



unicorn

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All submissions must be accompanied by an SASE, and all are eligible for cash prizes. Shorter fiction is preferred, and no more than five poems per submission.

Send all correspondence to:

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for

Mary Claire Helldorfer

*I must lie down where all the ladders start,
in the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.*

News

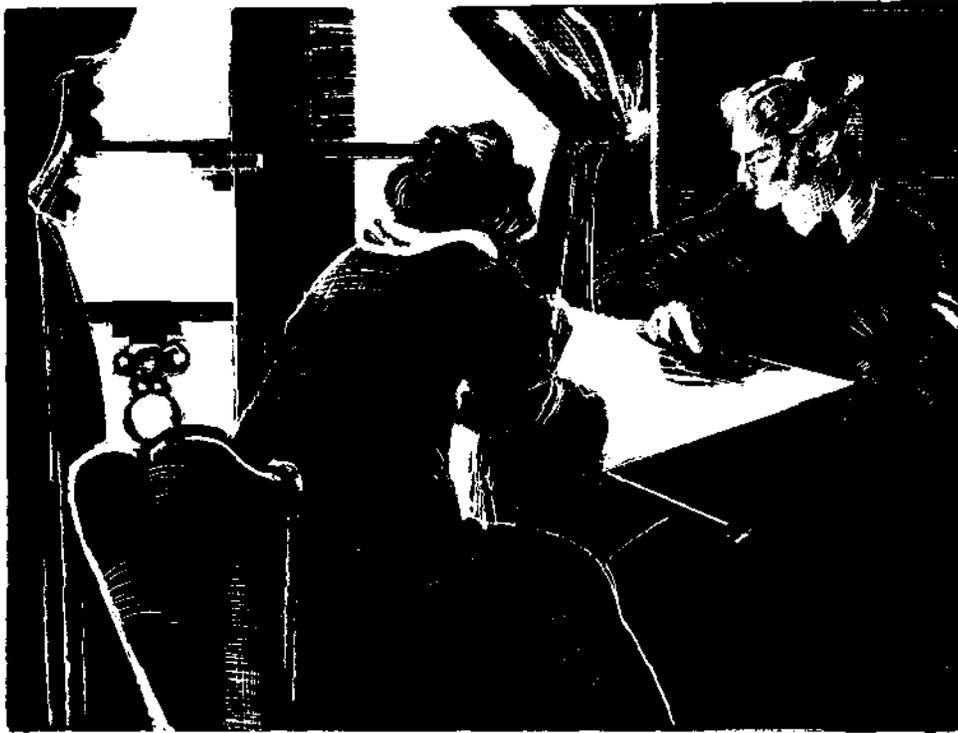
I have taken you into the composing room of my mind
And set you in big, bold-face letters.
And indented in your character where I thought right.
Now I have the proof before me
And read between the lines quite well
And from the words I read I tell
You are not my type.

---Fran Minakowski

Each New Generation

- I. Each new generation casts an image,
A cult, an idol, a dream or an idiocy
That grows over the old
Like the folds of fallen skin
On a grandmother,
And becomes a home for the aged.
This migration of grey dust,
Like the march of a determined tumor,
Finds its home in our machinery
And on our tabletops,
In our hourglass and eyeglass;
It is everyone's cataract.
- II. If you fit your father's suit
You are no dreamer, you own no images,
There is already twilight in your veins
And granite in a heartless mind
Of broken museum pieces.

---Bob Smith



SADRA

Lifeguard

beach lined with bottles
shoreline shining
a twelve foot formica spar before me
a sailor's elbow on it.

Cutty sark,
he says,
and water,
my life's wrecked,
he says,
officially it's my job
to hear how he ran aground
and on what rocks.

All the flotsam and jetsam
washes ashore here:
the gulled,
looking for lies juicy as oysters;
the toothed ones,
looking for that signal, the open wound;
the bloated drowned,
belly up, beyond helping;
and the ones out beyond their stamina,
calling out and downing for the third time.

