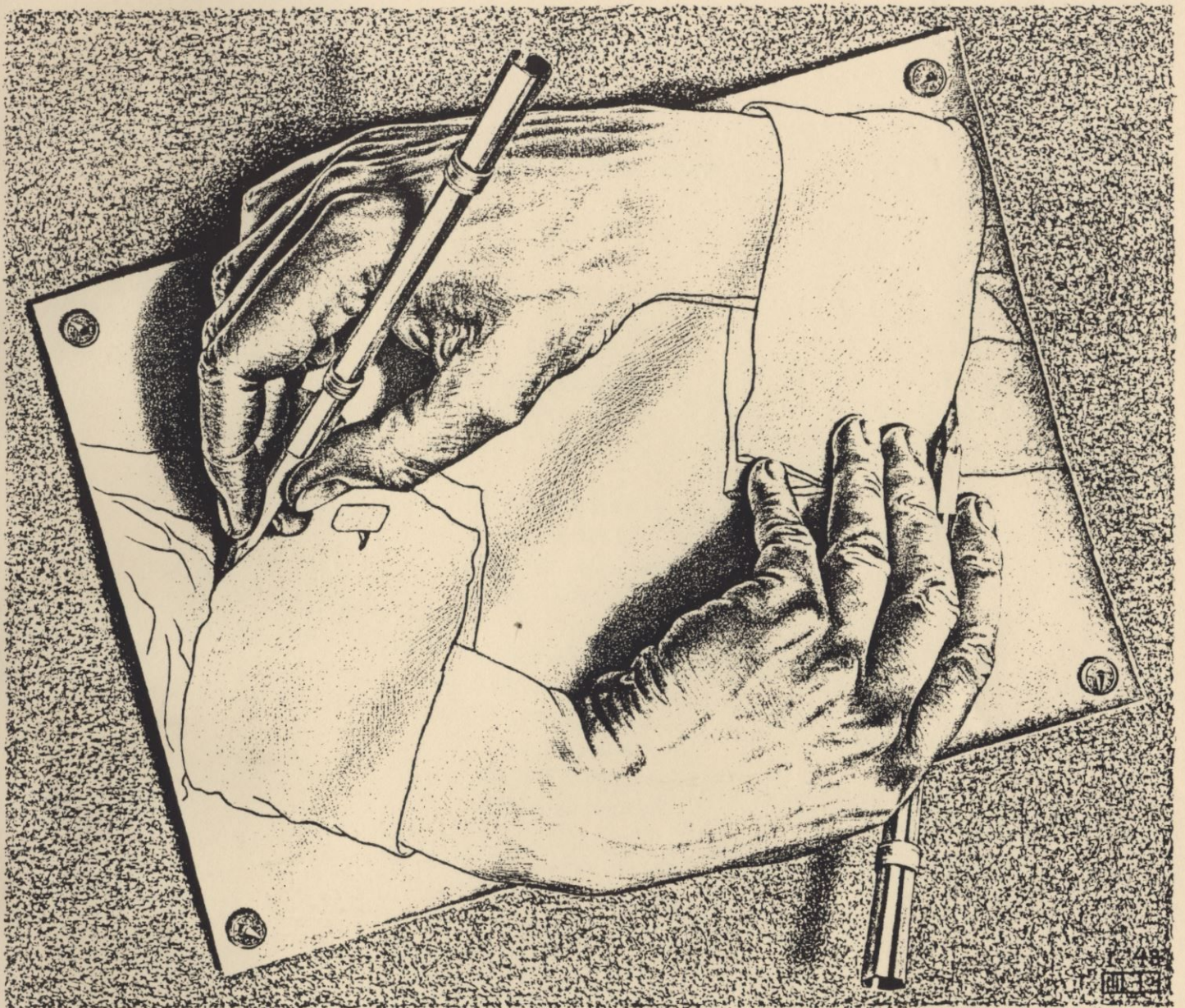


The Crucible



Lock Haven University's Literary Magazine

Spring 1991

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The Crucible

The Literary Magazine
of Lock Haven University

Spring 1991

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Janet Clarke

Portrait

I wish
that I could
open my heart
bathe and be
clean of all
the Hell I am
a liar but only
because you are
what you give
is what you get
nothing comes
from nothing
and nothing
is never enough
of empty to fill
of full to empty
but never
ever content
never secure
this is the
rule of thumb.

