

DRUID'S CAVE

Spring 1987

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Through A Child's Eyes

Papa came in from the frozen fields
And danced his message across my hide.
Blood-red icicles hung my windows
Sunset dripping frozen tears.

Papa staggered in from the frozen fields
And danced his message in my hide.
Blood-red icicles hung my windows
Sunset dripping whore-frost tears.

Papa reeled in from the frozen fields
And danced his message through my hide.
Blood-red icicles hung his windows
Sunset oozing manly blood.

Papa's buried deep in the frozen fields.
I dance my message on his grave.
Blood-red icicles hang my windows
Sunset melting frozen tears.

Judy Anderson

The Lake

There's this lake across the street,
I always thought it was a lagoon,
it seemed so stagnate.
But there is this lake,
it looks frozen over right now
but looks can be deceiving,
a young boy found out.
So there's this lake across the street,
suddenly busy with action,
there seems to be someone in it.
Almost chilly for a swim.
First neighbors
then firemen,
a crowd begins to form.
There's a helicopter now,
a flying ambulance
or perhaps an angel.
Now there is this lake,
with firemen and angels
and a boy to be saved,
spectators search for a view.
Is it too cold to go in
or did they just forget their suits?
Two arms wave in the water,
he's waving them in.
Helpers in white
jump from the angel
and throw off their coats
as if they are going to join,
but the boy stops waving them on.
Some more think he wants them still
even though the water is hushed.
They grab a boat and long poles
with hooks on the end,
but this is no time for fishing.
The red lights aren't flashing
and the crowd is thinning out.

It's becoming cold.
So now there's this lake,
and the dark is setting in
and there's firemen and angels
fishermen and neighbors
and two men with scuba gear who just arrived
It's been almost two hours
when there is a scream or a yell,
it's not light
but there is sudden motion.
The angels' wings start flapping
and the helpers dressed in white
with another this time,
take to the sky.
There's this lake across the street,
without firemen or angels
fishermen or neighbors,
just a new sign that says
danger thin ice.

William Clow

Willie

by Ricardo Cortez Cruz

Ellerbee had tried to beat the rocks. It be's that way sometime. It wasn't kid stuff anymore. Ellerbee was grown now--big. Just like the rest of us. But Ellerbee would still beat the rocks. He'd beebop his long, fragile body clear down the street and then brakelight like crazy back up to the front end like he were selling or something. Sometimes Ellerbee could stomp and rage so hard he'd make his biscuit spin; you know, go round in circles.

"You just like all dem utta' niggers," his mama had told him. "Got rocks in your head." Folks all said Ellerbee wasn't like the others though, said he was like Winchester on them cartoons. You know, playing sweet soul music with a wooden guitar stuck in his mouth and his teeth just a grinning.

Ellerbee now sat on a small wooden stool humming a serious birdie watching and glaring at some white bitches strolling by. "Eh, Mama," cheered Ellerbee. "You sho' is looking good. Commere baby, and let me talk to you for a little bit." But them hoes wasn't studdin' Ellerbee so they called him a boogie bear and took off.

Ellerbee was that ugly when he was born. He said his mama wanted to name him Willie but when she took a peek at him, she first said: "Oh my God--Hell it be!" Later some stuff got started--rumors, I guess--and folk said she cried Ellerbee. Anyways, Ellerbee was still a boogie-bear--and a mighty black one too. Folk said he was so dark his mama called him midnight. You see, "midnight" was the color of the palm of his hand. His mama stole it from the dog who they named "Whitie" instead.

Ellerbee was messed up though, didn't know who folks were calling Whitie: "Whitie. Here Whitie," folk would shout and good ol' Ellerbee would bring his lanky self up over to them and wag his tail. "That's a good boy," folk would say while they slapped him on his big head. You see, when Ellerbee used to play with the horses and stuff (he was a stable boy) he kissed a lot of ass. Couldn't keep his big head out of their hair, I reckon. He spent the rest of his time nickel-diming. Shoe-shining, I mean.

"You like the job?" they asked Ellerbee.

"Yessum," said Ellerbee, teeth a grinning as he polished their stuff.

"Hope you're making enough money now."

"Yessum," smiled Ellerbee, clutching his pockets to jingle' them nickel-dimes.

"Good boy" they said



Photo by Diane Rapala

"Aw, yes you is! Everybody said they saw you cry that day you couldn't play basketball and stuff with Bobbie Jo. Bobbie Jo said you was no good, anyway."

Jimmy doesn't answer.

The girl begins to become frustrated.

"Aw, come on and play with us, huh Jimmy? Bobbie Jo plays with us sometimes."

"Whoop-dee-do," Jimmy said. "What does he want for it? A butter cookie?" The truth really was that Jimmy didn't like Bobbie Jo anymore. Jimmy felt he was the kind of guy who was easy to hate. Bobbie Jo used to be the only friend Jimmy had, until they split.

It happened one day while Jimmy was struttin' cross the yard on the way to shoot hoop at the playground. You see, almost all the brothers in the neighborhood could shoot some serious rock, and most of them wanted to dunk or clown or hang on the hoop like black monsters. "Brothers who can hang, can slam," they'd say.

Jimmy couldn't hang though; they said he had white man's disease and told him that he had better stick to handling the pill.

So naturally, while Jimmy was struttin' the field--hot sun beatin' down on his raisin-face, and weeds and stickers and stuff ticklin' and scratchin' the golden-brown skin of his shin-bones--he couldn't help but to think about all of this.

Jimmy hadn't gone far before he realized his best friend, Bobbie Jo, was heading toward him. Sweet Caroline was gingerly plodding along-side Bobbie Jo, rubbing her stuff against him. Poo being the same for most niggers.

You see, Caroline Brown was a whore--to the best of Jimmy's estimation. Jimmy used to sit by her in his business class. (Jimmy said they was the only blacks who took business back then.) Sometimes on hot summer days she'd come to class wearing tee-shirts and her moist nipples would show like bronze pennies under a bed sheet. Once Jimmy saw her without panties: she said he was seeing things--being squared up as he was.

She lied and told Jimmy and some others that Bobbie Jo was her eros lover and that he had got it. You know, tagged it. When Jimmy heard it he fled to ask Bobbie Jo, who said that she had never gotten inside her pants, and that Jimmy was crazy; she was too, and that he would tell her. Later Bobbie Jo busted with sores and puss all over his mouth and his lower lip busted open. Things went downhill after that.

Jimmy knew he would never be able to tell the little girl peeking beyond his window sill--Caroline's sister--about what happened.

