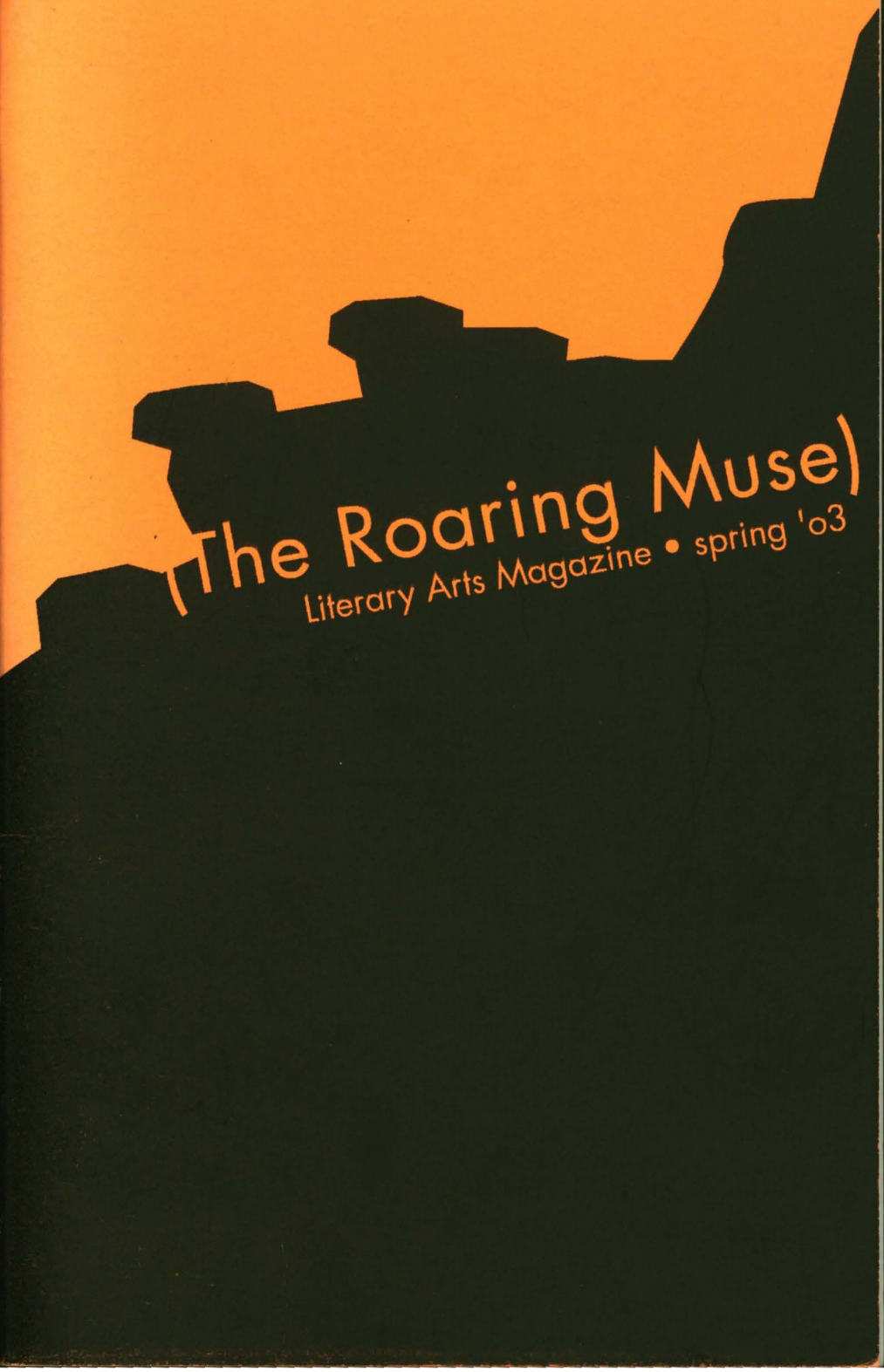


The background of the cover is a solid orange color. A large, black silhouette of a lion's head and neck is positioned on the right side, facing left. The lion's mouth is open in a roar, and its tongue is visible. The silhouette is stylized and blocky.

(The Roaring Muse)

Literary Arts Magazine • spring '03

(The Roaring Muse)

literary arts magazine • spring '03



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Q & A (Amanda Kurta)

What makes us fall
In love?

The same thing that drives
Lactose intolerants
To eat cheese.

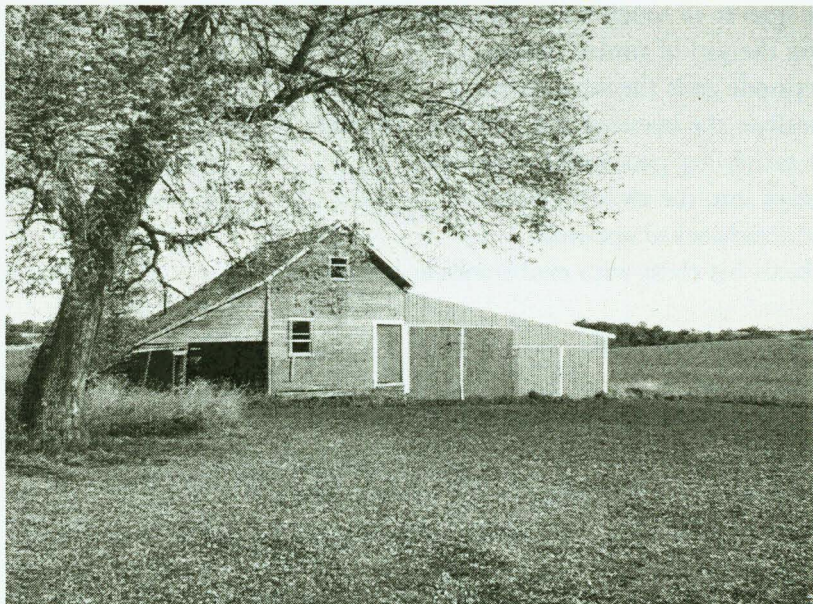
Cabin Fever (Amanda Kurta)

Here I am,
Stuck inside another Minnesota Winter
Complete with flocked trees, salt-crustured
Family sedans, and empty washer fluid tanks.
I am home alone,
Jacking-off to Tarzan.
Maybe it's the loincloth
Or the rapacious growling,
Or the face of a wild spirit broken
By the hunter with a double-barreled gun.
Maybe some Freudian fulfillment,
Watching a scantily clad
White man so in touch with a foreign paradise
Getting the girl of simian dreams.
Each episode ends the same way:
Jane realizes the materialistic virtues of London
Won't satisfy her passion for adventure,
And leaps into the awaiting arms
Of her dread-locked ape-man
Who beats his chest with exuberance at her return.

But while the tape is off,
Jane and Tarzan
Spend their time swatting pigeon-sized mosquitoes
And battling malaria.
Tarzan leaves every morning,
Kissing his beautiful,
Perfectly cultured bride,
Rushing out of the tree house to catch the 7AM vine
To the heart of the jungle.
Jane rolls over,

Snoozes until eight-thirty,
Then stumbles onto the bamboo veranda
And wonders how in the hell
She lived every day wearing a corset.
She yawns again
And rubs the sleep from her
Naturally dark eyelashes.
As she fries an emu egg breakfast,
She pictures her Michelangelo-sculpted man.

The Granary (Tim Grossheusch)



Sunset (Hanaa)

Scientists claim that the pink we see in a sunset is
due to pollution in
the air.

As for me...

