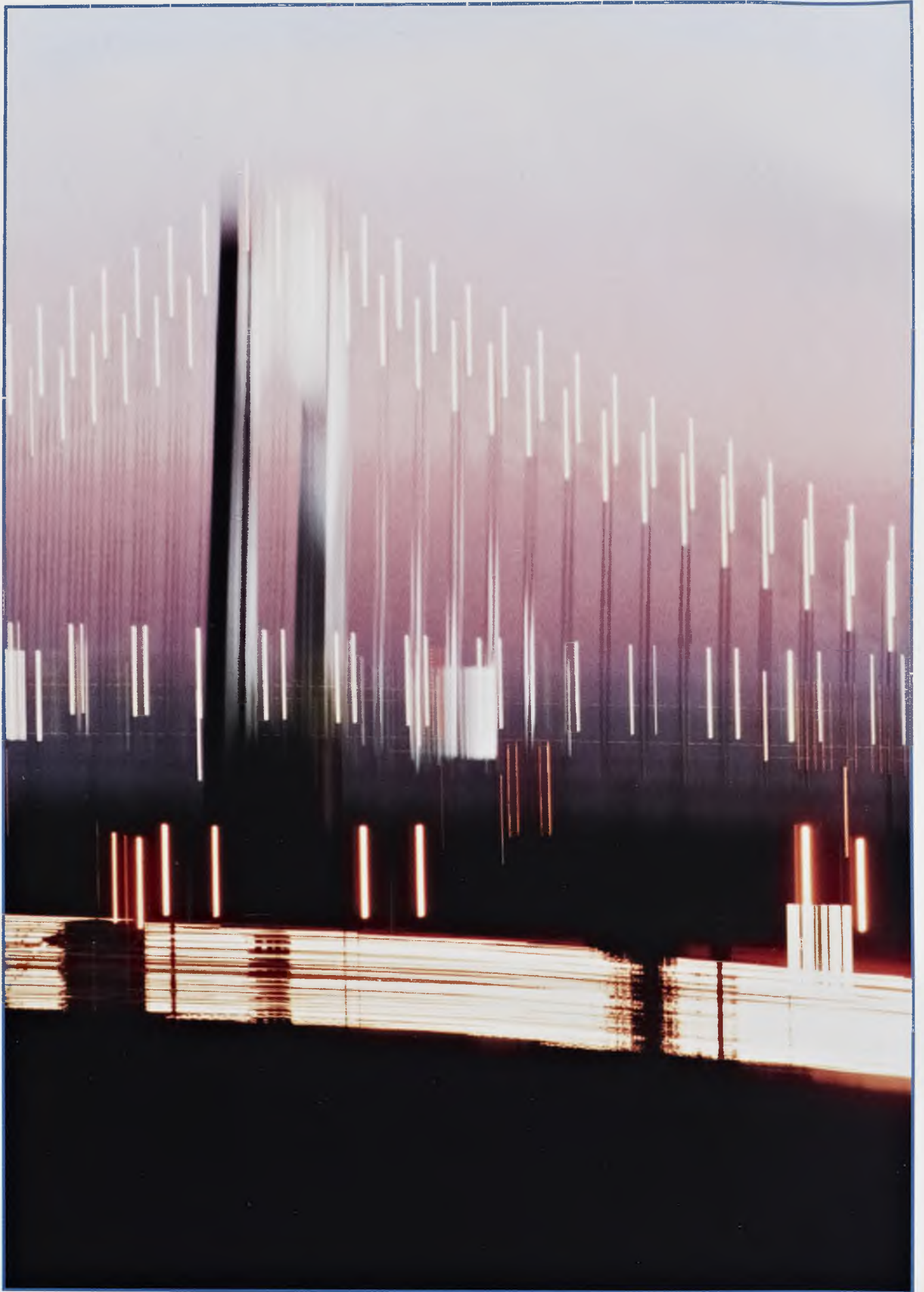


A woman in a traditional Japanese kimono, with her hair adorned with flowers, looks upwards with a reverent expression. Above her, a large, glowing, ethereal figure with a bright, fiery aura is visible against a dark background. The overall mood is mystical and spiritual.

the road  
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Volume 2 Issue 1  
Fall/Winter



XIANG CHEN

# third

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# Third Rail

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ANTHONY GARGISO

# it's always

*it's always five o'clock in the living room*

*At least 'cording to the antique clock  
we only got from your grandmother 'cause it doesn't work,  
and i've never fixed it.*

# five

*One item on a long list:  
some battles are lost before you fight them. . .*

*Feels like i'm in limbo here, which ain't got nothing to do  
with a bar and bending over backwards, but is  
instead a religious reference. (Damn, i renounced that*

*shit a long time ago, amazing how*

*it stayed stuck in my head still the same. That jesu  
character sure knew what he was talking when*

# the

*he said suffer me the little children.) Blame  
my mother for that one, she picked out my schooling.  
Just like the kids will blame you: oh yeah, you  
better get ready for it. They are*

*gonna slice and dice you right up, just  
you wait and see. It's always five o'clock in*

*the living room , and i've never fixed it.*

*g. kessler*

# o'clock...

# banopath!

THOMAS GOOD

(for Leonie van Dragge)

## Introduction

"You ain't the nazz.  
You're just a buzz...  
Some kinda temporary." — Ian Hunter



**O**h man, like dig this: there's a woman I work with she's like Cosmic. I mean she's like Tantamount. Crazy. So listen man...

Here's the deal. My name is 'this, that or the other thing' but most folks just call me Slider. Prob'ly cuz I ain't no square, with my corkscrew hair. Or maybe cuz I slid from Detroit City to Avenue A in Alphabet Land... Anywho, I'll be like your narrator for today...hang loose, it'll be cool.

So I work in a crazy telemarketing place with a real gone groove named LuciferSam...we all call him Lucy...for short. This guy wears like seriously long hair and a little goatee. He eats lots of eggs, got the idea from Mickey Rourke or something. Luce had a real gig here at the Shop one time but no one remembers what it was... all we know is that it's better to have him hacking other people's systems than our own so we keep him here - he's like a paralegal. Cool, eh?

And now I sell disclaimers to folks who got their paranoia together, which is like a good thing to have, nowadays. Paint your windows white and stay in the suburbs, that kinda thing. My workmate who is sorta the antagonist in this story, is called Sugar. Don't know her real name. Don't care cause like I said she's like Tantamount...I mean she is like Psychic. She lives on Cathode Rays. Sure, we all do but she's gone, man. She only leaves the suburbs to buy nose hair clippers and to come to work. Otherwise she's lost in the mystery of the televised reality. Buying her fix from the Electronic Consumer Television Network (ECTV) ...which is like a complete planetary thing for virtual consumers. They take you around the world in a day and you can like buy souvenirs (credit cards are cool if you don't have an online account) and even send postcards to other teledidiots...they even come thru the snail mail, postmarked and all. It's real scary...



Sugar talks on the phone all day - trying to sell our mailing list to people. She also orders supplies. So we got like cuckoo clocks and shit on the walls, 'stead of regular office clocks. They came from Germany, Sugar met the craftsman dude who made the stuff. Yep...on the ECTV Network...

My buddy Groovy Nancy sits next to Sugar...she sells malpractice insurance to like Clerics: Catholic Priests, Rabbis, that kind of thing. She also makes some amazing coffee - I don't know what's in it but it's like Perpendicular. She calls it 'typically Dutch' cause she gets the ingredients from Amsterdam (Sugar orders the shit - yeah, thru ECTV...) Nancy is like my favorite character in this theatre of the absurd known as communal reality. Sometimes during the middle of a conversation she announces, "I'm going to sleep for an hour or so." And that's it. She's gone. Wow. She sez that this wild and carefree behavior is typically Dutch. I don't know, man. Listen I gotta find like a Marlboro cigarette so dig this: Nancy has a radio that's shaped like a wooden shoe. She keeps it on this underground station that plays a lot of songs by a Dutch rap group called the Fat Elvis Four. That's three guys who do like acapella grunge rock. Listen Up and I'll be right back.



So I'm back and dig it, here's the real deal, our story as it were: One day some weird shit happened and it took me awhile to piece it together but it's too cool for school so let me like narrate. It'll be a groove, not to worry...if it's cool with you we'll start with the morning dialog stuff that usually goes down...

I was rappin' to Nancy:

"Nancy, man, this is some bitchin' java," (I said this part, like laying some serious lines on my girl Nancy is VERY groovy...)

"It's typically Dutch, I got the recipe from the place where I used to work - the Psychic Delicastessan on Marnix Straat in central Amsterdam..."

Then like Sugar cut her off at the pass I was making. She does that a lot - really bogus of her, I'm thinking, like antagonistic and all. Anyway she rapped thus:

"I've been there...on ECTV...that's where I get the supplies for Nancy's coffee...I ate blue anchovies my first time there...it was great. I took my husband with me - we have two headsets connected to the ECTV network. He watched Dutch Football, some team called Ajax, spelled like the cleanser...but he didn't like it because both teams were Dutch...me, I liked it. The place I mean. I like Holland. The canals are beautiful and I always go shopping in Delft where I get really lovely pottery and I like to mail some to friends..."

(Ain't this a bitch?) So like, Lucifer tries to get a word in here...pretty weird, he don't say much...

"Sugar...you're a real Tupper-warrior...clad in glad...all that shit." (Sugar beamed ecstatic like - mistaking this for a compliment.) Luce kept going: "Nancy, I got a Dutch friend...he works in Utrecht, for Philips Electronics. We became buddies after I hacked his system...he's a great..."

"I bought a lot of stuff from Philips when I was in Holland last time," Sugar said (her mouth was like full of crumb cake chunks of which flew across the room - it was a beautiful thing.) "I know the owner. I had dinner with his family, on ECTV..."

I couldn't like deal so I interjected my 3 cents at this juncture. "Hey, Binary Citizen, that's like electronic cheez whiz," I sez.

Sugar tried to speak but choked on her crumb cake.

Lucifer smiled and said: "you shouldn't talk with your mouth full..."

Sugar got kinda ruffled in the like feathers at this point so

Lucifer rubbed it in a little more, like thus:

"You know, your whole life is run in emulation...nothing is real...that's some weird sin, man."

Sugar drank some water and then, her composure regained, she went into like a Mary Kay speech:

"My husband likes sports, me I have my ECTV...I like to travel. My husband watches sports all day and night. Basketball is his favorite. He loves his basketball. The only thing he doesn't like is that he thinks there are too many negroes in the game..."

"What??!" I sez, like amazed at this shit.

"It's OK, he's a redneck...from old Bama...he watches Larouche Broadcasting and votes electronically...he's a patriot."

"Sugar, that's some bizarre crap you're slingin'" Lucifer said. "That shit don't compile..."

"Live and let live, to each his own, that's what I say," Sugar answered, "That's why I'm a Nixon gal."

"Dig this and dig it good," I said, "Tricky D is dead."

"Yes, but they had a special on him the other night on ECTV...I bought a commemorative cassette deck...you know, for old audio tapes...I play my husband's Pat Buchanan tapes on it..."

"I'm going to sleep for an hour or so," Nancy said, and she was gone...Luce mumbled something in Sugar's general direction and wandered off to his cube. I looked at Sugar in amazement for a minute and then headed off to the crapper...she was still talking as I like rode off into the sunset of this paragraph...

Next day it came over the news that some cat had froze to death down by the lake. I was rappin' about it with Luce, like this here:

"So like they found the dude froze stiff but his portable was still going...the cat was blue but the TVCR was still cookin..."

"It was a Sony," Sugar said, "I just bought the same model, on ECTV. For my husband so he can watch his sports in the bathroom..."

Luce got real annoyed for some reason and left the room... this is like where the plot thickens...

Wow. Like a new guy was hired a day or two later and this effort by the boss to expand our operation really stirred the pot. El hefe hired some ex-cop named Harry Doyle to hawk used religions to people looking to part with their income. The big cheese felt the 'Christian Telemarket' was a lucrative area to enter into so we got Harry...Harry was a trip. Like wiggled out. He was very secretive and didn't dig talking too much (like the evil twin of Sugar...) So...Lucifer did some snooping on the Net. Turns out Harry had been a Fed. A spook type spy dude. Harry was heavily into pharmaceuticals. Luce said that the H-Bomb, as Luce tagged him, had worked on some top secret projects called Project Chatter and Operation MK/Ultra. I said, 'Whoa!'

One day Luce mentioned, real casual like, to the H-Man himself, that some of the office personnel knew about his plausibly deniable past. Harry still said nada...

So Luce was skipped the subtle approach: "Hey Harry Man, what's up with you? Was like your Dad a Nazi or some shit?"

Harry looked up real slow. I mean to say, s-l-o-w. Sinister like Boris and Natasha. He shoved his documents into his desk in a James Bond manner...ultra cool. Then he scanned the room. He looked at Sugar who stared back blankly. Then he looked at me. I winked back.

"Listen, kid," H-Bomb sez, "these people got a need to know?"

Luce nodded slyly, with a espionage type grin on his face - if you looked away, it was gone without a trace.

H-Bomb nodded slowly (the camera pans the room here - these are like Hollywood directions for when I make it big...with like real mean looking shadows and shit) and sez this here: "What about Ginger?"

"Sugar ain't a problem...if it ain't on ECTV she don't wanna know. Won't remember diddly...just use big words."

H-Bomb reached into his desk, fishing out some kind of major blade with like a compass on the handle. Harry started cleaning his findernails - what there was left. He chewed 'em down everyday... then he went into like a soliloquy rap, spaking thusly:

"Right...my father was an American agent who helped bring a group of German scientists over here after war." Harry looked around carefully, "Project Paperpush...we saved a lot of krauts from the noose. It was a beautiful thing - a very successful operation."

"Why man? Why not fry those bad boys...after all they was criminals..." This part was spoken by the protag - your truly.

"Criminals?" H-dude like retorted, "No, they just got caught. All those goddamn liberals crying over spilt milk...a couple of Jews... we needed those boys to help fight the Rooskis..."

And then the H-Bomb went on to like relate how his "Agency" imported tons of Nazis - shipping these "units" direct to Alabama. A place called Huntsville. They became American patriots in no time at all. "DeNazified" Harry said, "some of the nicest guys you could ever meet. Sure they made some bonehead moves but who hasn't?"

Right here, establishing like the pregnancy of the proverbial moment, Harry took a pause for the cause, sticking his knife blade into a ziploc filled with brown powder. He snorted the powder right off the blade. This dude was freakin' heavy. We was buggin'.

"Little pick-me-up," Harry explained, "still got friends in Laos and Afghanistan...from the good ole days. I traded some Stinger missiles for this stuff. We had some left over, you know, after the war."

Luce was like staring intently (stage right, for the Hollywood dudes) and so Harry sez: "Look kid, this is a dirty habit. This stuff will stunt your growth...stay clean. I mean that."

Just then Nancy rolled into, looking mighty groovy (I reminded myself to lay some lines on her later...) and bearing some psychic java. Oh man...

Sugar looked up from her TV Guide and said, "Did you get that knife from ECTV, Harold? I'd like to get one for my husband...he's a good ole boy from old 'Bama."

Harry checked out the room for like listening devices and said this part here: "What's his name? Are his prints on file?"

Sugar gleamed, the center of attention (she was always like too much on the clutch): "His name is Muller, Dick Muller. He's a butcher." H-Bomb nodded and then pulled a little black book out of his desk. He looked under d and then under m. Then he scrunched up his eyes real spooky like and smiled. It was totally cool. "Give him this knife here," he says, handing her the knife, "and tell him CLIPPER-14 says hello."