So anyway, by the time Jimmy had done all this thinking stuff, Bobbie Jo and his girl had finally confronted him; two against one, it seemed to Jimmy. Bobbie Jo, like all the other brothers, was real cool: clutching his stuff with his left hand and directin' traffic with his right. (Tommy Lee, a poor little white boy down the street, always asked Bobbie Jo why he always had his hands in his pants. But Bobbie Jo paid Tommy Lee no nevermind, and just said he was crazy or somedin; said white folks didn't understand things like that.)

"What's up," said Bobbie Jo, milking the situation and C.B.in' Jimmy at the same time. "Have you seen Willie-boy?"

"Uh-h no. Naw, I haven't seen him," replied Jimmy.

"Let me know if you see him, huh?" said Bobbie Jo.

"Yeah, that's cool," snapped Jimmy. "And I'll tell you when I see him."

Bobbie Jo and Jimmy never traded words again; both said they preferred it that way.

A Thoughtful Jimmy, reflecting on this, donned a look of dismay flush on his face--his eyes like livid pools. "Damn," said Jimmy. "What did he do it for? I want to know why."

By the time Jimmy had stepped outdoors with his basket and a glowing pumpkin in his hands--the red sun had faded and disappeared somewhere in the horizon, lighting the sky with fiery red fireworks on a hot summer evening. Jimmy was alone now. The little girl who had once watched him was no longer there. But Jimmy? Yes, Jimmy was there; Jimmy desperately trying to force himself to bravely face the fact that many people must live and die alone.

You know, go round in circles.

clean down the bricked streets.

All this lasted about four years before Ellerbee finally realized he had made a big boo-boo, said he was living on chicken feed and stuff and that he couldn't keep no money in his pockets. He said he had been living like a buster, said he would go to the city to look for work.

Then Ellerbee somehow and someway (I dunno) got a crazy break, said he landed a job on television's Little Rascals. Ellerbee said he making tall bank cause he was the negro responsible for fixin' Buckwheat's head; he said "we the people" could get ahead that way, using white folk like that. (Ellerbee thought he was the shit then.) I told him I didn't want to use no white folk like that. He got all fussed-up and mad, actin' kind of wild and crazy cause I kept calling him Willie.

"Fuck you," I told Willie and strolled off with my head cocked high in the air. "I don't need this shit." I didn't see Willie do much after that; he just lowered his fluffy head and started to cry—right there, clean out in the middle of the street. I didn't turn around to go back.

The next time I saw Willie things were different. Willie was different. Me and my boys saw him one night out in the street, his eyes red and drinking some super-supreme. Willie looked pretty bad—hard-up.

"Hey, Willie, what's happening?" we said.

"My name ain't Willie," he said.

"Shit-t-t. You sho' do look like Willie to me," we said. "I jes know there can't be two negroes that ugly. Shoot, you so ugly you'd scare the boogey-monster away."

"I said my name ain't no Willie . . . My name is Haji-Abdul Kareem Mustafa Muhammed. It means free will."

I looked at his stuff . . . Willie was poor, filthy, pathetic and frail.

"Free will, my ass," I said as I pulled out my blade and busted open his guts, happily watching his shit and stuff run down his leg. Happily watching for no reason at all. His face landed flush on the brick like the flap of a hard book against its pages as I fled into the dark night.

Who the Jimmy-crack Cares?

by Ricardo Cortez Cru

Jimmy carefully laced his purple and white Converse sneaks despite the small black speckle-faced girl who peered helplessly inside his opened window. Sometimes Jimmy could dream so hard he'd make his own head spin; you know, go round in circles.

"Jimmy," whined the girl, sucking in air, "ain't you gone come outside and play with the rest of us? Or are you gonna stare like you stupid, all day?"

"Aw, forget it!" shouted Jimmy, feeling a bit funny near his heart. "I don't play games anymore."

You see, Jimmy wanted no part of the little girl—wanted nothing to do with her. Even something as minute, as tangible as the sight of her stubby pony-tail braids and whimpish grin sickened him, although the complexity of people, in general, amazed him. She was tiny and fragile—a delicate creature—and the stick-like frame of her brown body propped itself spryly along the white brick wall like a poor child's cabbage patch doll. She could have been Raggedy Ann: her tan shoes were torn apart at the sole, and one featured a gaping hole near the toe—leaving little wonderment as to why her large feet were always dusty black underneath. Her cherry red pants were covered with little blue-denim patches, hand sewn with swirls of green thread. The citrus-orange blouse she wore was strained with fingernail polish. But all of this made the girl no difference because she was young and her mama had told her not to worry about concerning herself with those kind of things.

"Play with us, Jimmy!" she begged. "Everybody else thinks they too big to play. You don't, do ya', Jimmy?"

"Of course, I do."

"That's what you think," she said.

"Where's your sister?" asked Jimmy, pretending not to have heard the impish little girl.

"She went to see the movies with Bobbie Jo." Then a smirk grew on her face. "They've been gone 'bout an hour . . . Why? You like my sister, Jimmy?"

"Naw."

"Do ya' think she's cute?"

"Hardly." Jimmy smiles.

"Aw, yes you is! Everybody said they saw you cry that day you couldn't play basketball and stuff with Bobbie Jo. Bobbie Jo said you was no good, anyway."

Jimmy doesn't answer.

The girl begins to become frustrated.

