

**First  
Class**

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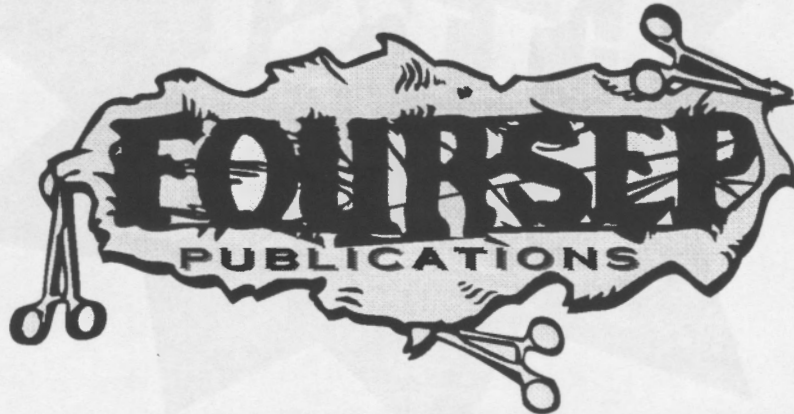
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FRANKS • GREY • HUFFSTICKLER • JACKSON • LOCKLIN • MCDARIS  
MILLER • NIDITCH • PHILLIPS • PLATT • SPLAKE • SWEET • WINANS**





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# FIRST CLASS CONTENTS

- 1: **GETTING EVEN** *by John Bennett*
- 2: **A WISH COME TRUE** *by John Bennett*
- 3: **A NEW YEAR'S EVE BASH** *by Alan Catlin*
- 5: **KNOCK DOWN THE UMPIRE** *by Larry O. Dean*
- 6: **THE WIZARD CRYSTAL FART** *by Gary Every*
- 8: **THE NAME** *by Greg Fitzsimmons*
- 14: **YOU COULD, ON ANY-OTHER-NIGHT** *by Christopher Franks*
- 15: **UNTITLED** *by Christopher Franks*
- 17: **THE USED CAR GUY** *by John Grey*
- 18: **THE PERILS OF HAGGERTY** (an excerpt) *by Albert Huffstickler*
- 20: **CHRISTIAN SCHAD: SELF-PORTRAIT WITH MODEL, 1927** *by Gerald Locklin*
- 21: **TRIPLE DIPPING** *by Gerald Locklin*
- 22: **THE TV BANDIT** *by Christopher M.*
- 25: **...TILT...** *by Catfish McDaris*
- 26: **THE WAY I THINK IT IS IN MANHATTAN** *by Errol Miller*
- 27: **SOUTHSIDE MOBILE HOME PARK** *by Errol Miller*
- 29: **JANIE LYNCH** *by B.Z. Niditch*
- 31: **THE QUIET ONES** *by B.Z. Niditch*
- 37: **ZIP CODES AND AREA CODES  
DON'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY** *by Walt Phillips*
- 38: **YET ANOTHER SCENE** *by Walt Phillips*
- 39: **AMPHIBIANS** *by Steven Platt*
- 40: **CHECKLIST FOR "SORRY WE NEVER  
HAD THAT CONVERSATION"** *by T. Kilgore Splake*
- 41: **POEM OF LIES** *by John Sweet*
- 42: **DURING THE DEBATE BETWEEN  
CLINTON AND DOLE** *by A.D. Winans*

**IMAGES: COVER PHOTO** *by Christopher M.* • **DRAWINGS ON PAGES 1,5,16,  
and 30** *by Walt Phillips* • **ILLUSTRATION ON PAGE 20** *by Fred Jackson*



# Getting Even

JOHN BENNETT

I've got a few things I could do to even the score. A few choice things. I could blow his ears off with a penny whistle or tap-dance on his tightly-laced toes while kissing him sloppy all over. You know, smiling and giggling all the time, so as he gets confused. I mean, talk about your mixed-messages. A 400 pound eunuch dancing on your toes with his tongue down your throat, his fat hands pulling you gently to him by your slender waist so that the pain gets mixed with the pleasure which is shocking in-and-of itself. And then, then I could just shove him off, not too hard, not enuf to knock him down, just enuf to make him stagger back a step or two, giving him a bird's-eye-view of what it is he's done. That would bring him down a notch and sow the seed of doubt. And then, then I'd walk away, the ground trembling under the impact of my massive weight. Slip into the first bar I came to. Start slamming down the whiskey. Shun sailors making passes. Drop a quarter in the juke box and pour my heart out to the barkeep as he nods and wipes his glasses with a bleached-white towel. At this point I lose it. I always do. My great head lowers into my folded bar-top arms, and I cry my heart out. Somewhere before it's over I'll grow coy, but for the most part it's for real. I am so unhappy. Life is not fair. Something's terribly wrong. I walk around with a knife blade to my throat and kiss the hand that holds it.

You live up the block,  
without walking distance  
The door's locked now, isn't it?  
Isn't it?

"Maybe you don't remember me, Carl  
I'm the guy you hated for life."  
The voice said.

"I remember you fine, hit the road, Jack. I mean it."

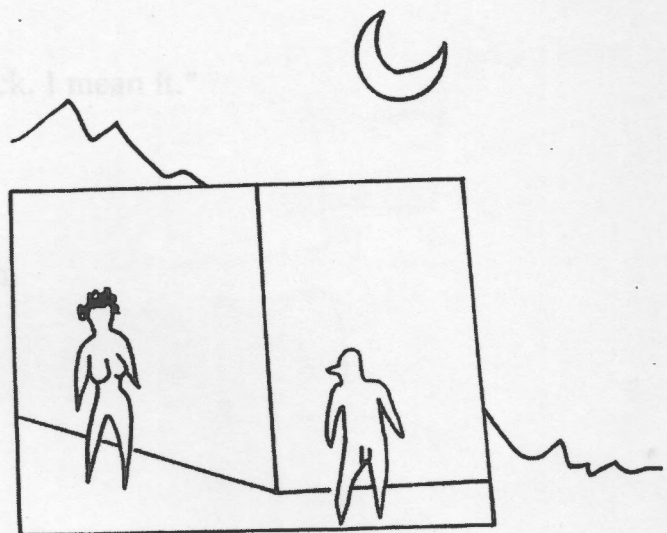
"Make me."  
The voice said.

Carl tried, all five foot ten,  
one hundred and fifteen pounds of him.

Not much to match up against a  
"I guess I went crazy" unemployed  
construction worker.

Cops, off the record, said:  
"It was a real mess.  
A real sick act."

The defense attorney said it  
was like self defense.



WALT PHILLIPS

# A Wish Come True

---

JOHN BENNETT

Who knows what the good Lord has in store. Just about everything. Shelves stocked to the ceiling, coiled hemp on big spikes hammered into raw timber, glass jars of soft cloying candy, dark ugly-tasting liquid to drive out gout and evil thought, nail clippers and three-mast clippers with pre-billowed sails, waiting to carry your dreams away. And under the counter, between the ball bat and chess board, a mace gun filled with disappointment. It's all there waiting for you to enter the shop with your little list that mommy made, that teachers tagged things onto, the list inspired by example, the list that once everything has been crossed out will make your wish come true.

Some angel with acne puts it all in paper bags and two more help you to your car. You slam the trunk shut, start the engine and look both ways. Still blocks from home, you're stricken blind or your heart explodes. Worse yet, nothing happens, but when you try to put the key into the front-door lock, your hand is shaking and spotted brown.

Inside, you slump down on the couch, the bags on the floor beside you. Everything is in order, has been for years. The clock is lopping off the heads of seconds on its tiny chopping block, and the cat is sunning on the window sill. You doze. Every now and then you surface, try to remember what comes next. Someone will find you there, long after your message machine hits overload and your dial tone fades. There are procedures for cleaning up a mess like this. They're followed, and life goes on.



# A New Year's Eve Bash

ALAN CATLIN

All the stools are upside down on  
the bar but one

You've been doing this all your life  
and you've never messed up once

You're a professional

You've had a few  
Ok, more than a few  
It's New Year's Eve,  
two o'clock in the morning  
and you're counting the till

"Have a beer, Carl" you said.

This is lower Albany  
Longshoreman land  
Tough country to sling drinks in  
but you can cut it,  
you're kind of tough yourself

You live up the block,  
within walking distance  
The door's locked now, isn't it?  
Isn't it?

"Maybe you don't remember me, Carl  
I'm the guy you barred for life."  
The voice said

"I remember you fine, hit the road, Jack. I mean it."

"Make me."  
The voice said

Carl tried, all five foot ten,  
one hundred and fifteen pounds of him

Not much to match up against a  
"I guess I went crazy" unemployed  
construction worker

Cops, off the record, said:  
"It was a real mess.  
A real sick act."

The defense attorney said it  
was like self defense:

“The guy knocked my client off a bar stool. Attacked him with a sharp instrument.”

No one was asking what was his client doing there in the first place, kicking a man lifeless, caving in his chest, breaking thirteen ribs, spending eight hundred dollars worth of cash he stole as “an afterthought” the next day in every bar in Troy

Eight months later, the headlines read:  
“Bartender Said Drunk When Stomped To Death”

As if that made him somehow responsible for what happened next

“Heart of Man Stomped to Death Exploded, Doctor Says”

Off the record cops said:  
“It was kind of disgusting what he did to that man.”

Think about it after next year’s  
New Year’s Eve Bash:  
Did you put up all the bar stools?  
Is everyone out?

And if not  
Who is that sitting on the last one,  
the one closest to the bar?  
Is it Carl?

Or is it his friend?

# Knock Down the Umpire

LARRY O. DEAN

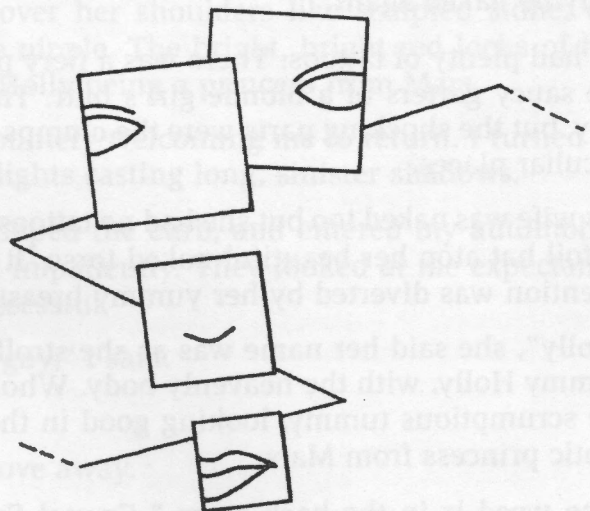
I was indifferent  
to the game  
until I saw that someone  
had knocked the wind  
out of an umpire,

lying on his back  
like a pinstriped beetle,  
circumscribed by players  
impotent on the astroturf.