Sugar dutifully wrote down the message on a post-it. "You spell it like the ship?" she asked. Harry nodded circumstantially, preserving his deniability...Sugar then announced that she was going to lunch as it was exactly noon. "I go the same time everyday," she said.

"It's always good to be regular," Lucifer agreed.

Nancy gave H-Bomb some coffee that he waved away saying, "Never use the stuff..." As Nance split the scene (leather jacket, tight jeans and oh man, I can't take it, gotta remember to hit on her later. For like dramatic effect. A love interest, in like Hollywood speak.)

Harry asked "Who's the girl and what's her clearance?" The H-Man was like upset visible when he learned that Nance was "typically Dutch."

"Keep an eye on her," Harry Doyle said. I nodded vigorous-like.

"You can't trust people that ride to work on bicycles," Harry explained. "It's unamerican. Besides, they're a bunch of liberal freaks over there in Holland."

Harry pulled another ziploc out of his desk - this one filled with white powder. Harry jabbed a pinky into the bag and inhaled until he got his "mind right"...

"I still got friends in Costa Rica, summer house in Panama," he said. Luce asked for a little of the coke and Harry said, "No kid," real fatherly like, "do as I say, not as I do..." Then Harry locked everything back up inside his desk and announced he was "going to the John to get some work done."

And this was like our intro to the new guy. What a trip. I could see already that a bond between Harry and Luce was forming. Father and son stuff. Over the next two weeks Harry told Luce all about his adventures: giving LSD to prisoners ("Boy, that was something to see...I never laughed so hard..."); overthrowing foreign governments ("It had to be done, son..."); controlling the news ("Ah c'mon, everybody does it..."); and even assassinating "unreliables" ("Yeah we hit a lot of guys - no big deal. They were all pricks, especially that pretty boy Kennedy.") Yessirree DaddyO, Luce had a need to know and Harry had a need to show and tell.

I shoulda known Luce had something cooking, the way he squirreled away Harry-info like so many nuts...But like I was busy keepin an eye on Nancy ("Just following orders...") and Sugar was too wasted on ECTV to remember to duck and cover...until it was too late.



For like a week or so things were quiet. I was diggin' Nancy's scene and Sugar was od'd on ECTV. Luce and Harry went everywhere together...picture this man, a real skinny pale lookin' dude and some beefy, barrel chested paranoid overthehill secret agent with an itchy nose traveling around the City like bullwinkle and rocky...

One day I was in the head taking a, well, anyway I was in there (I had lifted Sugar's TV Guide to read...lucky for me cause we ran out of paper so I had to use most of Saturday.) I looked out the window and I saw Luce and Harry on the roof of the neighbor's house. Luce was typing on some antique laptop computer with like red and green wires hanging out of it - these wires were connected somehow to the neighbor's phone lines (oh man, I don't wanna know...) meanwhile Harry is up there snorting lines of something. All of a sudden they both burst out hysterical laughing. I was so startled I like dropped Sugar's TV Guide into the toilet bowl. Bummer.

That night I couldn't take it anymore. I invited Luce over to my place to listen to some Marley and smoke some spliffs. We were groovin and I was ready to dive into my like heavy plot-enhancing dialog when Luce demanded that I turn the news on.

"Hey Luce Man, first tell me what's up with you and Harry..." "Turn the news on..." he said.

So I did.

The lead story was about how some guy was arrested for using his PC to crash the White House computer network. Luce smiled and and switched channels. The next channel had the same story but a picture of the cat the cops busted...our neighbor! This was the dude whose house Luce and Harry were on top of earlier. Just then the phone rang one time and then stopped. Then it rang again.

"That's for me," Luce said. I gave him the cordless...

"Yeah, I saw it, hee hee...alright H-Dude...cya tomorrow." I took the phone back from Luce and spake thus: "So what gives, Daddy-O?"

Luce said, "Come on," and we went down the block, to an old phone booth. Luce ripped the wires off the phone handset and bared them with wire strippers. I was bugging out.

"Luce man, be cool!" I like intoned.

He just smiled like that old Chelsea cat type dude. Then he pulled a laptop out of his backpack and it had like wires (yep, green and red again) hanging out of a modem card, said wires having alligator clips attached to them...Luce clipped the wires to the wires he had just bared - cool as a calculator, faster than you could say "Englebert Humperdinck."

Luce booted his machine and it dialed out...I watched like blown away...he dialed up an account on US-OnLine. "I got a thirty day free trial on this bad boy - under a fake name of course..."

Luce went to the web surfer and dialed up some resource like 'www.nsa.gov.80'...it was the National Security

Agency's home page...oh shit. "Dig this," Luce said and he launched an 'exploit' against the server. Our little script told the server that we were the authors of the html script that it ran off of..."Here's the fun part," Luce said.

Once we got a shell prompt -that's geek speak for getting behind the scenes, cool touch for like a Movie (hint, hint, Mr. DeVille...) - Luce said that we could literally do anything.

"The html script was hacked by the server's superuser - he has top clearance - to all NSA files...cool, eh?"

"Oh man, let's get the hell out of here, Luce."

"Chill, Slider, let's just send some mail first..."

So like Lucifer changed to a directory called ts\_only and found some file called AE\_ILLUSION..."It's a complete list of all the algorithms used in the DES code called 'skipjack\_6'...nice stuff...state of the art cryptography... Harry, I mean CLIPPER told me where to look...now lets write the old folks at home..."

Luce opened up the pine mailer and dropped the AENIGMA file into the buffer. Then he addressed the mail to some addresses I couldn't make out...

"Just some interested third parties in Russia, Cuba, Iran and Palestine," he said. "Alright man, control-x will do it...you want the honors?"

I said, "Yeah, why not..." and did the deed. Holy sheet...next Luce uploaded a file from his laptop to the NSA server..."just a little virus package," he said...Luce mailed the 'package' to the DOD (that's like spyspeak for the Pentagon) via a secure transmission route (some kinda 'uucp' protocol Luce said...I said "Man, if we don't get outta here soon you'll be seeing some pee...I gotta go!") Anyway, Luce said the virus would crash the Pentagon server and display a signature that sez: "CLIPPER-14 sends his greetings to the PHOENIX-2 development team...I said, "cool, let's split!"

Luce nodded and ran some little script he had written just for this occasion - it would 'recursively' remove all the files on the NSA server. He launched the script and the NSA crashed as we unhooked the laptop...

"Beautiful, isn't it? Just a simple little hack...but it'll be awhile before they're back online..."

"Luce," I said, "that was the NSA, and the DOD...hey man...you two cats did the White House, didn't you?"

"I can neither confirm nor deny any knowledge of the events you are describing," Luce said, "and I suggest that if you are to maintain plausible deniability you forego questions about things about which you have no need to know..." Luce glared at me and then burst out laughing.

"All the kids are doing it," he said. Luce grinned and said, "One more call, dude."

He pulled a cell phone out of his jacket and dialed out.

"Yeah...codename woodward...the night sky was lit by five shooting stars...and a crashing satellite of love...yes, confidence is high...OK, hold on," Luce said, passing me the phone.

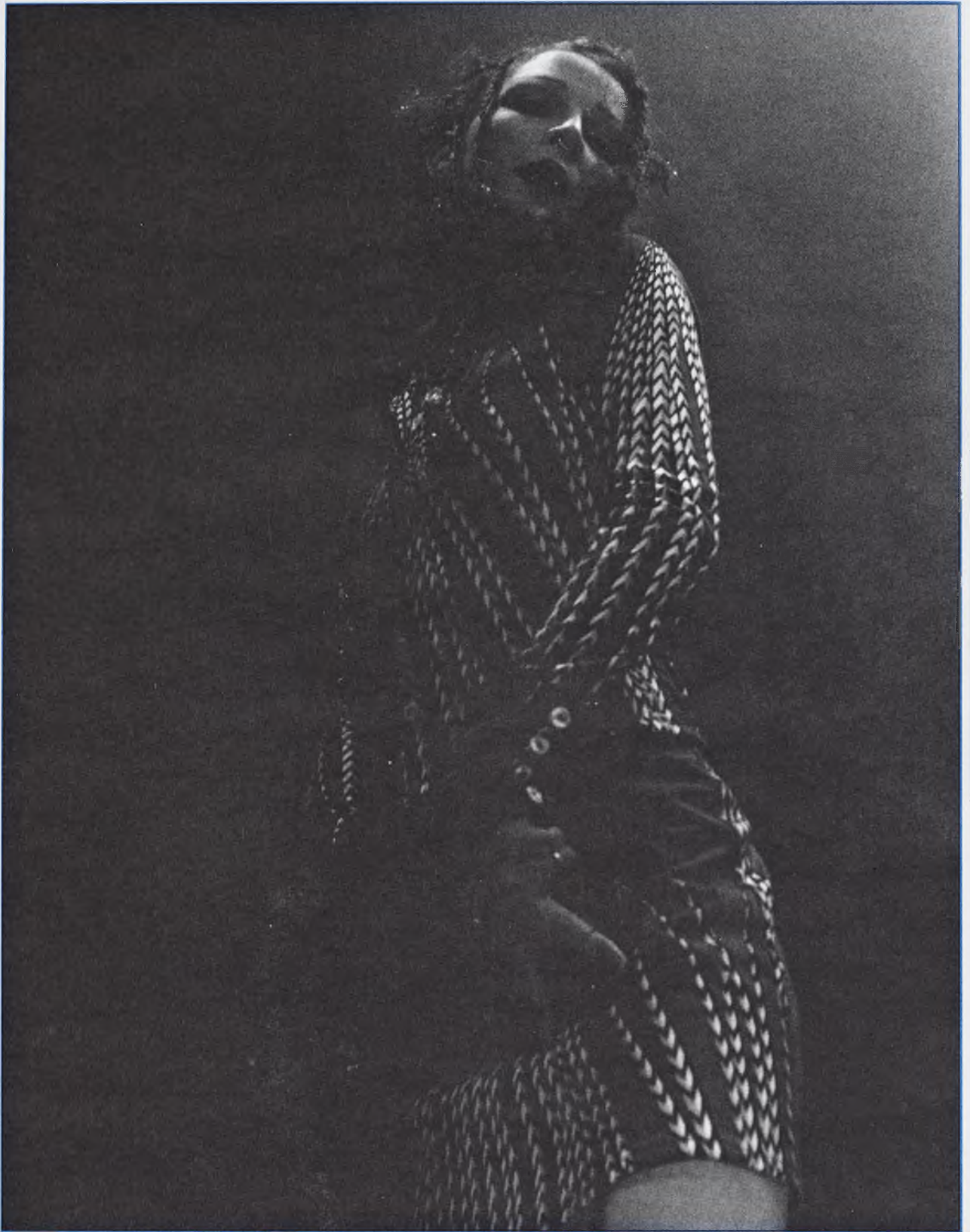
"What?!!" I splurged out, majorly freaked by the whole scene...

"He wants you," Luce said.

I said "yeah?" and a gravely voice came out of the receiver telling me: "This conversation never happened..."

"OK, Harry," I said. I gave the phone back to Luce.

"Time to split," he says. And so we were gone.



ISRAEL GATTENGO

So like, dig this: the next day Luce and I were groovin' with Nancy and her effervescing espresso. Everything was nice and fuzzy...trippy... typically Dutch, ya dig?

Secret Agent Harry Doyle was in the corner of his separate reality, getting his mind right. And making a list. Checking it twice. Then tossing it into his personal paper shredder...Sugar was looking for her TV Guide and Nancy was looking, oh man, I felt like Bond...James Bond. So I said, to like myself, now is the time to develop a love interest groove thing to move this story along. I mean like the movie of the week...

So, I asked Nancy to groove with me later on that evening, at my Nest. She said OK but could Luce come too. Huh? I sez, yeah, OK...

The day dripped by like a mescaline trail and Luce and Harry conspired in virtual silence...Nancy took a nap here and there and Sugar rambled on like about ECTV and her husband's love of fried food, shit like that. Finally, it was time to go.

That evening I welcomed my guests to my cosmic abode. Slider's set. Luce sat there staring down his Scotch while I rapped to Nancy. And then she turned to Lucifer Sam saying this part here:

"So, Lucifer, what is going on with you and Harry?"

Luce surveyed the scene, he was like panoramic, and then spake thusly:

"H-Bomb is cool...he's done some lame shit in his life but now he knows the deal. He wants payback from all the Federal dipsticks that hassled him when he was in the game...he gives me the in and I exact the revenge on his foes."

"What does this do for you?" Nancy asked.

"Hey whoa, Groovy Dutch Lady, I get to hack some serious geeks and whack their systems. I get to hack the world. Unlimited access to all the suits that fried our planet..."

"But what about Harry's old buddies? His Nazi friends, his CIA friends, he knows the men who killed your President Kennedy..." Nance like pointed out.

I put on some tunes to like defuse this rap...some old glam stuff...`Well I grow my hair just to scare the teacher..."

Luce went on:"Harry's wasted. He knows it, I know it. The Company ate his brain. He's gone. He knows the shit he pulled don't run...half his life don't compile. And now, his system is running shutdown...so he's paying back some American Nazis...that's cool with me.

"And you guys are helping him?" Nancy like, put forth. Man she was looking good...it was like heavily circumstantial. Man oh man...

So like I said this part here, like a soliloquy. Just call me Hammy, Prince of Denmark:"Lucifer is like running the program, Nance...he's a screwdriver jiver, an automobeat on the street...I'm just here for the ride." Pretty good, eh? Man, it was like Technicolor...

"Look man, hack the world, that's the point - Harry ain't gonna hack no SouthPaws, he's going after some major mal-functions..." (This is Luce talk: he was looking real devilish, ready for like Joe Bob Briggs's Drive In Movie Theatre...)

"But I worry about you two," Nancy said - kinda like a very groovy Donna Reed...she was wearing like an orange blouse and black jeans. And orange converse sneakers...I was like cooking with gas.

"We're cool," I sez, "Luce knows his stuff...let's show her, man." Luce smiled like fiendish and pulled an egg out of his pocket...he cracked it on the coffee table and peeled off the shell. He took a major bite and said, "This is for Sugar...I've been thinking on this for awhile."

An hour later we were at a phone booth. Luce had his laptop wired to the NYNEX box and we was logged in as root at ECTV! Luce knew a C routine to run against Solaris boxes, some security breach to exploit and so there we sat, in the driver's seat...Luce was like much too much on the clutch...

Luce hummed some old ditty about some Walrus dude (koo koo ka chew') and said: "Alright, dig this....Sugar is logged into ECTV, she's buying clothes at some Hong Kong sweat shop...her husband's watching the Bulls stomp on the Knicks...perfect...OK. I got some little number here that I compiled at home...a VRML script I think you all are gonna groove on...What's happening is it's gonna run against ECTV and at the same time I'll interrupt the Bulls feed and plug in a little love story..."

I looked at GroovyNancy and she gave back like a wild smirk, squeezing my hand...Luce like took over ECTV and sent a Virtual Reality script, interactive like, over the airwaves, right to Sugar's login...as she sat jacked into her ECTV headset she found her sorry butt having like animal sex with Abderazzak Kamir, the star forward of the Chicago Bulls. Then Luce redirected the output of Sugar's virtual wet dream into her husband's headset...

Nance and I looked at Luce in virtual amazement.

"There's too many negroes in basketball..." Luce said with a sneer.

We all were giggling and shit, watching the scene on the laptop's little screen until a message beeped at us. It said this here:"Broadcast message from CLIPPER-14 on tty0:

"NYPD locked onto your location...recommend termination of project. EOT"

"Oh shit, Luce," I sez, "I mean like, Careful with that ax, Eugene. Let's pack our shit and boogie out of here."

