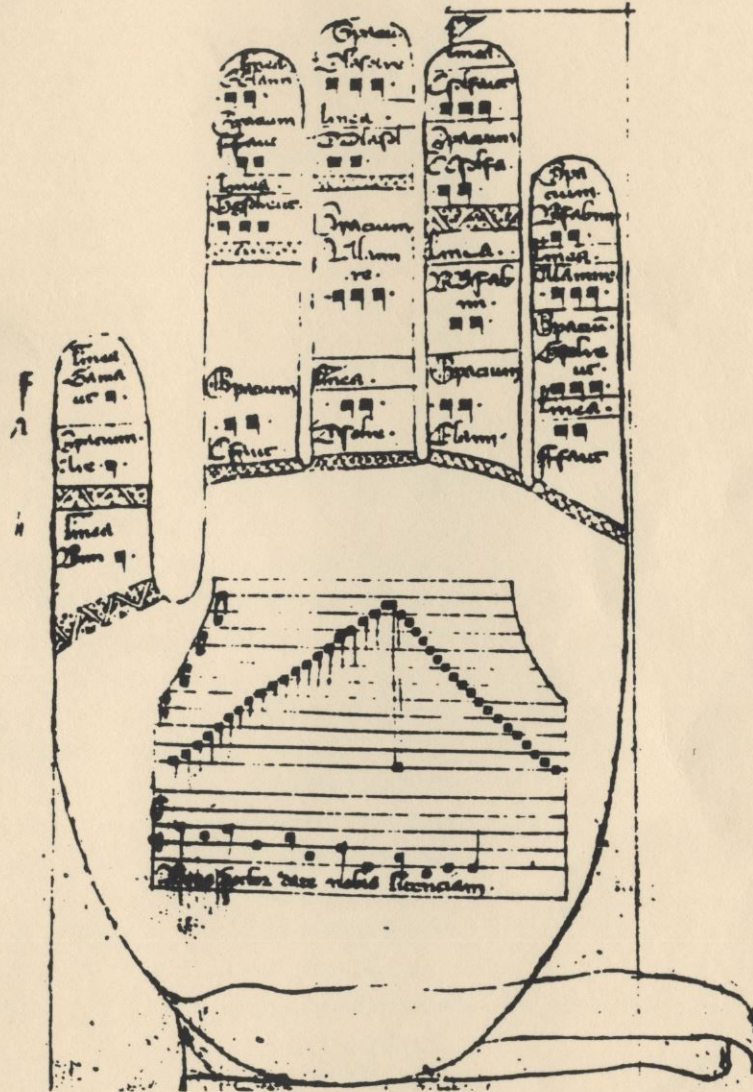


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The Crucible



The Literary Magazine
for Lock Haven University

Winter 1990-1991

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The Crucible

The Literary Magazine
of Lock Haven University

Winter 1990-1991

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I will throw it back
to the sand,

Kathy LaLota
I will lie down,

I Want Indians

the dust into sandrice,
my face, my lips, my eyes,

You're not real.

If you were,
you would be different
from heaps of pink pig's flesh.

You are the same

things

glowing night faces on electric clocks,
garbage trucks churning chairs and soup cans,
toasters spitting blackened bread.

I want you to be different
things

blue corn feathers
arrows piercing
berry lipstick streaked teepees.

I want you to be savage spirits dancing in animal heads
roaring with wild mustangs
unshod hooves beating skin
stretched over roaming rivers.

I want you to be dark,
drenched fields
ripe with blood for
exploding boundries in wilderness
loving
thrusting your hips into mountains.

Kathy LaLota

China Woman

I crawl

clawing

scratching baked sandwiches

to find my father's

penis—

the flaming tool that erected

him, thrust him up—

the oppressive lance that struck

me, beat me down.

With it he made my lips

tiny, stunted,

cramped from silence

they sealed.

With it he cast down my eyes

milky, opaque,

thickened from spinning

they wearily pasted shut.

But my swirling brain

still unruffled, catching the winds,

still cast glimmering beams

on the water holding me.

He did not see.

So I crawl

clawing

scratching the sand until I find it.

I will break it

from his tomb crumbling

apiece, shriveled,

run to seed

no more.

I will turn the dust

over in my palms,

feel the fatal weight,

inhale the fetid power.

Kathy LaLota

China Woman

I crawl
clawing,
scratching baked sandrice
to find my father's
penis—
the framing tool that erected
him, thrust him up—
the oppressive lance that struck
me, beat me down.
With it he made my lips
tiny, stunted,
cramped from silence
they sealed.
With it he cast down my eyes
milky, opaque,
thickened from squinting
they wearily pasted shut.
But my swirling brain-sails
still unfurled, catching the winds,
still cast glistening beams
on the water holding me.

