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# DREAMSTREETS



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## Fat Enough? by Douglas Morea

Good Lord are we fat! Perhaps I should say muscular? – no flab in this issue. Steven Leech, longstanding champion of local cultural history, illuminates us all once again with his scholarship—including a review by Hart Crane—on, “James Whaler, Wilmington’s Most Successful 20th Century Poet.” While in that neighborhood he goes on to air out John Biggs Jr., who lived in Delaware and, among other achievements, brought F. Scott Fitzgerald to live here as well for awhile.

Other achievements of John Biggs Jr. include a short story reprinted here, entitled, “Corchran of the Clamstretch,” in which the enthusiasm and skill of the writer glowingly delivers the humanity of his main character, who happens biologically to be not quite human. More detail in Steve’s intro to the story.

Phil Bannowsky covers our vital local word-loving scene, in its Newark Art-House Tuesday-Night-Event incarnation. Catch him in these pages for current glory in this corner of our rich cultural life.

Question: If you had a million monkeys at a million refrigerator doors with a million magnetic letter tiles, how long would it take them to accidentally re-create a work of exquisite corpse? Confused? Read on. Trust in confusion, for through it find the clarity of playfulness. Look for Steven Leech as he experiments on the audience of Wilmington’s 2nd Saturday Reading, another of our word-loving scenes.

And if this much muscle isn’t fat enough there’s more, in the form of contributions from other local and national poets.

Lyn Lifshin strikes again! Bless her. From “High Heels” through “Afterward” and “When I Can’t Sleep,” she puts the weight of our sexual political world upon our shoulders, and the yoke is not light. Weigh it for yourself.

Gary Hanna sends us one he calls, “Mixed Message,” which—no two ways about it—serves to make a relationship perfectly clear.

In “The Naked and the Nude,” Edwin Friend gets under our skin by baring it to ourselves. The speaker’s cool is threatened, but what we see is coolly handled.

Last and definitely not least, our own Fran McMillian comes through again, as always, this time with “The Brady Bunch Joins the Relief Effort.” And what a refreshing relief it is to have disaster, such as from Hurricane Katrina, treated playfully without any sacrifice of seriousness.

Fat enough for ya? Take that!

• *Edwin Friend*

**The Naked and the Nude**

She bent, twisted, reached, stretched and  
Flowed into changing snapshots, angling  
Her nude body-compass into the  
Challenge of poses.

Eyes and hand moved  
Charcoal and paint to  
Capture the essence of shape.  
The model, in nude naturalness, all  
Ease and confidence, free of  
Any shame.

A glint in the  
Artist's eye pushed the  
Charcoal faster, covering the  
Nakedness within.

• *Gary Hanna*

**Mixed Message**

What kind of mixed drink  
are you? I know you are  
intoxicating, and can  
bring on such exquisite  
euphoria, like becoming  
alive at the very tip ends  
of sensory perception.  
Coincidentally, of course,  
you also dull my senses,  
in a careless and happily  
impersonal way, not in  
the sense of putting me to  
sleep, like a gas chamber,  
you'd never go that far,  
but you could have my life  
if I would let you. Why  
then, does nature allow  
you to be so disarming,  
and so desirable, that I  
literally thirst after you.  
How can I want you so much,  
especially in the spring.

## James Whaler, Wilmington's Most Successful 20th Century Poet

by Steven Leech

James Whaler, who wrote two volumes of poetry in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, garnered the attention of American poet Hart Crane as well as poet, editor and anthologist Louis Untermeyer.

James Whaler was born in Wilmington on May 5, 1889. He attended Friends School, as did many other literary luminaries from Delaware such as Henry Seidel Canby, Christopher Ward, John Biggs, Jr., Charles Wertenbaker and Peyton Wertenbaker. He later attended Princeton University where he did graduate and postgraduate research on the English poet John Milton. In 1931 the Modern Language Association recognized Whaler's work regarding Milton, which provided him a reputation as a Milton scholar. Among the schools where Whaler taught was Goucher College.

James Whaler's first book of poetry was *Hale's Pond, and Other Poems* published in 1927 by Harold Vinal, Ltd. About this volume, Louis Untermeyer wrote in the 1942 edition of *Modern American Poetry*, published by Harcourt, Brace and Co.: "His first impulse to write poetry came when he found himself in the depths of Maine woods in 1922, but Whaler was thirty-eight before his first book, *Hale's Pond* (1927), was published. The volume attracted little notice; beyond two or three perfunctory reviews, there was no critical consideration of the six long narratives comprising this strange work. But though few copies of the book were sold, rumors of its quality seemed to spread by grapevine telegraph; here a surprised critic and there an unprofessional enthusiast spoke up for the coiled vigor of 'Runaway,' 'Jordan,' 'Monsieur Pipereau.' This was New England with a difference."

The entire setting of *Hale's Pond*, as cited by Untermeyer, takes place in Maine, usually in settings related to the logging industry. In addition to the individual poems cited above are the title poem, "Hale's Pond," along with "Bill Sayres," and "Lady of Katahdin," which is the final poem in the collection and is Whaler's ode to beauty inspired by one of Maine's natural landmarks.

The first poem in *Hale's Pond* is "Runaway" and is the story of a young man who hates his parents. When they die within a short period of one another, at first the youth is relieved but is delivered into the custody of guardians. These, he realizes, accrue as much animosity in him, if not more, than his deceased parents. The reader gets some hint early in the poem of the issues involving the youth's inner life:

Tall boy at nine, eleven man, sixteen  
Heart-rebel dreaming of a world less lean;  
Muck among cattle, rock to Father, smudge  
To Mother, either swishing in swamp-sludge,  
Or plowing rocks, or forcing in stray cows  
Hour by bleeding hour through jungled boughs. —

Not even the lull at fall, when Father hunted,  
Lulled off the world I wanted:  
New slavery? — yes, but new faces, words.  
Father I hated and his bloody birds,  
Mother I hated and her penny-madness, —  
Whatever gave them gladness;  
I hated every hog-grunt and hog-smell —  
Oh, to rebel!  
To drive those hogs like lepers from the pen  
Downhill so fast they'd never turn again  
Till in Hale's Pond they'd hear a devil's amen!  
I hated milk like dung;  
Hated this fireplace where nothing young  
Had thriven, but dust and ash and death;  
Hated all oxen and their furnace breath;  
Hated all horses and their nervous tricks;  
Hated the hens that nested in the ricks;  
Hated the sun that scorned me sawing birch  
Cord after cord, till I could only search  
The pockets of my beggar-nights to find  
One coin of reason why my days were blind.  
I hated August when the well went dry, —  
Buckets off the Pond to water sty  
And trough and garden and, O God, what not!  
Hated these hills till hating I forgot  
If I was going or coming, cold or hot.  
My winter hate was solid — a prisoner's ball;  
My summer hate was smoldering-lyrical. —  
Oh, I could cry an oath against a stump  
Would call dead stones unto a judgment-trump.

Whenever Father and I drove into town,  
And I'd see boys kick footballs up and down  
(Sun were you tired of burning,  
As tired as I of everlasting yearning?),  
And I'd stare through the windows of one house  
On Main Street, craving: Oh, to be a mouse  
To tread that red-rose Brussels-carpet floor,  
Smell of those golden oranges heaped galore,  
Touch up and down that organ's gloss of keys,  
Make crystal chandeliers my flying trapeze, —  
And then to read those story-books by night! —  
Oh, Poverty's the world's one sybarite!

*The woods are kind, the woods are cruel,  
But out of Maine men lumber men for fuel!  
Go to the beaver's learning, the wood-rat's mind;  
The very rocks have eyes where men are blind.  
Go to the books of salamanders and of bees,  
Learn at the lips of trees!  
The woods are kind, O Youth, the woods are cruel,  
But out of Maine men lumber men for fuel!*

The next poem in the collection is the title poem, "Hale's Pond." The poem is about a civil War veteran who returns to Philadelphia to find the woman he left behind. Because both have working class origins, and much like today, working class people are compelled to move around a lot over the course of their lives, the veteran cannot find her. After being forced to give up his search, and becoming traumatically broken hearted, flees to Hale's Pond to become a hermit.

"Monsieur Pipereau" is a kind of fable, much like the Pied Piper of Hamelin story, about what happens to a group of logging camp dwellers, who live in rat infested conditions, when they attempt to cheat, successfully so they think, the exterminator.

We are reminded in the following poem, "Jordan," that *Hale's Pond* was written during Prohibition. Jordan is a temperance activist who is in tight with the boss of a logging camp. The poem is also about teaching a lesson through deception in the midst of an aberration called Prohibition. The men decide to deal with Jordan by forcing him to get drunk, but it turns out that Jordan can hold his liquor better than all of them — combined! But Jordan has a bigger surprise. He knows the location of a huge stash of booze, which he springs upon his unsuspecting tormentors. In Jordan's own words:

Now, gentlemen, beneath this blanket lies,  
As you may see, twelve cases of choice liquor:  
Two bonded, super-distilled Kentucky ryes;  
One case of ale imported in the wicker;  
Here's baby-cider with a ten-year kicker;  
Brandy of honey of the peach and grape;  
Gin — Holland gin! — each bottle wrapped in crepe;

A keg of lager beer that's crossed the sea;  
A case of real ship's grog for auld lang syne;  
And here is cognac with a pedigree;  
And one big layer of seven sorts of wine:  
Three dry, — Catawba, Delaware, and Rhine;  
Four sweet, — white sherry and a blood-shot port,

Gold scuppernong, and tokay by the quart.

There is no winter, men, with a glass of port!  
Gold scuppernong can buy a bunk in Spain!  
The longest day of lumbering is cut short  
By California brandy and champagne! —  
But oh, it's whiskey made the state of Maine!  
It's whiskey raised the camps and felled the trees,  
Sawed up the boards and made 'em sail the seas!

The stash must have looked like the Emerald City to Prohibition thirsty working men and Jordan's savvy huckster style sealed the deal. One would think the lesson to be learned came when the men found that all the bottles were filled with kerosene and other unknown poisons. By the time the bogus nature of the stash is discovered it is too late. Jordan is gone, but the final lesson has yet to be learned and the real teacher has yet to be discovered.

The penultimate poem in *Hale's Pond* is perhaps the strangest in the collection, entitled "Bill Sayres." Sayres is a man whose . . .

. . . only steady friend was a little valise  
Of papers, which he'd read out piece by piece  
By lantern. Must have saved them from 'way back  
When there lived folks to write him such a stack  
As he'd read over to himself in bed  
Through the cold night-hours, mumbling as he read,  
With all our camp a-snoring round his head.

