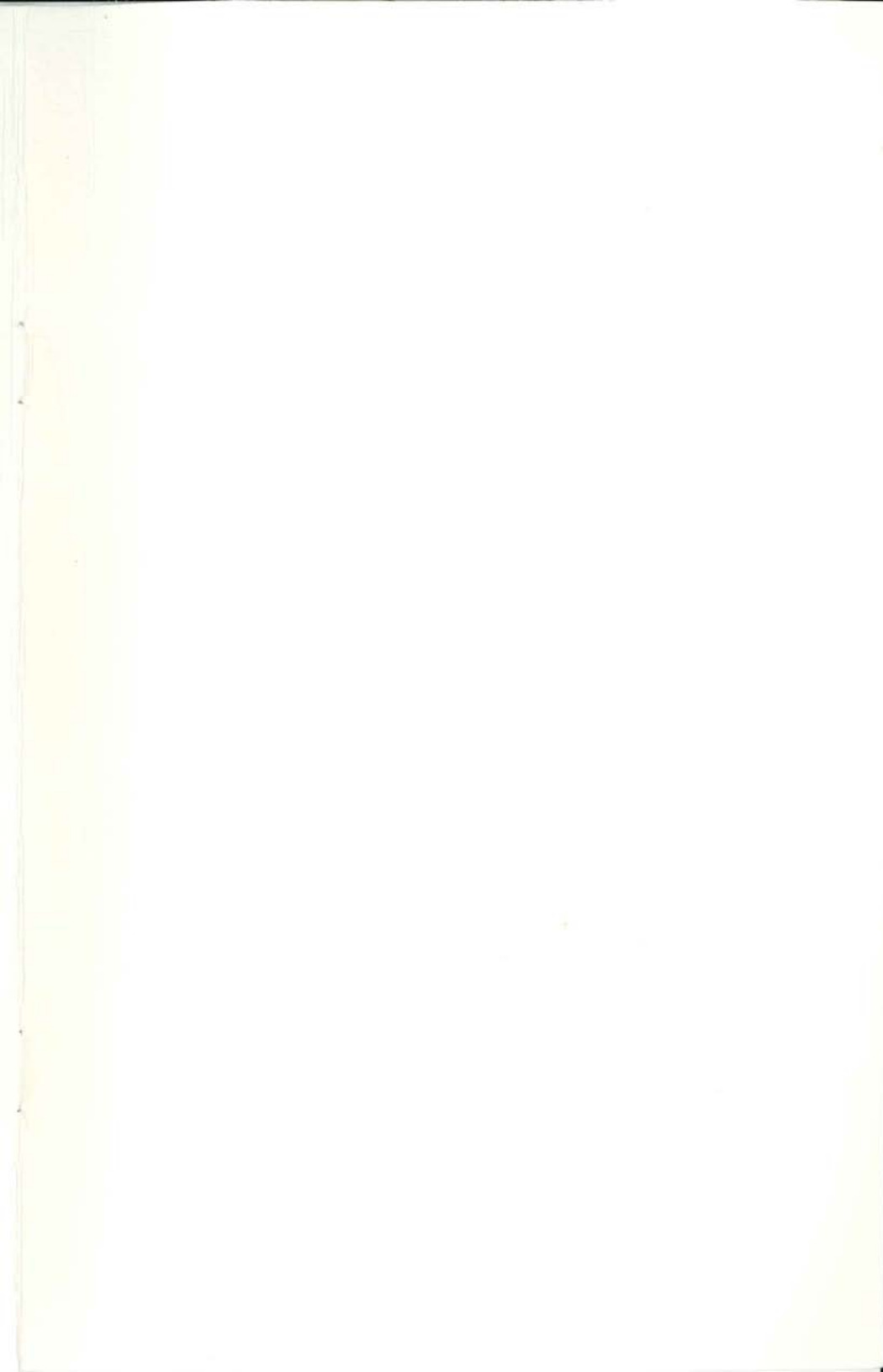


The Kiosk

1996-1997



The Kiosk

1997

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Creative Writing Award Winners

First Place	"Spilled Milk--Texas 1958" by Cathee Phillips
Second Place	"One Season" by Marlene VanderWiel
Third Place	"Self Revelation" by Danielle Grubb
Honorable Mention	"Andy" by Jeffrey Moon

About this Year's Judge

Terry Wright is a graduate of Morningside College. His most recent book of poetry, What the Black Box Said, was published by Mellen Poetry Press in 1996. He has published two other books of poetry--No More Nature in 1993 and Fun and No Fun in 1984. His work has appeared in many magazines, including Sequoia, Rolling Stone, The Nebraska Review, Puerto del Sol, Slipstream Productions, Urbanus, and others. He won the Arkansas Literary Society's poetry prize in 1996 and their fiction price in 1994. He was a finalist for the Arkansas Artist of the Year award in 1996. He holds an M.A. degree from the University of Arkansas and M.F.A. from Bowling Green University. He is an associate professor of writing at The University of Central Arkansas.

All entries are judged blindly by editors and no entry receives special consideration. Editors are eligible for the contest; however, they are not eligible for the prize money.

