

the alchemist review

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...vernal pages of eldorado...

Winner of the Magazine Title Contest:
Craig McGrath

Cover Photo by *Dennis Kirchner*

peter devlin

YOUR FATHER IS VERY OLD

*your father is very old
you have seen him in dreams
hesitating into meadows
pausing at canyons
falling silently into water
you tell yourself it is not him
the dreams retreat into themselves
and are forgotten
like names smudged on the backs of old photographs
the tug is faint
and perhaps final.*

*your father is very old
he does not remember well
he holds your hand oddly
because warmth can not be memorized
if he moves slowly
you must pause often
and there is nothing here worth seeing twice
you will invent new powers new roles for him
but his bones are dull
and no longer answer his questions.*

*your father is very old
his dreams are the flowers slumped in wet prairies
the tree's roots bruised through at the cliff's rim
the lakes drawn still by thunder
your father will never die
because fires rage and sink at the island's edge
he will forget so easily
as he lugs onto his knee
by fits your new and beautiful body
his hands will describe your smile
and your mother's face
will tremble in your eyes.*

RACIN' TO WHAT, THOUGH, WILLIE?

*Aye, Willie, yi marked 'er right then;
only green too then.*

*But yi listened hard to the deep heart's core,
its drum echoin' thunder from the night before
poundin' unfilled thirstin' fir more.*

*Yi notched tendrils, life upon their backs, creepin'
snakes to the sunken central hollow. Yi let vision
fly free o'er all that flows an' saw in every direction
tributaries reachin' back all the way to time, Willie.*

*Aye, Willie, yi marked 'er right then, nothin's changed then:
'Been listenin' to the same thumpin' Willie; it's a song it is.*

*After all predictions, foolish speculations,
Long after South has risen up again—
Phoenix ascending in nauseous squawking— long after
its tremored head spills its crimson fevered brain;
After, even, rage replaces reason —& been replaced— by virtue
of tumult the passion's chaos employs;
I'll know then in confusion
Yi've shown me all along
I've known I've known that this.
When after West resists privation's throbbing blinded fright,
its strength rooted granite hard and cool eternal;
I'll fall upon the mossgrown mountain rock
Knowin' sage grown alone
'sgrown sturdy alone, all along alone.
After North in its darkest coldest might comes rollin' down,
annihilating rival tensions under heave, brutal clear;
I'll dumb stare into its infinite black
Wearin' a gown of fact over sly deception
Its true-star's light truth's only truth.
When East in pregnant ease waits nimbly with a ready jibe,
perched 'tween thinly veiled nightmares and mornin's sunburst hope;
I might seek the swirling cycle rest
As the motion stalls hoverin'
'fore ancient currents round about
Back to South's deepest blood-red well gurgling purple embers —desire's birth.*

*Sermon by Fire, Discourse by Reason: attitudes in chipped glass reflecting
broken pieces of glory swallowed in the stream. Eureka, Willie! Eureka!
Springs whimper growing snaking bell down to cresting rivers, to seas
of sloshing tidal undertows locking islands lost at water's edge.
And the deep still core, to whom the center owes its hollow,
stalled for just this single watch
watch the hours, epochs, of revolution knowing
is 'what the age demands.' Smiling rhythmic murmured pounding.
It's the thumpin' tells us we've known we've known all along we've known this.*

*Aye, Willie, yi hit 'er right on the mark then.
I'll plop another clump of ice into the steamin' coffee to yi, Willie. Together we'll
watch it melting cool the cup, spinning 'round smaller till it dances itself to death.
Aye, to death, Willie. To death.*

rick amezquita

TO CHIHUAHUA, CHIHUAHUA

*He says
he likes
to wear keys on his belt
because the jingling
reminds him of spurs
and a dusty trail
grandfathers rode*

CUDDLE UP MY APATHETIC BABY

a story by donna mccracken

I saw my old friend Alice Grooby again the other day. Alice and I have been friends off and on since high school. She drops into my life every so often, and it's always, if nothing else, an experience.

"Well, Alice," I said as we scooted into seats in a dark corner of a small downtown bar, "how's everything?"

She pulled her arms out of her coatsleeves. "Eh. You know. Ok."

That was the first inkling I had that Alice was off on a new stage of the constant metamorphosis she calls her life. As we waited for the waitress I probed for further signs as to what the new Alice might be. There was a certain lack-luster look to her and she replied to my attempts at conversation with monosyllabic grunts. I thought maybe she had decided on becoming the modern answer to Marlon Brando or something, but when the waitress finally arrived my curiosity was piqued even further. Alice ordered a hamburger with her beer.