Patrons in the bar  
were understandably fascinated  
by this unforeseen turn  
of events;

for several  
minutes, all eyes  
were glued to the TV  
screen, silently  
scrutinizing, mine

included. Then  
it hit me: the way  
to involve  
even people like me,  
who don't ordinarily  
watch football, is  
knock  
down the umpire.



WALT PHILLIPS

# The Wizard Crystal Fart

GARY EVERY

I stood at the front door of the wizard Crystal Fart, far from the suburban sanctuary where I lived, journeying across the railroad tracks deep into downtown, in the very heart of Barrio Libre. My death metal high school friends waited in the car while I knocked on the front door of the wizard Crystal Fart, whom I had never met before. I was there because my older brother O.Z. had sent me. On our end of town, the white bread section, O.Z. was an urban legend: a rip-snorting, two-fisted, lady-killing, hell-raising, Harley Davidson kind of guy.

When I told O.Z. that I wanted to score some weed, he set me up with "the best connection in town." O.Z. made a quick phone call, scrawled out some illegible directions on the back of a grocery list, and I was very nearly on my way. First, I had to stop and acquire some investors, a few financial partners to provide extra capital. When my friends heard that O.Z. was going to turn me on to the choicest of his connections they all insisted on climbing aboard, cramming into my Honda Civic. We entered downtown, crossing beneath the railroad tracks, rolling through the underpass, concrete walls sentried by voodoo spraypaint demons.

So there I was in the heart of Barrio Libre, on the wrong side of the railroad tracks, far from my suburban sanctuary, deep in the heart of downtown, where this guy my older brother knew, an aging hippy named Crystal Fart, sold nothing but skunk weed.

I knocked.

He knocked.

I knocked again.

The wizard Crystal Fart opened the door stark raving naked. When he noticed that this unsettled me, Crystal Fart tried to put me at ease. "Once you have tattoos you can never truly be naked again."

He had plenty of tattoos. There was a fiery phoenix, a celtic horse, a reptilian skull, and the saucy garters of a blonde girl's butt. The tattoos were flamboyant in a technicolor way, but the shocking parts were the clumps of body hair he had growing out of the most peculiar places.

His wife was naked too but she had no tattoos. She was wearing a large, pointed, crumpled tinfoil hat atop her beautiful naked torso. It was easy to ignore the tinfoil hat when my attention was diverted by her yummy breasts.

"Holly", she said her name was as she strolled across the room. Good golly Miss Holly, yummy Holly, with the heavenly body. Wholly Holly, heavenly hole, yummy Holly with the scrumptious tummy, looking good in the tinfoil cap. Perhaps, I mused, she was an exotic princess from Mars.

"The weed is in the back room," Crystal Fart said, leading me through the old adobe house, weaving through corridors of contraband and artifacts. There were little piles of electronic equipment everywhere: amplifiers, microphones, equalizers, and mixers. As we walked past the bookshelf, his body bobbed to the reggae beat of Sly and Robbie. The

dressers were covered with glittering gemstones and an amazing selection of archeological finds: new and old, exotic and ordinary, purchased and scavenged.

The wizard Crystal Fart removed some bone kind bud from a large Hefty bag and began balancing the scales with an intricate series of alchemical calculations, complex computations, and the proper pinches and doses of potions. I handed him the money and he smiled.

"You have just made the phone company very happy," he said as he stuffed the money into an envelope that already had a pink overdue bill inside. "They run the world you know."

I didn't know what to say.

"You haven't really been broke," the wizard said, "until you have been broke in a foreign country. I remember this one time I decided I just had to go see the Oracle at Delphi in person, and suddenly there I was stone cold broke in the middle of the Mediterranean. Selling blood in Greece is totally different from selling blood here. You don't sell it to a blood bank over there, first you have to find a customer who wants to buy it. In order to sell blood in Greece, you hang out in this hospital lobby with all these other people trying to sell blood, mingling with these other people looking to buy blood, a roomful of bait and predators. It reminded me of a singles bar for vampires."

"So, I'm lying on this table with a needle in my arm, and the guy the next table over suddenly passes out. The technician and the nurse rush over, but instead of reviving him, they leave the needle in his arm and prop his feet up on a stack of medical books, leaving him to drain dry while unconscious.

The beautiful part about giving blood in Greece is that there are absolutely no limits, as long as you can find someone who wants to buy blood, you can legally sell it to them—no questions asked. I sold six times in four days and took off for Morocco to score some hashish.

He cackled as he stuffed the marijuana into a plastic baggy and licked it closed as heavenly Holly entered the room. She removed her tinfoil hat, revealing a head of freshly henna-ed hair, wet fluorescent red locks cascading over her shoulders like sculpted stone, one strand dipping down to curl around a bare nipple. The bright, bright red locks of hair then confirmed my theory about heavenly Holly being a princess from Mars.

Crystal Fart escorted me to the front door, politely welcoming me to return. I turned the knob and stepped into the night, the streetlights casting long, sinister shadows.

I strolled down the sidewalk, whistling, hopped the curb, and entered my automobile. My death metal high school friends waited impatiently. They looked at me expectantly, wondering whether the quest had been successful.

"First time I ever bought pot from a naked guy," I said.

They were impressed.

We twisted a fat one, sparked it up, and drove away.

# The Name

GREGORY FITZSIMMONS

"IN THE SPHERE I AM EVERYWHERE THE CENTER, AS SHE, THE CIRCUMFERENCE, IS NOWHERE FOUND."—ALEISTER CROWLEY

The Name. She never liked to say her name. But why should she have. She hadn't chosen it and, for her own reasons, had inwardly divorced herself from the life it represented, the sheltered existence of always having lived in the same place, a little girl who needed protection long after she'd become an adult. My grandmother and great uncles and aunts treated my mother more like a sister than a new generation. She was the baby who needed watching over, the precious one who must not be allowed to stray too far. My mother's name probably represented to her all the things that had prevented her from doing what she wanted. When she finally broke free, she broke free in the only way she could: by breaking down and refusing to identify herself with the name she'd been given and the person that had been molded by that name. She went insane. She went out the back door and ignored the voices calling to her.

"Matilda!"

"It's a black servant's name," she'd rave, unwittingly showing off the racism that's a curse to the envious, low-middle-class white. "It must have been when I was Scarlet O'Hara. We must have had a maid named Matilda on the plantation. People who didn't like me, the Evil Ones, would call me that. They wanted to sell me into slavery..."

Her life was a sort-of slavery. Catholic slavery. She'd grown up with so many Italian-American adults fawning over her that she must have felt completely stifled, so she got out the only way she could and renounced her name.

My mother decided not to be herself anymore.

But it wasn't that easy. You can't stop being yourself unless everyone around you, the whole world, agrees to let you do it. And they won't.

"THERE ARE THOSE WHO WILL MAINTAIN THAT THE SCHIZO IS INCAPABLE OF UTTERING THE WORD I, AND THAT WE MUST RESTORE HIS ABILITY TO PRONOUNCE THIS HALLOWED WORD."—GILLES DELEUZE AND FELIX GUATTARI, *ANTI-OEDIPUS*.

I recall my childish attempts to make my mother use the word "I". Or, accurately, my attempts to make her sign her name.

"ALL OF WHICH THE SCHIZO SUMS UP BY SAYING; THEY'RE FUCKING ME OVER AGAIN. I WON'T SAY I ANYMORE, I'LL NEVER UTTER THE WORD AGAIN; IT'S JUST TOO DAMN STUPID. EVERY TIME I HEAR IT, I'LL USE THE THIRD PERSON INSTEAD, IF I HAPPEN TO REMEMBER TO. IF IT AMUSES THEM. AND IT WON'T MAKE ONE BIT OF DIFFERENCE...HE IS TOO FAR REMOVED FROM THESE PROBLEMS, TOO FAR PAST THEM."—GILLES DELEUZE AND FELIX GUATTARI, *ANTI-OEDIPUS*.

When I was in the fifth grade, things had begun to close in on her. They, the Evil People, had become more malevolent and inimical. Her paranoia increased to a feverish pitch. She was afraid to leave the apartment. There were microphones in the sink and cameras in the corners. She hung a warning bell inside the door and posted a sign on the outside which read "Fuck Off". She refused to even be seen by my grandmother and Aunt Nancy, who lived in the apartment downstairs. My mother hid in fear from everyone but me and

my two sisters.

Her illness could no longer be ignored, but my family tried hard to do so. My aunt and grandmother went to extreme limits in their denial of the problem and treated my mother's delirium and illness as if they were mere eccentricity and emotionalism.

"It's just nervousness. She misses your father," Nancy said, waving her hand and trying to dismiss the obvious.

"She's so thin and anxious," my grandmother remarked, thoughtfully. "She must not be eating right."

"WOULD SHE HIDE IN HER ROOM AND COME OUT CHEERFUL FOR BREAKFAST? OR LOCK HER DOOR AND STARE THROUGH THE WINDOW FOR SIDE-STREET SPIES? LISTEN AT KEYHOLES FOR HITLERIAN GAS? DREAM IN A CHAIR— OR MOCK ME — IN FRONT OF A MIRROR ALONE?"—ALLEN GINSBERG, *KADDISH*.

When I wasn't playing with my Matchbox cars or staring at a Playboy that I had garbage-pecked, I was writing a biography of Humphrey Bogart. It was an imaginative biography and not at all based on fact. Bogart wasn't an actor in my fictional biography; he was a real-life gangster. He shot down his enemies with a tommy-gun while chewing a cigar. Drinking bourbon, he reclined in cheap hotel rooms with flappers and planned his get away. The cops were closing in on all sides. He rubbed his chin and thought, worried. They probably had the place bugged. Bogey cleaned his .45 while watching the street for g-men.

