

Third Rail

Volume 2 Issue 2



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a i l

w o r d s

Clockwork	5
Richard Fulco	
The Blackness	6
Dee Smith	
Hitching	8
Andrew Winters	
Song for A Child	12
Diane Moller	
Bread	18
Vincent Vok	
Day's End	20
Niles Elliot Goldstein	
Ruby Slippers	21
Robert L. Harrison	
Untitled	24
Sarah Husain	
The Sidewalk Lesson	25
Diane Isaac	
Guilty of Regrets	26
Donna J. Bernstein	
Untitled	27
Mike Batistick	
Young Bloody Mating Cape	28
Steve Greeley	
Wanda	30
g. kessler	
The Redhead Factor	31
Christopher Mari	
Untitled	40
John Tsandis	
1995 Kunster Defends Mantle	42
Robert L. Harrison	
Martial Arts	45
Sinan Hepcaker	
7:30 Ferry	46
Kerri Deitch	
Whimper	47
Gabriel Lopez	

i m a g e s

Robert L. Harrison	Front Cover, Inside Back Covers,Back Cover, 2, 14,29,42
Henry Lewis	Inside Front Cover, 3
Tony Torres	4,22,23,39,44
Rob Jr.	7,21,36
Jules Allen	8,13
Abe Ginsburg	16
Anthony Gargiso	24,31,41
Nanci Richards	32
John Loeshe	43
Sam Salganik	46
Ed Davin	48

photo by robert harrison

Third Rail

The College of Staten Island
2800 Victory Blvd.
Campus Center Room 231
Staten Island NY 10314

Voice (718) 982-3105

email us at: third.rail@usa.net

Fax (718) 982-3104

Editor

Colleen McGraham

Associate Editor

Kerri Deitch

Fiction/Non-Fiction Editor

Vincent Vok

Andrew Winters

Poetry Editor

Donna Schaffer

Art Editor

Anthony Gargiso

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artwork by Henry Lewis



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Awake with bad breath.
Travel to work in your Volkswagon.
Work.
Come home to a traffic jam on the BQE.
Eat yesterday's leftovers.
Spend ten minutes on the bowl reading the newspaper.
Watch your favorite sitcom.
Go to sleep.
Dribble upon your pillow.
Snore all night long.
Awake with bad breath.

richard fulco

Clockwork
CLOCKMOLK

THE BLACKNESS

Dee Smith

Why must I hide my course hair, is it not beautiful.

Why must I cover my brown eyes, are they not soft.

Why do you hate my sable skin, it is all that I own.

It is you My Nubian Brother who make me feel shame

You My Brother who call me nappy

You My Brother who want Blue, and yes you My Keeper

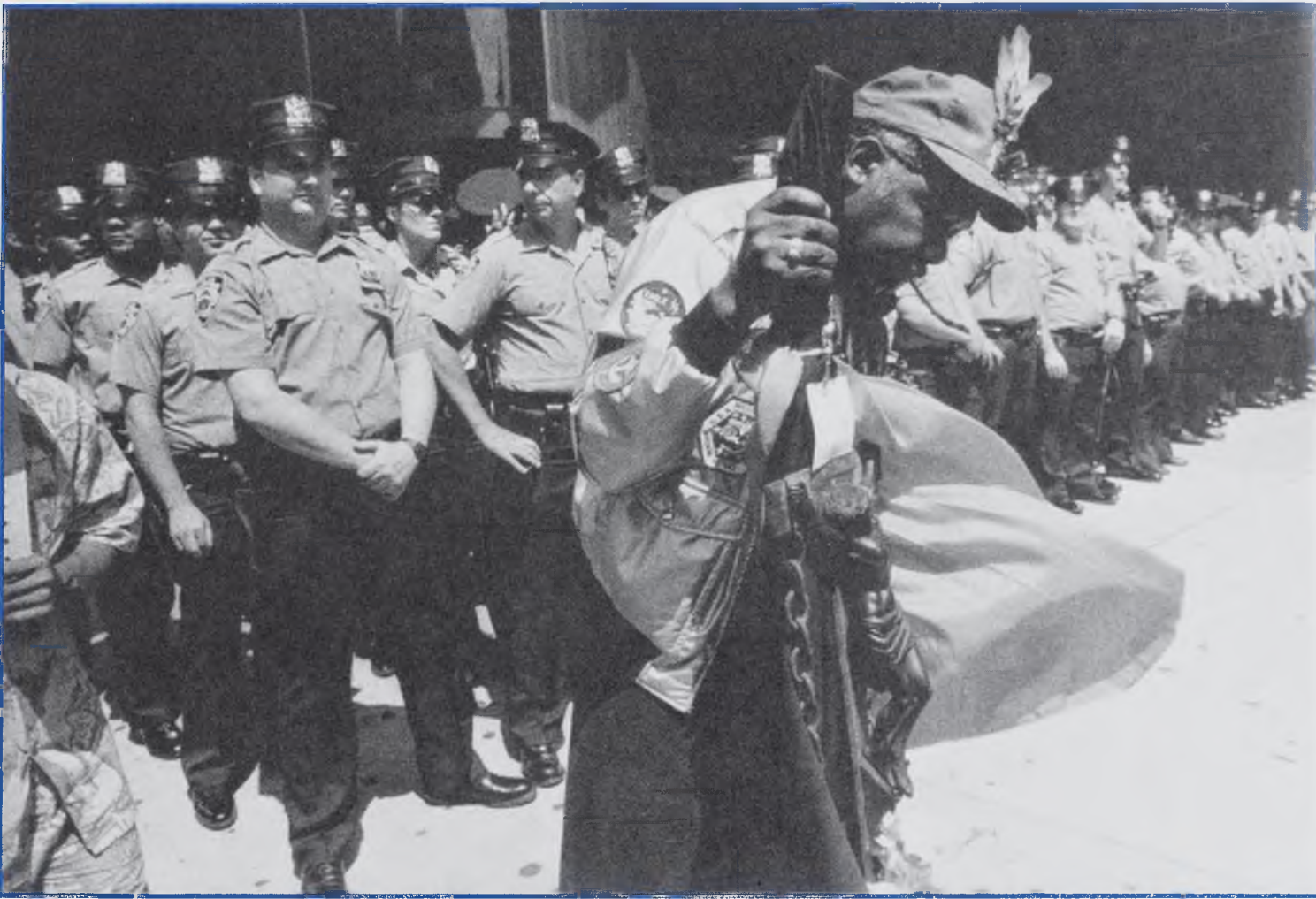
who call me darkie...

Then You wonder why I want to be Her.

Being black isn't a color

It's an experience

FROM THE BLUE COLLAR SLAVES
TO THE WHITE COLLAR PIMPS
~ A KID GROWS UP ~
BONDED BY CONCRETE AND STEEL
; ONLY TO REALIZE ;
THAT HIS DREAMS NEVER WERE REAL



JULES ALLEN

There was little ambition being reflected from the outside. A bird was perched atop a swaying tree branch, its head lowered into ruffled feathers, shielding it from the damp, gray winds. I was seated by the window in a road-side coffee shop with a map spread out before me. My nose dripped on England. A pregnant backpack sat beside me, its weight leaned into my right shoulder. I've been bearing the burden of my excess belongings since I left London at 9:10 that morning.

It was getting late. My tea was finished minutes ago. I checked my watch; 3:20, time I got back to the road. The M74 extends from Birmingham, England through Glasgow, Scotland. I began the day standing on the entrance ramp of the M56 holding a sign that read "GOING NORTH." This vague description of my intentions had been suggested by my friend John.

John speaks of himself as a hitchhiking legend. He's been down the Autobahn in Germany, in Fiats south of Rome, and back and forth through out Europe.

"Hitchhiking is free, the bus costs money," he lectured. "Save your money for the more important things like beer." He called me from the Isle of Skye, Scotland two days ago. He had gone on about how a big city can suck the life out of you and drain your traveling money. I had been living in a youth hostel across the street from the British Museum. I stood in the lobby sipping from a cup of instant coffee. Since my arrival in London five weeks ago, I'd managed to get some temporary work doing construction but the wages hadn't matched my living expenses. I'd decided John was right; I needed a change of scenery.

"I'm sure this phone call is costing you a wee bit, John," I said. If anyone has taught me how to stretch money, it's him. He rationalized that the more he spends, the less he's on the road.

"Yeah, I got to go, but go for it—hitching's no problem," he rambles. Then, there's the buzz of a dead phone line.

Two days later, I lean against a guardrail in North London. For every vehicle that approaches, I present them with my cardboard sign reading "GOING NORTH." John has advised me that if I head in the right direction, I'll get to where I'm going. Don't be specific, he said. You're not being picked up by a taxi. After a couple of hours of not moving an inch, my sign lowered to my hip and I began wondering, what the fuck am I doing?

John had informed me that my accommodation was free when I arrived at the small hotel where he was working a mop. Free is truly a magic word, I thought to myself. A free bed and a free ride was enough to get me to hitchhike. I read Truman Capote's novel *In Cold Blood* only a few weeks earlier. I let the book's imagery play in my head: two real-life, hitchhiking, mass murders are in the back seat preparing to slit the throat of the unsuspecting driver. I don't know who these drivers are. Should I ask to see their driver's licenses before we depart from the curb? I'm lost in thought when a small, six wheeled truck pulls up along side me.

"Been on the move all night, Simon's the name," a white rastifarian with blond dreadlocks extended a hand and pulled my backpack into his truck.

"Andrew, thanks," I replied, stepping onto a truck's floor littered with coffee cups.

"You have to keep me awake, man," he said, grinding the truck into second gear.

"Sure, no problem." I wondered if this is what John meant by "no problem," keeping truck drivers from falling off to sleep.

I talked and talked like dead air would kill me—filling in the coconut scented cab with unimportant facts about my experiences. He asked if I was American and said he had family in Florida. I rambled on about visiting Disneyland once as a child and getting lost in the Magic Kingdom Castle. He grunted several times. I picked up the pace, fearing he'd doze off if I stopped chattering.

"Feels strange driving on the left side of the road," I said. "I nearly killed myself several times crossing the street in London." This continued for nearly two hours but I didn't mind because I was finally heading north. He dismissed me of my duties as verbal caffeine at a lurie stop in Coventry. He lived ten minutes west. I imagined he'd be asleep before he got his jacket off. I was now on the shoulder of the M34.

In no time, a chain-smoking, bait salesman from a small town just south of Liverpool pulled over. He was returning from a business trip in Birmingham. His trade was the

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andrew winters

breeding of nightcrawler worms for bait shops. I couldn't imagine a more particular way of making a Pound.

"I didn't know money could be made marketing worms," I said. I'd always just turn over a rock, by the lake and put that worm on the hook. Maybe, this was an inferior worm; perhaps, British fish were more finicky.

"Sure," he informed me, "there's plenty of money in worms." He continued between drags on his cigarette.

"There are risks, of course."

"Really, I wouldn't have thought that."

"Worms get diseases, and when one worm is infected, it can contaminate the entire batch."

He continued discussing worm ailments and I wondered if this was what John meant by "no problem." He stamped out his sixth cigarette into a mountain of spent smoke that towered from the ashtray. His car, an old blue Jaguar, was as unkempt as its driver.

He had yellow-gray hair that appeared smeared across the top of his scalp. A

pair of glasses hung on to the tip of his nose; sweat beaded on his forehead. He fumbled with a limp handkerchief and patted down around his neck. Several silver chest hairs poked out from underneath his shirt. He smiled sheepishly and I imagined him as the friendly, old man by the sea, nursing his worms.

We rode together till Stockport, where he too

would be continuing his trip westward. But, before he left he insisted on showing me "the goods." We walked around to the back of his car and he lifted the door like he had a trunk filled with eggs. On the bottom of his car's boot were two green Styrofoam containers.

"The worms need to be kept moist," he said, lifting the roof off the worm's mobile condo. I nodded my head up and down as if I was his apprentice.

"How long have they been in there?" I asked.

"Been since ten this morning, soil still plenty moist though." He ran his hands through the dark soil and these magnificent, pink nightcrawler worms slid from his fingers.

"Man, those are tremendous!" I was amazed; these worms were as thick as rope.

"Yeah, these are mature worms, ready for the hook." We both leaned over the boot and gazed down at the shifting soils. At that moment, I was as hungry as a bass and I envied the worms simple diet. Dirt was free. The man brushed off his hand on the side of his pants and we said our good-byes. I had forgotten his name, but it didn't matter, he was delighted to show me his work.

I was about 200 miles north of London—a long way from where I was headed. I had been traveling for six and a half hours. I figured, looking over the map, that there was little chance I'd be able to make it Glasgow by the start of night. John had said that hitchhiking at night is a waste of time. I didn't want to be on the road past eight o'clock. I painfully circled my destination, a hotel several

kilometers north which would probably cost me more than the price of bus fare.

I sat motionless in the coffee shop, thinking about the security of living at home: the scheduled work hours, the back seat of my girlfriend's car, the smell of my father's pipe smoke, my dog's wagging tail when I walked in the door, all this seemed like some other man's life. You get crazy when no one knows your name. I suppose this was the reason why I was going north to John's remote corner of Scotland; I wanted to hear someone call me by name. There is no solace in being nameless; God made Jesus for this very reason. He got lonely and tired of everybody worshipping the things of the world they could put a name to and not him. He got insulted and created Jesus so when we want to call God, we say Jesus. I believe I understand how God felt—being nameless results in the unremitting existence of solitude. God knows all. I only knew I was going crazy in London.

I pulled myself together and wrote "CARLISLE" on the reverse side of my sign. I must have looked beaten down, carrying my backpack had begun to wear away at my strength. There were several other hitchhikers on the entrance ramp of the M34. I jockeyed for position and read their signs. My stomach was rebuking my choice of lunch. It rounded over my belt, filled with the saturated fats of fish and chips. I wouldn't recommend this combina-

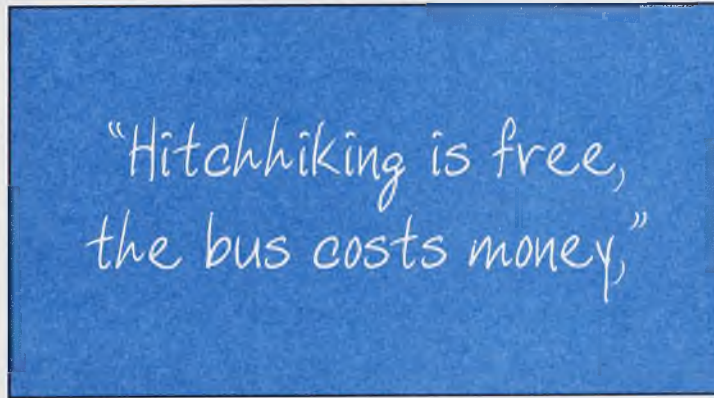
tion to my worst enemy, but it's cheap and I'm stretching my Pounds—in more ways than one.

