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ALDEBARAN

Aldebaran Winter '93-'94

Aldebaran is a student-run literary magazine. The magazine, created in 1971 and publishing semi-annually and annually for the past twenty-two years, is the result of the work of both the contributors and the staff. Aldebaran publishes poetry and fiction in traditional, contemporary and experimental forms.

Our guidelines are as follows:

- 1: No submissions can be accepted without a stamped, self addressed return envelope.
- 2: Address all submissions to Aldebaran, Roger Williams University, One Old Ferry Road, Bristol, RI, 02809
- 3: Please limit poetry submissions to 5 poems each: We cannot respond if more than that are sent, and will be forced to return the submission unread.
- 4: Fiction submissions cannot exceed 3500 words. If the submission exceeds this length, it will be returned unread as well.
- 5: We do not accept simultaneous submissions.
- 6: Please type all submissions. We accept computer printouts, our sole interest being legibility. Fiction must be double spaced. Poetry may be either single or double spaced.
- 7: While our response time is usually 6 to 12 weeks, we would appreciate your patience with delays, as they may be unavoidable due to the student-run nature of the magazine.
- 8: The deadlines for submissions are August 15-November 1 for the Winter issue, and January 15-March 1 for the Summer issue.

Aldebaran is digest sized, around 60 pages, and saddle-stapled. Art work or photography is used on the cover, and we accept submissions of same. We do not pay for accepted contributions, but the contributor receives 2 copies of the magazine his work appears in.

The price per issue is \$5, a one year subscription is \$9, Back issues are available for \$4. Postage is included in those prices. Contributors are encouraged to buy a recent issue of the magazine before submitting, in order to gauge the compatibility of their work.

All rights revert to the author upon publication.

Thank you,

The Editors of Aldebaran

Aldebaran
Winter '93-'94
Staff

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Special Thanks:

Geoff Clark, Martha Christina, and Robert McRoberts, for encouraging Rossi to take this job, Dr. J.P. Schuyler for the new shoes, Paul and Ivan and Tim for reading the work, Marc for the belated birthday boots, all of you who appeared at the student readings, to the "I" plan, to Renée Beaulieu for inspiration and penguin slippers, and anyone we might have forgotten.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red valve heart--and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart: it is a father and mother and lover: it came from God-Knows-Where: it is going to God-Knows-Where---For I am the keeper of the zoo: I say yes and no: I sing and kill and work: I am a pal of the world: I came from the wilderness.
--CARL SANDBERG
From *Wilderness*

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An Editorial (Or : Gee, this isn't the same guy, is it?)

Hello. My name is Matt Rossi, and as of this issue and for the foreseeable future, I am the Editor of Aldebaran. Now, it may say Editor in Chief or Managing Editor up front, but don't let that fool you. That is basically there just to separate me from the Fiction Editor, who handles Fiction submissions, or the Poetry Editor, who handles Poetry submissions, or the Assistant Editor, who handles some of the scutwork.

What I handle is somewhat difficult to explain, but I wanted to take this time out to attempt to explain it to you a bit. I'm new at this, so I hope not to drag it out unnecessarily. Basically, if you have a problem, or a suggestion, or if you just like to write letters to people, send it to me. That way, I'll probably rip into it with zest, thrilled with the prospect of receiving a letter with my name on it. Which ensures that your letter will be read, and that's probably why you wrote it, isn't it? This way, you come out ahead, I come out ahead, and all's right in the world.

Now, onto what I do. Well, I guess you could say I'm responsible (Read "I'm the fall guy" between these lines, please.) for what appears in Aldebaran. If you read a poem or story you like, thank the writer of said poem or story. If you read one you dislike, the buck clearly stops on my tiny, overwhelmed little desk. We do our best here, but clearly we aren't perfect. However, the tone and taste of the magazine are set both by its readership, which is still being defined, and by us here on staff, most of all me. Hopefully I'll get it right. If I haven't this issue, feel free to correct me. After all, this is your magazine. We want to print what you want to read. That's goal one.

Goal two is to put out the highest quality magazine we can. In order to do that we need as many good submissions as possible. So, if you are a writer, or even if you just think you'd like to be one, or even if you just play one on TV, go ahead! It's so easy, you'll wonder why you haven't been doing it all along! Address your submissions to Aldebaran, Roger Williams University, One Old Ferry Road, Bristol, RI, 02809, making sure to follow the writer's guidelines in the back of the issue and to include a stamped, self addressed envelope if you want a reply. You can address it to me if you like, or to the Poetry or Fiction Editors. We swear to read it as soon as we can.

Okay, I guess that's enough of an introduction for now. Thank you for reading Aldebaran, and I hope you continue to in the future.

Nancy Reid

Quinnipiac River Bridge

Highways entwined
Cracked cement and iron rails
Tangled in one lump
Heavy air purges soot
On housing projects
Or maybe its my eyes
It's all a blur at 70 mph

I remember a man named Cliff
He played a guitar and sang
On a street corner in the city.
A voice, clean and raw
Knowing.
To me he sang "Respect"
He said we'll all get it
One way or another.

I haven't been to that city in months
I've stopped watching the news
It's all a blur at 70 mph.

Shannon Sassi

Wondered Child and Prayer

'at the hour of our death'
tripping through your apartment
in darkness
naked bodies meeting wet
in the shower
pressed pulsating water

and then cold under you
my hair soaking the pillow
slowly creeping into and
through each fiber
like blood
my hands pleasingly crushed
within your fingers like
a flower in the grasp of a child
stupidly I moaned your name and "I can't"
but I did and nothing between us
this time
my head splitting
trying to help you come
shaking off the remnants of the drinking
letting go of the night
and sick with the prospect of
putting my clothes back on
you spitting me out the door while
I wipe my mouth with the sleeve of my coat
and then my apartment at dawn alone

it's more than selfishness
I beat myself with that day
the fear of disease only small
to the choice I'd have to make
and how I would get the money
to end the child I thought
growing inside of me
sick from her mother's
disgusting life

'pray for us sinners'
sleep hid from me
my hands reached out to the rosary

my grandmother gave me years ago
all of them watching me now
hypocrite
I prayed all night
I swore never to do this again
'hail Mary' running after 'hail Mary'
tranced and pleading I moved my lips
through the darkness
killing my child over and over
the prayer
I don't want you
I don't want you...

'the fruit of my womb'
released me
the crucifix locked
into my hand all night
engraved across my palm
and wound itself around my wrist
I will not have a child
this time

Robert Edwards

No Salvage

Each day the diver jumps into blue silence, follows the anchor down through bright fish...

Under a restless skin of reflections are drowned museums for the taking: the pitcher on the way to foreign wells, now full of salt water; the buxom figurehead staring woodenly at sunken horizons; dull doubloons spilled along the anemones...

Curious squid bring him silver and chunks of rusty cannon from the reefs, steal the shiny ribbons he ties to mark the loot.

Down here, breathing to a clock of bubbles, it's all his, and he can have whatever can be pried from the silty bottom and carried away.

