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Spring 1998

the
Roaring
Muse *Spring 1998*

Literary Arts Magazine



“Curmudgeon”

Mark Herritt

Spring 1998

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the Roaring Muse *Spring 1998*

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Oranges from the Kitchen for Mike, a true rainmaker

Andrea Cacek

I have taken out the paddles of my life,
and in thought have traveled back to you.
Up the lush of the Kadunce River,
to fresh memories of a summer's past.
I laugh as you send me smiles of play,
right through the holes of your father's time worn overalls,
right through the scruff of your dancing face,
your African drumbeat dancing face.
Your hands reach towards Lake Superior for a stone.
I sit and listen and wait
for the stories it will share with us both.
I grin beside you in a wooden chair
as water pours from a sky of trees
like a new set of markers
on a crisp sheet of white paper.
Together we watch as the artist creates.
Lightning and thunderclouds swing
to the colorful music of the earth.
We sit with open ears and hands,
ready to fly,
ready for anything,
wanting a couple oranges from the kitchen,
and nothing,
and everything.
Later our eyes meet in a nighttime song
while we eat peppermint bon bon ice-cream at 3:00 am.
Your eyes tell me stories that hug my soul
as we jumprope barefoot in the damp moonlit grass
of MCC,
stories of life, friendship, and love.
I listen with soft, outstretched arms
wishing to hold everything
that makes you the light that you are.

Shower

Grief Carls

the white hot rivulets strike my skin
and run like redemption over the landscape of my body
etching canyons, smoothing hills
formed in my soul during the days of doing and being
that cannot silence themselves
until i stand here,
under the water,
set free.

Falling Into Sleep

Grief Carls

i saw my hand
a floating leaf
(or was it god's hand?)
deep green with promises of paradise
lolling in the slant of sight
wavering, beckoning
lilting in the silent waves
that rippled the glass of the air,
moving inward
and swallowing as they neared
my head my hand
-----slip-----
under opaque peacefulness
warm soft dark womb
soothed
i slept

Announcement

Mary Satch

I once was privy to the rebirth of a shamrock plant
which had been drowning in too much good will.

As you laid the soggy roots on old newspaper,
the green leaves wilted, prostrating themselves
like hundreds of identical mannequins
in perfect syncopation.

Protection from this hurting help of yours.

Later, roots dried, tended and repotted,
soil, cleansed and fed and sparingly watered,
the shamrocks continued to recoil in horror
at what you'd done to them:

upset their root system

and

pulled apart their home.

Annoying, unwanted refreshment.

Dramatically they glowered their disapproval of you.
Imposing their viewpoint upon your vision,
they lay in a state of repose
circumferencing the pot.

Death posturing before rebirth.

Until one day, having spoken their silence long enough,
the shamrocks clamored towards the light:

soft green leaves

and

white fragile blossoms

vibrantly romancing the sun,

lusting towards it,
bound for it.

Depleted resistance to the warmth and light.

Afterwards,

having withstood disintegration,

upheaval

and pain,

the shamrock proclaimed, "REBIRTH!"

A cleansing complete in resurrection.

Exclamation animated in exposure.

i want to shake sarah
to make her actively listen-
“love is bigger than us
and me and my sins are every bit as precious
as the pious”

others agree
and we just hang around here
and hope we’re doing
what we oughta
(and since there’s time
to waste) dare to dip our toes
into warm tubs of hope

“because it’s bigger than
babies without fathers
homogenous marriages
and all the other things your
brain blocks and fools your eyes and makes you see
small as large and large as small
love is bigger than that”

so sarah come with us
and we’ll let you let us down
because someday the others
(not fit to sit for tea with you)
will feast with us in the end



“Guarding the King”

Melanie Pearson

The Rememberer

John R. Donahue

She has unearthed histories
in old Bones
Tracing broken threads to weave
into webs of Remembrance
like a miner
She digs and delves
in books and newspapers
Amongst old library shelves
She grasps at each scape
as if it were a gem
to glean, to polish
to make name histories live again

