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TOUCHSTONE is a magazine of literary and visual artwork produced by students at Kansas State University. The bi-annual publication is funded by the university's Student Government Association and supported by sales.

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Additional copies of TOUCHSTONE are available at the SGA office and from staff members.



by Gretchen Strandhagen

Instructions for Living in the Dark

by Darya Semanitzky

Stand still
and be trapped in a window
blurred
from the streetlight behind.

Wait
while midnight signs flash
people into t.v. characters
laughing at themselves.

Walk to the nearest corner
and smile to anyone there, and turn
and climb down the subway stairs.
Run through the tunnel along the tracks,
wave to the engineer, dance
if he doesn't come.

Dance
behind a dark window
where passers-by
can't see.

Closing Time at Safeway

by Susan Bennett

The lights blink off
Over silent rows of oranges and pears.
One lone woman walks the empty aisles,
Pushing along her cumbrous cart,
Calling, between corn and peas,
—Where have you gone, Sweetheart?

Free-Flights: To the Man Swinging Silently from the Chandelier

by Darya Semanitzky

The only thing on the stage
is a man swinging silently
from the chandelier.

Echoes of dreams flower
and fly with him, but I think
he knows that to let go
would be suicide,

and he knows that it's hard to argue
with a man swinging from a chandelier
who loves
swinging from a chandelier:
he's the actor here.

PAY DAY

by Emmanuel Onuegbe

The voice of the minstrel rang out as clear toned as an iron gong.

"My name is Dambe the Singer," he sang. "I carry my music to prosperous spots where men-of-action ride, as it were, on unicorn backs and the land overflows with plenty. I was in the land of the distant North when the scent of prosperity from this plateau blew into my nasals. Now, God himself has sent me to say 'congratulations'. Congratulations to all you men-of-action."

"Ex—a—ctly so Dambe the Singer," yaaed his three man chorus as each rattled his little sticks on tambours. Rantam . . . ratatam . . . rantam . . . ratatam . . .

In the giant earthenware pots, burukutu (the locally brewed sorghum beer) hissed and foamed as millions of air bubbles surged upward to brave the expanse above the surface. But at the surface, the bubbles burst into nothingness, leaving behind them the convulsive maelstrom that was the liquid and the other adventurous bubbles. From the big asphalt road, from the dirt foot paths, and from the innumerable cattle trails that striated the grass covered tableland, people trickled into the Tunga—that large open-air wine market. And filled now to capacity, the buzz of the Tunga quaked the near-dark as was always the case each market day when people, who knew that a world without social intercourse was as good as worthless, met to drink and chat.

The wine sellers (all of them women) sat confidently behind their pots of simmering liquor. After all, this was Pay Day; the women sellers knew the frivolous spending spree of the miners—this would certainly not be a day for bad market.

A faint haze like ash was enveloping the world as the giant tropical sun finally began to drop beyond the rim of the plateau. A frail new moon appeared. And even at this late hour, the open-pit tin mine was a bee hive. Hands dug and shoveled; legs ascended painfully from out of the pit, while heads burned from the excruciating crush of the ore-laden headpans. The miners dumped their cargo and quickly disappeared. Somewhere a little engine sucked in water from a little pool and disgorged it in a violent gust against the ore-laden cargo. And a little muddy rivulet gutted away, leaving behind glistening black pellets of the denser ore. In his make-shift tarpaulin office, a young clerk raised his head again and again as if bored by the monotonous toom-toom chug of the little engine. He would lower his head and scribble, scratch, scratch, scratch in a large notebook. But he finally stepped out and flashed a glance at the toiling miners—a glance that spoke without words: Gentlemen, Pay Day is here.

Pay Day. The day to buy this and that. Cloth, meat and drinks. Jamaga Walango had thought about this first Pay Day of his. One could be shrewd, he thought. One could spend little on drinks and cloth, save enough to buy better clothings for the two wives, save enough to send some of the children to boarding school, save enough . . . save enough . . . one could be shrewd he thought. As he pondered over these things, the big entrepreneurs' helicopter finally landed.