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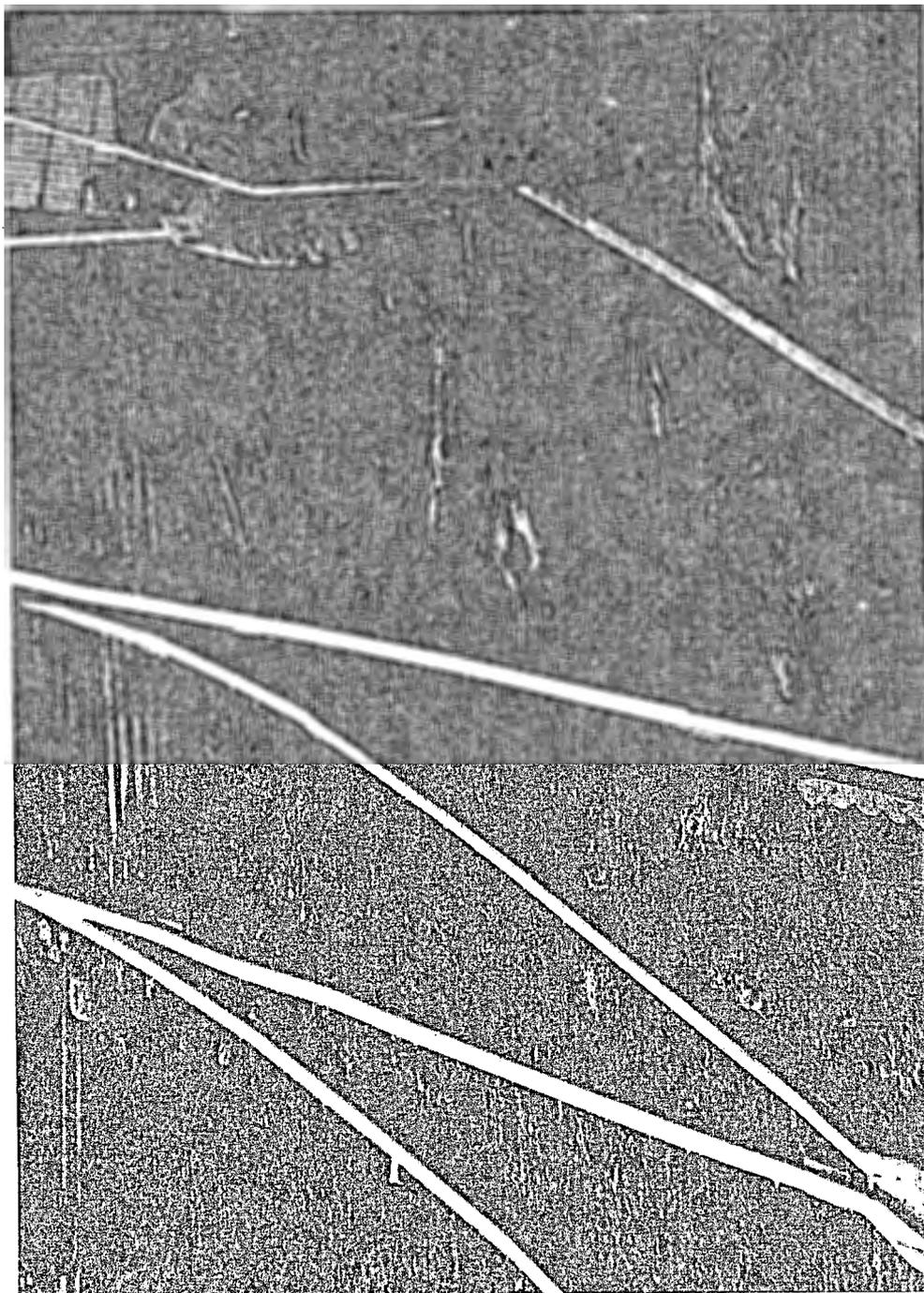
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You know, go round in circles.



Self Reliance

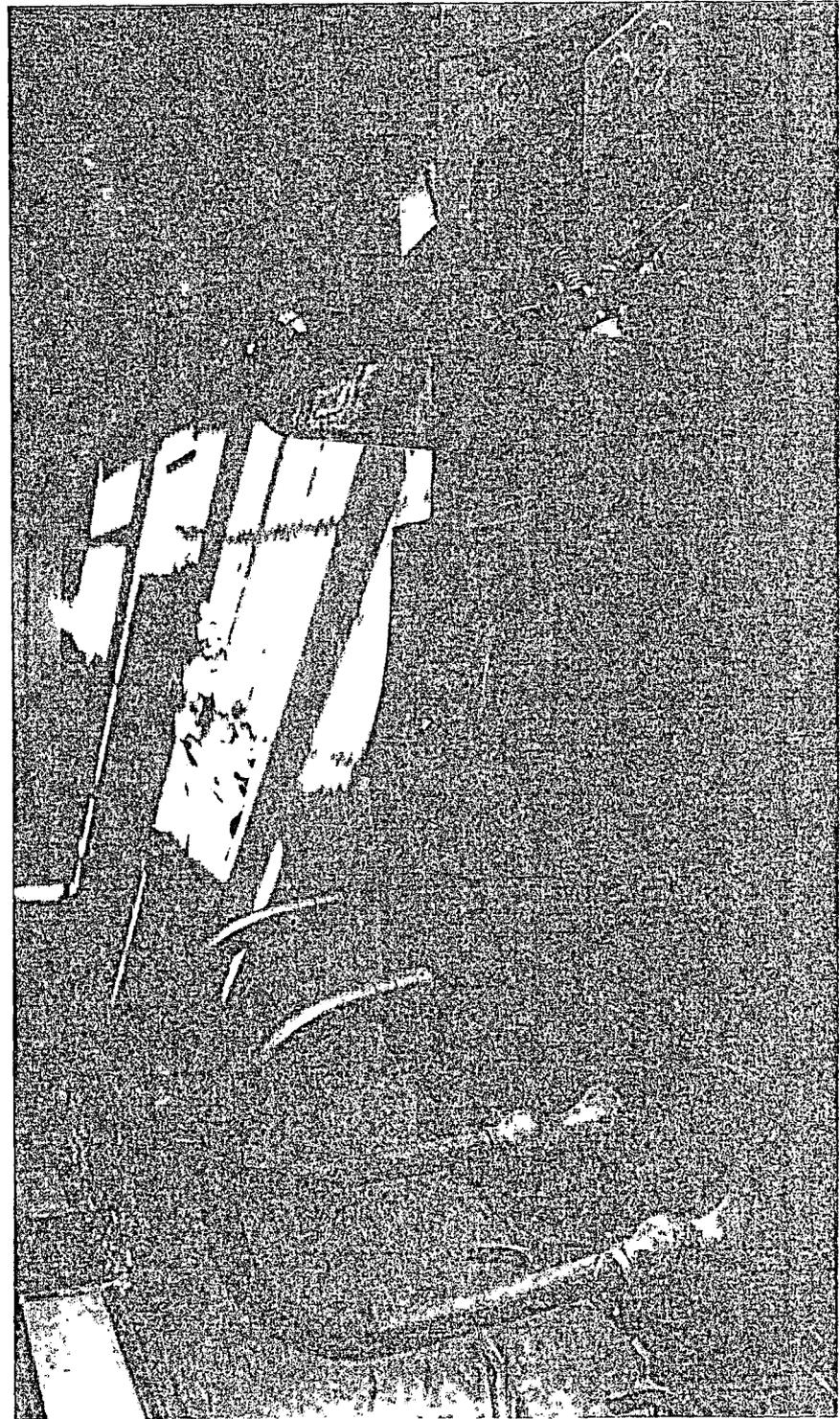
I exist like a whisper in a stranger's silence
Until I am safe within my yellow walls.
A sleep-inducing room where the calmness appeals t
Stepping out beyond my body
My selves converse with each other
And comb each other's hair
Like sisters.

