I have beaten out my exile.
I have weathered the storm.
I have thought.
I have sung in, misunderstood.
You who can not know at first hand,
Broken against false knowledge.
You of the finer sense,
You who can not know at first hand,
Broken against false knowledge.
You of the finer sense.
Balanced Budget

October 23, 1981

Today the United States national deficit surpassed $1,000,000,000,000 for the first time in its history. If every person in the United States would wipe their ass with a two dollar bill and send it to the Treasury in Washington, D.C. we would have the biggest pile of shit in the world.

August West
Horace had acquired the lighter in a flea-market barn dance at 3:30 in the morning, on the eve of his 21st birthday celebration, with his friend Al and two ladies of the night: Gatsby and Flatsy. It was a beautiful, slim, rectangular lighter with a bold "Winston" logo gilded on both sides. Gatsby and Al had knocked over a small table after completing a generous liberation of mutual energy, and the lighter had cracked Horace in the forehead as it fell; Horace and Flatsy had been on the other side of the table.

Horace had treasured the lighter fiercely from that moment on. He carried it with him everywhere, told all of his friends the circumstance of its acquisition countless times, and never really forgot about Flatsy Carry it with him everywhere, told all of his friends the circumstance of its acquisition countless times, and never really forgot about Flatsy.

"Horace, you embarrass me. How long have we been partners?"
"I like it."
"I like it." Horace said.

"It doesn't even work!" He told Horace almost every day as they drove home from work.

"I like it." Horace said.

"It's juvenile Horace. Grow men don't carry beat up old lighters around that don't work, and tell stupid stories about hookers to every Joe that walks in the newstand.""I like it." Horace said.

"Especially if they don't smoke!"
"I like it." Horace said.

"Horace, you embarrass me. How long have we been partners?"
"I'm not certain."
"I don't know where I got this; Wanna know where I got this?"
"I like it."

"I like it."
"I like it." Horace said.

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"Horace, you embarrass me. How long have we been partners?"

The lighter had been the subject of many altercations between not only Al and himself, but also his mother. Mrs. Shilling felt that toying with the lighter was a childish vice not unlike sucking one's thumb. The lighter had been the subject of many altercations between not only Al and himself, but also his mother. Mrs. Shilling felt that toying with the lighter was a childish vice not unlike sucking one's thumb.

But the lighter was a small hand mirror with a message: "Win!" He had once mentioned this to Al, but he simply chuckled maliciously and threatened to steal it.

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"Are you alright Horace?" His mother called up to him.

"Yes Mother. Just a little gas that's all."

"I told you not to eat that chink food in the fridge", it's been there a week an' a half!"
Slinking like a vine
along the bricked brownstones
his hatbrim spaces him from
the metal gated storefronts.
The stars fall in droplets
dripping light in streams-
and puddles as
dopplers by
a gently tapping cane
leaving a shadow of its
echo,
its length spaces him from
among the brick brownstones
Embracing the solitude
he licks the night.
Heartstrings

Wires give him life, like a puppet
Yet soon they will break
From the doorway I stare
In the bed he lies, decaying

But what of kite flying and baseball games and piggybacking, I ask?
What of pizza and haircuts and the new math?

Limply he waves—hello or goodbye?
Eyes close. Lips seal.
Robed in white, his puppeteer removes the strings
Can’t anyone fix him, please?

Hello Father, I am still waiting.

Pete Waters

MUMS

Under hot, blue days
She kneels
Among her lilies of the valley.

Her calves are two, firm balls
As she pulls at the weeds
With her swollen hands;
Pink polish still splotched on her dirty fingernails.

Her sweat, like sycamore pores down her back
And under her arms
As she ovulates dreams.

Mary Wilson

Spell

Wine drunk evening, snowstars fall
Cold cornfield walking
Slow stutter to sleep, past dreams.

Eric Stevenson
Nancy is alone in the steamroom. She is sitting on the cedar bench, her elbows resting on the top of her knees, her hands gripping the wet strands of her sweaty hair. She has turned the steam up nearly as high as it will go and she listens to the powerful hiss of the steam escaping from the vents beneath her.