But when he breaks the bright ceiling of this world and climbs out of liquid time, the tide still groaning in his bones, he forgets the vessels and the cargo below, and he frowns, trying to remember why he'll return tomorrow—as the unrecognizable lump in his hand crumbles in our thinner hand, under a harder sun.

Mary Winters

A Man's Hardest Time

Was after the divorce though
he was the one who insisted —
reverse chivalry; he was the

one who briefed the kids
(her lunatic with grief).
The man now had to learn to

wash dishes. A photograph
shows him with bubbly hands
in the sink, plaid dish towel

over his shoulder, careful and
serious. He hoists a plate onto
the drying rack; still quite
a lot of black in his hair.

Family grapevine said he woke up
crying in his sleep. One night

he felt his car drive over a
human body—"couldn't have been
anything else"—on a back road

near home. Police said the man
was dead before he struck—
anyway: it was the night he
"hit rock bottom."

Mark Fitzpatrick

Beyond Rhetoric(with Ruby)

in the speech of afternoons
my tongue wants to explore
the root of words
in your mouth
your lips speaking their redness
and the energy of your eyes
calling me from some winter resting place
where all the verbs are dormant:

my hibernation in the season of nouns
melts by my finger smoothing under your chin

you are moving me into the one sentence
of touch and taste
in an afternoon of basic grammar
where tulips bobbing like wind chimes
sing out the redness of unspoken things

J. Mason
Opens Slow

Your hair scratches my lips as I kiss your head
out of guilt. You keep standing in that doorway
standing in my way in that floral print yellow daisy dress
rambling on about green grass taller than your head
and the price of eggs when you were a girl
quoting from Revelations
and twisting your face
as you try to place mine

When you walk into the room and open your mouth
I can almost hear teeth stripping behind your eyes
and in the air is a hint of smoke that I almost smell
because you are shorting out inside as you try
to say hi.

I bought the bread already.
It's in the breadbox.
No, not the cupboard, the breadbox.
Not the stove. Look, gram, over here,
in the breadbox, right here, see?

When I walk in your house all I can see are the
yellow walls of your kitchen, which you've had
for forty years, hard years since Ed passed on,
bless him and keep him, Lord.
Have you seen the bread?

Yes, I did know you were Seventy three, Gram.
You told me already.
Ten times.
Just this half hour.
Yes, I miss Ma too.
No, I don't have a job.
I'm Twenty now, Gram.
I like my hair this way.
No, I'm not hungry.
Yes, The milk's in the fridge.
Not the sink, Gram.
I did that to my pants.
No, you don't have to sew them.
Please don't die.

Aldebaran11

Mason kills

I have killed
On the farm it was expected,
The plasterboard shook with it
Wet, hot, and always there
And I am not sorry.
I have expunged many things
That buzzed,
Flying swarming lives
Bugs of all types;
I have snapped the drying necks
Of birds with sparkling feathers
The earthen tones of chickens
The green peppered black pheasants
I have led the dull headed
Small horned
Deep eyed cattle
Into the cement room that used to be a shower
With the massive brass drain and
Shot them in the head
Feeling the heft of the nickel plated
Colt .45 my father let me use for the job
Watched them hang from the chain
The deadfall pierced through their legs
The blood dirty and black
Splashing into the drain
The wheels of their eyes dead
The death that I own
Needs no strong hands to snap brittle bones
No heavy silver Colt .45 Peacemaker replica
(Made in 1933)
Just the endless failures,
The olive green bag of disappointments
Hanging around my neck that
Killed my Mother

Mahdy Y Khaiyat

Where is my conscience?

Pardon me!
Could you show me
The way to my conscience?

Scale those mountains,
Beyond, cross the desert,
Traverse the forest,
Climb the hills,
Walk through a tunnel;
You will see a dusty, locked door.

Knock several times—
There is a long hallway
Between the door and
The inner sanctum.
If there is no answer,
Pound on the door
Again and
 Again and
 Again.

Soul

Eyeless,
It stares at you.

Earless,
It hears you.

Like a sucked in
Puff of cigarette
Smoke,
It curls inward
For urgent
Meditation or
Self-analysis—
Agonized
Over a guilt.

It expands like
Taffy into the
Illimitable horizons
When pleased.

When it leaves you
It resides among
The stars,
Not of this world
Or beyond!

Lyn Gardner

His Last Day in the City

Forever
he has seen
the blocks of sidewalk turning into cement:
no time now for pity
he rushes by

She has seen him
in the bar on the corner
that night last week when the glasses were full:
shyly she asked him if she might
get him a refill
because he had smiled at her
from under thick-rimmed glasses

His eyes are swimming
under the lenses
like fish behind thick glass
cold, uncertain, they glide
by the pastry shop,
over the barber's,
beyond the newsboy,
past the woman on the corner

The bus pulls up;
he steps aboard,
carrying a folded newspaper,
staring straight ahead:
as the bus pulls away
all the buildings merge
into the distance

Maureen McGovern
Untitled

It's time to put my shoes on

now...

I must go away. Must leave this...unsettling place.

It's time to put my shoes on and start off for another plain.
I must not look back at the fallen kingdom behind me.

It's time to put my shoes on these crooked feet that have
walked so many broken hearted miles. The soles are worn and my
calloused feet hit the ground. I feel the hot gravel through the
holes and it burns my spirit.

It's time to put my shoes on and leave this kingdom behind in
all its hurtful splendor.

A kingdom I cannot have to rule.
A kingdom I thought I had seen so many times before, but none so
clearly than when I looked in your eyes.

Another mirror of deception?

I look behind...

A mistake.

Leave well enough alone.
I should have known from the beginning,

I lack the pride
the sustenance
the gall
the patience
to wage a small meaningless yet highly dangerous war.

Children should not be so bold as to play with fire.

A bomb placed at the core of feeling only to be blasted apart at
a moments notice.

Through a cloud of smoke I can just make out your figure.

My feet burn.

Will you move towards me? Or leave me to reckon with destiny.

And I wonder: Is my life my own?
Or am I controlled by your eyes?

A God behind glass
A god I cannot touch
cannot feel
cannot have to sacrifice.

Know that I am angry at the kingdom YOU chose to destroy.

My feet start to bleed as I run from you.
Questions stirring the mind.

The unity of Yin and Yang should have been forever embedded
in the palms of your hands.

Will you rebuild that kingdom?
Will you plant daisies and fill green pastures with
Pintos and Arabians?
Will you sing my name as an opera...

Or a greegorian chant?

And when you do....
Will I take my shoes off again?

For George.

Margaret Adams Birth

Nota Bene

You'll eventually understand—a portion
of Earth will break off and explode into space,
leaving you floating on an ice
cap, in a state of altered consciousness, discovering
how we are always either estando or siendo, and
seeking to improve our quality of being, again and again,
in each new place we encounter, in millions of ways,
every subsequent tale freshly shaped by the last;
even some sages betray their lack of wisdom when
they search for enlightenment in wolves' eyes viewed
through sacred ceremonial flames, a wreath of thorns
dangling from the dancing dogs' necks—
they a symbol of God, all seeing, through the ages;
eternal truth is found in the barren swells of ocean
where one soul-seeker discovers all
being of this world inside himself.