During my research for the book, I studied a large medical encyclopedia, concentrating on the chapters about mental health. An author should understand the psychology of his subject, and the criminal mind was of keen interest to me. But there was very little criminal psychology in the tome, although it did contain many simplistic and easy to understand definitions of terms like "manic-depressive", "neurotic", "obsessional", "sociopathic", and "schizophrenic", so I began to pepper my biography with clinical and technical descriptions. The sociopathic bank robber was obsessed with hallucinations of money. His manic-depression caused him to kill cops with the ease of a housewife stepping on cockroaches. The schizophrenic glory he felt while murdering and stealing was cathartic.

"SCHIZOPHRENIA IS A DIAGNOSIS, A LABEL APPLIED BY SOME PEOPLE TO OTHERS. THIS DOES NOT PROVE THAT THE LABELED PERSON IS SUBJECT TO AN ESSENTIALLY PATHOLOGICAL PROCESS, OF UNKNOWN NATURE AND ORIGIN, GOING ON IN HIS OR HER BODY. IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE PROCESS IS, PRIMARILY OR SECONDARILY, A PSYCHO-PATHOLOGICAL ONE, GOING ON IN THE PSYCHE OF THE PERSON. BUT IT DOES ESTABLISH THE SOCIAL FACT THAT THE PERSON IS LABELED ONE OF THEM."—R.D. LANG, *THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE*.

With my new found medical knowledge, I attempted to diagnose my mother. At first, I thought she was manic-depressive. She was moody, sometimes appearing normal and sometimes delirious. But, as her paranoia increased and she became more enveloped in her fantasies, I found it hard to ignore the obvious diagnosis of schizophrenia.

There were few, if any, connecting bridges between things. I knew only halves.

There were blocks and bundles, pieces and drift, phrases and stories. Everything was disconnected and an allusion to something else that I didn't know.

I couldn't explain anything.

To begin with, words were missing from my vocabulary. And the few words I did know

were often as alien and unfathomable as my penis and its precocious hard-ons.

Before the fifth grade, I had very few ideas about the purpose of my cock. I was surrounded by women and felt myself to be the freakish possessor of a bodily abnormality. It was a zebra, an armadillo, a strange aberration, an ancient evolutionary line that had forgotten that it was extinct. An erection had no meaning—except as a possible omen of future ill health.

Words were the same as my dick and its hard-ons. They were objects and reactions which needed to be explained. But there were no real explanations, only more words I couldn't understand. While playing in the sunlight or while drinking a glass of milk, I often found real-time stories being told in my mind. The first narratives I heard in my head were as confusing and exciting to me as the first hard-ons I felt in my pants.

“He returned the milk carton to its proper place, and closed the refrigerator door. Inside, the light bulb went out. Taking big gulps from the glass, he imagined his Aunt Nancy laughing at the white moustache that always formed above his upper lip.”

These stories were narrated by a silent voice in my head. Although it was soundless, the voice had a metallicly confident tone. It used words I didn't understand and wasn't my normal speaking voice. But it was me or a part of me. Odd and alienating, the inner voice was the adult I would later become.

The voice grew stronger with each new addition to my vocabulary. It stayed steps ahead of me and learned new words weeks before I did.

I was never fully aware of the way in which words were added. Using a new word was never as simple as picking up a screwdriver or hammer. Words weren't tools; they were secretly planted seeds which grew to fruition in darkness before being added to my vocabulary.

“Phenomenon.”

The word was read on a page turned upside down. Maybe the word was in the newspaper my Aunt Nancy was reading. Maybe it was in the headline of a story about UFOs. I stared at the word, becoming hypnotized by it. What captured me was not the meaning and not the shape of the letters. These elements were as unimportant as the ink or the paper. Inherently, intended meaning and its method of communication were totally besides the point. The power of such a word as “phenomenon” was that it was like a stairway. The word was a place in which I could move forward, backward, up, and down. It could mean anything. I understood its multifarious meaning in an every-which-way-at-once fashion and without recourse to other words. “Phenomenon”: what's happening or experienced as happening. That's everything. Easy enough, like riding a bike or the bike itself and the way I see, feel, taste, touch, and hear it. (Going round and round in circles. Going around the puddles in the backyard. I first learned to ride a bike miraculously one day after months of trying. Suddenly, I could do something I couldn't do the day before. I just sat down on the seat, gripped the handle bars and started doing figure-eights around the puddles. There had been no slow accumulation of bike riding skills. My months of practice had gotten me nowhere, and there was no line of progress that could be traced. No history of development— just bang(!): there I was riding around the puddles with no problem.)

My mother wanted me to take an afternoon off from school and accompany her on a shopping trip. We had just received my father's child-support check for the month of



January. They, the Evil People, didn't want her to go shopping. They didn't want her to have any of the nice things, the finer things in life. They had always taken things from her. She was afraid They might try to kill her or kidnap her if she left the apartment. I was to be her protection. They would be afraid to hurt her if They saw me. All of which didn't make any sense to me. Even if—a big “if”—even if the Evil People really existed and weren't just her crazy paranoia, how could a fifth-grade boy scare Them off?

“WHERE THEN IS EVIL? WHAT IS ITS ORIGIN? HOW DID IT STEAL INTO THE WORLD? WHAT IS THE ROOT AND SEED FROM WHICH IT GREW? CAN IT BE THAT THERE IS NO EVIL? IF SO, WHY DO WE FEAR AND GUARD AGAINST SOMETHING WHICH IS NOT THERE? IF OUR FEAR IS UNFOUNDED, IT IS ITSELF EVIL, BECAUSE IT STABS AND WRINGS OUR HEARTS FOR NOTHING.”—ST. AUGUSTINE, *CONFESSIONS*.

But an afternoon without school didn't seem like the type of thing to turn down. We'd be finished shopping by two o'clock, and I could spend the rest of the day writing my book about gangsters or playing with my toy cars.

My mother behaved very strangely in the store, acting as if she were constantly being watched and was in a hurry to get everything into the grocery cart as quickly as possible. When we arrived at the check-out line, the cashier said something unintentionally rude.

My mother did not like to be treated with disrespect. She was better than that, she always told herself. She must have imagined the girl was an agent of the imaginary Evil People.

“IN MY MUSINGS AS A NATURALIST,” she told the cashier, “IT HAS OCCURRED TO ME THAT WHILE DECORUM IS AN EXCELLENT THING SOME MUST BE INDECOROUS IF THE RACE IS TO BE CARRIED ON SINCE THE POSITION PRESCRIBED FOR PROCREATION IS INDECOROUS, HIGHLY INDECOROUS, AND IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT PERHAPS THAT IS WHAT THESE PEOPLE ARE, OR WERE: THE CHILDREN OF DECOROUS COHABITATION. BUT REGARDLESS OF HOW THEY STARTED I HOPE TO SEE THE FINISH OF A FEW, AND SPECULATE HOW WORMS WILL TRY THAT LONG PRESERVED STERILITY; WITH THEIR QUAIN PAMPHLETS GONE TO BUST AND INTO FOOT-NOTES ALL THEIR LUSTS.”—ERNEST HEMINGWAY, *A NATURAL HISTORY OF THE DEAD*.

“Yeah, whatever,” the girl said, rolling her eyes.

“You make sure you tell the people you work for what I said,” my mother told her and shook a finger.

I grabbed one of the grocery bags and headed for the door in red-faced embarrassment.

“Fuck off,” I heard behind me, too faint for me to be sure if my mother had said it or the cashier or if I had only imagined it.

My mother caught up with me outside the store. She was almost running. Her shopping bags nearly spilled their contents into the snow on the sidewalk. She was angry at me for having left her alone in the store with one of Them.

All the way home, neither one of us said a word.

During my first encounter with a new word, I understood its meaning quickly and in an every-which-way-at-once fashion. I moved around in it—up, down, forwards, backwards, and side to side.

“Phenomenon.”

“Nonemonehp.”

Reading the word backwards, I imagined it meaning those things that do not exist and

are not experienced: None moneph; not moneph; not there; not existing; none there; none in it; none for you; none and empty. But what is a good example of things that do not exist? Even if I think of something as not existing, I still have an experience of it in my thoughts. If a tree falls in the woods and no one is there to hear it, is it none moneph? A question as perplexing as this one could boggle me for hours. To answer the question of what was not a phenomenon required a more solid definition of the word than I already possessed. I had to learn not only what the word meant but also all the things that it didn't mean.

It was at this point—when having to define the negative of a word—that I had to use other words. The new word had to be fitted in amongst the others I already knew. Fitting the new word in with the old was done by my incessant inner voice. It appropriated the word and cut it down to the proper shape and size, making it usable. Once a new word was fitted in amongst the other words, I lost track of it. The inner voice properly classified, tailored, and placed words in my head, arranging them in a confusing menagerie, a zoo. The voice correctly used the words in order to explain things I felt I didn't understand. The words in my head—the words the voice used, the words I used—talked a lot without really knowing or saying anything.

My mother had a large collection of fantasy names. This collection could be separated into two equal divisions. First were the names of the many famous people she believed she was or had been. The second half of her name collection consisted of a large horde of fictional names. I do not know if she conceived of separate personas that went along with each of these fictional names, but I think not. Every name was her and only her—a gallery of mirrors, a funhouse. They were a catalog of her many states of mind, moods, and desires. I am not sure what each name actually stood for, specifically. Perhaps each name was just one further step away from her real name. The fictional names included Amy Falls, Ann Falls, Cossete Lee, Elizabeth Bathory, Connie Mason, Jullie Kellog, and Dora Steele.

Usually she grudgingly accepted the official use of her real name, the name she'd been given. Without comment, she received mail addressed to "Matilda Fitzsimmons" and signed her legal name when endorsing checks. It was as if she were willing to admit that there was a limit to her beliefs and fantasies. But I think, in truth, she viewed with pity and superiority those who demanded she use her legal name. She went along with the game without it changing her one bit. Her consenting to these demands was carried out in the same manner as I imagine the Pope carrying out his audiences with protestant clergy and Jewish rabbis: she knew she was right—and they were lost—but played along in the spirit of tolerance.

Now, with the increase in her paranoia, she no longer wished to identify herself at all with her real name. She refused to sign my excuse note for the missed afternoon of school when I had went shopping with her. When I insisted, she slapped my face and accused me of being in cohorts with her enemies.