The Kiosk

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At Sunset

It could be that I've lived
in this house by the side of the road
too long. Any number of things
are apt to pour into a visitor's cup:
a praying mantis, two dark stars,
a locust's abandoned shell, or
the yellow beak of a blackbird
still cawing its bitterness.

*Marlene
VanderWiel*

Hansel and Gretel can be heard some nights
calling out to each other in the woods
outside my window. They search endlessly
for the clues they were clever enough to leave
behind, believing their meager offerings,
like crucifixes, would lead them
to the right path.

All day I have boiled mounds
of dandelion stems, in search of the right
color of green for a gown. I'm thinking
of something equal to the forest
at dusk. The perfect blue
to match the children's eyes
will be harder to find.

First Snow

*Carolyn
Hauptmann*

Midnight
snow silently caresses
brittle ground
covering decayed leaves
grass and
withered flower beds
with pristine
white crystals.
Cold yellow bright moonlight
illuminates
grey brown trees
frostily transformed
iridescent silver.
Rabbit tracks create
a maze
criss-crossing
virgin blanket.
For one tiny moment
I catch
my breath
quietly savoring
nature's
mural.

One Season

The reckless spiders began
to drop out of hiding places
by late September and
the autumn air drooped
with its lust for endings, and
gold was everywhere--we'd worn
our walking path copper smooth
where all summer you pretended
our meetings were secret rendezvous,
and there were nights we delayed touch
to lie in black grasses to imagine
starlight outliving the stars and
multiple harvest moons on Jupiter.
Later at your place you put on
some saxophone blues and
I played your wanton woman
whirling and whirling around you,
my yellow dress melting like the ribbon
of exploded moons circling Saturn.

*Marlene
VanderWiel*

From Katmandu— Rhythmical Alliterations and Rhymed Felicities

*Mary
Seiler*

My little shape changers,
snug in the crevice of my books,
flattened into a linen drawer,
a tell-tale tail in the laundry chute,
up on the shelf behind the flour.

Afghan, alarm clock,
book end, tea pot;
bedroom slipper, welcome mat,
cobweb, dust mop;
percolator, paperweight,
potpourri, door stop.

Ethiop,
or the palest odalisque
with little Chinese eyes.
Indian,
or a touch of the tropics
on cold winter nights.

My harem, my purdah,
it is no mirage.
My court's full of intrigue,
Mahal de la Taj.

Jesters and clowns,
dancing girls and magicians;
jugglers and tumblers
and makers of poems.

Fairies and ghosts,
dwarves, ugly gnomes,
and dragons and trolls.
It's no place like home.

I'm Alice in Wonderland
with the Mad Queen;
the Wizard of Paws
in jungles feline.

Rare plumage they bring me,
spiced wines and perfumes;
kaleidoscope silks
from Shangri-La looms.

In far lands at travel
they study to be
ornamentals of art;
they teach me to see.

Returning to me,
I am earth
to their stone,
a wavelength to the moon.

Isometric or slack,
contempt or contentment,
what must it be like to purr?

Solid, liquid or mist—
angels climb
the furthest reaches and mine,
and my changelings
find the gem,
me.

When Nuns Wore Black

*Marlene
VanderWiel*

When nuns wore black
and she was a child
she thought of them
as messengers of death
soon bound for heaven,
and it seemed the smell of death
worked out of the folds of their robes
and gave the incense its hint of rot
and excited the altar's flame.
If only their footsteps,
like iniquity, left marks,
she would set her feet down there,
practice the posture of atonement
to prepare herself
for the Perfect Groom.

When nuns wore black
and she was young,
she dreamed she stood naked
beside Him, but instead of garlands
they hung their beads
and crucifixes from her neck,
and out of their mouths ravens
rose, singing *Aves*, and plucked
her flesh. When she turned to Him
she saw His mutilated hands,
saw they would have their way with Him,
when nuns wore black
and she was young.

Waiting for the Prozac

It is that time
from when I swallow...

till it takes hold,

that I like to call
the dangerous hours...
when I cannot trust myself.

I sacrifice control
and let my mind...

(like your mother's sheets)
so easily slide back.
I happily torture myself
with thoughts of your bare shoulders
and the rhythm
that your breathing keeps
all because I know
I will be rescued.

When I am at my worst...
and waiting for the prozac,
I grow suicidally fond of you
all over again.

Randy Clyde
Michael Uhl

Window Shopping

Amy
Jenkins

My eye is drawn
to her soft round butt
sitting on a stool
and one leg in the window.

She arches her back,
tosses her hair—
long, black, and silky strands
fall round her arm,
hiding a lace covered breast.

My eyes follow
her painted nail
from ankle to thigh.

My mouth waters
like Pavlov's dog.

Her eyes lock
with mine, calling
me to the door.

I try to move,
but can't.

She stands and stretches.

I see the curves
of her sweet back.

She bends at the waist
to touch her toes.

She turns to me.

Fingers brush
the thin strap
off her shoulder.

I choke.

She flashes a grin,
motions me in.

I walk to the arms
of a red light love.

