



THE YALE GORDON COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE

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RELIEU 33

THE YALE GORDON COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SPRING, 1983

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Acknowledgements and Apologies

Welter '83 was scheduled to appear no later than June, 1983. The original staff consisting of the following:

Michael Hafner—Poetry Editor, assisted by Sue Dalton, Florence DiGiacinto-Layton, Anne Johnstone, Mary White, and Shirley Walker.

Carolyn Wincek—Fiction Editor, assisted by Cathy Armstrong, Florence DiGiacinto-Layton, Lois Miller, and Claire Whitworth.

These students completed the selection of material and about one-fifth of the typesetting.

Circumstance beyond apparent control, however, brought the operation to a standstill at the end of the spring term, 1983. Had it not been for the optimistic persistence of Susan Carole Ciotta, Laurie Kelly, and Rhea Wilson (assisted by Sue Dalton, Brenda Taylor, and Carolyn Wincek) *Welter* '83would have remained a forgotten manuscript.

We thank our many contributors (45% from the University of Baltimore and 55% from outside of school) for their long suffering patience.

Thanks are also due to Kevin Bailey for his handsome cover design and illustrations, as well as his help in the final production.

On behalf of the entire English Department and personally, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to all of the above, but particularly to the two who assumed the final responsibility for production, Susan Carole Ciotta and Laurie Kelly.

Alexander G. Rose, Faculty Advisor, *Welter* Professor of English Emeritus University of Baltimore





MAKING SNOWMEN

M.C. Helldorfer

Lonely, my man?
"Others rejoice, each with their kind,"
you say. You say you want a mate?
How about me? I've been alone
for what seems eternity.

Well, well. No matter.
I'll make another, and another,
though often you embarrass me.
You know I cannot keep my hands
out of unshaped snow.

Whom, what do I love, to spend so many hours on image and likeness? You won't endure spring, and only a mother could see beauty in such a lumpy thing.

See with what ease snow falls and finds the shape of trees and milkweed stalks. Is it madness then? Is it selfish—or selflessness—this love to shape the artless sift into stumps of men?

WARNING TO A FEMALE FORTUNE HUNTER

Rhea L. Wilson

Little Ladybug, Aspiring Queen Bee: Beware of clever spider hands, with green palms, whose hairy fingers dance merrily upon the thigh.

The poisonous pinch (of a penny) disabled the feminine predator, now preyed upon and entangled in a web of his creation, before she could ever effect the sting.

WALKING

Mary White

Let me take you by the hand into another world beyond ahead of us a century or so where you can see the flowers that blossom without number Oh, how wonderful it is to walk into a corridor of time and view a cityscape in bloom.





THE REVENGE OF EQUUS

Carolyn Wincek

When she awoke that morning the sun was a crescent that cupped her face. Her eyes didn't flutter, they opened with one stroke and revealed the blinding fury that left her sightless.

She waited on the tweed carpeting of the hallway, the cold plastic phone at her side, and in refusing to cry pulled memories out of the darkness.

She learned to ride the darkness, letting the coarse hairs become intimate. Creases formed on her brow when admired for her serenity. They couldn't know the demons that stripped before her every night.

She held the knife, felt the formica, learned to peel onions in the night. They applauded. Yet, her steps were still timid.

Her world is grainy new like that of an old photograph. She can only see things clearly when close to them.

Every morning before dawn she hears him, outside her window, disguised as the wind—he doesn't neigh or whinny, he screams his promise into



the aluminum siding. His teeth squeak against the pane glass as she pulls her blanket closer,

her eyes always open, refusing to give him even a moment of victory.

TWILIGHT IN DECEMBER

Bradley R. Strahan

Slowly creeping into winter the days swallow themselves.

The sun lurches toward the pink horizon like an old drunk to the bar.

TANGO

Herb Fackler

Forget this boogie business, honeylips, let's really do it right—let's pay the band double and tango all night.



TRIPLE CROWN

Michael Hafner

Lonely lovers mingle Amid the smell of smoke and bourbon As Muzak plays "Never on Sunday"

Good thing it's Monday

Tom lights your cigarette
And smiles his oriental smile
Keeps ashtrays clean and drinks coming
Trolling for a tip

Too young to remember Hiroshima

Waitress with back street charm Bellows with frustration "Gotta table with six regulars and one wants his regular!"

How could she know it was vodka, not gin

Hostess asks me, please Help settle a dispute Who would I like at the piano Charming man or lovely lady?

As long as they can play. . .

Smiling through my glasses Shrouded in Pierre Cardin I look like every other exec Drowning another day



Oh, if they only knew

Last bit of foam

"void that beer"

Lay a buck on the bar

"Never on Sunday"

Slowly light a cigarette

"...I'll be back in town on..."

Smile at the waitress, nod to Tom

"manhattan, straight up"

Life is brutal, but goes on regardless

"...on the rocks"

And I walk away, fulfilled.

CYCLADIC

Florence DiGiacinto-Layton

her thighs damn near as big as mine her breasts about a half her neck of mine would make seven

her vacuous spheres for eyes no iris there perceives her place in history this woodenly crafted statue

and i, of flesh and bone, thousands of years hence will be remembered by this poem?





ALONG A TAUT WIRE

A. David Copperthite

Sunday morning while digging through a dresser drawer, the bottom one, the one I never use, I found beneath the Christmas pajamas shrouded in plastic, beneath the single socks. a thing I haven't seen for years a hat, green, pale, a gold emblem stuck in its crease, a boy scout nearly forgotten. I sat, letting the memories rise and fetch in one another to stand naked, yawning to lead me from the bedroom, sitting there legs spread hat perched cockily on my head, to that C&O Canal the adventure of my twelfth year. I saw the canvon again for the first time. The old wire bridge broken like the teeth of a city hag. A span of steel cable shiny here, rusted there, left for us to tightrope across. Fear again rose in me, the youngest—too young to know the ways of manly men, young enough to separate the "fool" from the "hardy." I watched the others slide and scream across that twelve feet of cable their feet slipping, hands hanging to a piece stretched overhead. Then it was my turn.

I breathed in deeply, determined not to stay on this side of the drop, alone. My eyes flirted once with the ugly brown water gushing through rocks thirty feet below. The hag smiled, urged me on. I stepped easily, relieved to be on the cable, knowing that I could not fall. My feet touched both sides at once, the solid and the air. I waltzed like a man in a marble yault.

DANCE OF GRAY

Yvette A. Schnoeker

Fog, a party of ethereal giants emerging from Neptune's ocean tavern, floats swiftly to the bay, lingers; rides a storm into town.

The dance of gray begins as fog and clouds mingle mist to music of thunder clap and gale growl pulsing darkly through the ballroom sky.



DRAWING by Kevin Bailey



FOR ALL THE EX-GODDESSES

"He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher." - Whitman

Max Westler

When we hoisted you from
The general admission seats
And onto that resplendant pedestal,
It was all heave-ho, ho-hum,
And yo-ho-ho.
We simply imagined you something
Carved on the prow of ships—
A mermaid, perhaps. You meant
To sit there just beneath
The surface and never speak.

Prodigal sons kept threatening
To return in victory or defeat.
When you fell tired waiting for them
And began dancing, dancing, dancing,
We could only ask, "with whom?"
And check the recordbook for absences.
Then the loosened stone columns
Crashed and we ran for cover.

This was only an afternoon sky Making itself known.

Listen. A shaking wind bothers Forest walls at the farthest edge Of the field. But the grass stems Grip deep and will not give way. You walk them like waves.

We're still huddled in a basement Waiting the "all clear" to whistle.



HAUNTED

Cindy Mitchell

Tonight my Dad said you stopped by and I couldn't have been more surprised if I had seen your ghost myself.

I could imagine you in my doorway. Bayonette-like, the news pierced my rib-cage.

You wash across my inner lids looking like a soldier who has twenty minutes to kill before boarding his last train.

The last time
I saw you alive,
you spoke
about your pregnant wife,
your future child.
Your hands cupped the air; giving up
a broken explanation.
Our three year "affair" seemed to float
out the window like the buzz of a fly.

From the edge of the bed
I watched you lace
your boots. Then your eyes
searched about my room
for anything
you might be leaving
behind.
From the corner, by my bedroom door

you pouted a goodbye.
And I tried to accept the truth
as I clutched my pillow and your well-rationed lies.
You were leaving me as though I had
never spread my legs
for love.

I couldn't have been more surprised, when Dad said you had stopped by, if I had seen your ghost myself.

I imagined you in my doorway, bayonette-like. The news pierced my heart. I could picture my father talking to you matter of factly, as though you had not just risen from the dead.

STATION OF THE CROSS

Chris Toll

A-jack-in-the-pulpit preaches behind a monastery. In a metal plaque on a stone pillar, Veronica defies the scorn and spears of soldiers, offers her veil to a beaten man with hunted eyes. Her eyes are brimmed with flakes of rust.

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DELIVER US

Peter G. Andruskiewicz

ink blue touches fragrant on paper dashed in multicolor hues glowing/in friendship jostled across the rolling blur of Interstate 95 running thru lush valleys murmuring/to the beat of neon signs calling in never sleeping cities

bustling dockmen rippling muscles past stale coffee awaiting the crack of the sun coming home

whispering white envelopes holding rainbows that shower past multitudes caught in the hour glass

turning

my eyes

hear all this before i open my letter to see your voice shouting from a distant land.

HACKBERRY

Peter Wild

Embarrassed by praise I saw you standing in the sunset fingering the hackberry.

I couldn't tell you how it happens, how the earth full of wealth sprays itself out in such variety

That even the woodcutters though making a living at it sometimes stop, thinking of their own families stand amazed before continuing their work

As I have done passing your garage, in the open door spied the rows of stored paintings, rack on rack of canvases, landscapes that so I've thought, make the neighborhood glow and rumble nights with its own nuclear reactor.

But now you just stand there in your straw cowboy hat with the muskrat tail dangling at the back, in your baggy plaid coat, the blurb from some effusive book jacket,

Fingering the little iron leaves of the hackberry, wild pony just shot out of the earth, just made manifest, crazed but static, stroking its nose, feeding it.



GROVELING FOR MY DAILY BREAD

Shiela E. Murphy

You leave a bookmark in my nightmare, tease me with frostbitten checks the bank won't honor, crumbs of sleep left in my eye.

School readied me for this. I carried butterflies beside the snaredrum lunchbox. By evening, shreds of pink eraser crossed my stinging palms. Now I face starched pillowcases with the same fear.

A report card buys my cigarettes and cheese. Your patience stretches taut, leaning on my whole life without knowing I am there.

BOGIE

P.L. Jacobs

you always were a terror-

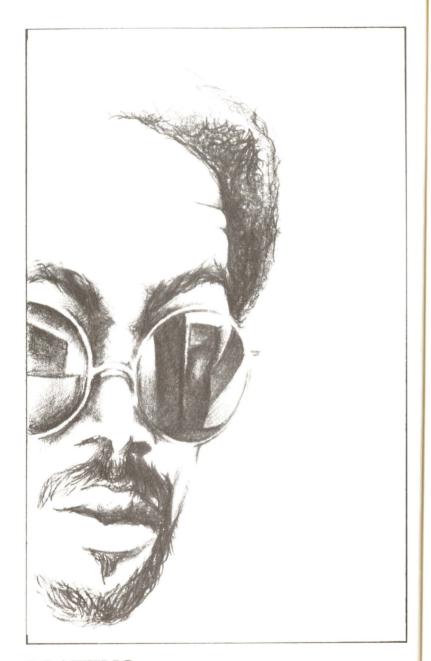
but then again-

love always screams loudest when in doubt

IN HARBOR LIGHT

David James

Full moon on the ocean. a rowboat in the harbor gliding through its reflection. One thin voice echoes to shore. A woman in green or blue. sitting on the bench, crying, waiting to be calm by the water. turns her face in that direction. Across the harbor, the lights of stores and restaurants merge and sparkle. The woman wonders. She feels something must happen tonight, and then she sees a rowboat near the moon. in the harbor. where someone is standing up to wave, a simple arm creating the miracle for her.