Aganda Osman, the tin magnate, had finally come to pay his miners and he emerged out of the helicopter carrying jute sacks of money and accompanied by some of his secretaries.

Hawkers of everything—cloth, bangles, shoes—had pooled into a bazaar near the mine pit and now did brisk business.

“I have all kinds of bubas,” announced one hawker to Jamaga, as he spread his wares. “This one comes from Akwete and you know that those folks are wizards at the loom. As for this one, its cloth came from Ilorin and I need not sing the eulogies of those folks and their magic dye pits.”

“How much does that blue one cost?” Jamaga asked.

“Ah ha,” continued the gimmicking hawker. “It is imported material from Arabia and it is forty pounds.”

“Woh!” shouted Jamaga.

“You do not need to shout. You will not die because of forty pounds. All you need do is deposit ten pounds. And if you can install two pounds every other Pay Day, my dear, why in the name of the Holy Prophet shall I not let you have this king’s dress? Try it.”

Jamaga tried it on and deposited ten pounds out of his twenty pound pay. He moved on to the next trader’s corner and bought two beautiful shoes made of python skin. At the other corner a jeweler peddled Nkalari beads.

“Nkalari beads!” he shouted as Jamaga drew close. Nkalari beads? Those were rare in an era when people bought any useless gems and wore them as if they were real. Who brought Nkalari beads to the plateau?

“Are they real?” Jamaga asked.

“For sure my son,” replied the aging hawker. “I traveled across land and sea to bring these precious gems to the plateau. Try them.”

Jamaga wore them on his neck and they glowed like the halo of God in the near-dark. He could not resist. So he made a first installment of six pounds. From the next Pay Day on, he would deposit one pound until he completely defrayed the eleven pound purchase price.

That was why a thunder of acclaim shattered the Tunga as Jamaga stepped into it that evening—here was a man garbed in a shiny silken buba, sophisticated shoes of python skin, and lustrous Nkalari beads. He was like a king from the distant North. A smart wine seller brought him a stool and gave him a calabash full of liquor to drink. He sipped at the drink and spat it out. “They don’t even brew strong drink any more, what is the world coming to?” he complained.

“Taste this then and see the difference,” intruded another ambitious woman. Her skill at brewing burukutu was perfect. Jamaga ordered a whole pot of it. Of course, he would not drink it all alone. Twenty of his admirers, many of them old, impecunious but thirsty, went to work. How true the popular sayings about the Tunga; The Tunga is like God’s paradise; you may have money, you may not have it; but a bachanalain orgy always awaits you if only you put on your best clothes and take the pains to walk in.

The inimitable minstrel was equally at work. He sang the eulogies of a cavalier of long ago. Once there was that steel-hearted warrior who rode into an army of charging troops and single-handedly raped their mothers. Of course the cavalier was Karimu Walango the great-grandfather of Jamaga Walango.

“If I were not already cursed to be a singer I would just become a house boy to this great son of ours, Jamaga—at least I’ll polish those expensive shoes of his,” continued the minstrel who also twanged his one-string banjo faultlessly as ever.

“Ex—a—ctly so Dambe the Singer,” yaaed the untiring chorus. Rantam . . . rantatam . . . ratatam . . . rantam . . .

Jamaga was forced onto his feet by the flattery. He drew out one of the remaining two pounds in his pocket and slapped it onto the sweaty brow of the minstrel.

The crowd roared an applause.

The revelry continued into the middle of night and large Tiley lanterns were brought into the Tunga to augment the morose glow of the moon. The singer sang a dozen lyrics, the chorus supported him, and people clapped, laughed, talked, drank, gossiped, cursed, danced.