I believe that the sunset has become tired and
withdrawn. Every evening,
every day for every year for ages, she has come out.
And every time to warn us that night is near. Make
haste, she cries, seek shelter lest the night's
tendrils drag you in. The people neither hear her cries nor heed her
warning.
They sit back as generations before them had done, on patios, on fields,
beneath trees to watch her fall into her pit and they stride effortlessly
into the night--drawn by the sounds and all the false lights, sucking on
every man, woman and child--every night.

The sunset has warned them. She's tried her very best. At first, with
flashes of purple and gold and red. Now, she looks so tired and all one
can see are her pink cheeks, turning away from the world. Hurt.

Untitled (otis bright)

cotton quicksand-
your soft skin, an icy luster
-cold as its color
there are razorblades in your hand
and i'm stuck in
honey of your voice
which can't stitch
steal of your actions
cotton quicksand-
your lullaby assurances
send me dreamily to sleep
-i need to be used
and you have nothing to lose

Circles (Dan Doty)

I fully intend to one day give myself over to insanity. In fact I believe it would be the noble thing to do. Why should I, no, why should anyone have the assumption that they could live an entire lifetime thinking that they can handle life. An implausible notion.

As he walked through the trees he was aware of a presence. He was also aware that he was sweating profusely. He discarded his shirt and the cool air made his skin quiver.

Unfortunately I can see it, and have been able to for some time already. If only I could have been blind for another twenty years. The delay would have been most comforting. Maybe it's not quite so unfortunate, maybe there is nothing wrong with insanity at all. In fact, perhaps it should be the goal.

A new sensation swept through his body, or was it his mind? He sat down with his back to a birch tree, and felt three vibrations on his bare skin. Turning around slowly, he let out a whimper. He saw hundreds of pustules in the white bark, three of them had burst open, oozing a very sticky substance onto his skin.

Perhaps one should not get so down on folks who choose to end their existence by way of the bottle or the needle. Yes, I should imagine that it would lead to a much simpler life indeed. It would at least narrow the scope of thought. Not quite a noble way of ending things, but far superior to suicide. I can't fathom the thoughts that support that. Each one of us lives life, and we have plenty of trouble understanding it. We can not know death, therefore we can understand it far less, correct? Maybe it is the only thing that we can understand.

This thick liquid was new to him, and felt very strange on his skin. He realized he had never felt anything as he was feeling this. This was a very confusing thought, how could he have never felt anything before. He felt the need to wash the sap off of his back, the sensation was more than he could handle. The stream

was close by.

There's a kicker, the only thing we can really understand is the one thing we can't know. Or can we? Do we? Each of us has been in that position before. It really didn't seem to bother me at the time. But that really isn't the question here is it?

Walking down the path was very difficult; he could not seem to place his foot where he meant it to go. He noticed a squirrel sitting on a branch. It was staring at him, and it made him very uncomfortable. Why was it staring at him? He didn't want the squirrel to look at him anymore. He took a step backward and caught his heel on a protruding root. His own fall felt much longer to him than it should have.

The real question is whether there really is a question. That's what I can't come to grips with. That's too bad for the beards. They do nothing but ask questions, but they know deep down that there is no question. If there isn't a question, there sure as hell can't be an answer. There is nowhere to go from here. I think I need to shave.

He knew he was bleeding, but he couldn't find any reason to feel pain. He closed his eyes and stretched his arms to his sides. His right hand brushed up against something soft, and he recognized it as his shirt. As he sat up, he felt the blood run down his neck. He could hear the stream running, it wasn't far away.

What a sad realization. I am writing as if I know that there is no question. What do I know? If I know nothing, what is there? If what I know is not what there is, there can't be anything. If everyone knew what I now know, no one would know if anyone knew anything. I can't do this anymore.

He began to feel very afraid. He was now beginning to question, and the feeling of a presence was very strong. He left the path and followed the sound. The sound was very soothing; he knew he had to reach the water soon. He could see it through the trees. He knew he would reach the water soon.

Circles are too much. I can not drink myself to death, I have tried, and

I'm afraid of needles. I thought I had an idea earlier. Ah yes, insanity. That may be worth considering.

The water filled his shoes and weighed him down. There was a small falls directly upstream, and the water was running fast and shallow over the solid rock. It was no deeper than the middle of his shins, and had a numbing effect on each inch of skin it came in contact with. He felt he had better clean his wound, though it was not painful.

I fully intend to one day give myself over to insanity. In fact I believe it would be the noble thing to do. Why should I, no, why should anyone have the assumption that they could live an entire lifetime thinking that they can handle life. An implausible notion.

The water was not deep enough, so he had no choice but to lay down in the stream. He felt the water soak through his clothes and touch his skin. He leaned back and lowered his head into the water. He was very happy with the numbing effect. The happiness was very quickly gone for he knew he could not put it off any longer. He had to face the presence. He knew who, or what it was, but wanted more time. He could not embrace, could no force himself to recognize the sentence. He foolishly pretended that he didn't have the answer. He asked himself what this presence was. There weren't that many options. It could be God, but he thought that he didn't believe in God. He knew he was in no position to make that decision until he gave in. Soon, though, very soon. There was no more time. He had no option, this path had been chosen some time ago...

The blood on his clothes gave off a sickly smell, and the sap on his back burned his skin. He did not hurt, but he ached. He looked down at the water, longing for the numbness he had just experienced. He could never again be numb, he would now always feel.

Myceanean Hillside (Nichole Hughes)



los arboles (a. vega)

the smells of the countryside
hang on the rim
of my memory--
stirred up at the mention
of foreign cities like
Léon,
Mategulpa,
and Estelí.
i remember the dusty,
dry air,
and the lush, green canopies
of trees along the mountainside,
and for one second,
i feel like home.

maybe it's the way
you delight
in my skim milk skin,
or how you bite your lip
when you're nervous;
maybe it's the secrets i keep,
the ones that whisper
beneath my sheets,
that reminds me.
i wake
with an ache in my heart
and tropical air
on my tongue.

i am sorry now
that i have confused your arms
with the branches
of every foreign tree
i have yet to climb.
your eyes were the closest muddy blue
to Lago de Managua
that i have seen yet,
and we both like palm trees,
so i lied.

next stop, baltimore (a. vega)

we carry
the baggage we have acquired,
and continue
this endless conversation
over another cup
of lukewarm coffee.
the words we never speak
evaporate,
and swirl
into the cream
of the muddy stratosphere.

the conductor calls;
i will get off here.

Untitled (Nichole Hughes)



Grandpa's Dying (Kyle Davis)

He's dying. This is enough to deal with, but there's more. Death should have a mercy rule. It shouldn't be allowed to kick you in the face when you're already pinned down.

I look at grandpa and find comfort in his face. It is pink and fleshy, weathered by time yet sparsely wrinkled. He smiles constantly. It looks like the edges of his mouth are going to touch his ears. He is pleasantly oblivious to the fact that his cancerous tumor will soon rise to his throat, and he will be unable to breathe. Now he can't speak. But he's still vibrant and expressive, even cheerful. He fought through the Great Depression and boxed his way through the Navy, so he's not ready to die yet. You can tell when you look into his eyes, with their gray radiance that whisper of a time long ago when children didn't kill each other and love was something that sparkled between two people.

Dad enters the living room. I know his stomach is swimming right now. I know because it's a curse I've inherited. There was a time when all the beauty and pain in this world would cause my heart to crumble. But, like my dad I've learned to be cold. There's an art to indifference; it takes practice to keep that fragile chaos buried deep. We manage, though, at times more successfully than others. My dad and I are glass tigers.

