



# IC T U S R E V I E W

VOLUME 3  
ISSUE 1





MY BOYFRIEND SUGGESTED

ED DAVIN

# I C T U S R E V I E W

## VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 1

Prose	
NY Dreams Vincent Vok	3
Damnation Thomas Good	6
Enter Tierney Stephen Dowdell	11
Memories Of Daddy David McGraham	14
e.e. cummings:Poetry and Motion Paul Levine	16
The Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong II Mike Russo	22
Inheritance TC Lynch	24
Memories of Death Robert Levine	26
M & M's for Phylis & Kerri Thomas Deignan	29
History of a Prince Fan Casey Kelly	35
The Night Visitor Jim Higgins	38
Soliloquy: a Diction Thomas Good	41
Death Ain't No Thinking Thing, Robert Levine	43
Solo David Graziano	45
Cousin Mental Illness Robert Levine	46

Poetry	
Untitled Debra Behr	5
Untitled Debra Behr	5
White Coffins Steven Schwartz	5
China Victoria Seretis	15
In Line at McDonalds Wayne Berninger	33

Photos & Images	
M. Carfaro 2, 27	
Ed Davin inside front, back cover; 4, 21, 47	
Vincent Fressola 19	
Mike Garofalo 23	
Tommy Griffin 10	
Jack Griggs inside back cover; 32, 34, 40	
Peter C. Guagenti 13, 39, 44	
Colleen McGraham 28	
Lara Parks 5, 37, 42	
Nanci Richards front cover; 48	
Steven R. Schwartz 7, 25	

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M. CARFARO



# NY DREAMS

VINCENT VOK

**W**hen I arrived in New York city it was a cold, gray, February Sunday morning. Dreams were chasing each other to sleep up and down the street. I had a guitar full of music and a head full of ice, but my heart was beating pure blood of wonder and joy. The echoes of my footsteps followed me up and down long, endlessly numbered streets and avenues. I walked through mazes walled by thick, high buildings. By day or night the lights were just bright enough. Above my eyes the sky was a thin, crooked ribbon. Below my path hard concrete muffled the restless thunder of hungry journeys. A new city is yours to put together like building blocks. You can be who you want, and any street or alley can lead to success or failure.

I came to New York one cold winter full of dreams, hoping one would be captured and made real and given the good life. I opened my bag and they scattered and bounced like litter in the wind. At first I ran down each street to look after them. Then, as they grew distant I tried to think of them as seeds that one day might spring up again in my path.

People freshly far from home are desperate but undecided. They instinctively look for a familiar face through the millions of strange ones. When you see the same face three times you're no longer strange, or a stranger. A small, unnoticed crack appears in your deepest roots. Time surrounds you and leads you far. It is cruel but painless. You hardly notice.

There was a similar group of desperate, misfit poets, losers, wizards madmen and hungry women that had already nested around the few blocks of Greenwich Village that offered musical havens for would-be pop prophets and saviors. Some had been there for years, picking at bones, leaving some of their own. Others, like myself, were only just arriving. Others still were leaving, casualties of drugs or reality, lifted away by routine angels to distant white clouds.

It was on a square city block in a circle of light that I met Dickie, who was already fighting a good fight with his own angels. Wounded in Suburbia by a Prom Queen and no night-life, he staggered into town with a lot of chords and Bob Dylan on his lips. I myself had a leather attitude, to hide my fear.

We became friends and regulars in a scene of unfriendly irregulars. There were games to be played for success. We ignored them, ran from them, resented them and envied the players.

New York always leaves you with an empty taste in your soul which you always need to fill. We chased the emptiness down with pot, beer and cheap, thick brandy and it fell and rose like a mushroom cloud punching through the sky. There was music in us and words that rhymed and that freezing emptiness we occupied with time. We hated ourselves and we loved each other like brothers.

The nights were as long as life and the hostilities from the Village chiefs, who thought we were undisciplined fools, made us feel like crippled missionaries. Our emptiness was vast and we prayed to ourselves in song and silence and our laughter as the loudest, and often we were ugly and always we were free.

There are roads waiting, and journeys and streets yet to be numbered and mapped. We were clueless, confused, stranded; music is merely an abstract guide without a strong voice to translate it.

At that time I began renting a room from an uptown actor named Michael. He was a gentle homosexual who lived with three cats and sixty five well-fed roaches. We met in the off-off Broadway theater where I was living, on 22nd street near Seventh Avenue: Van Gogh Productions. Stranger on the Earth was the name of the play. A long, detailed production about Vincent Van Gogh. I acquired the job of stage manager, set builder, lighting technician and art forger. In return I was given a place to sleep, a pot of boiled potatoes and all the change I could steal out of the soda machine. I slept on stage in the cot that was used for the death scene. In the blackness of the empty theater at night I would dream of Vincent standing over me, looking at me like I was crazy. One of my lost dreams looking for a place to die? Not here. Not yet. I need this dream.

Michael was suffering from unrequited love and I was suffering from pot, frustration and brandy. We comforted each other the best we could, neither one of us understanding the other. He was a kind, generous, tolerant man. He never minded when I offered Dickie or other homeless musicians a place to stay for the night. He would enjoy looking at their asses as they slept like babies on the floor.


Michael would die of AIDS a few years later. I never got the chance to pay the back rent I owed him. He was a good, good person, and I wish he was still around.

Dickie had no tolerance for gays, although he appreciated the shelter. We were both hungry for a real woman, but couldn't break the chains of fresh scars left on our egos by the women back home. We took turns dating the Bronx Irish Catholic (as she called herself) that lived in the apartment down the hall, but we were too large in our own minds to last too long with her. It ended with me when I asked to borrow five dollars. I have no idea when it began and ended with Dickie. Around that time Bob Dylan pulled Jesus Christ out of a dark corner of his room where he had been all along and had Him sit in the light for a while. Suddenly all the metaphors turned into dog-like dogma; karma with a vengeance. Simple songs

became prayers and drunken thoughts became divine states of mind. We played the role of holy outlaws all too well. They could smell us coming, hear our breath around the corner, feel our heat. We fell from grace with the graceless.

The wings of thought, once lightened by drugs and alcohol were now merely all thinned out. They refused to support our weight. One night Dickie stepped on my music and I got pissed off at him. He left wounded. He tells me that I threw his stuff out the window. I don't remember. My creative voice fractured into voices that became angry to be in my dreams. I moved out of Michael's after chipping away all of the plaster on one of the walls in my room. I would break glass and cut myself to draw the words out. My poetry became blood on the paper.

This illusion of greatness that anger sometimes is pushed me and pulled me for a couple of years. My life was a spectre that ran as I approached it. My dreams chased each other and others down the streets, and it hurt when I recognized one or two of them as they disappeared into the lights or shadows. Time was shifting on and I was changing. I was aging. I was living and dying.

 Dickie came to visit me recently. He's living in San Francisco now, pursuing his dream. New York has soured a lot of dreams lately. We told each other we haven't changed, that we still looked the same. He enjoyed the company of my ten year old son, Dylan. He told him what a tough guy his father was once. "Yeah, right." My son responded with loving sarcasm.

We went out that night and played music to each other. We smoked cigarettes and drank beer and golden brandy from one of those little bottles he got on the plane. We laughed about those days, and shook our heads. Time passes with a steady hand, touching everything. We played out our memories most of the night. The next day I drove him to the ferry where he could make it to some train that would bring him to the airport. I remember once on 3rd Street and 6th Avenue saying one more of many good-byes to him. "Be careful." I told him.

"I'm a big boy," he replied, resentful of leaving.

"One of us has to be." I answered as he climbed down the stairs to the subway. I watched him disappear and then crossed the street, in a dream.



É D D A V I N      R E F L E C T I O N : S O U T H S T R E E T





LARA PARKS

Dance louder  
so I  
can  
hear your  
breath

Debra Behr



I found your twin  
lost  
angry  
Just as  
I  
left you  
kissing God

Debra Behr

### White Coffins

ebony trees stand gravely,  
as the winter wind snatches  
their autumn spirit,  
branches crack and fall  
into the yielding snow—  
soft shuffling sounds,  
white coffins.

Steven R. Schwartz



# DAMNATION

(for Calra)

Thomas Good

**AT** least they've got the trains running on time," Cain muttered, as the Amtrak Express idled in the New Jerusalem station. The Express had left Son City an hour behind schedule and the thirty minute stopover in New Jerusalem had already exceeded two hours.

Cain nodded at the conductor, his contact in the underground; the man who would get him new papers and a new mission. Cain, a section leader in the Resistance, was a man on the run. Before his cover was blown he had been an employee at the Ministry of Science; a binder of books on Creationism, Nuclear Armageddon and other approved topics. He had used his access to government printing presses to produce anti-government tracts.

Cain's mission had been compromised when the Son City Police discovered that he was the one who had stolen a box of books slated for public burning. Unable to consign *Tropic of Cancer* and *Lolita* to the flames, Cain had been forced to flee Washington, or Son City - as it was now called, after his theft was reported by a scrupulous coworker.

Cain lamented the loss of his job. In these times it wasn't easy for a Black man to get a decent job, let alone a civil service post.

Cain also found it a pity that his political work had been interrupted. It was a critical time for propaganda ridiculing the Elect. The government was vulnerable due to the recent military defeats they had suffered in Utah, where a handful of Mormon irregulars were holding off the vaunted Army of Salvation. For three years Cain's pamphlets had mocked the alleged military prowess of President Halliwell, the Commander-in-Chief, and his Minister of War, Buck Cannon. Halliwell, a former carnival huckster and drug addict, had found Christ a personal savior and political expedient. Cannon, a defense contractor and manufacturer of dashboard icons, had gotten very rich in the wake of the Revolution that had established the "Realm of the Son." Both men had been regular targets of Cain's satirical brochures.

His nerves frayed, Cain stiffened as an officer of the Natural Guard boarded the train. The Guardians, former activists in the struggle for Pre-Natal Self Determination and Men's Rights (what Cain termed "Fetus Envy"), were self described "enlightened racists." They functioned as the shock troops and secret police of the Elect, the ruling body that had replaced the pre-existing tripartite system of government. The blackshirted Guardians had "nothing personal" against their sworn enemies: Muslims, Mormons, Catholics, Jews, and above all, Baptists. Guardians hunted down "Enemies of the State" in order to offer these misguided creatures the opportunity to have their souls "Saved" at public stonings. This officer, whose name tag read: "Abel, Lieutenant William T.," was escorting a Muslim prisoner. Another soul for saving, Cain thought.

"Excuse me, Little Brother," the Lieutenant said as he brushed past Cain. The Lieutenant liked to refer to Black men as "Little Brother": a term of endearment from an enlightened racist.

The Lieutenant's prisoner, a tall and thin Black male, looked familiar to Cain. Ah yes, Cain mused, this man had been a political and spiritual leader of the Black community in Jericho, formerly Chicago. He had been on the News lately; something about being apprehended and incarcerated in New Jerusalem. Apparently he had converted to Islam while in prison. Cain established eye contact with the brother as he passed. A born leader, charisma emanated from the man's every pore. Adrenaline flooded Cain's nervous system. Could this man have something to do with his next mission? The Blackshirt and his charge took seats in the forward section of the car as a beautiful young woman boarded the train.

She wore the uniform of the Sisters-in-Christ, the Christian Militia. A statuesque Black woman, she walked with uncommon elegance. Cain found himself assenting meekly when she asked if she might sit next to him. I'll be damned, Cain thought, will this train ever move?

"Praise the Lord, Brother, what a beautiful city," the Sister said as she looked out Cain's window, admiring the crucifixes that stretched up from the twin towers.

"Yeah," said Cain. Interior Minister Frank Braggert was another beneficiary of Cain's literary venom. A former televangelist who had been convicted of pedophilia, Braggert had been pardoned and released from prison after the Revolution. Halliwell had made Braggert Chief of the Realm's police forces, including the Guardians, due to his expertise in law enforcement. New Jerusalem, nee New York, had been Braggert's first project. In the early days, thousands of sinners were Saved daily. Rumor had it that their corpses were "together-in-Christ" at the bottom



of the East River.

Two white men entered the train as the engine revved. A wounded man, clad in the uniform of a corporal in the Army of Salvation, hobbled past Cain. He was followed by an older man with closely cropped gray hair. This man wore the uniform of a sergeant in the Lions of Judah, as the federal prison guards were known.

"You Abel?" the old man growled as he approached the officer.

"Affirmative," the Blackshirt replied. "Who are you?"

"Peters, Lions of Judah, here to receive the prisoner," the old man said.

"My orders are to return this Little Brother to the authorities at Jericho," Abel answered.

"Suit yourself, Lieutenant," Peters replied, "I guess we'll ride together. Lucas, let's sit here," he said to the wounded man. The two white men glanced over at Cain and the Sister. Cain looked away.

So, Cain thought, the Muslim was to be Saved. Probably at "The Castle," the federal prison at Jericho.

Peters and the wounded Lucas sat down just as the overhead television flickered to life. The image of Doctor Rogerson, the Minister of Culture, appeared on the screen. Rogerson, the sole member of the Elect to possess a bachelor's degree, was Halliwell's propaganda chief. "Will everyone please rise for the national anthem," his image commanded.

Peters and Lucas stood up, grumbling. Abel jerked the prisoner to his feet. The Sister took Cain's hand and they rose as a choir sang the anthem. As the soldiers saluted, the video screen blasted "God is Watching," the one-time pop song that had become the nation's anthem. Cain felt his palms sweating as he realized that his next mission might well be his last. He felt certain that his assignment was to rescue the Muslim. How this was to be accomplished remained a mystery.

The Sister squeezed Cain's hand as the music crescendoed. What a gorgeous creature, Cain thought, a ripe plum, direct from the Euphrates. A true beauty; and a true believer. Poor fool.

"I'll be goddamned," Cain muttered, cursing his luck, as the train rolled out of the station.

Cain's mystery ended around nightfall, as the train thundered through Good Shepherd, Pennsylvania. As the steel mills of Western Pennsylvania passed by, the conductor dropped a slip of paper into Cain's lap. Cain met the man, code name Zachariah, in the passageway outside the lavatory.

"We're going to make our move at Columbus, I mean, Son Rise," Zac said. "I'll grab the prisoner but it's up to you and Peters to take out the Blackshirt."

"Peters?" Cain said.

"Yeah, Peters. He's one of us. But you'll have to finish that Blackshirted bastard. Peters is an old man."

"Finish? I, uh, can't kill anybody. . . I'm a Quaker. I joined the Resistance to stop the killing. This man may be the enemy but he's still a human being. He's my brother. I'm sorry, but I can't do it."

"Your brother? Listen fool, you're just a nigger to him. If it was up to him, you and me would be dead. Shit, he's a Guardian. You know where they're recruited from. . . get it together, brother. Do your job. Kill that bastard. Remember: we move outside Columbus. When I enter the car, you move. Got it?"

Cain nodded, numb. The train was passing over Trinity Bridge when he returned to his seat. Cain stared out the window at the three rivers of Good Shepherd.

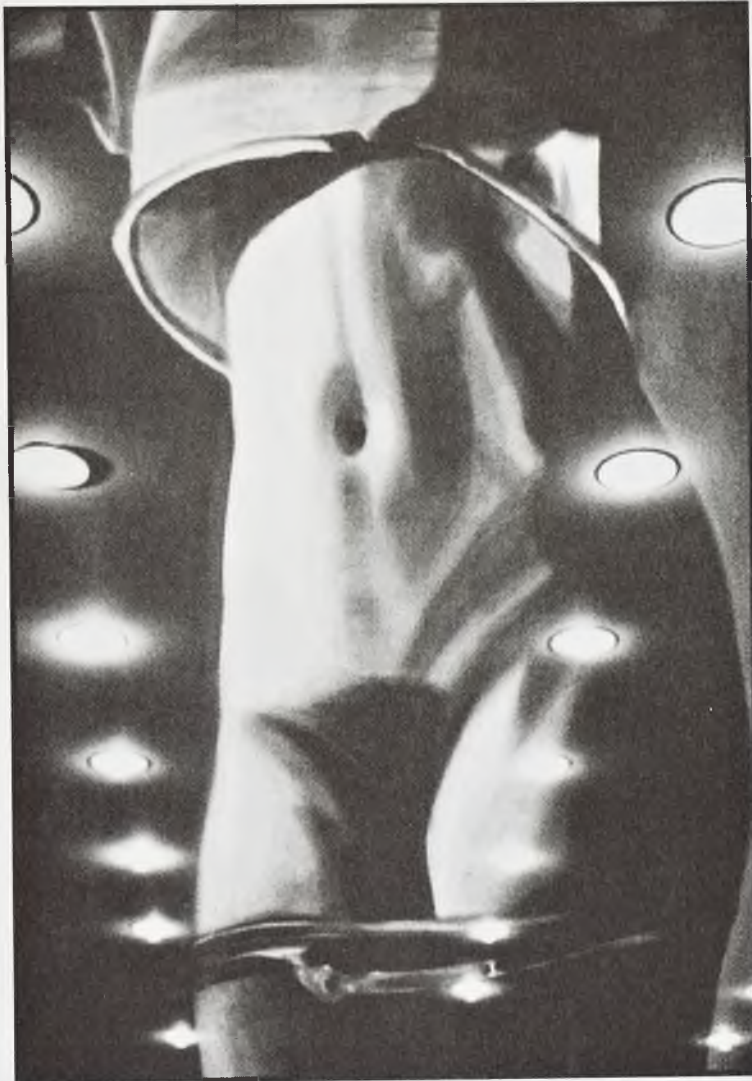
"Are you all right, brother?" the Sister asked. Cain looked up at her. At the far end of the car, Lieutenant Abel guarded his prisoner, his stare burning through the deepening dusk.

"Yeah." Cain worried a loose thread on his parka, ruminating about his new assignment, cursing his misfortune.

"You sure you're all right?" the Sister said.

"Yeah, I think I just need some air," Cain replied.

Cain and the Sister made their way to the Chapel car. Cain ripped open a window, gulping in mouthfuls of crisp winter air. The Sister gripped his



STEVEN R. SCHWARTZ

hand, staring through his haunted look.

"What are you running from?" she asked.

Cain stared out the window. In the distance three crossfires lit the evening skyline; a book burning in some civic center, organized by a local Guardian unit. "I'll be god-damned," Cain muttered.

"Yeah, brother, they gave the Klan new suits, but it's the same shit," the Sister whispered.

Cain stared at her in disbelief. "But you're in the Militia, you're one of them," he said.

She kissed him, gently at first. "I'm in the Militia, brother, but I ain't one of them. I'm a Black woman and don't think for a minute these redneck fools will let me forget that."

She kissed him again. The train entered the Ohio frontier under cover of a darkness pierced only by the glow of three burning crosses. A small pocket of warmth in a frozen wilderness.

"Sister," Cain whispered, undoing her tunic, "what do I call you?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Just outside Son Rise the train stopped to take on fuel. During the wait two white soldiers - a Guardian private and a lance corporal in the Army of Salvation - boarded the train.

"Hey, L.T.," the Private said to Abel, "mind if we ride with you awhile? We're on our way back to Utah to kick some Mormon ass."

Abel nodded.

"Where you takin' this piece of shit?" the other man asked.

"This little brother, Lance Corporal, is being escorted to Jericho. You two men may sit, provided you can keep quiet."

"Sure, L.T.," the Private said, "we're switching at Resurrection, anyway."

"That's right, Loo-tenant," the Corporal said, "Indianapolis, I mean Resurrection, that's my home town."