Minutes drifted by, drivers sped past, and the hitchhiker nearest the expressway has been picked up. His image lingered a moment from where he had once stood. I asked myself questions: who are these travelers I share the road with? where are they going? what are they looking to find out there? I exchanged a couple nods and some brief talk, but none of us could afford to get to know each other. The clouds overhead had darkened the sky. It was only a matter of minutes before we would all need to seek shelter.

Travelers are all landless nomads who own only the land beneath the soles of their shoes. I realized, while I might share road with them, I did not have the heart to live that way. I felt a similar distance from this group as I did in the neighborhood I grew up—never quite part of the action; I watched from the sidelines.

These travelers weren't your Eurail tourists who flood Europe during the summer months with their set itineraries. This was the middle of October, long after that group had gone home. These travelers wore clothing perverted by street grime and their hair was shaped by the position that had slept in the night before. They were purposefully irresponsible about how they represented themselves. Society be damned! Was this noble? And, where in God's name are they going?

A gray diesel automobile with a tree poking out the hatchback pulled me away from my thoughts. I'm was seated on my backpack. A man alighted onto the curb with his



socks pulled up to his knees. He was wearing green, nylon parachute pants with a heavy, Navy sweater tucked in at the waist. A silver chain held his reading glasses to his chest. A crop of salt and pepper hair curled around the back of his ears.

"You are going to Carlisle?" he asked with his hands on his hips. His posture looked rigid, elbows pointing East to West. I imagined a string being tied to his belt buckle and him defying hurricane winds, aloft like a kite. He reminded me of my father standing atop of the stairs when I came home late, past ten on a school night.

"Yes," I replied.

"Here, put your bag behind my seat," he said, revealing a space between a nursery of green plants in the back. "Watch out for my wife's pine," he instructed me as I wedged my backpack onto the back seat.

"Got it," I said, with pine bristles tickling the soft of my forearm.

I could sense the stare of the other travelers as I lowered myself into the passenger's seat. I was moving on and they'd continue to wait by the curb; I wondered if I cheating them somehow. I was only experimenting with hitchhiking, for these travelers it seemed to be a way of life. I admired their willingness to wander, but I had a place to go. A warm bed in Carlisle awaited my arrival.

"I can drop you off on my way home," he said as I pulled the seatbelt over my chest.

"Yeah, I was hoping to make it to Glasgow by the end of today. I guess I was too ambitious."

"Maybe not, I live just north of Glasgow in Port Glasgow," he stated. The car's speedometer needle pushed past 120 Kilometers an hour. My watch read 6:10 and I looked at him for a moment like he was an angel. I thought of him as my Clarence from the movie *Its A Wonderful Life*.

"That would be great," I replied enthusiastically.

"So then, what's your name, friend?" he asked in a rich Scottish accent.

"Andrew," I answered.

"Andrew, I'm Robin." My name sounded royal coming from his lips. He extended his arm in my direction and we shook over his car's center console.

Robin was an engineer at a small electrical circuit manufacturing plant. His was in charge of company sales but this didn't seem to impress him nearly as much as the years he spent aboard the British Naval Destroyer. He talked at length about Naval strategy, submarines, and the great former "Empire." I sat back in a comfortable Sterling and listened intently.

"Today, the nuclear submarines are so quiet that a warship's sonar can not detect them. You Yanks, use advanced space satellite technology to photograph the heat and air bubbles from the submarine's exhaust." I threw in an occasional "yeah" and Robin went on to refer to past British Naval victories with fondness. He detailed the vast empire Britain once commanded. I had always thought of war as the greatest of civilization's failures, but to Robin tell the story you'd think it was a British achievement. With his cheeks flushed he said, "the high seas once belonged solely to Britain." I couldn't picture this. Rain thumped against the car's windshield. Who can put a fence on slippery water.

I replied "Hmmm."

"I couldn't resist visiting the Maritime Center in Greenwich. My wife is probably wondering where I got myself lost. That's why the cars' filled to the gills with all these plants." He motioned his head to the back and smiled. "A Christmas pine as a sort peace offering," he declared and laughed. A contagious laugh, and soon we were both rolling, driving up the M74 at high speeds with green leaves, pine needles and flowers dancing around the interior of his car.

Robin had decided to take a more scenic route over the English/Scottish border. Somewhere in south Scotland, we stopped by the side of the road to have a bite to eat. He'd packed some sandwiches, a couple of Guinness beers, and a few Spanish oranges. Between a mouthful of cheddar cheese and white bread I asked, "what's the difference between saying England, Great Britain, or the United Kingdom?"

Robin wiped dry the corner of his mouth with a handkerchief. "Well. The island of Great Britain isn't just England; it comprises of Wales and Scotland too. Add to this Northern Ireland, and you have the United Kingdom—or the UK." He concentrated on cutting up an orange while I looked out over a field. The sun had just set and sky was cast in a salmon hue. Borders didn't seem to matter out here. I sat Indian style and breathed in the fresh air from tall grass. I heard the birds, the sheep, the wind, and my heart. I was at peace all in one moment. I felt like I was a Cherokee; my name was Drifting with Wind.

The road was absolutely black. Robin and I had been quiet for quite some time. He looked over his shoulder; I was semi-reclined in my seat. "Your welcome to spend the night at our house if you choose," He said offhandedly.

I answered without given it any thought, "sure, that would be great." I probably should have declined, but I had a sense that Robin was an OK guy. And, I couldn't imagine a man with a Scottish accent being a deranged murderer. Robin was a bit off but in a friendly sort of way.

Robin drove with his knee and telephoned his wife. "Hello Love, I'll home in forty-five minutes." He glanced in my direction and smirked. I imagine she was in the kitchen badgering him about why he was so late. "We'll have a guest spending the night with us," he continued. I squirmed a little; Robin's late and he's bringing home a hitchhiker. I looked into the back of the car, I hoped he bought enough "peace plants" with him.

Robin's wife Sara smiled when we entered through the door. Three dogs jumped up onto his thighs and looked at me curiously for a moment before doing the same. We drank a couple of cognacs by a fireplace and talked about the States. I stole a few glances around the room and read the titles of the books lined up along the mantle. They were mainly about the British Navy and gardening, but at the very top was a tattered copy of *Moby Dick*. I wondered if a modern day Ishmael would take to the road rather than the high seas.

I laid in a bed that night with an electric blanket wrapped tightly around my body. The road had led me to this woolen womb. I revisited the day's experience and wondered why I had met those people. I checked the time; it was 12:45. Tomorrow, I would help Robin and Sara plant those peace offering and write a letter home.

Song For A Child

Diane Moller

Wind blew the candle out.
I was freezing in the rain.
My reaction caught up in logic.
(feelings cost)

Once in awhile, the child's hand
reached in, out
only to come up without.

So I stepped into the shadows,
taking on the tears,
to raise what is love.



Jules Allen

Scarecrow

TOM HENRY

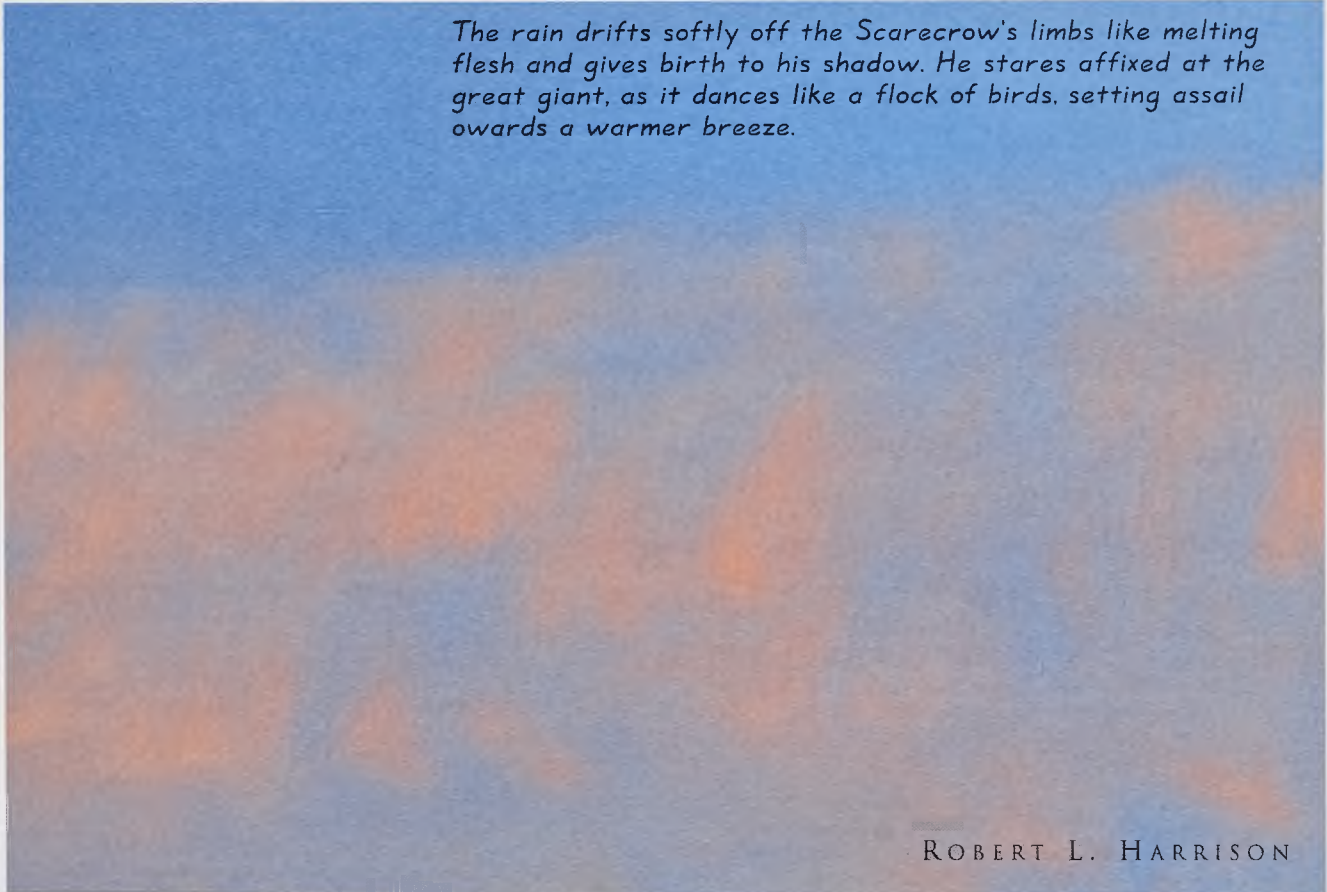
In the midst of a secluded wheat field, a Scarecrow stands firmly planted into the soil. His old rags flap in the wind like a bird who has yet to learn how to fly. One could travel through his sunken, midnight eyes and become blind.

The Scarecrow stands taller than the golden stems, with arms held out horizontally like a crucifix. The full moon sits directly above him and cast a shadow, which lays raging in the wheat field like a giant. The starless sky travels deep and wide with no perimeters.

Weary travelers gaze into the distance at what appears to look like a heartless Frankenstein, sewn together with one hundred patches of worn out, puzzling, tropical rainbows. They begin to chant: "A dead man with great stance and movement owns a sanctuary with distant concrete walls."

The music of the Scarecrow's kingdom is confined only to his existence. The wind whispers relentlessly through the hollow family of varying notes. Severed stems slowly disconnect, as they sizzle and snap away like starving rattle snakes. The tension beneath the soil collides and tap dances its way to the surface. A distant scream, bursting through a hollow branch, draws nearer and nearer.

The rain drifts softly off the Scarecrow's limbs like melting flesh and gives birth to his shadow. He stares affixed at the great giant, as it dances like a flock of birds, setting assail owards a warmer breeze.



ROBERT L. HARRISON

You have a beautiful neck he says
 and lights a match.
 She bristles brightly and curls
 so he would see her spine quiver
 Cold kisses of milk and
 ice fall from watery sky.
 She leans to feel it all
 tiny spears
 like anger, like waterfall,
 like joy, and inured laughter.
 Across the clear ether
 of comet and flying horses
 he would point
 (Cygnus and Orison.
 Here. . .you may feel the arch brighter.
 And she
 flying with head high
 would receive all
 like burning ball
 like fierce sphere of flight.