After reading those letters over and over, during a lengthy period of time, Bill Sayres gleans from them that his father's lover, Albertine Rose Meservey, had been buried with a veritable fortune of jewels that had been given to her presumably at the expense of Sayre's relative poverty. He decides to dig up her grave to retrieve what he believes is rightfully his, but by the time he draws his conclusions he is old and getting more infirm and needs the help of the narrator of the poem to dig up the grave. With grisly description, what is found in the grave is what one would not want to speculate what is at the bottom of an old grave bed: a collapsed coffin, bone chips, and enriched soil. The disappointment of finding nothing richer than the soil is a disappointment that verges on the deliciously anticlimactic.

James Whaler's second book of poetry is *Green River — a poem for Rafinesque*, published in 1931 by Harcourt, Brace and Co. This book was reviewed by the American poet Hart Crane for the April 1932 issue of *Poetry*, and republished in the appendix of Brom Weber's *Hart Crane: A Biography and Critical Study*, published by Bodley Press in 1998. According to the late Wilmington poet, and former Delaware Poet Laureate, David Hudson, who knew James Whaler, both Whaler and Hart Crane knew one another. James Whaler died, by best estimates, on October 26, 1972 at his

home at 212 West 18th Street in Wilmington. According to Hudson's account, Whaler died of a heart attack while taking a bath, ". . . and the damn mailman let the mail pile up and didn't know until the neighbors complained about the terrific odor, and poor James died, but he knew everybody. He knew Hart Crane. He said he tried to help him, but Crane was set out for self destruction. He said 'Brooklyn Bridge' is a beautiful piece. And he said he was murdered."

Hart Crane died in 1932. The review that follows, republished here in its entirety, is most probably among Hart Crane's final writings:

## REVIEW OF *GREEN RIVER*, BY JAMES WHALER

by Hart Crane

To write adequate biography is one task, but to convey that record convincingly in terms of heroic couplets is a far more delicate achievement. It involves a closer identification of the author with the intimate aspirations of his subject — an even finer apprehension of his very pulse and successive subconscious motivations than most matter-of-fact accounts take into consideration. James Whaler, inspired by the noble vision and tragic frustrations of the Sicilian-American naturalist, Constantine Rafinesque, has taken a life that is all but forgotten, and so illumined it with intrinsic light of its own Shelleyan pantheism and purity of motive that this long dramatic monologue, in which the aging botanist pours out his recollections, penetrates and transcends the bare recorded facts of his career. And if this results in a characterization imposing enough to take on some of the outlines of myth, it is all to Mr. Whaler's credit as a poet. In so doing he has been but the more faithful to his subject, whose scientific obsessions were the active manifestations of a poetic imagination.

A beautiful and adulterous wife robbed Rafinesque of his native Sicily and all further hope of earthly love. His courtship of this daughter of a Greek innkeeper, his subsequent struggle between the claims of science and matrimony, and his desperate and lonely departure for the unpoisoned wilderness of the New World form the theme of the first half of *Green River*. But still more disastrous was the storm which floundered his ship in Long Island Sound, swallowing within call of shore his fifty boxes of scientific equipment, his books manuscripts and funds, the results of years of devoted labor. Later on, while working in a Philadelphia counting-house, he was to hear how his wife — whom he constantly envisages as "Proserpine" — was squandering what remained of his once ample fortune in frolic with an island lover. But the final blow came with the death of John Clifford, his friend and benefactor, for whose sake he had gone west to Kentucky.

It is easy to conceive how this series of calamities could confuse the vision of the staunchest spirit. Rafinesque died a half-insane pauper in a garret on lower Race Street, Philadelphia, in 1840. During his twenty-five years in America, however, he had been a lecturer — received and remembered with honor — at Transylvania University; had crossed the Alleghenies five times on foot rather than by horse, in

order to neglect no possible discoveries of uncharted forms of natural life; and had consistently held the respect, if not always the unbiased understanding, of Audubon and other more fortunate representative scientists of his period. The cave region along the Green River in Kentucky still has mementoes of his wanderings; and it is in his monologue relating his presumable discovery of what is actually named Rafinesque's Cave that his high moral conscience and lyric phantasy unite in a scene (*Section II*) which forms the poem's dramatic apex. There amidst "Babylons of stalactite" —

Where pearl-boughs blossoming in bursts of stars  
Show me a jeweled heaven of dead czars,  
And moon-tailed orioles roost wing to wing  
With mocking-birds that only dream they sing —

as this nacreous Plutonian palace unfolds before him, his ecstasy conceives an idealistic prehistoric race of river-men about him, stone-frozen, "paired lovers all, in a dominion where beauty in omnipotent with death." Before him also looms the mummy-phantasy of his wife, his "Proserpine" of bitter memory, whose beautiful image he there commits to flames, burning her imprint forever from his heart.

The curtain falls on Rafinesque before the tragic breakup of his faculties, but already in his Race Street garret overlooking the shipping on the Delaware. In a stoic refrain he is left in contemplation of the world about him:

With masts and mariners before  
Your window, street-cries in your ears,  
There lay your bed, there nail your desk,  
There leaven all you know with tears.

*Green River* contains few of those psychological nuances and moral casuistries abounding in the narrative verse of Mr. Robinson, Mr. Aiken, and others. Though if often features nature, society and the individual at odds, they are like the more elemental odds that have occupied such themes as Masfield's. *Green River* is often melodramatic with expletives, rhapsodic flights of fancy and bitter invocations. Perhaps any extended monologue must be so rhetorically energized in order to sustain the burden of so long a narrative. But here one occasionally feels a strain in the otherwise vigorous and tough texture of the verse, so felicitously inlaid with a thousand names from field and stream. Rafinesque speaks in his multitudinous world of flowers birds and fish as intensely as an astronomer breathes among the stars. Mr. Whaler's fresh evocation of this natural background (so prettified and sterile in most hands) is almost as fine an achievement as his resurrection of a forgotten hero.

## When Words Dance The Performance Poets of the Newark Arts Alliance

by Phillip Bannowsky

He pouts and stomps, amid artwork and installations, about the frustrations of young geekdom.

Head tilted and eyes a-glint, she reminisces to spectators on three sides the joys and agonies of her first lover, an older woman, and with a wry smile, confides the fragile deliciousness of her own protégée.

Next, a revolutionary wordstorm pelts the audience, while hands, eyes, and hips dance in synchronous symbology.

Playing to the judges, another poet pantomimes suggestive glances that passed between herself and her karaoke chum.

Then, boos and whistles assault a hapless judge, the randomly-selected amateur, who has given a poet too low a score.

These are the images of Worddancing at the Newark Arts Alliance, Delaware's core venue for poetry slam.

Slam developed in Chicago in the mid-1980s as a rebellion against the snobbery of academia and a celebration of the community of poets and audiences. In contrast to how academic poets strive in cloaked competition for sinecures and elitist accolades, slam contestants are judged by randomly selected audience members. "The points are not the point" goes the saying, but accumulated points can send poets to national and international tournaments. Some slam poets have parlayed their talents into lucrative careers. Some travel from arthouse to bar to basement and pass the hat like spoken word troubadours.

Worddancing at the Newark Arts Alliance (100 Elkton Road—the old "Granary") hosts poetry readings every Tuesday night at 8, combining open mics with featured poets, often of national stature, while slam competitions ignite each last Tuesday of the month. The poetry readings that began at the Jam 'n' Java on Newark's Main Street in 1997 were introduced to slam by nationally recognized slammer Rich Boucher, who managed the readings until late last year. Current skipper Beverly Wilkinson's tight ship-steering has earned certification for Worddancing with the National Poetry Slam, so that Delaware was able to send its

first team to the national competition in Albuquerque this past August. Worddancing tech guru Morgan Connor has designed a terrific web page, complete with calendar, slam links, and live journals at <http://www.worddancing.com/index.php>.

*Dreamstreets* is privileged to present here a sampling of the poetry heard at Worddancing, much but not all of it composed for performance. You will find no diminution of poetic art on account of a reliance on presentation skills. As a matter of fact, the interaction with audience and judges motivates the poets to constantly reconsider and refine their words in addition to their performances. Consequently, the standards at Worddancing are high. For two bucks you can witness the fireworks in person.



## Barriers

by Fran Lazartic

Your voice is a barrier,  
I'm willing to smash my brains into,  
Leaving me searching ways,  
To express the love I feel for you,  
Each and every single day,  
You tell me to just say something,  
Because you want to hear me say something, Other than those three words,  
That have been borrowed so many times, People have evolved to the thought,  
That saying "I hate you" is a wonderful thing, Sometimes I forget what all of  
that means, I've been studying the art of feeling, While saying nothing at all,  
Sometimes I forget what all of that means, When the feeling of silence soothes,  
Almost in a theraputic sense, That pieces my mind together, Theraputic  
sounds so theraputic, Like a drug, And in that case, I want to inject nothing  
into my veins, Three times a day, Make it part of this complete breakfast,  
Along with a pack of Newports, That calms nerves long enough, That I can  
balance a thought, On the tip of my tongue, Walking a straight line, Watching  
what I was going to say, Fall, I lost the words when you told me, That you  
wanted to be with me to make me happy, I had nothing to say at all.

## Synaptic Ballet

by Beverly Wilkinson

Some people may say there is a fine line  
Between broken and beautiful  
But the way I see it  
Broken is beautiful

I'm reminded of beautiful ballet dance  
How the dancers crack, smash and rip  
Their shoes to get the fit just right  
Grace and form are not lost  
On their basic foundation of broken shoes

I forget about the shoes when I watch  
It is the dance that catches me

There is pain in the practice  
Process in the pain  
I have to imagine that sometimes the dancer  
Just wants to stop dancing  
But the heart takes over  
Keeps the feet moving  
The head spinning  
Balancing along on faith and sole/soul  
And while I am mesmerized by the  
Gentleness and Strength  
The elegance and simplicity  
The effort and the pain

I remind myself

Something has to break to dance so beautifully



## Black History

by Innocence Bello  
from *Cheap and Poorly Made*

*If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. —Frederick Douglas*

4 score and 7 years ago, my forefathers burned  
and hung from trees, suffered scarred knees so I could wear cotton pleats,  
muffled screams so I could sport designer sneaks.

And now I stand before you. This eloquent, literate, black woman  
who is the epitome of everything hate has taught you to fear,  
education is my resistance to institutionalized systems of hypocrisy,  
whether it be 1869 or 1965.

There is still a need for screaming, preaching and pleading  
for enlightenment, justice and truth  
to shed love on dark minds, help prejudice find some sunshine,  
that once beat the backs of beaten men  
whose strength in cut tongues fought for 3/5's of manmade freedom.

And now it's my turn  
to give voice to revolution,  
free knowledge from confusion  
and help revenge every lost soul killed in racist sanctions of legalized  
bondage.

