

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 58 *CutBank* 58

Article 26

Fall 2002

Interlochen

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Recommended Citation

Dombrowski, Chris (2002) "Interlochen," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 58 , Article 26.

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INTERLOCHEN

THE ART STUDENT'S POTS LINED the shelves of her small studio, drying, and leaking a dampness into the air. Sixty, seventy, eighty of them, waiting for the kiln. Evenings, she would wander in the cool Michigan orchards picking apples, and late at night, waking from a dream, she would eat one, and in the morning, place the yellowed core among her pots.

The young clown juggled torches. At first he lit the wicks with white gas, so if he caught one wrong it wouldn't burn. This grew expensive. Once a week he rode his bike to the service station in town to buy a pop bottle's worth of fuel. After dark, torches lit, he'd wade waist deep through the lake's cooling waves, the tops of which still trapped the warmth of the late September days. Sometimes a small crowd gathered on shore to watch the torches pass above their unseen thrower, other times he watched the orbits alone: comet chasing comet on the flat black water.

The clown climbing up the sandy dune, the potter studying a moon-cast shadow on an apple—their bumping into one another seemed staged and ridiculous. But when else, ever, were so few words spoken before a kiss? Afterwards, in her dorm room, they lay awake, though neither heard the other's breathing. She heard the wheel spinning and felt the wet clay between her fingers. He heard the flames whistling past his ears, felt his fists letting go. In the morning, she thought, I will fire half the pots, and throw the rest away. At first light, he thought, I'll juggle all six and keep them in the air until I can't see the flames.

When they awoke it was raining, the first hard rain of fall.