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The Pin Monkey

A bent over crowd all half in the bag
on “50 Cent Draft Night” at Garnsie’s Lanes
in Joliet, near Statesville’s hum of electric lockup,
as an old man pushes into a barstool, fingernails
a scab into a deeper scar, whistles for a drink
through his three-ten split of teeth, and jingles
a plastic baggie of quarters against the hum of balls
rolling thunder down planes of varnish into
the thick-necked echoes of candlepins that shrapnel
the lanes and maintain a perfected white noise
of collision, while on the TV the Cubs are losing
again as spirits are rationed out in stingy pours
by a barkeep munching pretzels and stealing bills
from a waitress with flat hair and menthol perfume,
who sifts her hips through tables of leers and sweaty
grips, lining up drinks for five bucks an hour
plus tips, not even enough for her to afford a sitter
as her boy john henrys a back wall video game,
playing all night on one quarter, and again across

the bar the old man slides his coins for another fill,
faces this babel with a fractured grin and yells,
“I used to set these fucking pins by hand!”

Matt Miller

Matt Miller was born and grew up in Lowell, MA. He has received two Pushcart Prize nominations and is currently a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. His first book of poems, *Cameo Diner*, is forthcoming from Loom Press in the fall of 2005.