Alice Yvonne Jackson

Cerebral Compass

To answer questions only Frenchmen ask,
My tongue picks words like grapes in South Bordeaux.
A yet unsure cerebral compass shakes.
Perspective vague, my wine is slowly vin.
My mouth, now bouche, awakes from sleep and says,
"Ah oui, ce type est con je sais." My lips
like pudding jiggle. Glottal gestures come
and quicken. Now the compass needle clicks,
and out pour words in almost native tongue.
"Tu veut encore un autre verre de vin?"
I ask, and then a stranger taps my back.
"Hey, you speak English, don't you," penetrates
my ears. Cerebral compass jarred again,
I stammer, "Oui, uh yes, I guess I do."

Michael Jensen



Sleeping With Mother

Her face, sagging in his absence, gazes into the dull night. Friends and strangers gone, in these first moments of quiet we sit together. I watch her worry about the night, ask, "Should I sleep with you Mother?" She gives a heavy nod.

I enter
the restless room after her wearied head has said goodnight to the funeral day. Contorted, her body swallows the emptiness of their bed. My father's half is dark and untouched, she has not taken his pillow between her thighs as I would. Her numb arms hug her own half for comfort.

I feel for his space and wonder
if she sleeps. One rustle of sheets puts me inside, motionless. This bed is not mine.

Her still body calls, urges my voice,
"How are you?" Hoping for silence, unwilling to hear more sorrow than her body rolls, I wait until her tired sigh rises over her head.

I struggle to stay with her, try to wake with her tossing her uneven breaths. But exhaustion takes us apart until the peak of morning when she arches her back and goes to the mirror:

This is real
and forever

my body full of her memories.

Karen K. Johnston

Cut Up

The newness of solitude gets old, worn down like kitchen chairs, the ritual of my clothes nestles in sagging cushion

I start bringing some of you back into my home.
I believe I'm strong enough to be surrounded.

I will listen again to your music. Play it out, wear melodious fibers down, woven pieces of song will hang on my body until they are threadbare

And become something different: cut ups for bookmarks of finished chapters.

I will be another woman.

Karen K. Jol

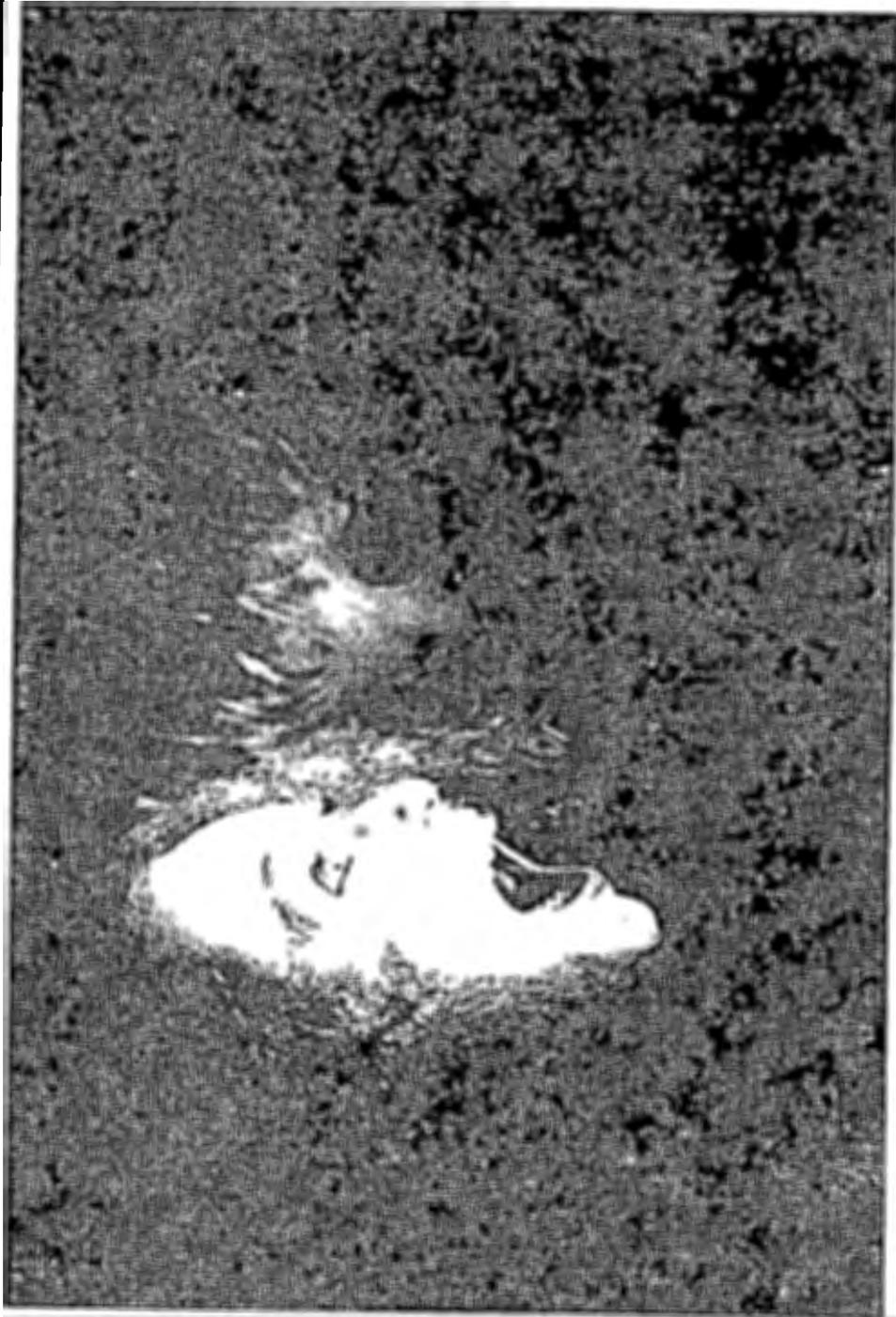


Photo by Sandra Wilson

Drum Blues

A shower of grizzled rain incites
the dawning night and drizzles pain.
Relentless melody shimmers my
intensities till I'm blue and black.
No matter--play on. Let the beat
come in tap shoes--tap dancing on a
drum. I'll dance too.

"Say buddy--can you play this
tune? My momma told me when I was
20, 'I don't know who your daddy
is.'"

"Naw man, get yourself a trumpet.
I ain't got time to be specific. I
play only general pain."