Abel looked away as the two soldiers took seats across the aisle. The Lance Corporal glared at the Muslim prisoner who returned the man's stare. Evenly. Proudly.

"What the fuck's this boy got on his head?" the Corporal demanded.

Abel spun around in his seat. "I told you to keep still, Corporal," he said menacingly.

"It is a kuffee," said a deep, melodic voice. "I am a servant of Allah."

"Silence!" barked Lieutenant Abel, striking his prisoner across the face with a powerful backhand.

"Hell," muttered the Corporal, "he's a goddamn sand nigger."

"One more word, Corporal, and I'll terminate you - right here, right now," snapped Abel.

The Muslim watched the exchange quietly, blood dripping from his nostrils. Abel offered his charge a handkerchief. The prisoner slowly shook his head. Abel shrugged.

As Cain and Ava watched from the rear of the car, the incident was reflected on the overhead video screen. The drama was interrupted by the return of the conductor.

"Tickets, please," he said. Punching Cain's ticket, he

whispered, "Under the seat. . ."

As the conductor moved down the aisle, Cain reached under his seat, fumbling for the hidden revolver. Looking up, Cain glanced nervously at the two soldiers sitting opposite Abel.

"Strength, brother," Sister Ava said.

Cain searched the distorted reflections in the video screen for some sign of Peters, some cue. Peters and the wounded Lucas were sitting directly behind Abel. Lucas was apparently dozing.

Things fell apart quickly. Peters jumped up from his seat and fired four times into the young Blackshirt private and his fellow traveler, killing them both. Zac, the conductor, shot Abel at point blank range, hitting the Lieutenant in his left shoulder. Abel smiled thinly at Zac, drew his semi-automatic and, using the Muslim as a shield, put three rounds into the conductor. Zac dropped to the ground with a thud.

Sergeant Peters panicked and fired wildly, in the general direction of Abel. Abel, the proficient killer, dispatched the old man with one shot. Abel rose from his seat and looked around the car. The wounded Lucas peered up at the Blackshirt officer.

"What the hell is going on, Lieutenant?" he stammered.

Abel kicked Zac's crumpled form. No response.

"Lieutenant, what the fuck is going on?" Lucas shrieked.

Abel stared hard at Lucas, raising his gun. Lucas covered his face with his hands. Abel fired twice, hitting Lucas in the heart. As he slammed another clip into his gun, Abel noticed Cain standing in the rear of the car, dangling the revolver at his side. Sister Ava screamed a warning to Cain as Abel fired a full clip in their direction. Cain was hit in the arm and the stomach, collapsing onto the carpeted aisle. Ava fell at his feet, dead before she hit the ground. As Cain drifted into shock he glanced around the car. Abel changed clips and began walking toward him. Cain called Ava's name as tears blurred his vision. From the front of the car came the sound of chanting in Arabic. As Cain faded he saw Abel standing over him, holding the unfired revolver.

"Finish me," Cain pleaded.

"Not today, Little Brother," the Blackshirt answered.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cain awoke in a hospital bed. A plaque on the wall said something about Christ County Hospital, Jericho, Illinois. Nurses buzzed to and fro, sometimes stopping to adjust the various tubes sticking out of Cain's arms. A distant throbbing echoed from his heavily bandaged midsection. A passing nurse informed Cain that he had been asleep for five days. She opened his curtains and switched on the television. A morning news broadcast leapt from the screen.

"The terrorist was tried early this morning in the People's Court. High Justice Terance McRandell presided. The accused defended himself. We go now to a tape of the proceedings."

The camera pulled away from the anchorwoman's smiling face, entering a courtroom. On a raised dais, backed by flag like portraits of President Halliwell, Interior Minister Braggert and other members of the Elect, sat the presiding judge, Lord McRandell. He wore a black judge's



gown over a cleric's collar. The defendant, a Black man, tall and thin, dressed in a white robe, stood before the dais. Before the Law.

"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me for justice," the judge intoned.

"I know not my Lord," the defendant said.

"Little Brother, you are cursed by the very soil of our land which has absorbed your brother's blood. A fugitive and a vagabond is what you will be from this day hence," Lord McRandell said.

"My punishment is greater than I can bear, my Lord. You have made me a fugitive before the very eyes of God. Surely all the servants of my Lord shall try to slay me."

Cain wiped the sleep from his eyes, straining to make out the familiar figure that stood before the Law. There was something about the man. . .

"Nay, that would be unlawful," Lord McRandell replied. "You shall be remanded to the federal prison located at Chattahoochie, in the Land of Nod, formerly Florida, for the rest of your unnatural life. None of the prisoners there shall harm you lest they suffer a sevenfold vengeance. So that they recognize you, you will be allowed to retain your headgear." Lord McRandell gestured to the defendant's white skullcap, an open weave kuffee. "This unholy hood shall be the Mark of Cain that none shall strike. The mark of shame that shall damn you for the wanton murder of your brother, the heroic Lieutenant William Abel. May God have mercy on your soul."

Cain stared out the window. It was a beautiful day in Jericho. Children were ice skating in the park across the street from the hospital. The murder of Lieutenant Abel? Someone had killed that bastard? The Muslim must have grabbed a gun from somewhere, Cain thought. What did the judge mean by the 'Mark of Cain'? Cain looked up as the anchorwoman reappeared on the television screen.

". . . from Son City where he distributed anti-Christian lies and slander. The terrorist Cain has confessed to a number of capital crimes, however, as he has repented, coming forth with the names of other agents of Satan, the court has taken pity on him and spared his life. The condemned was taken to Chattahoochie this very morning, to begin his life sentence. Praise the Lord."

A commercial for the revised Gideon's Bible occupied the screen as Cain struggled to process the data he had ingested. "Damnation," he muttered "what the hell is going on? Why don't they just kill me? Why has the Muslim taken my place?"

The anchorwoman reappeared briefly and introduced another taped segment.

"This very day, Praise the Lord, our heroic troops launched a major offensive that succeeded in flushing the Mormon defenders from their hiding places in what used to be Salt Lake City. The assault was led by a Skinhead unit, the First Aryan Division, that suffered over seventy per cent casualties."

On the screen a ragtag collection of bloodied skinheads grinned and displayed banners that read: "Death to the Zionist Occupation Government! Death to Z.O.G.! Long live the Realm of the Son!"

"Over eleven thousand Christian soldiers fell in battle and received the Rapture," the commentator continued. "In a press conference, Information Minister Rogerson denied a Canadian claim that Christian forces used tacti-

cal nuclear weapons against the Mormon bandits. At the conference, Minister Rogerson told a grateful multitude that the sin of polygamy has been wiped from the face of the Earth. Calling the Mormon atrocities 'an abomination before the eyes of the Lord,' Rogerson revealed that over six thousand of the Philistine criminals and murderers have been captured. Rogerson told a KRST reporter that the prisoners will be Saved immediately and that a special commando unit of the Natural Guard has been dispatched for this purpose. Rogerson also told the thankful crowd that Salt Lake City will be rechristened 'The Whore of Babylon.'"

"Praise the Lord," Cain mumbled, closing his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cain next awoke two days later. He stared in disbelief at the Blackshirted visitor that sat next to his bed. The Guardian smiled. "Good morning, Little Brother," he said.

"Lieutenant Abel, I thought you were dead. . . a dream?"

"By thee my days have been multiplied, and the years of my life increased," Abel said. "I have been promoted Captain, thanks to you, Little Brother."

"But on the news they said you were dead. The Muslim. . ."

"Ah, the news," Abel replied, "the news. Yes, it would seem Lieutenant Abel is indeed dead. I, Little Brother, am Captain Seth. I will command a frontier garrison, until the public forgets my face. Eventually I hope to be able, so to speak, to reclaim my proper name. Once the masses have forgotten me, that is. I'm afraid they'll never forget your name, Little Brother. Minister Rogerson will see to that. Unfortunately for you."

"So what will become of me?" Cain asked.

"You will be Saved, my brother. I'm afraid that two Cains would be redundant and we already have someone to play your part."

"The Muslim," Cain said. "How the hell did you get him to do it? He struck me as a man of character."

"Indeed. However, after we removed his. . . objections. . . he was happy to accept our proposal. You know Minister Braggert is even allowing him to take his wife with him to Nod."

"How generous. . ."

"Yes. It seems the wench was already pregnant. She will bear him a son," Abel said. "And you, my friend, will be transported to the federal prison in Turnerville, Georgia. I'm afraid your Saving will be devoid of the usual fanfare, for obvious reasons." Abel paused for a moment. "Now, Little Brother, I have a question for you. Something that puzzles me. Why is it that you did not shoot me, when you had the chance? I had my back to you for some time. . ."

Cain stared at Abel a moment before answering.

"I am a Friend," he said. "A Quaker. I joined the Resistance to stop the killing."

"I see," mused Abel, "you are, in your own twisted way, a man of God. I respect that. In fact I had hoped it might be the case. You never struck me as being a coward. . . hmm. . . we are indeed brothers, after all."

Abel rose from his chair and extended his hand to Cain. Cain shook it weakly.

"Goodbye, friend Cain," Abel said.

"Yeah," Cain replied, nodding slowly.



TOMMY GRIFFIN





# Enter Tierney

Stephen Dowdell

LAURENCE HARBOR, NJ, NOVEMBER 27, 1993 . . . It was high time for Tierney Griffin to be born, so her parents, Terry and Tommy, decided to throw a party, to coax her out.

It was altogether fitting and proper that they do this.

In fact, they had already tried it once, a couple of days before, by attending a big family gathering for Thanksgiving. By then, Tierney's due date had passed without incident, so the couple were sure that Thanksgiving would get things rolling.

At Tommy's parents' home on Staten Island, three Griffin generations swarmed about. Grandparents, parents, kids. . . there were high expectations all around that the time had come, and it was on everyone's minds. The children present at the dinner - Tierney's sister Tara Lee and brother Tommy, plus lots of cousins - made a big banner calling on Tierney to show herself.

Maybe the pressure to perform was too great, the vibes at such a major family event too charged. Anyway, nothing happened. No Tierney. Later, at their home here, the Griffins hung the banner above Tierney's crib in Tara Lee's upstairs room, a room she was eager to share.

And that's why, two days later, we were called in, to eat leftover lasagna, play games, and induce labor.

Six of us made up the crew, with not an inch of birth experience among us.

There was Bob and Lina, a Staten Island couple who'd just transplanted themselves, their sharp-edged, frenetic urban humor and black leather-jacket life-style in tow, to a dreamy old house in manicured suburban Milburn, New Jersey.

There was Frank, unmarried, who some months before had followed the fleet and his job when the Navy decided to abandon the half-built Home Port facility on Staten Island.

Tom, another bachelor, was there, an Island bohemian well known both underground as an innovative musician and host of many memorable parties; and above ground as an effective shaker of hands and agendas, an agitator for the alternative arts community. And Eva and I, still learning to take care of each other after five years of marriage, a grad student and writer with parenthood on some far horizon.

However, we each knew our place in this particular universe. It was to party with Tommy and Terry, to play games, to be there.

Eight people, all huddling around the age of 30. Not what you'd consider a major party. Even the youthful Tara Lee and Tommy were absent, staying over night with some cousins. Still, we represented a core constituency, the chorus in the Griffins' life drama. An additional few others would have made it most complete, perhaps, but we were enough to get the job done.

We were there, you see, because Tommy and Terry have the kind of family life you'd want to be there to see, and to be part of. The six of us, there that night, had also been there for most of it.

Their life has not been easy. They'd married too young, with the responsibilities of parenthood thrust at them before they could catch their breath.

And they are not perfect individuals. There are stubborn human weaknesses at work in their relationship, and they struggle to overcome them, hurting each other occasionally as they go, stumbling over the same kinds of emotional baggage and bad breaks that challenge most of us.

As trite as it may sound, that's their life. The Griffins mostly succeed at it. That is not what makes them extraordinary.

As parents, they are extraordinary. Tommy and Terry operate with a natural grace, as if, by teaming up, they had awakened within each other an innate grasp of the essential tools for parenting. They treat their children with respect, teaching them how to do the same. They use discipline wisely, rarely with too much or too little zeal, and offer clear guidance of what is right and wrong. And they praise genuinely, and love openly.

The praise and love are well directed. Tara Lee, 10, and Tommy, 6, are two quite different little people, but they are both beautiful, affectionate, fiercely intelligent, brimming over with life.

And they know how to party. Their parents, big partygoers and party throwers themselves, included their kids in the fun from the very beginning. First Tara Lee, then Tommy, have been regulars at all our parties, indoors and out, in gatherings of 10 people and 100, at quiet evening affairs of cross legged conversation as well as loud, sprawling, dance crazy, two day jams.

As a result, the children are social dynamos, but wielding a force that almost never turns disruptive. Instead, they blend easily into the chemistry of a given party, always making it better.

In short, the Griffin kids are always invited.

Tara Lee and Tommy were missed that November night in Laurence Harbor. We made do without them. The eight of us ate warm lasagna at the dining table, trading jokes, stories and opinions. I think that in the back of our minds, almost subconsciously, we all thought about Tierney, now fully formed in Terry's womb. She had already been stirring, Terry said as she stood before the oven. Of course, the baby had been squirming for days.

After a while, we grabbed our desserts and shifted to the living room, settling in a circle around their small coffee table. Tom, Frank, Bob, Lina and I were squeezed on the couch. Terry, Eva and Tommy took the carpet.

The discussions and laughter ricocheted about, and Tierney became a hot topic. Bob, for one, was certain she would be born that night. He proclaimed so several times, bouncing to his feet or waving his arms like an excitable herald.

Wide eyed, he'd blurt out, "This is it, this is it, we're going to the hospital!" Then, perhaps under the smoldering gaze of Lina, he'd quiet down; but he still grew progressively more distracted.

The party evolved, and a familiar rhythm settled in. Naturally, effortlessly, we slipped into a gentle dance of movement and conversation, a dance we all knew well. We felt at home.

At a certain cadence, calls went out for a game. A few of us scrambled upstairs and through a trap door to the attic, where the Griffins had dozens of them stashed. We considered and rejected several, until Tom, the hustler-poet among us, made a suggestion. And once made, it immediately became the best choice, the only one.

We played the Game of Life.

It was an old game, in a shredded box and with a board warped from too many damp cellars and hot closets. So old, even the rules had been changed since this edition was bought.

But we plunged into it, tossing the dice and making the snap decisions that hurled us down Life's warped path. Before long, virtually all of us had bought a car, gotten married and landed on the square that wins you a baby daughter. The ironies piled up alongside the dirty cake plates.

And then it started. Maybe Tierney, floating gently within her warm cocoon, sensed the mood was right, that the game, the dance unfolding only a membrane away, was too irresistible for her to remain sidelined anymore. While we took our turns and made our moves, she began to take hers.

"I'm getting contractions," Terry said, calmly, as if she'd just mentioned she was hungry again. We perked up. Bob out-perked us all, opening windows and exhibiting vital signs that suggested he, too, was getting ready to give birth. The game of Life went on, now with a certain edge of expectation.

After every few turns, Terry would lean back and close her eyes. Beside her, Eva kept time, counting the seconds until each contraction subsided. Then Terry would spring back up, Life paused only a few tense moments, and someone would toss the dice, win an inheritance, send a child to college, or change careers.

Finally, and as Bob had foretold repeatedly, it was time to go to hospital.

Life was put back in its box. Then, we all went to the hospital. It was well after midnight, by now, but no one - except perhaps Bob - thought twice about going home at that moment. Instead, we deployed in three cars and sped

away in a caravan. We stayed with the Griffins because we belonged there; we each had a vital supporting role in the game. Tommy and Terry wanted it that way.

It began to rain, but we did not have far to go, just about 15 minutes up Interstate 440. At the pediatric emergency entrance, the night man watched the procession pull up. He'd scarcely had time to grab a wheelchair before the whole entourage streamed in and almost swept right past him. Somehow, we'd all expected to go in, and it did not seem right to break the rhythm holding us together. But only Tommy, as her husband, and Eva, dubbed hastily as her "sister," were allowed to accompany Terry upstairs.

The rest of us shifted to the empty waiting room nearby, and quickly settled in, drawing chairs into a circle around a low table. The party's beat returned, and it evolved again, now into a direct celebration of Tierney's birth even as it was occurring.

On the way out, Tom had grabbed the card game UNO, so we played hand after hand to honor Tierney and her parents two floors above us, locked now into the most beautiful and awesome dance of humanity. Eva came down a few times with the latest news, then joined in the game. We took turns running to the vending machines for soda and snacks.

At close to 3am, Tommy emerged from the elevator to tell us the birth would probably take several hours longer. Reluctantly, we closed the UNO game and headed home. Our role was played out, for now. The rest of the dance was theirs.

Tierney Griffin was born at about 9am, Sunday, November 28, blanketed warmly in her young parents' love.

Late that afternoon, after the big Griffin clan had greeted Tierney and gone home, Eva, Tom and I returned to the hospital for a short visit. Terry was on her feet, looking tired but triumphant, happy to see us. As we departed, I noticed that in the waiting room, our chairs were still circled about that small table, just as we had left them.

We are not family to the Griffins. We share no blood line with them. We were just there.

But as we played The Game of Life with them that night before Tierney's birth, we were linked solidly with their unfolding fates, in our own ritual of community. If not a blood kin, then as members of a tribe. We shared the Griffins' experience, even enhanced it, supporting them and being supported by each other in turn, as the engine of Existence pushed all of us forward.

We will continue to play fundamental, if rarely acknowledged, roles in each others' life rituals, as that engine keeps pushing. There will surely be other births, other epiphanies, either dramatic or trivial, to draw us together in support of each other. In time, we will attend each other's deaths. That's the way it should be. The dance is easier if you don't have to do it alone.

If we are lucky, the drive to party will stay with us throughout; and will flourish then in Tara Lee, Tommy, Tierney and the other tribe members to come. Partying may seem a flimsy example of tribal ritual, but it works for us. Such playful celebrations of community are sometimes all we have. For me, at least, they are as reaffirming, and as real, as any religion.

Now, Tierney Griffin will have to grow up hearing over and over about how we all partied and played games as she was born.

And for us, The Game of Life will never quite seem the same.





PETER C.  
GUAGENTI



# Memories of Daddy

David McGraham

For the third time since I awoke I reached over and picked up the piece of paper that was resting by the luminescent clock that read "4:30 a.m." I gently unfolded it, already knowing what the words would say,

Dear David:

I am sorry to have to tell you that your father passed away last Friday. I tried to reach you by phone, but was unsuccessful. I guess you and Kathy are still in the mountains. I hope this note catches you before the funeral, which will be held Monday. Call me for details. I'm sorry you had to find out this way.

Sincerely,  
Harold Jensen  
Dir: New Horizons

"David, come here! Right now!" I could still hear my father's voice, echoing down through the decades, as my mind, unbidden, replayed memories of times long ago. This sense of reality that told me I was lying on my bed, in my home, with my wife sleeping beside me, seemed to fade away, as it had so many times before.

It was replaced, in my mind's eye, by the image of a living room in a dilapidated apartment whose "better days" only meant that it had been slightly less dilapidated. It was here I had spent most of what was suppose to have been my childhood. And, as I visualized the scene, through the eyes of a little boy, the image was like that of a freshly minted coin. Defying the adage that "time heals all wounds."

Once again, I saw the stained, peeling wallpaper that seemed older than the apartment itself. The huge coffee table, its brown varnish chipped, and faded, seemed to dominate the center of the room. I turned the focus of my mind to the left until it took in the door of the bedroom where "he" always seemed to stay when he was home. Even now, viewing it from a distance of many years, I felt the same tightness in my chest that I had felt when I was a boy.