DRAWING by Kevin Bailey



BLOOD BROTHERS

Tom Shepard

Day after day your skill Fills the glass vials with blood.

Tighten the tourniquet,
Make the fist,
Find the vein,
Place the needle in the crucial spot.

Are the three vials symbolic? Is your skill a special gift? How do you feel As you perform. This ancient rite Day after day?

Has it become routine Like all tasks humans do too often?

Blood brother? No, not quite. One part is missing.

You do not shed your blood to mix with ours To solemnize the ancient rite Of occult brotherhood.





UNTITLED

Ruth Bogart

He took me in the middle of the night I thought about congenital defect and diabetes.

My universe was controlled by him but my thoughts were born of terrible anxiety.

I thought orgasm was the out but the bones of generations past were strewn around my bed.

The opiate of wine blessed my head and the handsome, hostile prince would not speak.

Trapped in my neurosis I could not penetrate and they could not escape.

The music speaks to us and in the silence our isolate self we cannot feel.

We are the living dead just waiting for the ax to fall.

MY FRIEND

Eileen Murrin

My friend lets me peek

at the fire under the folds of cool silk

the blue behind a tear

the warmth beneath a pair of jeans

the dreams that chase away the nightmares

his peace and mine are the same when we are together.

VICTIM

Denard O. Jones

Tiny mouse sniffs instinctively at the nugget of cheese, measuring the enticement calculating the inducement of preying on the sour gold of ruthless eagles. Inching nervously towards the half-concealed gloriously abandoned trap, death rings in his ear seconds before he twitches under the snap.



FUMES

Anne Nolen

They know
They know the limits,
for each tumble there is a bruise
a small purple remembrance,
skin that's damaged not broken.

They know
They know the contusion grows
helpless hemophiliacs,
the sex is a subterranean orchid
petals shaped for pleasure.

They know
They know there is an end
It is lost, lost in a bloody sunrise
in fumes of cognac
in murmurs at midnight.

He knows
He knows the pillow on his bed is stone, moss cold.
She knows
She knows where the contusion festers, lemon-colored.

They know with each end there is a burial, blood at the mouth, and with each new kiss a resurrection.



IN THE MIDDLE OF BACKGAMMON

Alan Britt

The light through the sliding glass door lifts its petticoats above the mahogany round chips Three dark chips lined in a corner here One beside them unprotected A half row of them falling down in the completion area A pair isolated backcourt And so much open space for the pale light to dance upon

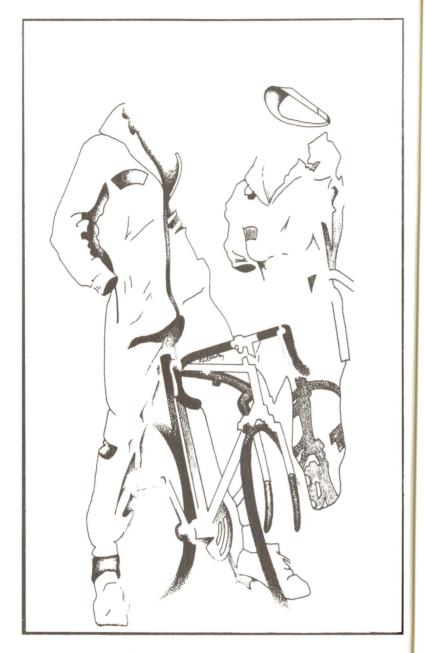
FOR FRAN

C. Anne Johnstone

the ring at the bottom of my coffee cup is telling me that Time is not linear..

the stacks of greasy dishes in the clogged sink remind me that Love does not conquer all..

my grandmother's laugh still whispers in my ear that death is not the end..



DRAWING by Kevin Bailey



THE AWAKENING

Jeffrey Sams

Lying here without a word

Drifting into the cups

that Lorca has placed around

the mountains

I press my body into the wood grain

Two dark birds pull the evening

from my muscles

I've found a wide space for both of us

Two white walls

Lodged between the splinters in your bones

But there's a thought

held between two atoms

that taunts my skin

before it sleeps





STRIKING IT RICH

Joe Cardarelli

i followed the way the words said go came to spring that bubbled pale gold on to a swale oil slicked rainbow to find a lost forest where giant trees grow

one late night in the cool woods of maine a master plan was struck in my brain i'd word from the woods and word from the city i was feeling strike it rich and sitting pretty

the master plan like a smile in my head foretold of the GOLDEN BARD RECREATION HOME of gold of a POSTAL CARD to everyone of my friends saying cool quiet in the woods you can understand

you understand i was feeling alright and having a vision oil wells, gold mine, endless timber you see i was striking it rich i was going swimming waiting on a myth coming true on the wishing you see i was feeling no pain cool blue flame sizzling oil wells, platinum, great big timber you dig i was striking it rich i was going fishing waiting on a dream coming true in my vision

UNTITLED

Effie Mihopoulos

the moon is like a shell that breaks open tonite revealing you inside a pearl the moon is like an ovster an aphrodisiac tonite as always when we stare at it white moon that shifts like an irritant travelling from day to nite like an invisible messenger it sprouts wings in places where it shouldn't brings us news, always that makes us breathe faster how the moon breaks open tonite like a walnut ready to be consumed brings us news, always that makes us breathe faster



THE COTTON MILL

Mark Busby

Across Main Street is the cotton mill, polluting probably, but we never knew it. All we understood was that in the fall, bales of cotton would be stacked in rows like regiments of raw recruits. And we would climb on them, charge through them, playing army in that maze of cotton bales.

"Rat-tat-tat, you're dead!"
"Uh-uh, you missed me."
"Ah, you liar, you won't play fair!"
until the bales disappeared slowly,
soundlessly, moving into the cotton mill
row by row
where they were made
into the shirts and pants,
the fatigues and dungarees
that were worn by others—
and later,
by some of us.



WINTER ON THE SWAN

Nick Meyrovich

evelids flutter light kisses moist lips yearning, lingering demanding Dawns arrived, the renewal of innocence our guest our birthing Adam and Eve in a log cab Eden skin against skin clinging cozy under the sheets, it's 40 below out-side we sink under the covers and soar upon the vapors tightly pressed and meshed together, seeing the peaks of fulfillment we climb higher higher melting into oneness slowly gently floating down cuddled in comfort you whisper "vou should start a fire" smiling, i said " i thought i did" as the Woodpecker beat his rhythm upon the roof, we laughed our breath fanning the coals to flame as you wrapped me in your softness and we lost ourselves in a rhythm all our own



CONDEMNED

Sue Saniel Elkind

that's what the house is condemned by the city the board of health before demolition there will be a sale of the furnishings an old piano keys yellowed like neglected dentures mattresses each with the dent of a body on it still others with vellow relief maps on the ticking luggage dusty peeling scarred for years like the residents unclaimed huddled together each a buffer for the other against the wind waiting for the salvation army van

HAIKU FOR PETER

Florence DiGiacinto-Layton

Dreams are the wings of a hummingbird floating from flower to flower



POEM FOR A DAUGHTER

Grace Bauer

A part of me lies fallow year on year growing fertile preparing for you.

When time is ripe you will be planted here. I will swell like the earth in Spring.

"You're expecting?" they'll ask.
I'll say, "No, I have swallowed the moon."
And you, like that face
in the night sky will laugh
at a joke that's meant
only for us.

When your day comes you will coil out quick like a serpent from my spine. A part of my self will be born.

I will name you Isadora. And hope that you will dance.



THE MARK OF FRANTIC

Rachel Ballard

Today My Love Is Stirring Beyond The Bounds Of Reason. I Wish You Were Here, So I Could Say, Thank You For Listening.

Today My Love
Is Out Of Control.
I Wish You Were Here, So
I Could Say, Thank You My Darling
For Trying To Understand Me.
For Being Kind.
For Being A gentle Man.
So I Could Say, Thank You
For Making Me So Happy By
Telephone, And For Not Immediately
Entertaining The Thought Of Keeping
Me On Hold—Forever.

Today My Love Is In Orbit, I Wish You Were Here With Me, So I Could Say, We Can Turn It All Around. So I Could Say, Our Love Is Stirring Beyond The Bounds Of REason And Our Love Will Change The World.

But Since You Are There, I'll Just Close My Eyes And Ring For You In My Dreams.



PHOTOGRAPH by Karen Laco





REAL FANTASY

Kathaleen Newson

She sat on the bed, hugging her knees and thinking. Cool night breezes blew in through the open window, smelling of incense and Marvin Gaye's music. She stretched and swung her legs to the floor, All in silence. She didn't want to wake him up.

She padded softly out of the room in her barefeet. Not stopping at the bathroom, but going straight on to her practice room. The room was bathed in moonlight from the glass ceiling. The mirrors round all the walls imperfectly reflected her perfect figure. There was the slight scent of old perfumed sweat in the air. She slid into leotard and tights, knit leg warmers and her plastic sweat pants.

Sitting on the hardwood floor, she began her warm-up. Wiggling each toe separately in concentric circles she thought about last night. Loving Tee had been quite an experience. Flex and point. Flex and point. Twenty times each leg. He was such a sensitive lover. His touch seemed unusual, tingly light and firm, all at once. Now the torso. Bounce and stretch, head to knees, twenty times. S-l-o-w-l-y. Twenty was such a nice number. She decided what she liked best was the way he expanded like a hot air massage to throbbingly fill her. Rolling backwards over her head, she landed on her feet in one fluid motion.

Now she padded to the corner to start some music. She chose Grovet Washington's *Mr. Magic*, her favorite exercise piece and a true description of Tee. Thump, dum, dum, dum, dum, da, da, da, over and over. Then the sweet wail of the tenor sax brought to mind her wails last night. She laughed and started her standing exercises—stretches, plies, jumps, stretches, torso isometrics, pelvic rotations. . .Pelvic rotations, but not like last night's. That natural, unpatterned rhythm like no music she knew. Tee's song maybe

She worked up a good sweat, soaking her leotard and plastic pants. She grabbed the bar and did her ballet technique to the pulsating disco of *Electric Circus*. She liked that contrast. The slowness and precision of ballet against the slow disco funk beat. The in and out, innn and outtt against the stop, ooh baby please. . .

She loved how dancing could re-ignite her passion. She changed her music again. Hot now, having to move. She decided to go on stage first. "It's show time folks." Bob Fosse, George Benson and her. *On Broadway*.



She stopped to pick through the albums again. She needed something penetrating. Tee? *The Drums of Africa*—a little ethnic gyrations to loosen the soul and hips. God, she felt good. She needed to walk and wanted a companion. She selected Sonny Stitt, *Mr. Bojangles*, slow, jazzy, saxxy movements. Sensuously slow, cutting like raindrops.

She flies to the bathroom and whets her lust in a perfumed shower. Lightly patting herself dry she floats down the hall to the bedroom. She slides into bed next to Tee wrapping her loose, sinuous legs around him. No, something different. She straddles atop him lightly, keeping his penis warm in her hands. She rubs and kneads it lightly, playing, watching him harden and start to move restlessly in his sleep. She draws his penis into her mouth mingling warm breaths and wet tongue up, down and around. Tee startles awake.

"I was having this dream," he says reaching toward her empty pillow. The emptiness fully awakens him and he tries to sit up and stops. Eveball to eyeball with his companion, his penis in her mouth.

"Lord, it's not a dream."



UNTITLED

Lois Miller

Right or left.

I was only eight years old when I began a career of looking into eyes. Mostly grown up eyes. Watching the lids go up and down, the pupils move right to left, around. I chose eye watching as a worthy ambition only after learning that the old man down the street had a glass eye. His eyes became my prime fascination because no one could tell me which was the glass eye, the right or the left. Both were suspect.

That summer my days were spent deciding which of the eyes was glass. Every morning I rushed outside into our front yard, waiting for the old man to come out. His mornings were spent reading the daily newspaper on his front porch. He read the whole paper and that took all morning, with only one eye. If I missed seeing his door open I would always hear its unoiled hinges. Either way his morning ritual signaled the start of my day's work.