Like when Rosa had enough and wouldn't give her seat up  
and now kids prove they're cool by sitting at the back of the bus?  
As in, there's no coincidence that ignorance rhymes with hindrance  
and I'm convinced it's the man, not the mentality  
when fools bend and break over materialized possessions,  
using stacked egos and ids,  
grown men act like kids  
blast fancy cars with big rims, fights break out over scuffed Tims?

**Truth be told,  
they are only shoes.**

And if a man is measured by the clothes on his back,  
I'll start a new FUBU line,  
FOR UNEDUCATED BLACKS ONLY  
cause just like them clothes,  
we were bought and sold when they pillaged our home for ivory and gold.  
And we must never forget  
that mom used to slave 9 to 5 just to put food on our plates,  
when today, food becomes waste like whip and lash used to hit face.  
and while 23% of my people remain illiterate,  
I refuse to perpetuate this hanging repetition of ignorance. . .

Cause all of mankind began with one black man  
and the master's children were raised with black hands.  
A mother's love knows no color  
cause 1 *drop* used to be enough to make you a brother.  
And I'm here to testify that underneath wicked white lies  
manifest destiny trespassed on free minds,  
which is why my people shall fight forever-no-more  
and by any means necessary,  
we shall overcome, we shall overcome,  
WE SHALL OVERCOME!!!

# Blood Oranges

by Maria Del Naja

*for Kate*

You are categorically forbidden.  
And something about you reminds me of fresh blood oranges  
I wanna split you open with my thumbs,  
just to feel the juice drip – off my elbows.

You are essence of infinite summer,  
and I know it's a cliché, but  
your innocence is sexy.

Seven years my junior,  
you're only minutes into the land of legal, and baby,  
you are leagues away from the realm of good ideas.

You reflect a younger me, in the self-conscious way you cross ankle—  
to knee—In the  
eager eyes beneath disinterested lids. In the  
deliberately indifferent posture, belied by your easy smile, and I know...  
seducing you would be eating the past— raw.— I recall

me, at 17,  
just one year shy of your current age,  
and the woman, four years older,  
who found my innocence too sexy to resist.

I remember turbulent thighs shuddering with expectancy,  
How she made me  
so nervous, I wanted to puke.

And those thighs, shaking like  
earthquakes, like  
mountains toppling  
the first time she touched her tongue to my cunt  
the blue domed sky collapsing, and all of civilization crashing  
down about my ears,

Her lips, an epiphany,  
as comparison revealed, "YES!  
This is what sex is SUPPOSED to be. . . ."

At 18, avoiding her meant  
ducking, terrified, down back alleys on main street.  
Knees weak.  
Teeth chattering an impressive staccato symphony,  
and helpless thighs spasming, amplified echoes of her original effect on me.

Now 25, I gauge the result.  
See that she set my controls and replicated into my future  
in a line of abusive drug addicts,  
and I understand the unrelenting iron weight of that 1 year.  
Feel it grow heavier at the thought of having such an effect on you.

But since you've already got a year on the memory of my awakening,  
I reconsider.  
At the rate today's youth grows up, it's a safe bet  
your earthquakes have already passed, your controls have been set.  
And maybe—  
they're all dialed up to  
mediocre poets sporting nose rings, tall shoes, and a  
healthy aversion to penis.

Yeah, maybe your skin aches—for the half-moon imprints of my thumbnails.  
Maybe your blood rushes to greet their thrust  
as I split you open without peeling you first.  
Maybe,  
you want to watch your juice roll red rivulets down my forearms  
then suck the droplets from my sticky elbows.

But although fruit has a long history of temptation,  
and I admit. I do love oranges,  
No amount of loaded glances will bridge those years between us.  
Yeah, nothing's gonna change the fact that I was out getting laid,  
while you were sitting there in fifth grade.

So tonight, appetite grudgingly concedes a point to prudence.  
And my barren hands search out a tougher harvest. —One  
requiring more than only thumbs to split.  
Perhaps more ripe  
but undoubtedly less sweet.

## Two Verses from Blood Traffic Moons

by Matt McDonald

from *Blood Traffic Moons*, Lunatron Press, 2005

### V. Tramp

A vagrant watcher stands drunk for time  
warily beating jack-gloved hands against  
his crystal face, Radium eyes wild  
at nine and eleven twenty  
and mouth agape to the cold copper hammerstroke.  
His stomach is filled with springs and herringbones,  
and he breathes Swiss breath through sulfurous  
lungs, his neck tapped brass with a left twist.

He has curled and ticked  
his knees to wreckage,  
bent at a gearhead corner  
under Blood Traffic Moons  
for an age and a nickel tock.

### VI. Timing

The hands are black,  
tarnished steel,  
and the cast iron case cracked  
in frost,  
high atop the gray limestone  
pillar, copper hammers hiding inside,  
the obelisk a drifter calls home:  
his icon,  
his palace.  
The action is old and  
soft,  
soaked in urgent bustle and regret  
every day with every tick  
of tock and gear stripped and sheared,  
spring untwining once more for  
the pleasure of the pavement skies  
and the Moons that guide them all  
to a point of synchrony,  
less than a single second,  
instant,  
this infinitely thin slice of time,  
in which a  
beautiful catastrophe is manufactured,  
and so these filthy hands swing staccato  
upward, counting down  
to vile crescendo.  
Soon the clock will strike  
its mottled copper bells  
and chant cyclic  
for the glory of Blood Traffic Moons.

## Bo Peep

by Megan Hoffman

from *Bound Chimera*, Tail End Publishing

Little Bo Peep's sheep was a black Romeny.  
His dark tresses housed her secret fantasies  
Of wet love grass and churned apple butter.  
In her mind she straddles him,  
Barely barefoot and naked scarlet slit  
Loved by his public back hair.  
His name is Charlie and his hooves are shit brown  
But his eyes warn velvet sunsets  
That tempt her out of her bonnet.  
Her crook the prop to her lascivious pole dance  
Performed sky clad in hedonistic humid afternoons;  
Mons dust damp and longing for male intentions.  
She rubs her wetness on his nose,  
Scenting him and enticing him.  
Warm nostril breath fluffs muff tuft.  
Inhaling sharply surprised at lightning lust  
Bo arches and sweet cries pour forth.  
As notes from wool-strung violin strings  
Tuned taught in climactic foreplay.

Bo denouements and dismounts,  
Clarity of situation of fleeting imagined climaxes  
And mutton legs, sex-weary.  
Awakening, cum dust in eye comers,  
Midsummer's fantasy fading into afternoon afterglow  
She dons her frock.  
Crooking come hither  
She and Charlie resume companionship  
With the flock.

## Cupid's Henna Arrows

by Bob Chartowich

"Directly did there flit before her eyes poppy bonnets, striped parasols,  
buff boots." – *Jack Brag*, T. Hook, 1837

Dedicated to the marvelous, mercurial eyebrows of D. Vine

Whence such naughty coquelicot bolts that,  
Fired from a nitro sky,  
Were gathered by subversive sculptors  
Who did gently curve the arch red quarrels  
Into coral romanesques –  
A two-step rubricate arcade  
Before occult-blue sunken living-rooms of The Muse?

Once, Great Goddess Venus chortled to Her bawdy Child,  
"From the scarlet goldfish bowl of this My scandalous imagination  
I will pluck a brow *so* quizzical –  
Praxitelean apparition peering from a forest of Pre-Raphaelite brunette –  
And *then*,  
With which to punctuate this strawberries-and-cream query,  
*Wicked Eros*,  
Kindly give to Me Your slenderest, softest, *sharpest* pair of arrows –  
*These* – like satin roccelin!"

So now, she reads, and we listen,  
As Sin's own mighty scimitars are loosed upon the room. . . .

## Bag of Stones

by Elizabeth Hope Smith Boucher  
from *Upstream, Poems and Recipes, 2005*

She carries a bag filled with stones.  
On each stone is carved a memory,  
an accusation, or a daydream.  
Memories of everything I've ever said  
Every tear she's seen me shed  
are carved in stone.  
The text of every conversation in which  
someone's said my name  
is set in stone.  
On the other side are the words  
"I disapprove."

They rest snugly in her large bag  
with the floppy handles  
next to the stones on which  
my accusations are written.  
I am accused of snobbery,  
cruelty, cold-heartedness  
and vanity  
but she's  
looking out  
the wrong way of a one-way mirror  
and all she can see  
are shadows of me  
behind the reflection of herself.

The rest of the stones contain jealous daydreams  
in which I star as the black widow,  
the ice queen, the evil ingénue, the Harpy.  
She thinks that life is like the movies,  
with honest-to-goodness good guys and bad guys.  
I am not perfect, thus,  
I am a bad guy.

She lashes me to a pole in the town square  
with her poison-sugar words  
and icicle glares.  
With the dramatic flair of a carnival barker  
she gathers a crowd of angry citizens  
to watch my demise.  
She reaches into her bag  
and her hand curls around one of her smooth cool treasures.

She takes aim.  
She misses.

# Home

by Maranda Wise

Riding down to where the wide, busy highway meets the country roads,  
when I catch that first glimpse of blue mountain haze kissing the sky,  
I know I am home.

Home, where the summer air drips with the sweet smell of honeysuckle  
and autumn leaves set the mountainside ablaze with orange and yellow.  
Home, where warm, lazy days are spent in the garden,  
dreaming while the bees hum midafternoon lullabies  
and the nights are alive, but silent and watchful.

When I pass the houses all nestled in the sides of the mountain, locked in a  
love embrace with the trees and the wildflowers,  
I know I am home.

Home, where the forest is my backyard  
and the creek is my wading pool.  
Home, where there are no unforgiving pillars of concrete,  
standing like cold and impersonal prison guards,  
or smothering blankets of tar to see for miles.

The moment I see the gentle swirls of smoke sashaying from the chimnies,  
dancing with and caressing the mountain air,  
I know I am home.

Home, where people always try to make sure your belly and your heart are  
full.

When they ask how you are, they actually mean it.  
Home, where there is always a table laid out with good food,  
the succulent aromas of cornbread and chicken filling my senses,  
and warming my heart, reminding me of the love and wisdom blended in  
with every bite.

I see the familiar faces, and I remember our history.  
Generations of people working all day in the factories,  
then coming home to work the land they earned by the sweat of their brows.  
I see the hopeful young, just beginning their journies, and the wise elders,  
teaching us all what to expect on the road ahead,  
and I know I am home.

I look around and see the fruit trees, the roses, the daffodils—Mama's  
daffodils,  
and I remember that this soil is in my blood.  
Even when I go back to the suburbs, to the place where I've started a family  
and a new home of my own, I remember where I came from.

My heart is in the country.  
They say you can take the girl out of the country,  
but you can't take the country out of the girl.  
I know with all my heart that this is true.  
You take the country out of me, and there isn't much left.  
No matter where I go, I will always be a country girl.  
And as long as I remember that, I am home.

