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Editor:
Gael Carnes

Judges:
Becky Bradway, Tim Osburn, Jessica Weber,
Michael Power, Peggy Boyer

Cover:
Julie Unsbee

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* all photos except **The Wizard of....** donated by *Ross Hulvey III*.

Kathleen King

A Mountain Valentine

A haze, sunset reddens the mountain
to the west snow breaks
into lace beneath her skis
like the Valentine poems she writes
each year the lines deepen
in her face the eyes darken.

She telephones last year's Valentine.
Long distance they say
remember me and I love you
a thousand miles and six months apart
voices electric through copper wires
remember skin and chocolate
Sunday mornings of strawberries
the lazy kisses and tangle of legs.

Late that night she cries for
his hand on her naked back
the way she curved to him
their faces turned toward each other
when his skylight glowed morning
with rumpled hair and bare feet
he stood at the top of the stairway
she at the bottom. Both wished.
She steps into a cold red dawn.

Kathleen King

Fiddling Dave

A few years ago, I played in a pickup band we called A Wing and A Prayer. We specialized in bird and gospel songs, heavenly feathers Charlie Kuhn said, and we played at the Zoo Bar on Sunday nights. We were heavy on fiddlers and banjo players.

At first, Doreen was just the woman in the chicken costume. One night she showed up in a chicken suit which shed yellow and green and red feathers all over the floor. Sissy and I, both novice fiddlers, stood on stage between Charlie Kuhn, a hippie lawyer turned banjo player, and Fiddling Dave Theroux, the hottest fiddler in town. Sissy shook her straight brown hair and played the first few notes of "Cluck Old Hen." Jim Sparks, a retired fellow with too many grandchildren to remember, plinked his banjo on Dave's other side. The chicken woman wanted Dave's attention badly, kept wiggling her tail feathers all evening.

At eleven we put our instruments away and leaned against the wall behind the stage. Keith, the long-haired graduate student who tended bar, ambled up and gave us each a bottle of Falstaff.

I looked up at Dave, tall and redheaded next to me, and he rubbed his elbow on mine. "I'm drunk as a chicken and twice as happy," he sighed.

The chicken woman pranced up to Dave and took off her papier-maché head. Her short brown hair stuck up in sweaty tufts. She looked up at Dave eagerly. "See you upstairs?" she asked.

He rubbed against my elbow again and took a long pull from his Falstaff. "Not tonight, Doreen."

Her face crumpled. "Bastard," she hissed, and turned away.

Dave shrugged and drained his beer. Sissy waved goodnight. Jim packed up his banjo and joined the regulars finishing their beers at the bar. I pulled on my coat, picked up my fiddle case and car keys, ready to leave.

"Come upstairs for a cup of tea?" Dave sounded so gentle.

I looked into his brown eyes, felt the warmth of his body as he leaned closer. I nodded.

We climbed the creaking stairs to Dave's loft above the Zoo Bar. Spider plants jungled below a skylight. I set my fiddle case down next to the door which led to the Zoo Bar office at the front end of the loft, then followed Dave past a bamboo screen to his living quarters. He filled the teakettle and set it on the stove.

"Dave?" Doreen's voice echoed. I heard the stairs creak as she climbed. "Can I talk to you?"

"Shit," Dave said softly. He dried his hands on a towel. "I'll just be a minute." He laid a warm hand on my shoulder and pushed me toward the stereo. "Find some music for us while the water heats."

They went into the office to talk, and I browsed through a box of tapes until I

came to "Buffalo Grass August 16." Buffalo Grass was one of the bands Dave played in. I tucked the tape into the stereo and the first tune echoed. "Hand me down...my walking cane." I heard Doreen sob in the next room, then her words interspersed with Dave's.

"But what will I do?"

"Change, grow. You're in the social sciences, you know about these things."

"But why can't we talk?"

"Because I don't want to talk with you. Now go home."

Doreen came into the sitting room alone, her eyes swollen and wet behind oversized glasses. Her old jeans and stretched-out sweater hung on her skinny body. "Laura, can you give me a ride home?"

So we went out into the winter midnight, exhaling our clouds of steam onto deserted streets. Doreen directed me toward her apartment house, and as she got out of the car, she thanked me.

Driving toward home on the one way streets of the empty downtown, I remembered that my fiddle was still at Dave's. I steered the car onto 14th Street and pulled up in front of the Zoo Bar. The lights were still on upstairs, so I knocked on the door and peered through the glass as Dave came down the stairs in stocking feet. He unlocked the door and held it open for me.

"Glad you came back," he said.

"My fiddle is upstairs." I followed Dave up.

At the top, I bent to pick up my fiddle, but Dave caught me in a hug. He felt good, big and warm, and I hugged him back.

