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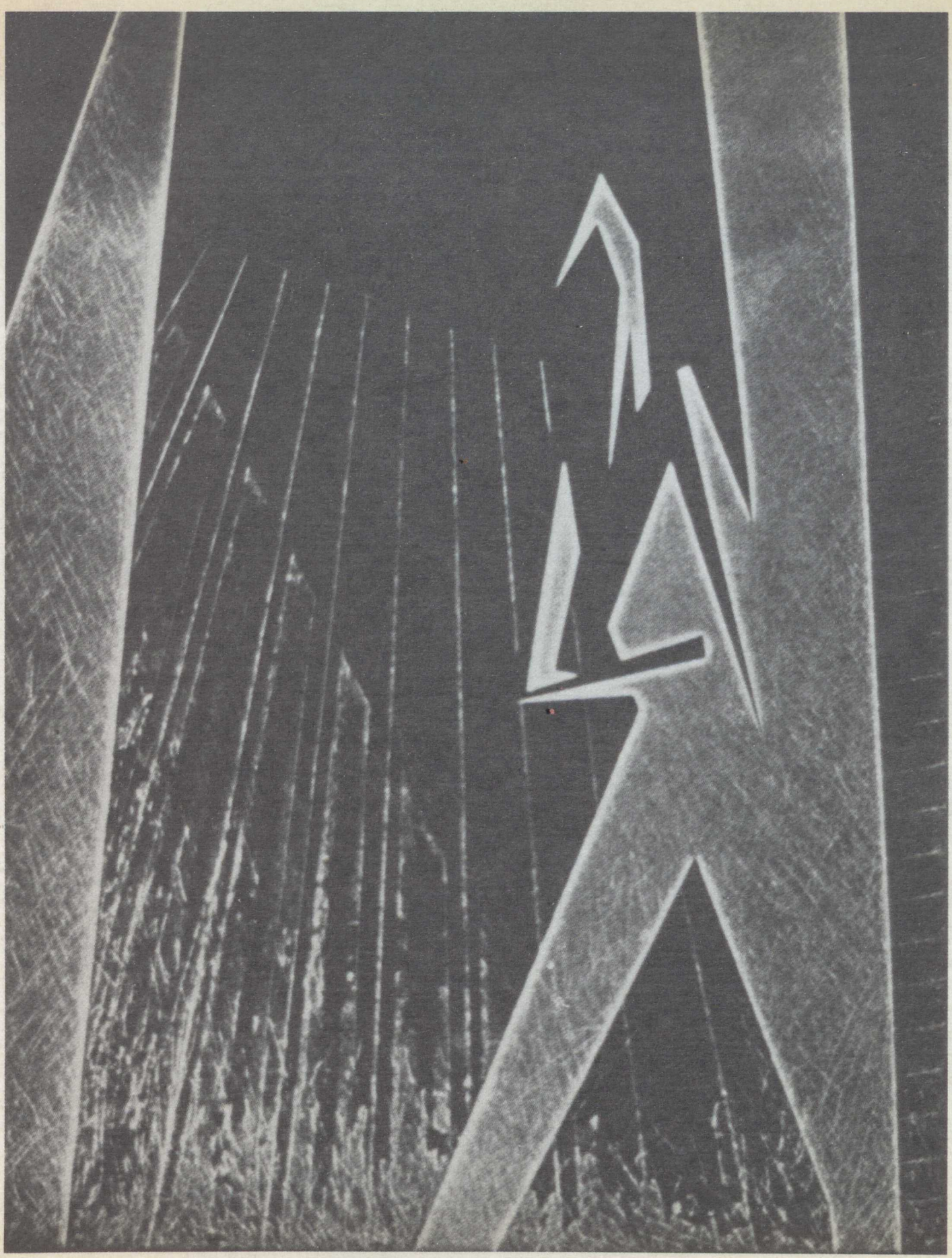

TOWERS

The literary magazine of Northern Illinois University.

