

ISSUE TWENTY-NINE
FIRST CLASS II of II.2007
SIX BUCKS

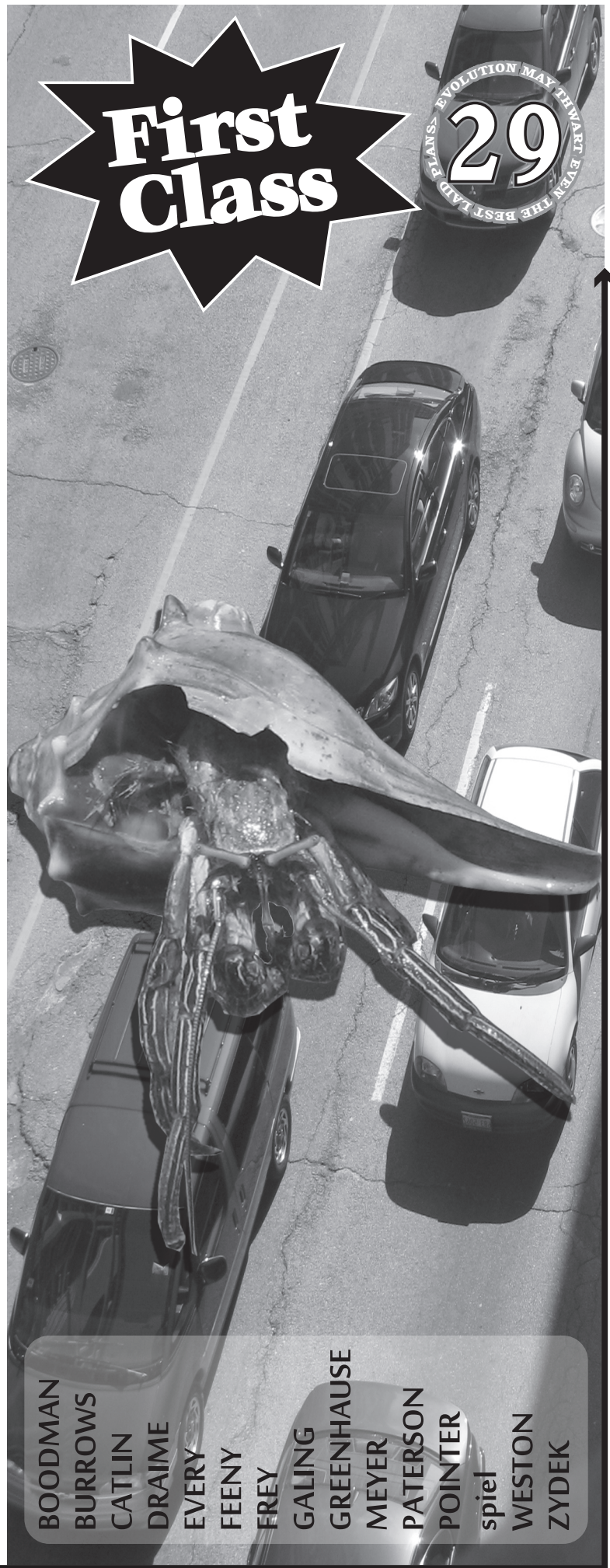
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and poetics – compiled with finely
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your back pocket...*



First Class

EVOLUTION MAY HEAR! EVEN THE BEST LADY PLANS.
29

- BOODMAN
- BURROWS
- CATLIN
- DRAIME
- EVERY
- FEENY
- FREY
- GALING
- GREENHOUSE
- MEYER
- PATERSON
- POINTER
- spiel
- WESTON
- ZYDEK





ISSUE TWENTY-NINE
AUGUST, 2007

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

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*Cover Art and Photograph, as well as any
internal photography by Christopher M*

First Class #29 leans toward the absurd in many instances, though also lays down a fair share of pungent realism. There is a blur in our culture wherein the absurd tends to swirl reality about, clouding our ability to perceive just what is what, when “they” tell us what is what. Speaking of “they”, there is also a piece from spiel that spins on the “they” axis... a puzzling aspect of our collective vernacular. The “they” may have much to do with how the “we” collect information and make decisions. Altruism, or the death of altruism, rears its head in this issue as well. So, as usual, more reading to crack open the skull and expose the mind to further thought-provoking ideas -- just what Four-Sep is all about, eh?

Again, I am pleased that your eyes are on these pages.

- Christopher M.

- christopherm@four-sep.com

Honeymoon In Havana

Charlie Boodman

At eleven o'clock, the morning light flooded in through Dorothy's open, eighth-story window. She sat in an armchair, naked save for a pair of Chinese slippers. Her auburn hair draped over her breasts and her pale skin glowed with the rising sun. How will I tell Harold, she wondered and leaned toward the window. He should be here soon. She gazed down at the city, at the streetcar that had just arrived.

Dorothy studied the lines of passengers that streamed from both ends. They scattered onto the avenue and disappeared into alleys or doorways. The bell on the trolley clanged. "God damn you," she said aloud when the streetcar pulled away.

She recalled her mother's admonition. "Get married first, like your father and I did." But Dorothy's mother didn't know Harold.

Harold said things like, "Why don't we honeymoon in Havana?" He showed up with flowers at the beginning, sometimes brought along a bottle of bootleg. One night they got too gassed to go to the theater, so they drank more, stripped and danced to Fats Waller on the radio. Sometimes Harold said he loved her, but she thought it odd that when they made love he kept his black socks and garters on. That, and he never spent the night.

Dorothy fished another cigarette from the metal case on the sill. She balanced it between her lips and let it dangle. Behind her, Harold's undershirt lay tangled in the bed sheets. It had been there three days, the three days since he'd left without it. That night she had clamped her legs around his waist as he was trying to pull out of her. He'd broken her grip, heaved her aside and cautioned, "Don't do that."

A boy with a baseball cap pedaled his bicycle on East Burgundy. The afternoon cross-town trolley barreled toward him. The boy's mother leaned out of a nearby window and shouted, "Off the tracks, Eddie!"

The boy vanished around a corner and Dorothy thought to herself, the city is no place to raise a child. It's too dangerous, with the traffic and all. My boy will have a nice place in the country where he can ride his bike on open roads or run around and climb trees far from the din of the city.

The cigarette she held was mostly ash. It looked like the arthritic finger of an old woman, the way it curved downward. The brakes squealed and she heard the bell clang as the streetcar skidded to a creaky halt.

Dorothy craned her neck and the ash plunged to the floor. She ground the stub in the ashtray and scanned the figures in the throng. From eight stories, all the men looked alike, all hats and suits. She knew Harold's walk though. He had a long, bowlegged stride. She wondered if the child would be bowlegged too.

The crowd faded. She watched the car operator adjust his cap. The riders mounted the car. Dorothy imagined herself with Harold boarding a ship on their honeymoon to Havana. She'd wear a gingham dress and a Panama hat with blue ribbons that would blow like banners in the breeze. He'd carry the suitcases and wear a pinstriped suit with a yellow necktie. Her friends and family would be on the docks waving them off. Her mother would be crying, dabbing her face with a handkerchief. There was the clangor of the bell. The trolley pulled away and nobody waved.

The afternoon shadows grew long across the city. Mr. Wilkins, the butcher, swept the sidewalk in front of his shop. Dorothy noticed the smeared blood on the apron that hugged his large, swelling gut. When he finished sweeping, he rested the broom against the side of the shop and lit a cigarette. Dorothy reached for hers to join him. A mother with a baby stroller stopped outside the shop and spoke to the butcher. He tossed his cigarette away and held the door open for her. Dorothy finished her cigarette without him.

It was late. A light chill crept in through the window. Another streetcar was soon to arrive. Evening was met by the flickering of streetlamps. As the light beamed in through the apartment, her eyes fixed on the green sweater her mother had knitted.

"Green to match your eyes," her mother had said, Dorothy's best feature. Would the child have her eyes? She rose and walked to the closet. When she extended her hand to feel the soft wool of the sweater, she choked on the lump that had formed in her throat. She needed another smoke, but the case on the sill was empty. Dorothy pulled the sweater on and quickly descended. She wanted to make it back before Harold arrived.

The Sunken City

E.G. Burrows

Rovers, sea-wolves
of dubious registry, roamed
the high seas with a bellyful
or archeological bric-a-brac,
then bartered the loot
to glut the sub-basements of museums.
Each country flaunted
the best relics of its neighbors
but not much it could call its own.

