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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

_Ezra Pound_
Ars Poetica

Those who call this self-indulgence are dead wrong.

It is suicide as sure as any line drawn plumb
by a neck firm in its arch, delicately swaying.

David Zivan
Jesse James In Wax

Staring back into the opaque eyes of your bodily twin, with lustre-less buttons of shell said to contain your essence, I recall the rebel soul ravaging free, a stolid desert tempest and kiss of death to the very men who with words cast you immortal, the outlawed ambassador of the American spirit;

and I wonder if they haven't captured, in their myopic art form, the piercing and blinding emptiness behind dreaming eyes.
I remember the colorless hallways,
Parochial back-country schoolyards,
My small hands blackened
With the cheap printing ink of missalettes.
This was the world, all of it, to them.
Your people only existed in books,
They were the ones who killed Christ,
The fair-skinned, blue-eyed Saviour
Of my delicate farmtown childhood.
They would not even have allowed us
To play together.
I can laugh now at what I was taught.
They would tell us we should not love
— Or, so it is written.
The white-haired, knuckle-cracking nun
Who ruled my adolescent conscience
Would never have thought, at all,
That we would settle our differences in peace
Under the ancient stars.

Jennie Dawes
Silent State

Local names, lowered one by one, oppress the silence.

Without dignity they rest face down, stamped into anonymous sites, clinging to an earth-covered mother

whose face blushes across confidential files, spied with a mouthful of muzzle,

while a hired executioner stands tall, impotent and musclebound with overdeveloped arms.

Cam Martin
The chicken died timidly, no noise, only a quick crazed dash from the bullet before giving in. Detached feathers settled peacefully around its surrender.

Burt didn’t pick it up right away. Hate was a warm tight embrace, crazy in the sun. He sat back on the porch scratching his dry fingers on his milk white leg and enjoying the empty yard. Crazy hate. The chicken annoyed him.

The way she walked, it was as if she were afraid to get her feet dirty. One leg down, ginger soft, and the other curled tight as landing gear that would let itself down at the last possible moment. And then the other leg would yank up. Fast and disgusted. She was a lady, a dainty little lady, delicate poking legs firm in their stockings, solid but don’t touch. Never. Not that he would want to. She never ever had both feet on the ground at the same time. Scared of the dirt between her yellow toes, scared of the yellow sun behind her head, she always moved fast, quiet, a sheen glaring off her fitted feathers with each tenative bob of her head. Pointless crazy hate like liquor after that one swallow that does it, that kicks it down, can’t be stopped. It made Burt so tired just to watch. She annoyed him. She did, and heat did, and the sun was within reach.

He burned alone. No one else was ever there, only heat and a persistent drone that was summer. If Burt could have shot the noise he would have, with more than one bullet. And he did have more than one so that was fine. He could pull one out like diving warm hands into cool schools of silver fish, like life in his palm separated from all the rest, a single bullet. It probably wouldn’t take more than one. Only nerves.

The thing was, when you spoke it was barely there, but the silence was filled so that you had to listen to it, the hum of a thousand maniacal insects. It was so heavy that the air dragged. The sound of his chair leg scraping against the porch seemed a little delayed, fighting
its way up through the drone as the warm whiskey fought its way down his throat. He shoved the chair loud, with dull anger, his legs three times as long as the chairs, and tilted back for a beer chaser. It wasn’t cold. Nothing was, not even the chicken carcass. Heat like this and it would stay body-warm all afternoon.

Burt ran a long spare hand across the canvas of his stomach, pressing at its fever. His body stretched taut, short of skin, bones pressing through like a relief map. Sweating sapped him tired and sweating for no reason, sweating sitting still made him crazy for something. He didn’t know what. Maybe it was just whatever he was losing like thoughts floating away mistaken for impurities. It was an angry thing not to put them back. He could think about a dead chicken and he could hate the tentative nature of each footstep and what it did to him to watch but he couldn’t bring on a clean sweat. It was all bad, sour.

He’d done her a favor, really—at least she was out of the heat. Cold silver fish bullet. She didn’t have to feel anything anymore, just hold it all cold inside. Dead blood pumped sweet and she was dead even if she wasn’t cold. Burt closed one eye, tight, looking in, rolling it up, straining the socket trying to imagine the hen someplace else. Wherever it was she’d have both feet on the ground. She’d be relaxed. Opening the shut eye was hard, it had rolled so far away. Hands hanging, asleep, out of blood, cold because they were empty. It mattered more what it felt like on the inside. Pockets in the winter were filled. He could slip a hand in stirring silver bullets metal cold pulling away blood from one finger. Now, his head dropping back, whiskey, imagination, something jerks it up and out up and out, hard, pecking chin search. Burt pulled the wave of drunkeness heavy over his head.

