

1981

Exile Vol. XXVII No. 1

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Recommended Citation

Acker, Andy; Augusta, Mike; Freeman, J.L.; Heinlin, Michael; Hogshire, Dave; Hussey, Chad; Kropf, John Whitworth; Lavin, Dane; Minacci, Lisa; Pence, A.; Riseborough, Penelope A.; Sessions, A.K.; Viola, L.S.; and Zarchen, John (1981) "Exile Vol. XXVII No. 1," *Exile*: Vol. 27 : No. 1 , Article 1.
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Exile Vol. XXVII No. 1

Authors

Andy Acker, Mike Augusta, J.L. Freeman, Michael Heinlin, Dave Hogshire, Chad Hussey, John Whitworth Kropf, Dane Lavin, Lisa Minacci, A. Pence, Penelope A. Riseborough, A.K. Sessions, L.S. Viola, and John Zarchen

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Denison University

May 1981

Editor Lisa Minacci

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The Minstrels

Lung

A. Pence

Just past the highway
deep in the woods of Ohio, where ice
turns and folds,
snow has found its own gray pocket
the roots are bare
over in the clearing
is the fallowed place
of the minstrels

In this gathering
the earth is groping
the wind is at peace
and buried away, packed beneath
the wet-black humus, below
the shifting of snails and seeds
there is the sound.

I heard it only once--
when the sun was on my face
when ice cupped the morning
and the lines on my palms were thick
and long.

It could have been my foot
scraping my sole on a pebble
or blood rushing in the shell of my ear
but the sound was of an instrument
turning and gleaning under there
it was like a lung filling,
pumping--taking the deep deep woods
into itself
First, the intake
then the release, a letting-go,
the slow slow mutter
the spindle set loose
and music rising from
out the ground.

By Penelope A. Riseborough

You fill me with Browning and texts
the classics and masters of

Knowledge you offer me with a gun
when I can no longer accept.

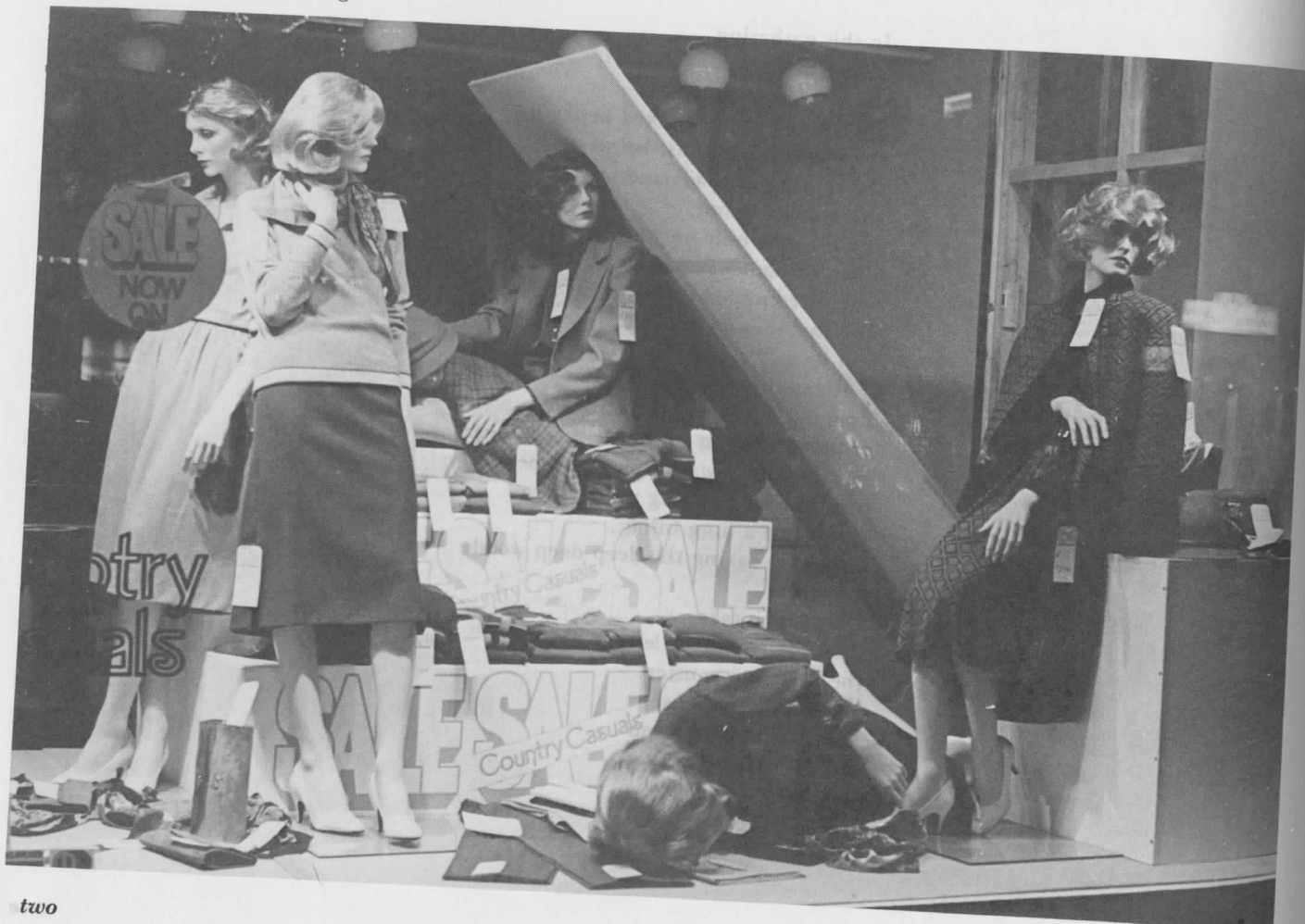
And I scream at others and myself
sometimes asleep, and ready
to burst, even while dreaming.

But I continue towards
the long hollow barrel-

At breaking point I grab
and pull and shoot

at myself, waking
cold, under covers of printed
words and specks of blood

Regent Street Mannequins
by Penelope A. Riseborough



by Jennifer E. Gardner

He first noticed it when his mother was cleaning out the dusty patch of floor space under his bed. She bend down uncharacteristically on one knee and contorted her head and arms to reach the tattered box of comic books and gum cards that was wedged against the farthest leg of the bed. She sat upright on her knees at the side of the bed and sorted through it casually, wiping away the grime from its surface with a soiled dust cloth and a squirt of Endust. He had never seen her squat on her knees like that before, with the bare dirty soles of her feet showing beneath the rim of her buttocks. Later that day when she was supposed to be basting the chicken breasts he caught her slumped against the refrigerator next to the stove with a *Cosmopolitan* in her hands and her forehead pointed in a studious frown. When she looked up and saw him he turned defiantly and went into the den without saying a word and turned on the television. She stayed in the kitchen until his father came home.

He would think about it often during the bus ride to school or during study period. At recess he would sometimes avoid the usual sandlot baseball game and head instead for the swings, where he would pull himself up into the highest seat and sit for the full thirty-five minutes, watching his sneakers dangling aimlessly below him making colliding shadows on the smooth surface of ground where the bigger kids' feet rubbed. He felt himself growing more and more uncomfortable walking the three-quarter's of a block to his house, having to go through the motions of greeting and hugging her when he came through the door. He was grateful for the distractions school would sometimes bring, leaving him breathless and sweaty after a football game or a whirl on the jungle gym. But eventually it would always come back to him, punctuating the smell of the breeze moist and salty on his skin with the acrid hurt of stale on his tongue, the stiff shock of reality that brought the facts home to him with irreversible clarity once again. It would creep up on him at night, just as he was barely conscious of crossing the netherline into full sleep, and in an instant his eyes would part wide in sharp alertness and bring in the faceless image of the plain darkened white of the wall by his bed. Every once in a while one of them would open the door to check on him and he would close his eyes and snap his body into a facsimile of sleep, deliberately calming his breathing and parting his lips to make it look authentic. In a few seconds the bright hall light would fade from his eyelids and he would open his eyes again and sigh, relieved at the familiar dark of his room and the slip outline of yellow around the closed door where the light still seeped through.

His father was harder to detect but he noticed some signs showing through in the way his father sloopily tossed the liquor into the glass when he came home from work and how he walked with his feet out more toward the side than he had before. After dinner his father would often

slump down into the armchair by the divan and watch T.V. with his stocking feet propped up on the coffee table without bothering to remove his loosened tie and good pants. The smell of lilacs had come even sweeter and sooner than last spring and his mother had for some reason taken to standing for long periods by the lilac bushes, sometimes half the afternoon or more, cradling one of the clumps of violet blossoms to her face every once in a while. Sometimes she would be there when he returned from school. He was used to seeing his parents outside as the weather warmed but they were usually mowing the lawn or bent over the garden or something. Occasionally he remembered them sitting until dinnertime under the umbrella by the picnic table, next to those hedges.

The past couple of weeks he knew that they suspected and he watched them become even more conscious of their actions. He lay awake some nights with his hands folded behind his head trying to remember the first time, the very first time when he had noticed, when it had begun to make sense to him. It had been a slow, smoldering start, he recalled, but so long ago. He was no longer sure just when he had first known.

He was "sullen," according to them at the breakfast table, and "moody" at dinner. Once his father erupted angrily and ordered him to bed without eating. His mother did not transgress against him, calmly avoiding her son's stare as he marched down the length of the dining room to the hall to his room. He had felt a soothing sense of pride underneath the jangle of his nerves as he entered his dim bedroom and shut the door firmly behind him. He was angry and fearful of his father's temper, but he felt a heightened sense of accomplishment at the confusion and reddened exasperation on his father's face.

