

CARDINAL SINS
LITERARY MAGAZINE

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all from the tree of knowledge

Cardinal Sins

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Infertility

Kelly S. Sams

The word ovulation is heard
at her table. It's as
commonplace as plate, Grace,
green beans and butter.

Trapped. she can't escape
the hard coldness
her naked toes grip. Relax.
Take vitamins. Take your temperature. Get
drunk. Buy him boxers. It just takes time.

No matter where she is,
round bellies
attract her attention, the way
you can hear your own name
in a noisy crowd.

She avoids propaganda where
babies and diapers
and home pregnancy tests
and mothers tasting peanut butter
are displayed like zoo exhibits
for the interested outsider.

Dictated by the thermometer,
she engages in innocuous sex.
Once, she stood alone
smiling at her lovely profile in a long mirror
after stuffing a pillow under her dress.



The Meeting Place Marybeth Enciso

Dead Ed's Funeral

Shark

Sometimes I think I'm crazy. It goes like this; sometimes I feel people should be flipped off, but I don't finger them. I wait and get mad, then madder. And sometimes someone will be nice to me, they will buy me a drink at a bar or something, and then I'll get all crabby and pull out the bird like I was flicking ash off of a cigarette. If they act surprised, then I'll tell them to fuck-off. In a matter of fact kind of voice as if it does not mean anything. They either walk away or call me an ass or something and ignore me the rest of the night.

But here's the nuts part. After I've been alone for awhile I feel lonesome and try to apologize to anyone who listens. Then I cry.

It's getting so I don't go to parties anymore. There's too much turmoil and crying. Mostly I hang out alone, and if you've ever been to pick up joint or party, you know that the guy alone in the corner stays like that. Alone.

Yesterday was different though. Not just because it was a funeral, but because this doll gave me attention.

"I don't even know the deceased," she said to me. Those were her first words. Not hi or how are you, just a stale kind of statement on a dusty whispering voice.

"I don't even know the deceased."

"I haven't talked to anyone who knows him. Seems we're all here with a friend or husband or lover, but no one seems to know the guy," I said. "Maybe he was a real bastard and even his parents won't admit to knowing him. What's his name?"

"Edward Stadler or Stoddler or something." She had bright eyes. Maybe brighter because of her black dress and make-up, or because this was the longest conversation I'd had in a few days. The pipe organ played those death knolls they always play, and I suddenly started thinking about sex with her. Kinda sick, right? I don't even know her name and we are at a funeral, and I'm thinking about that. But I told you I'm probably crazy, so try and understand.

Did I tell you that when we got to view the body I stepped behind the doll? She was not as tall as I thought so I had to bend down to talk in her ear. I asked if she'd go out drinking with me after the mourning. She didn't turn around, just back-handed my voice like you would a fly buzzing at the screen door.

When I got up to see the Edward fellow, lying in a double breasted suit with some kind of awkward smile underneath the lipstick, I felt it. He looked soft and gentle and I reached to touch his nose, but stopped myself in time. Then I flipped him off. Quick and subtle, but I gave it to him. No one noticed, I think. I gave it to him good.

When the music stopped this guy stood at the podium in the front. He was a priest or a minister or something. He looked around and waited for us to settle down like he was the father, son and holy ghost all wrapped up in one. Hell, I don't know. But he started with a prayer and I looked over at the doll. Her hair was long blonde and her nose had a bump on the bridge of it. I'm not partial to long blonde hair, but that bump got me thinking again. Then the priest fellow began with, "I never met Edward Stockier, but through his deeds ... "

Through his deeds? What about his thoughts, his secrets? Where were his sins? What kind of beginning was that? Where's the brimstone and hell-fire? Where was the passion? This is what I was thinking through the eulogy. Twenty minutes worth of deeds, and he never met the dead guy once. And no one cried. Did not even try to fake it. Three nights ago I bawled at the bar so hard that I had to go out to my car and regain my composure. It's not so hard to do. But no one even tried.