He tried to focus on the carcass in the yard. The sun was so crazy he let his tired eye slip back into hiding. When he looked at it cockeyed, the chicken could be nothing but discarded paper, limp and careless with humidity. Chickens never relax. Never. Don’t touch. God, breath pressed hard around him. Metal would be cool. Burt woke up a little more with this thought, became conscious of his spine, swilled more whiskey. It didn’t seem to have any temperature at all. Burt thought of himself, stiff as furniture in the shade of the porch, sweat sliding down his body in effortless streams. It didn’t feel so angry now, just quiet heat. He was smooth. He was dripping wax from his fingertips, burning up inside, licking his own flames. He

Chicken soup wouldn’t help him now. Burt wouldn’t let himself think about eating. His palm casually dropped under the chair looking for cigarettes. He slipped one long-fingered and white out of the pack and placed it gently between dry lips. He held it there lightly, never clamping down, a retriever taught never to bite down on the bird. He was so gently drunk that holding it was sweet and his lips were fond with memory. He thought he smiled as if at children, as if at small warm soft things, he thought that was how he smiled but in the drunk crazy sun it was really just a leer. The cigarette hung stiff until he remembered that he hadn’t lit it yet. Finding the lighter in his pocket seemed fond, too, familiar, and then to have it burst forth with a flame more touching than sunsets in its wavering heat upon heat. Something. He would never get over things like lighters and suns and the way they performed without effort or fear.

Burt dragged dry on the cigarette, pulling it away from his lips with a hand turned sideways to cover his mouth. It was all so slow, magnified. He was beginning to feel big and loose in his movements, expansive toward this swimming world. Drunk arm, flopping back after a drag, seemed so graceful in his head but on the outside it was unexpected, a limb bouncing from the side of a stretcher. In the crook it slowed white and if he looked down he would smile at it with fondness. His. A thin stream of sweat travelled like a vein from his breastbone, pooling in the thin folds of gut. Burt could feel another starting somewhere in his armpit, gathering, building up, then slipping quick as oil over the grooves of his ribcage. It didn’t make any difference that he was stiller than the air that crawled around him. Burt thought of himself, stiff as furniture in the shade of the porch, sweat sliding down his body in effortless streams. It didn’t feel so angry now, just quiet heat. He was smooth. He was dripping wax from his fingertips, burning up inside, licking his own flames. He
was a pissing cow, detached, disconnected, and he would float away in the stream of his own sweat and piss. The whiskey was running sweet inside.

Now it was only the chicken. Sorry. He felt like now he could have held her still and soft. Pet her in his lap like a cat. Warmer. Too late though, so he wished she were just paper in the yard, trash that would disappear gradually, sinking into the grass, separating by fiber. The cigarette burned close to his fingers and he brought it to his mouth, sucking smoke out fast before flicking it off the porch. It landed in the green weeds not even smoldering, put out in the air, afraid to challenge the choking strength of summer's vegetation. Claws in and out stroking sitting heavy, not tense to leap from the thigh, a chicken blinking like sleep arching its neck. At least the yard was green. Beyond green, swelling with growth, weeds and grasses spilled over any sharp objects and held them down. The area was blurred by its own fertility, and of course, the animals. Noise, the hum of insects crawling—the air was infested. What did it take to make a dead chicken purr? Burt could almost see the yard moving and he knew what it was. Every humming insect was dragging some air behind it, blurring, crayon trails. Burt was out of cigarettes. Burt was tired. He sat watching the yard while the whiskey replaced the insect hum in his head with a sound all its own like a muddy river. Breath was slow and ragged. He'd get the chicken in a minute.

In the yard the chicken seemed to sleep, a wing crooked open, whiter than paper in the sun.

A minute of summer came slower than death. Burt slept, stiff with its denial, glowing in the shade like a rock under water. He snored but he didn’t know that he slept. As he dozed the afternoon wore tired without promising any darkness, only more heat, threatening, bladder full. The chicken in the yard had flattened imperceptibly closer to the ground, feathers matting lifelessly where in the morning breeze they had stood bravely fluttering, inviting Indians. Death was apparent in the curve of her beak and the way her yellow leg twisted, clutching at its invisible perch. The bullet hole was an indentation in her side, dark, caked like blood from a forgotten nosebleed. It seemed close to harmless. All that she had been running from now gathered here, bumping crazy and alive with the music of a feast.

Things also gathered around Burt where he slept stiff as the wood of his chair. Gnats and flies in small swarms clouded near any promise of wetness, the gaping cave of his mouth, the pocket between the arm and chest. Every now and then one would touch needles on his skin. Then Burt’s sleeping arm would lift, annoyed, and wave them away. From the ward it was a lazy summer welcome.

The sun didn’t really sink. Evening came with light filtered haze and more noise. Cicadas tortured shrill in the air. Mosquitoes flew intent on bursting ripe with blood. The yard seemed dangerously green. Crazy. Ripe with the smell of sun-baked wheat. Heat drew some lines too sharp, trees and grasses were etched fine, but in the middleground light wavered, a sweet pool, clear.