Marcellus Leonard

111th & Vincennes

Music's fast
up on the corner.
Niggers dig and jive
slappin' hands n' back
walkin' scoop dip,
talkin' loud and live--
up on the corner.

Daddy hangs
up on the corner.
From the time that I was five,
forty years back,
he was there talkin' shit
zoot suited, cool and hip,
Stacey Adams, Dunlap slick
up on the corner.

Pop's Tavern's
up on the corner.
Old up-on-it chicks
barter virtue for some time,
spread voluptuous hips
and garner headaches
up on the corner.

Let's walk
up on the corner,
peep on the huddled cliques
leanin' rappin',
watch the buses turn around
where the trolleys used to.

You kin cop a dime--cash;
hang around a bit
like bein' dere all the time
is what be happenin'.
Watch the ladies turn around
the way men used to.

New faces always be
up on the corner.
Some took they daddy's spot;
some tried it and got caught;
others say dat dey be hustlin'.
I jes be waitin' for the bus to turn ar

Gits my transfuh n' my change
pays de crowd no nevuh mind
I jes be thankful
I kin stand up
on the corner.

Marcellus Leonar



Photo by Joseph Eilts

Escape

Her fears wind around her, enclose her, hold her under, a Houdini stunt she's had no instruction in escaping. She writhes dramatically, wiggles her toes, clutches water in her fingers, grimaces, the wide straps slip a half inch, the audience cheers, a woman in the back row shouts encouragement, the spangled assistant strokes the air gracefully, and smiles, and no one seems to notice that the magician is drowning.

Christine M. Maier

Out of Darkness

The tired, old man sits
in his chair, expressionless.
The blue smoke drifts slowly
into the darkness as
intermittent ashes fall
silently, unnoticed,
to the darkness below.

Through the orange glow
of the cigarette,
I see dark thoughts
etched indelibly on
the old man's face:
"Another operation.
Another one to add to the six
over the past six years.
Why."

Still he sits, motionless.
I ask him if he now
thinks there is.
"Don't even think
such questions!
Of course there is.
But,
it hurts.
The blasted arthritis"

It's dark out,
but through the yellow light
of the harvest moon,
I can still see the heart-rot
in the old oak out back.
"A lightning strike years ago,"
he suddenly whispers.

I turn to him.
The last ash,
cool and implacable,
begins to fall.



My City Brother Writes That He Thinks of Buying a Kitten

My brother writes: he has found a nice kitten with stripes.
For his door he is thinking of buying a stronger lock,
against some enemy he has heard of.
If I see my "best friend" some morning, I'll tell her,
"A certain mysterious kitten knows my habits."
I'm not sure if she'll answer.

By evening, some pretty stray must be
lost in the street. How long would an urban owner
search for its face? Now in my mental picture
it sits, up on my brother's fire escape, his,
held to his chest, in both arms. Shy,
not handled in how many weeks. My brother
will have to be taught to keep living:
Even the kitten takes a rest very far from Love.
This would be proof, the scratched heart
that returns.

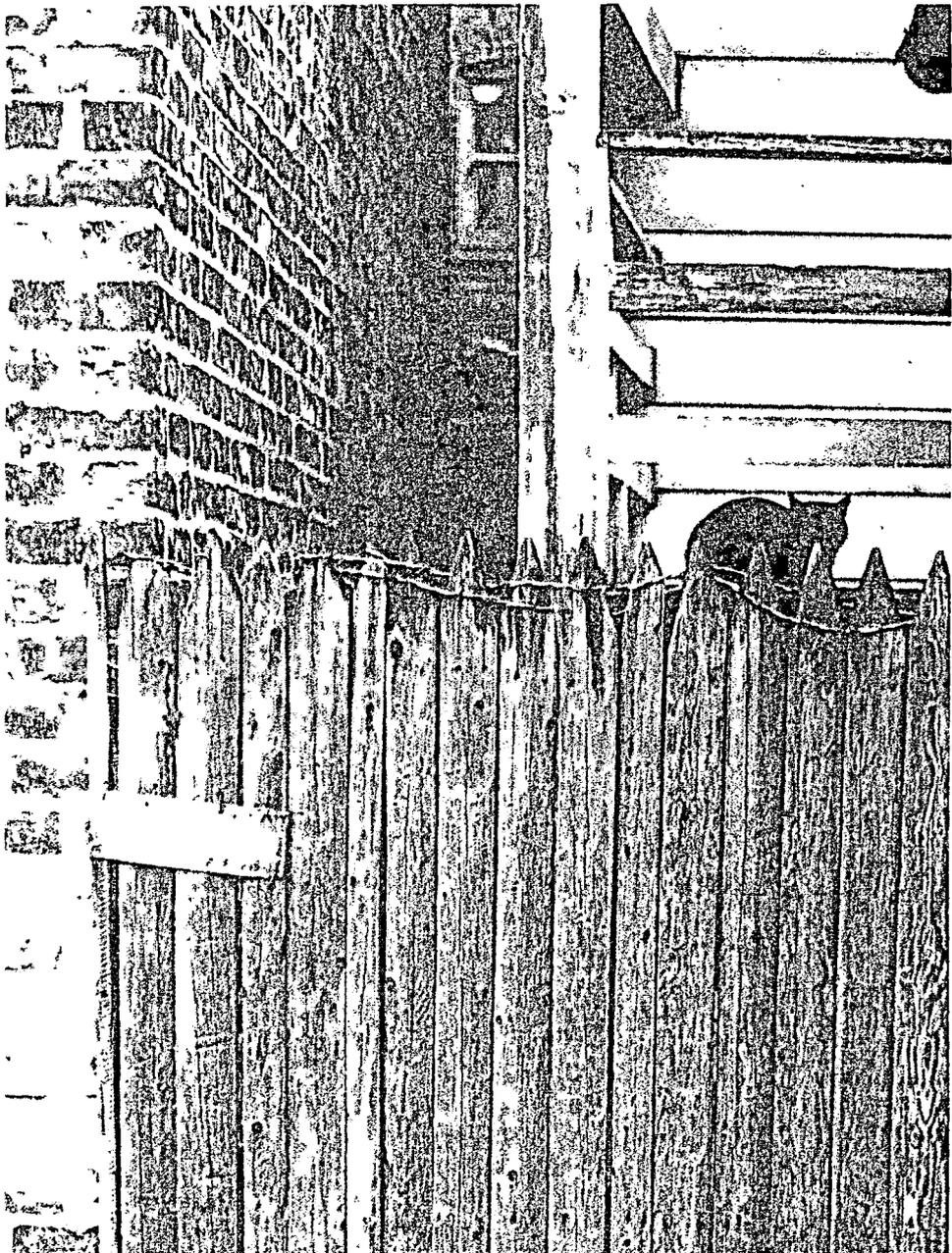
Five or six days in my darkness, a man I could love
returns my kisses. I am surprised, proud.
There's no way to tell someone else
where to hide in the world.