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Northern Illinois University DeKalb, Illinois No. 62 Winter 84-85

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the Student Association

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Award

Lucien Stryk Poetry Award
David Williams **Los Indios**

Judge: Joe Gastiger

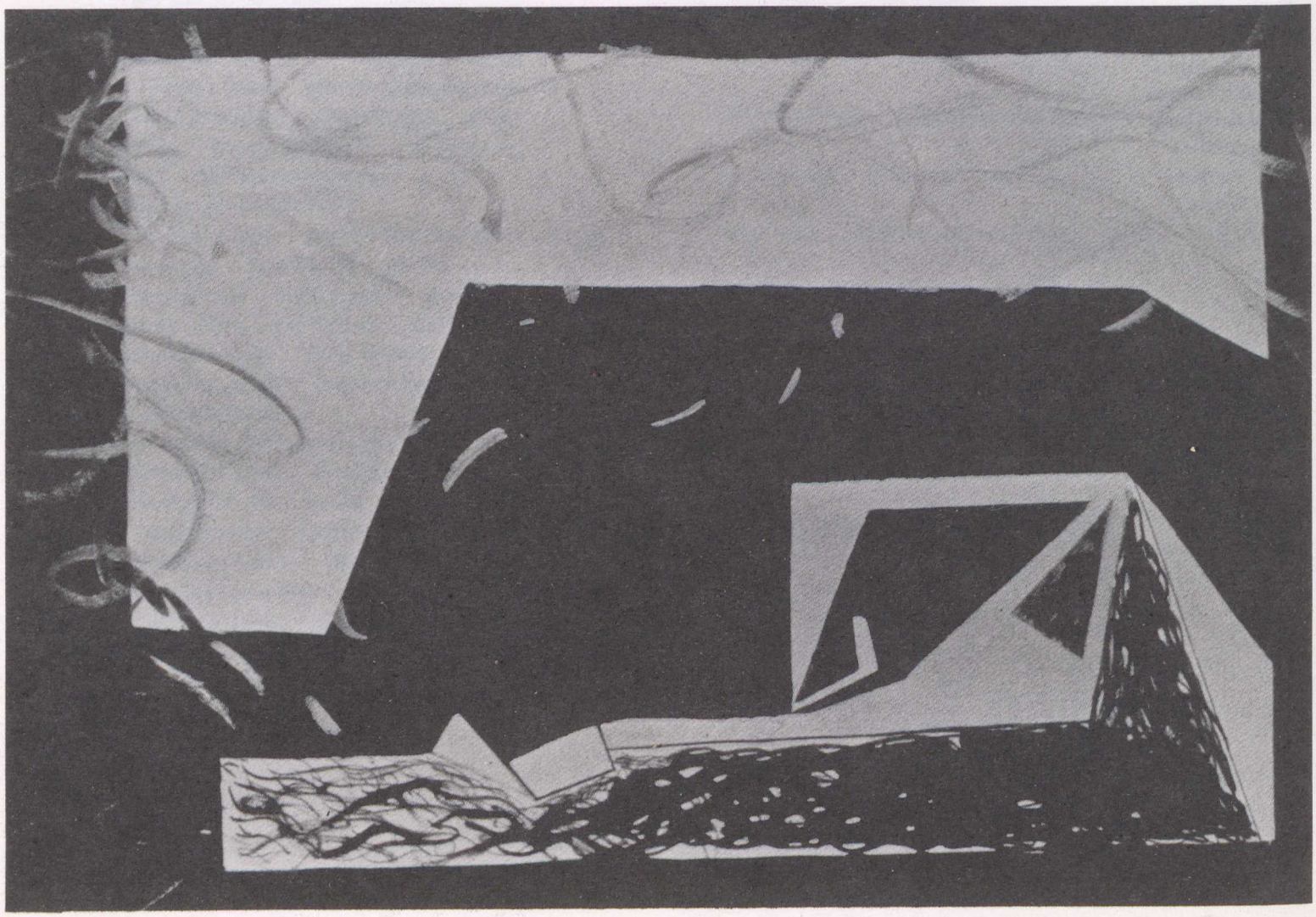
Editors' Note

In our minds, this issue of *Towers* represents some of the best literary and artistic talent in the university community. We were pleased, surprised, and perhaps even a bit overwhelmed by the quantity and variety of submissions that we received, but we were, ultimately, more pleased than anything else, for this enabled us to present what we feel is an excellent body of work with a great diversity of forms, voices, and perspectives. We hope that this energetic response is indicative of what can be expected in the future, because it is only through the active participation of the members of the university community that *Towers* can remain the excellent publication that it is. We would like to thank all those who contributed to and worked on *Towers*, and we hope that the enthusiasm and interest shown for this issue will continue to grow as we and our successors work to put together future issues.

Anthony Pope
Editor

Susan H. Eichner
Assistant Editor

Judy E. Hinkes
Art Editor



Barbara Stark **Man with a Dream I**

Grandpa Paul

At Lake Wandawega
you taught me
not to flip the canoe,
told me how you left Chicago
a janitor,
made the Wisconsin summer cottage
your home.
White hair beneath
your khaki fishing cap,
you never lost your German lust,
laughing my name
you had the accent
of a true immigrant.

