



Idol

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WEISHAR

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The Gift

"Ouch!"

The thorn pierced deeply into my thumb and a dark drop of blood welled thickly from the wound. I raised my hand and sucked at the cut, tasting the salt and easing the pain. It wasn't very bad — I'd known this small throbbing before and it would soon disappear. That wasn't my main concern at the moment.

I flipped over another leaf.

"Damn aphids!"

They were all over the bushes, hiding under the leaves, clinging to the sepals and sucking greedily at the new buds. I bent towards a gentle yellow blossom. Nestled near the heart, dully reflecting the sunlight, lay the coppery-green body of a Japanese beetle.

"Ugh!"

I should have been used to it by then, but the sight still made me shudder faintly. I beat a slightly hasty retreat to the toolshed and rummaged among the shelves. When I found the spray, I returned to the garden and stood for a moment, staring at the rose bushes.

"I feel like I've been fighting them for ten years, instead of five," I thought. "Won't they ever quit?"

I hated them — eating away at the velvet petals, withering the leaves, boring holes in the fragile buds. I tugged the red bandana from my back pocket and tied it over my nose and mouth. As I sprayed the leaves, I kept thinking "Five years of fighting aphids and beetles. Five years . . ."

* * * * *

It had been hot — a heat that was still and thick, moist and pressing. It lay heavily on everyone and everything, but most especially on the shorn rose bushes sitting drunkenly in the old paint pails on the sidewalk.

"Fifteen?! I didn't realize there were so many!"

"Well there are, so let's keep digging."

As we finished clearing the rectangular plot in the backyard, I glanced over at the roses.

"Fifteen, huh? If we don't get them planted soon, we'll be lucky if we have five."

They had been my grandfather's hobby and his prize possessions for as long as I could remember. He had tended them carefully and lovingly, and his little garden had been an oasis of vibrant color and subtle perfume amidst the concrete of the city. He had died four years ago, but Grandma had continued to look after the little rose garden, feeling, as we all did, that they were part of Grandpa.

But now Grandma was gone too, as was the beautiful house they had called home for 40 years. Clearing that house out had been a sad and poignant experience for me, but the knowledge that the new owner was going to pave the garden over was devastating.

"Why? Did he say why? Who wouldn't want a beautiful garden like that in their backyard?!"

"Apparently he wants more space for the kids to play and things like that . . . — I don't know."

We stared at the garden. It was July and the roses were in full bloom — crimson, and salmon, and tender yellow, all against a background of plush green velvet.

"He's crazy."

"What a waste."

Silence.

"It doesn't have to be. What if we take them home — move them out to the house with us? We've got room in the yard."

"Now who's crazy?"

"No, really, Dad. They're just gonna die if they stay here. Why not put them where they're appreciated?"

"It's not that I don't want to. Pop loved those roses, I know. But do you realize what it's going to take to dig those up and transport them 60 miles? And in this heat? They'll probably die before we move them two feet!"

We stared at the garden again. I could see Grandpa in my mind's eye, weeding and pruning, carefully checking each plant, stopping at each one to admire the fragrance and the richness of color.

I looked at Dad. "What a waste," he muttered. Pause. Then, "We'll need some old pails to put them in."

Two days later we were planting them in our backyard. Their presence somehow made me feel better, as if I hadn't really lost that whole portion of my life that was Grandma and Grandpa.

Yet as we fed and watered them, my worry returned. The heat was killing them. Two of them looked as if they wouldn't last the night, and I was anxious about the rest. It had been a long, oppressive journey, made longer and more oppressive by the fact that they had sat in a broiling hot car for an hour longer than necessary as a result of heavy traffic. And since roses like cool weather and plenty of water . . .

"It doesn't look good."

"Well, honey, we tried. Just don't get your hopes up. This heat is likely to continue and the plants have had quite a shock already. Just remember, we did our best."