Priscilla Price

Polar Bear

If the world is not whimsy
then why are you here,
standing up in a puddle of ice?
You cannot help but breathe
cold between bars
while your black-nosed cubs play
dead. Bear, you inspire warmth
not fear, melt up white
into unbarred skies.
Neighborhood boon of winter,
brushing against so many lives,
you are mother, brother, home
and the lonely know your birthday.

Priscilla Price



Research

by Andrew Saindon

Late last night I had to take a leak so I stopped at this place and as I was going in there was this fat woman with lots of makeup coming out and then right behind her was a real square-jawed pretty boy young model guy you know the kind you would see with a mustache on a horse with a cigarette etc in some glossy magazine? Well anyway as I was going by she reached back to hold his hand and I caught his eyes which he averted quickly but it was too late because I knew already I'm a scientist you know

I'm in the lab doing some preparatory stuff before I call the guys in the shack and tell them to fire it up and she just strolls right in in that blue dress you know the one with the slit? I really want to ask her how the hell she got past Buddy the security dude but I don't I just keep on going like she's not there I just got the paraffin block out of the fridge and was setting it up on the goniometer

What's a goniometer? she asks

Well I reply it's sort of a cross between a bar stool and a screamingly accurate protractor and by the way how the hell did you get in here? (Boy I really hate when I give in to her like that I speculate (wonder) what would happen if I clamped her face in the goniometer vice and fire a beam of thermal protons at her pineal gland Hee hee hee) I just told Buddy that you forgot your lunch (she holds up this big Carson's shopping bag) and he just smiled and looked at my legs through the slit and let me in

There were of course shoes and shit like that in the bag but no lunch

Tell me about what you do here she says

Like what? I ask

Like what's that big fucking block of paraffin doing on the goniometer?

she asks back

I decide that I will answer her because usually she has as they say a pretty long fuse but when she uses the F-word it means that she has as they say reached the end of her rope The last time she said that word was when G spilled the chocolate milk on her cat (actually I saw that G pretty much poured the milk on the cat Blinky not so much spilled it but she turned around just as he was putting the glass back on the table Another thing I think that made her say the word was that when she first yelled at him we just sat there smiling which made her even more pissed off so

Well I say we accelerate sub-atomic particles using this big circular magnetic chamber and then fire them if you will at various targets (like carbon graphite and paraffin I say with particular emphasis) and by studying how the particles are absorbed and/or deflected by the target we can learn certain things (incident energy lattice structure and other polysyllabic fertilizers/budget expenditures) about the (flourish flourish) structure of the UNIVERSE

OK she says Don't forget we have to take G to lunch today

G is my son from my first marriage and I don't like to say his whole name because it brings back thorny memories Also speaking of thorny I'm starting to wonder about this blue dress business G as you don't know yet because I haven't told you is fifteen years old and when I was that age LUST was my best friend and I know that G has lots of friends but that doesn't mean he hasn't invited LUST over for a beer or two now and then figuratively speaking The whole point of this is that Sue (with the blue dress with the slit my current roommate) is rather attractive in a chesty sort of way and I can't help but wonder if G like Buddy the security dude will just stare at the slit and think of what they would do if she would only let them things like chewing her nipples and taking off her panties and I don't think I have to continue One time I think G was about seven or so he asked me after school one day Dad he said why can't I play in the park after dark? After all it is only right across the street

Even though he was just seven or so I think he understood when I told him that after dark the H S kids gather to invent new ways to drink and smoke and swear I was glad that he understood or appeared to that much but I was also glad he didn't ask about the stupid loud j h s girls who laughed too much who sat in the cars with the H S boys Now that he's fifteen though I don't think there's any doubt that he knows their purpose in the great cosmic SCHEME of things as it were he is a smart kid On the way I stop at Bill's Liquors

I want a bottle of Chivas Regal Wild Turkey Johnny Walker Red Myer's Smirnoff Cutty Sark Seagram's VO Fleischman's Royal Crown Jim Beam Baccardi and some tonic water

Pardonnez-moi monsieur mais c'est un magasin "self-service"

OUI OUI (Yes Yes) of course Pierre I was just checking

I tried to give Giselle a smoldering look while she put it all in the trunk I tipped her 50 cents and then she winked at me It's a start I'm glad everybody's using plastic now because I can drive around like a maniac and not break the booze

Please don't

Drive like a maniac

Back off sister just because I said I CAN drive around like a maniac (wildman) doesn't mean I WILL drive around like a maniac I hate it when you get like this

Shut up and kiss my ass I'm not like this at least not yet

The mood quickly lightened as we mutually agreed that our problems seemed minor now that the bar is freshly stocked Nothing like a freshly stocked bar to put things into perspective Picked G up at his H S Difficult to drive and see if he's getting a hard-on (boner stiff-guy woody) while staring at Sue's legs Easier to look for furtive glances Furtive glances are usually a big give away

How is school?

OK My guitar lessons are going good

I wonder about this boy of mine sometimes His grades are good and/but he says the word like B B King (accent on the git) unl Jimi H (his favorite accent on the ar) More important things think about (dwell on) Like trying to stay calm in a goddamned Milwaukee Shakey's Pizza with a Ph d in Sub-atomic Interaction Particle Physics and I wonder if you could TURN UP THAT FUCKIN Grandpa JONES BANJO MUSIC A LITTLE LOUDER

A Prologue to the Main Story Which However Really Serves No
Purpose Other Than to Be a Prologue
(Or Something Like That)

by Peter Sav:

"I kill things," she said one windy afternoon.*

*Author's note: The prologue has begun. Please disregard if you have no desire to read this wholly unconnected opening section.

I smiled mostly because I enjoyed smiling.

She continued, "Bugs mostly. Sometimes small animals, occasionally a yak or two. Working my way up to people."

"Well, heck, that's actually quite swell. Everyone should have a hobby. I do some soap carving, ya know.***

**Author's note II: Perhaps this prologue was a bad idea. I mean, how many people really care about what the hell is going on in a prologue that has nothing to do with the main story? Although it is true that the two characters talking here in this meadow are indeed in our main feature, why bother to make the readers read irrelevant dialogue? IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE, DAMMIT! I mean, does the writer, meaning me, even care one IOTA about the concerns of the reader? Apparently NOT! Well, enough of that, please stay tuned because it can't last much longer.