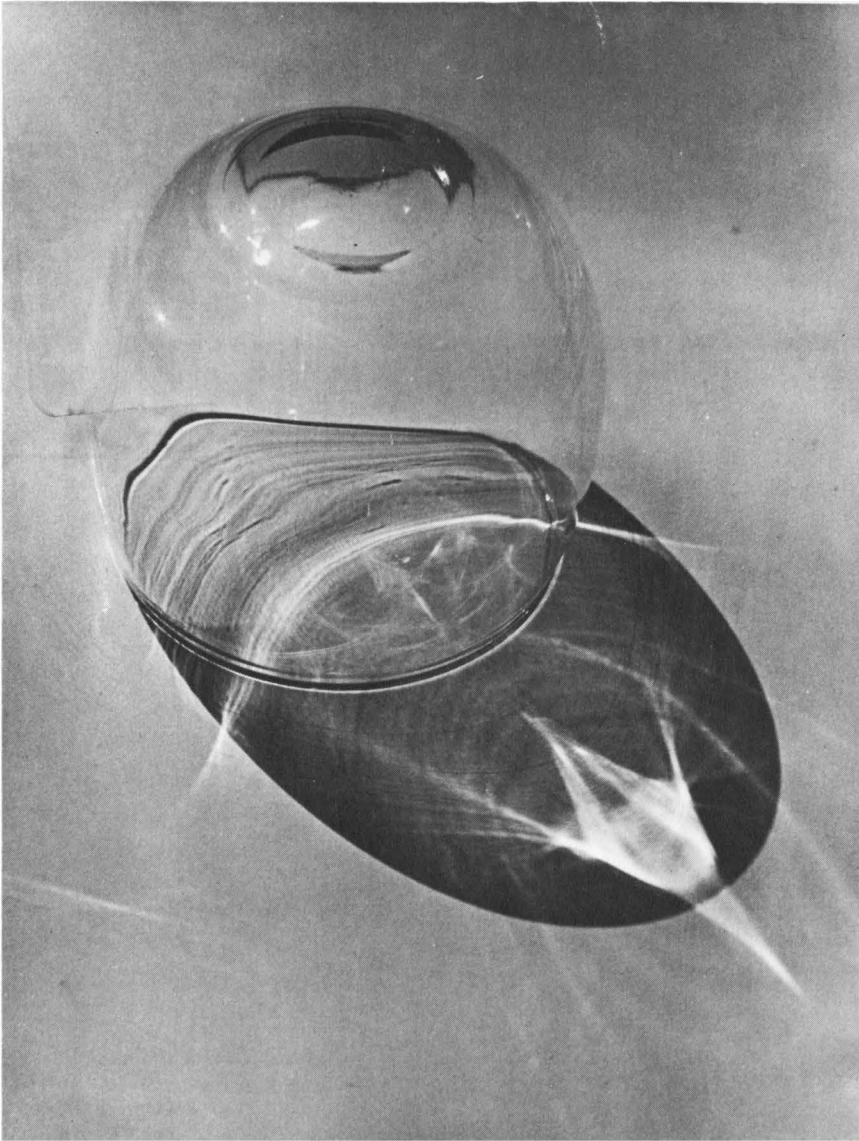
Because he did not have any bicycle or motorcycle as did many of the older hands at the mine, Jamaga Walango walked back by a cattle trail toward his shack. In the faint glow of the night he saw the many distant houses of brick and aluminum that sprawled clumsily across the mine field. Here and there hideous mounds of earth spoke silently of years of ore mining. Beyond the miners, however, some of the land was yet undefiled by the greed of man. It was lush green and nothing and portioned into steads by cactus hedges.

Jamaga tripped and fell. He got up and hollered and grunted and then giggled something to himself. How much remained of the money? Well, no problem. Would one buy fine clothes for the women? No problem, God would provide. What about sending the children to the coveted boarding school? No problem, one could decide that on another Pay Day. He stumbled into the bush and out of it. But in spite of his drunkenness, Jamaga was still bonded somehow onto the trail and leashed on steadily along it toward his home by a very, very thin string of sobriety.

Un-Rain

by Judy Sasse

Watch their crystal breath,
Through windowed music unsung,
Drop into your
Hand . . . turn, under mountain frost
And desert pain, and fall again.



by Scott R. Whisler

Logorhythm

by Shelagh Stromberg

A cold grey tongue of ice
Locked up the word,
Seized by a winter season
Of censured thought,
It froze the very dreams of sleep
That seal night from life.

