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CRUCIBLE

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literary magazine for Lock Haven University - Fall 1992



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The Crucible

The Literary Magazine
of Lock Haven University

Fall 1992

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Matthew Dailey

Amy Linn

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Susan Sarvis
Ducks

Bowling pins with wings
fluttering overhead.
Scattered in a "V" shape
squawking.
Swim through
and over the wind.
Bursting against clouds. . .
and down again.

Landing
in a stubbled cornfield.
Mingling among
leftover ears.
Talking among themselves.
Knowing
where to go,
what to do.

Corine Stewart
There Are No Houses Here

Scoping with the free eyes of a passenger on this dry fine-point
road I come across a curious green road sign that actually
says: SHOOTING PRESERVE. On its pole is an arrow pointing
slightly down and to the right.

The idea of this pops into my brain like red steaming homemade
jellies into a mason jar.

As I'm stickied with the thought, heat accumulates in this
capsule behind a truck a split second before the road line
breaks, and the car, aiming left and surging forward, sprays
over the shade-soaked hill.

A rotting wooden sign waits below reading: BAIT
crawlers, tackle, worms

Heather Pecoraro
The Ride

I mount her
carefully
placing the cold
steel firmly
between my warm
thighs. I put each
canvas-covered
steel tip precisely
in its place.
I grasp the grips
and feel for the
grooves. I adjust
the straps
under my chin
tightening the hard
protective shell on
my head.
I am ready.

I push hard
against the
resistance.
(This is just
the beginning.)
My calves bulge red,
my thighs ache. My
shoulders shudder
under the strain.

I resist, prolonging
the feeling. Sweat
beads on my forehead.
I am exhausted and
fatigued. I relax and
enjoy the ride.

A. Neff
Aquarium

The churning underworld
breathes soft life
through and around us.
Two stars smile in a dead sky
watching my silent fins rotate
while my pulsing gills suck
all the life from your sustaining water.
Together we drown
in these rhythmic waves
where your salt does not sting
my opened eye.

Amy Linn
Nine Faces of My Feline

Wise old woman
with eyes like eclipses.

I awaken to the kneading
and meowing of my clock.

Pure white canvas
with two brush strokes.
Unfinished painting.

Lick, lick, lick
wash, wash, wash
the princess is primping.

Finicky gourmet
digs in the garbage,
drinks out of the toilet.

Loyal friend
who listens to
fractured Liszt.

Furry tissue
close to my chest
catches falling tears.

At the end of the day
my whiskered wife
eagerly greets me.

Slumbering sundial
between my breasts,
breathing cat naps.

Amy Linn
Coffee Break

I pour the coffee,
a special blend,
into china cups
while you dress into
your Dockers.

Silent steam rises
from the Amaretto,
as the air thickens
with the bitter aroma.

Your words had cut
the slices of my
heart, now served
on a paper plate.

Glancing at the clock,
you grab your coat
and flick your cigarette
in the coffee,
extinguishing the fire.

Closing the door behind
you, I taste
the last cold sip left
in my cup—
coffee grounds!

curling the edge of your mouth
like the "y" in "sorry"
once to the baby
then cooing
once at me,
the words
Your mommy's little girl
trailing tiptoe
like naked footprints across the room.

Susan Sarvis
Ode to a Green Pea

Ode to a green pea
sitting on the silver stove top
after Sunday dinner.

All alone, a morsel
of brightness
on a shimmering lake.

Shriveled beach ball
burst by
the sun.

Forgotten food
revealed to a princess
under a mattress.

Beautiful in its
singularity
against a metallic desert.

Matthew Dailey
Artist and Model
(The True Nature Of Art)

I wash
and separate the brushes
working the No. 5
into a sharp, hard point
while you slip
into your naked clothes.
You look good
in goosepimples
I whisper,
working the bristles.
The fleshtone brushstrokes
swirling down
the pink blush, a final dab
the crown atop each nipple
almost complete. I hear
the baby start to cry
again. You look at me,
your Persian-blues
turning to a mother's hue. Quietly
I lower my brush as you
lift the baby to your breast.
I know
I'm never going to get this painting done.
As I wrap a blanket
loosely around your shoulders,
you raise one eyebrow,
curling the edge of your mouth
like the "y" in "sorry"
cooing
once to the baby
then cooing
once at me,
the words
Your mommy's little girl
trailing tiptoe
like naked footprints across the room.

I yell
as quietly as I can
I've lost the light.
We'll have to try again tomorrow.
And you
seem only to notice
the unspoken words
I love you—both of you.
And I'm glad
you can hear me.