Ships docked, their holds stoked
with worked blocks of granite
and numbered marbles ripped
from the frieze of a temple
or the cyclopean walls of a castle
trucked down from the heights
to be reared again for the rich,
mainly in America.

Time to swap,
time to return the colossi,
the boulevards of horned sheep
or recumbent camels, to trade them
for a gross of fertility figurines,
a tin cup, a smashed bowl.

But too many ships sank,
their loot strewn
over the reefs to recall
a citadel, a wineshop.
It was Atlantis, of course,
an entire new city to pillage
and cart off, brick by clay brick,
bone by bone.

War Reporters

Alan Catlin

They've been everywhere, covered everything, done it all.

Twice.

Are so deeply embedded they might even be spies. Might be terrorists. Their visas are vague and unhelpful but their cash says volumes. Gets them where they need to go.

They are citizens of the world like mercenaries, bounty hunters with an unrestricted license to kill. They'll go anywhere, do anything, and write it all down. The story is everything, more precious than life itself.

They laugh at Death.

They eschew the tools of the trade. Their brains are the only tools they need. Writing stuff down leaves a paper trail, computers have pixels, a hard drive, trace elements they want no one to see.

They laugh at Death.

If there are photographs of where they've been, they didn't take them. Someone else did and they will deny having been, done or whatever it is these alleged pictures show.

All of them have been wounded. Many times. Ask them and they will show you scars. One more horrible than the next. One might wonder how they could have survived. And who could have saved them.

"A world of hurt" is the catch phrase they live by.

That and winning hearts and minds. "Once we see the enemy, find out where he lives, we'll give them one for the heart and two for the mind." No one has to clarify what they meant.

They laugh at Death.

They laugh at the way the world seems to burn around them no matter where they go. How nothing is built solid enough to withstand the kinds of punishment that follows their having been somewhere. Or the kind of destruction that precedes them.

Even thinking about going somewhere seems to mean a hail storm of destruction of the worst and most comprehensive kind.

And still they laugh at Death.

They laugh at the way people never look them straight in the eye. The ones that had long ago been turned to stone or dissolved into pillars of salt. Women run when they see them coming. Children hide. Men turn away. No one knows what it is they are trying to accomplish, what the nature of their mission is, but there is no doubt; stuff happens around them that can never be reversed.

They are absolutely fearless, crazy as a full squad of shithouse rats and twice as rabid. Whatever it is they think they might need to accomplish, what they have set out to do, they take, and no one tries to stop them, no one asks why they are taking or if they are bringing it back.

Even if they did bring the stolen good back, no one would want them after what had happened to them. Not unless they were into death and transfiguration as a spectator sport. The only people who might would be other war correspondents. People who shot dope, dropped acid, mainlined speed and then set out to discover the bigger picture. And most of them were gone, were part of a rare dying breed and, if the truth be known, they weren't missed at all.

Especially the ones who wrote *My War How I Miss You So*, whose father's played buccaneers and war heroes, rogue lovers and daredevil drivers in a hundred studio films and gave their sons a dose of unreality only getting killed the hard way can cure. Getting killed being a relief after the tortures they were made to endure, the public display of their flayed skin as all too mortal flesh.

And still they are laughing, laughing at Death, free lancing past the front line as stringers for news agencies no one ever heard of or, if they had, no one would ever hear of those agencies again.

What they file seems beyond understanding but no one could deny that what they said had the undeniable stench of truth. Had all the prerequisites for a PhD thesis on fatal incursions of the mind, insurgencies of the soul, military infringements on sovereign bodies so defiled, by the time the news hits the wires, no relief agency created yet could assuage the wounds, relieve the injuries, repatriate the disenfranchised.

They laugh at Death.

At atrocities, ethnic cleansings, euphemisms for genocides so vile a vocabulary for describing them has not been invented yet. Reporting is instinctual, basic as need, what they were trained to do and nothing can stand in their way. Their honest appraisals are unassailable, unimpeded by judgement or rationale, are never editorial or judgmental; this is war after all and someone has to see it, someone has to tell us what is going on or else it will not be like war at all.

Someone has to laugh at Death. Everyone knows that what they are doing is more than a job, more like an avocation, more like a calling, more, even, than faith itself; it is the religion of primitives, a sanctification of murder, killing as an end in itself and they are the only ones who know the true meaning of what they are recording.

Only they know.

They laugh at Death.

And Death laughs back.

Bird Watching At Burger King

Doug Draime

He looked at me and I
looked at him. He knew
that I *knew* the score, as his
wild- haired, bovine wife wiped down
a table at Burger King,
yelling at 2 small children
and barking at him,
*I'm going to the crapper,
watch the kids,
our number is 23!*
I turned away, but I could
feel his eyes on me, as I watched
a beautiful blue bird
outside eating a
crumb of a hamburger bun,
with perfect
dignity.

Molly's Place

Doug Draime

Back when bebop had overcome me and rockabilly was not that far behind, in the summer of my 15th year on this earth, Charlie and I spent most of our afternoons down at Molly's place: a "colored" whore house on the other side of the B&O railroad tracks in Vincennes, Indiana. We'd sit under her big sycamore tree listening to the jukebox sounds of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Billie Holiday, and Lead Belly coming from her screened in porch, where her johns waited for the pretty young black girls. Oh, what soul jarring sounds they were!

But at school, we both cringed under the desks after films on the H-bomb, that were shown between films on dental hygiene. What tooth decay had to do with total annihilation of the human race, I have yet to understand. I would much rather have been down at Molly's with Charlie listening to the throbbing sounds of real life.

Molly spoke to us only twice, though she must've passed us a 100 times. We were always trying to melt into the tree. "What you boys doin' out here?" she asked. I told her we were just listening to the music. She laughed. Her laugh was strong and open. The only other time she spoke, was when she was fuming at one of the girls inside. She stormed down the steps of the house and down the walk passing us behind the tree. "Hope music is all you boys hearin'."

One day that 15th summer, Charlie died in a fall from his bike, head first, onto a concrete slab, that his mother hung the clothes out to dry over. His brother, a few days before, had found Charlie and I sitting under that sycamore tree. He yelled at us about "niggers" and disease. Charlie just blinked and followed him home. My dad, drunk one day, asked me where I was spending my afternoons. I could do nothing but lie. A few days later at the funeral, I helped carry Charlie's casket; a pallbearer for a weird white kid like me, who liked music and young black girls.

The next day after the funeral, I was back at Molly's sitting under the tree. She came out smiling sadly and handed me a plate of the best peanut butter cookies I've ever eaten. I ate four of the ten cookies in honor of Charlie much later that night, as I listened to Little Richard over the radio from Nashville. I rocked out, moving into my darkened room in a frenzy... with tears I am not ashamed of, and with laughter that was like the tooth decay and the bomb, something else I will never understand.

Salton Sea Army

Gary Every

The Salton Sea is an artificial lake
created by an engineering mistake
when burst dams and ruptured canals
flooded the alkali flats of California.
The artificial lake is near the international border
which seems pretty artificial too
since it is the same dry flat desert on both sides.
On the southern side of the border,
there is a toy factory in Mexicali
where they make little green plastic army men.
When the molds are corrupted
and the little green men come out deformed,
the factory throws them in the creek,
where the soldiers float and swim,
crossing the border,
until they wash up on the shores of the Salton Sea.
The lake evaporates so fast
that as a little boy I was forced to walk
across miles of dead fish skeletons to reach the water
where the refugee soldiers were floating.
Even though they were all discarded by the factory
these soldiers fight as valiantly as any others.
This army of little green soldiers
has already invaded our land
evaporating across the countryside.
as they all find homes,
someplace, somewhere;
maybe your home town.

Wisconsin Jacket

Gary Every

"It's a Wisconsin jacket," she said with a beautiful smile.

I pondered that racket for a while and asked "Do you meant the pockets are full of cheese?" "Geez," she harrumphed and marched away.

Still, my brain started thinking about the virtues of a Wisconsin jacket with cheese in every pocket and making sure there are lots of pockets. I like to hike a lot and the very thought of cheese and crackers on the trail sounds like heaven.

Soon my pockets started stinking. I'm not sure if it was the swiss, cheddar, or gouda but mostly I suspect the limburger. just as I was about to toss my jacket in the trash, before I could do anything rash the first mouse arrived and then another and then another.

The mice came by the thousands, from alleys and fields, woods and woodpiles, houses, caverns, and castles. Thousands and thousands of mice made pilgrimages attracted by my splendid Wisconsin jacket with lots and lots of pockets and every pocket filled with cheese. They surrounded me everywhere, my little rodent army and I was their king.