Jim is standing in front of the meat section in the Safeway grocery store trying to figure out the difference between hamburger and ground chuck. He examines them closely. They look the same. He tries to remember what his wife used to buy. He notices that the ground chuck is more expensive and reasons that it must be better quality meat. He picks the hamburger. "I have ketchup at home," he says out loud.

Nancy is lying on her back, enjoying the heat and the solitude. She enjoys the smell of the sweat, the slippery, almost greasy, feeling of the hot wall tiles as she rubs her hand across them.

Jim likes foods that are instant, or as close to instant as possible. When he examines labels he is not looking at the ingredients. He is looking for the cooking time. Things like "heat and serve," and "just add boiling water" mean a lot to him. "Ready to eat" is his favorite.

There is a group of retarded men swimming in the pool near the steamroom. The water is cold. Three of them decide to go and warm up. They have been in the steamroom before and they begin to giggle as they shuffle across the slippery pool tiles towards the door.

So far in his grocery cart Jim has three cans of chicken noodle soup, a jar of Ragu, a box of macaroni, a loaf of rye bread, a package of hamburger, and a twelve-pack of beer. He notices that the other shoppers, all of whom seem to be women, have full, or nearly full, carts, with things like fresh vegetables, flour, eggs, butter, chicken. He pushes his cart down the aisle.

Nancy is almost asleep when the door burst open and three retarded men came in and sat across from her. She sits up and smiles nervously. She notices that the scrotum of one of the men is hanging partially out of the bottom of his swim trunks. She puts her knees together and begins rubbing her legs. "Hi," she says.

Jim decides he has enough groceries and pushes his cart into a checkout line. There is a middle-aged woman reading People Magazine. She has a nice tan and wears horn rimmed glasses. Her upper half is quite attractive. She seems thin, but he notices that her hips and thighs are unusually large, as if all of her weight is being pulled downward by gravity and is stuck between her knees and her waist. She looks up from the magazine. "Hi," Jim says.

Nancy knows that she has been in the steamroom too long, and that it is time for her to go. She jumps up, very much to the men's surprise, and says, "Hi!"
Two more retarded men enter the steamroom. One of them is very obese. His swim trunks are old and look dirty. One of the men begins to hum. She can't quite make out the tune. The obese man moans, stands and starts to leave.

Jim is going a little too fast when he makes the turn into his driveway and one of the bags tips over, spilling its contents onto the dirty, carpeted backseat floor. He turns off the radio, stops the car, and contorts his body over the seat to see what has spilled. He curses.

The obese man is holding the steamroom door shut so no one can leave. He is flicking the lights on and off, on and off. He is laughing and having a good time. Nancy has shut the steam off but the room is still very hot. It is time for her to go. The four retarded men are yelling at the fat man, calling him something sounding like Pete, and this makes him more excited and he flashes the lights on and off even faster and laughs even harder. “Just ignore him,” Nancy says. “Just ignore him and he'll go away.”

Nancy is standing on the inside of the metal door trying to reason with the retarded fat man outside. “Please let us out,” she says, “Please.” She pushes on the door to see if he's still holding it shut. It won't budge. She steps back and slams her shoulder against the door. The obese man has taken a few steps back, deciding to let the people out, and he is laughing as the door hits him in the face. His nose begins to bleed.

Jim is in the bathroom urinating. He is too tired to stand so he is sitting on the toilet, his pants down around his ankles. He stares at the empty bathtub with its solitary shampoo bottle and thin piece of yellow soap half way down the drain. He begins thinking of the woman in the grocery store with the big hips. He imagines her large thighs spread wide, a small mound of pubic hair barely visible beneath a thick roll of fat. He decides to masturbate but finds that his penis is unresponsive, and hangs between his legs limp and uninterested.

Nancy is alone in the shower room. Too tired to stand she sits, limp and exhausted, on the tile floor, letting the cool shower water fall gently over her hot red shoulders.

