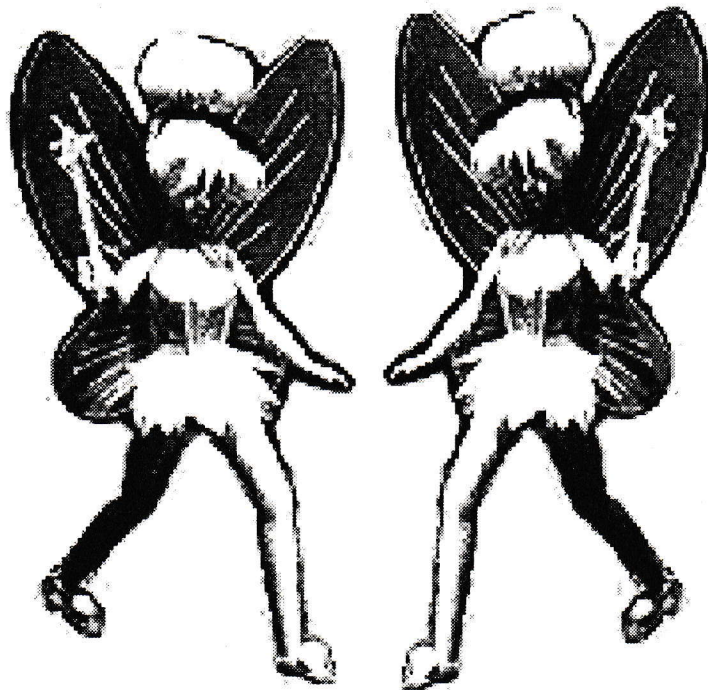
All the things I  
should do  
We  
should do  
This failed  
experiment  
of a species

It's the year of the  
stylist  
thin sharp faced  
beauties  
Just look at the prom  
decorations  
says one after a water  
pipe bursts  
Now face this way  
says another  
C'mon smile  
She instructs an edgy  
pretty boy  
Hands reach out quickly  
Let me do your lips