He just got off the phone with grandma. Here's where the kick comes in. Grandma has gone nuts. She's old and depressed and angry and confused and she's throwing it all at dad. Each day her claims become more absurd and her sanity more distant. Today, she threatens to sue our family, an extension of the accusation made a week ago. She is convinced that we have kidnapped grandpa against his will. I shake my head and think about what this beautiful woman used to be.

I remember picking strawberries and blackberries for hours under the gentle Midwestern sun. Once, she encouraged me as I ate about fifty strawberries when I was six years old. I got a bladder infection and pissed every half hour for three days. It was worth it, because those were the best strawberries I'd ever had. Full, rich, and wet, they could only have been picked by grandma.

The image of fishing off the dock with grandma, surrounded by the sparkling lake that existed to entertain us, remains perpetually fixed in my mind. The shriek she'd emit after conquering the most feeble fish was one of absolute joy. Now, it seems like an alternate reality. You can't reproduce the purity of a moment like that, a moment that transcends wealth, pleasure, God, acceptance, or whatever else I bother pursuing today.

Dad is feeding grandpa. He can't swallow, so we feed him liquids through a tube connected to his stomach. As I watch, I can't help but notice the cruel irony of this. A man that used to noisily suck meat from the bone will not be able to eat in the waning hours of his life. At the same time, a simple woman that has never paid a bill is trying to figure out how to hire a lawyer.

I walk outside, watch the leaves glide and strafe in the chilled November wind, and think about what my life has become. The stages and fickle obsessions of my past float, distantly, through my mind. I decide that this coldness I have now arrived at is an improvement over the gaping open wound that once defined me. But I need to reach a new stage. I need to change again. At some point, I forgot how to suck the meat from the bone, to notice the way things sparkle in this world. For better or worse, I need to be able to *feel* again.

I close my eyes, relax my body, and wait patiently for some generic epiphany to jog my heart's numbered beat.

Distracted (Amelia Anderson)

I got distracted

By whispers...

By fingers...

By belt loops.

I got distracted

By lips...

By toes...

By the tickly spot on bellies.

I got distracted

By something more real

Than characters on a screen;

By something that can't be

Rewound...

Fast-forwarded...

Or saved for another day,

Just enjoyed as it comes.

Just...

Distracted.

Red Line (a. vega)

a homeless woman
just interrupted my poetry writing
on the L.
she cursed me out
and called me a nigger
before throwing
her swollen shopping bags
from the door.
the train spits her
out
like spoiled milk
onto the wooden deck
of Monroe.

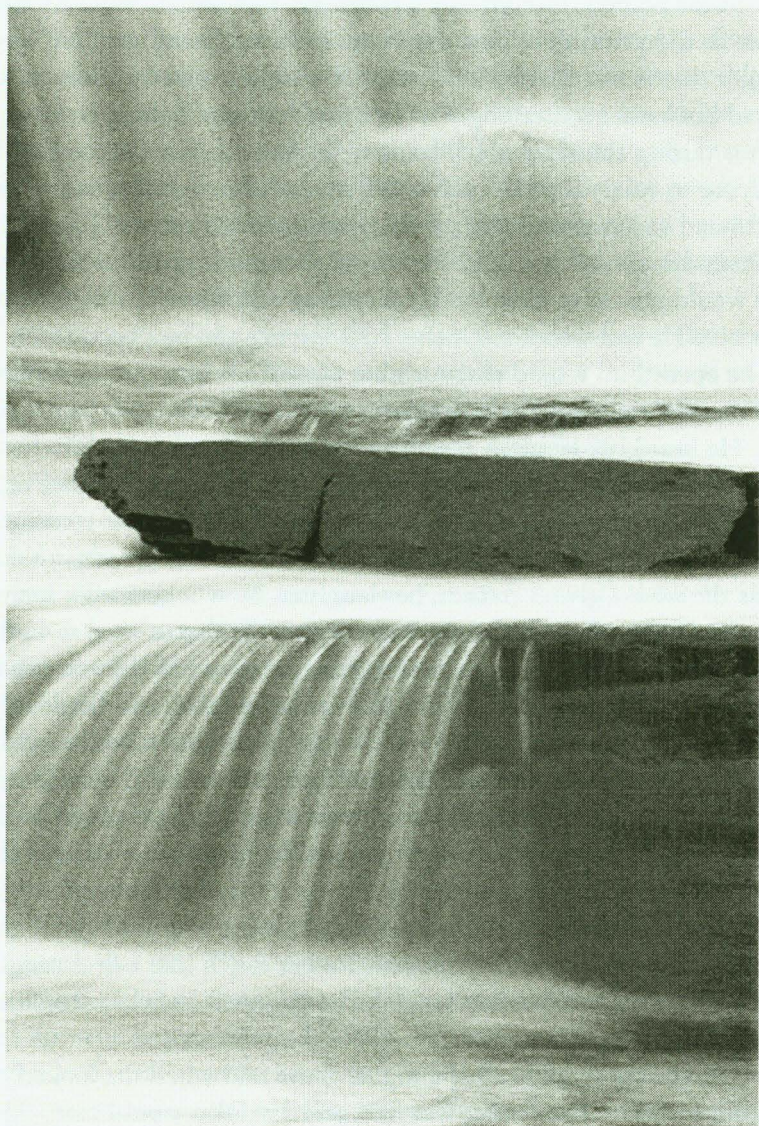
i'll bet
she despises Jesus
and gods who know how to dance.

there is no music here,
and watching her struggle,
we all become atheists.

Untitled (Aaron Bosanko)



Waterfall (Aaron Bosanko)



Roll of the Dice (Jon Robinson)

Sweat poured through Roy's pores. He was furious at it. At that moment he didn't think of how the sweat had come from him. He was just angry that it was there. He felt that it wasn't something that he had produced but rather something that he came across and clung to him sometime during the night. His hands were shaking. His sweaty palms were trying to vainly dry themselves off on the fabric within his pockets. His left hand encompassed a felt jewelry box for what seemed like the ten thousandth time that night. He cursed at himself as he let it go. It simply would not do to have the box be slimy and wet when he finally drew it out. He had wondered if she would notice the box's condition before he opened it. Would that turn her away from him ... even before he had the chance to ask the question?

He heard her laughter trying to draw his attention back to her. His ears perked up upon hearing it. In the past year and a half that he had been seeing her that was the one thing that had kept him coming back. The one thing that he had looked forward to hearing as many times as she would give it to him, her laughter. Now it seemed a more nervous laugh than her usual light-hearted ones. It also seemed to him that he had heard that nervousness in her laughter and in her voice too often during the course of the night. Each time he had heard her laugh this night, it had sounded a little more forced, and a little less heartfelt. He gazed up into her eyes. There was a softness there as if they were trying to put him at ease. But there was something else there as well, a sense of fatigue. He found himself frightened by it. Was she tired of the night, or of him? His gut wrenched at the thought. Fear gnawed at it, turning it into doubt, paranoia- a hundred different emotions about the night. His own eyes must have appeared to her much like a deer caught in a pair of headlights. Quickly he looked away until he could stop his hands from shaking.

"Maybe we should call it a night..." she said when she looked away from his eyes "The dinner was fine, and I think I would have enjoyed the play immensely if not for that headache."

"Tannins..." he muttered under his breath not really meant for

anyone other than himself. He had spoke louder than a whisper, but still soft enough that she might not notice. Not for the first time tonight he had misjudged her.

"What was that?" she asked. He wasn't even sure she had asked in earnest or merely out of obligation.