I went to the apartment downstairs and told my grandmother and aunt about my missed afternoon of school and the unsigned excuse note. I pointed out the red mark on my face where she had slapped me and confessed to them my worries that there was something mentally wrong with my mother. I explained to them the material I had half-digested from the medical encyclopedia and told them what I believed was her ailment.

"They call it schizo-fren-eeah," I said. "It's the most common sick-oh-sus. That's why she acts the way she does."

They refused to believe me. I had cut school on my own, they said. I had been a "bad boy" and that was why my mother had slapped me and refused to give me an excuse note. There was nothing wrong with my mother.

I argued with them: they'd seen the way she behaved, had heard the things she said, and it should all add up quite easily. How long were they going to deny it—it was obvious. Finally, I convinced them that she was ill. But they resisted doing anything about it.

"Doctors could help her," I suggested.

She didn't need a doctor, I was told. She was just depressed and would get over it. It was a bad thing, but life was filled with bad things and sadness. My father had left her to care for a small boy (who misbehaved and cut school), and her life was hard. There was nothing unusual if she wasn't taking it well. She would get better on her own, with time. Meanwhile, my grandmother would write an excuse note for me to bring to school.

I refused this offer.

"I am not going to go back to school until my mother signs her own name to a note. There's something wrong with her and she needs help. If you don't want me to go to school, then you can wait for as long as you want before you do something" I said, crossing my arms and scowling.

I missed school for five consecutive weeks. And, even then, my mother had still not signed her real name to the excuse note. But something was done about her illness: she was hospitalized.

# you could, on *any-other-night*

CHRISTOPHER FRANKS

Well, you could do that. You could come home *as if it was any-other-night*, and I know how it goes on *any-other-night*. You could unlock the door, and lock it again once you are inside. Set your keys on that little round table in the hallway. You could hang up your coat. Slip your shoes off, and set them next to the others underneath the coats hanging on the wall. You could take a minute to stretch your over stressed shoulder and back muscles which have been neglected all day long. Of course, you could do this all in the dark you know your way around your apartment, you know what is where, you could have no reason to turn on the lights, you could be perfectly safe like *any-other-night*.

You could go into the kitchen, and get a drink. You haven't had a drink in a while, because you don't like the coffee at work. You could bring your own, but why waste the time? Maybe you could slap some leftover into the microwave, it would create a little light, light enough to find the salt and pepper. You could turn the television on, more for background sound than anything else while you eat some leftover.

You could go over to the window and look at the apartments across the way. You could see practically all dark windows, as you could *this* late on *any-other-night*. You might strain your eyes to see into the two or three windows which still have their lights on. You could see a party going, or late night domestic dispute, or maybe the sexual act itself which led to the dispute. You could get bored of this being as you can't see much, and if you used binoculars, why then you would probably end up feeling like a voyeur. From boredom, you could turn the television off obliterating all light in the room. Maybe turn the radio on, softly so as not to disturb any other residents, and as a replacement background sound for the television.

You could go into the bathroom, and you could draw a bath. Then, you could take off your clothes, which smell of a hard day's work, and throw them into the hamper. You could proceed to soak in the bathtub with a wash cloth over your eyes for an hour or so. Simply laying there in the warm bathtub, like laying in a rain drop in the summer on a yellow afternoon. You could then get out of the bath and dry off, throw on your robe, and brush your teeth and all the other *any-other-night* sleep preparation rituals.

After all that is through, you could go back out into the living room and fall onto the couch, because you could still have not had time to cleanse the bedroom of the odor and images which you might not want to deal with yet. And then on the uncomfortable couch, you could attempt to go to sleep, there in the open, as vulnerable and naked as you were in the bathtub, only there is no door, now. But it is *any-other-night*, and you could be perfectly safe. And then...

I could not be in your apartment. I could not have sat here in the corner, of the very room you could now be attempting to sleep in, ever since and before you came home, like *any-other-night*. I could not be sitting there *still*, watching you attempt to sleep on the couch, mere feet from where I could be sitting.

# untitled

CHRISTOPHER FRANKS

walking the halls attempting to find something, but that something isn't quite clear in his mind. every hall is a dead end and all of the rooms are vacant. why does he continue on? he's not even sure if he is continuing on or if he stuck hack in the same rut he thought he had just escaped from. he's better off on his own, or so he keeps telling himself. he likes to move, if he stops moving he just gets stuck in another hole. it was hard to keep moving with them, because they all wanted to go in different directions. that's how he ended up here, where ever here is, but hole is probably too lenient of a description for this place.

this place is cold. not temperature cold, but the kind of cold you feel inside your mind, when all you want to do is leave because something inside says, "go". doors everywhere but none of them lead anywhere, most of them open to brick walls. there are no windows either, all of the light is artificial, every breeze is artificial, the "cleanliness" is even artificial. the fluorescent lights on the ceiling illuminate the halls, but where is the breeze coming from? so many bad ideas racing around with so little room hidden under a shroud of white which reeks of bleach. it's the kind of place that seems so unassuming something has to be wrong with it. it's the beginning of every night terror. this is the new frontier, but the pioneers of old where outdoors. there is a kind of certain ness to the the 'vide expansions outside, but inside where everything is balled up and compressed there is no telling what comes next. the best thing to do would be to go outside. then again he can hardly find inside now let alone go outside.

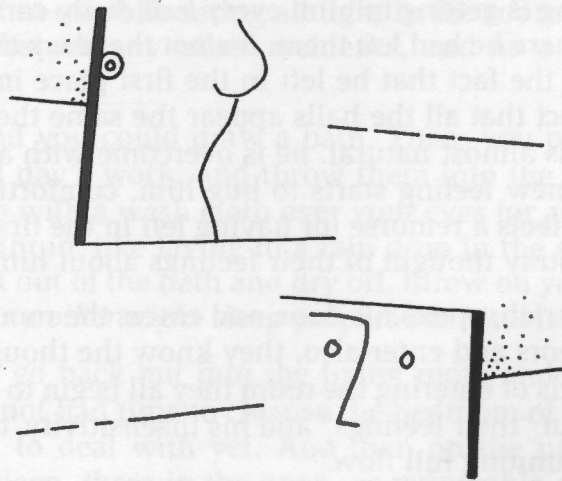
this wandering is getting to him, every hall every corner looks the same. so he decides to go back to where he had left them. it's not that easy of a decision, he knows that they will probably rub the fact that he left in the first place in his face. but what else can he do? despite the fact that all the halls appear the same the route back to the room he had left them in seems almost natural. he is overcome with a strange sense of "home" the closer he gets. this new feeling starts to bug him. comforting in a way but there is more to it than that. he feels a remorse for having left in the first place. as he reaches the door he is hit with the stray thought of their feelings about him having left earlier.

he turns the knob, opens his door, and enters the room. simultaneously, as if on cue, they open their doors and enter also. they know the thoughts running through his mind and within seconds of entering the room they all begin to blame him for leaving. they all start weeping about "their feelings" and his insensitivity. their words shoot from their mouths like faucets running full flow.

it is as if he has been thrown into a pool of what they are saying and what he is thinking, it's all the same. he is struggling in their blame trying to reach the other end of the pool which seems so very far away. his self blaming thoughts seep out of his skin becoming one with the contents of the pool, which is gaining consistency the closer he gets to his destination. his muscles are over stretched and he feels like their is more lactic acid running through his limbs than blood. he gives up on going forward and focuses all that remains of his strength on stay up. the pool has become like the earth in its infancy at an accelerated rate, life has begun. the blaming has become millions of small organisms which are slithering around his body. his stomach churns with the waves which have started because of all the movement in the pool. the organisms surround his body adding

mass, slowly pulling him down. his body hits a peak and adrenaline rushes through his body, with new found vitality he begins to inch forward once again. but this burst of energy doesn't last long and he goes back to struggling to stay up. he is almost to the point of giving up...

all of a sudden a strange high pitch cry pierces the struggle, it's a stray cat calling out for its companion. this calling brings him to reality almost instantly. he is standing in the middle of an all white room, like all the others he had looked into earlier but this one is different this room is full of mirrors. one of the walls is actually a gigantic mirror, there are mirrors of varying sizes and shape covering most of the other walls, and free standing fun house mirrors are placed towards the comers of the room. also right in front of him, parallel to the door behind him, is a window. it was here that breeze had come from all along and the cries of the cat where coming through it also. at this point it all makes sense to him, for that reason he leaves the room and starts wandering the halls again. forgetting again. but what else can he do?



WALT PHILLIPS

# The Used Car Guy

JOHN GREY

He sees woman,  
he thinks sucker.  
He likes this job  
because he figures  
here's the one place  
where he can totally  
bamboozle them.  
Okay, so women aren't  
as dumb around cars  
as they were in  
his father's day  
and they've been  
dealing with con-men  
all their lives  
so they're a lot more  
battle-hardened  
than you'd expect  
and most of them  
have learned the hard way  
how not to be taken in,  
or how to strike a bargain,  
cut a deal,  
as well as,  
if not better than,  
any man.  
Shit, there was  
one even took  
him to the cleaners,  
and another he fell for hard  
who told him  
to go fuck himself,  
and he cried worse  
from that hurt  
than for a thousand  
dumb females  
he couldn't talk into  
taking a lemon off his lot.

# The Perils of Haggerty (an excerpt)

ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER

Haggerty's dreams during this time were like sky rockets flooding the night of his sleep with awesome light. He was dismantled by the light and reconstructed.

One night he dreamed that he was in a vaudeville show in an old theatre in the Thirties. Jesus Christ and Buddha were stand-up comics. Jesus kept slapping the Buddha in the face with a huge padded glove.

"You want to hear the sound of one hand clapping? I'll show you the sound of one hand clapping:" Jesus said and slapped him again.

Buddha turned to the Virgin Mary who was playing a ukelele and dancing a hula in a grass skirt.

"Momma, he hit me!" Buddha cried.

"Well, you must have done something to him," Mary said, hitting a hot lick and swinging her hips.

Jesus slapped him again.

"How many angels can sit on the head of a pin?" Jesus asked. "I give up," said Buddha.

Jesus slapped him again.

"All those angels with pinholes in their asses," Jesus said. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and ends up with pinholes in his ass?"

"I give up," Buddha said. Jesus slapped him again.

The Holy Ghost in a dirty sheet floated out of the wings dangling from a harness tied to a thick rope. He landed with a thud.