Later we headed for our cars and the body was loaded into the hearse. The motor was running. People stood around in groups of three or four, probably trying to find out who knew the bastard. The driver was off in the john or getting some whiskey or something. It must be a corny job, to drive dead bodies around and act real sad and sober.

I got behind the wheel of the hearse, and flipped on the radio. It had a cassette player. but I didn't have any of my tapes. I pulled out slowly. The people standing around thought they were missing something and started bot-footing it to their cars. It was a scramble, but I pulled away with Ed.

The windows were tinted and the air conditioning blew all over my race. It was like watching T.V. in my own little room. I drove about two blocks to a corner drugstore. No one had caught up yet, so I went inside and bought a six-pack or beer.

Dead Ed laid in back, probably still smiling. I walked back towards the funeral home with my beer. The procession of cars had just gotten out into the street. The hearse driver was running around in the driveway looking for his ride. I saw the doll in a blue car with another girl. They let me in and we pulled out of the procession and headed north. Me, two girls, and a six-pack.

But that was yesterday. Today my ears are buzzing and my butt hurts from sitting around too much. I have a headache from wondering whether I remembered to turn off the hearse's radio. Crazy isn't it.

Dandelion Niece

Susan Foxx

Katee lives popsicle days.
She knows the rules of the sky,
and believes the sun can walk.
She can paint the scent of crabtree blossoms,
and smile the chirping of birds.
She can dance the texture of grass,
and sing the flight of butterflies.
To her, sewers become streams,
and dandelions make butter.
Willow trees have staircases,
and fire hydrants have names.
She measures success by the
number of scabs on one leg,
or who can spit the farthest.
She scratches her mosquito bites
too much,
And perhaps bathes herself
too little.
All of life is stretched out
before her,
But all Katee knows is
blue dandelions.

A Hard Worter

Eric Buschlen

My whole life I have been a farmer. I plant
fields of everything, reaping nothing. I need a cup
of coffee to tide me over. Like a river
is controlled by its shore, the T. V.
weather man is my prophet until the snow is a blanket
over my land. I continue to walk.

The things I saw on my walk
disturbed me. Others like myself plant
crops of plenty. Instead of money they need a blanket
to keep the cold away. Anything warm like a cup
of hot chocolate would help. The kids watch T. V.
programs about rich people who live by a flowing river.

"Why can't we live by a pretty river
dad?" The kids ask me as I walk
away with tears in my eyes the size of a T.V.
set. I went away crying to work at the plant
making something that no one uses- a cup
full of moth balls used to shelter blankets.

As people use their blankets
it protects them from the harmless river
which flows much like tea into a cup.
Crawling out of work I start to walk
home because I forgot to water my plant
it might become discolored like my T. V.

I got home and adjusted my T.V.
it was messed up and it acted like a blanket
on the small stand it was on. The plant
had expired like the dried up river
that ran next to my house. I walk
by it with my family and an empty cup.

Returning, I fill my cup
to the top and start to watch the T. V.
that doesn't work. My eyes walk
with the changing shows that blanket
the airwaves and run on like a river
does. It will soon be time to plant.

In the spring, I plant and will find the cup
that I threw in the dried up river along with the T. V.
We need a blanket for our family walk, as it is still winter.



Abstractions of Eric Marybeth Enciso

Art of Learning

Hollee Hart

Blue, I chose Blue.
Teacher glopped the jelly-like mass on my paper.
It was wet and coot.
It oozed through my fingers.
I moved the ocean around.
I made a storm.
The waves crashed into each other.
Then, waters calmed with slowly gliding hands.

May I have some yellow please?
The sun, the glob is the sun.
The yellow squirted through my fingers as I smashed the paint.
A bird, my whole hand made his body.
My thumb made his head.
Oh Oh, the ocean swallowed my bird.
That's okay.
The mixture made grass.
The wind blew the grass.
My fingertips became ballerinas dancing in a field.

Teacher has red too.
I'd like red.
A bright red apple has fallen on my grass.
Suddenly, and without warning,
A fire truck raced across my paper.
My hands pushed it.
Faster and faster,
Around in circles it flew.