"Tannins. I...I chose red wine to try and compliment the dinner better. *But-but I had forgotten about the tannins. They're responsible for giving red wine its color, but they are known for causing headaches as well,*" he said. It seemed an awfully stupid thing for him to say, but he really did not want her to take any part of the blame for how poorly the evening had gone. It seemed to him that he had apologized to her an awful lot this evening, but while he was at it he decided to apologize for the carriage ride through the park as well, and did.

"Oh, that can't be your fault. I mean you didn't know that the police were going to chase down a purse-snatcher right in front of us. That was just fate," she said taking his hand. Her hand wasn't too sweaty or too dry. It seemed smooth and just perfect. Just like her.

"Yeah, fate..." he said as he gazed up into the sky. Fate might as well as just toss down a lightning bolt at his sorry ass, it would probably make his night complete and do a world of good at the same time. "I-I know you want to go home, but can we just go for a walk down by the river for a few minutes?" What a lousy suggestion, he thought, how could she possibly be interested in that...

"Sure," she said forcing a smile, and all but leading him by the hand in the direction of the river.

Within five minutes they found themselves what could be best described as swimming in a rainstorm. Roy found himself staring up toward the sky with anger and sadness written on his face waiting for that lightning bolt.

"Roy, I think it's time we called it a night," she said walking back towards the car. "We just were unlucky tonight."

He hated that word. Unlucky. It seemed the word was used around him entirely too often. Usually they were events that were beyond his control when he heard it, but all too often it seemed to him that the cosmos was merely having fun seeing how much they could dump on him. Roy followed her a few steps behind with his head hanging in defeat. It seemed that this was a natural way of walking for him.

"Yeah, I guess you're right. I don't know what I was thinking. Wrong night for it anyway."

She stopped walking and stood in the middle of the rainstorm looking at him. "Wrong night for what, Roy?" she said. Her eyes took on the look of someone trying to solve a riddle now. A look of someone who was looking at something but the real action was taking place behind the eyes, assembling pieces of a puzzle.

"Nothing..." Roy said. He shoved his left hand into his pocket as he walked toward her. It encompassed the jewelry box as if trying to shield it even further from her view. He wished that it wasn't there. That somehow he could throw it away when she wasn't looking. He just wanted to take her home now. The feelings in his stomach had turned purely to fear now. Fear of being discovered. Fear of rejection. Fear of further embarrassment. He desperately wanted to avoid facing those fears.

She shifted her stance now, to an outward look of impatience. "Roy, what do you have in your pocket? You've been fiddling with it all evening."

"Noth.. it-its my cell phone." He stammered. He felt the rain pelt down on his face and shoulders. He was growing cold, and his feet that were sore just a few minutes ago were growing numb now. His knees were shaking wanting to collapse and bolt at the same time.

"Roy don't lie to me... you always keep your cell phone in your jacket pocket." She said shifting her head from one side to another. "Now what is it?"

He removed the jewelry box from his pocket and opened it before she had a chance to see what it was. He found himself still somehow worried about the box appearing wet in the middle of a rainstorm.

The diamond glinted off a nearby streetlight as she stared at it. Lightning lit up the sky and illuminated the scene for a split second revealing the curve of the ring. The thunder in the following seconds echoed through Roy's head as his hand began to shake. He finally looked into her face as seeing a softness there that he didn't imagine possible a few seconds ago.

Her eyes came up and met his. There seemed to be a subtle silence except for the rain that cascaded around them. "Yes." She said and her tears joined the raindrops running down her cheeks.

He hadn't even asked her the question yet.

The lights in the casino had often reminded him of that night. The flashes of the bulbs that seemed to be attached to everything possible except for the gamblers themselves. It seemed both so short ago and so long ago. His hands were sweaty again but this time he did not try to clean them at all. In fact he took a small amount of joy in laying them on the felt tables and wiping them there. Part of it may have been done to mark his territory, but he also may have been doing it to try and lower this place to his own standards, his own luck.

He looked at his cards again. Two threes. There was no harm in taking a hit. Of course there was no harm in taking his money and going to another table. Maybe even trying another game entirely. So far he wasn't holding up very well for the evening. He was down five hundred dollars at least. He looked up at the ceiling. Little black globes stationed periodically dotted the ceiling. There seemed to be a new type of "fate" staring down at him now. And this one didn't seem to have any charity about it as much as the last one had. Both had plotted against him for as long as he had known either of them. Why should he prefer one to another? He looked down at the dealer who stared at him quite mechanically and quite impatiently.

"Hit" he said slapping the table with his sweaty hand. Another slice of fate came down next to his already dealt luck. He looked at it and suppressed his emotions. He never could figure out why he did that. Emotions don't betray you in this game. It was in poker that they would betray you. But nevertheless he still pushed his feelings into the pit of his stomach. Maybe it made losing easier to bare. It made sure that you didn't get your hopes up in vain. A face card. That brings him up to sixteen. A nice number to stop on. Safe, and yet with a good chance of winning. Not a spectacular chance but maybe the rest of the people on the table would force the dealer to bust. His decision was made. The dealer took his money with a nineteen. He should have hit. He should have left. He wasn't going to make that mistake again. He used his sweaty palms to push away from the table with one long shove, leaving behind as much sweat as he could.

He gazed around the room. He took a deep breath of the smelly place. It held far too much smoke for his liking. He hated it. Not at all like the smell of his wife. She could freshen a room just by walking

through it, he had told her. She had laughed and threw a pillow at him. But taking in the smell of her hair had been his favorite thing to do before falling asleep every night for the past four years.

Here the toxins in the air were probably enough to kill several lab rats. He thought about the irony of the metaphor. Scientists were protested against if they were involved with that kind of research in a lab. Nowadays all they would really have to do is go to a casino and get a job working one of the black globes imbedded in the ceiling. They could get all the research they would ever need off of the people on the casino floor. Then again ... the rats were probably more active. Looking around at the kind of people planted in front of the slot machines Roy realized that the rats were probably in better shape as well. All you could study looking out of one of those cameras were machines sitting in front of other machines.

He looked around for something else to do. A woman's face caught his eye. She was in charge of the craps table. She seemed to have a smile resembling his wife's. He took that as a sign from fate and decided to give the table a try. He was never really lucky with the dice but maybe this night would be different. Maybe this night he could go home with a different story than he had done for the last three months. The other dealers he had pretty much seen around before. This one he hadn't.

"She must be new," He thought. She had to be new. None of the other dealers even smiled anymore. They just sat there and kept score.

He hadn't really come here all that often at first. It had started as just a few weekends with some of his friends he had from work. Then he had started to come here during the week. It was a great break from his job... when he still had a job. Slowly he had spent more and more hours here after weeknights. He found himself coming home late and sleeping in, going to work even later. Finally, he found himself with a whole lot more "free time" to go to the casino. It was the only "free time" he knew of that regularly cost him more and more money. Now he spent most of his free time between job hunting and interviews here. He shouldn't be here though. Of course he had come to realize that. His wife had talked it over with him. Talked of getting some help for him. It was strange how often he could listen to her just talk. The sound of her voice being so comforting, so guiding. For the first couple of weeks he had listened in earnest, enjoying the sound of her voice. Then her voice seemed to

grow more and more desperate. And it grated on his ears when he listened to it now.

She seemed to be around him less and less now. Or maybe it was him that was around her less and less. These days he usually ended up sneaking back into the room later and later, or earlier and earlier depending on how exactly you would look at it. He enjoyed the first few moments when he entered their home. The smell of her seemed to emanate from every corner of the rooms. But all too quickly, that smell would dissipate and there would be the smell of the smoke and the liquor of the casino upon the air, replacing hers. Climbing into bed as softly as he could he would lay there and listen to the smell of him slowly effect her breathing. Once or twice he could swear that he or it had rather awoken her. She had never said anything about it though. He had tried showering once before going to bed, but somehow by the time he got clean and into bed she had already gone, without a shower and most likely late for work. He had vowed never to do that again. And he had further even stayed home for a night cleaning the rest of the place, but when she got home there was little gratitude in her eyes. There was little of anything in her eyes that night. So he fled back to the lights of the casino at the first chance he had. At least these lights shined like her eyes used to.