Matthew Daily
Artist and Model
(The True Nature Of Art)
I wash
and separate the brushes
wording the list
into a sharp, hard point
while you slip
into your naked clothes.
You look good
in goosebumps
I whisper
working the brushes
The brushes bristles
swirling down
the pink black, a final cap
the crown atop each night
almost complete. I hear
the baby tears cry
again. You look at me
your face is
turning to a mother's face. Quietly
I love my brush as you
lift the baby to your breast.
I know
I'm never going to get the painting done.
As I wrap a shawl
loosely around your shoulders,
you raise one eyebrow,
cutting the edge of your mouth
like the "y" in "sorry."
cooling
once to the baby
then cooling
once at me.
the words
Your woman's little girl
raising voice
like naked footsteps across the room.

Jenn Kipp
Broken Pencil Point

Through art class and algebra,
love letters and lab notes,
An occasional honing was all you needed,
considered it a facial.
You never minded the bite marks,
the blackened eraser,
the naked wood showing
through school-bus yellow.
Yet now,
In a room filled with desperate scratchings,
(a scramble to gain entry to the future)
You have failed me in one
snap
of Fate's fingers.
Was it something I wrote?

Witchy Wanda (trance-like):
now to appear to us
Evil Edna (trance-like): Oh Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Suddenly the form of Juliet appears through the trees.
Juliet: Although you said it just fine, I want you to know that it is my line!
Broomhilda (still trance-like): Oh, yes my dear Juliet: it is wonderful of you to appear, but we really want Romeo my dear!
Juliet (moving closer): Romeo shall not follow me until our families can live together in tranquility.
Witchy Wanda (still trance-like): If you wish we shall summon them and put an end to all this mayhem.
Edna: If you shall be so kind to us to end all this bitter feud, we shall both appear on earth, just as fresh as we were at birth.

Matthew Dailey
the BOOK

Words - bound
in perfect rows - Leaves
clasp in hardcover - Root
words dug in - deep
asleep - in the empty
cold - waiting
for the hands of summer
to come
and spread the leaves.
Slowly - five
fingers creep
like cats
across the cover - The words
begin to rise - leaves uplifting.
Dawn breaks
at midnight
to the light
of a kerosine sun - illuminating
a girl's eyes - breathing words
kept asleep - too long.

Bonnie Colantoni
The Return of Romeo and Juliet

Cast

Romeo: son to Montague
Juliet: daughter to Capulet
Witch 1 - Broomhilda: one of the three witches from Macbeth
Witch 2 - Witchy Wanda: one of the three witches from Macbeth
Witch 3 - Evil Edna: one of the three witches from Macbeth
Capulet: head of the Capulet house
Montague: head of the Montague house
Lady Capulet: wife to Capulet
Lady Montague: wife to Montague

SCENE I

Three witches are holding a seance in a wooded area, around a campfire, on the outlying countryside of Verona Italy.

Broomhilda (trance-like): Oh characters of Shakespeare, great and small, answer please to our call.

Witchy Wanda (trance-like): Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we summon you now to appear to us.

Evil Edna (trance-like): Oh Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

Suddenly the form of Juliet appears through the trees.

Juliet: Although you said it just fine, I want you to know that is my line!

Broomhilda (still trance-like): Oh, yes my dear Juliet; it is wonderful of you to appear, but we really want Romeo my dear!

Juliet (moving closer): Romeo shalt not follow me until our families can live together in tranquility.

Witchy Wanda (still trance-like): If you wish we shall summon them and put an end to all this mayhem.

Juliet: If you shall be so kind to us to end all this bitter fuss, we shall both appear on earth, just as flesh, as we were at birth.

Evil Edna (also trance-like): Oh Juliet we promise to fulfill your wish if you promise to return to us.

Juliet: Yes we shall keep our word for we respect those whose ears it heard.

The apparition of Juliet begins to fade and then disappears altogether.

The witches cease the seance and formulate a plan to bring peace between the Montagues and the Capulets.

SCENE II

In the mansion of the Capulets.

Broomhilda (to Capulet): I know you've not forgotten her death, but I bring you good news of Juliet.

Capulet: What news of Juliet could you possibly have for me, for she has died. I shall not listen to thee.

Broomhilda: Please listen noble Capulet, for this is good news of dear Juliet; she is willing to continue her life if only you will cease the Capulet/Montague strife.

Broomhilda: No, I beg you Sir Capulet, please come and hear dear Juliet! If she does not awaken, I command you that my life be taken.

Lady Capulet: If the woman feels this strong please, dear, let us go along!

Capulet: We shall go along to hear, the voice of our daughter dear! But if this turns out to be a fake, I command you to be burnt at the stake!

SCENE III

At the Montague mansion.

Witchy Wanda: Although his death occurred long ago, I have good news of your son Romeo! He is alive and well in the spirit and promises to come down to earth. If only the Capulet and Montague feud were to quit, he would appear in the flesh as he was at birth!

Montague: What is this nonsense I hear, that you, witch, bring to my ear?

Witchy Wanda: Please come with me to hear the voice of your son so dear! And, if he does not awaken, I command you that my life be taken!

