

Three Poems by Alan Catlin

From Bubbles to Bag Lady

In the year book she was:
athletic, cheerful, class brain,
“smooches in the hallway”,
nickname, “Bubbles”.
National Honor Society, Softball
Field Hockey, Band, Chorus,
Spanish Club, Latin Club,
Salutatorian. Played the classics
as privately taught prize pupil,
blue ribbon winner, on a Steinway
grand. Owned reams of bound
annotated scores: the Germans,
Austrians, Russians, pencil marked
in the margins with a short hand of
her own devising. Was an amanuensis
to voices no one else could hear:
“Inscribe the secrets. No one else must
ever learn the truth.”

Where did it all go wrong?
Not on Upstate liberal arts college
campus, earning a bachelor of arts in
business but somewhere else along
the ivy covered, post-commencement
path, to a cold, industrial complex campus,
that first voluntary commitment ten
years later, where she was shocked into
insensibility, rehabilitated and let go

until everything around her collapsed:
her marriage, her jobs, her life at home.
Everything gone as South as a subway could
carry her to the next involuntary commitment
twenty years later; aptly described in letters as,
“two years in hell with free drugs” and all
the spare time she needed to formulate bullshit
to confuse the doctors and to plot her revenge
upon all those people who put her here,
knowing full well, at some point, like in two years,
they had to let her go.

Which is how she ended up in the City,
one step removed from the street, unsupervised,
untreated, unaccountable for any new violent
crimes committed. Just another gaunt, denim
bag toting old lady in second hand clothes,
hopping from one place to another, chain smoking
menthol shorts, Kool’s with the filters broken
off, whispering to herself words, only she,
and the creatures inside, could understand.

Sometime she pauses in her travels from
place to place to listen, rapt, a smile on her face,
content knowing what only she, and the chosen
ones who travel with her, could ever hope to know.

Virginia Wolff California Dreaming

Drifting, formless, brain and body
disconnected, floating on an air played
by a string quartet, an invention of
music for blank sheets. She creates notes

like insects, nits for her sightless eyes
transfixed on a frame without references,
or a landscape without horizon.
Swept away, compelled by unseen tides,
an undertow that eddies about clashing rocks,
sirens are paused to sing from, beckoning
as they sing, lips that mimic speech.
These sirens inspire her recurrent dreams of
walking
on pliant waters, in a darkened room
of one's own.

The Surfer

Even in his 50's, he exuded
a kind of perpetual adolescence
made evident by his wet suit,
trimmed as shorts on the bottom,
unzipped at the neck to display
graying chest hair, pounds of gold
chains, his surf board floating
nearby on low rollers as he bitches
to his woman about the poor quality
of the waves, his woman an almost-
trophy wife: not quite young enough
or fit enough or good looking enough
or able to fake interest in what he was
saying as a real trophy wife on this
way-off-season bargain vacation
of sand and sun but no swimming
in way too cold ocean. He looks so
pathetic, you almost want to hand him
a tide chart and direct him to where

the waves really were but consider
a guy as dim as he was probably wouldn't
know how to swim.

Alan Catlin is not the Wizard of Menlo Park
though he lives in Schenectady, New York, as he has
for many years. He has published dozens of
chapbooks and full length books of prose and
poetry, the most recent being *Alien Nation*, a
compilation of four thematically related chapbooks
of poetry.