

## SHELLEY AND THE ROMANTICS

They're sorting through cardboard boxes of used clothes, inserting hangers through the arm holes and hanging them on the racks. She's tapping her feet in time to the Country and Western tunes on the sound system and he's asking her, "Do you really like that stuff? Technically speaking, it's not even music." "It grabs me where I live," she says, working the dead end closing shift in a Salvation Army store, not quite used to the spreading lines near her eyes or the less than firm places on her thighs and around her waist where they used to hold her, looking deep into her eyes, whispering, "Be mine, sweet young thing, be forever mine." "What kind of music do you like?" she says, not really caring, working, hyperactive, a coffee junkie with a deadline no one else could meet. "Pink Floyd concept music, Ziggy Stardust, Bowie in drag, the thin white knight." Behind the counter, watching the cash register, he reads Shelley and the Romantics, twisting the posts of his earring as he reads, says with a lisp, "I kind of like Shelley, first read him in high school. You know any Lord Byron? My English teacher said I was the Byronic type." Takes a long drag on his Marlboro filtered, while she punches the numbers into the machine, not listening, singing along as she works to My Cheatin' Heart.

## EXTENDING JOE DIMAGGIO'S STREAK

He was one of those guys  
liquor makes old and obnoxious  
in a hurry. I must have looked  
like some kind of smart assed new  
kid on the block that needed a lesson  
in how things ought to be done by  
a pro. Started giving me all kinds  
of loud mouth lip like: "Hey, boy,  
my beer glass is empty, what's your  
problem, I need another beer."  
I'm always deaf in one ear for  
a while, washing the glass, thinking  
he's got until Joe D finishes  
selling Mr. Coffee machines to



clam up or else it's a whole new  
ball game. They never clam up.  
He's still going on about being  
lost in a desert without beer  
when Captain Kirk's face materializes  
on the tube. That's strike three,  
you're out, big mouth, take the big hike.  
He doesn't understand the rules  
to this new game. They never do.

#### SPEED DEMON

He was just what every  
bar needs -- a large  
filthy man in a red  
flannel shirt. Smelled  
like the second coming  
of a lord of the flies  
ordering a double martini  
over ice that seemed  
doomed never to acquire  
the proper chill.  
I didn't know where he  
was going but he sure  
as hell was going to  
get there fast.

-- Alan Catlin

Schenectady NY

#### PAPER

I work in a mailroom  
fold it, stuff it  
weigh it, meter it  
count it, jam it into big green mail sacks  
open it, date stamp it, route it, sort it.  
Heft around heavy boxes of it  
stack boxes of it in a storeroom full of it,  
copy it on a xerox machine making more paper  
all day moving paper around.