He did not see.

So I crawl
clawing,
scraping the sand until I find it.
I will break it
from his tomb crumbling,
sapless, shriveled,
run to seed
no more.
I will turn the dust
over in my palms,
feel the fatal weight,
inhale the fetid power.

I will throw it back
to the sand,
tasting the gritty grains
in the still air.
I will lie down,
my back grinding
the dust into sandrice,
my face, my lips, my eyes,
my woman's body turned up,
open.

Kathy LaLota

Linda Bennett

China Woman

The Poison of a Butterfly

She is colder now
 robbed of speech and thought
 her image strikes and shouts
 silhouetted against another reluctant dawn
 instilling within her a sweet fear
 as a kiss of darkness is laid upon her,
 she could see their smoldering smiles.
 Wading through tiny tiny squares of painted perfection
 her mask crumbles
 and her eyes fall upon a fiery celestial chamber
 from where petals flutter silently down.
 Feverish and trembling she touches each one
 bringing strangeness and fear
 commanding trampled grasses to arise.
 She longed to dance with the trees at night
 and earn her own ray of sunshine.
 Her smile returned with her childhood.
 I am such a contradiction.

I will throw it back
 to the sand,
 tasting the gritty grains
 in the still air.
 I will lie down,
 my back grinding
 the dust into sand,
 my face, my lips, my eyes,
 my woman's body turned up,
 open.

Linda Bennett

They Called Me a "Flower Child"

I think that I am a fictional event
 for a forbidden story
 from planes of denied sleep
 I have been thinking
 standing between the stages of death
 and the strangeness
 who is my dearest friend
 that I can create some songs too
 I put on my costume this morning
 and decided which color to be today
 straight from a storybook I bet
 Maybe tomorrow I'll be Snow White,
 with floral socks, of course.

Lindy Wojcicki

Remembrance

A crisp, blue sky spanned as far as my young eyes could see. Beneath it lay a world of calm, powerful waves that I had never seen before. As a five years old, I was positive that we were vacationing in heaven.

Like a magnet drawn to a refrigerator, something inside my brothers and me drew us to the water's edge. Our mother's warning, that we would have to leave this new world if we explored out too far, created a boundary between us and the evil we didn't even know could be there. But we weren't afraid of its mysterious depths. A child's curiosity in each of us permitted only a fascination to blossom when we discovered "treasures" that appeared out of nowhere.

Our splashes and giggles seemed to belong with the sounds of sailboats zipping through the water and ducks quacking at our feet. All our lives we had lived in a noisy metropolitan area. Cars honking, police sirens wailing and polluted air were a part of our daily lives. Here at the ocean, we were hearing and feeling nature for the first time. The warm sun and soft sand squishing between our toes was a welcomed change from the cracked pavement of the city. The smell of fresh air was the best present we had ever been given.

We were happy and we were proud. It was here where we could swim without scraping our knees on the bottom of a plastic pool filled only three inches deep. Under its surface lay a separate world, unlike our plastic pool which only reflected the sky above it. And even though we could barely move, we were "free" in it. Our greatest accomplishment was when we swam with our faces down in the water. We could act just like the fish we had never seen before.

But when we brought our faces out of the water, the horror began. Instead of seeing the bright sun, our mother stood over us. A

single tear ran down her cheek, like that of a sad child in a fairy tale. Our hands came together and she led us all out of the water.

Silently we sat at the water's edge and the fairy tale came to an abrupt end. "Daddy's gone to heaven," Mom whispered. My younger brothers didn't understand. But I did. She meant that we would never see Daddy again. It was like a terrible fish had broken the boundary and come up and taken my father back down with him. It was hard to believe that a place with so much happiness could be filled with so much pain. I knew this could not be heaven because pain didn't exist in heaven and Daddy wasn't here.

* * *

We're older now, my family and I. Time has passed and changed both the ocean and each of our feelings. We no longer live in a fairy tale. We never did. It is reality that brings us back to this place we have grown to love.

At the ocean's edge we enjoy the importance of each other's presence. It is here where we now share an unspoken profession of love. And it is in the shells that we hear a remembrance of a loved one.

Latisha Mojica

The New World

Heard above the frog's croak

Silence.

Sweet ripples made

passions once burning

lost.

There is a stark nothingness here in paradise—

where are all the men, the women?

gone.

lost?

gone.

and heard above the frog's croak

Silence.

Michael S. Maggs

To Autumn

Sunlight blighted through tree limbs,

Caught the warmth slight on my chin.

Spider webs scarce damp with dew

Made gauzy veils brides might choose.

A murder of crows above

Besieged a tree, watched me move.