But for some of them, our best wasn't good enough. We lost two that summer, and the aphids and the beetles and the heat wreaked

havoc with the others. There were very few blossoms the rest of that summer, and I began to wonder if maybe Dad was right — it didn't look hopeful.

The winter was colder than usual, also, and this only added to my fears. But as the months wore on, my sorrow and my anxiety, like the roses, were buried beneath the snow and the ice.

Spring, however, brought a renewal of apprehension as I watched the first tentative buds wither under the onslaught of the insects. One day, while contemplating the sight of this random destruction, I couldn't help but remember all the long and patient hours Grandpa had spent tending those flowers; all the love and appreciation he had showered on them, and which had contributed so much to their nourishment. And here they were, his pride and joy, his beautiful, fragile heritage, being eaten away by time and nature, while I worked in vain, pricking my fingers on the thorns, and cursing the pain, and fighting the growing despair.

"Damn it, they can't die now. They can't!"

And so I weeded and sprayed, and pruned and watered, and sought to remember all that Grandpa had ever told me about roses, until gradually the garden became my oasis, an oasis of memories, each more beautiful and fragile than the tender young buds that began to blossom everywhere.

I still struggled with the aphids and the beetles, and sometimes, when my back hurt and my fingers were sore, I would wonder what it was that drove me so hard.

My answer came unexpectedly that June. After receiving my diploma in a lengthy ceremony on a blistering hot day, I arrived home to find my friends and relatives waiting with congratulations. After making the rounds of aunts and cousins, I went into the kitchen and leaned against the refrigerator, hot and tired. As I answered my mother's questions, my father entered through the back door and walked slowly towards me. As he stopped in front of me, I glanced up, and carefully he removed from behind his back a single red rose, its petals deep and velvety, its leaves a tender green, and everywhere sparkling with fragile droplets of water. When I looked into his tear-filled eyes, he said, simply, "From Grandpa."

And so now, when I gaze at my little garden of memories and see the first hopeful blossoms of crimson and yellow and salmon bursting from the lush green buds, I forget all the little aches and frustrations, all the curses and thorns, and think, simply, "From Grandpa."

Ann M. Weber



Melissa Murphy

Three Reasonably Free Impending Decisions

I. diner

Two half-empty cups of styrofoam coffee
on a soap-streaked formica table.

4 a.m. flickering neon humming sausage and eggs.

She rested on her elbows and did not blink and said —

“Your eyes are a prurient fire in whose furnace
we have forged an alloy, an alchemy, androgeny.”

“I love you” he lied.

She said —

“We are artists, completing each other’s works,
tracing lines across time
and rhyming each other’s lines.”

“You know I love you” he said.

A pair of headlights skidded into the parking lot
and shattered against the guardrail.

II. home

Two empty bottles of wine watching a 2 a.m. movie.

Two children sleeping off an afternoon of Ritalin.

Two absent lovers one a husband dealing poker
one a joker dealing cocaine.

Two tests to pass tomorrow for equivalency.

Two teardrops reflecting a bottle of Valium
in the medicine cabinet.

III. bench

August is the hottest month.

Sitting sweat beading in the plaza,
eyes gazing groundward,
watching the cigarette
flick ashes onto pebbles —

looking up

in time

to acknowledge

people walking by

They would have stopped —
only last time the bench
burned a splintered ember
through the label of their jeans.

The bench is not a point.

(I know)

— they view through a prism imprisoned
— they have built their geometry
from a horizon of deflected lines

following only finds the street
too hot to walk barefoot.

The time has come to create
or remain assimilating motion.

Stephen Crimi



Katie Briber



James Archibald

Upon etching my arm with a razor

The punched-out signs of contemplated pain
Pulse through my hand, reveal no redemption;
The swelling bruise unsoothed by soft rain
Or no light touch, empathizing intervention.
To walk home alone embroiled in angers
And strike at the signposts placed on the way;
To cast cautious glances, slip from stranger's
Eye; let the passionate blood of the day.
I sit with a razor cutting my arm,
In fine bloody lines etched on my canvas.
Shallow tilling on an infertile farm,
The dewdrops of blood rise to the surface.
Perform the ritual of suicide
And bleed out the cancer hiding inside.