Destiny

Two distant souls
weary from the dance
take their seats
to watch dreams brush by
as a sea of coupled hearts
teeming with passion
swells between them
both longing,
 both hoping,
 both praying
 for that one moment
 when the sea will divide
 and unite their lonely eyes
 as they take the floor
 to embrace one another
 granting His wish.

*Eric
Knell*

Letter from a Former Student

*Lori
Castle*

Dr. Swift,

I've read your letter. You must excuse this formal tone. Old habit. I'm sure you understand. I ran across your poems the other day on a bookstore shelf next to Danielle Steele. But, I bought yours. I never knew you felt that way. I wish I had . . .

I also have a family now, four children and a man who treats me well, although, he loves in prose. I wish he were more like you.

Did you ever wonder why I chose to sit in the back row? There I could dream of you, could taste your untamed spirit come alive when you played Lancelot. There I could pretend your words were meant for me, could hear the unsaid in your eyes and feel your pull in every metered line. And I was never far enough away from you. The perspiration, beading on your neck and upper lip, simmered with the scent of your cologne. That teasing scent, like wild wood hyacinth, would dance around the room

with you. It wasn't quite as tempting in
the back.

I live in a prose world now.
Please don't misunderstand; it's nice enough.
Yet we who want the warmth of double life,
plagued with dreams of something sweet beyond
all sweetness cannot ever be content.

Have I been presumptuous? Your letter
never mentions me by name. Still,
I can't help thinking . . .

Should I find the heart
to send you this (though I won't; I'm too
afraid of what you'll think of me), please
remember what you taught me; poems aren't
always autobiographical.

Affectionately,
Lori Hall

Self Revelation

*Danielle
Grubb*

We sat face to face in a warm coffee house.
Steam rose into my face as you sipped your Coke.
The lights were dimmed and I should have felt
something, anything as the woman softly sang,
and her partner strummed the mellow tune.
You spoke, I heard. Yet nothing could pierce my heart.
I cared not about your dreams, fears,
still I peered into your eyes and managed to smile.
But dreams of another flooded my mind's sea.
I longed to tell you how I'd felt for months, but
to see you cry would cause me tears of guilt.
How long could I stash lies inside my heart?
The woman sang out, "I'm a fool for you."
And I said to myself, I'll never be.

Andy

by Jeffrey Moon

The carpet between the old RCA television and the off-yellow refrigerator was worn nearly to the floor. Fake wood paneling walls reflected light from the orange lamp bought second hand from a charity shop. In the corner sat two porcelain dogs which were a wedding gift. And in front of the mirror stood Andy.

He gripped his brand new .45 Smith and Wesson loosely at his side, hesitated, then sprang to life as his outstretched arm brought the gun up to eye level.

“Gimme the fucking art!”

He pulled the trigger which released a harmless “click” from the hammer. Andy was preparing himself to rob an art dealer. He had been tipped off by his friend Hawk, who worked in the café of an art museum (and who coincidentally also had a natural talent for spotting things to steal), that Bionca Price was bringing a semi-valuable piece of art from Denmark to donate to the museum. Not big time, Hawk told him, but enough. Enough for maybe a nice trip or a ticket out of the lower deck.

He tried again. “Excuse me, would you like some te—NOW! GIMME THE FUCKING ART!” He enjoyed using the word “fucking” to add a bit of intimidation.

Andy’s lips curled back to reveal his cigarette-stained teeth. This is my best plan yet, he mused still standing in front of the mirror. He threw the .45 onto the frayed brown reclining chair, which had been there before he and his wife, Adalia, moved in—probably before the last tenants moved in, Andy speculated. He climbed on top of Adalia, who was sleeping blissfully despite Andy’s practice threats.

She moaned and shifted under his weight.

Andy . . .

In a forceful whisper Andy said, "I'm gonna do it this time baby. This is it. I'm taking you out of this dump. I'm taking you to *Buenas Aires*." He waited for her response.

Eyes still closed, Adalia said softly, half asleep, "That's nice, baby." She turned her head, her long dark hair slid limply off her neck. Andy lowered his head and bit her there, making her squirm and shift again. He kissed the bite mark.

Andy got up and walked across the brown shag carpet to the refrigerator. Plucking a carton of milk from the inside, he sucked down the remainder and returned it to its spot on the top shelf.

He tucked the .45 between his lower back and his jeans and, fingering his red scraggly hair, whispered to Adalia. "*Baby*. I'm going to get some milk. You need anything?" She didn't move.

They had met six years ago in the 7-11 on Court Street. He was holding the place up and was just reaching for the roughly two hundred dollars the clerk had mustered together from the till when she charged in dressed in all black and held the *two* of them up. Andy was instantly struck by her fortitude. They later had a good laugh, and she admitted that she had no idea he was in there; that she had rushed in without even checking.

"It never occurred to me that someone else would rob the place the same night!"

But it was enough. It was destiny. She moved in, and they were married eight months later. We've actually done a few jobs together, Andy reminisced gazing at her from the doorway. I wonder why I didn't ask her to do this art job with me?