Calm winds swirled the dried leaves

Like the mistral inside me,

Stirred responses to Autumn;

Each moment I hear its hymn.

I considered a pond then

When, realizing how far I'd been,

I turned to run the other way:

Thoughts conspired, led me astray.

Laila Meyer
Peter McBride

The Fear

Not to know what the nautilus
of time held for us.
As I looked into your green eyes,
I saw the fear.

The same fear, inside me:
hopeless assurances.

The rain fell on soft flesh.
The bitter drops on my lips
distended my fear.

Where will we go from here?
What will become of us?

This new life I've found
will not be cut from me.

Matt Arkin

The Murderer

He rode on his horse
His head held higher still,
He knew he was in hell
Awaiting his last kill.

Above the sunset plain
Another who awaits,
He rides the same black horse
And carries the same fate.

Tracy Muetze

Rainy Days

The door stands wide open.
No one enters.
People are crowded in a room.
They stand alone.
The sun might shine.
The water might run peacefully
yet the storm lies underneath.
Summer breezes may blow
only to chill one to the bone.
Ignored laughter echoes against the walls.
A new day begins
to find darkness once again.
The door now closed, locked
insures one might
look in the mirror
to find himself alone.

Tracy Muetze

Letters

Eagerly she reads the letters one by one,
Oh, they are so fine;
Little
Does she know how each will end.

Laughing with memories
Exuberantly she continues
The letters become
smaller,
The words become dull.

A drop falls, unclear;
crimson,
As the dagger twists.

The end has come, she knows.

The letters now
minute

And finite, as she reads the final letter —
"e."

Michael Montag

Banishment of Poets

or

Can One Be Two Poets at Once

Consider these—

Z B T F Q D C.

Now,

In the blackened meadow I lie
Anticipating Phoebus Apollo's rise.
Bristly energy of the daystar ferments the spirit
And drives the darkness to its viper's pit.

So, I lie there, all idyllic
Vitamin-D and contentment.

Then I think of the above lines—the Apollo stuff.
How may I have received the gift
Without these words?
Tell me.
Would it have been the same?

Ryan Ritter

If They Can Do It, So Can I

Upon a day both bright and cheery, on a park bench with my dearie,
Over a picnic lunch we shared in bliss.

When a sound set our feet to tapping, o'er the radio there came a
rapping,

A dance filled beat so much entrapping; Yet the deja-vu I could not
dismiss.

"'Tis a remake," I pondered, "But something still is quite amiss."
Quoth the boom-box, "U can't touch this."

I must admit I was quite dazed, I stood there listening, amazed
At this abomination of music and vice. The way he
Mixed the old tune to new words, the result so absurd,
In all my life I've never heard a song so silly or idea so crazy.
How uncreative! I hoped the next song would be better, maybe.

Quoth the boom-box, "Ice ice baby."

I hung my head and smiled sadly, that this music wrote so badly
Should imply the final closing of originality's door.
Is this a new trend pending? Oh crave not creativity's ending,
From these sounds my heart is rending, sending us new music that
will only bore.

Is there hope for mankind's future? Tell me radio, I implore!

Quoth the boom-box, "Nevermore."

Stephen Zoldi

Collars and Chains

Take your teeth from in our hearts.
You don't understand. You were looking too hard to see;
Must have been the light in your eyes: never saw it start.
You never thought things like this could be:
All of us are really free.

We're not crazy. Don't talk to us of needs:
We've slept on our toes and bled in the streets.

You picked on friendly meat with your eyes closed;
Then, moving in silent, down wind and controlling the lights,
You struck when the moment was right, never thinking.

Were we ever collared and chained?

We see your smile, see you gather friends for style.
Nice straight tie, and a soft handshake.
The stupid look inside your eyes, mirroring your smile.
Do you believe you're trusted by the people you lie to?
We're covered in it because you want no blame on you;
Therefore you twist all your knives.

Keep one eye over your shoulder:
It's not your friend behind. We'll make it colder and colder
And colder if you kick us before you leave.
Hide yourself among well-dressed friends;
Dying will show you how similar it ends.

Lights always fade away.

When you lose control, you see what you should've known.
It's too late; light only defines the form you have grown.
Nothing is what you hunted. Have fun, alone.

Feel the cold stone.

Don't tell me you're confused!
We're tired of being used.
We're staying awake and counting the days
Till we make our way out of this maze.

Deaf. Dumb. Blind.

How long will you be pretending?
Not everyone is expendable; everyone has a real friend.
You are wrong again.
Equal to us in total sins.
Not everything happens under the sun;
Sometimes, in the dark, people can have hearts.

You built your own house of pain.
You pissed on your own electric fan.
You never talked to us man to man.
You thought we were mindless personel.