Burt woke with only one eye and so heavy now. God, breath pressed hard in his throat. He was dripping warm and sweet, blood, sweat, none of it mattered. Wax would melt slow. Mold. The gun felt almost cool against his palm, but he knew it would get hot soon, go bad held against flesh, so he shot out fast, murdering the air. Dull pressing noise beyond noise: the emptiness. Then for a minute everything seemed quiet. Burt relaxed and let the taste of metal cling to his lips.

In the yard the chicken drowned in the light. One eye had recently been plucked by a wandering hawk, leaving the socket harmlessly smooth. Without an eye the chicken seemed almost good natured and a satisfied blank expression came over her small head.

Lauren Williams
Red Rock Mound

Beached
atop the wind-tossed head
of metallic sand waves,
a sacred mound wails,
exposed to the marrow
like the headless pink
of a buffalo carcass, sacrificed
and flowing.

Carving
beneath the scarred
and denuded back,
iron forearms flex and rake
razor-straight wounds,
as buzzards crowd to watch
the draining and arched body
exhale its last
breath.

Itar
Almost There

Stoned out of our minds,
we steer our truck
towards the Canadian border.

None of us have ever
crossed into Canada,
so we ready our vocabulary.

“Want another beer, eh?”
“Are there any left, eh?”
“Only for you, eh.”

We punch each other
on the arm, laugh, and hope
we are almost there.

The radio crackles another
request while you roll
the last joint.

I still can’t figure out
what drove us to leave
Ohio in the middle of the night.

I’d like to think it
was a woman, or maybe just
our friendship.

Either way, we are all smiles.
I speed, you roll, and both hope
we are almost there.

Chris Hanson
In Memory

I

My heart cries,
Wooing dew from the moonlight
To guild my tears.
And I cling to my pillow,
A fragile link with permanence—
As soft memories caress my heart—
Summer warmth dripping into an Autumn night—
The stars, as if of smoke,
Gently shift around me
In the liquid dance of mortality
Performed to a symphony of still muteness.
Blow the flame, feeding the flickering light,
A flower blossoming in a dark blue sky
Petals dropping to float through the air
And root again in the dusty ash.

You haunt my dreams and my faith,
A sultry spectre, all ivory bones,
The cradle of your ribs holding a soft and yielding heart.
Love a warm breeze through the barren hallow,
A timid silence that cements the void
Clinging to the vanishing moments,
Spoonfulls of dusty road—
Parched mouthfuls feeding a feeble voice
That whispers its jealous fears to wandering progress.
Fear and love, trembling houses forever falling
Like raindrops on stones
Splashing like memories into experience.

And me and you, some ethereal presence
Drifting in and out of my conscience
Standing at the end of a bridge
Receding, fleeting, imaginary touch
Racing amongst the stones in the universe beyond—
Richer sorrows have yet to kiss my lips
The languid wind crying, singing,
Playing in the dark forests of your soul
Rustling memories like dry leaves,
Whispering imaginary things in the shadows,
Stirring the strings of my heart
Into an eerie, wobbling chord of despair.
And the moonlight, the twilight of your dreamless sleep,
Sprouts scratches of knowledge
On the stones in my eyes.

II

My heart falls
A leaf slipping through the wind
To settle by the ravaged banks
Of a swollen stream
Chasing my thoughts through the waves,
Ice cold memories
Melting in the ripening emptiness
Dripping in heavy tears
That mix with the ash and dust below—
A sucking mire of dormant hopes.
A stray bird standing on the world’s coast
Tempted by the waves, the thrill of flight,
The gentle, unceasing gnawing of that great sea
Dissolving the sands of his little isle,
And he paces anxiously, fleeting glances
Tossed away at fleeting things and faces.
And all the while his heart drowning in its plenty
Now still, now frozen, now gone
Missing one lonely light
Like a shower of gold, trapped in a tear
Tracing its way down a familiar, forgotten cheek
And lost in the void beyond.

III

My heart settles into the river
The shards of a life cast recklessly away
Perhaps to sink beneath amber waves,
A dull glow in the mist of the sea's breath,
Or else be swept downstream
To float beyond sight and vanish.
You live there, in the corner of my dreams,
Like waves of sunshine
Flooding my eyes
Lapping at my feet
A flash of daylight in the night
The warmth of a spring afternoon
Between the sheets of darkness.
Hazel eyes, the curve of your mouth,
Hair flowing through my fingers
Like the sweet breath of dawn...
Shall I sink, or like you be swept away
To vanish beyond sight
The river flowing, flashing, growing in my mind,
Searching for its roots
As I'm drawn amongst the waves.

And so we float,
Held in the sky like leaves in the wind,
Floating silently into the dusk and beyond.
The river runs quick, gleaming,
Conjuring dances of light
That pass in laughter from each wave
As they sing to the sodden banks
Like your eyes once sang to my heart.