"Ouch." said the Holy Ghost. Jesus slapped him.

"Momma, he hit me." the Holy Ghost cried.

"Fuck off," said Mary. "Can't you see I'm doing my act?" She dropped her grass skirt and, turning her back to the audience, swung her naked hips with abandon, gazing at them over her shoulder. Then she turned to face the audience, hips still swinging. "This day shall you be with me in Paradise, Baby," she sang and threw a bump.

Haggerty stood off to one side, feeling uncomfortable because he didn't know what his part in the act was. Jesus came up to him. "Do something," he said. "The show's dragging."

"I don't know what to do," Haggerty said.

Jesus slapped him with his glove and did a little tap dance. Haggerty started to cry.

The audience applauded.

"You must be the Town Crier," Jesus quipped. The audience roared with laughter.

Haggerty cried harder. More applause. Haggerty stumbled around the stage crying while



Jesus followed, pummeling him with the big glove.

More applause.

The applause stirred something very deep in Haggerty and he began to cry harder than ever. He stumbled past the Buddha crying his heart out. The Buddha put out a foot and tripped him. Haggerty fell sprawling. The audience roared.

Haggerty sat in the middle of the stage crying. The Virgin Mary danced around him, swinging her hips. "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise, Baby," she sang.

The orchestra took it up and the music swelled. Buddha and Jesus linked arms and did a soft shoe. The lights grew brighter and brighter. A big spot focussed on Jesus as he stepped to the center of the stage and faced the audience. The lights pulsated to the sound of the music. Jesus spread his arms wide.

"It is finished!" he cried.

The music soared, the lights grew brighter, more vibrant and then, in an instant, vanished and the stage was in darkness.

Haggerty woke in the night crying sweet tears on Lila's tiny breast.



FROM THE SKETCHBOOK  
OF FRED JACKSON

# christian schad: self-portrait with model, 1927

GERALD LOCKLIN

her nose is pointy as her nipples,  
jet hair as sharp as fingernails.

a glimpse of red silk stocking,  
black bow 'round one waist,  
black hair beneath her arms, eyes darkly lined.

in his transparent shirt, the artist  
seems to feel that he is sexier than she.  
and, scowling, handsomer. whereas, in fact,  
his ego blocks the view that we would  
otherwise have of her sex.

in the background, a single daisy  
rises, comically.



FROM THE SKETCHBOOK  
OF FRED JACKSON

# triple dipping

GERALD LOCKLIN

although i've been on my own  
crazy but effective diet  
for a few years now,  
i allowed myself a piece of chocolate cake  
dripping with a chocolate-liquor sauce  
after lunch today.

this was partly because  
i wasn't paying for it  
and i knew how much i would be  
if i were.

it was also, though, because i'd read  
in the last couple of months  
that chocolate has something of the same  
effect on brain chemistry  
as marijuana and as sex.  
i figured if i were going  
to get fat again,  
i'd feel less bad about it  
if my brain thought  
i was getting  
stoned and laid  
along the way.

going to show the story for which the C.A. ...  
Willy assured me that the ...  
a few more minutes about Gerald ...  
out. He was a preoccupied man.

The walk home ...  
Ben ...  
during the ...  
the ...

As his ...  
As his ...  
As his ...

As his ...  
As his ...  
As his ...

# The TV Bandit

CHRISTOPHER M.

"It's the strangest gol'darned thing."

"What's that, Ben?"

"This fuckin' TV bandit."

"This who?"

"The TV bandit. Ain't you been readin' the weekly news? Seventeen TV sets been stolen from our town in the last month. But, that's it, just the TVs, no jewelry, no silverware, no tools, nothin' else. Just goddamn TVs."

"Those poor bastards."

"Who?"

"All them families without their TVs. What are they gonna do? Must be a real sicko out there takin' away everyone's TVs."

"Fuckin' psychopath. How much can a guy get for a shitty TV set anyway? He doesn't even take their VCRs."

"Does Sheriff Bailey have any leads on him yet, like fingerprints or somethin'?"

"Hell no! This guy is a real pro, can't even tell he's been in the place. The TV is just gone."

"Well Ben, I've gotta get to the wife and kids. I'll see ya after the weekend."

"Yeah Jerry, but cover your ass, he might be comin' for your tube next, you never know. You can bet he ain't gonna get my set without a fight."

Ben Patrickson was an industrious man, in the crudest sense of the word. He was also quite the patriot, and defender of law and order, in his own special twisted way. He liked to think that he was clever, but his track-guided lawnmower is still full of cobwebs in his reeking garage, while his half-dead spread-of-green is perpetually tripping his kids with the rusted and uprooted "tracks" laid down five years before.

Anyway, the TV bandit had him truly intrigued. Images of the glory that went along with catching a major criminal ripped through his mind on the long walk from the factory. A hero, he has always wanted to be a hero.

As his worn, gritty hand turned the broken knob on the back door of his dilapidated two-story colonial shed, as his three successors to all he had gained dove for his legs, and as the smell of overcooked meatloaf burned his nostrils; he was thinking about explosives.

That night at dinner, Ben seemed to be distracted while Molly, his overworked and undercared-for wife, attempted to pry into his thoughts, his day, his life. Bobby's art project, a montage of guns and artillery taken from the yellowed pages of Soldier of Fortune's efforts over the last ten years, went in one eye and out the other. Explosives.

After dinner, the chipped plates and bent silverware were relieved of the baked-on slop by Molly's hurried hands. It was Friday night, and a new movie was in town, the first in three months.

The family piled into the truck and as it barely lurched out of the driveway, Ben told Molly that he had something to do, and that he would leave the truck parked outside of the theater for her to drive home in with the kids. This was followed by the pathetic whimpering and tear-dropping which Ben had become so accustomed to from his wife. He scarcely heard it. Ben was a man with a mission. Nobody was going to take his TV.

Willy's place was between the theater and Ben's place, so it was as though he were merely walking home: efficiency. On the way to Willy's, Ben spent his last five bucks on a twelve-pack and some smokes. Willy had one of the oldest places in town, but it was nearly invisible from the street, as the house was completely surrounded by shrubbery. The overgrowth was divided by a few worn dirt paths.

Ben took the tunnel-entrance, located to the right side of the front porch. He slowly crept into Willy's "habitat". Brushing aside the olive-drab mosquito netting at the entrance, Ben apprehensively called out for Willy, but the cold barrel of the rifle was already planted firmly behind his ear.

"A beer or your life, pinko!"

Ben immediately surrendered the saving can and gave his friend the traditional warrior-like head butt that always preceded any dialogue between the two, although conversation was, at best, minimal.

Ben lied about the tree stump that needed removal. This was his baby and nobody was going to share the glory for which the C-4 plastic explosives were actually intended. Willy assured Ben that even though the detonator was ancient, that it was still fully functional, and that if he had any troubles he should give him a call. He babbled on for a few more minutes about German assault rifles and napalm until Ben simply walked out. He was a preoccupied man.

The walk home took only three beers and the work he did took the rest. So, by the time he finished, he passed out, wrapped in thread-bare sheets and a handwoven quilt.

What was accomplished in the last eight beers was the creation of a trap, a really nasty trap to teach that TV bandit once and for all. Ben fancied himself a demolitions expert. Here is what he came up with....

The components consisted of some really neat junk-shop shit. A mousetrap, the plug and cable from a million-year-old lamp, some black insulating tape, and the detonator, supplied by good-old Willy. Ben's brain was really flying as he envisioned glory, glory, glory. Maybe he would be made an honorary deputy!

First, he rigged up the detonator to the snapping hinge of the mousetrap, securing it tightly with a partially rusted clamp. He then broke off the little lever that activated the trap, it just got in the way and wasn't necessary. He cut open the index finger of his left hand when the screwdriver he was using to pry the lever off the base slipped. A couple of "shits" and "goddammit's" later and he was back to work. He drilled a small hole in the wooden base on the side, to where the snapper snaps down to, aligning it perfectly with exactly where the whipping steel would hit. Through the hole, a bolt and washer held the

splayed end of the lamp cable, which was fastened on the opposite side by an oversized nut. He didn't need the electrical tape.

Once this feat was accomplished, he tested the little gadget, making minor adjustments where his too-hard-thinking mind figured he should. He even oiled the hinge, so there was no chance of a jam occurring. Every angle was covered.

Meanwhile, his loving family had decided to visit another clan which they had met at the movie.

Ben then proceeded to test his nifty little invention. He wedged the "loaded" mousetrap, snapper set back in position under the backside of the oh-so-precious TV, and each time he "stole" the TV from its tacky particle-board stand, the mousetrap snapped and flipped up through the air. Mission accomplished. Ben beamed with pride. He was a true genius.

All that was left was to arm the trap before the enemy could strike. The ball of C-4 that Willy had given him was a little bit larger than a gambling die and a little bit smaller than a ping-pong ball. That Willy sure was a stingy one. Ben taped down the doom putty in a particularly deadly spot and carefully inserted the electronic detonator, which had its other end secured to the mousetrap. Then, he wedged the trap back into its familiar spot underneath the edge of the television.

Now for the tense part.

Ben downed what was left of the second-to-last can of beer and gingerly stretched the plug to the outlet. The nearest outlet was occupied by the TV's plug and the shitty little clock radio on top of it. Well, he couldn't unplug the TV. What if he wanted to watch it? If the bandit didn't come for a week, he wasn't going to miss Monday night football, oh no. The clock? That might make the bandit suspicious. If the clock wasn't working, the bandit might check the outlet, and then all of Ben's plans would be ruined.

Ben raced and stumbled down the basement steps. He knew where an extension cord was, somewhere near the Christmas lights, yeah, there weren't any outlets near the corner where the tree went that first year and he had to pop for an extension cord at Bart's Hardware. Thank god he remembered.

He got some use out of that electrical tape when he joined the lamp cable with the extension cord. The union was a little loose, and he definitely did not want to risk a disconnection. Good thinking Ben. At last, after double checking his work, he pensively swallowed a thick gob of his rancid, moldy saliva and plugged in the cable. No sparks. No explosion. Relief.

Ben ran to the basement to peek at the fuse box to make sure everything was in working order, then sat down with his last beer to admire his work. There's nothing quite as satisfying as making a detonation switch out of a mouse trap.

Ben went to his bed and fell asleep happy.

