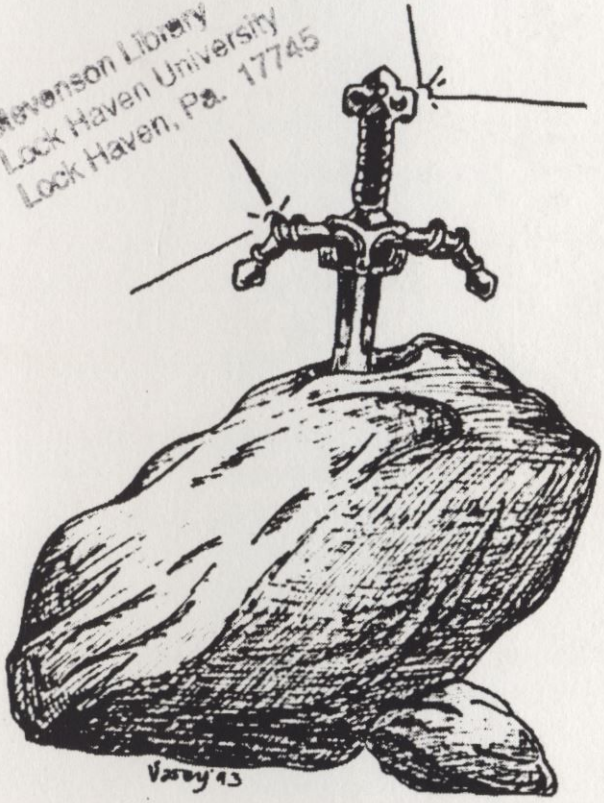
The Crucible



The Lock Haven University Literary Magazine
Fall 1993

The Crucible

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of Lock Haven University

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Sharon Conteh

Tea Leaves

Long after I've taken
slow sips of warm tea
in these chilled autumn afternoons
and blown streams of steam
across my cup,
the water rising
in my eyes, trapped clouds
on the lenses of my glasses,
and the last honey color drop disappearing
deep in the back of my throat,
I feel warm.

Long after I've lost
the sensation of the spices
under my skin, I feel
the heat in my hands
of the teacup as if
it hadn't been emptied.

Long after I've felt
your lips upon my skin
and drank you down,
held you inside
still warm to the touch
like my china teacups.

Sharon Conteh

Blasphemy

There is a small container
of water hidden in the back
of the wooden cabinet,
next to the other
precious things saved,
but not savoured.
"Little angel," I stole
this precious fluid, worthless
to waste on me.
I dabbed it
behind my ears, wrists
behind my knees
like models in malls.
I drank it,
and I don't feel
pure,
or anything.
Sin is sore, unhealed.
I still hurt.

This is holy?
water bottled in Belgium
imprinted in its sides
of plastic skin.
The label's an angel
white in white
with gold hair and blue eyes
like my brother's
"as good as gold"
girly magazines. No angels
look like me, God must
have forgotten. Too busy blessing
water, that's ordinary
like me.

Michelle Runk

Visiting Catholicism

Stop!
You must first
bow your head,
and cross several body parts
with a sponge-dampened finger
before you enter
this house of worship.

Stop!
You must kneel,
and recross your
forehead,
lips,
and heart
before your body rests
on the perfectly polished, wooden pews in
this house of worship.

Stop!
You must stay seated
and watch others feed
on dry
tasteless wafers, and
drink their vineyard's best,
if you're only visiting
this house of worship.

Stop!
You cannot tell your secrets
in the dark closet
to the man who forgot
Sears puts cardboard in
shirt collars,
if, again,
you're only visiting
this house of worship.

Darrell K. Bressler

Broken Hearted

My heart is my tempter,
It leads me into misery
and destroys my soul.
of the shadow of love. I
heart troubles me. My
misery and despair will follow
I shall dwell within the realm
ever.....awe-women.

I shall always want.
for its pleasure sake
Low, I walk through the valley
fear great evils, for my love-sick
passion runneth over. Surely
me all the days of my life, and
of the broken hearted for ever and

Laura Bulgaris

Day Dream
(Heaven On Earth)

Eyes steered headlong into plush scenery,
Thoughts veered heavenward into soft reality.
This is the place I dream of,
This is where I'm going, this is where I've been.
As vivid as the time
I rubbed dandelion yellow
On my little sister's cheek pure.
We laughed and ran
In circles, young, round, vibrant,
Yellow-faced, innocent circles.
Dusk falls, ritual time arrives.
Like clockwork we create...
Lightning bug death-fun.
As the fluorescent streak diminishes
We know it's time for bed.
Breeze brings me back.
My thoughts regress earthward.
Sunlight golden creeps through my lids
To my eyes.
Blues, greens, deeper than
Sea
I'm already there.

Heather L. Pecoraro

Jealous Hinges

Silver blue waves lick the crests
washing away specks of yesterday
fragments of today.

Paint the vast open sky
the rich billowing whiteness
melts into shimmering pillars
of sand castles proudly defending
the ambitious enemy.

The carved castle door opens,
puddles of creamy froth swallow
the delicate features. Why today
and not tomorrow?

(Tomorrow, will I ever see the
ring that bears life?)

Death stops, the waves dissipate
into tomorrow. The castle shudders
and moans, the saturated door crashes
in on the open life of today.

Lori Christopher

Ocean's Last Kiss

The dolphins dance
In the mystical sea
As the cold ocean water
Plays a butterfly kiss
On their skin.

The rhythmic crashing
Of the compelling ocean
Captivates my soul
And beckons me to
Admire the enchantment below.

As passion holds my hand,
I join the dolphins
In the frigid water depths
And watch the bubbles
Blow a whisper over my cheeks.

I sink and smile
As I drown in ecstasy.

Susan Sarvis

Drowned

Dangling,
hooked-bait
and dying.
Cast into the
salt-quenched ocean.
Never chosen
by even the meekest
fishes.
Trying to comprehend
the brightness of sun
and bigness of Humpback Whales.

Learning that
swirling mermaids
aren't as pleasant
as once believed...
he wants one
anyway.

Soon he'll be cast back
onto dry land
to die
sand-speckled
and sea-thirsty.

Michelle Runk

Drizzle of Death

Rain brings fat
slugs to the
blacktop sidewalk.
People stumble over,
and crush the
slimies dead.
Without shells,
they squoosh,
and flatten beneath
our rubber soles.

Michelle Runk

Little Fishergirl

Skittering away from school
to the docks;
waiting for Daddy to bring
fish-filled nets,
and evening-long chores.
Playing hop-scotch
on splintering planks
waiting for Daddy.

All cheery,
and ready for work,
but Daddy comes
with empty nets,
a saddened face,
and still a sharpened blade.