Milk

jeanie kwak

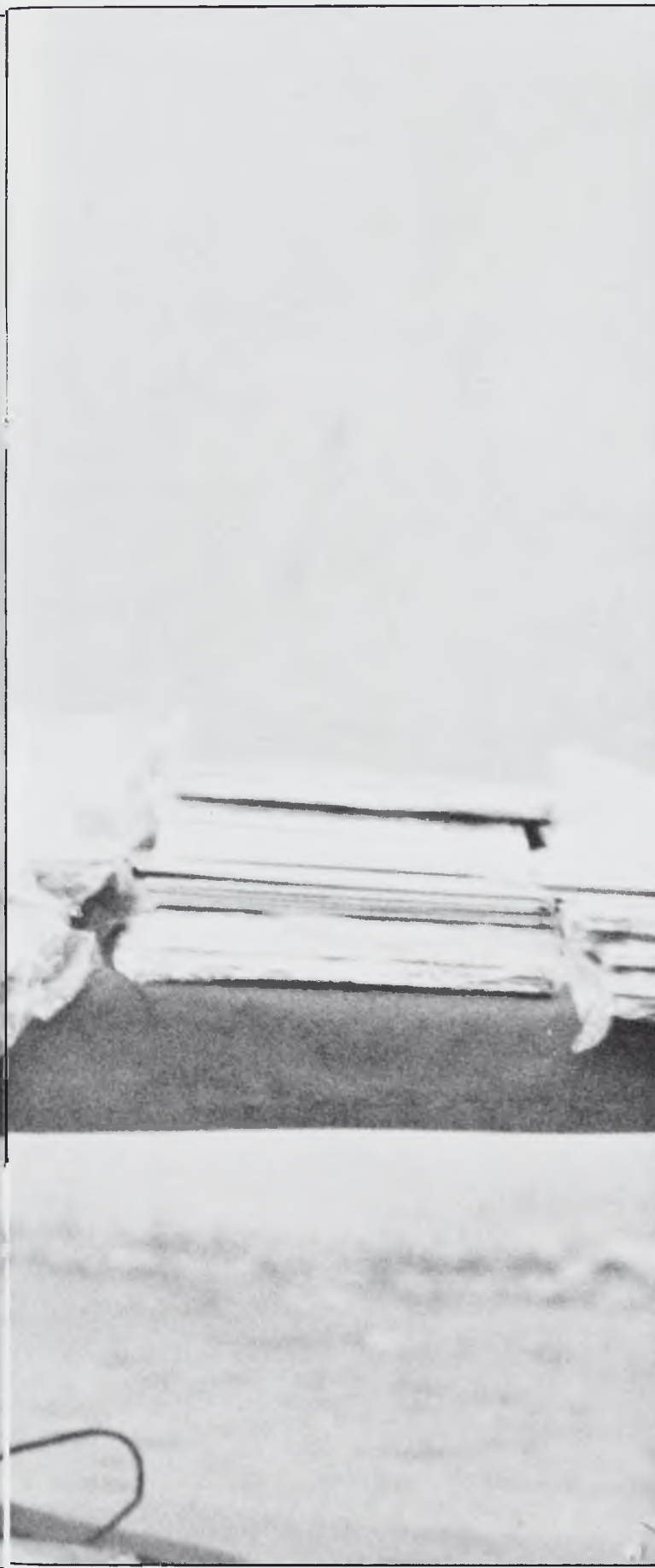
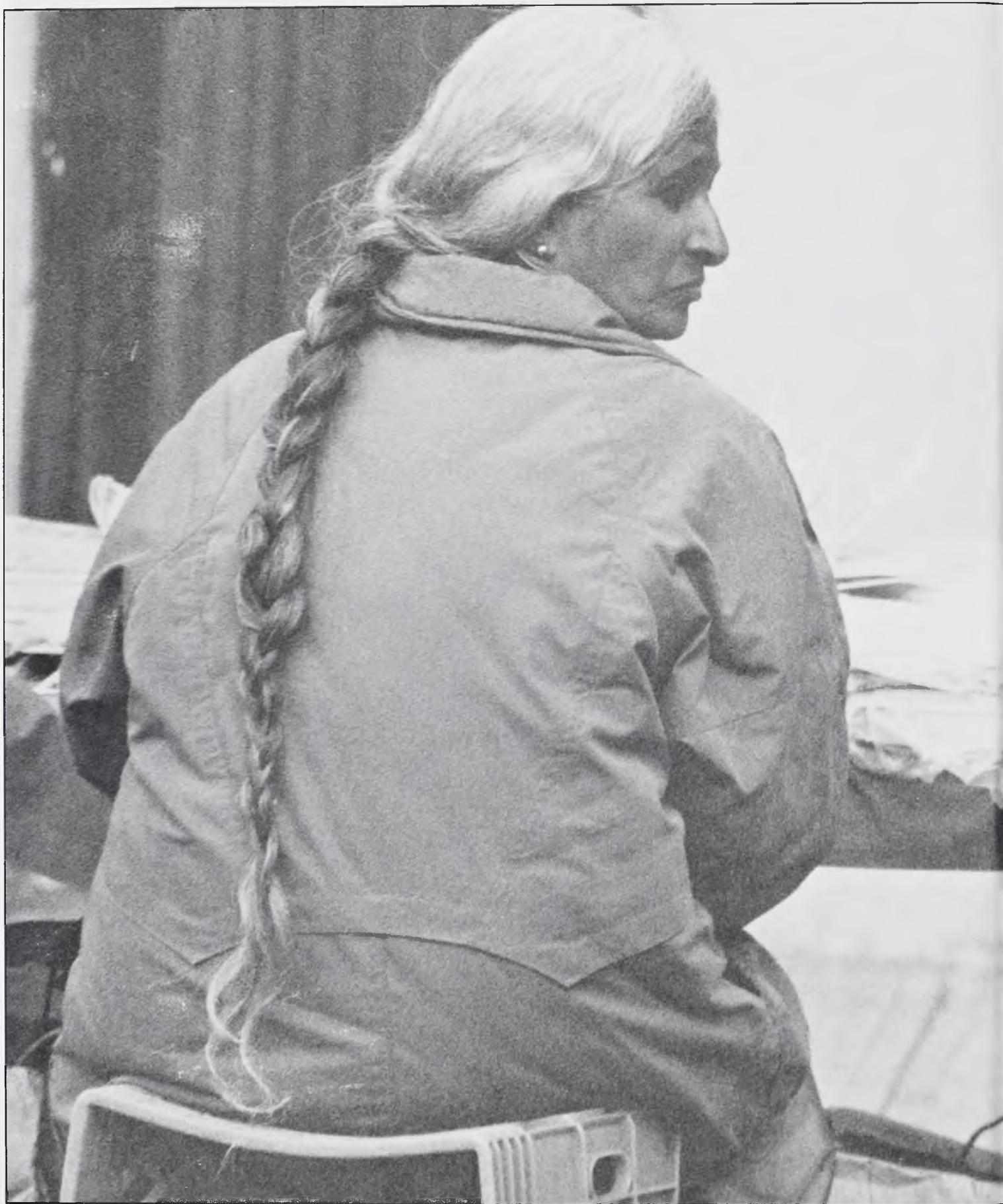
Butterflies Under Glass

Diane Moller

White sands through the hour glass,
 soft rock
 and the artist space filled with endearment.
 Once, lines about past experience
 manifested itself -
 with insight, depth, gains, adventures, travels.
 Laughing at the simplicity of it all,
 turning to each other and agreeing,
 it's a cycle.

Once, they walked through gates together -
 toasting to new years
 and within the struggle
 stood up strong and together
 identifying who they truly were and wanted to become.

Then came the lines of authority, the pull to win, not lose.
 Then came the finality, the great separation
 and the gates open to long stairways,
 climbing now,
 to see beyond the moon.



*Sparkling eyes imprisoned
In a weathered face
Proud gait, staggering
Lonely herat yearning for community
Fumbling jokes
Battling this rum haze
Longing for affinity
Charm encased in dirt and tattoos.*

ESA SILOW



BREAD

Going to sleep at 6 pm on a Saturday night is impossible, no matter how tired I try to be. There are noises outside the window, and television in the living room. There are conversations and the smell of dinner. There are thoughts of the kind that finally catch up to me when my body kicks off the momentum of the day and lies still but still unresting.

The radio snaps on at midnight, as the rest of the apartment dispels the memory of the day's activity and replaces it with the silence of the soft breathing of my sleeping family. I click off the music and walk through the living room, momentarily distracted by the glaring TV which is jumping and yapping like a neglected mutt desperate for the attention of any passerby. I click it off and it crackles in relief as it's radiation dissipates into my atoms. I look at Jeannie, sleeping her sleep, drooling onto her pillow, hand still entwined around the remote. I step over Dylan, who is sprawled on the floor in his own dreams, and make it into the kitchen. I make a pot of coffee, then eat as it spurts and bubbles.

We finish together, the coffee and I, and I pour most of it into the green metal thermos with the silver lid, and the rest into a cup, which I guzzle in spite of the burn. This finally wakes me up as much as I can be. I go into the living room, peel Dylan off the floor and guide him in his sleep into his own bed, giving a shove, aiming his head at the pillow. I am more gentle with Jeannie, who stays on the couch, but gives me a warm, sleepy "Be careful" before her eyes slowly close again.

I pull on my blue faded jeans, hooded sweatshirt, jacket, black work boots white with flour, and brown work gloves with the fingers cut off. As I step down the stairs, the air gets colder, preparing me for the eventual slap waiting just outside the wooden door. My face is washed by the chill; colder where the sleep was laying heaviest. Outside, the street is revealed in patches of scattered light from random sources of porch lights, street lamps and dark, forgotten sky. The white bread van

sleeps in front of the house, tattooed with brown, hand-painted letters and cartoon figures of happy bakers in white hats and aprons holding up loaves of the bread they just baked. As I approach the truck they gloat at me, oblivious to the cold. "Hey, Vincenzo, looka the bread we just made. Itsa ready! Come an' get it!"

I get to the bakery and pull in behind Charlie's gray van. He's got the good spot, so I have to maneuver around a hydrant and a telephone pole if I want to get close enough to load. Charlie's a skinny old redneck with a baseball cap and a mean bastard attitude. I like the guy, because he reminds me of my father, who was neither skinny, redneck or mean.

Twelve boxes of Kaiser rolls, three seeded; six dozen sesame bread rolls, six large round, ten small round; three dozen regular Italian, three dozen semolina, and a six foot hero. This fills the van with bread and odors; and residual warmth. I climb in; check the tickets one last time. By then it's about 1:30 am. I turn off the dome light, turn up the radio and get out of there before I remember who exactly I am and go home.

My route is the crooked line of every Shop-Rite between here and Freehold, New Jersey, with a scattering of small delis and corner stores. At that time of night I am on the Outerbridge by the time REM finishes "What's the Frequency Kenneth?" That's a good road song, and I'm charged. I drive with the freedom of speed and solitude, connecting the music with the machinery that is the truck and the road. A common rhythm, a cement ribbon of the fast movement of purpose. I roll down the window and let the frigid air swirl in, my arm outside with my hand resting on the mirror like a ride to the beach. The song ends on a rough spot in the road, and I pull my arm in, rolling the window up with a hand I can no longer feel.

My first stop is a Sunoco station on I South that has a convenience store attached. The night guy there bears a mature resemblance to Cliff from "Cheers", and fills the tank as I bring in a box of Kaisers and a dozen sesame rolls. The pregnant girl with the tattoo on her hand greets me with a tired smile clearing off the counter to make room for the bread. I put the ticket on the counter, and without looking at it she gets the cash for me from the register. I fill up a black large coffee and grab a Snickers. She gives me the money for the bread. I give her the money for the food. Important transactions in the shrunken world of the night.

Those are the last humans I'll talk to except myself until much later down the road. The next five stops are all closed, and I leave the bread in a shopping cart and park it by the front door. The caffeine and candy suddenly kick in, and I settle in for the long flight.

I drive through dark, thin air, pushing the light from my headlights just far enough in front of me to show me the road. I penetrate the large circles of manufactured light hanging down from the lamps that stand intermittently along the way. Tonight I have a new stop, off the highway and down the road into small town Jersey. I miss the landmark, an unlit neon sign that threatens to say "Joey's Deli"

in colored lights. I keep driving. The buildings sink into the Earth until they become one and two story homes and stores, all locked and closed and asleep. Then they also sink, and leave hedges and open fields, and the road loses it's powers and disintegrates into the dust of a dirt road, and suddenly the large circles of light have left the planet, and are circling slowly in the sky as bright points of other universes. I slow down, looking for the road to widen enough to turn a van around in, and lean out the window, letting my face learn the air. I can see the cartoon bakers on the side of the truck through the large, vertical rearview mirror. We stare at the vast meadow of gray grass and dark trees and waiting silence penetrated by only my headlights, my breath, the rattling heartbeat of the van, and Jerry Garcia singing quietly about survival. Further into the night the road widens enough to let me turn; and I do with the skill of a quiet intruder.

Every story I've tried to tell since then has always brought me back to that road. I was the sleepy brains of a metal bug with 4 round legs that pulled it along through the ink stained night and time shot from lights and dark through my eyes and out the tailpipe in small puffs of gray infinity. In frenzy of short stops and long goes I arc across the wide curve of night in cold air. With my window open and radio loud I am the Earthbound demon Santa speeding past the sleeping houses in the toy towns that are laid out in patterns miles outside the city lights. The wind is washing my face now with cold purity and I keep my eyes wide in the face of it, to keep them frozen open. I feel the sleep growing in the back of my head, slowly. It tries to pull my thoughts inward, preparing for dreams. I yawn and bite my cheek. I live now from stop to stop. I race, outrun the sleep, but it catches up to me at each stop. I open the thermostat sleep render it useless. I pull in behind a closed bagel shop with a big purple cookie monster painted on the side of it. Out of the corner of his round, mad eye he spies me pull out two boxes of seeded Kaisers and the six foot hero and hide them in the shadows of daromos of coffee I made earlier. It's hot, but the cold and my k back doorway. With no comment he watches me piss against the wall looking up at the sky. I see the same stars that were circling me in the meadow, but framed against the building they are more defined, and thus hidden. I climb back into the van and speed again away, leaving him on his honor not to eat the bread, boxes and all.

I am on the last long length of my night, on the Palisades Parkway, in the wrong direction of where I call home. The darkness starts to thin out, with light from a different sky. There's a fog drifting up, poured out of the sky, and I am on the bottom of a cup of unstirred coffee. The deep blue black night starts turning a mystic gray, and my vision blurs. Pieces of the night dart back and forth as spots on the surface of my eyes, and as I rub my face they escape, and out past my windshield they are blackbirds flying back and forth, quickly, in urgent search of patterns, upon which to fly towards daylight. They quickly disappear back into my head, and I stretch to kick off the ten pound blanket of sleep that is weaving warmly around my

sight. My head jerks forward as the van swerves slightly into the shoulder. I put my face into the wind, and sleep blows backward, swirling into the fog and landing in a breath into the highway. Five, four three two one, the miles are pulled under the spinning wheels of the van, and I brake finally to let the exit line itself up and curve away back into last night.

The sun is a yellow circle filled with red distant heat, and hangs suspended next to then eclipsed by the red stoplight. As I idle my body vibrates with the shivering motor. I rub my face, my fingers tracing the paths of sleep, rubbing them clean. I turn left and the sun is now the large face of the new day, curious of my intrusion into its light. It notices my long bold shadow, which I drag behind; the last piece of night caught on my fender.

Five long lights and another left, and I am in the first open ShopRite of the route. I pull out the ticket, find a shopping cart and load it up, pushing it through the doors that open by themselves. Every ShopRite in the world smells exactly alike; bread, roses, oranges, deli meat and magazines. I am back in the van, cruising the empty parking lot, finding a private spot behind the sign. The van goes gratefully silent when I turn it off. It creaks. My ears, unused to the silence remember all the sounds from the night in a circular buzz. My eyes close, and sleep fills into the van, encouraged by my tired senses.