The street was bustling in the summertime. Pink-orange light from the street lamps blanketed everything, making the pavement look wet; but despite their dampening tones they could never quite dampen the

Andy . . .

sounds that bounced around the lower deck. People were always yelling across the street to each other or down the block. Andy doubted whether anyone actually spoke to each other face to face. He generally listened to his hard plastic boots clapping a pressing beat on the cement. He also generally walked quickly in the lower deck; you didn't have to be in the argument to be in the line of fire.

No police ever came to the lower deck, so it was expected that the inhabitants took care of themselves. And that's exactly what they did. Regardless of this, the locals were generally nice people; business was business, social was social, and never did the two meet. Well... *occasionally*, Andy thought as he stepped out onto the pavement.

A shiny black Cadillac pulled up slowly next to Andy; bass booming almost to the point of nausea. It was J Shorty.

"Andy!" He turned down the bass.

"Andy!"

Andy ducked down to tie his shoe. "Shorty. What's up, kid?"

"Shit. Naughin'. Wha chu got on your stilo?" J Shorty slid down in the black leather interior; lit a cigar sized blunt.

Andy waved his arm in a downward motion. "You know. Naughin' nice, kid. Hey. You know that art museum thing I was telling you about? I'm doin' it. Tomorrow." He drew back in excitement. "Hey, don't let anybody know. You hear me, kid? Keep this shit on the down low. I don't want anyone else in on this shit."

"Sure mon," Shorty said with a laugh and pulled away, simultaneously returning the chest thumping bass to full glory.

Andy approached the 7-11 the way he approached everything in the lower-deck: eyes wide open. The dull yellow 7-11 sign cast a haze over the gasoline pumps. At this particular moment, the parking lot was empty, which didn't mean much; gas stations had a way of filling up all

Andy . . .

at once and then dying down again in cycles. He enjoyed the smell of gasoline.

The bright track lighting of the 7-11 contrasted the pale yellow of the parking lot. A pinball machine, *Judge Dread*, stood silently in the corner. Walking through the aisles of snack food and grooming products, Andy came to the coolers. It always felt about ten degrees colder back there. The floor tile seemed a little dirtier. Every once in a while a pug faced man would be on the other side of the wall, stacking the milk in from the stock room.

Milk in hand, he approached the counter and saw the top of his head and shoulders on a TV directly behind the clerk. "What's up, Holmes."

"Sup, chico. Gimme a pack of GPC 100's, too."

The clerk laughed. "You're gonna need them for tomorrow, eh?"

"What do you know about tha—Man, I *knew* Shorty—." He looked away in disgust.

"You're mama told me, bandejo."

Andy dropped a few bills on the top. The clerk just laughed.

Shit, Andy muttered to himself as he walked back out onto the street. The summer air filled his lungs, and he chuckled to himself.

Opening the apartment door, Andy found Adalia awake and getting dressed for work at the 24 hour restaurant in Berwin. The Horizon. She worked the graveyard shift.

"I've got to work until eleven tomorrow, so I won't be back until one because I can't catch the red line until—"

"I won't be here anyway, baby. I told you, remember?" Andy said with a smile, "What Hawk told me? This is it. No more working." Adalia blinked, remained silent.

"You know," she finally said, "I gotta get outta here." A decisive look came over her features.

Andy . . .

"I KNOW! I know, baby. That's what I've been sayin—"

"No. You don't know. Can't you see the bullshit we drown ourselves in everyday? Your small time thief act; me at that stupid, filthy restaurant! When was the last time you felt exhilarated during a hold up? Shit, when was the last time you actually accomplished a hold up?" She paused. "It's us, Andy. We're dead. We wake up and do the same things every day. I go to my stupid job and you sit at home talkin' shit about jobs you'll never do. This is not what I bargained for, Andy. When I was a little girl, I didn't dream of...of *this!*!" She was breathing heavily.

"I—I don't know what you're saying. I thought we—" He stopped, unsure of what to say next.

She tucked a small pipe and slightly less than an eighth of draw into her pocket and walked out the door.

Something strange is going on with Adalia, Andy thought. It *isn't* like it used to be, though. The jobs. Most of them didn't go off, and the rest were petty and boring. Andy felt a sadness come over him, as if he just realized something was missing, something he hadn't felt in years. He felt old. This surprised him. He had always imagined that *old* was an age. He was barely 28. *This* isn't what he wanted, either. Somewhere along the line he had settled for less, agreed to something he didn't feel right about. He couldn't imagine when exactly that moment was.

Andy cleaned his gun several times, planning out exactly what he was going to do tomorrow. A renewed sense of purpose came over him. He tried not to think about Adalia. After this job, things would blow over. Maybe they could take a vacation with the money from the art.

He would go to the café of the museum at 9:00 a.m. and wait for Bionca Price. Hawk would be working and be able to spot her out to him. He would wait until he saw the art for sure and then approach under the guise of a waiter. (Hawk of course would provide the appropri-

Andy . . .

ate attire.) Andy smiled. He would demand the art and when she yielded under his gun he'd make a dash for the door. Best to make a ruckus about the whole thing. Chaos is always preferable to sneaking around.