"Alice!" I said. "I thought you were a vegetarian."

"Naw. Not anymore. I gave it up."

"Why? Did you get a vitamin deficiency? A craving for meat? Rickets?"

"Uh-uh," she answered. "Politics."

"Politics?"

"Yeah. When I became politically aware it got to be too much of a hassle keeping track of what was being boycotted from week to week. Y'know—grapes, lettuce, sarngrria—so I went back to eating meat. Livestock may be exploited, but they don't have much of a following among political activists. Even Lenin enjoyed a good steak now and then."

"Oh." I'm always willing to talk politics and at least she was speaking in whole sentences now. Besides, as I said, Alice is continually up to something and I wanted to hear more. "What do you think of the political scene, then? Read any

good books lately? How about that Stanley Aronowitz?" I asked, nodding my encouragement.

All I got was a sigh. "Eh."

"Given up on socialism, too, Alice?"

"Yeah."

"I see. Well, what are you interested in these days?" I said doggedly.

The answer was swift and simple. "Apathy."

So was mine. "Huh?"

"These days I'm heavily into apathy," she said. "I spend all my time not reading newspapers or thought-provoking books, not listening to the news and not being involved."

"That must be very time-consuming."

"It is. And hard, too. Every day I have to resist lots of people who are always trying to tempt me with juicy tidbits. Why, I didn't even hear that Sonny and Cher were back together until last week and that was by accident. I sleep alot."

"You're very dedicated to this, aren't you?"

"Oh yes. I'm what you might call militantly apathetic. If anyone so much as hints at current events I get violent."

"Must be a big handicap socially," I said sympathetically.

By now our orders had come. Alice took a big bite out of her hamburger. "You bet," she mumbled around the food. "For instance, I went home to see my folks last week. My Dad and I used to have some really great arguments, especially back in the 60's, and I could tell he was spoiling for another. Right after supper he takes me into the living room and sits me down on the sofa.

" 'Well,' he says, rubbing his hands together, 'President Carter says we've whipped the inflationary spiral. That's one great president, huh?'

"I just look at him. 'Eh,' I say.

"He looks stunned for a minute, then he tries again. 'And that Henry Kissinger! Boy, too bad he wasn't born here. What a president he'd make.'

"Again I just look at him. 'Eh.'

"He takes a deep breath. 'But that Ronald Regan, now there's an American!'

"When this doesn't get a rise out of me, Dad

gets a really concerned look on his face. Then he gets down to business and works his way through every hot issue, starting with abortion and ending up with Zionism. By the time he finished he was sweating, red in the face, and had a kind of wild look in his eyes. I just sit there.

" 'What's the matter with you?' he says. 'Aren't you a concerned aware individual with carefully considered opinions any more?'

" 'No,' I say.

" 'But isn't everything I've been saying diametrically opposed to everything you stand for and believe in?' he says.

" 'Yes,' I say, 'but they're your opinions and you're entitled to them. We apathetics don't believe in taking sides, Dad.'

"Then he looks like he needs some maaloX. 'Doesn't it bother you that the world is in the hands of old fogeys and crocks who think like me?'

" 'Not particularly.'

"He yells, 'Arrgh! I can't stand it! You put me through hell with your crazy politics for years—rioting and marching and protesting and embarrassing me in front of the neighbors. You give me an ulcer from arguing with you and now I finally learn to enjoy it and you tell me you're not interested!?! Arrgh! You're killing me, you know that? Killing me!

"I just look him right in the eye and say, 'I don't care.' That shut him up."

"Wow," I said, shaking my head in admiration I couldn't help feeling. "I bet it did."

"Yep. Except he made an awful lot of noise banging his head against the wall. I would've stopped him but I figured he knew what he was doing."

"Gee," I said. What else was there to say?

"Well," Alice said, finishing the last crumb of hamburger and draining her beer glass, "I gotta go."

"Go? Go where?" This was a new Alice; she was actually leaving without mooching so much as a cigarette.

"A bunch of us have gotten together and formed a coalition. We've rented a hall and are giving a series of seminars, which for \$15.00 teach people how to achieve happiness and fulfillment through apathy."

"Really? How do you do that?"