Nance looked at Luce quizzical like. "Harry?" she said.

Luce nodded, ripping his alligator clips off the NYNEX handset wires. "Harry's got my back," he said, "time to split!"

And so we was gone. \* Back at my Nest I said like how the whole thing was really bugged out. Luce sipped a beer and Nancy said:

"I'm going to sleep for an hour or so now..."

I seized the moment by its proverbials saying this little bit here;

"Nancy, man, could I like hold you, while you sleep...just for while?"

Nancy smiled and said:"That would be very Dutch."

We stretched out on the couch as Luce lit a cigarette and grinned like a fool. "Gotta go help Harry get his mind right...goodnight Dudes," he said...and was gone.

Nancy was already out so I kissed her forehead and turned out the light.

Next day Sugar called in sick...too much to dream I guess...anywho, that left me, Luce and Nancy to our own devices. And of course the H-Bomb. Oh Man...it was like cosmic. Harry began to talk openly about his exploits and Nancy joined in here and there...Harry didn't

seem to mind. He even made like a joke about how the Dutch are so goddamn liberal that even their spies ride bicycles...

"Yes," Nancy said, groovily I might add, "even the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst are typically Dutch..."

"The what?" sez I.

"The BVDs, we call 'em," Harry Doyle said.

"Ja Ja, the BVD, they take the trains and trams, not personal cars. They do it out of respect for the environment...it's very..."

"Dutch," we all chimed in...Moe, Harry & Curly.

So the day went on its merry way and eventually Harry leaked the information that he and Luce were planning 'one last hack'...of the CIA!

"Yes sir, I'd love to say howdy to the Company," Harry said, "just take a giant dump on the odci...that's office of the director of central intelligence, kids."

Luce and Harry agreed that the final hack should take place away from shop and so I said, hey, what the hell, let's like adjourn to the Slider's Nest and do the deed. We boogied from work early and went to the Slider Pad. Luce asked if any of my neighbors were especially bogus and I offered up a suit down the hall that liked to hit his old lady...Luce climbed up on the roof and we were connected into this fool's phone line. Luce dropped a length of telephone 'station wire' into my living room while I put on some appropriate tunes..."thirty days in the hole...that's what they give ya..."

Harry was laying out his plan to Luce and Lucifer said: "OK, Harry, but I'm gonna need a shell prompt, how do I get in?" So Harry had Luce dial up the CIA's web page (www.odci.gov, if you gotta know, brothers and sisters) and we took a virtual tour of the lovely Langely facility...Harry took us past the usual virtual touristy stuff and straight to a icon of the Langley Day Care center. He told Luce to type a click on the icon...and type a double bang on the j-peg image as it was downloading...Luce hit the exclamation mark twice as the image formed. A small side door opened up, slowly at first, and then the entire screen was repainted black. A tense moment later a dollar sign popped up in the upper left hand corner of Luce's real estate...

"OK, H-Bomb, man, we're in," Luce said, "now I need root's password."

Harry laughed and said, "J - A - N - I - N - E..."

Luce looked up, one eyebrow raised. Harry smiled and said, "she's the office sexpot, and the DCI's mistress..."

Luce hit enter and the system said "sorry..." Luce mumbled an expletive deleted and retyped the password. "Stupid typo," he said. He pressed enter again and we got a pound sign. Sheer villainy, man. We had cracked the frigging CIA. It was tantamount.

"OK Harry, where is it?" Luce said.

"In the DCI's home...it's a hidden file, a dot file..."

"Right...here's something...AENIGMA...yep, that's it!"

"This is very exciting," Nancy said, squeezing my hand.

"Oh, baby," I said. Just then Harry noticed a blinking cursor like stage right in Luce's screen.

"Hurry, son, we gotta terminate soon," Harry said.

"I'm on it, H-Bomb, I see them...fucking CI is tracking us..."

"Counter Intelligence," I whispered in Nancy's ear.

"This is very European," she said. I nodded, she smelled like vanilla...oh man...

Meanwhile, Luce is downloading the AENIGMA

file...Harry is breaking out in a sweat and Nancy sez: "You know the Dutch use a lot of American words. For example we say 'downloaden'. We just added the en to the American verb..."

Finally the download sequence hit one hundred per cent and Luce ripped the two wires out of his laptop's modem card...burning his hand.

"Shit!" he yelled, "Harry, I think we can still save the file but those bastards got my modem and my I/O card...gotta yank the zip drive out and see if we can upload the file to Slider's machine..."

Luce ripped the drive out of his machine and we hooked it up to my Pentium Decade...we coulda used my zip but the plastic case of the cartridge was all melted...finally Luce got the file transferred. It had some bad sectors but we were in the clear. Harry checked out the file.

"Nice job, son," he said to Luce, "the file's mostly there. All of specs on the chipset are intact. Anybody any good should be able to build the chip based on this data."

We like yanked the wire outta my humble abode and split the scene. "Harry," Nancy said, "do you think they'll know who did this?"

Harry smiled and said, "Sweetheart, the Aenigma chip is a code breaker the same one that broke PGP a decade ago...we used it to intercept all email traffic on the web. Everyone wants it...so, the DCI will have a lot of suspects to check out."

"But Harry, won't they find your back door?" Nancy asked.

"Angelface, is it true that Amsterdam is especially beautiful this time of year? I suggest we all get some tickets. Pronto."

And so we did. We planned to be at JFK the next day around noon for two pm flight...Nancy and I crashed at her place, Luce went with Harry.



Luce told me about what happened next some time after the whole enchilada hit the fan. Seems like Harry wanted to stop by work on his way home. Luce thought it was a bad idea but Harry needed the stuff in his desk. "It's a filthy habit, kid," he told Luce.

Four suits were waiting for them when they got to the shop.

"Good morning, CLIPPER," the head honcho said.

"Fuck you, Frank," Harry replied.

Head honcho got real upset. He was like visible.

"Goddamn it Harry no true names here...you want the kid to join you?"

"Leave the kid out of it, Needle Dick, I'm the one you want."

One of the other suits spoke up: "Doyle, the DCI passed an RPT on you to the DDP. Personally. It was mirrored in the RMD sent to the Station Chief. So, my FIR, to be included in the Control's FPO will state that you were adversely affected by overexposure to toxic chemicals... lead poisoning. And I plan to administer the poison myself...after you give us the file..." "Yeah well, Dicky boy, the DCI used your wife's name as his super user password...I wonder why he choose her..." Harry Doyle smiled, so evil he even scared Luce... "You know I hear she carries her own condoms..."

Dicky lost his head and pulled his weapon, some big cow-

boy handgun. He fired three times hitting Harry in the abdomen. Harry Doyle, secret agent, crumpled to the floor. Frank, the head dude, got peeved over this peccadillo and ordered his goons out.

Luce crouched down and tried to soak up some of Harry's lifeblood with like one of Sugar's genuine Black Forest doilies, to no avail.

"Son, I'm sorry about all this," Harry choked, then he coughed something into Luce's ear and died.

Frank Honcho came over and put his hand on Luce's shoulder. "Give us the disk son and you'll walk out of here," he said. Luce forked over the disk and said, "AMF, dipstick."

As he was walking out the door Luce heard the Honcho say:

"Kid, think about a career as an intelligence officer...I think you got the stuff..."

Luce boogied to the airport and by 3 PM the next day we were getting off a plane at Schipol airport in Amsterdam. Luce was sporting a new look: on the way over he had gone to the bathroom for a hour or so and shaved his head...it made him look even more egg-like. Koo koo ka chew, man... We spent the night at the Victoria Hotel, across the street from the Central Station, very high profile so we figured we'd be OK there for one night. We caught a train to Rotterdam the next morning and booked a hotel near Little Israel...Nancy loves the falafel...like only 7 guilder for a huge sammy, but anyhow...we slept off the jet lag and then went to a cafe for lunch. Luce pulled a brand new laptop out of his backpack...

"Where did you get that?" Nancy asked.

Luce smiled.

"Harry," Nance and I said.

Luce nodded. He told us that Harry had given him one hundred thousand dollars in cash and the key to safe deposit box in Dusseldorf, Germany. "We should be set for a long time," Luce said. He booted the PC and loaded some software off a 1 gigabyte zip cartridge. After the install was done he clicked on an icon of an old sailing ship. A gravely voice came out of the little speaker: "Hi kid, hope all is well. By now you should be in Holland, yes?" Luce said, "Yeah, Harry, we're all here."

Harry's face beamed and he announced: "Good, I assume you distributed backups of the disk to the usual suspects?"

Luce answered in the affirmative and informed Harry that the usual suspects were already beta testing the code breaker chip on some sensitive Department of Defense documents...

"Good work, son...I knew you could do it. Listen, when you and Nancy and Slider get settled I've got some great pranks online - right here in my little database. I'm sorry I can't see Nancy's homeland but I was never big on public transportation and I guess I had some payback coming too...anyway, next time you boot me I'll pass you a couple of scripts you may find amusing...See ya kid."

Harry's face blinked out and the CLIPPER icon reappeared. Luce put the box away and we ordered lunch...an assortment of Dutch cheeses and some local beer. "A typi-

cally Dutch meal," Nancy said.

"Luce, man, who wrote the Virtual Harry program," I asked.

"H-Bomb built it...I helped as a tech advisor, but he really did most of it. By some of the questions he asked, I think he has some pretty cool hacks in mind for us."

I grinned, evil like, and kissed Nancy on the cheek. She said, "Now this one," as I kissed the other cheek, and then: "now this one again," as I kissed cheek number one. Luce laughed and I just shook my head.

"Man oh man," I said, "this is just too much on the clutch..."

## ✧ Epilogue ✧

**B**eneath the hot stage lights of this our like anti-climax, it's like *ex post facto* time, man, I mean, ya dig? Me, I look like a bum spats and tails with satin entrails but I move like a veil so...watch me now, I'm gonna slide:

Lucifer Sam looks like a mink without its stoll, some kinda superstar out on parole and will he keep hacking? Do a bear squat in the woods? The man got feel on the wheel and he don't make with no brakes...

Will Harry Doyle stay dead? I don't know, man, if Hollywood wants a pre-quel, we could resurrect the dude but anyway we got virtual Harry. The flesh and blood Harry was a speed child, born to be wild, abused by the system and caught in its stink, some kinda missing link. But he made amends and we'll miss you, man. Unless Quentin Tarantino offers me like some serious bread...

Sugar Sugar? Well her idol remains Ginger of Gilly's TV Island or Betty of Archie-Land but she'll always be a jughead. Yeah, she'll survive, like the man said, she's a tupperwarrior...clad in glad. But her husband may switch from B-ball to bowling for dollars...

Groovy Nancy? Oh man...she is a very groovy super sleeper, such a gas, I gotta keeper. My glam girl, her habits swirl, her world is spinning on its axis, a dull dull theory but a dizzy practice...oh man...at her suggestion I nearly fainted - now I carry a placard that sez: `wetly painted.'

So here's an end to our neon nylon dream? Our little grasshopper stopper, our cosmic sea where all schools are strange and Moon Boys are prophets in the end? I dunno but T Rex had giraffes in his hair so I don't care, cuz me too, man, I ain't no square with my corkscrew hair...so watch close now, we're all gonna slide:

If you ever get to Holland and see like a trio of special effects, I mean like a real cool cat wearing like shadows and eating lots of eggs, a gone groove clad in a top hat and tails, arm in arm (that's very Dutch) with a paisley postcard, a neon moan Lisa, a future passion...if you see this sight, brothers and sisters, three twilight groovers doing a seesaw maneuver on a knapsack superlative day, stop and say:

"Hey folks, like, can I make the scene?"

It'll be cool.

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A false sense of victory fell into one of those human struggle patterns,  
almost freezing the children dancing and singing,  
"The Blue Snake's Gone"....

Only to realize it had shed it's old skin, leaving it behind and was busy slivering  
down to the blue lake, where the children played.

Fear is relative.

It can be overcome.

The shedding 's a natural occurrence for the blue snake.

So the children are wiser now about the blue snake...  
and of course, the blue lake.

DIANE MOLLER

## LETTER TO THE PILGRIMS

The flower's final act  
in a clay vase  
on a wood shelf high up, contained.  
The season's final act  
in the loss of light  
and didn't they see the Indian village  
when they arrived?

The painting's final act  
in the last stroke of color,  
summer green into brown  
and didn't they hear the Indian drums  
when they settled down?





KARI BERNARD

SAM SALGANIK

# QUEST

GRAYSON

The boy cast his eyes downward and a forlorn look clouded his face. She was the last in a long list of spirit mediums he'd consulted over the past three months. If she couldn't contact the spirit of his dead grandfather he'd be lost. The dismay hung heavy in his heart and was evident in his face.

Madame Zaladane raised her eyes. A brief pained look of embarrassment crossed her face as she realized she'd been discovered for the charlatan she was. "Perhaps your grandfather's sleep is heavier than most of the departed, child," she offered in an attempt at consolation.

"He's no more dead than anyone else you've contacted in the past," the boy looked up with a slight hint of defiance flickering in his eyes, "if your abilities are as good as you say they are, ma'am."

Madame Zaladane wrinkled her nose at the subtle affront the child had visited upon her and cleared her throat. "I'm sorry but I don't rule the spirit world, my child. I am merely a medium between this plane and the next. May I refer you to someone a little more sensitive to the rhythms of the astral plane? I believe Miss Helga may be able to grasp the wispy essence of your grandfather, because I certainly could not."

With that she abruptly rose and reached into the voluminous folds of the faded skirt surrounding her lower body. The table shook slightly with the motion and the tarnished pewter base holding her globe

of solid crystal teetered ominously. For a moment the boy felt that the thing would end up in his lap. He smiled inwardly. It would not be the strangest thing to happen to him since he'd begun his quest several weeks ago. The woman suddenly thrust a well-worn business card into his hand while grasping his elbow with her other hand. The fetid breath escaping her had not been noticeable across the limited expanse of the circular card table, but now, in such proximity, he felt his eyes gently begin to water. Mercifully her discourse was brief as he knew he couldn't bear the foul reek of her rampant halitosis for much longer.

"Miss Helga can definitely help you." She seemed on the verge of saying more but restrained herself. "That will be ten dollars", she added as if an afterthought.

The boy was about to protest when discretion overcame economics as he paid rapidly and escaped her malodorous mouth. He tossed the ten-dollar bill down with a hastily mumbled thank you and took the stairs two at a time after crashing heavily into the exit door of her basement room. He vaulted up onto Canal Street and sucked in a lung-full of sweet air — well as sweet as it could be with the usual abundance of traffic clogging the roadway. He hadn't realized he'd been holding his breath on the short dash up the stairs until he felt the blood thudding in his ears and felt the mildly labored breathing in his chest. He'd struck out again, but no bother, maybe Miss Helga could help.

He was an easygoing fourteen year old. Being an orphan had not made for an easy upbringing. His grandfather had taken him in after that fateful day when the news had come via telegram.

He could still remember the words: ACCIDENT AT HOTEL. STOP. BOTH PARTIES DEAD. STOP. PLEASE ADVISE OF PLANS FOR REMAINS.

STOP. Yes, he'd stopped all right. His entire world had stopped after that fateful day. He wasn't supposed to see the telegram but the babysitter wasn't the most sensitive of people and in truth the poor woman couldn't possibly have known that a four-year-old could read that well. The term remains had stayed with him for years after. What remains? Nothing remained except the fleeting memories which every day left him in greater numbers. It seemed he had to reach back further and grasp harder for the few which remained.