\* \* \* \*

"David, come here! Right now!"

Every time I heard him call my name I would feel the same sense of anxiety, mixed with fear, sweep over me. Instinctively, my child's mind would try to assess the situation, and determine whether I should obey, or take flight: How angry was he? Had he been drinking? Was he drunk enough so that if I ran, he wouldn't remember?

I turned to my mother, seeking some clue as to what I should do. She was stirring something in a pan on the stove, and pretended not to notice my dilemma. But, even at the age of seven I was aware enough to notice the tension that had suddenly appeared in her eyes, and how she averted her face from my gaze. It was only recently, however, that I realized the tension in her face was caused by the same fear that was in me.

I remember only one time that my mother had actually stood up to that man in the next room, my father. That was when he had been angered by some triviality, and had taken his belt loose, and was giving me an unusually severe beating. Her voice had been harsh, commanding, as she told my father to stop, that he was going to injure me.

Now, as I looked up at her, and saw the defeat that had been etched in her face long before the fear, I realized that she would not come to my aid this time. It was as if there was only so much reserve strength left in that once dynamic body, and she had to save it for the critical times. At last, my mother turned in my direction, seeming to sense what I was thinking, and bent down to give me a quick hug. She smiled, and I could almost see the face of the pretty woman in the faded photograph that my mother had shown me. I loved her.

She turned me in the direction of the bedroom door, and, giving me a gentle pat on the rump, seemed to be telling me that she was there, and would not let things get too far out of hand. As I reached for the



knob on the bedroom door I remember wondering, as I always did, whether touching the same things he touched would make me as mean as he was.

He was laying on the bed, his back propped against the headboard and one foot resting on the floor. He wore only an undershirt, and tan, corduroy pants, unbuttoned at the top. The wide leather belt he always wore still rested in the belt loops, unbuckled. I stood there in the doorway, watching him as my legs began to tremble. With what seemed like great effort, he motioned me over to him, and my mother's silent promise seemed to be overwhelmed by the growing fear within me. As I moved slowly forward I realized that I was close to wetting my pants, and I held my breath to keep from crying.

My father was normally a handsome man, but the effects of the alcohol seemed to make his facial muscles flaccid, and the reddish tinge of his skin was an early warning of the disease that would someday end his life.

The look on his face told me that something unpleasant was about to happen. But, the anger, which told me that I was about to get a whipping, was absent. Instead, a slight smile, bereft of humor, twisted his lips, and his face seemed to strain in the unusual effort.

"Hi, son," he said, without preamble, "Got something here you might want to read." His voice had taken on the huskiness that too much alcohol always seemed to produce, and his words were slightly slurred. He picked up a section of that day's newspaper, and handed it to me. "Isn't your teacher at school named Jack Flores?" my father asked me. At first the question confused me, because I knew my teacher as "Mr. Flores," and then I remembered that the first day of class he had written his name on the blackboard, and his first name was "Jack." My father pointed to an article on the page, and I began reading.

Even at that young age I was a voracious reader, ahead of my peer group. But my vocabulary was still that of a child's, and I struggled with some of the words and phrases printed in front of me. But gradually I understood that "coronary" meant a person had a heart attack, and the phrase, "failed to resuscitate" was clarified by the last sentence, which read, "he was pronounced 'dead on arrival' at St. Joseph's Medical Center."

My teacher was dead. He had died on the school playground, yesterday, apparently minutes after most of us kids had boarded the school bus to go home. But, Mr. Flores had been much more than my teacher; he had been my friend. The first week of school he had noticed that I was a very shy and withdrawn child, isolated from the rest of the class. He knew that I had an unhappy homelife, and many times he would talk to me after class, and encourage me by saying how smart I was, and how important my education would be for my future.

As I read the article, I gradually began to realize that I would never see Mr. Flores again, and my body suddenly felt flushed, and hot. My breathing became more difficult, and swallowed convulsively, but it felt like something was blocking my throat. Instinctively, I turned to my father, seeking comfort. But, even through the tears that were beginning to form in my eyes, I could see that humorless smile, and realized there was no comfort in those arms.

If I had been a few years older, I would have asked

myself how a human being could be so cruel to his own child. As I grew older, I did ask that question, many times. Of course, at some point I knew that my father actually hated me. Why? I never did find out. My mother would not discuss it.

But, at that particular time, as I looked into the sadistic smile of that man, my mind could not grasp such abstract concepts. Yet, I knew, without actually thinking about it, that something fundamental had changed in my relationship to him. Up until that time, I had always held out the hope that, someday, things would change. That someday, magically, he would treat me as I had seen other fathers treat their children. But, after that day, I stopped believing that that was possible. After that day, I did not care whether he liked me or not. That was the day that I stopped wanting him to love me. That was the day I stopped believing in magic.

## CHINA

I am chipped,  
cracked in two  
All this breakage  
It makes loud  
NOISE  
Dis

rupts trains  
of thought, some  
with no destination  
And then it's that  
huge chasm of  
silence, deafening  
drives me crazy  
So I start chipping  
at myself again  
Slowly, surely  
knowing that if  
I stop,  
It will force me to  
look and feel and  
realize and know.  
I'm the fearful,  
industrious romantic.  
I work at it.  
I'm good at what I do.

By Victoria Seretis

# e.e. cummings: Poetry and Movement

by Paul Levine

e.e. cummings (1894 - 1962)  
somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond  
any experience, your eyes have their silence:  
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,  
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me  
though i have closed myself as fingers,  
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens  
(touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if you wish be to close me, i and  
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,  
as when the heart of this flower imagines  
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals  
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture  
compels me with the colour of its countries,  
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes  
and opens; only something in me understands  
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)  
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

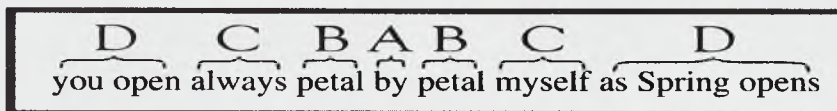


In the foreword to e.e. cummings' book of poems, is 5, he discusses his affinity for movement:

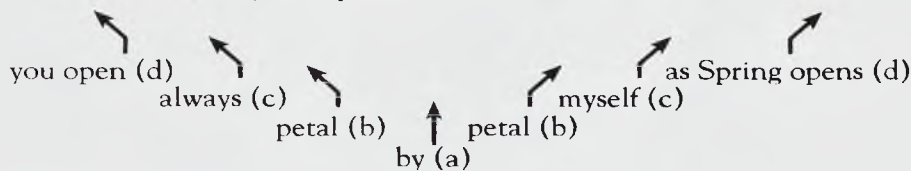
At least my theory of technique, if I have one, is very far from original; nor is it complicated. I can express it in fifteen words, by quoting the Eternal Question And Immortal Answer of burlesk, viz. "would you hit a woman with a child? No, I'd hit her with a brick." Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.

An excellent example of cummings' ability to create movement is his poem, "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond." Specifically, I am impressed with the moving image that he develops in line seven and the manner in which he reinforces this image with an interpolation in line eight. In these lines, he creates images that correspond with his theme that love, like "Spring" (7), has the power to "open" (7, 18) a person as if he or she is a blossoming "rose" (8, 19) or a symbolic clenched fist that has a need to "unclose" (5).

cummings represents this "unclosing" process by constructing line seven in a manner that makes it appear to shuffle off its linear structure and actually take the form of a blossoming "rose" (8, 19). The line is designed symmetrically in order to develop parallel proportions between the end phrases, middle words, and inner most words. For clarity, I have organized a diagram that labels the corresponding parts of line seven:



By starting in the center of the line, "petal by petal," we are given the theme of line seven. That is, the reader will witness, one by one, as if he or she looks at time-lapse photography, the "open[ing]" (7, 18) of each "petal" (7) or word of line seven. The word labeled A, "by," acts as the center of the line and, in effect, the most closed portion of the "rose" (8, 19); it "opens" (7, 18), on either side, to "petal" (7). At this point, line seven begins to visually represent a blossoming "rose" (8, 19). It achieves this not only by its symmetrical construction, but also by expanding the width of the connected words or phrases as the reader's eyes move from the inside to the outside of the line. For example, whereas the A word, "by," only consists of two letters; the B words, the repetition of "petal," have five letters each. This pattern is continued when we reach the C words, "always" and "myself." These words contain six letters each. They not only perpetuate the expansion of line seven, but they also reinforce its mirror-like quality; "always" and "myself" achieve this by containing two of the same letters in opposing positions. For example, if a flower were blossoming, and "always" and "myself" were written on parallel petals, then an observer would see that two letters, which are members of both words, "l" and "y," would directly face each other. Thus, they continue the symmetrical appearance of the line. In the space below, I have designed a diagram representing the physical transformation of the line as it ideologically corresponds to cummings' theme:



When we focus more closely on the "c" words, they look like this:



As we can see, when the words are placed side by side, as petals would be, two letters perfectly correspond. That is, the "y" and "l" are equivalent with their identical twins in the parallel word. For example, whereas "y" is the fifth letter in "always," it is the second letter in "myself." In other words, these letters have second positions in either the beginning or end of each of these words. Thus, when the letters begin to blossom, or the petals begin to separate, the two "y" letters visibly correspond because they both represent the second highest point, that is the second letter, on their petal. Similarly, the two "l" letters represent the second lowest point on their petals. For example, "l" is the second letter of "always" and the fifth, or second to last letter of "myself." Hence, "always" and "myself," without being identical words, are able to continue the physical appearance of petals slowly blossoming outward. Additionally, cummings

chooses these words because of two other similarities that reinforce their physical likeness. For example, although the placement doesn't correspond, these words both contain an "s". Moreover, their likeness is maintained through the comparable shapes of "w" and "m"; these two letters are merely visual inversions of each other.

As we move to the outer-most phrases of the line (i.e., "you open" and "as Spring opens"), we identify two phrases that are connected by the poem's dominant simile. That is, "you" and "Spring" both play the role of an external force that possesses the ability to "open" (7, 18), with "intense fragility," (14) either a lover, such as the narrator, or a "rose" (8, 19). these words are also connected because they are both placed before the word "open[s]" (7, 18). Consequently, they serve the purpose of completing the "open[ing]" of the line as if they are the final "petal[s]" (7) to blossom on a budding rose. Moreover, they continue the expansion of the line because these phrases contain more letters, a combined total of twenty, than the linked words that were previously discussed. In sum, the "unclos[ing]" (5) process of the "rose" (8, 19) is created by two techniques. Firstly, and most importantly, the symmetrical nature of line seven; secondly, the consistent expansion of words or phrases to the outside of the line.

Furthermore, the unfolding process apparent in line seven is reinforced by the interpolation of line eight: "you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens / (touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose" (7-8). Before explicating the content within the parenthesis, it is necessary to analyze the syntactical connection between lines seven and eight. For example, the end of line seven, "as Spring opens," is highlighted in multiple ways besides those previously mentioned. Firstly, "Spring" (7) contains the only capital letter in the entire poem. Thus, cummings magnifies the importance of "Spring" (7) and in effect leads the reader to contemplate its significance. A careful reader will notice the near rhyme between "Spring" and "fingers" from line six. The sonic relationship between these words reinforces the human quality of "Spring". Consequently, after reading and analyzing the poem numerous times, and becoming familiar with cummings' "buried" rhyme between "Spring" and "fingers," the reader returns to the enjambment at the end of the line seven, and enters line eight, more fully aware of the thematic presence of "fingers" (I will return to this point shortly). Additionally, cummings' use of parenthesis hints to the reader that the image represented in line seven will in some way be qualified or amplified; in effect, the diligent reader eventually returns to line eight with two expectations. Firstly, he or she awaits the possible reintroduction of "fingers"; secondly, a further comment on the image of the blossoming rose is anticipated.

As we move inside the parenthesis, we immediately reach "touching," (8) a word that, once again, recalls "fingers" (6). Hence, the reader is alerted that the role of "fingers" most definitely does amplify or qualify, as the use of parenthesis suggests, the image previously explicated in line seven. At this point, it is necessary to look for structural signals that will help us decode the thematic importance of "fingers". The most dramatic and relevant difference between the words within the parenthesis, "touching skillfully, mysteriously," and those words in the rest of the stanza is the presence of a dramatic syllable variation. For example, outside the parenthesis, in stanza two, and dominantly throughout the poem, most of cummings' diction consists of monosyllabic and disyllabic words. In lines seven and eight, for instance, not including the words within the parenthesis, there are no words that have more than two syllables. Specifically, out of a total of thirteen words, six are monosyllable and seven are disyllable; conversely, within the parenthesis, out of a total of three words, there is a sum of ten syllables. Moreover, these syllables are divided in half by the only punctuation of lines seven and eight. That is, there is a comma between "touching" [two syllables] "skillfully" [three syllables] (8) and "mysteriously" [five syllables]. As a result of cummings' syllabic emphasis, the reader should be aware that for a complete understanding of the line, and, in effect, the entire poem, it is necessary to decode the role of the syllables and their connection to the highlighting of "fingers".

I have discovered that e.e. cummings, with his fondness for "that precision which creates movement," has, inside the parenthesis, reproduced the image that he created in line seven; however, instead of witnessing the blossoming of the "rose" (8,19), the reader now observes the "open[ing]" (7, 19) of the narrator's "closed. . .fingers" (5) as if it were the unclenching of a fist. Whereas, in line seven, we were given the image of "petal by petal," one by one, unfolding; in the interpolation, we can hear "finger" (6) "by" (7) "finger" (6) slowly "open[ing]" (7, 18). cummings achieves this by syllable placement. When we read and listen "carefully" (12), we can hear the verbalization of each syllable as if it represents the "unclos[ing]" (5) of each "finger" (6). For this reason, there is a comma after the first five syllables. This comma signifies the pause between the "open[ing]" (7, 18) of the narrator's two hands!! Thus, after discovering the purpose of cummings' syllable variation, the reader is able to comprehend cummings' diction. Firstly, "touching" (8) introduces a physical dimension to the movement inside the parenthesis; hence, it recalls "fingers". Secondly, "skillfully" and "mysteriously" explain the "power of . . .





VINCENT FRESSOLA

intense fragility” (14) that the lover and “Spring” have in common. Moreover, they imply the delicate manner in which cummings labors to write a line.

In total, the importance of cummings’ sonic image can be best understood through its connection to the poem’s final stanza. The last stanza, number five, contains the poem’s only fully end-rhyming quatrain. cummings’ variation toward rhyme acts as a code to clarify the “understand[ing]” (18) mentioned inside the parenthesis of lines seventeen through nineteen:

(i don’t know what it is about you that closes  
and opens; only something in me understands  
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)  
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands  
[the bold letters are mine] (17-20)

In other words, the introduction of an abab rhyme scheme adds a palpable foundation to the enigmatic emotion expressed in the poem; similarly, in the interpolation of line eight, the only other parenthesis in the poem, the “deep[ness]” (19) of the lover’s affection is also clarified. In both instances, there is “something” (18) internal within the structure of the poem that adds logic to the seemingly illogical characteristics of human feeling. That is, the blossoming of the rose, the unclosing of the fingers, and the final stanza’s formal rhyme scheme all serve to give form to those emotions that we usually perceive as undefinable. As a result, e.e. cummings has succeeded in creating a poem that cannot be expressed through the limitations of prose or essay form; instead, “somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond,” belongs to those rare poems that Archibald MacLeish writes about in “Ars Poetica”: “A poem should be palpable and mute / as a globed fruit . . . / . . . A poem should be wordless / as the flight of birds” (1-2, 7-8).

Additionally, a complete understanding of lines seven and eight will also help the reader to grasp what otherwise may be an inscrutable concluding line: “nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands” (20). In the poem’s final two words, the physical presence of the lover’s hands reappear for the first time since “touching” (8). Through the thematic return of the lover’s touch, cummings gives his final comparison between the lover’s capacity to “open” (7) or close the narrator and nature’s analogous affect on a rose. In the negation of line twenty (i.e., “nobody, not even the rain”), cummings suggests that “not even” the life-giving force of spring (i.e., the fertilizing “power” (14) of the “rain”) is as vitalizing as the lover’s “small hands” (20). As stated in stanza four “nothing we are to perceive in this world equals / the power of your [the lover’s] intense fragility” (13-14). Thus, the magical image of line seven, the blossoming of the rose, is, at least thematically, overshadowed by the sonic image of line eight, the unclenching of the narrator’s two hands. Whether or not the reader leaves the poem wondering which of these forces is more potent, he or she is left to contemplate imagery that explores the relationship between nature and the human soul; a similar image is portrayed in Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet*: “The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of / countless petals” (Gibran 55).

A final important point about lines seven and eight is that cummings transcends the linear structure of these lines without altering their typography as he does in many of his poems, such as “1(a)”. He achieves this by creating two images (i.e., the blossoming rose and opening hand) by the use of various techniques, such as symmetrical construction, expansion, and syllable variation. If the reader does not recognize the virtuosity of these lines, he or she remains with only the initial feeling that is produced by reading the poem.

For me, the process of explicating line seven and the interpolation of line eight was enlightening. I am awe-struck by cummings’ ability to unite, with unremitting precision, the content and form of “somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond”. My personal experience with the poem can be defined most clearly through Zen Buddhism. To illustrate this, I leave the reader with a passage that discusses the origin of Zen:

Once during the life of Guatama the Buddha  
a disciple approached him with a gift of  
a golden flower and asked him to preach the  
secret of the doctrine. Guatama took the  
flower, held it aloft and looked at it in  
silence, indicating that the secret lay not  
in the words, but in the profound contemplation  
of the flower itself (Welles 57).





STAIR WITH FOOT

ED DAYIN

# THE SWEETHEART OF THE SONG TRA BONG II

OR

## HOW TO MAKE A COMPLETE ASS OUT OF YOURSELF

Mike Russo

TO: Corporal John Phelps  
FROM: Private First Class Steven Briggs  
RE: Incident occurring on 3/18/70

The following journal entries were found at the scene of the incident. I have arranged them in chronological order, starting from 3/16/70. Private Hellstrom's journal entries were found on his body, having been written on his pants. I believe they comprise his complete, but brief journal. Private Stafford's (whereabouts unknown as of this writing) journal was found in his backpack. I have only included his journal entries dating from 3/16/70, because they contain all the pertinent information relating to the incident. The remainder of his journal is included in my report of the ambush we suffered that led to our arrival in the Montegnard village. I believe these journal entries might help in deciphering the madness of what happened. Following the entries is my report of what happened on 3/18/70.

From the Journal of Private Damien Hellstrom:  
The Last Will and Testament of Damien Hellstrom  
March 16, 1970

I feel the devil closing in on me with every passing second. His fiery breath singes the hairs on the back of my neck. I feel his tongue as it drips burning drops of saliva on my quivering flesh. A plague of flies engulfs me. How much longer do I have to live in purgatory before I can embrace the fires of Hell.