We chewed through your collar and chain.
We chose to sit when you said stand,
We are breaking away from the pack.
We told you to bury your bone.

Who said the fault was not his own?

Who stood target for your stones?

We would have died for you if you were nice.
Building reputations has a price;
Built on souls.

This tiny theatre of
Passion
Is for ourselves
And our heirs;

But it will shatter
Down
If we do not
Rearrange our cares

And destroy all the collars and chains.

Lights always fade away.

Kathy LaLota

Death of Bubba

Even with the central air conditioning running, it was so hot and humid that the sweat was pouring from her. It was running in ticklish rivulets down her neck, her arms, and between her breasts. Even her ankles had perspiration on them rising to form dew drops on her white tennis socks. She felt dirty from all the sweat tracks on her body where grime had built up like the dirt behind your ears if you forgot to wash. She wanted to shower, but for now she sat in the kitchen having a lemonade, wiping her wet forehead with a dish towel, wondering what she would do with Bubba. "God, how could it have happened? I'm so stupid! Damn it!" she muttered. She was sure she was the only person ever to run over her own dog. And right in her own driveway.

Her morning had been going just fine until Bill had called from work. "Hey, you forgot to set out my lunch and now I don't have any damn lunch. Go get me something at McDonald's and bring it over here." She hung up the phone after he had given her directions to the job site, and she threw on some clothes. She knew she would hear it when he got home tonight about how stupid and lazy she is. Since it was about 11:30 am when he called, and he would expect his lunch at exactly noon sharp, she flew out the door without even locking it behind her. As she figured it, the drive to his job site would take twenty minutes at least since she still wasn't sure where it was, and the stop at McDonald's would take five minutes during the busy rush hour lunch traffic, so she had little time to spare. She went to the car as usual, looking to see if Bubba was lying under the car as he so often did. Hurrying, she barely glanced under the driver's side of the car before she got in. She started the engine, and drove toward the street. But before she reached the street, the passenger side front tire raised up off the ground and she heard a wailing bawl rising up from beneath the car. Before she stopped the

little Escort, she had gone over him with the back tire, too. The car screeched to a halt and she stumbled out, trying to run, yet dreading what might be awaiting her. When she saw him, she trembled all over, sweat running in her eyes, clouding her vision. Bubba was lying in a pool of blood, his insides laid open and oozing. Blood ran from his nostrils, his mouth, his eyes, and from his crushed abdomen. His eyes were still open and looked black. His head and his two front paws were pretty much O.K., but from the front paws down, he looked like a puddle of red fur and bones. She stood for a long time gazing down at what was left of him. As her eyes began to burn from the sweat, she closed them and ran her fists over her face. So many emotions welled up within her that she thought she would drown. Tears mixed with the sweat while she tried to wipe her eyes with her fists and instead of Bubba lying there, she imagined her husband lying there. His arms were thrown up over his head, his chest, stomach, and legs were smashed. She could see his heart lying motionless in the web of broken bones that were his ribs. His eyes were closed, his breathing stopped. She saw his wrinkled, bloody face, his eyes bleeding instead of crying and all at once she ran to the kitchen door and escaped to the safety of the kitchen.

She lay on the couch waiting for Bill's call, knowing that she must give him a good excuse for not bringing his lunch. When the phone finally rang, she nervously answered it. "Hey, where's my damn lunch?" Still sobbing, she said, "I'm sorry. I guess there's something wrong with the car because I couldn't get it to start."

"Christ, what did you do to it now?"

"I don't know. I don't think I did anything."

"Well, it was fine yesterday, wasn't it?"

"Well, it did shake and rattle kind of when I drove it to the mall yesterday."

"Hell, why didn't you tell me that? I'll have to get Roger to take a look at it tomorrow. You know you got to tell me this stuff when it happens. How did you think it was gonna get fixed? It's not like I ever drive that shit heap."

"All right. I'll remember from now on."

"Well, now I'm gonna be late 'cause I'll have to get Ed to run for

lunch and that'll set us back in time. Damn it. We were making good time too."

"I'm sorry. I'll see ya' when you get home then."

"Yeah, bye."

It was 1:30 pm. Two hours had passed since she murdered Bubba, and she was still at the kitchen table. As she drank the sour lemonade, she looked around at the mementos of her life with Bill. So many gadgets with their cords creeping over the countertop, rooted in the sockets on the wall. Bill had bought all of them hoping they would help her to make, in his words, "a decent meal." All that she knew how to make was tuna salad or eggs. She had tried them all in the beginning to please Bill, but they confused her, too many directions to follow, too many buttons to push, and too many digital clocks linking their neon eyes at her. She was sure that when she pushed the wrong button, those eyes blinked brighter, mocking her. She finally quit trying and now they ate either tuna salad, scrambled eggs, or T.V. dinners.