Inside, Jim begins to unpack his groceries. He takes out a box of Arm and Hammer baking soda, opens it, and puts it in the rear of his refrigerator. He laughs, and says “this is great.” He puts the rest of the groceries away, and grabs himself two beers and the loaf of rye bread. He goes in to the living room, turns on the television and sits in one of the two folding chairs in the otherwise empty room. He drinks the beer and nibbles the bread. Love Boat is on.

Gordon Black
A Grave Day-Dream

Yesterday, I met a red-blue Sprite under the wood:
She stood stark-bare with hair accented by her hood.
I reached, she pulled, and the black earth fell away-
Spinning quickly-white, I was unknotted from the clay:

We trilled about licking oily leaves with our feet.
Sprite ran naked-clean, but under Stream missed a beat:
She slid onto a rock, and quite calmly fell
Opening her knees, and I loosed my flesh-bell.
I jangled once loud, and much louder still-
Then we stuck, and burned together 'til we had our fill.

Overnight we slept under cool dirt and moss,
Our bodies wrapped in fine forest floss.
I inhaled bug-beetles, white-worms, and ants:
She fed me blood that had been stolen by Chance.

But when I woke, I knew that Sprite was gone,
And only then did I see one pretty doe-fawn.
She chewed soft grass above my lonely grave,
And I thought of Sprite, and the warm-soft fluid she gave.

John Zarchen
son, reconcile

last night i watched Life Goes To War
and seeing Donald Duck in full combat attire
fight the tricky Japs
could not help but think it is because of this
i am that i am
in arenas of amusement
baseball games and football
since i was a child
i had always noticed how
he sang the National Anthem
hand to heart
everytime
i heard it
my father of mine

my rosy children named me
for the hate that you gave them
like a Christmas or birthday present

he went to war and six months
on the busride
when he thought of how he left
i wonder
he was my age then

Spring 1942
R.T. Hayashi

present
like a Christmas or birthday
for the hate that you gave them
your rosy children named me

while in school

he went to war

and looking Donald Duck in full combat attire

Life Goes To War

Reconciliation
Outlined in white
Petosky stone beaches,
the blue lake lies
raw and unsalted.
The road empties
into the woods,
sunlit turquoise flickers
through washboard walls
of white birch
shimmering in
silver leaf droplets.
Blue-black road,
dark green and silver birch
mingle in the grey
of a windshield.
On Timber Shore’s boat trailer
“Torch,” in chipped paint,
dangles its rope and bailer
white against black.
Past the red and black
stenciled sign in front
of Peshawbetown’s white church,
a Sunday flea market
tries to close.
Women emerge, clinging
to soft cardboard boxes,
oozing leftovers.
An old Indian,
gnarled and reeking
of Night Train whiskey,
barters angrily over
fish hooks and worms.
Out from behind
a rusted car on blocks,
a small, naked boy
runs from a barking dog.

Shenango Valley

The powerlines leading
into town sag
a little more each day.
Pretty soon they’ll
be down scattered
across the roads and river.
There are still
mountain piles of coal around—
old women come
with dented wire shopping carts
to carry away their loads.
Further along the railroad tracks
naked children hide
among the rusting box car rows
and scavenge along
the river bank at dusk.
Coal-eyed men
sleep and roam, sleep and roam
stand along the mesh iron fences
that surround the black windowed
factories
and still hear their dreams die
like a dragon being slaughtered.
Ultraviolet Blues

New Orleans and the Silky Black Seams

Billy Death and the Magic Man Roaring Croation Band,
bite the wall, beer slurping blues babies
and a sweet Marguerita Mama,
playing poetry
in the Ultraviolet Swing Bar.

Extension cord
illuminates Billy's exhale,
illuminates Billy's exhale,
keeping my ear hairs
illuminates Billy's exhale,
keeping my ear hairs
wiggling my ear hairs
illuminate Billy's exhale
illuminate Billy's exhale

Tendril cone microphone
in the Ultraviolet Swing Bar.

Laughter, the costume clinches,
And concert, the chowder, ending buffet,
In Billie Holiday nightclub with slow massage,
O io stop your toes while under steamy bursts

Kathy Shelton

Kate Reynolds

23
25 spend some time without you."

