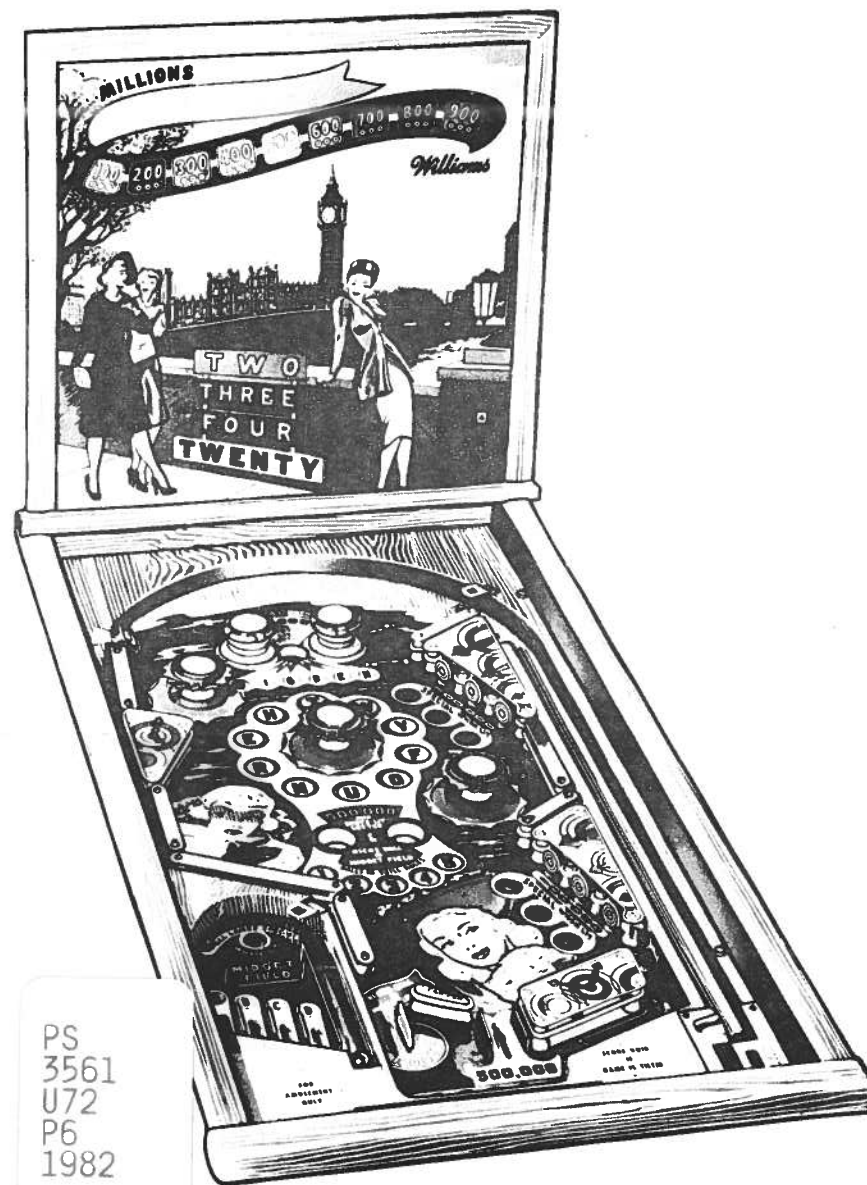


THE PINBALL PLAYER



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PAT M. KURAS

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POEMS

Prom Night

carrie white got soaked with blood and
i spent prom night with my sister
getting a flat tire directly in
front of my high school as we
brought home rose bushes to
my mother in my sister's mg

petals perfect jr wedding cake people
goon gowns dinner jacket & ties
heterosexist dress-up games

well i enjoyed changing
the tire more

for Walta Borawski

Lesbian Leviathan

A lesbian leviathan, you rise above the
glitter and murk of twilight people.

You have been though it all --- the
tragic pathos and inane farce,

the drama and comedy, the squalor and mirth
of all our lives.

And still you rise, flow with the
tide, follow through, day-to-day.

With the gracious gift of yourself,
you make it easier for all of us.

for Pat Bond

Specific Persuasion

I lean towards women; it's a
specific persuasion. Like cats to
mice, I'm fascinated. Like flies to
honey, I'm attracted. Like steel to
magnet, I'm drawn. Like moths to
flames, I kill myself over and over,
burned, scorched, dying blissfully,
always satisfied. It's a persuasion
that cannot, will not be denied.