Her thoughts were disrupted by the horrified gasps of Jim. Jim was their mailman and when he brought the mail, he always came to the kitchen door instead of the front door if he saw her car in the driveway. They would chat for a while about the weather or the neighbors. Well, now she was caught, her victim lying in the driveway while she sat in the kitchen pondering the eight-speed blender she used twice. She knew she should go out and give him some kind of explanation, but what could she say? "Oh, yeah, Jim, I ran over the dog today. Just sitting here having a lemonade while the flies do their dirty work." She heard him muttering something about Jesus Christ and dead dogs and poor Bubba. She couldn't force herself to face the dead heap of brown fur and she knew she could never come up with a good lie about Bubba, so she ran crouching to the other end of the house so he couldn't see her. She felt just like a murderer hiding out from the police. When she got inside the bedroom door, she realized that he would start knocking since her car was out there. Surely he would know she did it; who else would have done it if her car was out there? He must have seen the splattered blood on the tires as he had walked up the driveway. As

soon as the knocking commenced, she turned on the radio that sat on her dresser. She turned the volume up loud enough so the music would drown out the knocking. She waited through four songs before she crept back to the kitchen door to see if he had gone. She opened it and saw no one, not daring to look in the direction of the car. Warily, she made her way back to the bedroom and turned off the radio.

This bedroom was cooler than the rest of the house, so she lay down on the bed to try to cool off and rest. She began running her hand over her thighs, feeling the perfectly shaped curves. Bill said this was his favorite part of her body. He said so many women, even those with well shaped bodies, had pudgy thighs that threatened to turn into puckered flesh if they weren't careful, but not hers. When they made love, he would grip her thighs tightly, squeezing the muscles around the bone. He called her his Barbie doll because he said her body was as perfect as the Barbie doll his sister had when he was just a boy and could be persuaded by a few painful jabs to his kidneys to play with her and her dolls. Her hands worked their way up to her belly which, according to Bill's Barbie doll theory, was also perfect. It was completely flat and sunken in the middle, the skin rising to cover her prominent pelvic bones. Moving her hands up beneath the point of her breasts, she thought that her body was the only thing God gave her that was of any use to her. After all, it's what caught Bill's attention the first time they met. It looked the way fashion magazines at the grocery store check out said it should look and performed like the sex manual Bill had given her for their first wedding anniversary said it should. He bought the book as a joke, because he said sex was the one skill she needed no gadgets or books to help her learn. When he used to say it though, he always looked pissed, as if he thought she knew too much about sex. She remembered the time he accused her of being a whore.

They slept together on their first date. First they went to a movie, then they went behind the movie theater and did it in his car. It wasn't like he forced her to do it though. She was used to doing it on first dates. In fact, she couldn't ever remember not having sex on

a first date. Some of them weren't really dates, though. In high school, word got around that she would have sex with anyone, so many of the boys just picked her up and drove straight to a deserted street. She didn't mind. She liked these dates because she didn't have to talk. All she had to do was tell the boy when he took off his pants that, yes, it was the biggest she had ever seen and then let him climb on top of her.

Bill was no different from the rest on that first night. He acted as if she owed him a fuck for the three dollar movie and she willingly obliged and made payment. The difference between Bill and the rest was that he called her again in a few days. She had been surprised when he asked her out again. They began dating steadily and within three months, she had an engagement ring. Then, about two weeks after he had given her the ring, they got into a big fight after Larry's party. Larry and Bill had been buddies since Bill had moved to town a year before. She and Larry knew each other too. She knew Larry well enough to know that he was circumcised. Since Bill hadn't gone to high school with her, he didn't know that just about everyone in town had had her. He still didn't know until he took her to Larry's party that night. That was the first time any of his friends saw him with her. When he took her home that night, he didn't put his hand between her legs like he usually did. He waited until they were in front of her house, then he started yelling about her sleeping with everybody in town.

"Christ, then Larry laughs and tells me he fucked you too. Shit, do you sleep with every guy you go out with?"

She didn't say anything and that only made him madder. She just looked down at her fingers twisting into a knot in her lap.

"Well, do you sleep with everyone?" he shouted.

When she didn't answer, he reached over and grabbed her arm and twisted it so she had to lean real close to him so it wouldn't hurt.

"You might've slept with a lot before, but you ain't gonna now. I'm still gonna marry you. I'll show those guys that I can do what none of them could. I'm gonna keep you in line and they'll see that once you've settled down, I must have the best dick in town to keep the town whore faithful. I'll teach you not to be a dirty little whore."

With that, he twisted her arm with a jerk, making her cry out. He grinned and let her arm go. Then he opened her jeans and they did it right out in front of her house.