The mirrored treasure box
came with other things
Letters, Photos and brass rings....
A name history..
Brought to life and shared
with kinfolk who knew nought
of Auntie and how she fared
Ancient hollow eyes
from brown and white
photos stared Leaving name and place
The letters are stories shared
These missives and tintypes
Passed into kinship hands gratefully accepted
lend light in bleak lands
The rememberer sits
Staring into space
The old gray head seems
quiet in place

But behind
those dull brown eyes
lie stories upon stories
of kinship ties
The spider of remembrance
from the broken threads weaves
a multicolored patchwork web
in amongst the oak leaves
The rememberer falls silent
Her tale is told
Of the mirrored treasure box made of wood gilt
in gold

for Mom

Wavy Stitch

She tucked love
into
toast
and fed us
her spirit
awash with
butter &
blessings

Confusion of a 5,000 Piece Puzzle

Andrea Cacek

Trying to fit together,
trying to become solid.
Stability is what the drowning dragonfly wishes for,
a lilypad to land upon.
But it does not know that stability also leaves it to die
where it was saved.
And that there are no wandering breezes
to push life to new places.

I will not lock myself up in a safety deposit box
from fear of fire or theft.
I hang onto this sailboat
and let the good lyrics of songwriters push me along.
And there is beauty in every pocket of my bibs
that continuously penetrates my skin
and enters my thoughts.
And the individual pieces of my life
are a confused 5,000 piece puzzle.
They are not tightly joined to form a single landscape
but are loose with possibility.



Mark Merritt

River Running By,

Lance G. Stolis

River Running By,

Flow slow into,
moments in rapids' rocky paths,
rampant, rolling rocks cutting
slow flow into fast past,
bends back bends,
floats by floats,
by bends round,
waking, watching, water,
bubbles coasting, foaming,
forgotten around the forward bend,
and gone,
moments fading, falling, flashing,
liquid silver streams,
then gone again beyond the forward bend,
forgotten in the flushing flood,
slow flow floats by floats,
by bends round.

First Snow

Amanda Norenberg

Cracked air knocks down the window pane with a falling gallop
of gem-encrusted hooves

Horses of snow, long-time a-comin', bear down on
the sill in white wicked fury

Pent-up disasters different from every other

Slant of eye, curve of calf and belly, glimmer
of teeth blend in blinding sparks

that shimmy and weave down, taking over
the air

Soft, still air
turned racetrack.

Ticket for Dartmouth

Griffin Talbot

pushed on stage

my new sidecar (temporary) had a limited quantity of sound
to fill the space.

I cannot remember for the life of me what the dull red
liquid was, but the hand that clothed it was smoking.
virgin cannibal was fueled and ready for the annihilation
of a theatre.

in the air mumbling about white cars and Texas.

all taking place on dirt roads, like spies in the cab, no face
for any of them - 2 fedoras that lasted a lifetime

"A brutal crime took place on that road you know.
A damn shame it was too, whole damn town was
in shock. You can feel it to this day."