When he left for school the next day his mother kissed him on the forehead and carefully straightened his bangs into place afterwards. She stood at the front door and watched him almost the whole way to the bus stop at the end of the curb. He could feel her eyes boring into the back of his Dodgers jacket, poking at his skin. He had watched her before, all polite and loving to him in the morning, at least pretending to be, and then heading for the car almost as soon as he had gone, leaving the house empty and locked up until just a few minutes before he got home in the afternoon. He could tell because she would forget sometimes and leave the key in the back door or forget to open the kitchen windows like she normally would have had she been home all day. She still set a place at the kitchen table for his father, for when he came home at noon for lunch from his office, but he caught her once setting the table with the same spoon with the faint coffee stain in its center that was at his father's place that morning and should have been soaking in the dishwasher that afternoon.

So all in all he was not surprised by the events in school that day. Mrs. Pickering who used to be his home-room teacher came quietly into Mrs. Magnus's grammar class and whispered politely to him to go out into the hall with

her. He looked up calmly and found she was smiling slightly and smelled vaguely of face powder. He remembered that her eyes were the same autumn brown as the rims of her glasses and the tight bun of hair at the nape of her neck. He noticed that Mrs. Magnus was eyeing him with concern as he followed Mrs. Pickering to the door even though she was trying not to lose track of her lesson. He glanced at her bravely as he passed out into the hall. Mrs. Pickering continued down the barren corridor without a word and ascended the wide first-floor stairs leading to the administrative offices on the second floor. He had been there (to see the Principal) only once, but he recognized the way Mrs. Pickering passed the Principal's office and went through a little foyer leading to a separate, smaller corridor of dark brown doors. She stopped at the last one and paused with her hand over the brass doorknob. "In here, please, Shaun," she said.

He went in the sat at a large red vinyl chair facing an imposing wooden desk. Behind the desk was a tall, well-dressed woman in the kink of lady's dress suit his teachers sometimes wore. She rose and stood behind her desk as he entered, with a symmetrical smile that was pleasant, almost motherly, the kind that don't show any teeth. She stood so that her fingertips were lightly poised against the emerald blotter on the desk top. As Mrs. Pickering closed the door on her way out the woman behind the desk nodded her head amiably at him and spoke. "Good morning, Shaun," she said, "I'm Mrs. Ladky."

He could read the nameplate at the front edge of her desk. "Hi," he said.

"I've heard a lot of nice things about you from your teachers." She sat down at the desk with a cordial sigh. "Mrs. Magnus is very proud of your work in her class."

He looked closely at her face and noticed the thin tilt of her nose and the curious downward curve of her eyelids that ended in little sloping furrows at the corners. Her eyes were round and the color of faded denim. Her voice was quiet and sounded smooth, the way most adults did when they were talking to children. Hers was especially smooth and courteous.

"What did you want to see me about?" he asked. He pushed himself back in the chair so that his shoes came up off the surface of the floor.

The woman crinkled up her eyes in a widened version of the first smile. "Right to the point, well," she looked away momentarily. "I just wanted to have a talk with you. I'd like to get to know you." She stopped smiling and looked at him with genuine question, "Do you mind that we talk today?"

He shrugged. "No," he said at length.

"Okay, good, Shawn," she began. "Can we talk about school?"

He was fidgeting with the thread dangling from one of his shirt buttons. He pretended to nod.

"Do you like school?" she went on, smiling inquisitively. "What's your favorite subject?"

He paused and shrugged again. "I like geography, I guess. I don't like math at all. I like reading in Mrs. Magnus's class better now but I didn't used to I had dyslexia."

"Dyslexia, yes," Mrs. Ladky said with understanding. "Yes, that can be a real nuisance, can't it?"

He twirled the end of the thread around one finger. "I don't have it anymore."

"What do you like to do in school? Say, for fun?" She smiled wider and raised her eyebrows. "You like recess?"

He gave a little smirk and nodded, "Yeah."

"What games do you like to play at recess?"

"I dunno. I like football a lot. I like to receive, then I zig-zag in and out and stuff." He made little wavy motions with his hand like a fish. "It's fun."

"Yes, I think I've seen you boys in action in those football games, you play pretty rough!" She chuckled.

"I don't like it when the girls play. Then I can't knock anybody down. They try to break in and play every once in a while, but they always end up complaining."

"So if they're going to play they'd better learn the rules of the game first, huh?" she observed righteously. "That seems fair. I used to play football once in a while myself. I had a lot of brothers around when I was little."

He gave her a quick glance and returned to his button. He smiled slightly and waited until it faded. "Sometimes I go and sit on the swings at recess."

"All alone?"

He shrugged.

"Don't you need somebody to give you a push?" She was trying to be friendly. He looked up at her with a little annoyance showing slightly.

"Not usually."

She looked away, changing the subject. "What about at home?" She put the accent on "home." "What do you play there?"

"Same thing. I play football."

"Who do you play with? Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

He shook his head. "I have a dog, and a hamster."

"What about Mom and Dad? Do they play with you?"

He had started getting suspicious when she mentioned home. He suspected she was onto it somehow. He thought she was asking about them on purpose. He didn't answer.

"Shawn?"

"Yeah, they play with me sometimes." He felt his body flush with shock and the nerves tingle all the way down his limbs. Mrs. Ladky went on.

"Do you wish you had a brother or sister to play with instead?"

He shrugged quickly. "I dunno," he said.

"You know, Shawn," she said, shifting around in her chair, "I always would get angry at my parents for some reason or other. I remember one time," she said animatedly, "one time when I was about nine or so; well, right around your age, I suppose. And my mother washed my

favorite blue sweater one day and she forgot to use the right kind of detergent and she accidentally bleached it, she put bleach in the water by mistake, and the sweater came out all blotchy and ugly looking. And I was so mad at her that I swore I wouldn't talk to her for weeks. Well, forever, really. Because my mother had a lot of us on her hands, and she and my father had a hard time supporting all of us when we were young, so my mother was always kind of stern, and very proper, and I always felt that she would never be the kind of person to make that kind of foolish mistake." He could feel her watching him from time to time. "And so I swore that I wouldn't speak to my mother ever again for ruining my good sweater, and I didn't for about, oh, a week, I'd guess. And my mother purposely ignored me and pretended not to notice. But finally at the end of the week my mother was tucking me into bed when she suddenly started to cry, and she told me that she would have given anything to buy me a sweater as nice as the last one, but that she couldn't afford it right then. We just didn't have the money. I had never seen my mother cry before." She turned to face Shawn. "And of course, I felt terrible about being so cruel to her. But it made me realize that she felt as bad as I did, all along, but she just, for a lot of reasons, tried not to show that." She paused. "Does that make sense?"

He looked her straight in the eye and nodded. "Sometimes," she went on, "sometimes when we keep things inside because of our own hurt just as badly by the way we act. Whereas if we could have told them, first thing, that something they did made us unhappy, we could clear up the problem in no time. Can you understand what I'm trying to say?" She smiled again. "Maybe I'm not doing a very good job explaining it."

"No, I understand," Shawn said.

"So you see Shawn, if there's something bothering us, there's no sense in hiding it and secretly holding a grudge against people, especially someone we love. Chances are they didn't even realize they'd hurt our feelings in the first place."

She waited quite awhile for the words to clear the air and watched him pensively study the tips of his loafers. "Is there something bothering you, Shawn?", she said at last. "Is that why you sit alone on the swing sometimes? Is it school? Is someone bullying you?"

He made no reply. "Is it at home? Is it your parents, Shawn?"

It slipped out before he could stop and think about it. His mouth and throat constricted in a little click, almost clipping off the last work. As it was, the entire phrase was barely audible. But he had said it, and he cursed himself inwardly for having done so, having been so careless even after the long weeks of preparation; he had had, in his stoic silence, to let it go so helplessly, and in her presence. His body shot through like a lightning bolt as he heard the echo of his own mousy voice in his ears: "They're not my parents." "I'm sorry?" She leaned forward and frowned slightly. "I couldn't quite hear, Shawn."

He made absolutely no sound, no movement. He did not breath. "Did you say they weren't your parents? Are you adopted, Shawn? I didn't know that."

He felt the rims of his eyes begin to sting and the skin on his ears grow rosy warm. "No," he said. "I'm not adopted." He shook his head apprehensively. "I didn't think you were. Why would you say that, then?" He could tell from her voice that she was frowning, like Marcus Welby in the reruns on Channel 9. "I dunno." His voice was choked. "Can you tell me why?"

They sat in silence for several minutes; she did not ask him again. Slowly a single tear began to make its way down one cheek and he wiped it away without looking up. when she finally excused him he did not look up either, and he did not raise his eyes from the speckled grey linoleum that lined the foyer and the hall to the stairs until he was back in Mrs. M's classroom with his pencil in his hand.

As he came around the house and up to the back porch he saw them standing together in the open doorway. He stopped at the back steps and looked up at them with his lunchbox jiggling gently against his leg. "Did you ask her to talk to me?", he asked. They nodded. They were smiling similar to Mrs. Ladky. He realized his father had deliberately come home from work to be there to meet him. His father would never get off this early otherwise. He moved past them through the doorway and on into the house. He took his jacket off and threw it over his chair by the kitchen table. He set his lunchbox by the sink. He heard them coming behind them, their feet whispering on the thick rug. "What did you talk about, honey?", she said. "How did it go?" "I didn't say anything." He filled a dixie cup with orange juice from the refrigerator and drank it while they stood there. He glared up at them derisively as he tossed the cup away under the sink. "Don't worry," he said. He went to move past them to head towards his room, when she moved in front of him and reached to hold him back. "Please, Shawn..."

"Don't touch me!" he snapped. "I said I didn't tell her anything." He tried to move by her and she grabbed one of his arms impulsively. He jerked away from her instantly, so hard that he nearly fell back against the wall. "Let go," he shouted. "Don't touch me, I said!" His father opened his mouth to speak but apparently could not. He set one hand weakly on her shoulder. Shawn stared up at the two of them in a sudden swell of anger and began to stagger back from them to the open hall doorway. "I don't know who you are," he began, "but I know all about you. I know what you're up to." He started to shake his head rapidly. His eyes began to sting again. "You're not my parents. You're not my parents. You're...imposters, or...spies, or, I don't know. I don't know who you are." The woman who pretended to be his mother was wearing a ridiculous expression, the likes of which he had never seen before. The man looked even worse. With sudden fury and fear

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before, had never really known the face as it became known to him now. He waited for her to speak and was silent until she did.