Erin O'Marra

Song for Childhood Lost

Remember when your days were
full of lightning bug promises and rainbow wonders?
Do the chain link fences of growing up keep back
the melodies of mudpies baking in the sun?
Is your vacant playground of yesterday
rusted and crumbling under recent stress?
Do you even remember your bloodbrothers' names?
Mike? Tim? Jeff?
Skateboards, kites,
Matchboxes and bikes
pass you by.

Stop.
Have you killed the child yet?
Is he dead?
Have you killed?
Or were you killed?
Did you hold the child that was-is you?
Did you put the gun to his freckled face?
Did you pull the trigger
piercing his innocent brain
with the shotgun shells of society's demands?

The child is laid to rest.
No funeral.
No tears shed.
Only a fading scream,
lost,
in this litany of maturity.

B.Kim Meyer
Cemetery Trees

John William Calvert could see Callie sitting on her front porch steps from a block away when he stepped onto South Street. There was no mistaking who it was; she had the strangest hair he'd ever seen. It was like a giant coppery tassel, silky-stringy, that she parted in the middle to give herself a face.

John William walked slowly. The stately oaks interlaced their branches across South Street, but the dappling shade offered little relief from the ninety eight degree heat. There had been no rain for a month. John William's nostrils flared intermittently at the scent of the dry dirt and hot cement. Dust motes rode the heat currents like microscopic hot air balloons.

John William had intended to while away the hot day fishing with his friend, Bruce, but when he had stopped at the old Sunoco station just outside of town, Bruce said he couldn't go. He had to help his dad until three o'clock. John William left his fishing pole there next to the Sundrop box when he left. He wondered if Bruce's dad really needed help or if it was because he didn't much like John William. John William didn't have many friends.

Maybe it was because John William had gotten suspended last year for pulling the school fire alarm once too often. They all did it; it was just that he got caught, John William thought wistfully. Denny and Mark had really laughed. Joe, too. Bruce hadn't.

Maybe it was because his family just didn't live up to town standards. His mom was a part-time waitress at Harry's Grill. His dad ran the local garbage service, when he wasn't too drunk to drive.

As John William got closer to the Evans' house, he knew he'd have to decide whether to speak to Callie or not. She had never had much to do with him before. They had grown up in the same town, been to school together forever, but society made them strangers. That, along with the fact that she had already celebrated her fifteenth birthday some three months before he would, made her seem miles away.

He could see she was crying, her long skinny blue-jeaned legs drawn up onto the second step, her chin resting on knobby knees. The shiny curtain of copper hair shimmered with each quake of her body. He wondered what reason she could possibly have to cry.

Callie Evans lived in one of the biggest restored Antebellum houses in town. Circa 1860, the little green sign on the lawn said. It was overwhelmingly big, overwhelmingly white. The azaleas and rhododendrons had all lost their blooms and the ferns hanging along the edge of the wrap-around porch were beginning to turn crisp and brown, but a sprinkler ran non-stop on the carpet-like grass. "Rest o' the folks can do without drinkin' water, but Pearson Evans gone water his yard," John William's daddy said.

Callie's daddy, Pearson, was a lawyer, like his dad, and his granddad

before him. The house on South Street had been owned by Pearson's great-grandfather, who had been governor, and was filled with old furniture and oil paintings of important family members, John William's mother said. She had once helped clean for a party the Evanses gave.

Callie's mother was what people called "society," John William supposed. She was on every board of everything there was in town, and he figured she practically ran the Baptist church from what he gathered in the way of community news.

Neither John William nor his mother or father went to any church. His older brother Bob had gotten married when John William was seven, and went to church now. He had married a Catholic girl from up north and they lived in Michigan now.

John William had heard Mrs. Evans say that the Catholic religion was something odd. He couldn't really see that one was more odd than the other. The idea of an ever-present, ever-loving, forgiving Being was a little unsettling at best. John William thought it was an invasion of privacy having someone forever looking over your shoulder keeping score.

He paused on the sidewalk in front of Callie's house, expecting her to look up, acknowledge him in some way, but she didn't. He could hear her sobbing softly. John William shrugged and walked up to the porch, timing the sprinkler's pass just right.

"Hi, Callie," he said. "What's the matter?" The sheen of copper was in his eyes and made him blink. He felt an urge to reach out and touch her hair, just to see if it felt like it looked. He didn't.

The girl jerked, startled. John William looked into her pale, almost mint-green eyes set between swollen red lids. He had never noticed her eyes were that color before. Her smooth peach skin was blotched, her cheeks and lashes wet with crying.

"I didn't hear you come up, John William. Just go away." Her lips trembled and she compressed them into a hard little line.

John William tried to dredge himself up out of the depths of her eyes. He felt like he was trying to speak underwater. He'd never seen a person look so helpless, so forlorn. Not even his mother, when his dad went off on one of his weekend drunks and didn't make it home in time to pick up the east side garbage on Monday.

He took a huge breath and let it out slowly. "Well, okay. I just thought I might help. I haven't got anything better to do." He stared at her pursed lips and waited. He pushed his left hand nervously into his jeans pocket and scratched the Tree Brand knife he carried.

"I don't think anybody can help. Not anybody," she said. She had stopped staring at him and looked as if she might cry again. John William could see her eyes filling like two green pools.

"What's wrong?" he asked again. Being very careful not to touch her,

he edged up and sat on the porch steps beside her. Scattered fern droppings crunched beneath him. He could feel himself staring at her hair again and he tried not to. She didn't look up, but picked at the frayed edge of fabric where one knee showed through her jeans. John William could see the veins in her hands like blue rivers on a road map. Her skin looked almost transparent.

"To say it sounds silly. Dottie and Janice laughed. You won't laugh, will you, John William?" Her voice was high and tense.

John William considered. Would he laugh? Had a girl ever confided in him before or asked his aid in anything? Had anybody, for that matter?

"No," he said firmly and Callie turned to look at him.

"I don't believe you will," she said. "Dottie and Janice laughed, but I know they're scared like I am. They won't even talk to me."

John William was glad when she turned those unsettling green eyes aside. He found he could hardly hear the words she spoke for trying to make a pattern of the gold flecks in her wide-set eyes. As she looked down to continue picking at her jeans again, John William could hear her voice.

"... but we'd all heard it from somewhere. Dottie's granddaddy told her. Then I read about it in a book at the library, too. It's real if it's in a book, isn't it? We were talking about it and then Denny told me. It was awful!" Callie shuddered violently.

"Told you what?" John William was frowning. He had missed the first part.

"The tree growing in the cemetery has my name on it! Just like in the story. It's horrible! I can't stand it!" Impulsively, she grabbed his arm, clung to it. John William sat awkwardly, a marble statue on the porch.