refer to bonfires

mind and body separated now

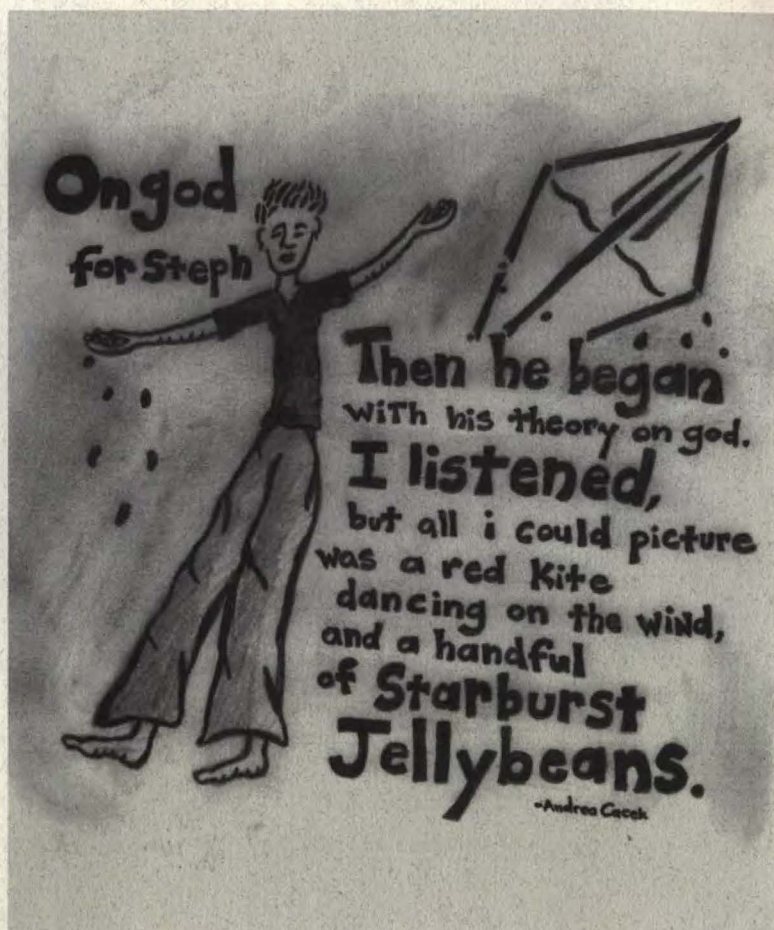
mind in a tweed case and body shifted to the right

Lungs are at full capacity

morning sickness has arrived, scraped and blown very hard again
dirty vacuum bags

I'm feeling all paranoid and greasy

no one wants me today.



“on god for Steph”

Andrea Cacch

Nindaniss Wawashkeshikwesens on a Winter Night

Linda LeGarde Grover

In the moonlit quiet of a winter night
as I pass her bedroom door
Nindaniss Wawashkeshikwesens
my daughter the Deer Girl
springs from her bed.
While in startled graceful silence
she totters to my arms,
from the distant dark forest of her sleep
her wide dark eyes ask "What? Wegonen?"
and I carefully lead her back to bed.
"My girl, sh, sh, niban, niban,
go to sleep, go back to sleep."
Folding her long legs beneath herself
she nestles under the pile of blankets
I tuck around her
and her wide dark eyes close
as she returns to the distant dark forest sleep
of the Wawashkeshiwug.

When Nature was Real

James C. Vath

those firefly summer evenings
last light along the
edge of woods we chased
at shadows
pulled at them
pulled at ourselves
swimming in the green
deep blue grass coolness
chasing christmas light sparkles

songs like smooth round
stones from the beach
dancing years & years
blackbirds screaming
we spin faster

(dark yellow dandelions)
the small children
always have the best
rituals
(the dandelions cry in ecstasy)

Soap blue dresses whirl
past toadstool serenades
& perfumed applause
the deer gently
acknowledge this beauty

the trees nod their approval
we laughed & laughed
into the night

Going Down Three Times

Joy Peterson

1.

they say the third time is the charm
and i fully believe it
as i listened to the voice low and real,
crackling over the 2 a.m. phone line.
my slurred words were coming out
sideways and muddled
from my chapped pink lips and
i looked out my 5th floor
window and watched winter fall onto the full moon.
i wondered if he realized that i had been anticipating
this blow;
i wondered if he could hear me cracking in half,
splinters of girl falling to the dirty floor around
my white nightgown.