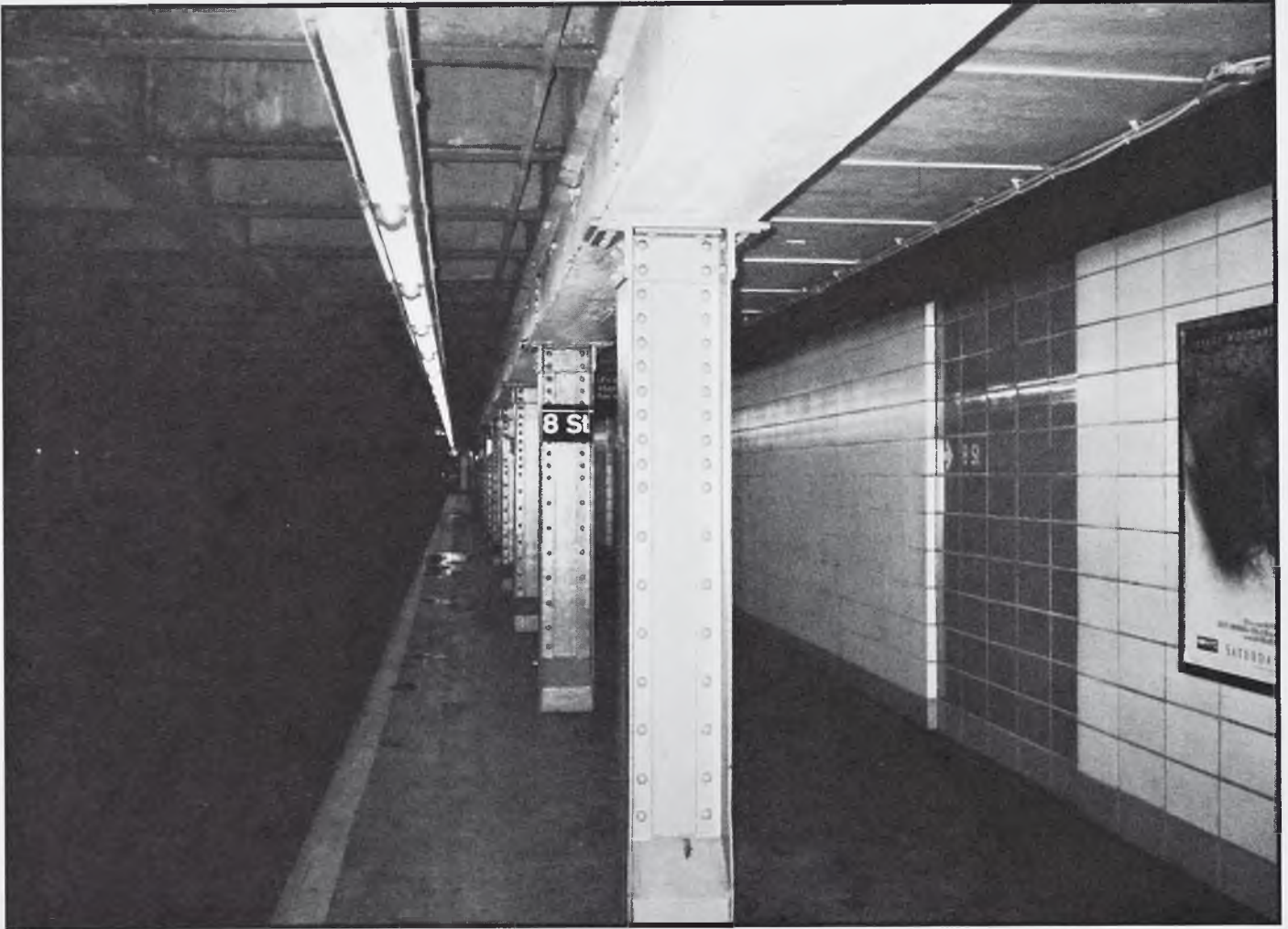
A forgiving sunlight opens my eyes, and I stretch in the cold. All is still, and stiff with the chill. The inside of my body quivers, bones and blood in despair of the transient ration of sleep. I drain the warm coffee which disappears into my chest. The ride home is forty minutes on 9 North, and Sunday morning is just the night without wings, laid out bare in the open sun. Dark buildings and looming shadows have become petty stores and warehouse billboards. My brain is awake for the moment. My body is in a war with existence.

I pull into the short road that is given as my block, and park unparallel to the curb in front of my house. There is always a ton of leftover bread, which I shove into one or two large garbage bags and drag up the stairs. I smell fresh coffee, hear quiet television. Dylan is back on the floor, sleeping and oblivious to the destruction caused by the cartoon demons dancing across the screen. Jeannie is in the kitchen with the Sunday paper. I put my hand into a bag and pull out two fresh rolls, which she butters, and sets down on the table next to two cups of coffee. We talk, and it's a blur. But we talk. Then I say goodnight with a kiss. Stepping over the kid in the blanket, I make my way to the bedroom. I pull off my clothes. The bed is unmade, and the sheets are cool next to my skin. The pillow is soft. My eyes close and seal shut. Sleep, waiting in the blankets covers me. The sounds swirl, and float off.

Day's End

Niles Elliot Goldstein

*Ran my soul ragged
into the earth and across
it. Nothing's changed.
Same damn fire
I could never control
consumes me—
like a razor, flays me
raw—a tornado that sucks
backwards. Sometimes I
want to scream. Am I there
yet? Other times
I just want to scream.
Black hole bastard soul.
All of it would end
all of it
if I could only give it
a name.*



Rob Jr.

Ruby Slippers

Robert L.
Harrison

*The Wicked Witch is dead!
Or so the television said.
But my wife found her shoes
and she was not amused,
for now I sleep alone in bed.*



Portraits

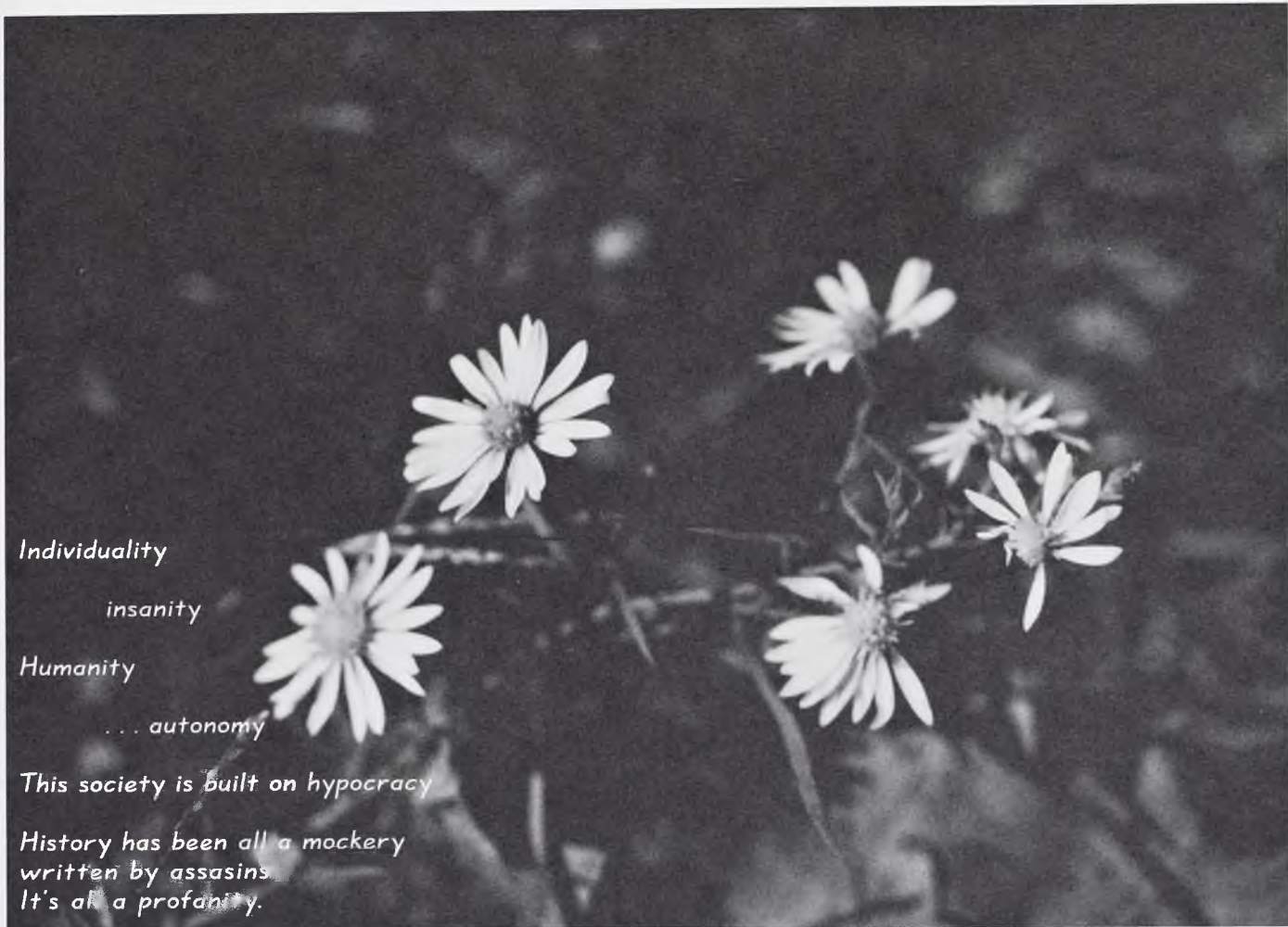
by tony torres

Silence. . .
it screams

loud



vicious cries...



Individuality

insanity

Humanity

... autonomy

This society is built on hypocrisy

History has been all a mockery

written by assassins

It's all a profanity.

Painted faces of injustice...

Anthony Gargiso

...perpetually searching

in Past

memories are all we share

of those who fought

stories

... they are of injustices

sketches

...we slowly draw of the future

One day we will change

rise above all the obscenity

Passions...

will no longer be constraints

rooted in grief

Bear in mind we will

...all the victories of the oppressed

Sarah Husain

Third Rail

THE SIDEWALK LESSON

Diane Isaac

He taught a lesson
As they waited for the bus,
Seeking refuge from the
Merciless sun

On the sidewalk
A father taught his daughter
A lesson of life

Slowly,
He scratched hieroglyphics
On the sidewalk
With a stone

Only semi-permanent promises Destined to dissolve in The threatening rain
Leaving only cloudy reminders of sobriety

The scent of beer and
Hot Tar steam
The skin on his fingers worn away
Like the seat of his pants
And the soles of his shoes

Sun Bleached Blond; His face scalded by the merciless sun He formed his prophecy
on the sidewalk And she with fiery cheeks and hair like wheat Stood knee high

Broke the trance... "You know what I wanna be Daddy?"

His tired blue eyes
Squinting from sweat
Looked up and visually answered:
"What?"
No sound

The tattooed Eagle on his arm
Dark blue
Against his sun-burnt arm
Eagerly threatened flight

"When will the bus Come Daddy?" He draws his answer on the sidewalk With the
hint of chalk that he found Each stroke he makes leaves behind on the cement

His prophecies etched in skin And chalk.

GUILTY OF REGRETS

Donna J. Bernstein

*"Excess of grief for the deceased is madness; for it is an injury the living, and the dead know it not."
-Xenophon*

I woke up this morning with that dull ache in my stomach. I had hoped that it would be gone, and now, once again, I feel it. It's not a pain, exactly, not cramps or anything specific, just a tiny throb that is almost not there at all. Except that I know it is. When it first began four months ago, I had myself checked out, thoughts of the complications I'd heard so much about ringing every warning bell in my head. Every test, every needle they stuck in me, every question that was answered brought me closer to the realization that this was not a medical problem I was experiencing. It was becoming clear that I was suffering from something a lot deeper than that. At first I denied it, not wanting to admit to myself that I could be so emotionally unstable I could cause myself pain. Even today, as I sit smoking the fourth cigarette of the morning a play with the spoon in my coffee cup, I have a hard time accepting the facts. The past six months should have taught me well the true meaning of acceptance; in this period of time, I had to accept that which I could not change, and that where the choice was taken away from me. And yet, stubborn as I am, I find myself fighting the inevitable.

I go into the kitchen and turn on the burner under the coffee pot. I usually stop counting after three cups of coffee, but today it seems important that I keep track of every detail, every nuance of this day.

I go into the living room and switch on the television. Nothing much is on now except game shows and talk shows, neither of which I have any patience for. I'm just about to zap Mr. Springer back out into the cosmos when I hear that word. THAT word. It's funny, not in a ha-ha, jovial way, but more like a sad ironic way, that the word that can reduce me to tears these days is not abortion, but procreation. Pro-cre-ate: To

bring into being; to beget; to generate. Simple word, three syllables, and yet it is big enough to throw me completely off for days on end. Even now, the tears I only shed when I am alone slowly dance down my cheeks to the corners of my mouth. I taste a tear with the tip of my tongue, and I am strangely comforted by the taste. Life changes, tears never do.

I turn off the T.V., and the hand that is not holding my fifth (or is it sixth) cigarette has found its way once again to my stomach.

In the beginning, there was fear. I would say that it was fear of the unknown, but sometimes knowing is worse. When I was sure, I was even more afraid, because then a whole new set of questions replaced the original one, questions I wasn't sure who to ask, and what they would think of me when I did. I certainly couldn't ask him. He had shut down like worn out machinery, silent and brooding, like a Hispanic Heathcliff. I would lie awake at night and listen to him breathe, and wonder why it was so easy for him to remember how to do that, simply fall asleep and breathe, while I lay there panicking every time I thought I wasn't. I mulled over my options, always drawing the same conclusion, and hating myself for it. All my life I had wanted to be treated as if I were fragile, feminine; I wanted someone to take me into his big strong arms and kiss all of my troubles away. People saw me as a strong presence, someone who could withstand anything life threw at me, and still bounce back smiling. They didn't see the frightened little girl hiding behind my eyes.

Hate, of course, was a predominant emotion in those days. Aside from the self-loathing that assaulted me constantly, there was the hate I felt for him. More than anything, I wanted him to feel what I felt. I wanted to forever wipe that condescending, smug grin off his face when he experienced what I was going through. He had once told me that he'd always be there for me, and yet when the time came that I really needed him, he was unreachable. When it was all over, and suddenly he was back to his old self, he acted as if nothing had happened. I despised him for choosing his ego and self-preservation over his responsibility to me. I hated him for loving me enough to get me there, but not enough to bring me back. And I hated myself for still loving him despite everything.

I've been told that things like this affect men differently than women because men feel distanced by the experience. I suppose that this is true. After all, they never feel the sickness, nor do they experience the anxiety at what this will do to their bodies. For some men, the first awareness comes when they feel the first movements. For others reality does not set in until they are actually holding it in their arms. The down side is that men never have to get up on that cold table with the crankily paper, wearing gowns designed to cover nothing; to fit their feet into stirrups and have their legs strapped in. They never have to pull the thin white sheet up to their chins, feeling no comfort in the fact that while they are completely covered, they have never felt so naked. I don't think that they will ever feel that vulnerable. Or empty. Or dead.