With my kick ball, I developed a purposeful marksmanship, strategically advancing my ball and body from our yard into his. After the ball bounced over his fence I would march through the gate. He never seemed to mind my visits.

"Helen, how are you this morning?" I'd tell him "fine" and watch his eyes. He usually read the paper out loud and I'd watch for his glass eye to do something.

First I'd look at the right one then the left. Both were strange. The right eye was rounder. The left one watered more. For a time I decided that the right eye was the glass eye. This made sense. The left one had to work harder so it cried more.

Then, mid-summer, I was sure that the right eye was watching me, inbetween paragraphs. The left eye didn't seem to move. I tried several tests to prove that the left eye was glass. I'd stand or sit on either side of the old man, pretending to swat flies near his face. By the end of August I had built a strong case in favor of the left eye.

My mother called me an intense child. Father called me his little crazy girl. My older sister, Margaret, told me to leave her alone. Later in college somewhere, a friend with two-colored eyes, hazel and green, told me that my "penetrating gaze" made her uncomfortable.



The day I graduated from the state university Mom and Dad were there. So was sister Margaret and her husband Frederick and their children, Amy, Arnold, and Allen. Being the first college graduate in the family great success was expected. Success in Mom's eyes was living in the City among the Cultured. Dad saw success in money. Sister told me to look for an old wealthy husband who wasn't interested in sex.

After the ceremony, Dad took us to a Pizza Hut for a celebration. "Helen," my dad demanded in the same voice after ordering two large pizzas with everything and two pitchers of birch beer, "What plans have you made for a job? Clarence Wagner told me he is looking for a secretary. You know you'll have to find something. Your sister was out on her own after high school. Working in his office is one of the best jobs in town. Pays better than the Hinkey Dinky."

Clarence Wagner was our town's only lawyer, the County Coroner, tax preparer, and Town Constable. Hilda Meinken, his secretary for 26 years, was sick, and tired, and retiring. She was a pillar of the church and was needed there. Some said she had loved Wagner when she had taken the job after high school. But she had married an implement dealer, Charlie Meinken. Neither Clarence nor Charlie went to church. The last time I'd seen Hilda was after she'd been crying at a funeral.

"Helen is a college graduate now," shrilled my mother. "She's always been an exceptional child." Mom, avoiding my father's glare, turned to me. "Helen, you'd get bored working in Mr. Wagner's office. I talked to Aunt Mazie. She'd love to have you live with her in Topeka. Just think of the jobs there and all the exciting things to do!"

Aunt Mazie was a widow. Every summer Margaret and I spent two weeks at her house in Topeka. After her husband died when she was 43 Aunt Mazie began working as the society editor of the Topeka Capital-Journal. That was about the same time that I noticed Aunt Mazie wore lots of eye make-up, her dresses were tighter, and she installed a bar in her dead husband's game room. Her Sunday column, "Main Matters by Mazie," was widely read. My mother always talked about how successful her sister was and how many interesting people Mazie knew.

Frederick returned to our table with his third frosted mug of draft beer in time to hear his wife agree that Topeka was where I should move. "At least you'll have an opportunity to meet new people



and take some time before you get married."

That was all she said. Allen started punching Arnold and Amy was smearing pizza sauce in her hair. Frederick told Margaret to "straighten the kids out." Allen was always punching Arnold. He was born seven months to the day after Margaret and Frederick were married. He was only five years old and already was wearing thick-lensed glasses. Mom insisted that Allen's poor eyesight was due to his being premature.

"Well, Helen," my father pressed, "do you want me to call Clarence Wagner?" Before I could answer Amy started screaming. Allen was pouring his birch beer over her pizza stained head. While Margaret and Mom took Amy to the bathroom, Dad and Fred started talking about next weekend when they were going to re-seed the lawn around our house.

I wanted to wait until tomorrow to tell Dad I wouldn't be working for Wagner. I wasn't opposed to the idea, I'd simply made other plans. I had met Wagner once when I was sixteen. One day after school my mother gave me a letter addressed to me from Wagner's office. The letter informed me that I was a beneficiary. I'd seen the ambulance take the old man away the week before and I'd heard my dad read the obituary from the paper. The old man didn't have much to leave anyone. I got his glass eye. It was delivered to me in a gold, satin-lined case.

Mom and Dad thought that was sick. I was disappointed that the final papers didn't say which socket the eye came from. The old man's eyes were closed now, and I knew I would never know. . .



CASSANDRA

Michael A. Hafner

I had moved here a month earlier to escape the lingering New England winter and possibly bring a change to my faltering luck. My modest income as a writer of mediocre poetry had dwindled to nearly a negative level and with my few belongings, I headed south.

Running out of gas and money on a downtown street here, I parked my van and strolled the storefronts looking for a job. An hour later I had been hired as a proofreader for a greeting card company, and considering this an omen of regenerated luck, I decided to stay and see what this town had to offer.

With my new found work being not particularly taxing, I spent the evenings enjoying the Spring sunsets and strolling the streets and shops.

A June breeze blew me into a dim and cramped bookstore and as I was browsing the dusty shelves, my eyes drifted to a holographic vision gracing the corner.

Shrouded in the soft illumination of a solitary overhead spotlight was a woman of beauty so intense that it bordered on surrealism. Her skin, of a slightly darker hue than the other people I had come in contact with since arriving here, gave a soft caramel glow which dramatized her flowing features. Her blond brown hair lay gently upon her shoulders which sloped serenely into the surrounding shadows.

Her vision captivated my every sense and held me in a momentary hypnotic trance. Before me stood the kind of creation that poets devoted their entire lives to trying to describe. And being a poet I could not let this vision escape. Stammering through a few trite opening lines which included an invitation to a nearby cafe, I was enthralled when she whispered softly, "That would be nice."

We walked along the street in near silence. Just as I turned to utter some extraneous jargon, she opened her delicate lips to speak also. We both broke suddenly into a fit of uncontrollable laughter as she slipped her arm in mine and tenderly touched her forehead to my shoulder.

We talked for hours over wine and then coffee. I told her my story and she told me about Tim and Paul. When we rose to leave I knew my heart had been pierced by this elegant queen. At the point



when I thought my fantasy had come to a sorrowful close, she beckoned me to come to her place to meet Tim and Paul, who shared the house with her.

This first meeting with the two men who would become my closest friends was less than amicable. Paul was unsettled at the small attendance at that evening's showing. Tim was agitated about a comment that a local art critic had made about several of his paintings, so an unnatural calm prevailed. But even as Cassandra and I withdrew to an upstairs room, there was no animosity, no indignation, no jealousy.

Rare indeed was our relationship. We shared Cassandra and she shared us. Soon we could be seen nearly every night strolling, laughing and singing along the streets, in the parks, but particularly

along the water's edge.

Here we stepped momentarily into a world foreign from the rest of the city. The city sounds were far away from our ears. You were instantly caught between the smells of the ever changing stream of pleasure boats and the nearby spice company.

Everywhere you looked were people: minstrels, shoppers, lovers, strollers. In the entire year I spent in this city, I can't recall a time

when this waterfront was deserted.

Not until today.

Water lapped the bricked shore as I walked along the harbor place, staring out over the pine dark bay, recalling the days just two years ago when we laughed and sang along this same trail. The scent of cinnamon and the smell of oil permeate my nostrils. Above me loom the glass and concrete giants, their shadows growing gradually as the day wanes.

Tim loved those smells, Paul loved those mammoths, but Cassandra loved the city. And whereas the city allowed us to live within its

charms, it belonged to Cassandra.

As I step upon each brick, I wonder whether they remember the feel of my shoes. The same gulls dive gracefully; concentric ripples rise then fade. Behindme, just a few hundred feet away, executives and hucksters coalesce among the bustling downtown traffic.

The afternoon wears on as I wander aimlessly along the streets. The facade looks somehow metamorphosed but I realize suddenly it is myself that has changed. The same shops, the same galleries, the same people scurrying here and there, oblivious, are all here, each adding its own element to the painting taking shape before me.



But the painting was incomplete this time. Cassandra was gone.

Tim, or Timothy Cooper as he preferred today, was a student then. I never knew what he was studying and I doubt whether he did either. He liked being a student and had accepted that appointment in life until an occupation that he fancied would present itself. Superficially intellectual, he frequented the galleries, the readings and the cafes. In such a cafe, he said, was where he first met Cassandra. She was a waitress, an occupation quite befitting her stature. Tall and long, she at first appeared awkward in the crowded confines of a coffee shop. But she moved with the grace of a swan among the tables. Like the swan she personified, she yearned to be free.

As a noble deed, he rescued her from the confinement and swept her into his world, and she enticed him into the magic of the city.

Tim could sense this.

Quickly he became a disciple, lured by her charms and her beauty. Wounded by her sharp, keen wit, nursed by her velvet touch, he became her companion as she unraveled the mysteries which lay veiled around each corner. He was her lover without love, a vine without roots. Her essence was fire, but Tim could not be burned.

Paul Denier was a successful entrepreneur when Cassandra and Tim ventured into his shop one dreary night in January. The wind slapped your face as it whipped between buildings and swirled into every urban cleft. They huddled just inside the door extracting some heat from the tiny shop. Paul, behind a counter and pensively alone until that point, spoke in his silken voice, "How 'bout a coffee?'

A gesture of hospitality, but it entwined Paul into a relationship which would change his life. Cassandra saw in Paul inner strength and determination that was absent in Tim. Inasmuch as Mr. Denier was a leader, Mr. Cooper was more so a follower. A queen of enchantment, her sword pierced this king's armor with a wound of fervor.

Pulled together as suitors, Tim and Paul related not as competitors but as compatriots, colleagues in a quest for fulfillment. Aware of their joint devotion to Cassandra and her alluring spell over them, they became loyal friends, each striving to compliment the other. Tim became the vehicle for implementing Paul's now ever increasing enterprises.

It proved a maturing for Tim. From his academic shell he evolved into the artist that he was meant to be, a painter with a keen



ability for capturing feelings in a face. Combined with Paul's experience as a successful art dealer, they were both led into the local spotlight. Their reputation brought more clients and in less than a year they had amassed a considerable profit.

Their rapid rise among the artistic community had liberated them from their past and built them a future. But it had also liberated Cassandra. She was now free to wander about her city. It was about this time that I met her.

I don't recollect exactly when I decided to move on, or really why for that matter. I suppose I was tired of looking at greeting cards. Or maybe it was just my itinerant nature. I could never see in the city what Cassandra could see. She had the power to make it whatever she desired. She was as much a part of the city as the waterfront and the cafes. She was the city.

But I moved west and left my friends behind, expecting never to return. I saw snow majestically crowning the mountains. I watched the sun set across a glistening lake and a blue ocean. But I didn't laugh. I didn't sing.

Three days ago a telegram reached me and I hesitantly called the city. Paul related the tale. Cassandra was dead, taken by the river.

Upon my arrival back this morning, the three of us sat without talking over a lunch we didn't eat. Neither Tim nor Paul had been with her when it happened. "Acting alone," the police had said.

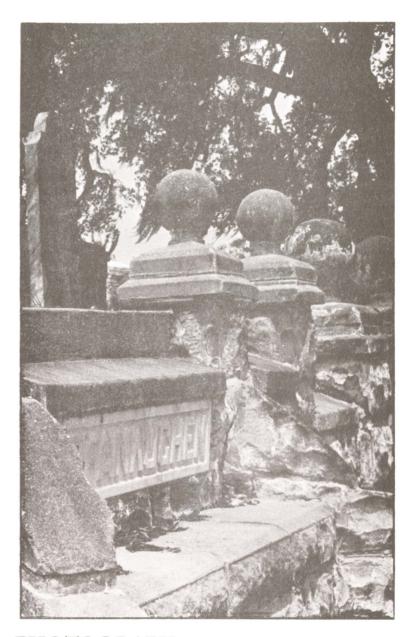
After a silent funeral, we met for one last time. Paul had decided to take his business south to Florida; plenty of money among the rich retirees. Tim was packing for New York; he was a true artist now.