2.

i have tripped into blue dreams,
frozen solid to bus stops and bridges,
and i have been stranded somewhere between freedom and
highway 55 more than once.
i've hitchhiked with mad poets who
taught me the way around the stars in february,
who taught me the to stand on both feet
and to touch with both hands.
i've learned how to kiss without looking and
how to look without touching, and most
importantly, to breath from my hips, deeply.
i've learned to love the feel of cement under me and
the taste of the warehouse district air in april.

i've learned that nowhere and anywhere is home and that most
of the time security is a luxury i cannot afford.

3.

that's why i knew i was in trouble when i saw him and
he looked like home to me.

New Jersey, 1955

Gun Niddringhaus

I grew up next to a mimosa tree

If you've never

seen one

let me explain

pink

ethereal

puffs

bowing

supple

branches

In memory

its silhouette

transects

a smoggy sky

To J.Donne:

Mark Herritt

awake in sulphur pond

litmus. magma. poked pierce

solderize naked

brow.

thoughts of lost temperament

tenacity to contrition. loosened

by liquid stench

he forlorn. begotten with

abrasion clean

she valorous. dampened

perspires alone.

branched above. peers down

words soak into tongue

-tones. only tones leer forth-

(evaporate)

eyes never catch adjacent plane.

silent forest consoles

each body

separately

kept apart by

acidic air.



“The Castle”

Melanie Pearson

2 men's voices snigger low
 When we pass the new shop, "Designer Dogs," on 15th.
 "Wha' the hell do ya need them dogs here for?"
 "Heh heh..."
 Next stop the guy from a Halloween party 2 years ago
 Is waiting. He was a Superhero then
 Now he just carries skis and looks down.
 Ashamed? That we only have 3 inches
 Might look fanatical? We don't care...
 Past the Kozy and the closed-up Coffee Shop,
 Nobody gets off at the Casino today-
 Too warm, too grey to be trapped inside the week-old
 Santa-covered panes?
 A woman 2 seats ahead has fuzzed out '50s hair clamped
 By a barrette that's like a Tootsie Roll-brown.
 "We had that 6-pound test line last year
 That other stuff broke my pole." The men in
 back sigh, talk about cold water.
 Downtown, a man to the right explains to
 Another-"See, the original ones had a real
 Bean inside, back in the '50s, that's what the
 Real ones were ya know. Now they must be
 Makin 'em new again- manfuracturin' new ones-
 They have the red tag and that's how you
 Know they're the original ones."
 The other man mumbles.
 To the left, a group of teens hop around in
 Excitement and smoke. One girl works on the
 Other, "Pick a fight with her! C'mon!" Hop. Spin.
 "You tell her, 'Did you call my boyfriend's
 pager?' and hit her-wham!" Her fisted
 Bulky arms swirls up, flailing.
 The Beanie Baby Man bumps over to the
 Street to check for buses,
 He hawks from his gut and splats it on the sidewalk.
 Next bus up the hill-
 Silence.
 We chew on our own secrets.

i am cellophane and stars now.
empty as a universe of black.
skies hollow against my lips.
you suck me dry.
whiplash and concrete stairs,
my future.
we make no sense
you and I.
all hair and lips,
all naked insecurity.
i'll clothe myself in guilt
and walk alone.
i'll smoke my sin
on the front porch in the winter.
with all the white on white,
and even the sky isn't strong enough
to turn black in this cold.
i'll tell you this,
i never wanted the moon on a chain
or anything fashioned silver from you
(i would have choked on it for lack of words.)
i merely desired a kiss that was meant
an ounce of soul on a hoop,
something material to burn in your leaving.
(a star sparkling in the eyes of a lover.)

Thawing

Mary Dragich

It was in my fourth year of living in Duluth
that I walked past the Lester River
when it was frozen in motion
stunned into stillness by the slap of the icy hand of wind
off Lake Superior

It was in my fourth year of living
that the ice cold, bony fingers of my grandfather's hand
clasped mine around his penis, teaching me his rhythm.
It was then I froze, clinging like the water to the rocks of the falls,
back turned against the cold.