"It's funny, ya know," she would say in that voice of hers, "how obsessed people are with sex and death."

"I wouldn't know," this would be me talking now, "I've never experienced either."

She said nothing. She popped my arm back in its socket.

"Why thank you," me talking again. "You have a lovely touch. Is that really your hair?"

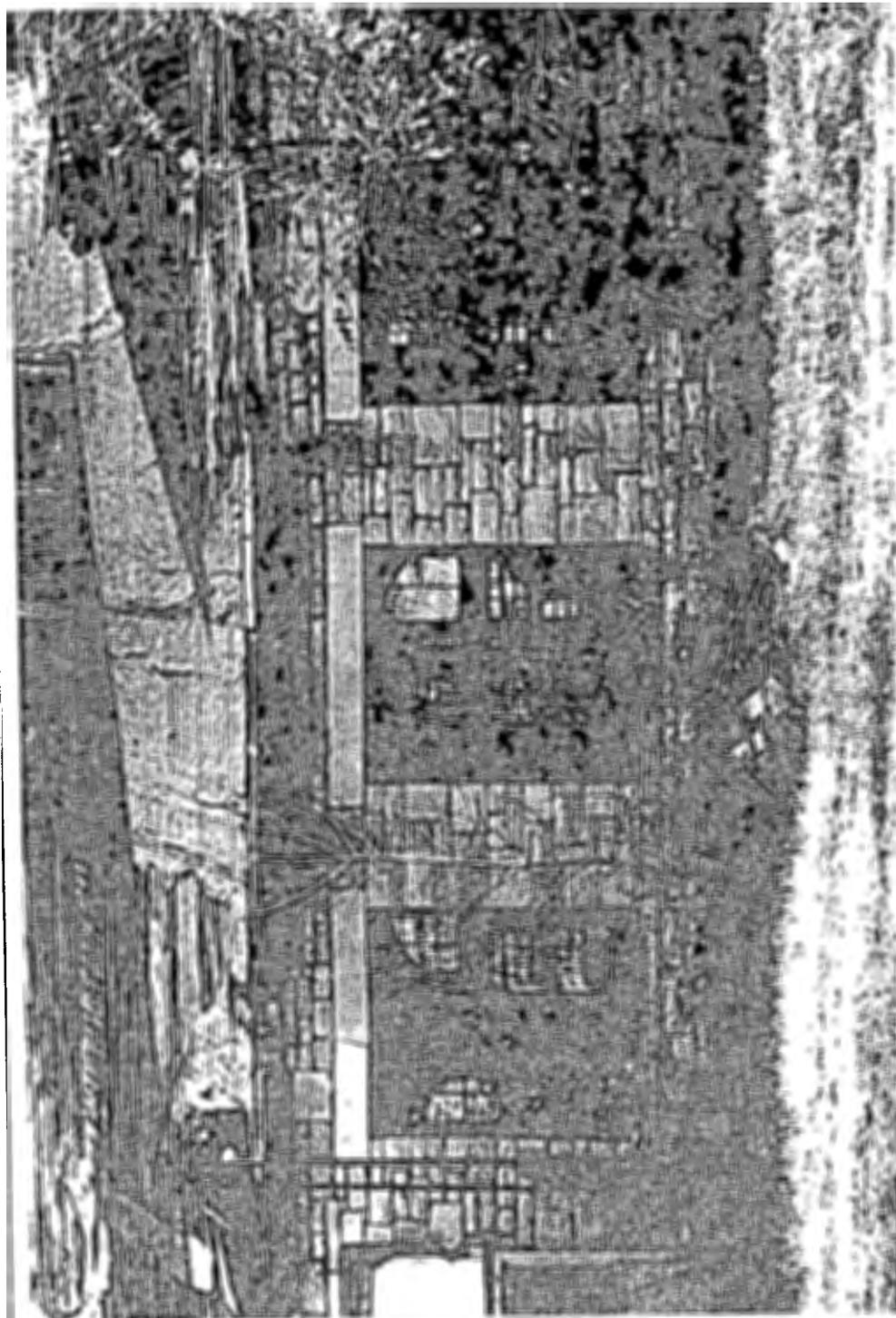
She shook her head "no."

Me: "You're the bees' knees. What say we paint this town in bold colors?"

Her: "I'd love to, you know that, but you're beginning to repel me."

Me: "I can't help that. Attraction is purely subjective."

Her: "And love is ever falling."



Me: "How disillusioning. How disenchanting. How
dismembering"

WELL ENOUGH OF THAT ROT SEEING AS HOW IT'S TIME FOR OUR
FEATURE PRESENTATION

"A Tender(ized) Love Story"***

***Author's note III: The first three sentences of this story
are not mine, nor do I wish to claim them as such. And now let's
begin our story already.

Mary worked in and part-owned a feminist bookstore in
Venice. I met her there lunchtime on my second day in Los
Angeles. The following Friday I chained her by the foot to my bed
for the whole weekend. That previous day, Thursday, was when I
discovered that she was a closet cannibal. This, of course, was
disappointing news for me simply because I really thought that we
had something special going. But it didn't take me long to
realize that she was only really interested in one thing—my
body. Well, that is, my body on a spit.

Since our initial interlude at the bookstore we had been
seeing each other quite often. I was rather attracted to her
intelligent, quick mind and the way that she wore her eyeliner.
Her attraction to me, on the other hand, was certainly more
obscure at the time. But as our first week together chugged
along, I began to understand the attraction.

Towards the end of our second meeting together, much to my
pleasant surprise, she invited me to dine with her at Fettucini
Hut. She ordered for both of us in Italian—a child's portion
salad for her and an extravagant seven-course meal for me. Not
wanting to seem rude, I devoured each course, from veal cutlets
to cheese ravioli, with a passion suitable only for someone of
advanced weight. Which, of course, I was, weighing in at a
portly three-hundred and twenty pounds.

As I slid each forkful of Italian cuisine into my mouth, I
noticed Mary's greyish-blue eyes widen and her face flush with
some uncertain excitement. Little gobs of saliva would seep from
the corners of her wide mouth when I would take an especially
hearty portion. At the end of the meal she smacked her lips as
if she were the one who had just completed a meal suitable for
twelve.

Mary herself was thin and gaunt. Her body was not badly
proportioned, but awfully boney and lanky. I concluded that she
must have been anorexic simply by her meager diet. It
seemed to me that all she really needed was a good meal or two.
But despite her physical deficiencies, I was really turned on by the
way she would look at me. She was the first one to make me feel
positive about my massive frame since the Fridge.