William P. Hallgren

Judy

Did you read what Judy wrote?

Oh, to have what Judy wrote.

She wrote flowered walls in love castle courts.

Barefoot ballet on satin floors.

Corduroy pebbles streaked through her vast mental beach

Oh, to have Judy's vision.

She talks of pillow wars and friendly crime.

Golden labor in the poorest time.

Say it again, dream it once more, Judy.

Oh, to have Judy's vision.

Crystalline perception, divine intention.

Oh, to have Judy.

Edward P. Sinkora



Michael Rock



PORTRAIT ONE

I will look in the mirror once more
and so there I am
and so there I am in a room
in a room with a mirror
in front of me
in a room with room all around
me —
and I am a room

and there in front of
me is a portrait — a self portrait
two self portraits of Michael
and I hate now that I have
to make words to let him
understand —
and he has to make pictures
and the portrait is dark and
young —
wants passion and pleads control
and my eyes are wrinkled under
and I am under —
and beautiful

and the motion of a hand
in a can of black dust
is gone
and I'm still here looking
at what's left —
and I look in the mirror
and push my hair just a little —
I wear it down when I'm hiding —
and it frames my face with a
gentle curve —

2

2

PORTRAIT TWO

And here I am looking in the mirror
at the curve I made
and I look back at the second face
precisely shaded
and the movement of the muscle
is not so apparent —
but a muscle that could move is
almost real
and the eyes are still looking
fixed and half open
in the mirror
and I am the mirror right now
and the picture won't let me just
walk away burning
yesterday my eyes were black
and burning

Jamie Forton

Sweeney Toddler

Come round, fine people, I've a tale
to tell,
About a boy who all thought
was swell,
He came and went and took from
the good,
All for which they had fought
and stood.

He was Sweeney
He was Sweeney Toddler
The demon baby of Fleet Street.

He was exiled to Leeds at the age
of two,
unjustly accused of cutting
nursery school,
He shaved his head and in his last
address,
said "You've not yet seen me at
my best!"

did Sweeney
did Sweeney Toddler
the demon baby of Fleet Street.

All was quiet for at least
two years,
All was quiet, the folk had no fears.
But then one day he escaped
from Leeds,
hailed a taxi, hissed
"London, please,"

did Sweeney
did Sweeney Toddler
the demon baby of Fleet Street.

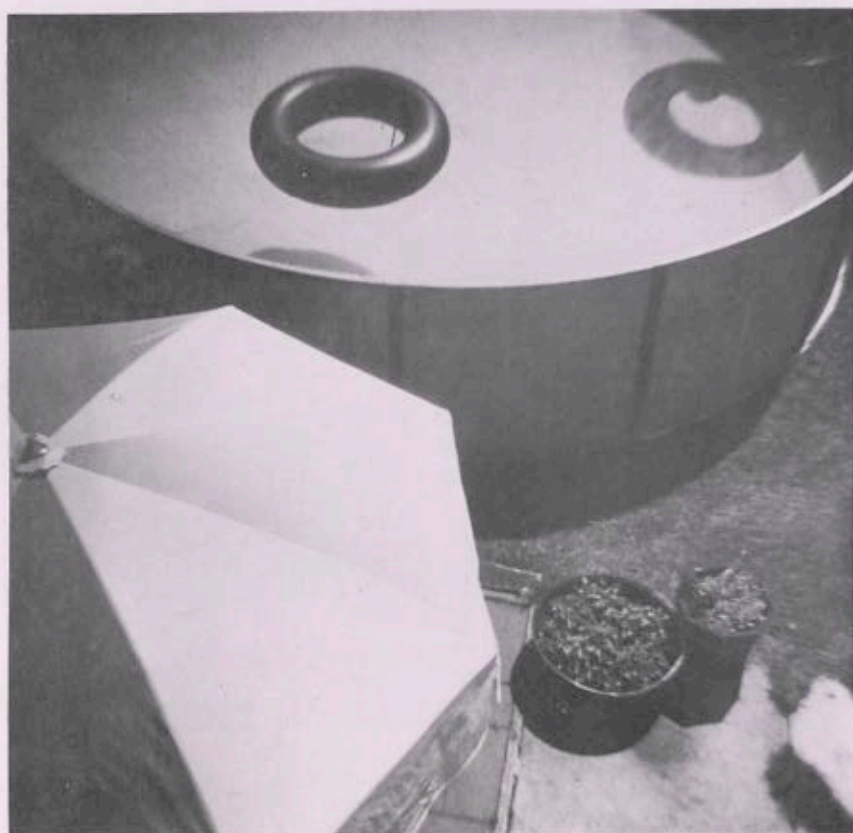
No one knew he was back in town.
No one perceived him in
hand-me-downs.