At least until the cats came.

So I told my beautiful friend about my Wisconsin jacket, with the pockets full of cheese, the army of mice and the cats the terrible, terrible cats. She just laughed. "A Wisconsin jacket," she said "Is a jacket with room for two or three sweaters underneath because it is so cold." "Oh," I reply.

Stupid cats.

Flowers In Cuenca

Thomas Feeny

In the Generalisimo's jails
back in the forties
life was frowned upon.
What flower, what weed would
grow in that fetid Spanish light?
Except when, following interrogation
some tiny thing, a rosebud
—mother's pink treasure once
bathed with shyest touch—
would give forth bloody bloom
there, where pale thighs lay
spread on puddled clay.

My Execution

Michael Frey

Da DaDa Da
trumpeted from trumpeting trumpets
making happy trumpeting people and
happy circus music.
It was 1912 in River City, Iowa.

I was hanging by a rope tied around my waist.
My hands bound, mouth gagged with a
bloody Barney rag.
The town librarian read from the Bible.

In this sweet town, I awaited my execution by boiling,
in the bubbling black cauldron directly below me.

The gentlemen wore seersucker suits and straw hats.
The lovely, sweet ladies wore red bonnets and
the darling children read Captain Billy's Whiz Bang.

There was no reason, no crime.
Just women.

The insane executioner spoke insane words
and walked around insanely in a grassy field
in a nearby insane park, waiting to be called to kill.
Gas pipes ran in rectangles in his brain.

Summer symphony pillboxes and parasols
flung across the shoulders of lovely women.
Water ran in squares across the desk of the town clerk.

The learned schoolmaster stood at the podium
condemning me and praising my upcoming execution.
His beard was filled with red blinking Christmas lights.
He spoke of...

The women waved yellow handkerchiefs as
the fat mayor waked by, cigar in hand.
Their bodies waved as he waved by.

He stood beside my suspended body;
I could hear the cheers as they lowered me in.

Soon The Revolution

Ed Galing

eating in this jewish
deli
i meet up with
max, my friend,
who is now past
ninety,
small man with
glasses, and
a small beard,
who has been saying
for years, ever since
i have known him,
SOON THE REVOLUTION
COMES...

he said it during ww2,
during the russian
cold war, also at
mccarthy hearings, where
everyone was a communist,
SOON THE REVOLUTION,
he kept saying,
even after the bay of
pigs, even after vietnam,
every time i meet him in
the deli, the same thing
again,

now we are eating our
corned beef, and i say
to max, well when is
the revolution coming?
max puts his fingers to
his lips, looks around like
its a big govt secret,
and whispers,
SOON COMES THE REVOLUTION,
when is it coming max,
i ask him, when will it
come?

max shakes his head,
its coming he speaks again,
i guarantee it is coming...
now shut up and eat...

i smile
max knows everything
i can wait for the day

same old shit
tired of readin
about it
today the bomb
killed eighty
iraqis and ten
american soldiers
score is gettin
higher
all the time;
keepin score?
almost like a
ball game,
who's winnin,
who's losin,
nuthin left of
baghdad but
smolderin cars
and dead bodies,
what else is
new?
is american idol
on
tonight?

there are thirteen of us
sitting around a table
in the rest area, and we
are all in mourning...
this is a grief
counseling group,
and i am a part of
it,
we are behind closed
doors,
almost like a
jury room,
and each of us
has a story to
tell, of heartbreak
and despair, and the
tears come from
one end to the other,
as each one recalls
the death of husband,
wife, child, parent,
all in the same cauldron
of agony,
we are here to learn
how to combat our
grief,
there is a woman moderator
speaking in a soft voice,
compassionate, understanding,
there are a few grey haired
elderly women, a few men,
and a pretty black woman who
looks very elegant and refined,
we are each trying to learn
how to stop the tears, and
how to go on living,
so many sad faces, until
i read a poem i brought
in, filled with pathos
and laughter too.
i read slowly, and
soon everyone is smiling...
some laughing out loud...
now, this is the kind
of grief i can handle.

Outside The Barbershop

Jonathan Greenhouse

Bald beggars stare long and longingly
toward the well-lit layout of the barbershop,
sharp, shining scissors held in darkened hands,
tufts of hair stretched high and held
and clipped, then floating to the sea
of butts and tresses orphaned, loose, and bare
as sewage slips into a swallow's beak
and gasoline keeps growing in her womb;
Toxic waste surrounds her, as a wreath
of radiation signals out her tomb.

In darkness, moonbeams add a secret
spice to soups,
nocturnal brews belonging to the owls
as rattlesnakes protect sprite, playful boys
whose mothers measure butter into molds.
Angels float by series of swing-sets
as cousins mate in passionate incest,
and demons buy false real-estate interests
in deltas at risk of extinction's intentions.
Worms are entrapped beneath layers of gravel,
in pavement that presses an infinite field.

A scent of decay rides the post-vernal air:
The cracked-open door of the barbershop whines
and creaks in expectancy of mayflies' arrival
skimming on the surfaces of stagnant puddles,
drinking the skin of forgotten showers,
and seizing the remnants of May's
withered flowers
within the lengthening shadow of a light-post
and its ten-thousand starlings.

Shadow Of The Divine

Jonathan Greenhouse

God is born in iridescent stains swirling through a puddle where piglets tread, their curlicue tails minuscule tornadoes twisting as the bristled sow floats by like an earthen angel, 'til her breasts caress the swimming offspring dressed in gasoline's lingering rainbows, an acrid scent of God unleashed from propane tanks, trails of oil delivered from deserts ten million steps away.

Children play in the shadow of factories, in streams saturated with runoff, their skins reddened, rough peeling like serpents' sloughs; their lungs congested with undiagnosed toxins; God inhabits their chests, wheezes with labored breaths, sparkles in their eyes as darkness descends over the Andes.

Workers spread cyanide over the open pits, extracting gold, earning the freedom to work and live in their own country. Schools of river trout float belly-up, grown rich with gold, gathered by girls in hand-woven baskets on a bed of orchids and lilies.

God watches over his creatures, christening the growth of fungi and fashioned plagues protecting his earth. Fragile, orphaned, neglected. Burnt fields, felled forests, emptied oceans and men devouring orders, families, and species, 'til nothing remains but to name God in a swirl of oil.

First appeared in *Off the Coast*.

Kentucky Fried Forgiveness

Andrew Meyer

can i get a witness?
when we left you were a waitress.
i was playing my 45 year old mistress.
she paid for what we saw as a fortress.
that always bothered you the meaningless ways
to make do.
but now.
not missing the “downs” or backwood temptations.
just the blue hills and homemade libations.
she gave us jefferson davis and abe lincoln.
and now we are free.
hopped in our ford capri.
pants you wore and i with no “t”.
sun at our back early in the day.
as we live out the young american cliché.
are we being followed?
paranoia as we enjoy the panorama.
we made it.
145\$ a week for a stove and a bed.
you got a job at Big Erb’s.
i scope PTA meetings in the burbs.
life couldn’t be better.

Mice Are Famous

Andrew Meyer

tiny mice spitting ice crystals.
at charlie chaplin's ass.
while he bends over to pick up susie longhorn's wig.
that fell off her when she was wrestling popeye.
who incidently forgot to eat his spinach that day.
drained by the fear that someone.
would notice.
you know.
picking knits while knit picking is dangerous.
and time consuming.
time trickling through the eye hole of space
i call my mind.
that has started to believe that it is back in control
of it's surroundings.
but not it's situations.
like a hyena caught in a leg brace
nibbling it's own appendage.

Ghosts And Boys And Jesus Too

W. Tyler Paterson

If there was such thing as luck of the Irish, at eight years old Chester didn't have it. If there was such thing as normal parents, he didn't have that either and in his room at night, he'd stare at his poster of William Shatner and think *how did you get so cool?* Thinking helped drown out the sound of his parents downstairs. They had furious love.

"Is that a knife, Fanny?"

"Yes, Neil, it is!"

"Are you holding it to my throat because you hate my beard?"

"Yes Neil, it's your beard! I want to cut off your beard because it tickles when we kiss!"

"Kiss?! Is that what we're calling it now?"

And a few minutes later, they'd calm down and one of them would come into his room. His Dad would knock and softly explain that Mommy and Daddy weren't really fighting. No, they were just talking...loudly...about...sensitive things. If it was his Mom, she'd burst through the door and hover over his head.