Lady Montague: Oh, dear the woman sounds sincere, for her death she does not fear!

Montague: We shall go with you, so it be done, to hear the voice of our departed son! But I remind you that if this is a hoax, it shall be the last of your jokes!

SCENE IV

In the middle of the woods around a campfire, the three witches, Capulet, Lady Capulet, Montague, and Lady Montague are together beginning their seance.

Broomhilda (trance-like): Oh tragic couple show your face, for we brought your parents to this place. We have brought an end to the feuding families, so hold up with your promise, please.

Witchy Wanda (trance-like): Oh Romeo and Juliet, what else is it we must get? Your families now live in harmony, so it is possible for you to live in matrimony!

Evil Edna (trance-like): Oh sweet couple will you please appear, for it is only you we hold so dear!

Capulet (interrupting): Juliet, please make our dreams come true. Oh my dear, how we love you.

Montague: And strong, bold Romeo, why did you have to go? I command you couple, please return, for it was a hard lesson for us to learn.

Suddenly, through the misty moonlit trees, Romeo and Juliet can be seen running hand-in-hand. The Montagues and Capulets, so happy to see their children, break the chain of hands to go greet them.

Sandy S. Breon
Trust

Drip.
Drip.
Drip.

The thick drops
of scarlet fluid

slowly trickle
from the silver steel
to
the
tainted meadow grass.

The knight
in jet black mail
kneels down on a tired knee,
cleans his trusty friend
like a dirty dip stick
on the crimson cape
of his fallen foe,
checks the blade for blemish,
then mounts his
ash grey warhorse.

Golden spurs jingle

as he rides away.

Jenn Kipp
Bugaboo

feelings
crawl blindly
antennae itching
apprehensive
ready to scurry
from any threat
(real or imagined)
yet in retreat
sometimes
an accidental
encounter
paralyzes them
enough to invite
outreach
tentative
yet deliberate
an opportunity
to realize
how alike
they actually are

Matthew Dailey
The FLY

Information clicked
on-and-off

The electric hum
of silvery wings

stuttering

shutting down
to silence

as the news came in

Our cameras were on the scene
when the swatter came crashing down...
Due to the graphic nature of the images,
this network has decided—not
to show any pictures of the incident

The name of the victim
is still unknown...

Michael Harper
A Fly in the Soup

Said the man to the waiter in the black & white suit,

"Pardona Garcon, there's a fly in my soup!"

Said the waiter to the man, "That just will not do;

I'll have someone come and fix that for you!"

So out came a boy with a big, crazy grin,

Who carried a frog—then threw the frog in!

"Thank you, dear waiter—but I've one thing to say;

There is no more fly, but the frog wants to stay."

"The frog will not leave? We mustn't have that!"

So the boy came again with a fat, furry cat.

The cat leaped from the boy with a slick, mighty bound,

Then pounced on the frog and swallowed it down!

"Thank you, dear boy!" said the man to the chap,

"But now this fat cat won't move from my lap!"

But the waiter sighed lightly, with a sad look in his eye,

Then looked at the man, and uttered, "Oh, my!

We haven't a dog to chase the cat from the coop.

I'm afraid we used him to flavor the soup!"

"I see," said the man as he walked to the door,

But I don't think I'm hungry just now anymore."

Laura Bulgaris
The Serenade

Each song kills the last
But it doesn't matter
With you in close reach.
So I'll sing to you
With one thing in mind.
I want you in me
Down my throat
More, More, More.
I want you, I need you,
I love you,
My beer.

Laura Bulgaris
Underneath the Big Top

We heard the crowd gurgle.
Instantly the Bearded Lady
Gnawed at the human web below.
Now I stand alone
Shuddering on a wire,
High above the heads of the weeping jesters,
Taking a glimpse of what . . . seems
To be nothing more than
A slaughtered embryo.

A. Neff
Cayenne Pepper

Alice crosses the brook
never running back,
a Queen so fast
under the red sky,
a hot iron left
on too long.

Running to the top of the mountain
after a white rabbit
under the morning sun. My life flashing
in the corner of his mind.

The rabbit turned,
devoid of color
against the watercolor sky.
Looking up too high
blinded by the whiteness
I toppled into
the blackest hole
twisting
crashing
reeling
breaking my neck,
breaking my head;
all you want to do is live.

Live, grated by the sharp
corners of cheshire smiles
a Mad Hatter rambling
rhyme
no mock-trial here
to disembowel with
words, an idle stack of
cards
after crossing
the womanhood brook in
strapped
silence.

Standing by the small door
stiction forcing me to swallow
the tart bottle
of DRINK ME
plunging into pinching inches
under the hot iron
pressed and scorched
smothered by the stench of burning
flesh, folded like a skirt
forever pleated.

'shrooms lift larger
larger than life
to climb out of the hole
and eat the cayenne pepper
sky. Gaining momentum to
kill the grunting pig-boy
who debauches
and kills
the green bud
of a rose.