Kent Lambert
Driving Cross-Country

No companions to speak of, but some presences of a sort are here: the haunting daylight moon, visible since early afternoon, and growing steadily brighter now in the inklings of the mid-winter sunset, the mix of blood and milk that could be a bright blaze ending beyond distant hilltop pine, but is more likely the turning of the planet; alongside, the swiftly passing landscape, spotted with fire stubble from a farmer’s burning or a careless smoker; closer, the fearless crows, plucking at a carcass, dodge only in the last seconds when my vehicle nearly overruns their black wings; there on the concrete pillar, grey support for a perpendicular higher road, a message painted in red with a quick hand, urging “Jesus or Hell.” The evening turns briefly white as the sun sinks further, diffusing all the light for my eyes which briefly discern the swiftly passing white lines and the spaces between them.

David Zivan
Sunday Morning

Kneeling respectfully, you stake your claim beside the wooden seat.

Head hanging self-contemptuously, you project by the gut-full your bottled beliefs into a swirling galaxy, mouthing

  unspoken sacraments
you pray for stamina and dawning stain-glass colors to temper the volatile spirits, the devil offering

  lip-service for salvation, something about delivering you from temptation

  and seeing the light in your dark corner, you cringe behind tight-lipped curtains, confessing your “human-ness” and lack of conviction for your fallen state.

Cam Martin
A Subtle Change in the Flowers

Insanity snuck up on him like the sun surprising a sleeping island. As far as he knew, nothing had changed. He was buying lillies for his wife, Lily, when he realized he couldn’t—there was something menacing in their whiteness. It was like they were hiding something terrible inside, something fundamentally destructive but attractive, like the sirens. He heard one, indignantly screaming in the distance, enraged by one more injustice. It had interrupted his thoughts, but not his actions evidenced by the lillies on the floor, flattened and torn around his feet. The clerk was looking at him strangely. He apologized and made some vague excuse about a bee, paid for the originals and sheepishly asked for some more.

While he was waiting he noticed the array of beautiful arrangements and thought about how each one was intended for a different person. He was thinking about naming them when the cashier returned with the new bouquet. Once she brought them, though, the same fears roared through him. He found himself sprinting out of the shop and down the street leaving her with a bewildered expression partially covered by her long, blonde hair. He ran until he came to an older woman trying to sell sickly looking flowers to the stream of people out of which he had just flowed. Between gasps for breath he asked her if she was doing much business. She said she hadn’t been but that was the way it had been for years and, somehow, she always managed to get by. He studied her, decaying with her flowers, by the road and felt sorry she was going to die that way. He thought he should do something, so he scouted around and, being careful to avoid the lillies, decided on some limp looking tulips.

He paid her and walked away feeling he had done something right. He looked down, examined his purchase and realized how much he hated Tulip. She was a woman, a few years older than he was, who worked in his office. She was only the next pay-scale up but acted as if the difference were five. She had this transparent, twisted smile like melted glass which she was always flashing at him. She squinted too.

It was like she was a crocodile that had just devoured his mother, mocking him with her long, thin eyes and smug grin. She was taller than he was and had a voice like a pig’s seconds before slaughter. He really hated tulips. He was grinning at the pathetic things and pictured them withering in the flames of his hatred. As the last embers died in his mind he realized he was still in the flower shop paying for the roses he was going to take to his wife. She was like a flower herself: delicate, soft like the silken petals and fragrant. He knew she loved roses. He wondered how long he had been standing there and what he had been doing. The clerk acted as if nothing was wrong and continued to ring up the flowers. She said it would be fifty four dollars and smiled to him quite innocently. He paid her and walked from the shop wondering what just had happened. On the way to the car, he thought it could have been a flashback from an acid trip. That would have been strange, however, as he hadn’t had one in over five years. Maybe, it had just been a disturbing daydream. He knew dreaming occurred very rapidly, maybe he had, somehow, briefly dozed off. He didn’t know and decided it was either the latter or he was going crazy.

He continued walking toward his car when he realized he hadn’t driven, his wife had wanted the car and, even though he needed it for work, he had given it to her and caught a bus. He had never been able to say no. She had this way of pressing herself into him which prohibited the word. She would gently grind into his groin slowly working up him up till he thought he would explode and then stop. He usually held out past that point but as she continued to stroke him his resolve would erode with every wave of pleasure. As she stood close he could smell her too—humid, warm, wet like some exotic tropical plant. Between his rising excitement and the feel and smell of her body it was only a matter of how long he would try to hold out. Sometimes, if he proved especially resistant she would start brushing her lips against his neck and would kiss him lightly on and around his quivering lips. She always got what she wanted though.

He realized that his reverie excited him nearly as much as she did and flushed as he noticed the curious gaze of the girl sitting inches away from his erection. She looked to be about sixteen and startled...
him as she looked up and smiled. He quickly turned away and hoped, when they had a daughter, that she wasn't like that.