"Did you hear us?" she'd command like a fuehrer.

Chester would fearfully shake his head no and look back at the Shatner poster. She'd follow his eyes.

"The Shat Man, I bet he knows how to please a woman, just like the Fonz," she'd say under her breath and Chester would pull the covers up to his nose. Not even the rocket ships on his comforter could fly him away and the heroes that hung on his wall suddenly became eyes watching, staring at him through the darkness. It was worse than the boogeyman. "And let me tell you," the mother would scream, "cool people never have to put up with bull-crap like your father's!"

"That's it! I'm sleeping in the tub!" his father would echo back.

It was a few days before Halloween and in school, Chester sat listening to Ms. Hawkins talk about ghosts and goblins. She crept around the classroom and spoke in a spooky voice wavering the long o's and overemphasizing vowels.

"They say ghosts are spirits of people who don't know they're dead and are doomed to wander earth!"

One kid raised his hand asked, "Then why ain't I ever seen one?"

"Why *haven't* you seen one? Because not everyone does, you can't go looking for them. They find you... just like my ex-husband's lawyers," and her whole demeanor changed from spunky to closed off. "You

think vampires suck blood? Wait until you get married and divorced.”

Chester noticed how the excitement in the air died like a bird hitting a plate glass window, so he came to the conclusion that ghosts were bad news. Ghosts were like that one flat chip amidst a bag of crinkle cut, or taking

GHOSTS WERE LIKE
THAT ONE FLAT CHIP
AMIDST A BAG OF CRIN-
KLE CUT, OR TAKING
A BITE OF A SALT AND
VINEGAR CHIP THINK-
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FINDING ONE COULD BE
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a bite of a salt and vinegar chip thinking it was regular salted. The shock of finding one could be devastating. To remind himself, he wrote this as a note on his desk in pen. One little girl raised her hand and said, “Is that why we call you Ms. instead of Mrs.?”

Another little boy raised his hand and said, “I’ll marry you, Ms. Hawkins!”

Another yelled out, “Would you ever marry a ghost?”

The teacher looked at her class and said, “No.”

The same boy replied, “what if you were in love?”

Chester wrote on his desk *don’t marry a ghost either*. If it wasn’t good enough for Ms. Hawkins, it wasn’t good enough for him. At that moment, the schoolroom door slammed shut. It was really the pressure of the hallway equalizing with the room mixed with bad timing. The teacher said, “Speaking of ghosts, there goes one!” making light of the door. The kids were too young to understand physics, so they believed it, especially Chester. Something fishy was unfolding, he could sense it like warm breeze on a cold day.

That night from his room, he heard his mother from downstairs. She was yelling, but he didn’t know at who.

“He did what?! WHAAAT?!”

Something told the boy it was about him, so he crept to the door and with an action figure in hand and listened in.

“You’ve got to be kidding me! You’re dead! DEAD! Well, not you, but you know what I’m saying!”

Dead? Was she talking to a ghost? Was that ghost telling her about how he broke the rules and wrote on his desk...in pen?! Oh no...

“I can’t even believe he’d do something like that! Well, that’s men for ya, dare I even call him that. More like little boy, if you know what I mean. Tell his creative

writing class that I said that, see what he does.”

Class? Little boy? Oh man, he was in deep, just like the time he found out his Dad wrote a story about his Mother for his Adult Writing club. His Dad said he was trying to be honest and express himself, but his mother made him rip it up, sleep on the couch, and do two hundred sit ups to get rid of his flabs before he could sleep in the same room again. He told Chester he didn't have flabs, they were pockets of love.

Even still, his mother came charging up the stairs and saw her boy playing in the doorway.

“Did you hear that? Were you listening to me on the phone?”

“Uhh...a little,” he replied focusing on his superhero. He didn't know his mother's weakness, so even though he wished he could be a superhero, he wouldn't know where to begin to defend her attack. Maybe her jugular. Maybe not.

“Yeah, well your father, when he gets home...ba boom,” and she made a mean face. That ghost must have told her some serious stuff. Looking at his superhero, he muttered, “This is worse than I thought.”

His mother heard and said, “you don't know the half of it. Oh look, here comes your father right now! Yeah, look at him walking through the door. Why hello, NEIL!”

“Hello, FANNY!” he screamed back, “I hope you're ready for another GREAT NIGHT OUT!”

“Yeah, thanks! Me and you have got to have a little CHAT!”

Chester became real nervous and tried to slink away and hide. No one noticed.

Chester's parents left twice a week to go out. Once on Tuesday, and once on Friday. He didn't know where, all he knew was that they'd leave spitting fire and come back silent. *Man, being in love doesn't look so fun*, he'd think. No one told him otherwise. No one sat him down and told him that his parents were on the verge of divorce because his mother was too much for his father. That his father, even with his pepper beard, wasn't man enough for his mother. No one explained that this was not how a functioning family functions. Normal people don't sleep in the tub when they're angry or talk about sexual fantasies with William Shatner to their son. When you're eight, you believe everything because, why not? When your home life is your foundation, that's what you take as normal. Then there was Tucker.

“Yo, the Chess man! What up buuuu-ddy?” Tucker was the 8th grader from two streets over who wore his football jersey everywhere. He was the type of kid who will never be what he thinks he is in his head. He'll never be cool, even though he acts like it. He'll never be smart, even though he thinks he has all the answers.

He'll forever be his own biggest fan. "The rents are out again, which means more bling for the king!"

Tonight, he wore a giant gold crucifix around his neck with an anatomically correct Christ. He also brought over a video of his last football game.

"Chester, who's that girl across the street, you know, the kind of fat one with the cute face?"

"She's not fat, she's pregnant. And her name is Amie," he said coming into the room sporting feety pajamas and a yawn. Tucker was one of the only people he that listened to because he didn't pull any punches. He wasn't trying to fool anyone, except himself.

"Pregnant? What is she, like 17? Who's the father?"

"I dunno."

"Shitty."

Tucker sat down scratching his armpits before turning to the TV bobbing his head to a song that no one else could hear.

"Who's that on your neck right there?" Chester wanted to know. His parents weren't religious at all, and these days, neither were the schools.

"This?! Are you kidding me?! It's Jesus."

"Oh..." he said and sat on the other end of the couch, "...what'd he do?"

"This guy is the lord, dude, our savior! He died for our sins! Haha, listen to this kid over here. *Who's Jesus*. Man, you crack me up. You know, the son of God, watches over us and shit. Dude, put my video on, you gots ta see it!"

Chester grabbed the video and put it in the player, not sure of what he would be seeing. On the tape, a camcorder roughly followed the action with some unseen Dad giving the play by play. It was nothing special, but Tucker was heavy into it.

"Check this one out," he boasted, eyes still glued to the TV, "that's me! Watch this, ready? BOOM!" and on screen, Tucker hit some kid so hard that the poor soul's helmet came flying off. A parent stood up and screamed profanities at the ref and the guy behind the camera said, "and the crowd goes wild!" On screen, Tucker stood up, crossed himself, then pointed to the sky.

"Big ups to the lord!" he said from his seat at the edge of the cushion, "that's Jesus givin' me the strength right there."

"Jesus gave you the strength to kill that guy?"

"Basically. Killed huh, I should use that next time I talk to my lady friends. *Yeah babe, I killed this guy. Wanna kiss?*"

There was something about his babysitter that Chester admired. He was funny in a tragic kind of way and had a confidence that seemed to pour over into the young

boy. Whenever Tucker came over, Chester walked a little taller and tried to imitate the strange mannerisms like waving certain fingers around. He never made the boy go to bed early or brush his teeth and together they watched the shows that come on after 9 o'clock. It was a big deal, like a secret that they shared.

"Let me tell you something about women," Tucker began, "the sooner you kiss them, the cooler you are. The older, the better." By older, he meant high school and by women, he meant high school.

"That's how you get to be cool?"

"That's all it takes, mon fairy. That's French for *my brotha!*"

"How do I know they want to kiss?" To Chester, a kiss was just like on the forehead from his Daddy at bed time. It was on his cheek before school.

"When a woman leans in close to your face, she wants to kiss, but she wants you to make the first move. So you lean in and kiss *her*. On the lips too, tongue, depending on how you feel. But sometimes girls don't lean in, so you can't kiss them."

"What happens then?"

"Bitches be crazy, little buddy, bitches be crazy. That's all you have to know."