He took one hasty look at the crumpled business card still in his palm. He glanced at the address, slipped it in the back pocket of his Levis and absentmindedly wiped his palms on his thighs. It seemed he sub-consciously didn't want the taint of Madame Zaladane to stay with him. He trudged along Canal Street until he came to Broadway. It being a rather crisp September day, he decided to walk to the Ann Street address he'd seen on the card.

Miss Helga was not an imposing woman but there was a quiet authority about her. She calmly seated him and listened to him as he began:

"Good morning, ma'am. I don't know if you're familiar with Madame Zaladane but she said that you may be able to help me. I'd like you to get in touch with my grandfather for me, Miss Helga. We didn't talk much as I got older. He died recently while I was away at school, so I never got a chance to tell him how I felt about him before he died."

Her eyes swept him in one knowing glance as she took

his measure. There was a plea in the boy's eyes, yet there was a hardness in him — a hardness which seemed to spread from his core. Loss did that to some people. They had nothing left to live for and hated the world for the hand they'd been dealt by fate. Poor child, the emotions were conflicting but she thought she sensed the anguish pouring off him. Miss Helga resolved right then to do her best for the young man before her. The obvious love he had for his grandfather...oh, she had to make sure she could get a hold of the dead man's essence! She felt great self-pity overcome her as she realized her own bratty grandchildren would never miss her to this extent. She knew Zaladane, the hag! Of course she'd been unable to contact anyone, the pretender. At least she'd had the common sense to send the boy to a true Old World medium of undiminished power.

She raised her moist, rheumy eyes and reached a gnarled hand across the small table to him. "I can definitely help you, son..." she began. She held up her hand against the boy's outstretched wallet. "No, no, we'll discuss payment after we have been successful in our contact. Do you have anything from your dear grandfather?"

The boy offered the same items he'd taken to every other medium since he'd begun his quest: a photo and an old leather flask his grandfather had owned since the post-war years. The flask was covered in a burnished Italian leather which had developed a unique patina over the years. The photo was an old snapshot of his parents taken shortly after he'd been born. If anything would entice his grandfather's spirit it would be this photo of his beloved only child and her new family. He set them down before Miss Helga.

"I haven't seen anything like this in years." She exclaimed. "This was made in Italy before the war. I know. My father used to sell some of these from his caravan before the Nazis and Mussolini's fascists took him away. Where did your grandfather get this?"

"From an old man in Italy. Apparently he did a lot of traveling as a businessman after the war. He always picked up unique items. Do you think you can reach him with it?"

"My dear, I can probably reach the cow this leather was taken from. Miss Helga is strong, that I assure you. What was your grandfather's name?" He told her.

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. After a few moments her regular breathing became a slow, steady almost imperceptible sigh. The boy was afraid that she'd died right there before him without the decency to warn him first. He jumped when the knobs of her gnarled knuckles brushed his fingers briefly across the table before she tightly clasped his hands. Abruptly the silent breathing became a labored gasping wheeze. Her cracked voice seemed to come from the depths of her chest. He was slightly embarrassed and also fascinated. Her voice had taken on the deep resonating timbre of a chain smoking Lauren Bacall.

"Jacob Henderson hear my call. I know you are there, you've just left us." She flinched as if slapped. "I implore you to hear my call. I command you to breach the barrier separating us as only you can and make yourself known. The one you left behind is in misery. He needs to know of you. Jacob! Jacob, I say. Heed my call. Follow the sound of my voice to the plane of your past existence." Her voice now took on an ominous timbre. In the center of the small table the leather flask rattled slightly against her scurrying globe.

The boy was taken aback. Even if he'd been dead, the

sound of that voice surely would force him to obey. He looked down at their clasped hands and noticed the sheen of perspiration on her fingers. Her face held a similar sheen and there was a faint charge in the air somewhat like electricity. Could this be it? Could this crone do what the others couldn't? He'd finally be able to speak to Grandad!

After the drama of the summoning, the apparition's manifestation was somewhat anti-climactic. The gauzy immaterial face seemed to come out of the table. Its gaze went around taking in the scene before fastening on the boy. The rest of the body slowly drifted up.

Miss Helga stiffened. The wizened face didn't seem at all as benevolent as she'd anticipated. She waited until the table had apparently egested its unholy contents before speaking to the apparition.

"Jacob Henderson, you are held here by my will and the desire of the boy before you. Before you drift into the endless night remain that your offspring may know one last discourse with you."

The wraith's attention had turned to her during this monologue but her words had been unnecessary as its attention had been fastened on the boy and had only been pulled away by the sound of her voice.

"Speak, child. My power is great but not limitless. It takes great ability on my part to keep him here, ability which wanes as he is reluctant to stay. Speak! Tell the spirit of your despair. Let him know what you wanted to tell him at his passing but couldn't."

The boy couldn't believe it. After weeks of trying he'd done it. He tried to control the words so they wouldn't be

an undecipherable torrent. He slowly and loudly began:

"You were the one who took me in when Mom and Dad died. I wasn't there when you died Grandad but I wish I was. I wanted to look into your eyes as you lay dying and tell you how much I hate you, you animal. You bastard! What would Mom had said if she knew what you did to me. The days you were pissing drunk with that flask in your hand, the nights you raped me out there on your farm up state! Only the animals could hear me scream... I got away from you by getting a scholarship to prep school but I wish I was there to see the light leave your eyes.

"I'm your grandson and you left your money to a god-damned horse! What would your only child say if she knew the things you did to me. Grandad. I wanted you to know that I'll hate you forever! I want you to go to your eternal rest with my hatred ringing in your soul!! Rest in Satan's arms you freak and go damned well terrified into that good night because in another eighty years I'll be coming to make Eternity even more Hell for you...!!

There was an abrupt sound like water going down a drain. The wraith wavered briefly and dissolved to nothing. Miss Helga sat in mute shock. Her nicotine-wrinkled lips seemed permanently resolved into a perfect "O".

"Thank you ever so kindly, Miss Helga," he wiped the perspiration from his throbbing temples, "How much do I owe you now, ma'am?"

The words were a dry rasping croak like a roach's wings rubbing against dead wood:

"No charge"



V. F.

# METAPHOR FOR LIFE #312

*gabriel lopez*

*Life is a hysterical absurd joyride  
through existence with  
Chaos and Order  
drunken in the backseat  
shouting directions.  
Inconsistency and Regularity  
are locked in the trunk  
cause the car is too crowded  
due to the fact  
it is a small foreign model.  
Time  
is riding shotgun  
meticulously navigating  
through the up and downs staring straight ahead  
never looking back at  
Chaos and Order  
drunken in the backseat  
shouting directions.  
I am the driver  
haphazardly maneuvering  
the highways  
city streets  
crowded roads  
and occasional unmarked dirt path.  
Trying to balance out the suggestions of  
Chaos and Order  
drunken in the backseat  
shouting directions  
and doing my best to ignore the ever present  
dominantly looming presence of  
Time  
who meticulously navigates  
the path to a destination  
that I am not even sure of*



XIANG CHEN

*The mirror never says a word  
but is cursed out for revealing,  
a body that is out of shape  
and used to be appealing.*

# *Image*

ROBERT L. HARRISON

NIGHTS  
Fair!  
Please  
LITTLE  
TOAST  
LEAST  
AGAIN  
GHOST  
DID THE  
SHARE  
THEY  
EARNED  
THEIR  
WAGIN  
TRUTH  
DARE  
EYES  
INCRED  
INDIVID



**I** didn't know, when I first met you that you were in the habit of burning the toast," Eric said with a coffee mug raised to his mouth. He sat in his underwear with his legs spread out underneath the kitchen table. He carefully sipped his reheated coffee and busied himself weeding out the supermarket flyers and travel section from the rest of the Sunday paper.

Sarah rummaged through the refrigerator; "Where is the orange juice?" she asked from behind the door. Her bare feet were at shoulder width apart.

"You going to get that toast, or what?"

"Get it yourself, you lazy shit." The refrigerator light streaked across her face and crept into the opening between her nightgown. She wore a white satin robe that hung to her knees. The knot around her waist hardly held in her breasts; her nipples were barely covered and her naval was inches away from revealing itself. The smoke continued to billow out of the toaster. "Did you finish off the orange juice?" she asked.

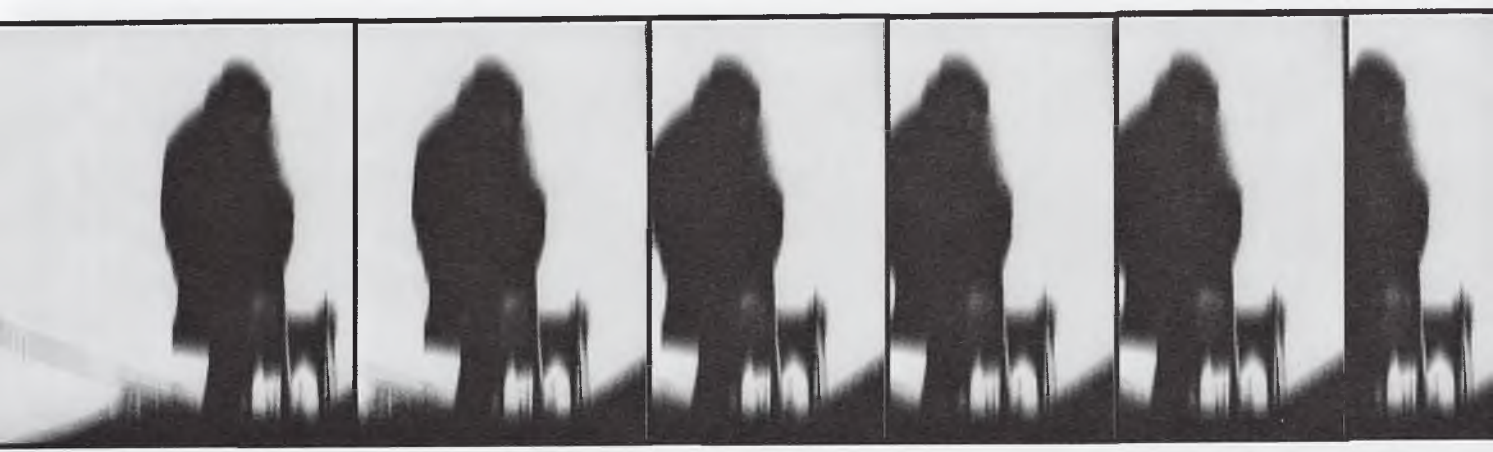
"Are you going to burn this house down?"

"God damn you, Eric! Why do you have to be such a bastard?" She shook the hair from her eyes, stepped over to the toaster and slapped up the handle. Two black pieces of toast shattered into pieces on the counter. Sarah wiped a ball of saliva away from the corner of her mouth with the back of her hand. She opened the pantry and counted: three cans of beef broth, one can of Bavarian style sauerkraut, two tins of pink salmon, a half dozen boxes of orange flavored Jell-O, and a dented can of red clam sauce both of them were afraid to open, let alone eat.

"I finished off the OJ two nights ago," he said, thumbing through the A&P circular. "You know, they should make incense with this smell," he said, locating Sarah, "call it 'Burnt Wheat Toast' or something."



ANDREW WINTERS



The phone rang, "Good morning, Eric." It was Bill Macquire from the local church. His voice rang out and caused the right side of Eric's face to twitch involuntarily.

"Yeah, so you say," he replied and gave Sarah a choking sign. She knew it had to be either her mother or the Catholics.

"Something wrong, Eric?" Bill piped in.

"No, no, Sarah has just burnt the toast and spilled the orange juice, that's all." She gave him the finger and began mouthing out a sentence.

"Oh, my, my... well, nevertheless, it is the day of the Lord and we here over at his house..." Eric attempted to read Sarah's lips. "... have been wondering where you've been these past few months." She tried again, this time with a wider mouth.

Eric mumbled "kiss—my—ass?" while his eyes followed her lips.

"What was that you said, Eric?" Bill asked. Sarah shook her head no.

"Nothing, I was saying that I miss mass," Eric looked up at the ceiling and saw what looked like a giant coffee stain around the light.

Bill continued, "Well, that is the reason I called. I wanted to tell you that mass begins an hour earlier today and because of this we're also having a coffee hour to follow the service." Sarah was impatiently tapping her fingers on the counter.

Eric mouthed "what?" in her direction and asked, "Will there be French Vanilla coffee, Bill?"

Sarah slapped both her palms down on the counter and screamed "Where's my glass?" with a heavy sigh.

"Glass?" he replied.

Bill chimed in, "Is that Sarah I hear in the background?"

"Glass?" he mumbled, "Ohhh, you're looking for your f- um glass?" Eric put his hand to his forehead.

"Eric, did I call at a bad time?" Bill asked. Eric had momentarily forgotten Bill was on the phone.

"No... no... no..." Eric said with his body lifting in spasms of laughter. "Sarah was asking for her glass. She likes drinking out of this particular glass, you see." He had no idea why Bill needed to know this. "Well, Bill, we'll see if we can gather ourselves up and get to mass after I locate that missing glass,

OK." Eric figured that Bill was over his time limit for calling up the absentee flock.

"OK, I'll see you later then." Bill sounded cheerful until his voice trailed off at the end of the sentence. Eric imagined him there behind his desk, pencil in hand, putting an X next to his name. Eric hung up the phone and called Sarah over to sit on his lap.

She lingered over the kitchen sink as if her glass had been washed down the drain. Eric didn't know why this glass was so important to her. It looked like it was decades old. There used to be a beachball, an ocean, two seagulls, and Seaside Park printed on it. But now, the gulls had disappeared and the lettering floated like white rice on the ocean.

Eric called her again, "Sarah, darling, come over here— I have something important I want to ask you."

Sarah lumbered over and pulled a chair out. "Well?" she asked. "What is it?"

"I want to know if you will go to church with me today."

She crossed her arms over her breasts. "What for?" she asked.

"Because I feel the need to get something to eat, and today they're having a coffee hour."

"Well, isn't that a noble reason to go to church." she said, gazing out the window. The morning sun had cast a shadow across the bridge of her nose, making Sarah look like she was looking over a gray wall.

"Just come with me."

Sarah got up from her chair and looked down on Eric. "If you want to go to church, that's fine, but I'd rather go hungry than prostitute myself for a couple of donuts and a cup of coffee."

"So go to mass and don't eat afterwards; I don't care," he said. "Some religion would probably do you good."

"Just tell me where my glass is," she asked again.

"Come with me to church and I'll tell you where it is."

"Whatever," she said, shrugging her shoulders. Eric gave a half smile. "Your stupid glass is on the floor next to the toilet, on top of the newspaper crossword puzzle with a blue Bic sticking out of it."

"Yeah, I love you too, Eric," she said, leaving him to cut out coupons and dream about foreign beaches with exotic names.

The Honest Heart Church wasn't an impressive building. It had formerly been a Reformed Protestant church until a Catholic congregation moved in last year, had a fund raiser and erected a stained glass figure of the Virgin Mary. If not for this addition, a passerby would have sworn that it was a wooden Methodist church that belonged in New England. Its white planks stood stiffly before a backdrop of sagging pine trees. The church was set back on a quiet winding road. Most of the townspeople didn't even know it existed, yet a handful of them drove by it Monday through Friday. There were no bells or cathedral ceilings, but the over-sized organ was heard from the back of the parking lot as soon as Eric and Sarah stepped out of their car.

Eric's plan was to slip in fifteen minutes late and slide into a back pew as inconspicuously as possible. They had arrived five minutes ahead of his schedule, so Eric was intent on sitting those minutes out on the hood of his car. Sarah continued walking; she seemed drawn by the music and with it, she crossed the gravel lot. She had never heard an organ before, and for reasons she wouldn't have been able to explain, its music pulled her in and comforted her. Its voice reminded her of Grandmother who used to read to her when she was a child. How granny's voice rose, fell, and whispered until Sarah drifted off to sleep. This organ carried Sarah into church and she stood listening beneath the stained glass Virgin Mary.