Won't you swim
damnyou swim damnyou
swim.

---Dyane Fancey

Off the Road

---John Sullivan

Robin slid over to the side of the road, obeying some instinct unfamiliar to him since it meant the delay of going out of his way, though he never did completely stop. His exaggerated whistle of admiration met the hitchhiker strolling alongside as though he had expected this ride all day.

With a careful whirr the window powered down a crack and Robin asked from inside the car, "How far down are you going?"

The hitchhiker answered eagerly, "That's fine. Thanks. Thanksalot," and tossed his sleeping bag among the housing blue prints in the back seat. After shaking the snow from his windburned thumbing hand he jammed it inside the gold-plated heating vent.

Robin had just clinched a big housing development contract he had worked on for months so he felt unusually relaxed and after a smiling glance at his passenger he unknotted his tie and laughed as a sort of throat clearing before speaking.

"You know I don't often pick up hitchhikers. You're never really sure what they're going to be like."

Robin loudly laughed to show he was kidding and started to reach over and slap him on the back but checked himself. With the beard and the cap pulled down over the face it was hard for Robin to tell if he was listening.

The figure nodded slightly and Robin thought how the wisdom of that nod must have been the product of his many odysseys out on the road.

"How long have you been travelling around?"

He was tightening his arms against his chest so Robin continued, growing unaccountably nervous.

"I guess you've seen a lot out there, there must be quite a lot to see I guess. You know I often want to travel but of course with my work I never get the chance. In fact I'm beginning another business trip right now. I'm a real estate salesman, I just began my own company, on my last birthday. I'd give you my business card but of course you're not interested in that. I would really like to travel but of course there's the wife and kids. We're a very successful company you know."

"You say you sell houses?" the hitchhiker finally

spoke. The voice startled Robin and he stared at the road where he had drifted out of his lane, something which had always left him uneasy. It was a weak, gasping voice, the voice of someone with the wind knocked out of him.

To hide his surprise Robin quickly said, "Hi, I'm Robin Towers," and shook the surprised hand of the hitchhiker, which he had been stretching to bring back the circulation. It was a deadly cold, reminding Robin of some hunk of metal left out over a winter night.

"You hire anybody?" the hitchhiker wheezed.

"Wellll I don't know."

"Look I've done a lot of different things, I've been, I need the job, man." He peeled away his cap in his plea and the skin was a wrinkled white, like the skin under a band-aid. He tried to raise himself and sitting rigidly like Robin he was exactly his height but much thinner.

Robin ran an uncertain hand through his closecombed, thinning hair, then stopped himself and patted the strands back into place.

"What have you done. I mean, where have you been? You know I am still interested to see what it's like someplace else. Since I've never really stayed any place except here. I often wonder what it's like while I'm driving by-- you do a lot of driving in this game-- what it's like to live in the place I pass. I've never been anywhere else. Except when I was drafted in the Army. And that of course does not count."

"I tried to get in the Army last winter, but they wouldn't take me."

"You're lucky you know, you've been around and seen a lot, I'd like to go someplace else--"

"Someplace else is always somebody's place, you know?"

Robin punched in the lighter. Though his hands flashed nervously, they were still very controlled, grabbing the new pack, tapping and opening it, the cigarette popping up just as the lighter popped out.

"How about a coffin-nail, hee-hee?" Robin pushed the pack towards the hitchhiker, who fumbled the cigarette several times before succeeding in keeping it between his swollen lips.

"I'm trying to quit, but I guess I just don't have the old willpower. If I stop I'm sure I'll gain weight, and I look like a circus balloon already," he playfully pinched his stomach and added, "What do you think?"

"I think I need a light," and grabbing Robin's cigarette he lit his and gulped deeply. "You sure you can't get me a job?"

"No I'm sorry. Besides what do you want with a job, living--"

"Just skip the condolences."

