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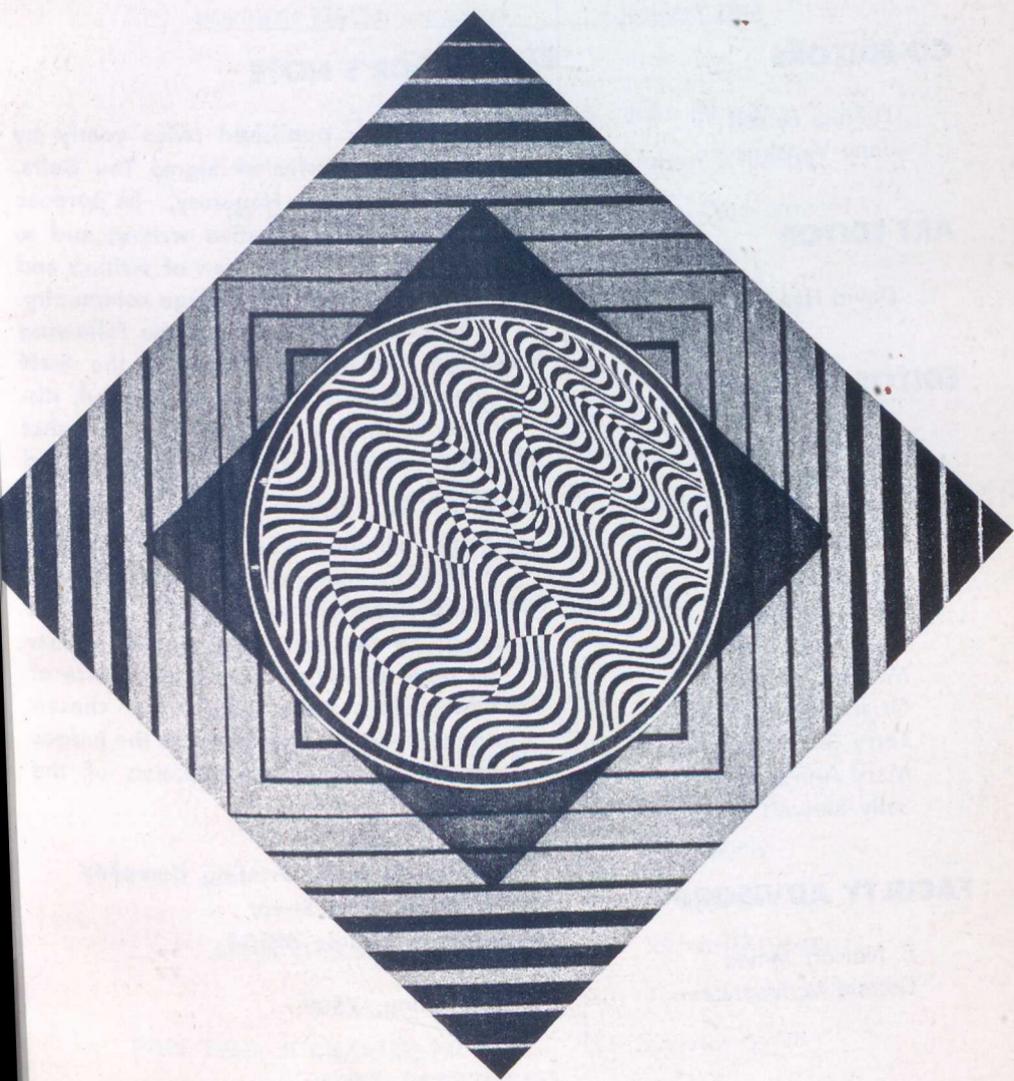
TOWERS

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

JANUARY 1965

VOLUME XXIII





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EDITOR'S NOTE

TOWERS is published twice yearly by Xi Delta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, National English Honorary. Its purpose is to stimulate creative writing and to promote an appreciation of writing and literature within the college community. The prose and poetry in the following pages reflect the choice of the Staff members only, who carefully read, discussed, then voted according to what they felt to be best of the submitted material.

Prize winners were chosen by four faculty members of the English Department from the twenty-four selections made by the staff. The awards appear on page 47. They reflect the choice of the judges only and were chosen anonymously. Our thanks to the judges for their careful consideration of the entries.

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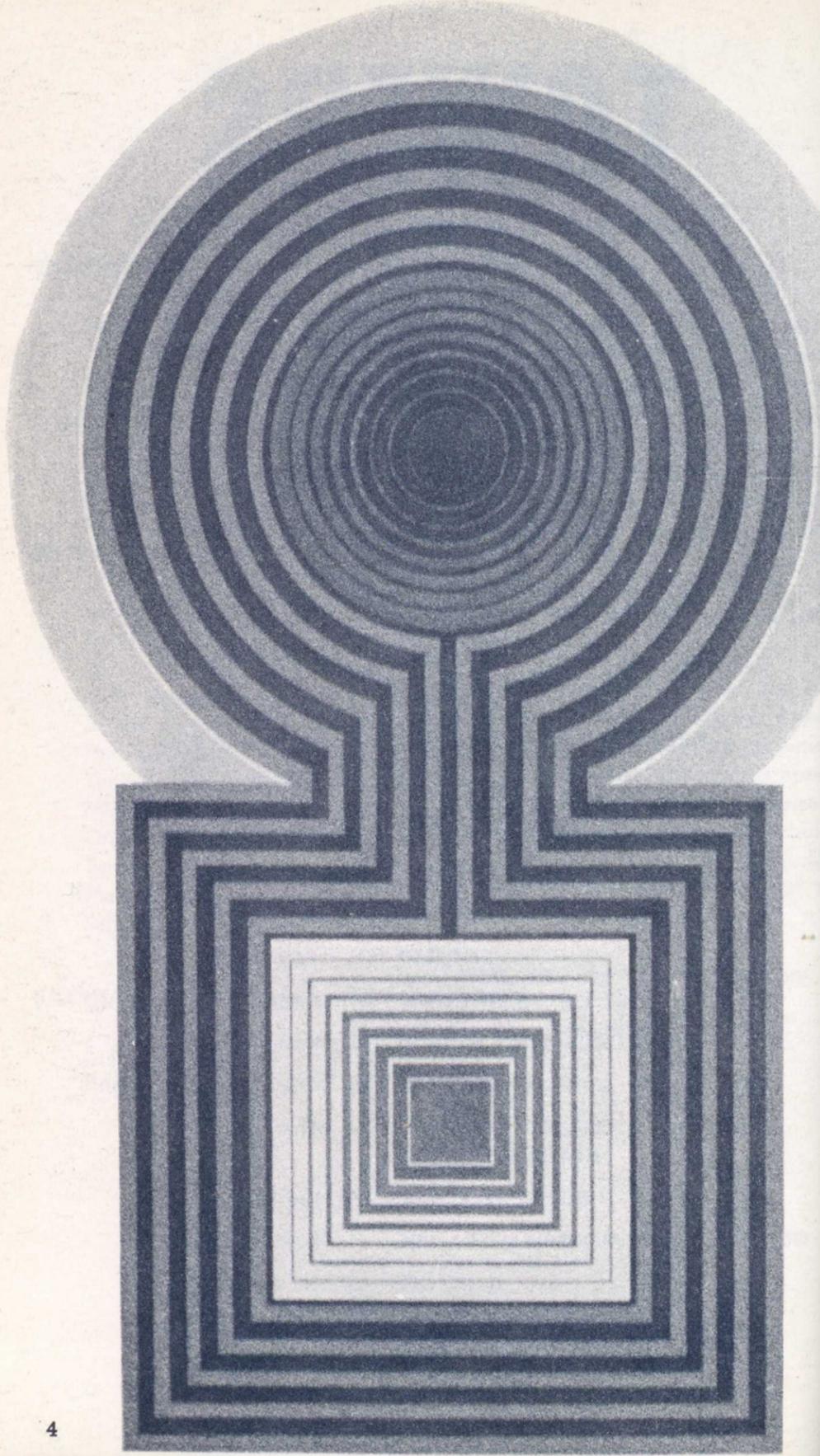
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A SHELL BEACH

Forever lapsing into black,
forgetting present time,
forgetting pain
and lapsing back and lapsing back
I go . . .

A thin line of water's foam breaks
across a shell beach in the night and, broken,
is pulled
beneath the water
as a thin line of water's foam comes on
and breaks . . .

No more to lapse, no more forget!
Away dull black, no darkness yet.
Show me to this nothing life
and through life's pain
I'll find some light which will sustain
me; which will sustain
till banal black returns again
to claim me with its peaceful wheeze:
Amen.

Tiny shell chambers of
purple and pink and ivory
glitter like shattered glass
in the moonlight for a moment
wet
until the water breaks
and with a sigh comes through
to dilute

then dim then drown them in its blue —
But water finally leaves again
pulled back
pulled back
and gives them to the moonlight . . .

The sound the chambered water makes
while coming through and —
now that water's gone —
the sound of dry air moving on the shells:
Listen!

—John Slusser

SOMETHING OF ORPHEUS

Carefully caressing the lyre,
The fingers are wet with blood
And the skin slides loosely
Over the rotted flesh.
It is a pity that corrupts
By drawing a golden cord
Around the upward reach of song.
Everywhere this singing is
To and from
The corrupted dumbness of beasts,
And it invokes
The melodic smell of death
Where the joints of the hand
Fester and break open
In tune with the music.
Music is immortal,
And the world rots around it,
Smearing consciousness
(No less pure than the soul)
With the fluid odor of decay.

Better to die
And pretend cleanness.

— Hubert F. Lappe'

IN A PILLAR OF A CLOUD

The boy turned restlessly in his sleep. There was a small determined bounce at the foot of the bed and he knew, even in his dream, that the little yellow cat had arrived and was making its way in a light measured tread toward the pillow. The boy's dream changed to include the cat and he waited, knowing in his sleep of the sounds and sensations to follow: the whiskery touch, the rattling purr, and the day unfolding to him as he gradually awoke. The drifting calls of the mourning doves outside the bright window, his grandfather's shout to the dog, the sunshiny breeze rattling in the cottonwood tree — all would gently nudge him to wakefulness until they were no longer isolated snatches of sound but an insistent message.