Our platoon was ambushed this morning. There's only three of us left: Briggs, Stafford and myself. I saw Captain Lowry's head explode this morning, leaving us leaderless. I'm still picking pieces of skull and flesh off my person. Private Armstrong died with his head in my lap, leaving a bloodstain as big and as dark as the mouth of Satan. Those rat-eyed chinks shall burn with me, I swear they will. I'm starting this record because I'm sure I don't have many days left, and a man's last thoughts should be collected somehow. I could die any minute in this Godforsaken jungle and my mother will never get to see my corpse. When the devil comes for me I shall accept him with open arms, because God has no place here.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF PRIVATE PETER STAFFORD:  
3/16/70

Our platoon was ambushed this morning about forty clicks from the Tra Bong Mountains. We were out on long distance patrol and we got separated from our company. Captain Lowry, Private Shohorn and Private Edwards were killed in the ambush. We managed to get away, but Private Edwards was killed in the ambush. We managed to get away, but Private Armstrong died of chest wounds shortly thereafter. It's God's mercy I suppose. We weighted down his body and threw him in the river. We had no time to hold a service. It's a miracle I survived, along with Privates Briggs and Hellstrom. Hellstrom is starting to worry me. He never speaks and he has taken to scribbling on his pants. He seems to be like a time bomb waiting to explode.

We are following the river upstream. Briggs says that there is a medical station in the mountains, about forty clicks away. God help us that we get there in one piece.

From the Journal of Private Damien Hellstrom:  
March 17, 1970

Now I begin my descent into hell. The devil's hand has led us to the way station between earth and Hades. It is the heart of darkness. All manners of depravity exist here. Flying insects of all types abound with the fierce intensity of a raging tornado. Man and beast live together and share their food. The land is littered with the dung of all of God's creatures. At the center of this madness the demon Cthulu makes her seat. Her throne is built with the remains of all manner of creatures and plastered with the skins of many more. She rests on the flesh of men! She is in part beast herself. Her eyes burn with the icy green that God hath reserved for the panther. Her long tattered hair hangs down to her backside like the mane of a lion. Her body is adorned with all manners of atrocities. Around her neck she wears the tongues of man, caught in an eternal death scream. Her breast is bare, save for Satan's rosary collected from the fingers of children. She maintains a savage beauty that stirs the fires of my loins. I know this is the Beast calling to me and I shall not refuse him. God has rejected me and hers is my only salvation.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF PRIVATE PETER STAFFORD:  
3/17/70

Today we stumbled across a most fascinating place. We are in a Montegnard village about three clicks from the river. We came upon it very much by accident, but I believe God has led us here for a greater purpose.



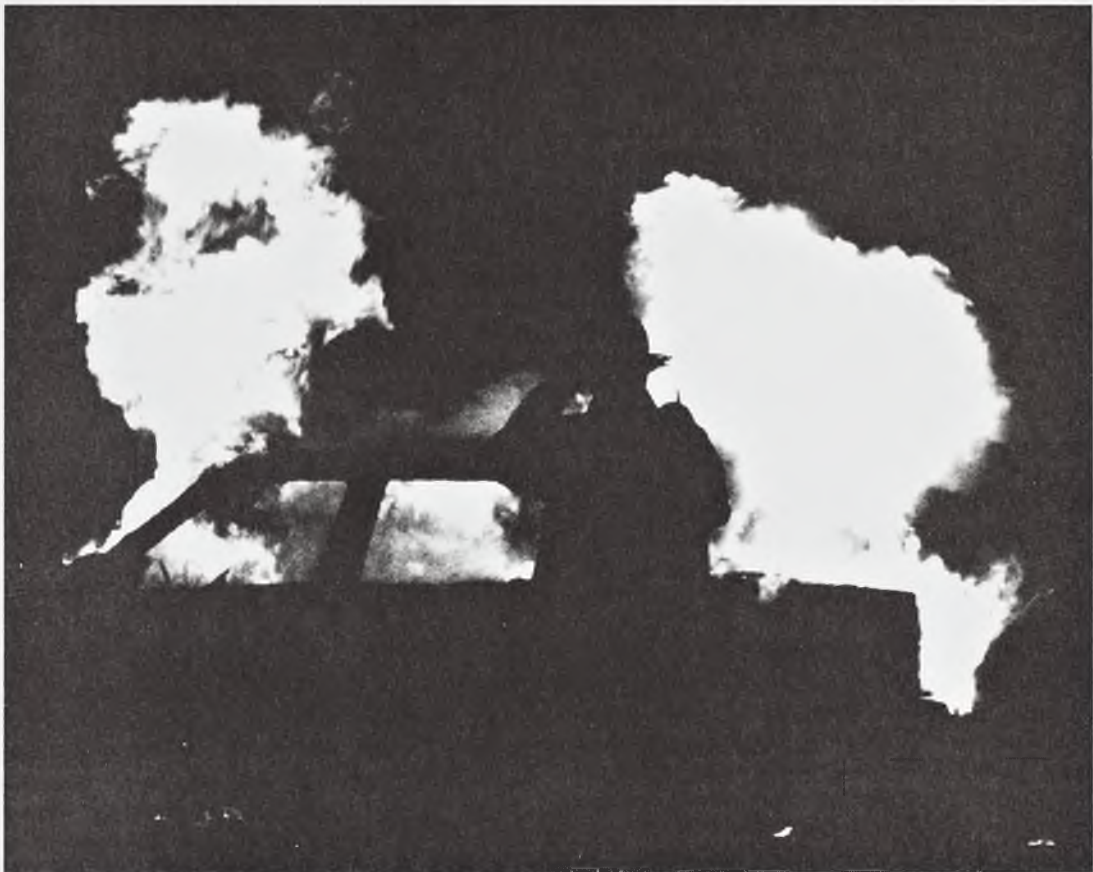
It is a village in total harmony with nature. Men and animals coexist with each other peacefully. Upon our arrival nothing affronted us, and no creature, man or beast, seemed threatened by us. A woman nursing a tiger cub led us to the leader of this oasis—the goddess of the jungle. The savage beauty of the dense jungle explodes within her. It teems with life and burns a fire white hot beneath her skin. Her long blond mane drapes her body like threads spun from the spindle of the sun. In her beauty lies the savage intensity of jungle. Her neck is emblazoned with necklaces culled from tongues and fingers, her seat built on the remains of man and beast. It is as if she holds all that is the jungle in her. She bears all the death and madness of this war and reminds the humans and the animals that this can be no more. Man and beast have been separated for too long. She is God's instrument for reuniting man with nature. Tonight we rest, and tomorrow she shall baptize us so that we can join her.

From the Journal of Private Damien Hellstrom:  
3/18/90

Today is the day of my salvation. She shall anoint us with the fire that will allow me to pass into Hell. I shall take her back with me so that we can rule her at His side. There is nothing more to be said. Thus I close this chapter of my life, for today I start a new one.

This concludes the journal entries. Apparently Private Stafford never made one on 3/18/70, unless he carries it with him. The woman who led the Montengnard tribe is believed to be Maryanne Simmons, an American citizen who disappeared into the Tra Bong mountains nine months prior while visiting her fiancée, a private stationed at the M.A.S.H.

Upon arrival in the village, I was stunned by the amazing union between the animals and the Montengnard. It was as if she had some sort of hypnotic control of them. We rested shortly after arriving. Ms. Simmons told us that we would be initiated into the tribe the next day. Privates Hellstrom and Stafford seemed receptive to the idea. I was playing along, because frankly, there was nothing else I could do. I was free to leave, but then I'd be lost in the jungle, thirty kilometers from any sort of any base. On 3/18/70 a ceremony was staged for us. We were led to the center of the village. Ms. Simmons stood with a staff to anoint us with. Private Stafford was the first. He kneeled by her feet and kissed them while she touched his head with the staff. I followed his lead. When Private Hellstrom reached the platform, he knelt and kissed her feet and then proceeded to appropriate the staff from Ms. Simmons. He embraced her and thrust the staff into her back and into his own chest. Private Stafford screamed and removed the staff from Ms. Simmons back. Private Hellstrom died immediately. She apparently said something to him right before she died, and he stood up holding the bloody staff aloft and screamed something in Montengnard. He ran off into the jungle and the village, man and beast, left with him. I was picked up by a search copter shortly thereafter. This concludes my report of the incident.



MIKE GAROFALO

# INHERITANCE

TC Lynch

**This is a test.**

**You've been told by the proctors to ignore your senses. They're obviously flawed. That's why you're here. Don't waste time arguing. Your presence confirms this statement. Now answer the following question:**

You're standing in a room that smells of smoke, but you've been blindered by a pair of glasses that prevents you from seeing clearly. Do you:

- A) Wait. If the room is actually on fire, the proctors will come with a bucket of water and save you. That's their job.
  - B) Sit quietly. Allow the flames to find you. All things have a purpose. Your purpose is to burn.
  - C) Remove the glasses. Leave the room. Kill the proctors.
  - D) None of the above.
- 

Tommy was sitting on a bench in Battery Park, sipping a can of beer and noshing a couple of lunchish hot dogs (extra onions, kraut on top). Excursionists drifted by like so much financed flotsam, cameras occasionally pointing toward the great green statue and squat red buildings less than a league leeward. Some boarded a charter that would let them gut-shoot the buildings and look up the green lady's dress.

He'd visited both locations when he was a grade schooler; seen their profiles so often since he'd stopped noticing. But it was something to look at while he halfheartedly chewed his food. He brushed a stray piece of cabbage from his thigh, noticing the sheen his pants had acquired. It had been awhile since he'd had his suit cleaned. No, not his suit—his father's suit. A banker's blue Brooks Brothers three piece, two decades behind the fashion curve and damn proud of it. His father had willed it to him, along with an identically tailored gray one.

He'd never seen the suits until the estate executor handed them to him. His father had been a bus driver, a profession where you learn certain truths: show up on time. Follow your route. Put up with assholes. Every morning the grease monkeys told you their machines worked. You believed them. Maybe it was naive, but it let you drive into the morning's daily maelstrom. You did the kind of business that gets you killed when a junkie throws a garbage can from a building's roof and it crashes through your windshield and shatters your skull. No one ever mentioned that part of the business, but it was there when you kissed the wife and kids good-bye each morning, hovering at the edge of your consciousness. You don't need pin-stripes for that kind of life.

Behind Tommy granite slabs inscribed with the names of dead men surrounded an arching eagle. The sea's salt air had provided the bird a patina matching that worn by the woman on the water. He'd seated himself here plenty of times, sometimes staring at the bronze bird, wondering about the price the men on the wall had paid for immor-

ality. Didn't need Brook's Brothers, that's for sure.

Every other time he'd sat in this park he'd had a wad of cash tucked in his front left pocket, with a wallet crammed with plastic riding on his right hip. Today, he carried less than ten bucks. The plastic had pretty much melted. If he tried to use one of his cards to buy something, it'd be confiscated. But they were still handy as identification. Tommy polished off the last of the franks as an older fellow carrying a brown bag settled beside him on the bench.

"Hey there, pal," the fellow said. "Hell of a day. One hell of a beaut of a day, ain't it?"

"Beat it," Tommy said. He drained off his beer and tossed the can toward a wire basket by the end of the bench. It rolled the basket's rim and dropped in for two.

"What's the matter, kid? You don't like pleasant conversation on a warm Spring day?" The fellow reached into the bag and pulled out two cans of Genessee Cream Ale. "Especially with a guy willing to share this whole damn six pack? What, you too fancy-assed to drink with a stranger?" He offered Tommy the can, a short, crooked smile playing across his face, reaching up to his eyes.

Tommy took the can, popped the tab with a practiced thumb, and grasped the stranger's empty hand. "Shit no, Jack," Tommy said, shaking the stranger's hand. "I ain't too fancy-assed to say no to anybody offering me cold Gennies." Tommy glanced down at his tie and wiped away a dollop of onion juice with the can's bottom edge.

"My name's not Jack, friend. It's Bedlam, Terry Bedlam."

"Tommy. Where you from, Ter?"

"Oh, nowhere special. California if you mean where was I hatched. Death Valley. Haven't been there in a long time though. Spend most my time wandering the country, seeing sights."

Tommy sipped his beer. Bedlam was a big guy, with sandy brown hair and eyes the color of store bought ice.

"First time in New York?"



Bedlam swallowed a big slug from his can and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. An onyx stone set in gold twinkled on his pinkie. "Hell no! Love this city. Come here every chance I get, 'specially in the Spring. Too humid in the summer for my tastes. You're a local, huh?"

"That obvious?"

"May as well be tattooed on your head way that voice of yours honks. Bronx, right?"

Tommy smiled, took a deep pull from his beer. "Yeah." He pointed to Staten Island, barely visible through the haze hanging over the harbor. "Over there since I was ten. Used to be like living in the country. Now it's just Brooklyn with trees."

"And you don't like trees?"

"Don't like Brooklyn."

They sat for a few silent moments, then Tommy turned to face his benefactor. "What do you do, Terry? That you can spend all your time traveling and giving out free beers?"

"Oh, little of this, little of that. Mostly I just draw from investments. Daddy Bedlam knew a thing or two about making money. Left me a pretty tidy pile when he kicked off." Terry held his can up. "Here's to inheritance!"

They clinked their cans and drank them dry. Terry reached into the bag and brought out two fresh ones. "What about you, kid? What do you do to make ends meet?"

"My ends don't meet, Terry," Tommy said. "They're barely on speaking terms." The interviews he'd worn his Brook's Brothers for had ended same as dozens of previous ones had, with a variation of "Eat shit and die" used by Manhattan personnel flacks to blow off losers. Tommy's hand disappeared into his suit jacket and produced a box of Marlboros. "I do free-lance work mostly. There's enough around that I don't go totally broke. Come close sometimes, though." Tommy pulled a cigarette from the box, then offered one to Terry.

"Nah. Gave 'em up three years ago. What kind of free-lancing you do?"

"Writing, editing . . . sometimes I play computer geek when I find someone who doesn't know where the plugs go on the machine they just bought." Tommy took a book of matches from his pocket and lit the cigarette, his hands protecting the flame from the harbor's insistent breeze. "Lately I slouch around looking for something full-time."

"Any luck?"

Tommy took a long drag on his cigarette, blowing the smoke through his nostrils as he spit out a hacking laugh. "Oh, sure. I'm a full-time member of the 'We'll Let You Know' patrol. I've heard that song from the employment industry elite." Tommy drank some more of his beer, staring out at the water. "Doesn't even bother me anymore, hearing that tune. It's like when you get junk mail where they say that smart, successful bastards like yourself are

exactly who should be getting whatever they're selling. I check off 'Bill me later' and stiff 'em. None of them seem to catch on. Shit keeps coming."

Bedlam reached over and gave Tommy a warm smack on the shoulder. "That's the spirit, kid! Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke!"

The pair sat on the bench, laughing and sipping beer, ignoring the sidelong glances of tourists and lunch time passers-by. Tommy's laugh faded down as his thoughts turned to the overdue rent he was still two hundred short on delivering, but was expected to turn over in full in two days or get his ass and gear tossed out on the street. He drained back the beer and reached for another.

"Ain't really so funny, Terry," Tommy said. "Sometimes I wonder if I'd be better off chucking it all over the side, you know? Just throw up my hands, say 'Fuck you, world. You win,' and check my ass out of this hotel." Tommy rose from the bench and walked across



STEVEN R. SCHWARTZ

the promenade to the railing running along the Battery's bulkhead. He put the can to his lips and tilted his head back, letting the cold, smooth amber fill his mouth and throat. He squeezed the can, forcing its contents out in a splattery stream, some dribbling down his chin as he inhaled the beer in airless gulps. The can crumpled as the last drops settled on his bottom lip. He hurled the container into the harbor and gripped the railing, flakes of black paint cracking loose under his fingers.

"You hear me, you fucks? Fuck all your asses! I don't wanna play this game no more!"

Tommy turned back to the bench. The bag was still there, but Terry was gone. Tommy looked up and down the promenade but couldn't spot the old fellow anywhere. When he looked in the bag, there were six beers waiting. Tommy sat down and polished them off. After he tossed the last dead soldier into the garbage can, he held the brown sack above his head and turned to look the great green eagle square in its soul-less eyes.

"Here's my inheritance, you fucker! Does this get my name on your walls?"

# Memories of Death

Robert Levine

It's almost time. My brothers and myself refer to it as "Daddy Season." It's only about one fourth of the year, (December to March 11th, his birthday). During this time of the year I feel especially empty. A large cloud usually travels with me. It's as if I'm trying to push my way through a thick fog. I fail. This year I think I'm a little more prepared. I know not to resist. I'll let the fog settle over me without aggravating it.

The memories seem to pop up more frequently during "Daddy Season." The hollow memories. The empty memories. There are endless amounts of them. Some make me feel as if there is nothing inside me. Absolutely nothing. No blood, no heart, no guts, nothing. Hollow-like death.

My Father died of multiple myeloma, cancer of the bones. The disease ate his body. It ate his bones until he became frail. Dead. His bones were not enough to support his body. He needed two canes as well. The sound of his canes smacking our wooden floors is a vivid memory for me. The metal canes had rubber bottoms. The rubber hitting the wood would leave a thumping echo in my stomach. I would always know if he was walking in the house. Always.

One of the memories I have of his illness is especially terrifying. I was about thirteen years old. My bedroom was right next to his. He snored very loudly. He always snored very loudly. I always hated it. However, now that he was very sick—now that he was dying—I loved his snoring. I depended upon his snoring. After helping him on his twenty minute journey from the bathroom to his bed, I would prepare to sleep. I would calm myself. I would listen. He would snore. I would again listen, praying to hear him snore. After a few agonizing seconds, he would. It would go on like this until I fell asleep. It took awhile.

The most common time for emptiness to plant itself inside of me is when I'm by myself. It was late at night. I was at the hospital. I was sitting in a wheelchair, which was in the hallway. The chair rolled back and forth, with little effort from me. I stopped it from moving next to a stairway entrance. I sat for some time. I listened to the wind swirl up the staircase. It was very powerful; moving extremely fast. It flew up the stairs - right into my stomach and swirled up to my throat. This tornado activity removed my insides.

My father was very stubborn. He wanted all of us to go back to our normal lives. He didn't want us to waste our time watching him die. He insisted my brother Peter go back to college. However, it came to the point where he could possibly die any second. My other two brothers and myself then decided to pick Peter up at the train station.

Adam was driving. Paul was in the passenger seat. I was in the back, behind Adam. Peter came in the car and sat next to me. For a moment we sat in the car outside Madison Square Garden. I looked out the window and saw a humongous city. Huge buildings. I was intimidated, scared. I sat in the car with all that I had left to love. I waited for the inevitable. My heart was screaming. Boxes with nothing in them. That's all we were - empty boxes.

I was sitting at the kitchen table with my mother. My aunt and grandfather were in the living room. Adam was in his bedroom. Paul was at school. Peter was at the hospital. The date was February 23rd, 1987. It was a Monday at about 3pm. The phone rang once. My mother answered. I knew. He was dead. My body involuntarily shook. Then I became calm. My mother needed comfort. My 82 year old grandfather had outlived his son. He needed comfort - big time. I sat on the floor next to his chair and held his hand. He moaned. I couldn't believe my father was dead. He moaned. I couldn't believe. . . He moaned. . . couldn't. . . moan. . . I couldn't moan. He believed.

Later, I was alone in the living room. I sat in a big, soft chair. I pointed it directly at the TV and attempted to let it "take me away." It took me nowhere. That second was the most blank, nothing second of my life. I was so hollow that I wasn't sure if I was there - if I existed. I remained.

"Daddy Season" is back, but I wish it would leave. I wish I didn't have anymore haunting hollow thoughts. I would like them to disappear. In many ways they have. I don't think I have any more fresh thoughts about it — just memories. I think. I eat dinner. I look around at what is left of my bruised family after our war with death. I realize "dinner time," which used to be very special in my house, is not the same. Daddy is no longer at the dinner table. And even now, four years after his death - I'm hollow. Dead.