Gail Grosbeck

Quill Gordon

An elliptical arc whirred overhead, cutting through swarms of black, buzzing gnats, the kind that tangle themselves in hair, become smashed behind ears, and have a tendency to fly into the nose or eyes.

Descending silently into the cool swirls of sweet, clear water, the fly-line drifted the pheasant feather March Brown just below the surface.

"Dad, when will you teach me to cast with your fly-rod? I promise I won't break it. I just want to try it once," questioned a wiry, long-legged pubescent girl.

Again the whoosh of the outgoing double taper fly-line with the March Brown melted into the chirping peepers and clicking crickets, but no answer came.

Staring at the figure of her fifty-something year old father, she wondered if he even noticed her half the time. How could he not let her try to fly-fish? It's not fair that he wouldn't trust her with the fishing pole. Maybe this quiet, shy man wasn't her father. No, she knew that wasn't the case because bouts of tempermental swearing when the butterdish was empty and the toast became cold while the butter was unwrapped weren't a coincidence.

"Want to get over here for a minute?" jolted her out of her reverie.

"Sure. Are you going to let me try now, Dad?"

He didn't look up from his red, thick-veined hands, nimbly working the delicate brown-and-dove-grey fly from the line.

"Could you please get me the Quill Gordon? It's that light green and yellow fly in the second compartment," said the low voice.

Bending, she tentatively reached her thin, tapered fingers into that box of colors, sour, worm odor, fish scales, and hooks. Shivering as the vision of a hook curved effortlessly through her soft, pink flesh. Not a drop of blood, just a shot of pain. Tears welled uncontrollably and she couldn't stop herself from crying out for the one person who would know what to do.

"Is this it?"

Gazing at the majestic beauty of a red-tailed hawk swooping in the May evening drafts, he glanced at her and ambled towards the tree where she stood.

"Yeah, that's it. We're going to use this one because it's dusk and

the caddis flies are out. If it was April at this time, I'd use the Pale Evening Dunn or Grey Fox, which is a nymph. See, there are always nymphs in the water no matter what time of year because different flies have different larval periods. Some live as nymphs for two years." As he explained this, she watched him and wondered why it was that he wanted her to learn how to fly-fish and yet he wouldn't let her try. Spinning rods were easy. Knowing what fish to go for and which lure was needed, she could cast and reel them in almost as well as a boy, except she was a girl, but for a girl she wasn't half bad.

"Well, if that's all you want, I'm gonna go for a walk. Just around the trail we passed, okay?" As she said this, she watched the graceful, fluid motion of the man's wrist as the pole was coerced into a circle around his salt and pepper head.

Looking up, he met the eyes of this strange teenage girl, his eyes darted out to the place where thoughts are formed as he mumbled something she couldn't understand.

"No, wait. I can't seem to get anything here. Maybe you want to try. We'll move downstream to where that eddy is. No, it'll be hard for you to cast over there because of the branches."

Her feet danced over the rocks and she reached him in all of five seconds. Placing the pole in her hands, he wrapped those red, weathered, wind-beaten hands over hers and moved her left hand on the line, giving her the slack she needed to propel the line with the Quill Gordon across the river.

"You know my father gave me this rod over thirty years ago. It's split bamboo. At the time it was an expensive piece of equipment. It was worth it though. I'd rather use this than one of those new poles any day."

She stared intently at this strong man who couldn't explain what it was that bothered him about talking to her.

She looped the line over her, slicing through the May flies and gnats, watching with her father as the line dropped into their rolling, glassy world.

Joshua Z. Davison

Electrifying

The sky was on fire, burning.
My brain was grinding, churning.
The moon was alive, talking.
I was sleepy, dreaming, walking.

The box had ears, listening.
Rob was smiling, grinning.
Jason was on fire, smoking.
Hedge was trapped, choking.
The room was happy, dancing.
The colors were flowing, changing.
Orange to green to blue, scintillating.
Johnny was frolicking, promenading.

The stars outside were near, surrounding.
The earth was disappearing, confounding.
Each of us our own planet, orbiting.
Along the path floating, soaring.

The path seemed to be never-ending,
Moving beyond unceasing, unremitting.
Through a cow pasture, persisting,
Over a mountain, devoting, consecrating.

Rob was certain, assuring.
He had been promising, insuring
We'd be there soon, enjoying
The becoming, alluring.

He was correct, exacting.
There it was enticing, dazzling.
We were overwhelmed, sparkling.
It was the most bedazzling, bewildering, enchanting

Lake we had ever seen.

Christine E. Allen

The Creek

Ceaseless sounding,
As my heart keeps pounding, in time
With rhythmic tune of
Water-tickling stones,
Seeping precariously beneath my bones,
Leaving lurking pools cold,
Behind in mud
Where my feet once touched,
Drowning the ever-present essence of my soul.

Andrew Ludwig

An Autumn Walk in the Appalachians

The path crawls slowly
up the
mountainside
as that of a learning
infant,
but
wrinkled age
squints
through leafless trees
and battered banks.

Beyond the eroded turn,
the path coils
downward
to the forest's
cellar,
into the dense
clouds
lingering below.

Above,
the sky cowers
behind the
forest's golden-flamed
shield,
a fortress allowing
only sneak previews
of sunlight and
whispers of
Mother Nature.

The path dives
deeply
into the secluding mist,
below to a rumored treasure.
Like a piece of discarded blue
yarn,
a brook glides through the
funnelled valley,
its pools drowning out darkness
and reflecting the true beauty
inside the forest's scarred shell.
Leaping pebbles,
the ripples skip briskly along the
path,
a path which now beckons the traveler.

Jenn Sterner

The Hollow

The night brisk and harsh,
the moon shining full without disturbance.
Still air rustling no leaves,
then the hollow comes alive.
The owl above clatters its wings,
and the awakened animals hover for shelter.
A strange eeriness sweeps across the night.
Winds howl and disturb the mood.
The owl robs his prey of soul.
Another painful, agonizing moment
of fear and confusion.
Death prevails!
The fearful mood lifts
and the night again becomes sleepy and undisturbed.

C. Gold

The Storm

Sitting in an
empty box,
listening to the
barometer drop
in the shadows
of my mind.

Thinking, when action means
swift death,
not thinking that
procrastination certifies
the inevitable demise
of it all.

Holding on to that
vaporous rope,
I feel it,
but then I look
and fall into
The Storm.

Darrell K. Bressler

Broken Feathers

Hey, big white man,
with your rainbow hair.
Who invited you to the promised land?
You came to take more than bear and deer.
You came and left us with a jagged tear.
You took what was not ours to give,
and shoved us aside, the few that lived.
We lived as one with mother earth,
while you named it, and gave it birth.
We raised your bastard, and you razed yours.
You filled us with bullshit, we licked our sores,
we lived in your bottles, we bought in your stores.
You showed us our place. Now, when you look in the
Mirror, what is your fate? To us life was peace, to
you it was hate. Our tragedy and suffering you can't
deny. You wrote your history, now live with your lie!
Again you ask what is not ours to give, maybe this
time you'll let none of us live.