He opened his eyes. The cat's face was no more than two inches away, watchful with some deep urgency. The boy swung rumpfirst off the high ancient bed, sliding on his stomach until he pulled his top sheet halfway to the floor. He stood for a moment savoring the notion that he was awake, that it was a promising day — a special day — and that there was breakfast waiting for him in the kitchen. In the time it would take him to pull on his shirt and britches, it would all begin.

He thought of the white horse. He could almost see him again, the way he looked last night in the dream, close and warm, the luminous skin shivering and caressing the boy in the smoky-bright smell of horse. He remembered the quick turning of the milky ears, the polite curious lipping at his shirt front and the secret place where he had run his hand up the satin neck and under the coarse white-gold mane.

He had never really been that close to the white horse. But he knew that someday, perhaps today, they would become friends. He was sure, from his dreams awake and sleeping, that the white horse would recognize him.

He was standing in the kitchen now, unaware of his progress out of the bedroom. He let his eyes cross just a little, to unfocus them from the big black iron skillet on the stove, to think of how it would be.

The horse would be standing in the shade, perhaps, with the shadows of the leaves dappling the silken back. There would be no one near, and when the boy approached, the horse would turn his head, slowly, until the boy could see into the endless blue-brown depths of the eyes that had seen and known everything. He would walk up to the horse as if he had done it every day of his life.

"I am Tillman Nestor," he would say. He would say it quietly and formally, so that the horse would know that the boy loved him.

"And you are . . ." Here was a recognition so great that it was a nameless thing, like the feel of himself inside his skin when he stopped to consider it with a deliberate awareness. How could there be a speaking name for some-

thing like him — so big, like the engulfing red and purple waves of sleep, and so small as to fit into his mind's eye, galloping on a wind-blown horizon, past schoolhouse windows, always to be glimpsed in the distance? "Now, we will always be together."

In advance, the boy knew it would be necessary to say these words aloud, not so the white horse would know, but because it was imperative that the words be recorded to the unseen forces that cause everything to come out even and the small justices to be done. God, Tillman knew, was in charge of the big things, but Tillman Nestor knew that there were certain other things which could be controlled by a careful observation of accumulated ritual.

Just now, for instance, as the heat of the skillet handle pricked his thumb, Tillman Nestor snatched his hand away and thoughtfully approached the offending metal with the thumb of his other hand. Burned thumb pressed against his teeth, the boy applied its opposite member to the skillet, taking care to leave it there for no more or less time than he had accidentally left his other finger. He would not have been able to explain that by eliminating the possibility of favoring one hand he had banished the whole thing from his mind.

The screen door wheezed and slammed. "You don't git your breakfast, you be late," his grandfather warned. "Be late your first day's no good."

The old man trailed a length of squirmy wire across the floor, rolling it up in his hands in a rebellious loop. The boy watched the end of the wire flip-flop over the buckled linoleum in its journey to the big, dark, knotted hands. "Granpa, where's Ru'al Areas? Somewhere hereabouts?"

"All over. Right here. Down to river an' over to town. Anything not a town ru'al."

"I thought it war a town," the boy said, scraping the skillet. "I thought it war a name of a town."

"No, no," the old man said.

"Radio over to neighbors las' night say they no more school there, anyway," the boy went on. "That mean here, Granpa? They take the school away?"

"They don't take it away, boy. They jus' don't use it." The old man turned to look at the boy for the first time in the conversation. "Ain't nobody teach school, that's all. But you kin read an' write anymore. That all a workin' man need." He chuckled and knocked the boy on the shoulder with gentle curved knuckles.

The boy stood up. "Now I got a job. Someday I boss all The Farm. All Mister Peterson's horses, they be done by me." And the white horse, too, he thought. He'd have a boy, small like himself now, rub the white horse while he stood and watched to see that every move was right. And then he'd take the white horse in hand, leading him by a special bridle he'd made himself, and he'd trot that white horse up and down the road for everybody to see. Tillman Nestor and the white horse. See how the horse just skims along behind, not

being led at all, but following with his nose just behind Tillman Nestor's ear, never moving away, never dropping back? He'd be like Granpa was, even bossing Mister Peterson himself sometimes.

He started out the door, walked backwards across the dusty yard. "I come home this even', Granpa," he shouted, "you tell me again how you was at The Farm. An' about how you tol' people about the horses, an' about the desert folks —"

He was at the road, running. He was alone in an endless narrow world, a shimmering lane between whispering, creaking stalks of field corn, as far as forever. Above, a red-tailed hawk darted, then glided, resting its great wings on their cradle of rising warmth. The heat buzzed, and he slowed down to a walk.

Soon he began to point his toes with each step. He tucked in his chin and blew out his lips in a mighty snort. His rider reined him in too sharply, and he swung his head fretfully from side to side, pawing out with his front hooves. Now he began to trot, bringing his knees up quickly and throwing his feet forward. Not too fast — just so! His rider's flowing robes tickled his sides, and the cornfield was a vast desert, undulating and glowing under the white sun. He broke into a gentle gallop, leading the horses of his rider's tribesmen. They had been riding for days, with no water, but the horses of the desert drank the wind and never stopped.

His grandfather had told him that the horses at The Farm were the same horses as those in the Bible, about whom God asked Job: "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder?"

They were the same, the old man said. They were not like ordinary horses; even the new foals were older than Christ himself.

Tillman Nestor stopped. The desert dropped away. Ahead and to his right The Farm's pastureland began, and he knew that just around the bend in the road on the left was the big house, which he had heard was built on a stone foundation so that the people had a room underneath the floor.

And right before his eyes were the horses themselves, mares and foals and young stallions, all of the colors of the sun and earth, all with the memory in their eyes of a faraway hot wind, and the knowledge of a vast Eastern starlit night.

They were all on the far side of the pasture, under the trees, so that to the boy they were like a picture or a dream, with no sound or smell to them. He walked on down the road. There was no white horse among them, nor in any of the pastures

He turned up the lane that led to the long, low-slung barn, and to keep time to his thumping heart, his feet quickened again to a jog-trot. But he was a boy, now — Tillman Nestor's boy, with the same name as his grandfather's and the same dreams to tell the people who came to see and buy the horses. It

was even the same knowledge he had; of how his grandfather could rub a horse just so, and gentle the throb in a bone-slim leg just so, with strong fingers drawing the hurt out of delicate tendons, downward, down into the ground; he knew how to scrape packed dirt and stones from a horse's feet, and how to walk with a horse so that it knows where you are and what you are going to do next.

Yet when he tried to tell his name to the horseman who confronted him just inside the barn, it was almost as if he had forgot who he was and why he was there. His tongue made only a dry clicking sound on the roof of his mouth, and he could feel the skin on his face prickle. Suddenly he wished he had not come; it would have been easier to stay home and listen to his grandfather tell what it was like to see the white horse for the first time: "Some said he has a magic. I believe it; when I first see him, boy, he filled my eyes so I couldn't look any place else but him. I expect a man with all the bad things they is in his mind, look at him and forgit 'em all. Be like, seein' a thing so perfect, they no room for bad thoughts all a sudden. That when a man is free, boy; ain't a man **born** free."

The horseman was speaking, as if from a distance.

"Old Tillman's boy, aren't you? Well, you come along with me and I'll show you where you work. Come along now," and he led the way through the murmuring, shadowy barn, booted feet sighing into dusty tanbark. Overhead, sparrows cried and whirred in the rafters. The horses in the box stalls along the side of the barn swung their heads to watch them pass, rattled sleepy snorts and turned away again to take tearing bites of racked hay. There were ashy grays, chestnuts the hard gold of evening sunlight, rich dark bays, but not one of them a gleaming white. No matter; the old man had said the white horse was the last, after you had seen all the others.

They turned a corner, came out into the sunlight, and entered another barn. The boy blinked at the dancing speckles in the shadows and looked down at the straw on the floor to watch them fade away.

The trainer stopped at the first stall. "They five stalls in here. You be rubbing all the horses. Clean the stalls. Feed and water. This the stallion barn." He leaned against the door and studied the air above the boy's head. He was a very tall, which made Tillman Nestor reckon his age in direct proportion to his height, as his grandfather had told him to do with the girth of their cottonwood tree. For a moment they stood in silence.

The white horse whirled in the boy's mind. The unspoken question roared in his ears, but he could not speak. He waited.

"Well, now you start right now," said the trainer.

The boy stared at him. He wanted to look into the distant end of the barn, where two dust-flecked columns of sunlight crossed, barring the cool depths of the last stall from view. But he did not turn his head.

"Come along now. First horse, you take care of him, hear?" And the trainer left.

Tillman Nestor stood still, letting the horseman's words echo in his mind like ripples in a quiet pond. The horse in the stall in front of him came forward, pushing its nose through the bars. It was a dark young stallion, the vagueness not yet gone from wide-set eyes. Chin whiskers, soft as spider web, quivered at him.

On the floor there was a box containing brushes and soft cloths. Tillman Nestor began the day's work: rubbing, pushing against the hair with the curry comb, brushing clouds of dust up to the heavy-beamed ceiling, and polishing, until the stallion's coat lay smooth and shining against hard neck and haunch muscles. He ran his fingers through the mane and tail until they were like the black silk tassels he had once seen on a fancy armchair in a store window. He lifted each foot and cleaned it, and with its nose the stallion nudged the small of Tillman's back as the boy leaned over to brush the last speck of dust from a dainty foreleg.

Then he took a pitchfork and raked over the straw in the stall, carefully piling it up in the middle so that as the horse moved about it would become evenly distributed.

Slowly he worked down the line of stalls. One horse done, then two. Two more to go before the last stall. Outside, the day aged and wilted under a steaming sun, but in the barn it was cool as Christmas.

At last the boy heard a hush, as if the land had succumbed to the heat. In the late afternoon stillness, he saw how the light had changed in the barn, and he looked toward the last stall. It did not seem strange to him that the light still cascaded across the front of the stall as it had early in the day. He turned toward the end of the barn.

He walked very slowly, making sure that his feet set themselves down in a straight line. He let them carry him to the crossed shafts of golden dust, then he stopped, standing very straight. After a moment, he moved through the airy sentinels, feeling their warmth stroke his head and shoulders.

He looked into the stall, at the emptiness.