# Jimmy

By Hannah Renk

"Star-crossed lovers are lovers  
Who are so violently never meant to be  
That the universe has to step in and say,  
"Oh crap. Tragedy alert."  
But this never happened to you and me, Jimmy.  
We were never even star-crossed friends with benefits.

But we liked to drink.  
And we liked to sing karaoke.  
So in that way, we were destined to meet  
At the local joint where college kids and townies alike  
Could be heard belting the classics once a week.  
You were three years my junior,  
Swilling those illegal Yuenglings like a champ,  
Clinking your mug to my Cosmo glass.  
Sweet pink liquid warmed my gloss-coated lips,  
Made my laughs deeper, clouded my vision.  
Of course, soon after this it was footsies under the table  
And fingertips lingering just a little too long  
When they accidentally bumped over the same cheese fry.

You rocked out when I sang "I Love Rock'n'Roll,"  
And I hummed along to your "Here Without You."  
But we locked eyes during "When Doves Cry"  
And I tried to play off the feeling of your hand on my thigh  
As someone else belted "Hold Me Closer, Tiny Dancer."

Was it your hazel eyes, the small gap in your teeth,  
The way you went on about the men's tennis team  
That made it feel like a game to me?  
I created rules as we went along, like catching your gaze  
During the sexier songs.  
But I think it was your hot breath on my ear during  
"Let's Get It On" that cleared my head.  
The high heels? The skirts? Something had worked.

As I sang, I could hear the sounds of new confidence,  
An edge of sex in my voice.  
And when you walked me home, I just knew it would happen.  
It was some sort of college miracle—  
All my roommates were asleep and we learned the ways  
Our mouths worked in unison on the sofa.  
So much different than the duets I'd sang with you.  
I can't confess if I'd call it better.

I tried to talk to you when karaoke was over,  
Those almost-indiscretions still burning fresh on our skin.  
However, I liked theatre, books and poetry,  
And you liked sports, cars and keg parties.  
We liked to drink.  
And we liked to sing karaoke.  
Two slightly-aligned stars in  
The same make-out galaxy.  
This was no romance.  
You'll never be my tragedy.

# LUGHNASADH

by Shannon Connor Winward

I pull the stalks up with my hands,  
venturing shoeless from the strip  
of weekly-mown grass  
into the wilderness  
of nettle,  
thorns and glass.

I break the stems with my bare hands  
nails torn ragged  
to sever summer's growth.  
The skin is worn away as I reap  
a bundle of reeds  
and wildflowers.

I wave away seeds and insects,  
knock loose their grip;  
tiny bodies scatter on my skirt.  
The sun burns my back  
from a suburban sky  
neatly painted within the lines of houses.

Aluminum white ripples and falls back.  
Housewives watch from window steam.  
My harvest: weeds clutched in bleeding palms  
like quills with peasant's ink.  
My bundle, grain from another life—  
I recreate the Cradle.

Another feast-day passing quietly,  
I leave the assembly of one  
and pick my way back to my concrete porch  
with the gifts of earth and sun; an offering  
from the bounty of the year  
to be molded in the likeness of their Bearer.

A twist of braids, limbs and leaves,  
crowned and ribboned and hung from my door  
'til the fields lay folded under frost and wind  
and the lady of winter comes knocking,  
leaving in her passing the seeds for new life  
to be reaped in time with my love-worn hands.



## HAS MY POETIC LICENSE EXPIRED ?

by Jesse E. Klosiewicz

from *Foot Loose. . . and Free*, Funhouse Press, 2005

Am I tired ? . . . or just can't get inspired,  
It's at my stubborn insistence. . .  
I'm fighting for my poetic existence.

Every topic under the sun,  
Has been done and overdone.  
The many lines of poetic sages,  
Are found in some yellowing pages,  
WORDS. . . result of oppression, obsession,  
Or... depression.

Poems about...  
"HOW MY LOVE LIFE HAS BEEN SMITTEN"  
Or?  
"LOVE LIFE WITH MY CUDDLY KITTEN"

Love. . . death. . . the human condition.  
Just another poetic rendition.  
There is poetic propensity,  
to write and recite with intensity.  
What a pity....  
Sometimes, neither nitty or gritty.

Playing theatrical antics with literary semantics,  
On the stage, the poetic player. . .  
Lays on. . .  
Layer over layer. . . over layer.

Multitudinous lines of love intense or hatred bitter,  
Will. . . eventually be ground up as kitty litter.

## The Canvas Screams

by Rich Boucher

My god-damned art will show the world the world my heart sees  
even if it kills me. The truth: I think I'm okay with it.

It's always a quiet experiment that ends in an angry half-masterpiece.  
Every black is green, every metaphoric sky, a mess of purple smoke.  
There is a symbol that keeps surfacing from under the oil paints.  
A half circle, an s-curve into a star, it keeps moving underneath what's there.

A psychic once cried when she saw the color of my creative spirit.  
I said does this mean I was never meant to say a word, I should never be  
heard?  
She said you do what you have to do and if the universe can use it, it will.  
I then forever conceived my muse as a quiet, mad and angry black bird.

When I sing even though my heart feels free I hurt the feelings of the air.  
In nightmares I watch myself strange, learn to make sculptures lethal.  
What's with my eyes I see all my written lines shiver on the page like fire,  
and every time I paint using the colors I find inside me the canvas screams.

I'm okay. With this. I am.

Even if it kills me.

# Velvet Monogamy

by Rosanna Lee

We took a bus  
to Massachusetts.  
An autumn wedding,  
past the paper mill  
in the moss blanketed  
bridge town,  
Turner's Falls.

The bride was much too young.  
Vows in a blur, ache in a dress,  
she stayed outside and drank.  
We danced merrily, eating cake with  
our fingers and lying, lying,  
lying – the day is lovely.  
Congratulations.  
kissing strangers.

We were supposed to shack up that  
night at a hot pillow.  
But the French King lodge was  
a cozy inn with curtains,  
grilled cheese and a  
Dylan easiness.  
We were supposed to eat breakfast  
at a greasy spoon.  
But we had wild maple cakes  
with cranberry soda bread -  
our jackets snugly tucked  
under heavy maroon tablecloths.

Your cousins asked, when we met,  
how long we've been together?  
She was some scampy tramp I found  
on the way up here at  
a gas station. She looked so cute  
squeegeein' the windows that  
I cleaned her up and put a  
nice black cocktail dress on her.  
They laughed.

But its not funny -  
how serious we've become.

I didn't even put my hands out  
for the bouquet.  
But I stood there.  
Pushed around by the bawdy pawed girls  
in your oversized suit coat.

Like a child playing dress up,  
I'm hesitant to admit –  
I'm ready.  
I'm ready  
for you  
to enter me  
slow and  
stay there.

## Sexual Universe

by Phillip Bannowsky

The way the universe looks at me,  
I'm convinced it wants to fuck.  
The question is, is it a copulatory gaze  
or just a collagen smile?

Is it a creative come-hither from that darkest space in the eye's vitreous humor  
that beckons with the dim, distant light of the Bang. . .  
or an infusion of fibrous protein found in skin, bone, cartilage, tendon and  
other connective tissue that renders gelatin or glue when boiled in  
water,  
makes a mouth look like a vulva?  
Is it an archetypal roundness, the Ourabouros of the first ballooning birth  
or just a money shot?  
Mother Earth  
or Mammon, burning babies for gold?

Is it the intelligence of random design,  
the chance encounter of proteins in a chromosomal dance,  
Love at first sight, chemistry, flesh and sweet fruit,  
pheromonal ecstasy, and free souls on fire?  
or God's fraudulent game,  
with rules made up as He goes along,  
changing staves into snakes, wine into blood,  
setting traps to strip foreskins, snare souls,  
discard the ashes, and scatter the dust?

I remember my first love:  
Princess Summerfallwinterspring on Howdy Doody,  
a mere plank of flat-chested, painted pine,  
but I was in love!  
Suddenly one afternoon in 1951 she was replaced  
with a real flesh and blood  
though still phosphorescent Indian Princess  
with braids, buckskins,  
and BOOBS!

feeding my polymorphous perversity for two years  
until the actress Judy Tyler quit  
and was last sighted as Elvis's girlfriend in Jailhouse Rock  
on a reel of aging celluloid.

And once I even dreamed of her,  
and once I forgot which one I dreamed,  
and once I even forgot I'd dreamed.  
Gaze, grin, bang, glue, love's chance, God's scheme,  
knotholes, knockers, skins, souls, row your boat and life's a . . .  
rendered fibrous protein dream?

# The Altitude of Gods

by Amy Eyre

from *Pele The Volcano Goddess Out On The Front Lawn, Orange Crush Press, 2005*

Journey into the astrosphere with me and feel the frozen tundra beneath  
our feet.

Yeah, it's cold when you take the high road;

Altitude gets you closer to the gods,

And gods are colder than dry ice.

The special effects are blinding,

Lift you up, knock you down, and spit acid in your face.

With a word annihilate you. . .

Twisting linguistics into profane language.

To the victor go the spoils.

We all want to be spoiled.

We all envy the cushy spot on cloud 9 the gods of Olympus held.

At least the gods allowed us to walk upright,

Gave us the power of speech,

And with it the presence of mind to think for ourselves.

They managed to make hazy philosophers of prophets.

While one was speaking of long walks with his god,

Another was cussing the prison of his presence. . .

Just proves it does not matter what skin your in,

If they hate you, they will abuse you.

If they love you they will praise you,

And throw pennies at your feet.

It's all about the attitude of your altitude,  
and the climate can be conducive to vaporized virgins.

Ugly laughs are spiritual.

Maybe that's what it takes to win,

Kiss the ass of the god nearest you.

Throw in, for shock value, a few "Fuck You-s"

and pray they like it that way.

You just have to figure which way is which  
and what it means, and cram it all into a rhyme scheme.

Maybe shake a tree or two, get the sleeping aroused  
from their drug-induced state. . .

Communion wine. . . what a trip.

Falling to the ground like coconuts.

Uproarious laughter, gasping, heads lifting,

Tilting, and then that blank stare. . .

The one seen when a woman cries rape. . .

The room falls silent like dandelion wishes in  
October.

I have seen joy so bright it lit the night.

I have seen suffering that blanketed summer skies with angst.

Felt anguish, bliss, and abandonment.

It all comes to this. . .

I am thinking of quitting (but) I am poet. . .and I feel this. . . so I never give  
up.

Never give in to the voices in my head; that's always a bad scene.

I always give out, all that will come out; save the doubt.

When the altitude of my soul soars above their Heavens and Valhallas

The gods will throw floods and lightening bolts, sledge hammers and

Plagues to knock me down a peg or two. . .

They want my rage, sinking into the lowest common denominator of humanity. . .