But somewhere secretly
The earth ticks on
To a place
That looks familiar
But for its filling
Of a space
It has not occupied before;

And then
A quiet thaw.

Cool wind, soft rain
A sliding-away
Of gritted blocks
A washing-away
Of muddied memories.

The knotted limbs
Refuse to back down
From their leafing and healing,
Here,
Once more.

A flower opens unafraid,
Deep in a pre-Raphaelite
Shade, and speaks her leaves,
Glow and goes before
Their scattering,
Raised to the power
Of love that knows
Life cannot be apologized for.



by Christine Ward

Circus

by Clara West

A man-god promising,
Taking back . . .
He has plagues in his pocket.
His beard flows like melted marshmallows . . .
That long gnarled forefinger pointing down
The rows of angels like a weathervane . . .
Those webbed feet for stamping ants
Like cigarette butts . . .
You are a dictator, I shout.
Divine right, he answers
Amid the thunder.
Archaic, I shout,
Why don't you bring on the whole show?
Let's have snake charmers
 lion tamers
 bareback riders in sparkling swimsuits . . .
Let's make admission ten cents—
Let's make sure everyone gets a dime.

My Daughter

by Leslie Rianoshek

My daughter
follows in her father's
kneeprints, in the garden
ripping weeds out by their throats
tossing them
in a dead heap.

So like
a man she never knew.
Her sighing breath,
her gesture of dismissal,
the way she —
champs her food.
I choke her in my sleep.

Our daughter,
those weeds.
She rips at me.

The Barn

by Kathleen Cashman

I have dealt (straight
across these rough boards),
a storehouse must —
keeping, owning, but
relinquishing. And
here I stand — red,
weathered and raw.





by Sharon I. Spinks

The Beginnings of Abdication

by Carol Wright

The veins weave in and out
of his splitting skin—
like criminals in camouflaged corners,
they prepare a final ritual
as their venomous hands lower
the snake-shaped rope,
waiting to seize his soul.

A terrarium world churns and
rots within his body.
In drought-wheezing air
and clinging stench of light,
his dusty Tudor frame attracts parasites
that nibble on his frayed clothing—
shedding wounds and stained bones
of brick-jagged stone.

His fractured steeple sags
like hanging limbs on trees
or sprained wings of a windmill
in a tired, rusted country.
His chest slowly sighs, then rises
to fast tempo like the accelerando
coming from the distant heartbeat
of an oil pump.

His webbed eyes swell
with moss-crust reflections
as his mind is boarded up memories.
And while the birds disappear
in mourning flight,

the veins weave in and out . . .

We Were Eating Alphabet Soup

by Cindy Bily

one afternoon,
trying to see the future
in the letters we scooped up.
Well, yours said FAME
and his said LOVE
and hers said TRUTH.
Mine said NPXLB.



by Frank Meacham

Ad Libitum

by Pamela A. Johnson

Characters

MALE: 30 or so, dressed in 1920's garb including suit and top hat, a misplaced artifact.

FEMALE # 1: thirty-year-old cheerleader, sagging, varicose-veined and peppy.

FEMALE # 2: also 30-ish, a flabby prostitute wearing a sequined red dress and opaque make-up.

FEMALE # 3: barely 30 and pregnant underneath a crisp apron.

Female # 2 and Female # 3 are scattered throughout the audience, along with three additional anonymous women. A small ensemble will provide background music, beginning with the "Notre Dame Fight Song".

*A white pedestal is downstage left with a wedding bouquet beside it. One of the anonymous women in the audience is armed with a copy of **The Total Woman** by Marabel Morgan.*

Spotlight fades in on Male preaching from upstage left. Female # 1 is silhouetted standing on the pedestal. Female # 1 parallels Male's gestures, exaggerating them into cheerleading routines. Intonation should also be parallel.