Janet Clarke

Michael Maggs

Michael Maggs

A Dream

A Dream

The Methods of Children

Greg J. Wilson

In the bedroom I move
like dust,

past her. She has
no legs: she is

part of the bed;
her lips separate,

a reopening scar:
she says, "over here,

over here," and wakes
to see me dreaming.

Ryan Ritter

Canon

Corine Stewart

The Dead Sky

Ken Parson

The Third Trick

Mark Thomas

No Blemish

Michael Maggs

Sherrin's Thought

Sherrin said, "oh,
the mountains

are so round here,"
and traced the thought

with her index finger;
the trees bent

under it,
and sprang up again.

Or maybe
it was the wind.

you were a reasonable person
doing the right thing
—you know that for a fact
because they told you—
and you believed them—
you'd believe anything

when you were shot
they said you you'd be alright

Michael Maggs

The Methods of Children

The window made him
look like a pantomime to her;
his hands flattened
inside the cold surface.
Syllables condensed on the glass.
She moves through snow,
inexperienced, wondering:
Eden is the only ground.
It makes the methods of children
strange. He cannot walk
there, having crossed
the one-way bridge:
the end of innocence
is the only death;
the pantomime is dust.

Greg J. Wilson

"In the room of wars...."

In the room of wars--
to be a god--
with a folded flag and a single box
composing--with a uniform--your stuff

Books denote your life like any other--
brave and galliant--
ready to take on any enemy in the long war--
--or was it the world war or the holy war--

You were handsome in uniform
and travelled the world
--neither by your choosing--
sending back china, pearls and porcelain
to your sister back home
who religiously supplied you
with cigarettes and fan mail--
one day in the china shoppe
next in the mud--
fighting for a god, a king
fighting a man whose blood you took
though you held no communion with him
and prayed to the holy mother
for permission to take her son

You were a reasonable person
doing the right thing
--you know that for a fact
because they told you--
and you believed them--
you'd believe anything

when you were shot
they told you you'd be alright

Greg J. Wilson

"Mungu-god"

Mungu--god--mwenye nguvu
all mighty
all power
milele--forever--
he came--with our coats and palms
we offered him songs
"alleluia" we praised him
"alleluia" we cheered
and waved our flags for the gentiles to see
"conquer them for us"
mfalme wa amani
"prince of peace set us free"
He rode through our city
baba--our father
mungu--our god
on the back of a pony
upon rags he trod
mshauri wa ajabu
wonderful mungu
full of wonder--we called out
"hosana, fuel the fire of destiny higher"

Pharisees came
"teacher, rebuke them"
but louder we claimed
"mungu" our god
"baba" our father
"alleluia hosana"
our voices grew louder

Mshauri wa ajabu, mungu mwenye nguvu,
baba wa milele, mfalme wa amani
and they circled and hemmed us
as--our voices--they cried
"baba" my father
"mungu" my god
as they dashed to the ground
our children
our town

Yes--we recognized you
Yes--we cried out your name
hosana

hosana--
shanoka--
our savior--
our shame

Jennifer Kipp

Protest

I have not the intellect of Adam. He gave title to
all creatures; some days I can barely recall my own name.
"Child," said He, "Adam Fell."

I have not the patience of Job. He endured the unspeakable
without so much as a wince. I complain about triviality.
"Child," said He, "you are not he."

I have not the talents of David. His music could calm
demons. Mine is more likely to create them.
"Child," said He, "it is all praise."