Horses

You remind me of dappled horses
from my childhood, they seemed to be great
towering creatures --- wild manes and flaring nostrils, but
always maintaining a stately sure-footed beauty, strength,
character.

I wanted to ride, but never did,
loving and fearing them,
watching from a safe distance,
always standing alone.

I am no longer a child
but am still afraid to ride with you
who have come into my life, trotting
at an easy gait, with your dark-eyed beauty,
a majestic creature.

If I ride with you,
can you promise that I will not fall?

I fail to notice your blushing with
the lights out.

You tell me you do
blush,
flush
red cheeks
ruddy.

Can your shyness
truly be more crimson than mine?
How can I ever know, but take your word.

Morning Poem

I awoke from a night of scattered dreams;
they lie in a pile, jagged fragments
threatening to slice me apart as well.

You roll in a cocoon, still sleeping
nestled between sheets. You're oblivious to
my early morning scribbling.

I try to catch my dreams; slippery fish, they
slap their tails, slide from fingers.
elude me, always.

You're quiet now. A mound in the bed
safe as a child, escaping in sleep,
the most comfortable hide-away.

Upstairs, your landlord and his family are
awake, jabbering. A top-40 station
on the radio. My dreams are totally
gone, scared by the domestic din
waged above me --- no hope to retrieve
them now. I listen to the early
waking sounds of the city --- sirens
in the distance. I clutch at my
poems and envy you, wish that I,
too, still slept.

for Barb

Will you shake loose the dirt from
the unearthed vegetable I've become?

I exist in stagnant space; life

moves around me and like

some unfocused entity I

remain uprooted

unmoving

ungrowing

Will you send me a breath of spring and

bring me back to life?

Homecoming

You return on a dusk flight, prior to a night
that promises to be heavy w/ stars.
Bat-like, I'm blinded by the glare of
airport fluorescence. I stay near the walls
familiar w/ their cool aloofness.

I am a flower of differing
germination & geography;
like willows that dip to kiss
the ground, I falter in the
background.

I look for proper gates &
allow a corridor to swallow me.
People tote Samsonites & buzz around me w/
the urgency of fast flight. They
swell at safety points ---

I pass thru their scanning arch
--- unblipped --- I walk to the
appropriate gate & sit in an
orange plastic chair.

I watch silver planes plop
perfectly to the ground & slide along runways.
It does not matter to me that it will
take a machine in the form of
a cock w/ wings to return you to me.

The process is so long.
A plane rolls toward me.
(Its windows are like many eyes.)
As I wait, I wonder from
which eye you watch me.

for Barb

The Pilgrim's Credo

You are like the most radiant of shrines;

I have trekked and toiled long and hard to reach you.

I am a pauper without coins and can give only myself.

I will touch your body in hopes of being blessed.

(I could write psalms of lust for you.)

I can offer you my lips and tongue in a very special prayer.

I believe that you will never forsake me.

I Must Remind You That It's Winter

I must remind you that it's winter,
the season when things will die.
Love had never been there,
just a fondness
with an unsure source.
You brought along too much
too fast,
feelings that our relationship
was too young to grasp;
situations too draining to touch.
Do not be remorseful.
Some things wither and fade,
while others end abruptly.
I must remind you that it's winter,
the season when things will die.
But with the passing of winter,
spring arrives,
drawing new energies and lives.

Ghost

You are a most appealing ghost.
You do not shriek or throw my dishes about the kitchen.
Instead, you're quiet; your laugh falls
like rain.
You do not reek with repulsive odors,
foul must, shit, stench in my rooms.
Instead, you're flowers, sea waves, a spring morn.
Your presence is not felt in cold wind, blustery and
blaring.
Instead, you are warm, tinkling light.
You are a ghost, shadow in my steps,
following me, hounding me.
(Sometimes, I expect to hear you wail!)

I pay you no heed,
despite your many visits. For, you see,
although you are a most appealing ghost,
I have never invoked your spirit,
asked for you
to haunt me.

Crush

this poem is dedicated to all my
ex- and would-be lovers

I have made love to fat lesbians before.
I have mooned over straight, blue-eyed, blonde-haired women.
I have tagged behind politically correct dykes who have found my
romantic advances to be oppressive and grossly incorrect.
I've had crushes on brown-eyed Jewish girls.
I have chased upwardly mobile lesbians who wore doubleknits and
always combed their hair.
I have been trampled by women who demand control and enjoy crushing those
who have crushes on them.
If my heart had teeth, I'd say those teeth have been kicked in
many times; but despite the beatings my heart has taken,
it always goes back.