MALE: *(cups his hand towards
 Female # 1, shouts his lines
 in her direction)* Give
 women the suffrage and
 our wives will be cam-
 paigning, not cooking, ca-
 rousing, not cleaning!

FEMALE #1: *(picking up on Male's
 lead) ERA is communistic,
 pro-lesbian, anti-religion!
 HOORAY!*

MALE: Giving women the vote
 will unsex our mothers,
 wives and sisters!

FEMALE #1: Under ERA, we will lose our motherhood, motherhood, rah, rah, rah! *(beats center of her chest)* We will be d-r-a-f/t-e-d, drafted, drafted!

MALE: *(prompting her)* Expose them to politics and women will lose their femininity!

FEMALE #1: *(eagerly agreeing)* We will lose our femininity! We will . . . we will . . . *(looks over her shoulder for help from Male)* Prompt me.

MALE: *(moving towards her)* But you always give the cue.

FEMALE #1: *(steps off her pedestal)* But you make the first advance.

MALE: *(gracefully bowing)* Hello, nice to meet you.

FEMALE #1: Oh, I'm lovely, and how are you?

MALE: What a nice name. *(kisses her hand)* But this will take days . . . Let's skip two pages?

FEMALE #1: Yes, the weather is lovely.

"Notre Dame Fight Song" now played by violin.

MALE: Wining and dining at seven?

FEMALE #1: *(said in one breath)* Lovely! Let-me-check-my-appointment-book-yes-I'm-free. But what shall I wear?

MALE: Something nice, my dear, and do something with your hair.

FEMALE #1: *(angry)* Insolent male!

MALE: Silly woman.

FEMALE #1: I can't stand you.

MALE: I find you foolish.

FEMALE: #1: I hate you!

MALE: Will you marry me?

FEMALE #1: MARRY you!

MALE: *(shrugging shoulders)* Opposites attract.

FEMALE # 1: *(coquettishly)* I'll want a diamond . . .

MALE: I'll give you two.

FEMALE # 1: *(quickly)* How large!

MALE: A carat.

FEMALE # 1: How large?

MALE: Two carats.

Male polishes imaginary diamond ring on his coat and begins a sales pitch. Simultaneously, Female # 2 (prostitute) stands in audience, excuses herself as she edges down the aisle and glides onto stage, enchanted by the large diamond. She reaches Female # 1 just as the ring is forced onto Female # 1's finger.

MALE: Two carats. A perfectly-cut blue marquis set in platinum, and—*(tries to push ring on her finger)*—sized—at no extra—*(one last shove)*—cost! Now, *(drops to one knee)* will you marry me?

Female # 2 has now joined Female # 1 onstage. As long as they share the stage, their gestures are choreographed together. They move as one, speak as one, and each is unaware of another Female.

FEMALES: *(distracted by ring, murmur)* What's your monthly salary? Are you a doctor? Lawyer? Plumber?

MALE: *(angry)* WILL you MARRY me!

FEMALES: *(startled into consciousness, regain coquetry and prance away)* Perhaps.

MALE: *(sputters)* Perhaps!

FEMALES: Yes, perhaps. After all, I hardly know you.

MALE: Love at first sight?

FEMALES: *(preening)* But you haven't met my father . . .

MALE: I'll love him too! *(lunges for Female # 1, misses, grabs Female # 2 as Female # 1 wanders offstage, still enamored by ring)* Can I kiss you?

FEMALE # 2: Can I stop you?

They kiss briefly.

FEMALE # 2: *(bashfully)* I think I love you . . .

MALE: *(interrupting)* I'm sure you do.

FEMALE # 2: . . . and yes, I'll marry you.

MALE: I'm afraid not.

FEMALE # 2: What?!

MALE: We're not opposite after all. I've lost my attraction for you.

FEMALE # 2: But we are! I'm demure, you're overbearing. I'm a lady, you're a man.

MALE: We're both phony.

FEMALE # 2: *(panic-stricken)* Then let's pretend love.

MALE: *(turning away)* Sorry. I'm not interested.