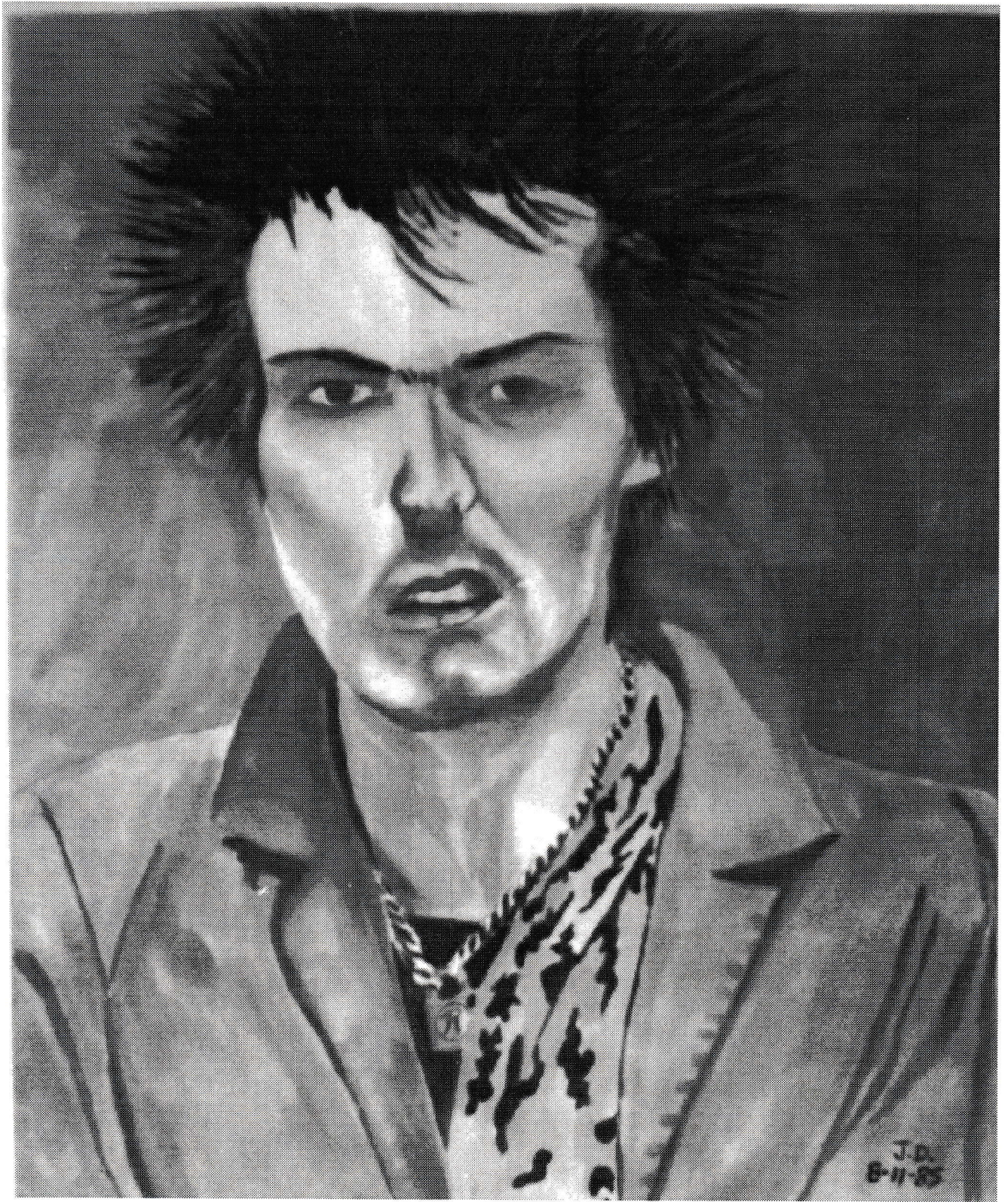


## éliott

We used to have the same watch but it broke maybe the exact suicide watch at Nassau Medical Center top floor observation tuna after dead the smells of beer and piss, the wasted bus terminal before skag before they broke me lifetimes ago Subject shows signs of mental instability evidenced BEFORE entering the service Paranoid schizophrenia with SUICIDAL Tendencies They took me by FORCE, men, 3 or 4, took me wailing like Lon Chaney Jr. strung on amps, howling, they took me forever into the fortress of the Brentwood Asylum I broke out in one hour James Cagney There ain't a prison that can hold me but they delude me with an abbot or a timecard I am élliott, bill or Jack on the moors just a werewolf in London Cocaine killed Roxanne I am élliott and I spare the bums a dime Dave, Marco and Merle say it is a scam but the streets fed me once long ago, the hunger in my belly and the thirst in my veins I can tell the eyes which are real or fake it Ten year spree so close I could taste the feathers on the devil's ass The amulet handed me crescent moon inlaid pearl, three stars the jazz man plays the theme of Andy of Mayberry by the Penn Station entrance on his horn White trash tourists drop silver I want to cook up candle coke cap and free him blow wild man yeah he won't gotta eat all of us tamed lovingly in the system I am not part of the work force I am ex-addict, mental patient, soldier, prisoner; MP and civilian I don't want them to die on the street I want to kiss life to breathe life into the corpse on Avenue A and 1st Get up I got up please please I raise the head but it only slumps down heavily Won't anyone help? I want to be back home at 315 Riverside with the razor blade against my wrist This time I don't want the phone to ring Raise his head, raise his head Please god don't let him be dead









## Laura Albrecht

### Unraveling

There is a spot  
Under her left arm  
Where she is coming apart  
A blank space  
The size of a buffalo  
Head nickel  
It should be red  
With bared muscle  
Or brown with  
Her dried blood  
Instead it stretches  
Empty and shined  
Beneath her fingertips  
Like a cold section  
Of wind grafted  
Into her skin  
She thinks her lover  
Will feel it  
When he touches her  
Will pull his hand  
Back with a gasp  
And turn on  
The overhead light  
To get a good  
Look at it  
But his square  
Hands never get past  
Her colored lips  
Her solid breasts  
He never brushes  
The empty place  
Where she is coming  
Apart with his mouth  
He never notices  
And she doesn't  
Tell him how  
Quickly it grows



## Michael Sean Conway

### convinced

i sit in dark rooms  
drinking to the nighthawks  
and fighting with the poem.

something flies before me  
with green eyes staring.  
it studies me  
like some obscene mushroom,  
then gathers itself to  
fly off.

somewhere a small boy is  
eating crackers and milk  
out of a bowl of  
green and blue flowers.

stuck here  
in between suicide and  
this slow dying race...  
the rats shall only miss  
our crumbs.

throw me something, mister!

a woman with red hair  
and false hazel eyes  
screams inside my skull.

sitting here,  
on top of ten-thousand  
dead dreams  
slipped inside my head  
like a cold blade,  
dull and slow.

beckett sits up  
in his grave,  
looks around with a  
shit-faced grin  
then lays back down,  
quite convinced.

there's nowhere to go  
from here  
but to  
sleep.