I would be off for the coast again, but not before one last walk through Cassandra's city.

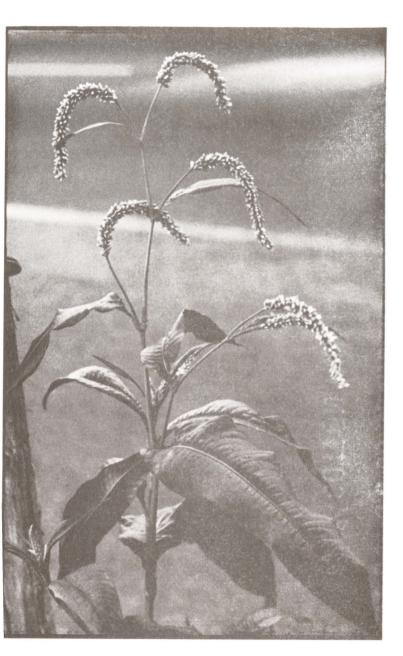
The water laps against the bricked edge along the harbor. The gulls still dive into the darkening water, but I don't hear their call. The buildings loom above me, extending their shadows over the deserted docks, mourning a departed comrade. There are no people here today, only the shades of a time gone by.

Yes, Cassandra loved the city. But I loved Cassandra.

Yes, Cassandra loved the city. But I loved Cassandra.



PHOTOGRAPH by Michael Brands



PHOTOGRAPH by Karen Laco



THE GAS STATION CALENDAR

Gary Fincke

This neighborhood was as cracked and dry as paper keepsakes stored too long in a box. It curled around its edges; it split and grew ragged. The asphalt paths through the park were zig-zagged by the grass and weeds growing through the crevices. The driveway to the house from which Greg was looking had crumbled around its borders, was becoming narrower. He could imagine it being transformed into a field again or substituting as a place where excited teenagers parked, throwing bottles out of windows, groaning in the dark.

From this upstairs window Greg could see the old men who gathered in the decaying park. A bell tolled from the church that lay beyond the park; birds settled on broken paths, on the cleared spaces in front of the benches where men sat. He expected a funeral to pass on the highway, pennants waving on the cars. He expected the smell of cabbage cooking in dark, hot kitchens, the men returning home to pierogies. He expected the street to snicker, sending the pigeons or whatever they were into scattered flight. The laugh, when it came, would be a quiet one, a snort nearly, without mirth, the kind he sometimes consciously started in movie theaters when someone on the screen did something extraordinarily stupid or evil, and the intent of the film maker was serious.

There seemed to be no women, as if this were the Park of Patriarchs, designed by a bearded figure from the Old Testament. A priest could show them the feeding of birds, handling the stale bread with care. He could judge, perhaps, as he slowly tossed it, how much faith it would take to feed the city.

The bell stopped. Most likely, it was only a ceremonial ringing to acknowledge the hour. There was a hymn, probably, at noon. Downstairs someone was laughing, a ball bounced against a wall. When Greg walked across the room, he watched the floor, afraid suddenly that there would be a hole or a weak spot to fall through. As a boy, he recalled, he had explored an old place like this one, an ancient farmhouse that was waiting to be razed to make way for a housing plan. He had become bored at once; there was nothing, he had thought, in the house but dirt, broken glass, fragments of things carried away by relatives or thieves.



Regardless, Greg and his two friends had gone upstairs, looking for something they could keep to prove they had rousted whatever demons might have settled into the house. Paul, the heaviest of them, had stepped on a ventilator and it had given way immediately. He remembered how Paul had fallen in a way he thought now was abnormally straight, both legs together, and how Paul had caught on the sides of the hole with his forearms, grabbing with his hands for support. By the time he and Walt had done anything but watch, Paul was pulling himself back through the hole.

Each of them had peered through the open space to see the ventilator lying on the floor below. They wondered whether Paul would have pierced the flimsy floor, taking pieces of wood in his body as it plunged to the packed dirt floor of the basement. When they went back downstairs, they hopped on the floor, testing it as well as they could. It had a precarious bounce to it. He had imagined it swaying above a gorge.

What they had found at last was an abandoned case of beer in the basement. Twenty-two of the bottles had been empty; two had been intact, the caps still on. Walt had surprised him by opening them in the notch in the door. He had swallowed before either of them could question him. The beer had been foul and rank and warm, and he had pretended to be silly for a few minutes until it became too tedious to act.

Starting down the stairs, he saw Lorrie before he saw the others. It had been her idea to come here for the weekend, yet she was standing apart, uncomfortable, he thought, from being left alone.

He was going to speak to her, but reflexively brought up his hands. The football bounced off. Someone laughed again.

"Nice hands!" Mark shouted.

"Stick it."

"But even so, I took you and Lorrie on our team anyway."

"What team is that?"

"We decided to have a game of touch, girls, too. Work up a thirst and all."

Greg understood Lorrie's distraction. She hated games, played none that he knew of.

The approaching summer made Lucy dizzy. She saw her mother and her aunt sitting on the porch, rocking, occasionally singing in those voices that grew lower each year as if they had not paced themselves properly in the past and were consequently running low on



power. Death was in their songs, or love gone bad. Lucy thought of them shelling peas or lima beans and looked at her hands for scars. Jim, she knew, would be drafted or take a job with a large company in a city. He was already blurry; she saw her mother standing behind gauze, taking on a soft, haloed look.

Could she sleep anywhere in this house? It would manage to blemish her, fill her pores with filth, bringing oil to the surface. Even the air there seemed filled with soot. She wished for a full length mirror, looked at the pock-marked walls and thought of diseases that scarred. Several times in high school boys with acne had asked her for dates. She had been repelled.

A clear skin was more important than any feature. She thought of sliding her hands under a shirt and discovering pimples with her fingertips, how something like that might spread to her own body.

A priest, when she was fourteen, had told her to pray for release from vanity; he promised he would do the same for her. She had come to confession reluctantly, had been embarrassed to tell him how she suffered from lustful thoughts, how she spent hours looking at herself, marveling at her body, how each separate part seemed to be achieving a kind of harmony.

Like an insect she could not discourage by brushing at it with her hand, his prayer still bothered her. It returned often, flew close to her ear so she could hear the hum of its wings.

She had never returned to confession. The light, she had decided, loved her. She had waited for the boy who looked as good in the sun, and she had given herself to him on a blanket in an open field not far from his house.

On the wall of her room at school were pictures of models and actresses. All of them had perfect complexions. A border of boys surrounded them, each with clear skin. Curt, she knew, occasionally had pimples where his collar rubbed his neck. Today, however, his throat was as smooth as Jim's. She thought of undressing each in turn, examining them for flaws.

When Jim reached for her from behind, cupping her breasts in his hands, she stood still and allowed him to slowly caress her. She wanted him to see her naked in natural light. She was unblemished; he would be moved by her perfection.

Amy wandered away from the fire. Building it up after dinner had been unnecessary; it was not really cold, no one was particularly anxious to sit around and talk.



These were sad times, after all. The eight of them, however well they knew each other, were saying a kind of goodbye. A month from now she would be married at her parents' church in another state, and none of the other six would be at the wedding. While Curt trained, she would live with her parents. Her way of life would be like a return to high school. She saw herself wandering around town, looking for old girl friends. They would be married, those who had stayed behind, and they would have babies and small children for her to hold and look at in astonishment. She would sit at a kitchen table with a pregnant woman who was feeding someone in a high chair, and she would forget the woman was Kathy, her lab partner in biology. She would stay for a lunch poured from a can and heated on the stove, and Kathy would tell her stories about Mr. Berkley, the old history teacher, who had died in school, collapsing during cafeteria duty.

Sorrow and joy would be as public as calendars hung in gas stations. They would laugh quickly, feel suddenly sad, would say goodbye

and promise to get together soon.

In the Gulf station near her house were the only nude pictures she had seen until ninth grade. Each month, she remembered, a new woman had been folded over, one as uninhibited as the last. She and her friends had taken their bicycles to this station to check the air in their tires. They had looked in the window and seen the latest model. The woman would be leaning against a tree, or standing under a small waterfall, or lying by a lake. Every shot Amy recalled had had an outdoor setting. She thought of lying exposed on the flat rock she had seen by the creek that afternoon. It would be warm on her back; the photographer would claim to have trouble with the light, would have her try a number of positions.

Until one of the neighborhood boys had come along with them, no

one had ever sent them away from the window.

Earlier, she had caught one of the short passes Curt had obligingly thrown her way during the game. As she had turned up field, she had collided with Mark and had gone down underneath him onto the grass. His hands had slipped across her shoulders and her breasts, had stayed on her longer than necessary.

"Hey," he had whispered, "we should do this more often," and she

had pushed him away from her forearm.

"Sorry," she had managed, "already spoken for."

Rather than looking at her face, he had stared directly at her breasts,



and she had rolled over on the ball, looking back at Curt. He was laughing.

"Hey, Rider," he called, "you gonna give us the ball back?" In Jim's pockets were ticket stubs for a performance he could not remember. They were not dated.

There were days when he woke up and wondered if he had been riding a bus all night and was now hundreds of miles from home and anyone he recognized. He would look for landmarks out of the window—a telephone pole with a peculiar yellow mark on its side, the green van with the psychedelic stripes parked across the street, the license number beginning with RA on the blue sports car in the adjoining driveway.

He carried the initials H.T. with him, worried that he might some day forget them as well. Harry Tyler, Harry Tyler, he repeated. Could something memorized for so long be forgotten? He tried to imagine an appropriate background for his annual childhood portrait. A stillborn brother required something more than the usual phony backdrop to make an impression. . .snow outside a window, colorful fall trees, a rich purple drapery. . .no one was in the foreground.

If his father were still alive, he could ask him about H.T. Jim could never approach his mother. She had, after all, carried H.T. in a way that had been ill-fashioned. H.T. was older; she had been more careful with Jim or had learned, and he had survived.

His father had taken him to the cemetery one day and shown him the grave.

Harry Tyler Armand June 28, 1944 May He Find Happiness Elsewhere

"I should have been in the war, maybe," his father had said. "I should have been fighting like everyone else instead of being at home with these damn bad knees of mine. You were born in '46 and you were fine; Jenny was born in '48 and she was fine. It was meant to be, you see? H.T. shouldn't have been born at all, or not until later. It just wasn't his time yet. I was supposed to be somewhere else."

"Why not have a third kid to make up for him?" Jim had asked. "We already have three children. We've had three children and that's what we'll always have. H.T. has things neither of you will ever



touch; they're stored away special for him."

His father limped slightly, a stiff-legged kind of walk. When Jim was thirteen, his father had a heart attack while driving to work, and the car plowed into the side of a Dairy Queen along the new four lane section of road just outside of town. No one was hurt; the store, because it sold mostly ice cream, was not open at 7:45; his father, the coroner said, had died before the car hit the wall.

That summer the garden grew over in weeds, a few vines reaching like arms for the house. The porch, neglected, took on a seedy air that spread throughout the frame house. By fall they had moved to an apartment on the side of town farthest from the cemetery.

Each afternoon he sweated, in the insufficient studio space, through drawings and paintings of unremarkable objects. Each night Mark found a way to get at Dawn's body, walking off beyond the cemetery near the college, parking in the wooded areas of the nearby county park. Ordinarily now, he was drinking, too, carrying a bottle of cheap wine under the seat of the car. Everything he was sketching was beginning to remind him of classrooms and desks arranged in an orderly way from front to back, a woman standing by the blackboard showing something cut neatly from colored construction paper.

After the football game he had taken Dawn and two beers into an upstairs bedroom. She had whined a bit about someone might come in, but he had worked her clothes off, had sung a little ditty to her as if she were a child being humored in a bath tub.

Now, as he looked at Dawn, who had moved just far enough back from the fire to be at the edge of the light, Mark thought that he was singing the verse again. She was thin, coltish, someone might call her; dressed and with her back to him, she looked even younger than she was. It came to him that everyone around the fire was deaf, that he was bellowing an obscene limerick and no one could hear. In each verse he supplied graphic detail of his intent for the girls sitting by the fire.