So they can prove I am not a deity, remind me of my mortality.

My love eternal, my bile ink, my sweat blood, my life Earth. . .

My words command the four corners,

North, East, West and South.

I am the recycled presence of the Mother of dirt.

Zeus and Jupiter,

Jehovah and Allah,

Hindi and Buddha suckled at my breasts,

"Got milk?" Do the gods have enough ambrosia for all the starving  
babies?

Mine is sweet sustenance for creatures of myth.

I am so high I hold orbits in my wake and the stars are my crowns.

Journey into the astrosphere with me just for the altitude of it. . .

That rush of words, fluid flowing through us like wine aged to perfection.

We could make Aphrodite blush, and Lucifer's cheeks flush

Form ripe words of passion upon our lips of flame.

Fly with me, spread your wings, and swim into the clouds.

We could make our own altitude.

Ra's sun is setting.

New again is the sea.

First thought is ours to think.

A new world begins with the word peace,

Transformed, with a breath from you to me.

## There are men by Susane M. Peiffer

There are men who know  
far more than I  
and understand Nature's reasons  
why 80,000 Pakistani's  
died today when the  
Earth shrugged her shoulders  
like she didn't care.

Without the facts  
the math-  
the theory-  
It's a fool who looks but isn't leary  
at the cycle in which  
we're living; Armageddon's sitting  
ducks getting fucked by all the gods at once!  
The Cosmos is rebelling  
against the parasite who's  
been dwelling without gratitude  
on her soil.

Pass-time prophet of the Eschaton  
The Earth shrugged her shoulders  
like she didn't care, but  
she rends her heart  
and her soil; she lets  
boil and quake  
Lava spews and tears burn into floods  
by the volcanic lake  
Santiago Atitlan  
Guatemala  
Home of the Jacaranda tree  
-vivid, juicy, vibrant periwinkle  
colored to perfection-  
imagination  
illustration  
what dreams may come is

This-

Your suffering will cease;  
Your graves will sprout grass;  
The mud will darken into growing Earth  
and Spring Will Come

# Where X=Carbomb, Carbomb=Love

by Nigel Baum

once there was a young man  
who had a vibrant glow  
but one short day  
some time ago  
a young woman took it from him

she turned to me one day  
said,  
"nomorecutandmoosegames,ok?"  
continued, "we need  
to start  
paying  
attention."

i answer  
"No.  
We need  
to be  
the tension  
that people start paying."

and a car bomb  
cups your cheek  
in its hands  
tells you not to worry  
says that it will,  
for you,  
polish your crown  
and find you  
some dessert

it wipes  
your jet fuel tears  
from your chin  
dissolving  
your top layers  
of skin  
at the ends  
of its tasty grasp.

Soon,  
Her *entire empire*  
becomes your stage

everyone gleams

shut up

as the car bomb  
says, "crunch"  
and informs you  
politely  
how to fall in  
too deep.

Following through from our previous issue of DREAMSTREETS, and the article by Robert Chartowich regarding the history of composing "exquisite corpse" poetry in Delaware, we decided to continue the process at the regular 2nd Saturday Poetry Readings held at the 4W5 Café in Wilmington. These two poems were composed by those who attended the 2nd Saturday Reading on September 10, 2005.

## If Cows Could Dream

**Behold! The frog with fluffy feet flies again!**

Angelic warded green & gaudy, twanging on his harp  
Emitting those fragile sounds with  
echoes of music as *FROGADILIC!*

**Sing, Sing, Sing and lift those fluffy feet.  
No wonder they've got those permanent smiles.**

**Ah . . . thought the cow sadly standing beside  
the dusk marsh . . . would that I were a frog . . .**

## You Can't Squeeze Gas from a Rolling Stone

**Smooth stones shining in the sun**

**Fast cars on the run  
Beauty and industry  
Arm in arm on the highway**

**every car on the road a rolling stone smooth & shiny.**

*Looking for a place to fill up and keep rolling  
Strollers despair, the greasemobiles rule*

**AND THE ROLLING STONES PLAY ON WHILE  
WE WAIT IN THE SHINING SUN**

## John Biggs, Jr.: Wilmington Novelist from the 1920s, Federal Judge, and Friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald

by Steven Leech

*John Biggs Jr. was part of a illustrious group of successful novelists who lived and worked in Wilmington during the 1920s, which included authors Christopher Ward, Anne Parrish and her brother Dillwyn Parrish, Charles Wertenbaker, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist John P. Marquand, and Biggs' sister Mary Biggs. While a student at Princeton, John Biggs' roommate was the famous American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald. It was John Biggs who convinced Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda to move to the outskirts of Wilmington in 1927.*

*John Biggs Jr. wrote two novels, both published by Scribner's; Demigods, in 1926, and Seven Days Whipping, in 1928. Biggs wrote two other novels that have not been published including one entitled Darkness of a Star. All three have settings located in Wilmington. Educated as a lawyer, Biggs relinquished a career as an author for the legal profession and was later appointed to the Federal bench by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Biggs remained a lifelong friend to F. Scott Fitzgerald, acting as the executor of Fitzgerald's estate, and as guardian for Zelda Fitzgerald during her final years of protracted illness.*

*The following story, "Corkran of the Clamstretch," written by John Biggs Jr. and republished with permission from John Biggs III, was originally published in Scribner's Magazine in December 1921. It is the story of "a self-made horse," and patterned after an actual horse owned by Biggs' uncle Willard B. Biggs. While the setting is not specifically identified, the location of the story is most probably the environs of Middletown and Harrington, Delaware.*

### Corkran of the Clamstretch

by John Biggs, Jr.

This is a record of genius. I saw him for the first time as he lay beneath an apple-tree, endeavoring by muscular twitchings of his upper lips to grab an apple which lay just beyond the reach of his long black nose. Indisputably it was a game which he played, and he ordered it by set rules of his own devising. It was fundamental that he could not move his body, but he might crane or stretch his neck to any impossible posture. I climbed the paddock fence, and moved the apple an inch toward him. He looked at me reproachfully, but seized it none the less, and, devouring it with a single crunching bite, rose to his feet, and proceeded inscrutably to stare.

He was a dumpy little horse, resembling a small fat business man, and as soon to be suspected of immortal speed as a stock-broker of a sonnet. His torso was a rotund little barrel. From this his legs, heavy and muscular, stuck out at odd angles. A lean neck rose from the mass, and upon this was plastered a head, many sizes too large, which looked as if it had been thrown at him from a distance and had inadvertently stuck.

His gaze mellowed and he regarded me more leniently. A faint smile began to wreath his lips; the smile expanded to a soundless tittering. At last, in looking at me, he fairly laughed. This I considered impolite and told him so. He listened courteously, but made no comment other than raising a quizzical hoof. He walked around me and looked carefully at my reverse side. This satisfied him. He returned to the apple-tree, yawned broadly, and lay down. Richard Thomas Corkran was at rest.

Tentatively I offered him apples, but his ennui was not to be dispelled. Finally, he slept the sleep of a good and honest horse. I retired to the fence lest I disturb the sacred slumbers.

Genius is an unutterable thing. It is a spark flying from no visible flame. It is an excitement of the soul; it is a terrific motivation. It is a vapor that splits the rock of reality.

Richard Thomas Corkran was a strange rhapsody of speed. He was without circumstance, without explanation. No great family had crossed a bar sinister upon his unknown escutcheon. His fathers were indistinguishable clods of work. At the time of his first race his sides were galled from plough harness. Literally he was self-made.

He was possessed of an iron will and intelligence. Consummately he understood his métier; never did his greatness overwhelm him. He remained unmoved, his attitude the epitome of a successful business. Yet he was capable of a cold and dignified fury. Always was it merited, but he worked himself to it, for he had found it to be an efficient symbol. A balanced quietness was his attitude upon the track, and from it he never deviated. He raced without the slightest enthusiasm or excitement. Icy imperturbability marked his technique — an imperturbability that was unaffected. From the tips of his tiny hoofs to his absurd head he was polite, both to his rivals, whom he scorned, and his attendants, whom he considered unworthy of notice, and this politeness proceeded from his conscious known superiority.

One thing of all things aroused his wrath, hot and sincere. He considered himself a free agent, and any molestation of this right caused anger to boil within him. The hours of his business were those which he spent upon the track; at all other times he came and went as he pleased. He would permit no officious infringement upon his leisure. As to his racing it was indomitably his own. He considered all human aid simply cooperation. If it became direction, no matter how tactfully suggested, he was done. He would not move a hoof toward the track's end. In his maiden race, a whip had been laid, solely as an incentive, upon his muscular little thighs. Richard Thomas Corkran had slid to a stop with stiffened fore feet, and, without heat or expression, but with icy malevolence, had kicked his sulky to fragments of wood and steel.



Thereafter his driver, by iron order, sat braced to the sulky, and with loose reins simply fulfilled the requirements of rule. The race and the trotting of it were solely Richard Thomas Corkran's.

It was five o'clock when they came to arouse him, and this partook of a stately, ordered ceremony. There were five men in all, and I presume that he would not have deigned to rise for less. Down the field in careful formation they advanced. First came the head trainer, magnificently unencumbered by blanket, sponge, or currycomb, the veritable master of the bedchamber, and flanking him, his subalterns, two graceful yellow boys — this touch exotic — carrying combs and skin-brushes; next came two buckets, marked with the white initials *R.T.C.*, and then his *own* blanket, plaid-striped, refulgent, the one slight vulgarity necessary to all genius. Last of all was a small white dog, like an animated wash-rag, propelling itself forward with staccato bounds and barks.

The process halted; the dog continued forward, and barked malevolently in the ear of recumbent greatness, which responded with a slow opening of its left eye. The long thin neck rose from the ground at a right angle, and surveyed the halted host. Richard Thomas Corkran got to his feet and shook his rotund little body. He stood waiting.

As they combed and brushed him, he moved no muscle, but placidly chewed a succession of straws that hung pendulous from his lower lip. It was a gesture nonchalant. At length his black coat was sleeked and glossed. The head trainer stepped forward and felt his chest, his locks, and pasterns. This he endured with kindness, and, inspection over, trotted toward the watering-trough, preceded, however, by the white dog. Pleasantly he played with the water, drinking but little. He blew through his nostrils, causing white bubbles to rise and burst through the turmoil of the surface. The light, finely made racing harness was then put upon him, and adjusted perfectly to each of his expanding muscles, and last the blanket, strapped and belted, making him look like a fat, plaid-cowled monk. The gate was now opened, and he walked gravely to the paddock. Behind him streamed his acolytes in meek procession. Heralding him was the woolly dog. Last was his sulky, wheeled by a negro boy. Past the judge's house he plodded, and I saw he old jurist rise from the porch to greet him.

The discovery of Richard Thomas Corkran, and his relation to Judge Coleman, a famous county story, deserves record.