"Give me a backrub?" he whispered. "Give me a special backrub, tonight?"

I thought of Doreen's sad face and tear-swollen eyes. I knew that if I stayed with Dave tonight, in a month I'd be the woman crying. "No. I have to teach at eight in the morning."

We pulled apart. I wound my muffler around my neck then picked up my fiddle case. "See you next Sunday," I said.

Dave bent toward me. "Buffalo Grass is playing the matinee at the Zoo Bar Friday. About five."

"Maybe I'll bring a friend to dance with," I said, not promising.

Outside, the midnight seemed a little darker, a little colder. I shivered and looked up to where clouds covered most of the stars. The first wet snowflakes spattered on my face.

Friday afternoon at five I sat on the bike rack outside the Zoo Bar and watched my dancing buddy Joe amble toward me. He folded me in long, skinny arms, and his green eyes sparkled behind his glasses. "Buy you a beer?" he asked, brown hair all ruffled from the wind.

I hugged him a good one. "Joe, I'm so lucky to have you for a friend."

"Shucks, ma'am," he said in mock cowboy.

We paid the dollar cover charge, then pushed into the crowd. After we threw our coats on top of the cooler, Joe bought us each a dark beer. Buffalo Grass tuned up, and I heard Dave's fiddle sing out as he adjusted the volume on his amplifier.

While the band played "Ain't Misbehavin'." Joe and I drank our beers and tapped our feet. Then Slim and Jennie, the best dancers at the Zoo Bar, walked out onto the tiny dance floor and began the intricate moves of swing dancing.

Joe grinned at me. "Ready?"

We danced straight through to the break. I gave Joe a dollar to buy us each a beer, then headed into the women's room. I saw the new graffito right away, in big red letters that looked like lipstick. "Dave Theroux is a prick."

Joe waited at the bar, a glass in each hand, drinking from both alternately. "I didn't know which was mine, so I sampled both," he said with a silly grin.

We stood at the bar and argued photography. Doreen pushed up next to us and waved to get Keith's attention.

"Dark draw," she said. "Big one." When the beer came, she drank it in a few gulps and slammed the glass down on the bar. "Another. And a shot of Jack Daniels."

Joe raised his eyebrows at me. "Who is this chick?" he said softly.

"Dave's girlfriend."

He shook his head. "Naw, Dave's been going with Julie Deering for years."

I remembered Julie, her mane of blond hair, her elegance.

"Of course, Julie has been in France for six months," Joe continued.

We danced until seven, when the beer-cheered crowd stomped and whooped until the band played one more, "Alligator Man," their theme song.

Joe rooted through the pile of coats on top of the cooler and handed mine to me. As we walked toward the door, I noticed Doreen. She hung on the bar, a long cigarette in one hand, her eyes half-closed. She swayed, her legs seemed to give out for an instant, then she caught herself and stood up a little straighter.

"Someone should take her home," I said to Joe.

"Not me. I'm for Mexican, as in Arturo's Taco Hut." He rubbed his stomach.

My own stomach growled. I looked down the length of the bar for Keith, caught his eyes, and tilted my head toward Doreen. Keith nodded. He would see that she got home.

As Joe and I turned to leave, Dave walked toward us, fiddle case tucked under his arm. He went right past Doreen, whose face brightened and then fell, without looking at her, and stopped in front of me.

"Doing anything later?" he asked.

I looked at Joe, a friend, not a lover. Safe. "Yes."

Doreen disappeared after that Friday. Charlie Kuhn said she'd gone to North Dakota. Dave took up with a long-haired woman who always wore a charm bracelet. Within a few weeks she didn't come around any more either. One rainy Sunday night in March, Doreen turned up to listen to A Wing and A Prayer, and after that she often sat at the door to collect the cover charge when Buffalo Grass played. But I never saw Dave talk with her or acknowledge her presence in any way. Sometimes Doreen watched him with love on her face, but never when he could see.

Then Doreen showed up with a cowboy, and they spent hours playing the Zoo Bar pinball machines. The next week she played pinball with a fat bearded man. I noticed how she followed men around, bought them drinks, leaned her body against one and then another, seemed like a new one every night. Sometimes when I saw her I felt like crying.

One warm Sunday night in May, Charlie Kuhn didn't show up for A Wing and A Prayer. The rest of us sat at the big round table to wait. The door was open and wind breathed in and out, emptying the stale smoke smell from the

bar. The Sunday regulars clustered around the television to watch "Cat People" on HBO.

Dave leaned back, stretched, rubbed his stomach. "I feel like some fish ribs from Catfish John's."

"Sounds good to me." Sissy nodded her head, then reached for her purse and pulled out a five dollar bill. "I'll call in the order and we can run over and pick them up."

"See if Keith wants some," Dave said.