JED

On Thoreau

You said it well, my friend:
"The earth is the mother of all creatures."
To miss an opera of nature
would indeed be a waste of a day.

The genius of cartooning, our friend, backed you well.
His tears flowed from the man
as his home had fallen into society.

"Heaven is under our feet...as well as over our heads."
The forests are there to enjoy;
once they're gone, that's it.

Could we indeed see through each others' eyes
for an instant?
Things would certainly change!
Let's look through the eyes of a tree...
as a saw approaches.
Let's look through the eyes of a lake...
as a child throws a can into her,
polluting her forever.
Let's look through the eyes of the air...
as holes begin to form in her skin,
and in turn, she is forced to hurt us.

You look through my eyes
and I'll look through yours.

Amy Timko

The Caged Bird Who Cannot Sing

She sits in her cage,
dull and lifeless,
Going about her business.
The freedom outside the bars taunts her;
She once soared about the skies of her homeland,
But now, only sits
and remembers what once was.
In her new home she sees opportunity outside the cage,
Different skies to explore,
But only moves about a little in her cage,
dying inside for want of more.

Matthew Vasey

The Dark Mirror

The midnight fog slithers and curls around me like the souls of the condemned trying to take me away to answer for what I have done. I hear a cacophony of men and horses in the distance, but it is sadly overshadowed by the echoes of my own feet on the cobblestones. They must have found her. The sly thought slides around my head as if on ice. It seems more and more difficult to think, but I know that the sounds of discovery seem to come sooner each time; even my quicksilver sanity knows that.

The silver eye of the moon is absent tonight, leaving my acts without witness, but also leaving me to rely on the gaslamps along the street to guide my way. I count them without really thinking, feeling their presence pressing in on me with a soul-scourging heat. I listen more carefully to the sounds behind me: nothing. A cold clutching hand of paranoia grasps me, shaking me to the core. I can see nothing in the fog; maybe they've crept by me to lie in waiting.

My throat constricts as the beating of my staccato heart quickens yet further. There is an alley ahead, I remember as I wipe at a sheen of sweat that's blossomed on my brow despite the night's chill. My pace is quickening with my pulse, and I find my eyes shifting uneasily to every shadow. Stopping abruptly, I listen again. But for my own ragged breathing, there is no other sound.

I scramble down the slowly constricting roadway, the tall, dark sides pushing down on me. Shooting out the end and back onto a main street, I make my way down the labyrinth of London's cramped back streets. Finally, panting and stumbling, I come to the grim silhouette of my apartment, a sanctuary waiting to swallow my torment. I fumble with the rusted latch until it clicks and the door squeaks grudgingly inward.

I wipe my red-stained gloves on my pants as I slowly ascend the rickety stairs to the attic where I stay. My boots thump and creak upon the groaning staircase, and a few tiny drops of scarlet still fly with my movements.

The door to my room is missing, and as I pace through the gaping portal, I reach down and strike a match on a table at my side. The smell of sulfur wafts up and the oil lamp catches.

The slope ceilinged room is sparsely furnished, having only a night table, cat, and a broken backed chair against the left hand wall, and a wash stand and mirror along the far wall. The mirror, a tall looking glass in a carved wooden frame, catches my attention. As a child, I remember sneaking up into this attic to stare at the strange reflection that the mirror would cast. It was not my own, but that of a tiny ethereal face with large inquisitive eyes and shimmering white skin.

As I grew, the reflection changed as well, becoming darker and more horrible. When my recent crimes started, the image in the mirror had disappeared altogether, but now as I stride past it to the chair, a black, twisted apparition with barbed skin and antlers mimics my movements. I pay it little heed as I drop my crimson-stained gloves down on the chair, carefully placing my scalpels and folded cloak atop them. A thin rivulet of redness rolls off of the seat to spatter on a dried, rust-colored patch on the floor.

A steady cadence of rain begins to patter against the dirty window pane as I scrub my hands in the wash basin's murky waters. I have no towel, so as I finish, I wipe my hands on my breeches like a child cleaning his hands after play.

Wandering over to my cot, I drag out a plain wooden box and remove from it a pen, ink bottle, and a heavy, leather-bound book. I jot down all I can remember of the night's activities in fragmented thoughts that run across the page like the tangled perfection of a spider's web. Small chortles escape as I recount some of my more fascinating memories in all of their grotesque detail. Consumed by my mad glee, it takes me a long moment to realize that I am being watched. My writing slows, coming finally to a stop. This is no longer my self-induced paranoia that trails me like an empty shadow, but a feeling of pure and substantial dread. I look up to find the dark, spiny-skinned silhouette drilling my very core with its eyeless gaze. Through my loathing, a curiosity takes hold of me. Who is this long unseen companion that has grown with me since my childhood? Does he see me as I see him?

I rise from my seat on the cot and approach the mirror as one would approach a skittish deer. The reflection does not move as I do, but seems to retain a being of its own. Arms crossed, it watches me: it has no eyes, but I know it watches me. I tilt my head in horrid fascination, coming to a stop to stand as still as the dark thing in the mirror. It nods as

if in greeting; I nod back, mouth agape.