Clinging to the cold bars in a shaking heaviness, he rested his forehead on his clenched hands. The hugeness of the empty stall thundered at him; even the beloved image was gone from his mind.

After some time had passed it occurred to him to look for the white horse, and with no particular plan of search in mind, he stepped out into the summer twilight. Behind the barn was a sparse grove of trees, of sapling dancing in the west wind, the gentle breath of a sinking sun. The boy moved through them and emerged on a rise above a small meadow rimmed by hickory, cradling oaks, and jeweled birches. The sun sent their black shadow-streamers' across the grass and lighted the roof of the grove so that the glow seemed to drift down through the trees and lie trapped by the surrounding shadows.

He sat down with his back to the sun. The evening pulsed with voices now. Above him, the locusts set up a wall of sound, then sighed into silence. The dickcissels in the tall grass, catching the lull, sang their song of long summer days: ssszzzz, tk, tk, tk, tk. From their hidden homes the tree toads began their sing-song trill, and the boy saw one give a sudden hop out of a shadow. It landed so close to him that he could see the throbbing wheat-colored throat and the cool smoothness of the delicate mottled back.

The lights in the stallion barn blinked off, and the trainer and his boss, Mister Peterson, stood in front of the building in the hay-sweet dusk.

"Had to feed and water, myself," the trainer said, looking at the ground. "Tillman Nestor's boy come to work, done the stalls, rubbed the horses, but come time to feed and water, he's gone. Had to do it myself. Come time, he's gone."

Mister Peterson was staring into the distance, where the lights of his house probed the wooded shadows. His lips turned up a little at the corners, and he moved his head from side to side in a gesture of faint despair. "Took a disappearing spell, did he?"

The trainer looked up, as if to take his cue from the older man. "Ah," he reflected, "These kids, they all alike."

The trees became murmuring shapes. The boy looked up and saw the late afternoon's scattered clouds forming into a giant drifting thunderhead, etched gray and blue against a darkening sky. As he watched, the cloud writhed upward, and a snow-white turret appeared, illuminated suddenly by the departing sun. Pushed ruthlessly by lofty winds, the thunderhead top rolled outward. It sprang to glowing life, high above the sluggish grayness.

The boy felt himself jerk with surprise. He sat up, watching the cloud turret.

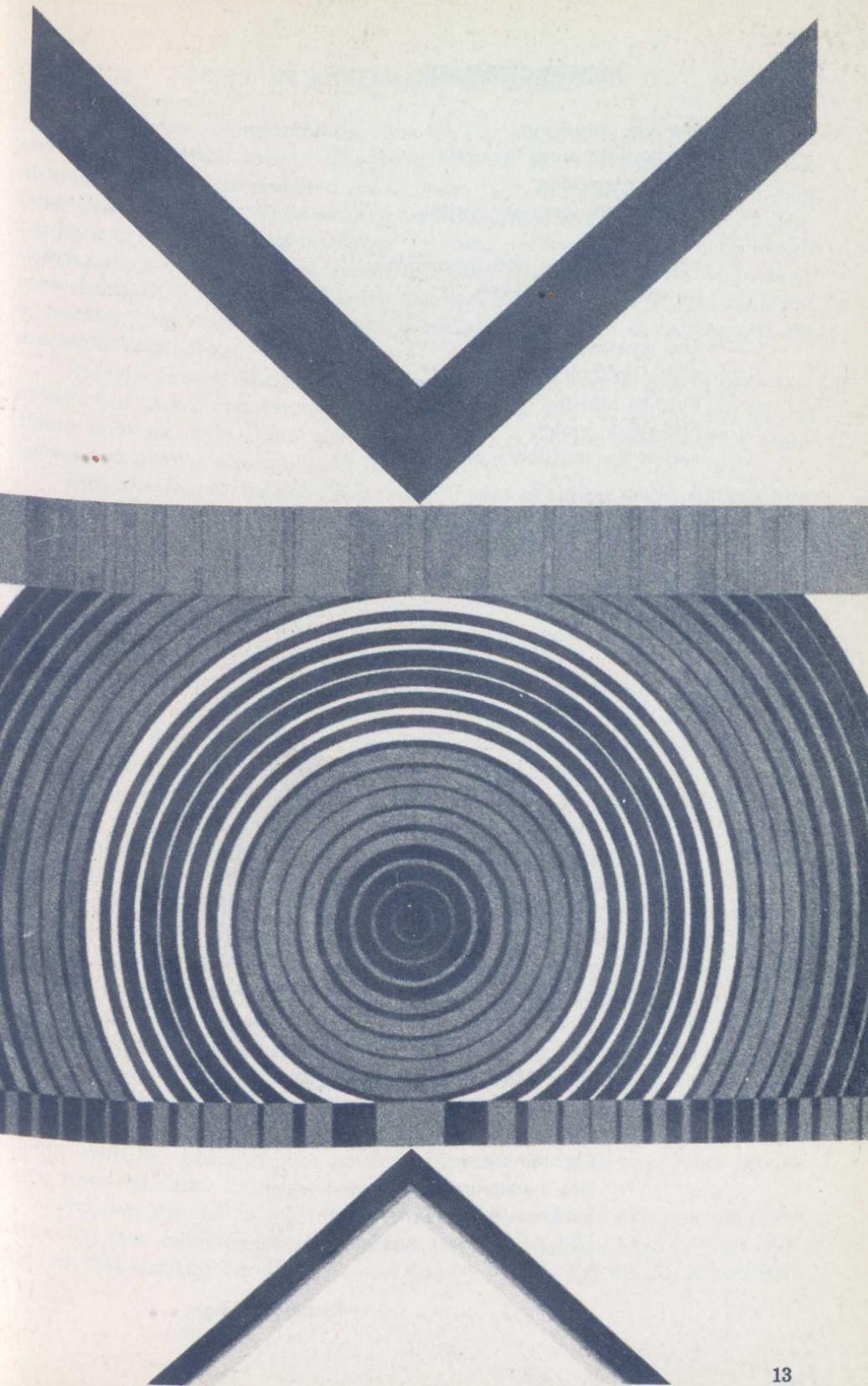
It was the white horse. It reared slowly, reaching forward with tireless front feet as if to gather the world under it and put it behind. Its neck was arched in perfection, draped by the tossing white mane. Its small haughty head searched the sky; muscles hunched and smoothed, strong and fine as silk.

Tillman Nestor watched until his eyes ached. A quietness settled around him and gradually he became aware of a kind of singing energy, the feeling he used to get when there was school and he could see the world through the window-pages of his books. He thought of his geography book and remembered how it felt when he found out what different parts of the earth were like, some hot and green all the time and others with nights that lasted for months. He felt now that he had learned something, but he did not know what it was. It was only the learning feeling that filled him, not the knowledge.

Then he thought for a moment that all at once he knew everybody, even people he had not met. It was as if he could hear their voices from far away, all calling their names to him, the way he felt when he sniffed the first breeze of spring, and it seemed to come from all over the world.

Presently he got up and started toward the barn.

Mary Dale Stewart



MONOCHROME

She sits unrocking,
her twilight mind inviolate
as her memories,
folded with lavender sachet,
as her body,
beautiful briefly and inaccessibly
as sparse thistle-bloom.

The amethyst evening,
alone enfolding her,
purples into night.
She sits in violet,
sad as the transience of lilacs.

— S. Pasia

SMALL PREFERENCE

Some yellow insect,
Chrome crazed,
Has a passion for my wrist watch.
Sublime incarnations, hell!
I'd be that small, and mark the time.

—Richard Krueger

IN A MOMENT OF EXILE

She had not wanted to move. She left her whole ten years of life behind, and everything most loved. The yellow house and her apple tree and the nineteen rows of corn, counted many times, with the birches at the end, had other people in them. They would chase butterflies and pick Mr. Hunt's raspberries and throw stones at his house. He was old and had a shrunken mouth without any teeth and all her friends had been afraid of him. He whips boys with chains, they said, but she knew that was a lie. She loved him, birds ate at his feet. He chased away the boys because they killed butterflies and ate the bird's raspberries.

The new brown house was big and ugly but she had no one to tell. Her parents had glowy eyes because of solid oak floors and big rooms, and all the others were too little. She wandered up and down the street full of silent houses and people who could not be seen.

Then she found the goldfinch nest. It was of white, thick, spidery film and hung like a net from the spindly branches of a lilac bush so big there was a room for her among the trunks at the bottom. The field around it was only the size of a back yard, but the damp, steaming weeds came almost over her head. She sat there, day after day. No one knew. When the little ones tried to follow, she hit them. When the mother asked her where she went, she lied that she was trying to find friends.

At first they flew away when she came. The female bird was grey and brown and left last and came back first, scolding with a crackly voice. On her nest she was quiet, and whenever the girl looked up, a dull brown eye would stare into hers. The male glowed in yellow just a bit darker and less clean than the ones in the pet shop. He would leave as soon as she began to crawl into her room. He would come back to his mate and leave again, and coming back the second time, he would hop nervously from twig to twig high over her head, and chirp in sweet, short, worried notes, and the girl would sit very still.

Soon even the father did not leave, and his notes became scales and trills that made her feel warm and quiet inside. She knew they were her friends and she stopped thinking so much about her years, except for Mr. Hunt. He was sometimes there with her in the little room hidden from the brown house and all the people she never saw, and she would talk to him. She told him about the friends above her and the babies they would share with her. She told him how the father stayed closer every day and soon would eat from her hand, with his bright beady eye winking at her. The little birds would fly awkwardly around her head and on her fingers, while the mother watched quietly with her peaceful eyes never leaving them. Soon now noise would come from the nest.

One day she ran to the field. It was windy and her thin hair whipped across her face, battling with an impatient hand. The ground was still wet with the rain that had kept her from the nest the day before, and the sky hung color-

less, but she was not conscious of the ground and the sky as she began to burrow through the hole formed by twisted branches.

Suddenly two dark forms flashed before her face. She heard a screeching sound, and again one, two hurtling bodies came toward her eyes. As she shielded them, a redness in her mind closed out all sound and she flailed her body wildly at them. The high, almost noiseless cries of hate that spurted through her teeth faded into low moans as she realized there was nothing to chase away anymore. She crouched in her wet room, her face buried in trembling arms, her mind crying in thought. They had left her. They had tried to hurt her and then had left her. The young must have been born and they all were gone. They never were her friends and stayed only because of the nest. She looked up at the motionless white mass above her.