The world bites her head off,
Bitter.
Bitter.
Bloodless residue of the
tart taste
of red rape.

*stiction: "The force required to cause one body in contact with another to move" (Webster).

Markus Schröder
On Campus

It was one of those nice evenings that everyone likes during the Indian Summer. It was still warm, but not so hot as in the weeks before. The leaves were shimmering in the brightest colors during sunset. He liked to be in the darker areas of the campus at this time of day. Everything seemed to be so clean, so calm. He sat down under a tree behind some bushes. Two or three of the more curious squirrels came to see if he brought something to eat. He often sat under this tree and he always had something for these cute animals. He liked to watch them coming closer, very cautious, but still curious. Then in a quick hush they grabbed the macaroon or peanut or whatever he brought with him. He enjoyed it and could watch them for hours.

When the squirrels were gone, he lay back and looked into the sky. It was melting with the leaves. It became golden and red, orange and yellow. He did not dare breathe loudly because he was afraid to disturb the majestic atmosphere. He often asked himself why he was worthy to enjoy it while other people just rushed by—like now. He heard the heavy steps of a student in sneakers. The guy was running. Thomp-thomp-thomp. And he passed by without noticing the other one. The quiet came back and comforted him. The quiet was not only no sound; it was a quilt he could use as a shelter, and he liked to examine its different patches: the black of nightly oak tree forests, the blue suede of starry skies, the white clouds in full moon nights, the grey and foggy meadows—all the things other people who are always in a hurry never realize.

He lay back and watched the starry sky. It was amazing how many stars one could see from one small spot. And he felt like one of them, shining in the dark, being something to remember. He was brought back to reality by other steps. These steps were not as heavy as the first ones. Tock-tock-tock-tock. A woman. She wore high heeled shoes. He began to smile. Maybe she liked stars. He got up without a sound and stepped out on the path, but she had already passed by. Always in a hurry, he thought when he followed her. She didn't notice it until she felt a strong arm around her neck and a big hand over her mouth. She had no chance. Unfortunately, he was in a hurry and couldn't help her as courteously as he wanted to.

He left her, with her face turned towards the stars, the moon shining on her white body. What a wonderful night, he thought. A squirrel was looking curiously from one of the lower branches.

It's a peaceful, quiet night on campus.



Michael Dube
1911: The Fall of Tyranny

I guess you could say it's pretty peaceful here when the managers leave. At least it gives a girl a chance to gather her thoughts and have a bit of conversation without getting yelled at. I only started working here at the Triangle Textile Factory about a month ago. I started with Martha and Tabatha working the sewing machines in the pit. They call it "The Pit" because that's where all the new girls go when they're just learning. It's awful dark over there, everybody being pushed so close together and the machines making such a racket. There's no windows over in that corner, just a couple of wall lamps, and even if they do work the way they're meant to, you can barely see to work. There is filth everywhere; they say it costs too much to hire a cleaner so they just have one of us do the work. But you know they need us to be workin' every minute God gives us, so they pretty often forget about the cleaning.

It surely isn't a grand place to work, but it's a job. Nowadays a person ought to feel real lucky to have work, that's what my mother tells me anyway. I live over on the west side with my mother, my two brothers, Paul and Matthew, and my older sister Catherine. Mother tries real hard to keep our stomachs full and a roof over us, but ever since Papa died it's been a true struggle. We had to move twice since then, and since the boys are only small still (Paul is six now and Matthew just turned eight), that leaves Catherine and me to help bring in the money.

Up until a month ago, I attended school over on the east side. I had to stop going when we moved again so that I could get work. You see, the landlord didn't really want to rent to us; being women, he didn't think we could make the rent. Mom's been lucky enough to stay on as a secretary to one of Papa's friends. He helps out when he can, but he's got a family, too, and in these times everyone's pretty much looking out for their own. Catherine got a job over at Sementelli's slaughter house. She hates it over there, but the pay is better than it is here. Every day she comes home smelling like fresh death and looking like she just finished crying. Sometimes before bed she sits up and tells me stories; when I hear stories like that I thank God for the job I have.

Our manager, Harold Lechniak, is a crusty old man, I would guess about 50, who staggers back and forth the length of the factory all day long yelling at us for one thing or another. It took some getting used to at first, and I even thought about quitting, but Catherine talked me out of it with one of her stories about Sementelli's. Besides, I was very lucky to get my job.