And then just when the time
was ripe,
revenge was his as he raped
the night,

did Sweeney
did Sweeney Toddler
the demon baby of Fleet Street.

He managed to rape thirteen girls
in all,
It must be said he had had
a ball.
Then Scotland Yard stumbled on
the caper,
at last unmasked as
Jack the Raper,
was Sweeney
was Sweeney Toddler
the demon baby of Fleet Street.

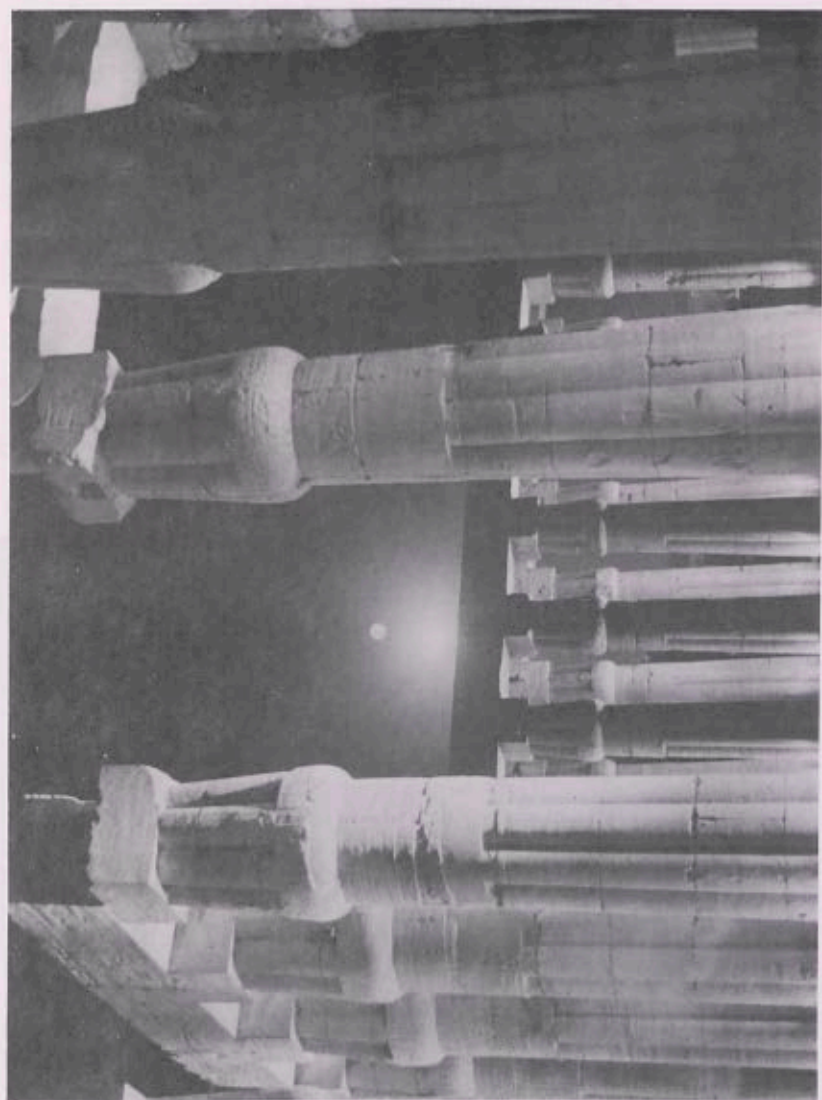
Andy Sobel



James Archibald



Katie Briber



Michael Lipson

Waves

Arms outstretched to the side,
Outlining the shores'
Meandering movements.
The wind blowing over the waves
Pushes at my torso, and
Twisted, I shake my hair
Into the guests of sand and salt.
My palms tingle and are wet.
I place them in cotton-lined refuges
Of disconnected dryness;
Away from this grey mist.
And the water of the ocean continues
to rush in natural frenzy
Toward me, stopping short;
Pleasing me.
Small curling waves
Run to my feet,
Offering a pebble or shell,
And then dart back again.
Quick enough sometimes
I spot and grab at the gems
Before the opportunity is gone.

I am here, only
Because of the opportunities.
I understand
The smoothness of a stone,
The fragility of a gently held shell,
The softness and roaring,
The sting and tear of grains blown
Into my senses.
I can feel
The opportunities of life here.
The sea offerings run deeper than yours did,
Or maybe I was not quick enough.
I could not catch the drifting moments,
Nor the fragile love fragments you spoke.
The words were not offered
Like opportunities. Feelings are not
Ultimations; but here I stand,

My face is wet,
Footprints empty, and defined
In sand
Where no other prints
But the wind's sweepings
Prove me alone.
If I turn,
Wildness will be at my back;
Cold, grey, alive,
Opportunities continuing to tumble,
Away with the waves.