In a moment all feeling sifted from her and left a hollowness. She memorized the pattern of the whiteness and black, angular weaving of branches against the sky for a long time, an endless time that would not stop; she could not stop her eyes from watching and her mind from feeling nothing and then she could not bear it all anymore. She rose to her feet, sobs still catching in her chest, and the nest turned into a white spot on her brain. Maybe they would return, maybe for a moment they had forgotten who she was, maybe the nest was still full. She locked her hands around the strong, thick trunk that diminished into the branch holding the nest high above her. She saw the face of Mr. Hunt before her but a new feeling covered it, and twisted her mouth and blazed in her eyes. Her arms quivered as she tugged at the trunk in her hands and the white spot in her brain grew larger and larger as she grabbed the higher branches and pulled them low and reached for the next ones. She panted, her whole face twisted and the white was veined in red and her lip, clenched between her teeth, dripped the red onto the earth-stained sleeve of her upstretched arm. There was no longer a reason for her to see what was in the nest; her mad movements and contorted face took up all her mind.

Then a color flashed downward twice. As her eyes followed, the branch turned ugly, wriggling, and very hot, and a great searing burned her heart as she freed it, as it sprang indifferently upward.

It took a long time for the scar to form over the wound made by two little blue heaven-eggs shattered on the ground at her feet, their contents melting into the mud.

Andrea Marshall

W. W.

Late one night, with a friend
Who knows, we walked in a sleazy rain.
When at once my friend cried out,
"There he is!"

I saw an ancient man
give us bright eyes,
With his white beard a glow
Took to an alley
running.

Slippery streets, on wet shoes
my friend and I pursued.

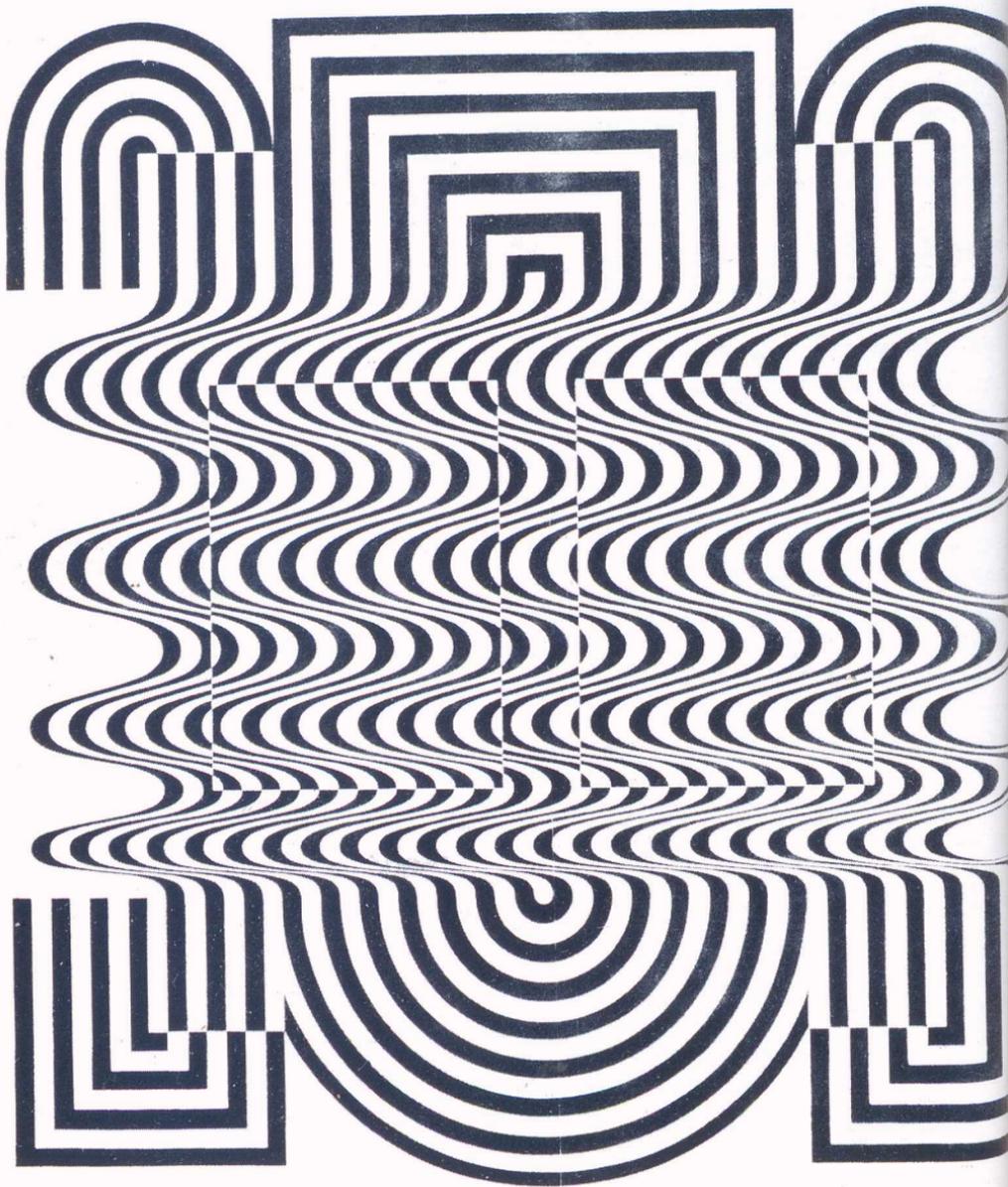
Clang!
"Ouch, damn"
My friend ran into
A garbage can.

Too late we saw
him scaling wall
dancing the high
tension wires.

"Walt!"

"Look for me in
the clouds,
or maybe in Duluth.
I might be there at the corner
Where shadow meets the wall."

—Jack Bin



DIALOGUE FOR DEPARTURE

This dialogue escapes from a living room in which two ladies are sitting. They are probably in their late fifties. It is a comfortable living room with fashionable, pampered but dated furniture. The furniture and home belong to Rose, the younger of the two women. Like her surroundings she looks fashionable, pampered and dated. Her appearance indicates she makes valiant but futile efforts at looking young. She was once very beautiful and wishes the world would remember.

Cora is the other woman. She looks like an English teacher; the kind one hated in high school but loved in retrospect. She has intelligent eyes and was once quite pretty. She hopes the world will remember her for something else.

Cora has just entered the room. Rose takes her coat, mechanically feeling the fabric and checking the label.

Rose: I'm glad you're here. That youngster will be back selling books again. He shows every third Friday. He always has that hungry look and I'm afraid of him. He always stays so long too. What must the neighbors think.

Cora: Think? Really think? These neighbors? How charitable of you. We don't have to think these days — we have television. Your neighbors think whatever Jack Paar thinks and I'm sure he doesn't give a damn who seduces you. Anyway, don't be impressed with their erector set morality. If they think you're well, shady — at your age — you should be proud. I'm sure you are. Besides you've bought all the boy's encyclopedias and promised him the supplements, so why shouldn't he come peddling.

Rose: "Oh hush. I would have bought the books anyway. Don't swear, too, dirty words make your mouth rot.

Cora: You would have bought the books — hah — at your age I wouldn't buy past volume A-D. Oh yes, I cuss everytime I brush my teeth and they've never fallen out. But then, I've always been one to tempt the gods.

Rose: Well, about those books, I didn't think I was encouraging the poor boy. I'd hate to break his heart.

Cora: You'd only break his budget.

Rose: Why, I'll have you know, he once reached out his hand and . . .

Cora: He was probably handing you a pen.

Rose: You're cruel, Cora. I know I'm not young, but I know my men. At his age, they prefer a mature woman.

Cora: Rose, the ball game's over. But here you are, still coming up to bat on an empty sand lot. The professionals went home a long time ago. You're starting to look a little silly, dearie, now it's just little league coming on the scene for pitching practice.

Rose: Cora, you have an abnormal concern with death.

Cora: Well, we both have little else on the agenda now. I'd hate to see you 'go' thinking you're going to be buried in a bassinet.

Rose: (laughing) Cora, they're so small. Don't make jokes. Besides I don't

mind death. Come, let's watch television.

Cora: Rose, don't you want to leave posterity something other than an empty powder box and a burned out tube?

Rose: (She fusses with objects on a coffee table and appears concerned.) I just don't want to dwell on morbid things. Anyway, I went to church yesterday. I feel good. Don't spoil it. (She appears calm now.) I went back to the old neighborhood to visit Walter and Louise yesterday so I stopped in to visit old Father Riskie. He said I should do good things now that will count at the — uh at the, oh yes, at the last judgment.

Cora: Rose, your memory searching does amaze me. Did you really forget?

Rose: Don't interrupt. Of course I didn't forget. I just forgot what he called it.

Cora: A spade, but you never will.

Rose: Huh? Well anyway, I gave some money to their youth camp. He said we should fill our spiritual banks with grace. I would have given more but I didn't bring too much with me. You know, you shouldn't carry too much money with you in that neighborhood. It's so bad now. All kinds of foreign people in the parish. It's so changed. Full of dreadful people. Walter and Louise — they don't seem to mind. I would mind. Had more faith in my brother's good judgment. And do you know what, Cora? Do you know what they have in the church?

Cora: What?

Rose: Well, it's on the altar. It's new. The mother's club bought it. It's a nigger Jesus.

Cora: A what?

Rose: A nigger Jesus. You know, like a regular, nice statue, in gold and all, but he's colored.

Cora: Oh. (She pauses and adds) Well, you didn't like the last one anyway.

Rose: Huh?

Cora: You didn't like the other one anyway. He was a Jew.

Rose: (quite indignantly) No, he wasn't. He was, ah, he was Danish.

Cora: Rose, you're not even Danish.

Rose: I know. But the gardener was.

Cora: What?

Rose: I told you. Remember? When John and I were first married — that first summer. We had a gardener who was Danish. The Jesus in the church looked like him. (She smiles and sighs) I liked him.

Cora: Jesus?

Rose: No, silly, the gardener. We had such beautiful peonies that year.