I should have gotten dressed by now, and the clock over the stove keeps reminding me of how late it is, and yet I light another cigarette and stir the oily film off my coffee, and wonder if anyone would notice if I didn't show up for work.

Turning my left hand, I catch a glimpse of the silver scar that no one else can see unless they are actively looking for it, or I point it out to them, which I would never do. The one on my right is more detailed, and this one I hide. To an observant eye it would seem that, at first, being a lefty, I was deeply committed to the task at hand, and then, switching sides, I lost interest. This would be a good guess, but slightly off base. At first, I was committed, but after all my thoughts came rushing in, I realized that it was my responsibility to live as a reminder of the life I'd taken. All earth shattering revelations aside, I simply needed to go on, and try to forget, or if not, at least forgive. Myself.

My right hand is planted firmly on my stomach again, and I would not be the least surprised if one day there is a hand print permanently imprinted there. I now know that I am waiting to feel the movements that will never come, just as the dull ache I feel is the emptiness I will have no matter how full my life becomes. Acceptance will come with time, I know, and in time the guilt and anger will fade. Somewhere down the line I will see new sprigs of growth push themselves through the withered and dead remnants of my past, and I know that with patience and time, my mind and body will become whole again.

*There are minutes
i miss your fingers and more
stupid, inconsequential things
that stick in my mind like all-important memories*

*Your long dresses, your cigarettes, your demeanor in the
passenger seat of the car, your look as i saw you in the morning.*

Tired, spent, and brilliantly alive.

*I miss those things at times,
And it reminds me that we had it pretty good for a while.*

Mike Batistick

Young Bloody Mating Cape

Steve Greeley

Young Bloody Mating Cape
bounces through the woods,
The dark and gloomy limbs.
Waiting Watching Whistling Wolf
follows eager.
Dagger,
tight about her waist.
Cloak,
holding in her warmth.
Knee-high,
showing off her thigh.
Young Bloody Mating Cape
lets out a simple sigh.

Waiting Watching Whistling Wolf
travels swiftly, swiftly.
She is going to grandma's house.
Good- no redemption from a sinner.
She's bouncing through
the trees.
Groping, looking fingers.
She smiles.
They cannot have her.
They reach,
and groan with each passing.
Young Blody Mating Cape
wags her little tail.

Wrinkled Bedridden Sinner
waits for her young piece.
Blankets are pulled high,
when there is a knock at the door.
Sinner greets wolf,
and remembers as she is impaled,
for the final time.
The final time.
Waiting Watching Whistling Wolf
hoists granny over him.

sinks beneath the folds.
And waits.

Young Bloody Mating Cape
comes.
Bounces through the door
and stands in Grandma's ooze,
parting her legd proudly.
Come in, come in my pretty,
my honey, soft and pretty.
Waiting Watching Whistling Wolf
says beneath the wrinkles.
She does not bounce over, but peers.
You are worse than I remember, she says.
Worse, far worse, granny dear.
But you seem cold and lonely,
and I will join you in the bed
Waiting Watching Whistling Wolfs
throws granny to the floor.
What, not granny? Wolf? says she.
Well I'd never known.
Young Bloody Mating Cape,
shows her little teeth.

Young Bloody Mating Cape
bounces through the woods
the dark and grabbing limbs.
Waiting Watching Whistling Wolf
follows not.
Dagger,
retaining some warmth
Cloak,
flung free from her body.
Knee-high,
made the poor wolf cry.
Young Bloody Mating Cape,
dancing, lets out a heavy sigh.



Robert L. Harrison

WANDA

g. Kessler

My cat is dying.

Wanda's her name, and she's some fourteen years old. I found her years ago on Southern Boulevard near 145th Street in the Bronx when she was a kitten. Black, with some scattered white markings, she had been heading into the traffic on the boulevard when I picked her up thinking to return her to her owner. The block we were on, though, was mostly cinderblocked sealed brownstones, except for a bodega on the corner, and when I brought her in there no one claimed responsibility. Returning outside with her, I looked up and down the street to see if anyone was trying to find her. No one was.

There is an old Chinese saying, I'm told: "One who saves another's life is forever responsible for that life." I looked at the bundle of fur in my hand. I doubt she weighed more than a pound or two — she was no bigger than the size of my clenched fist — and she couldn't have been more than five or six weeks old.

"What do you think?" I asked, heading back to my Toyota pickup truck; "did you ever consider Staten Island as a place to live?" I turned her over in my hand- "little lady?" It was a twofold question, as it is often difficult determining a kitten's sex. She squirmed a little, unhappy at being held upside down, but calmed right back down when I turned her right side up. "Okay then, girlie," I told her, as I got in and closed the door, "we are outta here! A few quick stops on the way, and then it's viva Staten Island!"

By the time I got her home I'd picked a name: Wanda the wanderer, but it wouldn't prove to be very accurate. Wanda fit right in with our other two cats, Captain and Mistress, and it took her no time at all to start earning her keep. An excellent mouser, she not only caught and killed mice for us, but unlike most other cats I've known she gobbled them right up too! Everything but the tail she'd eat. I guess mouse tails just aren't that tasty.

She never grew very big, but by the time she'd reached two she was top cat in the house, and even had the dog we'd also acquired thoroughly cowed. She didn't do it by strength, but rather through cunning and craft. When, for instance, Poochie the dog got on her nerves, she'd give him a swipe across the snout then haul off — with Poochie in hot pursuit — across the floor and under a bed or low slung chair which Poochie would then proceed to crash into. Neither was she very affectionate. For the majority of her life she would prefer to spend a good portion of each day outdoors. After she'd produced two litters we had her spayed, but except that she didn't come home pregnant any more this didn't affect her behavior much. It's not that she didn't like people, it's just that, until she was about eleven or twelve, she hardly ever sought them out to be petted, and even when she did she was never obnoxious about

About a week and a half ago Wanda suffered what was, we think, a stroke. Primarily affecting her sense of balance, it had her walking like an ocean liner with half her starboard holds flooded. She

started falling over, often. For the first week she seemed determined to carry on — stiff upper lip and all that — and just ignore this like she had so many other things in her past. Unfortunately, this time it was serious.

She badgered us constantly for food, but then wouldn't eat more than a bite or two of it. She stopped cleaning herself. We realized she was losing weight rapidly. Now, when she'd fall over, she tended to stay down and rest a while before moving on. Picking her up one could feel each and every bone, every separate vertebra, and her muscles were like thin cords holding everything underneath together. Discussing it with the children, my wife and I considered bringing her to the vets to be put down. We didn't want to see her suffer.

Only she wasn't suffering, or not obviously. She would lay on the towel on the couch where we put her, gently and evenly breathing for hours, seemingly in no distress at all. And since she wasn't in distress, we decided we'd let her go naturally. Over the space of the day we all spent some time with her, stroking her back or scratching her ears the way we knew she liked, saying our goodbyes. She was now very weak and needed assistance just to change positions. I tried to get her to take some milk through an eyedropper but she had no interest in it. We went to bed sure she would be dead by morning.

In the morning, though, she was still alive, still seemingly not in any distress. Arranging fresh bedding for her, I realized it had been quite a while since last she used the kitty box. She was weaker now, but still showed no interest in food or drink. Occasionally she would raise her head and try to follow some activity she saw, her head bobbing back and forth like Katharine Hepburn's did in her last interviews.

It was wearing on all of us. Other pets in the household had died over the years, some due to accident, some disease, a couple to the poisons others in the neighborhood put out to deal with the raccoon population, but those had all been quick deaths, over in a couple of hours at most. What was happening here seemed, in contrast, to be taking forever...

By the afternoon I was sure she couldn't last much longer, so I decided to take her out in the backyard to sit in and feel the sun one last time. So many afternoons she'd played back here, or stalked birds, or simply napped... and I wanted to get out of the house and away from the kids. My oldest had asked, when she came back from school, "Is it still alive?" in a tone that clearly indicated she hoped she wasn't. It was obvious how much they wanted this all to be over... they'd said their goodbyes: why didn't we just finish it?!

I wrestled with that for hours. I knew she was dying. I knew there was nothing we could do that would keep her from dying. And I knew too that, if I had to, I could do it myself; I'd done it before... once for a kitten whose head got half bit off by our dog, and once for a mouse who stumbled around our kitchen dying from poison. But it just didn't feel right. I didn't know what had kept her alive this long; I didn't know what was keeping her alive still, but for as long as I believed she wasn't in pain I wasn't going to interfere.

Night came and found us, now in my bedroom, scratching her ears. I knew for sure she'd be dead by morning and I was saying one final goodbye. I made her as comfortable as I could, and then I turned off the light.

Wanda died, fourteen hours later, on Saturday afternoon as clouds gathered to bring us the first rain we'd had in over a month. We were out in the backyard again, and about an hour or two before she went my wife and oldest daughter had come out to gently suggest that maybe it was time we brought her to the vet.

"But she doesn't seem to be in any pain," I had replied, perhaps a touch defensively. Tears, which I had held off up until now, had my eyes red and puffy.

"How could she show you if she were or not?" my oldest quipped. I'd always been the competent one, the one who knew what to do, in her eyes, and here I was, practically paralyzed, my eyes brimming with tears... it clearly made her uncomfortable.

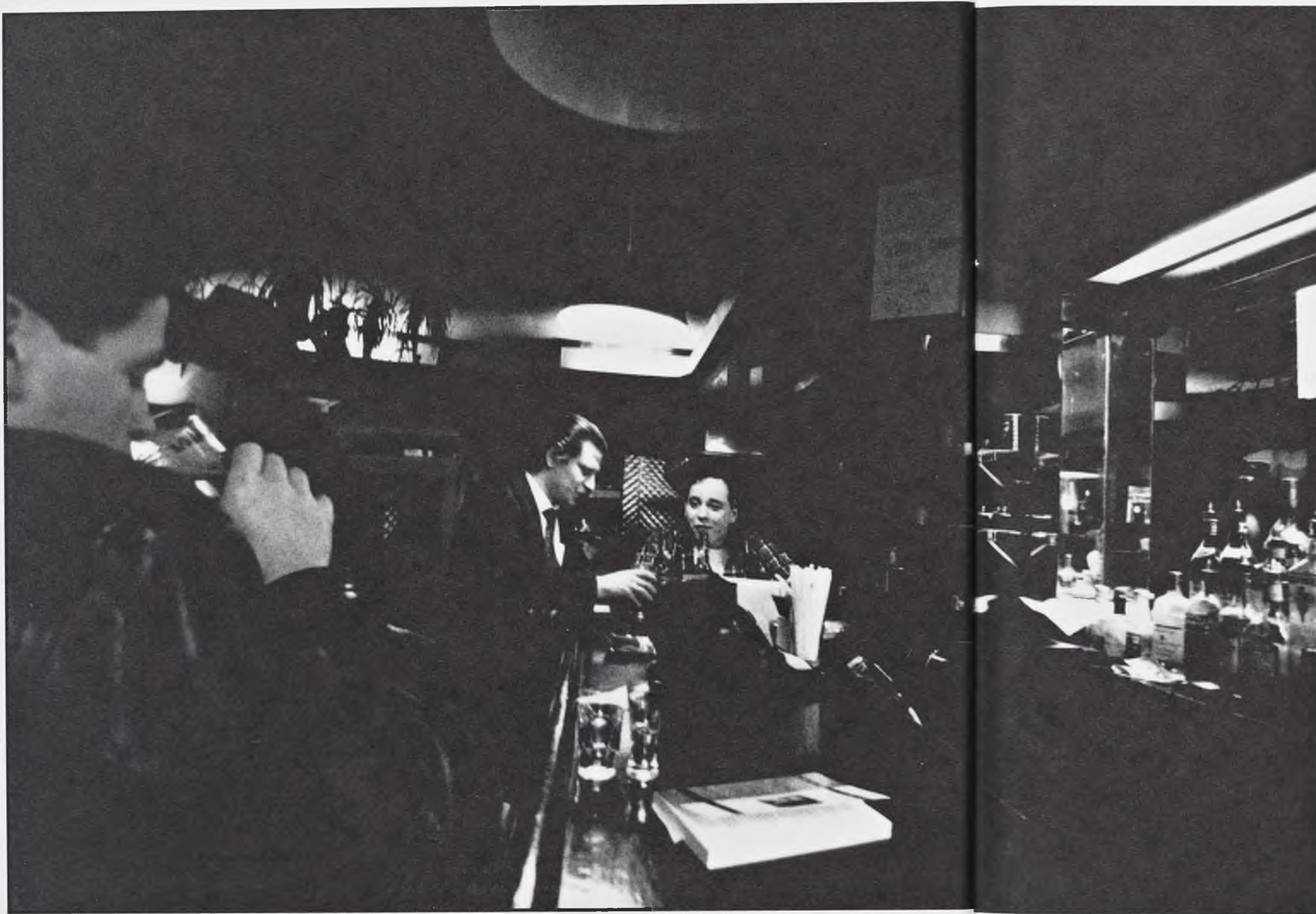
"I couldn't," I admitted, sorrowfully; "it just doesn't feel to me like she is, and anyway..." my voice trickled away, as I really wasn't sure anymore that I was acting rationally about this. I looked, then, at my daughter and wife, helplessly. "...it's just, it's just — well, I feel real bad and you feel real bad — I just don't want to take her somewhere and have her killed just because we're having trouble dealing with how long it's taking!"

Was this right? Was this true, or was I just prolonging Wanda and my family's grief? My daughter considered my words for a couple of seconds and then gave an ambivalent shake of her head and returned to the house. My wife stayed with me, saying nothing.

I stroked Wanda's ears, listening to the sounds of insects and birds, the sound of children's voices out in the street, the low hum of traffic around the neighborhood, a jet plane passing high overhead, a neighbor cutting a tree down with a chainsaw about a half block away... then turned to my wife; "and anyway," I said softly to her, "I don't think she could survive the trip to the vet~."

Shortly after that my wife had also gone bac~ in, and I was left with Wanda and my thoughts. Wanda, now, who had shown practically no activity all day, began exhibiting some mild body tremors and facial contortions. I laid her out on a soft towel on the chair next to me and softly stroked her back. Her eyes weren't tracking, but she was breathing more deeply suddenly. A couple of times her lips pulled back and revealed her teeth, and then she began stretching, her legs, her back, her neck. It was like she was waking up after a long afternoon nap except, instead of getting up, she just slowly relaxed... and then she was gone. She'd stopped breathing and her eyes had dilated fully open. I reached out and stroked her one last time, then just sat there looking at her for a couple of minutes. I felt I would cry my eyes out, but I didn't, so I got up and found a shovel.