The first day I walked in, Mr. Lechniak was yelling at one of the girls; he told her she wasn't working fast enough for the Triangle standards. I still don't know her name, but she was more like the shadow of a girl than the

real thing. She was hunched over from working the machines, her hands were covered in crimson stained bandages, and she moved very lethargically, as if she wasn't getting any sleep (and knowing Mr. Lechniak, she probably wasn't). I was just standing to the side, waiting for a chance to talk to him, when he pushed that young girl to the ground and told her that if she didn't work faster, he could find just about anyone who could. I guess she didn't think much of her job, because when she stood up, she charged, head first with her arms waving violently and uncontrollably, right into Mr. Lechniak and knocked him back a few steps. I don't think he really knew what was happening. He was standing there all agasp when the hunchbacked girl dragged her bloody hands across Mr. Lechniak's face. She left streaks of dripping blood and four scratch scars. I don't think she knew what she was doing, either, because after she had done it, she had a look on her face as if she had just shot the President himself. Well, Mr. Lechniak, he started yellin' and screamin'. He was usin' all kinds of cuss words and then he pushed her down again, much harder than before, and told her she was fired. Momma tells me that a lady never uses cuss words, so I won't tell you exactly what Mr. Lechniak said, but that young girl ran out in a hurry. He looked at me and said, "What do you want?" It was more of a statement than a question, but I told him I wanted a job and he asked me if I could work a sewing machine. I said I was a quick learner and started telling him about how my family needed money, but he grunted that he didn't care and pointed me to The Pit. I hope he doesn't come back and hear me talking about him. I think he should be gone about another half hour.

The Triangle is located in one of the tallest buildings in New York. In fact, we are all the way up on the seventh floor. It feels strange being so high off the ground, and I don't know what we'd do if there was an emergency, you know, like an earthquake. It's no fun walking up and down those stairs every day. Mr. Lechniak says we get twenty minutes for lunch, so I stay in the factory and eat; it almost takes me my whole break to walk the stairs. There's only one ice box, and that's in the manager's office. I usually bring a sandwich and stash it under my table. It stays a little cooler down there, but the rest of the place is always so hot and sticky; the heat makes the day seem so much longer. I wish they would get the rest of the fans working; sometimes the sweat gets in your eyes and burns while you're trying to work your machine. I've cut myself many times that way.

Right now, as I look around me, it seems most of the girls look more like zombies than women. They stare off at the walls, most are skin and bones, and their skin! White like a ghost's. Just about everyone seems like they are about to fall over from exhaustion. A couple of the girls seem to have it better than most. Sometimes we gossip about why. There are a couple of girls, mostly the younger ones, who Mr. Lechniak sometimes gives

a couple of pats on their backsides when he walks by on his tyrannical tour. To me it seems like a secret code.

We work such very long hours for so little money that a lot of us just don't see the point. Most girls don't have a strong family as I do. A lot of them have to go home to an empty one-room flat or to an unemployed husband who is bitter about them having a job and him not. That's the case with my friend Tabatha, that's her over there, next to Slow Hazel. Tabatha came in last week with a big shiner on her left eye. When I asked her what happened, she showed me bruises all over her arms and legs. She said her husband had gotten drunk and beaten her for money to go back to the bar. Sometimes I think how lucky I am.

Every once in a while, all of the managers get together and have what they call a "board meeting." I think they probably all go out to lunch and talk about how lazy, slow, and stupid we all are, but that's just guessing. Just once I would love to see good old Mr. Lechniak strapped down to one of our machines for a day and see how he likes working under our conditions. Anyway, when they have these meetings, all of the managers leave the factory and we girls have a high old time. It's not like we slack off or anything like that; you never know who's gonna tattle to the manager to try to get a promotion. But we have fun. It's nice to be able to work without anyone yelling at you or looking over your shoulder to make sure you don't make any mistakes. When all of the managers leave, and they only usually leave us for about an hour, sometimes two, they lock the door behind them from the outside. They think that since we're all women that as soon as they leave, we will stop working and have a tea party or some nonsense like that. I don't mind much since I never leave during my shift anyway, but I think that it's queer the way men think. They seem to think they're better than we are for some reason, and that women are like work mules, stupid work mules that have tea parties with crumpets. As far as I'm concerned, men are just big boys; they don't seem to think any clearer when they're 50 than when they're 10. But I have to keep reminding myself, *You're lucky to be where you are, lots of girls don't have the things you have.* I usually feel better then...usually.

Everything has been pretty calm today, but that's usually the case when the monsters are gone. I just heard a bell go off. It sounds more like an alarm than a bell. I think it's coming from one of the lower floors. I can hear people screaming. The girls up here seem to be getting frantic—no one knows what's going on. Girls are running to the windows to see if they can see anything. Some of the girls are trying to get the door open, but it won't budge and they say it feels very hot to touch. Oh my God, the building must be on fire! Martha just yelled that she sees fire trucks. I run over to see, but there are already too many girls to get close to the window. The other girls

have the windows open, but there's no way to get out that way. A fireman is yelling up to us.

"Attention people on the fourth through seventh floors," he begins, "Please do not panic, I repeat, do not panic. We are having a problem getting our equipment to reach your floors. Please find the most efficient way out of the building."