"Have you seen it? Maybe he just told that to scare you." John William still hadn't moved and he didn't look at her either. "What would it matter, anyway?"

"Oh, John William, it's just like that story. I told you! A name appears on the tree, then the person dies. It's almost like a notice, you know. I'll be next, I know I will! Denny said the name Beth appeared last month, then old Mrs. Harrison died."

"Was her name Beth? I never knew that."

"It was Elizabeth. See? I'll be next! I'm scared, John William! I'm only fifteen. I don't want to die."

"I'm not laughing, Callie, but it sounds like nonsense to me. I never heard that. I'll go see for myself," he said, and stood up. "Want to go?"

"No! I couldn't bear it! Will you come back and tell me?" Her hand slid down his arm, giving him goosebumps. She squeezed his hand, her green eyes pleading.

"I'll be back by. Promised Bruce we'd go fishing about three o'clock." Tentatively he squeezed her hand back. "Don't worry, Callie. I'll take care of it."

The Hawkins Ridge Cemetery was on the other side of town, down

near the river. John William hitched a ride with Sam, the plumber, who was going out that way to fix Mr. Tarham's leaky faucet. Mr. Tarham raised turkeys out that way. The smell was awful and John William was glad he wasn't going that far. Sam let him out onto the sandy road and waved out the open window of the old red truck. John William could still hear it rattling as he neared the black wrought iron gates of the cemetery.

One gate hung askew and he pulled it further open, bumping it over tufts of weeds. It couldn't swing shut, he assured himself, but he walked slowly all the same.

It was dark beneath the canopy of trees. Cemetery trees, John William thought. Not like oaks or pines, or any other tree you could name. Just cemetery trees. The roots go right down to where all those dead people are, he thought. Drawing life from the dead. An involuntary chill rippled down his spine and he looked back at the gate and felt embarrassed about it.

The dry brown weeds of the cemetery were waist high and crackled as he walked. There hadn't been a caretaker for as long as John William could remember. He stepped over broken granite markers and around sunken graves. Confederate soldiers kept watch from several tombstone vantage points. Bits and pieces of old plastic flowers lay scattered over the ground, a sad mottled pink and green and yellow. A pair of mockingbirds bickered and fought in one tree, but all else was silent.

The thick gnarled oak with names on it stood beside the river that ran a lazy greenish brown. Spanish moss hung from it like an old crone's dishevelled hair and John William swatted it away to get to the tree trunk.

"You'll get red mites from that Spanish moss," he could hear his mother saying. "Red mites," he said aloud to himself.

John William could see the new name, "Callie," emblazoned on the trunk. He walked closer, ran his fingers into the lettering. He brought his fingers away sticky with sap, a fresh wound in the skin of the tree. He saw an empty Marlboro pack, sneaker tracks in the impacted dirt around the tree. John William smiled as he left, hardly even brushing at the moss that grazed his shoulders.

"Looks like we've got better things to do today than fish," he told Bruce when he reached the Sunoco station.

Bruce came over by the minnow tank re-tying a cat-gut line onto his cane pole.

"Better than fishing?" he asked. Bruce looked puzzled and paused at his task.

John William nodded with a grin and started to explain. Pretty soon Bruce was grinning too.

It was pitch dark when John William and Bruce walked across the Evans' lawn. The sprinkler was off.

"Supper time." John William said, staring up at the imposing blaze of

light.

Bruce's head bobbed. "Are you going to knock?"

John William turned to face him. He could feel an odd knot in his stomach.

"I guess I'll have to. I told her I'd be back." He shrugged his shoulders. "You go on ahead."

The grin on Bruce's face stretched and he reached out to hit John William on the arm.

"Callie Evans! Jesus Christ, John William!"

"Shut up and go on, Bruce. I was just helping out."

Bruce clamped one hand over his mouth. "Sure, John William. I'm going. But let me know what she says about it, okay?"

"I will." John William said and headed up the porch steps. Just as he reached the door, it opened, spilling lemon yellow light onto the porch. Callie's hair shone a burnished gold, a soft halo around her head. Her face was in shadow and all John William could see of her eyes was a tiny glint and sparkle.

"I was watching for you. Mama says to ask you in," Callie said softly, "but I'd rather sit out here if you don't mind." She was still as stone.

John William swallowed. "Suits me," he said.

Callie closed the door and followed him to sit on the steps like they had earlier.

"Did you see it? Was my name really there?"

John William could hear the fear and apprehension in her voice. She held one white-knuckled fist against her teeth.

"Yeah, it was there. Just like Denny said. Along with a cigarette package of his brand and some sneaker tracks you'd recognize." John William waited for that to sink in.

Callie had her eyes squeezed shut while he talked, but she opened them with a jerk and turned sideways to stare him in the face.

"What?"

"Denny and the guys put that there, Callie. I'm sure of it. Just to scare you. I heard tell he was mad you wouldn't go out with him. That old tree was fresh carved. The story says the names just appear. Not that they get carved out by some jerk." John William straightened his shoulders a bit and sat up taller, proud of his reasoning.

"It does, doesn't it, John William? You think that's right? What if the tree doesn't know any better? I'll surely be the next to die anyway! Even if it is a mistake!"

John William shook his head.

"Nope. I took care of that."

"How? What did you do?" Callie's eyes looked enormous and pale in the scant light on the porch.

"When I make a mistake on paper, I just erase it. Your name on that

tree was a mistake, a hateful mistake. I just carved it right off. Smooth."

Callie continued to stare at him, afraid to speak.

"Me and Bruce went out there after I'd seen it. I carved your name off and then we rubbed some ashes and a little oil into the spot. Looks like there never was anything there at all. But there's a few new names on the tree now." John William stared back at her, awaiting her reaction.

"Whose?" she asked in a breathy voice. "Whose names are on the tree now? Oh, John William, how awful!" She reached over and took his hand in the darkness.

"Just Denny. And Joe and Mark. I know that's who tried to scare you. Did a pretty good job, too, didn't they? Me and Bruce put them there, you understand. Nothing mystic or magic about it. Just us with our pocket knives."

"For me." Callie whispered. "You did that for me!"

John William gave a nervous half-shrug.

"Thank you, John William," she said. "Nobody ever saved my life before."

"Saved your life?" John William felt a little shocked at the idea. He hadn't believed the story anyway.

"Sure, that's what you did! Dottie and Janice kind of abandoned me when they thought I was going to die. Isn't that horrible?" When John William made no comment, she went on. "You know, I think I've changed my mind about sitting out here. You want to go in? Mama's got brownies in the oven and all of a sudden I feel hungry."

"Yeah, me too." John William said and stood up. As they walked to the door he reached out and touched the copper curtain of her hair for the first time. It was like silk. She turned and smiled at him. He was smiling too as she opened the door. The smell of hot brownies washed out into the night.

K. T. Weston

Filth

Dirt underneath my fingernails,
Makes me wonder if the weather has anything to do,
With what I really want to say.
I sit in the same chair,
Behind the same desk,
In the same office,
Digging my hands into the filth,
I tell the world I'm still trying,
In words that sound more like pleasant conversation.