**Tamra Plotnick**

sleep writing I

Got my jackhammer wake-up call, but wove it into my dream cause i'm naturally rebellious  
THEY DISINTERRED her lips, a big soft blur

i thought she held innuendo

in that line separating the two

and a long outgrown mauve innocence

the music's so loud i can't hear the typewriter thinking for me, but i trust its dyslexic polyphony

longing and lack of a vitamin

enough corn and loneliness to

write several country westerns

yet my lover is just a beep away

Ernesto's still dead and he doesn't call anymore maybe he just doesn't want to scare me

so i'm hanging on these typewriter keys as if

there were no abyss



Red Panda -- Bronx Zoo



## John Iverson

Too Bad  
Too bad you live in brooklyn  
Too bad you have a boyfriend  
Too bad there were no limitations  
Too bad there were no reservations  
Too bad there was mystification  
Too bad there was revelation  
Too bad there were no barriers  
Too bad there was no offense  
Too bad there was no defense  
Too bad there was no plan  
Too bad we gave/took so much  
to/from each other  
Too bad at 49 you've managed to retain some admirable  
child-like qualities  
Too bad you look your age when you put on your glasses  
Too bad you're very astute  
Too bad you're very comforting  
Too bad you love to live  
Too bad you love to have fun  
Too bad there was unspoken understanding  
Too bad every position/posture was perfectly painless  
Too bad there was intelligent conversation before/after  
Too bad silence was deepening, not deafening  
Too bad it was so easy  
Too bad it was so natural  
Too bad it was scary  
Too bad I snore  
Too bad it wasn't perfect, nor expected to be  
Too bad we have AIDS  
Too bad our options are limited on all too many levels  
Too bad it was so uncomplicated  
Too bad life is so complicated  
Too bad it was so honest  
Too bad you have such a sexy nose, jaw and chin line  
Too bad it was an aberration  
Too bad it was all too real  
Too bad we make each other feel like a million bucks  
Too bad it was just a taste  
Too bad it was "Oh - So Good"  
like that brand of soda pop in a bottle was to a Minnesota 6 year  
old when you deposited a nickel & had to pull it up vertically with  
some force to extricate it from the machine  
Too bad, Jimmy Cliff sang Johnny, Too Bad



## Jan Schmidt

### Excerpt from A Little Bit of Flavor

She thought about the first day she saw the apartment. Mark and she had seen the ad for it in the Village Voice. The rent was really cheap but there was a fixture fee of a couple thousand dollars. They knew there wouldn't be ten dollars worth of "fixtures" in the place, the money was obviously an illegal purchase price. They were really excited, even though they had no money.

Before they went over to look at the apartment, they'd sat on a park bench near the projects to discuss living together. It was a warm fall day and they passed a joint back and forth. Claire looked at Mark and knew it would be a mistake to live with him, mainly because he didn't have a job. On the other hand, he played the electric bass. He used to say that when he was really into it, he played for the clit. Claire loved that. She'd met him hustling dope outside the methadone clinic where she went everyday.

She sat on that bench and looked at his pretty olive Italian-American skin and watched him run his fingers through his thick dark hair. The sun glanced off his fingers and sparkled in the black strands, and in that second she decided to live with him.

They went to look at the apartment. They knew the area. The Post had dubbed it the worst drug block in the entire city. Over half the buildings were abandoned except for thriving heroin dealerships. They knew it very well.

They got buzzed into a hallway that was dark after the bright fall sunlight. The dirty gray walls were covered in graffiti, but the stairs were marble. They huffed and puffed up the three flights and knocked nervously at the metal apartment door. Claire tried to straighten out Mark's clothes, looking at him critically then, wondering what she was doing considering living with such a slob. Instead of saying anything, she pushed him roughly to face door. Of course, she ignored the fact that she had on the same jeans and sweat shirt she'd worn for a week, had even slept in the night before. He looked raunchy, but she thought she looked cute.