Sara Gordonson



William Ross

The panther

Panther sheltered from the rain,
Through the darkness of the night
Came sliding sinuous refrain.
Oily fur glistens bright
As movement overtakes repose
And panther stalks
The source of those strange cries.
Darwin metamorphosed quakes;
Rain drop causes leaf to shake.
Not driven by hunger
Nor lust inspired
The impulse odd
The synapse fired
By the river burns a flame,
Brown watchman, lonely nods—
Dreaming of the jungle gods.
Eyelids twitch
And shoulder shakes;
For a moment he awakes
And feels the trigger like an itch.
Fragmented rhythms escape the tent
Discordant counterpoint
Imposed upon
A song of pure experience:
Folk music
Indigenous to a land
Alien to man.
Four paws syncopate the song
Propelled by movement
Controlled and strong
Darwin metamorphosed quakes;
Rain drop causes leaf to shake.

(the sentry's dream)

The angry gods demand a sacrifice,
Reaching forward with fingers of ice
And closing around the watchman's throat;
Thirsting for throbbing blood of man and goat.

Running away—warrior turns
the panther-god quickly burns.
WOMAN stands in PANTHER'S place
Donning a mask to hide her face.

She beckons to the man
With sensual hand —
Reason deserts him —
Surrender to skin hymn.

WOMAN/PANTHER
Rips his flesh —
Cries, anger
And fear enmesh.

Blood drains.
Rains.
Shake.
Awake.

Darwin metamorphosed quakes;
Rain drop causes leaf to shake.

Gunshot redhot in the night
The sentry runs off in his fright
The panther startled by the light
Cat screams breaks dreams muscles tight

Music stops quick smashed by paw
Scientist looks out stares in awe
Holstered gun reaches tries to draw
Others, brothers, never saw

Stalking walking in the rain
The panther's shoulder stiff with pain
The jungle's music lacks refrain
Flowing going all the same.