FEMALE # 2: *(grabbing his arm)* But now I am.

MALE: Sorry, my dear, *(kisses her hand)* but it's all over. *(kisses her arm)* It was nice while it lasted *(kisses her upper arm)* but all good things *(kisses her neck)* must come *(kissed her ear)* to an end. *(pats her ass, chuckling)* Good-bye!

Last three notes of "Notre Dame Fight Song" should be suspended, and drummer uses them as a transition for next rhythm, a loose blend of a Congo war chant and a striptease.

*Male walks back to upstage left, combs his hair, smoothes his suit, and begins his speech from the beginning with exactly the same intonations and gestures. Spot is on him, gradually dims as his voice trails away, light focuses on Female # 2 as she stumbles offstage and down the theater aisle in despair. Actresses padding the audience offer her consolation, patting her on the back as she wanders by, saying "Don't worry sweetie," and "The play's not over yet." One actress hands Female # 2 Marabel Morgan's **The Total Woman**, saying, "Here, honey, try this." Female # 2 declines weakly, muttering "Nothing can help." Actress persists, reading from the endsheet. "It's written by 'THE ASTONISHING MARABEL MORGAN—who brought new delights to her marriage—and can do the same for you! Go ahead, take a look at page 63.'" (Female # 2 agrees reluctantly, sits on an armrest, begins to read aloud.)*

FEMALE # 2: Psychiatrists tell us that a man's most basic needs, outside of warm sexual love, are approval and admiration. Women need to be loved, men need to be admired. *(she pauses, leafing through the book to page 68)* Tell him you love his body. If you choke on that phrase, practice until it comes out naturally. If you haven't admired him lately, he's probably starving emotionally. He can't take too much at once so start slowly. Give him one good compliment a day and watch him blossom right before your eyes.

Female # 2 is determined. She walks briskly onstage, circles Male, critically examines him as if he were a quarterhorse.

FEMALE # 2: Gorgeous specimen! *(she blatantly scans him from head to toe. Male is confused.)* Firm shoulders, a full chest, he'd set off a sport coat beautifully. *(Male blushes, flattered. Female # 2 begins to sound like an auctioneer, pace quickens)* Notice the biceps. All muscles are in perfect proportion—back, shoulders, chest, arms, legs, stomach, do I hear a bid?

Drum beat steps up in time to the bidding. Actresses padding the audience stand up as they shout their bids.

FIRST: Five dollars.

SECOND: Ten dollars.

THIRD: Fifteen?

Momentum grows, drum beat quickens, bids shouted in rapid succession.

SECOND: Thirty!

THIRD: Fifty!

FIRST: Eighty!

MALE: *(screaming)* STOP! This is barbaric!

FEMALE # 2: This is love.

Music changes to a striptease of sorts. Female # 2 stalks Male like a panther, talking in a sexy, raspy voice. Female # 3 (pregnant housewife) excuses herself from audience and joins Female # 2 onstage. Again, choreography is exactly the same for Females. Female # 3 dances awkwardly at first, but eventually steals the stage from Female # 2.

FEMALES: Spiked heels and pierced ears
torture the prey
Silishaped bustcone
Saucy derriere
QT sunstroke
and Bonne's natural flush
Cheaper than oil paints
Come with a brush

Female # 2 is upstaged and leaves in a huff, unnoticed. Female # 3 continues singularly, peeling off clothes.

Trust Maybelline
and each eyelash will curl
Then starch blonded hair
Like a good Clairol girl.

MALE: *(drooling)* Yes . . . yes . . .

Music and dancing abruptly stop.

FEMALE # 3: No! *(she grins at the audience)* Not unless we're married.

Male groans.

FEMALE # 3: I want a little white house . . .

MALE: *(groaning louder)* Mortgage.

Music begins again, shifting from death march to wedding march, stanza by stanza.

FEMALE # 3: *(unconsciously twisting his arm)* . . . with a little picket fence.

MALE: *(head hanging)* Insurance.

FEMALE # 3: Color-coordinated sheets!

MALE: Mastercharge.