"Your father brought me - that man, in there - brought me these when we were engaged. Every month for fourteen months I got a bouquet of these on my doorstep. I still don't know where he got them or how, all those months. These just remind me of that...that time. That's all." She sighed and pulled a few errant leaves from the stems of her plus bouquet. He looked at her face and dry eyes and firm chin. "I will always love your father, Shawn. You don't stop loving someone overnight for no reason. Whatever happens in life, I want you to know," she sighed slightly, "I'll always love him." She set the vase on the rack of dishes above the stove and turned to look at him for the first time. She knelt down a few feet away from where he stood and left her hands at her sides. "But the most important thing," she said, "is that we will always love you. Don't forget that. Both of us love you very, very much, and that will not change, ever. You mean everything to us, Shawn. You're...everything we have going for us, is you."

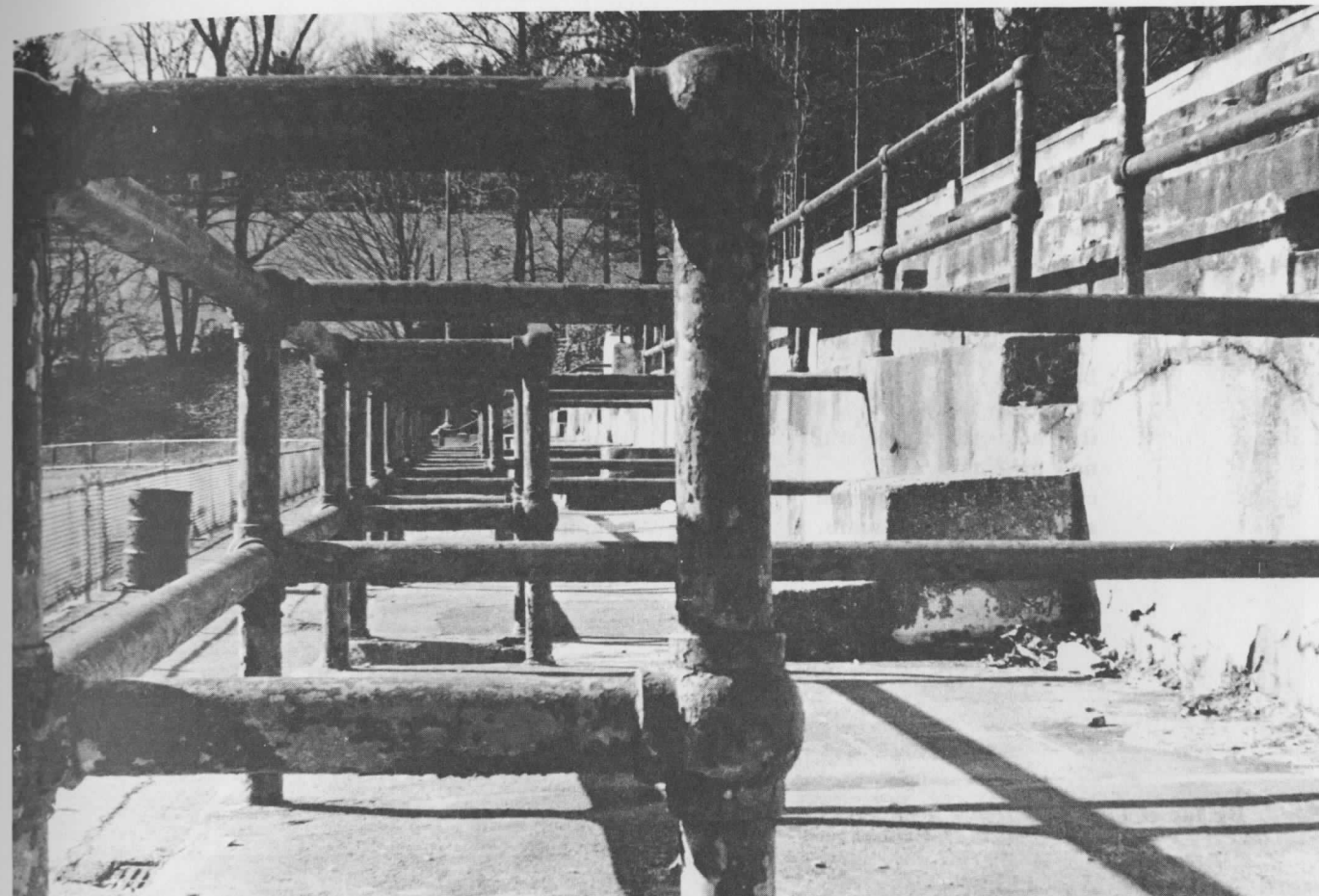
He watched her for a few minutes and then turned back into the living room and down the long hall to his room. The sun had gone and the room was black and lifeless save for the vague taint of the streetlights. He sat on the edge of the bed in the dark and listened to them. The cool yellow light from the hall made streaks in the carpet through the cracks in the door. He waited to hear the sound of her feet creaking the kitchen floor and the rush of water above the clinking of plates, and the rattle of icecubes, and distant crowds laughing from the den.

to give in, to let them take him, to relinquish his fate to whatever cruel forces had somehow seen fit to disrupt his life with such a subtle, sly, cancerous crime. He wanted his mother like a baby, and he said so. She was clutching at his clothes and he could still feel the wide palm of the man's hand cradling one shoulder. He turned his face away from them and spat out whatever words he could think of. He was tiring and he was glad. "You're not my parents," he said for what must have been the thousandth time. My parents love each other."

She let him go and he stumbled into the bedroom and slammed the door shut, then locked it. He could think of nothing but to lie on the bed and sleep - running was of no use and either was crying. Things seemed immediately doomed for him but at the same time, perhaps because of that, relievingly final. He felt a glowing pang of justice, of proud self-righteousness, even in the face of the enemies that had struck upon him so viciously. The sun was going down. The room was dark and deep like the inside of a tunnel. Within seconds he was asleep; for long minutes he was numb.

When he awoke he walked calmly down the hallway and into the living room to avoid his father in the den. As he turned to enter the foyer he could just glimpse him in the armchair in front of the TV, but the room was silent. He had his hands folded around his chin and his eyes wide open.

She was in the kitchen sorting a handful of lilac blossoms into a wide-mouthed ceramic vase. She did not turn when he came in, but he sensed that she knew he was there. He stared at her in bewilderment, with painstaking studiousness. It struck him that he had never seen her



by Jennifer E. Gardner

Resistance

By Lisa Mead

i've got eight nails
tapping me
on the shoulders.
And each of those
eight has eight of their own
(mine.) and so...
forth. making about
80,000
fingers taptaptap
ing. My head
swirls deeper
and deeper
around and
-into- my two 2
pillows until the
soft, whiteness
is hard and
black.
Why don't they put their gloves on?