Dirk van Nouhuys

Assuming the Lotus Position in the MacArthur Street BART Station

A sturdy young woman in loose white shirt and ragged cutoffs assumes the position here on the platform, her hair reaching half way down her back.

Her thinner companion with shorter hair in a pony tail, sits with crossed legs as well, but not in full lotus.

They gaze, seeing, first at each other, and then down the receding track to San Francisco.

Their clear rose-beige skin with a blush of dark gray and their prominent noses are very alike; perhaps they are brother and sister.

Seeing them, others sit with crossed legs but not the full lotus.

These two do not fear men in grey flannel suits; they do not fear the Soviet Union or atomic war; BART has outlasted these fears.

But they fear, seeing down the track.

Patricia Higginbotham
Rosemary Garden

However many times you say good-bye
it gets no easier. For parting's hard
no matter how it comes. That boy you met
in seventh grade and loved until July,
the pup that's buried out in your backyard,
the kindergarten teacher you cannot forget,
and every high school friend who, with regret,
you left behind...all these you will regard
with sorrow. Yes, and there's the child you knew
but slightly who decided to discard
his life, your dad who simply couldn't die,
the infant, now a man and wed, and, too,
the young and hopeful man who married you...
you can't forget them. Never even try.

Duet

To this day I see the two of them
she in white strapless gown
dark eyebrows like wings above her face
he, tall and elegant
fond eyes looking down on her

They sing the old melodies
Sweethearts, I Love You Truly, Because
their voices a perfect marriage
lyrics in deep embrace
notes caressing

They take their bow
his arm enclosing her bare shoulder
she, throwing grand kisses
My hands burn from clapping:
I am their child

William E. Cooper

A Briefcase In Rio

Paradise of bargain leather,
stunned by his own voracity
being a student of peace,
a guardian of animals,
he strolls and visits stores
along Copacabana, buys a few
wallets and belts, but still
searches for the grand booty,
the image stout, supple, smooth
yet with subtle lines of character,
like the one he saw brandished
by the tall carioca woman
in the Rio Palace lobby,
amid the harmonious blend
of cigars and cafezino.

He sees what he covets
in a window display,
enters to greet the clerk,
cheerful, round headed, moustached.
Bom dia, por favor, uh,
could you show me
that large briefcase
in the window?

He begins the examination
with the pleasure he usually
reserves for the carioca women,
stroking cordovan exterior,
gently probing inward
to explore small pockets
for papers, pens, cigars.

But wait, what about
this angled pocket,
the large one with the snap?
Ah, smiles the clerk, nonplussed.
This is to hold your pistol.

Frances Ford

Dark Matter Is Personal

Dark Matter, you pour through our sky
like black glue on black paper
sprinkled with sparkly glitter.

Dark Matter, you slip down the curly side of galaxies
as though fun never ends.
Around and around and around again.

Dark Matter, you string along a million worlds
like a mystery belle with a million beaux,
drop fluttering notes, odd hints from high windows.

Dark Matter, you embody fantasies:
the scary wisdom of a weird, old shaman
on a midnight prairie of interior terrain.

Dark Matter, you inhabit nightmares:
a hooded guide on a foreign street at night
pulling a dagger--- The victim is blind.
(Does a world implode if you come too near?
Don't come too near, Dark Matter.)

Dark Matter, absolute monarch, hear
the music of the spheres, the spheres in your procession.
Quietly, carelessly, occasionally, you kill one.

Dark Matter, you glide silent and unseen,
swift and potent and forever restive
through energy, matter, verbs, nouns, wave after wave.

Dark Matter, tell me why I exist. Do you
know everything, do everything?
Shall I make a religion?

Janna King
Snakeskins

Go now while morning traffic
moves like slowed blood
in the dull circular journey of a day.

This is the way you have always gone
obliged to stay in one lane, one job
and home when the day is worn.

Oh love, how hard it is to feel your life
as you must have felt it all
these weary years.

My drab patterned skin is shed
I've moved beyond the husk around my eyes,
I see you

Leaving and empty. Somewhere
past the far city line, this time
you should keep on going.

Ethan Micheal Morgan

No Blame Attached To Anyone

They spit us out of their ruined unions;
Their stillbirthed marriages,
Red, foul, the placenta grey and ruptured,
Out onto shattered family albums and broken
Heirlooms handed down from their
Grandmother's mothers,
They tossed us out like dogshit
And ground us under their heels.

The gleam of gold stains their lives:
Gold they tore from the promise of the future
Silver, Platinum, Copper, the shine of the sun
Hoarded and buried under their manicured lawns
And thirty-seven thousand dollar cars
The ones that they bought with our blood
The ones they drive with abandon over
The cracked yellow roads they built with our bones.

We came from them but are not of them,
We care for the families they tossed aside
We tend to the dessicated witherings that
Used to be their parents, grey and sucked dry
as we are beginning to darken and shrivel,
We are the witnesses to the piles of moss creeping green
over the world that was to be passed down to us;
The one that will be dead by then.

They grind our bones to make their bread and
Our blood crimson dyes their plastic Visa altars
The land is blasted, a No-Man's-Land of mud caked
Barbed wire and gouges torn from the earth and loose dirt,
Crushed by the weight of their passage, smashed flat,
Houses are kindling and cracked glass biting at our feet
Everything is gone, eaten or fucked or spent or poisoned,
Because our parents decided to leave us nothing.

Chris Cousineau

Home Ec.

Neal was staring out the window into the bright spring day. It was finals week, the last week of classes. Then summer vacation would start and he and his fellow classmates would start high school in the fall. Neal was sitting next to his best friend Jack, whose leg kept bouncing with a will of its own. They were about to be assigned to a group and cook their final project for Home Ec. Jack was peripherally involved in the class discussion and Neal was in a different world.

"Any questions?" The teacher's voice had the texture of crinkling paper.

There were none and the students were divided into four groups of four and assigned to individual kitchen set-ups. Chaos reigned the minute the class was divided. Jack and Neal were in the same group. Their U-shaped kitchen was in the back corner of the room, near the window.

Neal sat himself on the counter, legs pulled into his chest and stared out the window. Jack was leaning against the counter next to him and the other boy, Tim, was seated in a chair at a small round table at the mouth of the U. Shelley stood between Tim and Neal-Jack. The table was at the foot of the counter. Shelley held the recipe and assignment instructions in her hand.

"Okay." Shelley was the self appointed leader of the group. "Let's divide this up by what needs to be done. Someone needs to mix the dry ingredients, someone else can mix the wet ingredients, I'll set the oven...right...now," Right now, was held out as she examined and set the knob. "And someone can do the dishes. Now, who wants to do what?"

Neal's hollow tenor drifted from his mouth: "I'll do the dry ingredients."

"Wet." Jack's voice popped.

"No way man," Tim drawled, "I ain't doin' no dishes."

"Somebody has to. You were the last to volunteer." Neal was thinking how Shelley's voice was really tinny and seemed to make his back vibrate in a bad way.