They sat on the couch finishing out the football tape before watching a high tech murder solving show. Neither spoke much; both were lost in their own little worlds. Chester wanted to kiss girls and become as cool as Shatner or The Fonz or Tucker and relieve himself from the household tensions. Tucker wanted to kiss girls to further his ego and maybe get some of the respect he thought he deserved.

Tired from all the excitement, the youngster fell asleep on the couch and when his babysitter saw, he was carried to his room. Then, Tucker went back downstairs and watched more TV, quiet and alone.

Wednesday was a full curriculum day, so Chester went to school with his mother because, "Neil has his girly emotions class," she so delicately put it. She was a teacher of self defense at Philip Pinkleheim's School for the Blind and Deaf during gym. It made her feel important.

Right after work, she'd bring her son to swim lessons, the ones that his father signed him up for so he wouldn't *drown in the sorrows of life*. Chester kept his swimsuit in his backpack and promised his Mom he'd stay out of the way and do homework. He knew better than to cross her after seeing what she did to his Dad. A swift kick to the groin while screaming "bastard" will stop any man dead in his tracks. To pass the time, he sat on the bleachers and looked at the unique graffiti. There was a picture of a middle finger, and next to it, a finger pointing at the viewer like Uncle Sam's. A few

rows down was the phrase “for a good time call...” and then pictures of hands holding up certain numbers of fingers. He was too young to realize the number was his own. He was also too naïve to see that it was his own mother’s handwriting.

“Hey, we’re going to be running a little late today because one of the bats punched another kid in the face thinking it was a punching bag. Nose might be broken,” she said smacking her gum between every other word. She called the blind students bats and the deaf ones gridders forgetting that the blind could still hear and the deaf could still see. Chester had barely finished his math work. “Why don’t you go into the bathroom in the hall and get changed early so we can leave once I patch this guy up, ok?”

“Yes, Momma.”

As Chester walked into the hall, he found the single bathroom. He entered and closed the door behind, but didn’t lock it. It was big enough for two people to fit comfortably even though it was an open space with one toilet and one sink. He put his bag down next to the sink, took out his trunks and started undressing. First, off came his shirt, then his pants, then his undies. When he was completely naked and bent over, the door opened behind him and a man came in. Not knowing what else to do, the young boy shot upright, froze and held his breath. The man didn’t seem to notice him there, even when he locked the door and started towards the toilet. As the stranger pulled down his pants and sat down, Chester realized that the man was blind and had no idea the boy was in the room. Then he saw the man’s balls, wrinkled and dangling amidst a jungle of brown. Completely naked, terrified, and in need of oxygen, the boy let out a whimper. He knew he should have locked that door.

The blind man heard and immediately stood up, pissing all over the floor.

“Who’s in here? Huh?! Who’s in here you sick bastard?!” He pulled up his pants and began feeling around the room. Even though he knew this guy couldn’t see, Chester still tried to hide his genitals.

“Everyone! There’s a pervert in the bathroom! I need help! There’s a pervert somewhere in this bathroom! I can hear his heartbeat, that sick asshole!” The man kept yelling until there was a clang of keys and a teacher flung open the door only to see Chester standing there butt naked, penis in hand.

“Oh dear,” she moaned.

Outside against the brick wall, the young boy was mortified as he watched his mother pace back and forth.

“I know that guy, Chester, he’s a teacher here. You’re lucky he was a bat.”

“Mom, I didn’t...”

“You need to stay quiet. I can’t believe you’d pull a stunt like that even after I asked you not to cause trouble.”

“But I didn’t!” he pleaded, “I said I was sorry!”

“Rule #1; never tell the bat’s that you’re sorry. You always say they’ll do better next time, got it? You say sorry, they think you mean you feel sorry for them and their condition. Then they get all emotional. I mean, you’d think being blind, they wouldn’t have tears but they do. I’ve seen them, those black empty tears. Well there’s still time before your swimmy practice so I suggest you stay out here and when I’m done, we can go. Take a few laps around the building and think about what you’ve done. No more funny business.”

“No more funny business, Momma.”

Chester stood up and with shaky legs and a heart beat of about a million flutters per minute and started to wander.

Around the corner there was some grass that needed to be cut, some leaves that needed to be raked and the scattered remains of lunchtime litter. After readjusting his bathing suit lining so it wouldn’t itch, he decided to be of help and pick up the loose pieces of paper and empty coffee cups when something caught his eye.

“Aw, a doggy,” he said aloud and less than cautiously approached it. It was a Boxer, brown, and tad too thin. When it smelled Chester coming, it backed up and dipped its head low. Its jowls flapped open revealing a row full of nasty teeth.

“It’s ok boy, you don’t need to be afraid. How’s about some lovin?” and he stretched out his arms and leaned in towards the frightened dog face first. The animal snapped up at his face like a cobra missing by only inches.

“Whoa, jeez, you’re a mean doggy. Forget your hug then,” and he backed up not taking his wide eyes off of the dog. He turned the corner and was out of sight. He sat back against the brick wall waiting for his mother when the dog came sniffing around the corner. *What now?* Chester thought. The dog wagged its tail as it came nearer to the boy and didn’t seem to have the crazed look in its eye. It was stepping high with its back legs.

As it sniffed around, Chester said, “See, I’m not a bad guy, huh.”

And the dog lifted its leg and peed all over him.

A minute later, his Mom came out mumbling something about how late they were and to get in the car without a word. Chester obeyed not wanting to cause any more trouble or face any more embarrassment.

In the car, the mother asked, “Do you smell stale popcorn? Roll down your window. Go, do it now. Whatever it is, it’s nasty, like...wet dog...wearing cologne.”

At the indoor pool, Chester stood in the line of other

kids listening to their female swim instructor.

“Remember kids, move your arms and legs like this, alright? And if you have to go to the bathroom, don’t do it in the pool. We have a special chemical that lets us know if you did or not. It turns the pee a wafting red so there’s no lying, unlike my cheating boyfriend.” And she walked to the diving board mumbling “bastard” under her breath. A whistle blew which meant hit the pool. There were red crosses on her stand, similar to the cross that hung a Jesus from Tucker’s neck. Caught up in the motions, Chester cannon balled in to the water and started kicking around. The whistle blew again and when he looked, two life guards were reaching down to scoop him out of the water.

“Hey, kid, what did we tell you about peeing in the pool? Now we have to drain the thing and sterilize it. A+, kid.”

“I didn’t pee...” he started, but looking down, he saw the red waft of chemicals swirling in the spot where he had just been. “No! That’s not mine! It’s a dog’s pee! I’m telling the truth!” But who would believe that? Upon jumping in, it leaked off of his shorts, but try telling that to a lifeguard with a cheating boyfriend.

His furious mother drove him home in silence, that’s how he knew she went off the deep end and he was in way over his head.

That night, he heard his parents downstairs.

“Jesus, he did what? After the whole bathroom incident?” his father yelled. Jesus? Oh no, it must have been those big red crosses at the pool. Were they the eyes of Christ?! This is bad, the young boy thought, very bad. Jesus must have seen the whole thing and was now downstairs telling his parents.

“Can you believe that?” his mother shot back, “Christ almighty.”

The Christ Almighty probably could believe it, using those crosses as his spy eyes, waiting for more sins. Peeing in the pool was for sure a sin, especially if it wasn’t even yours. What a tattletale. The son of God sure needed a lot of attention.

“Well is he ok? Is my boy alright? Fanny, is he traumatized?”

“Do I look like a paraplegic, Neil? I don’t know!”

“I think you mean psychiatrist, jeez. What, did you take too many masculine pills this morning?”

“I had to, you took all the feminine ones!” his mother screamed. Someone scoffed, probably Jesus, and he heard his father say that he was going to check on their son. Chester slid under the sheets and pretended to be asleep. He couldn’t bear anymore embarrassment. His father came into the room and sat on the edge of the bed.

“Hey buddy,” he said quietly, “I didn’t wake you up did

I? Listen, I want to bring you in to see Grandma this weekend, ok? Then maybe we can go out for some treats, how's that sound?" and he smiled at his son. Through the pepper beard, Chester saw his father was being genuine and nodded an ok. "I'll see you in the morning, son."

The thing with his grandmother was that he hadn't seen her in a while. She moved to a new home with other old people where workers helped them live. She had her own room and was hooked up to her own machine. Even still, she wasn't a cyborg. This new place smelled like a freshly cleaned bathroom at a fast food restaurant. It was clean and gross at the same time with the residents being as stale as the air. Most were hunched over and hairless, some left their tongues hanging out at will. It was a carnival.

Chester's grandmother had her own room and when he walked in, he didn't recognize the old woman, just as she barely recognized anything.