Ben woke up two hours later to the crashing blast of a massive explosion. Half his house was missing.

I guess that when his wife and kids came home, Bobby tripped over a beer can and fell into the TV. And.....the C-4 blew the living shit out of them.

# ...TILT...

## CATFISH McDARIS

On the lam from a marijuana beef, the state west seemed more favorable to my predicament and behavior. Radical. Outrageous. Entirely without redemption or qualm.

The old Argonaut Hotel sat empty, semi-condemned across from Argonaut Liquor. Every wino, burn, vagabond, renegade, hippie, hobo, hooker, and hustler scored booze there.

Promising the landlord to fix up his building, we started the first in-town commune. As one of the founding members and most lucrative pussy getting smokable drug dealer, it's most appropriate that I relate the following events surrounding my inhabitation of the above mentioned den of inequity and the catastrophic calamity.

I would ask you to refer to me as Jason, but the statute of limitations on all my supposedly criminal acts have expired. Our fucking president smoked dope, incorrectly. So I'm not considered such an outlaw anymore.

Skeletons dancing from closets. Timothy Leary's ghost leering. Jerry Garcia grateful and...

Orange sunshine, blue cheer, purple microdot, blotter, chocolate mescaline, peyote doorways to gladness sadness madness. Save the ladybug. Talk to plants. Pet rocks. Free love. Jail hate. Blow jobs. Tuna fish. Smoke morning glory. Climb trees. Fuck pigs. Save green stamps.

LIFE/DEATH 1.Papa's little squirt 2.Yo mama's titty 3.Uncle Sam's penis 4.Worms

Then California fell into the Pacific. The world's a small turd circling a ball of hell.

Lucifer drinking mad dog. Hollywood is Atlantis. 1.Calling Aquaman 2.Arizona beaches 3.Saguaro dancing in waves 4.God's pinball machine

# The Way I Think It Is In Manhattan

ERROL MILLER

Dogs pooh-pooh on Gangsters.  
"What, me worry," says Alfred E.  
Drinking is not prohibited.  
Many residents have flown away to Florida.  
Damn good blondes are giving it away.  
Some of them are selling out.  
Frank O'Hara Rust have gotten his diploma here.  
He kept a pink elephant in his living room.  
(He kept skeletons in his closet, too)  
The news is always, uppermost, spontaneous.  
Language flows out. Language floats out.  
Language swims out. Language stumbles out  
staggering like a stabbed man.  
But what does it really matter?  
Maybe tomorrow in the movies.  
Or in a fast-moving Lincoln limousine.  
No need to be mean about it.  
Love of life, Space. The Second Coming.  
James Dean strolled through here once upon a time.  
And Montgomery Cliff. And Batman and Robin.  
Ranchers with a lot of money come up from Texas.  
And representatives from the Old South  
in grey britches.  
Night fell upon the city.  
And there were fireworks across the River.  
And Madonna came and sang  
and it was a rainy day  
and there was lots of despair  
'cause she only brought one truckload  
of music and suddenly everyone  
gave her the finger  
simultaneously  
and that was good because  
she deserved it  
and there were cheers  
in the silvery night  
and later  
a few couples hit the jackpot.  
Excitement. Waking up refreshed.  
A lot different than Chicago.  
Gimme a break, gimme this, gimme that.  
The bartenders won't gimme nothing.  
Hordes of people in the geography of eternity.  
Urbanic steel craters mysteriously built  
by foreign money, wide  
passageways to insanity,  
narrow boulevards leading to  
an Anonymous Other City.  
A writer with his car fender dented.  
A lady with sagging breasts.  
Some kind of town with blue bruises,  
forever becoming.  
Exhaust fumes, evening traffic,  
a long way down an  
anonymous country road.



# Southside Mobile Home Park

ERROL MILLER

"PITY THE PLANET, ALL JOY GONE FROM THIS SWEET VOLCANIC CORE..."—ROBERT LOWELL

I live in this trailer park, see,  
and most of the folks here don't give a damn  
about the environment, about how things look, they  
toss tumbleweed out their back door and boxtops and coupons  
and afterbirth and stale cigar butts and rotting unused Trojan  
condoms and hand-pumped green fly sprayers and beer bottles,  
of course, pickled beets and wacky weeds, pink corsets  
yellow with age, faded photographs of Elvis in a tux  
and music from some ol' dance in '57 and barbecue pork from  
last summer, paper grocery sacks full of spore-like watermelons,  
figs never preserved and blueberries picked late in '69  
somewhere along the fertile roadsides of New England.  
Chained dogs sniff and moan and carry on,  
mooning each other with their noses.  
Their land is our land, rich  
with the odor of what must excrete  
when they can't go next door, those damn papers  
thrown in plastic wrappers, who gives a damn about  
them here, in this flimsy redneck homestead where  
last year's geraniums rust in tin coffee cans  
and skeletons of '74 Ford pickups just lie there ailing  
in a creeping slippery circle of heavyweight Wal-Mart motor oil,  
and the Johnson grass grows higher and the swimming pool  
is full of urine and paper cups and bent Coke cans  
and cigarette filters from people who don't even live here.  
There's an older Southern lady who dips snuff and spits  
in the pool and a fellow with his memory gone  
who incessantly fishes there, stunted shrubs, they're  
coated with residue, red-clay dust and used toilet tissue  
and flyers from Bill's Dollar Store and Budget Saver  
and special offers from everyone but God,  
folks who'll fix your eyes and ass  
and arms and legs and car and kids and even  
wait a while for payment, folks who'll grease  
your palm and paint your wagon and clean your gutters  
and install aluminum siding on your storage shed.  
And the streets are strewn with cars parked  
from the 50's and the 60's, the 70's and the 80's,  
shiny foreign cars from the 90's, from Jackson and Shreveport,  
El Dorado and Little Rock, Baton Rouge and New Orleans,  
they bring them here to clog the veins and arteries  
of the park, just to set them there to make a mess.  
So you have to cross the playground to get to  
anywhere, past the swings with frayed cotton rope on  
one side only, past the jungle bars where ten skinny kids  
broke their heads, past the empty garbage barrels,  
past the immaculate lawn of the military retiree  
in the wheelchair who hires his work done,

you meander on past the pool again where  
robust boys from the apartment complex next door  
are splashing all the water out, their stolen Chinese  
radios booming Rock, they wave back in dirty symbols  
they musta learned at home, they  
spray graffiti on the mail boxes and leave  
until tomorrow, dusk falls on the transients dealing dope,  
and only one or two of the night-lamps come on  
'cause most of the bulbs are burned out  
and it's a paradise for thieves  
who sneak in after dark to steal  
broken-down lawnmowers and worn-out grills,  
who steal the horns and carburetors and tires and tubes  
and other accessories off our cars, thin dogs bark  
and howl at the moon but you can't see nothing  
'cause the Paper Mill haze is mighty thick  
and the neighbor's burning trash,  
his boom-box on wide-open, pulsating  
to hell and back and up and down the avenues, there's  
a crowd of kids throwing rocks and kicking out  
the windows of the clubhouse, spraying  
obscene words on the entrance sign.  
Mobile-home living? A place of my own?  
America can be a prick at times, depending on your  
location, born and bred into semi-white-trash-status  
a man's gotta endure a lot of BS or hire Biff  
to help him with it, pretty pretty pissed  
about the service, when the water's off  
and the commode won't flush  
and the sewer's stopped up again  
and someone paints an unacceptable word  
on your parking space, pity the planet,  
its trailer parks, sweet volcanic  
cores of Southside men and women  
seeking refuge in the dimlit future  
where fine fat mice scurry away  
with bacon and eggs from the refrigerator  
and big brown roaches are wearing  
your favorite winter coat.

# Janie Lynch

B.Z. NIDITCH

"O.K. I am a vitamin freak."

Janie takes the vitamins but her father drops the bottle on the floor. He is bald with a red face and drops the bottle on the floor.

"Before that it was nuts and grains. Then you wanted to be a rock star and a Jesus freak."

"Leave me alone."

"Before that it was Vietnam, Cambodia, always the Contras, and now you are the oldest hippie on the block."

Janie looks down at the table. Her eyes and face are red.

"I let five kids from five different men live here and you call me a bad father—who supports them, and I can't even pronounce their names."

"All right, I'll go."

"You always come back."

"And don't you swear at me. The door swings two ways."

Now Mrs. Lynch in her wheelchair buttoned up in her warm sweater starts to get angry too.

"I won't put up with the fighting anymore. None of the neighbors will even look at us; and Father Manton can never forgive you for wearing the rosary as a necklace to the prom and then asking that gay boy to go with you."

"I didn't have a date."

"You had Roland."

"He broke it."

"Of course, he was too normal, too straight shooting for you, so you go off to that California commune that night without calling; then you join an Indian reservation, live in Greenwich Village and Provincetown. You send the kids here for Christmas and your father and I are not well. We lost your brother, don't forget. He was the good one."

Janie starts to leave and her father won't let her move. She is tall.

"Those cats should be spayed."

"But Salt and Pepper are all I have."

"A brilliant student who could have been a nun, and this is how you treat your parents... If it wasn't for those alimony checks and our welfare you'd have starved all those years, and most of those so-called fathers are dead or deadbeat dads, anyway."

"All you do all day is work on your computer. What are you doing, finding another man?"

"I'm writing fiction."

"Get reality—the way Tom was. He knew he had to serve his country. Two purple hearts, not one but two."

"She's about to swear. Remember Janie, one swear word and your soul gets blacker."

"Janie, we didn't ask you to be Cinderella when you were younger but we knew you were

a whore and a stripper even before they took you away for those bad movies you made.”

Suddenly there is a knock at the door.

“This is my friend Toure. He is from Africa. I can’t tell you where.

“I don’t care where he’s from. We have enough troubles without him. Remember, the man without a green card who promised you \$2,000 after you married him and he left after a weekend.”

“Do you always have to embarrass me in front of my friends? I have a political meeting. Toure’s father is a guerilla leader.”

“Get that guerilla out of here.”

“Forgive me, Toure, I’m never coming back.”

“And who will support your brats?”

“The door swings two ways.”