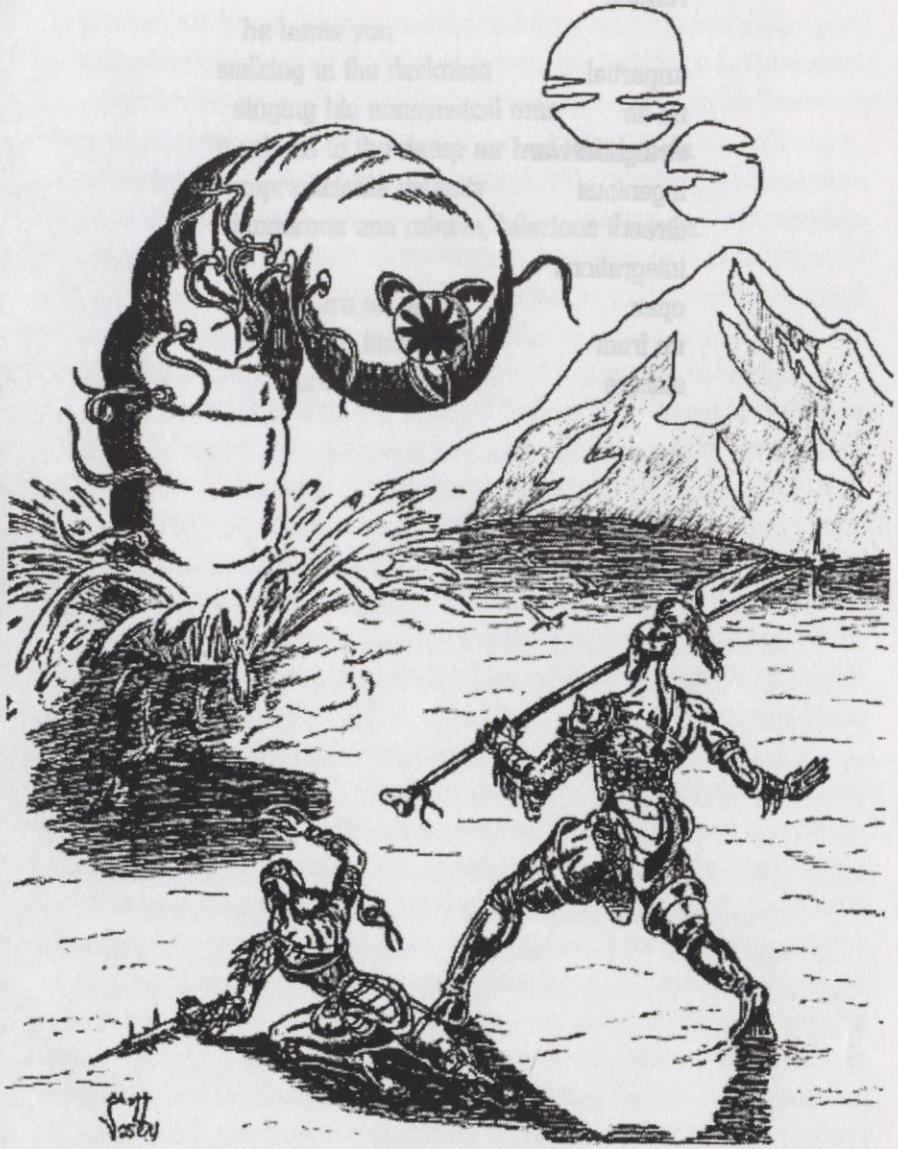
Working up my madman's courage, I reach out to touch him. The mirror ripples as a pond that has been touched by a dropping pebble, and a living blackened hand slides from the epicenter to grasp my wrist like a manacle. Shrieking, I slap at the inhuman hand, bloodying my own in the effort. Slowly, menacingly, the rest of the dark silhouette floats free of its mirrored prison. Still in its frightful hole, I wail like a wounded animal.

It raises its other hand to my throat, and we stagger around the room, overturning my washstand and stumbling across the floor to crash into the table with the lamp. The glass globe breaks and flames escape to hungrily race around the dry floor boards. My log book combusts with a tiny explosion, and I feel as if I myself have been consumed also. Seared and ravaged, the creature that is my tormentor throws me to the floor, and his darkness descends upon me as the flames climb the walls....

* * *

By mid-morning, the weary fire fighters finally had the blaze under control, and by late afternoon it was doused. It had been an unearthly blaze that had raged against their best efforts, and some would even swear to have heard the cries of a suffering soul during their grueling vigil.

The constable picked his way carefully through the charred, steaming shell of the apartment house, finding that the flames had made quick work of anything that might lead to the disaster's cause. What he did find as the violet shadows of twilight settled across London, were somethings that raised more questions than it answered. Under a smoldering board was what appeared to be a singed, red spattered cloak, a half melted set of surgeon's scalpels, and a blackened piece of shattered glass.



Joshua Z. Davison

Honest

impartial
no lie
straightforward
ingenious
direct
integrations
open
up front
sincere

Ain't I

Amy Timko

Insanity

he hunts you
stalking in the darkness
singing his nonsensical tune
it echoes in the damp air and the tunnels.
unpredictable insanity
dangerous one minute, hilarious the next.

is there escape?
will he find you?
are you alone?

Jessica Stull

Crossing the Line

She stands in the surf, body braced for the tug of the undertow even while the waves surge inward, knowing that the pull will come eventually. Eternally tense, always waiting for the threat she knows must come. As the tide rises, the pull becomes stronger, fiercer, yet she still remains. She begins to slide backwards, no longer able to resist the force of the water as it rushes out to the sea. Slowly, ever so slowly, her slender form disappears underneath the teeming waves, until all hint of her presence vanishes and the sullen grey waters settle over her.

.....

I feel him tugging at me, pulling me: nothing specific, just a growing sense of unease. Those "red flags" that they talk about spring up constantly. He doesn't like that I strive to be independent, to be a person apart from him. I think he needs for someone to lean on him—his life seems to be spiraling out of control and he needs to have power over something. Somehow, he's decided to make me that something. Because I am independent and I balk at his attempts to control, I have become a challenge. I can almost pinpoint the moment when he decided to turn the charm on. He follows unexpected kindness with demands, and reacts angrily when I refuse to "repay him" by fulfilling his desires.

This situation frustrates me because he has done nothing at which I can point my finger and say, "See...see that? That was abusive. That was an attempt to control me." There are no specific instances to pinpoint, only a mishmash of actions and attitudes which, taken together, trigger that sixth sense that I seem to have. I listen to the way he talks about other women and I wonder how he can possibly have any respect for me when he seems to see all other females as sex objects—things to pursue. I become even more suspicious when he pushes me—harder than anyone else has ever pushed me—to be physically affectionate. "You're so cold," he complains. "It's like putting my arm around a block of ice." He doesn't seem to understand that I don't want his arm around me; I don't feel the need to rest my head on his shoulder. To me, these are signs of intimacy that one engages in with one's boyfriend, or perhaps with a very close male friend. He certainly is not the former, and having only known him for a matter of weeks, I don't think he qualifies as the latter either.

He touches me softly, intimately, not sexually but in a way that only my boyfriend may touch me. I am not sure how to react. I'm not comfortable with this, but I'm not sure about his motives—is he coming on to me? Or is this just the way he is accustomed to acting with his female friends? I don't know what to say, and so I shrink away from his caressing hand, hoping that he will take the hint. But the hand does not fall away from my neck; it continues its slow movement up and down my back, around the nape of my neck, an area I know he considers erotic. He ignores my stiffness, and I finally ask him to stop. The hand stops moving but continues to rest lightly on my back. "Why?" he asks. "Why are you being so cold?" he demands. Merely saying, "I'm not comfortable with this" is not enough of an explanation for my distaste. This is a kind of touching that I allowed before, he asserts, and he doesn't see why it has to change. He seems to believe that despite my protests I must, deep down inside, desire his touch. The tone of his voice, the way he looks at me, all convey the message that I am being unreasonable about this and depriving him of something which is his natural right. "This kind of intimate touching should be a part of a male-female friendship," he says. He does stop, but so does the discussion. No understanding has been reached, and so I deliberately distance myself from him, fearful of similar situations.