"Man, this sucks."

"Aw, poor Timmy." Jack said.

"Fuck you, man."

"Guys this isn't helping. Let's work together, we're a team. Remember what Fucciello said." Shelley's bony body moved past Jack to the main part of the kitchen. "How well we work together is as important to our grade as our chocolate chip cookies."

"To hell with Mrs. Fuckinyellow." Tim said.

Neal rolled off the counter and stood next to Shelley as she pulled bowls and spoons from out of the off-white cabinets.

"What do we need to mix?" He asked her.

Jack also moved next to her and plucked the whisk from out of the drawer. He grabbed his own bowl and started to pull things from the refrigerator. Tim had opened the window and was sticking his hand out of it while Shelley read the ingredients to Neal.

"Remember guys," Shelley was saying to Jack and Neal, "after you mix the two together, make the cookies on the cookie sheet. I have to go to the nurse, I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Why are girls always going to the nurse?" Tim asked, dangling a paper plate from his extended hand.

"Female thing," Neal said.

"No one really knows for sure," Jack said. "It must be some kind of chick training."

Tim walked over to Neal empty handed.

"Neal, man, let me put something in. Let me mix something."

"No way. Do the dishes Mr. Mom. The measuring cups need to be cleaned."

"Come on man," Tim whined. "Let me help."

Jack handed him the dirty whisk, "Here ya go man. Get in touch with your feminine side."

"I fucking hate home ec. This school sucks."

Tim rummaged under the sink for dish detergent. He pulled out a box of Cascade and began filling the sink with water. Shelley got back from the nurse and bumped into Jack who was bringing the wet ingredients and a big empty bowl to Neal. Jack bumped into Neal and some of the contents of his bowl spilled onto Neal's black t-shirt. All three voices blurted exclamations and apologies at once.

"Shit Shelley," Jack said. "Watch where you're going. You made me slam Neal."

"Yeah, and I almost spilled stuff. God forbid you get a grade less than an A"

"God forbid we get a grade higher than a B." Jack laughed, handing Neal both bowls.

Neal emptied both dry and wet ingredients into the big bowl and began to mix it. Shelley noticed Tim shaking Cascade into the sink and grabbed his arm, saying "No, that's detergent for dishwashers." Tim's arm swung wide and some of the dish detergent fell into the mixing bowl Neal was stirring.

"Shit!" Neal laughed, thinking the whole thing was rather funny. "Well, there goes the ole girl's grades right down the shitter."

Only Jack saw or heard what had happened.

"Shit man," he said. "This sucks."

Right next to the two of them, oblivious to what had happened, Shelley and Tim argued about liquid soap. Tim proved that there wasn't any liquid soap in their kitchen and Shelley walked off to get some from the teacher. Neal looked at Jack who was shrugging.

"We don't have enough time to start all over," Neal said, finishing the mixing. He handed his wooden spoon to Tim. Tim's muscular form walked behind Jack with the spoon, a spatula, and one of the small bowls.

"Don't worry," Jack Smiled. "I know what we can do."

"What's that?"

"Sabotage everyone else's. It's the only way. I mean, she can't fail everyone."

Jack turned and was gone. Neal noticed that everyone else already had their cookies in the ovens and it was too late for sabotage. Shelley's brown curls bobbed through the class to Neal.

"How's it coming?"

Before he could answer, both he and Shelley noticed Tim walking back from the window, empty handed. Shelley held a single finger in front of Neal's face.

"Here you go, Tim. Now use this to do the dishes," she handed Tim a yellow bottle of Joy. "Remember that powder soap is for machines." Shelley turned back to Neal. "Is everything okay?"

Neal opened his mouth to tell the mother of all honor students that her cookies would give Fucciello the shits when she ate them, but was interrupted by screams from the far side of the room. Jack was walking back to Neal and Shelley, smiling. Mrs. Fucciello was yelling at his shrinking back.

"Stay in your own section, Mr. Anderson. Keep out of other people's kitchens and stay away from their spices and projects, thank you."

Mrs. Fucciello was always thanking students after her scoldings.

Shelley started to scold Jack as he approached the kitchen, but was interrupted by Tim. Tim bumped into her holding the whisk and the last bowl.

"Excuse me," he said, on the brink of laughter.

"Jack," Shelley was waving her finger again. "You're going to hurt all our grades and not just yours by misbehaving. You should show some consideration."

"Why?" asked Jack. "We're fucked anyway. Tim spilled Cascade into our batter."

"What?" She turned to Neal in desperation for confirmation and reason.

Neal looked into her wide brown eyes and his heart melted. he didn't have it inside him to lie. He didn't want to tell her. He felt really sorry.

"I'm sorry, Shell," he sighed. "It's true."

"What will happen?" Her voice sounded hollow and scared, and made Neal even more uneasy.

"It may give her the shits. I don't know. I have no idea how much is in there. Maybe she won't notice. It doesn't matter anyway. If we fail, we fail. I say go through with it. Maybe the oven will cook out the soap. If it doesn't, well, I never really likes Mrs. Fucciello anyway. She's always bitching and telling us what a waste we are. Screw her and home ec."

Neal watched as Shelley's face fell. Her eyes were open and blank.

Neal was sure the girl was used to order. She was always dressed neat and everything matched. She had been getting great grades since Neal had met her in fifth grade. He could picture what was going on in her head. The concept of chaos had entered her life, and she couldn't cope. Neal could see in that blank stare a girl grasping for some sort of order, some modicum of control she could exercise. But there wasn't any to be had.

Neal shrugged helplessly, wishing he could do something, anything, to ease her plight.

Then, Neal saw her eyes home in on something. He saw her reorganize after seeing the foothold in the ledge. He turned and saw Tim release a small silver bowl. It slid down the open safety window and off the second-story ledge.

"Tim! What are you doing!?"

Shelley and Neal ran to the window. Neal stood beside a laughing Jack and gazed down at the pile of paper plates and cookware that was piled up on top of the shrubbery below.

"Tim, why?" Shelley was whining again. "I got the soap for you to do them. Why?"

"I'm not doing any dishes." Tim said roughly. "That's chick stuff." His clear blue eyes gleamed from under his pale yellow mop. "If you want me to use the soap, I'll use the soap. You're the boss."

Tim walked to the sink to get the bottle of "lemony fresh" Joy. Shelley was on the verge of tears when Neal put his arm around her shoulders.

"Look," he said, looking into her glassy eyes. "We'll do up the cookies and hope for the best."

"How much soap got in?"

"I don't know for sure. But I wouldn't hold my breath. We're gonna get slammed."

Tim was at the window with the open bottle of Joy. He was dumping it out of the window onto the dishes below.

Shelley and Neal started to spoon out the cookies onto the cookie sheet when Neal heard Jack laughing.

"Shit!" Jack ducked below the window.

Tim was right beside him saying "Did I hit her? Did I hit her?"

Shelley looked over at them.

"You don't want to know," Neal advised.

