

Three Poems by Alan Catlin

Arizona Forest Fire

“city vultures never leave the ground”

Wherever the fire had been,
he hadn't been able to get out
in time, you could still smell
the smoke on his clothes,
an unforgettable stench of burnt
flesh and hair that clung to his
permanently discolored skin.
the upside down heart tattoo
on his arm of twin cupids
sticking pitchforks into a
wounded heart, red ink bleeding
from the cuts in the form of tear
drop shaped scars, all discolored
now by blackened burns, festering
sores and scabs that a closer inspection
revealed the cupids as demons,
hit men for an arson squad of lovers
denied, losers marking time in terms
of conflagration as he whistled,
“When Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”
through the gaps where the canine
teeth used to be.

The Monkey's Paw

Back in the old country,
one of her immediate
ancestors had incurred
the wrath of some powerful
crazy people with enough
ready cash to buy the strongest
malo mojo curse bestowed
by severed parts of a spider
monkey, dried and cured
to be passed down through
the years, from one generation
to the next, and, somehow,
he had ended up with a choice
of a paw and the desiccated
head but being such a wild
and irrational youth, he took
them both, mixed up some strange
concoction of his own creation,
that he stirred with a paw, poured
into the head and drank, as if it were
not some porous vessel, all the essence
of his-soon-to-be-bad luck
leaking from the eye holes,
perpetually smiling mouth,
a kind of liquid death staining
his skin, his life, marked forever.

The Angel of Death

They were calling me the angel
of death down at Division One.
Every call I had for weeks had
a stiff on the end of it or
a fully involved Domestic.
No one would ride with me.
You know what it's like doing
a dead end shift on a busy
Friday night in the hottest
spots in town being the first
guy on the scene without a partner?
You won't be getting any
long time life insurance policies
once Met Life gets a hold
of that kind of action.
It was wild for awhile then
they gave me a break from front
line duty which turned out
to be a lot of limp surveillance
work. You ever try to keep
warm on the rooftop of a tenement
on Clinton Ave watching windows
glaze over on an empty building?
Pushups help for awhile
but your arms get tired and
your hands get cold. I got to
thinking, though, I'd been
a cop for several years and
always thought it was just another
job until I pulled down some guy
for speeding in North Albany and

he came on to me with a gun.
I had just enough time to get
down and a door in between me
and the bullets. Later,
when it was over, I figured
that first hole in the door
was where my balls would be.
I've been real serious about
being a cop ever since.