Nervous Tension

By A.K. Sessions

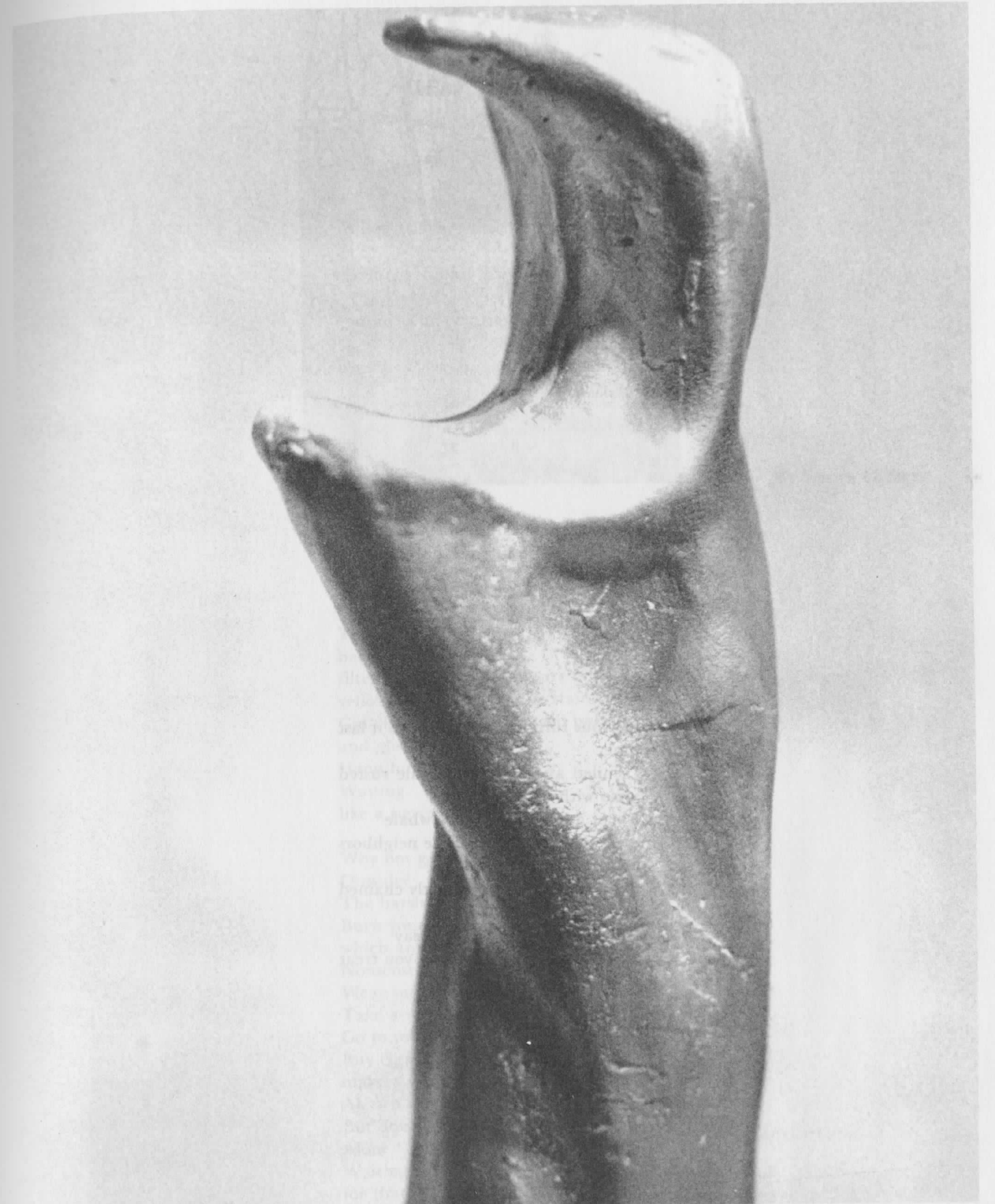
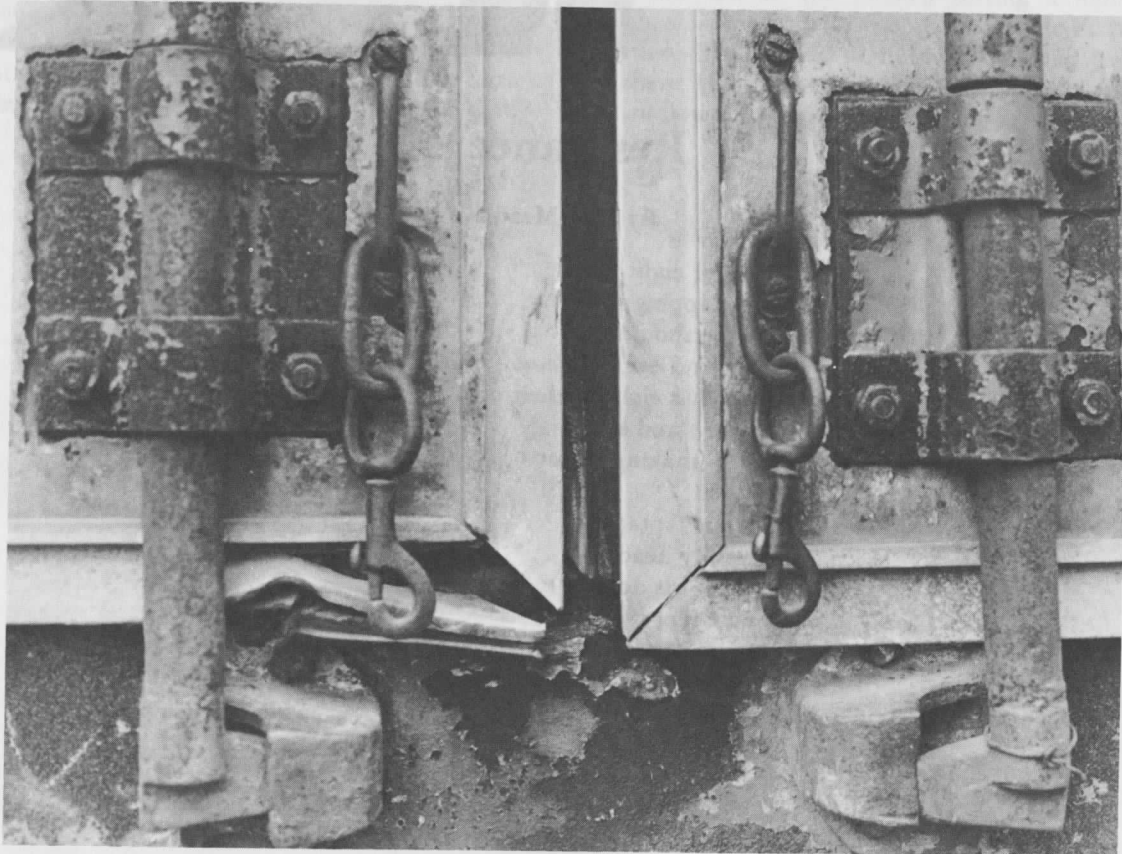
as i brush my teeth
the blue veins in my neck
on the right side
bulge to the surface
pulling the tendons up with them.

but when i relax my neck
i tense my left hand
that holds the blue toothbrush.
now my fingers will
cut into the fleshy muscle
at the base of my thumb.

so i release my left hand
and move the toothbrush
with the white bristles
to my right hand.

but i've lost my concentration
and my jugular jumps out again.
my right elbow locks
at an awkward angle
immobilizing my right wrist.
and my left hand is still caught
in its tight little fist.

Bonds By James Lundy



Twisted Ulna By James Lundy

Trash Can

By L. S. Viola

This morning the trash can spilled
into the yard
a rotting fish with mouth agape on
the sand
Eggshells, beer cartons, milk, orange
peels,
puked from its mouth while it eyed
me coldly

My roommate said it was the dogs
but I thought it must have been a
whale

It's your turn he gestured I did it last
time
I smiled and stuffed its scale rusted
torso with chicken bones
I kept a look out for the whale
to see if it had been to the neighbors
homes
but all their fish were neatly chained
through the gills to poles
and looking at me as if to say
You are a disgrace the way you treat
your fish



By Laura Gilbert

WAITING - for Anne Sexton By Chad Hussey '83

There you sit,
bathed in stained light,
filtered through the impure glass,
yellow, like your nicotine stained hand.
Gin clear **icicles** with sharp **points**,
and glistening **bodies**
Hang hungrily outside
Waiting,
like a tigress.

Why not go
Outside?
The harsh, white light may
Burn your cat-like eyes,
which are used to the dark?
Nonsense!
Wear sunglasses
Take a walk
Go to town
Buy cigarettes
make a snowman
Absorb the sun
But don't sit there
Alone
Waiting
for that little man to
Hotwire your
Brain.

by Laura Gilbert

thirteen



by Kate Glazer

fourteen

The Man With The Red Hat

By Lisa Lawrence

Jeremiah wears a red hat. He always wears this hat. He thinks it elegant. Jeremiah will do anything at the drop of that hat. He walks through the gates and stands near the monument of Prince Albert. The stone angels with erect nipples look down at him. He walks on.

It is Sunday and families are lying about on the grass. Most of the dogs are running after each other. Some are chasing sticks instead. The park is large and there is a pond. A small boy sits crying on the edge of the pond because his miniature sailboat has sailed into the middle, out of reach. An old man sits trying to make the little boy laugh, but his face grows more purple and screwed up with each word.

Four nannies are pushing four prams. They talk to each other as the four babies become heavy-lidded. One nanny is wall-eyed and Jeremiah notices that she and her pram are on the end of the line. When she speaks, the three nannies either ignore her or laugh. Her pram catches on a rock and the baby cries.

Jeremiah comes to a fence. According to the map in the park, this is where Hyde Park begins. He has to scale the fence and cross over to the roundabout. On the other side of the roundabout, Jeremiah can see Hyde Park. Jeremiah stands at the fence a moment and is trying to decide whether to climb it. He is heavy and the doctor has told him to be careful of over-exertion. Jeremiah also wants to be careful not to rip his new rabbit fur coat.

Finally he lifts one plump thigh and rests it on the top of the fence. It is warm out and Jeremiah rests in the position of a wishbone. Finally Jeremiah hoists his other leg up and grabs the fence with both large, wet hands. The cars that go around the roundabout honk at him. Jeremiah falls over onto the side grass unhurt and relieved. His pants have a small tear in the seat, but his coat and hat are intact. He wheezes.

He remembers wheezing when he was young and he and his father had gone bicycling. They would bicycle to the grocery store in summer to get ice cream bars. The very first time they had gone, Jeremiah's father gave him his ice cream and said that he had to learn to do two things at a time. They both were to each ice cream as they cycled home. Every time Jeremiah went to put the ice cream bar near his mouth, his bicycle would wobble. As the two pedalled further, Jeremiah's ice cream began to melt. He could feel the tears coming up to his eyes. He couldn't see where he was going. As the ice cream melted down the handlebars tears blurred his vision and his father cycled onward neatly eating his ice cream. Jeremiah fell and his father disappeared. Jeremiah looked and saw the ice cream still in his hand. He sighed and sat on the side of the road to eat his ice cream.

Jeremiah takes out a cigarette and darts across the road. Huffing and sweating he lights a Camel and stands a moment until his hands stop shaking. He sees a path that has a sign with an arrow that says, "Speakers' Corner." He walks. His sneakers have holes in them through which soil keeps entering. Jeremiah can feel the soil grinding under his toes with each step.

As he follows the path, he notices some people glancing at him. One foot follows the other as Jeremiah pushes himself to get to Speakers' Corner. A crowd of people appears as Jeremiah turns a bend. The dirt in his sneakers is damp with sweat. He grinds his feet faster and faster as he half walks, half runs toward the crowd. His cigarette is still burning in his left hand, but he doesn't smoke.

When he is within a hundred feet of the crowd, a few people hear his running and turn around. He stops short and looks back at the people.

He watches the crowd from a distance. The man with the red hat draws deeply on the non-filter cigarette and lets out a lump of smoke through his mouth with a belch. The crowd cheers. He puts his cigarette out with a sneakered foot.

The crowd quiets down and looks on expectingly.

"He was in that new wave film, wasn't he?" titters a fat lady in a navy blue jumper.

"Ooh look, his lips curl down on either side at the same time," sighs one sallow-faced girl.

Slowly, slowly he draws up his arm. His hand outstretched at shoulder height, he pushes his arm higher.

The crowd hears the rip as the fur gives way.