When he was spent, he felt always like a child. It seemed to him that he should run naked in the yard, turning a hose on himself and giggling. And how had he ended up here with Dawn? Because Greg was his roommate. Because Lorrie had an old relative who had died. He was sitting here like some naive photograph; he could as well be posing nude for a stranger offering him candy.

Something scurried through the weeds behind him. He tried to sing

again, and this time everyone groaned. Something like mortar was falling from between the bricks of his life. "Summertime, and the livin' is easy." or "Summertime, summertime, sum-sum-summertime" or "One summer night." He knew them all, even "In the summer of his years," the one hustled onto the market a few days after Kennedy was shot.

It was May. Mark saw himself as a calendar of memory, a life like salt in water trying to work its way upstream from the ocean. Lately, every picture he had drawn had been set in autumn. He had taken a break from lifting weights and had not taken it up again.

There was a girl at home, his sister's friend, fourteen, whom he ached to touch. He thought she looked at him strangely; his sister told her he was an artist; he was afraid to be near her.

He traced an outline of her face in the air, drawing her with her eyes shut, her mouth open. The portrait dangled in front of him until Dawn, standing, knocked it into the fire.

The house belonged to her great aunt who died last fall. The will was being contested; the house was patient. Lorrie wondered how much of this anyone wanted.

She felt her heart was lost somewhere in the attic of this musty house. Among boxes packed away and forgotten, it was smothering. At the end of the street where her parents lived, a band would play on warm nights in summer. In the same square there was a statue of some sort of soldier who kept the people passing through on any other night aware of a silence dead for years. It was the music she tried to remember now—what march had they played that set her feet to moving?

She felt, standing alongside a box of used paperback books, that it had been the street that had moved. Always she had been immobile; the band was simply local musicians, most of them inept, who played together as a hobby.

The statue had been badly vandalized the summer before she left for college. The arm had been broken off, and its face had been painted a metallic blue. It had stood all winter like that, the stumps held close against the side, the face reflecting light. In the spring someone had replaced the arms, but the angle was wrong. The soldier no longer gave the appearance of spirit and resolve; each time she walked by, Lorrie expected him to lay down the rifle he seemed to long to surrender.

Earlier, when everyone had become bored with the football game,



they had decided that the next touchdown would win. The boys became serious, followed each other closely, left the girls to block in the middle of the field. Lorrie had jogged out slowly during each play, had walked back, sometimes before the play ended. Lucy, who had been appointed to guard her, followed half-heartedly, brushed her hair back behind her ears after each play. On a fourth down play Greg had run around behind the line of scrimmage looking for Mark. Both Curt and Jim were covering him; no running plays were allowed. Lorrie had walked toward the end zone, waiting for Greg to throw the ball at Mark so she could turn and come back. Lucy had stopped, throwing her hair back. And then Greg had released the ball toward her, a lofted, rainbow pass coming out of the sun, and she had panicked, had backed up so it would not hit her, had thrown out her arms. The ball had struck her forearms. had bounced straight up instead of away, and she had caught it without thinking as it came down.

She was already standing on the goal line; Mark and Greg and Dawn were already cheering. Lucy looked at her and smiled. The game, she understood, was over; she was suddenly sweaty, wanted to take off the uncomfortable blouse she was sure was beginning to smell. She dropped the ball and walked toward the house.

Later, when Curt vomited and she saw the blood that came up, she cried, rubbing the tears away as unobtrusively as she could. In the thickets behind the dying house something was being irretrievably lost.

Here she was the last of a line keeping herself intact, as if she were writing in blood in a snow-covered tent, preserving a record that would be read after her death. She had, she was sure, stories to tell.

They were driving back to school from the bar just across the state line, speeding. Amy talking the whole time to keep him awake, to persuade him to go slower. Curt took the curves easily; the car knew him; he had practically built it. When he drove fast, the perfection in it seemed more accessible. The high speeds aroused him. He wanted Amy to take him in her hands as he drove.

"What's that noise?" Amy asked, her voice lowered now that she expected an answer.

"What noise?" He felt the lack of response in the steering, taking his foot off the accelerator even as he spoke.

"That noise, that noise, Curt, like the car's falling apart."
The car fought him. He pulled off onto the shoulder and the



noise stopped.

"It went away. The noise went away."

"It sure did, Sherlock."

"You don't have to get so pissed off."

"Damn it, something's wrong."

"But the noise stopped."

"Only because we stopped."

"What's that mean?"

"The tires, the wheels, the axle, the steering—something like that." He got out and walked around to her side. He already knew it was the right front tire, the one he had changed that morning. He kicked it and it wobbled, tilted slightly, even with the weight of the frame on it. Christ, it was so loose it was ready to fall off. A

few more miles or less and the damn thing would have flown away. "What is it, Curt?" Amy, sticking her head out the window, reminded him of his mother calling "Get away from the street, Curt. You're too close to the street, Curt." She had shouted the same message for years, even when he had been nine or ten and the other kids were riding their bikes with the traffic.

Amy's face hung suspended. He could wind the window up and catch her throat. Would she let him take the handle, trusting him with whatever kind of test he felt obliged to make?

"It's okay, dammit." He felt cold. Amy closed the window; she looked like she was immersed. He began to shiver. . .

. . . He claimed the cooking for himself, drank quickly from the bottle while keeping an eye on the meat.

"Shishkabobs," he said, "are my specialty."

No one complained. Curt turned the skewers as Amy handed him another beer. He puzzled over his asking, last night to come along. These were his friends, after all, yet he had felt excluded when they had planned the weekend without inviting him. Permission was in the fire in front of him, the enlistment papers he had signed in March. He thought he spoke differently now; he watched the news each night for pictures of the war. This afternoon, watching Mark fumble with Amy, he had seen a bayonet stab through a mirror, had seen a wound open in the glass that would take more time than he had to heal. He had followed the blade back and looked for the hands that held it. They would be wearing a class ring from the high school near the college.



Before he laughed, the blade jabbed the air in front of him. When he called Amy by her last name, he thought for a moment he had seen the face of the soldier.

"Curt says he was born to wear a uniform."

"Christ, what a stupid thing to say."

He was surprised Amy said it with such bitterness. He was going to

fly; he was nearly certain of going to war.

When he felt sick, as he always did after a half dozen beers, he turned and vomited easily into the bushes, noticed there was a trace of blood from the ulcer he had developed during the past few months.

It would not keep him from combat. In a month he would wear the uniform; in four months he would wear the uniform and his short hair to the homecoming football game; he would wear the uniform when he married Amy and wear it home when he lived with her near the base and wear it when he shipped out for 'Nam and wear it when he flew cargo planes, taking up the extra weight, one morning, of a concealed bomb and explode in the air over a jungle, leaving Amy and his family to begin a scholarship in his name.

Dawn slept lightly, dozed and woke. All day she had been looking for the embarrassment she was certain would touch her. She was the youngest, would be chosen for any humiliation, a freshman among seniors. Her giving herself to Mark seemed flagrant; the others, perhaps, had taken months to reach the intimacy they shared. She had known Mark for only weeks, had permitted him to take her after a few hours.

The house disgusted her. It was worse than camping with Girl Scouts in some rancid camp that always seemed to be along a creek or a lake. Once, in one of those lakes, she had swum naked with Barb and Martha, two girls a year older than she was. They had talked her into it, had undressed in front of her and shamed her into following. Their breasts had begun to form; she was boyishly flat, conspicuous, as if they had talked her into removing her clothes so that they could examine her body. In the shallows, they had ducked her under the water, shoving her into the mud at the bottom of the lake. She had been certain their hands had explored her, had felt the filth from the lake floor covering her as she thrashed.

She had screamed silently; her breath had disappeared, and she had realized the girls were holding her longer than any playful duck. When they finally released her, she had sat in the mud, gagging, water streaming from her hair. Giggling together, the girls



walked away, their bodies brushing against each other, and she had begun to cry, had finally picked up her clothes and walked to the showers behind the cabins where she stood under the spray for twenty minutes, trying to control her sobs, trying to clean the history of the lake from her body. When she had returned to the cabin, Martha and Barb were already back in their bunks. She had lain awake all night, imagining grit working its way through her skin.

Everything she touched in this house felt the same, seemed like filth,

not dirty, simply filth inherent-

The scuttling woke her at once. Mark snored slightly. She was terrified—mice, rats, something out of a tree or a cellar. A form moved by the wall, small, and something moved nearby, definitely, she saw, a rat, large, repulsive. There was a stirring beneath her, and a rat emerged from the couch on which she was lying. It had eaten its way, she was certain, through the couch like a carcass.

She shook Mark. He mumbled and turned over. "God, Mark, there's

rats here."

He opened his eyes. "Field mice probably. Harmless."

"For God's sake, Mark, these are rats." She felt like she was set at

panic and spinning.

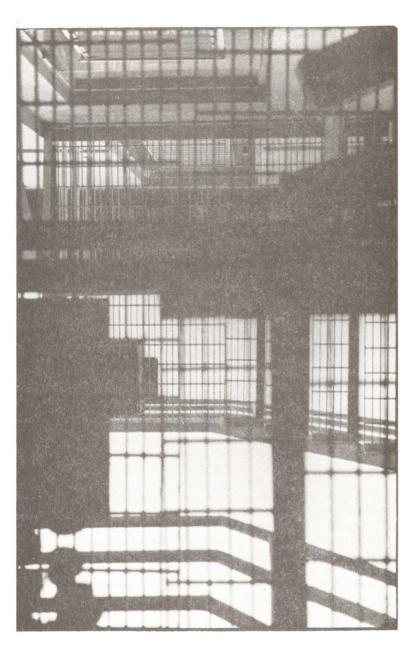
He rolled back and looked. "Field mice, Dawn." His breath was sour—stale beer, cheese, onions. He lifted one of her shoes and fired it at the one nearest the couch. It gave a squeal she would sleep with for weeks. He rolled over again and would not be roused.

She watched the floor for the rest of the night. In the morning she got up quietly, slipping away before Mark would reach for her again. She was already dressed, felt clammy as if a fever was beginning.

Outside Curt and Jim were packing the trunks of both cars. It was a two-hour drive back to school; her parents were visiting this afternoon; a fine drizzle had begun.

She walked along the side of the house, picked her way around a pile of rusty spray cans, plastic containers, broken bottles. Involuntarily, she looked up at the second story window from where, she imagined, someone had once dumped a box of trash. The bathroom lay inside, she thought, remembered that she had not gone upstairs yesterday had preferred to walk to the public restrooms in the park.

When she turned the corner, she faced away from the road, stood at the edge of a yard overgrown with a season of weeds. Beyond the line of short trees was the park she walked to four times. This early



PHOTOGRAPH by Michael Brands



on Sunday morning there was no one on any of the benches, no one moving from one place to another on the crippled paths.

From out of her purse she took a hand mirror. She looked at her face closely, examining her expression as it slowly blurred, the drops of thin rain clouding the surface.



ROUTINES

Richard O'Brien

He did one last handstand in the empty locker room. Upside down, with his jacket hanging down around his head, and his hands spread tight on the smooth concrete floor, Kenny Cahoy turned the lights off with his feet. Grinning in the dark, he stepped down from the handstand.

"Ten-point-oh, or so," he thought.

He grabbed his wet towel from the bench and flung it in the darkness over the lockers to where he knew the canvas hamper was propped in the corner. His shoulders felt warm and loose. He picked up his gym bag and jogged out to meet Chris.

He cut through the big gym, squinting against the bright lights. Three black kids were playing basketball under the hoop at the near end. They burst back and forth, wideeyed and sweaty, their shoes slapping and squealing on the blond wood floor. He could hear their grunts and the slam of the ball against the backboard behind him as he crossed the gym.

Chris was still in the little gym, lying on his back under the rings on the big blue crash pad.

Kenny called from the doorway, "Hey, you ready?"

Chris rolled over onto his stomach, his chin sinking down into the mat so that it looked like he was floating in a pool. He raised one arm straight into the air.