Cora: Well, they grew beautiful on their own if they were. Nature did the work — on the garden and the gardener. Anyway, back to Jesus, in a sense he may have been a Negro, you know. Remember your Bible, Rose, somewhere in John, Jesus said ". . . as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee" ah, let's see, oh yes, ". . . that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Well, I

refuse to believe that God sent him if he looks like some overzealous gardener you romanced one year. Yes, if Jesus is God I choose to make him look like someone else. I choose him to look like Martin Luther King. What does that do to you, Rose?

Rose: (Very angry by now, she almost sputters.) You're sick, that's what you are. I've seen enough pictures to know what Jesus looks like.

Cora: Polaroid or what?

Rose: Oh be quiet. You know so much. I don't care what you think he looked like, I happen to know he looked like that Danish gardener.

Cora: Do you worship Jesus or the gardener, Rose, seriously.

Rose: (Confused and unhappy but still argumentative.) Jesus, of course. Don't be vile.

Cora: Then it makes no difference what color he is.

Rose: It does too. I can only think of that sweet, gentle gardener when I try to visualize Him.

Cora: Is that the only way you can think of Him?

Rose: Yes. (Her retort having the strength of a finality to the discussion.)

Cora: In that case, Rose, I'd hate to tell you what an anthropologist would say you're worshipping.

Rose: I don't understand you, but I'm sure you're vile. I'm sorry, sometimes, that I told you about things and people in my life.

Cora: You didn't have to. I just looked at your various gardens.

Rose: That's not true. That was the only gardener.

Cora: Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does my sinning show.

Rose: What, what's that.

Cora: Nothing. I do remember a carpenter you liked once. I used to count the cabinets. Really, Rose, four spoon racks — didn't John wonder?

Rose: I wonder how we've stayed friends so long Cora. I really don't understand a lot of what you say. I think you're jealous sometimes. Anyway, you got around too. But, I suppose some sins are less dreadful if we're sure not to enjoy ourselves at them.

Cora: I never said that, Rose.

Rose: Well, you never told me anything. I always told you.

Cora: I didn't feel I had to come to you for a coffee klutch confession.

Rose: Well, never mind. Let's forget this nonsense. I must show you some pictures. They're from the historical society's picnic. Remember that man? I was so embarrassed. I had two of the grandchildren with me.

Cora: Rose, when are you going to turn in your prom bid?

Rose: Huh?

Cora: Get the pictures.

(She leaves the room. There's a knock at the door. Cora rises to answer. A middle-aged man comes in.)

Cora: Walter, how nice to see you. Your sister will be right in. What brings you to the suburb of the ancients?

Walter: Rose forgot her shopping bag the other day. Talk about ancients. I noticed them all out on their steps — sneering in cadence and throwing mental rocks at the kids playing on the sidewalks. It's nice out, though. You two should be out in the air.

Cora: The sun might freckle Rose's complexion.

(Walter laughs.)

Cora: Rose tells me the neighborhood is getting bad. Sounds like blight when you listen to her.

Walter: Dear Rosie has had a blighted mind for years, Cora. You know that. In fact, I could never imagine how you two became such close friends. You were cursed with a mind. My sister was spared the burden.

Cora: Rose means well, the classic excuse, I guess. I've seen so much of educated terror, it's always been rather refreshing to be around Rose — enlightening too. She's been like an emotional thermometer for me. Being with Rose, I always learned the current hate. Then I multiplied her by half the population in the world and I knew what we were up against. Actually, she's such a simple dear. Just a little receptacle into which others pour prejudice. She's really very innocent, you know. Besides, time has tempered her. She's denormed now and I enjoy dropping in occasionally to listen to her sputter.

Walter: You should come visit us once in a while, Cora. There's nothing wrong with the neighborhood. Once those hardheads found out nobody wanted to marry their daughters they settled back and granted integration. In fact, I think a few wish the adage were right. Some are stuck with a few old-maid daughters they'd like to get rid of.

Cora: Perhaps it's good, then, that John whisked his little brood off to the suburbs. Rose would have only held things up.

Walter: Yea, John, rest his computed soul. I think he was so very successful selling furniture because he had all the spirit and emotion of an early American divan. Good businessman, though. Poor John. What a waste. He did some brooding, breeding and then unobtrusively died. (He pauses.) Cora, do you think he ever knew — knew about Rose?

Cora: (She pauses — walks to a window.) No. And the real shame is that in his case the classic ignorance was not based on illusion. He never really loved Rose. I don't think he loved anything he couldn't total and draw a red line under or at least go to a convention about. No, John never knew. One Rose equaled one woman equaled one wife, equaled fidelity.

(Rose enters.)

Rose: Walter, how nice. Why didn't you bring Louise? I'll bet she'd like to come out here away from them. You should bring her and the kids out for one whole day. Then you could go back.

Walter: Sure, Rose, I'll tell her. I just wanted to drop this off. I have to leave right away. I have some kids from the neighborhood in the car. Took them out for ice cream.

(Rose goes to the window — looks out.)

Rose: How cute. (She peers, then stiffens a little.) Walter, one of those boys is colored. (She smiles, nods her head and says with what she considers profound understanding and sympathy.) That colored boy is cute, though, Walter. Poor thing. Does he know who his father is? I read once that . . .

Walter: I'm going to get going before they burn a cross on your lawn. Nice seeing you Cora.

(There are good-bys and he leaves.)

(Rose watches him leave.)

Rose: You know, sometimes I worry about Walter. They should have moved out here years ago when we did. I don't think anybody could save him now. It's getting dark now. Don't you hate the dark, Cora?

Cora: I think it's quieting. You should learn to like the dark, Rose. It's like a coming attraction.

Rose: (Becoming hurt and angry.) Please, Cora, if you talk that way I wish you'd go. I don't even feel like showing you the pictures now . . .

Cora: I'm sorry, Rose, I'm really sorry. I don't mean to walk my wits over your grave site.

Rose: (Becoming very hurt, almost tearful.) Cora, stop.

Cora: Okay, dear, forgive me. Let's watch television.

(Rose turns the television on and both women watch in silence. Soon Rose turns towards Cora and looks puzzled.)

Rose: Cora, there is one isn't there?

Cora: One what?

Rose: One heaven. I mean a heaven.

Cora: Sure.

Rose: What's it like?

Cora: It's all pink and white and gold. In fact, I think the more attractive people are favored.

Rose: Really? (She brightens and seems happy.)

Cora: Something like that. At least angels are always blonde and pretty.

Rose: You really do believe then?

Cora: I believe.

(Both women watch television in silence for a few minutes.)

Rose: Cora?

Cora: Hummm?

Rose: Cora, do you think, ah, do you think I've ever done anything that would sort of bar me, you know, keep me out of heaven?

Cora: You insist God is a Dane. He might resent that if he does look like Martin Luther King . . . Well, he'd probably be amused. No, I guess you're clear.

Rose: (Becoming more thoughtful) No. I don't mean that. I mean other things, you know.

Cora: Well, I think you'll manage. As you say, a man is a man — anywhere.

Rose: There too?

Cora: Well, you wouldn't want to go if it were otherwise would you?

Rose: Well, I guess not. But still, the other place, well it's supposed to be so hot.

Cora: Yea, I know, and you freckle.

Rose: Huh? No, I mean they really don't give us much of a choice — supposing the other doesn't allow it . . .

Cora: No. They don't — give us much of a choice. Probably don't allow it either. Did you ever see a pregnant angel?

(Cora smiles to herself. Rose doesn't answer, sits looking puzzled. A few moments pass.)

Rose: Thank you Cora.

Cora: Humm?

Rose: Thank you for saying you believe.

Cora: That's alright. It's my fault for not telling you about dragons sooner. This fairy tale will do at your age.

Rose: Huh?

Cora: It's too late to be contrary, Mary, Mary.

(Rose doesn't answer. After a few moments.)

Rose: I wonder if that gardener died yet?

Jeanne Kruzic

TOO CLEVER POEMS

Brad Brekke

Atlas like Rodin's
With head bowed,
Sat on a rock and said,
"Think to your muscles!"

ENDLESS

We are born
with a rind of knowledge
a perron
 of genuflects
 that run through the brain like a hem.

Fever
some womb in gypsum
killing all
a slag of broken names
all the same
in the Requiem Mass it's arranged:
Life is not taken away, but changed.

— Lavonne Mueller

PARENTHETICALLY SPEAKING

Nobody's being's excused except by
love (in whose garden Eve's laughter's
flowering (and nobody's loving's
forgiven except by dying (in whose
garden dreams like
bright flowers are most lonely
among the leaves (and nobody's
dying's explained except by
being (in whose garden
love and death blossom like
quick-jawed carnivorous plants
(by whose hunger poets buzz like flies)))).

— Hubert F. Lappe'

A thin nasal voice, seeming appropriate enough to the old yellowed-plastic radio, announced uncertainly, "And now for your Morning Reflections."

"I will call her now, Villiam." Mrs. Oleson turned God's word down to inaudibility all unconsciously.

"Is it too early, do you think?" Thirty American years had removed as much of the Danish flavor from her speech as from her coffeecakes. Only Guillaume du Dewmott, a **l'anglais** Bill Dewmott, her baker, was uncompromisingly "Villiam."

"No," this worthy offered, and only then looked in the direction of the watch that hung, relic of the long-dead Mr. Oleson, above the radio. All the while his hands, seemingly unconnected with his mind, continued their systematic pounding of the dough. Having finished with the clock, he gazed even more myopically and wistfully toward the black gas burner where a small dirty coffeepot perked.

Mrs. Oleson hung up triumphantly, and automatically turned the volume back up. "You don't deserve life!" The thin voice had gained confidence. "Yet God selected YOU to receive it!"

"She wants them, Villiam!" Mrs. Oleson came to stand across the workbench from him. She was a smallish woman with big bones on which the fat had settled in ordered fashion, and she carried herself with dignity. She picked up a scraper and began to clean the caked flour from the corner nearest her.

"Would you like your coffee now?"

Responsibility wrinkled Williams's long brow. "Well, I better get the bran muffins out."

Mrs. Oleson looked up at him bright-faced. "How many does she want, do you think?"

William's attention was absorbed in watching his hands roll out the dough.

"Six dozen!" she pronounced.

"Yeah, I guess I will have a cup," he decided.

Mrs. Oleson went off to gather breakfast accessories, finishing with a wooden chair, green-painted to match the walls, which she covered first with a towel and then with her own solid backside.