Martha is yelling that she sees newspaper reporters gathering on the sidewalk. She says they're taking pictures of us. It is hard for me to see because there are so many girls in front of me. The smoke is filling the room now. I don't think they know that we can't get out. Martha says that people are gathering all around the building. The fireman is yelling again. "Everyone please remain calm," he yells frantically, "we have the situation under control."

Everyone in the factory knows he's lying. *We're going to die.* The smoke in here is getting overwhelming. I see girls over by the door collapsing in fits of coughing. People are running around in circles; there's nowhere to go.

Oh dear God! Someone just jumped out the window!

Martha! Please don't!

It's too late—Martha jumped too. The path to the window is getting less congested. I can see outside now.

There *are* a lot of people out there. I can see down at the many bodies of my co-workers. I don't think I have a choice, the smoke is going to take me if I don't jump. Maybe the other girls will break my fall. I love you Mom. I love you Paul. I love you Matthew. I love you Catherine, *take care of mother and the boys.* I love you God, please protect me.

Sharon Conteh
Riding Buses

Rain smears the gold
of busy taxis,
the red
of phone booths,
the green
of the lights that flicker
quickly.
The city dwellers crawl:
worms out of the cracks.
They scurry slowly.

Seduced by the sights of the lights,
my warm breath clouds
the cool window.
I etch
the words "i love you"
then watch "you" disappear
but the love remain.

Markus Schröder
Braune Augen

Meine Trauer spiegelt sich
in der warmen Tiefe Deiner
braunen Augen.

Toerichter Versuch
Dich zu kuessen
zu beruehren

Schuldbewusst zuckt meine Hand
zurueck,
wissend der Leere, sie hinterlaesst.

Die Frau nebenan, auf der Bank
Nickt bekuemmert. Sie weiss um Deine
braunen Augen.

Ich tauche in sie ein,
Doch der Waerter zieht mich zurueck.
"Ihre Zeit ist um."

Er fuehrt Dich weg, aus
meinen Augen,
in mein Herz.

Un die Tuer faellt hinter Dir
ins Schloss.
Nur noch 436 Tueren.

Brown Eyes

My grief is reflected
in the warm depth of your
brown eyes.

Silly try
to kiss you,
touch you.

Guilt shrinks my hand
back,
knowing the emptiness it leaves.

The woman beneath me on the bench
nods sadly. She knows about your
brown eyes.

I dive into them,
but the guard holds me back.
"Your time is over."

He leads you away from
my eyes,
into my heart.

And the door closes
behind you.
Only 436 more doors.

Colin Sherman
Matches

Kent found himself on a circular patch of wood, about five meters across. At its edge began a huge expanse of purplish, gritty pavement, which stretched off limitless in all directions. Except for some obscure shouting and bustle which seemed to be going on far off to the east and a few wispy high clouds, this giant sea of asphalt and the little island of wood on which he sat formed the whole of his visual perceptions. He was wearing his old khaki shorts, with pleated bottoms, and a green faded pocket-tee. What surprised him were his feet.

His legs, below the knees, had somehow transmuted into rough, tapered wood, and where his feet had once been were now two giant match heads, with white tips. The wood part blended smoothly into his knees, where it formed a fine transition with that joint's tenuous network of ligaments and bone. He found he could move his new match-stick legs as easily as his old ones, although he had not yet tried to stand. When he did he found it was not so difficult to balance on his new feet as he had expected. He walked, slowly at first, around his little wood circle, and found that by shifting his balance in new and curious ways, he could stop himself from toppling over. He imagined he must have appeared as if he were stalking something or other, on little Q-tip legs.

What he then discerned was that the giant expanse of stuff which surrounded him was not macadam or pavement, but the very striking surface of match-books. A whole ocean of it. It was fine and gritty, like sandpaper, and it glittered. "This is some devious shit," he thought, and sat down on his wooden island.

He sat for a while, thinking deeply, and then stripped himself naked. His shirt he tied easily around the bottom of his left foot, and to the right he fastened a covering with his shorts, underwear, and belt. For the next hour or so he concentrated on producing as much saliva as possible, and rubbed it into his covered feet. Then he made off toward the east, toward the voices and the shouting.

His first steps outside his circle were cautious. With each step he waited, teeth clenched after he put each foot down, for that fateful WHOOSH that signals the striking of a match. He thought back to the stories he had read about people who had spontaneously combusted. They at least had no idea what was coming. So with each step, he lifted his knees high and was careful not to scrape his feet in any way, almost as if he were marching. He continued on, this naked, bundle-footed, ignitable thing, for some time.

What he soon found discouraging was that the ground proved very abrasive, and despite his attempts to walk with care, the bundles he had made on his feet were quickly wearing through. He had been walking for several

hours, and his wood island was far out of sight. To the east, the activity seemed to have become a little louder, but he still could see nothing on the horizon and he speculated that sound carried there like it did over water. He sat down, spit on his feet some more, re-arranged his bundled feet so that the quickly forming holes were near the top, and slept for a little.