"Well, we've developed a technique which sort of combines EST, yoga, and assertiveness training."

"And does it work?"

"I don't know. No one's ever bothered to find out."

She slipped back into her coat and stood up.

I said a hasty good-by. "Good luck with your seminars, Alice. And it was sure nice seeing you again."

She shrugged, "Yeah. I gues so."

As she drifted slowly towards the door, snatches of a tune floated back over the bar noises—she was humming "It Don't Matter to Me." She stepped out into the freezing rain that had begun to fall, and as I had expected, Alice didn't even button her coat up. But she did stick me with the check. □



photo by L. Michael Purnell

HE'S SINCE REPEATED THE MISTAKE ON OCCASION

a story by bob springer

At five he learned something about looking over his shoulder to view the future. At five it was the first time he made the mistake, and he told himself he'd never do that again. But now, like a five-year-old, he sometimes forgets.

He'd been enjoying himself, riding up and down the long path across the street from his house. Then the wheel came off. It just plunked. The tricycle stopped in the dirt, scraping the ground for an inch or so, sending a thin cloud of dry, dusty smoke into the sunny summer day. He looked down and back to the naked axle, the wheel on its side nearby. There wasn't much he could do without one of three important wheels, so he sat. The details are foggy, but he remembers the bike, the sideways wheel, the bright day and the isolation of being broken down far enough away from home that he could watch it without calling to it and not care since it was outside his immediate grasp. He called for his big brother but his lungs were not strong enough to overcome the distance. He thinks he may have cried, but isn't sure because he can't remember having cried since and so doesn't know what crying feels like.

He sat on the tricycle for some time, looking back over his shoulder to his home at intervals, watching his big brother play in the front yard. Then he would watch the tall grasses sway in the light breeze, and the dragonflies dart from place to place. He turned around to see his mother standing inside the screen door, looking at his brother and moving her arms. His brother began to stomp on the ground and then bent over, falling on the ground on his stomach, kicking his legs. His mother opened the screen door and stood on the stairs, straightening up and shaking her finger at him. He wondered what his mommie could have said to make his big brother act that way. Then he saw his mother go down to his brother and pick him up by the struggling arms and drag him inside.

So he sat on his tricycle, alone, unable to move. He didn't know quite what to do so he did nothing. But watch the dragonflies and look at the tall grasses and wild flowers blowing from side to side. He heard a sound behind him and turned around to see a car turning onto the path from the street that ran in front of his house. He stared at the approaching car for a moment and then returned his watch to the view in front of him. He looked over his shoulder at the oncoming car again and it seemed if the vehicle had not moved any closer to him in that moment he took his gaze away from it. He blinked his eyes and again the car appeared to make no motion toward him. He stared at the car; it was coming toward him now. He turned away and looked in front of him for an instant in an experiment and then quickly jerked his head around back in the direction of the moving auto. It hadn't moved, though. He thought if he watched the car, it would approach and run over him. But if he looked away, it wouldn't get any closer and he'd be safe.

The car's horn burst close behind. He looked in panic to see the car stopped only feet away from the rear of his tricycle. He began crying, first short hiccup sounds and then long, loud shrieks of fear. Doris, the enormous fat lady who lived down the street from him and who had a voice that roared, got out of the car and came to him. She asked him what he was doing there, but he just cried. She saw the wheel and understood while he sobbed, sometimes no sound at all coming out because he was that afraid: he buried the noise under his shock and panic. Doris picked him up and put him in the car, and then put the tricycle in the back seat. She backed the car down the path to his house, where she let him out and set the bike on the driveway.

His mother came out to see what was happening. He saw his brother kicking and the grass slowly moving and couldn't understand it. His mother and Doris talked while he wrapped his arms around his mother's legs and held tight, still unsure what had gone wrong. □

THE MINOTAUR"

by mary elizabeth coffman

She had never known a season—a year really,—of such personal struggle against the elements. Mainly, she thought, it was the weather that finally drove her to the Minotaur (though she didn't really know about the Minotaur yet.) And the wind. In years before she had loved the wind: the sound of it, the smell of it, whether the air was warm or cold. But now she was simply sick of it, and a breeze made her wince as though a stone inside her head was being driven outwards by the rush of air.

In the mouth of that curious cave she could hear the wind whistling more loudly than ever. She pressed a hand to her head, pressed it fiercely, determined to keep the stone inside, and ran further into the passageway.