Cheating Poem

My lover is gone, away --- but she'll be back.
In the meantime, you're here.
A sprite, fairy, witch
teasing, leaping, enticing.
I shake loose my bonds of fidelity;
dank rope, chains,
dropped into an ungainly heap,
always in the back of my mind.
Possibilities and desires slope into
convex paths, grope, glisten,
gleam, curve near my reach.
I'm willing,
you're willing,
we will, have the will, do,
taste, please, swell.
Fidelity is a blink trying to catch my eye;
in the morning, I'll be stabbed blind with it,
eyes ruined, pained.

Rules for Ex-Lovers

Your hair is a thick, rich trap that threatens
to snare my fingers;
I keep my hands in my pockets.

Your eyes are much too huge;
they always swallow me, so I look away.

I stare at your mouth,
but it is too big and sensuous.
I dream that it will eat me.

Unless you change your face,
how the hell do you expect me to remain platonic?

First, be polite;
if eye contact is made,
it is only proper to say hello.
Second, always be civil.
Leave quickly, quietly,
discreetly.
Do not make a scene.

If you feel anger towards me,
do not show it in harmful games.
(Especially in public,
you ridicule yourself.)

If you still love me,
then avoidance is necessary.
Remember, we are ex-lovers.
I do not want to hear
your maudlin reminiscing.

Keep all chance encounters brief;
who knows what emotions could fall into play/
In review, remind yourself
to be polite,
say hello,
then leave.

Do not ask how I am;
it may now be none of your business.
And don't bother to tell me how you are;
I probably no longer care.

If you see me with a new lover,
do not come over at all ---
even if I make eye contact with you.
(Yes, I am also guilty of games.)
And, in return, do not introduce your new lover to me.

Remember only the positive moments of our relationship.
but do not expect to rekindle them.
Somewhere in my heart,
you linger still,
but that is only
for me to cherish
alone.

Games

with a spider i
was deluded by finding
her parlor so nice

New Ground

Your apartment, a tiny living room with
tinier kitchen. (Where is the bedroom?)
You smiled at me and I lost my pretenses.
(Knowing each other less than three hours,)
you brought me home quickly, like a
carton of ice cream from the store,
hurrying, lest I melt and ooze away.

Your apartment is new ground.
I sit awkwardly on the couch, leaving vastness
to my right and left. Will I be swallowed in
the cushions?

You pour wine in the kitchen,
maggie mouth, chirping charmingly.
(You tell me: "Myself? I don't often do this.")
Your teeth smile too fine, bone white, gleaming,
ready to devour.
I fear you've played this scene before.

BAR SCENES

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre

My sweetheart isn't here,
but then, she isn't really my sweetheart anyway.
I've been seriously pursuing her for some weeks now, but she
slips from my snares and lopes on ahead.
Ducking, I follow her scent.

How to...

How to kiss her lips.

How to...

How to move from the lips of her
face to the lips of her cunt.

How to...

How to kiss.

How?

I am at the bar with friends
who have until this point been spared the spectacle
of seeing me in a severely inebriated state.
Tonight, I am a social butterfly gone made;
caught in a drunken tailspin,
I dive from woman to woman
pressing petals
lips to lips
kisses that are, oh, too brief.

I am an over-friendly, obnoxious drunk;
a demented debutante cut loose.

Consorts are scarce ---

women scurry when they see me
loom towards them in kamikaze flight.

Who is she?

They marvel that I have not fallen down yet,
or collided with someone more drunk and less
friendly than myself.

I have been outrageous!
By evening's end,
I am too drunk to remember
how earlier, my heart had bled
from a romance of arrows.
Friends tuck me into my car
and we drive away.
Like a Van Gogh night,
I am lost to a swirl of colors.

Dancers

like snake charmers
soothing the savage beast
and flirting with death
the vipers bite
waiting watching for
the moment to strike
the dancers are
unaware or uncaring
flirting flaunting
shaking gyrating
pulsating throbbing
dancing in the darkness
(of the bar)
figures electric moving
in jerks and jumps
like some interrupted dream
they are tellers of
vague stories and
hollow promises
moving in jagged time
alone

Sharks

They pose with surrogate pricks.
slender rods of wood resting amid
straddled legs.
The pool sharks, clothed in
denim and work shoes, keys
suspended on belt loops.
Lesbian pool *shtarkers*,
they crave the attention,
but refuse to acknowledge it.
Cool, cat-like, they stalk
the table. Silent, curt
nods to the targeted
pockets; tapping, nicking,
shooting balls into the
table's womb, they
smile thinly.