Within an hour, Roy had managed to win back around eighty dollars at the craps table. Indeed fate must have thrown him a sign. Perhaps his wife was his good luck charm. Roy had long ago ruled out the possibility of her accompanying him to the casino but maybe she could point the way for him to go. All he had to do was look around for her.

The following twenty minutes did not go well. Roy had lost thirty of the eighty that he had won back from the five hundred he had lost prior. Still that put him in the neighborhood of around four hundred and fifty to go before he would break even. There were even a few nights where he had climbed out of a deficit like this to finish a few hundred ahead. Not many nights but there were a few. Now he looked around to find a new sign from fate telling him where to try his luck next.

Something in Roy had led him over to the roulette table. He couldn't say what had led him here only that something had pointed him in this direction and he had done the walking. As he stood there he

really did not know what to think. No one ever wins any big money at roulette. Just a veritable black hole that gamblers throw money carelessly down. For about the hundredth time that night Roy thought of his wife. Two numbers popped into his head, the date of her birthday, and the date of his marriage. Taking out the fifty he had won back and another fifty from his wallet, nearly the last of his savings which he had fallen hard upon, Roy bet fifty on each of the numbers. Walking away from the tables seconds later Roy realized what had led him to that table. It was nothing reminding him of his wife, but "fate" making sure his life was living up to its usual status quo. Assuming his usual head-hanging walk Roy strolled around the casino floor. Now he had five hundred and fifty dollars less than when he had walked in.

Although it was earlier than his usual hour of departure Roy decided it was probably best for him to leave. Who knows maybe she would still be up and willing to talk. Maybe she won't ask him any questions and simply talk. Right now he could think of no sweeter thing in life than to hear the sound of her voice.

A glint of light caught his eye. He found himself staring at a coin on the ground. Almost without thinking Roy scooped it up, it seemed so much the natural thing to do. Looking around him he saw he was near the set of slot machines with the ever-growing jackpot. Deciding that the universe could have the opportunity to play yet one more practical joke on him this evening he waltzed over to the machine and with a great deal of flair placed the coin in the slot and pulled the lever.

Roy leapt nearly a foot when the bells and whistles started going off. And when the coins started pouring out he found himself at a loss. Most of the other slot machine players had buckets or something else to put the coins into. Roy had nothing other than his pockets. Gazing up at the total jackpot that he had just won nearly all of the blood rushed out of his face. Looking at the faces around him he found the immediate surrounding players to have a great deal of contempt and even loathing written upon their faces. After all they had been playing these machines for probably hours hoping in their wild fantasies to win what was now his jackpot. The gathering crowd of on lookers were not all that much better but a little more accommodating than the few cutthroats that were surrounding him.

Eventually, the managers of the casino came out to greet him and congratulate him. All of them had smiles brimming from ear to ear and they energetically shook his hand. They had brought along with them the standardized larger than need be check and presented it to him in a flurry of flashing lights, which strangely did not blend in with the others positioned around the floor of the casino. Afterwards Roy found himself ushered back to a large office in the back of the casino. Here the large grins that they had sported earlier disappeared as formality and the actual event of giving away this amount of money took precedence. It was here where he was obligated to fill out a great deal of forms turning over a large portion of his prize to any and all forms of government for taxes. Roy asked eagerly about the amounts of money that he had lost earlier in the year to be placed against these amounts but the officials merely chuckled and asked if he was joking.

Nearly a full hour later after Roy had intended to leave he finally found himself outside the casino with a vastly smaller both in amount and size check in his hands. Still this would probably be more money than he would ever be able to spend in a great while. A full 1 million dollars was his to do with what he pleased.

Not trusting his own nerves to safely drive himself home Roy hailed a taxi. On his way home feverish dreams filled his head. Among the thoughts of flashy cars and large ornate houses Roy dreamed of finally hearing his wife's laughter again. He dreamed of holding her in his arms again finally free of worry about losing her and all of their future plans because of financial worries. He dreamed of finally shaking free this casino smell, which all too eagerly filled the cab and basking in her own heavenly smell once more.

Roy raced up the stairs to his home feeling his heart pound within his chest. His stomach was a knot of excitement spurring him. The door would not open for him three times before he tried his key.

He burst into the living room and the first thing he noticed was her scent. It seemed fainter for some reason, fainter than it had smelled in the last months. He thought that perhaps it was because he himself smelled more strongly of the smoke and the alcohol that emanated from him, invading the house. He called out her name and it echoed off the walls without a response. His heart started to slow from pounding now and sweat began to flow anew out of his pores. It was a new kind of

sweat, different than that from earlier that evening. It was not from running or overheating, but a sweat of nervousness and fear like that night so long, so short ago. Now he noticed some of her favorite pictures were missing from the walls. But still his mind could not understand. His brow wrinkled and he knees started to shake. He wanted so desperately to cry out and to hear her answer him, to hear her laughter, to gaze into her eyes. He slowly walked over to the kitchen counter and paused as he strained to read the first few lines of a letter laid there in the darkness, written in her own handwriting.

He collapsed to the ground in the darkness, knowing that he would never get a chance to tell her how much it was that he had lost.

Untitled (otis bright)

s bstoryu od dsof
nryerrm dqsvrd.
yjomhd gsaa om vtsvld,
kiaw rgwue oklxwa.
loowlelxbwa swxwucw,
vyr ud tiy ewls relxwa
1nwaalfw ainwrunwa rljwa dien.

dqrsломh aolr yjod,
eptfd jofomh grst,
nwlбubf ua wlat ri nuaa
and nothing is clear.
ua ufbielbxw ewlkkt vkuaa
lbs reyrq gles ri gwle?

Impressionism (Mike Jupiter)

My upstairs attic, man, is like the Vatican.

It's filled with so many bad habits I can't sort through the static or the madness and...

This city is filled with idiots... it's all,

"Give me this, and take that!"

[landed] Stranded on a planet where citizens roam the campus like Columbus compass addicts.

I take back fanatic status by throwing down my own idioms down on canvas. I have been, a has been, that's been fastened to the clock tower until the class ends.

my ass spends most my days drowning somewhere between starving and crossed emotions.

I've lost my focus in notebooks stroked with opus and wrote the dopest hopeless strophic notions to put the heads back in motion.

[It was my deaf culture movement...] And it's a claustrophobic moment.

Opponents search for a bonus but get ill willed and killed by my flow that's so bad, [the nomad holds back nothing like kids with no dad].

I'm so glad my notepad quotes paint pictures like Kodak.

I'm trying my hardest to recite harvest of lethargic catharsis.

I'm a martyr artist regardless of what the nametag states.

[The movie stars are moving to Minnesota].

Stealing the public's quotas, prototype photo sight...ugly sees through total tight facelifts.

[And you're so shocked that "we" throw parties with Botox?]

Graced with broken antenna and mental tremors I'm choke dilemmas when my pencil stencils rental Rembrandt's in the dormant format of echoes.

I've got a soul chockfull of hostile monsters, and they just won't let go.