Normally cautious, she wound through the cave without thinking about finding her way out. "What is the word," she said, "for this? Oh! A labyrinth." She giggled, and the Minotaur bowed grotesquely before her. Startled, she attempted to compose herself by studying him—his appearance was about what she'd expected (not meaning, of course, that she'd expected him to appear) but there *was* something decidedly different about him. Perhaps it was the cap somehow hung over one ear that gave him that raffish look.

"And where did you expect to see one?" he said pleasantly. "But please—I must insist. You are somewhat knowledgeable to have recognized me and called me by name. In your subconscious, anyway, you were expecting to see me. Perhaps even more than that."

"Could you explain what you mean?" She felt somehow uneasy.

"I could, yes, but I won't. I never explain my meaning. It's for me to know and you to find out."

"Do you know," she said, after a pause, "this situation—especially your last remark—rather reminds me of Alice's conversation with Humpty-Dumpty?"

"Does it now?" said the Minotaur. "Would you care to walk a little further into the labyrinth?"

"Not really, but I might as well."

"Where were you going, little girl?" asked the Minotaur. "To Grandmother's house?"

"You must read lots of children's books," she observed.

"That's really all I can read," he returned. "I had no real education, you know. I'm more-or-less a self-made Minotaur."

"Quite a trick," she said. "Perhaps that's why you use so many clichés."

He sighed. "That's true. My speeches are nothing but timeworn phrases, welded together with a thin mortar of originality."

"Even that's old," she said nastily. "Clemens, from *Tom Sawyer*."

The Minotaur glanced evilly at her. "Watch out where you're going. There are skeletons on the ground. And you might...trip over one."

They walked in that silence for a while.

"When I lived at home," she said suddenly, "I used sometimes to come home at midday and turn the television on. But I didn't want to watch it, you see. I'd go upstairs and read while the television was on downstairs. And I was less lonely. I don't mean that the television set—hearing the voices—made me feel that someone was there with me. But somehow it made me feel that someone was coming."

"And no one ever came," said the Minotaur.

"How are you so certain of that?" She didn't know why she had to know.

"If someone had come, you would not have been here," the Minotaur said, off-hand.

"No," she said positively; then, "Is there some reason why you keep insisting I *knew* I was going to come? I know why I came. I'll tell you why I came. It was because I was afraid the wind..."

"Would blow the stone through your forehead," the Minotaur finished for her. "Yes," he said, with heavy politeness.

"Now I am shocked," she said. "How did you know?"

"There have been others here before you," he said. "You know that."

"Well, of course." She began to recite, mockingly, "Seven youths and seven maidens were sent as tribute from Athens to Crete every nine years because..."

"Wrong on all counts," said the Minotaur. "First of all, there were no youths, just maidens. And also, they weren't sent, they came—by themselves."

"A likely story," she said, nastily again. "Why would a maiden come here?"

The Minotaur looked at her, and said nothing.

She flushed, and put her hand to her forehead as before.

"That's getting to be rather a habit," the Minotaur observed, "or did something I said offend you? If so, I apologize."

"No, no," she said, hastily, and then, "I hope, at least, I was right as to the number of victims—pardon me, maidens?" She was having difficulty, for some reason, keeping any outward composure. "Seven maidens, or perhaps, since there were no youths, fourteen?"

"I don't know," the Minotaur said carelessly, "I never bothered to keep track. They were...sufficient, that's all I know."

She did not ask him the next question then, just walked a little faster.

"I really don't know where I'm going," she said, and gave a strained laugh.

"Why don't you admit what you're thinking?" said the Minotaur, smoothly. "You wanted to know at first. Do you realize it now?"

"About the maidens," she began, then broke off and looked at the Minotaur. "You know, I never thought about it before ('oh, to be sure, murmured the Minotaur) but—it's so funny. Centaurs, I know, had the—body of a horse and the, uh, torso of a man. But you're like a bull from the waist up, and a man from the waist down."

The Minotaur eyed her thoughtfully.

"Why is that?" she demanded, suddenly urgent.

"Because I'm the Minotaur," he said. "And you knew who—or what—I am."

Then she began to scream. "But which half of you is the beast, which half of you is the beast, which half of your is the beast, which half of you..." □

nancy pistorius

“CUT”

*i was carving some meat
when the knife slipped
sliced open my finger
and cut it to the bone
the skin parted
and blood spilled
bubbled
oozed
onto the plate of meat*