Eric followed two minutes later and slipped his arm under Sarah's. He tugged her into the back pew, aggravated that she had left him outside. He let out a moan when his backside made connection with the bone hard bench. Several of the others in the congregation turned around and Eric nodded assuringly. He remained quiet throughout the service. He mouthed the words of the hymns, stood on cue with the rest of the congregation, and did his best to fold into the fabric of the church around him. He occupied his mind with the vision of homemade cakes, glazed donuts, steaming French vanilla coffee, and big speckled blueberry muffins. His only distraction



was Sarah. She leaned forward to better hear the sermon and she sang too loud. Eric found this all mildly amusing until he saw her drop five dollars into the collection basket. He whispered into her ear "Have you gone crazy?" Sarah merely smiled and gently gripped his knee.

Eric had to wait until the end of the service before he was able to get Sarah alone. They had descended into the church's basement in the midst of the congregation heading to the coffee hour. He pulled her aside, "What has gotten into you, Sarah?"

She held the service program, a sheet of upcoming events and pamphlet of uplifting psalms in both hands. Her cheeks were slightly flushed. She gazed around the room and appeared not to have heard Eric's question. The gleeful congregation exited the stairs and walked through the room to a larger meeting place. They formed a stream of laughter and muted small talk colored by their Sunday suits and dresses. The room began to silence when only a trickle were left crossing.

Sarah spoke quietly. "This is all very new to me." She moved into the corner where the concrete walls were covered with colorful finger painting and crayon drawings.

Eric watched as Sarah stepped around a scaled down table with tiny plastic chairs pushed beneath it. "I hope I haven't made a mistake bringing you here," he said. She stopped before a picture of a purple guitar, smiled, and traced over the child's wavy lines with her finger. "Let's go, Sarah, I'm hungry." The room had a cool dampness that was scented with slow drying finger paint and drifting coffee.

"Do you ever wonder what it would be like if we . . . well, went ahead with it?" Sarah said, motioning to the children's art. She sat down in one of the chairs and dropped the papers on the table in front of her.

Eric picked up a loose red crayon and rolled it between his fingers. He knew very well what she meant to say, but she never quite said it in plain English. She stayed quiet about the matter for two months after she chose to listen to him as he explained that they were just too young and too poor. It was a matter of circumstances, and theirs wasn't a perfect world. He went short of breath finishing the reasons why they just shouldn't, and couldn't, have a baby. Since that day, a silence had fallen between them that never quite went away. A decision had been made, and it seemed like neither one of them cared to put it into words.

Eric began drawing red circles on a piece of construction paper. "This must be where the kids have Sunday School," he said, drawing lines that ended where they began.

The table was arranged into an adult order. There was a coffee tin in its center with paint brushes protruding out, and on either side of the tin, two stacks of construction paper were weighted down by sixty-four count boxes of Crayola Crayons.

"Eric, would you raise a child to be religious?" Sarah asked from her seat.

Eric cleared his throat, "I'm not sure this is the right time to talk about this."

"It's never the right time, but I believe you mean that church is not the right place for me to talk about an abortion, don't you?"

Eric stopped drawing circles. "I am really sorry I brought you here."

"Oh, to your sacred house of donuts. Well, I have

some news for you, Eric, and I'm not going to wait any longer." Sarah paused, "someday soon, you're going to be a father," she said abruptly.

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you I'm having our baby," Sarah said a little louder. "I couldn't go through with it."

Eric dragged both hands down his face. "This can't be happening. Didn't we have a long conversation and decide that we weren't ready? Sarah, you can't do this." He shook his head several times. "Why, why?"

"Because it did happen, and I can't let it go now." Sarah stood up and stared across the table at Eric. "Why don't you draw me some hearts?" she said, with a half smile.

"Sarah, we aren't even getting along anymore." Eric put down his crayon and crumbled up the piece of paper.

Just then Bill Macquire popped his head in the doorway, "Hey you kids, what are you doing staying after class?" Sweat glistened from his forehead and continued into his hairline. His head was covered with strawberry red hair that had the thickness of a child's. His cheeks were always a shade of red; today the color was a little darker from the excitement of organizing the coffee hour. "Sarah, this is a surprise. I haven't seen you in months. How's the family?"

Eric leaned against a poster size calendar with a couple of children's names and the dates of their birthdays circled. He wanted to ask Bill to leave but didn't. Instead, he listened as if Bill's words caused him pain.

"Everyone's fine," Sarah replied.

"I'm glad you've come," Bill said, taking Sarah's hand. "And Eric, why are you being such a stranger?"

Eric snorted and looked up into the fluorescent bulbs. One of them was struggling to continue giving light. It flickered between bright and dim with irregular jumps. "I guess I'm just bashful," he replied, scratching loose several flakes of dandruff.

"Well, let me introduce to some people then." Bill's voice perked with enthusiasm. "You too, Sarah, I have some people I'd like you to meet." He led Sarah by the hand through a short hallway that led into an adjoining room. Eric, however, lingered behind for several moments.

He remembered picking Sarah up from the clinic with a box of chocolates in his lap. She didn't want to talk about it, she had said. It was difficult, she had said. Lots of forms and girls waiting in line. Some with eyes swollen from crying, others just staring down at their feet like they were wishing they could click their heels together three times and disappear. "I stayed strong," she had reassured him. He had said he was sorry several times- sorry it had to be this way, and had handed her the box of chocolates. And then, she just didn't want to talk about it. And it wasn't talked about for two months.

His eyes traced over the crooked lines of homes and stick figure parents with blue clouds overhead. And then some paintings were smears of color that resembled nothing. He mumbled into the empty room, "She lied... she's lied to me."

Bill led Sarah past a small group gathered around a piano, singing "Lord, Thy Savior." Mrs. Mary Cantwell played with her head rocking back and forth. Bill leaned over and whispered into Sarah's ear, "She can play a pretty mean organ, too."

"So I heard," said Sarah. She gazed around the room.

Groups of people were huddled in conversation, nodding their heads between bites of cake and sips of coffee. She saw some faces she recognized from town. There was Mr. Peterson who owned the hardware store and Mrs. Fried taught high school mathematics at the local high school. There were a couple of little boys who looked familiar as they scooted past her, playing hockey with a rolled up sock. Bill and Sarah stopped beside Father O'Reilly and waited while he finished talking with an elderly woman.

When he was through, Bill spoke up. "Father O'Reilly, this is Sarah Ann Cooney. I believe this is her first time with us."

"Yes, this is my first time," she said, straightening up her back.

Father O'Reilly smiled and little wrinkles appeared around the corners of his eyes. He reached out a liver spotted hand and asked Sarah what she thought of the sermon. Sarah said she had enjoyed it although she wasn't familiar with some of the references. Bill chimed in and said that

Father O'Reilly was real fond of literary allusions. This seemed to amuse Father O'Reilly greatly and he began talking about Shakespeare's plays with fondness. Sarah nodded her head several times, and from the corner of her eye, she saw that Eric was standing in the doorway. Their eyes met briefly between drifting members of the congregation.

Father O'Reilly finished with praise of Hamlet and said, "Well, I hope to see you again soon, young lady." He turned to the next person, who was waiting patiently.

"Are you hungry?" Bill asked.

Sarah looked over and found the doorway empty.

"Sarah, do you want to get something to eat?" Bill asked again.

Her eyes panned the room for Eric. "No, I think I'll just have a glass of orange juice, thank you," she replied.

Upstairs, Eric walked past the stained glass figure of The Virgin Mary and stepped into the afternoon sun.



SAM SALGANIK

Nights so fair!

With their little toasts...Release

Twist again old ghosts, who did their share,  
They earned their part waging truth or dare  
Eyes skim, incredible -individual sovereigns  
About ( ? ) nations out there,  
diplomacy never seemed so fit!

Release again, to the asylum and green flowers

are growing older and outcry to sunflowers  
who are acing bright light heights, daffodils  
are unfolding their multitude, so many Roses  
bleeding from passion, romance, and labor  
Concoct and they gather  
A swelling g-arden burst forth hot immense sense  
this night to down the spasms which have their  
antecedents anywhere, somewhere on some  
occasion, which express themselves any  
place - but here!

An elderly sea-woman slides in,  
and manages to grip  
this sore-ly tangible bite  
Swearing, harnessing, conjoined one by one  
In a circle she stands, waving her science  
Injecting mad loads of color—  
She's a secret genuine bastard standing over  
this cauldron!

# PRUDE CIVILIZED LOVE

LOU BARDEL

II. Our fair city, the centre, is getting dim  
towards the west a wild eyed drinking  
quest - cold coitus- and calm

A cauldron, sweating projecting a zillion  
zingular beams  
Flames beneath its base  
That climb up the outside rising up - to the trapeze  
equilibrium - beatitude - bestial floor  
Brilliant blue...

fomenting flaming orange...

Cool ever-green...run to excellent yellow  
sun-life-basking-hopped-yearning-  
prude  
sense for me & you

Twilight, we went on a stage coached by  
the largest scale now out to the country,  
an organic farm to build a shining city  
knock back pollution stacks that dirty my  
child's lungs - I'd like to join my fellow  
omnipotent sovereigns  
(Dance on the floor shuffle barefeet thinking  
back n' forth big sister baby D. curly  
fleshy big head crust eyes wonderful  
bright glare, the pyramid the sun exotic  
the theater lively ears a voice anyone  
my child's lungs, fellow omnipotent sovereigns)

III. Now- back to love's bitter mystery, ranging  
around places maybe we shouldn't be but  
the architecture of the room, the way it  
makes you walk...

Scrape from some soil something that I  
can give or consume and collide spirit  
head on hard on fear of sex...

To match the glint in your eyes that is  
sending  
that your mute eyes implies and surely  
hints at, finally once I'd like to know...  
would it startle me  
If you lifted the words from your mouth  
Take heed, I would, I could  
My civilized love — driving into the radical garden!

IV. Step on the gas, peel down the clock  
Oh wait! I forgot

I left my lover over there around the  
block and I think my lover might have  
skipped the other way —

# Silent House

REBECCA GIACCIO



ROBERT L. HARRISON

# N

ight had fallen in that pretty Christmas way and I had received a wonderful Christmas gift—to spend a few days with Lou and his family. I had learned to appreciate these times with him since our relationship had become long-distance. And likewise, I admired and enjoyed spending time with his family.

It felt as though we had stayed at the family party only a short time, probably because I had arrived later on in the evening. Everyone was in good spirits, but I could feel Heather's absence. I was curious to see her and see how she was holding up. Lou said she was with her friends and was "holding up" better than she should be under the circumstances.

The family was playing a game. Each was trying to remove a block from a tall tower without collapsing the structure. Around and around they went, slipping out piece by piece in turn until it seemed that every block was structural. At that point in the game, they astounded me with each piece successfully withdrawn.

I remember watching Lou's dad's gleaming eyes lock on those pieces as he slipped out one daring choice after the next with an ease evidently natural, not practiced. In the end the skeleton inevitably crumpled into a pile of bones on the table. I do not remember who caused it—it did not matter to me.

Lou, his parents and I climbed into the Suburban and headed for home. I was sleepy and happy as I sat next to Lou in the back of the truck. We were all quiet and I watched the snow flurrying down. As we approached his town and the trees became thicker, I could see the snow falling into the dark spinning woods that cracked the slate colored sky with blackness. I thought of the Robert Frost poem, "Desert Places" and recited it to myself several times:

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
But a few weeds and stubble showing last....

Lou brushed my hair from my cheek and let his hand rest there. I smiled and enjoyed the warmth. The windshield wipers were making crystal rainbows and their song was lulling me to sleep.

✧ ✧ ✧  
"I've never seen him like that."  
"He was pretty quiet."  
"My father has a range of emotions and this, today, was not in his range."  
"Do you always eat breakfast together, or is it just because I'm here?"

"No, that's because you're here."

Clair's voice rang across the basement startling Lou and me from our whispers. "Lou, get OVER here right now," she broke in angrily in that singular tone of hers that sounds like a cross between a whine and a nag, and a mockery of both. She yelled at him for leaving his laundry on the floor.

"I could have fallen and hit my head!"

"Would that have been a bad thing?" Lou joked.

Clair, further incensed, loudly affirmed it, and stormed off. "What was all that about?"

"I thought she was kidding around."

"You shouldn't joke around with her. She told you she was a grump in the morning."

"I thought she was kidding," he restated helplessly.

We could hear stomping over head, and then a vicious exchange between Clair and their mother. I looked at Lou. He was staring blankly at the television.



"I would definitely live up here."

Lou was quiet, as if I had finally come to a realization he had been confident of—cocky of, even, all along.

"It's so beautiful and quiet." But as I said it, I thought it could also just be the magic snow can bring, covering everything with sparkling perfection.

We pulled into the parking lot of the A&P. In the hurry of packing I had forgotten my toothbrush. Lou smiled. "Do you see that stream at the end of the parking lot? When I was little, I used to hop across it while my mom shopped."

"Very cute." I thought about how we are so afraid at home to leave children out of sight for even a moment. Things seemed so much more wholesome up here, far away from the city.

It was so cold, we ran from the car to the store. As we browsed we heard a young boy, his eager hand on a half gallon of orange juice, ask his mother, "Come on, Mom, can we buy this?"

His mother was reluctant. "Well, all right. But don't drink four glasses of it—only one glass at breakfast! Drink soda or water if you're thirsty!"

"Yeesh!" Lou leaned against me. "We're not going to do that to our kids, are we?"

I smiled. I liked the mental picture his question provoked.

"Maybe, someday," I thought hopefully and sighed. I was not sure if a year and a half of dating meant he was the one, but I did feel very attached to him. I kept thinking of what my Dad always says: "You've got to eat a lot of corn bread with someone before you really know him."

But then we had just come through Heather's tragedy. I remembered him calling a couple of months ago saying, "My sister just had a baby." I thought his family was kidding him because a birth is not something that just pops up on a person, that someone other than Heather had to have known about it beforehand. But they were not kidding. She had fooled us all and herself, and the raw fact of the matter is that her baby died because of it.

What a terrible scene at the hospital. Lou's family gathering around Heather, who was still having trouble believing that any of it happened to her. It was the first time I had ever seen Lou and his father hug. I know what that meant to Lou, knowing that they never had a very expressive relationship. But Lou had not relinquished my hand even as

they hugged. I drew myself away feeling out of place and in the way. I told him it had made me uncomfortable because I felt like I was taking snapshots of very private and personal things. I felt like an intruder. Everyone assured me that I was "family" and that I belonged there. And Lou said that he did not care about anything except that he wanted me there.

And when we walked into Heather's room, and the nurse was fiddling with the intravenous in the top of her hand, and as I saw the look of pain across her forehead, I got light-headed and had to pretend I was going to get a glass of water in order to regain control of myself and avoid passing out. It was almost too much. I felt just terrible about everything.

Lou had a lot of trouble with it. He kept saying that Heather had robbed him of unclehood, of the opportunity of playing with a little baby. He told her that she was irresponsible, that it was her fault. He was stupefied, we all were, that her pregnancy had been kept a secret from everyone including their parents. And then she gave birth in her grandparents' bathroom when no one was home. The tenants upstairs had heard her cry for help and the police had to break down the door. The door jambs were still broken and you could still see the shoe prints. I guess we all felt a little sick.