They roar. Pens, keys, hats, sweaters, books, anything they can find are in the air.

fifteen



By Suzie Snyder

By Lisa Lawrence

I used to sit in school
all day and write.
The little hairs on the back
of my neck stood up
as I scratched
black ink on white paper.
The creases in my hand
were veins as ink seeped
and ran, dried and then caked.
Now I hear the new method
is to take blunt instru-
ment and punc-
ture each an -

I am not
sweryou think
tobecorrect.
I'd rather
be dead.
in the mood for
eroticism
thank you
anyway.



By Rick Rorick

Reflections

By Michael Heinlen

At night I can hear
the snowplow shoving aside
snow that will be melted
by morning anyway.

I wonder how often
the minister across the street
really prays to God.

My dog sits and shakes
on command,
in hopes of some reward--
are my own prayers
nothing more?

I heard a man say
on television once
that blind obedience
is the highest quality
a man may possess,
but I'm not so sure.

To me, dreams are
as real as a cigarette burn
or broken glass.

A woman I know
lost her eldest son.
Since, she has neglected
her youngest.

Johnny Morris,
a retarded dwarf,
always asked me,
what's for supper?
he is one of the happiest
men I know.

In the morning
a fresh layer of snow
has covered the
snowplow's tracks.

In Autumn

By John Zarchen

Milo McGee shuffled carelessly into the street zipping up his fly. Tattered grey flannels, baggy and beltless, surrounded his legs and rather large stomach. A Homburg, obviously his prize possession, sat proudly atop his half-head of sabled grey hair. Milo's shirt was stolen from a boy he once knew. It was blue with four breast pockets. Each pocket contained some item necessary for survival; string, cotton balls, assorted safety pins, matches, and a corkscrew. He stood in the hazy, cool September light of New York's 125th street looking, watching, aimlessly panning the quiet street.

Seldom did Milo do in any one day more than any other. In short Milo rarely did anything. The minutes of his day were snowflakes: coming in rapid succession, or slowly, or heavily, or they would come thick and choking, even often they would just cease, hold their breath, and wait. Milo pulled at his nose, twisted his lips, and sneezed. His sharp green eyes watered, and using a small tuft of cotton that he carried in his lower left breast pocket he dabbed at their corners.

"M-M-M-ilo...h-h-hey Milo!" came from an unknown source. Milo looked about slowly, his eyes like trowels digging into the crevices of pavement and buildings. "M-M-M-ilo!" came the shrill voice. Milo again scanned the street and adjacent alleys. Seeing no one he tossed his hand into the street, let it fall to his thigh, and turned to walk back into the alley. His black buckle-booted feet scraped a small segment of sidewalk when he was stopped by the sharp stuttering voice, "M-M-M-ilo its me T-T-T-ooley. Over here." A burr of black curly hair was held aloft above a pile of garbage across the street. Tooley's thin lanky form sprang from behind the pile, and bounced gleefully to where Milo stood, still enjoying the soothing sun.

"D-d-d-idn't see m-m-me over there d-d-did you?"

"Aye" Milo replied, his eyes tugging at Tooley's jacket.

"Haven't s-s-seen you f-f-for a while huh?" Tooley queried, smiling and patting Milo on the back.

"Aye" Milo said clasping Tooley's lean black hand in his own "its been a time." They stood hand in hand sharing a pulse for a full minute before turning and sliding into Milo's alley.

Their heavy breaths filled the alley with static thrusts; airborne hands feeling and scratching at the brick and soot, the crawling nitre of these city catacombs. Dribbling and wet, sticky droplets, straw mats to sleep on, and garbage. An odor of human excretion, exhaust from the Chinese restaurant next door, and gin pricked their nostrils and palates. But now, eyes closed to the open sore, a human confluence to pass the snowflake minutes.

"M-M-M-Milo?" Tooley said turning his head toward him.

"Aye" he replied.

"It g-g-g-ets c-c-c-c-older at night now."

"Aye"

"I m-m-m-ight g-g-g-g-go away" Tooley said timidly. Milo did not answer.

"T-t-to Florida M-M-M-ilo." He continued. Milo still did not answer, but lay on his small, frayed straw mat staring through the angular lense at pale blue changing white air.

"M-M-M-ilo I c-c-can't stay again. For the c-c-c-old Milo. I c-c-c-an't. We's gonna go to Florida Milo. Whince, Stagolee, B-B-B-ubba, an' m-m-m-e. We's gonna go Milo."

"Aye." Milo said sighingly as he stood up.

"I w-w-w-ants you t-t-t-o go too Milo." Tooley said, leaping to his feet and facing him.

I got me home." He replied blankly.

"What about the s-s-s-now M-M-M-ilo?"

"Aye, it snows."

"And the c-c-c-old?!"

"Aye its cold."

"M-M-M-ilo you'll d-d-d-ie!" Tooley said pleadingly.

"I ain't yet me friend, but aye, I might." With this Milo ambled to the front of his cavern, and glazed the street with his burning green eyes. Tooley followed.

"How long y-y-you been here?" Tooley asked, taking a new track.

"Long time me friend." Milo answered, fixing his gaze on a half bottle of gin that lay prostrate in the gutter.

"You s-s-s-tay all the w-w-w-inters?"

"Aye."

"What do you eat M-M-M-ilo?"

"The same thing." Milo said gently, taking three steps to the curb, and bending to pick up the gin.

"All w-w-w-inter?" Tooley queried.

"Aye me friend. It keeps me blood warm, and the Devil's snakes in the street where their likes belong."

"I c-c-c-an't do it M-M-M-ilo." Tooley said scratching the ground with his shoed foot "its t-t-t-oo cold."

"I ain't a rich man me friend. I ain't have the licks always, but I got me spirit. Me spirit is in these bricks and in this air, my blood run down these walls and back into me bones. Aye me friend I might die. But I got me spirit." Milo's green eyes flared and danced about madly. He turned and clutched Tooley's forearms, drawing their forms together. "You stay too Tooley." He said slowly with unblinking countenance. "You ain't been here. I want you here."

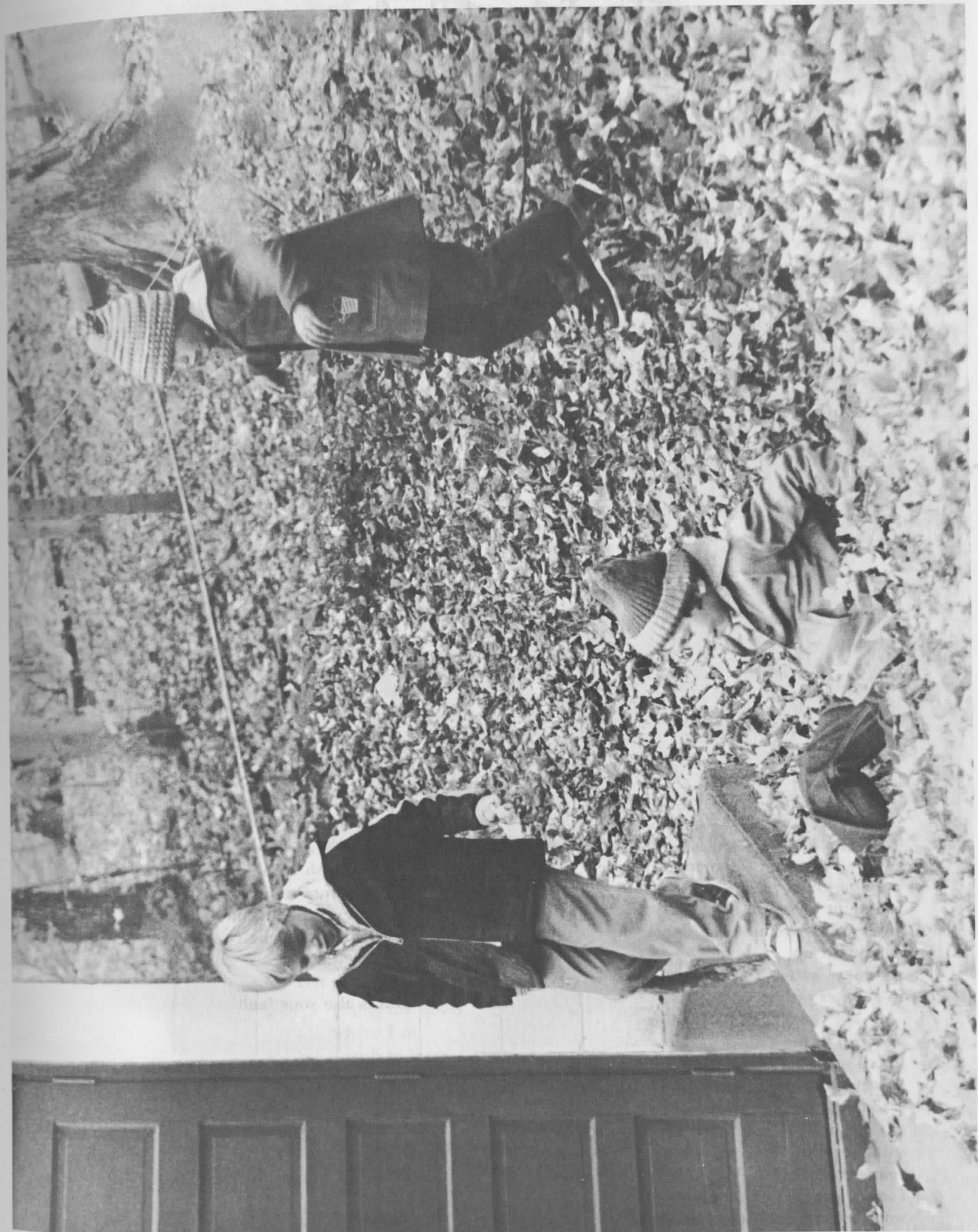
"I b-b-b-een uptown s-s-s-ome Milo. I's been livin' with S-S-S-tagolee." Tooley offered quiltily. "We's gonna go to Florida Milo. C-C-C-ome with us." He continued, putting his arms around Milo's waist. Milo tore away, and turning, facing the wall he raised up his hands, and carressed the bricks with his thick pudgy fingers.