A short, hefty, plain-looking woman in her forties opened the door and motioned them inside. A younger, lumbering guy stood next to her gawking at us. They all shuffled around awkwardly and introduced themselves. The woman's name was Lorraine, she didn't bother to tell them her boyfriend's name. The four of them filled the kitchen completely but it was a real separate kitchen. The place was immense compared to her studio at the time which had the kitchen sink and stove next to the bathtub in the living room.

Lorraine asked them what they did.

Claire and Mark looked at each other. Mark said, "I'm a musician, I play the electric bass."

"Are you in the musician's union?"

"No," he laughed, his eyes twinkling, turning the charm on for Lorraine. "I play in rock bands, we don't join unions." He was trying to turn the situation around, make her feel uncomfortable for asking the question, not him feeling stupid because he couldn't get into a union. Lorraine seemed too unconnected to understand either implication.

Claire didn't want them to get into it any further and have Lorraine discover that he didn't have a band or an instrument at that time, so she interrupted. "I make videos. I'm working on one right now that I'm sure will be shown at Moma. But for money I do pick-up work at restaurants."

Lorraine, stuck her hands in the pockets of her tight polyester slacks and spoke rather eagerly, "I'm an artist, too," she said, "but I make my living as a dominatrix. It's off the books also. But I'm doing so well, that I've purchased a loft in Soho."

Claire nodded at her afraid to look at Mark in case they should start laughing. She was nervous both from the woman's candor and at her motherly-look. "She would have won What's My Line immediately," Claire thought to herself.

Lorraine went on, trying to impress them with her business acumen. "In fact, I've made enough money to build my own dungeon -- that's why I'm letting go of this sweet deal." She gestured grandly about the apartment.

Claire found herself standing with her mouth open, she quickly rearranged her face to a big smile, and said, "That's great that you're able to fulfill your goals in life."

Mark kicked her in the foot and grinned at her. Claire was even more embarrassed and to hide it added quickly, "Why don't you show us the rest of the apartment?"



Before they moved on, the phone rang and Lorraine walked briskly into the living room to answer it. She pulled in her stomach and puffed up her chest like she was aware of them watching her. They sat mesmerized as they listened to her conversation. "Of course I'm beautiful. I wouldn't be in this business if I wasn't." She made the date and hung up.

Then she motioned them into the living room to look at the apartment. Her work tools were arranged along a couch. "Oh, excuse me," she said, "I forgot when I got my things out that you'd be stopping by." Right, Claire thought, you put them out there for us. Laid out primly on the red velvet sofa were whips, chains, handcuffs and then, last but not least, plastic high-heels with pink pom-poms. "Tacky, tacky, tacky," Claire whispered to Mark, pointing to the shoes. Mark picked up a whip and tried it on his hand. Claire, not to be outdone, found a black leather face mask and tried it on. Mark grinned at her. Lorraine's boyfriend watched intently, hovering around, slump shouldered, saying nothing. Claire picked up a whip and posed with Mark, while Lorraine photographed them.

Afterwards Lorraine showed them the two tiny bedrooms, then they all returned to the kitchen to discuss the terms. Lorraine insisted they sit down and then told them it was two thousand dollars to move in. "I'd like to have it up front."

"We can give you all the money now," Mark said, "pay in full, but we need to actually take possession of the apartment first, you know, just to be sure and all." He glanced up at the boyfriend who slouched in the doorway, watching them. When Mark caught his eye, he lowered his gaze to the floor. Claire noticed the heavy metal hooks attached to the arch of the room divider.

"Well, I really hoped to get the full amount right away. I need it to do the finishing touches on the dungeon. My clients are expecting it to be completely ready, and there is a lot of work involved in getting it done right, like the hooks for the wrist clamps have to be adjustable." Lorraine sat sideways in her chair, she leaned her weight against the table where her arm rested. Claire noticed the freckles on her arms. One big one moved around the elbow. It wasn't a freckle, it was a tiny cockroach. Then she noticed a number of them crawling up the woman's arm. Claire yanked her own arms off the table suddenly. She tried to speak to cover up the fast movement but she couldn't even remember what they were talking about.

Mark took over. "How about this. It's Thursday today. We bring you the first half on Monday. When you're out and we're moved in, we'll give you the second half."

Lorraine smiled at them. Claire could see that she had once been a pretty young woman. It wasn't age that turned her unattractive, it was her lack of something, a deadness that manifested in her stooped shoulders, her greedy mouth, her pasty skin tone. "Okay. I'll do it, but only because I like you two. You seem like a nice couple. And," she turned and smiled at her boyfriend as though he were one of her pets and added, "it's our anniversary. We met just one year ago today. It's been like a honeymoon every since." He shuffled over to her, eyes still cast down, and put his arm around her and grinned at Mark and Claire. A cat moved under the table and rubbed up against Claire's ankle. She jumped. She recognized the sharp ammonia odor she'd been smelling. It was cat piss.