For most of the night Andy ran over the plan. Again and again and again. The times, the café (which he only had secondhand knowledge of through Hawk), the booty. Through all his planning, though, he could never have prepared himself for what would happen tomorrow. He called Hawk from a pay phone down the street.

"H-hello? A-Andy?" Hawk's voice was high, almost a screech. He always spoke with a peculiar anxiousness. There were many things about Hawk that made him "Hawk." His hair was golden orange and always stuck up. And the eyes. His eyes were red. Good, too. He could tell you a red ant's cargo from thirty meters, which is why Andy was elated to have him at the museum.

"Yes. Hawk. Listen, you still on for tomorrow? I've been planning this out. Everything is going to go smoothly. Hey, I was thinking, and I've decided to give you three per cent of the money instead of two. Eh? This is going to be *great*, kid."

"Uhh. O-okay. H-hey, I was th-th-thinking, too. And I don't know if I c-can—."

"Come on, man!! What are you saying! What the fuck is it with people today? Listen, I need you. What are you doing? Backing out? I knew it. I can't find anybody worth anything around here. Remember Collins? That cat was 'fessional. Not like this—."

"HEY!" Hawk's voice was clear as a bell. Andy stopped.

Silence.

"Yeah? What is it?"

Silence.

Finally, "I was in a b-band, man!"

Andy . . .

Silence.

What...the...shit did that have to do with anything? Andy pinched his bottom lip and waited for him to go on.

Still nothing. Andy wondered what on Earth could be going through Hawk's head. He had always been a little flakey—another one of his bird qualities.

"So... What's up kid? Are you in or out?"

After a pause, "I'm i-in." Then he hung up.

Andy always wore brown corduroy when he did a job, especially in cafes. Black is too conspicuous. Besides, everybody wore all black. Brown gave the impression of the starving artist, instantly excusing his unshaven face and shaggy, oily hair. He tucked the .45 in the back of his jeans the way he always did; adjusting it for comfort. He felt together. Like a professional.

Having walked a few blocks north he was able to hail a cab which took him straight to the museum. It was 8:45 a.m., but he figured it was better to be early than late. He walked up the huge stone steps; gazing upwards at the tall Romanesque pillars. He tugged on the door, only then seeing the sign which said,

Walker Gallery Museum

Business hours:

Mon-Fri 10 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Sat. 12 noon to 5:00 p.m.

no Sundays

With a grunt, Andy turned around and walked back down the steps, as if he had been bounced. *Shit*. Eyeing a coffee shop across the street, he jingled a few coins in his pocket.

Having procured a large cup of Kenya AA, he sat down at a window seat. Okay. No problem. Hawk comes in at 9:30. I'll just wait it out. It'll

Andy . . .

be a warm winter in Crook-town before anything ever goes as planned. He cursed under his breath as he took in the warm, rich flavor of the java bean. At least you can still get a decent fucking cup of coffee.

10:15 a.m. Still no sign of Hawk. Andy ran his fingers through his hair and pushed his chin forward, squinting and tilting the paper cup to get the last drops of his sixth cup of Kenya. WHAT...THE...FUCK!! he screamed inside. He shoved his cigarettes into his pocket and, yanking his coat from the back of his chair, walked out the door.

Barely noticing the cross traffic, he charged across the street and up the steps of the museum. He pushed open the huge, wooden doors to be greeted by two security guards. Andy stopped suddenly, a little taken back, then carried on to the café area which was, as Andy noted with disgust, in the main lobby of the museum.

Sprawled out in front of him was a long marble floor. Off-white and blue. Three large statues added to the immensity of the lobby. The one on the left was David, Andy at least knew that, but the other two he didn't recognize. The center statue was a Roman warrior defending what looked like a helpless woman. This sort of art usually made Andy spit out some revolutionary jargon, but today he had no time to chip away at patriarchal rule.

He approached the coffee stand.

"Uh..." he squinted his eyes at the menu, "gimme a cup of the house blend."

"Large or small." She was the type of girl you see working in coffee bars everywhere. Long blond hair pulled back and underneath a green billed hat. Short. Small-framed. Green striped apron. Blue eyes.

"Large." Andy peered around the gallery. Any one of these women could be Bionca Price.

"We're out of large cups. Will a small do?"

Andy . . .

"Then why did you—gimme two smalls then." He gave her a couple bills and walked away, coffee in hand. The clerk put the change in the tip jar and went back to reading her magazine.

He chose a spot centrally located between the two sweeping stairways which flanked the lobby. Setting his coffees on the table, he once again scanned the area. *Damn that Hawk*. I know why they call him Hawk —'cause he's always flying away when the shit comes down. Andy balked at the unprofessionalism involved.

Utterly at a loss for any idea of how to proceed, Andy gulped his coffee.

"Ah!" He spat the scorching coffee back into the cup and glared at the clerk, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

An old woman sat down at the table next to him. She was wearing a gray jumper over a black turtle neck. A big black furry hat circled her head, accentuating her thin, pointy nose. Andy guessed she was around 55 years old. Age had treated her well. She struck him as an intelligent person. The type of person who might dabble in art. A package wrapped in brown paper sat close by her side on the floor. Guard it all you want, lady. In the end it's mine. He suppressed a smile at this stroke of fortune.