I dug a grave for her and then went in and told the family that she'd died and I was burying her. Returning outside I placed her in the ground, then covered her with the dirt I'd removed earlier. She'd been the best damn cat I ever had and now she was gone, and it was over. Rest in peace, Wanda, rest in peace.



Nanci Richards

Art is a universal force
that lets us explore and express ourselves
through different techniques.
In such wonders
we've accomplished many patches,
representing the colors of the world
to the light of our emotions,
which truly speaks for itself
through the blanket of many words.

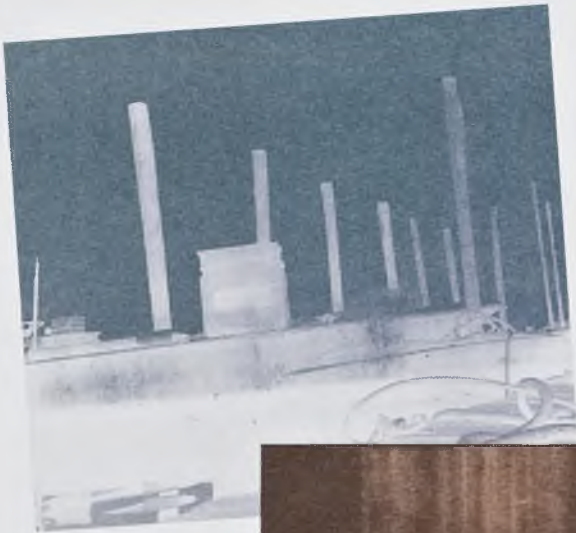
For we will never dominate or limit ourselves to one color,
but achieve through many
and this is what makes up the people of tomorrow.

A blanket deeply rooted will never end
but will only guide us and set us free!

Mia A.

The Redhead Factor

Christopher Mari



photos Anthony Gargiso

Jay Crane had spent the last three days and nights in a motel room somewhere in the Arizona desert drunk and hiding from the manager, with a woman he picked up in California, who had been tripping on everything imaginable since they got there. She was pretty irresistible, even though she was from Queens, with her long red hair and looking so whip thin and gorgeous—the only problem was the guy she was with. He was some pansy in a little leather vest who had stolen Jay's car three days ago when he said he was going out for some cigarettes, food and Pepto Bismol because the redhead was sick.

Jay stood on the balcony on the second floor of the motel waiting in the middle of the night, staring into the nearly empty black and silent parking lot before him, staring at the road on the horizon that his car had left from. It was the same road that would take him home. Jay loved roads and their promise, and was especially in love with this road and its promises. He listened to the woman behind him as she rolled around on the bed muttering something about her boyfriend coming to the party of pilgrims dancing on the ceiling. Then she started to sing the Lionel Richie song of the same name.

He laughed to himself as he looked into the clear dark desert night sky pierced with white starlight. This wasn't a fair trade, he thought, this bitch isn't worth my whole car, maybe the tool kit alone; I didn't even ask the guy for a trade, and if I had, I wouldn't have let myself get dropped off in the middle of nowhere. He just left me with this strung-out bitch, car's used but worth four grand, a little less than what I paid for it. Hell, this wouldn't be so bad if she wasn't baked all the time so I can, oh never mind.

He left California a day before his car was stolen; only a day ago he picked up these lunatics who were on their way to Nashville to pursue the "homosexual Bohemian" lifestyle, even though neither of them were homosexual or Bohemian. They said they just wanted to try it, as if bright experimental California wasn't enough for them. Jay thought that explanation was a nice line of bullshit to facilitate conversation. Jay had a lot on his mind since he left the West Coast and wasn't really thinking straight when he picked them up. He should have thought something was up when he saw them, the guy in his little leather vest, shirtless and the chick in her flaring tight bellbottoms and belly shirt. He remembered thinking how he liked her ass; he hadn't seen as good an ass his whole way out west—everyone else's being the fat and rural working-class type that carried wallets in back pockets and wore printed handkerchiefs wet around their chubby necks. Now he could tell this girl was New York just by the way she dressed. New York and visions of skyscrapers and street corner pretzles poured off of her as she leaned in his open window the way a New York girl only could, promising him a good time and a couple of laughs as payment for the ride, nothing more expected, everything else hoped for. He couldn't resist that red

hair, that smooth white belly rising up from the waist of her frayed jeans. He thanked God that he was able to look at her for the next 2500 miles; He thanked God for letting him know that such girls still existed in this world. Still, she was with the freak California pansy pimp. He was a hard-bodied bastard all right, all pumped up and glistening tan brown, looking really fake and useless. Jay was a big guy who worked out some and looked pretty wild with his slicked-back stuck-up hair and crazy beard. He knew he could take the pansy in the little leather vest if necessary, so he opened the door and let them in and watched those long smiling bellbottomed legs stretch into his car. That pretty punk boy was the only problem. He hoped maybe he and the chicky could strat talking one night on the road all low and close and personal after the pretty boy fell asleep, and then they could dump his ass out in the desert. He sighed at the irony of his dreams.

Anyway, Jay just wanted to get the hell out of California and get back home to his friends and his adopted city, so he could forget about this abortion of a trip out west where he spent all his time working in all-night stores and in strip joints as a bouncer, places where the scum of the earth seem to be congregating. His last night at the all-night store was the most interesting; he got a call from some guy who said he was coming down there to rip him a new twin set of assholes with his double barrel shotgun. Then he grunted a sweaty perverse laugh and promised to fuck the remains. Well, needless to say, old Jay beat a path for the door as soon as he hung up, threw all the low lives out and locked up a twenty-four hour store, while stripping off his work shirt and name tag. His car was humming out in the desert for a while before he realized that maybe this thing was some kind of joke, shit like that always happened in New York; it only freaked him out so much because he was so alone and so tired and so isolated from everything on the planet at that point. He didn't go back to work having decided he had gotten all he could out of the West Coast. He called his boss and told him he wouldn't be back and the boss told him that was fine, who the fuck really wanted him anyway?

He looked into the room again and caught a glance of the chick rolling around on the bed, red hair flapping like Superman's cape. She sat up and laid down, sat up and laid down looking all too much like the chick from The Exorcist. He couldn't just bail on her because she was a real redhead; he had firsthand knowledge of that fact because she had puked on herself the night before, and he had to wash her down in the shower and there was the proof she was a real redhead glowing like some kind of like some kind of modern day burning bush. But like Moses, Jay couldn't look upon it too long because it was too beautiful and perfect; if he had it would have driven him crazy. So he put her to bed in a bathrobe and and soaked her shitty clothes in the sink. That was at the beginning of her last trip hours ago. Feeling flustered by the glowing truth of the real red-



Rob Jr.

head, he got pissed off and flushed her stash. Again like the angry unthinking Moses, all he needed to do next was tap a rock too many times with his cane for some water. And he was afraid of her wrath, of how angry she would be when she finally came out of it. But he was more afraid of the cops finding a dead O.D.ed body in the room with him when the manager finally got around to realizing they hadn't left yet and called the local coppers.

He came through the glass doors out of the desert night and looked at her lying there muttering to herself with her robe half-open way up her thigh. He was mesmerized by that white thigh and its promises, mesmerized by the ceiling fan whirling overhead. He wondered if this one look at her thigh was worth his car, which was worth about four grand. He wondered if knowing she was a real redhead was worth it. He really wanted to jump into those sheets and bury himself somewhere on her flesh underneath the robe. He didn't though, having some vague vestiges of Catholic morality left in him, and went back outside to smoke a cigarette.

The night was still, still in the way that only a desert can be like someplace out west where nothing happens that everyone takes notice of, and by everyone that includes all those hippies and hillbillies who could hop into their old Ford pickups which haven't been started since 1972 to

come a-running. Jay knew that pimped-up, pumped-up pansy was put there somewhere; he would be back for what was his and he was just waiting until she could cool down some. For all that pansy was, Jay thought he did appreciate a redhead's beauty and her passion; he knew when to split and when to get laid. He'll get horny soon enough, Jay mused with confidence, and then he'll come back because nobody who's had a redhead once can let one go this easily. He remembered how the two of them sat in the back seat together smoking hash and making him feel like he was their own personal driver. They spent most of the time back there feeling one another up pretty openly and Jay could do nothing but watch them in the rear view mirror and wait. She'd have him too, he could see that now in the way she had shown off with the pansy.

After a while, the pansy said they should stop because she wasn't feeling well and they decided to take a room for the night. Pansy boy helped her out of the car all right, all graceful and bullshit kind, and Jay watched this unfold seeing she wasn't sick enough to forget her bag, which was full of a sweet momma of a stash. He caught a glance into that bag; this chick carried dope around the way other girls carried make-up—she had every shade and kind in there. The leather vest pansy brought her upstairs to the room and then went down to the manager's office asking if there was

a store nearby where they could get some food. The manager told him it was three miles down the road going east. He then asked Jay if he could take the car to get her Pepto Bismol and aspirin, cigarettes for himself, and food for all, his treat. Jay gave him the keys readily and why

not—what was he going to do, leave his girl, that hottie? So Jay spent the next three days wondering if his trip could get any worse.

He pulled the chair from inside and placed it on the balcony. He had been outside long enough; the manager wasn't around at that time of night. He lit another cigarette and sat down with his bottle of rum in hand, then propped his legs up on the railing just looking at the asphalt line on the horizon. The night was so quiet and he marveled at it and how it made him feel. He fell asleep for a couple of hours around two A.M. and woke up suddenly, feeling as if someone was standing over him. It was the redhead with a knife at his throat, which seemed impossibly big for her to have been able to hide in what she was wearing.

"And who the hell are you?," she asked softly. Jay stared past the knife toward her eyes, but his gaze was caught by her open robe, the bulge of her breasts and the freckles across them, so clear in the moonlight.

"Jay Crane," he began slowly, not moving an inch. "I picked you up in California, remember?" Something like recognition moved across her face. She started to lower the knife, then she quickly raised it again.

She glanced down at herself long enough to understand her state.

"Have you been fucking me the whole time I was tripping?"

"No." She could tell by the man's eyes he wasn't lying. Truthfully, she was very perceptive when she wasn't stoned.

"So where's the fucking asshole?" She wondered. Even though the knife was still at his throat, Jay couldn't help but smile at what she called his favorite driving buddy.

"The 'fucking asshole' ditched us three days ago when he took my car down the road to get you Pepto Bismol and aspirin."

She looked at him for a long moment and then lowered the knife, "Right." She collapsed on the floor of the balcony leaning against the railing with the huge knife in her lap. Jay looked at it and figured it to be at least a few inches longer than his hand. "Shit, oh shit, that bastard, that fucking bastard."

Jay sighed and fumbled the pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket, collected two and then handed one to her. She took it, lit it and smoked quietly for a bit.

"Well at least I'm with a New Yorker," she said finally, gazing at him with smiling tired blazing green eyes. "You are a New Yorker, right?"

"Born and raised in Brooklyn," he answered with a confident lie. He was born in Connecticut; his best friend in Brooklyn. He had only gone to school in New York and wanted to move back if he ever got home.

"I'm from Queens myself. Rego Park."

"You told me already," Jay explained smiling. He looked at the knife lying partially on her bare thigh and partially on her terricloth robe. "Mind if I ask you something?"

"So long as it don't cost me anything," she replied smiling through a wave of smoke. "As you can see, I don't have much to give."

"Right," Jay grinned. "Where'd you get that knife from any-

way?"

She grinned at him proudly, looked down and then blew some smoke into the desert night breeze. "I had it in a sling under my arm. It was tied to my bra. I got the idea from Dostoyevsky, you know, Crime and Punishment."

"Do you read a lot?" Jay asked, a little surprised to find himself discussing literature with a redhead from Rego Park in the middle of the night in the Arizona desert just after she put a knife to his throat and had been tripping out for three days and nights.

"I try to keep up with the classics," she answered with a shrug.

"So do I."

"Well of course you do, college boy," she said with a sly sideways observant grin. "English major, right?"

"Double major, English and History."

She laughed.

Jay sniffed himself jokingly. "Do I reek of it?"

"No, not really, but I guess in a way you can tell." She put her head in her hand. "So Columbia or N.Y.U.?"

"Columbia."

"Yeah," she said with a great smile. "Definitely."

Jay reflected on his new situation with this girl awake and fairly sober and with the car still missing; he wondered if it was now worth four grand.

"He'll be back," she mused looking out to the road.

"I've been figuring he'd be back by now."

She smiled coolly. "Soon, baby soon. But not for me, oh no. For the stash I have that he was gonna sell to some guys for pocket cash. I figure he'll be pretty pissed that I've tapped into it some."

Jay's face turned white and he held his cigarette stiffly. "What guys, red?"

"Oh I don't know, man, some guys."

"Oh. Okay."

The redhead looked down at herself again and it seemed to finally register how her robe was open and draped around her shoulders. She gathered it up and tied it tightly.

"Um, how did I get like this, Jay?"

Jay leaned forward in his chair rubbing his head and still thinking about the pansy in the vest and the new mysterious "guys".

"Oh," he said straining to smirk. "YOU puked on yourself and I had to wash you off."

She stood up and went inside. "Thanks," she said over her shoulder walking, "it seems that I owe you one."

Jay stood up also and followed her part way, stopping to lean in the doorway. "Well, I've gotta thank you for not cutting my throat."

Shre shrugged while looking around the room, her back still to him.

"No really. You could have."

She sat on one corner of the bed, her legs straddling the edge. She leaned over to her pile of clothes on the floor and put the knife back in the sling once she folded it. Jay watched her the entire time and wondered how he could have missed a thing as big as that mother of a knife.

"Well I really do owe you big time," she began looking up at him in a smirking sly way. "You did pick us up and all and we did sort of screw you over. You didn't have to go through all this." Suddenly she undid her robe and Jay stood there really surprised and thinking: Christ this is like a bad HBO movie and I'm stuck in the middle of it, how do I know this

psycho stoned bitch won't pop that knife in my back, oh shit decisions decisions . . .

"I should tell you something first, babe," he remarked as she leaned forward, taking him by the hand and leading him towards her. "I flushed your shit. All of it."