Many times since then, the river has thawed and flowed,
sung happy tunes and raged.
Many times since then, I have stood along my own banks,
watching the small child clinging still.

And now I have a lover
whose kisses are soft, warm-breathed, full of life.
I feel the heat of him against my belly.
I dance and I sing
and I curse the grandfather
I curse the grandfather and I release him to the river
I release him to the river and I dance
and I sing.



“Introspection #3”

Shannon Klay

The Human

Ann Niedringhaus

In lush woods
I scratch away the surface,
mosses, vines, tree roots,
to see the color.

Ohaingu sand was off-white,
the hew of sun-bleached
wood, old straw,
radiating back African sunshine.

A day's travel away, Ruacana,
warm burnt orange,
primeval clay, glowing,
echoing the lingering sunset.

A friend told me
about pure black Hawaiian lava
where white stones
can print graffiti.

So I dig, intent
on making my mark.

This soil may be uncovered too.

Mom

Jean Cole

Today, inexplicably, my mother demands to go home. "Why, Mom?" I ask. "I can't, I can't, I can't," she says, her hands raised to each side of her head, trembling.

She's crying. And there are no words to explain. I am upset. She was supposed to stay the summer. I told her neighbors she was coming home with me. "That's so nice," Gert said, leaning on her walker in the hallway outside her apartment door. "You're a good daughter."

So, I load her and her suitcase and her bananas into the car. We're on Highway 77 and her nose is running. Neither of us have a tissue. I say, "I'll stop at the store and buy some." "Yes," she says.

I forgot my purse. "I need some money, Mom," I say, rubbing my thumb and the tips of my right hand fingers together. "I don't, I don't, I don't, oh my," she says. All she has is a \$100 bill. "Oh, well," I shrug. Then she pulls out from her purse a wad of \$1 bills that she rubber bands and keeps to dole out to the kids. "Oh, yeah!" I say. "We'll use that!"

So, she gives a look like, I didn't really want to have to spend

this money, and she painstakingly pulls a bill from the wad without removing the band. It is difficult for me not to snatch it from her, to hurry things along. With a look like, Here goes, she slowly lifts it to her nose, and blows. I stare, momentarily transfixed. "Nooooo, Mom," I say, gently. "Let's use that money to BUY some tissue." Realizing what she's done, she starts to cry again, and I go in and buy a box of Kleenex™.

I don't remember lifting my feet to climb the stairs, paying the clerk.

Mom's losing it.

When we get to her small apartment, I help her get ready for a shower. This is normally the responsibility of her home health care aide, so this is something new for me, washing my mother.

Each action my mother takes is preceded by a look of confusion until she remembers what she was doing or where she was going. Finally, she is naked. Her 77-year -old body is pale and loose. She shuffles to the shower, sits on the aluminum and plastic chair and holds on to the handicap bars. I gently spray her with the detached shower head, and soap her back. She indicates she can do this herself.

Okay, I tell her, but I'll shampoo you. I really don't trust her to clean herself. She forgets she has armpits, so I remind her of them before I leave the bathroom. I walk around the other two rooms while she washes. It is very still, neat. Unlike our house which looks noisy, even if no one is there. I inspect her things, what's left of her life after 77 years, 50-some years of marriage, six children, one already dead of cancer, and a dozen grandchildren. There's little here; much of their belongings were given away in the past few years as they moved to smaller living quarters. I touch my father's ash-filled urn, bronze and heavy, on the hutch. Straightening picture frames, I look at the faces of my parents' parents, sad because I never knew them. I look in drawers, open cabinets. I know everything that is here.

It upsets me that I don't remember my mother when she was younger, when I was a child. I can't picture in my mind what she was like then. Did we have fun together? I was the youngest. Was she too tired by then to have fun?

I will have to ask my siblings. Did Mom ever take you to the park when you were little? Did she ever read you bedtime stories? She must have. She must have.