When the fire truck stopped,
I looked at my creation.
Mud. I made mud.
Rich, goeey, brown mud.

For W. Leslic Whittaker

Kelly S. Sams

Teacher,
you said I was
"a casualty"
of public schools
caught in the crossfire
of a superior struggle
camouflaged as education.

Deserted and starving
I strayed into your classroom
like a phantom,
a mirage,
inverting reflections
of the distant target;

but my bones heard
your voice vibrate
and rumble
through the floorboards
like grenades
as you pounded words
into my hungry hands.

Can Creature

Tina Walkowski

You see me
roaming the halls
searching for empty cans.
I am not a beggar
(Mister, you got a dime?)
but I am not too proud
to pick up what you
leave behind.
You say
isn't it humiliating
 degrading
to rescue cans from the
trash?
I say
cans equal money
money pays rent
 tuition
 food
 shoes
for my children.
If every bit helps
a dime here
a dime there
I'll help myself to them.
I am doing what I can
bit by bit
dime by dime
to survive
to go to school
and bold my head high.

A Gentle Storm Begins...

Kathleen A. Schulz

A soft candle moves the darkness
As I lie still in the bath.
Warm liquid whispers a symphony
Through my floating angel hair.
Sweet oil beads upon my breasts
As cool air hardens my nipples.
My breathing sways the tepid water,
And a soft gray blanket covers my soul.
In a lost dream of fading photos,
A face appears through heavy shadows,
A forgiving figure that lifts the cloud.
We speak with subtle movements.
His hand touches my warm rose mouth.
I taste the wine on his fingers
and a gentle storm begins ...

Swiftness of Each Day

William Jeruski

Shouldn't I in younger travels
have sounded waters deep
or sought among the planted fields
the solitary trees

And shouldn't I have picked the violets
passed beneath her feet
and kept them in some clothbound book
to save a summer's day
each petal but a whisper
passed from eye to eye
she in dress of cotton white
in softest blue the sky

Yes, these things I should have done
moments passed away
overtaken by a fear
and the swiftness of each day



Summer's Breath Marybeth Encino

¹⁹⁹²
The Effects A
Name Can Have

My friend Ian had two cats.
Now he has one cat.
Now one of his cats names
was Awesome, and the other was
Useless Now this is the
weird part Useless died. Now
they say cats die
regretfully but on this
one I don't know.
Do you?

THE END

AMERICA'S MOST WANTED

By Ashley

School
Story
I am writing

Musical Understanding

Janna M. Kern

The Steinway sits alone
shivering
in the icy darkness,
her melancholy frame
sulking
beneath the veil of twilight
Silent ...
an ear propped up
waiting ...
for the sound of her lover's footsteps
From the depths of the lifeless shadows
her long-time companion appears,
his soft caress warms
her ivory cheeks
Blushing
warmly, she returns his greeting,
his hands dispel the shadows
Touching
gently he asks her questions that
only she can answer
Reaching
to her depths, he
tells her his
grief
Strong hands frantically
searching
for comfort...
only she can ease
his soul
Despairing,
she weeps,
she cannot find all the
answers he is so urgently
seeking
She gently sings her love
as tears stain her face
His tears
falling in the darkness as
she smooths his brow
Whispering
gentle words,
her music soothes his pain

Cherokee Soul

Mary K. Hansel

When he was nine,
his father told him he was half Cherokee.
He wondered what it meant to be Cherokee,
and came to the conclusion that it was bad
because Indians were always killed in the movies.

One day, while playing in the woods behind his house,
he found an arrowhead.
He held it in his hands and thought,
“One of my relatives could have made this.”
That night he dreamt of
Indians dancing wildly around a fire
to the pounding of drums.
He woke up, and could still hear
the echo of the drums.