As a child
I listened to war stories
as though you were a prophet,
saw the small bunk you slept on
as a boy,
walked with you
along the banks of the Elbe
where you lived near Geestacht,
hugged you when you said
I looked like my mother at seven.

Years later, I fear
you are sleeping less,
knowing
that all your soccer buddies
in the brown picture above your bed
are waiting for you
Fritz was the last to go,
and you tell me every time I visit
that even he was four years
younger than you.

Your knee bounces
insistently,
making the room hot.
I want to wrap arms
around your fragile shoulders
say it's "duck soup."
I'd gladly give you
ten of my years,
so my children could know your smile,
see the wink of your
once romantic eyes.
After two cateract operations
the silver blue
has gone black,
and I can only tell you
which birds are eating at the window feeder.
Yet you know the Yatzee dice
as if they roll, *auf Deutsch,*
you always win.

How tired you are
tapping your nails on the table
in a dark room,
smoking citarettes
and feeling where to flick the ash.
Ich bin stolz auf dich,
for living so long.
Grossvater,
what will I do when you are gone,
but feel your blood
moving in me,
turn dark
and die with you.

Gretchen Thompson

The Scorpion Tree

The scorpion tree
Sheds stingers
In spiney autumn

Dying we lie and sing
Beneath the scorpion tree
Until eyes and mouths
Are pricked to sleep

Our souls fly
Swiftly to the sun
As mute snowy swans

Paul Engel

Mad Man

In rage
planting bombs in flower pots
around concrete coffins.

Gus Vasilopoulos

Alberto Meza **Minataur-Musician**

Sylvie

With the first sign of winter, (vapor, when we blow
our breath into the air,) we leave the playground.
We hide in the folds of the curtain that falls
black to the gymnasium floor.
You whisper your Father's story.
He is wealthy, you say. He has mansions in
Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Madrid.
When you are sixteen he will come,
He will take you to Madrid. The closets
of his mansions are full, with pink and yellow
dresses. He brings one, whenever he comes,
but you never wear it. He does not stay.

Once, you say, he sent an olive tree.
The girl who irons your clothes has cared for it.

You call the girl Mary. They say she is your mother,
but you say she is hired,
a girl who will take care of you,
a girl who will iron for you
until you go to live on a veranda in Madrid.
I comb your hair as you whisper.
I part it, twist it, braid it. I curl it
around my finger. It is smooth.

When I am older I go to Madrid.
I try to find you in the colors of the street.
For a moment you are the pink of the evening sky,
the yellow lights over the marquee.
For a moment I think you are the woman
on a balcony. Her hair is black, straight.
It looks smooth. But she moves inside.

Michelle Parrini

Jennifer Hoeft **Untitled**

Verklaerte Nacht

by Jeremy Hughes

The deserted street, covered by a dirty white slush, had an aura of unearthliness about it in the light cast by a clouded, pale winter moon. As if in confirmation of the alien environment, the subway exit belched a breath of steaming warm air, heralding the arrival of another train. When it cleared, a young woman was rising out of the tunnel. At first only her light coat was visible, but slowly the dim light revealed her striking, mocha-coloured face. Drawing her cream-coloured coat around her as a defense against the bite of the wind, she walked off wearily towards the imposing grey hulk of the hospital. She climbed the wide concrete steps and entered the revolving doors before looking up.

Unaccustomed to the bright glare, she blinked and covered her eyes. The white halls that during visiting hours bustled with healthy relatives now were punctuated with patients and severe nurses. Bypassing the desk clerk whom she knew would be both sullen and bored, she walked down a long wide hallway and through a nameless white door.

. . .

He lay on the hard bed in a position so immobile he looked like a mannequin momentarily laid on its side in a display window. His white face, paler than usual, made no contrast against the starched sheets, the floor, walls, or ceiling. His eyes were open, staring at, yet not seeing a pot of dying flowers directly across the room; flowers dying in spite, or perhaps because of the nearly constant light.

She was pacing back and forth in the confines of the room; beautiful, regal, caged. Each time she crossed his line of vision, he was able to focus on her for a split second, affording him some pleasure. She never faltered, pendulum-like in her regularity. Each time she crossed his line of vision, a tension rose within him; would she reappear? And each time she did, his heart settled again. He began to count the swings of the pendulum.