Male and Female # 3 walk apart from each other to opposite sides of the stage in a straight line to the back, then turn sharply towards each other. Forming a rectangle, they meet, link arms and walk downstage center.

FEMALE # 3: *(dreamily)* A June wedding . . .

MALE: A mother-in-law.

FEMALE # 3: Bridesmaids will be in blue.

MALE: My bank account's in red.

FEMALE # 3: An empire waistline . . .

MALE: I'll tighten my belt.

FEMALE # 3: *(tosses her bouquet to the audience)* American red roses for my bouquet!

MALE: Flowers every anniversary.

FEMALE # 3: *(clutching him)* We'll be the perfect couple.

MALE: *(clutches)* Eight o'clock — time to go to work!

Male kisses Female # 3 on the cheek and runs offstage, down the aisle, and out of the theater. Female # 3 stands and waves until he is out of sight, and a little longer. Lights soften until Female # 3 is barely illuminated. Females # 1 and # 2 return to stage, audience unaware. Female # 3 stands on pedestal, begins to seduce the audience as soon as musicians are absolutely silent.

FEMALE # 3: *(running her fingers through her hair)* Gorgeous specimen.

Second spotlight illuminates Female # 2.

FEMALE # 2: *(also seducing audience)* Soft shoulders.

Third spotlight illuminates Female # 1.

FEMALE # 1: *(also seducing audience)* Full chest.

FEMALES: *(in unison)* I'd set off a mink coat beautifully.

FEMALE # 1: Notice the calves.

FEMALE # 3: All muscles are in perfect proportion.

FEMALE # 2: Back, shoulders, bust, arms, legs, waist,

FEMALES: *(in unison)* Do I hear a bid?

The stage is dark.



by Diane Gonzalas

Flowering Tree

by Susan Bennett

Briefness of flowers
We learn early to accept;
A few days, the poets say.
But all my youth—
Indeed, until I saw
There, at my feet,
These wounded petals
That yesterday, just yesterday,
I first had noticed
Nodding in the lambent air—
I had thought a few days would be enough.

On Learning to Ride a Bicycle at 21

by Kathleen Cashman

Oh the five year olds
who can balance on two
thin wheels and not feel
their heart for the
rolling joy—because
at a flying five, the
skinned shins and knees
are not inevitable.

Flashflush 1-3

by Pamela A. Johnson

c'mon sweetie:
whole natural some sex
will grind hibitions up,
loosen rains,
and generally smear around away apart
juiceless malnutritions
you hold (dear)
and I will run
afraid you say?
Give me your hand.
like a watch, stop
because three times a charm
and then you're out of luck.

Impressions

by Darya Semanitzky

Windflaw
reaches out behind me
and I walk away.

I am followed:
trees that breathe my name
turn to me and cry
blood

candy-swirled
rain slipping from leaves
ripples the image
in the water.

Wind
of pine ashes and honey
fades across my face
streaking my hair
green,

and without knowing it,
the wind sweeps me
gone.

Our Street

by Ann Carrel

The corner mailbox
Held the pooled sky in its lid
Just after the rain—
The trees in the sidewalk, too,
Asked a second opinion.



by Randall Shuck

Slaughter of the Innocents

by Leslie Rianoshek

Jarrick, my hand is swollen so and black;
he was the child, the future king,
I'm convinced. My sword pierced
his swelling heart, I know it. If only
eastern men had sought elsewhere
but Herod's house, if only
Herod weren't a jealous man, if only
you had not been watching,
I might have let them go. Yes, you.

They were slipping by— simply done
in all that moil, women wailing,
begging, screaming, soldiers ramming doors—
I could have turned my head
and did, but met your eyes. You don't
remember?

I rode my horse twixt them and
their escape. I reached for her load;
she slashed my hand, a tool hid up her sleeve,
and ran. Would not the mother of a king
protect her child thus?

I caught them— you— you can see the proof—
his blood splashed on a corner hut.
I know he was the king.
I'll die a Jew— god vengeance from his mother's cut.

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