I go back to shampoo Mom's hair. It is all white now, dry, and falls out easily. I am gentle, for fear it will all wash away down the drain. I see much of her pink scalp as I rinse.

I help her pat dry the places that are hard for her to reach. Even with a shower and shampoo, she still smells old. Mom had her stroke nine years ago. I remember her lying in the hospital bed, looking confused and frightened. I remember asking the doctor, "But she'll get better, right?" And I remember his hesitation, his glance at my oldest sister, who seemed already to know the answer to my question. "Not necessarily," he said. I felt weak, powerless, like a child.

It's called aphasic. She began to speak an unknown language; and likewise, our words became mostly unintelligible to her. But she could get around. And Dad took care of her. Sometimes, we joked. That Dad thought this was great, after 50 years, finally, some peace and quiet. But I knew that he hated what happened to her.

Dad died of a massive stroke and so she has lived here, alone, for two years. She only goes out when I take her. I do everything for her.

But now, she blows her nose with dollar bills and forgets she

has armpits. She doesn't know where she is when she wakes up from a nap, and veers precariously from wall to wall when she walks.

I get the curlers out to set her hair. The old-fashioned brush curlers with the plastic picks. Yellow, blue, and green. Tiny, medium, and large. She likes it done just so. I know. As I divide each section of hair, the comb fills with loose hairs. I think I could pull it all out if I wanted, just like that.

And then, floating to the surface, comes a memory. I'm little, in my pajamas, cross legged on the living room floor, just out of the bath. My hair is wet. My mother sits with me, and combs my hair. Sections it, twirls it around to a circle against my head, and she secures it with bobby pins, two per curl. "Mom, remember when used to put pin curls in my hair?" I ask her as I twirl a white lock of her hair around a tiny blue brush curler. "Pin curls," I repeat. "Remember?" She smiles, shrugs. She doesn't understand what I've asked. That's okay, though. I remember.



“Birch Tone”

Kristi Link Fernholtz

The County Fair

Jean Cole

Annie and I are on the double-decker ferris wheel at the St. Louis County Fair. It's 85 degrees. I hold Annie close...she could fall right through these bars. Every time we spin downward, my gut rises.

Our bare skin sticks to the red vinyl of the swinging chair, and I smell machinery, oil, greasy food, hot asphalt, people. It's a thick smell, fills you up and hangs in your throat. I look at the steel arms of the ferris wheel, the bolts, wires, gears. Grimey and paint chipped. It's old, been too many fairs like this. I wonder about the people who take it down and put it up. Will we die on this ride? We bend over the bar, looking down over the tips of our tennis shoes. Annie says *I'm getting sea sick, but don't worry, I won't throw up on you*, and I look at her face to be sure. She's smiling.

It's time to get off the ferris wheel and we meet Greg and Angela and Amy and they all want to go *here*, go *there*, they're *thirsty*, they're *hungry*, *Can't we play some games...*so we spend \$24.00 in 7 minutes for two games that they each play twice and lose and we say *No more games*, and that's all Amy wants to do, play games. I am silently furious to have paid for their disappointment.

The girls get on another ride, and as we watch them go higher and higher in these swings and go around faster and faster, my stomach rises even though I am standing on the ground, when Greg says to me, casually, *I think I clinched a good deal today in Cloquet, they want me to consult for them on their expansion, and we'd get all the valve business...WOW, that's great*, I say, *you must be a happy guy...Well, it's not for sure yet*, he says, *the details have to be worked out...but I can see he's pleased*. I am amazed that he finds satisfaction in selling valves for a living.

Some teenaged girls wearing hip hugging bell bottom jeans with short shirts and too much make-up stand self-consciously in a little group. One of them has a hickey on her neck, and so did another young girl that sat next to me and across from Greg on the Sea Ray and Greg says, *Did you notice all these girls with hickies on their necks?* and I say, *Yeah, I noticed*, and he says, *Our girls better not ever come in with hickies on their necks or they'll never go out again...*I nod, and silently remember having hickies on my neck when I was in high school, trying to hide them with makeup, wearing bandanas and white lipstick, hip huggers, too. I gaze at them a little longer, young women with no regrets.