She continued to massage and stroke her sugar-white skin until she dozed. One hour later the ringing telephone woke her from her troubled dream world. Something troubled her about the dream she was having, but all she could remember about it now was the ending. In it she had been running fast and hard until she took off from the ground and began to fly. Forgetting the events of only a few hours ago, she answered the phone thinking that she could shower and run errands. The voice on the other end quickly reminded her of Bubba spread all over the driveway. Bill's voice reached her burning ears. "Hey, I called Roger and he said he would take a look at the car when I get home from work, so make sure you clean all your shit out of it and make sure that dinner is on the table when I get home so I can eat before Roger and me look at the car."

"I will; I'll take care of it."

She put the receiver back in its cradle, once again breaking into a sweat. She still had a couple of hours to decide what to do about Bubba and do it. Right now, what she wanted to do was call the trash collectors and have them dispose of him. She could tell Bill she hadn't seen Bubba all day. He would figure he was out terrorizing the neighborhood cats. But of course, that would never work. When it got dark and he still wasn't around, Bill would know something was wrong. After Bubba didn't show up in a day or two, he would begin searching everywhere. He would be heart broken, probably grieve for months. It would go on forever.

The dog had been, after all, his before he married her as he often pointed out. He had gotten the dog when he was still a bachelor and he and the dog had been constant companions. Even now, he and the dog were inseparable, except in bed. She had finally won that battle after months of nagging. The first four months of their marriage, Bubba slept beside Bill. She had never gotten along with Bubba and begged and pleaded with Bill to keep him out of their bed at night. He finally gave in, allowing him on the floor.

From the moment that she and Bill had started dating, the brown, hulking ball of fur barked and growled at her when she pulled in front of the house like she was a burglar coming to ransack the place. As soon as she got out of her car, he ran to her, nipping her ankles, actually biting her a few times. She had been sure that once they lived together, Bubba would get used to her and be as friendly to her as he was to everyone else, but it appeared that she was as inept with animals as she was at cooking, because he never warmed up to her. It was a source of constant embarrassment to her when guests came over and Bubba growled at her. He seemed to know when people were coming and would start his barking assault just to humiliate her. Bill laughingly commented on it to whomever was there. "She's the only one he hates," he would say with that puzzled, yet chuckling expression. She hadn't thought that it was her fault that the dog hated her, but maybe it was since he loved everyone but her. She didn't know the reason, but it didn't matter now anyway because he would never snarl at her again. She would never have to awaken to the sounds of Bill dragging the old galvanized wash tub out of the basement for the "Saturday Morning Ritual," which he carried out every Saturday morning of their married life. After his early breakfast, Bill would put the tub on the front lawn and then fill the tub with luke warm water—he said it had to be luke warm because if it was too cold Bubba would catch cold and if it was too hot Bubba would sweat. Even though she told him over and over that it didn't make any difference what temperature the water was because dogs have fur to keep them warm and dogs don't sweat, he insisted that he knew what was best for his dog. He would say if she was so smart, why didn't Bubba like her? Then he would call Bubba for his bath. The bath always took at least half an hour because Bill scrubbed that dog from paws to ears to behind. He scrubbed until his hands were red and Bubba got too restless. Then he would lead Bubba out of the tub and rinse him off with the hose. This was followed by a thorough towel dry and brushing, after which the two of them would set off for a walk around the block. Once, on one of their wedding anniversaries, she told him she would like him to take a bath with her and wash her hair before they made love. She

thought it would be sexy, but Bill didn't want to do it because he said with the two of them in the tub, the water would get twice as dirty and he wouldn't be able to stretch out with her in there. Yet, every Saturday morning he put his hands in the filthy dog water, the whole arm up to the elbow, even. He had even slept with Bubba, but he couldn't take a bath with her.

Yes, Bubba had run his course and now he was up in doggie heaven, or as she preferred to think, doggie hell.

She fearfully looked back at the phone on the night table, expecting Bill to call again, only she imagined him screaming into the mouth piece, "You killed my dog! You must pay! You must suffer!" Just then, the house creaked, as all old houses do, and she nearly skinned her knee on the corner of the night table as she jumped at the sound. She stood for a moment trying to regain her thoughts as the blood rushed out of her head. The slight dizziness left her as she slowly made her way out to the kitchen. She poured her fourth glass of lemonade for the day and sat down at the table to agonize over her predicament. "What if Bill's so upset that he leaves me?" As she yanked a napkin out of its holder to wipe her wet forehead, she tried to imagine how she would feel if he ever really did leave her. She always thought that if Bill and she weren't together she would fold into herself until she disappeared—kind of like the "Squidgicum-Squees" in the children's nursery rhyme her mother read to her when she was young. The Squidgicum-Squees could swallow themselves when they wanted to hide, and they needed to hide quite often. And right then, she wished she could swallow herself, that way she could avoid the whole mess. But would she really fold up and disappear? Bill's face suddenly appeared before her. Blood dandruff flaked from his face, his mouth was an open sore, and his brown hair was red and matted. The sore opened into a grin as Bill, in the low, harsh voice of a demon, muttered, "You must pay, you must suffer, you must pay, you must suffer...." A passing car honked its horn, startling her back to the kitchen. She shivered and shook her head as if to shake back reality. She wiped away a mustache of sweat and rose to pour herself another lemonade. After so many glasses, she was getting tired of it, but it was icy cold and had more flavor than water.