"This is me home Tooley. I can't leave. Say with me here-we'll chase the Devil and sing, stay me friend."

"I c-c-c-an't I."

"Stay!" Milo cried out, pounding the wall "stay and...and...ohhh" he trailed off. Milo pivoted on black buckle-booted feet, and stared with white and watering green eyes at Tooley. Embracing him in sobbing passion he whispered quietly, "Stay, me friend."

The snowflake minutes swirled away, stripping the sky, the garbage, the cold dripping nitre, the noxious airs of fear, and they stood lonesome, all alone.



by Jennifer E. Gardner

The Echo of the Street

By Suzy Snyder

From dark cafes
Smoky eyes and like a silent butler
We present ourselves
to moon brick buildings, smoldering sidestreets,
and gray window glass.
Cat crys from beyond the cracked wall,
Clicking steps on the pavement
like a message delivered
to the hooker
who stumbles pass us
red lipstick smeared
over the bottled bagged wine
She calls to the man
on the raw iron stairwell
A boney hand fishes for
white gloves and dead roses
under the embellished trash
Through the stricken alley
We descend down
the familiar creaking stairs
back to wine and candles

Bobbie

By J.L. Freeman

Your teeth sit
in the trough indenting your protruding tongue,
a sign of your genetics;
you place the familiar white plastic hat
on flattened head,
bang it down with your hand.

Smiling
you walk through the room of people
avoiding them all;
you paint lines and blotches
and carefully remove the smock,
hanging it up,
you move away
to another project.

You run to me
to tell me something of importance to you,
but inside of you
is too much of one chromosone--
too much DNA, too much life material--
stuck together sometime after
your conception;
I am angry that chromosone
won't let me understand what you say.

twenty-two

the rubber cement of your smile
drips
off your face
over my legs
gluing me down
where I sit.
I wish to leave
but you have my shoes under your bed;
you too wish I would leave
but I cannot stand
because of the stickiness
that covers this chair
and the floor;
I want to feel
this is also your fault.

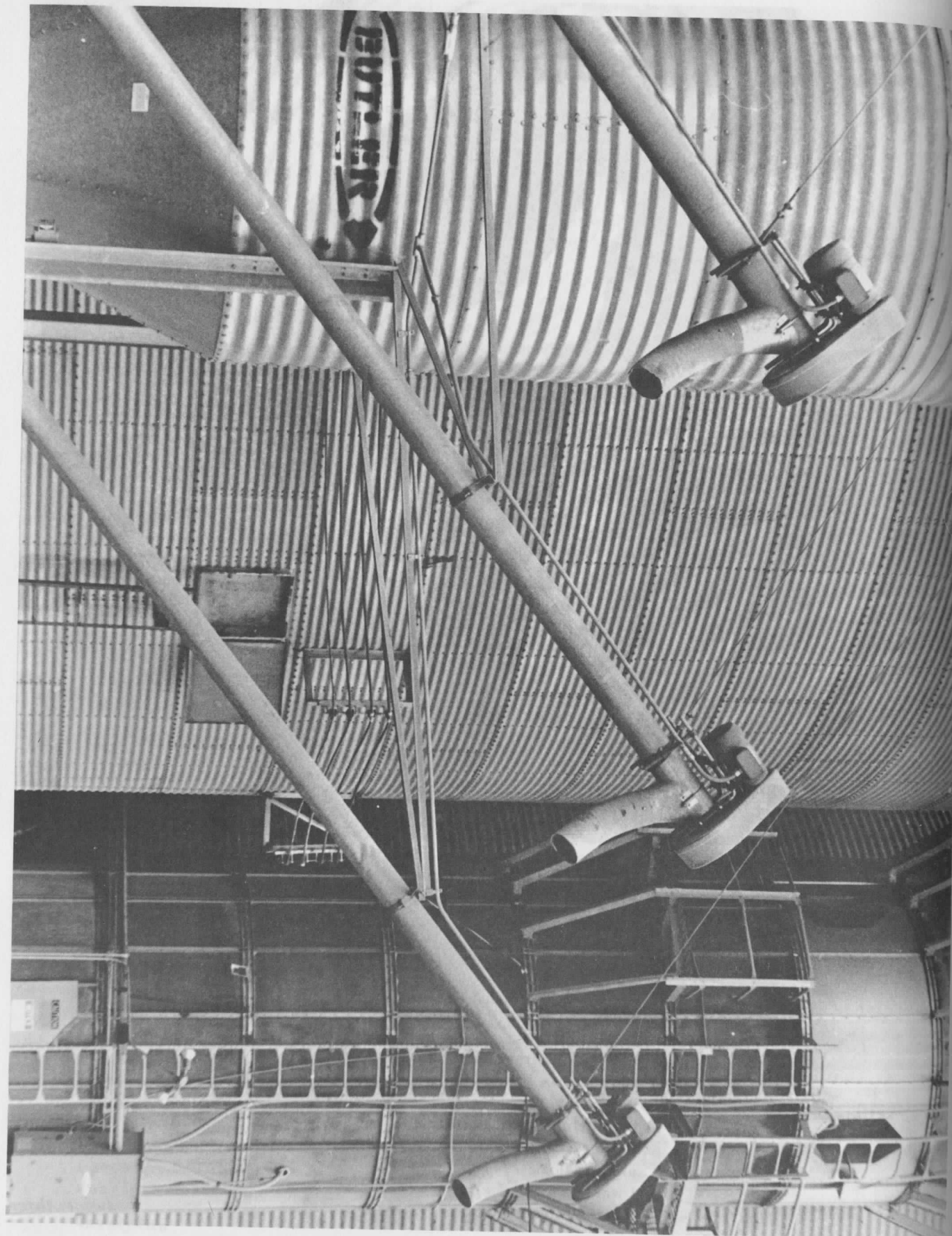


By J. L. Freeman

Puzzle Picture By Jennifer Gardner

The rubber cement of your smile
drips
off your face
over my legs
gluing me down
where I sit.
I wish to leave
but you have my shoes under your bed;
you too wish I would leave
but I cannot stand
because of the stickiness
that covers this chair
and the floor;
I want to feel
this is also your fault.

twenty-three



The Store

By Mike Augusta

Bill had already arrived by five minutes to eight, and was wiping down his new Grand Prix when Stanley pulled in next to him. Stanley's rusty Datsun sputtered stubbornly, refusing to quit, even as he hauled himself stiffly upright and out of the car. "Sounding kinda rough," Bill vollied across the gleaming expanse of the Oldsmobile's hood. "Oughtta check out that carburetor." Stanley quickly edged in a broad, tired "G'mornin." to Bill's cool greeting. There was a pause as they fumbled in trouser pockets for keys and scanned the empty palm lined street. "You know, it's damned cold," Bill said, almost bitterly, as they began unlocking the steel grating that covered the two little display windows and the front door. After Bill had stuck the faded American flag's flimsy aluminum standard into it's slot in the crumbling stucco wall, another working day started, indistinguishable from any other working day of the ten years that they had been operating the little army-navy store for the boss up in Chicago. "Yup, down to fifty two last night," Stanley chided, bravely unzipping his parka.

As the cowbell on the front door signalled their arrival, a two inch long palmetto bug scurried across the concrete floor, disappearing beneath a counter of \$1.99 Taiwanese work shirts. The store was divided into two small, rectangular rooms, each one crammed with piles of dungarees, cowboy shirts, surplus fatigues, boots, hardware, plumbing and camping supplies, and the handguns, locked up in the glass case behind the cash register. The few bare bulbs failed to cast light into the many recesses where the helmet liners, candles and machetes lay stacked in dusty disorder. Bill pushed a dust mop through the narrow aisles while Stanley retrieved the loose bills and change from their overnight hiding place under the step that led to the warehouse. The warehouse was Bill's domain, where he struggled with his calculator and price tags to get the 33% markup for the boss. Bill's only diversion was the stack of old Playboys under a case of ammunition. Once Bill had opened the delivery door, and the air-conditioner and transistor radio were turned on, they were ready for the first customer.

At eight-thirty the cowbell jingled again, but it was only Toby, the boss's nineteen year old nephew. Bill and Stanley greeted him with disinterested courtesy, and Toby assumed his position at the knife case, already engrossed in his newspaper and orange juice. Bill eyed him with contempt, then, shaking his head and muttering "Oh me," went back into the warehouse to get a can of diet soda out of the refrigerator.

"You breaking into those already?" Stanley ribbed him on his return.

"Yup, Safeway's got 'em ninety nine cents an eight pack," Bill responded defensively. "Have to pick me up a couple on lunch hour."

At five to nine the cowbell chimed again and an ancient, bent black man entered slowly, wearing knee length rubber boots and carrying a long, thin bundle wrapped in greasy, brown paper.

"Got any shawgun shayls?"

"Sure do, Watcha need?" Ben straightened from writing a letter on his counter and went over to the ammo shelf.

"Shawgun shayls. Uh. boyd shot,"

"What kind of gun you got?" Ben pressed further. The black man began unwrapping the bundle, revealing a rusty old .410, a Pierce, out of production for half a century. Stanley and Bill casually took in the gun, veiling their interest with throat clearing and head scratching. Bill took it confidentially in his hands, turning over the little single barrel and smiling at the pocked steel and the butchered stock. Without comment he pushed past Stanley to consult the used gun digest. Keeping his back to Stanley and the black man, Bill pored through the obscure brands, the Sinter's and the Appletons, until he found the Pierce Sporter, available from 1926 to 1928 in .20 and .410 gauges, original retail, \$11.95. The price for one in excellent condition was put at \$300 and up. Bill figured he could clean this one up and get a C-note out of some tourist for it. "Yup. Pretty beat up," Bill said, turning around.