"John, I'm sorry. I wish I could explain it but I can't. Maybe I'm swamping her senses. She had to keep telling herself that life was going mean I don't think it would be terrible, and it would help, a lot, to have someone who has more problems than you do." Again, she hadn't gone back to the shrink so I went out and bought the album."

"Quadrophenia?"

"John and Jamie sat facing each other across a candle lit table high above New York City. She glanced down at her plate where the remains of a steak, a piece of parsley, and a potato skin stared back at her."

"It will be good . . . you'll understand where I'm coming from."

"Finally my parents sent me to a psychiatrist" he said. They were sitting in semi-darkness, one corner of the room illuminated by the glare from the streetlight across the road. "Yeah, the shrink told me I had Quadrophenia."

"My parents never found out what my sister was doing to me...it used to hold John when he had nightmares, but this wasn't John, and me."

"No need I don't think it would be terrible, and it would help, a lot, to have someone who has more problems than you do." Again, she hadn't gone back to the shrink so I went out and bought the album."

"Yeah, the shrink told me I had Quadrophenia."

"My parents never found out what my sister was doing to me...it used to hold John when he had nightmares, but this wasn't John, and me."

She closed the heavy door and stepped out into the deserted predawn. They had been sitting in darkness for hours, and the hard streetlight made her wince. She walked calmly, confidently through a part of town that even scared her in the daytime. Rape would be so minor and unimportant after all that had happened. A million thoughts of the night streamed through her head. She couldn't put them in any order, but she knew if she did they would scare her to death. She wanted to run back inside and hold him again. She panicked. What if he needed her now? What if he called sometime when she wasn't home. If he asked her a question she couldn't answer. What if she ever pushed too hard? What if she wasn't available enough.

She was walking parallel to Fairmount Park and stopped to steady herself on a park bench. A sleet storm had fallen on the park. The grass, trees and benches were encased in hard shiny glass figures. The yellow-white streetlights lit up the frozen scene casting a steadily, frightening glow. The reality of the park gave way to some kind of demonic fairyland. It made her think of being frozen in hell. She pulled the sweater he had given her closer to her body and realized she was losing the feeling in her fingers. She put her hands inside her jeans hoping to warm them, but her body was cold and felt under her clothes. She pulled them out quickly and stared at them.

She was sitting in her well lit living room grading a handful of Freshman compositions when she saw the large dark figure pass by her mailbox. She drained her coffee, rose and went to the window just in time to see the figure disappear around the first bend in the lane. He was running. Slightly unrelaxed, she called Court, her new English sheepdog to her side. He padded down the stairs and came towards her, tail wagging and massive tongue hanging from his mouth. She was getting used to being out in the country alone, but it was slow going. After four years in a dormitory where privacy was at best a rare privilege and quiet nonexistent, and then a summer in the city with John, a Virginia country cottage at the end of a 1/2 mile dirt road was a little more than an adjustment.

She mulled over going to check the mailbox. Normally she wouldn't have hesitated but these last few weeks had been so draining. She hadn't expected graduate school to be quite as much work as it was, and when she finally ended the drawnout engagement with John she hadn't expected to meet . . . him. She glanced toward the window. With more than a little effort, and with Court in hand she made her way out the door and down the driveway. Once at the mailbox she put her hand inside; her fingers clinging around a small square envelope. She slipped the envelope in her pocket, turned and dashed towards the house, sending Court into a barking frenzy; certainly scaring off anyone who could be lurking around her house.

Once back inside the safety of the cottage, she sat at the coffee table and removed the letter from her pocket. The envelope was yellow, and the sender had sketched a black omega on the back. She opened the envelope and unfolded the letter.

Jamiie:  
You have been invited . . .  
To play dictionary.  
Room 5—The Haunted Mansion  
Alberto Giocometti

They sat in his apartment. It was near dawn, but neither of them realized it. They had been reading all night. She was struggling with Crime and Punishment, he with Marxist theory.