I know it is important to have the same grieving patterns as someone else and I liked the way Lou and I were handling this together, although I was mildly worried about his judgmental attitude towards Heather. As far as the rest of us were concerned, she had mentally blocked it from her conscious reality. Lou could not accept that. But he listened, and that is so important. He listened, and I honestly believe he tried to understand. After all, it is completely normal to feel the way he did. And I was glad he was not expressing this to anyone else, most of all Heather. The last thing she needed, I thought, was to be judged by her brother, one who is supposed to be an ally.

And I suddenly thought of how odd it was that I was visiting their home during the holidays. I remembered the awkward reception my house gifts had received. I could not imagine why I had gotten such a peculiar response. But it made sense when I realized they were still in mourning.

After that I could not help but wonder what I was doing there in the first place, and why Lou even invited me at all. I told him that I felt like I did not really belong there. He told me that he wanted me there and that was all that mattered to him. I felt like I had made the decision to come without having all the facts. But now I was determined to make the best of the situation. We were still together, after all.

"There you are!"

Startled, I grabbed any toothbrush I saw. My musings had brought me far, far away from the A&P in Andover, New Jersey. "Yes," I said calmly, returning the hastily chosen toothbrush and choosing another. "I'm ready to go now."

"I think we can go to the express lane."

"OK. I'm glad we got the juice, too."

"You didn't have to."

"I know, but I'd like to anyway—for the house."

He nodded and hugged me as we waited on line. "I'm so glad you're here," he whispered in my ear.

"Me too. I can't believe I'm here."

"Me neither."

"But I'm glad about it. I miss you, you know."

"I know. I miss you, too. A whole bunch." He squeezed me tightly and we went back to the house.



Dinner was very strange. Neither of Lou's parents said much, and Clair seemed much too lively, in general. When the two mock teased each other in the kitchen right before dinner, their mother hushed them sharply. I could hear Lou telling her they were just kidding. I thought of how he thought they were just kidding that morning.

Conversation was scant. Somehow, nothing I thought of to say seemed important enough to break the air-tight silence in between the brief conversations. And the bits that intermitted the grave, profound silences, seemed laughably ridiculous in comparable importance. There was something in Lou's father's particular aura that warded off my glance like an invisible shield. It was actually physically impossible for me to look at him except on the rare occasion that he spoke. The contrast in his character was too acute to face directly.

As a matter of fact, I found myself looking down most of the time. And I began to run out of things to concentrate on as I ate them.

"Were you at work today, Dad?"

"No."

I started in surprise. If he had been in the house, he had to have spent all day in the bedroom.

"Oh. I thought you did," Lou persisted, as if he had been preparing a topic of conversation and did not want to give up on it without a concerted effort.

"No."

"He stayed home today," his mother concurred blankly. He had spent the whole day in the bedroom? He lay down by himself the whole day? It seemed completely out of character for him.

Dinner stretched painfully on. Suddenly Lou's mother ordered, "Clair, do the dishes." Lou's parents rose and disappeared into their bedroom. I began to bring my plate into the kitchen.

"Don't do that," Lou said lightly.

"I have arms, Lou. I'm not completely helpless," I said playfully. Lou watched me affectionately as I deposited my plate in the sink and went back for the condiments.

"Don't help, Rebecca. I get vicious when people try to help me."

I placed the condiments carefully on the table and backed slowly away. "No sudden movements," I thought to myself, smiling. I did not share my private joke.

Lou took me down into the basement. I felt incredibly relieved to be away from the tension at the dinner table. We stayed there the rest of the night.

I peered out of the sliding doors down to the lake. Everything was still and covered in the beautiful silken snow. I became aware of my reflection in the glass. It was studying me, brooding. I turned away from the doorway.



"Lou," Clair said, once again in that characteristic tone, "I'm afraid to ask if I could go out tonight. I'm grounded because of you, you know. And I want to go to the movies but I'm scared they'll say no and yell at me. You think they'll let me go?"

At that moment Heather descended the stairs.

"Did anybody call for me, Lou?" she interrupted as she glided towards us.

"I don't think so. We've been here since before dinner and I don't remember the phone even ringing."

"Ok."

The girls went upstairs together whispering. I felt awfully like their demeanor was exaggerated for my benefit. But I did not know them well enough to know for sure, so I dismissed the thought and we played a little pool.

The house was sleepy and impregnably silent. A hush had fallen over it like a clear plastic film and I felt as though we were all suffocating in it with seemingly perfect composure.

I was drawn back to the sliding doors. The last rays of light were shrinking from the sky but I was not ready for nighttime yet. The lake was frozen solid. I became aware that my reflection was growing more articulate and had become orange, like a moon rising above the horizon.

A sense of foreboding came over me as the sunlight abandoned the room and the night began to draw our light from the house. We would never be able to illuminate this night. I felt like stepping outside and grabbing hold of the horizon of the black sheet sky and throwing it up, up overhead. Let the light in here! I imagined myself stretched taut, the dark cloth clenched in my hands, the folds of darkness billowing above my upstretched arms like curtains.

My reflection was overcome with bitterness at the foolishness of such a vision and turned away from me. Despair turned in my stomach. I was not ready for darkness yet. It was too early. I turned to Lou.

"Let's go see a movie."

"I don't know. My sisters said they wanted to go, too."

He went to talk to his sisters and returned darkly.

"We can't go anywhere."

"Wha...Why not?"

"My mother has the car."

"Where did she go? Will she be back soon?"

"I don't know; no one really does." His eyes avoided mine.

"Well, can't we take the Suburban?"

"I don't want to ask my dad."

The plastic film began tightening its grip around us. I didn't know what to say.

"Can't we go somewhere else?"

"I don't have a car."

"I don't mind walking."

"There's no place within walking distance. Besides, it's freezing out."

I knew he was right. Heather and Clair descended the stairs in line, like two hens, still whispering indiscernibly. They had a mission.

"We need to talk to you, Lou," Heather said with gravity.

I took my cue and headed for the television.

"It's ok, Becky," Clair said. She turned to Heather and said, "Lou's just going to tell her anyway."

"That's ok. Just ignore me."

I watched cartoons for a while searching for anything entertaining and lighthearted, but bits of discussion cut through the noise of the television.

"...tell me, with what? With what?" Lou was asking impatiently.

"...just look in the back of your closet."

He disappeared into his room, returning a moment later, his hand running through his hair, his panic filled eyes flash-

ing from sister to sister.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?!"

They hushed him and their voices fell again. Heather's voice floated over the TV, "It wasn't used. Just...it wasn't used."

Lou's expression hardened. The murmuring continued until I heard finally, "Well, we just thought you'd want to know...just don't do anything to upset them..."

I got up and walked over to them, my eyes wide, playing unwittingly well into the beautiful performance.

"We're sorry we ruined your weekend."

I was incredulous. Something apparently disastrous had happened and they were apologizing to me. "Ruining my weekend?" They all looked at each other. Lou walked away from us. He leaned up against a window sill and looked out.

"We're going to lay low and not cause any trouble. Don't say anything about it to them, Lou. Just don't provoke them."

The group dispersed. I went and stood beside Lou, placing my hand on his back. I looked out the window with him. I do not know what he was watching so intently, but all I saw in that framed blackness was an orange mask pressed up to the glass looking in at us. It floated in the window expressionless, unseeing, vacant. I spoke quietly, keeping a cautious eye on it, "Lou? Do you want to talk about it?"

"Did you hear any of it?" the mask asked in a voice as smooth and clear as the glass it hovered in.

"Not really."

"No." Lou moved away from the window, sat down on the couch and began to flip the television channels. "No. I don't want to talk about it."

He stood my unwavering gaze without response until finally he rolled over, pulled out a newspaper and began to read it. I sat down in the chair beside him and watched him turn the pages. I did not know what to do. There was a problem but he would not talk about it. More importantly, not only would he not talk about it, he would not talk at all. Minutes passed. Pages turned. My eyes never left him. Twenty minutes ago I wanted us to get away from this together into some kind of light, some life. Now I was completely alone in a house of silence.

This is how it is going to be, I thought, as the moments slipped to minutes. He is not going to tell me. He is not going to talk to me for the rest of the night. I waited in vain for him to even look at me. My breath quickened, I blinked back tears, I was ready to scream, but my stare never wavered from his slow, deliberate page turning. His stare never wavered from that paper.

I began to realize that I was stranded there. I was alone for certain. The silence was unbearable. I thought of calling home. I thought of doing anything to get away. But I did not want to go home. I wanted to stay and deal with this. I wanted to stay and have everything work out and get better. The spell of our still-life held me captive and motionless; only my silent, quick, irregular breath betrayed any life at all.

Suddenly, it became ghastly amusing. This is how it is going to be. I could not stand it a moment longer. I grew angry. This is how it is going to be for the rest of our relationship. Do I want mine to be a house of silence too?

"You're not going to tell me, are you," I breathed fervently. I could not stand another minute.

His eyes rose from the paper. His manner was alien to

me—distant, cold, almost condescending.

I saw in those eyes what the mask could not cover. I could see through the glassy calm smolder like a clearing smoke screen. Rage was destroying, devouring whatever it is that dwells behind our eyes and makes us alive.

"You don't want to know."

I don't want to know! I cackled softly at the absurdity of his comment. He reassembled the newspaper carefully and put it aside. I laughed again. It was too much.

He looked me in the eyes and told me the story. Clair had gone out with her boyfriend and had stayed out past her curfew. Her father snapped. Probably with Heather's tragedy weighing heavily in his mind, he went looking for her with a shotgun which was presently propped in the back of Lou's closet.

I could not speak. It was too perverse: the self-aware behavior, thrilled whispers, exaggerated tiptoeing and pregnant silences. They were all playing parts in a melodrama and I was being sucked into the insanity.

Lou said they all agreed to lay low: Clair would stop seeing Randy, Heather would not go out as much or as late, Lou would stay away.

"You have to go talk to him."

"No."

"He's all alone up there. I'll stay here and watch TV. Go up and talk to him."

"No." he persisted.

"It's not healthy, all this tiptoeing around people. It gives them license to go another step further. Laying low isn't going to make things better."

"No. You can count the number of times Dad has mentioned Vietnam on one hand and we know he lost his best buddies right in front of his eyes. He just doesn't talk about it."

"Well, maybe not to you but to your Mom..."

"No. She thinks the best way to handle a problem is to let it alone and it'll go away." The scorn hung thick in his voice. "When Heather came home after having the baby, Mom let her have and do whatever she wanted—anything to keep her happy so she wouldn't kill herself or leave. Now she's stopped seeing the therapist." Lou leaned forward, his eyes passionate, his voice dropping to a burning whisper that shook his body and ignited his dark eyes. "She got away with it. They let her get away with killing that baby. She acts like nothing ever happened. Whenever Mom tries to bring it up, Heather starts screaming and Mom drops it. She lets Heather and Clair have whatever they want and she doesn't have to deal with the screaming. I can't stand it."

"Then why are you doing the same thing? Why are you letting them get away with this?"

We conversed well into the night. Every sentence uttered made me feel so much better because we were talking about it. It was so important to me that we talk about it.

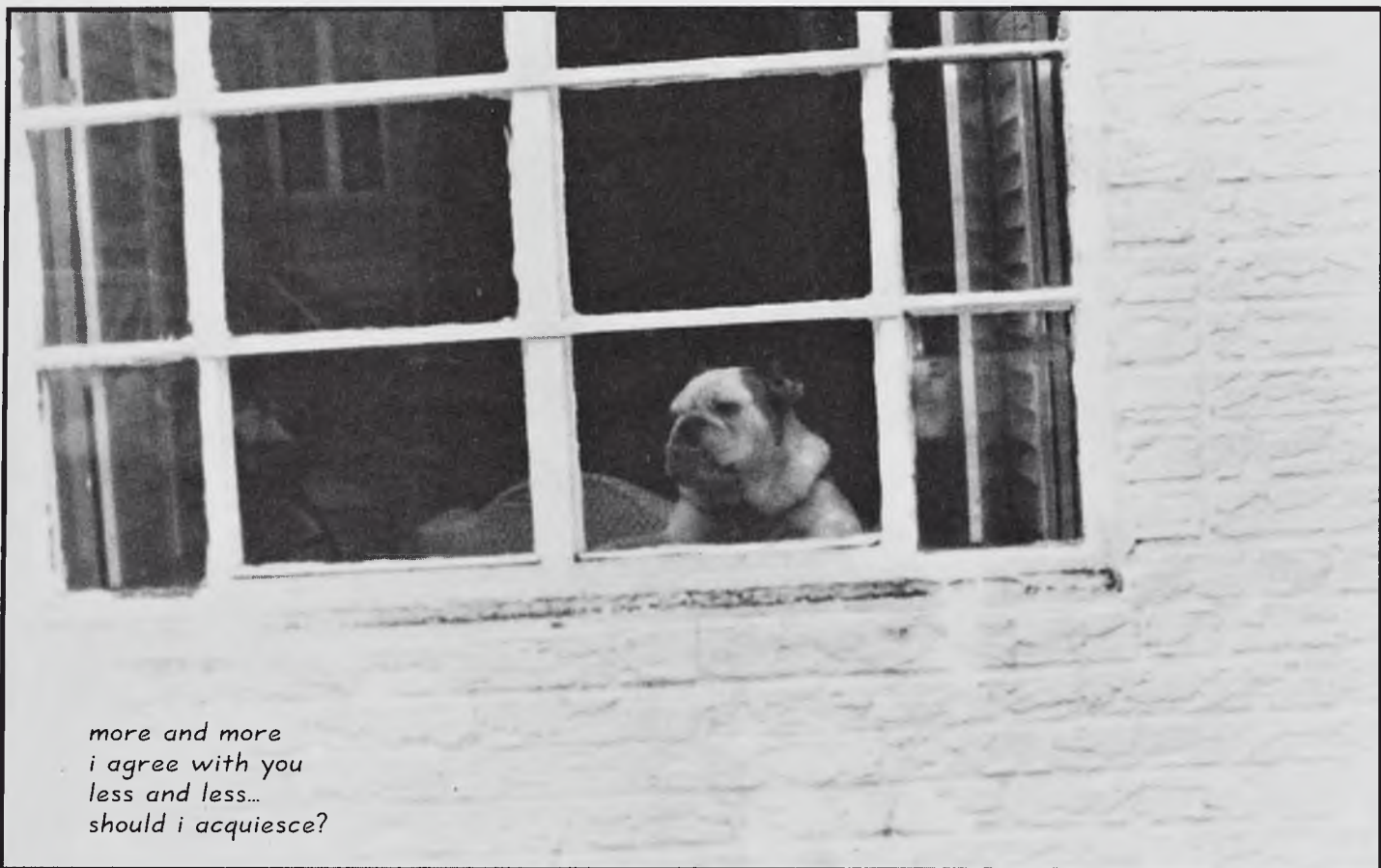
But towards the end of our discourse, I began to realize that talk is all it ever would be. Whether or not he listened to me, I could do nothing about it. I could not help him. I could not help his family.

And when he left me for the night and flipped off the light switch, a curious sensation fell over me as the darkness fell over my body. It was like endless folds of curtains that had temporarily been suspended in the sky, falling down over my body, burying us all in its fabric despite my small, powerfully futile up-stretched arms.