I have not the wisdom of Solomon. He was a master
of logic. I have trouble just deciding what to wear.
"Child," said He, "just listen."

I have not the boldness of Daniel. He was proud to
face death in Your name. All too often, You are a well-
kept secret with me.
"Child," said He, "they can tell."

I cannot remain in your presence. I have done nothing
to justify myself.

"Child, dear child, I have done it all," said He,
and showed me the scars. "There is nothing required of
you but belief."

"I believe, Lord!" I sobbed, and my tears turned to
gold where they fell.

Kathy LaLota

Grandma 1

When I was six,
you sent me to the dairy across the alley
to buy us each a dixie cup ice cream-
shiny vanilla swirling syrupy strawberries.
We took baby bites from flat wooden spoons,
rocking on the stained cement porch
with orangeade mustaches
your silver moon curls flattened under your net,
puffy peach corn pads between your toes,
waving the faded green flyswatter at ghost flies.
You were eighty-five.

When I was seven,
all day you cooked chicken in chipped enamel pots
for pot pie and noodle soup,
let me eat the greasy, goosepimpled skin.
You laughed at the Honeymooners' reruns
and peed on the padded rocking chair.
I rocked and smelled you.

When I was eight,
on the way to your grandson's
Saturday afternoon revival, you
died. The back seat of mother's car was full
of you, Christ, and Jean Naté.
They gave me back the broken plastic duck with muddy feet
that guarded your geraniums in the yard
and the crusty rainbow
potholder I wove for you.
I rocked and smelled you.

Wednesday

Time sinks in on me until
 Weekends, giving me up for dead here,
 fly away on either side of me,
 as the weight of Wednesday
 breaks my back and
 tries to bury me.
 But I will emerge
 as I always do
 with a dirt filled mouth
 grasping the rope thrown by the next day.

"Please be gentle,"she said, "I've never done this before."

In fevered sheets, seduced by death,
 she writhed through dark and heated hours.
 The roguish lover, dampened, slept
 and with his kiss goodbye, stole her breath.

Belinda R.B. Bodo

Butterfly Ghost

There is a black butterfly
in my left eye:
hazy ghost swirling
light-winged and uncentered for
I have to chase him across the page
too white.

Forgotten, imprisoned
pet, he darts attention hungry
not so tipsy as young August
whistled him clumsy into dandilions,
between fingers curious of one
five small years.

I didn't net him down,
or cage him, or press him in
a book.
So he came back.

His ghost haunts
Sunday papers,
articles in the Rolling Stone,
beige, cracked bedroom walls,
morning sidewalks; he misses
barely
each tired step.

He bats his foolish eye,
blinking out of Bukowski.
Yes, yes,
I answer.
I look to windows,
again giving him August.
Scolding soft, I reopen pages,
and he dances under words
content.

Belinda R.B. Bodo

For Mermaids

I envy the memaids

loitering at the cellar steps in green
seaweed giggle, playing

hide-and-seek
in corners, compartments.

A drowned spider sticks
tangled to silver, rolled remaining

crepe-paper web.
He is another child, freckled and dressed

bow-tied birthday attire,
caught, waving open-eyed surrender

to the tide.

The mermaids giggle green.
Their breasts never sag.

he is to them blackened sand,
wrapped casket satin and lowered

the ignorable finite fish.

I am on cement steps
watching mermaids,

waiting for cigar men with
carpenters' cracks and pepper-haired ears

to pump my flooded cellar.

Beitinda R.B. Bode
Susan Davis

Butterfly Ghost
Four Love Poems

There is a black butterfly
left eye:

FOOD

i don't always eat
my breakfast
i feel somehow lunch
will be more
satisfying

COMPLEXION

i have learned to live
with my face
i only wish i could
live with yours

PROVERBS

they say
you can never really love anyone
until you love yourself

i guess i hate you, then

SYMPATHY CARD

it wasn't 'til you were gone
that i realized i never
liked you that much anyway

Yes, yes,
I answer.
I look to windows,
again giving him August.
Scolding pages, I reopen pages,
and he under words
content.