"Momma, look who I brought today," his father said and pushed the young boy forward.

"Is that my granddaughter? How old is she?"

"Uhh...you don't have a granddaughter, Momma, this is Chester. He's eight," and he turned toward his son and whispered, "why don't you go give her a kiss, maybe she'll remember you close up."

As he neared her bed with tiny steps, he noticed her supremely wrinkled face and open mouth. Somehow, she found enough energy to lift her head to get a nice close look at the child, but all Chester could think about was what Tucker had said. Wanting to be cool, he sucked up his breath, leaned in and gave the woman a fat juicy kiss on the mouth. Her peach fuzz tickled his upper lip and the saggy flesh encapsulated his face. It tasted extra salty in a warm, leathery kind of way. When he pulled back, his father was aghast.

"Well, I guess the gimp keychain I made you is useless now, Mother."

"What's her name again? I like her!" the old woman popped.

"Chester, buddy, we'll talk about this later, but for now can you wait in the hall? I need to talk to your

"JESUS, HE DID WHAT?
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IS BAD.

grandma alone for a few. I'll be out soon."

As he left the room feeling a little cooler, he heard his father say, "it's about me and Fanny, Momma."

In the hallway, all of the old women wanted to see the cute little boy that was sitting all by himself. Such a nice little boy. How handsome he is. He looks just like Charlie or Peter or Ronald and they wanted better looks. One by one, they all leaned in, some with tongues flopping about, but most with eyes open. *Jackpot*, Chester thought licking his lips, *I'll be the coolest person ever.*

When his father came out moments later, even amidst his coolness, the boy asked for a mint. Or some gum. Or some toothpaste.

The next time he saw Tucker, he told the stories of his full tongue kisses with women as old as they get.

"That's some sick shit dude, but you's a playa son!" and Tucker slapped him five and snapped a few times. For a white kid, he sure had rhythm. Respect. "Let me ask you something, brotha."

"What?"

"Have you noticed any new Uncles showing up and taking your Mom out? Or new ladies being really nice and bringing you new toys when they come to talk to your Dad?"

Chester looked at Tucker like he had two heads. Was this supposed to happen?

"No, not that I know of, but sometimes a woman with short spikey hair and a dirt lip comes over to help my mom 'work out' when Dad isn't here."

"Oh shit!" Tucker screamed, "Girl on girl action in your own house?! You're like the coolest person I know. But don't worry, I won't tell your Dad."

Chester kept looking at his babysitter and got the sneaking suspicion that there was something wrong, the type of wrong that older people hid from children. It was magic being realized as sleight of hand or by innocence being used against you because you don't know of anything else.

"Tucker, is there something I should know?"

"What, like your parents splittin' up? Eh, don't worry about it, man, worse things can happen. It happened to me, but chicks dig angst, so I roll with it."

The child sat there desperately trying to understand, but could not so he faked it as best he could.

Neil came home early that night without Fanny. Chester and Tucker were still up watching TV.

"Hey Tuck, I'm back early so you're all set."

"Thanks Mr. D. Nice pink shirt by the way."

“It’s not pink, it’s rosé.”

“Who said that?”

“My friend José, but he got deported.”

“Why’d he get deported?”

“Because he stuck his fingers where they didn’t belong. See you later, Tucker,” and he closed the door. Everything was silent. “Chester, sit down, I need to talk to you about your mother and me.” Something in his voice was dead serious, everything felt wrong. “Your mother and I...we still love you very much, but...this is hard to say. We aren’t...together anymore. We’re separated now and you’ll be living with me for a while.”

Suddenly, something clicked. Of course there was turmoil, all of the bad things he had done were being reported to his parents by the supernatural.

“Is it because of what Jesus said about me? Or the ghost?! I’m sorry for being bad and writing on the desk or changing in the bathroom when that guy came in! I’m sorry!”

“No, this isn’t your fault, honey. It really isn’t. Sometimes, life doesn’t work out the way you think it will, but we have to deal. Roll with flow, do what you can and maybe somewhere, everything evens out. Do you understand? Sometimes bad things happen to good people because it helps them grow.”

“What’s wrong with Mom?”

“Well, aside from the fact that she has more muscles than a seafood restaurant and has a new affinity for the clam, it’s not working out between us. There’s nothing wrong per se. This may feel like it’s your fault, but remember that it isn’t and I still love you very much,” his father said holding back tears.

“Is it because bitches be crazy?”

Neil looked at the boy, then shook his head saying, “that’s the last time Tucker baby sits. If you want to talk, I’m always here. This is a hard lesson to learn at such a young and supple age, but life has a tendency to crap on you. Well, it’s different for everyone, but it comes in all forms.”

“Like pee?!” He exclaimed wide eyed in a moment of clarity. Yes! Yes, now it all made sense. His crazy last few days weren’t crazy at all. It was just life peeing on him, testing him, actually physically peeing on him.

“Umm...sure? Do you understand any of what I’m saying?”

“Sure. I’ll have angst, but worse things could happen.” Tucker’s words were coming out of Chester’s mouth.

“That’s very sophisticated and mature. I’m...kind of impressed. But before I forget, there’s someone here I’d like you to meet. A woman in class knows this guy who pulled some strings and anyway.” Neil went and opened up his front door.

Chester's eyes became huge when he saw the person standing in the doorway was none other than William Shatner.

"Hello, Chester," he began. Already Shatner was too cool. "I want to talk to you about being strong in these tumultuous times, in this black-hole edge of space, dance with the devil days of your youth. In dealing with growing up, we are warriors fighting a battle of hormones and sexuality and as we search through the unknown corners of our very minds, we find that the demons that hide amongst our reflections are really ourselves. But where does that leave us against the gentle chaos of time? We are but dead machines. Fear has rendered us immobile while lust has set us free. Do you see? I don't claim to have all the answers, but I have some. I'm just a man, you see, flesh and blood, you see. A hero? Sure, to some perhaps. But I am no different than you, Chester. We are the same. Homo-sapien. Our only crimes are violence against ourselves and as we strike the open wounds over and over, the light fades and our eyes dim. But we are strong. So very strong. As long as the rain can only wet us, we will never drown and as long as there is thunder, I will be there. Don't you see, Chester? It's all for you! My boy, this is life! The fierce mother that has plucked us from her nipple is telling us to run and howl at the moon. Awoooo! Awoooo! Remember, you will always be what you see yourself as." Then Shatner turned around and walked away into the night, his body getting darker and darker away from the streetlights. Neil closed the door a bit flabbergasted and bewildered.

Chester didn't understand a word, but he ate it all up. By God did he eat it up.

Another Change In The Scene

David Pointer

The cops staked
out at the enema
cocktail bar finally
caught the meth
addict selling select
cups of urine to
other meth addicts
unable to afford
their usual drug.
Suddenly, all these
kids getting 8 or
10 tattoos seems
tame and normal
as gum warts
under a table, or
watercolors
on a wall: What's
next-nocturnal
emissions wrapped
up in necrotic tissue
at the local breakfast
burrito stand?

Building Up Dr. Feelgood

David Pointer

For Those Who Didn't Survive

Need based assistance
Was met with greed
Based resistance as
Dr. Royal Rife's new
Microscope and cure
For cancers stemming
From viruses and bacterias
Were suppressed by an
Earlier cunning congress
Seated in service to the
Medical and pharmaceutical
Fortunes to be made then
Multiplied when more
Unsuspecting people
Became patients seen
By strategically silent
Doctors providing a
Certain brand of *Quality*
Care like mortuary assistants
Specializing in an untold
Spectrum of dark

they were white and i...