"How many cats do you have?" she asked Lorraine.

"Nine. And I love every one of them."

Mark "borrowed" the upfront half from his father, who, is probably still waiting to be reimbursed. They moved in and began dodging Lorraine's inquiries about the second half of the money. They made excuses, stalled, made more excuses, stalled some more. They had a million excuses, the only thing they had more of than excuses, was resentments. Addicts are living, breathing, walking resentments. They even blamed Lorraine for the fact that they didn't pay her, after all, she shouldn't have charged us so much.

The last time they talked to Lorraine, she came to the apartment. She barely mentioned the money. She said her new neighbors were trying to get her thrown out. The people downstairs were complaining of cat piss and the people upstairs were complaining of the traffic. But worst of all, she said, "My boyfriend. I loved him. I thought he loved me. He said he was an investment banker. He put on a suit everyday, I thought he looked so good. He never had money, but he kept saying it was tied up. I should have known, I should have known."

Claire mumbled some sympathetic sounds. Lorraine went on. "He didn't have a job. I found out he was hanging out in bars all day and then would come home like he'd been at work. He never had a job, he was just using me. He lied, he cheated and he stole."



She kept repeating it, "he lied, he cheated, and he stealed." After she left, Mark and Claire laughed about it. Lorraine never called them again and Claire never forgot the phrase. When she caught Mark in lies, or taking money, she'd scream it out at him, "you lied, you cheated and you stealed." She thought Lorraine had put a curse on her, because she didn't pay her. It couldn't be her own fault for being too high to see straight, or Mark's fault for being irresponsible. No, it had to be a curse.

\* \* \*



Rat Cat -- Photo by Arthur Rivers



## **Johanna Ross**

### Cowboys On The Dashboard

And who will save my soul  
From the fires of memory (Don't hide)  
I've smelled the evil in this room  
And known my mistake  
Come with me now  
I cannot protect us all

The lost trail after me  
Pulling at my skirt  
Begging for some scrap of recognition,  
Sad as the makeup on the shattered  
face in the coffin

The cowboys on the dashboard  
Aim their guns  
And it's starting to smell  
Like yesterday

All we can do now  
Is pray  
And listen for the magic.

### The Young Girls

Here's to the faces  
Of all the young girls  
Eyes glazed with fear  
And a splatter of hope  
Big hands cover their mouths  
Muffling screams  
And innocence is  
Ripped away

Here's to the hands  
Of all the young girls  
Clenched half prayer  
While many grab  
What should never be theirs  
Dragged into life  
By the hair

We will never speak  
Of the smiles  
That drowned in the dark

I opened the closet door  
And saw only black  
You were pressed  
Far into a corner  
Or I would have let you out  
If only

You had cried  
Just a little  
I might have helped you  
Now you are truly Invisible











## Diane Spodarek

### The Hidden Camera "Mirrors"

She sits in bed and waits for the stillness of the water. She waits for the shower to end.

There is no stillness to it, not how she imagined it at all, no rights across the sluts shoveling the snow into the wall, cutting through, willing their graves, their bullet shoulder-length frozen hair, where their pacing is their memory to the cold, what was theirs; there was no stillness to it, no neighborhood harmony, the sounds nineteen floors below, no sound so slow, and she waits.

She sees him entering the room and imagines him entering her. His hand raises to pick her up by the heart and throw her across the room over the bed where she hits the wall and crumbles like a white wash cloth soaked in menstrual blood, like the first time. But this is not the first time; it may be the last if he stays in the shower a little longer. She could become Norman Bates in Psycho and see him as Janet Leigh, a blonde thief with a good heart who only wants to get away from under her boss' thumb and leers and her boss' colleagues who without apology let her know that she has yet to experience the perfect lover, the perfect male fuck.