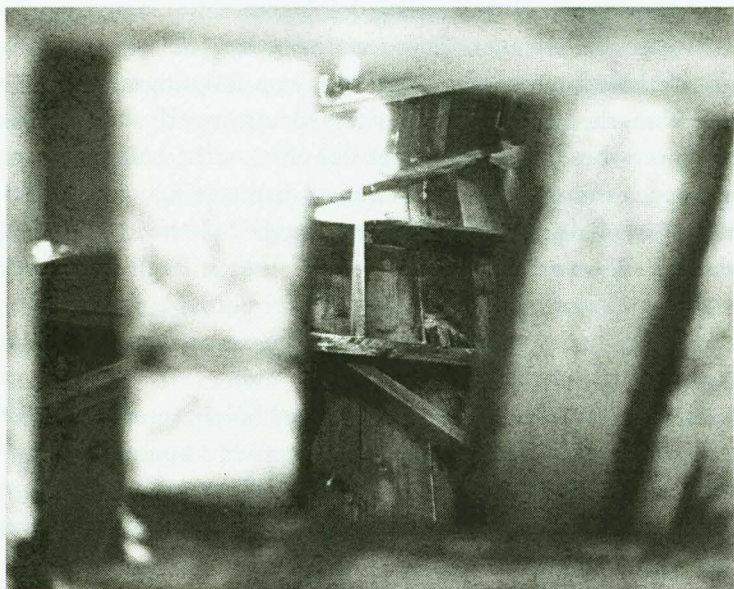
I've finally cut the shackles so I can move my axle from the meadow to the metro.

This is potent poetry running off petrol... and it's free verse scripted with diseased germs straight making my femurs and knees jerk.

These words make little kid- big mouth lie down and bite a street curb.

My daddy was a teamster, mommy was a seamstress... I am the great
irate pigeon-toed primate that just can't fly straight.
Now I got your head cavity, and I'm ready to gyrate.
[what are you gonna do?]
Breath fast and die late.
I vibrate my brain until my eyes dilate.
Poor sister was a looker, my brother was a hooker- I'm another transfor-
mation patient pacing my patience that's cased in a vacant flagrant
vagrant page and... I've only got one thing in this world that matters,
and if I lost her I'm sure I'd shatter.

Untitled (Sarah Welander)



the hole (otis bright)

hole /hol/ *n* 1.a cavity in an object or area 2.a gap, opening, or perforation 3.a burrow 4. an unpleasant, usually small and dirty, place (*infml*) 5.a flaw 6.an awkward situation (*infml*)†*

"i started digging the hole years ago. it was to be, i thought, my life's work. at first the hole was small, and the work was hard. i found, through - that as the work progressed, that the longer that i dug, the easier it became to dig. and i found too - that this process of digging was something that i thoroughly enjoyed. the hole was to be a labor of love, my labor of love. the work itself was an expression of this love. the beauty of it was in the simplicity of the action, the constancy of the work - shovel full by shovel full, the work itself was an affirmation to me. it made me feel, or rather i assigned a sense of accomplishment to it, a sense of progress. i was, at last doing something, dare i say "proactive." i was - at last, more than reacting; i was participating in these events that are known as my life; creating a meaning for these events, as it were. the hole itself was a story about myself; about what was - to me, everything. and the sheer size of it, of the hole, of its vast cavernous emptiness was itself a reflection of it's meaning, of the idea behind it, of this whole ideal of mine. because the hole had to be perfect, i had to do just this one thing right."

sips beer

"people though, they were unsure of my hole. some didn't like it at all. they, the people who didn't like it, couldn't appreciate what it meant. didn't understand what it did mean. it was too big of a concept, too abstract, for them to grasp. the beauty of the hole was not, could not be a part of their understanding. some though, i suspect, am certain - could grasp it, could comprehend its full meaning, and that was precisely what they did or did not like. it was not something that they were comfortable with maybe, those that did not like it. so they chose to

ignore it, or to deny that it existed at all. this is, of course, assuming that they had to interact with it at all. some, seeing the hole and recognizing it for what it really was, simply went about their usual business. went about their usual lives, and stayed away from the hole - from my work, both in thought and in their physical location to the being of it. they had no reason for being near the hole other than preference, which was clearly not their preference in many cases, and so they chose not to include the hole in their lives. that was their business - not mine, and so i paid them no attention. i gave no thought to those who were disinterested in my work; to me they didn't really matter in the grand scheme of things."

sips beer

"i think, too - that many were afraid of standing near it, over it. though, of course, there was never really any danger of them falling into it. they could fall in if they wanted to, but the hole was engineered - by which i mean to say "designed," in this way; the hole was engineered to be hard to fall into. you would know that it was coming anyways, that you were going to fall in if you were about to. it was that your fascination with the meaning of it, of the hole - could, even would, swallow you whole. though it would be no fault of your own, it would be just the sheer fascination of it that swallowed you, of its beauty, and the size of its meaning. you would almost have to try to fall in - that was what captured me, what caught my interest from the beginning, it was why i began to dig in the first place. at the time you may not be aware of the full ramifications of falling into the hole as i was not aware of what the digging truly meant, what in actuality it was. the nature of the hole was that its meaning - its essence, grew on you as you were in it. what it truly meant to be in the hole you would have at least some shaving of meaning, a dawning of perception slowly made more clear, of it - of being in this hole. if at first you didn't happen to know that it was a hole, which by the very nature of the hole - by its very design, was entirely possible; you would at least have this sense, a perception of a difference of being. it could be a nice hole - comfortable; warm and damp, moist almost, even womb-like. it was exactly this sense of comfort that would lead you to believe that it was not a hole, that it was a

home. it gave you a sense, an idea that everything was fine, that you were not in fact, existing in a hole. the hole - underneath, as it were, other people's existences. it wasn't that the hole would lead you to believe this either, give you this sense itself. for there was nothing wrong with the hole, but rather if there was anything wrong it was what you perceived of, or about, the hole. it was about what the hole brought out in you, about what you perceived it to be, what you made of it."

sips beer

lights cigarette

"most people when encountering, when viewing, or examining my property could not help but to notice the hole. it seemed foolish to me or perhaps besides the point to disguise or to try to hide the hole - so i never really tried to. i did not, in any way, try to, in fact. the opening into, or the entrance to the hole, was not large by any measure, but that is not to say that it was imperceptible, something indistinguishable from the background of my yard. people would know of the hole when they come to see me - when they visited with, or talked to me. it was not that i would draw their attention to the hole - humility has always been, to me, one of the highest virtues; it was just that it, the hole, was an obvious fissure."

draws on cigarette, exhales

sips beer

"i remember that my mother did not like the hole. she thought that it was a waste of my time, to dig this - to embark on this journey of epic creation. perhaps a negation better describes it, this hole that i dug. she thought about the hole as an empty space, she thought that it was wasted effort. one day, i remember, after i had been working on the hole for a long time; and it was quite big by then let me assure you. she told me that there used to be so much there, but that i had taken it all away, that i had "moved it out." this is the way she put it, the way that her mind understood it, was able to come to grips with the hole. it was her mind's own way of grasping the being of, and the meaning of the

hole. she wondered why i felt the need to make this, this hole. i thought about it for a while, and at first it seemed to me like just the thing to do, like it was inevitable, an obvious progression of events. i had no more understanding of the act than someone who had just become acquainted with it, with the hole. it wasn't until later that i understood why. you see, i told her - that this hole is on my property, that the hole itself was my property, and that i get worried about my property, that i must protect it. that i didn't want anything bad to happen on, in or through it; and that it was the hole that made this possible."