He awoke renewed with a vigorous determination to reach the source of the activity to the east. He let out a little yell. "Ah!" he said, and threw his arms into the air, "So what! So what, if I am straddled with combustible feet, in a desert designed for my combustion! So what! I am going to reach those voices!" And he set off again.

Whether it was adrenaline, or anger, or a sheer acceptance of the good possibility of his becoming a tater-tot, he nevertheless set a blistering pace, considering his situation. In a stilted, almost robotic flutty of arms and quick, high steps, he marched and flapped his way to the east. What a sight he was! If anyone had seen this freakish thing galumphing toward them so purposefully, they would surely have let out a yell and run off as fast as possible. What made his appearance worse was that he was well aware of it, and he proceeded on his march sometimes letting out little cackles of laughter.

Finally, after several hours of this, he glimpsed on the horizon the source of the eastern commotion. Just barely visible, he saw little squadrons of people running around and yelling. Occasionally he would see a little burst of flame and a poof of smoke which trailed off into the sky. These people seemed just as lost as he was, for he saw no buildings or landmarks of any sort—just a continuing expansion of purple match-lighting stuff.

When he got closer he realized they were playing football. And not just one game, either—there must have been a hundred teams, all squaring off against one another on the hardpurple desert. There were no stands, no spectators, and no referees or coaches. Just row after row of football games, and a few extra players who sat on a few scattered benches. He moved over to one of them. The extras sitting there had match-feet, apparently the same as his, except that they were protected with somewhat more sophisticated coverings than his makeshift clothing wraps. He had forgotten that he was naked. He sat down next to one of the extras, a bearded big-eyed man with the number 6543 sewn to his shirt.

"Hello," Kent said.

The bearded man, who along with everyone else had taken no notice of him before, turned to him.

"Egads, boy! You haven't any clothes on! You're naked!"

Kent assessed himself, "You're right," he said. "What can I do about it?"

The man looked at him stupidly. "Well, maybe you can suit up! Just ask Geronimo over there," and he pointed to a big man with a green hat who

was just barely visible across the scenes of four or five unrelenting football games.

"Thanks," Kent said, and struck off toward Geronimo. By this time he had nearly forgotten about his match-feet, but the crossing of these football fields promptly reminded him. These football games were a terrible sight. The players, like Kent, had matches for feet, and although their feet seemed fairly well protected, the little flames and smoke he had seen from a distance were the result of one of the players occasionally bursting into flames. The other players responded to this merely by signaling for an extra from one of the benches, and until the burning man had stopped screaming, and had burned through, they avoided that part of the field. Once ignited, these players burned very quickly and violently; this entire scene speedily persuaded Kent to sit down, right in the middle of one of the playing fields, and re-wrap his feet.

He found that his foot coverings had become mere rags, and he noted ominously several abrasions on the combustible parts of his feet. He had nothing left to wrap them with. About ten feet away, he watched one player in some sort of shuffling maneuver, ignite himself. His right leg caught first in a huge swirling flare, which immediately crossed over and ignited his left leg, and soon enveloped his entire body. A player from the opposing team who had gotten too close stumbled over the burning man and he ignited as well. So they were both incinerated, one on top of the other, and reduced to carbon within a few minutes. Kent had watched this grisly thing run its course with a morbid, intense attentiveness. He had watched their faces, even as they burned, and seen their poor melting screams. When it was over, he touched his face lightly with the tips of his fingers. He then vowed not to play this game, and crawled, suddenly afraid to stand, the rest of the way over to Geronimo, bloodying his knees on the rough ground.

Geronimo was a blond, angry looking man with a waxed yellow mustache, and he scowled as he presided over the football fields. Kent crawled up to him from behind, and tugged on his coat-tail.

"What?!" Geronimo scowled, and turned menacingly down to Kent.

Kent was suddenly terrified. He had pretty much run the gamut of emotions that day, from wonder to frustration to fear, and even to happiness, when he had at last spied the football games after walking so long, but now he was simply terrified, both at this man Geronimo and at what he had witnessed in reaching him. He just wanted to know what was going on.

"What!" Geronimo yelled again, above the din of several football games. He nudged Kent with his boot. "What?"

Kent shrank back a little. "Are you Geronimo?" he asked.

"I am," said Geronimo and he knelt down to look Kent over.

"Who...are you? You are one sorry sight! Bloody and naked and asking for me! What do you want?"

"The man over there said you could help me."

"How? Who?"

"One of those people on the benches. He said you might get me some clothes."