After a little time, a man dressed in a neat, black suit sat down across from her. Andy's adrenaline shot like a jolt of electricity.

They spoke softly. Andy tried to listen without being obvious. He flipped through a magazine methodically and strained to hear.

"... called APP. I don't know what it stands for. I like it better than methacordohydroginine. That stuff gives me the..."

The conversation was barely audible.

"...yeah! I did see that one! Helen, you know this world is on the verge of something *huge*..."

Helen? What's this? Oh shit! He jerked his head around the lobby,

Andy . . .

suddenly aware that he hadn't been paying attention to anything around him. He took a few exasperated breaths, spotted a thin woman in a leopard skin coat walking towards the door. She had a large, brown paper-wrapped frame under her arm. He ran over to her side, which she greeted with a look of shock; her eyes wide open and waiting for attack.

"Hey," he said, searching, "just where do you get off wearing a dead animal on your back?"

"Wha-what?" She stepped back, then found her ground. "Are you one of those people who spray-paint animal fur? 'Cause if you are, my husband is right over there and —"

"You from Denmark?" Andy's eyes darted around, trying to gauge the attention he was causing.

"What? Who the hell are you? Wha-what do you want from me?"

"What's *in the bag*, lady?"

"In the bag? Wha...? who....? Hey where do you get off..." Her voice trailed into nothingness. Andy gazed at the stairway.

"Hey!" He heard the woman say from a thousand miles away. The thought of replying didn't enter his mind.

That couldn't be her, he thought.

But it was. Even without his glasses he could identify her walk: upright and proud, shoulders slumped slightly forward, slightly beaten.

Coming to the bottom of the staircase on his left was Adalia. On her arm was a thin, blond-haired woman in a long, white silk dress carrying a brown paper-wrapped frame.

For a few seconds he just sat paralyzed. When he came back into consciousness he took a couple of steps toward her, but she had just stepped out of the door.

On his way out after her the security guards eyed him suspiciously; their conversation coming to an abrupt end when he approached. They

Andy . . .

could kill him for all he cared. He pushed past them and stepped into the brilliant late morning sun to see Adalia climbing into the back of a black stretch limo.

Before she was entirely in she looked up at him. It was a moment outside of time. He saw their life together flash in his memory. Their marriage. The fights. The sex. The quiet of two lovers at 4:30 in the morning. In that glance he saw her as he saw her when they first met; alone, a thief, and raging inside. A proud, a powerful beast drove her. One that at one time he dared to challenge. An ocean of regret washed over him, reminding him of the things he promised. The freedom.

The freedom.

The city rose up around Andy as he watched the limo pull away, as the full weight of what he was witnessing sank onto him. He could hear nothing but the few city birds that scurried from tree to tree in front of the museum. *Calling to me? Laughing at me?* He couldn't decide. He sat down on the stairs which were still moist from the morning dew, and lit a cigarette. He didn't want to go home; he knew already what would be there. Rather, what wouldn't be there.

The lock on the door clicked an empty herald into the apartment. There, on the couch, was a small envelope with the name "Andy" on it. For a few moments he just stared at it.

After reading its contents, he buried his face deep into his hands and cried a sorrow his exploding chest hadn't felt for years. "Andy" was dead. In the quiet of the apartment he dared not consider who *he* might be without her; it had been so long since he last posed that question. As he slumped down against the brown leather couch, the city buzzed on without him and somewhere a 7-11 was being bumped over by a new, fresh batch of two-bit thieves.

At Breakfast

I can smell a flea on your dog outside
the sweat on your sheet on our bed

*Cathee
Phillips*

I can hear a leaf drop in our yard
an ant crawl in my cupboard
the blinking of your eyelash

I can taste rose petals on our front step
dust on your old tennis shoes
lime from my kitchen faucet
the salt on your fingertip

I can see the blue ghosts
dancing in our chimney
my antique lace tablecloth breathing
against the sapless oak of your table

I can see the strangers in your eyes

I can put my hand through your paper
touch the swaying lodgepole pine
weigh my heart in my open hand
feel what your lips felt when
they last kissed mine

I can feel the strangers in your arms

Bill's Bar

Passing away
time
In
rotten, desolate
bars
of madness,
Staring into mirrors
of jaded, broken
glass,
Reflecting images
of desperate,
lonely,
young-old
human carcasses
(Herded and corralled
by bar stools)
Killing time. . .
and each other.

*Sarah
Storm*

Orion Could Teach You a Thing or Two

*Cathee
Phillips*

“You’re Ancient, Mom. Just forget it.”
Ancient! Forty years plus two—well, three—
is Ancient? Count to ten. Breathe deeply. So.
Perhaps you mean I feel the Prophets’ call
to kindle air with living flame and know
the joy of earthly fruits by water born?

Perhaps, my child, you have in mind that I,
long before man, soared with hawks and drank
sweet rain to cool my tongue, refresh my blood,
revive my flagging feathers, give me strength
to fly through rainbows’ red blue yellow light,
brave the thunder, laugh at lightning flash?