M. CAFARO



COLLEEN MCGRAHAM



# M & M's

## for Phylis and Kerri

Thomas Deignan

As if contending with an unexpected and wrathful bout of diarrhea weren't bad enough. As if sitting here, stinking and splashing in the first floor bathroom of the downtown Court of Appeals (it was the closest available toilet) weren't enough of a twist for a day that started out pretty good. No, now Kerri sees that she has, in the haste of trying to keep her underpants clean, inadvertently selected and ducked hurriedly into the bathroom's handicapped stall. (She didn't notice the bars, but did note the spaciousness.) Of course, what comes clunking in the bathroom door but an old man in a wheelchair? He enters noisily, and has remained so, pounding on the door and alerting her that he is about to call security and that, as a handicapped person, he has priority over her in usage of this stall. It's like the parking spaces in the lots, he's said several times.

"Look, I'm not having fun in here. Could you please just wait?" Kerri sighs to the man between groans, helpless.

"It certainly don't smell like you are."

She grimaces, and sees, under the stall's door, the two large wheels, a decrepit white, crumbling hand and dull, black rubber shoes. Realizing that she's ducked into the men's room didn't even matter at this point.

The hurricane in her bowels reluctantly and noisily emptied itself into the toilet, and she sits and wallows in the ebb, and waits for the next wave, the next phase of the sludgy flow. The wheels under the door remain, unmoving.

This is awful she thinks. I need to take another shower now. Ugh. And the baby shower later tonight!

Because of the shower and Phylis' mood (What will it be?) Kerri pretty much dreads going home. She dreads this almost as much as she dreads. . .wiping herself clean.

Feeling her entire outfit stained, from her broad tan blazer to her matching knee-length skirt, Kerri fumbles through her black pocketbook looking for her house key. The three steps leading up to the modest one-level brick house with the small green-brown lawn would have been a perfect time to locate the keys, but she waited until she was holding her pocketbook in one hand and holding the white screen door open with her body. She spots a crowded ring of metal and pulls it out but they are her work keys from the hospital. (She's a nurse.) She mutters to herself, releases them back into the chaos of her purse and produces the right set of keys. They quickly slip from her fingers and splash and puddle onto the pavement, still warm from a day of cloudless summer sun.

"Damn it!" she whispers to herself as she bends against the resistance of her pocketbook and body bulk and high heels to retrieve them. They are in her hands only seconds when she drops them again. She only laughs this time, feeling a slight, teary lump in her throat. Kerri sets her pocketbook on the gritty cement, grabs the keys and sets about rattling the doorknob, which is loosely set in the door, so that it may open.

And sitting right there, watching TV, is Phylis, her housemate and sister.

"Hey, what's up?" says Phylis to an incredulous Kerri.

"Didn't you hear me out there?!?" Kerri asks annoyed.

"Yeah, where's your key?"

"Where's my key?"

"Yeah, where's your key?" Phylis tries again dumbly, eyes on the TV.

"I couldn't find it. . .it was. . .it was. . ." Kerri huffs, and heads through the small, cream, sofa-covered-with-plastic living room, into the kitchen.

She flips the flame under the kettle on, hoping a hot cup of tea and a spot of rum will help her escape from a day that seems to have spun out of her control. And, again, the dreaded gray boredom of their cousin's baby shower looms, contrasting, strangely to her, with the white light of the kitchen. Phylis clunks into the kitchen, balancing herself on four inch heels.

"What time do you want to go?"

Phylis' voice has maintained a squeak that Kerri is simply numb to, the way she has become numb to Phylis' exaggerated high heels and lipstick that is always too bright and somewhat

splotched beyond the limits of her lips.

"...want to go?" she asks herself before sighing aloud and smiling. "As late as possible."

"Good, because I still have to shower."

"Why didn't you open the door when I was fishing for my keys?" Kerri calmly, but paternally asks.

Phylis, walking towards the shower, spins and glares.

"Hey, look, how the hell do I know who the hell you are when you're comin' in the door like that, huh? Rattlin' the knob and everything. . ."

Kerri, defeated already, returns, "but I obviously had a key."

"How the . . .look. . .OK. . ." Phylis' splotchy lips sputter and she grabs at her frizzy, thinning, jet black hair. Her fingers burrow beyond the hair and hold her head, wanting to squeeze it, to pop it like a white facial pimple.

"How the hell do I know who the hell you are at the door?" she quickly spits out, transparent hazel eyes wide open, staring right at Kerri. "How should I know? On damn Oprah yesterday or last week they showed. . .they. . .they showed. . .I don't know. . .dangers in the house or crime or car jacking. . .I mean how the hell am I supposed to know?"

Kerri just nods as Phylis, exonerated because she feels she's right, tears jovially into the bathroom, on her heels and big legs. Normally Kerri would have chided Phylis for running late or for needing to take a shower when she is clearly already made up. Normally Kerri would have, but she's in no mood now, and in no hurry anyway.

The tea kettle whistles and Kerri, listening to Phylis sing to a blaring Bobby Vinton record in the shower, places an herbal tea bag and hot water into a cup, along with a gulp of sweet, 151 proof rum. She hates rum, but it always tastes fine mixed with the tea. And the tingly feeling the alcohol gives her sprouts tiny gooseflesh pimples all over her arms.

"Ooooooooh," she shivers, barely audible.

What should I wear she wonders. Her anus itches incessantly, but her stomach does feel better. She makes several woozy attempts, after the tea, to re-wipe herself, but it only dries her out and irritates her more. Earlier, while in the bathroom, thick with steam after Phylis' shower, Kerri looked at the fogged mirror and saw artwork typical of Phylis: ugly, cartoonish faces, three or four, and in big, block letters, BOO!

Kerri, in her room, glares at the image of herself in the mirror and fights tears. Her wide belly with its stretched skin reaches almost as far out as her stout breasts.

"I'm fat," she whispers, "I'm really. . .really fat." Not fat enough so that her boyfriend would leave her, however, which is why her day, at least started out good. They made up this morning after three days of thorny bickering.

The shrill phone breaks her spell, and she waits for Phylis, dressed and in the kitchen (singing still,) to answer. The phone rings a third time, and Kerri is about to yell but realizes it's futile because when Phylis is in a mood, (and she is in a mood!) she isn't going to answer the phone. She won't answer the phone, open the door, open the mail, read the paper, talk, eat, whisper. . .whatever. The best you could hope for, aside from avoiding publicly embarrassing scenes, would be some comedy, such as when she occasionally trails off into Dr. Seuss language.

(Once, breaking a placid silence at dinner Phylis sang, in Seussian tongue, "I feel it's my duty to tell you sis, this dinner you've made tastes like shit and piss. It's cold, it's burnt, it's rubbery as hell. And if you're trying to poison me, you're doing quite well." Kerri, initially crushed since she's insecure about her cooking, later falling into sleep, couldn't believe that Phylis had put forth such a description. Had she sat there and plotted the rhyme scheme out? Was she capable? Or did it just come out, like a child instinctively spitting out food it doesn't want? Either way, she laughed and was amazed, planned or not. She laughed herself to blissful sleep, and for weeks after, the mere thought brought laughter. Since then, the thrill has worn off. And besides, she hasn't done it in a while.)

The phone rings a fifth time.

"Hello."

"Kerri?"

"Hi Aunt Kate."

"Why are you out of breath?"

"Oh, I was in the shower and I had run to get the phone."

Aunt Kate asks Kerri to bring some soda over for the shower party, if possible, if passing a store on the way.

"Oh damnit, WILL YOU GET DRESSED!" Phylis screeches at the sight of Kerri in her bra and underpants on the phone, in the middle of the kitchen floor, white on white. Aunt Kate hears this clearly and tersely asks if Phylis is coming. Phylis continues talking loudly as Aunt Kate notes how good Kerri has always been and how good Phylis used to be, especially as a child when all she ever liked to do, when she visited, was play Perfection and watch the pieces, the jagged stars, the triangles and those round, what rhombuses? explode loudly from the board.

"OK Aunt Kate, we'll pick up some soda," says Kerri, over a belching and rambling Phylis, cutting off Aunt Kate, who barely squeezes in an, "Oh, I'm sorry, OK, buh-bye."

Phylis, filling a cup with water at the sink, continues hammering until Kerri grabs each of her shoulders from behind and begins yelling.

"What do you think you're doing, talking like that when I'm on the phone, making an ass of yourself? How about a little respect, huh, for me and for yourself?"

A new coat of black-cherry colored lipstick, beyond the lip-line of course, shines in the dim kitchen light, as Phylis replies, looking away, "Oh, who was that? Aunt Laura, Aunt Kate, they all hate me anyway. . ."

Kerri grabs her older sister's hugely padded shoulders again and, looking overweight, yet broad in her tight, white undergarments, focuses in on her.

"No, look at me. I'm sick of this, all right, it's the same type of wild-eyed stuff all the time. You get scared and paranoid and. . .and. . .you just don't make any sense." Kerri lets go of Phylis' shoulders, collects her brain, and steps away. Kerri sighs, closes her eyes and pleading for reason asks, "Why wouldn't you answer the phone? You're right here!!"

"Put some clothes on, please," was the simple reply.

Phylis quiets and retreats as if Kerri has said something quite wrong. Paranoid? Well, it could be, but no one ever suggested it so it's not as if Phylis would be sensitive to it. It's not like saying, for the first breakthrough time "Why do you drink?" to an obvious alcoholic, or "Why do you



cheat?" to an obvious adulterer. There is no mutual, unspoken, agreement about what's wrong with this woman. There are no words that embrace reality and set things off every now and then, no unutterable phrases that color the tender blankness of all that may be wrong with her over-made-up, overweight, poorly-dressed, loony fucking sister! So why the withdrawal? Either way it's short-lived because it leaves Kerri alone standing in her underwear and Phylis contentedly singing to Bobby Vinton in her room.

And a dirty itch, on top of this, still lives inside Kerri's anus. She's picking at it gently when the door bell rings. Her first reaction, since Phylis is in rare form today, is to get the door, until the sight of her wide papery thighs makes her realize she isn't exactly dressed to pay the paperboy, or whoever it may be.

Pretty much trapped on an island, Kerri is shocked to hear Phylis' door open, her heels (shiny, patent leather) clonk to the door, and the jingle of the loose doorknob. Kerri even smiles in the dusk-shadowed room. There is mumbling, and Kerri frowns in an effort to hear better. She moves as close to the door as she can without exposing herself, in an attempt to decipher the mummings when Phylis' voice rises above a mumble.

"Where does the money really go, HUH?"

What the hell is she doing? What is she talking about?

Kerri hears a faint reply. "Ma'am I could just leave if you don't want any. It's a collection. . . I work for the church house at St. Margaret's."

Phylis laughs comfortably, knowingly. "Yeah, but how much do you pocket of it, huh? How the hell much do you pocket?"

Kerri grimaces, makes a tight, dry fist and flies around the corner to save the little boy from this interrogation. The boy, black-skinned and slight, dressed in baggy turquoise shorts and a white tank top, pops his eyes out. Kerri steps in front of Phylis and glares at her.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Phylis screams at Kerri's near-nakedness, and turns to walk into the kitchen. "He's selling M&Ms for the church, and here you are, tits out here defending him."

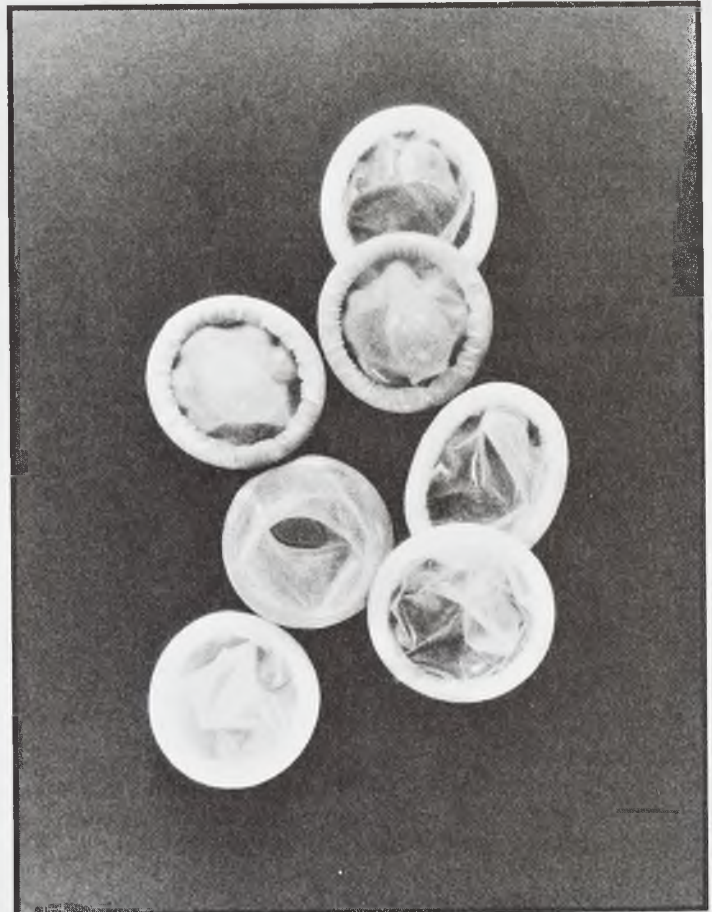
The boy begins to inch out the door when Kerri grabs him and growls, "what are you selling?"

"M&M's, dollar a box," he says mechanically, as he did to a thousand doors before, (but never to an almost-nude female, which would seem to be something he'd wish for, black or white). But he's scared and confused. Kerri's right hand grips the shoulder strap on his shirt. His friend selling across the street is lucky, and for now he wishes he were she. Phylis hums in the kitchen loudly, as Kerri rampages through her pocketbook, tossing aside loose change, gum wrappers and a Bible pamphlet which asks "Do you think it's too late to be saved?" She pulls out a twenty dollar bill, approaches the boy and says, loudly, "Mmmm, M&Ms, I like them. I'll take. . . twenty boxes. I like the peanut kind better, but as long as the money goes to charity. . .!" The boy, his hand shaking, sorts out twenty boxes, never taking his eyes off of Kerri, and lays them on the golden, dusty rug. He, like Kerri, knows Phylis, silent now, will have to reply to her sister's clear instigation. For a second, each stares at the

hallway, waiting for Phylis to come. Kerri hands the twenty over and the kitchen sink is still running water. Water tinkles and splashes slowly to the tan kitchen tile and, seconds later, as the twenty is placed into the boy's small, tentative hand, Phylis rounds the corner, facially calm, but walking quickly towards the two (as she saw it) co-conspirators.

"That money is not leaving this house," she says, coming at them. Before she reaches them, she trips over her heel, which is snared in the rug, and, airborne momentarily, thuds, with a scream, to the ground. Kerri, who has already opened two boxes of M&Ms, explodes in laughter, and flings the candy into the air, forging an abrupt, harsh vision of reds and greens and yellows, which, in sight and sound, clash pleasantly with the low cream ceiling, and settle, like muffled hail, on the rug. The boy hugs the big box breaking the handle, and running across the street, sniffing to himself, with tears filling his eyes.

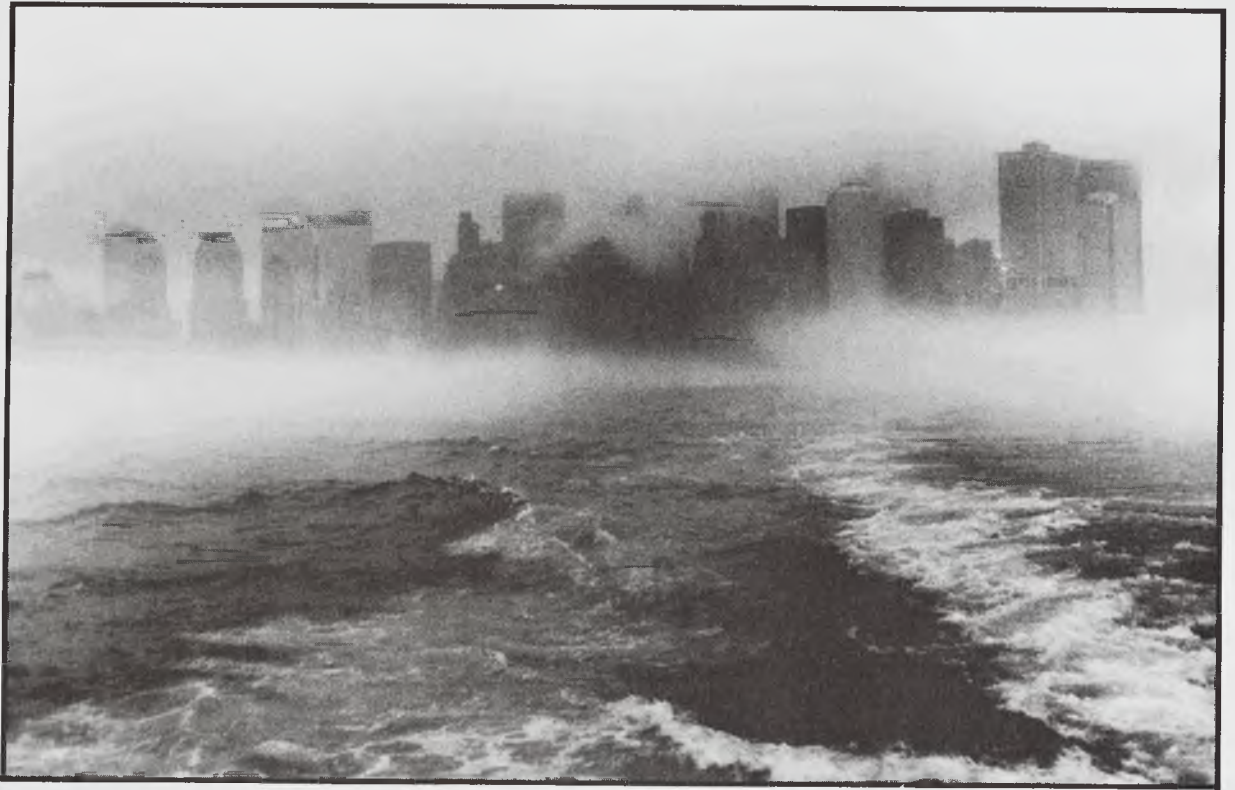
Phylis gets to her feet, hot and angered, and fixes a glare on Kerri. Phylis slaps her hand on the bookcase next to where she fell, thinks for a second, and heads off to her room, her fizzy, black hair tossed all over. Kerri, staring nowhere, feeling naked and embarrassed, quietly closes the heavy interior door, shuts her eyes and places her head in her hands. She sobs twice, quietly, swallows and retrieves her bathrobe from the bathroom. She slouches on the soft couch, which inhales her, recovering from the soft rum high and hopes the twenty wasn't the only bill in her wallet, because she still has to buy the soda for Aunt Kate.