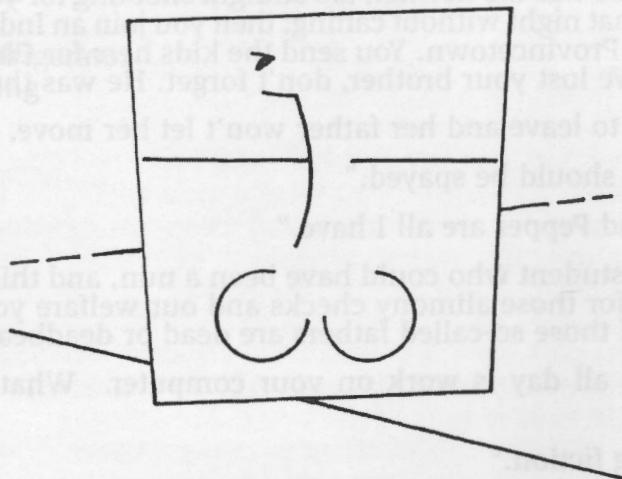
“Where are you going?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Always secretive, not like Tom who always came home early.”

Out in the car, Janie starts to cry. Toure can’t seem to help her and she runs out of the car.

A police cruiser spots her and goes after Toure for no reason. Toure starts to run and is shot and killed. Janie asks the police for a quarter to call home.



WALT PHILLIPS

# The Quiet Ones

B.Z. NIDITCH

TIME: the 1950s

PLACE: Cambridge (U.S.A. or U.K.)

CHARACTERS:

Violet

William

Dexter

Trotter

Rudolph

(all age 11)

VIOLET: I don't have lunch, William, you know that...

WILLIAM: Just because "the three" make fun of us; Trotter is obnoxious, Dexter is a nitwit and Rudolph is just a bully...

VIOLET: I dread being in the same cafeteria with them; they always gang up on us...

WILLIAM: I know, but you don't eat.

VIOLET: I have these peanut butter crackers.

WILLIAM: But every day?

VIOLET: It's better than being hurt.

WILLIAM: I wish I could get through to them, but they've threatened me.

VIOLET: It's three against us, sweet William.

WILLIAM: You say the kindest things.

VIOLET: You are like a flower; you're not like the other guys.

WILLIAM: They call me pansy.

VIOLET: I don't care; we are the ones who feel things more than "the three."

WILLIAM: They were cheating on Anne Frank.

VIOLET: English is not their strong point. Swear words are more their line. I've been having daily nightmares about "the three" hurting you. They're apt to do something more brutish to you than to me.

WILLIAM: If they harm you they are hurting me...

VIOLET: We've gotten along since kindergarten, just you and me. First I thought I was the only one teased, then I saw them punching you one day in the corridor and for no reason.

**WILLIAM:** That's just it—no reason. And if we tell, they will really do something. I heard Rudolph is really dangerous and injured Mr. Connolly because he couldn't play on the basketball team. He failed fractions three times, including summer school.

**VIOLET:** Maybe we could run away.

**WILLIAM:** There'll always be other kids; I would take up judo.

**VIOLET:** Me, too, but I have no interest; Dexter calls me a bookworm.

**WILLIAM:** Trotter just calls me worm.

**VIOLET:** If we could get one of "the three" to leave us alone, but they're like a pack of wolves; sometimes I want to tell my parents, but I can't...

**WILLIAM:** If I tell my father, he'll say I am a wimp and hit me.

**VIOLET:** Even at camp there are bullies; I just go off in a nature park and write poems or watch butterflies.

**WILLIAM:** I catch butterflies.

**VIOLET:** I feel, Willie, you are different than the others.

**WILLIAM:** I'm happy I am and you feel that way.

**VIOLET:** There's the three.

(Dexter, Trotter and Rudolph begin to approach them.)

**WILLIAM:** Hold on...

**VIOLET:** No, I have to leave, please.

**WILLIAM:** Yes, I don't want to get beat up. This is a new shirt. They wouldn't understand at home.

**VIOLET:** They never do.

**DEXTER:** How are the brains? I'm going to ruin them.

**TROTTER:** You dumb creep.

**RUDOLPH:** Eggheads are cracked.

**WILLIAM:** Dexter, you got a passable grade in English.

**DEXTER:** You don't like my English? (punches William)

**TROTTER:** He thinks he can say something smart, the creep. (He punches William and William falls.)

(Violet tries to run for help, and Rudolph pushes her tightly against the fence.)

**TROTTER:** Divide and conquer, they think, but "the three" is greater than anybody.

**VIOLET:** You're so great that William's shirt is all bloody.

**TROTTER:** Serves him right. (Trotter helps Rudolph put Violet on the fence.)

**VIOLET:** It wasn't what he said; that's just an excuse for hurting him, and you're hurting me.

**DEXTER:** We can do anything to you at any time and if you speak up we will kill you.

**VIOLET:** It's better to die, you think, than to live, with you; well, I can transfer.

**RUDOLPH:** We know where you both live and like to put rats near your bed.

**VIOLET:** You are rats; leave me alone.

(William gets up from ground and is crying.)

**WILLIAM:** We'll transfer, we will.

**DEXTER:** We'll wait for you at the bus stop.

**RUDOLPH:** Tell your parents or the school teachers and you will both have accidents.

**WILLIAM:** You don't frighten me. You're jealous that we're different.

**RUDOLPH:** If you're so smart, why are you a cry baby? (Rudolph starts beating on William.)

**VIOLET:** You will grow up to be monsters; you probably live like rats.

**RUDOLPH:** That's an insult, Dex, isn't it?

**DEXTER:** A rather bad one; she insulted my mom...

**VIOLET:** I did not.

**RUDOLPH:** She called my mum names.

**VIOLET:** Liar.

**RUDOLPH:** She called me liar. She thinks 'cause she's got money. Let's see what she's got in her pocket.

**WILLIAM:** Leave her alone.

(Rudolph takes Violet's pocketbook and flings it through the air, and starts beating up on William.)

**TROTTER:** They don't like our home life; maybe they'll grow up to be social workers and come 'round the house and snoop at our beer.

**DEXTER:** The little queer William is trying to run from the three...you won't.

**RUDOLPH:** I think this is the day of their death; they don't seem to be cooperative.

**TROTTER:** No, but maybe they could be our slaves and do our homework.

RUDOLPH: It's too late for that.

TROTTER: Any money in his pocket?

DEXTER: His hands are in his pocket. Let's see here...

VIOLET: Leave him alone.

TROTTER: Stupid girl... They're all scatterbrains; even my stupid dad says so.

VIOLET: You have no ideas. You have no idea of anything.

RUDOLPH: I have an idea of how to put both of you on this fence. Dexter, take them and lift them up, and you, Trotter, take this branch. We will beat them so no one will know they're human; I've seen how they do it.

VIOLET: You are slaves to Rudolph; that's all; he is a your master and you're afraid of him.

TROTTER: I ain't afraid of nothing, and if they arrest me who cares, at least I had some fun; ain't it fun, Dexter?

DEXTER: I hate the way they look...blind their eyes.

TROTTER: I'd like to bludgeon them like in King Arthur's time or make crosses for them.

RUDOLPH: There's no time; they must be eliminated; they're our enemies.

VIOLET: Your enemy is ignorance; that's what Mr. Allison says.

WILLIAM: You won't get away with it.

DEXTER: But we will; we are, after all, only kids; they will try to reform us of course.

TROTTER: I found some rope in the junkyard...

WILLIAM: By tomorrow you'll be sorry. (Dexter punches William to the ground.)

RUDOLPH: Even if you are rescued you won't forget this day—guys—and why do you have to wear any clothes now that you're going to be dead?

(William gets up and starts to beat Rudolph. The other two murder William.)

RUDOLPH: I think he's got it...now we better go. Let's kill her with the log.

(They kill Violet. Then they leave the scene of the crime.)

RUDOLPH: Sure, we must keep quiet.

DEXTER: We took the blood oath.

TROTTER: We don't know anything or see anything; I saw that on a crimeshow.



RUDOLPH: They will question us but we will get out of it.

TROTTER: I hope they didn't play dead.

RUDOLPH: They are dead.

TROTTER: They are dead; they are dead.

RUDOLPH: Don't show any weakness or I'll kill you. You're not talking Dexter. You look funny. Willie got your eye?

DEXTER: What do you mean, funny...

RUDOLPH: I mean funny.

TROTTER: He means funny.

RUDOLPH: Don't have to repeat it, Trotter.

DEXTER: What do you mean by funny?

RUDOLPH: Funny, funny...like sad; you can't be part of "the three" like that.

DEXTER: I'm not sad; everything's a lark.

RUDOLPH: I don't believe you; do you, Trotter?

TROTTER: No, I don't believe him.

RUDOLPH: Shut up, you bonehead.

TROTTER: Who are you calling bonehead?

RUDOLPH: Can't you hear? I heard you was half deaf...

TROTTER: I ain't deaf.

RUDOLPH: Maybe, Dexter, he's deaf and you're dumb.

TROTTER: Maybe you are both...

RUDOLPH: Prove it.

DEXTER: Bugger you... Your father does. You told me.

RUDOLPH: Trotter, come here; let's get Dex; strip him, Trotter, for me...

DEXTER: You're queer.

RUDOLPH: Come here, Trotter...(Rudolph takes a log and hits Dexter.)Now strip him. If you do, we'll be two, just the two of us.

TROTTER: You mean it?

RUDOLPH: Strip Dex...

TROTTER: But he's out cold.

RUDOLPH: It's better that way... It happened to my sister...(Now he hits him again, and he's dead.)Now you can say he's dead...he's dead...as much as you want. He was not really one of "the three."

TROTTER: I am, right?

RUDOLPH: Trotter, now you'll be my slave.

TROTTER: I want to be pals.

RUDOLPH: Tie my shoes...and lick them,like the army. Lick them, do you hear?

TROTTER: You're crazy.

RUDOLPH: I'm going to have you worship me, then I will have you killed.

TROTTER: What do you mean?

RUDOLPH: You think I don't know how you and Dex talked about me behind my back... You're just like the quiet ones, only sneakier...

TROTTER: I never talked against you.

RUDOLPH: You rat... You're a traitor...

(Trotter takes a log and suddenly kills Rudolph.)

RUDOLPH: He's dead. Ha, ha, I got him; he's dead...he's dead...