"We could go twenty on it."

"Oh no suh, I need shayls. I doanwan sell it."

"You shot that thing?" Stanley chimed in, wanting a piece of the action.

"Oh yeah, I gest some rabbit. Yeah, down Immokalee they's lotsa rabbit. Gimme boxsa shayls."

"Sevens or tens?"

"I take sevens."

"OK, that's five and a quarter."

"Whoeee, five an'a quotah? Shee." The black man reached deeply into his pocket and pulled out a thickly layered stack of wallet. Ben Franklin emerged from a strata of U.S. mint green, and was tossed casually on the counter by the shellac smooth hands. Bill and Stanley's eyes followed the trajectory from billfold to counter with several blinks. Bill coldly counted out, "Change is six, seven, eight, nine, ten, thirty, fifty, thank you, sir."

The bills disappeared into the deep pocket and the black man flashed a grin of several strong thick teeth. "I be gettin some rabbit now."

Stanley walked over to the door when the old mn was gone and muttered, "Jeez, ya see the wad that ol' bugger had?"

"Yup, them old timers always got the bankrolls," Bill replied icily, stalking off to the warehouse to put price tags on a new shipment of field jackets. Stanley went back to his letter, a long, carefully penned message to his sister back in Ontario, where Stanley had been born. Stanley had spent his first twenty-five years there, through some good, but more often lean, times in the shadow of the London Smelting Company's towering stacks. He escaped to the Merchant Marine just in time for World War Two, and rose to Ensign on the corvette 'Chrysalis', escorting freighters full of Lend Lease C-rations and blankets to Glasgow, and twice Murmansk. Stanley survived the war

to join the Canadian liquor control board, and while he couldn't control it in his own life, he and his wife Noan were meeting ends in the industrial pall of Ingersoll, getting by until his older brother called from Florida and filled his head with warm sun and tropical exotica, and he and Noan were packing for Lee County, Florida to find their place in the sun. Stanley had started out at Guy's Army-Navy in 1969, at two-ninety an hour six days a week. Ten years later, having moved up to four dollars, he was still in the store every Monday through Saturday. Stanley took care of the books and bank deposits and left Bill to himself in the warehouse, only consulting him about ordering. Stanley spent most of his days leaning on the showcase that held the holsters and other leather goods, smoking his Kents and drinking ice water, his short body bent over the counter as he rubbed his bald head with both arthritic hands. Stanley would occasionally fall asleep in this position until the cowbell jangled and he would groggily snap on a cordial smile, looking for the right opportunity to slip in an easy going "Hep ya?"

Stanley must have been dozing when the bell jangled. He readied for the strike, but the customer, a high-schooler with a crew cut, stopped right at the knife case where Toby always perched. The crewcutted boy was hard line R.O.T.C. and was out to equip. He stared longingly at the Ka-bar fighting knife and asked with wonder if it really was Marine issue. Toby assured him it was and began pulling out knives; folding knives, drop points, Gurkhas and even the brass knuckle bayonets issued to doughboys in the First World War. The crewcutted boy had two hundred dollars in his sweaty palm and Toby knew he would probably blow it all. Off to the side, Stanley and Bill silently wished they would get to ring up the sale. They listened with disgust as Toby began his spiel about .223 ammo, rip stop camouflage, rocket boxes, military insignia and the latest faigue caps. "Look at him tearing up the whole damned store," Bill mumbled in Toby's direction, not intending it for Stanley to hear but just for the pleasure of saying it out loud. When Toby was ringing up the Ka-bar, jump boots, an ammo belt and a jungle fatigue suit, Stanley and Bill eyed him contemptuously from the boot department.

Bill left for lunch at eleven thirty. "Gonna pick up my Fury," Bill mumbled as he walked out the door. Stanley and Toby didn't look up. Bill walked down the street to Roger's Used Car Emporium, as he did on most of his lunch hours.

When Bill had gone an uneasy quiet came over the store. Stanley didn't like being alone with Toby and dreaded his smart assed conversation. At least Bill could respect a man's silence. Stanley began doodling on a scrap of paper, rearranging the letters of PENITENTIARY to form new words. He was soon stuck, so he went back to the warehouse to refill his ice water. When he returned, Toby was hastily scribbling in words, "Irate, tenet, tapir, oh man, can't get striate. Oh hey Stanley, got a few more for you," Toby said and shuffled back over to the knife case. Stanley grabbed the pocket Webster's when Toby was out of sight and checked off the

additions. He crumpled up the paper and glumly lit a Kent. Holding his head in his hands, he almost wished Bill would come back. He pictured Bill down at the car lot, looking under hoods and feeling for rust in tire wells. Bill sure was car crazy, Stanley thought, wiping the damned thing off after it rained, bringing the hubcaps into the warehouse to steel wool the tar off them, taking it into the shop at the slightest sign of trouble. Although he'd worked with Bill for ten years, Stanley rarely saw him away from the store and they had never been to each other's house. Stanley's main interests were his two orange trees, his hydroponic tomatoes and the Shriners, while Bill and his wife Rene took care of her eighty year old mother, watched television and traded cars. They had heard each other's life stories so many times they knew all the punch lines, climaxes and let downs, so lately their conversation centered mainly on the weather, the day's paper, and Toby, when he was away at lunch. Their mutual dislike of the boss's nephew had become their common cause. Bill relished telling Toby about the hardships of his life; Cuba, Missouri during the depression, having to leave college after one semester when his Baptist minister father died, sitting out the war in a flak battery in the Aleutians, losing his jewelry store when his first wife divorced him, fleeing to Florida. Stanley didn't like hearing Bills' morbid stories, but he was grimly pleased when Bill would corner Toby with his unsentimental bitterness. Bill could fill the store with frustration and broken dreams, heaping them on Toby, and then bursting into a Woodie Guthrie lyric, he'd stalk back to the warehouse, satisfied with the dark shadow he'd cast.

A Winnebago pulled up to the store and two couples from Michigan piled out. The wives tried on gob hats and laughed at each other in the little mirror while Toby and Stanley trailed them, eager to assist. Stanley corralled one of the husbands to ask him about the Winnebago. It was Stanley's dream to someday return to Ontario in such a camper, and maybe go west to Las Vegas. Just one last trip, nothing fancy. When the man from Michigan said he'd put out \$17,000 and was getting maybe seven miles to the gallon, Stanley longingly rubbed his thin wallet through his double knit slacks and felt where the sole of his right shoe was splitting. Stanley numbly nodded at the tourists, who bought some mink oil and told him how nice his store was. Stanley let it go at that.

When Bill returned from lunch he was in unusually good spirits. He had traded in his wife's Catalina for \$500 and a Fury with less mileage on it.

"Yup, got the best of old Roger on that one," Bill exulted as he washed his hands in the small sink under the gun case. When he'd gone to the warehouse, Stanley quickly edged up to the front door and nonchalantly took in the big, brown Plymouth. He noticed the glare off the new paint job and compared it to the rusty flanks of his battered little Datsun. Stanley didn't give a damn about cars.

"Only thirty seven thou on it.", Bill said proudly, returning with a can of diet soda.

"A real beauty." Stanley was noncommittal. "Got to get the vinyl patched up, it's got a few cracks in it. Got to get Roger to clean out the air conditioning too, but the V-8's got some jump to it. That baby really moves." "A real beauty.", Stanley repeated, losing interest.

"What a boat. You're going to be putting a lot of gas in that monster. Should have gotten a Volkswagen.", Toby said derisively from the knife case.

"Aw, you don't know what you're talking about." The color rose in Bill's tight skinned face. His glance was a carbon steel knife blade that pinned Toby's eyes to his newspaper, draining the fight from him. Toby and Bill had often had head butting sessions over American versus foreign cars, and Toby liked to tell Bill about the mileage he got in his father's Volvo wagon. Bill was grinding his teeth when he pushed through the front door to go look once more at the Plymouth's engine. Bill stayed outside for a half hour, tinkering with the gas line while his anger subsided. Toby tried to get Stanley to comment on the gas guzzling behemoth, but Stanley wasn't about to give him the satisfaction. There were no customers all afternoon, so while Bill inspected his engine, Stanley dozed on his display case and Toby read Newsweek. Just before closing time, Bill shuffled back into the store. He leaned against the wall behind Stanley and pulled the five hundred in cash out of his pocket. What the hell is he wavin that around for?, Stanley wondered. It was more than both of them took home in a week. Bill fingered the cash a little longer and then jammed it into his pocket. The Chessie System's 4:43 rumbled by, hauling brush out of Big Cypress to be used for landfill in a retirement development down the coast. The store rocked while the locomotives lumbered past. The ensuing silence was tired and heavy. "Lost Rene's mother last night, Stanley."

The words hung as if on a clothesline while Bill stared at his shoes. Stanley opened his eyes wide and straightened his creaking back. Toby's head popped up from behind the Old Timer's knife display. The temperature soared as the ceiling crammed down on Stanley, forcing him to say something. "Huh?" "Yup, the old girl just. We hadn't counted on it so soon. Had to trade the car to cover it. She didn't eat nothing but grease, ya know, dip her bread in the fryin' pan after we was done cooking sausages. Peein' all over herself in the middle of the night. Ohh me.", Bill sighed. "I'm gonna miss that damn girl."

Toby started to make like he was going to come over and say something. Stanley glared at him. If he says anything I'll break his face, Stanley fumed. Toby sensed the tension of the moment and kept his distance.