spiel

so what do you think of me now that you have seen i am a person of color i see you are the same so we pass the first test of liking each other as folk of like color that colorer in my crayons maybe you remember it as **Flesh** sort of creamy but pinkish and only sort of like the color of my mom and my dad i don't know who named it nor why when i made those hideous true pictures of them i used my **Flesh** colorer to color them only **they** always said **they** were **white** folk not creamy pink

but really my favorite crayon was **indian red**

i wished my folks had been **theys** like that instead **indian reds** cuz those redskins got so rich with all that freed-up land our great government just handed over to them so they could kiss up for all the bloody dead red **theys they** took in those hopeless long-ago wars

well i have become pissproud to grow dark blotches on my forehead and on my arms now so they kind of match up with the injun's redskin but here i am finally part injun shelling out taxes to pay for more bloody wars invented by those **they** all flesh white whores and yet to see any sign of they freedomland falling on my new halfbreed redskin hands and now a bunch of pissy **theys** have eliminated **indian red** from a decent new box of colorers

but i have noticed the chinks are faring pretty well these days so since the injun thing may not pay off i have been shopping to contract a case of jaundice a nice buttery yellow colorer still comes with the coloring box kind of the color of a chink it is just that whatever i am going to be i don't want it to be the color of all those **theys they** called themselves white the opposite of black like in movies **they** always made they bad guy wear the black hat but **they** colored they own **theys** that insipid sort of creamy pink what we used to call the **real** and **only** color of **Flesh** but let's get this straight a white man stinks when he is filthy and he stinks when he is dead and a filthy man is no different if he is black yellow or red but give me the choice i would rather be one of those instead of like those white **theys** they tie their necks tight till they brains cease to function then they queer for a fight slaughtering flesh heaps of flesh never mind of which color just so it runs red but do not count **they** dead nor question **they** pride just like in the movies **they** got white on **they** side

don't you see...**they were** white
they are white but i...well...
i am a person of color

marble sized balls of hate,
compassion.
marble sized balls
wet, filled with tears.
they can tear through skin
poking holes into you,
hundreds and hundreds of holes
like a fork being jammed back and forth into your
guts.

eyes filled with green,
blue, brown
digging a hole deeper.
lie down
let the flower roots
tickle your arms.
feel the maggots
crawling under your clothes
just looking for a way in.

eyes :
they smile
they stare
they weep
quietly alone in a room.

eyes that die
the rest of the body will follow
soon enough,
and there is some small comfort in that.
in the meantime,
everything else
is just an endurance test.

Letter To David About Loving

Fredrick Zydek

We need not think alike to love alike.

Francis David

Dear Francis: But what if the other folks think you're better off dead or that you should be their slave or that your children shouldn't be given the same standard of education in the schools as their children get? What if the other guys are

convinced that the way you live is proof enough that you are a witch and have the power to burn you at the stake, or that you are of the Devil and they have enough votes to exclude you from public life or attending the church of your choice? What

if they have the ability to send you into a war you do not believe is justified and can have you shot for being a traitor because you refuse to kill people you believe have the right to live? What if you know you're right but have been silenced by those

to whom you swore obedience before you figured out the truth about something? Lastly, I can't help but wonder if you ever sat on a church board where no one thinks alike and love hasn't a damn thing to do with how much money is actually in the budget?

It's my experience that birds of a feather tend to flock together because it is impossible to love people who do not think like you do who are dead set on making sure you have fewer rights than they do to legitimacy and the pursuit of life, liberty and personal happiness.

Letter To Wallace About The Nature Of Religion

Fredrick Zydek

Dear Cheryll: What if religion called us to either absolute activism - so there would be no way to avoid the issues of social justice - or the comfy indulgences of being an ascetic - contemplating

ways to understand why the poor must always be with us? What if the fly in the ointment of every government is a built-in addiction to power, war, and an urge to be the alpha of the pack? What if

that urge is the drug that powers all governmental thinking even when that thinking takes the form of a church board or the planning committee that gets to decide what the others will eat at the annual

church picnic? What if the language of self began as a me first concept because survival isn't offered many alternatives? Whether we like it or not we are fierce furnaces busy consuming any form of

energy that gets too close to us. We aren't just eating our way through all other living things - we devour the energy of the sun, the wind, rivers, tides, waves of sound and light we can't even see. You

and I are not just witnesses to all this activity. We are the doers. It is the nature of religion to rely and be obligated. The word comes from the old Anglo-Norman, just as it was becoming old French.

The word isn't used much any more, but when it was, religare was a common term used to imply that none of us survives anything unless we rely on our natural obligation to hold things in reverence.

wordmakers

Charlie Boodman » *An English teacher at Los Angeles public high school, who lives with his girlfriend and two handsome dogs.*

[A period piece rife with stark imagery. What drew me to this was how the impression is so very different than if it were played out today – where one might view her with derision, rather than pity/empathy.]

E.G. Burrows » *Lives in Edmonds, Washington.* [Is a culture judged by its mastery over others? By the plunder of their neighbor? The Germans and Russians have yet to trade back their pilfered fine art. This piece awakens many thoughts on cultural heritage and what the ownership of property and “creation” of history means.]

Alan Catlin » *Barmaster in Schenectady, New York. An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps, a few of which are available from Four-Sep.* [This is Catlin at his finest. Momentum, rhythm and a riveting pulse permeate this piece.]

Doug Draime » *Lives in Ashland, Oregon.* [Two striking poems. One, the simplicity of youth marred by impending doom on all sides; the other, just plain doom.]

Gary Every » *His exceptional ‘Cat Canyon Secrets,’ 46pp of especially descriptive and fantastic stories from the southwest, is available for \$6 from the author (First Class will forward).* [A couple of great absurd pieces. Being from Wisconsin, the second poem was particularly trippy.]

Thomas Feeny » *Lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.* [Simply put: horror minus or plus beauty still equals horror.]

Michael Frey » *A doctor of medicine and associate professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in New York City.* [The absurd blurred with caricature, I dug the piggish and priggish observations prior to a silly death...]

Ed Galing » *The famed Poet Laureate of Hatboro, Pennsylvania has appeared all over the independent press and numerous chaps, including ‘Tales of South Philly’ from Four-Sep Publications.* [These three pieces are taut, tight as a fist, and chip the mind like a wicked glancing jab. This is America – right now, assiduously dissected by a 90+ year-old blender of perspective.]

Jonathan Greenhouse » *Lives in Jersey City, New Jersey.* [These two poems, burning with imagery and a simply stunning flow, made me feel slimy with oil and refuse and was a stark reminder of just how filthy we can make this place....]

Andrew Meyer » *A nice kid out of Madison, Wisconsin.* [Just friggin wickedly weird.]

W. Tyler Paterson » *Lives in Ocean Park, Maine.* [A creative piece spinning from three directions at once -- perception and clarity muddled in the fog of youth. Plus, a guest appearance by William Shatner... what could be better!]

David Pointer » *A oft-seen writer in the indie press, living in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.* [Bitter pessimism done up fresh. Fun to read, a good poke in the brain.]

spiel » *Pushcart Prize contender, FC regular, check out www.thepoetspiel.name.* [The “they” concept has always intrigued me, its usage being prolific and constant in our daily speech. But who are the *they*? Why are they doing all of these things we talk about....?]

Douglas Weston » *Lives in Duarte, California.* [Fine imagery with one line in there that cinched it for me.]

Fredrick Zydek » *Lives in Omaha, Nebraska, and has more than 800 publishing credits under his belt.* [Zydek questions the use and abuse of power and puts altruism’s toes in the fire. These speak passionately and forcefully, and left me thinking, which is why I read.]

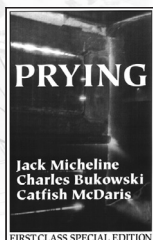
A booming thanks goes to all who have and continue to submit words on paper to First Class. I read every scrap that pries it’s way into my pobox, and enjoy and appreciate the efforts of those who submit their words to other’s scrutiny. Please continue to pleasure me with your submissions.

— Christopher M.

killer reads

Four-Sep Publications Chapbooks

PRYING - Prying is a special edition of First Class featuring the words of Jack Micheline, Charles Bukowski (unpubbed), and Catfish McDaris as well as images by Sinisa Dugonic (Belgrade), Jouni Vaarakangas (Finland), Carlos Serpas (Mexico), and Mike Tolento (USA). *Glossy cover/bamboo paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



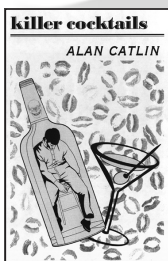
John Bennett

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - a sweet collection of John Bennett's finely honed style of 'shard writing': stripped away convention beating like a pulpy red heart. The very sharpest cutting edge of his talent, and a most eloquent assault on post-modern sensibilities.