"I got me an appointment to drive Sherry Mitchell home," he proclaimed. "And I intend to drive her home."

"Whoa. . ." Kenny laughed. "In that case I'll walk."

"Hey man, thanks. Listen, why don't you give me a call later on, we'll plan some strategy for tomorrow night. Plan how to destroy Kamp, win us some jingle-jangle."

"Okay, yeah. You doin' anything in the morning? I could stop by."

"Great, come by around noon." Chris flopped back over on the mat. "Sherry. . . Sherry. . ." he sung up to the rings.

"Later," said Kenny. He walked out the door, picking up the last carton of Dr. Pepper from the bench. The bottles clinked



together under his arm as he walked down the hall. He stopped, leaning against the brass breakbar of the outside door while he buttoned his coat. He unzipped his gym bag and slipped the bottles of soda in one by one among his sweaty socks and shorts.

The local Dr. Pepper distributor had some deal with the school district community relations or something where they gave two cases a week to each of the high school's teams. The gymnastic team was so small that each kid got a whole sixpack after Friday practices. In the first weeks of the season, when it had still been early September, Kenny would drink at least three of the sodas on the way home, stopping in his tracks on the sidewalk to finish half a bottle with a swallow. But now, two and a half months later, it was already dark at the end of practice, and Kenny could feel the cold, sharp around his ears, and in his wet hair. Only his hands, still stiff and white with chalk, felt warm in the early winter night. He curled the fingers of his left hand in against the palm, feeling the jagged callouses. He could imagine his palms glowing like embers in the dark.

He angled up the hill beside the school, letting his steps kick through the leaves, while the gym bag, heavy with the bottles, scuffed against his leg. His eyes teared in the cold. The ground was hard, and the bare branches of the trees swayed in lacy shadows under the streetlights. Across the stadium on the far side of the school, he could see the last of the cross-country team returning from their workout, small dark figures like a line of monks in their hooded sweatsuits. He could hear their voices, a faint murmur on the night wind.

"They got State this weekend," he thought. "Everything's finishing up."

He watched the last runner disappear behind the dim line of the far grandstand.

"Now that's a crazy sport," thought Kenny. "The only thing that makes you good is if you can hurt more than anybody else." He thought about Pete Apple showing him his ankle in the locker room one day. There had been a knot the size of a walnut in the tendon above his heel, but Pete had seemed proud of it, even though he had to have an operation and hadn't been able to run track or cross-country since.

"Of course, you can't fall off a track," thought Kenny. "Besides,



it could be worse, it could be football."

At the top of the hill he stopped and set down his gym bag. He swung his hands back and forth in front of him, palms turned up to the cold air. As he cooled his hands, the swinging of his arms became the pantomiming of his routines. He stood beside the sidewalk, reciting the moves in sequence to himself, his breath fogging before his face as he swung through imaginary pirouettes. He walked home quickly cutting through the park.

After dinner Kenny sat on the floor of the living room, his legs straddled wide in front of him, the newspaper opened between his knees. The t.v. set was turned on to Hollywood Squares. His mother and father were still sitting at the table in the kitchen, finishing their coffee and talking quietly. He could hear the occasional clink of a dish. He closed the paper and watched the set for a while.

"Dad," he called, "what book is Buck Mulligan a character in?" "Ulysses."

"The lady guessed Huckleberry Finn."

His father came in from the kitchen, wearing his big shapeless sweater and carrying his coffee. He was taller than Kenny but stooped slightly as he walked as if always ready to duck. He settled into the chair behind Kenny with a sigh.

"Huckleberry Finn? What kind of illiterate is she? You knew it was Ulysses didn't you?"

Kenny handed his father the paper.

"You should never watch this show, Dad. You get too mad at how dumb the people are. She's probably just nervous."

"Well she must have read Huck Finn." His father was trying to sound severe, but he started laughing at something Paul Lynde was saying.

"Not everybody reads six books a day, Dad."

Kenny brought his legs together in front of him and then rolled them back over his head so that his knees touched the carpet beside his ears.

"Are you nervous about the meet tomorrow?" his father asked.He always asked.

"A little," said Kenny, his voice thick because of the angle of his neck.

"I figure if I hit my routines I can do okay, though. Y'know, it's between me and Chris and Kamp, I guess. I'd really like to beat Kamp on the highbar."

"You won last year, didn't you?"

Kenny looked up between his legs at the ceiling. "Yeah." He wanted to describe the whole meet to his father again, go over every detail of every routine. "Yeah, but he fell. I got better tricks, though, this year. I think I can beat him all around, too." He rolled back up to a stand.

"Well, I wish I could see the meet." Kenny's father was being cheerful, smiling up at him from the big green chair with his sick man's smile. Kenny never wanted to think of his father as sick.

"Yeah," said Kenny.

"But I really don't think I should try it. It's a lot of walking, and with it getting cold . . ."

"No, yeah, it's okay."

Kenny didn't want his father to explain.

"And your mother can take a lot of pictures."

"Right." Kenny nodded his head. "Right." He paused. "I think I'm gonna go to the library for a while."

His father was still smiling. "Don't be late."

Kenny went into the kitchen where his mother was doing the dishes. She smiled at him as he took his father's car keys from the hook. Her hair was drawn straight back from her forehead, and her face was flushed from the hot water.

"I'm going over to the library," he said. "I swear I'd help you with the dishes, but you know I gotta be careful with my hands this close to the meet." He pulled on his jacket.

His mother squinted at him, raising one eyebrow. "Right, kid," she said. "Take the trash out on your way."

He carried the two stiff sacks down the back stairs, feeling the cold on his face again. He stuffed them into the can and then stood poised for a second on the grass before he vaulted over the chain fence and ran up the driveway in the dark to where the car was parked.

He drove fast at first, sealed into the little world of the car, still chilly while the heater warmed up. He drove down Highland past the library. The parking lot was crowded. There were two or three clusters

of kids among the cars, and he tried to spot Brett or Karen, but didn't see them. He drove on by, letting himself turn left onto Kingsland, and went up the hill past the university. He turned the radio on and off, trying to decide between silence and music. He wanted to think about the meet, go over his routines. He pictured himself hitting perfectly, moving in the smooth slow motion of his mind. When you're really hitting, he thought, that's what it feels like for real.

He found himself driving past Kathy Niko's house for the second time, making the careful hairpin turn at the end of her block and coming back by on the other side of the grass median. He used to park there, on the far side of the street, among her neighbors' cars. He'd sit there, slouched down in the front seat, watching her windows. He never did see her, and he'd long since quit really liking her, but still he drove down her street by habit whenever he was out late.

It really doesn't seem like a year, he thought. All through the winter and last spring, they'd snuck into the university fieldhouse at night to workout. Those spring workouts had been the best; just Chris and him and the girls they got to come watch. They'd drag out the crash pads and practice only the big tricks to make the girls scream. Double backs off everything. That's where he'd first learned his vault on the high bar. "We're gymnasts," they'd yell when the custodians chased them out. "We're gymnasts." But now it was the end of senior season.

Kenny turned east onto Wydown, driving slowly past the big houses with their wide, randomly lit windows. He thought about the meet last year and, like always when he thought about that meet, it was the policeman he remembered first. The policeman he'd first noticed, absently, pushing his way through the group of cheerleaders at the gym door, who, in the next instant, had appeared in the midst of the team beside Kenny to tell him that his father had just had a heart attack at work and had been taken to the hospital. Still wearing his uniform, he'd left with the policeman. He had spent the rest of that night with his mother in the waiting room of the hospital. He had gone into the bathroom there and stared into the mirror while she slept.

"I'm just glad it wasn't at the meet," his mother had said. His father had later agreed, saying, "The judges probably consider it a major deduction if your father keels over in the stands." Before his father got sick, Kenny had tried to teach him a handstand. He drove home past the high school, looking at the tall, dark

windows of the gym.

He unlocked the door to his house and pushed it open as quietly as he could, kicked off his shoes in the hallway, and went upstairs. Only the light in the study was on. Kenny's father was sitting up reading. He wore his old flannel robe pulled up tight under his chin. His calves shone white and spindly between the bottom of the robe and his slippers.

Kenny leaned around the corner. His father looked up over his glasses.

"G'night, Dad."

"Night, Ken. Rest well."

Kenny nodded and then turned and went down the hall and into the bathroom. He took the smooth leather gloves from the towel rack and the bottle of handcream from beside the sink. He squeezed the lotion with a slurping sound thickly into both gloves and then pulled them onto his hands. He called goodnight to his father once more, softly.

In bed, with the covers pulled up around his ears, and his hands, warm in the gloves, folded across his chest, he saw the light from the study go off. Quite a while later, when he had almost dozed off, Kenny heard his father get up and go to bed.

The next morning Kenny woke early. He rolled out from under the covers onto the hardwood floor, shivering in his underwear. He peeled off the gloves and began stretching before the mirror in the pale sunlight. Watching his body in the mirror as he stretched, he could see the muscles slowly warm and loosen.

He showered quickly and then took out his uniform, freshly washed and pressed, and put it carefully into his gym bag. He stacked his socks and his jock and his handgrips in on top, and then he dressed.

Kenny and Chris spent that morning in the park, trying to get loose for the meet. They left the car down by the entrance to the zoo, where mothers and fathers and tiny children bundled in winter coats streamed in and out. They walked up the hill past the art museum and across the deserted golf course where they used to come to steal golf balls. They took the path into the woods that bounded the west end of the park.

"Man, I am so hyper, so psyched," said Chris. "I went out with Sherry last night, y'know, and I had to come home early I was so wired. She's comin' to the meet though."

"You better win then"

"Hey, we're all gonna win somethin'. But yeah, I gotta look good for her. Your folks coming?"

"Yeah . . . well, yeah, y'know, my mom."

"Oh, hey, how is your dad?"

"He's fine. Great." Kenny always wanted people to ask until they did.

They had come full circle now and were back down near the zoo. Kenny noticed how much quieter it was during the winter not as many people, he thought, and the animals stay inside.

"That was last year, wasn't it—that your dad got sick? Man, that cop freaked me out. I thought he was arrestin' you or something."

"Yeah, well it was weird all right."

"Remember how you'd fallen off side-horse earlier? And you should won horse, too—and how Little Winnie said that when you fell off it was probably the exact same instant tht your dad was having his heart attack?"

"Little Winnie's an asshole."

They got back in the car. The seats were stiff and cold, but the sun felt warm through the windshield. Kenny drove out of the park, past the art museum again and down the hill past the artificial waterfall. Chris drummed the seat, smacking out the beat with his palms.

"I'm really ready," he said. "Are you ready? I'm ready."

"Yeah." Kenny laughed. "I'm ready."

Chris slapped Kenny's shoulder. "You and me can do it. We can go one-two on every event. Shut Kamp out."

"I don't know. He's real tough. We'll see."

He pulled into Chris's driveway and stopped the car. Chris stopped drumming and reached over to slap Kenny's palm.



"I'll see you in a couple a hours, man. Just come on by and we'll walk up to the bus. Coach Nagel said to be there by six-thirty. Psyche-up."

"Right," said Kenny. He looked up at Chris who was standing beside the car now.

"I figured it out once." Kenny paused. "When I fell off was about an hour later."

Chris nodded.

The evening was cold and crisp and clear, and Kenny felt hungry and light and it made him walk fast. He gave his mother detailed directions on how to get to the meet at Crescent High School. She walked with him to the door.

"Good luck, honey. I'll see you there." She stepped out onto the porch beside him. "Kenny, make sure, if you go to celebrate afterwards or something, that you stop by here and let your father know how you did."

He jogged around the corner onto Chris's street, anxious to get there, to get on the bus and then to be at the gym, with all the waiting over. When he got closer, he could see the front door of Chris's house was open, and Chris's mother was standing on the porch without a coat, yelling something and laughing.

Oh Oh, thought Kenny, the damn dog got out. Chris's dog, Nanook, was a seventy pound, blue-eyed, Siberian husky that went on rampages throughout the house whenever you looked at him sideways. Whenever he got out, which was as often as possible, Nanook would race with mad determination back and forth across the lawns of Chris and his two neighbors, doing endless laps until someone discovered he was missing and came out to tackle him.