This must be the way a woman feels at the beginning of a battering relationship. She's not sure whether what she thinks she's seeing is really there. She doesn't want to say anything to anyone, or pull out of the relationship, for fear that it's all in her mind—and also because maybe it's not, and then she will have to deal with it. And will this continue until she has the shit beaten out of her? Or until he tries to force her into something she really doesn't want to do? It must be the same helpless feeling magnified thousands of times. I thank God that I have a strong relationship behind me and that I don't have to depend on this man for anything, but at the same time I wonder how I will handle this if it continues and how I can explain to him my pulling away.

Lori Christopher

Madonna Was Right

Your lips press insistently against
Mine, then run a trail down my neck.
I feel your hand slide up my leg until
Your fingers lie restlessly on the fly
Of my loose fitting Levi's.
I lift my knee to push your hand
Away while you suck vigorously on my
Neck, marking it to claim me, like a dog
Pisses on a tree to mark his territory.
I lie still beneath you, feeling out of body.
Your kisses do not burn my lips.
It is moist skin touching.
Nothing more.
Your touch does not excite me.
I feel no need to writhe in pleasure.
It's only a touch.
There is no electricity,
No compassion,
No love.
Madonna was right when she said,
"Romance is dead."

Laura Bulgaris

Gangrene Sex

Making its way up
My hand gently.
Quietly creeps and seeps,
Deeper and sweeter it gets.
My fingers tingle at an unsuspected moment,
A kind reminder of you.

Lori Christopher

Holding On

Soft red petals. . .
Withering they fall
As the tears of a
Shattered heart
Cascade through
The ebony night sky.

We clutch tightly
To the dying rose,
Our hands cut crimson
From perpetual pricking
On stinging thorns.

Deb Daniels

Acceptance

Call me not rose,

Although the vain, shallow part
Of my heart cries to hear
Such a compliment;
Although ancient bards
Declared that flower noble
And deemed their lovely ladies
Worthy of that name,

Call me not rose.

Other women—beautiful women—
May be compared to the rose,
But I, I am not one
That men would honor
With such flattery.
I am more likely
Compared to
The lowly dandelion—
Who sees its worth?

It is not a romantic
Love-inspiring flower
Like the momentary rose,
But is a symbol
Of strength, resilience,
A will too strong to surrender.

Uproot a rosebush and see,
It is gone forever;
Uproot a dandelion,
It returns, even more determined
To survive and mock those
Who wish to see it destroyed.

The dandelion is reborn in spring,
Driven only by its will
To show tempestuous March
It fears nothing.

Ah, Petrarch, can you brag thus
About your noble rose?

Your lady's cheek may wear
The damasked red-and-white
Of that gentle bloom,
But the ever-bold glow
Of the dandelion flower
Needs no woman's cheek
To survive, but in its own existence
Represents eternity—

A more appropriate symbol
Of ever-lasting love
Than the fickle rose
Whose beauty, like youth
Does not linger.
More honor lies in constancy
And strength of will
Than in the fleeting beauty
Of vain youth.

No, call me not rose,
For though I envy
The beauty and romance
That flower symbolizes,
To give me that name
Would be false flattery—
What love is built on that?
I would rather have as my emblem
A symbol of strength, endurance,
And a stubborn will to survive.

Poets, if you would think
Of this lady,
See her not as a fickle rose;
See in her the qualities
Of the noble—
Yes, I said noble—
Golden dandelion.

Andrew Ludwig

The Roll of Film on the Table

A black,
plastic,
transparent paper
rolled up in
its dark
encasing,
like a turtle
inside his shell.
Slowly,
step by step,
it clicks
one cell
at a time.

Though small
and light-
weight,
it bears the name
of royalty,
a king,
Kodak,
as it unfurls like a red satin carpet.
Chemical odors of
mummification
reek from this
Monarch's tomb,
a tomb filled with captured memories,
imprisoned until the past
falls on glossy paper.

Mark E. Heisey

Love, Dad

Ever since the divorce, dating feels rather uncomfortable, so I don't go out much. I never enjoyed bars or picking up women anyway. In those days, I spent too much time finding women I didn't want to get to know. I suppose that explains why I was anxious when I heard the doorbell. (Being an only child taught me how to play alone, but that doesn't mean I never got sick of it.) With all the apartments crammed into this complex, the area is a regular target for door to door salespeople. Company, even a peddler, would be a welcome sight.

When I opened the door, he greeted me with a wide smile and a firm handshake. He also spoke my name, both first and last, with confidence. This threw me until I remembered *it's on the mailbox*. I was still impressed though; he did his homework. Even so, his clothes seemed frightfully out of place. He had an average-looking bag over his left shoulder and a briefcase in his left hand, but his apparel was unmistakably casual. He wore cotton twill pants and a polo shirt, untucked, like I do when I am relaxing on weekends or after work. I felt this paradox did his profession an injustice. Of course, it could be a salesperson's attempt to touch base with the customer.

After the greeting came a hearty "How are you?" Then came courtesy questions about my family, my hobbies, and my general feelings about my recent life. I quickly answered the first few, then during one of his questions, I cut him short to invite him inside. Once we were seated, I prepared myself for the pitch. It had to come soon—now that he had gained my confidence. Instead, the polite questions kept coming. I offered him tea because I didn't have any coffee. I'm glad he asked for Earl Grey because it's all I had, and it's too bitter for anyone except real tea drinkers.

When he mentioned the Boston Red Sox, I thought my heart would fall through the floor. He asked me how they were doing. I stuttered a little then realized their schedule was on the table right in front of him. Still, I was even more impressed. First I told him they were in contention but

probably still doomed by the curse. That didn't matter, of course. I'll still cheer for them even if they never win the World Series. He asked my why I, living outside of Philadelphia, cheered for Boston. I told him then about my first game.

I was five—the year of the divorce. My family was on vacation. Mom stayed at the hotel while my father took me to a game at Fenway. My first live professional baseball game—just me and my Dad. The crowd cheered in waves and the hot dogs burned my mouth. I remember, I asked my Dad why Mom didn't come with us. I loved doing family things. Dad explained that sometimes the guys have to get out and give Mom a break. I was only a kid; I didn't understand. I wanted Mom to be there. I felt like we didn't do anything together anymore.

Later, I understood; my father was right. Being with *the guys* is a different experience. Although people change, hanging out with the guys is always the same. I like to think of it as life's most important rescue blanket, most often used to dowse the home fires. And, of course, Mom should have some time to herself to do "girl" things. That day at the game is my fondest, most vivid memory of my father: the most precious image of the few. The old man seemed to delight in the story.