"Six dozen," she said, pouring milk over her cornflakes, "for all the ladies. You know, Villiam, she is having all the — the —

"Alderman," William suggested, watching his hands throw rolls accurately onto the pan.

"Yah. The wives of the aldermen. They will all taste our petites. And you know why she ordered them from us, Villiam?"

William's brush continued its regular slap of eggwash on the rolls.

"Mrs. Palmer told her about them." Mrs. Oleson answered happily. She looked up suddenly concerned at her baker. "Aren't you going to eat?"

"Well, these all have to be ready by . . ." the critical hour was lost in the squeal of the proof-box door as he slid the rolls in to rise.

"Mrs. Rivers," Mrs. Oleson continued as he returned, "she told me if she likes our petites she will be ordering from us lots. The mayor's wife, you know, she has people all the time visiting."

"Mmmhmm," said William, apparently to himself. He whipped a stool from under the work table, plunked narrowly down on it, poured coffee with habitual haste and made a pass with the butter knife at his half of toasted bun.

"And if the — what are they?"

"Alderman."

"Yah. If the aldermen's wives like them, then they will order them too, don't you think?"

The bell on the front door rang, followed by the slam of the screen door. Mrs. Oleson frowned, pushed herself up from the table and marched slowly toward the store in front.

The customer broke off in the very middle of a monumental throat-clearing as she appeared.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Oleson unsmilingly. She made a practice of not smiling at throat-clearers.

"Well, good morning. Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"I thought it was cold out."

"Oh, well, it's a little chilly, but you know, not bad. Four crescents, I think, and two long-johns."

Mrs. Oleson wielded white bag and wax paper. "White or chocolate?"

"And now this morning's livestock report," the radio said from behind the door.

"Oh, white'll be fine."

"Cattle won today: five thousand two hundred cattle to three thousand sixty hogs."

"That will be thirty-eight cents, please."

In the back room William swallowed bun and coffee alternately and with the same unthinking speed. He had just finished as Mrs. Oleson returned.

"Oh, have you finished?" she asked, surprised. William began to weigh flour as she replaced herself on her chair.

"Business is better already. She began to spread butter on her half-bun, very slowly. "It will never be what it was, when we had the old place. But I think it will stay steady now."

"Yeah." William dumped the flour into his dishpan-sized mixing bowl. Flour dust rose to join that already on his eyebrows.

Toast poised, Mrs. Oleson asked, for reassurance, "Will they be all ready for her at ten o'clock, Villiam?"

"All ready," said William, cracking an egg into the scale pan.

Mrs. Oleson bit into her toast.

The door-slam and brassy tinkle penetrated through the blaring polka and William's whistling. William whistled along when he liked a song. Mrs. Oleson was still half-way from the door into the store when a female voice also penetrated the music.

"Is anyone here?" it shrieked. William stopped whistling mid-note.

"I am coming," Mrs. Oleson answered stolidly, but she cast black anxiety over her shoulder at William.

"Why, Mrs. Rivers, are you back?"

"Yes, I'm back!" The polka stopped, and Mrs. Rivers' words rose into near-hysteria in the sudden silence.

"Is something the matter?" For if her voice were not sufficient clue, there was the box of rolls sitting on the counter.

"Is something the matter?" Mrs. Rivers' blue plush front quivered in outrage. "Is something the **matter?! LOOK!**" And she tore open the lid of the white bakery box. Mrs. Oleson stared blankly at the neat rows of small golden rolls.

"Look!!" Mrs. Rivers cried again, and Mrs. Oleson looked where she pointed, down at the side, where lay a very small black lump. Mrs. Oleson's eyebrows twitched. She looked up at Mrs. Rivers. "Yes?"

That lady stared back. "Well, don't you see it?" she cried.

"I see petites," offered Mrs. Oleson.

"But don't you see the **fly?**" shrieked the mayor's wife. "Don't you see that fly with — with **frosting** on it?"

Mrs. Oleson's pale Danish eyes widened and then narrowed. "Mrs. Rivers," she said with dignity, "we don't have flies in our bakery."

Under her make-up, the lady's face became mottled. "Well, you got one in my rolls!!"

Mrs. Oleson eyed her coldly. "You mean that thing in there? That's a raisin." She reached in and pulled it out between thumb and forefinger.

"Raisin?!" shrieked Mrs. Rivers, "Why, it has **l-l-legs!**" She backed off as Mrs. Oleson held it toward her.

"Legs!" Mrs. Oleson said scornfully. She looked at its legs. "Why, it's only a plain raisin. See?" And she put it in her mouth.

Mrs. Rivers stood aghast in total silence.

Mrs. Oleson swallowed. "Only a plain raisin," she repeated. "I'm sorry it looked like a fly, Mrs. Rivers, but it couldn't be. We don't have things like that in our bakery." She reclosed the box and put fresh scotch tape on it. "I hope it didn't upset you too much. And I hope you like our rolls enough to order from us some more." Smiling, she pushed the box forward. Mrs. Rivers slowly picked up the box and, mouth still slightly open and eyes fixed on Mrs. Oleson, began backing toward the door.

Mrs. Oleson slowly turned and walked heavily into the back room.

Kathi Davis

WELL MEANING

Like the catacombs
of some mother church
and chaconne of Bach's day
your kiss
now cold on my lips
was as St. Bernadette
after four days of death
without corruption.

Voluntary black
wears sweetly
on one so frail.

You

(as eager as truss-roofed old women
to kiss the hands of a newly consecrated priest)
come beside my bed
with what you call the **living bread**,
forgiveness.

How serpentine your means.
I'd rather shunt blood, it seems,
than have your well meaning eyes
pry into my lapses.

— Lavonne Mueller

" . . . young / We loved each other and were ignorant."

W. B. Yeats

Young, but not so young as not
to have outgrown swings.
we played on swings,
walked the railroad tracks,
and in the long and matted grass,
caught a garter snake.
As Sunday waned
and mothers called their children in,
we retired to grow up.

— Kathi Davis

Pardon me, Sunday
But
my soul is darkly suited
mourning
Sunday
morning

Knowing
Love not God
Is
The Soul
 hope for man

—Leslie Davis

who gives life a purpose
who controls the why
who maintains the balance
is it God or i

if admitting deity
why the rush of cruelty
if selecting entity
prepare yourself for certainty

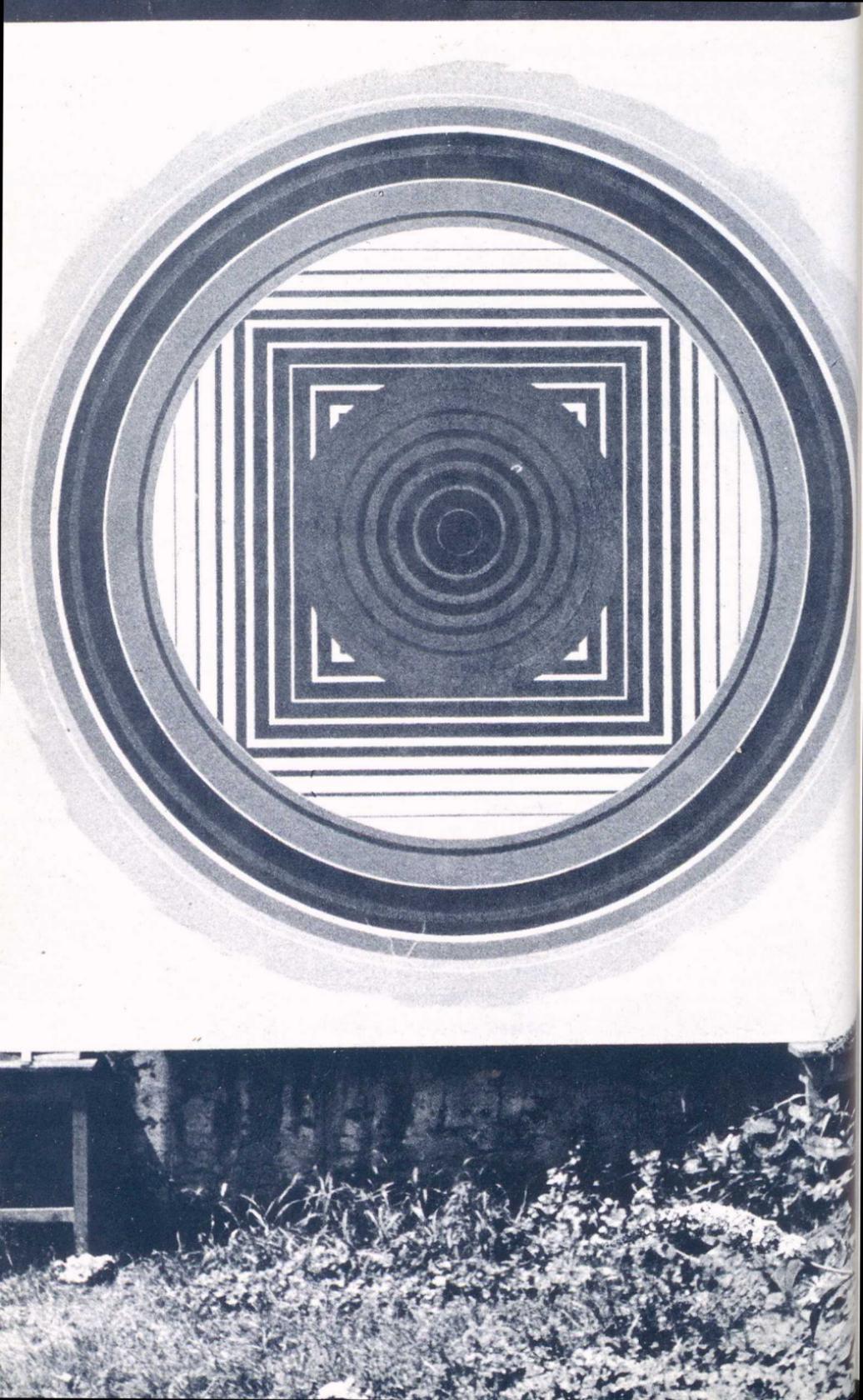
— Julie Seely

My recent past, so maculate,
has left me inarticulate,
though god knows now if ever
I need words to get me over
what I feel.