He began to hope, to wish that she would vary her pacing, but she never did. Each time she crossed his line of vision, his heart fell. He started to hate her precision: he hoped, wished, lived for the moment when the pendulum would wind down, stop swinging. Now each time she reappeared the tension got worse, until he was feeling each swing in every recess of his mind: each time she crossed his line of vision, his pulse thudded in his ears. It was as if his heartbeat had succumbed to the beat of the pendulum.

The thousandth, tenth, hundredth expected swing didn't come. The world, and his heart, seemed to shudder. The tension within him broke like a tidal wave, but didn't relieve him. He lay, still, in the position he had occupied for an immeasurable time: through a thousand visits, bordered on both sides by a thousand immeasurable voids broken only by faceless, white-uniformed orderlies, he had lain still, on the bed.

. . .

She crossed the wide, white, hall resolutely and entered the doctor's office. His glance as she opened the door was at once compassionate and sympathetic, and weary of intrusion emotion had made into his professional life. She closed the door behind her, shutting the noise of the echoing hallway out. The womb-like seclusion of his office, the chocolate-brown carpeting, panelling and the mahogany desk all lit by a single incandescent lamp had a visibly relaxing effect on her.

—Mrs. Todd he said by way of greeting. Have you made a decision?

She took a breath.

—Euthanasia.

He slid a form across the desk.

—The hospital needs your signature before we can proceed.

She signed and slid the form back without reading, almost avoiding its contents.

—Do you want to come along?

She shook her head sadly, asking instead;

—Is there somewhere I could rest . . .?

His eyes smiled at her.

—This couch makes a wonderful mattress, he said.

She turned in the direction of his gaze and noticed the dark brown couch for the first time.

—Please use it. Here, at least, you will not be disturbed.

She smiled back at him, grateful.

. . .

She had been gone a short, long, immeasurable time. The flowers, placed by a kind-hearted soul in his line of vision, had in their death come to haunt him, the white petals slowly but inexorably disappearing from view onto the floor. Another in the endless chain of orderlies crossed his line of vision; he took no notice until the glaring fluorescent lights were inexplicably dimmed. He lay in the peaceful semidarkness, giving silent thanks to the compassionate orderly who had distinguished himself among thousands. He came to the sudden awareness that he could move his limbs. He reached up in wonder to touch his temples; he felt at peace with himself. In this final ecstasy of his conscious mind and in blissful quietude, he died.

She lay curled up on the large couch, not asleep, yet not awake. The darkness which had seemed warm and inviting now seemed oppressive. This thought roused her, so she arose and reached for the overhead light switch; at nearly the same moment the doctor came through the door, bringing with him the light and activity of the hall. He was met by the light from the office as she