When he was seventeen,
he got a job laying bricks with Bender’s Construction.
During the day, he worked building apartments and office building,
but in the evening,
he would walk out to the woods behind his house
and he would search for arrowheads.
He would pick up a handful of earth,
and he would let it sift through his fingers.
He liked the way the earth fell.
It was warm and gritty, and made him want to keep sifting.

When he was thirty-two,
he looked sadly upon the city he helped build.
Where once there had been woods,
there was the South Mall, one hundred and two stores
and still growing.
The pond he had swum in
was now part of the eighteen-hole Bender’s Country Club.

He walked to the edge of town
where Bender’s Construction was putting in a parking lot.
He glanced down at the spot where his favorite apple tree had stood
and he saw something embedded in the ground.
Picking it up,
he saw it was an arrowhead.
There was blood on his hand.

Collected Poems

Shark

"What costume shall a poor boy wear?" Dean says.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow... the party is always 'tomorrow. So what does it matter?" Neal says.

Dean's hair is blonde, straight and short enough to hide under his wigs. His bedroom closet is full of them. Lightening red. Amber. Black as a sewer rat's coat. Blue and purple with frost highlights. Each wrapped around the heads of faceless mannequins.

Dean lights a filterless Camel. The smoke runs towards the ceiling glittered with sparkle-paint. He stares through the mirror at his nose, his high cheekbones, his thin shoulders. His skin is pale like a cave explorer who does not remember the sun. No freckles or blemishes-just paper white skin.

Neal flips through the pages of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems*. "What goes on in your mind? he says.

"Barb says I avoid myself by worshipping others. I went to the print shop yesterday. The place was a mess. Paper clippings cluttered every corner of the room. The lights were yellow and buzzed like a bad wine. I had a headache by the time I left. I did meet an interesting man, though. Liquor. He likes words. Talks across a void. Doesn't care who knows what about him. Honest-I think. He helped me staple. Said it was too painful to watch me move so slow. Told me about re-hab and the separation from his wife. Pictures of his kid. Barb's fucked. I could stare into this mirror all day." Dean picks tobacco off his tongue. The smoke hovers at the ceiling.

Neal coughs and opens a window. A car horn blows in with the breeze. Neal picks up the Ginsburg book again and hollers.

"Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! What hair did you wear yesterday?"

"The curly brown. It's still in the kitchen. I told Liquor I am the dauphin. He did not understand. He does not realize that we are all kings and queens and princes and princesses. He only likes words. Kind of queer, don't you think?"

"Moloch in whom I dream Angels! Liquor sounds like an Angel." Neal says.

Cigarette ash falls to the honey-colored carpet. Poems cover the walls. Scrawled-unreadable-mostly. but neat in some phrases. "Fridem-framp-froom/Clump-clomp-klumm" and "Harmony dropped her panties/I dropped my chin and laughed" and "Run run run down the beach with waves coughing/CRUSH the sand packed tight with Life-magic" and "Fantastic seasons rub raw mine eyes."

"I've decided to invite Liquor, but not Barb. She's too interested in Frankie and the Cocaine anyway. There were two girls there yesterday. Hardly spoke. Liquor went on about how beautiful white women are and they just sat there slicing edges off magazine covers and smiling at each other. One blonde, the other red haired and freckled. Wallflowers. Not the party types at all," Dean says.

Neal lies face down on the bed. His shoulders are wide enough to carry the extra weight around his belt area. The rear of his pants bulge and sag with limp flesh.

"Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasures!" Tomorrow's the party? You are serious this time?" Neal asks.

Dean picks tobacco bits off of his tongue. "Yeah, I'm ready this time. Finished. I'd appreciate you not being here. Carl says you are bad for my creative freedom. He says I try too hard to impress you and lose my "self." Dean puts out the cigarette.

"Carl's crazy. He told me once that drinking beer through a straw increases the alcohol's potency. I told him that I'm no faggot and to go get fucked. He called me sexually repressed. No kidding, in a body like this anyone can see I'm repressed. He is nuts," Neal says and rolls over to look at Dean.