ISRAEL GATTENGO





*more and more  
i agree with you  
less and less...  
should i acquiesce?*

*should i just seek  
rest? not be  
such a pest...  
as our children grow*

*older and bolder  
they need us both here  
less and less...  
our lives are such*

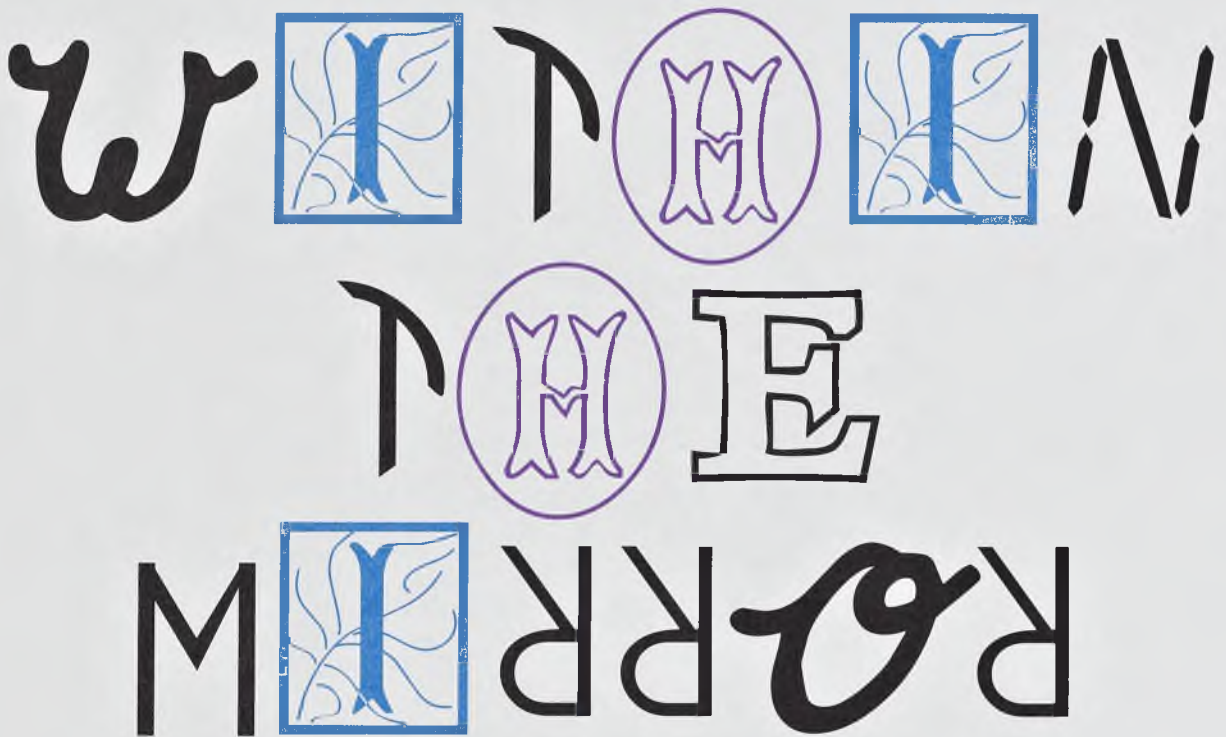
*a mess, perhaps  
it would be best  
if we weren't so much  
each other's guest.*

*more and more  
we keep becoming  
less and less...  
should i acquiesce?*

G. KESSLER

SAM SALGANIK





JACQUELINE  
SCHAMING

*Who is that? The one I see standing beyond the mirror stares back at me with a strange resemblance, although something is quite bizarre. Could this be me? The possibility seems so confusing. Could it be that one is not aware of such ways about oneself? The thought is frightening, but the desire of my curiosity is exotic.*

**I** woke up early on May 24, 1993. It was my twenty-fifth birthday. Exhausted from an intense dream, I laid awake in bed for a whole hour. I could only think of my dream and what it could have meant, if anything at all. I felt so different. It was my birthday, but this was much more than just being a year older.

As I thought, I ran my hands down my body. It felt so new, so different- not different in the way it did when I'd first started to develop into a woman, but similar to the way it felt when Kyle touched me. All of my senses became alive with the stroke of my own hand, creating a pleasure that at one time was only brought on by a man's touch. If the doorbell didn't ring, I would have stayed in bed touching and fondling myself all morning.

When I opened the door, my friend Bobbie was standing there holding a bag of presents and a bakery box. As I let her in, she placed the bag and box on the table and gave me a hug. "Happy birthday, Nina. How does it feel to be half way to thirty?" She laughed out loud and shook my shoulder. I just looked at her and smiled.

"Come on, Bob. Grab the stuff and I'll make some coffee."

"Ni, wait till you see these muffins that I bought you. They're still hot."

As we waited for the coffee to brew, Bobbie went on about our plans for my night out. We had been friends since kindergarten, and knew everything about each other, if not more than the other knew of herself. Bobbie was almost a year older than me, but she felt as if she were forty. Her biggest fear was being "old" at thirty. She lived by her motto: "Party every day as

though it were your last, experience new adventures, and NEVER go to bed with your make-up on." Her belief was that make-up made your skin grow old quicker when you slept. When you woke up, you could simply break a mirror with the sight of your face.

Bobbie had planned for me to have a night like no other. She told me of a club that had opened a few months ago in the city. "Ni, it's called Tranzitionz. You're going to love it."

"Have you been there before?" I asked.

"Of course I have. And if you weren't always playing Miss Maturity, you'd have experienced it too."

"Miss Maturity... well, someone has to be. At least I'm going out tonight."

"Yes, and you're going to have the time of your life."

Strangely, I found myself mesmerized by the name of the club. Tranzitionz- it made me feel weird. Somehow I thought that my dream and this club were connected. I was looking forward to tonight and started to think that afterwards I would never be the same.

I looked up at Bobbie and asked her if she ever felt confused about who she was.

"I know who I am, don't you know who you are?" She laughed at me.

"Internally, stupid. I mean, do you ever wonder if you ever truly know your real 'self'? Subconscious desires, unknown territories of the soul, I don't know. Sometimes, especially lately I feel as if my subconscious is trying to tell me something."

"Yeah, it's telling you to get a life. All you do is work and see Kyle. You're like an old housewife and you're not even engaged."

"I'm not an old housewife. I just don't like instability."

"Nina, you're twenty-five. You have to start experiencing life to the fullest. Let your hair down once in a while and just let yourself go. Tonight I am going to make sure that you find yourself."

I told Bobbie about my dream. "I was in a room that had no walls. It seemed as if I was lying in a huge cloud, caressed by softness. I felt like hundreds of hands were softly gliding along my body, touching every inch of me. I could hear sweet melodies and the voices of women. I didn't hear words, only sounds. I was completely absorbed, and when I woke up, I was in a daze. My head was tingly, the way it feels after orgasm."

She sat there and looked at me in a strange, yet understanding way. "It's simple," she replied. "You're horny and missing Kyle." That was Bobbie, plain and simple with the facts, but I knew it was something more.

Later that day as I was getting ready for my birthday out-

ing, I was intrigued at what could possibly be. I wasn't frightened by this, tonight I was going to let whatever happened happen. I had planned to dress as sexy as I could, and I was going to enjoy myself.

As I was about to get into the shower, the phone rang. It was Kyle. He was away on business and was calling to wish me a happy birthday. He told me that he would be returning by the end of the week, and would make it up to me as soon as he got home. When we hung up, I looked at the receiver and thought about his smile. Kyle and I had been dating for several months, spending at least five out of seven days together. I loved him, and knew that he loved me, yet I still felt as if something were missing. Something was not right, and it wasn't him. It was me.

After I showered and dried my hair, I stood in front of my mirror and got dressed. I watched myself as I put on a tight fitting hunter green velvet dress. I put my long auburn hair in a clip so when I was ready to leave it would look wilder and fuller after I took it out. When I finished

applying my make-up, I glanced at my image. I felt beautiful. For the first

time, I looked at my body and noticed it. My shape and proportions all seemed new. Before that day, I had thought that my legs were too long, hips too wide, and breasts too big.

Even though everyone always said that I had a perfect shape, it was only in that moment that I understood what they were saying. I actually liked my body. It was like I had just discovered it.

Bobbie picked me up at seven o'clock. She drove me to the restaurant first, and at ten, we left for the club. When we arrived there was a line to get in that stretched around the block. Looking for a parking space, I wondered how long it would be until we were actually inside. After driving around for several minutes, we found a spot across the street. As Bobbie parked, I admired the scene in front of the club. There hung a large cloth sign that read "TRANZITIONZ." The building had been renovated inside, but outside it looked like the other old theaters in Times Square. Just looking at the place made me excited.

Bobbie, with her head held high, grabbed my arm and walked directly to the front of the line as I noticed the people waiting. Some of them looked so outlandish that I found myself fascinated and stimulated by what kind of lifestyle they could possibly have had.

As we reached the entrance, there was a man in drag and a woman at the gate. Two big men, one black the other



white, stood by the door. Bobbie walked up to the Drag Queen and spoke.

"Hi, we're on the guest list. Is there a certain line for us to go on or can we go in?"

"What's your names, gorgeous?" he answered.

"Bobbie Santino and Nina Arena."

I looked at Bobbie and giggled. People always laughed when they first heard my full name, just like this guy did. In a husky voice, the Drag Queen chuckled as he checked the register. "Ooh honey, Nina Arena. What a melody that is... yes, yes here you are. O.K. girlyies, enjoy the experience." Winking at us, he lifted the rope and let us through.

As we walked through the door, the music came screaming at us. We walked a dark, narrow hallway lit only by iridescent lights. People lurking in the corners looked high. The hall led into a huge room where the dance floor lay directly ahead of us. Looking up, I noticed there were five more levels to explore. Our first stop was the bar.

Bobbie ordered two Blue Acids as I gazed in amazement at all the music, lights, and people that surrounded us. Bobbie handed me my drink and I drank it quickly. I didn't waste a minute to order another. Bobbie looked at me and laughed. "Living it up, aren't we?"

I looked around and then back at her and said, "Look around and tell me what you feel."

"I feel like we're going to get drunk and live out a part of our lives that we haven't lived before." As she finished speaking, a very attractive guy walked up and handed us two passes.

"I hope you will join us," he said. He smiled handsomely and left us. The cards read:

V.I.P.  
TWILIGHT ROOM  
4TH FLOOR

We looked at each other, and without hesitation headed for the stairs. On the fourth floor there were three hallways. Straight ahead was a sign that read "Twilight Room" with an arrow pointed toward the middle hallway.

At the end of the hall stood another Drag Queen. We showed him our passes and were let into the room.

Inside, there were about fifty people already. The room smelled of sweet incense and warped music came from everywhere. I felt like I was being put into a trance. The people around were either at the bar, dancing, or coexisting in dark corners, absorbing the music.

Lovers of all sorts were hiding in the shadow and embracing on the dance floor. Men were kissing men and women were fondling and kissing other women as opposite sex couples engaged in various stages of foreplay. I couldn't believe my eyes. All of these people out in the open, just going with it and enjoying themselves. I wasn't appalled, but instead became very envious of the people around me.

I caught myself watching the two women who were dancing in front of us. As they moved to the eerie sounds of the music, I felt my body want them. I wanted to be wrapped up between these two beautiful women.

I looked at Bobbie, and she too seemed to be taken by the dancers. She turned to me and sighed, "So what do you think so far, my friend? Are you enjoying the scenery?"

I bit my lower lip and nodded slowly. "Do you want to join the others, and let out hair down?"

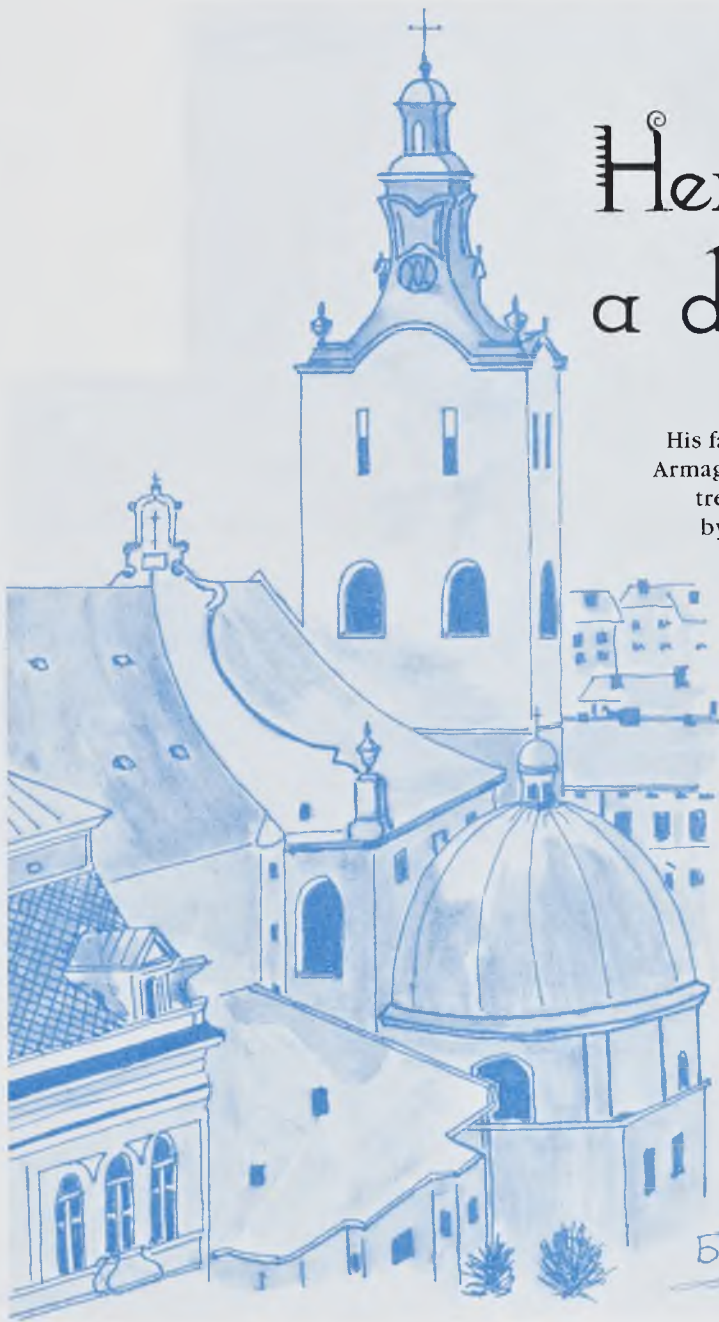
"I was wondering when you'd ask," she answered in a surprised tone. We walked onto the dance floor and started swaying. I let the sounds of the music control my every move. My eyes closed as I ran my fingers through my hair, and I felt as if I were being caressed by hundreds of fingers as I gave in to the sweet smell in the air.

When I opened my eyes, I looked into the mirror above me. The reflection of myself between Bobbie and the other two women smiled back at me. They were touching and kissing my body as I danced and watched. At that moment I felt an intense feeling that I dared not disturb. Rather, I joined in. I felt the cold touch of a hand slide up my leg under my skirt. I took a deep breath and reached out to the woman in front of me. As I caressed her breast, I felt a warm, soft tongue enter my mouth. That is when I realized what was missing when I was with Kyle. I looked again into the mirror and saw an image stare back at me. It was no stranger any longer. What and who I am was my own. It was I who stood within the mirror.

## Mom Loves Baseball But We've Got To Eat

ROBERT L. HARRISON

*We lost Mom  
to a Ken Burn's film  
about baseball.  
Mom liked his pitch  
so much that  
the laundry grew  
and the dust gathered  
and the dishes piled up.  
So we all stood by and rooted  
for the past to slide by faster  
because even the food  
was getting scarce.*



# Hersey Wolf was a dreamer. . .

He loved beautiful women, animals, and boxing. His father was King of Cornucopia at the time of the Battle of Armageddon. The king's men conquered and brought many treasures to his royal throne. The king committed suicide by hanging himself with wires. Some say it was because he was not served fresh eggs that morning.