Recreated
scenes, undifferentiated
clots of fresh emotion pass as
passed his deeply-wished caresses
down my nerves and in between the
book and my dumb eyes.

When the
very black and white here might be-
speak the answer sought for, sight is
lost in wordless gray haze and
the fog that is his kiss.

— Kathi Davis



AFTER THIS SPRING SHOWER

The rain will stop soon.
Then the cooled air
Will draw convection currents of light
From gray-massed clouds,
And jagged water drops will suck my window dry.

Now, through this sterile faced hydrocouple,
I see the twisting ghosts of winter drydum
Escaping through puddle mirrors.
A good ridding dance and in time,
For now the rain stops.

Time to coalesce
With half-green and cooled-to-squeak grass.
Its heavy odor
 rotates the ankles,
And remembers scuffing to the pond
Down a frog's trail.
 Again, again . . . Again!
Dance for black feathers in the clouds
And seeds in the raindrops.

—Richard Krueger

A leaf floats on the pond as if it never
 knew a tree:
Drops of water tickle its edge
And stones itch its belly.
The moon is pooled with the wind
While reeds applaud the stars.

Self, why do you sit?

—Thomas Lowderbaugh

Old Ben watched Crabtree's back, his eyes tracing the faded seams in the blue denim shirt. Crabtree had laughed at him, but he knew thirty years more of the land and work than Crabtree did. Besides, one of these days Crabtree would get old and they would laugh like jackasses at him, too.

Crabtree kicked the black, angle-iron frame.

"Wonder how long this old horse's been here?"

Ben sat up.

"Helped build it back in 3 and 9," he offered, his pride in the handiwork overcoming his natural reticence with Crabtree.

And years before, when the cities that were now steel and stone laid surly in tents and reeked of cheap twenty-dollar whisky, he had walked his horse the last mile from Oklahoma to Odessa, tramping in the muddy streets in a pair of two-dollar boots. "Where does a man har out?" he had asked. The next morning he slid on the oily floor of a sputter rig and twisted his ankle. Laid up for four days, he lost the horse and the two-dollar boots in a poker game.

"Yessir," he added, musing. "Back then this pasture didn't have nothing but sand burrs, Johnson-grass and rattlers."

Crabtree guffawed. "You looking at that pumping unit like it was some-thing to feed," he chided.

Ben spat on the ground near Crabtree's boot. "A man got to love something he makes with his own hands." He scratched at the cracked paint with his thumbnail. "But I reckon if a man loves something, it ain't no sign it got to love him back."

Crabtree struck the steel frame lightly with his fist.

"Come on, Ben. This here thing ain't nothing but a bunch of pig arn. You know that," he prodded softly.

Ben blushed.

"Hell, I reckon I knowed that."

He pulled a sack of Bull Durham from his shirt pocket and rolled a cigarette, carefully licking the gummed line on the paper and twisting one end when he was finished. To light up, he struck a kitchen match on the seat of his khaki pants, then drew long draws and settled back against the frame to watch the pastures. It was good to smoke and look out over the distance — he hadn't had a chance to take a good look at the land, to remember it like it was when he came to this country, since he got out of the hospital. Now he promised himself he was going to take a day off, first chance he got, just to look at the pastures.

Crabtree whittled on a mesquite stick and noticed the old man's eyes sweep the bright, bush-laden pastures.

"What you looking for?"

"Just wondering," Ben answered, "when the rig'll get back."

Crabtree spat on the ground and watched the juice roll into a ball on the oily ground.

"You worry too much," he declared. "A man'd think you was a young kid."

Ben snorted.

"Old man worries about time more'n a young 'un."

Crabtree shoved his hands into his hip pocket.

"Could be, but I reckon we got time to eat before the rig gets here."

Ben squatted in the shade; Crabtree popped his knuckles and walked into a thicket of mesquites, then broke back through the brush with a black lunch pail and a brown, grease-spotted sack. He tossed the sack near the old man's feet.

"Wait a minute," Crabtree commanded, his eyes squeezed shut.

Ben's hand stopped on the sack.

"Lemme guess what you got," Crabtree challenged. "Bet there's two bacon and egg sandwiches, half a tamater and two ready-mades."

Ben grinned.

"Yep, same as always."

"How long you been carrying the same thing?"

Ben stopped chewing and the resting cheek muscles sagged down past his sharp jaw bone.

"Five, six years maybe," he said. "Didn't usta carry the ready-mades, but lately I get to hankering for a good smoke after dinner."

The old man started on his second sandwich, which he usually saved for late afternoon when the sun was down.

"I'll tell you," he said, "A man gets to livin' a certain way and it's hell to change. I recollect about a year ago I had me a chicken sandwich and it spoilt my whole day."

Crabtree laughed.

When the old man was through with his lunch he reached under his brown khaki shirt and twisted the knob that shut off his hearing aid.

Crabtree observed the movement, and when the other had settled himself against the frame, he said: "I'm a honkey-tonk man."

Ben's brown and bent fingers snaked under the shirt and turned the knob.

"What'd you say?"

"I said," Crabtree answered, "When you going to retire?"

"Be a while yet, less my old pump gets tared out again." He ran his hand over his heart as if to reassure himself it was still pumping. "Cain't afford to retire," he added.

"You wouldn't know where a man could get his kin a job of work would you?"

The old man scratched his chin. "No, don't rightly know. Not for a working man anyhow. Now, if a man could read and write good, he might find hisself something."

Crabtree grunted, then lit a cigarette.

"Some of your people out of work?"

"Nephew," Crabtree said. "Owe him seventy-five bucks. He says he's got to have the money or a job, and I ain't got the money."

"Sorry I cain't help."

Crabtree nodded, carefully running his eyes down the old man's profile to appraise his health.

Ben creased and folded his lunch sack and slid it into his hip pocket. He looked at Crabtree, who seemed to be dozing in the mild heat, then sat up and scratched in the sand with a stick:

\$363

-67

\$286

Two hunderd and eighty-six dollars. That's what he still owed the hospital people for staying there. And if he paid them as much as he could, twenty-seven dollars a month, it would be a long time before he could buy the kitchen things she needed. He didn't want to retire anyhow, it wouldn't be natural to just sit around.

He turned to the unit and frowned when he saw grease on the walking beam. The unit was still now, shut off by the automatic controls, and the horse's head that lifted the silver polish rod jutted into the sky, leaving the rear of the beam low over the weights.

He rose, his knee joints popping, then brushed off his flat buttocks. Leaning slowly down to pick a sand burr off his drooping socks, he walked to the rear of the unit and began to fill a five gallon bucket with kerosene from a black drum. He watched Crabtree sleep and considered waking him, but decided against it. He could do the work himself and it didn't do any good to stir a lazy man; he wouldn't be much help anyhow. But he had been lazy, too, when he was a young buck like Crabtree. He remembered when he first came to the oil patch how he hated the thought of getting up in the morning, day in, day out. But that's what work is to any young fellow — just something to bear up under until time to go out whooping it up and rip roaring.

He grinned to himself. He had done some of that, too.

Now he didn't hate work; it was only something that had to be done. Besides, a man couldn't hate anything he spent his whole life doing, no matter what it was. No man could do that.

He walked to the ladder that ran up the frame and hung the bucket on the inside crook of his elbow. He hesitated on the bottom step and wiped the oily sand from the soles of his boots on the first round rung.

Going up the ladder, he went slowly, careful to place one foot on a rung, then bring the other up beside it before he climbed another step. Even his slight movements tipped the bucket and the greasy kerosene splashed on his neck and shoulders.

Halfway to the top he felt a flutter in his chest. He stopped climbing to embrace the ladder.

When his vision cleared and the rhythm in his chest steadied, he climbed the ladder and didn't stop until he reached the top rail, where the beam pivoted on the frame. Steadying the bucket on the top of the flat beam, he eased himself onto the hot black surface and sat resting a minute, his legs dangling over the side.

Below him Crabtree slept and dreamed of younger women and exotic lands where nephews had money and machines did the work.

Ben straddled the beam and scooted along its ascending surface, pushing the bucket ahead of him as he went. At the high point just behind the horse's head, he rested again and looked out over the yellowing fields where other units were lifting and sinking their rods.

In the distance great black columns of smoke from the burning slush pits rolled into the sky. The way the smoke came off the pits in puffs always made him think of Indians, and he wondered again if the land had been the same when the Apaches lived on it: flat with slow, smooth hills; cold, brown and bare in the winter and green with mesquite and grass the rest of the time. And them fellows from Spain that Opal had read to him about off the historical sign by the highway — was it any different when they came looking for gold?

He laughed softly. Gold, the poor bastards. When he had come to these parts, he'd just wanted a job. But that job to him was the same as gold to them Spaniards, and he guessed that if they all felt about the country the same way — worried, hoping, wondering what it was going to give them — then it couldn't have really changed. He could see landmarks on it that were new, like the narrow two-rut road he now traced between two new wells, but things like that didn't make a country any different, no more than a man who got himself a new hat was another man.

And them Spaniards with those fancy clothes and shiny stuff hanging on them like he had seen on TV shows — they run home with their tails between their legs without even a piece of gold to cap a tooth with. And he knew why — he got his gold because he stuck with the land and worked it. Those Spaniards had just wanted to grub and take from the land. Hell, he wanted something too, but he'd given it thirty-five years of sweat. The land'd give to a man that worked it.

The sun began to heat the kerosene on his shirt; he could feel his skin blistering, so he began to consider, a little reluctantly, how he was going to wipe the grease off the far tip of the head.

He chuckled at his own hesitation. "You know," he said aloud, "for all yore patting yoreself on the back, you sure eyeing that dab of grease like it was something that would bite you."

He set his hands firmly on the head to steady himself and stood cautiously, holding his breath as he rose. Once standing he didn't look at the ground; he

leaned over the head and rubbed at the grease with the kerosene-soaked rag. His blistering skin began to pain him, so he hurried as fast as he thought the height would safely allow.

On a creosoted pole not far from the unit an electric brain began to function, sending with a click and a whir its impulse.

The beam creaked and began to seesaw, shifting under the old man's feet. He slipped and landed on his back on the beam and then he struggled to sit up on the moving beam, fought the metal's swaying motion until he felt a soft flip in his chest. He slumped forward and laid his head on the beam with his arms dangling down and just before his eyes closed he tried to look across the brown distance, but his vision blurred.