I’m sure you only mean to speak, my child,
of when I sang to Mars (who would not hear),
and swung the Dipper round and round the night—
Orion laughed so hard he dropped his club;
old Taurus, spellbound, missed his chance to strike,
and I breathed stardust till my eyes did shine—

Or do you simply mean to say, dear son,
“I love your gentle wisdom, Mom?” He smiles.

My New Job

I put my application in over nine months ago
Like I'd done many times before.
I wasn't qualified for the job
No experience, training, fancy resume, or recommendations.
I never expected a response
Just enjoyed applying.

*Sam
Irish*

Two weeks later I heard the news
I was shocked.
A new position would open up in forty weeks and
I happened to be the only applicant considered.
My perseverance had finally paid off
I started work on the second day of May.

I fell in love with my new boss the minute I saw him
He's a tall guy like me, and absolutely beautiful.
I admit he's very demanding and when
He cries out, I do whatever he wants because
I've been given a very prestigious job title:
Daddy.

Spilled Milk

Texas, 1958

*Cathee
Phillips*

Trembling
we pulled down our sunsuits
hugged our white chests against
the unmade bed

He whipped our
round pale cheeks with
a razor-thin belt methodically
extracting one million tears
for each precious
drop of cereal
milk

That night
at supper we gagged
on greasy fried liver he
rammed his fist down on
the chrome dinette table—milk
jumped from our glasses

We grabbed each other ran outside hid
in the tall wiry grass watered
the weeds watched
for his big bumpy knees

He sauntered out on the porch stared
at the grass laughed out loud

Our neighbors waved.

Fatherly Love

I look into the mirror and see the pain etched upon my face
But I see no sign of feeling on his
My reflection watches in silent horror—
Because I am the one with the voice

*Misty
Petersen*

But I cannot open my mouth
The words will not come
I, the one who has never found it hard to talk, am speechless
But what is there to say

And so it continues on until he is through
He gets up with a small satisfied grin on his face
He turns to me before he goes and whispers into the darkness,
“I love you.”

Take Me Home

by Misty Petersen

"Please take me home," Johnny heard in his head. "Please take me home." He looked restlessly about him. Nothing was out of order. The trees were not reaching out to get him. His car was not rolling toward a tree. He was okay.

Except for the echo in his head.

It wouldn't go away.

"PLEASE take me home, Johnny. PLEASE."

Johnny lifted his head up toward the dark, turbulent sky. Thunder rumbled in the distance.

"Please take me home." His head answered the thunder.

He sat up on the top of the seat in his cherry red convertible. For some reason, the color reminded him of blood. Thick, red blood. The stuff that life was made of. The stuff that death was not.

Again, thunder grumbled angrily in the distance.

Johnny once again looked about him.

Nothing.

Nothing lurking in the shadows.

Nothing about to grab him.

Nothing.

He was just sitting in his car on a deserted road just outside of some woods. Thinking.

"JOHNNY! PLEASE!" the voice screamed more loudly in his head.

Johnny closed his eyes. The voice was driving him crazy. Why wouldn't it stop? Couldn't it tell he felt bad enough? He couldn't help the voice now. That was all over.

There was nothing he could do. Nothing.

Lightning suddenly shattered the cold, dark night sky. The night swal-

Take Me Home...

lowed up that brief flash of light and went back to being dark and ominous. The night had no feeling.

Neither did Johnny.

"Take me home, Johnny. I want to go home!"

Johnny thought about his life. It was so boring.

Johnny smiled to the pitch black sky. It wouldn't be boring anymore.

He was *A Member*.

He was no longer just Johnny Cates. He was someone. He belonged. He would no longer be just a shadow walking down the halls of Kinley High. And everyone would know it. They would see how he had changed. They would see that he was important. *They* had wanted him to be part of *their* group. That meant that everyone would have to treat him with respect because people who didn't get hurt. Yes, having power was going to be wonderful. He already knew how being new in school felt. He was happy that those days were over.

"Please take me home, Johnny. Please!"

"Shut up!" he yelled into the night air.

Nothing was going to bring him down now. He was so close to the top.

"Please, Johnny, please."

Thunder echoed through the quiet night sky once more. Johnny could feel the tension that comes just before a big storm in the air. Soon the storm would come.

Johnny suddenly felt that the storm had already come, but no one knew it but him.

"JOHNNY, PLEASE!"

The voice just couldn't be silenced. Johnny knew that. He knew it would always stay with him.

But it shouldn't matter.

Take Me Home...

He was *A Member*.

He was a member of a wonderful group of powerful people who knew how he felt and could help him. They had chosen him.

Just like he had chosen her.

"I had to do it," he whispered softly into the night. His words floated quietly on the softly blowing breeze. He knew they would never reach the ears that were meant to hear them.

"I'm sorry. I had no choice."

Johnny hit his car seat. He shouldn't be feeling like this. He shouldn't be feeling remorse for what he had done. It was necessary. It had made him one of *them*.

"Johnny, take me home. Oh please, Johnny, just take me home," the voice taunted him.