ANONYMOUS



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## IN LINE AT McDONALD'S

a homeless woman asks me to buy her a sausage biscuit  
an old I think quite old woman asks me to buy her a sausage biscuit  
it is breakfast time  
I am on my way to Cliff's house and I'm at the McDonald's in the Staten  
Island Ferry Terminal  
in the Staten Island Ferry Terminal because Staten Island is where I'm from  
well not from, I guess  
I live in Staten Island at this time  
is anybody really from anywhere?  
I mean I'm from that chair at this moment  
I am from this mouth  
I sleep in a place in Staten Island  
we sleep in a place in Staten Island  
I lock my things behind a door in Staten Island  
but are we, any of us  
really from a place  
or places?  
it is fun to think of Bernadette riding on the Staten Island Ferry  
what does she think about?  
she is the type of person that would really enjoy riding on the Staten Island  
Ferry and she does  
I tell the old woman I can't buy her a sausage biscuit  
I tell her I don't have any change, either  
I think:  
"I have to save this money to make copies of my poem for Tamarind."  
When I get to the counter, though, I order a "sausage biscuit extra value  
meal"  
an "extra value meal" is a paper bag  
an "extra value meal" is a paper bag and a sausage biscuit extra value meal  
is a paper bag that holds a gooey sausage biscuit, golden hash browns,  
and hot coffee  
I take it and I go to find the old woman  
"Want some breakfast?" I ask her  
"There's coffee and cream and sugar in the bag." I say  
and I think about my grandmother back home  
I talked to her on the phone last night  
she said, "I love you" like she always does  
she always says, "I love you"  
and I said, "I love you, too"  
I always do that  
an "extra value meal" contains what are normally items sold separately  
and the name "extra value" implies that the individual items have some sort  
of value on their own but that when part of an "extra value meal" they  
have even more, yes  
extra  
value  
yes these already valuable items have extra value when sold as part of an  
"extra value meal"--a sausage biscuit, hash browns, and coffee  
I told my grandmother, "I love you" like I always do

Wayne Berninger



JACK GRIGGS



# History of A Prince Fan

Casey Kelly

From the AP Wire:

Minneapolis, MN. What's in a name? A lot of publicity for the former Prince, whose decision to change his name to an unpronounceable symbol is keeping everyone guessing about what the pop star will call himself.

That Sign Guy, HeShe, Purple prima donna and Andy (short for androgynous) are among suggestions made by more than 400 people who have called the Star Tribune newspaper, which invited readers to name that Prince.

The rock singer announced last week that he wants to be referred to with the symbol that combines the signs for male and female. It's also the title of his latest album. But there's no spoken word for the symbol and the former Prince, born Prince Rogers Nelson, gave no clue how to pronounce it.

The newspaper reported Monday that a few callers said they'd go along with whatever Paisley park, the Minneapolis-born pop-star's record studio, decided.

But most callers were cynical.

"Prince's new moniker can be traced back to some old Persian script. Roughly translated, it means gimmick," said Tom Shaughnessy of Minnetonka.



The first time I encountered "Him," I was walking through the front door of my friend Michelle's house. Michelle and I were both 9 years old and "He," 12 years our senior.

Initially what struck me were the many elements about him that told me he was a she. The long hair that was flipped up on the ends seemed OK but he had a mustache and hair on his chest. I just stared at the album cover a few minutes before I asked Michelle, "Who's that?"

"Can I see it?" I asked. In the black female grade schooler jargon that translated into, "can I pick it up and inspect it closely?"

"No, my mother wouldn't allow it," she said. So I was stuck with just staring at the odd picture with the studio blue background. The man with the woman's hair style, the mustache and the hair on his chest, blatantly stared back at me.

Probably because I grew up with three brothers, I have been exposed to very macho ideals about masculinity. The kiss of death was given to any man when one of my brothers called him a homosexual. "Hey that guy's a faggie," one of them would say. I knew what they would classify the man with the woman's hair style that I saw for the first time on an album cover that afternoon.

But I didn't care. I was always attracted to the different and the odd. I had fallen in love with Prince that day.

There's a good chance I may have heard of the man with the hair before I saw him that day in Michelle's house, but it didn't matter. That afternoon in 1979, I began a relationship that would be with me for many years and continues today.

I don't remember how, but three years later, I obtained a copy of Prince's "1999" cassette tape. I listened to it intently. I found the profanity exhilarating. All the dirty words I used in private conversations with my friends, he used right there on a recording that could be played and replayed. As a preteen? I found this phenomenon quite titillating.

My mother, concerned about the artist that I was spending so much time obsessing on, listened to the tape and promptly took it from me. She said that any man that used the name of God and motherfucker in the same sentence was no good.

Some time later, in the school year of 1982-83, I was a seventh grade student at Eliot Junior High School in my hometown of Washington, D. C. In my second period math class, I met my first over-obsessed Prince fan. Her name was Philamena and boy, did she get carried away with the man. By that time, he had crossed over from his cult status in NYC into the mainstream and had become somewhat of a household name. Many people agreed with either my brothers, my mother or both. He had to be gay and/or satanic.

If he were either, it didn't matter to me and it certainly didn't matter to Philamena. She cut her hair like his and put studs on her trench coat in the same formation that Prince did on the cover of his "Controversy" LP. She wore that trench everyday. She always talked about him. Even I got tired of her. In her school ID photo, she looked like him. She was elated. It was

erie. Studying all available photographs of Prince, Philamena was able to emulate his facial expressions. At the tender age of 12, she had recasted her entire identity around Prince.

Another student brought a cousin to school one day. She introduced the relative as the biggest Prince fan in the world. The relative was introduced to Philamena. The two girls went at it. They began to quiz one another wildly on the details of the man. What was his favorite color? What was his favorite thing to eat? They argued over what a certain lyric to a certain stanza of a certain song was. I was lost.

Then the inevitable came. "How tall is he?"

I had read many of the teen and rock magazine articles about Prince, but not that closely. I was probably around the five foot mark myself. I didn't know exactly how tall I was, let alone Prince.

One of the girls said he was 5'2". The other said he was 5'3". An argument broke out and the two girls almost came to blows. As I watched the whole thing, I clutched a copy of a magazine that Philamena had brought to school. Prince was on the cover.

I have never seen or heard from Philamena since junior high.

Back in the early 1980's, there were no video shows for young people like me who didn't have cable. Just late night shows that came on after hours. Many times I sat through David Letterman, waiting for the video shows to come on. Prince would be featured often, singing his song "Controversy" in front of stained glass windows, flipping his long trench coat back so that you could see his butt which hung out of the side of his pants. He had cut the pants that way and the sight would always wake me out of my semi-sleepiness. I loved that guy and there was no way I was ever going to give that feisty little fellow up.

My mother surprisingly took me to see Prince's first movie "Purple Rain" on my fourteenth birthday in July of 1984. He seemed more human than he ever had. His lyrics or the tidbits of information in the Black fan magazines didn't do him justice. The shortness of his stature became more real to me. His speaking voice seemed deeper than his singing voice did on the radio.

There was a woman in the theater who sat a few rows behind and to the left from my mother and me. She had purchased the soundtrack to the movie before hand and had learned all the words. She was singing aloud through out the movie. I was glad because I could clearly understand the lyrics. My mother was annoyed. "I swear, I just don't understand you Prince fans." I never understood why my mother took me to his movie, she never gave up her opinion that he was agent of the devil.

The next crazed-out Prince fan I ran into was named Tracy. Her mother was a lawyer and her father was a doctor. It was 1984 and my parents had separated. At the time, my mother was too poor to buy me clothing at the fast rate that my adolescent body was growing. Tracy and her sister periodically gave me hand-me-down clothing to wear.

Tracy had everything she needed and wanted, including all the popular Prince posters. The posters were hung on her bedroom walls and ones was even inside her closet door. She would just start at them and I with her. There was one showing Prince in a shower stall wearing scanty

black underwear. In the background was a crucifix and I felt guilty about staring and lusting at the photo. Another poster had Prince in a room with two windows. One window showed a daytime scene and the other a nighttime scene. I was falling deeper and deeper in love. Tracy was a traitor, though. She also had posters of Michael Jackson that she adored just as much.

I recently spoke to Tracy's mother this past May at my brother Kevin's wedding. Tracy has a degree as a recording engineer and is pursuing a second one. She specializes in religious music. "I don't think she's interested in Prince anymore," her mother told me.

Prince continued to hit the charts in the 1980's, especially the R&B one that I kept up with all through high school. There was a fellow student I occasionally associated with named Monica. She had brought the Prince "Sign 'O' The Times" cassette to our 11th grade history class and during the lecture, she copied the lyrics of a few of his songs on notebook sheets of paper. She wanted to be able to learn them by heart. Prince seemed to always do something odd to his fans like print the lyrics so small you could barely read them. I wondered if he knew people like Monica cared.

Monica is now a wife and mother and lives in Germany.

Throughout my school years, my mother continued to try to dissuade me from enjoying the music of Prince. "Oh, he's a beautiful ole thing but you know he's evil don't you? Just look at those gorgeous eyes. The Bible tells you how the devil will come, it plainly says 'and he shall come as an angel of light.'"

In my freshman year in college, I joined a record club. Along with my best friend Erick, I began to collect all of his works. I got the "Purple Rain" soundtrack. "Parade," the soundtrack to his second movie, "Under the CherryMoon," and "Around the World in a Day." I had to have his poor selling follow-up record to "Purple Rain," and all the others. I even replaced 1999 after all those years. My mother allowed my 2-year-old niece to destroy it one afternoon, though. She claimed that as she saw the baby pull the tape off the cassette reels and stretch it out of shape, she couldn't get to her fast enough. I don't think she even tried.

I have totally consumed each of Prince's albums. I have studied, examined, labored, started at, and memorized every, beep, quirk, hoot and holler that he has had to offer. Lost in the private world of my headphones, all the delicate details of his instrumentation comes through. Someone once told me that on some songs, he played all the instruments, and that he had taught himself to play each of them.

My brother Kevin's wife, Tarita who I have affectionally labeled a holy roller was very disturbed when she found out that I was a Prince fan. "At my church, we heard some of his music played backward and on that "Purple Rain" album he says something about God and starts laughing."

"Oh, yes. He experiments with backmasking," I answered.

"I wouldn't listen to that stuff if I were you," she said.

Prince writes for other artists. Some of those works I love. His songs for Sheena Easton slink along like his Royal Badness himself. Others just plainly suck, like the song he did for Madonna. I read that he was dating her at



the time and she dumped him right before he wrote it. Perhaps he was getting revenge.

Band members have come and gone. Those of us who remember the beginning know his guitarist Dez Dickerson, who went on to form his own band and opened for Billy Idol some years ago. There was bassist Andre Cymone who, after a brief solo career, produced soloist Jody Watley. Any one who has seen "Purple Rain" knows Wendy and Lisa who are now doing their own thing. Sheila E. is an old friend who plays the drums for him periodically. For that, he writes her hit songs.

Then there are his women. A friend of mine once remarked that he seems to change his women faster than he changes his underwear. There was Vanity, who is now a born-again holy roller like my sister-in-law. When asked on a talk show whether or not Prince was Satanic, she declined to comment. After her was Apollonia. Then Sheena Easton. After her, Cat, the dancer. I think after he made the soundtrack for the movie "Batman," he was dating actress Kim Basinger. You can't tell the difference between his business and his pleasure. I never really cared. I love his music, but his love life is another story.

One thing has always bothered me about him, though. All the women he dated seemed to be lighter-skinned. I know the purple man himself is fair, but I've often wondered if he didn't care for darker skinned women such as myself.

I still marvel to see him when he makes those few rare appearances. He doesn't seem to mind performing for MTV. He did one performance where he turned around and exposed the back of his pants. . . which were cut out to show every-thing. . . while he moaned the lyric, "now turn your big ass 'round so I can work on that zipper, baby." That wasn't unusual, he's done that before, but it was still exciting.

I recorded his appearance on the Arsenio Hall show. He burned copies of less than enthusiastic reviews of his latest CD. He gave a marvelous performance. He wears finger waves in his hair now, but he still sports those avant-garde clothes.

I don't like his latest band. He has a rapper and although the raps are fine, I don't care for the guy's style. He had a dancer or two, but I think he could have hired better.

His latest woman is a belly dancer. Aside from flipping quarters with the powerful muscles of her stomach, she's not that good of a dancer. Certainly not as good as other women he's dated, but she's not bad. She is very pretty.

The last I heard, he parted with the group. He should have another band next year.

I remember patiently waiting for his 1992 album to be released. It didn't have a title, just the symbol that he has used on his clothing and on his album art. The symbol is a fusion of the male and female symbols. I think it stands for his sexuality. I remember he was once asked in an interview if he was gay. He answered, "I'm not gay, I'm adventurous." I understand that he feels he has contacted his feminine side. He calls her Camille. His masculine side he calls Spooky Electric. I believe it takes a lot of confidence for a man to admit to his feminine side. It just fuels my family's arguments against him.

Now he's gone and changed his name to that unpronounceable symbol.



# The Night Visitor

Jim Higgins

I only see her at night. When I see her in the day, she is not the same - a different person. But at night I see her true self. As I slip through the darkness, I realize that the inky blackness adds to the special nature of our meetings. The anticipation is great, and superb, almost as exciting as the contact itself. A shudder ripples uncontrollably through my body. I am aroused.

*It's nighttime. I lay here waiting, still like a small statue, not moving. He will come tonight. He doesn't come every night, but I somehow always know when he will. He gives me no warning, no real way to expect him, but I am always ready when he comes.*

I walk slowly and silently, my feet padding the floor like a restless cat on an evening prow. All my senses are at their peak; my muscles move me through the night ponderously, rhythmically, like slow motion hydraulics. I am a beautifully crafted machine, moving efficiently and inevitably toward my goal.

I feel my eyes wide open, scoping out my path, viewing silhouettes, judging distance, looking cautiously at black areas with hidden and unknown configurations. My hands are out at either side, fingers splayed, like feelers on an insect.

I am on an exciting journey. Escaping from the static inanities, the mundane boredom of life, I cherish these feelings that course through my body. All that I cannot be during the day, I am now. Strong and powerful in my erotic endeavor, confident and almost predatory in my determination. I am alive.

*I look around my room, as best as I can in the dark. I see the dresser, with some stray clothes hanging out of it, my brass jewelry box on top, no longer shiny without the light. Behind the door, closed over but not shut, is my favorite robe, made of terrycloth. Across the room from the dresser, is a full length mirror. From my bed, I can't see myself, which is as it should be. I am afraid to see my reflection when he comes, because it is not my true self. At night, in the cool darkness, I am someone else. I am beautiful and frightening.*

My excitement builds as I move through the night. Briefly, fleetingly, I think of my wife, alone and asleep in her bed. I rid my mind of her quickly, shaking my head as if I can physically cast her out. She is disgusting to me. She speaks of lovemaking in the daylight, as if it were a sport that all engaged in, disturbing the essence and secrecy of it. She sullies the act by her acknowledgement, debasing herself by doing so. Her claims of freedom entrap her in indecency. She does not deserve my erotic gifts, and does not receive them.

But at night, my true lover waits for me. She never refuses me, or demeans our joining by useless talk. I know what I do is right, though others would not understand. Her love for me is pure and my love for her transcends all. Her beauty and innocence are rare and unspoiled. She satisfies my intense hunger, never once ruining the sanctity of the act.

*Time stops when I wait here for him. I feel like I am underwater, not suffocating, but not breathing, like in a dream. In the daytime, I sometimes wonder if he has ever come at all, if it is not just a dream that returns again and again. But when the darkness falls, I know it is true. The night brings him to life.*

I am almost to her now. I have moved softly through the dark like a whisper. I have successfully navigated through these spaces again, disturbing no one, leaving the balance of nighttime unchanged.

I am on carpeting now, feeling the softness through my now-socked feet, making my passage seem all the more cat-like. The hallway is lit by a gibbous moon. I enter the elongated and illuminated projection of the window frame that stretches along the floor, breaking the box with my figure and shadows.

*Over in the far corner of the room, near the front of my bed, is an expensive and beautiful clown doll. His name is Mr. Sawdust. I've had him almost as long as I can remember. My father won him at a traveling carnival, a million years ago, and gave him to me. The carnival left town and never came back. Mr. Sawdust has a baggy white clown suit, covered with red and blue diamonds. There is a large white frill around his collar, and one around each ankle. He sits still (always still) on the painted white chair, with his big black clown feet facing me. His face is white, his eyes and mouth are rimmed with black; there is a red circle on each cheek, and atop his head is a shock of the deepest black hair. He is not smiling or frowning. But somehow he always seems sad.*



I see the door on the left, just at the end of the hallway and the beginning of the image of moonlight on the floor. It is closed over, but not shut. I sometimes wonder if she truly wants me, if she really desires me, the way I desire her. But each night that I come, I find open doors, until I come to this, the final one, and my fears drain away at the sight of the slim blackness that leads to that room, and I know she waits for me.

*Sometimes he comes early in the night, sometimes he comes very late, and wakes me up, if I have fallen asleep. I know that he loves me. He always tells me. I know this is right (though somewhere inside me is a voice that says NO), because he always tells me. I know he wouldn't lie to me or try to fool me. He comes for our secret meeting, our lonely crime. I know he is coming tonight.*

I reach for the door to her bedroom, slowly, always slowly, like I am underwater. The reaching for the door seems to stretch out in time. The tension is almost maddening, the excitement builds inside me until I feel that I must burst like a weakened dam. Sweat is beading on my forehead, above my lip, down the crevice of my back, and on my sex ( I must not think that). I touch the doorknob, and there is a rush, a release, finally, as I slowly open the door.

*I am sitting up in my bed, looking at the door, waiting for him to come. I should not be afraid. He takes care of me, protects me, keeps me safe, and has picked me, above all others, to touch in the special way he touches me. I am grateful (but I am afraid).*

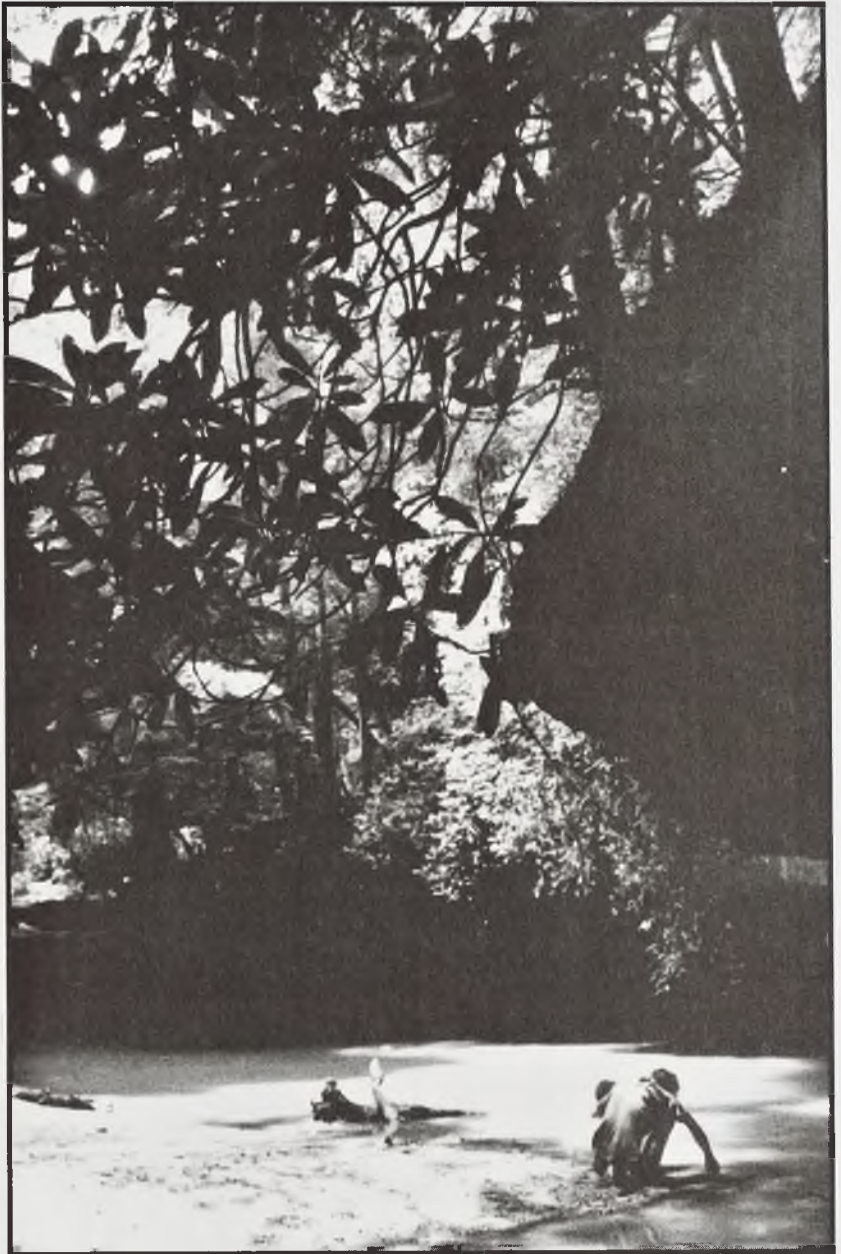
I push open the door, ever so gently, the room comes more and more into view, and I see her.