For the most part we talked about common interests—books
travel, and cold cereal. She seemed distraught over the fact
that Quisp and Quake went off the market years back, but seemed
encouraged over the recent success of Cinnamon Toast Crunch.
Much to my dismay, she sidestepped all of my questions concern-
ing her past life and really only seemed interested in my dietary
habits. She also made several poorly connected allusions to
Melville's Typee that baffled me at the time.

It wasn't until that Friday morning that I finally put all
of the pieces together. That previous night we had slept together
for the first time. She was great in bed, a woman who really
knew how to use her mouth. I was aroused from a heavy slumber
by Mary's sharp little teeth nibbling at my left ear. I rolled over
and was immediately stunned at how ravishing her face looked.
Her cheeks were naturally colored, her eyes bright and
cheerful, and her lips a lush red. Her nose even seemed to
be back in joint. About then I was feeling pretty good about
myself and my sexual antics of the previous evening. Within a
flicker of a moment self-confidence suddenly displaced self-
consciousness for the first time in my obese life. I put my arm
behind my head, as satisfied people are inclined to do, and it
was then that I noticed something wrong.

Sometime during the evening my lover had taken a huge chunk
out of my right thigh. I immediately asked her if she knew what
had happened to the huge chunk of flesh that had once been
a part of my thigh. She responded, without the least sign of
remorse, that she had pared it off with her original ginsu and
dined on it while I was napping. I felt used in a most profound
sense of the word.

Morally befuddled by my delicate feelings for her and her
delicacy feelings for me, I slipped out of bed, hopped over to
top dresser drawer, and pulled out my cast-iron handcuffs that
had bought at a Shewanee flea market years ago. Before she could
say "New York Strip," I fastened one end to her left ankle and
the other end to my bedpost. Suddenly I began to have that old
sinking feeling again that one associates with fallen love.

And Mary just lay there, another month's meals torn from her
grasp by something called fate.



Ruth

She stood firm on the cliff's edge, short legs
balancing her in that space between rock and sky,
the salt wind ruffling her grey hair
like the wrinkled hand of an old lover.
She warned us not to stand too close.
We were grown, but we did not know the rocks as she did.

I had never seen the ocean before, and Ruth
watched me wade in the shallows, salt
clinging to my ankles. "Makin' freands
with 'en, are ye?"—her keen eyes
dark as the feathers of a tern.

Ruth walked as if she'd ridden a horse since the day
she was born and had just dismounted.
In New Zealand, the schoolchildren had taken
turns riding her horse while she wrote
letters to her Dorset sweetheart.

She returned and married him, and their child
was the land. They traced its delicate features
onto grid maps, marked the color of the cliff rock;
cradled the dank soil with gentle hands.
And then the earth called one keeper to itself.

The day we went to the churchyard was
the first time Ruth had seen his grave
beneath the yews. She stooped
to trace the carved name, to feel
the hollow curves.

"'ello, Jim. I'll be seein' ye."

Brenda Stalcup

ecraft

know these crafts; my handiworks display
e magic in my hands--how easily
shape clay, carve and burn the wood, nimbly
ave thunderbolts in blankets, black and grey.
ese earth-creatures bear all my dreams, obey
e plan of my design; the tapestry
thoughts is brought into reality
rough grainy wood, soft fleece, and yielding clay.

t sometimes when I work, it seems the wood
s visions of its own and guides my thought
follow its design. My hands' swift skill
es tangible the dreams of trees that stood
sunlit contemplation while they sought
neone to bear their secrets, do their will.

Brenda Stalcup

Wind A'Rising

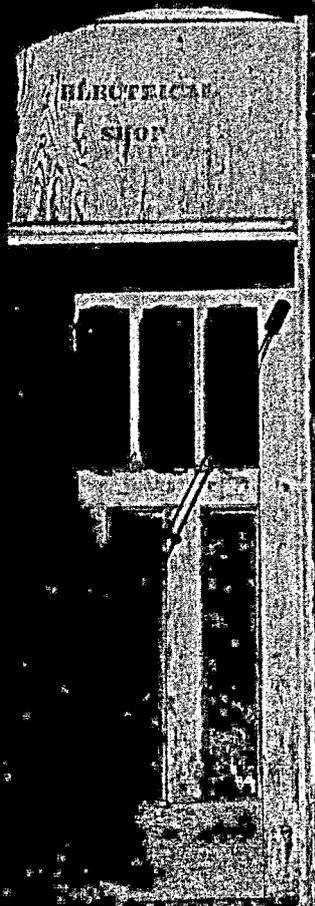
Don't I hear the wind a'rising?
No, Pa-pa, the kettle's singing.
It's the steaming of the kettle
For the tea I will be bringing.

Don't I hear the wind a'rising?
No, Pa-pa, the fire is burning,
Blazing with the added kindling,
Crackling when the log is turning.

How I wonder what he's hearing,
Wonder what his ear is tuned to.
Is it something far off calling?
He, alone, that it communes to?

Now, the night has grown more silent
Softened by his shallow sighing,
Growing fainter every minute;
While, outside, the wind is rising!

Nettie Strohkirch



You Died and Carved a Cave Inside My Head

which once was filled with love so bright it gave
a radiance to the core of me. Gray like lead,

my hollowed eyes stare vacant now as medicine
abates the fevered dreams that pave
the darkened path to caves inside my head.

The melting dream takes shape again, a bed:
two lovers arch, groan, sigh. I rave,
"A dagger rips apart my core, gray like lead!"

The answering face has quiet eyes. It said,
"I lift your yoke and you will rest" and, grave,
it smiles at knives and caves inside my head.

Phantoms join into a towering thread
of light which slashes deep into the cave
and purifies the core of me. Gray like lead,

dawn emerges, thick. Then streaks of red
and starlit gold begin to tint my cave.
You died and carved a cave inside my head,
but radiant once again, not gray like lead.

Helen Walker

(Although you build houses)

Your shoulders
are broad not from building houses but
for giving me shelter--one who never
travels far from home but gets lost anyway.

Your hands are sure, sureness bred from
Affinity with earth and wheel, yielding
vessels of shoulder-strength, palm-cool.

My eyes
draw my hands to your glazed gifts. Yet
as I hold their placid curves, I long for That
which is not so sure, strong . . .

In your eyes

I see richly textured fabrics unfurling;
Pain, woven from nubby doubts and gauze dreams
whipping, fluttering snapping
against their blue.

A crack, a fissure in that clear glaze will
Unleash pure hot energy that will
Explode your crafted shelters and
Pierce my heart with splinters.

Kathy Zeidenstein