"Sure, whatever you say. As they say, you're the boss."

They drove on in silence for some time, with the bubbly Muzak on the four-speaker stereo growing in the silence. Robin occupied himself working the windshield wipers switch by hand and the hitchhiker continued stretching his fingers in the warmth. The Muzak pounded against Robin like pressure under water. As the hitchhiker grew accustomed to the heat he shed some more of his clothing and out of the corner of his eye Robin saw that the beard was neither full nor stylish at all, but more a splotchy covering sprawling across his face. The Muzak grew until Robin could hear nothing else. He patted his rather loud bald spot, a gesture that had been most successful with middle-aged male clients. He felt a bit foolish and next drummed his fingers on the steering wheel while the hitchhiker's tired whistle of admiration escaped as he sunk his hands into the leather seats.

Somehow his passenger heard nothing but to Robin the noise was relentless and he abruptly shouted, "By the way I'm turning here!"

"What? I thought you said you were going all the way!"

"All the way where?"

"All the way to the coast, all the way to my home, man. I was going home."

"Well I'm sorry, I've changed my mind...Man."

He pulled over to the side of the road and stopped to let the hitchhiker out. He exited reluctantly, savoring the warmth as long as possible. He slowly moved down the road, jamming his hands into his pockets trying to keep warm.

Robin pulled off on the first exit he spotted. But instead of slowing down on the smaller road he accelerated, pressing his foot against the pedal as if pressing to squash an unfortunately tough spider. Then with a satisfied look he took his foot off the pedal entirely and let the car drift as long as it liked.

He rolled to a stop somewhere along a deserted field, one that had been left fallow for some time. With a flick of the wrist he turned off the motor and the heater and turned off the Muzak, drew his knees up against his chest and decided to wait until he heard nothing but his heartbeat.



Because the radio just announced that the War is over
I'm hiding in the janitor's closet at work.

The War is over.
I sit on a bucket
turned upside down
and look up
to the fire sprinkler
in the ceiling, wondering
how much water it would drop
if my skin burned slow.

Two mops upside down
hang on hooks
their strings fall loose from
their heads.

I listen to the drip
in the sink
next to the long box
of large plastic bags
and I am quiet
thinking of how men
can listen to their own breath
in silent dim cells.

The brick wall blurs
all I can see is the
rotary buffer
darkened in the corner
with its cord wrapped around its neck.

---Ritch Kepler

Missie McCloskey

Missie McCloskey is the uncommissioned Rushmore
of Hubner Alley.

In the great, compassionate confessional
of her kitchen,
rumors fly
and every sin is venial.

"I was drivin'," says Missie,
"five of them Brownies around
in Girl Scout Curbside Service Center #1.
You know--the volunteer bus--
when--this was near Penn Station--
this muscatel bozo comes up
and starts in with his monologue.
Well, the girls are gettin' jittery
so I says, pointblank:

'Look, I ain't takin' no stuff.

You get obscene, Jack, you can forget the coffee.'

Aw, yeah, he shut up after that.
Heck, I'd stand a poor man's apology any day.
But Jesus, Jane, I have to deal with 'em.
I mean, do I have to deal with 'em?"

And Missie's absolution is grits-thick
and general as butterscotch syrup
in the crannies of kids' fingers.
Oh, Lord Love A Duck!
for forgiveness over saltines
spread down in Hubner Alley.
All down, in Hubner Alley.

---Mike Reis

burden

an immortal giant stood for centuries
bearing the world on his shoulders.

when he was young it seemed as light and wonderful
as an orange, as shining as a toy for children.
a muscle strained at first, then pain coursed
down sinews and sweat down trembling arms
till at last the great bones cracked,
the massive shoulders drooped and broke
like storm-bent trees.
his god's face was twisted out of beauty,
out of reason with the pain.
he remembered nothing but the weight of the world,
crushing his back; knew nothing
but the shriek and groan of tortured bones and flesh.

before he failed this Atlas threw the burden
to another god, who caught and held it
(though he was no giant), who holds it still
with nerves that scream and splinter,
in arms flung wide in love.