Kenny stood on the sidewalk and watched as Nanook barreled by full-tilt with Chris sprinting wildly behind him.

"We got to go," Kenny called as Chris went by.

"God damn retarded dog!" Chris yelled. "Don't just stand there Cahoy—chase him!"

Kenny dropped his bag and took off after the dog, running over the lawn, down and across the driveway, and over the next lawn, and then back again, the dog darting away from him in furious, maniacal delight. Kenny made a lunge for him but missed and stood panting and sweating and then laughing as Nanook thundered



away on another circuit. He stood for a moment on the neighbors' lawn and the thought of the meet came back, but he reached down to touch the crisp dry leaves around his feet, and then he took a step and kicked up into a handstand. He pushed it up as straight as he could, and for a moment he balanced perfectly on the uneven ground.

In the next instant, though, a huge, furry shape brushed by him and he rolled over onto his back in the leaves, looking up at the sharp stars. He heard a shout and Chris staggered by carrying the dog who grinned good-naturedly in his arms. Kenny picked up his his gym bag and Chris burst, swearing, from the house and they set off up the street to catch the bus for the meet.

The bus was dark, catching only flashes of headlights or streetlamps as it bounced and swayed along the road. Each of the eight boys took his own seat. They lay with their legs stretched across the aisle and talked and laughed across the seat tops. Kenny sat with his feet up on the seat in front of him and his head leaning against the window. The glass was cold and hard and vibrated against his cheek as they drove. He could tell without looking which roads they turned onto, and he knew they were getting close.

Coach Nagel was leaning back in his seat behind the driver, swinging a roll of tape around his finger. He turned and called to the back of the bus.

"You boys know Kamp busted his leg, don't you?"

"What?" The kids in the bus were silent.

"Yep. Compound fracture yesterday. He was doing a Tsuk on vault. They got him in a cast to his hip."

"Woa-ho!" Chris slapped the seat in front of him. "Crescent has had it, man."

Nagel laughed. "Yep. It's all yours now."

Shit, thought Kenny. "Shit," he said.

The different teams sat in tight groups along the first row of the bleachers, and staked out spots on the mats—clusters of different colored uniforms. Spectators were gathering in the stands—groups of parents and high school girls in shiny ski jackets.

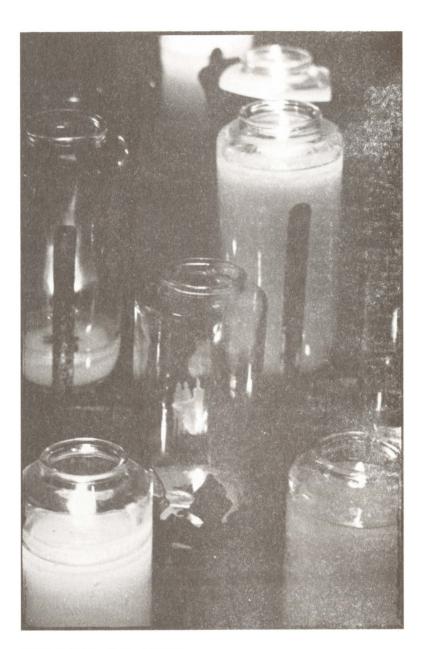
Kenny lay in the center of the floor-ex mat, stretching and looking straight up into the florescent lights on the ceiling. He could



feel the thumps through the mat of kids walking and tumbling by. It was time to warm up, and he wanted to start on high-bar.

Chris stood beside him to spot. Kenny jumped once and missed the bar and then jumped again. He hung there, settling into his grip, the chalk floating down in a cloud of tiny specks around his eyes. The crowd in the stands, always just a wash of color when he was on the apparatus, was now clear and sharp. Kamp sat in uniform with the Crescent team. Before him, two girls knelt down on pink knees to sign his bright white cast. In the top row of the bleachers, Kenny's mother was laying her folded coat on the seat beside her.

The bar felt as smooth and taut as a bone in Kenny's hands. He just wanted it to feel like one of those Spring workouts. He swung his legs up and over the bar, casting out to the handstand, reaching with the whole length of his spine for the long swings, before letting go for the jarring, hanging, quickness of the vault.



PHOTOGRAPH by Michael Brands



THE MASTER MUSICIANS OF GIZA

Sharon Spencer

Anna was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the King's Chamber listening to the music that came to her from the outside, from an incalculable distance, a high sinuous music that seemed to wind about her, binding her to this place and to this time as she had wished to be bound. Anna stiffened; in a far corner of the vast space something or someone moved. Many people had warned her that this was not a safe place for her to come alone. But perhaps there had been no rustling, only the whispered presence of Achille, from whom she had been parted many years earlier.

The tone of the music swelled with a dark resonance a sense of abundance and of sensuality, and Anna listened, sitting here in the King's Chamber, cross-legged, waiting for Achille to speak to her through the thick gray light.

And then for a time there was silence. She had been coming here every morning for nearly two weeks, walking up the steep hill past the large signs that advertised the Sound and Light shows, past the sprawling camel stable where men and boys were sleeping on the ground in the shelter of their animals wrapped in their *galabias*, past the smaller pyramids and past the Sphinx. To the right lay the desert blanketed with beige sand so fine and so light that few would suspect that beneath its surface lay the buried life of the centuries.

In the mornings some time before dawn Anna arrived at the pyramid, trying to slip unnoticed through the crude masonry entrance, for sleeping all around the base were half a dozen or so ragged men and boys who had made this place their home for lack of any other. Clusters of boys and men rolled up their *galabias* with the hoods pulled over thier faces. These homeless males were insistent and aggressive; they begged pitifully and also pitilessly for a few coins in exchange for conducting her inside the bowels of the pyramid. Sometimes they said things to her in Arabic, and because she didn't understand, she always smiled politely despite the uneasiness that tugged at her stomach.

One of these men, however, had unconsciously attracted Anna's notice, for although his *galabia* was no finer than those of the

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others, his face and head were elegantly and simply formed, his remote and stern features nearly lost in a mass of black curls that fell onto his shoulders. His eyes were usually closed in the very early mornings when Anna came to the pyramid, and his brown hands lightly held a long flute made of cane. Anna knew that the name of this flute was "Qasabah."

With a gentle effort Anna withdrew her thoughts from the man who still rested outside on the stones, awaiting for sunrise. With her eyes closed and her hands clasping her folded ankles, Anna herself slipped through her personal structure of bones andblood so easily that she was surprised by her agility. After a long pause the music began with a disinterested yet plaintive sound, and Anna wrapped herself inside this music, lying in its long coiling folded arcs, for she yearned to be swept along, spiraling and turning, spinning in upon herself to the sinuous rhythm of this music. Innocently, almost sweetly, the music came to Anna's ears, resonating in the space of the King's Chamber. The rustling sounds grew louder and more frequently, as though in the warm foul air something or someone had been sleeping and was now awakening slowly, coming into being by stretching, slowly, one limb at a time in the process of reassembling a body that had been temporarily abandoned.

Anna risks an act of observation finally and sees what might have been visible all along. In the corner diagonally opposite the one she herself occupies, is a seated figure wearing a *galabia* whose hood shields its face. Cross-legged, the figure sits with the folded *galabia* tucked up around its thighs. Exposed by this position and by the lack of underwear, the genitals are in full view: enlarged double lips of the female tilted upward and parted to make possible the emergence of a large penis rising from a nest of tangled black pubic hair.

It was in every detail exactly what Anna had expected to see. There is a music so insistent and so enchanting that, hearing it, one forgets time, yielding to the outline of a reality that displaces this one with its claim of barbaric exactitude. Anna dared a second glance at the dim figure, scarcely visible in the dim light; her eyes rested upon the vision of the double genitals. A cry came from her lips; she could not have stifled it. She allowed herself to re-experience the



agony of the separation from Achille. She felt as though an executioner had hacked her arm with a dull sword.

Twilight on the outskirts of a small city. There is a long curving street ascending a gentle hill and turning upon itself to form a circle, like the coiled tail of a serpent. Inside the serpent's tail is a graceful fountain with several tiers over which water flows steadily, hurled up in the air from a cental spray before it splashes down over the series of tiers and falls into a shallow basin at the pool's edge. Arranged around the small central park are a group of houses built in the early modern style with rounded corners and glass bricks. A group of children are walking along the street, arms linked. They are whispering and laughing. A black boy rides along, slowly peddling a cycle. Some kids are squatting on the ground playing with jacks or with marbles. An abandoned bright green wagon lies on its side near the curb. On the outdoor staircase of one of the houses someone has hung a gayly colored Slavic folk rug. Inside, behind the brightly lighted windows of this house, are many plants and flowers. The members of a large family are just pulling out their chairs to sit down at a dinner table on which several steaming dishes of food are waiting to be eaten.

This dream had been shattered by a loud desperate-sounding series of knocks on Anna's door. When she got out of bed and opened it. Achille was standing before her; his light yellowish-brown eyes same rigid sense of purpose as his eyes. "I can't stand watching him any longer! Will you help me?" Achille's voice was so strained it sounded rusty.

Anna nodded without having a clear understanding of what Achille wanted; she had agreed because it was he who asked. When he said "Come with me," he took her hand, and led her out of the room down the hall toward Timothy's room. Anna had obeyed. In a partly-darkened foul-smelling room Timothy, her father, and Achille's step-father, lay dying of a growth no doctor had been able to stop. Timothy's death was occurring with sinister slowness. To avoid watching him die, Anna spent most of her time in her room weaving fantasies about large happy families sitting down together in houses decorated with handwoven Slavic rugs. But Achille spent most of his time sitting with Timothy; he alternated these vigils with the long frenzied walks he took around the city where they lived as exiles from their own country. Anna knew how to calm Achille and



when he returned from his walks, she would hold him in her arms and sing the old childhood melodies they had brought with them from Russia when they left years earlier with Timothy and their mother, who was dead.

Anna sat beside Timothy on a wooden kitchen chair and held the bones, once his hand, while Achille whispered comforting words, raising the man against the pillows so that he could swallow the broth of poisons that Achille had managed to buy at a neighborhood pharmacy. The proprietor had been a friend of Timothy's; he cooperated with the dying man's wishes. Achille lay across the foot of the bed holding on to Timothy's feet while Anna let him clutch her hand while a series of spasms seized the man's body, shaking it hard two or three times before dropping into oblivion.

Stupefied, Anna dragged herself to her feet and walked back to her room, leaving Achille where he lay, sobbing into the dingy blanket.

Alone in her room, Anna had slept for many hours, sleeping heavily a thick bottomless sleep that was studded with harsh violent dreams.

She was in a room with five men who were dressed in feathers and skins with embroidered loincloths draped over their genitals. On their faces were huge masks representing wild beasts. They were playing musical instruments, these masked musicians, and the rhythms were sinuous, inviting, irresistible. Anna got down and kneeled in front of the man who was wearing the mask of a ram. She pushed aside the cloth that hung between his hard thighs, and she admired the long full penis that rose from semen-filled pouches of flesh. She thrust her face under the cloth and licked the man's genitals, letting the saliva from her open lips flow across his testicles and onto his inner thighs. She made her lips into a circle and slid them back and forth until she felt ready to draw the prong of flesh still more deeply into her mouth. And all the time she was sucking the man to orgasm, she was rubbing the smaller prong of flesh between her own legs, rubbing softly and gently with a moistened fingertip until the sticky fluid began to flow down her thighs.

Without knocking Achille entered her room and saw his sister's hand moving beneath the blankets, moving back and forth between her legs, tracing rhythmical arcs. His light brown hair was sticking out around his wet face, stained with tears.



He raised the blanket and got under the covers beside Anna, a thing he had never before done. It was she who, already flowing with welcome, caressed him before guiding him into the deeper chamber of her resonant body.

This act opened the door upon a time when, night after night, they fell upon each other like short blunt swords. It was a mutual invasion. Sometimes it brought pleasure; sometimes it brought pain; always it brought a morbid satisfaction.