Geronimo's eyes opened wide, as did his mouth. He seemed amazed. "What!" he shouted, and began to rant, "Who in blazes is anyone to tell you what I might or might not do? I am a busy man! Do you see this? All of this? I am responsible for it all! And who are you? A naked bleeding stupid person, asking me for help, urged on by the feeble notion of an extra! An extra! There are ten thousand players here, and who are you? I'll bet you walked here, didn't you? It's a shame you didn't just go up! Damn! look at your feet—oooh, you were close! You orphan! Ooooooh, I hate orphans! Do you think you're the first, coming here asking me for clothes? That guy on the bench probably remembers me from before! A veteran—I sure saved his ass! But you, no. There is no room! What am I talking about? Why am I talking to you? Go away! No—I'll help you, here!" He pulled Kent up. "Now, run! Slide! Jump! Shuffle! I'll make you a hopscotch court! Go on, get out of here! Run fast!" He pushed Kent down. "Damn, you stupid! Get up! Go!"

Kent reeled from this explosion of verbiage. Geronimo was huffing and puffing and cursing, and though Kent felt that somewhere in him this man had an explanation for everything that was going on, he felt it best not to press him at that time. Geronimo kicked him in the butt.

"Go! Go! Go! Leave me alone! Get out of here!"

Kent tried to crawl away, but Geronimo stalked him, screaming obscenities and kicking him.

"Stand up, fool! Burn! Burn! Go away! You, a uniform! Hah!"

Kent tried to stand, but Geronimo just pushed him down.

"Stand, Stupid, stand!"

At this point, Kent just stopped where he was and lay still, as if he were dead. Geronimo continued to kick and harass him. He grabbed one of Kent's legs and tried to rub his foot into the ground, but Kent pulled back and sent Geronimo reeling. He skidded a little on his butt. "AAaaaaaargh!" he said and flung himself at Kent and they began to wrestle.

And so they wrestled and they wrestled. Kent wrestled in sheer self defense, and Geronimo wrestled driven by some strange mania which Kent had brought out in him. Slowly, the nearest football games began to subside, as the players stopped their rushing and tackling and kicking to see what was going on. Soon others from more distant games were drawn to the spectacle until there were thousands of players crowded around the two combatants. Most of them could not actually see anything, but it was a diversion nonetheless, and they were all too happy to take a break from their routine.

"Who is that?" one said.

"Who knows?" said another.

"It's Geronimo!" screamed someone from up front.

This news spread quickly through the crowd. They pressed in.

"Who's with him?"

"I dunno."

"Some naked guy. He's doing well, though."

"Geronimo'll kill him!"

"Maybe."

Kent and Geronimo were growing tired. Kent had Geronimo in a Full Nelson, and Geronimo was biting Kent's knee, which was pressed up against Geronimo's face. Kent yelled and let Geronimo go, who pounced to his feet.

"AHA!!" he said, "I have you now!" and he leaped towards Kent.

Kent, though exhausted and utterly confused, somehow managed to outmaneuver this flying attack by Geronimo. He quickly rolled into the center of what had become their arena and watched Geronimo land.

Geronimo belly-flopped on the ground. He slid and bounced so that his face got pushed into the feet of the encroaching crowd, which had left them only a small circle to fight in. Kent saw that one of Geronimo's leather booties had become worn in one spot, and he lunged at it, and grabbed his leg.

What Kent then did, he did not attempt to justify later. He attributed it to the sheer desperateness of his situation. Upon grabbing Geronimo's leg, the one with the worn bootie, he with all his strength struck it hard against the ground, and it ignited.

The awfulness of the chain-reaction which then took place would be difficult to describe. Geronimo, lit at the heel, desperately beat his foot on the ground in a futile effort to extinguish it, but he was almost immediately consumed. The throngs of players who had pressed in the closest panicked. They tried to get away from this burning man in their midst, but the giant mass of people at the perimeters of the crowd, who had no idea what was going on, had pressed them together so tightly that they could not move. Soon Geronimo had ignited a spectator, who in turn lighted another, who in turn lighted another. Soon the whole inner circle of spectators was consumed in flames.

Kent sat in the center of all this and tried to breathe. People were igniting all around him, and the ignition of so many people at once was creating a vacuum of oxygen. He huddled into a little ball and covered his feet. All around he heard screams, popping noises, and a deadly succession of whooshing matches, like machine gun fire. These people had been so pressed together that they burned with the rapidity of a flaring book of matches. Kent dared not lift his head. He sat in his little ball, and waited for it to end.

It was over within ten minutes. It was quiet, and Kent could breathe easier. He sat huddled for some time.

Eventually he got up. He stood at the center of a giant donut of blackened, carbonized bodies. A slight wind had already begun blowing bits of them away. If any on the outer edges of this disaster had somehow survived,

they were nowhere to be seen. Kent pondered for a minute if he should be sad, or sorry, or anything for these men. He thought of where he was and what he was, and decided he simply didn't understand. He spit on his feet, and marched off again toward the east, over the blackened remains of ten thousand football players he didn't know.