Tucked under the covers in her bed she looks out her large curtain-less rectangular window and sees it turn into a drive-in movie screen as she imagines her lover coming to her with his large hand reaching for her. She smiles at the absurdity since her lover is a gentle soul who only wants to please her before and after he torments her. ('You are my mentor and tormentor,' he told her after their first night in bed together.) But the shower is still running and somehow she knows he will be done soon enough, he always is; and then he will come to her with the scent of jasmine and short clean nails and peppermint breath. He will lift the covers and go down on her without a gesture, without a kiss, because once she liked it, even though the touch of his lips were not that different from her memory of another, a woman's soft lips with iridescent pink lipstick; it was only because she imagined he was a woman that she moaned and then wept with pleasure.

Naked he slithers under the covers. She gets on top, he gets on top, they lay sideways, they go down on each other, she stands on her head, he wears her bra, she shoves her fingers in his mouth, he caresses her anus with one of the objects from the drawer, the oils spill, the ashtray falls, the fruit basket tumbles, the phone rings, the neighbors pound on the walls, cat fur flies, she hears her father call her name and her mother say, that skirt is too short. And then they begin again.

Later he will kiss her tears and whisper the things she doesn't know, like, 'I need you,' and she is ready to have her heart broken again, she is ready for the pain and sadness that love brings. She lies on the bed opening herself to him while looking out the large bedroom window at the dark sky with city helicopters buzzing on the Lower East Side. A garbage truck pulls in at three a.m., a bottle is broken and shatters, young men shout 'yo,' and six bullets echo, as the light from the helicopter shines like in the movie, *1984*; but she is not lusting for food or sex or even a



companion. She wants him to get out on the nineteenth floor and look in through the window from the buzzing helicopter's point of view and see her naked, see her body lit by seven candles, flickering images calling out to him with her mouth in a permanent pout, her lips dry and wrinkled from practicing kissing in mirrors, putting herself under surveillance, convinced all men must want her, all women must envy her, knowing in her remote heart she can't change a single goddamn channel.

\* \* \*

Our clothes stick to our skin, beads of sweat drip and we begin...to arrange the mirrors...We are in a room of mirrors, we see each other and we see each other seeing the other as we slowly begin to remove our clothes and become two mirrors. What I do to you, you do to me. My thigh becomes your thigh, my hands on your ass are your hands. I see my breasts multiply on you and you see your penis grow on me. Penises grow everywhere where vulvas should be. And we melt, and sweat and lick. Body parts mix and shatter and see each other, my tongue licks you as you watch in the mirrors, my tongue multiplies as I move down your body kissing and licking you. I can see my face in all the mirrors as I have never seen it before. We wrap ourselves around each other, melting into each other. We close our eyes and the after images of the mirrors burn and multiply inside. And we begin to fall. We open our eyes, ourselves to stop the fall but it is too late. We fall and melt and throb and hit the floor, and the floor opens up and takes us down so far that we rise again and the mirrors shatter and gleam and all the pieces fall on us like a soft cool rain. The broken pieces of mirror can't hurt us because they are us. We are the mirrors, we are the broken shattered pieces cutting through each other. We cut gash slash prick and nick. We sever slice carve cleave and slit. We lop chop crop. We are the mirrors, broken pieces forever fractured destined to be together no more.



NIRVANA ON NINTH STREET : ONE

She wondered if birds enjoyed flying, or if they did it unconscious of soaring through the wind. She wondered if they fly as most humans walk, solely to get from one place to another. She had meant to ask one, but was constantly being distracted. There was the light to be tended to as it grew and dimmed, and the sound of the waves to be fine tuned. She wandered around the great expanse of the heavens as if it were her own backyard, as if she had a backyard. But what did that matter when the sky was the limit, when everyone else was firmly tied to the earth, old *terra firma*, but her.

If I take myself in hand, Rachel whispered to herself, maybe I can reach past the boundaries of the universe. Who knows what worlds I might discover on the other side, on the edges of nowhere, on the borders of tomorrow.

Thoughts like this often drifted through her mind now, but vanished almost as soon as they appeared. Rachel was an optimist at heart. She thought in triangles, not circles or squares as most others did. Her mind took sharp turns, darting from one place to another. She cornered years, taking them at high speed, a bit recklessly perhaps, but ever confident, always in control. Whenever she could, she avoided obtuse angles, dull minds and imaginations. She liked danger.

Can I really be what I imagine myself to be, Rachel wondered aloud. It had been so much easier when she was young, so much easier to believe. Preferring the wondrous to the down-to-earth, she had hated stories of little girls and boys her own age who lived in towns like hers, or even far away in unknown lands. No matter how foreign, the textbook tales were always peopled with the thoughts and actions of the children who lived near her, who suffocated her with their noise and demands. She hated mundane explanations, preferred mystery and magic, times far distant, past or future. As much as humanly possible, Rachel avoided the here and now.