Beitinda R.B. Bode

For Mermaids

I envy the mermaids

loitering at the cellar steps in green
seaweed giggles, playing

hide-and-seek
in concrete compartments.

A drowned spider sticks
tangled to silver, rolled remaining

crepe-paper web.
He is another child, frothed and dressed

how-tied birthday attire,
caught, waving open-eyed surrender

to the tide.

The mermaids giggle green.
Their breasts never sag

he is to them blackened sand,
wrapped casual satin and lowered

the ignominious finite fish.

I am on cement steps
watching mermaids.

waiting for cigar men with
compartment cracks and pepper-haired ears

to pump my flooded cellar.

Ryan Ritter

Caught

I brushed my hand through her hair
As she lay sleeping beside me.
I felt the tangles our passion had left behind
And my fingers snagged, but I didn't mind.

Corine Stewart

The Dead Sky

She watched the sun as it made its slow, slicing cut in the side of the sky; the killer fled behind the earth.

The burning came. Like she had gulped up a stone from the center of the campfire, her throat intensified its heat until release came with the tears. She sucked a shaky breath of the crisp air and expelled it from her body before she swallowed down the dead weight that sat in her throat. She brought her head up and through a veil of liquid saw the sky sink deeper into death as its blood soaked the clouds.

She was alone, there on the crest of the hill, and she might have even been cold.

Bryan and Gina sat on top of the picnic table with their feet resting on the seat as little wisps of wind played and danced in their hair. "That was really pretty," said Gina as she gazed into the distance. "I love when the sun sets in kind of a blaze like that. I love red sunsets."

"Yeah, then the sun just seems to turn out the lights and go to bed, behind the mountains."

"If the sun is trying to sleep, then don't the moon and the stars bother it?"

"Nah. Nite lites. The sun is actually scared of the dark."

Gina was amused at his earnest answer. "You're silly." She bumped his knee with her own.

Bryan smirked. He looked at Gina as she cradled her chin in her hands and studied the ground. The last shades of the sun's sleepy red was disappearing from the sky and darkness was starting to seep through the air, but Bryan could still notice the slight disturbance in his lover's face. Wise to the cause of this, he wanted to get her mind off of it, but could only offer, "Hey, she'll be ok."

"I don't know, Bryan. She was really upset. I just feel.....don't you feel bad?"

He was forced to admit the truth. "Yes." Of course he had lost her as a friend. She had been one of his best friends. He hated what he did to her. He'd never forget the time she had walked in on him and Gina. The hurt on her face made her seem like she could have fallen over to melt into the floor had she been touched. He'd rather just forget it.

"I couldn't even look at her wh- I wanted to say something to her so bad, but...I didn't know what. It's just as well, it probably would have stuck in my throat anyway."

Bryan put his arm around her. "Are you cold?"

"No, I'm ok. This is a warm sweater."

"kay." After a few moments of listening to the rhythmic chirping of crickets, he said, "Hey, a lot of stars out tonight."

"Yeah, I noticed. It's a really beautiful night." Gina could smile now. The stars were shining though there wasn't much of a moon out, and she had her new lover here now to comfort her and share nights like these with.

I'll miss her, that's all, she thought.

She had now fallen to her back and watched the corpse of the sky blacken and decay. The once running fluids that oozed through her face dried into crusts that sat in her eyes, her nose and her throat. With her tangled hair on the hard ground beneath her head, she now breathed in smooth, calm sighs as the chill in the air kissed her skin and sleep caressed her brain.

Her eyes were almost closed when she made the effort to lift them to look once more at the decomposing sky above her and the tiny white things that were scattered throughout.

Maggots, she thought. Maggots.

With that she let her weighted eyes drop as she layed herself to rest in a crypt of sleep.