Shelley nodded slowly and patted out the cookies as Neal spooned them on the sheet. Shelley looked heart broken and he was wishing there was something he could do. Neal didn't care about any home ec grade, but Shelley did. She deserved a better group than the one she was in. She was being dragged into a situation she had nothing to do with. It didn't seem fair, but a lot of things about life weren't fair.

Tim and Jack slipped out of class with the rest of the students and Neal and Shelley stayed late. They went to lunch together, talking along the way. Shelley was going away to Williston, some yuppie-prep school in the Berk-

shires, or was it more east? He couldn't remember. He did remember that she wanted to be a lawyer. They went their separate ways at the lunch room door.

"Here's Chef Tell now!" Jack shouted.

"Knock it off."

Jack was sitting with Kira, Nick and Erin. They were all smiling at him as he sat down.

"Nick," Neal said. "Don't you have class now? I mean, you're in high school."

"Just a study hall, I don't need to be there." Nick's voice was deep and had the texture of sand.

"Fucked up another class, huh?" Kira was looking at Neal. It seemed to him that her eyes were beaming at him. He thought it was weird, but that was all.

"We'll see when we get back."

"Yeah," Jack was saying. "Sure. We're snagged and you know it. There's no way out of this one. She's gonna eat our cookies, go to the bathroom and shit our grade. A nice loose grade at that."

Almost at once, the table seemed to moan and Erin threw a french fry at Jack saying "You're sick."

Neal didn't want to believe that Jack was right. If Neal failed, his parents would kill him. He always got a sense of disappointment from them. They were always telling him how smart he was. If they believed he was smart, why care for grades? Jack was a genius and he didn't care about grades. All grades did was give teachers authority over students. That's the way Neal was beginning to see it. Grades were control. He felt he was about to feel just how much control they represented. Jack was right. If Mrs. Fucciello knew anything, she would know their cookies were a mess. She would know that chaos had ruled their kitchen. And she would fail them in due course.

The class reconvened after lunch. Jack, Tim and Neal were sitting together in a corner. Mrs. Fucciello was late and Neal and Jack were writing and drawing on a bulletin board that was set up at the back of the room. The bulletin board was on wheels and there was a black board on the other side. Neal was writing joke lines into the text of displayed articles and Jack was drawing on the pictures. They heard the door slam and quickly spun the bulletin board so it faced the wall. They were sitting in their seats by the time Mrs. Fucciello crossed the rows of clothes washers and dryers into plain sight.

She was commenting on the individual groups while giving grades. Shelley was sitting with her friends. Everyone except them was sitting in whatever group they were assigned to. Neal didn't know, or care really, if this was a friendly arrangement all around or if it was an elitist selection and everyone else was sitting where they were placed for lack of anywhere else to go.

Neal was staring out the window. He was hardly paying attention and Jack was doodling disinterested in his notebook when she called group four.

Their group. Neal glanced at Fucciello and Shelley, then back out the window. Jack never stopped doodling in his notebook. Tim, half-asleep, had his head down on the table. Shelley had her hands in front of her face prayer-like.

"Group four gets an A on their final. They worked very well together and had the best tasting cookies in class. Very well done, and congratulations. Thank you and have a good summer."

Jack and Neal looked at each other in shock. They rose and left without saying a word. Shelley was all smiles and mouthed a "thank you" at Neal as he looked at her. He smiled and nodded and followed Jack out the door.

"Did she eat our cookies?" Jack was asking. "She yelled at me! There was dish detergent in our batter! What the hell!"

"Maybe there wasn't that much in it."

Jack looked at Neal like he was crazy.

"Yeah, there was that much in it. We saw it. Remember?"

"Maybe. Then again, maybe not. One thing's for sure. I'm not going to push a good thing good bye. Let's keep it quiet and maybe no one will notice. She probably did it to save Shelley anyway. The whole group gets the same grade."

"That woman doesn't care about anyone. She failed Nick's final and Nick is a straight laced honor student. It wasn't his fault his group was full of idiots."

"Look, man," Neal stopped and looked Jack in the eyes. "Who cares? We get away again, bro. That's all. Don't push."

"Yeah," Jack said. "But it sure is fucked up that we passed."

"Yeah." Neal felt hollow inside. "It sure is."

Isaac Alpert
Birthday Greetings

So i'm delivering flowers
right
and i get to the address
and i go to the door
and i say
happy birthday-
just like the card-
happy birthday
i say

from uncle john and
aunt bessie

the man at the door
kept rubbing
his eyes and
saying

son
you got the wrong place
son you got the wrong place
son
you
got the wrong place

and

then he turned around
and closed the
door

happy birthday
i said to myself
as the hearse
pulled
into
his
driveway.

Paperboy at Ten

Peddle, peddle,
Bag hugging
and strangling
my neck.

Sometimes
the door, sometimes
the mailbox
and
on rare occasion,
a puddle
in the driveway.

Big important grownup places.
Afghanistan
Geneva
Washington
El Salvador.

Big important grownup things.
Recession
Boycott
Violence
Death.

I remember
Reagan
on the front page,
slumped and surrounded,
perhaps near death.

I turned to the comics
and read
Ziggy
instead.

The next time
the President
was in the paper,
he was old.
Very old.

Shopping

He walked into the store, and he knew damn well that she would be there, standing behind the counter with the red apron on, and the ceramic smile on her face. God, of course she would be there. She's there every afternoon. Every afternoon.

And so was he. For one reason or another, or no reason at all, he would be there. Usually he would take his bag of doggie treats or tortilla chips to the register next to hers, but this day would be different. He would step right up to her with his canister of half defrosted frozen orange juice, hand her a five, look directly at her, and say hello. This was the day. It had to be.

From May until now, October, October 17, he had waited for this moment. He held the same anticipation one holds for a dental appointment or a court date. Would she look at him and say hello, or would she fail to even notice, and just punch in the digits and give him the change? Would he even be able to get the word hello out of his mouth? Would it matter if he did?

There he was, in the middle of the frozen food department, holding a can of frozen orange juice. He didn't even like orange juice. Of course he didn't have a dog either, but that never stopped him from buying biscuits. There he would be, holding three pounds of pet food, and no one to give it to. Finally, after he ran out of room in his closet, he took the accumulated eleven bags and brought them to the pound. They could be a last supper for the mutts on death row.

But he had to do it. There would be no more stalling, no more indecision, no more silent excuses to himself. He would talk to her, and one way or another the matter would be decided. But the set-up had to be right. One more glance at the orange juice and he made a decision. He would put the can back. Orange juice would not be memorable. He needed memorable. But what to use?

Down the health and beauty aid aisle he strolled, casually. He was careful to only make eye contact with deodorant and toothpaste. God, if someone caught him staring at the tampons, they would think he was some kind of weirdo. Shaving cream? Well, in all honesty, puberty went south, leaving his face as smooth as a new sheet of paper. How about shampoo? He thought about that for a moment, figuring that it would signal to her that he was hip to hygiene. Finally he said no, because he could not decide between dandruff and conditioning.