At dusk one summer evening Judge Coleman, exercising a favorite mare, herself of note, had, on the Clamstretch, come upon the son of a neighboring farmer, atop the height of an old-fashioned racing sulky, a wooden affair with high shaking wheels. Beneath this relic, for the sulky jutted out almost over his rump, careened an odd little horse, looking in all the darkness, so says the judge, like a small, black mouse.

"I'll race you, Tommy," said the judge jokingly to the boy.

"Done," was the reply, and the little horse moved up to the mare's nose.

"Take a handicap, Tommy," said the judge, amused by the boy's confidence.

"You take the handicap, judge," said the boy, and the judge, fearful of hurting the boy's feeling, walked his mare some ten yards to the front.

"Now!" shouted the boy, and the judge heard with amazement the strong, unbelievable quick beat of the little horse's hoofs as he struck to his stride through the white dust of the road. Past the striving mare he went as if she were haltered to the ground. Three time was this astounding performance repeated, while the straining nostrils of the mare grew red with effort.

The judge pulled to the side of the road. "What do you use that horse for!" he asked.

"For ploughin'," replied the boy, and he was near tears with pride and rage. "I have to use him for ploughin'."

"What do you call him?" went on the judge.

"Richard Thomas Corkran," replied the boy. "After grandpop."

Then and there, for an adequate price, Richard Thomas Corkran changed hands, and the judge that night examining him by the light of a stable-lantern discovered the marks of plough-galls upon his flanks.

No attempt was made to teach *R.T.C.* to race; none was needed. When the time came for a race he plodded to the track, and from thence to the starting-point, and thereafter at some time favorable to himself he commenced to trot. No agitation of spectators or contesting horses, no jockeying of drivers, might shake his icy imperturbability, his utter calm. The race done and won, he returned at a walk to his paddock. In two years upon the Grand Circuit he had never missed a meeting nor ever lost a race.

With something of awe I watched him as he passed between the high stone posts of the judge's entrance gate and entered the Clamstretch.

This road is a long white ribbon which runs from the Porter Ferry to the hills. Its crown is covered with clam-shells beaten to a soft imponderable dust, and from this it is known as the Clamstretch. It is agreed by county racing authorities that from the centre of the ferry-gate to the old Weldin Oak is a perfect half-mile, and a horse that covers this distance under two minutes is worthy of notice. Richard Thomas Corkran, when the humor was placed upon him, had trotted the exact half-mile in one minute and five seconds.

It is a county saying that colts the day they are born are instructed by their mother mares in the trotting of the Clamstretch.

Beneath the old Weldin Oak and lining the road are rough wooden benches, and before them the ground has been worn bare and hard by many feet. At the side of the road sways a decrepit whitewashed stand, as high as a man's chest, and with two cracker-boxes for steps. This is the official stand of the judge of the course when such a formality is necessary.

The customs of the Clamstretch have grown up with time, and are as unbendable as bronze. It is decreed that Judge Coleman shall be the ruling authority of the meeting, that the time of trotting shall be from twilight to darkness, and that there

shall be as much racing as the light permits.

First the horsemen gather and solemnly trot practice heats, each driver carefully keeping his animal from showing its true worth, though the exact record of each is known to all. Then, with stable boys at the horses' heads, they collect in little groups about the oak and with tobacco, portentous silences, and great gravity, lay careful bets. But with the entrance of the judge comes drama.

He minces across the bare space before the oak and nods gravely to each friend. From an interior pocket of his immaculate gray coat he draws a small black book, the official record of the Clamstretch. In this book he enters the contesting horses, the names of the owners, and the bets. This finished, the four horsemen selected for the first race pass to the road, briefly inspect their gear, climb to the sulkies, sit magnificently upon the outstretched tails of their horses, and with whips at point, drive slowly toward the gate of the ferry lodge.

The noise of the hoofs dies to abrupt silence as the contestants jockey for position at the start, broken by the sudden thunder of the race. Puffs of white dust, hanging low over the road, rise beneath the drumming hoofs; strained red nostril flash across the finish. Comes the stentorian voice of the announcer, giving the winner and the time. Gradually the soft light fades; the last race is ended; the judge bids the company a grave good night, and the red point of his cigar disappears in the gloom of the meadow.

There are many names great in the history of racing, whose owners have trotted the broad white road and have been duly inscribed in the black book. From Barnett and Barnetta B., from Almanzer and the Bohemia Girl, forever from R.T.C., the time of the Clamstretch is set, and it is a point of honor between horse and man that when a great king falls he is brought back to trot his last from the lodge gate to the Weldin Oak. From Clamstretch to Clamstretch, is the saying.

I have often witnessed the custom of the Clamstretch, and this time I entered upon it inconspicuously in the magnificent wake of Richard Thomas Corkran. Upon the bare meadow, around the old oak as a nucleus, were gathered many horses. A wild roan mare led the group, a young, untried creature, who kicked and squealed in a nervousness that turned from sudden anger to helpless quaking. A negro at her head, a shining black hand upon her bit, soothed and quieted her with honey upon his tongue and a sturdy desire to thump her in his heart. Her owner, a bewhiskered farmer, stood just beyond the range of her flying heels and looked at her with dismay.

"Now, pettie," he kept saying. "Now, pettie, that ain't no way to behave. That ain't no way."

A hilarious group of friends, in a half circle behind him, ridiculed his attempts at reconciliation.

"She ain't your pettie," they shouted. "She's some other feller's . . . Maybe she ain't got none at all . . . Give her hell, Jim . . . Soft stuff's no dope."

A large horse, piebald and pretty, looking as if he has been purchased in a toy store, stood next to the virago. Her nervousness was apparently communicated to him, for occasionally he would back and rear. At these time, he raised clouds of dust,

which sifted gently over the field, causing a shiver to run down the line of horses.

"Keep 'em horses still," shouted the negro boys. "Hold onto 'em."

One giant black, a colossal hand upon the muzzle of his horse, a mare as dainty and graceful as a fawn, threw out his great chest with pride.

"My lady's a lady," he crooned softly as the other horses stamped and grew restive. "My lady's a lady." The pretty creature looked at him with wide brown eyes, and shook her head as if softly denying.

An animal at the end of the line held my attention. His hide was the color of running bronze. His head might have been struck for one of the horses of Time, the nostril flaring and intense, the eyes wild with hint of action. He looked as if he might run with the whirlwind, be bitted to a comet's orbit, and triumph. Sacrilege, it seemed, when I learned that he never won a race, was quite lacking in the heart that creates a great horse. In him nature was superbly bluffing.

Richard Thomas Corkran stood at some distance from the rank and file.

Boredom was unutterably upon him. He seemed looking for a place to lie down and continue his interrupted slumbers, and to be restrained only by the fear that he might be considered *gauche*. Truly there was nothing in which he might be honestly interested. No horse present could give him even the beginnings of a race. His heaviest work had been done upon the grand circuit in the spring and early summer. Vacation and leisure possessed him for this day at least. True, upon the next day he was to trot a race which was, perhaps, the most important of his career. Now, through the courtesy of the judge, he was the *piece de résistance*, the staple, of the evening. At the end of the racing he would trot a heat in solitary grandeur — on heat, not more, and this heat would be preparation for to-morrow's test. Two horses, strategically placed over the straight half-mile, would pace him, but they would have as little to do with his trotting as the distance posts upon the track. A little knot of men, gaping and solemn, had already gathered about him, interpreting his every bored motion as proof positive of his phenomenal speed. He accepted this as his due and was in no manner affected by it.

The men, as always, interested me. A few were professional horsemen, so marked and moulded. They were calm persons, who spoke without gesture or facial expression. Thought flowed soundlessly behind their shrewd eyes. Their attitude was one of continual weighing and balancing of mighty points.

The rest were prosperous farmers, country gentlemen, or honest artisans from the near-by village, all pleasure-bent. The regalia of those who were to drive, or hoped to drive, was unique. They seemed to express their personalities best through high black boots, striped trousers, and flaming calico shirts. The climacteric pinnacle was usually reached with an inherited racing-cap, scarlet, ochre, brown, yellow, plaid.

Twilight cupped the world, seeming to grant a hush to earth. The road took on new whiteness, the meadows gradually darkening, touched by night and the brooding quietness that comes as the sun goes down.

The first race came to a close — a torrent of young horses. The wide-eyes virago was among them, and she won by a prodigious stretching of the neck. Thereat,

totally unable to withstand triumph, she bucked and squealed, dragging her sulky, that tormenting appendage, behind her.

"Shure, it's temperamental she is," said a Scotch-Irish farmer standing beside me. "But she might have walked in on her hands and won."

The spectacle was dramatic. There was a flurry of horse and man as a race was called, a rushing to the track's edge by the spectators, a happy bustling of self-important officials. From the knots of excited humanity emerged the horses, the driver with their whips at trail beneath their elbows, their eyes self-consciously upon the ground. Slender sulkies, gossamer-wheeled, were pulled out, tested by heavy thumpings, and attached. Carefully the reins were bitted, run back through the guide-rings, and the drivers swung themselves up. The final touch was arranging the horse's tail, and here technique differed. A good driver must sit upon his horse's tail. This is beyond question. The mooted point is whether he shall do so spread or flat. Authority as usual holds both sides, Richard Thomas Corkran absolutely dissenting, for he would allow no one to sit on his tail but himself.

The horses dwindle to specks upon the long white road. The sound of the hoofs dies to faint pulsing in the ears, a shadow of sound. Silence follows, breathless, expectant, broken by the clarion of the start.

The rhythm becomes a rhapsody of pounding hoofs, quick-timed, staccato. A black swirl up the road falls to detail of straining bodies. A roar crescendoes to high shreds of sound as they flash across the finish. A second of tense silence — pandemonium.

Three races of three heats each were trotted. Darkness was drifting down upon us as the last was finished, and Richard Thomas Corkran walked out upon the track.

His small black body blent with the semi-darkness, rendering him almost indistinguishable. The crowd followed him across the track. There was no preparation, no ceremony. The small figure plodded into the graying distance. His pace was scarcely above a walk. He might have been a plough-horse returning from a day of labor. The spectators drew back to the road's edge.

The twilight deepened. We waited in silence. A faint drum of hoofs sounded down the wind. Sharper, swifter, it grew. A black line split the darkness, lengthening so quickly as to vanquish eyesight. There was an incredible twinkling of legs as he passed me, a glimpse of square-set methodical shoulders, which moved with the drive of pistons, of a free floating tail spread to the rushing scythe of air. He finished.

Carefully he stopped, not too sharply lest he strain himself. He turned and plodded toward the oak, where hung his blanket, and as its folds fell upon him he returned to peaceful contemplation.