William P. Hallgren



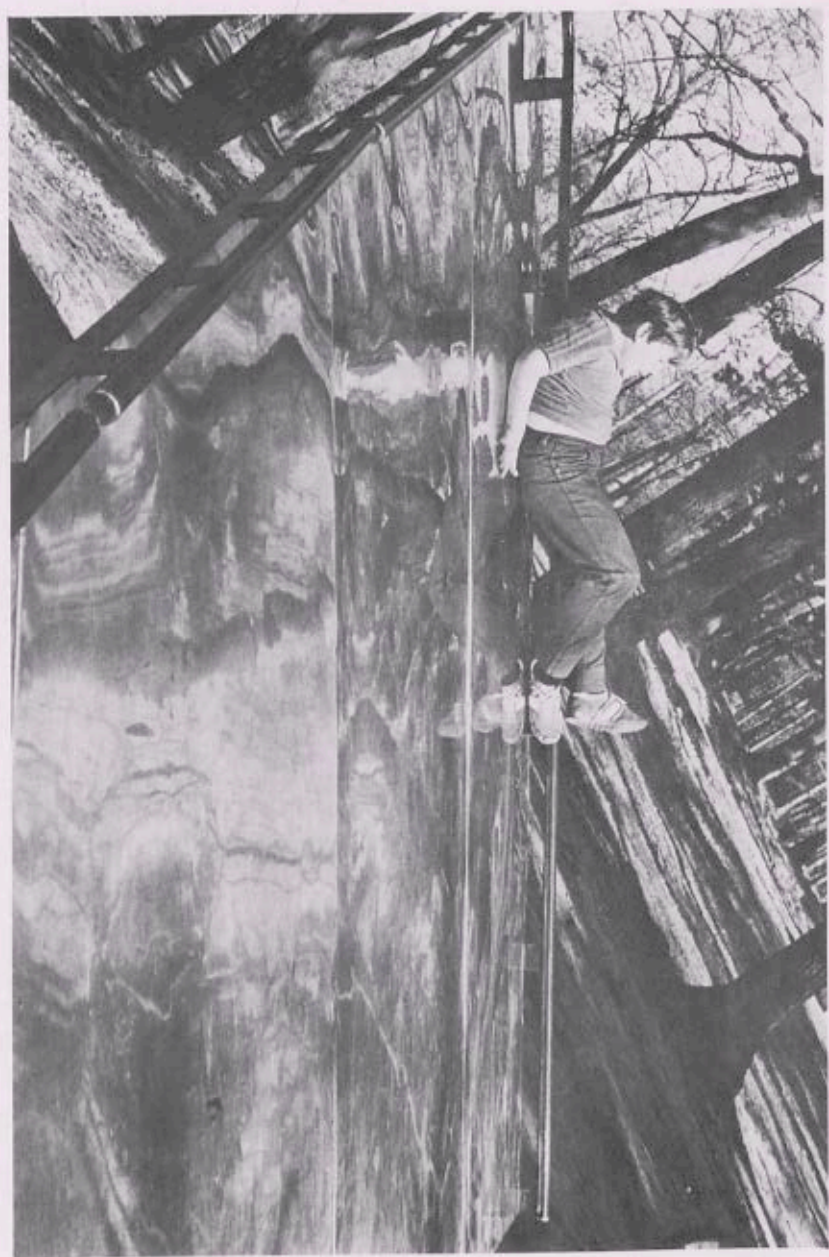
I Met My Neighbor In a Lecturer From Harvard

God,
He's like Tully
Hand
To back of greying hair
Touch his nose
Santa Claustic
Caustic voice and temper

Man,
He's Tully
With a chunk
of middle removed and
The top end
Chinked to his hips

A grafted Tully
With stiff-backed scuffle
And precisionary stutter
Tempered
In acid-steel education
With a
Wiscom-wrinkled
Cover

Mary M. Richardson



Melissa Murphy

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