sips beer

draws on cigarette, exhales

"what is significant about the hole is the idea that i could not have my property threatened in any way. it is that concept that birthed the idea of the hole in the first place. if there was nothing there - if i had removed everything from my property, what could anyone take from it? unless they failed to recognize the hole, that there was just simply nothing there; no one would or even could for that matter, try to take anything from the hole. whatever they took from the hole was only something that they mistakenly perceived within it, or thought of as being in the hole. most people truly failed to grasp this very significance of - this meaning of the hole. they also could not understand the sheer beauty of the hole; of its being - in its entirety, its whole. it was a tribute to everything that was ours before the hole. in a way the hole was all and only about me, but by its very nature; in its whole - its entirety; the hole was for you. a sort of symphony that was the music of what happened to me. a means of praising what was, what had been. the hole was a sort of a culmination of all our events that preceded its making. i have said that the hole was my life's work, you can easily understand this. it is what made my being - my existence, make sense. it was what made me real, it was the only thing that i could see that i could do. it was all that was in front of me, and its dedication was my vindication of being. if was my essence."

draws on cigarette, slowly exhales

gulps beer

"now, standing outside of the hole, looking into the hole, i puzzle over it. i ask myself why did this hole need to be dug. the will behind the act - the control necessary, the single - minded dedication to the act, to the digging, it - it overwhelms me. what spirit, what mood came over me that allowed me to - that made me accomplish this act, this hole. the size of it awes me - i can't imagine, no longer know, how it got so big; my only answer is us. that we did it, that we made this - you the unknowing participant were just as much a part of this as i was. i cannot take full responsibility for the hole; it is too big to be one person's creation. no lone individual could have created this hole - its scope, its vision is too large. and now - to me, the hole has no meaning. except the meaning of its being - of the tangibility of what was, is - the hole itself. i could feel it, it can still be felt. and it is - was, something; everything really - once, to me."

† microsoft encarta dictionary. 2002 ed. new york: st. martin's press
2002.

*this definition has been abridged

Formallylostinnormalcy (Mike Jupiter)

You've arrived as sleeper-trot manikin asleep at the switch.
I'm alive to hide all deprived, killjoy occupant bent backslappers with
off kilter head tilt manifestos, memory lapse disaster and fused flashback
echoes. memo [memo] me your [your] conscience and I'll depict my
fixed script to your ripped nonsense in the form of whiplash.
Let's sip fast with our heads hung low, from guzzled cans of gusto, and
mumble virtue down to the tune of doing something different.

[For instance, this is fingertip grimace clipping wings of privilege]

I resort to contort by falling back, backwards bottoms up, and stopping
coughing lungs with suffocative nature and bad timing.

I'm lying...

I'm stuck to boredom like adolescent eyes glancing vastly upon Oprah
Winfrey spawns Dr. Phil daytime meets crooked priority escort.
Abort all sorts of an orphaned destiny with this talent that I can do with
my eyes closed, while finger crossing and cursing writer's block back to
square one.

I wear none of the symbolic polish promised to fix up reflective
imagery... I rely on ocular handicaps and two forms related synergy.
[I just found the abyss of natural bliss in a frame engraved with natural
lips... and it's killing me.]

She shakes space with great fulfillment and spills emotional filament
with diligence, while I haul a few solitude molecules home to my mod-
ule. Now all I gotta do is keep cool and drool over this goddess. But
honest, god it's too hard to find promise on this earth platter of disaster
when my body of plaster is shattered slash fractured.

[shh... let's keep that to ourselves.]

From thereafter I cut the laughter with open eyes and tasted fire...
Time expired as I found her...

Heart pounding happiness, but now I realize that the sound hurts.

You Are (Amelia Anderson)

cross section

no direction

sliver slice

will suffice

i don't need the whole.

you are not a whole

you are not--

you are but

a speck of sand

a distant hand

a smile or face

a place

but not a whole.

and you are just like me (a. vega)

i ran because i needed to breathe. because i needed an honest reaction. the credits rolled and the blackness surrounding the small white letters began to cloud my mind and completely envelop me. there were two choices: run from the room or vomit on its floor. i ran.

we had all watched it together--the documentary, the tape. watched in silence. watched the two children gasping for breath. watched their emaciated bellies. watched their throats parch with more than just early morning thirst. watched them piss on the side of the street, in broad daylight. we watched; i watched.

we tried not to be disgusted by the lice crawling in their hair.

the class is called Diversity of Human Experience--a University name that really means, "A class to Show That You Don't Know Shit About the World." my professor is black. i derive a certain amount of respect from respecting her; she speaks like my mother.

so far, we have watched six videos and four slide presentations. Indians in Chile, Refugees from Vietnam, Exiles in Russia. this morning, we traveled to Africa; this morning we sat comfortably in front of a TV and traveled to a continent that swarms and ebbs with death.

the acid of my suburban guild rose in my throat and I choked hard on the, "repression of wealth" that i had complained about just that morning at breakfast. my toast was slightly burned; i threw it out. my eggs were overcooked; i fed them to my dog.

their emaciated bellies torture my eyes.

i fit into this Liberal Arts Education. i have dreads; i have ten piercings. i wear thrift store clothes with clever things like, "Adam" and "#6"

grafittied on the back. names of organizations i have never been a member of are embroidered on most of my sleeves. i protest sweatshops and wear; i drink red wine at parties. i listen to Ani. i am the punch line of every conservative's antidotes, and the object of every liberal's envy.

I am a fucking joke.

Spanish is my major--the language, the literature, the culture. i have been to Central America and lived in Mexico. before this morning, i had considered myself, "knowledgeable," and even, "mildly cultured."

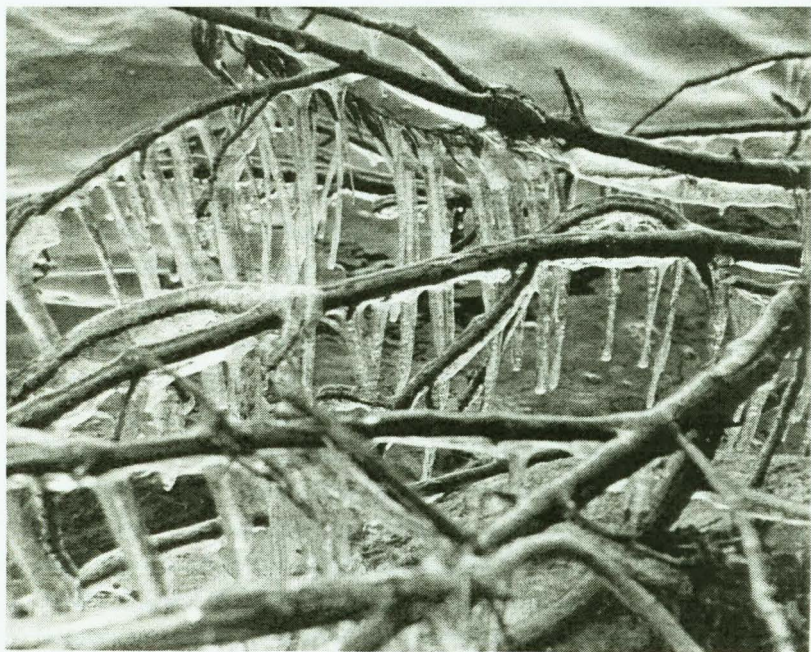
but my belly has never swelled with hunger. i go one day without chocolate and i consider it a tragedy.

i am honest with myself for a long time, for maybe the first time.

i don't know if i could hold that lice-covered, maggot-hosting child without flinching first. i don't know if i could clean out her infested wounds or spoon feed brown rice into her mouth. i don't know if i could ignore her rotten teeth. i admire Mother Theresa for her work, for having bathed the lepers. i want to do the same. but my collection of hemp necklaces and head scarves gets in the way.

my guilt consumes me. i ran today.