Ken Patton

The Third Trick

Third shift sucks, Rusty thought to himself. He detested his job at The All-Nighter convenience store, but it was all he could get. Employment had been denied to him ever since he was dismissed from the local diaper factory for sexual advances toward a QC inspector. The people at the Job Service finally stuck him on this minimum-wage bullshit, and let him hang.

He was due to relieve Old-Moan-n-Groan from the register at 10:00 that Friday night, which required him to come in at 9:30 to restock, mop the floor, and get his drawer ready.

She was in a bitchy mood as usual, and he hadn't put both feet through the doorway when she hollered, "Rusty, I need nickels and the cups are low and I got a date tonight so you'd better get me off the register by ten and Mary Lou wants you to order sandwiches." Rusty looked through her thick horn-rimmed glasses into her wrinkly frown. He held up his hand to suppress further instruction. She slapped down the office key and two one-dollar bills on the counter. Rusty scooped them up and marched to the office.

He punched in and returned with a blue roll of nickels from the change drawer, which he tossed to Old-Moan-n-Groan. He shut down the fans of the walk-in cooler to replace the milk and soda taken from the racks. He caught a fleeting glimpse of a nice female behind through the glass cooler door, then he left it and restarted the fans. Trudging to the drink counter, he packed the cup holders with styrofoam cups from the cabinet below. He took a wet rag and wiped up the coffee some welfare recipient had spilled some three hours before. He mopped the floor, including a small lake of Pepsi syrup well trodden by thoughtless patrons of The All-Nighter.

Rusty went back to the office and got his drawer ready, doling out the change from his shift's vinyl bank bag into the allotted nests. He took the bag, the drawer, and a clipboard to the checkout Old Moan-n-Groan had already started logging off, choosing to ignore the gas customer outside waiting for his pump to start. Rusty guessed her mind was solely occupied with her upcoming date.

She yanked out her drawer. Rusty replaced it with his own and stabbed the APPROVE button for the gas pump with his finger. Old Moan-n-Groan snagged her register tape and credit-card printout. She added them to her drawer and took it to the office. She had her totals counted and verified before the gas customer finished persuing the potato chip rack.

"Have a nice night!" she chirped to Rusty on her way out.

Adios bitch, he said with his eyes.

The first two hours of third shift usually went slow, and Rusty managed to inventory the sandwich cooler in between customers. He sold nine packs of cigarettes, five bottles of soda, two and a half gallons of milk, three cans of snuff, and 140 dollars worth of gas by midnight.

Soon the drunks would be spilling out of the bars and the parties. They'd be hungry. They'd be moody. They'd be mouthy. No doubt about it-- third shift sucks.

The Dizzy Sisters came into The All-Nighter at about 12:25, just as Rusty had started a fresh pot of coffee. They came in together, pretending to be slightly drunk. One put on a show for the clerk while the other took a five-finger discount on items not marked down. Usually Dizzy Debbie did the flirting. She started by shaking her ass and winking. Then she posed by the newspapers, licking her lips while she made eyes at Rusty. When the cashier still chose to watch Dizzy Darla, she resorted to rubbing her hands along her sleek form and making "the noise." Just as she passed her palm over her crotch, she let out a soft, erotic sigh--halfway between a coo and an ecstatic moan. It was clearly calculated to produce an erection in unsuspecting men. Rusty qualified. Dizzy Darla walked out with three packs of gum and a new lighter. Dizzy Debbie followed close behind.

Three men came together to buy cigarettes on their way between bars. One ordered a piece of Broasted chicken, or at least what was left of it after ten hours under a heat lamp. They told Rusty to "have a good one," and departed.

Rusty had just retrieved a coffee when a short, ruddy drunk tottered in. Despite the cold typical of February nights, his bare arms hung from the sides of a denim vest manufactured by coarsely amputating the sleeves of a jean jacket. To Rusty he appeared to be the type that infested Fuzzy's Place downtown and bathed only monthly.