In a minute his fingers relaxed and the bucket dropped to the concrete base, the crash of metal against the cement waking Crabtree. He sat up, startled, and saw the beam moving down, around and up to draw the day's allowable.

He stood and yelled at the limp figure on the beam.

"You all right, Ben?"

The old man lay on the beam like a horseman pitched forward in his saddle, riding slowly across the pastures.

Charles Smith

BLUENOTE -- 4 A.M.

Only the few —
disciples of the dark —
limply hungry for dawn's manna
remain
hunched over too-small tables
tracing
old parables in wet concentric rings.
Amber lights
make soft
their people faces
transfiguring
sepulchered selves into the sacred whole
while
from a silver reed
an ebony in crimson
blues the night.

— Lee Fee



GOD, DO I HATE MODERN LITERATURE

"No . . . , there's nothing the matter. I'm just tired . . . tired of a lot of things . . . my job . . . my husband . . . this stupid apartment . . . and myself, too, I guess.

"Jack says I ought to join the Peace Corps. They say that's even better than having a baby. Build roads . . . teach health classes. Ha!

"How about some more coffee? There's plenty.

"You know last night I was so depressed that I took notes on myself. I got that from a creative writing class I took a few years ago. We had to keep a notebook. It was really funny. I was always taking notes. In restaurants, in the library, at the laundromat. You know . . . describing people . . . what they were wearing, what they said. Things like that. I was always taking notes .

"At any rate, last night I was so depressed that I took notes on my emotions. Of course, it did rather break the mood when I had to get out of bed and find some paper and a pencil. In fact, I even tipped over my glass of water. I always keep a glass of water by my bed at night.

"More coffee? Are you sure?

"Well, anyway, I was going to write a poem. I thought I'd call it "Lie Down in Sorrow." Do you know the poetry editor of the **Saturday Review**? Cardi . . . Cardi? How do you say it? At any rate, this teacher sent in some free verse poems that her students had written. She wanted him to read them. He was quite sarcastic about it. He said that students shouldn't write free verse until after they'd mastered rhythm and rhyme. He was quite sarcastic. I'll see if I can find that magazine sometime so you can read what he said. It was really good.

"Well, anyway, I got to thinking about what he'd said, and then I didn't feel much like writing poetry . . . Free verse is about the only kind I can write.

"I did have a short story published once though. Northern has this literary magazine that they publish every year. It was in that. The story wasn't too good. It was about Jack's cousin and his wife. Jack didn't like the story. He didn't like me to take notes on his cousin. Of course, I made up part of the story, but it was based on his cousin and his wife. You see, his cousin was just wild about their baby boy. But, I thought his wife resented the child. Really,

I'd only known them a few months when I wrote the story. At any rate, I thought Jack's cousin's wife was selfish and that she was jealous of the baby, and so I wrote a story about the situation, and it was published. But do you know what happened? About a year after I'd written the story, Jack's cousin walked out on his wife and the baby. He just left them. He doesn't even come to see the baby any more. Very penetrating insight on my part, don't you think? And I thought he was really wild about that little boy . . . Oh, well.

"Getting back to last night, after I'd given up the idea of writing a poem, I decided to write a short story. But I couldn't think of a plot. I couldn't think of any characters either . . . Just myself. So I didn't write a story; I just went to sleep instead.

"Maybe I should have written something anyway. It would have been about as good as some of this junk you read nowadays. God, do I hate modern literature! Do you like it? I can't stand it. Damned egotistical ravings! It's supposed to mean so much. It doesn't mean a thing . . . Stupid!"

Katherine Jacob

A JUNGLE

That jungle of stalks hides the main secret,
And I hear more of it
Hidden in its eating of the blonds;
A vague incidental brushing — a bear, would think —
Except to see over the possible size
In this hot light past the wonderful corn
Touching and existing for some more.

— Gil Beamsley

**A FEW CAREFUL WORDS SPOKEN IN A
SMALL VOICE**

(wherever along the edges of my consciousness
life lurks carrying shaped like a knife beauty
i will dare any reach maybe of brightness
to uncover touch to the pain of love
which is more than everything
and plunge in rivers of springtime
where flowers are burning in many colors
and the wind splashes on the hands palm-out
for the sake of rubbing against sunshine)
If you think I will not die
you overlook the brief blossoming of
April night which calls forth summer
when the meadow pretends beauty
and the grass gets dry for autumn
(however death shall nothing diminish me
because now at least i stretched out my hand
and whispered).

— Hubert F. Lappe'



JOHN PEARSON

The unusual art which **TOWERS** presents in this issue is the work of John Pearson, a Graduate Assistant in the Fine Arts Department. Mr. Pearson is an exchange student from England and is at Northern working for an MFA in painting. With a broad background of experience and education, Pearson has an impressive list of credentials which includes participation in major exhibitions in London in the past two years. Born in 1940, the artist attended the Royal Academy and received an Abbey minor Prix-de-Rome Scholarship and a Bavarian National Scholarship which subsidized his studies in Munich last year. The photographs of him painting which appear in this article were taken in his Munich studio.

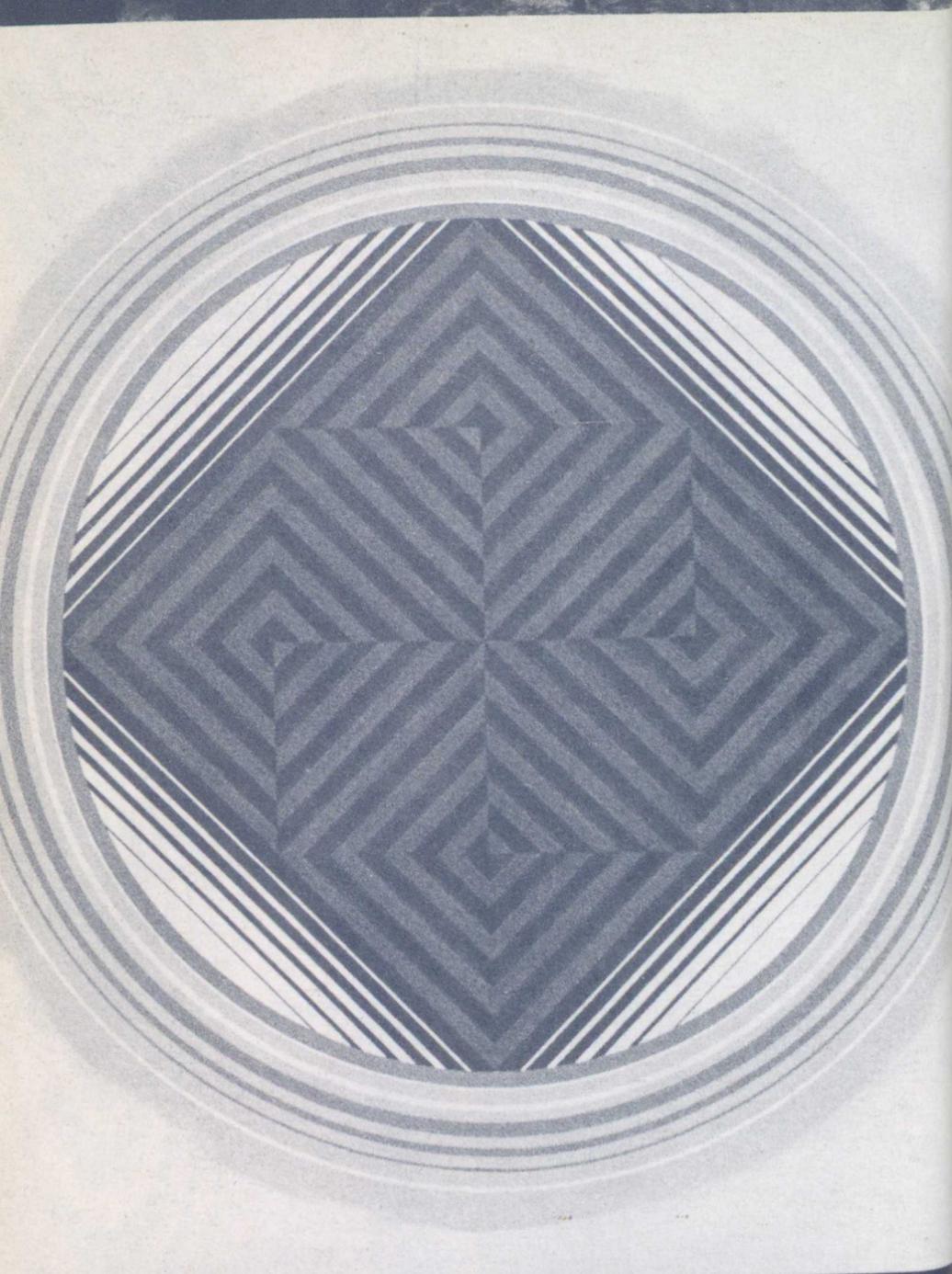
Mr. Pearson's knowledge, curiosity, and intuition with regard to color have produced dynamic results. His confidence in himself and conviction in what he does contribute in no small way to the success of his paintings.

The works shown in this article are currently being shown in Pearson's first one man show at the Gallery Muller in Stuttgart.

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Paintings Courtesy of Galerie Muller, Stuttgart



AWARDS

POETRY

FIRST PRIZE WELL MEANING LAVONNE MUELLER

SECOND PRIZE MONOCHROME S. PASIA

THIRD PRIZE MY RECENT PAST KATHI DAVIS

HONORABLE MENTION PARENTHETICALLY SPEAKING

HUBERT F. LAPPE'

HONORABLE MENTION A SHELL BEACH JOHN SLUSSER

PROSE

FIRST PRIZE IN A MOMENT OF EXILE ANDREA MARSHALL

SECOND PRIZE FALL 1955: A CHAPTER FROM

A NOVEL-IN-PROGRESS CHARLES SMITH

THIRD PRIZE IN A PILLAR OF A CLOUD MARY DALE STEWART

HONORABLE MENTION A THIN NASAL VOICE KATHI DAVIS

JUDGES

WARREN U. OBER

JESSE P. RITTER, JR.

RICHARD B. RACKSTRAW

ROBERT J. KOVACKS