Came the voice of the announcer, a hoarse bellow through the gloom — "Ti-i-ime by the ha-a-alf. Ooone — five — an' — two — fi-i-ifts!!" A roar of applause broke to scattered clapping. Relaxation from the tension expressed itself in laughter, jest and play. The crowd prepared to go home. The Clamstretch was for that day done.

After dinner Judge Coleman, whose guest I was, and myself walked down to the close-cropped green to the paddock fence. A moon had risen, bathing the land in clear pale yellow. Within the paddock and beneath his apple-tree lay Richard Thomas Corkran. He rested upon his side, his small torso rising and falling gently with the even flow of his breath. From his upper lip protruded a straw which moved gently as the air was expelled from his nostrils. Untroubled by thoughts of tomorrow's race, he was again sound asleep.

The next morning I saw him leave his paddock for the fair grounds. A large truck, whose side just disclosed the upper edge of his rotund, barrelled little body, held him, his three attendants, and his staccato, white and woolly dog. His placid eye fell upon me as he passed, and I saluted and followed him.

The site of the State Fair was a great fenced field upon the outskirts of a nearby city. Upon one side towered a huge grand stand, facing a broad and dusty half-mile track. In the gigantic oval, thus formed, was a smaller ring, tan-barked and barricaded, used at times as a horse-show ring, across a corner of which was now built a small, precarious wooden platform, where vaudeville teams disported themselves in a bedlam of sound for the free edification of the multitude.

On the outside of the oval of track, stretched the Midway, in parlance "Mighty," a herd of tents and rough-board shacks, a staggering line, running to a quiet negro graveyard, overgrown with yellow grass and flecked with the gray of forgotten tombstones.

Toward the city in larger tents and squat, unsided buildings, were the farming exhibits, and between these and the outer road the racing stables, flanking a hard-beaten square, in whose centre leaned a rusty pump, dry for years, and used as a hitching-post. Beyond, in a multiplicity of stalls and sties and bins, uncovered to the air, were huge and blooded bulls, monster hogs, and high-crowing, cackling fowl.

Over the wide field hung a haze of dust that stung the nostrils and soaked into the skin, causing a gray change.

I entered through a choked gate into which people streamed as a river banks against a bulwark, a confusion of carriages and cars, walking women with toddling children, red and blue balloons swaying between the ground and the gate-posts, flying bits of straw and dust, howling hawkers: high-pitched excitation of mob.

As I passed through the wooden arch came the sleek backs of racing-horses, surging toward the eight's posts, and the wild foreground of waving arms as the spectators beat against the rail.

The crowd was a sluggish, slow-moving monster, that proceeded with sudden aimless stoppings. It was impossible to change or alter its spasmodic pace. It rippled into every corner of the field; it ran over fences and beat down barricades. It possessed an attribute of quicksilver in that it could never be gathered or held.

Its sound was a great crushing. It winnowed the grass beneath its feet, and the beaten odor came freshly to my nostrils. It urged over itself and spun slowly back. It never seemed to break or detach itself into individuals. Its tentacles might loop and cling to various protuberances, but its black bulk moved ever on.

I wandered through the maze of exhibits, stopping and listening where I would. The broad river of crowd divided to smaller eddies that swirled endlessly within and between the long rows of buildings and tents.

I passed glittering rows of farming machinery, red-painted, sturdy, clawed feet hooked to the ground. This bushy-bearded farmers tenderly fingered, and fought biting and ungrammatically with one another as to its merits.

A small tractor crawled upon its belly through the mud, and struggled and puffed its way over impossible obstacles. It was followed by a hysterical herd of small boys, who miraculously escaped destruction under its iron treads.

I crossed the square where the lean, cowed racing-horses were led patiently back and forth by the stable boys. Always the crowd was with me, beating its endless, monotonous forward path. I grew to hate it, longed to tear apart its slow viscosity, to sweep it away and clear the earth.

Inside the buildings I passed between endless counters piled high with pyramids of jelly, saw the broad smiles of the presiding housewives, smelt brown loaves of prize bread. Baskets of huge fruit were allotted place, red apples succulent and glowing, fuzzy peaches white and yellow. The presiding deity of the place — the veritable mother of all food — I found in the centre of the shack. Her function was the creation of pie, and this of itself seemed to me sufficient. She was a large woman, red-faced, red-handed, and without a curve to her body. She was composed of but two straight lines, and between these lay her solid ample self. Her round fat arms were bare to the elbow and white with flour. On the table before her was an incalculable area of pie-crust, which she kneaded and powdered and cut with deft and stubby fingers. Behind her was a huge charcoal range upon which uncountable pies cooked, and around her were infinite battalions of pies, tremendous legions of pies, gigantic field-armies of pies. Exaggeration itself fell faint.

Before her, in the consummation of a newer miracle, fed the multitude. All men they were, and they ate steadily, unemotionally, as if they might eat eternally. They went from pie to pie to pie. They never ceased, even to wipe their lips. They never stopped to speak. They selected their next pie before they had eaten their last, and reached for it automatically. It was a spectacle so vast as to possess grandeur. Such a woman and such men might have created the world and devoured it in a day.

Around the eaters stood their wives — certainly none could have dared be sweet-hearts — gaping with that curious feminine lack of understanding — awed but unreasonable — at such prodigies of feeding.

I next came upon monster hogs, buried deep in the straw. Gruntingly they lifted their battleship bulks and waddled to the walls of the pen in response to the pointed sticks of small boys. The air was permeated with animal odor, occasionally split by the fresh smell of cooking pastry and pungent aromatic spices.

With the Midway, sturdy respectability changed to blowsy, tarnished sin. Gaudy placards in primal colors bellied with the wind. All appeal was sensual, to grotesquerie or chance. From the tent of the "Circassian Syrian Dancing Girls" came the beat of a tom-tom, like that of a heavy pulse. Squarely in the passageway a three-

shell merchant had placed his light table and was busily at work.

"Step up, ladies!" he called. "Step up, gent. Th' li'l pea against the world! Match it, an'y' win! You take a chance evury When yer born you take a chance, when you marry you take a chance, when you die you take an awful chance. Match me! Match me!"

His fingers moved like the dartings of a snake's tongue. The tiny pea appeared and disappeared.

"You lost! Poor girl. She lost her quarter. The Lord knows how she got it. Time tells an' you ain't old yet . . .!"

Beyond, outside a larger tent, sat a mountainous, a tiny fringed ballet skirt overhanging her mammoth legs. She was like some giant, jellied organism. To the crowd which gapingly surrounded her she addressed a continual tittering monologue.

"Step up here, baby . . . Come to lady! No, I ain't particular even if I am fat . . . I don't care who looks at me. I'm a lady, I am. Hell, yes! See that man over there?" She swung a monster finger toward a barker. "He keeps me up here . . . Sure, he does! You jest let me down an' at him — I'll do him in — I can make twelve of him!"

Further on the crowd clustered thickly around a small tank, from the end of which rose a tall ladder topped by a tiny platform. So high was the ladder that it seemed to melt into a single line. As I watched, a young man climbed upon the edge of the tank. He grimaced and bowed to the crowd.

He stripped off a beflowered green bath-robe, disclosing a body as sleek as a wet seal's, and like a slender quick monkey, climbed the ladder. Reaching the platform, he posed with outstretched arms. The crowd stiffly craned their necks.

At the side of the tank appeared another man with a fat pock-marked face. There ensued an extraordinary dialogue.

"Leopold Benofoski!" shouted the man beside the tank to him in the air, "Is there any last word that you would like to leave your wife and family?"

"No," shouted the man upon the platform.

"Leopold Benofoski!" shouted the interlocutor. "Are you prepared to meet your fate?"

"Yes," said the young man.

"Then dive!" shouted the other, " — and God be with you!" He hid his face with a prodigious gesture of despair.

The young man drew back his arms until he was like a tightened bow. For a second he poised upon tensed legs, then, like a plummet, dropped from the edge of the platform. Incredibly, swiftly he flashed down. I caught the glint of his white legs as he hit the water, a high splash, and he had drawn himself out of the other side. A grimace of shining teeth, and he was gone. The crowd, unmoved, went sluggishly on.

Slowly I worked myself through the area before the grand stand, where the crowd was thickest. There had been an accident upon the track: a young horse, "breaking" because of the hard path worn in the finely combed dirt between the turnstiles of the fence and the grand stand, had reared and flung its fore legs into the air. A débâcle had followed as the animals close in the ruck had plunged into the

leader. Three driver had been thrown into a thresh of horses. Splintered sulkies and broken shafts lay in the débris, hazed by the cloud of dust. One horse, maddened by fear, had run squealing on, not to be stopped until it had completed the mile. One driver was badly injured.

This had had its effect upon the crowd. An uneasy ripple ran across the grand stand. There was a tinge of hysteria in the movement, a desire to clutch and shiver. As time passed the tension heightened. In the officials' stand I saw the small, staid figure of the judge, peering alertly at the frightened multitude. Then came a consultation of bent heads, and his hand swung up to the cord of the starting bell. The flat clang, for the bell was muffled, beat into the turbulence. A gradual quiet fell.

There followed the announcement of the curtailment of the programme to the immediate race of Richard Thomas Corkran.

I cut my way swiftly through the crowd, back to the stables, for I desired to see the little horse leave for the paddock.

I found him fully braced upon stocky legs as they bound his anklets. His refulgent blanket drooped over his rotund torso, and from the striped folds emerged the long, grotesque neck and hobby-horse head. As I approached he eyed me with droll appreciation, for I seemed always subtly to please him.

As the last anklet was buckled he shook himself. It was a methodical testing to see that he was entirely in place. Satisfied, he took a few short steps forward, carefully balancing his weight so that no muscle might be strained. At this juncture the white dog, apparently just released from captivity, bounced forward like a lively rubber ball. Fierce was his attack upon the nose of Richard Thomas Corkran. Devious were his advancings and retreatings. Quietly did the little horse receive this adulation. Again he shook himself.

Now was the spider-web tracery of harness put upon him, the silvered racing-bridle and the long thin bit. The blanket readjusted, the paddock-gate was opened, and with the small, white dog surging before him, his attendants following, he plodded toward the arena.

As he emerged into the crowd there beat upon him a roar of sound. Like a great wave it ran down the field and re-echoed back. It split into individual tendrils that were like pointed spears falling harmless from his small unmoved back. Through the path that opened out before him he slowly went, unnoticed and grave. He entered the weighing ring.

Courteously he stood as his blanket was removed, and he stood bared to the gaze of the three inspecting officials. Then the slender spider-wheeled sulky was pulled up and attached. Suddenly I saw his head lift: the contesting horse had entered the arena.

He was like a legged arrow, a magnificent, straight-lined dart. Thin to the point of emaciation, the bones of his body moved like supple reeds beneath a lustrous skin. Lightly muscled was he, tenuous skeins at his wrists and hocks. He looked as if he might drift before the wind.