Bill was still leaning against the wall talking to himself when Stanley and Toby started turning off the lights and locked up the freight door. When the change and bills were stashed under the loose step, the three of them went out the front door, locking it and the grating behind them. A thunderstorm was building up, heavy and stifling. Toby got into his car and raced off without a word. Bill and Stanley stood silently, looking down the empty street at the thunderheads stacking up over the river. Stanley felt he should ask Bill and Rene to come over to his place for dinner, or maybe he and Noan should drop by Bill's later in the evening. Bill felt bad about subjecting Stanley to his problems. Both men felt they should talk, but throats were dry and words were elusive. Stanley suddenly patted Bill on the back and stuck out his hand. "I'm sorry, Bill." Stanley said with genuine feeling, as they shook. "Hey, we'll see ya in the mornon'." Bill's eyes cleared and sparkled as he looked into Stanley's. "Yeah, 'night Stan. See ya in the mornin'."



By Laura Gilbert
twenty-eight

The Life And Times Of General Worm

by Dave Hogshire

It was a warm spring day in perhaps my fourth or fifth year. I was roaming the garden just after a thunder shower, replacing the worms that had left the earth for fear of drowning, to seek the safety of my driveway. The driveway was no place for them, I reasoned, they could get run over. Therefore, I amused myself by digging small holes, dropping in the worms and then refilling the holes, sealing them with several stomps of my foot.

Then I saw Them, hundreds of Them, a line of Them stretching from the side of the garage to an old banana on the porch. I knew what They were, They were ants. I followed the column to their hill, under a hedge by the basement window. Then I was hit with a terrible realization. What if they weren't satisfied with the banana? They might try an assault on the kitchen. I had seen them by the baseboard under the sink, so I knew they knew where it was. These creatures were threatening my food supply!

There was but one course of action-wipe them out. I began stomping on every ant I saw, crushing them under my P.F. Flyers, scraping them across the driveway, filling in the cracks in the asphalt. I was the master of their fate. They could not resist me. I began to jump up and down, laughing and shouting insults at the ants. I searched for those ants that might have been foolish enough to attempt an escape. I was running around furiously in an attempt to rid my yard of this menace.

Then I accidentally stepped on a worm. Solemnly, I bent down to look at the goosh on the driveway. Worms were nice; they ate dirt, I didn't eat dirt. I scraped up as much of the worm as I could and carried it to the garden. There I dug a small hole, dropped in the worm, filled the hole with dirt and sealed it with several stomps of my foot.

By Laura Gilbert





by James Lundy

Four-Lane Breakfast
By Andy Acker

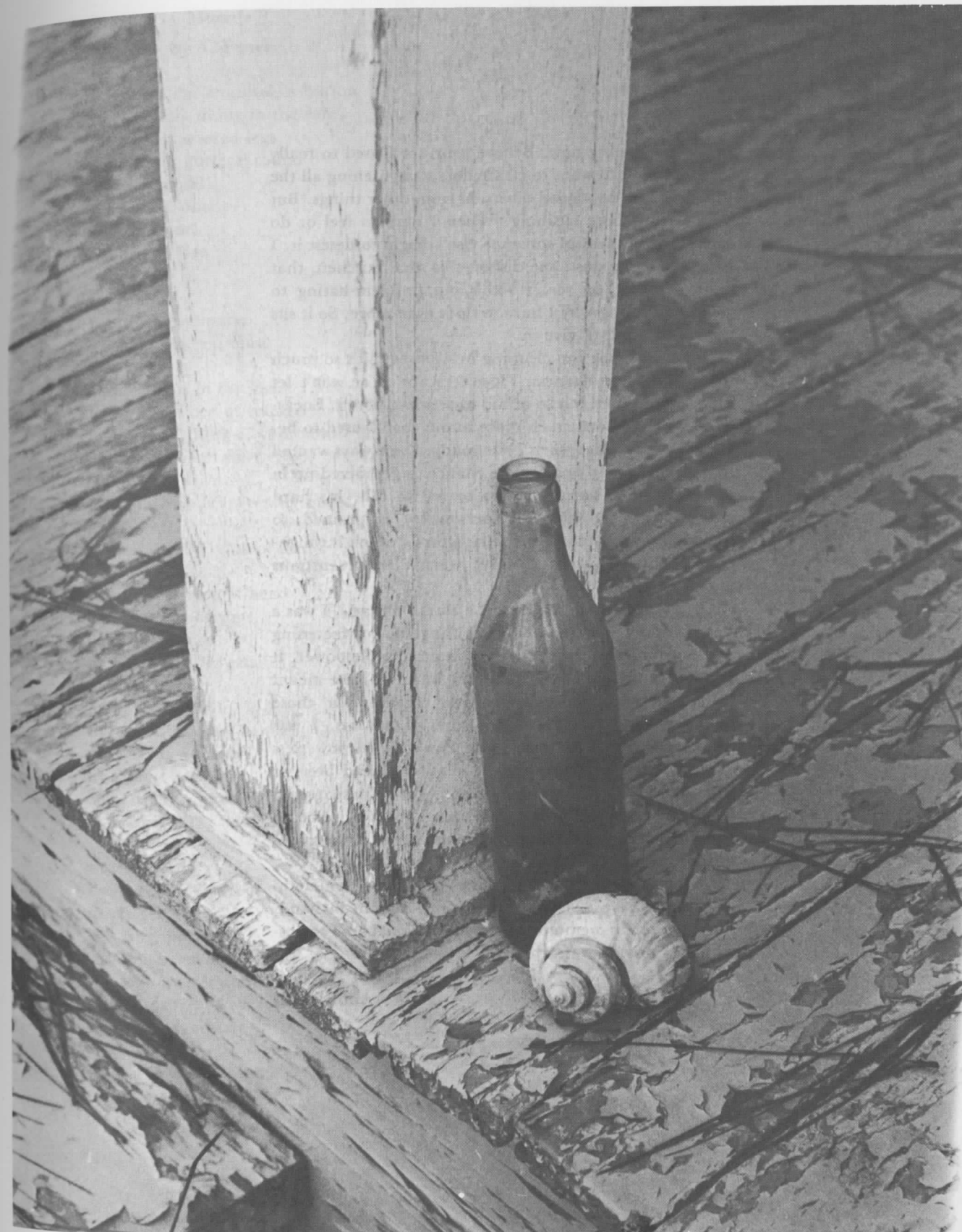
Make me some
automobile pancakes mother;

can't you see the
vinyl roofs bubble,

and listen to the
chrome pleasantly peel.

Friends in the Park
By John Whitworth Kropf

What would it be like
To be a dog
For a day or two?
Some of my best friends
These days
Are dogs.



by Laura Gilbert *thirty-one*

I hate cleaning now. Believe it or not I used to really love it. I used to want to clean alot, straightening all the time, perhaps as a good diversion from other things. But now I really hate cleaning. When I have to feel or do something because of someone else I begin to detest it. I can't stand the dust, the dishes, this small kitchen, that ugly picture. You see, it's this big problem-hating to clean but hating why I have to do it even more. So it sits there and finally I give in.

But it isn't just the cleaning or even her; it's so much more. The everydayness, I can't escape it or won't let myself. I'm bored but so afraid of seeming bored. Encased in a calm, I am much more numb than I used to be, yet much how I was when I was young. I've always wanted to be in the eye, dying for the chance to get mixed up in that beligerent storm but too scared to fall. It's hard either place for me. My personality is grained so smoothly, evenly, but I envy that storm's which is rough-edged, uneven yet deeply warm and sensuous underneath.

On a train, all alone, from Le Haute to Paris, I was a storm and for a little while I felt dangerous, threatening and burning with the strength of unpossessable power. It is a stoned memory now but I remember we were meant to be, timeless above all things, together for those moments, and forever in my mind if not his. I was recklessness and I let myself fall. Powerful yet powerless over myself, I gave no thought to where I had been or what I had to look forward to. I didn't care. On that train from Le Haute to Paris, I didn't care about a calm, an equilibrium or even trying to remember his crystal green eyes or the words to an Irish ballad.

I left that train without recourse, or a sign of lament in my eyes. I have a deeper regret now. Broom in hand, storms stored in memories, I feel so cold and alone enclosed in my private warmth.

Anonymous

Mussels by A. Pence

I dream I am a mussel, a button
and you talk to me in the rain.
I dream of severed legs
the gut-gut guttural sound
of the disposal.
I dream of doom--
hollowed-out,
someone I love
must die.

It is always summer
when I need you most.
The sun sets--
a hole opens in my heart
I sleep on a bed of stacked
bodies--and think of your voice
leaving trails on the
green front lawn.
I smell damp skin-seeping out
everywhere.
I have lost the sense of touch.

I pull my weighted head
out of sleep, dreams
vaults of silence--
in which I lift my hair,
back to mirror--
lift it like a shell
to see protrusions, tumors
my skull consumed
by disease or injury.
Somewhere you could be laughing
or driving a car.

In the morning,
I address an envelope
to you--
it is stiff, brown.
Inside--tatters of my wrist,
you will open it and know.
My hands fall away
under the faucet.
Once outside,
I am a hole against the sky
eating my shadow
off the sidewalk.

THE DROP by Lisa Minacci

She was named after
an ancestor who was hanged by the neck.
The woman who killed her husband,
for some reason like deformity
or wrath.
No one screamed
not even her mother.
The choke
as her blood settled in her feet;
suffocation without a sound.
The older shadow
is dust under a hood,
the tongue distended.

This newer name of guilt
dropping through a boarded floor.
Her dress is cut at the top
in a circle for her neck.

She imagines death,
like a series of necks
and open holes
in the bottom of floors
for the passage
and the change of face.



Sandymount Strand

I appeared out of a vacant bluegrayness
and walked the windswept cement.
Smoothed, once jagged edges
crumbling stones beneath my feet.

Sandymount Strand stretched out beyond me
into its own greyblue bleakness,
while the water took time-worn particles
of land out to sea.

Surrounded by their inspiration
naively observing its weathered consistency,
the essence of those poets' dreams
refused its secret to me.

I turned away from distant Dublin Town
the strand and the sea at my back,
while the cold, bland wind
gave way to my retreat.

Anonymous