On the walk to his house he felt strangely nervous as if he were still dating and was bringing her her first bouquet. On a whim, he decided to go with the feeling and, instead of walking in, stood outside and rang the bell. He waited, rocking from his heels to his toes, thinking of the night to come and rang the bell again but she didn't answer. He guessed she was napping upstairs, she had been feeling tired lately. Walking in, he was sure to be quiet as he removed his shoes and hung his coat up, careful not to rattle the hangers. He crept upstairs and gently pushed open the bedroom door, wincing as it squeaked. She was lying in the bed, motionless under the covers, and he walked over to her rotting corpse as the rose thorns pushed through his skin and soaked her yellowed wedding dress with blood.

"Hi Rose", he said.

"I brought you flowers". He grinned broadly. "You know, I had the strangest day today..."

The clerk stared hard at him and slowly left the register. He stood in the flower shop, addressing his comments to nothing in particular. She hurried off to find a phone as he smiled and nodded at the various arrangements placed throughout the store.

Zach Smith
Yoga At Sunrise

The thunder of silence
smothers the screams
of a frenzied world
as I sink below
the slapping and parting,
to a liberating darkness.

My actions reach out

[Oh Mother
Sun I rise
to greet you]

I sense a pond,
a tropical cocoon
wrapped tight and shrouded
in whiteness of lillies.

My consciousness reaches out

(Oh Mother
Sun I rise
to greet you)

Round and full
I settle in the center,
blanketed in the white
lotus, a watery drop content
like the potent nectar
nestled in the flower's belly.

My thoughts reach out
Oh Mother
Sun I rise
to greet you

I stretch
from lotus folds,
spreading expectant arms
to part petals
in a pre-dawn wetness.

Pulled straight
by my toes, I snap tall,
embracing the rising sun
(once but a sliver of light)
like the flower's smiling face
tracing the path of the sun.

My breath reaches out,

'Oh Mother
Sun I rise
to greet you'

spanked to life
in the unsteady exhale
of a new born speech.

My voice cries out,

"Oh Mother
Sun I rise
to greet you"

severed
from a meditative, holy
union.

His Photograph
(for Anne)

After he puts the last dish away,
this friend who used to be my lover
asks me to spend the night.
But I do not want a casual affair.

He understands; he has something
to show me in the bedroom. I stand
in the doorway as he goes to a drawer,
takes out a photograph.

I am ten years younger. I sit
in a sexy pose: legs, cleavage, enough
pout to be sultry, not childish.
He returns the photograph as I leave.

When I am gone, he will take it out
again and remember when
he was ten years younger.
He will kiss my body, kiss his image
of me. And when he has grown tired of this,
when he has grown tired of looking,
he will go to that drawer
one more time and put me away.

Debra Benko
Appalachian Spring

When we woke up one morning of our newness
To discover we were breathing in unison,
We were scared. But calmly we packed our things
And crossed Ohio, following the river.
Touching its edge at the shores of Marietta,
You said you would like to live on the river,
In a pontoon that travels as well as you do.
We laughed and loved so easily. How?
Vermont is far. It will be a long drive
Without the passenger you left in Wellsburg.
I do not care to think how long it may be
Until I see you again, if ever.
It does not matter. It has been good
To be lucky for a while, and to hold you. Oh,
Did I tell you? The flower you bought for me
In Connelsville — the one we stashed
In my glove compartment for safekeeping —
Bloomed overnight.

Jennie Dawes
My Proposal

There is time now for the hammock. I have straightened the begonias that were toppled in last night's wind, and tossed their spilled soil back into their pots. We have set out the tea to sweeten under the July sun, and you have picked me a full colander of raspberries. We will eat them for lunch from our fluted, glass bowls, and with the rest make jam for our breakfast toast. So now, come, and until that sun is highest let us rock above this earth worn shallow by our feet.

*Liza Jones*
Spheres of Influence

Blowing spinning bubbles into the setting sun I was reminded of us circling concentrically inside ourselves and them revolving around us as our world and their world turn around other worlds and we all revolve around the sun. I also thought about you and me and how we turn on each other.

Zach Smith
The Eros Motel

He holds her near
his casual heart and with distant
voice declares,
“Meet me
at the Eros” . . .

at the Eros,
where curtains shade
the terror of blushing sunsets,
frolicking and parting
in the promiscuous suggestion
of a young girl curious,
though scared —

at the Eros,
where whiteness is stripped.
and cowers in sheets,
falling from trembling walls
stained and sweating, in the heat
shedding second skin
like the desert salamander —

at the Eros,
where anyone's license
and ten bucks buys
a chance at immortality,
a notch and phone number
scratched in the wall —

“Meet me
at the Eros”.

Cam Martin
A Sacrificial Science

Sticky fingers clothed in plastic
Take it with a gentle touch.
Aligns its neck below the blade
Then kills with axe
and splinters the skull.

The flopping body drops into the bag
To join the heap of wasted flesh.
The slippery skin sticks to the head -
it frustrates the cutter, it tests his skill.

He takes the brain,
the pudding-soft ball,
and plops it into a numbered flask.
Then takes again, the next in line, with plastic hands
He'll perform the same -
cutting, slicing,
the sacrificing.