"America Sucks" he said.  
"I love it" she said.  
"How can you?" he said.  
"We promised to stay away from politics" she said.  
"Let's leave" he said.  
"School?" she asked.  
"America" he said.  
"Mexico's warm" she said.  
"Canada's closer" he said, "and then I can show you Detroit."  
"How can you get more American than Detroit?" she asked.  
"Shut up and pack," he said.
familiar sights. Came in the window even when it was rolled up (ever since she had windshield elongating the scenery in front of her. The cold that made in the last few weeks showed that she'd rather be abused than treated well. The streetlight shown in off the street, picking up the car stretch and slither past, getting disfigured in the reflection by the building.

"See that building? My father's office is on the very top of that building." She said. "Okay" she said. "See that building? My father's office is on the very top of that building." He said. "Okay" she said. "I wonder if my sister will be there." he said. "If she is she'll really go on with her uncomplicated, consistent life."

The pictures would have to come down soon, but for now they helped her to handle her guilt, and let her believe, if only half-

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"You've just missed your sister... she went back east this morning when he showed up at her cottage. She didn't even think she had told you."

"Good Dad, this is my friend Jamie," she took his hand with all the warmth she could muster.

"And you're beautiful."
"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Something's f up," he said.

"Yeah," she said, as the moon started to fall behind the hills.

"Okay," she said.
Couch Sleeping

A Midsummer Night's...
"Before We Could Build"

Two crows on the telephone wire line black-eyed and sassy.
We are squinting at the sun waiting for relief of the ice cream man
and banana scooter pies
knees holding chins
skinny elbows playing hide and seek
with sweater holes.
We live in the real world
everyday after school
at Card's market.
I best friend myself to you by chewing on your wet watermelon Bub's Daddy gum
And you climb the Jenkins fence to touch the one-eyed dog a sign of everlasting trust.
We skip school on spelling test days and win the three legged race at the sixth grade track meet.
Your liver brown summer skin pulls you through the chlorine faster than mine ever could
But in kickball I am the champ.

When the sun set early in September
summer melted from the sky, and we skipped home as the streetlights hummed on Another first day of school.
That was the Fall you kissed Bobbie Foster (I would have rather kissed my dog or Jenkins one-eyed dog for that matter)
You were a little less electric eyed to greet the ice cream man or relish scooter pies,
So I tried it alone until afternoon blossomed old then save up.
Now we build card houses fragile cathedrals, and watch blond boys at the fair.
But I want to know, if Bobbie Foster hadn't chewed your gum too would you love him like me?

Kim Kiefer
The Legend of the Bear Mother

It all took place some time ago
the woman's dark child thrust from her
in a ring of pine
the chill air in her lungs
her large hips in a pocket of needles.

The tight baby had squirmed for hours
Skoaga's screams echoed off rock walls
came back to her
came back to her
when it was done
silence rushing into that same deep hollow.

The boy was smooth and buttery
his eyes with the glint of blackberries
his maleness a capped mushroom
a nodding thumb.
The wind shook the leaves --
from the west a hush
in her ear as she breathed:
my little chestnut, my fallen berry
my bear-child, with the lips of a man.

It was spring
when she had crossed the stream
that rushed with herring
the waves humping with scaled backs
she entered the wood where the bear
was waiting in his hide
at the mouth of Whistling Rock.

In the shade of the glen
crude and ill-carved
Skoaga fell into his furred chest

into the dark-coated bear
wanting the shame, the touch
no voice but the bear's rumbling
no smell but the glistening oil of his hide.
She clutched at the bear's broad neck
as she would clutch the trunk of a tree
full of arousal and loathing.

Since then the Haidas
would not cross the stream
Skoaga's mother nodded
her wooly head to the drum
and wept.
There were tales at night:
she was seen crouching over an antelope
with her lover at her side
her mouth speckled red.
Skoaga was moving in the brush
her belly burgeoning plump
and shiny as a skull's head
her arms thick with new hair.

There was no truth to the tales
but this -- the bear had retreated into the cave
and she was alone at the stream
when the child was born.

Years later Tsagay the sculptor
chipped the argillite from the face of Whistling Rock
He carved her image from the stone
and she is frozen there still --
her mouth cleft in agony as the infant
rips and knaws at her bosom
that falls like a thick pod.

Amy S. Pence