Rusty pretended to stretch as he gazed up into the parabolic mirror in the ceiling corner. He watched the little scruff coast slowly up and down the aisles, never touching anything but looking at everything. An old geezer came in to pay for ten dollar's worth of unleaded. Meanwhile Rusty saw in the mirror a reddened hand leap out like a frog's tongue towards the Snickers bars. The drunk turned his bloodshot eyes to the counter and saw he was being watched. He emptied his hand and returned it to a pocket.

Throughout town "last call" had sounded. Tavern crowds gradually dissipated. Some headed home, some to a stranger's to spend the night in a nine-hour relationship. Others fanned out in search of food. Within three minutes, fourteen people crowded the aisles of The All-Nighter. Convenience store clerks refer to this as "gettin' buried." Rusty's fingers went into overdrive on the cash register keyboard. His head swivelled frantically to scan the perimeter of the store.

He managed to move five customers through quickly, until a bimbo tried to pay for a pack of Marlboro Lights with a bent bank-machine card. The scanner flatly rejected it on three passes, forcing him to enter the 23-digit number by hand and

wait for the bank computer to verify her PIN. The seven patrons behind her were clearly impatient, but he couldn't ring her up until the little dot-matrix printer made an acceptance slip. She signed it illegibly and stormed out.

Three coffees, two sodas and five packs of smokes--the line began to shrink. Rusty peered over his left shoulder, making sure the short scruff was still by the TastyKakes. He returned to his paying customers. A faint crinkle of plastic wrap reached his ear, but he couldn't identify its source. Perhaps it was the sharply dressed yuppie with the pretzels.

Rusty rang up a 99-cent pair of Toxic Weenies for a regular when he noticed in the mirror that a black-haired ruffian had made his way to the household items section. His intuition, via the sinking feeling in his stomach, told him he had a shoplifter to deal with.

Only two stood in line now. One simply wanted directions to the bypass and the other wanted a pack of Zig-Zag cigarette rolling papers. Rusty had reason to assume they weren't for cigarettes--at least not the conventional type of tobacco variety.

Rusty viewed in his mind the company rules for theft. If someone barged in waving a .45 auto, the clerk was to comply with his (or her) every wish, and get a description. Shoplifters, on the other hand, were to be apprehended, then referred to the police. Each arrest was worth 25 extra dollars on the paycheck, minus taxes.

The store was empty except for Rusty and the scruff, who approached the counter with a 25-cent pack of Wrigley's Spearmint and produced a greasy, faded dollar bill. Sweat from Rusty's palm slicked the surface of the register keys.

Instead of returning three quarters, Rusty slammed the register shut, looked across the counter and said sternly, "Please step aside, sir." The short man hesitated for a moment, then took three strides to the end of the counter, where Rusty met him.

"Please empty your pockets."

"What for, man? You got a warrant or something. I ain't takin' no shit from a skinny punk like you."

"No, I don't. But I could have the police search you if you'd like."

In reply the accused sent his right fist slicing through the air in a shallow arc into Rusty's diaphragm. Rusty tried to jump back, but still caught a portion of the blow. The attacker began a poorly coordinated run to the door.

Rusty leapt forward like a greyhound, catching the thief's collar with his extended left hand. He jerked his arm straight back and spun to the right, shoving the drunk to the floor.

Although Rusty had wrestled in high school, he was surprised at this little man's strength as he struggled to escape. Had both been sober, Rusty would have been pulverized.

Two short arms flailed blindly at Rusty's face as he in turn rained punches downward and tried to pin his opponent's shoulders. Rusty caught a solid hit in the nose as he siezed the weasel's oily hair. He lifted the head and slammed it on the floor. In so doing, he allowed his adversary's right arm to break free and uppercut him in the groin.

Rusty felt all his internal organs migrate up into his throat. Breathing stopped. He nearly blacked out. He realized he was being heaved upward and tossed aside, but was powerless to regain control of the fight.

The scruff rose to his feet, backing up two steps and surveying the damage he had done to the clerk.