Dean smiles at him through the mirror. "I'm with you in Rockland/ where you bang on the catatoaic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse." Now get the hell out of here. I'm busy." Dean goes into the bathroom. Neal grabs the pack of Camels and listens at mo bathroom door.

The faucet runs and Dean howls, "I'm in love with a woman. Lesbian. Over 200 pounds. We made love, I threw up afterwards. It's not a physical attraction, but her aura is raw. Legs of rubber, heart of spam. I wonder which of us plays the man. Uh? When I touch her breasts I cry for my mom. I lend her my wigs to cover her shaved head, she listens to my poetry in silence."

The faucet stops. A few minutes pass, then Neal slides the pack of cigarettes under the bathroom door and leaves the apartment. The blue sky hovers outside the bedroom window. The wind swirls into the closet and ruffles the wigs' hairs.

The office is square and dark. Dean reclines on the brown leather couch. Carl blends into the bookcase. His face is leathery-old. His books have liverspots on the bindings. A ray of sunlight comes through a break in the window blinds, and dust floats through the shine. The plants in the corners seem anemic.

Dean finally speaks. "My party is tonight. Will you come?"

Carl picks up a pen, lifts it, stares into it, then lays it down. "I'm glad for you, but I think I would only be an intruder. A negative influence on the proceedings."

"But I want you there," Dean says. Carl turns in his chair. It squeaks. Dean continues, "If you already have plans, just tell me."

"I promised my daughter I would spend the evening with her." Carl looks at his watch. His lips are thin-invisible-then blue. "Why don't we call it a day and I will give you extra time next week. You can tell me how tonight goes then."

Carl rises and leaves Dean lying on the leather couch. Dean sits up and adjusts his red hair, then pulls out a hand mirror from his chest pocket.

In the lobby Dean asks the receptionist if she has Liquor's phone number.

"I don't know Liquor. Do I? Same time next week, Dean?"

"Yes, please."

The mannequin busts are lined in rows on the floor. The couch has Dean's wigs stacked on it and is pushed at an angle out of the way. A candle burns behind each faceless head. Dean paces slowly in front of a brick patterned cardboard back-drop. He takes a drag from his Camel, then picks tobacco bits from his tongue. Typed pages lay on the floor between him and the busts.

"I dedicate this one to Neal. His desperate courage reenforces my own: The New World---" Dean squints, puffs at the cigarette and sighs.

The security door buzzes. Dean buzzes back and waits at his door for the visitor to climb the steps. Heavy footfalls make their way up the stairs.

"Barb, I'm not ready for you yet," Dean says.

"That's why I'm here. Neal and Carl both told me to get my ass over here before you do something ... unnatural."

Barb's head glows with perspiration on a pale white scalp - devoid of hair. Her large body is rovered with an oversized blue shirt and slacks. Black shoes, clod-hoppers. She smiles falsely, showing the bottom row of her small yellow teeth. She moves to hug Dean, but he dashes an ash at her feet and turns away.

"Unnatural, eh?" A moment passes. Dean flicks another ash on his door mat. "Well, come in. I was just rehearsing for my party. Do you want to listen?"