Just then Doreen walked in. Dave flipped his hand toward her in a little wave, and when she walked over he asked if she wanted to go in on our fish order. She nodded and dug in her pocket for money. When Dave went to pick up the fish, Doreen followed him out the door.

We sat at the big round table to eat our fish and chips, Doreen next to Dave on a bench against the wall. He half-turned toward her and rested his elbow on the back of the bench. My face and hands felt slick with grease, but the catfish tasted so sweet. We piled up a mound of fish bones on a paper plate in the middle of the table.

At nine we decided Charlie wasn't going to show. Sissy and Jim got up to leave, and I reached for my coat, too. At the door, I turned back and saw Dave lean toward Doreen, head bent to hear something she said. He nodded.

Outside the sky still glowed pink around the edges, and I took a deep breath, feeling both strong and lonely. Then I climbed into my Honda, pushed a Vassar Clements tape into the tape player, turned the volume all the way up, and went for a long ride in the country.

Kathleen King

Spinach Salad

Winter shaking at the bone,
a stiff neck, hooded eyes:
only spinach can cure.

I take out the crystal bowl,
rip leaves off a bunch of spinach,
wash them under cold running water,
tear them into bites,
layered in the bowl, an inch of spinach.
Next the sprouts, curly, clinging,
then a quartered tomato, diced green pepper.
I leave the skin on the cucumber,
cut generous rounds, layer them
against the sides of the bowl,
fan slices of mushroom on top of all.
Now for dressing, a little red wine
vinegar, some olive oil, fresh basil.

I pour a glass of cold water,
select a fork and napkin from the drawer,
sit at the dining room table,
hum Popeye the Sailor Man.

The crunch. The rush of vinegar.
My skin takes on a pale green hue.
I thin out, rumple,
my veins curve in new patterns.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Carol Anderson is a 1973 graduate of Sangamon State. She owns and manages an art gallery on Nantucket Island where she has lived with her husband for the past two years.

Dan Bialas graduated from Sangamon State in 1979. He now lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Becky Bradway is a fiction writer who has published in a variety of literary magazines, including *Ascent* (University of Illinois), *Crescent Review*, and *Greensboro Review* (University of North Carolina). She attended the M.F.A. program at Columbia University in N.Y.C., and has a M.A. in Literature from Sangamon State. She is now Communications Director at United Way and a grantwriter for Goodwill.

Gael Carnes is the recent graduate assistant to the English department. She has been published in previous *Alchemist Reviews* and in *Brainchild Off Broadway*. During the summer of 1985, an excerpt from her novel appeared on stage in a *Brainchild* production of the same name as the off-broadway publication.

William Crook draws Springfield from well-known landscapes to lesser known buildings and locations. He likes to capture Springfield as it is today so that we will know where we have been as well as where we will be tomorrow. His work is currently in collections such as The Marine Bank and Lincoln Library, as well as those of individual collectors. His prints are sold throughout various galleries in the United States.

Alan Hinsey has published in previous *Alchemist Reviews*. He is a family man.

Ross Hulvey is related to Mr. Green Jeans.

Mary Johnston grew up in Upper Michigan, then traveled and lived in a variety of places, including 13 years in Europe. She has been taking photos for many years. A recent interest is photo captions. This photo was taken in Navoo, Ill.

Kathleen King received a B.A. in Environments and People in 1979 and an M.A. in Literature in 1980 from Sangamon State University. In the summer of 1984, she received the Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and moved to Idaho. She teaches creative writing at Idaho State University, skis from October to April, and hikes the rest of the year.

Diana M. V. Liddle currently attends Sangamon State where she writes for the various student newspapers and is a Communication Major.

Martha McGill is employed by Sangamon State University at the Communications/Information desk. She has been a fingerprint technician for the F.B.I. and a communications specialist for various firms. She writes, she claims, to explain herself to herself.

Rosie Richmond has published both fiction and non-fiction. She has a M.A. from Sangamon State University. She is a writing consultant and president of Richmond Staff Development.

Christopher Simpson attends Sangamon State University where he is currently a spot on the wall.

Gary Smith has been previously published in *Off the Rocks*, *Alchemist Review*, *The Coe Review* and *The James White Review*.

Julie Stewart earned a B.S. in Education and an M.S. in Library Science from Eastern Illinois University. In the summer of 1984, she taught literature and creative writing at a comprehensive school in Bristol, England through the Foundation for International Education. Her spare time is spent doing watercolor paintings, photography and cross-country skiing.

Margie Towery is a Sangamon State University undergraduate student currently enrolled full time. Her major is History. She lives in the country with her husband, Dan, and her daughters Sarah and Lisa.

Julie Unsbee is a Sangamon State Art Major. Her paintings are well-known on campus where they decorate several offices. Her drawings have appeared in many local newsletters.