She is sitting up in bed, her green eyes glinting, catching the moonlight, as she waits for me. Her close-cropped hair surrounds her face, slightly tousled. Her languid arms, with their smooth, so smooth skin, sit at her sides above the covers. Her beautiful skin! My breath is coming in short gasps, my gait is mechanical, my face is flushed (I can feel it) I am overwhelmed with desire (and lust), and I run to the bed and pull the covers back

*Slowly, the door opens, and I see him. He stands frozen for a few seconds staring at me. I always wonder what he's thinking at that moment. What does he see in me that no one else sees?*

*From my bed, I can see that he is sweating. His fingers are always clammy when he touches me. My stomach tenses (I almost feel like retching, but that usually passes), my body stiffens at the thought of him touching me. It never seems this bad when I think of it in the daytime. How is it that I can forget this? Why don't I remember the horrible-ness, the wanting to be numb, the need to run away and hide from him that fights with my paralyzed body?*

*And like every other time, I stay still as he comes over to the bed. I look at his face, beet red even in the darkness,*

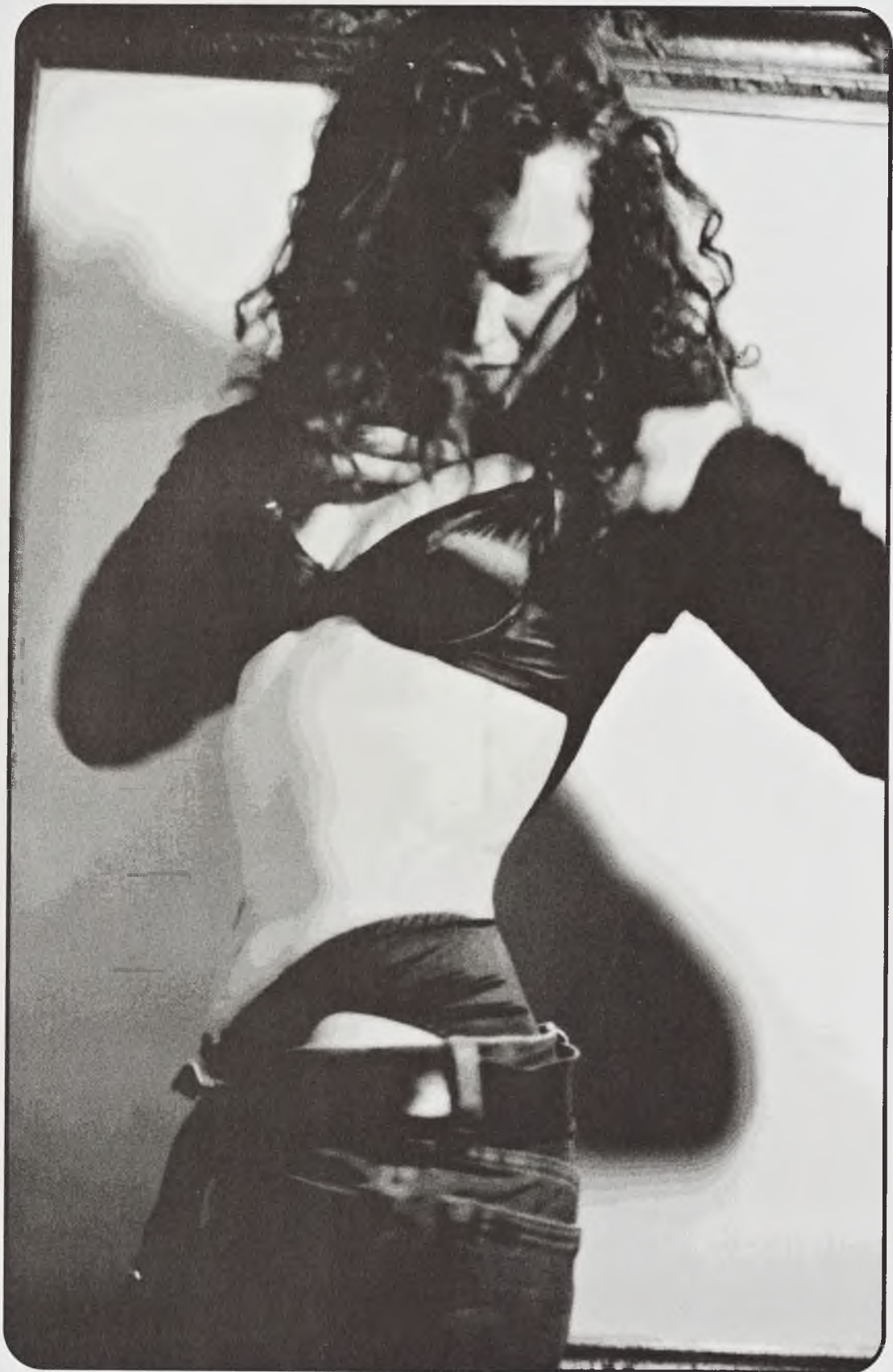


## PETER C. GUAGENTI

*twisted into something unfamiliar, staring at me, through me (how can a look be painful?). But it is still him. He is still my father.*

Uncontrollably, I run my hands up and down her body, under her flannel nightgown. It is hard to think clearly. My body is roaring with pleasure. I look at her smooth, young body and I know only a child knows how to love.

*I am kneeling up in bed now, my nightgown is pushed up and down by him as My body is his for now, but he cannot have me. In my mind, I know my true self is still safe. I retreat back into my mind, away from my body and away from the world, to a place where large hands and hot breath cannot touch me. I wonder if this is what dying is like? Perhaps I will soon find out. Dying doesn't seem so bad, or so scary. I wonder what it would be like for my father to die? Perhaps he will soon find out.*



JACK GRIGGS



There is nothing more magnanimously imbecilic than a verbose Hermit, yet, I would tell my tale. A tale dedicated to my friend Cinderella, or Cindy, for short. Once upon a time a horse openly brandished a feather duster and advanced the argument that, where there should be only the great Nothing, the verb to be had been uttered by the creator: Desire. (Desire herself eventually married a mental health worker named Andre Breton - shortly after the Great War.) Later, my corpse, clad only in dictionary words, laughed in its repose at the fire engine of its Dodgy existence - in its rusty perfection - and wondered aloud: Is there ever a second Chance? For Life? For Love?

Earlier, as the glue of logic dissolved into a strong brown Ale, I found an answer.

One particularly tantamount evening collapsed as reason evaporated into a cloud of incandescent perfume at the Smoking Dog Cafe. I sat, a Knight before the Law, opposite all of the women I had ever loved. I suspected my memory: a telephone programmed with nine or ten numbers (I mix up, having a parenthetical disposition). Number One, the loneliest, was the faintest. And the Dearest. She sat at the end of the bar, folding a perfect rose of honeybees into Her tousled hair, chestnut brown in temperament. Longing was clearly the language of Her geometry.

"Alan," I said to a great bear of a man, bearded with intellect, "I would like to be a poet, as indeed you are. A man who looks where no one sees: into the scented manufactory of Dreams, where Life comes apart at the "seems." Oh the buoyancy of this expectancy! I would like you to be a poet-King, followed by a herd of dictionary words."

Al smiled briefly, revealing a Kingly charm, bearded with opulence.

Number Two was clumsy and quick, elastic and brief. After the fact She wore an accusatory look; little else. Always testing the propensity of my density, Her name was Anagram.

"Michael," I said grammatically, to a man wounded from the lack of a War, a man who had gone past tense, "you are a fine wine." Michael brandished a large pocket cannon in the heart of his palm. He wept tears of sheer fiction, a man locked in his own Castle, a man imprisoned by bells that echo a car, by a Gravity that spills into a jar.

Numbers Three and Four talked silently of Lust, guilt and other thanksgiving Leftovers. Three sparkled with an effervescing gesture while the diminutive Number Four paced the widow's walk of Old Saint Time.

Outside the bar Carrot Topped Tom crowed a handful of adverbs, developed his Queen prematurely and parked his red haired motorcycle upon a lake of festive spirits. He waved a fond Raven at Mr. Higson, another of my tablemates.

"Mr. Higson," I announced with a syntactical wink to this fellow with the manner of an aside, this man growing pigeons in the boundary of his metaphor, "I would Dream you a fiery temper, a Celtic anger raging across your face with the abandon of a semicolon, a weapon with which to levitate trees and smite the Ronald McDonald clan.

# Soliloquy: a Diction

Thomas Good

Mr. Higson smiled slyly, his beard nodding and cooing.

Number Five waited patiently in the corner of a tear. Another tortured Catholic, She wore a distant hurt and plaid skirt. She smiled gently at Number Six, an ambidextrous who had instilled Lust in my heart and warmth in my loins. Her open windows proposed to appease; I had draped my Self about Her shapely breeze. Number Seven, unlucky Number Seven, held Her empty gloves in tight esteem. She had been the rise and Fall of matrimony.

Old Mick sat aging at the bar end opposite Number One. A policeman wearing a sad haiku, he was a closely cropped revolver with a stolen profile. Big Ed the barman sat with old Scotch, fabricating postcards. Vince adjusted his shaven pate, smiling as impish as ever: a demonic Saint. Dave the Publican talked nervous frittercisms rapidly with some pressure jetting full force from his Being. And the sweet Ophelia brought drinks to our table. Her heartbeat; gentle breasts; Her Spanish blood and a strong Ale. She moved away as a Queen; diagonally, horizontally, and pursuant to local myth: vertically.

I sat clean-shaven a pompous ass with a simile, mentally rereading my dispatched memoirs as Alan waxed his beard poetic and Michael reversed the blatancy of his vacancy. Mr. Higson smiled and cooed as Joseph C entered the bar, his grin reflecting an aquarium full of birded chessmen.

It was an expressionist evening draped in harsh neon light flooding the stark contrast of fledgling euphemisms interspersed with Wonders drunk from the well of Memory. Borrowing ideas religiously, I flowered full well knowing that Hope fathered the pregnancy of the Moment, as surely as my friend Ray was a convicted pedestrian.

Wearing an iambic pentameter, Alan lit a cigarette with a rhetorical lighter. Michael erupted insistence and Mr. Higson brushed Dove droppings from the table beneath his beard. Slowly, Number Eight rose from Her perch to greet your humble device.

I adored this Lover-turned-Friend, one success among a legion of failures. I toasted Her Being with a circumstantial gesture as the window looked away, down the hall of mirrors.

Mr. Higson wielded a pen briefly, separately, then replaced it slyly into his Bishop's miter: the Higson maneuver. This man understood the parallel relationship of Dreams and diction.

After Alan died figuratively at the hands of an exaggerated rhyme, his sister (who had married a Hyphen - ex

post facto) would Hawk his writings. Eagle-eyed Michael scratched and clawed the edifice of unnatural security. Mr. Higson removed an encrypted message from the leg of a new entry into his beard. He smiled sheepish, a carrier of stately secrets.

I sat stalwart as a pederast clad in Cardinal red as Number Nine came into focus. A verb gestured passion in the confines of my mind's echo (meanwhile, stage left, Mick observed the dear Ophelia with his elevator protocol). Number Nine, tangled in the vertebrae of unspoken utterances, had come to me a Religion with a Varsity letter. Perhaps inspired by the heroism of Her breasts, She drove my thoughts madly - a mysterious Dodge.

A wondrous diffusion: Number Nine had been cast as my second wife in the doorway of Time. When first we met I was truly parentetic. I sat in a sad corner of the Smoking Dog nursing an old dial tone. She arrived - a suggestion and I nearly fainted. (Now, of course, I carry a placard that says: "wetly painted.") She smiled at the eyes in my head. "My word," She said, "what a view." My reply: "I'd run a red light to comb your hair. . . I care." So joined, we existed evening-wise, a glow at the point of Imagination, laughing loud at our God. He's odd.

Michael retied the howitzer of his despair. He suffered from the delusion that television announcers were mocking him. I smiled knowingly (my interest in film heroes like Ron Reagan was purely paranoid). Joseph had nerves of steel and caffeine as he flirted voraciously with the sweet Ophelia. Alan smirked, sipping Avian water with Hawk like precision. Mr. Higson offered me an evaporating Dove. From the bar, Mick nodded at each patron, one after another, as if to say: "six billion served." Big Ed danced variously with Scotch while Vince raised and lowered his eyebrows incrementally: the Rhythm Method. Dave's lips moved facially and, penultimately, Ophelia offered your humble device transcendent sweetness in Her kiss.

I sat clearly opaque, a mental mistake, farewelling Numbers One through Eight. A fire engine spotted with Dalmatians awaited. But I had my answer. There is always a second Chance. On a sadly incandescent day, windows open where they may. Desire stands in the doorway of Time. Grooving around in a trenchcoat with satin entrails, I thumbed my way across the pages of this strange tabloid, finally arriving Home. Number Nine told me to leave the Others outside the door.

"I'd run a red light to comb your hair. . . I care," said I.

She smiled and pulled me into Her nest with the aplomb of a Songbird. In the distance I could see a fire engine, resting in its rusty perfection. I grinned madly: at that Moment, and all that preceded it.

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AMORPHIC SUDRIDE



# Death Ain't No Thinking Thing Just Appears, Lies Around, Like a Childhood Fear

Robert Levine

I was playing one of those stupid board games with my brother and our friend. We were in the kitchen. The kitchen has a very homey atmosphere to it. A wooden table takes up almost half of it. Books surround us. The point is that I was playing, like a child. We have French doors, which were closed at the time. The TV was on in the living room, so we couldn't hear much in there. We just played. So oblivious to everything around me, I felt like the rest of society. I knew my mother wasn't feeling well lately - but I wanted to ignore it. I succeeded. Just picture someone sitting in oblivion, as if it were a place. That's where I was.

My aunt came in the kitchen. She gestured towards my brother. He's older. I knew something. I knew. She looked fragile, scared. She was so scared to hurt me. She must've thought I was a glass and if I fell, I would shatter. Of course, in the midst of telling us that my mother was having a very difficult time breathing, she would attempt to assure us everything was all right. This was a lie. My brother headed up the stairs, where my mother was. As I went that way, my aunt suggested in her panicky voice, that maybe everyone shouldn't go. I went. I couldn't really believe my eyes. She was lying on my bed. She could barely breathe. The fear in her face was evident. It was pouring out, like tears flying from a crying baby's eyes. She would make a half-attempt to sit up. She didn't know what the fuck to do. And neither did we. Normally, you immediately call an ambulance. But my mother was totally fearful of ambulances, doctors. The paranoia does not help in these situations. We had many times begged her to go to a doctor, only to hear her refuse. Her fear of these things was so intense that we didn't know if she would get in an ambulance. The fear began to float in the room. The walls were sweating. I told my brother to call an ambulance, that it would be ridiculous to sit here and watch her die. I went to tell my uncle, my mother's brother, who lives around the corner. I went so quickly. I ran. It felt like five strides got me there. I never ran so fast before. I told my uncle. We went back to my house. He wasn't running like I wanted. It felt like we were taking too long. I had so much desire just to burst and dart back to my mother. But I didn't want to leave my uncle stranded. We got back to my room. My brother had called the ambulance. I think that having my uncle there relieved a bit of my aunt's pressure. My brother told my mother that we called an ambulance. She agreed to get in. I knew it was serious if my mother was willing to go in an ambulance. It must have been life and death.

When the ambulance people arrived, we guided them to my mother. She had some of that paranoia in her eyes, but was basically willing to accept help. She was scared shit. I stayed in the back of the ambulance with her—I felt like we were all characters in a movie. I didn't know who had the toughest part, me or my mother. This was the first time I was in an ambulance. My feelings of discomfort told me this. There was no need to recall. I stood in an awkward position—not able to stand straight because of the ceiling. Before we pulled off, I looked out the back door and saw my family. I saw only a friend, a cousin and his father, and my aunt. My brother Peter sat in the front seat of the ambulance. My brothers, Adam and Paul, were not home at the time. After the medical people had all the tubes and injections in place, we pulled off. Everything seemed to be a tube or an injection. The ride went quicker than I imagined.

The ambulance men pushed the back doors open to the sight of my brother Paul and his girlfriend Maureen. Time stopped for a few seconds when I saw them, totally baffled about how they were already here. I felt like I did years ago, like big brother was coming to save the day. He was coming to save the day. He was coming to beat up my bully. They immediately wheeled her into a room we could not go into. I contemplated going in anyway, but figured that would just hurt my mother's chances of living. All of us sat in the waiting room: Me, my tearful aunt, my brother Peter, my brother Paul and his girlfriend, my cousin, our friend, and my uncle. I

was listening to a walkman. As I slowly patrolled the hallway, I quickly turned back. I didn't want to miss anything, although, there was a small piece in me that wanted to LEAVE. Whenever the doctor came out, all of us popped from our chairs. Most of the time, however, he came with no news.

Finally, the agony temporarily ended. I was sleeping at the time, making two hard chairs my bed. I half woke up and heard the doctor speaking. I didn't become frightened. The tone of his voice told me not to be. Peter told me the doctor said she could have died if we had waited ten more minutes to call an ambulance. He told me it was my idea to call right away. I didn't know how to take that. I still don't. My brothers and I went in to see her. This hospital scene was too familiar for me, I thought. My father's slow death of cancer almost four years before made sure of that. Another visit. These visits seemed too frequent and made life feel very short, almost non-existent. I picked up my head and saw my mother. I saw tubes; I saw machines. I saw my father. I saw my mother. I saw death. And it was kicking my ass.

Death ain't no thinking thing,  
just appears,  
lies around,  
like a childhood fear.



PETER C.  
GUAGENTI



Everything was final. They had planned every aspect of the trip weeks in advance and today would be the perfect time to leave. Raymond's parents were gone on one of their bi-annual vacations and Raymond would have open access to his father's touring sedan. The goodbye letter, addressed to "all parties responsible for our departure," had taken at least four days to perfect and Louis held it in his hand, like a two page battle plan.

The doors of the vehicle opened simultaneously, and the two boys paused only long enough to catch themselves looking at one another over the navy-blue roof. Profound nervousness lingered in the air. The nervousness was anticipated and quite understandable. After all, this was to be their longest road trip yet. But despite the distance they would be travelling today, garage doors would never open—and the automobile would remain unmoved.

As soon as he was seated, Louis looked at Raymond's face and noticed how he had neglected to shave, for what was probably a week.