These nights comprised of splintered and jagged assaults, the couple's ravenous attempts to attain oblivion helped them to forget, for a time, that in the world beyond their small apartment other people were occupied with the activities that they called "life."

The mournful music of the cane flute resumed now, and Anna was reminded that the sun must be preparing to move above the brown rim of the Giza Plateau. It would not be long before bands of tourists began to penetrate her refuge. Anna got to her feet and stretched. She moaned sharply. She felt as though there were another body inside of her, pushing, pressing, straining to burst to the outside. There was a tightness that reminded her of the old discomfort her mother had called "growing pains." Again, Anna stretched, gazing down on her bare feet.

There remained a few moments of solitude, and she seated herself again on the floor, cross-legged, closing her eyes. Yes, she thought, it is finally happening. I am making it happen. Maybe I have already made it happen.

I am becoming someone else.

II

Absalom was sitting outside on the chilled stones wrapped in his dark *galabia*; he was half-enshrouded in a trance because he had been smoking hashish and listening to a remote sort of music that encircled him with the insistent pulsations of a conjurer. Hashish always drew him to other places and to other times, and he usually yielded to the melody of voyage, the more so now that he was deeply in love. His *Qasabah* lay across his folded knees, and he sat with one slender hand resting lightly on his flute, for at this hour of the day that was



just now being born, there were many thieves hovering around the pyramid. He had been made feminine by the hashish; he was not in the best condition to have to fight for his instrument, if it were to come to that.

He was in love with the woman who had gone inside the pyramid half an hour or so earlier, a foreign woman whom he had seen for the first time two weeks ago in the darkness before the sun had begun to rise above the edge of the brown desert. Tall and thin, this woman walked with a loose grace that might as easily have been that of a boy. Her pace was frank and not self-conscious, unlike the sexual sway of the women of his own race. She had a small head whose oval shape reminded Absalom of the King Cobra. When she walked, she gazed upward, seemingly unaware of the sinuous line drawn by her throat and head. Unlike the women of Egypt, the stranger left her head uncovered, so anyone could admire the pale brown hair that curled around her temples and cheeks with the symmetrical grace that Absalom had seen in ancient Greek statues of boys.

The woman's hands were shaped much like his own, long and thin with tapering fingers and a delicate tracery of veins on the backs of her palms. He had seen her hands quite close, because he had thought he might get to know her if she allowed him to accompany her inside the pyramid. But she had smiled in a cool formal way, shaking her head as she walked swiftly ahead of him before disappearing between the gray slabs of stone at the entrance.

The other men did not think this woman was beautiful. In fact, they mocked her, calling her foul names in their own language, but smiling as they abused her, so that the woman, ignorant of the meanings of their words, smiled back at them, realizing only that they had greeted her. Some of them boasted that if they were to rape her, she would learn what it was to become a woman, as if violence could transform her into the soft undulating flesh that they associated with femininity.

Absalom listened to all this and pains stabbed his belly, but he did not raise his voice to defend her, because he did not want the others to see the extent of his fascination or to glimpse the possibility that he loved this tall stranger, who came climbing up the long hill from the hotel every morning before dawn,long before the guards of



the antiquities came on duty. He wondered what she thought about as she sat inside the King's Chamber in the foul-smelling darkness.

Absalom remained outside on these mornings; he was watching over her; he felt that his music was connected with her safety. He had thought long and sincerely about whether he wanted to speak to her, but the *Qasabah* alone seemed the instrument she would respond to, whose tone would attract her attention, whose melody would cause a golden lava to flow into her finely-shaped body, softening her emotions. Absalom sensed that his woman was even more alone than himself.

He had devoted himself entirely to the perfection of his skill as a musician, sacrificing every other form of gratification except hashish, studying the *Qasabah* for five years under the direction of the master musicians of Jajouka in nearby Morocco. Absalom himself was entitled to use the title of "master" but did not do so from a combination of modesty and pride in his ability to abstain from this pleasure as from others. Although he had been invited to perform all over the city, in the many nightclubs scattered around Giza and even in the lounge of the Cairo Hilton Hotel, Absalom had taken a vow of musical service. He lived on what he was given by the visitors who came to see the Great Pyramid where he played upon the *Qasabah* from dawn until evening. He always had enough to eat. At night he slept with the camel drivers at the bottom of the hill though he had not yet gotten used to the fleas.

A faintness hovered above the rim of the desert, a hint of the light to come that blurred the meeting point of sand and sky, giving a promise of the softly arriving day. Absalom raised the flute to his lips and blew into its opening, the lips of his constant companion, blowing without making any sounds. He did not want to awaken the others, the riff-raff who made their homes, as he did, among the stones and rubble that had fallen around the base of the pyramid. A large bird flew overhead, squawking; it held a tiny creature of some sort in its talons. Several starving cats were slinking around the ruins in search of scraps of food a tourist might have dropped. Reaching into the folds of his *galabia*, Absalom found some crusts of bread and threw them to the cats. It was important not to awaken the others; they might express their irritation by going inside and attacking the stranger. They might



tear off her clothes to see whether she was really a woman.

Motionless, Absalom sat with the *Qasabah* raised to his lips. He blew delicately but noiselessly into the flute while his thoughts alighted on the image of the woman inside the pyramid. She was brooding, he felt, upon an event from which she wished to free herself. The rigid melancholy of her face expressed a sorrow, a vague and remote suffering for which this impoverished life seemed to offer no remedy. He felt that as long as he played upon the *Qasabah*, blowing breath into its body, the woman would be protected. Eyes closed, he swayed softly from side to side, and he dreamed, a dream that placed him in full view of the crest of a hill that was backlighted by a huge moon whose light was so harsh it hurt his eyes.

Standing on the crest of the hill silhouetted against the light was the profile of an extremely tall woman. Her head was titled slightly backward, as though drawn by the weight of her hair, a mass of curls encircled her head. She was African. She stood against the moonlight with a suggestion of insolence; her hands, one on each hip, framed her swollen abdomen. Her breats pointed upward at the sky.

Now the men and boys were beginning to stretch and moan. They were coming to life, and the light was rising almost imperceptibly above the thin line of the desert. Absalom heard someone call his name. He strained to listen more closely.

He blew forcefully into the *Qasabah* as if to answer the voice. It was that a very old woman; it might have been the voice of his grandmother calling to him from the world where the dead people live in the tombs that are located not far from the Sphinx. He concentrated as intently as he could, and he recognized that it was his grandmother's voice and that she was warning him of a danger of some sort, suggesting that he go to the outskirts of the city to hide. His name, she told him, was among those of people who had been condemned to death because their religious beliefs were different from the Christianity adopted by the Empire. And he obeyed the voice of his grandmother. In her lifetime she had been renowned for her wisdom.

He was alone in a subterranean cavern or labyrinth; before him stretched a long concrete corridor. The sides were lined with hollowed-out spaces just large enough for a human being to curl up inside. There was no one else in this tunnel. Only himself, and he felt compelled to walk along the damp



floor with no idea where he was going. Bewildered and frightened, he walked on.

It was almost a relief when he heard behind him loud footsteps, the steps of many people, and voices. He realized that he might be in danger, and he quickly scaled a wall and hid himself in one of the chambers cut in the sweating sides of the tunnel. He was above the eye level of the men who crowded into the tunnel, wearing uniforms and carrying swords.

One of the soldiers were accompanied by two wolves on leashes, another by a panther. Every now and then a soldier would jab his saber into one of the wall cubicles. But they passed Absalom without discovering him.

When they were gone, he climbed down and continued to walk along the corridor toward a pale greenish-violet light that he glimpsed far away at the end. He heard voices speaking a language he didn't understand. At the end of the tunnel was a small round passageway, so small that he had to get down on his hands and knees and crawl through it. When he emerged, Absalom was once again in the desert. Two men with black beards and white robes and headdresses were standing side by side watching him.

"Who are you?" one of them demanded. He was holding a tablet and an instrument for writing. Feeling confused, Absalom heard himself say: "My name is Achille."

Nodding, the man wrote it down, then waved, dismissing him.

Whenever he was unable to understand something, Absalom blew upon his *Qasabah*. And he did so now, for he could not understand why he had said his name was "Achille." He blew fiercely as if in response to the voice that was calling his name over and over again. "Achille." And again, plaintively, "Achille." She pronounced this name with a strangled passion, with a tremor of something both tainted and heroic, with the urgency of incantation. Irresistibly, she pronounced his name. And he responded by jumping to his feet and running toward the pyramid.

He hurried inside and quickly ducked down so he could scramble through the narrow passage that led to the King's Chamber. Now, still, the voice drew him along, sucking him through the tunnel with the formidable power to desire. Once he lifted his head too quickly, thinking he had arrived at the end. The frustration of having to bend down again, to regain control of this body, and to force it to move at a steady regular pace exhausted him.



When at last he arrived at the entrance to the King's Chamber, he paused. It was several seconds before he could see through the heavy gray light. The first thing he made out was one of the camel drivers, a ragged dirty fellow, sitting opposite the women exposing his sex organs to her.

Absalom said nothing. He walked over to the man, pulled him to his feet with a shake, and pushed him toward the door. The camel driver whined in protest but he was too surprised to resist.

The woman did not seem to have noticed either of the men. She was sitting on the floor of the vast room with her eyes closed and her head thrown back. Her lips were moving but no sounds came from them. Sitting motionless with her fine head tilted upon the column of her throat, bathed in a violet light, she emitted a spectral beauty.

Absalom dropped to his knees in front of her, resting his buttocks on his heels while he waited for the woman to become aware of him. When at last her lips stopped moving and she opened her eyes, she was not looking at him at all. Her gaze was turned inward, and the undisturbed surface of her gray irises made her eyes seem like wells at which he might refresh himself as greedily as he wished.

Absalom raised the *Qasabah* to his lips and began to blow upon it, drawing forth a melody so old it was heard in ancient Thebes three thousand years ago. The woman responded to the music; she opened her eyes and looked at him. And she said, questioning:

"Achille?"

"Oui. C'est moi. C'est Achille." He waited, with the *Qasabah* resting on his knees.

After a moment she gave a hoarse cry and covered her face with her hands, the long fingers spread wide. She began to sob.

Achille looked again at his own hands. He felt confused and a little dizzy, for he was no longer certain whether they were his hands, or those of this woman. He reached out and lightly caressed her shoulder.

"Watch me," she murmured. She raised both hands and drew them through the air, tracing an invisible form. "Do you see it?" she asked, her voice overflowing with urgency.

"Oui." He nodded slowly, his eyes following the tracery of her hands, which seemed no longer distinguishable from his own agile hands. And he did see it.

He saw a pale and vibrant hilltop pulsating under rays of lunar light. A moonscape. A long low horizon in which everything was washed with spectral grayish-silver. The time was near dawn. There on top of the hill was an object that resembled a very large bed shaped like an equilateral triangle, a triangular bed bisected from the base to the apex by a fine line. It was prepared for flight. The three angles were curved upward; the bed was equipped with immense wings.

Near dawn. Moonscape. Brilliantly lighted hallucinatory vision. Equilateral triangular bed prepared to soar into the heavens or beyond, toward a realm that has never yet been penetrated by those empowered to return with explanations of what they discovered there.

"Achille," she murmured, her voice hoarse with an emotion that he identified as repentance.

There was no doubt that the dominant tone of her voice expressed repentance, and Achille surrendered to its seductive power. He swept forward and folded the woman into his arms. He gathered her against his breast and clasped her so tightly that she gasped.

Together, they walked toward the space-bed and lay down upon it. Turning their heads, they smiled into each other's expectant faces, for they were now interchangeable, he and she, she and he, Achille and Anna, woman and man, man and woman, reunited after mutilated half-life.

They sigh, sharing a tremor of fear. The winged bed rises from the hilltop, and the couple who are lying there side by side, hands clasped, exhange an unbroken smile. The winged bed soars into flight, sweeping the voyager toward ecstatic and indestructible union.