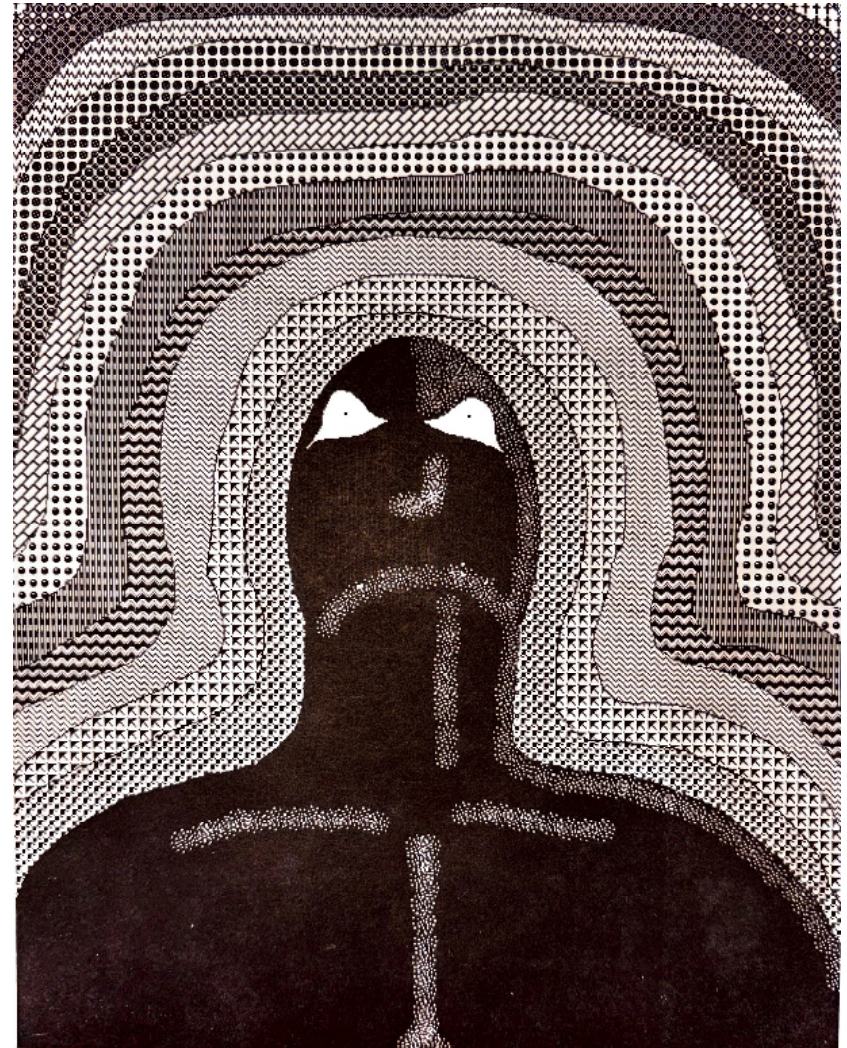
"Let's get down and dirty first; Barb says and brushes against Dean as she enters the apartment. "I'll wear a wig this time if it will help you."

In Dean's bedroom the blinds are drawn. The bed sags in the middle. Dean lies on top of Barb.

"I need a cigarette. You want one?" Dean asks. He walks to the bathroom, naked. After a moment smoke drifts into the hall. Dean steps out of the bathroom, but stops at his bedroom doorway and picks tobacco off his tongue.

"I can feel my heart beating in my ears. I felt yours tonight. Did you feel mine? Everyone has one, I'm not so different."

Dean stands between the bathroom and the bedroom gazing at the sparkle-painted ceiling over Barb's head. She rolls over, and continues snoring.



Aura Alex G. Zarate

CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Shark is a senior history major with a minor In English. His poetry has appeared In *Cardinal Sins*.

POETRY

Kelly S. Sams is a junior in secondary education majoring in English. Her poetry has been featured in *Cardinal Sins*.

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Holle Hart is a junior majoring in elementary education.

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Kathleen A. Schulz graduated from SVSU in December 1992 with a degree in elementary education. Her poetry has been published in the *Catholic Monthly Newsletter*.

William Jeruski has a history degree from SVSU and is working on a second degree in computer information systems. He won third place in the 1991 poetry contest sponsored by the *Bay Area Review*.

Ashley Hart is eight years old and enters third grade in the fall. Her poem was based on the truth.

Janna M. Kern is a senior majoring in history.

Mary K. Hansel is a sophomore majoring in art and design.

PHOTOGRAPHY & ARTWORK

Marybeth Enciso is a junior art major. Her works have been exhibited in the Latent Image Photo Competition IV and received honorable mention in SVSU's second annual Festival of the Fine Arts.

Alex G. Zarate is a student at SVSU. His work has appeared in *Cardinal Sins*.

Correction: David McAuley's photograph in Volume 12, issue 2 should be titled "From Russia with Love," not "Hellbound."