Car doors slammed with a jarring attack, and the smell of the leather interior was fresh and clean. Raymond produced the ignition key out of a filthy dungaree pocket and proceeded to insert it into its female counterpart. He waited there, with his right hand on the key—proceeding no further until Louis's right hand had joined it.

This particular aspect of the departure had been feverishly debated by Raymond and Louis, both with each other and within each other. Not only would whoever turned the key be taking his own life, but that person would, technically, be taking the life of his friend at the same time. Raymond wanted no part of being his best friend's murderer. The boys decided that it would be in Raymond's soul's best interest, if they both turned the key. So with a two man twist, the ignition roared.

At this point, Louis took the rolled up letter and inserted it into one of the belt loops in the right side of his pants, for fear that it would drop out of sight once the gas took effect. Raymond put one of his father's Jazz cassettes into the radio to break the droning monotony of the eight-cylinder engine, echoing off of the garage's cinder-block walls. He examined Louis' face adoringly, and wondered why his friend had even bothered to shave that morning.

Raymond slid his right hand across the smooth leather and clenched his friend's left hand tightly in his own. The two sat back, while grey smoke pumped into the vehicle from the hose that extended from the tail pipe into the right rear window. Raymond teasingly began to take very deep, exaggerated breaths, saying things like, "Catch me if you can, Louis, catch me if you can."

## II

An unknown blur of minutes passed by and Louis' mind began to run out of ammunition against the carbon monoxide. It began to grab cognition, from abstraction. Louis saw his life being hit like a tuning fork; images began to drip from beneath dry lids and coalesce into scathingly coherent collages of life; Beautiful life.

A loud "click" that signified the Jazz cassette's end

# SOLO

David  
Graziano

injected an iota of sobriety and made neurotropic sirens stop beckoning their young voyager, just long enough for reason to pervade.

To get his eyelids even part way open was a feat that required more strength than he, at the moment, had to supply. His tongue was of cotton and his throat manufactured nothing audible outside a hiss. He tried to call out.

Vomit began to inch its way up his larynx and the hydrochloric burn from this fluid began to augment the sobering effect that the "click" had initiated. He suddenly became aware of the fumes that clung to his cold skin like a jelly fish. Louis needed air. Louis needed life.

His fingers grappled with the door handle as if an alien device, void of all previous familiarity. His body pressed against the inside of the vehicle's stomach and all of it's weight flung the door open with triumphant urgency. Gravity pulled him from the tomb and sent him careening to cement. The impact added to his already dwindling supply of sobriety and gave him just enough ambition to resist sleep. He headed for the door that led to the kitchen from the garage; there were only three small steps leading to it.

Louis rose unsteadily to find that his legs could not feel the ground upon which they tread; eye lids were pried apart to a fraction of their normal bloom. He could see a yellow light that suggested only the direction of the kitchen door. Louis fell to his knees trembling and crawled up the narrow steps—clawing all the way for intangible help.

He applied the same method that had worked on the automobile door to the kitchen's, turning the knob and imposing the full force of his body weight upon it. It had no choice but to open. The air inside was clean and crisp and greeted his nostrils at the archway with a child-like enthusiasm.

Louis finally collapsed and the vomit could be contained no longer, it moistened his swollen tongue and made a puddle upon the yellow tile where his head took cool, ceramic comfort. He relinquished all ownership of what little consciousness he defended, and surrendered to the inevitability of a profound, womb-like slumber.

## III

Louis awoke metamorphosized. His shirt was a vomit encrusted cocoon. His head came off of the kitchen floor with an audible peel, the bilious moisture fighting the effort only briefly. The right side of his face and his left inner arm were left with a temporary lattice-work etched in the places where flesh was pressed into cracks between the tile.

He haphazardly arranged his body; it was sitting indian-style and slightly away from his vomit. Louis' head fell into both hands and then lingered in his left while the right dropped down to inadvertently stroke his shoelace. Both hands then re-emerged simultaneously to rub the evidence of sleep from his eyes.

For the first time he became aware of a thin, white paper cylinder hanging half bent from his belt loop and a disheartening, mechanical drone emanating from the garage.

"Catch me if you can, Louis."

“Raymond!” Louis shrieked on the wind of a guttural holler, holding the last syllable of his friend’s name for what seemed like minutes. “Noo-ooo-ooo!”, his voice bled. Unaware of how much time had passed, Louis ran to the garage to save his friend.

He was immediately confronted by the massive grey jelly-fish that floated there waiting hungrily for him, pressed in its little cage. A figure could be seen in the car, slumped partially to the right side and leaning almost fully upon the steering wheel.

“Ray? Hold on!”, Louis commanded uselessly, for Raymond had let go nearly three hours before. Upon viewing the rhythmless body Louis knew that Raymond was dead. But to admit death was to admit betrayal.

He defiantly burst out of the front door and ran to the outside of the garage. There, he bullied the large, vertical lift door into opening. The carbon monoxide disappeared into the late afternoon air. A small group of nearby ravens took fright at the garage door’s shriek and at the sight of the grey spirit billowing out into their beautiful, otherwise cloudless domain.

Louis crawled into the garage toward the vehicle’s driver side. He pressed his face and hands against the window expectantly. From here he could see the grey tissue replacing the boy he used to know was overtly devoid of life. From beneath Louis’ left eye crept a single, searingly hot tear. He knew with more certainty than he had ever known anything, that just as he stood there friendless and profoundly alone, Raymond stood somewhere looking at him, equally friendless and alone.

“Catch me if you can, Louis.”

an excerpt from *A Bluer Side*, a novel in progress

## Cousin Mental Illness

Robert Levine

Cousin Mental Illness was good to me; he was good to everyone. We called him “Men” for short, but he didn’t really like that. He was not very tall, only about five feet and seven inches. Also, he always had a smirk on his face as if he didn’t want to be bothered. He was a difficult man perhaps that is part of the reason that he wasn’t easy to let go of. Men died last year at this time and I still think about him every single day. I remember his stomach. It was so round, almost perfect. It always left a crease in his shirts right below the heart. I find it difficult to think about someone who is dead everyday, but I can’t seem to stop myself. I think about Mental Illness everyday.

I remember the funeral. Black. Everyone wore black. And he looked so perfect. He was so still so immovable. I kneeled in fear in front of his casket and said to myself, “Illness I love you so much without you I am not myself.” When I said that I felt his body tremble as if he was thanking me. I loved Men. We spent our entire childhood together, making fun of each other, helping each other through adolescence. He was part of me and without him I feel like I am without a leg or an arm—I need ample time to adjust.

He was such a humble person, always thinking about others. I wish he would have helped himself more often, paid attention to his own needs, and maybe all this wouldn’t have happened. I wish there was some way I could talk to him now and tell him how I feel.

As I sat at my desk thinking about my cousin, my wife came into the bedroom. I looked over her small frame and into the living room.

“Marty,” she said in her characteristic nasal tone, “what are you doing? Don’t you have work to do? You know how much daydreaming you can do. Please...” and as she continued her thoughts she began walking into the living room picking up stray clothing from the floor.

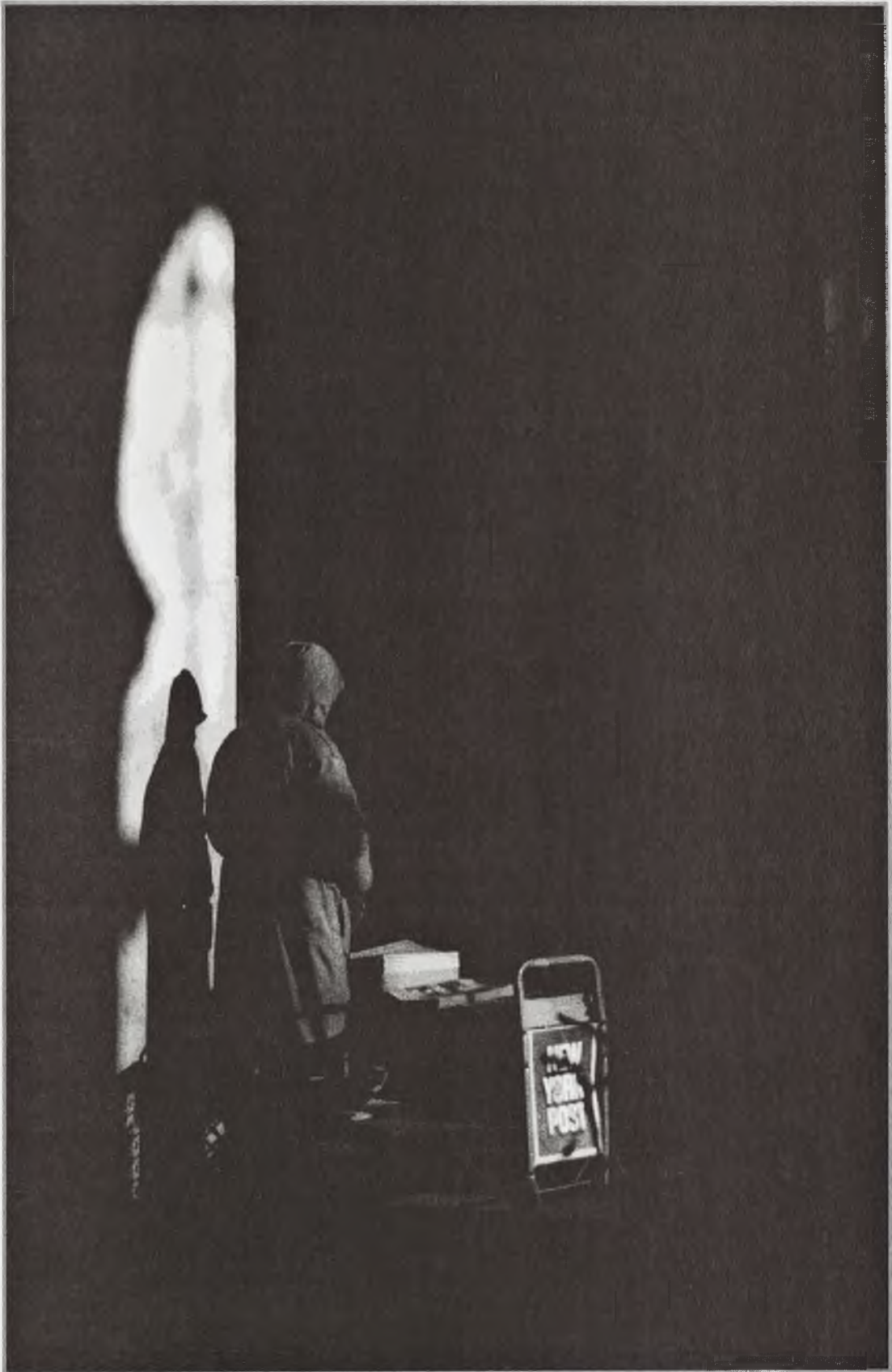
I walked into the large living room after her it was large to me anyway—

“Honey, do you ever think about Men?” I asked softly.

“Of course, but what are we suppose to do he’s dead! You seem to ask me this almost every day. He’s dead Marty. He’s dead!”

I walked back into the bedroom and stared out the window at the apple tree we had for about ten years now. The tree always reminded me of a bad horror movie but I never wanted to get rid of it. Even though it created an unsettling feeling in my stomach, I enjoyed the fact that it was there right outside the window. It reminded me of Mental.





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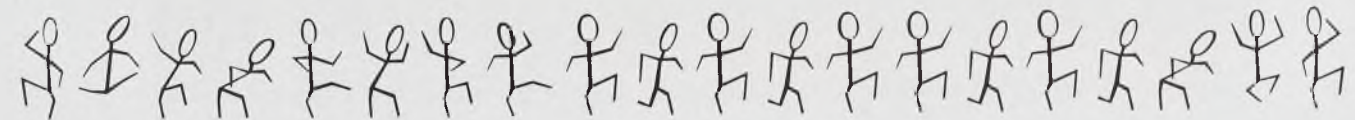
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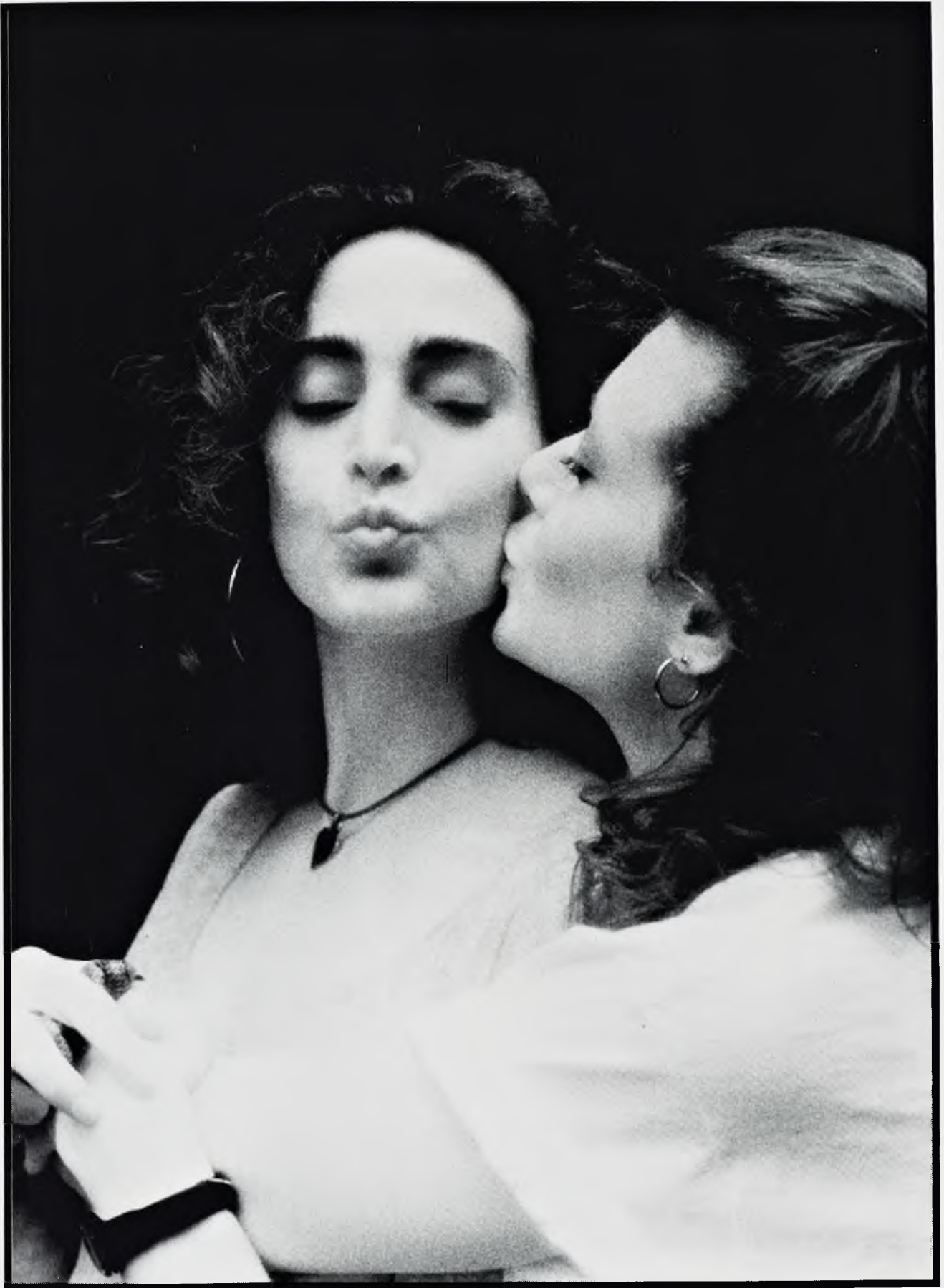
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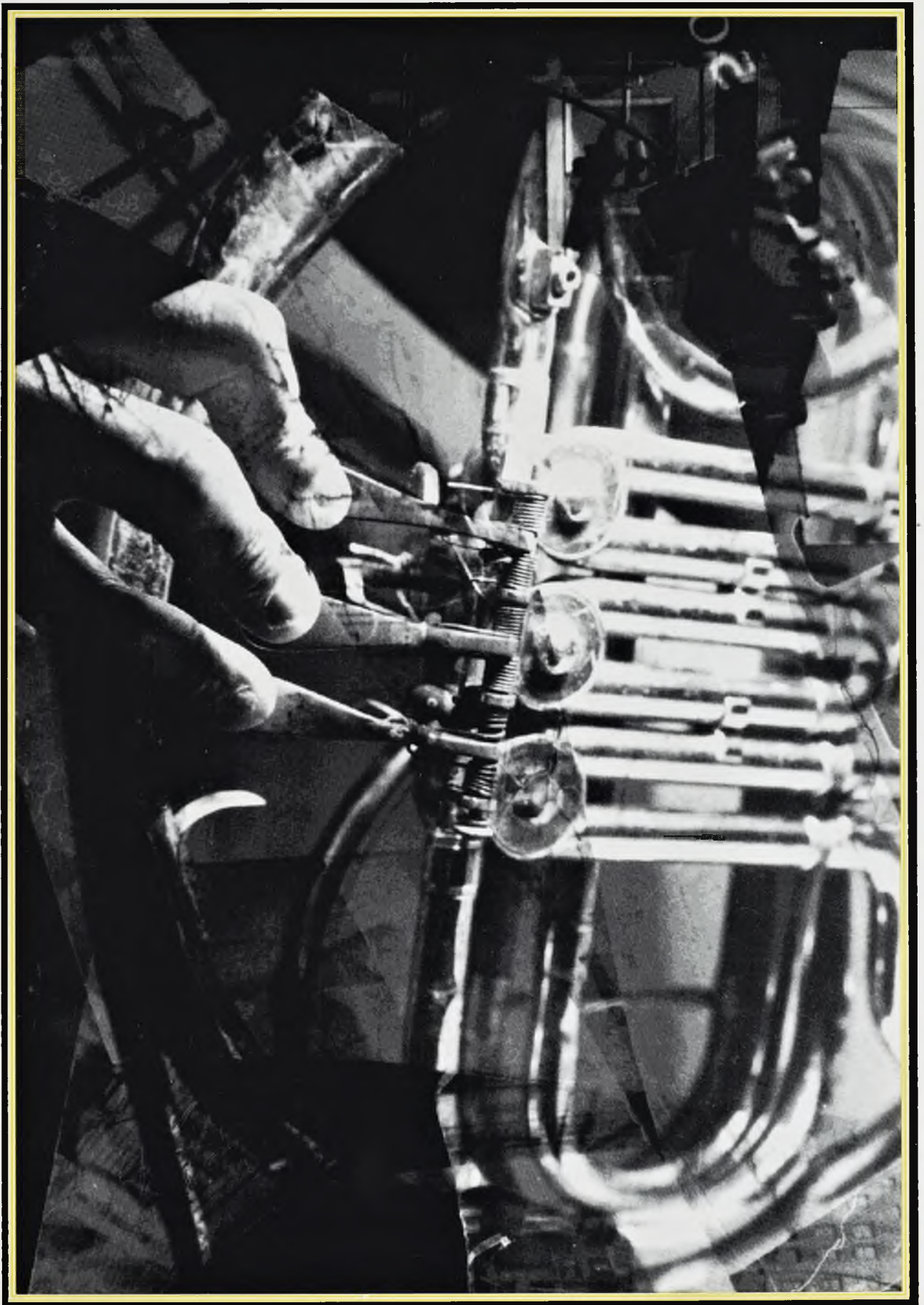
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JACK GRIGGS



BLUES

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