Then our girls get off the swings and Amy trips on the thick, black, snaking electrical cables that are everywhere and skins her knees and we say to her, *You're fine, Honey, come on, let's go see the farm animals* and she forgets about her knees. We go to the goat barn and someone is shaving a goat outside by some bleachers and Greg sits down to watch pretending he is interested when actually he is tired but the girls want to go inside so he gets up and goes inside. In the barns the greasy smell of the fairway is lost in the smell of urine and manure, hides and feathers, wool and hay, leather and fur. This smell is better, doesn't threaten to gag me. That humongous cow, surely, could kill a person if it felt like it. Can't we stay here a little longer? I want to touch the snout of a hog.

We go to the Home Activities building and Angela has won two blue ribbons, one red ribbon and one white ribbon for some clothes that she has sewn in the last year...she calculates her earnings as Greg and I look at each other and think, hey, cool. We pass by the baking section and there are blue ribbon cookies. Greg says *I want one, I want a blue ribbon cookie, I want one*, but they're in a glass enclosure, locked, and I think, his mother baked, he wishes I baked, why don't I bake...and I look at the canned tomatoes and the one that

had a blue ribbon didn't look any better than the tomatoes I canned once.

We go back out to the midway and Greg says *We've spent almost \$150 already*. Annie and Amy want to go on a kiddie ride and I say okay...they are the only ones on it, and the woman operating the ride dozes off while they are going around, slowly, in these little blue and white whales, shrugging their shoulders, yelling at me, *Doesn't it go any faster than this?* and then the woman jerks herself awake, stops the ride and the girls climb down...I look straight at the woman but she's somewhere else, what is she thinking about? I don't tell Greg.

We walk along the edge of the midway and I spot the Cal Spas hot tub exhibit that had been at our mall recently and I say, *Hey Buddy! Remember us? The girls and I saw you at the mall in Virginia*, and he says, *Oh, sure! Have you bought a spa yet?* and Greg says, importantly, *No, but we're going to*, and he hitches up his pants and lights a cigarette and they bullshit for awhile and discover they both grew up in the same neighborhood 30 some years ago and 15 minutes later we make a \$300 down payment and sign a contract for a Cal Spas Lounger with 23 jets and six seats, including a recliner...*Just like that?* I ask Greg. He shrugs: what does it matter?

Before we leave a young woman gives Amy a stuffed dog she won playing some game, and Annie whines about this all the way home...*She's lucky and I'm not...I never get anything...Amy got a dog AND cotton candy...I never get anything...*

On the ride home I think of the people working the fair, their dull hair, bad teeth, wary eyes, money aprons, leather and silver, and *those campers*, wondering where will they go next, to Cook County, maybe, someplace in North Dakota, or Iowa? How does a person decide to do what they do? Does the woman who fell asleep at the controls of the kiddie ride have a family? What would the business manager say if I walked into his trailer and said, *Can I sign up? Can I sell ping pong balls to be tossed into goldfish bowls?* What would it be like living with people who wear studs in their tongues and tattoos of hissing rattlesnakes on their shoulder blades? Could I find a friend among them? What would people say? *I can't fuckin' believe it. She left her family to be a carnie.*

And Amy and Annie are eating cotton candy in the car and they want to stop somewhere to wash their sticky hands, and I tell them to just lick and suck their fingers clean, and as they do exactly what I tell them to do, I think of all the things they touched at the St. Louis County Fair.



Weather Head



Bill Braddock

Our apologies to Bill Braddock. He was not listed as the photographer of this image in the Winter 1997-98 issue.

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The Roaring Muse is seeking submissions
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