The Pinball Player

She batters her fist on the pinball table with
wildcat fury and, when they all gather around to
admonish her violence, she insists she has done
no wrong. Besides, the ball in the machine had
tried to provoke her.

S'il Vous Plait

She wears a pastel-colored pantsuit,
miscast among the denim-slacked, flannel-shirted crowd
She left the make-up off; still on the vanity at home.
But she clings to the huge brown leather bag,
as if she may withdraw into it, pulling
the zipper shut over her head.
First night in the bar and
she smiles timid, hopefully, at
the flurry of bodies that
nonchalantly buzz around her.
No one sees or cares.
She is a misfit, as
her sexual longings have always told her.
(Even here, she does not belong.)
Soon she will slither from the stool and,
like a dissolving pool, evaporate
through the door and
fade into mist.
Return is unlikely.

Soldier

She wears her silence like armor,
takes command of a stool (always
in a corner) and watches, peers
over beer bottles. Thru out
the night, she launches forays
to the bar for additional beer,
ammo, or to the bathroom, in
momentary retreats. All night,
the battleground roars around
her. By last call, she is
closing camp. BUG OUT! With
draws, never saying a word in
victory nor defeat.

The New Tender

Sleek sapphire, her hair is a russet mane that she
strokes back with the same weary gentleness she
reserves for the clientele.

All night, they've sought her --- some, came to party,
share good news, laugh.

Others, fortified with alcohol, look to her for confession,
dole out their pain and sin.

There is no penance, she absolves them with
a smile.

As she works at the bar, the artists approach ---
musicians want to play...
poets want to give readings...

A sisterly entrepreneur, she schedules them all. (Lesbian bars
ain't what they used to be --- no more dark holes based on
heterosexist imaginations.)

By last call, the new tender is
serving coffee and phoning for cabs.

The exodus is happening in trickles and spurts.

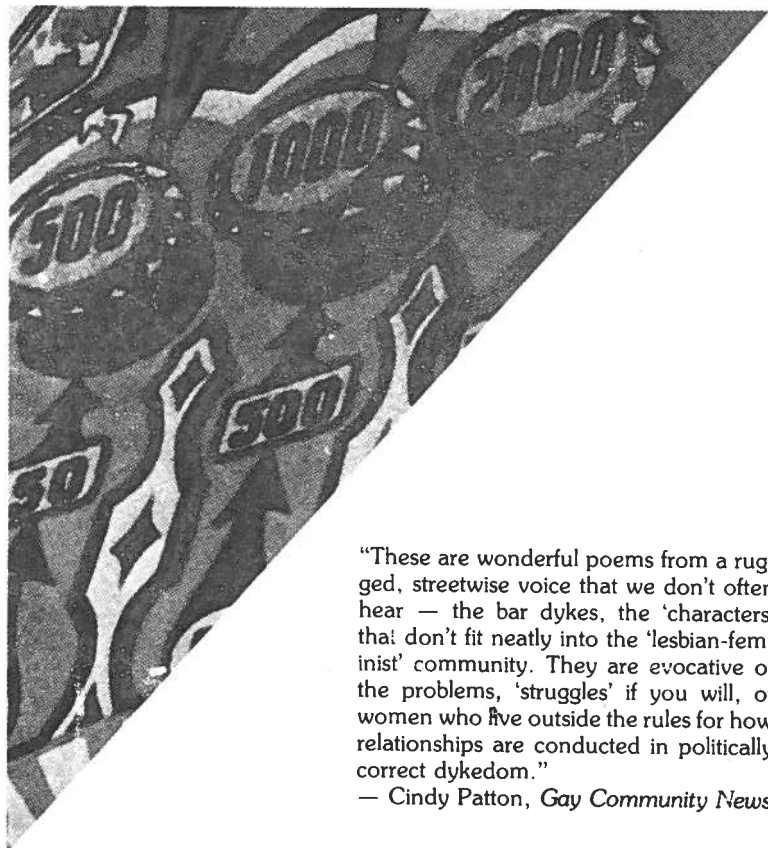
Tomorrow night, as with each successive night,

the believers will return, again and again to their
promised land.

The ritual will continue.

PAT M. KURAS

THE PINBALL PLAYER



"These are wonderful poems from a rugged, streetwise voice that we don't often hear — the bar dykes, the 'characters' that don't fit neatly into the 'lesbian-feminist' community. They are evocative of the problems, 'struggles' if you will, of women who live outside the rules for how relationships are conducted in politically correct dykedom."

— Cindy Patton, *Gay Community News*

*The Good
Gay Poets*