The linoleum looked so cool that she just sat down on the floor with her back resting against the refrigerator and closed her eyes. She almost expected to see the Satanic Bill's face appear, but thankfully it didn't. She only saw the black heat of her eyelids.

If Bill were here, he would make fun of her for sitting on the floor like a baby. He would also squeeze his nose, grimace and tell her how dirty she looked and smelled. That's one thing Bill couldn't stand all right, dirt. That's why Bubba got a bath once a week, that's why Bill showered twice a day. He insisted she do the same, but most days she only took one right before she went to bed and lied, telling Bill she had taken one that morning too. Only on blistering hot days like today would she shower twice. Maybe he was a clean freak because he had a job where he got filthy everyday or maybe because his dad made his mother keep his house spick and span. She wasn't sure why. When she grew up her parents would never have allowed such a vain waste of water and they had passed this belief on to her. Besides, sometimes she liked being dirty; it made her feel like the raw heathen she had been as a girl when she could have sex with whomever she wanted. And when they had sex, which was rarely these days, she loved to sweat until they slid against one another like greased pigs. Lying wet and exhausted on the damp sheets afterward, she would plead with Bill to stay in bed with her, but he ignored her and went to the bathroom to take a shower.

Of course, anymore, they hardly had sex. About a year ago his desire dwindled and she had been left wondering what went wrong. He refused to talk about it. Whenever she tried to bring it up, he looked at her the same way he had the night he called her a whore and told her to shut up.

Other than sex, the marriage was the same as it had always been. Bill never told her he loved her anymore. But then, she couldn't remember the last time she told him she loved him. She didn't love him. She wasn't even sure if she had been in love with him. Oh, she thought she was in the beginning, but now she realized that it had probably been need. Even though sex was infrequent, she still needed Bill. She had never lived on her own. She had lived with her parents until she married Bill. She was afraid to be on her own,

afraid of being alone. "So many things can go wrong if you're alone, but if you live with someone, they have to take care of everything for you," she had thought. In fact, that's why she married Bill.

They sat in his car as usual, listening to the radio. They had already had sex and now they just listened to the music and drank beer. Bill seemed a little nervous, which she thought was odd because Bill was never nervous. She had never seen Bill worry about anything really. When they pulled up in front of her house, she opened the door to get out, but his arm shot out and caught her. She looked back and saw that his face was red and his forehead was wet. Before she could even ask him what was wrong, he said, "Well, I guess you want to get married, right?"

"I guess so. Do you?"

"Yeah, I suppose so. A man shouldn't live alone. He needs a woman to take care of things for him. You know, cleaning and shit. Besides, I'm getting tired of doing it in the car."

"OK."

"What do you say about a couple of months from now? I don't know about this stuff. You women know what to do and take care of it."

"All right. I'll take care of it."

That night in bed, she felt sort of happy. Bill was the only one who ever asked her to get married. Of course she had to say yes. No one might ever ask her again, and she was getting a little old to still be living with her parents. All of her friends were married and most of them had a few babies. She might not get another chance. Besides, Bill did take care of her. He treated her pretty good, too, she thought. As for love, she was pretty sure she loved him. She really liked having sex with him and he took her to the movies and out to eat and other things. He took care of her. He told her what to do and what not to do. She liked that.

She glanced at the clock and saw that she had been sitting there on the floor for over an hour. She finished her lemonade and rose to get another when a stomach cramp hit her. She wrapped her arms

around her stomach and stood waiting for the pain to subside, when another stronger one hit her. This time she sank to her knees, grasping her belly tightly. She felt dizzy and weak and she was sure the blood must be boiling in her veins, because she felt hot from inside out. Her stomach muscles contracted again and she thought she could feel the perspiration dripping from all her internal organs. The next spasm brought hot, sour liquid up her throat and though she tried to stop it, it spewed from her mouth in a wave. As she knelt on the floor, throwing up, she saw Bill's demon face again. This time he wasn't grinning. His face was contorted with anger as he roared, "You killed my dog. I hate you. I never loved you. I'll never love you. You're stupid and worthless. You're just a cunt. That's all you were ever good for. Now I hate you. I wish I had Bubba and you were dead. You should suffer, you must pay." The wrenching stopped and Bill's face disappeared. Shaking and crying, she lay back on the floor and hugged herself hard. She lay there crying and moaning. She recognized the speech she had just heard, or at least part of it.