# Zip Codes and Area Codes Don't Tell the Whole Story

WALT PHILLIPS

the old composer  
wrote a symphony  
on his dirty bedsheet

you're getting crazier  
every day  
said his wife

how about you and  
your obsession with crickets  
he replied

i don't sleep with them!  
she hollered  
crocheting yet another wee outfit

# Yet Another Scene

WALT PHILLIPS

my heart is heavy  
said umberto  
then stop trying to lift it  
said his flea

they were sitting  
as usual  
on the street in front of  
the chapel of uncertainty

you are a wise guy  
said umberto  
it is because i've had no college  
replied his flea

umberto snickered  
the little bugger  
had a way of saving  
certain moments

(Thom takes a log and suddenly kills Rudolph.)

RUDOLPH: He's dead. Ha, ha, I got him; he's dead, he's dead...

# Amphibians

STEVEN PLATT

I'm at this party talking with two women. Really one, the other listening. Debra's upset at an astrological chart that says she is a "sweet little thing". She's about 5'2" with metal-pierced belly button showing between jeans and gaping silk shirt. Explaining how it is to live in LA with the gangs.

"The laundromat requires being just right- let them know you don't value your life, are ready to die, but the glare you give them says 'fuck off- it won't be easy.' You're only there to clean your clothes and that's what they want too, not waiting to kill, not to prove anything, but letting you know they can if you make them."

And I say, "like the way I walk in New York messaging attack's impossible, 'try someone else- I belong here asshole.' And playing pinball with Hell's Angels you bump into accidentally (while telegraphing nothing you do could be accidental, you are too knowing) and fast say 'Sorry' spoken with a glance, the word coming out as you turn away to what's really of interest to you, something else, not them- apologize but just right so they get enough and know there's no more.

This boyfriend of hers says to a kid removing her dry clothes from a machine "Keep your fucking hands off our stuff" and boyfriend, not knowing that its not the one that's important here but the kid's homies that matter if he doesn't learn the way to deal with things fast. And she for some fucked reason saves him, does what's right in the eyes of the gang but boyfriend is

dead to her now. And Debra's friend, thin, all in black, faint skin, light reddish hair, a 'granola muncher' full of love and shit- no eating of meat, in horror listens, stands there aghast. And Debra says she left LA when it was time to buy a gun and one of them would die and her too soon enough. And she's a Ph.D. in comp lit ("mostly Lacan, Irigaray").

When I'm telling my friend John this, he comments, "sweet little thing- salt water crocodile slips into black water."

# Checklist for “Sorry We Never Had That Conversation”

T. KILGORE SPLAKE

mother

father

brother

sister

ex-wives

sons

daughter

grandson

young dark-haired girl walking black labrador past my house each day,

theater actress, rich warm wool sweater, touch of grey tress fringe, foxy shy,

strange morning face in bathroom mirror, SOB “black out” persona who ‘must’ have shut the alarm off again, letting me oversleep.

# Poem of Lies

JOHN SWEET

this will be the poem  
of lies

crippled children will walk  
and battered wives  
will smile

i'll learn not to hate

the sky will be  
the purest blue  
and the wars will all end

drowning men  
will swim to shore

the bleeding horse  
will live

i have magic

i can make these things  
possible

but history is nothing more  
than past mistakes  
waiting to be relived  
in the future

this may be the  
only truth

# During the Debate Between Clinton and Dole

A.D. WINANS

I was in the Mission  
with the hookers  
        dopers  
                and the homeless  
none of whom were watching  
the debate  
during the sparring the jabbing  
the police seemed almost disinterested  
didn't even have time for the usual  
donuts and coffee at the 18th street  
coffee house  
eying suspiciously the alcoholics  
the disabled  
a vietnam vet  
with one leg  
limping on his way  
to nowhere

one furniture store with a tv  
playing in the display window  
drew no one  
but a passing transvestite  
who may have been sizing up  
the candidates  
but not for their political  
positions  
got in my car and drove  
to the tenderloin  
on the other side of town  
where a topless dancer  
had the attention of two  
blue suited businessmen  
with eyes hungry as german  
shepherd dogs  
and tongues panting  
for a piece of paradise  
the bored bartender  
fighting off sleep  
watching the woman  
dance on the raised stage  
with neon lights flashing  
just outside the bar door  
the poor the hungry  
the lonely embracing each other  
as the two candidates argued  
on the merits of western civilization





# First Class



# news



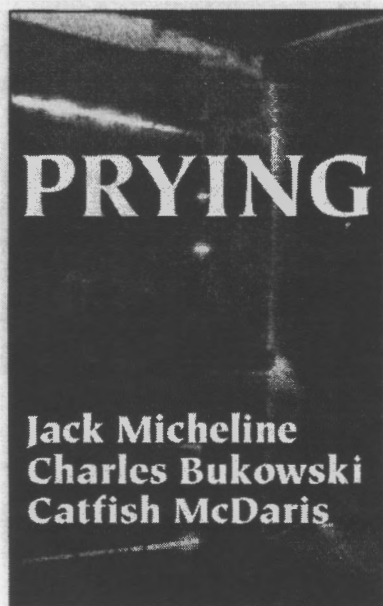
Sickened by the rape of your wallet at the copyshop? Tired of the unending hassles encountered while attempting to present your words with the utmost of aesthetic appeal? The editor of the esteemed literary urinal known as "First Class" is overjoyed to announce that Four-Sep Publications will now be able to produce your chapbooks. There are several options available, ranging from strict reproduction from your masters with full print-run delivery to your door, to full layout and design with partial distribution through Four-Sep/First Class. All points in between are available as well. The foremost concern in this venture is to communicate your work with the layout and design matching the scale of your message. Professional layout software along with crisp laser master output will be combined with my skill and the monster of a copier that hogs the whole side of my "den". A rate card should be available by the time you are reading this. 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. Plus, I'll be able to read more of all of your fine words. Drop a line to the address at the front. Nothing is impossible to work out, and I assure you that you will reel in amazement.



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TERMS: I PREFER CASH, BUT CHECKS TO CHRISTOPHER M. ARE OK.



# 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 seek the very best words you have available for me to read. I don't pay myself, so I certainly won't pay you, but you will receive at least one copy, maybe more.

There are a few important things to make sure that you do when you submit your work. Please, please, make every attempt to print/type your copy as dark as possible. Also, for the computer users, please do **not** justify or force-justify your text. Left-justification is preferred by my scanner and deleting all those extra spaces created by justified text sucks. Name and address on the first page of each piece only. Send along a SASE when appropriate. 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.

Christopher M.

# try these

- ANGELFLESH:** Jim Buchanan, pobox 141123, Grand Rapids, MI 49514  
Please send anything—poetry, artwork, fiction, body parts, sex toys, whatever. \$4/single issue, \$10/year(3 issues plus extras).
- NERVE COWBOY:** pobox 4973, Austin, TX 78765  
Send poems, short stories(up to 5pp), and b&w art w/SASE. Bias toward accessible work that depicts the absurd nature of human experience. \$4/sample.
- HEELTAP:** Richard D.Houff, 2054 Montreal Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55116  
Mostly poetry, excellent production. Send \$4ppd for a sample.
- FLASHPOINT:** Shannon Colebank, pobox 5591, Portland, OR 97228  
Exceptional "issue-oriented" compilation of sorts. Send him \$4 without fail.
- ARGOT SHELL:** Christopher Franks, 1812 Bristol Street, Middleton, WI 53562  
Experimental noise tapes available. Interesting. Inquire at address above.



# CONTRIBUTORS

**JOHN BENNETT**—His second appearance in FC, a prolific and enduring writer with numerous credits. Most recently, "Karmic Four-Star Buckaroo" for \$8 thru Pudding House, 60 N. Main St., Johnstown, Ohio 43031.

**ALAN CATLIN**—Barmaster in Schenectady, NY (home of the first successful television broadcast). An oft-published and award-winning poet with several excellent chaps. Recently seen in "Press", his second time here.

**LARRY O. DEAN**—Resides in Chicago, this is his first time here. Possesses a massive bio, which nails him down as a widely published and recorded artist.

**GARY EVERY**—First-timer who can be found in Oracle, Arizona.

**GREG FITZSIMMONS**—Working on the release of a chap-book novel about alcoholism, midgets, and blow jobs, as well as a pornographic novel about a schizophrenic hermaphrodite. First time in FC with more to come. Write: 1628 W. Ohio Street #2F, Chicago, IL 60622.

**CHRISTOPHER FRANKS**—UW-Milwaukee student, published in several small-press pubs as well as anthologies. He has an experimental noise project, "Argot Shell" with a third tape in the works. First appearance.

**JOHN GREY**—Third time on these pages. John is still an Australian living in New England earning a living in computers, writing stuff in his spare time.

**ALBERT HUFFSTICKLER**—Widely published phenom in the small-press, this is the second time he has appeared in FC. Lives in Austin, Texas.

**GERALD LOCKLIN**—Long time, far-reaching presence, with an abundance of publishing credits. Go to the library and reference "Contemporary Writers" for his biblio. Teaches at CSU-Long Beach.

**FRED JACKSON**—First time illustrating for FC, hopefully with more to come.

**CATFISH McDARIS**—Influenced by Hendrix, van Gogh, and Jose Cuervo. He's a New Mexican storyteller. His book "Catfish in the Pecos" is available through Angelflesh Press and is recommended. Fourth-timer.

**ERROL MILLER**—Writing and publishing since 1972. His work is widespread in reviews and quarterlies. New chap "The Downtown Diner", with much, much more forthcoming. First time here.

**B.Z. NIDITCH**—The artistic director of "The Original Theatre", with both national and international publishing credits. This is his second appearance here and the first play presented in FC.

**WALT PHILLIPS**—His drawings and poems appear widely. Resides in Riverside, California. Second time his art has graced these pages, first time for the words.

**STEVEN PLATT**—Member of the Root River Poets, Racine, Wisconsin. After 30 years in scientific research, he is currently teaching at an inner-city alternative high school. This is his second time in FC.

**T. KILGORE SPLAKE**—Denizen of upper Michigan, his words and images are widely published. "Available Light", a glossy chap of his fotos is recommended: Angst Productions, Drawer 337, Munising, MI 49862.

**JOHN SWEET**—Third time in FC, writing out of Endicott, New York. He has a few chaps available, and I still owe him seven cents...

**A.D. WINANS**—Born in S.F., he is the author of 14 books of poetry. His latest, "San Francisco Streets" out this year by Ye Olde Fonte Shoppe Press. First appearance.