Jen Druley

Documenting Secrets

She looked across the room at the old cherry wood table that had occupied the same place in the corner of her living room for the last forty years. Without laughing or crying she resigned to an uncharacteristic dullness and began to speak.

"I know now that I'm just any person; getting old, afraid to die, searching for purpose, lonely once a day, sucker to a bottle of good Scotch." Maggie sat intentionally in her most uncomfortable chair, naked, on the verge of something. "I've never been rich, I've always been smart, but hell, I haven't been in the right place at the right time since the day I got my period."

She leaned over without moving her legs, which were propped up on one of the four crowded bookshelves in the room, and picked up the bottle of Dewar's placed strategically below her. A little stream of sweat snuck out from the crease between one of her breasts and a roll of fat on her stomach, and slid with gravity down the side of her waist following a path of skin that was too old to be tickled. She filled her glass a quarter of the way, and shot it down as if she had said "why not" too many times. She thought of listening to an opera loudly, but knowing her habit of creating drama, she opted for a look at the mail instead. There had been a heat that summer from Hell, and as she got up to put on her bathrobe, the wood floor which was in good need of a finish, absorbed the sweat off her feet. Maggie's bathrobe was her favorite belonging; it was a pink silk kimono with a gold dragon embroidered on the back, inherited from her great Aunt Lucy whose life motto had been, "Never stand when you can sit, never sit when you can lie down."

She unbolted the two locks which secured her from "city crazies", and drew back the chain which she used despite a personal disbelief that the damn thing really did anything anyway; she opened the door wide enough to lean into the hall and pick her mail up off the ground. Aware of the hum of silence down the long corridor, she slammed shut the door and quickly went to the stereo to pick out an album.
Some Billie Holiday was out, so she put it on and sat down to look over her mail: A new magazine subscription she had picked up last month, the New York Times Book Review, some flyers advertising bonus days at various glamorized dimestores across “Chicagoland”, and a letter marked with a red stamp that read “Return to Sender”, accompanied by a little hand with one of its fingers pointing across the envelope and out somewhere, in this case her Lincoln Park apartment which she liked to refer to as a “flat”. She looked at the address written in her own writing, “Helen Burgess, 312 Carpenter’s Ridge Rd., Cincinnati, Oh. 45215.” She lifted her Scotch to her mouth and stopped for a moment to notice a black speck frozen in the ice. Ignoring it, she took a sip, and dropped the rest of the mail on the floor, holding only the returned letter.

Maggie hummed a bar with Billie, and then leaned back letting her kimono drop open. She thought of another song, and sang the appropriate line, “Return to Sender” and then started fanning her neck with the long stiff envelope. She had always liked Elvis.

It was a thick dirty city heat in its best August prime. She looked into her glass; the black speck had melted free of the ice cube and now floated on the top. Tilting the glass, she stuck her finger in to fish it out. After missing twice, a current of Scotch sent the speck against the glass, and enabled Maggie to slide it up along the side. Feeling clever, she flicked it off somewhere to join its brother matter on the floor. Pleased by the factor of human dominance over tiny black specks, she finished her drink and considered the returned letter.

“Face it”, she said looking at the empty glass, “The old girl’s probably dead.” Maggie didn’t read obituaries. She instead believed in classes at local universities and ethnic food. Her thoughts vanished back to last Wednesday when she had gone to class despite the heat and hangover from Tuesday night Bridge. She was taking a course in British film at the University of Chicago, and despite the diversity of students in the classroom, she was the only one, save the professor, with grey hair. She hated the way he singled her out in front of the class, saying ego-stuffing, sometimes patronizing things like, “Of course none of you would remember the original days of Hitchcock Technicolor would they Maggie?”, gloating over the advantage of age, as if the class was there simply for the benefit of giving him superiority.

And for what? Being born in an earlier era? She hated Hitchcock anyway; thought him possessed by the male penis, and secretly in love with Cary Grant. She got up to get some more ice. Holding the freezer door open for a moment, Maggie lifted up her long hair to cool off her neck.

“Don’t you think you should cut your hair Maggie Mae?”, her friend Corrin had said between bidding and lighting up a cigarette.

“Don’t you think you should stop smoking; you know they’re banning it in some states, Corrin”, Maggie snapped back.

“Don’t you think you both should shut up and play Bridge?” Emily had scolded over her glasses. She hated to talk while they were playing. The four ladies had been meeting together for Bridge since college, Tuesday nights, from six o’clock to midnight, including dinner and drinks. Winn’s husband had just died and she didn’t speak much, other than to tell second hand tales about her grandchildren in Arizona.

“I have the whole thing on video tape. From the moment the little muffin poked her face into her first birthday cake, to her graduation last June, from High School; cum laude you know.”

“Yes, Winn”, Maggie poo-pooed.

“And it’s all because of that wonderful new procedure of transferring film, home movies you know, on to video tape.”

“Winnie, if you don’t shut up, I’m going to stuff a sock in your mouth. Bid!”, said like anyone who has tried to create order for too long, and has received little success. Emily’s husband had left her years ago for a career in the saxophone, and had forced her to be both mother and father to four disrespectful children, all viciously fond of jazz.