Rusty's respiration resumed. He glared angrily, reminding himself to memorize the features. Dark greasy hair, steel-grey eyes, moustache, "FTW" tatoo on right arm--he recorded it all in a second.

The drunk stepped closer and planted a black leather boot squarely into Rusty's side. Another kick just missed his jaw. A third glanced off his left shoulder.

Rusty felt genuine terror. There were no customers and no way to get to the phone. He had no weapon and was in severe pain. I should have let him go, he told himself.

The boot lashed out again. Rusty dodged it like a mongoose dancing with a cobra. In desperation he hugged the leg, upsetting the scruff's alcohol-impaired balance. They tangled on the floor once more.

Rusty hammered viciously on the drunk's head and torso. At the right moment he drove his knee into the scrotum he felt tempted to remove. He pummeled the chest, gut, and face of his smelly enemy.

As he struck, Rusty recalled the nagging voice of Old Moan-n-Groan, which irritated him into punching harder. He thought of the welfare rats that constantly trashed the store, and struck a driving blow to the solar plexus. Visions of the Job Service assholes and the bitch that got him fired also taunted him. In his fury he accelerated his rain of hammering fists.

Rusty didn't know how long he had been pelting the thief before he heard a nonsensical cry of surrender. Rusty squinted down at the swollen, bleeding face he had created. Reality turned. Rusty got off his punching bag and hobbled to the phone. He dialed 911, reported a robbery and assault.

He stood transfixed, massaging his sore knuckles and looking down at the beaten shoplifter prostrate on the floor. Rusty felt a dull throbbing throughout his tissues, yet this was soothed with the tranquility of satisfaction.

"Don't move," he instructed the shoplifter. The scruff lay in a stupor, overpowered equally by the beating and several rounds of liquor at Fuzzy's. Although the clock advanced only seven minutes, it was eternity before the police arrived.

"Well shee-it, if it ain't our good buddy Archer," sang out the burly black officer that entered first. His nightstick was drawn. He motioned his partner to move behind him. "You all right, man?" he asked Rusty, who merely nodded.

Archer was found to be carrying three small sponge cakes, four candy bars, a box of Swisher Sweets cigars, and a chocolate chip Grandma's cookie--all squished beyond recognition. They hauled him away.

Shivering, Rusty wrote off the damaged merchandise on his shift report form. He washed his face and his hands in the kitchen and took his place by the register.

A truck driver stopped in for some coffee and a bag of chips. Rusty tried to be cheerful as he rang it up.

"Hey buddy," the driver said, "it'll soon be quittin' time."

Rusty glanced up at the Marlboro clock to find it reading 3:22. He nodded curtly and the driver left. The next hour elapsed slowly, but he managed to clean most of the windows before he went out to take the 4:30 gas readings. He mopped the entire floor and made ready for the early riser crowd. Gas, coffee, and danish would be the bulk of the business for the remainder of the shift.

Fat Boy came in at 5:40 and began inspecting the store. Fat Boy had a habit of stalling before taking over the register.

"Another slow night," Fat Boy said.

"Not really. Had a shoplifter. We got into it before I could call it in."

"Well, no one steals when I'm on," Fat Boy stated proudly.

Bullshit, asshole, Rusty thought.

Rusty gritted his teeth as Fat Boy wiped down the windowsills and repositioned the straws. The office keys still rested in the drawer. Rusty got it out and slapped it on the counter as a hint that maybe Fat Boy ought to think about getting his drawer ready.

Rusty got off the register at 6:13. Instead of thoroughly counting his cash totals and cigarette carton inventory, he simply stuffed the whole business into his bank bag and dropped it into the safe chute.

Below the faint "0619Sa" on his time card, he penciled in "shoplifter." He put on his coat and walked wordlessly past Fat Boy to the door.

Third shift sucks.

Mark Thomas

No Blemish

I wish for nothing
before this moment.
I wish a wordless history
where readers would begin
from this page
and watch the novelist
craft onward.