But age had crept up on her, had rounded bends she never took. Had hit her in the belly, the *solar plexus*, dented her belief.

There was nowhere left to go, but up.

And so she soared. Let them think what they would. They would never find her, lost in blue, leaving their days and lives behind. Let them search from here until tomorrow, from there until never.

She had work to do.

TWO

Rachel lived in a small, rectangular apartment with eight windows on East Ninth Street in Manhattan, between Avenues B and C, which occupied the entire top floor of a three-story building located in the back of a large housing complex. Two of her windows fronted a concrete courtyard; two, a fenced-in backyard filled with garbage of every description. Her two side windows faced an alley, while the remaining two came within three feet of the building next door. Rachel lived there with a calico cat named Jezebel who was the talk of the neighborhood for her prowess in catching rats twice her size. Jezebel made her feel safe.

For months now, Rachel had spent almost every waking moment standing in front of an old antique mirror, framed by gilt angels, that decorated her living room, watching her face fall apart slowly, piece by piece. She watched with a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach, with a fear that belied her calmness, the cool exterior with which other people saw her approach her everyday affairs. Above all, Rachel craved intelligence. In her friends, the books she read, the music she listened to, the wind as it maneuvered gracelessly down the street. Not pretentiousness, not arrogance -- intelligence. The quiet, careful consideration that signals a listening beneath the surface, a seeing beneath the shallows, a recognition of the questions that lunge forward with each breath.

Buddhists believe Nirvana unachievable until one is able to find peace in the present moment, to cease longing to be somewhere else, someone else. For Rachel that was impossible. Most often she wished desperately to be anywhere but where she was, burdened as she always seemed by the smallest details of daily life. What vegetables to eat for dinner. What to wear or wash or discard. The mail that had to be answered. The accumulation of years that waited to be



sorted. The fear of throwing away that one essential document on which everything would depend at some unknown date in the near or distant future.

Rachel was a cipher. On the one hand simple; on the other, too difficult for even herself to fathom. One year she strayed and became lost to herself. The current swept her under the stone barriers that guarded her little stretch of beach. She remembered once before as a child being pulled under by the tide and finally deposited, frightened and gasping for air, on a windless beach, bleeding from a dozen cuts caused by the sharp protrusions of stone the relentless waves had washed her across.

Even so she loved the sea, loved its sound, was glad when night came and she could hear it without distraction. The patience of it, moving back and forth endlessly across the sand, driven by wind and tide and moon. Never wavering, never stopping, never the same. The endless ebb and flow of difference.

If she had not chosen, or been chosen -- who knows which? -- to drift through the air, to cleanse the heavens, the sea would have been her home. Not the surface, but the depth of it. Down where it was dark and green. She could never understand why fish had such a multitude of color in a place where there was no light. She wondered how they must feel when caught, if the last thing they recognize, as they lie gasping for the water which is their air, is the blazing light of the sun. She wondered if that was why there were so many stories, about a blazing white light signaling the approach of death. Was it merely the remnants of an archaic memory, when we too lived beneath the waves, never seeing the light until, with our last breath, we floated finally lifeless on the surface of the water? A dream of heaven that ties us to our past?

Every morning at exactly 8:35, Rachel fed Jezebel, watered her plants and fixed herself a cup of blackberry-flavored tea and one piece of crisply toasted bread. Rachel believed in discipline, in schedules. How else could she accomplish all she had to do. By 9:10 -- give or take a minute more or less -- as soon as she had finished all her morning chores, Rachel would stand by the front window of her house, the one that faced the concrete courtyard, and, checking first to see that the sun was in the correct position, she would counsel the clouds to make sure that no two were alike. In her universe, imitation was taboo.

Rachel's downstairs neighbor Sadie had lived in her apartment forty odd years, had buried two husbands, a daughter and an errant son. She had successfully run a delicatessen on Second Avenue, between Fifth and Sixth Streets, until her husband Moe died of a heart attack one night after putting away his third roast beef and coleslaw sandwich on rye.

Sadie had managed to run the store for a year after that, but had finally given up. Not because the work was too hard, but because without her husband it was no longer any fun. Making sandwich after endless sandwich, smiling at customers she no longer even cared to see, lost all attraction for her. She felt she was drowning in numbers -- the cost of this and that, the pounds of smoked fish and large, heavy loaves of bread. It all seemed to sink into her feet, until they got so heavy that one day she could hardly move them and had to call for help to get to the door, locking it forever before she finally hailed a cab to go the few short blocks she had always before walked home.