He was very nervous. There was a continual thin white line across his nostrils

as his high chest took air. A rippling shiver ran through him.

Richard Thomas Corkran was the first to leave the ring. Never had he taken his eyes from his opponent. His small, black muzzle remained fixed, imperturbable. Slowly he plodded out upon the track.

The flat sound of the bell, calling the race, drifted down from above my head. As I fought my way to the rail, the roar of the crowd rose to frenzy. The horses were going by the officials' stand to the starting post.

The challenger went first, his curved neck pulling against the bit, his gait a drifting, slithering stride. After him came Richard Thomas Corkran, a tiny, methodical figure. His head was down. I could see the sulky move gently forward under his easy step.

As they reached the post and turned the tumult died away to a clear and appalling silence. Glancing up the rail, I saw the heads of the crowd leaning forward in motionless expectation.

For an instant they hung unmoving at the post. Then the challenger seemed to lift himself in the air, his fore feet struck out in the beginning of his stride for Richard Thomas Corkran, without warning, had begun to *trot*.

They swept down toward the thin steel wire that overhung the track at the start. In breathless silence they passed, and I heard the shouted — "Go!"

Like a dream of immeasurable transiency, they vanished at the turn. I heard the staccato beat of hoofs as they went down the backstretch.

The crowd had turned. To the rail beside me leaped a man, balancing himself like a bird.

"He's ahead!" he shouted wildly. "He's ahead! — ahead!"

I swept him from the fence and climbed upon it myself. Above the bodies of the crowd at the far end of the track I saw two plunging heads. For a second only were they visible. Again they vanished.

They came down the stretch in silence, the spectators standing as though struck into stone. At the three-eighths post they seemed to be equal, but as they drew down the track I saw that the challenger led by a fraction of a foot. His flying hoofs seemed never to strike the ground. He was like some advancing shadow of incredible swiftness.

Richard Thomas Corkran raced with all that was in him. His small legs moved like pistons in perfected cadence.

As the challenger passed I could hear the talking of the driver, low-pitched, tense, driving his horse to a frenzy of effort.

"Boy! Boy! Boy! Let him have it! Let him have it! Take it to him! I'm tellin' you. Go it! Go it! Go it!"

Richard Thomas Corkran's driver sat braced to his sulky, the reins loose upon the horse's back. I caught a glimpse of his grim, strained face above the dust of the advance.

Again there was the wild beating of hoofs up the back of the track.

"He's gotta do it now," shouted some one beside me. "He's gotta do it now."

He can't lose! He can't lose!"

At the seven-eighths post the crowd thrust out its arms and began to implore. The waving arms leaped down with the striving horses. The challenger was ahead by yards. His red nostrils flared to the wind. Never had I seen such trotting!

He came under the wire in a great plunge, his driver madly whipping him. Richard Thomas Corkran was defeated!

For seconds the crowd hung mute, seemingly afraid to move or speak. Then from the edge of the grand stand came a single shout. It grew and ran around the field, swelling to an uninterrupted roar that seemed to split itself against the heavens — a tribute to the victor, a greater tribute to the vanquished!

Richard Thomas Corkran plodded slowly around the track to the paddock gates. His head was down as before, and his rotund little body moved steadily onward. At the gates he halted and waited as the winner was led through before him. Then he gravely followed and disappeared into the crowd.

He met triumph with boredom; he met defeat, as a great gentleman should, with quiet courtesy and good humor. There was nothing of disdain or bitterness upon his small, black muzzle; Richard Thomas Corkran passed to the gods of horse as he had come, imperturbable, alert, sublimely sensible. But in his passing his tiny hoofs were shod with drama. Departing greatness may ask no more!

I saw him later in the paddock. His white woolly dog was stilled; a negro rubber sobbed as he held a washing bucket. The little horse stood by himself, his feet as ever firm upon the ground, untouched, unmoved, and quietly resting. The thoughts that he possessed he kept, as always, to himself. I bowed my head and turned away.

## • *Lyn Lifshin*

### Afterward

the monster in orange,  
how the last living  
thing she saw was  
so hideous.

Cover the hole.  
Someone do something  
with the plastic, the  
days of hoping

are over. Cover  
her terror. Cover the  
earth with flowers.  
She was grasping

a purple dolphin.  
Dream a slow noose,  
amnesia for the  
child's ghost, the

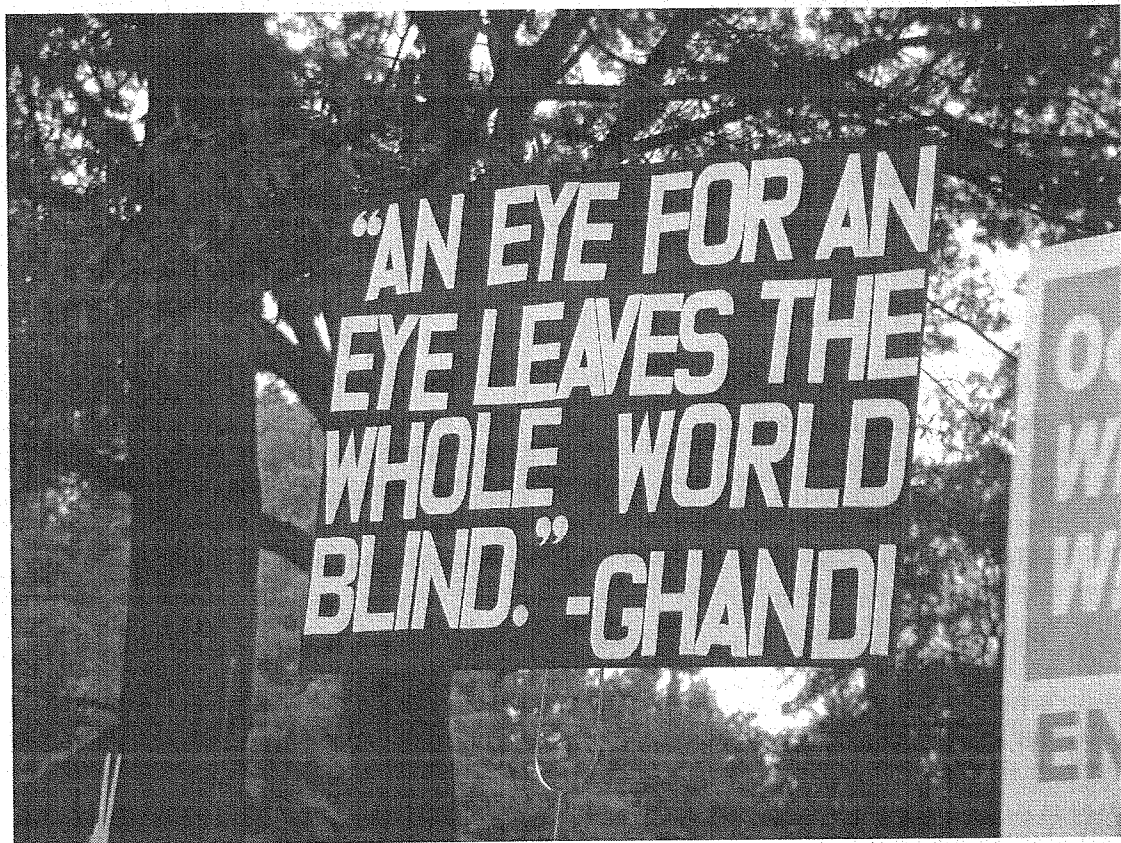
on green, mold

## When I Can't Sleep

when before it's light  
something in the mourning  
cove's moan is more  
mournful, different. I press  
my face into the cat's fur,  
or am under her, as if  
her heart beat could blur  
terror. Today I think of  
the child bound and raped,  
snatched from sheets,  
pillows smelling of her  
tawny hair. I think of her  
clutching the purple dolphin,  
her heat, her blood in  
terror, holding on to that  
one thing as something  
that could not have  
been human tore life from  
her smile, her body,  
buried her alive, fingers  
braided, hardening into the  
last thing she saw she loved

## High Heels

They're like wanting to  
keep a man, keep one  
on ice for sometime  
later, there like a dress  
3 sizes too small I know  
I'll slide into. Hell, I  
could wear it now and  
let it hug my ass so tight  
you'll want to tear it  
off me. In two houses:  
boots under the bed, S  
& M boots one English  
professor called them,  
boots that tilt my pelvis  
forward, toward you. I  
want to strut thru Dupont  
Circle, black boots a  
dominatrix might wear,  
stab heels you'd have to  
be afraid of me in. My  
mother wore spike heels  
into her 70's, up Beacon  
Hill and over at least one  
man's head who still  
saw her as twenty. When  
I'll put those boots on  
you'll never believe I was  
not always in shape. I'll  
out strut any Barbarella  
or Barbie. Men in cars  
will run into each other,  
the legs the last thing to go  
and I'm not ready yet  
for any one way ticket



*Franetta McMillian  
Washington, DC September 2005*

## • *Franetta McMillian*

### **The Brady Bunch Join the Relief Effort**

It was Marcia, still taut and tan in her late 50's, who came to the Convention Center driving a rusty old school bus that looked like she'd stolen it from the Partridge Family. "All aboard," she cried, and me and my two kids were the first ones on, thankful for the working air conditioning and the coolers full of ice water.

"Praise the Lord!" we sang, but others were more skeptical. "I ain't getting on a bus with no damn cartoon," some man shouted, but I figured what the hell, seeing as I'd already done Mad Max for three days running and needed to live in a different sort of movie for a while.

When we finally got to the tidy ranch house there was a collective moan. "Man, how the hell we all gonna fit in there?" but Marcia just smiled, flung open the doors and led us into a place already as large as a city, room upon room upon room of plenty.



Greg and Cindy were doctors.  
Carol Brady had started a school.  
Mr. Brady was teaching anyone  
who would listen how to build houses.  
Jan would look for the people you'd lost.  
Even Denise Huxtable dropped in  
from another time looking like  
some flower child Creole voodoo princess  
to help Alice whip up some gumbo in the kitchen.

And just when you'd think  
the house was finally full,  
a whole new room would spring up.  
The kids thought it was better  
than a video game: you'd be  
standing in a corner when suddenly  
a room would happen  
just as easily as dandelions in a field.

It's a miracle, some said.  
It's the devil, said others.  
Me, I asked no questions  
as I settled into bed  
hugging my children close  
all our bellies full for the first time  
since even before the storm.  
In the morning things might be different  
but for now this was the America  
I'd always dreamed of:  
room enough for all  
and nothing left to fear.

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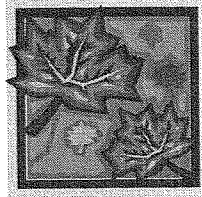
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