---Carol Sickles

Running Into First Men

just because he wears shiny suits
with his toupe and stylish shoes doesn't mean
he's not a complicated poet-lover; all my past men are.

he is a lawyer
for fifty dollars.
he buys me extra-large shrimp for lunch, and doesn't mind

that i don't drink
during the day because i have to write
for the railroad. he is building his own

house from scratch, and no one believes him.
he takes notes on my stories.
i grow freckles.

he tells me i shouldn't put myself down. he thinks of me
in Philadelphia. i like men with big smiles
who take me home.

---devy judith bendit



colorado (colored red)

in silence
you paint a coppery dawn
stalking the plains

you linger
where smoke saunters through the wind
prophesizing

buffalo
(meant for the Arapaho)
your shaman chants

a war cry
against the crimson sunset
gesturing death

in your land
ghosts haunting moccasin souls
chalk a white night

---Vicki Aversa

Period of Adjustment

---Mary Geis

Raindrops shivered on the briars and weeds lining the path to school. Kate skipped over the sodden leaves strewn along the way. Bundled up to her braids, she balanced a tin of cookies on her copybook, hiding inside fourteen valentines. A labor of love, she had spent hours the night before, pasting hearts and bits of ribbon to paper doilies. Never one to do things halfway, Kate had a card for everyone on her class list, even Bruce. She didn't care what the others said.

The crossing guard smiled down at Kate as she took her hand. Rounding the building, Kate saw the others on the playground. Donna and Jane were turning jump rope for the class and Kate got in line.

"Peeling oranges big and round,
See if you can touch the ground,
If you touch it over ten,
You may take your turn again.
One, two..."

Kate missed as the bell rang and monitors herded the children into double lines of seven. Like soldiers, they marched into school and down the hall. As usual, Bruce was waiting at his desk, away from the cold, for school to begin.

Kate gently placed her cookie tin with the others. The class was restless, and the morning dragged as Mrs. Baker droned through the reading exercises and homework. Twice she caught Kate gazing beyond the murky aquarium to the empty rain-washed playground.

Mrs. Baker waited past lunchtime to allow the children to mail their valentines in a shoe box emblazoned with cupids and hearts. Donna snickered, "I bet Bruce doesn't get any!" Kate whispered back, "So what?" and glanced away. As her name was called, she slid her hand inside her desk and got out her valentines. Happy that she had so many to give, Kate was longer at the mailbox than the others.

Mrs. Baker appointed Ricky Heffer mailman, and Kate watched the envelopes he tossed on her desk accumulate. Donna tore open an envelope, leaned over, and bragged, "Too bad yours are homemade. Jane's and mine are store bought!" Kate whispered, "Oh tough" and quickly searched through her

stack to hide the one with Ricky's scrawly writing.

Jane said under her breath, "Look, somebody sent Bruce one!" The class watched as Bruce turned the envelope with his stunted fingers. His blue lips parted in a hesitant smile, and Kate glimpsed the tiny pearl-like teeth. She remembered once when she had left the story corner, the children pulled at her braids and teased, "You caught Bruce Yeccho! Kate caught baby teeth--" because she had been sitting in Bruce's chair.

Kate opened an envelope with a big heart inside. It was inscribed, "BE MINE from 4-15-14-14-1." Mrs. Baker moved mechanically through the aisles, distributing punch. Kate tried to sip hers as Donna pointed to the valentine lying on Bruce's desk and loudly asked, "What dummy sent that?" Jane hissed, "He probably mailed it to himself!" Carrying his mailbox, Ricky walked by and challenged Bruce, "What's the matter? You scared of it or something?" Bruce shook his head mutely, but the blue veins in his temples throbbed. Kneeling backwards on her chair, Donna taunted, "Who sent it, Bruce?" Bruce raised his hand to be excused and stumbled from the room.