Perfect bound/finest offset multi-color cover/72pp - \$9ppd

Alan Catlin

KILLER COCKTAILS - each piece in this collection of thirty is a portrayal of a character or event inspired by a particular cocktail. Persona and event become imbibables. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$5ppd*



Alan Catlin

HAIR OF THE DOG THAT BIT ME - what you get the morning after indulging in Alan Catlin's earlier release, Killer Cocktails. Once again, plenty of deadly drink recipes that are indicative of the accompanying poetics. Another killer collection that belongs with the pleasure inducing prequel in everyone's bar (or bathroom). *High-end slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

Alan Catlin

THE LEPER'S KISS - the fourth installment in the Killer Cocktails chapbook series of poetics inspired by the river of patrons on the public side of the bar and invented imbibables, fresh from the mind of Alan Catlin, Schenectady, NY's very best bartender poet. *Craft cover/linen paper/32pp - \$6ppd*

Alan Catlin

DEATH ANGELS - is 'Killer Cocktails' spun out of control. Blending poetics within prose, mixing characterization with chaos, and serving up a hell of an ass-kicking booze-drenched nite-cap; Catlin continues to call 'em as he sees 'em from his side of the bar. *Craft cover/24# paper/44pp - \$6ppd*

Stepan Chapman

COMMON ECTOIDS OF ARIZONA - a romp through the field drawings and notations of the eminent Stepan Chapman, Doctor of Etheric Zoology. A superb collection drawn from the freakish menagerie dancing in Chapman's skull. A truly awesome work of art. *Gloss cover/24# guts/44pp - \$5ppd*

Stepan Chapman

LIFE ON EARTH - travel along as Life On Earth is personified in the guise of creatures, characters and imagery (36 pieces of art!) from the inimitable pen of Chapman's distinctive ink drawings. It's a tragedy, that we are all living, as Life On Earth struggles to survive—a blasting stare into the mirror of our collective consciousness. *Gloss cover/24# guts/40pp - \$6ppd*

Christopher Cunningham

SCREAMING IN SOME BEAUTY - poetics from a strong voice in the small press merging anger, urge and the quest for art into gritty clarity and words that will ring the psyche's call to contemplation. The book feels as good in the hand as it does in the head. *Deluxe linen cover/linen guts/36pp - \$6ppd*

Ed Galing

TALES OF SOUTH PHILLY - chronicles the sights, sounds, smells and action on the streets and in the homes of a long-since-gone South Philly. Hard living turning out the best people, leaving behind a few, struggling in the crossroads of a city and growing up. *Offset slick cover/24# paper/28pp - \$5ppd*

Albert Huffstickler

IN THE CLEARING - a wandering collection which merges into a fragmented cohesion. Disturbing and fearsome, yet the most brutal aspect of this journal of poetics is the impact of frank self-examination. Albert Huffstickler is one of the best, period. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/32pp - \$5ppd*



Errol Miller

THE DRIFTER TAKES ANOTHER LOOK - pieces from the late 80s, Miller's mind ripe, the pen in his hand, once again, after an 8-year dormancy. This is the sweetest, most well preserved fruit plucked from the sealed cellar of the mind of Errol Miller, one of the more prolific writers on the scene today. *Offset slick cover/bamboo-laid paper/50pp - \$6ppd*

Michael Newell

COLLISION COURSE - draws from the years Newell spent in Uzbekistan in the late '90s. These 37 observations reveal the confusion, anticipation, dirt, and beauty of the land and people wedged in the deep seat of the Slavic/Asian crossroads of ex-USSR. Invigorating. You may reconsider your own situation and stance. *Matte cover/linen paper/46pp - \$6ppd*

Michael Newell

MILES OF HIGHWAYS AND OPEN ROADS - features 42 poetic slices of the exotic loaf from which the well-travelled Newell nibbles. Never presumptuous and hyper observant, whether it's a glimpse of Jordan or Oregon, these poetics are tight and full of precise, earnest imagery from the perspective of full cultural immersion. *Matte cover/24# paper/50pp - \$6ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

DICTIONARY OF THE 21st CENTURY - features the wordplay and wit of Niditch in a format conducive to his quick, quirky jabs and observations. *Gloss cover/24# paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

MASKS AND BEARDS - loaded with a continuous flow of killer short pieces describing absurd characters and their even more absurd actions ala the great Russian master of the absurd - Daniil Kharmis. Modern and Post- meet on these pages. *Gloss cover/24# paper/26pp - \$5ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

MOVIE BRATS - this novella takes a serio-comic look at the tumultuous world of Hollywood and beyond during an era of political, sexual and religious uprisings. A big fat book of Niditch's intense, witty and fast-paced dialogue. *Craft cover/24# paper/48pp - \$6ppd*

B.Z. Niditch

3RILOGY - these three short fiction pieces explore art, humanity, political thought and the absurd underbelly of the 20th century. The fear of reprisal, unbelievable audacity and the mystery of murder - themes for a good read. *Craft cover/24# legal-half/34pp - \$6ppd*

Charles Ries

BAD MONK: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE - The Bad Monk, Charles Ries, marks shrewd, careful observations of the world around him, merging spirituality, a bit of beer, waffles and Milwaukee life. Bonus poem broadsheet! *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

Charles Ries

MONJE MALO SPEAKS ENGLISH - is the second chap from the Bad Monk, Charles Ries. A refined, yet rough voice out of Milwaukee, Ries matures with meditations on Mexico, mamas, love and religion that have been pubbed throughout the indie press world. *2-color cover/24# paper/24pp - \$5ppd*

Robert Roden

THE SCOPOPHILIAC - the latest release from one of the Long Beach area's strongest voices. This collection stirs Lee Mallory to state that 'one could mount these poems, or like a greedy voyeur, just watch and listen'. Gerald Locklin observes that he 'blends the ineffable of the Symbolists and the cacophonies of Southern California rock into a music of his own'. *High-end slick cover/linen paper/24pp - \$5ppd*



Robert Roden

THE BITTER SUITE - the is jammed with Roden's poetics pinning down new life, new death and new views, wrapped in the feel of dirty starched sheets, trapped behind the dual boarded doors of desperation and longing. *Craft cover/24# paper/28pp - \$6ppd*

Spiel

INSUFFERABLE ZIPPER - you get fifteen cunning and outrageous stories and intense character sketches. It's the reclusive Spiel's world of weirdos, women and wild worldviews - like bubblegum stuck to hot sneakers, if follows you. Read what's been called a 'fresh blast to the face and ears.' *Craft cover/24# legal-half/44pp - \$7ppd*

Wade Vonasek

STARTING TO END IN THE MIDDLE - pulls together 30 pieces of Vonasek's best poetics revealing somber introspection, consistent speculation, and often a glimmer of hope. Featuring artwork by Lori Dale. Vonasek was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. *Slick cover/linen paper/32pp - \$5ppd*

Wade Vonasek

CLAY MOLDED INSANE - revolted by the social morass of the 21st century landscape, fantastic and creative words leap from poetics rife with mood and cutting splendor. Featuring artwork by Dee Rimbaud, Michael Labash, and Stepan Chapman. *2-color offset cover/linen paper/26pp - \$5ppd*

A.D. Winans

PEOPLE, YOU THINK YOU KNOW? - short fiction and poetics from one of the long-standing greats in the small press. This is Winans at his best with short fiction and gritty poetics. Get into Winans' head! Features fotos of San Fran folks, through the eyes of A.D. *Offset slick cover/linen paper/28pp - \$5ppd*



cattle call



First Class is very open to submissions. Especially sought after are pieces of short fiction, but poetics are, of course, accepted as well. **I am now also very interested in illustrations and some stark photography for both cover art and internal pages.** I seek the very best words and images you have available for me to read.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work.

For the computer users, please do **not** justify or force-justify your text. Please do not "double space" after each period.

Name and address on the first page of each piece only.

Send along a SASE.

Disposable/recyclable manuscripts are cool and mandatory.

Lastly.....drop me a letter with your submission, it sure beats the hell out of a chunk of submission text and a SASE dropping out on the table without at least a brief greeting.

I make it a point to take advantage of the technology I have available to keep track of everything that comes in and leaves First Class. You can expect timely responses and notifications. I know from experience that it is disturbing not to know the status of your words.

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-Christopher M.

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"Lockout Press." There are several options available as to paperstocks and quantities, but all include full layout and design, as well as inclusion on the Lockout Press page of the Four-Sep Publications Web site. The foremost concern in this venture is to communicate your work with production matching the scale of your message. Professional layout and design along with crisp laser output will be combined with experience, skill and text-crafting ability. After dropping too many paychecks at the copyshop, I want to share the ability I now have to reduce the costs associated with this wondrous obsession, and increase the quality of the finished product. Plus, I'll be able to read more of all of your fine words. Nothing is impossible to work out, up to full-color covers and perfect-binding, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement. **Drop me a letter or e-mail (christopherm@four-sep.com) and I will work up a quote based on the info you give me.** Everything is included in the rates: layout, design, **shipping**, printing, binding, and **proofs-til-you're-happy**.

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