Corrin spoke up. “I just can’t get over these new movie cameras that can pick up sound. I mean, if they had had a machine like that when we were young, the world would have a concept of what life was like without the boob tube and Rock and Roll.”

“Don’t be stupid Corrin; then they would have been children of the Eighties in the Thirties. We didn’t have video to document our everything. It wasn’t a part of us. We relied on our minds for memory. A little Mystery was good then. Virginity was good then. Secrets. There aren’t any secrets these days. Just abortion and teenage alcoholism. Too old too fast.” Emily had given up her battle for group
concentration on the game. She looked up over her glasses to see who would lash back. They were a fiery bunch of opinionated women; a perfect lot for evening Bridge.

“Are you saying that’s bad?” Maggie lit up. “I mean if Ed and I hadn’t gone against what our era said was right and lived together for those two years, we never would have known we weren’t right for each other. We probably would have gotten married, right out of college, and started a family. I feel much better knowing I didn’t have to put a few kids through a divorce. Sorry Emily.”

They were silent for a moment, eyes jetting to Emily who shrugged her shoulders faintly and looked at her cards.

There was a skip in the record; Billie was stuck on “Bless the” of “God bless the Child”. Maggie got up to fix it, and then returned to her perch, completely caught in the unbelievable limitations of her best friends’ brains. Although she felt comfort in the consistency of their bridge games and afternoon phone calls, Maggie’s views had always transcended their loyalty toward their era.

“We lived in an age of mind games, my dears. Not mystery in its romantic sense”, Maggie continued. “For instance, in my Film class, the students talk openly about ‘farting, and fucking and shitting.’” She smiled and sorted a few cards.

“Oh Maggie, hush!”, Winn said.

“Well, everybody does all of the above. I don’t see why we have to talk about ourselves as if we all have lilly-white fannies that smell like powder and are wrapped in velvet bows imported from France. I like the youth of today. They’re honest.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what I can’t stand”, Winn said. “You know how Lydia and the children are staying with me for a few weeks while we take care of Sam’s affairs and all? Well, I swear, they all think I’m going to drop off too. Everytime I open my mouth, Lydia’s asking me to tell about the old days so she can video tape it. She’s got the kids asking me to tell them stories about my house on the farm down in Morris, and University of Illinois in the Thirties, my early days with Sam before Lydia was born ... and then I start talking and I look up and there’s Lydia with that darn machine, taping every word I say.

Get the old girl down on tape before she drops dead. It’s flattering, but I’ve had enough. There’s too many stories, and once I tell one, I feel like I ought to tell another that’s more important. But the truth is, there’s just not that much to it when it’s coming out of my mouth. That machine can’t go back and film my past. The darndest thing is that Lydia’s got no tact. I take a bite of pork roast at the dining room table, and look up, and there she is with that black box, getting it on film. Like everything I do is so cute; this whole get it all on film so the great grandchildren can see what dear old dead grandma Winnie looked like eating pork roast...it’s silly.”

“I can see what they’re trying to do though, Winn”, Corrin responded. “It’s a marvelous thing to be able to record a person talking and moving...closest thing to real life and all, but there’s a point where the whole thing goes too far.”

“I agree”, Emily said, “and nobody acts themselves. My youngest grandchild Bill, is seventeen years old and all he can do when his mother turns on the video camera, is cross his eyes and stick out his tongue. Sometimes he throws in a few opera-type notes or he’ll mock a seizure or something as a joke, but it’s not him on tape; just Billy looking stupid. I swear, if a colony of Martians ever take over the world and get a hold of everyone’s home videos, all they’re going to see is crazy people. A civilization of mental retards. Two hearts.”

“Well, I think it’s a mind bursting break through.” Maggie opened her eyes wide. “To think that we can actually document reality so closely, so precisely; it’s almost too good. I love it. But I don’t have children to chase me around and film everything I do either”, she paused. “… I bought one last week...a Camcorder. I make videos of myself for the world to have when I go.” Maggie had never married, and had only one relative still alive...a step sister in Massachusetts.

So that’s what Maggie had been doing all morning long. Making videos for the world to have.

The heat had been too bad to go to class. And it had gone so well, taking long shots of herself in different outfits she had saved from different eras, telling stories...that she even thought she’d miss Bridge for the first time in years.
And then she had made the mistake of switching on the television
to catch the noon news.

"This is Brad Jenner with Channel Nine News. Sales in the video
recorder market have risen drastically in the past few years. In fact,
over thirty-five million have been sold in America since last Christmas.
But the question we ask ourselves, as we carefully tape our families
together over the holidays, or our daughter's first gymnastics tournament,
is does this video machine, master keeper of memories, really work, or is there a flaw in its seeming perfection? John Belling is here
with us this afternoon to tell us some sad news about the nature of
our video world. John."