He winced expecting to be on the receiving end of all that true redhead fury, he could see shit being thrown around the room in his mind, he heard the shattering of the glass sliding doors, he felt the knife popping out again to find a bloody home in him, but all he got was that smirking beautiful evil face coming closer to his.

"Hmm," she mused. "That's better than me doing it all. That fucking asshole's gonna have a couple of surprises when he gets back."

Then she attacked him and pushed him towards the floor in front of the bed licking and kissing him and tearing at his clothes. Jay dimly wondered if there was some sort of condom machine in the bathroom somewhere. He pulled the robe off of her and used the excuse of kissing her arms and legs to check for track marks. No track marks, he thought, just pure white skin, so clean so clean. She muttered something about having rubbers in her bag and he was happy to hear that. They sounded like a bizarre safe sex commercial. Then he forgot everything as he lost himself in that red mane of hair as it worked its way down his neck and chest and stomach. Then there was a noise, something outside, something other than the two of them.

"Was that a car?" he wondered.

"Shh," she said and cupped her hand over his mouth softly. "It was nothing."

Then they both heard another noise, a pebble being thrown against the glass doors, then another and another.

"Shit," she whispered, pounding her fist against the floor. "Doesn't he just have the fucking timing?"

They crawled quietly over to the glass doors and peered out through the curtains to see the pansy in the leather vest leaning against Jay's car with two other guys under a lamp-post in the lot. Jay wasn't sure but he thought one of the guys was holding a gun against his side pointed down. He nudged the redhead and indicated the gun and she nodded stiffly. He suddenly got worried about the odds thinking he could probably take any one of them but not three and especially not with a strung-out fruitcake redhead chick. She just got pissed anyway and stormed out onto the balcony stark naked before Jay had a chance to stop her.

"You motherfucker!" she screamed, no hope of missing the manager with that wailing. "Where the hell have you been?"

"I've been dying here."

"What have you been doing, bitch? Fucking that asshole?" He pointed an accusing finger at her. Jay sighed and came out sheepishly when he was mentioned. It felt like going to the principle's office to him for some odd reason.

"And so what if I was, you bastard?" The redhead kept yelling. "He's better than you are! You think you're all that with that damn vest! Son of a bitch! You, ha, the best part of you dripped on your mother's sheets!"

Jay stifled a smile seeing as it wasn't really in keeping with the situation, but that mouth, oh that mouth, she was from Queens.

Just then the two guys with the pansy pulled him by his leather vest to the side and whispered something to him. He changed his tune fast: "Hey baby, just come down, we'll

work everything out."

"What?" She laughed. "So you can shoot me behind the car? Those boys tell you to make sure you got your silencer? Fuck you, you fuck!"

At that moment Jay tried to grab her arm and pull her inside because he knew someone was probably awake with all the shouting, someone was somewhere calling the cops who would be there in all of eight seconds. He wanted an out but not an out that would get him thrown in jail. She just snatched her arm away from him, still way way pissed.

"All you want is your stash, you bastard. I'll give you your fucking stash." She stormed inside and Jay followed her expecting to get a bullet in his back. She grabbed her bag and went into the bathroom where she started stuffing face towels into it. She did this while squatting on the cool ceramic tile floor muttering to herself how no goddamn pansy-ass motherfucker in a vest was going to leave her in the middle of nowhere and get away with it. Jay squatted next to her and slowly realized just how fucking weird this was — two people basically naked sitting on the floor of a motel bathroom in Arizona as three guys waited for them with guns.

"What are you doing?" He asked finally as she was reaching into the room for the half empty bottle of 151 proof fire-water rum. She began to pour it on top of the rags in her bag.

She smiled her evil grin. "I'm gonna burn these fuckers."

"Oh yeah like that's gonna work."

"Oh fuck you."

She started to get up with the soaking bag but Jay pulled her by the arm and forced her to sit down again.

He took the bag from her. "Wait. I've got a idea. Just follow my lead. Go and grab all your shit and be ready to move."

She saluted him. "Yes sir, Mr. fucking Indiana Jones,"

"Just be cool, okay?" He rubbed her face. "You fruitcake."

They crawled across the floor again to the space between the bed where he clothes were piled, still pretty wet. Jay moved to the glass doors, put his shirt on and searched the breast pocket with his fingers for the matches. He peeked out from between the curtains and was surprised to find his buddies still standing around the car.

"I can't believe it," Jay muttered.

"What?" the girl asked. She couldn't see jack shit from her position.

"They're still standing there," he explained and then stood behind the curtain thinking what a, lucky bastard he was. He knew that if he was going to go out it wasn't going to be crouched in the corner of some moldy old motel room in the middle of the Arizona nowhere with some acid queen freaking out because her pansy boyfriend dumped her in the desert with him. Jay wasn't going to be trifled with now; he saw his car out there and he wanted it back.

He slid the door open halfway, still hiding behind the curtain. He dropped a match into the bag and it burst into flame. "Here's your goddamn stash!" he yelled flinging the bag by its strap the whole length of the parking lot. The three of them scrambled after it like kids on a ball field, and he suddenly had visions of his youth, when he was a kid playing centerfield and wanting so badly to throw the guy out going home, in order to survive the inning, home, the east, New York,

"What am I thinking?" he muttered.

He grabbed the redhead by the wrist and pulled her down



Tony Torres

the stairs realizing: shit this must have woken everybody in the state up. Yet by the time he emerged in the lot no one was anywhere except those three guys in one corner of the lot and his car was just waiting there for him. He looked back to the guys who were stamping on the bag trying to put out the flames.

He hopped in, threw it in drive and started to really move before the chick had both bare feet inside. As they passed the guys, they started to yell something but there were no shots and then they knew that they were alive and gone.

"Oh man, oh man, I can't believe you really did that," the redhead squealed with joy and went on and on about how she would really take him around when they got back to New York calling him her hero boyfriend, the best lay she ever had (even though they hadn't slept together yet) and she promised to retell the story over and over because it was so compelling. Yes, she used the word compelling. She does read, Jay thought amused and happy to be alive on the road.

Jay felt the beat old car hug the road like an old friend, he flew east around ninety for a while, blood pounding in his ears, before realizing that he had better slow down because it would be damned hard to explain a naked girl to a hick cop. He explained this reasoning to the redhead and she put on her shirt and panties, looking so good sitting there like that. She leaned on his shoulder for a while as they coasted at an easy sixty-five while he rubbed his dashboard with one hand thinking about that eternal dotted white line forever before him, the line which would take him home again and he was ecstatic to be on the road in his car. Then he glanced that wild red mane of hair rubbing up on his shoulder and felt the desert air across his cheek. He enjoyed that moment for as long as any moment lasts, but then he noticed that the car was low on gas. He petted the dash again, knowing who he had to give his attention to now.

They stopped at a roadside station about twenty or thirty miles down the route. An old man with a dusty and leathery face came to the window and served them. Jay told him to fill it up and gave him some money. Then he turned to the redhead smiling.

"You better get out."

"Why should I?" she wondered with a laugh. "I don't have to pee yet. But I am getting hungry. Do you have any cash for food?"

He sighed.

Then Jay grabbed her sweet bellbottomed jeans and shoes and tossed them out the window. He saw the old man scratch his head in the rear view mirror.

She got out of the car muttering and laughing thinking he had a weird sense of humor and that it was some kind of joke. Jay slammed the door behind her and clicked down the lock after taking one long last look at those white legs in those panties. He tossed a few bills out of the window.

"For the bus."

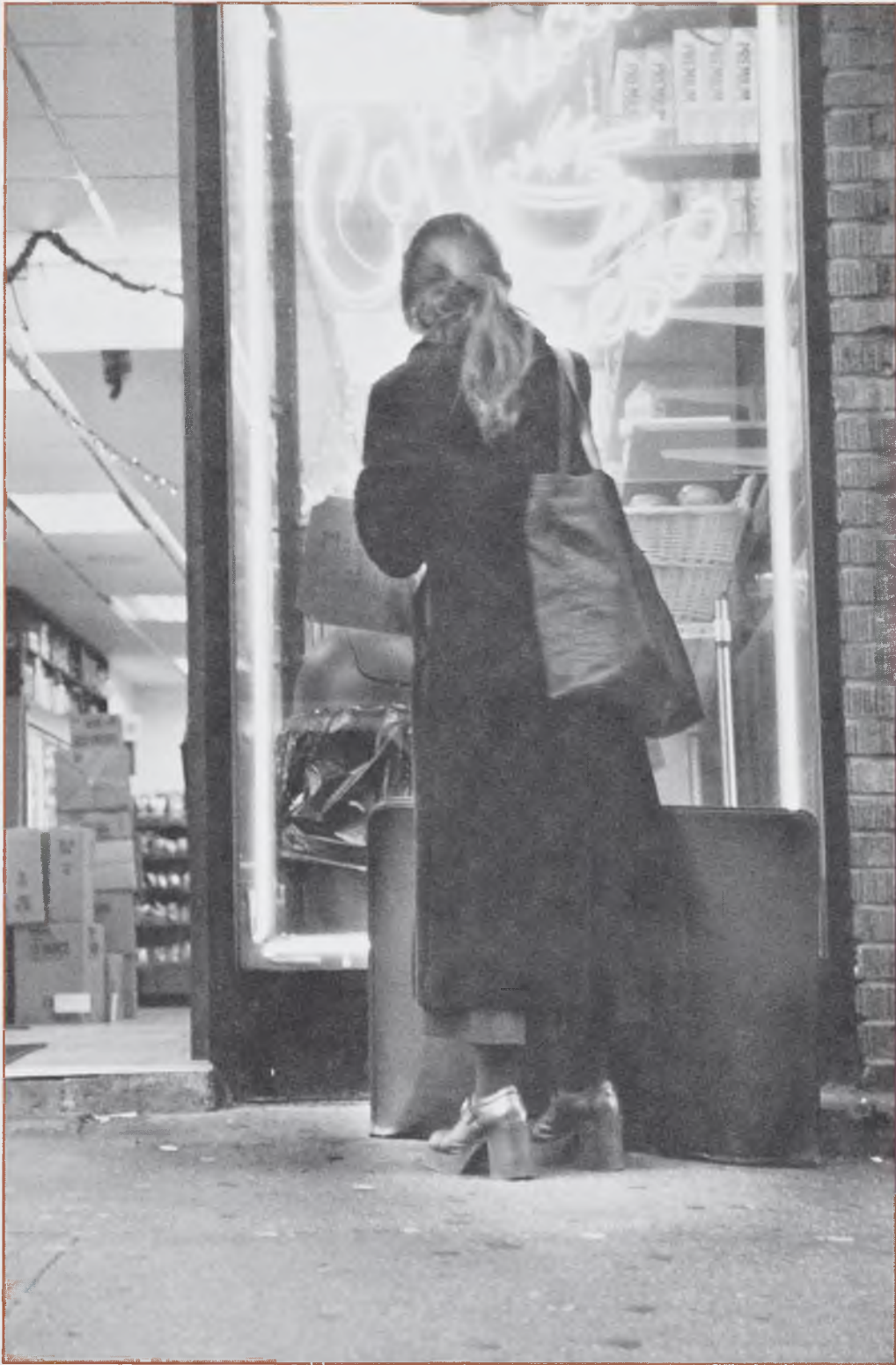
She moved to the window and leaned in. "Why?"

He smiled with a grin that was more like hers than his own. "Because you ain't worth four grand, babe."

And he took off towards home, catching a glimpse of her looking bewildered on the dusty sidewalk, looking beautiful in her panties and bellyshirt. The old man stood behind her and seemed as if he was smacking his lips. Jay howled with laughter at the concept and drove for a long time feeling really lucky that he found some good tunes on the radio. In fact, he drove for such a long time that he passed Nashville. It was there he felt he could rest again after glimpsing quite a few fat rural working-class asses.

*Her eyes are a doorway to a
secret place I have never been
I've imagined the destination
Felt it in my being
It always seemed distant
Impossible to reach
No more*

John Tsanadis



Anthony Gargiso

1995: Kuntsler Defends Mantle at Heavens Gate

You, Angels without pity dare deny
him entry to play forever on your
Elysian fields.

You, pretenders of moral justice what
one of you has not taken a nip of
wine, or sucked in second hand
smoke.

You, condemn not only him but a whole
generation that felt his lumber lift up
their dreary lives.

And I, defend him for free asking
just for a few token autographs
after you let him in.

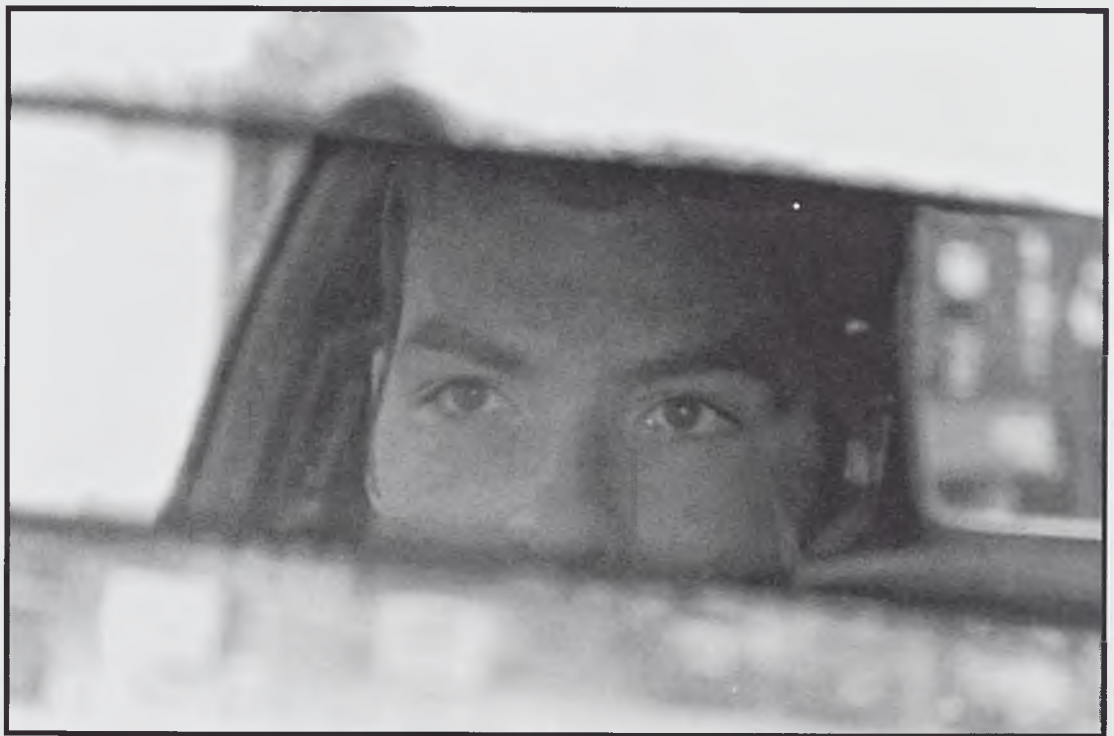
Take this man named Mantle and deny
him not his rightfull place on your
heaveny team.