Untitled (Amanda Zentko)



Regret (Cheryl Reitan)

Aunt Alice's voice rises from the spidery ink. I hold the paper in my 50-year old hand, Aunt Alice's whispery voice writes to my younger self.

Grandma had a bad day on Sunday. When I came to pick her up for church she was still sitting in the bathtub.

Aunt Alice would step inside the brick farmhouse and shout "Ma" one half a second before the storm door slammed. She must have stood there, while the word, "Ma," echoed in the mud room and the smell of sauerkraut and apples climbed the basement stair. She expected wire-rimmed glasses and starched cotton but instead the house was quiet. "Ma?" And then as soft as the creak of a door she heard the fragile answer.

I knew Grandma's methods. Things had order. Each day Grandma recorded the temperature and precipitation. She noted the date each flower and vegetable appeared. And she always took her bath on Saturday night.

Grandma had a bad day on Sunday. Grandma spent the night in the tub, the translucent white skin of her arms and thighs shriveling in the tepid water. *It was lucky she kept the heater on,* Aunt Alice wrote. Did Grandma sleep? Did she slide down into the gloomy wetness and wonder what it would feel like to struggle and cry out with only the mice to hear?

This was a woman who as a child helped her dad clear 40 acres. Even on days that iced eyelashes, she would wait for her father to wrap the chain tight around the log and then she would dig her tiny boots into the horse's side.

Her parents fought about it. "It's too much work for a little girl," Great-Grandma faced her German husband.

In the end, the horse won, as much as the child. Schützer would rear at Great-Grandpa, thumping hooves in the snow, but he tossed his head when he saw the girl racing toward him. Her parents just watched as she led Schützer to the fence and scrambled up his quivering back, her braids flying from under her red cap, her chin tucked under the scarf, mittens on the reins.

"We're ready," she would call and the innocent mist that blew from her mouth bewitched her parents.

Did they know then that this girl would milk and make butter, marry and love, and that while she guided them with knotted knuckles, great grandchildren would scramble up her legs.

It was lucky she kept the heater on. Alice writes. I drained the water and got Grandma into a robe but I couldn't pick her up so I called Edwin and Mary. We were lucky Edwin wasn't an usher that day or they would have been at church already.

This is too much for me. I put the letter down and splash cold water on my face. I am surprised at the greying hair. Wrinkles look back from my mirror but Aunt Alice doesn't know that. Her message is certain that I am still in my first apartment.

Dear Grandma. My younger self writes the letter I wish she had sent. I hope you feel better today. I heard you got your strength back. I have so many things to ask you.

Is it so very lonely, in the big farm house by yourself? Your daughters are near but Grandpa is gone. I remember the night you called. I heard the phone. Dad bundled us in the car before dawn and started driving. Mom cried the whole way, while I sat in the back seat, wedged between my brothers. I never saw her cry before. Never like that.

Is the garden and the quilting enough? Do the widowed farmers look across the pew at you? You are smiling at that, aren't you?

I still have my quilt. I wish I'd written. I use it. I need it to keep warm. We don't have nearly enough blankets, especially when we get company. I am sorry it got faded in the sun. I am sorry the fabric is wearing thin.

When did Grandma's letters stop? Which was her last letter? I sort through the stack, the diary of her life: pumpkin pie, new potatoes, blueberry outing. I want to find one that says she has altered her schedule. She puts her towels in the left drawer, not the right and she takes a bath on Sunday morning now.

The words are too late, *Oh Grandma, you turned 'round and 'round by the pump to watch us run in the grass.*

Yes, Aunt Alice, I do not write to the mother making donuts for my twin cousins, born the same year as I was, her baseball-playing boys.

Yes, Aunt Alice, *we were lucky. We were lucky.*

(if i speak in parenthesis) (a. vega)

i apologize

your eyes light up,
but i can do nothing
except remember the darkness
i have seen.

(you claim healing after near
suicide
when it has only been
a couple of weeks)

i understand fully
now
how difficult it was to trust
the same revelations i proclaimed,
two weeks,
six weeks,
after lockdown
and fifty-six hours
of intensive care
(i asked for more
than my fair share
of understanding.)

i know
that i am slowly and
not so gently
destroying our friendship,
but i am unwilling
to expose this raw wound
to your incessant need.

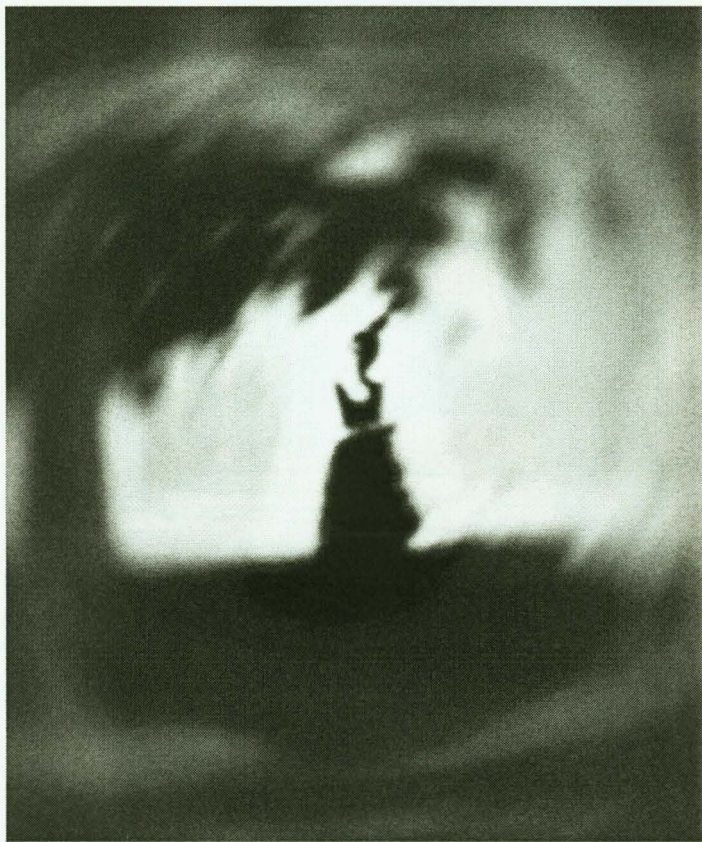
(i am waiting for you to plunge
deep into your depression
and suck
spit
chew the marrow
from within me)

i apologize
(forgive me if i only speak of trust
within parenthesis)

Olympia (Nichole Hughes)



The Wait (Aaron Bosanko)



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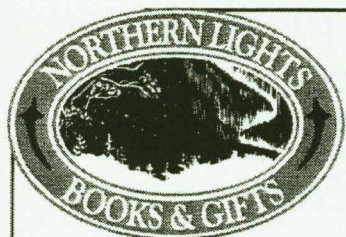
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The Roaring Muse is seeking submissions for 2003/2004.

We welcome poetry, prose, photography, and illustrations. All works are chosen anonymously in a democratic, forum-based process. While individual authors always hold the rights to their works, all submissions are property of *The Roaring Muse*. However, all works will be returned upon request. If possible, submit all works on a disk along with a hard-copy. For scanning purposes, all artwork that is not turned in on a disk must be no larger than 11 by 17 inches.

Submissions can always be dropped off at the English Department office or mailed to:

UMD English Department
Attn: The Roaring Muse
410 Humanities Building
10 University Drive
Duluth, MN 55812

For our next submission deadline or subscription details, please see our website at:

www.d.umn.edu/~litguild



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