A skinny man in a brown Ronald Reagan Suit appeared on the
screen. "Well Brad, we at Cannard and Lowell Laboratories have found
after much testing, that video tape does not keep. The brilliant and
realistic color that we get from our Camcorders and such, will fade,
and eventually be nonfunctional."

"And how long do you estimate video tape actually lasts, John?"
"Well, Brad, I'd say, not over fifty years."

Maggie stood up abruptly, and switched the station.

"Scientists have found that the AIDS virus is smaller than the
fibers of a condom..."

That was when she turned off the television, and took off her
clothes, and seated herself in her most uncomfortable chair with a
bottle of Scotch.

Bird's-Eye View

Below, the city chatters
with itself, discontentedly
honking at back alley cat-
calls that chase the thunder
passing in anxious waves.

Unmoving, I stare through glass
eyes, knowing this night
I leave my name, my mark,
on the curb-side cobblestone.

I perch on the edge, dwarfing
a boulevard bumper-to-bumper, content
to spread my wings and whistle
through the wind. I float,
twisting in the trees, my song
composed in a few notes, hanging
by a thread from my toe.

Itar
Driving

I drive at night to clear my aching mind.
The beams can penetrate the darkness there.
I follow roads of rock and dirt, unlined.

The path I take is first of those I find;
perhaps some unknown way, though they are rare.
I drive at night to ease my aching mind.

Behind the wheel is comfort. When aligned,
I roll the windows down to feel the air
and follow roads of rock and dirt, unlined.

Speeding once, I flew; the engine whined,
and wheels left earth, which happens often where
I drive. On nights too clear, the arching wind
attacks my eyes with fluids, makes me blind.
Then headlights blur; it's hard, considering glare,
to follow the roads — rocky, dirty, unlined.

When dawn arrives and leaves the stars behind,
I'm still unsure of what — should I dare? —
I'm driving at. But nights, to clear my aching mind,
I follow roads of rock and dirt, unlined.

David Zivan
Mobile Home In The Sky

Some may find it silly, and why not, after seeing the false glow of the Christ crucified and embalmed in colorful plastic, smiling tolerantly to an audience of longhorns & shepherders who also radiate that same artificial glow.

He stands proud, centerpiece to the only mantle they know, atop a veneer box containing an electron beam fire spit smoking & crackling onto a sooty screen.

Silent before the shrine and nestled in livingroom pews, the near-sighted family huddles for their hourly service & benediction, humbling before the radiance and stereophonic projection of yet another “chosen one”, who praises and pleads from the empyreal fires of some unattainable, better-than-average world.
The "chosen one" postures
in self-appointed shrouds
of silk & linen,
with fingers & wrists tempted
behind gold, glistening wires,
and hair divinely
anointed with age-less oils.

He has no shame, appealing
with tales & words fabulous
to peddle this book of leather
and fourteen carat gold,
which for one thousand dollars
is impressive enough to fill
the emptiness in the shelves
of their souls.

With his image branded
in their fond memory
and his words in their heart,
they live out their days
before the shrine,
in a temple precarious,
sacrificing monthly flesh
to repossess their grace,
as they watch and wait
for the final move
to their mobile home
in the sky.

_Itar_
The Cleaving

The woman walking past me
does not meet my eyes. She only absorbs
the glare of her black, shiny shoes,
sometimes stealing a glimpse
of her left clenched fist and her right hand
grasping the man beside her.

I wonder if she ever manages to stand alone
or if she only extends like ivy,
narrow and thin, clinging
to something strong and hard.

Amy Judge
She

She sits in the corner,
A victim of a simple kind of violence,
Stealing dreams from a needle
And taking love from her dreams.
Another fix and she'll be fine—
Maybe visit a bar, and
Lie awake in a stranger's bed.

*Kent Lambert*
Contributor Notes

Debra Benko thanks Anne Shaver for lending her a porch of her own, Amy Gordon for rereading *Anne of Green Gables*, and Nan Nowik for her presence. Rhonwen Churchill is a senior Art major concentrating in photography and printmaking. Her long time goal is to be an underwater photographer.

Jennie Dawes is looking forward. Shelley Dickerson is excited about ending her exile in Ohio. Her parents have decided that after four years in the cold, she has suffered enough and can come home to California "where it is always Spring."

Jen Druley is a proud graduatin' Hooooosier who longs to get back home on the farm to watch peegs makin' bacon.

Chris Hanson is an English/Studio Art major whose true passion is Ice Hockey. Rory Herbster's life-long desire is to travel back in time and photograph the fall of the Roman Empire.

Itar
Don Jacobs
Lisa Jones

Amy Judge is a junior English (writing) major with a minor in Philosophy.

Kent Lambert writes.

Cam Martin

Rob Myers is a senior Communications major who tries to communicate through photographs.

Pam Schilling is a senior Chemistry major whose secret desire is to be a "downhillier."

Jenny Smith is a senior Art major working with solarization methods.

Zach Smith does not like bright colors.

Lauren Williams

David Zivan is a senior English (writing) major, and still working.