Last year they had had a big fight over her getting a job. In January, a friend told her a job was available at the Homewood Nursing Home as a nurse's aide and she had gone to apply for it. Before she had married Bill, she had been a volunteer helper there and had loved it. After she married him though, she had had to quit because Bill had said she would have her hands full just taking care of the house; she wouldn't have time for volunteer work. But when she heard about the job, she applied without telling Bill, hoping that she would get it and tell him right before she was to start. "How can he refuse once I have it and he sees I'll be bringing home a little extra money for us?" she had hoped. She applied and was offered the job, but when she told Bill they had gotten into a big argument.

"You're stupid and worthless. You're just a cunt. That's all you're good for. No one in their right mind would hire you. You made a mistake I'm sure. And I don't care if some asshole does want to hire you, you're not going to work. You don't get the housework done as it is, how are you going to get it done if you're working? I'm sure as

hell not going to do it."

She didn't answer, and as usual that got him madder.

"Or maybe this is all just a big story you cooked up 'cause you got some boyfriend somewheres you wanna go meet? Is that it, you whore?"

Well, of course she didn't take the job.

She thought of the three of them, Bill, Bubba, and her, and for the second time since it happened, she replayed the entire incident in her mind. This time though, she remembered more, more than she really wanted to and it made her moan louder and her stomach cramp again. She remembered rushing out to the car. She even remembered looking under it to see if Bubba was there. This time though, she realized that she hadn't looked much. She hadn't cared because she had been in such a hurry. Maybe she had even hoped he was under there. The sudden realization that she might have wished for Bubba's death made her sit up in shock and puzzlement. She had wished to kill him; she remembered it all too well now. "But, oh my God, why, why would I have done that?" But she knew. "What am I gonna do? How am I gonna tell Bill? He'll leave me for sure, then where will I be? But I guess that's what I wanted, but what'll I do now?" She got up to blow her nose, wipe her eyes and her mouth, and get a glass of water to wash the sour taste out of her mouth. Leaning against the sink, she again wondered what she should do now. She cleaned up the floor, put the bucket and mop away, and went to the bathroom to wash her hands. Still drying them, she sat on the toilet to rest. She felt so tired, as if someone had wrung her out, mistaking her for a dripping washcloth. Sitting with her head in her hands, she began to look back on her life with Bill. She didn't love him and she was sure he didn't love her. She had to leave him, that day too, or she might lose her nerve.

Whatever it was that led her to kill Bubba might just have the strength to carry her away from Bill, and she didn't want to waste any time because it could leave her at any moment. She began to undress, when she noticed she was no longer sweating. In fact, she didn't even feel hot. She got her robe off the hook on the back of the door and went out to the kitchen to check the thermometer. It still

read 75 in their air conditioned house, but she wasn't the least bit hot. She actually felt cool and dry. Running her hands through her still damp hair, she went back to the bathroom, smiling, almost feeling good. After she showered and dressed, she hurriedly threw a few clothes in a suitcase and went out to the living room. She got some paper out of Bill's desk and began to write a note when she thought about Bubba out there in the driveway. She realized she couldn't just leave him out there. The storm door slammed shut as she went out the kitchen door. She reached the last step and went over to the driveway. Hesitantly, she walked down the driveway and over to the car. There he lay, broken and stiff. The hairs on her arms stood up and the all-too-familiar taste of lemonade rose up in her throat. She felt a little sick and guilty, but she really didn't feel sorry. She had hated the dog and the dog hated her. And though the dog had been strong, she had been stronger and she had won. She was almost glad she did it. She went to the shed out back and got the shovel. He was already a little stiff and that made her feel relieved; he really was dead and she really was leaving. That thought carried her through the ordeal of shoveling him into the box. She closed the lid and shoved the box beside the kitchen door. She started writing, her hand shaking a little at first. "Bill, I'm leaving you. I don't love you and I know you don't love me and I have to leave while I have the chance. I'm sorry about Bubba. I hope you'll be all right." She laid the note on the floor by the door on her way out, so he would see it as soon as he got home. Of course he would see the blood stains on the driveway, but she didn't have the time to scrub them off. Getting into the car, she shifted into "Drive" and pulled the car from the driveway, and this time she made it to the street.

Jeanne M. Ruczhak

Untitled

I reach for you
but, like an image
in a pond,
when touched
you disappear.