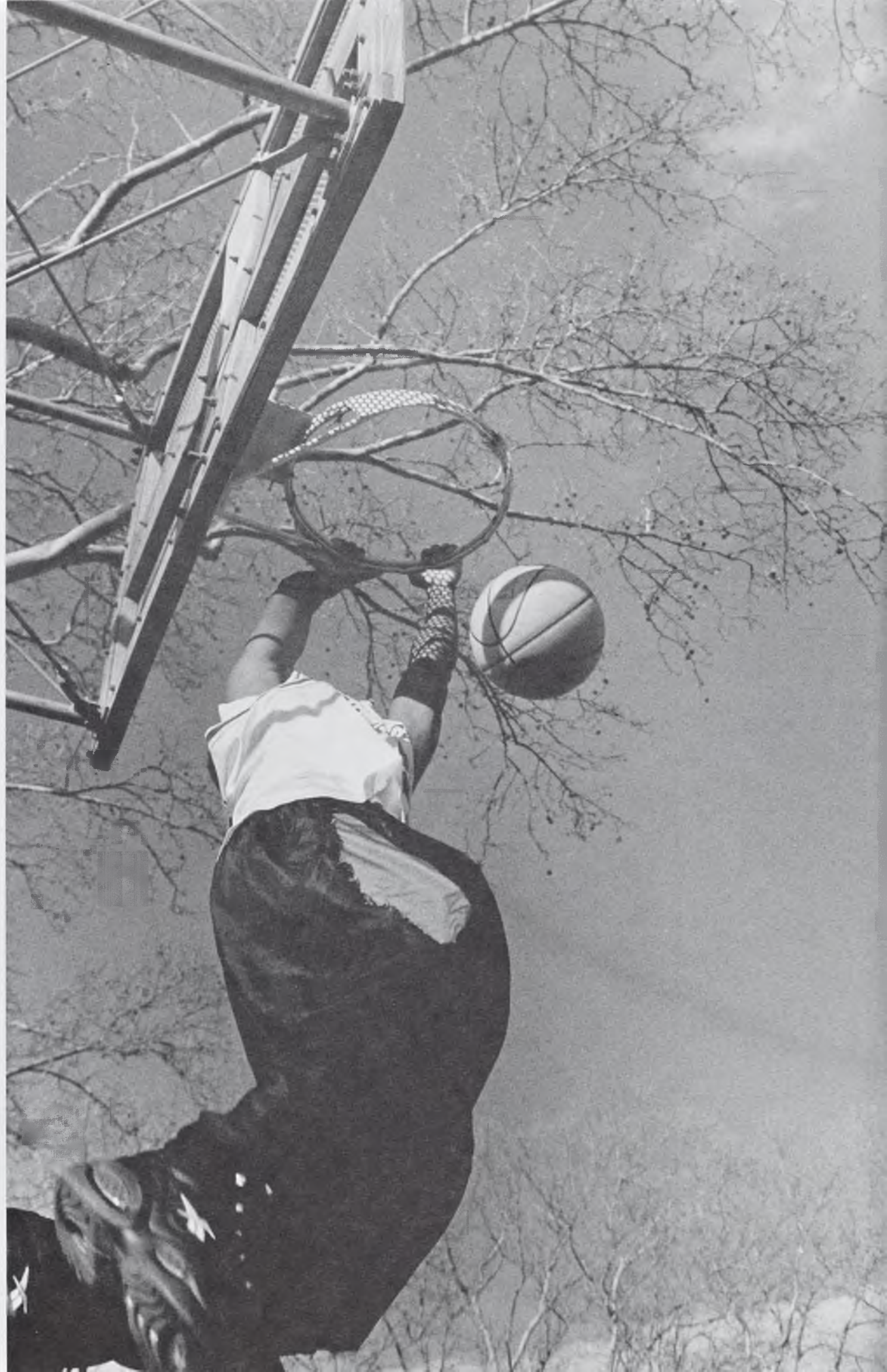
Yes, he abused his life but he loved
his fans so well.

poem and photo
Robert L. Harrison



Photos Jon Loeshe





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MARTIAL ARTS

Sinan Hepcakar

"Savages, I say. All of you!" he cried. Unmoved by his outrage, they continued to solemnize the dramatic proceedings. Passing baskets filled with plantains, kiwis, and pomegranates through the gathered masses. "Is there no one who feels this hideous ritual is unjust?" he hollered, immediately spotting the saddened face of his former wife. There was no prior evidence to indicate love in their relationship, but her melancholy expression told him differently.

Suddenly trumpets roared, the townspeople watched with amazement, while the executioner made his way to the platform and closed the door of the chamber. It was Sir Ware Hawkins, his longtime comrade. The same man that he bestowed knighthood upon. He could not ponder up an explanation for all this madness.

Fiendish nightmare, it was not. The look of his old friend, showed no sign of regret or intention of opposing anyone's orders. Poisonous gases began to cloud up the chamber, it slowly grew thicker, until he was no longer visible. Silence dominated, the crowd gazed intently for a few minutes, their mouths agape. The chamber began to clear up and the mob of people cheered with delight. King Hersey had survived the execution.

Sir Hawkins ran to open the door and released the king from his shackles. "Are you well?" said Sir Hawkins. "Yes, I am fine. Don't go anywhere, I will need to talk to you about your actions." answered the king. "Very good, your majesty." replied Sir Hawkins. King Hersey rose from his binding seat and exited the chamber. He was greeted with an honorable ovation, Sir Hawkins followed him from behind and quickly moved to the side without distracting the king, in his moment of glory.

The king stood upon the center of the platform like a stoic immortal. The lovely Anna Belle, rushed towards the stage, grabbed King Hersey, and hugged him with all her might. A continuous roar of celebration filled the air and grew louder when the king lowered Anna Belle, and passionately kissed her on the lips.

The kiss had ended and Anna Belle would not let go of King Hersey, locking her arms around him. His attention shifted to the crowd, as he focused on each face. The noise grew down as they waited for the king to speak.

"Friends, enemies, whatever you are? I am a man of great power. Power beyond the understandings of peasants like yourselves. It seems you all know about my adoration's, but the gossip among our towns has not heard of my secret devotion to sorcery and the martial arts. Your petty little executions cannot harm me. For I am Hersey Wolf, King of Cornucopia." he stated, with unattainable arrogance.

Rage washed through the people as they shouted crazily, enthused with pride, throwing their hats and other belongings into the air. They were interrupted in the middle of their festivities, when King Hersey finally said "Now get out of here, before I kill you all."

Within an instant, the commoners were sprinting for their homes. Trampling over one another, leaving many wounded, and a few lifeless. After they had all disappeared, employer of royalty, King Hersey Wolf fastened to speak with his adjunct, Sir Hawkins. He instructed the newly selected Queen Anna Belle to go back to the castle and make use of herself in the exercise room.

"I am quite curious as to why you tried to kill me?" said the king. "I believe your mistaken," said Sir Hawkins.

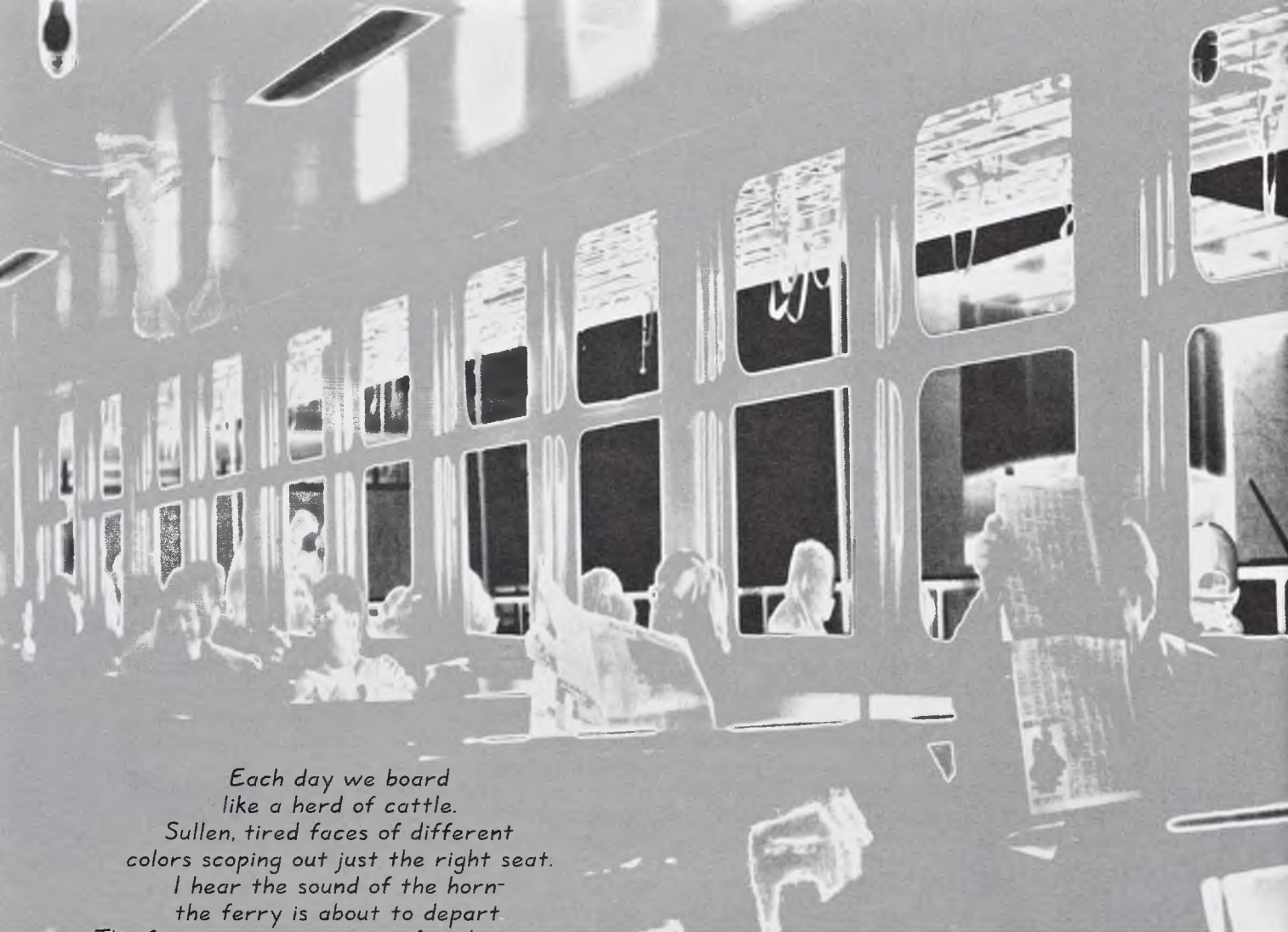
"Mistaken? You say such asinine things. It is obvious that you have deceived me. I will not kill you, but you will have to put up new wallpaper in my royal bedroom." said the king, demandingly.

Sir Hawkins replied, "Your majesty, you are alive because I put one of these in your gas chamber," he shows him a little yellow ball with a fuse extending outward, "I made it from sulfur. When you light this fuse, it creates massive amounts of smoke. I would never give you poisonous gas, I couldn't kill my best friend."

A bewildered King Hersey says "It wouldn't have mattered either way," he pauses for a moment, "Let me see that thing," grabbing the sulfur from the hand of Sir Hawkins. Sir Hawkins smiles and says "I call it a smoke bomb."

King Hersey lights the creation and throws it on the floor. This is a very useful invention," he says, "Although my skills of sorcery and the martial arts are essential."

"Indeed, your majesty. If it were not for your knowledge of the martial arts, you would have been hanged for being a witch." said Sir Hawkins. King Hersey, confusedly says "What do you mean?" Sir Hawkins responds "They are afraid of karate."



*Each day we board
like a herd of cattle.
Sullen, tired faces of different
colors scoping out just the right seat.
I hear the sound of the horn-
the ferry is about to depart
The ferry man prepares us for the journey
across the river Styx.*

SAM SALGANIK

*Some people choose to read, others sleep,
creating a predominant air of silence.
I usually choose the latter,
but on this day couldn't get comfortable.
I sat and watched and thought.
The Rat-Race-
I think that's what they call it.*

7:30 Ferry

*It is difficult to distinguish one from the other,
as we are now clones with one identity.
Identity lost through conforming.
Conformed because there's a family to feed
and bills to pay.
The Rat-Race-
I think that's what they call it.*

KERRI DEITCH

*The ferry slowly begins to dock
at the other side
disturbing me from my thoughts.
The moment has arrived for us to now enter
the First Circle.*

Whimper

gabriel lopez

If my generation had a voice, I guess it would be me
but it was sold off long ago to Pepsi and MTV
by some corporate figure X-hippie junkie
for a very very very small fee
after being strained, shoutin' out too much about being free
but if my generation had a voice, I guess it would be a guy
kinda like me

If my generation had a voice, I guess it would echo in my head,
but all our folk heroes are already dead
or they turned in their inspiration for a pile of bread
and not the kind you eat, but the kind you spend instead
though none of them really had anything worth being said
but if my generation had a voice, I guess it would echo in my
head

If my generation had a voice it would be harsh and loud
we would look at the future and be, oh so proud
and we'd all be together, an organized, collected conscious
crowd
there would be some truth to the things we avowed
and something would come out of our mouths, besides just a
smoke cloud
and the poor smiled down and the senators bowed
cause if my generation had a voice it would be harsh and it
would be loud

If my generation had a voice, yeah why not, it would be I
but the media stuck us with X and we want to see Y
cause I'm tired of being apathetic and I want to fuckin try
to find out who really is behind the bold face white lie
but we are too distracted by a lot of shit, we don't really
need to buy
and our brains are shot by too much heroin, coke, crack, and
fry
taken in abandoned lots, barbed wire fenced, beneath a pollut-
ed sky
and we can't wait till the day we die,
and it makes me want to fall down and cry
cause we were gonna scream but all that came out was a bro-
ken sigh
silently whispered "why?"
Yeah, if my generation had it's own voice
it wouldn't chant "X", it would shout out "WHY?"
but that would only be, if my generation had a voice

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