"I can't take you home," he had told her.

Johnny didn't want to remember anymore. He was strong. He was brave.

No, he was a coward. He had let *them* make him do something he never could have done on his own.

But that was the whole point of the group. To be a stronger person, someone other people could look up to.

In fear.

Dana had been afraid.

"Take me home, Johnny."

"I can't."

Johnny looked over at the trees. Something had happened there tonight. Something horrible. Something unspeakable.

"PLEASE, Johnny! Do something! Don't let them hurt me!"

But he had let them. He had let *them* have *their* way with her, and then so had he because it was required of him.

Take Me Home...

Dana's sobs came back to him as the rain began to fall.

"Johnny!" was all she kept saying because she couldn't seem to say anything more.

He was a coward.

He had just closed his eyes when they had hit her. He had closed his eyes even harder when he had to hit her.

It was his initiation.

He was *A Member* of a very elite group.

Johnny started his car and drove away.

Solitary Island

*Carolyn
Hauptmann*

Alcatraz. The Rock.
Former residence of the Birdman.
Walking up the long road from the dock,
I see flowers and greenery.
This beauty surprises me.
A different sight awaits at the top of the drive.
Gray cast buildings
jut up
from the hardened earth.
A shroud of discolored sunlight
hangs over the fortress,
like the fog
that often covers the island.
Eagerly I approach the cell-block entrance.
A perverse anticipation overcomes me.

As I walk inside,
an iron door clanks.
A double row
of iron bars faces me.
Each damp, colorless cell
holds a small testimony.
A mark on the wall,
scratches on the cold metal bed frames.
Silent memories.

The center is a barber shop.
Where photographs of famous inhabitants
hang, like wanted posters in a post office.

Faint noises resonate
like captured voices
through the hallways.

Other sounds
drift in across the water
from San Francisco's famous wharf.
It is said that the distant noises
echoed across the bay
on a cold New Year's Eve
many years ago.
Tantalizing the inmates
with the taste of freedom
so close,
so close.

The distant exit beckons.
Cautiously
I approach the doorway
almost fearing someone will stop me.
A breeze swipes past my arm
sending a chill through me.
The whisper of a forgotten destiny
is suspended in the air.
I hurry toward the outdoors.
Where freedom has the smell
of a fishy ocean breeze.

On the dock

*Stephanie
Buettner*

Mist rises from the lake,
grey ribbons floating
towards the morning fire
in the sky.

I sit in solitude
as the cricket's call
screeches through my head.

The blast of
the bullfrog falls to the
pit of my soul and
stays there -- lonely like
the dead leaf
on the dock beside me.

Carrollton

It was a forgotten place
A place where only the wind spoke
and only the trees answered
Remnants of crumbling tombstones
litter the ground along with the leaves
A perfect place for pumpkins
and candles
A witches' meeting in the dark

A bitter chill bit to the bone
I pulled my sweater tightly closed and
crushing dead leaves beneath my boots
walked through the graveyard in the ghost town
looking for a familiar name

*Tanya
Spaen*

Arethusa Falls

They labored to achieve the sum
of paradox in tensile verses,
had come this far—yet had not come

Jan D.
Hodge

to that still point where martyr's tomb
and bitter crone's demented curses
resolve themselves into a sum

of perfect equilibrium
without distinctions or divorces.
To come this far and not to come

to the sweet fruition of a poem
(inviting everyone's "of course"s)
is disappointing in the sum

of things—just as it is a shame
(yet one each moral life rehearses)
to come this far and not to come

to the Falls—to stop here and numb
the passions in this shallow. Worse is
to come this far and not to come—
to rest in this imperfect sun.

The Frost Place
Franconia
August 3, 1995

Note: Arethusa Falls, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, was named after a nymph in Greek mythology who was transformed into a fountain to escape being ravished by the river god Alpheus.

Morning Kiss

It starts off innocent enough,
this quick brush of lips at the door,
but lengthens as we linger to taste
toothpaste and mouthwash and milk
and more, something inescapable
which locks us in an embrace
as our appointments and deadlines loom
and the clock ticks and the news repeats
and buses and cars quit running
and the world itself stops spinning
until centrifugal force tears us apart.

*Tim
Orwig*

Flung high into our days we soar apart
oblivious to our deadening routines,
until the swing of the earth on its axis
brings night and drops us back together
in our bed, and we plot
to defy gravity and all the laws
of nature and man
again tomorrow morning.

Salamander

Jan D.

Hodge

fire
water air
and earth
born of fire
walks on
water light as
air and heir to earth
brother to the brontosaur
the thunder lizard born
of stone brother to the
bat-winged dragon power of air
and breath of fire sister to the
swampland croc and desert dwelling
Gila monster sister to the whip tailed racer
slick as cornsilk quick as wind kin to silver
butiki ceiling tracker come by night
blood of horrid basilisk born of
cockerel hatched by snake eye
whose very glance is death
distant kindred too of
phoenix rising new from
flaming ash promise of
eternal being artifice
of Zuni silver born again
of earth and fire air
water and earth
and
fire