He next crossed the aisle and picked up a three pack of condoms. This he rejected immediately, and he chastised himself. What kind of an impression would this make? He didn't want to nail her or anything. Well, actually he did, but if it were to happen, it certainly would not happen right here at the checkout line at the Food Bonanza. He caught himself thinking about what she would look like naked, and began to turn red. Perhaps the health and beauty aids aisle did not hold the answer to his problem.

From there he walked to the breakfast cereal aisle, and found himself in a glossy cardboard tornado of sugar frosted wheat crunch charms. There would be nothing here to help him, and besides the neon lights were reflecting off the shiny boxes and hurting his eyes. He went on, past the baker's chocolate and the candles in the shape of numbers, past the aluminum foil and the frying pans, and the spatulas and oven mitts. The produce department was no help, either, as he caught himself staring at the man putting up the row of cucumbers and thinking dirty thoughts.

He had now spent almost two hours wandering up and down the aisles, rejecting everything. Cigarettes were disgusting, and grape bubble gum was too boyish. He could see his whole plan disintegrating before his very eyes. He needed to find that perfect segue, that express lane to romance. He knew that if he could only find the right food, the right object, she would immediately recognize that it was destiny.

He stopped briefly in front of the magazine rack, and began thumbing through a news magazine. Other people's problems could not keep his attention, though. He picked up a magazine with the latest swimsuit fashions displayed in almost too lifelike color. Glossy, too. The sights of Bermuda were distracting him from his real mission. He took a final glance and returned the magazine to its place. When he turned around, he saw the perfect item.

There it was, a display of Chocolate Marshmallow Munchies. Every dentists' accountant's fantasy. Stacked twelve high, with a mixture of snack size single serves, team treat ten packs, and family feast fifties. He'd get the ten pack. I mean, it is the coolest snackfood in school, and besides, the famous actor Dirk Diamond, from the movies, eats them. She would have to notice that he was buying the hottest treat around. Plus, he was buying the ten pack. She would obviously assume that he was going over to hang with his buds. I mean, what other conclusion could there be? None.

He put the five dollar bill back in his wallet, and removed a ten. Good taste, and money too. He could already see them at the prom together. He inspected the box carefully, to make sure that there were no tears or dents in the package. After careful decision, he decided to take the third one that he picked up. It had a small scratch on the front picture, but he didn't have all day to search the entire display. Besides, the store manager was giving him a strange look.

Assuredly he took the box and went up toward the register, pausing only briefly to peer once more at the magazine. He saw her, standing as always, at the express register, smiling blankly at the customers and saying thank you in a voice two octaves too high. He put down the box on the conveyor belt, and slapped down the divider with the cigarette advertisement on it. There she was, just a few feet, and a loaf of bread, a bunch of carrots, and a pack of gum away.

Then the other express register, the one with the candyfree display, opened and the older woman called him over. He nodded his head no and pretended to be agonizing over the selection of candy bars. She shrugged her shoulders and turned her attention to the woman with the frozen chicken and the

two small children who had gone over.

Finally it was his turn. His moment. His destiny. She ran the box over the scanner, and the price appeared on the screen. He said hi to her, and handed her the ten dollar bill. She smiled at him and handed him the change and his receipt. He knew it had worked. The smile she had given him was not the same forced smile she had given to the man in front of him, who bought the denture cream. He had been watching it for weeks. Months. His smile was a different smile.

As he walked out the door, he looked closely at the receipt. This was much more than a sales slip. This was from her to him. He studied the price, the date, the thank you message. According to the slip, it was about five minutes to seven. His dinner was not until eight, so he decided to sit down at the bench by the store exit. He opened the box and began to eat the sweets. Before he knew it, the box was half empty. As he resealed the box, he saw her walk out the exit. She walked by the bench where he sat and on into a green car parked about thirty feet away. She leaned over to the driver's side and gave the man a long kiss. Not a fatherly kiss. A long kiss.

All of a sudden a sharp pain struck him about the stomach. It was followed by a wave of intense grumbling, and then more pains. He knew what they were from, but he imagined his heart down in his chest, all of a sudden refusing to cooperate with his body. It would stop pumping blood, and then simply harden up and crack. He took the remaining five cookies and threw them into the trash can.

As there was no need to remain here any longer, he adjusted his collar and began to walk slowly home. His route took him straight through the business district, and down past the hardware store. He walked briskly past the rows of orthodontists, lawyers and Realtors. As he walked past the hardware store, he slowed down to catch his breath. Inside the large picture window he could see her, with long dark hair and piercing blue eyes. His stomach settled down, and he wondered if his smoke detector needed batteries. He would check.

He would be back.

Kersan Merelli

Destiny

i am the master of my disease
it cannot overcome me
because i am immortal

i have not left my bed
for three days now
but i m fine
thanks to the warm fireplace like
glow of the television

as long as i can comprehend
what i see
everything is fine

i was once told
that i cannot let the machine
control me
and it will not

i need a drink
but it s not so important
that i have to leave my confines

this pillow is comfortable
so comfortable in fact
that i could sit on this cloud
in eternity

Maine

vacationing
by the north atlantic
blue hue
to my flesh as
my flesh is immersed
paradise
for lobster lovers
and land lubbers
and seafarers
and wayfarers
the many amusements
to be found
on deck

a small house
many feet from the water
one channel on the tv
one book to read
one station on the radio
worth listening to

Resurface

a miracle
created by a woman
as usual

the completion of
the mobius strip

the kindness of
fate
blessed perhaps

i am indebted
a promise of stability

i hated you
because i
left you

you loved me
because you found me

Richard Davignon
Serial Killer

Death musk
pervades the cold, dry air
and the crickets
have nothing more to add.

Black leaves
fall into blackness
and I inspect the scene
without a clue.

Summer lies decomposing
while that smirking bastard
autumn
protests his innocence.

Elvis Is Dead, Bubba.

He ain't comin' back...

Them Winnebago mamas

who say they seen him

are about two bananas

shy of a dozen, son.

Elvis is just a bunch

of bones in a box...

However, Roy Orbison

has been seen in Memphis

at The Blue Magnolia

by people I trust.

Sean Brendan-Brown
Johnny Kneels On

Johnny kneels on
red plastic prayer pad
and thinks how weird it is
Major is a priest
when Moses said thoushallnotkill
and Jesus said dounto others;
but Johnny kneels on.
Major distributes
 consecrated wafers, his hands
 stinking of athelets's foot powder
 and warm after shave.
Dogtags jangle
as Johnny leans forward,
Major says BODYOFCHRIST
so Johnny bites, earth under
his knees quaking as First Battalion
looses its cannons. INCOMING
 Major father screams quickly stuffing
 his cassock into his rucksack.
 AMEN says Johnny running
 to fight, bodyofchrist
in his mouth sticky, fortune cookie-sweet:
through the black bamboo and mists
staining his high boots red he climbs,
one-two-three concrete walls
seperate him from home,
from flags, cloaks, clipped green graves.

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