Besides baseball, we talked about everything. He even asked about my mother. I didn't know how interested he was but he seemed sincere, so I let the discussion take its course. My mother had recently remarried. And, although I tried to hide it, the experience disturbed me. I wanted her to have a good husband to take care of her, but I didn't know if this was the man. I've often wondered *What is the litmus test for a spouse?* All I've known is failed marriages. Besides, I couldn't manage to be a good husband, so I wouldn't know what to look for anyway. To keep a positive attitude throughout the event, I looked forward to the free tuxedo rental and the party at the reception. For me, the wedding was a dress-up party. At least, I tried to make it into one. During the ceremony, I wished the music would play, so that I wouldn't have to follow the proceedings. I don't think I trusted the groom. He was a nice guy, but I'm not sure if he was good enough for my Mom. I 'm not sure any man is good enough for my Mom.

To change the subject, I asked the salesman if he was married. He looked startled but then said that after the divorce, he had no desire to hunt for a new source of pain and anguish. He explained that the first few years were rough, relearning how to do laundry and how to clean the house, but after those early shocks and the settlement that went unfairly in her favor, he knew that he would be better off this way. He also added that raising one child was enough, so he didn't need a wife for that anymore. When I told him we had that in common, he hinted a smile, then he made sure I made regular visits to my son. I had to lie. I didn't need to hear the speech from him, too. I want to see my son more, but recently I haven't had the time.

I remember he said, "Don't neglect your son. He will only grow up once."

Most of the day passed like that. The few times we disagreed I felt a comfortable give and take. No argument, just two different opinions. Quite often, he dismissed my opposition as the innocence of youth. (At fifty-three, twenty-nine must have looked young to him.) The closest we came to a real argument happened during a discussion about marriage. He made it very clear that at twenty-three I had married too young. And, the following year was too soon to start a family. When I told him I wasn't so sure, he replied " You shouldn't have made my mistakes." I tried to tell him that it's too late for me now. I'll concede, maybe I did do it all wrong, but you don't need to tell a beggar that he needs money. He mumbled, " You should have known better." I didn't understand what he meant by that, but I thought it best to move the conversation along.

I enjoyed spending the afternoon with him. In these days of mass communication, good conversation is becoming a precious commodity. We agreed that people spend too much time being entertained by electronic boxes instead of the real world around them. Families fall apart because they think of socialization as simply watching television together. Of course, throughout the day we found many of these problems without discovering any viable solutions. We parted with the hope of getting back together someday and actually finding answers. Before he left, he said he

would call next time, instead of just dropping in. I reassured him; he was always welcome. He said that it wasn't polite and that I would understand when I was older. Maybe I will.

Right now, I miss the old man. Sometimes I wonder if I ever will see him again. I never knew two people could become so close in one afternoon. He never did make his pitch, but I suppose we were better off without it. In fact, we had so much in common and we shared so much, I wasn't even surprised when he called me, "Son" as he walked out the door.

I know Son, at five you're not old enough to understand. Heck, you haven't even finished your ABC's yet. I wanted to share this with you anyway because I never want the salesman to be forgotten. So, put this in your scrapbook, and as you get older, read it until you understand. I'll see you soon. Good-bye, Son.

Love, Dad.

Christine E. Allen

Little Clock

Never leaving,
Just leaning,
Against this hairy wall
of flesh and bone.
Strapped,
as if I had legs to run.
Never leaving,
Just leaning,
Beating out time
With each tick and tock.
I'm just a little clock
Sworn to my master's wrist.

Loriann Riviello

My Baton

I grasp the long, cold, shiny, silver shaft.
Lightning shoots through my veins,
my body, my hands, my eyes.
I am alive.
My spirit dances, jumps, leaps,
Arms circle, legs kick,
Momentum builds.
The once frigid iron now on fire
Races through my fingers,
Wraps around my body,
igniting energy.
With a mighty force,
My lifeline catches the wind,
Becoming a spinning wheel of the sky,
Illuminating the darkness,
Forming a circle of brilliant beauty.
I spin,
My feet no longer in touch with the earth.
I am carried in a whirlwind—fast and fury.
I am not sure I will survive.

Jennifer Alwine

Swatting Wasps in the Study Lounge

Tiny kites,
Their streamers hanging down,
Float across the room
On a phantom breeze.
Indifferent, I
Ignore them until

One swoops dangerously close,
Invading concentration.
Taking shelter under a notebook,
I devise my strategy
And wait

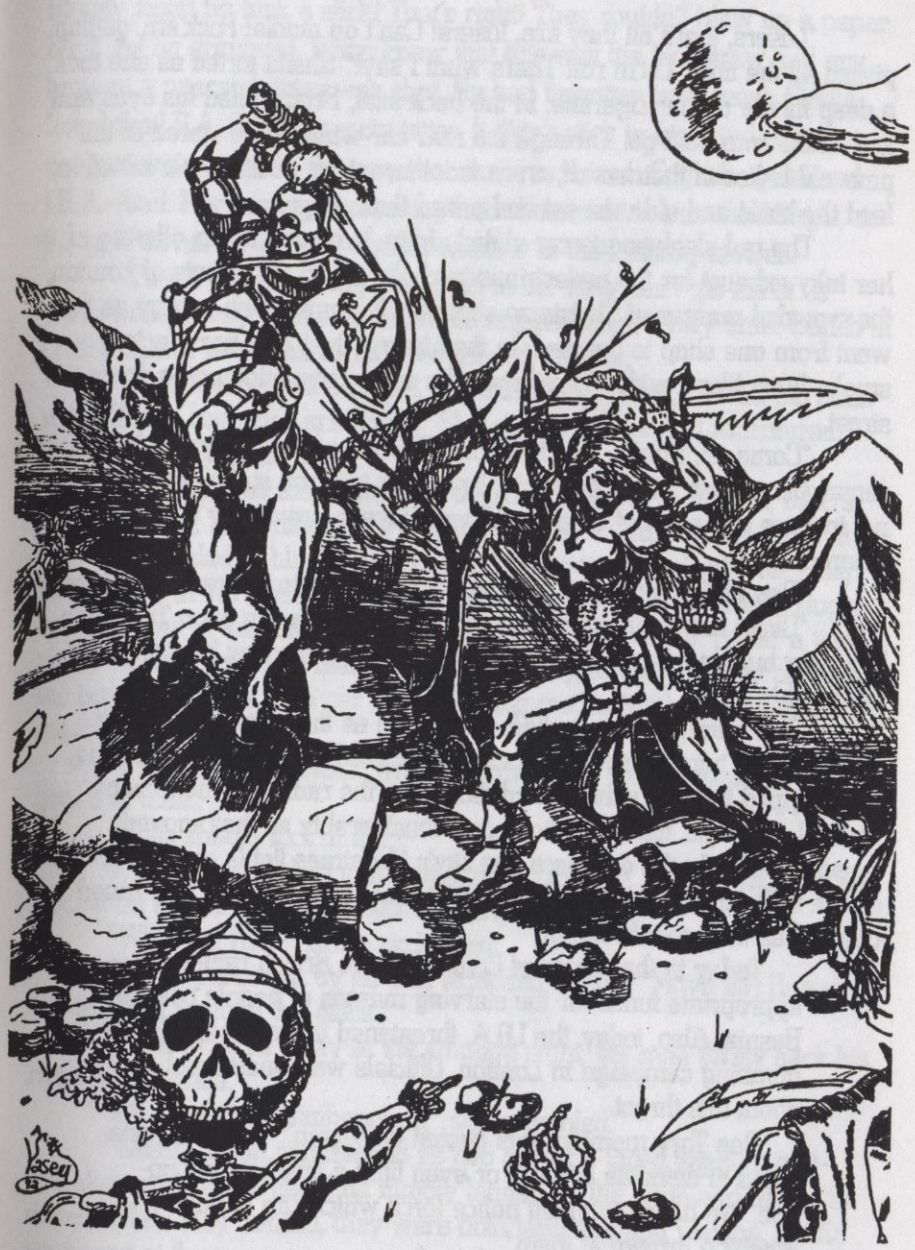
For its retreat.
Cautiously, I peer
From my hiding place,
Eyes locked on
The unsuspecting target.
I close in for the ambush.
Wham!