Others believe he was confronted by the evil beast of the underworld.

Whatever the reason might have been, it didn't matter because his son Hersey was now king. When asked about his current status; Hersey replied, "Although the death of my father is a tragedy and I am at a loss for words, the new role I have been given as King of Cornucopia is quite exhilarating."

King Hersey was fascinated at the notion of a queen. Weeks after his father's death, he was presented with the lovely Anna Belle, who was to be Queen of Cornucopia. She was quite entranced with all the riches she had married into. Much to the king's dismay, Queen Anna Belle would wear abundant amounts of expensive jewelry and then ride on the royalty donkey all day, while showing off her riches. She began to take less care of herself. In two months she had gained fifteen pounds and King Hersey was beginning to suspect Queen Anna Belle was nothing but a gold digger. The marriage ended when the king found her in the kitchen scoffing down cartons of butter almond and gummy bear swirl ice cream.

King Hersey was upset, but he still had his throne, his animals, and love for the sport of boxing. The king was a good boxer, so it made difficult for him to find opponents. This led to the downfall of King Hersey. When other members of royalty entered the gym, they found his majesty sparring with a koala bear. They were fumed by this display of brutality and King Hersey Wolf was given the gas chamber.

SINAN HEPCAKAR

REGINA BOROVIK

my thoughts like members of the worldwide

wrestling  
foundation

seem staged as

they perform within

the roped margined arena where

even as i approach  
down the aisle

the announcer pulls down as if from  
the sky

the microphone

and i can see

there

see

my  
opponent

approaching too down an opposite side

both of us stepping  
to the sounds

of our audience screaming

over the booming loudspeakers

"ladies and gentlemen"

and then

there

we are

climbing up to and

between

the ropes

standing

then

in the very center

shaking

hands

then coming out

fighting



ANTHONY GARGISO

*Saw you, don't worry  
no runover.  
I went in,  
came out again after much trevail.*

*Still you were there, well dressed  
sleeping the cleanest sewer  
in New York- then got up  
and just walked.*

*After describing  
what could have been me,  
police left.  
They didn't ask  
identification*

# The Impending Even-ing

BRIAN BELULOVICH





SAM SALGANIK

Brian says no way. That if you leave your mother in jail, you're a bastard. But he hasn't seen her reading his diary, selling his jewelry, he hasn't been in the car with her when she pulls out of the gas station without a cap without paying, the kid who works there chasing us for two blocks. She turned the radio up and stroked my hair, "Mom is gona' take us for ice cream," she says. I just sank in my seat. The other day she goes to the next door and looks in their front window. Then she rings the bell. I'm hiding behind the curtain and she looks back to make sure I don't see. Then she takes their mail? And she doesn't even open it, weeks later it's still on the table. So I put it back (most of it).

The doctor told my dad that stealing usually means sadness, that my mother is sad. Now she has these blue pills she has to take. She takes them when we drive; when we watch T.V., she takes them when she's on the phone. She says they keep her level. But she's different now, she's a different mom now. She's afraid of stuff now. Now the door always needs to be checked. The gas is never off. We'll be having lunch and she'll say, "The gas is on, I'm sure of it." Also, everybody is looking at her. Yesterday she locks herself in the bathroom and yells at me to stop staring at her, that she knows she's guilty. "It's okay ma," I say and I put her blue pills in my pocket and the other ones in her bottle.



# Mothering

HARRISON BARRITT

*Flight*  
DIANE ISAAC

As she lay on the bed, the clock on the wall seemed to hammer out the somber tone of a Southern funeral procession. Each beat of the second hand reluctantly marked the time expired, and with each beat her heart kept perfect time. What was it about these sheets that made them look like unknown beasts lying under the Arctic snow? The watch on the dresser joined the chorus now choosing the soprano and taking the lead. The sheets, as though preparing for the hunt, lay even more arched and prepared for attack.

As the clock radio in a distant room beckoned her to rise, the trees feverishly clawed at the window in the rising storm. Like freed spirits, they clawed at the slippery glass saying, "Come home".

She did. She was now on Lexington Avenue, just emerging from that infernal subway pit and turning her body to face Mt. Gerizim, the place where the most basic human elements constantly confronted the sick and the well. She had been there for twelve years; long ones. But hospitals aren't made to entertain and there is always tomorrow, a time to make better the wrongs of today. Right? Wrong. Because time unfolds like a seemingly endless ball of string suspended in mid-air by an ambitious kite heading for freedom— where she should be.

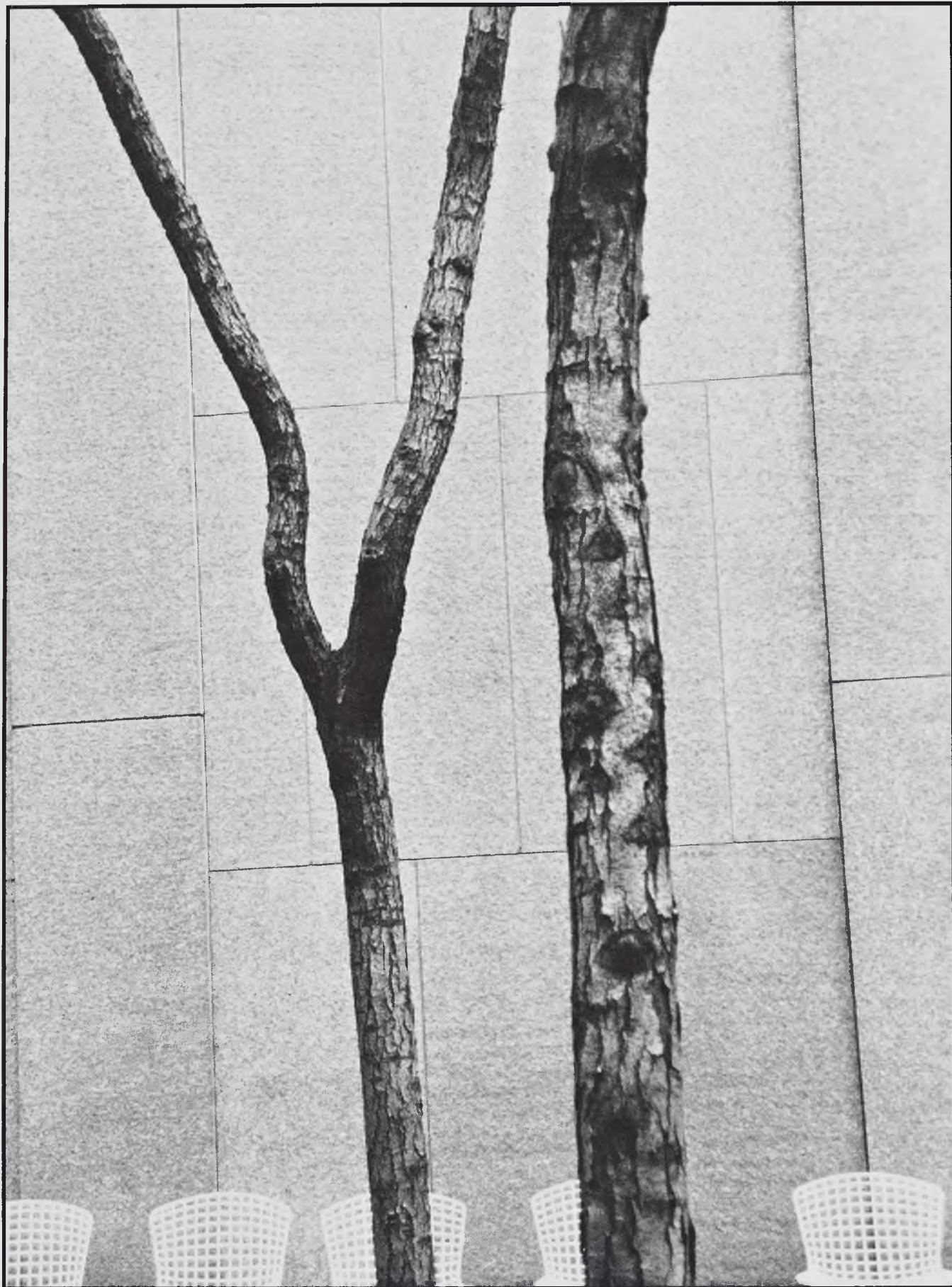
She remembered that as a child she would lie on the wind swept grass of Pickerton and count geese flying by. The clouds looked so peaceful; she wanted to fly. Some day she knew that she would, and the geese as they flew seemed to say, "Come home". Yes, Georgia was the place for freedom. Suddenly, a gust of wind picked her up and she was flying over Central Park— or was it Prospect Park? Somehow, she knew that it was not Georgia. There were too many buildings and the uninviting hellish grey-brown hue lay like a blanket of fate woven deceptively. But somehow above it all her vision of life itself became less distorted.

Somehow the hum of the refrigerator seemed to bring her out of her dream; it too joined the symphony of time keepers. Each pulse of blood that coursed through her brains brought the urgency of her awakening. Time didn't matter anymore, but the memories of times past haunted her deeply. They rose like hungry beasts determined to eat the painting that she had started a month ago. She knew that if she let them devour it, all hope would surely be lost. Her body lay sunken on the bed as if she had been attached to lead weights.

What did her life mean? Where were the songs, the letters, the children, the promises? Where were the lovers? She was now buried under a pile of broken promises and long forgotten dreams, but somehow she would rise.

As she gazed across the bedroom at her painting, the dusty curtains seemed reluctant to filter the light through, but the warmth of muted reds and yellows enticed her to rise. The smiles on the faces of the children whom she painted urged her on. Could this be true? Her body felt lighter and those haunting sheets which laid like Arctic snow now enveloped her as a protective shield. As she rose, she could hear her mother sing "Amazing Grace" and the smell of fresh paint tantalized her senses. She was ready. The Cadmium blues cooled her tired flaming eyes and made her journey much easier.

The storm had ended now; the trees had stopped their endless clawing at the window and she was now free. She had escaped with the colors of freedom. Why had she not seen this before? Somehow the past didn't matter anymore. She could now fly.



THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT

ALONA POPOV

# Trident

TED WISNIEWSKI

*Sporting the waves of his sweat,  
head back, eyes closed,  
spread out and flung wide,  
rumpled with sleep, immersed in his strength,  
-he turns-*

*Roots claw the land, deeper and deeper,  
twisting and turning, gnarled arms  
thrust forward, groping for water  
the winds give no relief-  
and still the world cries out "jug jug" to dirty ears.*

*We have had enough.  
God of the sea: strike us, smite us to bits.*

*Don't tempt stroking cool fingers:  
Don't douse parched tongues with cool spray:  
Look to the land, to the prostrate:  
To you we fling out our emptiness  
Gather strength from the nourishment thus offered.*

*Whirl up, sea,  
spin high,  
Spread your back against the sky.  
Rub the sleep from your eye.*

*No more running down sides and slipping away.*

*Hurl yourself,  
Fling yourself on us,  
Throw down the weight of your wrath.*



ANTHONY MALET

*You left me on my birthday  
I laid on the bed looking at the City upside down  
As the night fell and the paper white moon  
Sunk higher in the still blue and froze there-  
A huge white cut-out from the glass sky.  
The warmth of the room could not coax me in-  
My soul a thinner, colder glass  
Measuring the distance in seconds.*

REBECCA GIACCIO

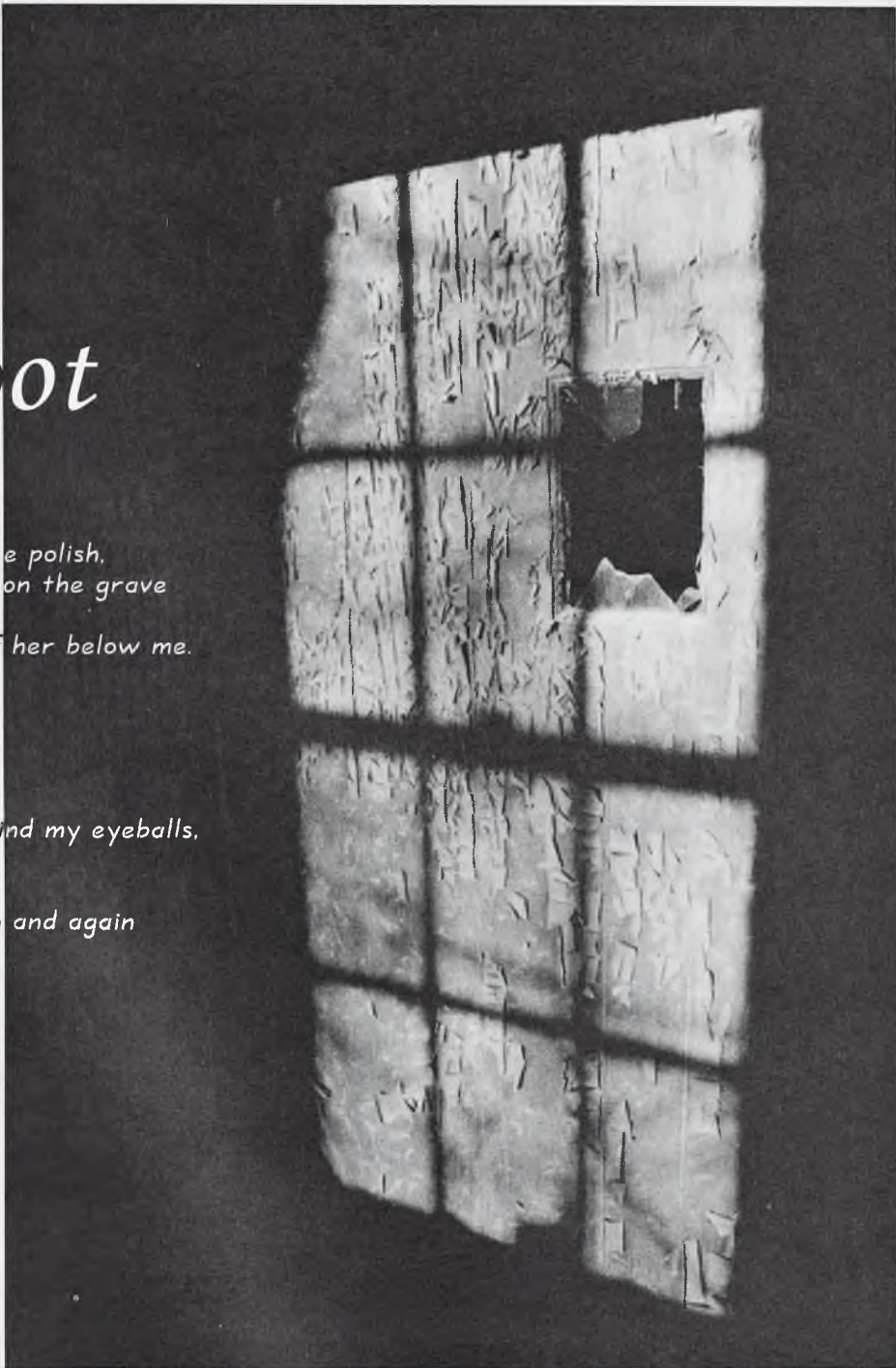
# Barefoot

AMY SOPPET

*Toenails half-covered in fading rose polish,  
I stand on the clover that stands on the grave  
that stands to no reason,  
Trying to feel some last vestige of her below me.  
Soul through the sole, perhaps.*

*I don't*

*I only feel the late morning dew  
And some mutant cancergrief behind my eyeballs,  
inside my muscles.  
Breathing hurts.  
Reading the stone again and again and again  
Hasn't helped.  
And I feel old.*



CRAIG WETHERBY

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