Unlike Rachel, Sadie hated detail. Unlike Rachel, Sadie was content with her life. She felt after so many years of pickles and cream cheese, customers and husbands, she deserved a rest, even if it turned out to be her last. She loved being home doing nothing. She lived now without clocks.

Sadie and Rachel were great friends.

Often at night, the two of them would sit and exchange stories of their youth and middle age. Sadie would pet Rachel's cat, her feet resting comfortably on an unused chair. She would tell Rachel stories about the customers who had passed through the glass doors of her store demanding bagels and conversation, coffee and a friendly smile. Sadie had become for them, even more than the wares in her store, a welcome routine, a map they could reckon their week by, something calming in a ruthless workaday world.

For many, Sadie's retirement and eventual demise signified the end of an era, the collapse of a generation. Oddly enough, Rachel hardly noticed she was gone. There were so many details to be tended to, so many chores to be done. Once in awhile, she felt something was missing. Some little corner that was not quite right. It bothered her, puzzled her, left her worried and restless.

But it was silly to fret. There was always tomorrow to fill in the spaces, find out what was missing. It was, after all, probably only a minor detail. Something that could be corrected easily enough. Given enough time.



## J.D. Rage

### Bus Poem #17

I wonder if  
today I will be  
the April Fool  
they are unloading boxes  
of Ho King Broccoli  
near Canal Street  
I wonder if I eat  
Ho King Broccoli

Many people are  
lined up early  
for their Methadone  
today  
I wonder why I was  
allergic to Methadone  
and puked from 14th Street  
all the way to Coney Island

These junkies all  
have sunken cheekbones,  
a wan pallor and slightly  
stooped posture  
I wonder why they  
are still so attractive  
to me





Paul Pines

HOMAGE TO GUY LOMBARDO

You've gone  
and left the rest of us stuck with it

New Year  
ringing down the windless spaces  
of our privacy  
*Auld Lang Syne*  
like a violet gas  
motionless  
over the orchestra pit

Mingus  
taught me  
to live gracefully  
beneath the underdog  
but hearing you play  
"the sweetest music  
this side of heaven"  
I learned  
that a man's last word might be  
"Confetti!"  
his final image  
that of you beside your brother Carmen  
amid crepe-paper  
balloons  
champagne bottles  
noisemakers and party hats  
in a ballroom with  
the Royal Canadians  
around you like numerals  
on the soft watch  
in Dali's

*PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY*

Once I thought I'd grow up  
and become the emblem  
of my experience--  
*SHAZAM!*

a super hero  
wearing the logo  
of his uncommon power  
tattooed on his chest  
and that everywhere

I went  
people would say: "Here comes *The Kid!* "  
or  
"Hey, that's the *Time Traveler!*"



Once I thought  
I'd develop occult abilities,  
perfect an obscure martial art  
so they'd see me and scream:  
"It's *Baba!*"  
or  
"Careful, that's the *Poison Palm!*"

But once a year  
like clockwork  
you let me know  
all I'd done was continue  
to exist

You were Father Time  
doing your job  
a professional--  
what we mistook  
for a confectionary smile was  
in fact  
a tap-hole  
for the sap  
in our family tree

Listen Guy!  
I'm beginning to understand  
a gypsy might open my hand  
and say:  
"You've wasted your life."

But not you  
You knew better  
What could any of us  
have done  
that we didn't do?  
Taken the violin  
practiced scales  
until we could play  
the conversion of matter into energy

leap planets  
like notes on a staff  
to drop  
at last

into  
the Vortex of Harmony?

No  
Instead  
you showed us  
your helplessness  
at Midnight  
when the old year hung  
like a monkey  
on our backs  
and all you did  
was  
wave your baton



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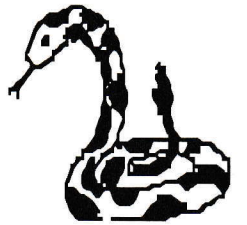
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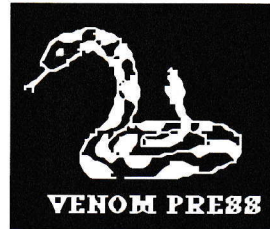




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