Victory is short-lived as
The remainder of the regiment
Launches an attack.
Darting,
Their engines whine
Past my ears.
I evade the stinging missiles
And retrieve my weapon.

Clutching the notebook, I aim
And
Fire
Swats
Wildly.

One after another,
My adversaries
Plummet
to
the
carpet.

Left alone
With the battered notebook, I
Patriotically
Survey the carnage.



Tim Burdick

Christmas Shopping

"Losers, that's all they are, losers! Can't do diddle! Fuck'em, getting pissed all the time. Let'm rot! That's what I say!" Sheila torted as she took a deep inhale on her cigarette. In the back seat, Brian rolled his eyes and just let the comment go. Through the rear car-window, he stared at the poor old ladies in their scruff, worn wool sweaters, as they sold bread to feed the birds and old men sat and petted their dogs.

The red sleek sports car glided along, leaving only an offering of her inky exhaust for the pedestrians to choke on. In the streets of London, the crowded masses of Christmas shoppers hummed with energy as they went from one shop to the next. In the gloomy dusk, the hazy factory smoke hung like a widow's veil over the cars' procession going down the street.

"Come on, Sheila. It's Christmas. You know, time of good cheer, remember a man with a bowl of jelly comes in a red suit to visit you. Try not to have too much of a heart. All your love is practically smothering," Brian drolled.

"Piss off!" she snarled, as she glared at him in the rearview mirror.

"Okay, only quit giving yourself an ulcer over the poor. Try not to burst my bubble, okay?" he asked, lapsing into silence as he stared out the window.

"Fair enough," she replied, mellowing as the nicotine began to work its way into her system. As she finished the fag in one long drag, she dropped it in the ashtray and flicked on the radio. As the music worked its magic, the mood lightened considerably as they moved through traffic. In the darkness, the city's Christmas lights seemed to take on the flickering glow of candles which dimly lit the streets. The mood cracked as the news broke in.

> Today in the House of Commons, the British refused to appropriate funds for the starving masses of people over in Bosnia. Also, today, the I.R.A. threatened to start their bloody bombing campaign in London. Officials were indifferent about this threat.
>
> One Tory member was quoted as saying, "The I.R.A. has failed to detonate a bomb or even light a sparkler in London. We have a vigilant police force which can handle anything thrown at them."
>
> This newscaster concurs with this opinion.

As she listened, she began to seethe, and grip the steering wheel tighter. At pauses in the broadcast, she shouted things like, "You tell'em! Bloody right! Go fuck a stick! That's right! They couldn't blow up a paper bag!" As he grimaced, Brian knew that this was the last straw and any hope of a peaceful drive was shot. He had forgotten how much Sheila hated the I.R.A. She was quite bitter. It didn't stick in his mind why, but she just was, possibly, the way that she was raised: English--good and I.R.A.--bad. Her ranting and raving had shattered his train of thought, so he ignored her by looking out the window at the rushing crowds.

"I'll tell you one thing. The Irish suck! They can't get rid of us! We're here to stay. We're the best! We stopped them every time! Bunch of Lucky Charm-eating bastards!" she vowed, fuming.

Brian looked at the crowd and exclaimed, "Look, Sheila. Isn't that wild? Those costumes are crazy!" She gave a glance and murmured, "Probably starving actors."

A group was marching in twos. Alongside the marchers, others were juggling, and some were walking on their hands. At the end of the line, a jester clad in black and white stripes beat methodically on a big bass drum. In the front, two clowns carried black banners with a single crimson spot in the middle. Another six carried a "corpse" under a white sheet. All wore red and black jester caps and jumpers. As they plodded on, one jester went from car to car holding out burlap bags to collect money.

"Pretty gloomy bunch, what do you think?" Brian asked as he gaped at them.

"Cops should lock'm up."

A skeleton-masked man appeared in front of Sheila's window and tapped on the window and began to wave.

"What the Hell?" Brian exclaimed.

Sheila, perturbed by all this, exploded at him. "Move off! Bugger!" she shouted through the glass.

As he skipped away in the smoggy night, the man threw back his head and cackled.

"All a bunch of panhandlers," she grumbled.

"Weird," Brian commented as two crimson-faced jugglers cartwheeled towards the car, then nimbly landed on the hood and began to dance. While they danced, they were both laughing and waving. Sheila screamed at them as one removed a tube from his brown burlap purse and began to write on the windshield. Brian burst from the back of the car. As he got to the front of the car, they both turned and grinned sheep-

ishly. Then they ran away cheerfully, waving as if they had just left some party. Confused, he wondered again, "What the Hell?!"

He followed after them, but then he turned back to the car. GOODBYE! was scrawled across the windshield! He turned to chase them again and saw that the whole group was waving now.

"Come on, Brian! Come on...." Her voice was drowned out by the red explosion which bellowed from the land mine on her door. Flames blossomed from the metal. With his back to it, Brian was thrown from his feet onto the hood of a nearby taxi like a rag doll being thrown around in a sadistic game. In a domino effect, the street came alive with a series of explosions in succession. Doors blew out everywhere. Screams of agony filled the icy night air. Weakened pleas were stifled by the raining of broken glass.

Impaled on the broken radio antenna, Brian's body began to highlight the car with red. As he lay there, Brian was only able to turn his head to see the decimated remains of the street as it was littered with bodies and debris like a spasmodic party which had been shelled while Christmas lights were still blinking and ripped open presents were everywhere.