Pretending to tidy, Kate raised her desk top and disappeared. Green eyes peeked from behind the wooden slab, and she spied Bruce cowering just outside the door. Their eyes met.

Donna snatched the envelope from Bruce's desk and ripped it open. On sight, the class recognized Kate's handiwork. The buzz of voices peaked, "Kate sent it! Kate loves Bruce! Kate loves Bruce Yeccho with the baby teeth!" Kate's face burned as she put her head and shoulders entirely inside her desk. The cloying aftertaste of the punch sickened her.

Mrs. Baker tapped her long oxfords. She admonished "Children, let's not be unkind today!" but they ignored her as their jibes turned to uncontrollable laughter.

Suddenly, Bruce ran from his hiding place into the room. Flushed and crumpled, he appeared to be strangling, but his tiny fists were clenched in rage. Like an animal provoked, he gibbered, "Why you gotta do it, huh?" and his voice climbed in pitch. "Why you gotta be so mean?" he screamed.

Mrs. Baker tried to restore order. She sighed, "Not again," clapped her hands, and demanded "Silence" in her sternest tone. When she looked back, Bruce was gone.

As if pursued, he fled the empty hall and toppled blindly down the steps leading to his home. Bruce pounded the front door urgently, showering flakes of paint on his small head. His mother opened the door. Sadly, she carried her son to her still warm bed where she held him close until they slept.

Funeral Train

Mario and I, on a blue-black night of March,
in the wired-in yard, next to the track,
swung high on the creaky long-chained swings,
high, higher
till the links, white stars, and our bones
shuddered, and our eyes rolled like moons,
rolled and rose to the rattling track--
to the snake of heat that shot the wire
live! alive
to home we ran with teeth-edged smiles,
afraid that we had overheard
the chattering of two skeletons.

---Mary Claire Helldorfer



i have always wondered,
sister
how we could
being raised in the same house
have gone so far apart
you are home
in his home (look on the deed sister)
cooking dinner
for him
keeping his house
thinking about raising a family
with sons
to take their father's place
and daughters
to make wives for another's sons
i have always wondered,
sister
what happened to the woman who said
"i will never marry"
and lost her name so soon

---Belinda Houle

Gone Mad

That first night of December
wasn't too cold
and when Dad said
"Indian summer is gone for good"
I could feel the faded pink

That first night of December
wasn't too cold
and when Dad said
"Indian summer is gone for good"
I could feel the faded picnic blanket
we keep in the trunk of the car--
how warm it might be
some wrapped night
if it was used for keeping warm

At the end of the alley
a rusted pipe railing
painted silver
keeps kids and old folks
from falling down the hill.
You can bang it
with a stick
and it sounds like a fire-bell
Alarm!
you can hear it all over
the neighborhood
Alarm! Alarm!

That December night
The moon was just above
The backboard--
Looked like one of
Kenny's free throws
Moving slowly to the net--
Like it was frozen there.

That night
Joan Lee's spaniel was in heat 23
so all these dogs came by
right after dark
and howled and howled
looking at the sky.
So we went out
and started howling too--
Steve and Mike sounded just like
those dogs.
Then we started banging the alley railing
kept hitting hitting
trying to make it louder and louder
to chase the dogs away.
Stevie was strongest
so he kept banging banging
Alarm!
I didn't think he'd ever stop
Alarm! Alarm!

He finally stopped
and we were all laughing
when we noticed the dogs were gone
so we laughed and
laughed doubling over.

By then
Mrs. Zittenger was out on her porch
telling us to stop making so much noise
since her husband was a U.S. mailman
and had to get up early.

So Stevie
Stevie yells
"Sitting-jerk! Sitting-jerk!"
and we all laughed--
started howling
like dogs gone made--
running howling home.

---Jack Holmes

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