The celebration was over. The hostess wasn't serving anymore. She and the rest of her black heart resembled a cocktail olive that had been squashed by a drunken guest. And the host was draped over the hood of a taxi like a crumpled party napkin. No more guests were coming. No one was leaving. For that seven minutes the party had been in full swing with the explosive music keeping a beat as the guests had the times of their lives or rather, lost them. This party was a definite success, but no one rose to thank the host or hostess.

Brian's eyes began to turn glossy, as he heard from inside the empty taxi's radio. "Well folks, the season's shopping is almost at an end. So be careful out there on those busy London roads—Silent night, Holy night, All is calm, All is bright..." In the distance a voice bellowed, "A Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!"

Tim Burdick

The Pigeon Man

A hushed giggle is stifled by a small pink hand. The cooing pigeons alert my ears that my companions haven't deserted me. Picking up a crust of dry bread, I cram it into my mouth and chew on it slowly.

Hearing the pigeon scream, I thrust my hand into the grocery bag and pull out a small chunk of bread. His scream reverberates his whole life as if he needed more than my generosity, so, staring off into space toward the sound of the little girls, I let the bread drop from my hand to the ground. As it falls, the location of the pigeon's scream changes from next to me to at my feet. As the sound down there increases, it seems as if I had thrown a piece of meat to the lions: I, the Roman Keeper.

The wind brushes against my face. I think, "There must be quite a few, " as I enjoy the cold October breeze and the sun.

My right hand dutifully holds out another crust of bread. Pinching it lightly, my fingers feel the rush of the wind as a small pigeon pecks it out of my hand. For a moment, I smile. "Eat well, my friend."

Then, the giggles and murmurs start again, now closer and a little clearer. Snatches of their voices reach me.

Look . . . . at . . . Look . . . him . . . . he . . . . . him . . is . . .is . . . the . him . . . over . . . there . . the . . . one . . . on the . . . . . wall . . . the . . on . . . . Bird . . . feeding the . . on . . . wall . . . birds . . . Look . . . at . . . at . . . him . . . his glasses . . his . . . him . . funny.

So their voices continue, and low monotones from a distance call them away. But I hear and see enough in my head to know.

Taunting and teasing me, an attack that is always the same. It doesn't matter whether they are little girls or boys, blacks or whites, young or old.

The bread burns a bitter hole in my stomach. I just sit there as my appetite fades away. The little girls' voices come closer.

He . . . man . . . . is . . a . . . can't . . . . see . . . . can't . . . see . . . in . . . . dark or . . . . light . . . . . He . . is . . a . . . man . . . an . . a . . man . . . Bli . . ma . . n . . . . Blind . . . . man.

I smirk and scratch my stubbly chin. "Yep, girls, You're right. You win. I am as blind as the day that I was born. I never saw snow or a sunset, but I've felt them, and I remember. But because I am blind doesn't mean I am helpless." The whole time their giggles continue, probably because they change positions. My hand reaches out and plucks a pigeon from mid-flight.

Hearing their gasps of surprise, I smile warmly as I open my hand and let the pigeon go. Picking up my cane, I start tapping down the street.

Deb Daniels

Her Side of the Story

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,
For this tower has neither door nor stair."

I hear this request each and every day–
Who does he think he is anyway?
A fine, well-bred prince he may indeed be,
And, yes, I am honored that he chose to love me.
But there is just one thing this young maid stresses:
I really hate it when he climbs my tresses!

Now, don't get me wrong, and don't think me hateful.
For his daily visits I am honestly grateful,
And I'd swear on my soul to the heavens above
That with this handsome prince I am falling in love.
But does he not know, has he not heard the story
That a woman's hair is her crowning glory?
I brush and comb, I primp and preen
Till my hair's silky smooth with a golden sheen.
Then what do I hear but my prince's yell?
Well, there's another hairdo shot to hell!
So, I gather my locks, throw them down to the ground;
He grabs hold, and up the tower he bounds.

Now, that hair-climbing guy all the storybooks praise,
But not once is the subject of my misery raised!
True, they oft tell how, alone, I spend hours
Weeping and wailing in this cold, stone tower.
Loneliness does play some part in my sobbing,
Though mostly 'tis because my poor head is throbbing.
A 150-pound man using my hair as a ladder
Makes me sincerely thankful that he isn't fatter.
Believe me, supporting his weight is enough
To make me feel like he's trying to pull my scalp off.

But it's not just the headaches that make me so blue–
I spend the day combing the knots from my curls,
And–how can a prince act like such a churl–
Not once does he notice its softness or shine!
(I've often wondered if the man is half blind.)
Also, the typical maleness of his being
Makes him act recklessly, without even seeing
That his boots are all covered with muck and manure
Which gets smeared in my hair–oh, he can be such a boor!

Ah, but when he reaches the window, how sweetly I smile
As I ask him to come in and visit a while.
Then, like any beau, he praises my eyes and my dresses,
My angelic voice, my soft skin–but never my tresses.
Should I be honest and tell him I really can't stand it
When he so thoughtlessly takes for granted
The pain I withstand when he scales these walls,
Or should I be sweet and demure, saying nothing at all?

I have only to look deep into his brown eyes
For the answer to come, then I realize
That dirty hair and headaches are a small price to pay
To be a fairytale princess, remembered always.
But just the same, before Prince Charming and I wed,
I have something important that needs to be said:

One requirement will be met before I go to his court–
This is one princess who will wear her hair SHORT!

Deb Daniels

One Verse That Poe Forgot

Hear the clanging copper bells
Moo-cow bells!
A pastureful of bovines their jangling foretells!
Through the misty air of night
How they ring when moo-bulls fight!
And the clinking-clanking notes
All out of tune,
What a "mooving" ditty floats
Among the calves as they romp in swampy moats
Beneath the moon.
Oh, from out the flowering dells
What a rush of playful noise cacaphonously wells
Loud as hell
Sounds real swell!
On the wanderers how they tell
Wherein what ditch they may have fell
By the bashing and crashing
Of the bells, bells, bells–
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells–
To the bonking and the clonking of the bells!

Geoffrey Harden

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Food Fight

Do not go gentle into that food fight.
Cabbage should fly and splat at close of day;
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

Though teachers in the lunchroom are in sight,
Because their forks have flung no pudding they
Do not go gentle into that food fight.

Good kids, who don't toss fries, crying their bright
and bleach white clothes have gotten stained,
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

Wild kids who'd throw a burger soon as take a bite,
And find, too late, a teacher in the way,
Do not go gentle into that food fight.

Students, once caught, can see with clear hindsight
The pears which flew like meteors made them pay,
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

And you, my lunchmate, a food-stained sight,
Curse, bless me when gook-covered still you say
Do not go gentle into that food fight.
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.