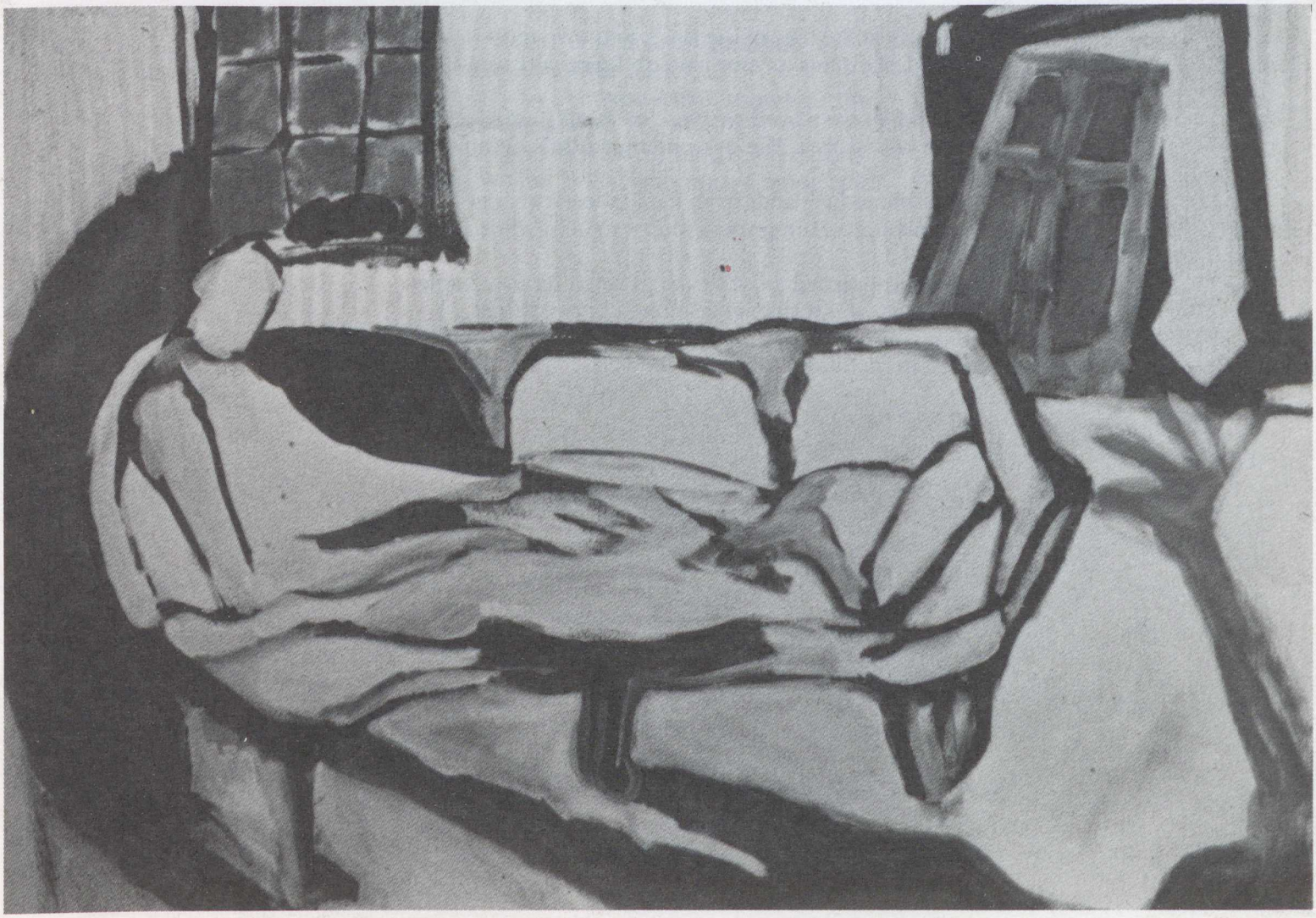
turned the switch. Both were momentarily nonplussed, and then relieved, they smiled, a trifle embarrassed by their reactions.

This small event dissipated the tension that both had been feeling. The doctor, at once sensing that nothing needed to be said or done, waited benevolently as her eyes adjusted to the new-found light. She, in turn, sensed that he knew her gratitude, and murmured only the two words,

—Thank you.

. . .

She left the hospital, and her mind was clear. It was snowing, a soft, hushful fluff. She entertained an impulse and caught a large flake on the tip of her outstretched tongue. The waxing moon shone brightly in its corner of the night sky. She walked home, following in someone's footsteps already half-filled with newly-fallen snow. ▣



Mary Anne Glynn Boies **Interior**

Maid of Honor

With this half circlet of flowers I find myself
caught in a cult of virgins. Misplaced in my long dress

I wear stockings in August. In white, to me, you are
a Titian angel, your frail collar bone framed in lace.

I hold the diadem of marriage, a halo of white flowers
and a veil of white light, draped across my arm.

The brilliance of your dress darkens the sunny room.
I am afraid to touch you. I think of the young girls

who wait at the foot of the stairs. Soon we must descend.
When I place this in your hair, do I give you away?

As children we played we were mermaids, under the feather
green willow tree. The descending tendrils became seaweed.

We fashioned garlands from the tenderest shoots. Now I am
your maid, so I bring you a mirror to hold while I adorn you.

I pretend I picked these flowers I smell for the chaplet.
It is heavy. It is a chaplet fashioned in childhood,

given in friendship. I arrange the veil.

Michelle Parrini

I'm Sorry I Watched TV When You Were Dying

But then again,
I like to hum the theme song from that movie when
I think of you.
I don't like to pray
for the poor souls in purgatory anymore,
not since you've died,
strange dinosaur lady.
Like a cat I avoided the cave where you lay
in a heap.
Old Irish woman, big bundle of breasts,
who'd say tanks
not thanks,
called me Catty. One of 26 grandchildren,
we were all young all at once.
You were always old: brown hair, brown circles
under coffee-grind eyes.
Always cooking pot roast on Sunday afternoons
in a brick two flat in a neighborhood going black.

Catherine Ward

Florid Conference With McN-----, Poetry Writing Class

Sir, I want milch camels and
Bedouin ladies with ink-green tattooed faces,
Smoking locomotives and maybe like the
Rue Git-le-coeur or something in my poem
So as to show I am a travelled authoress.

I want peachy-cheeked children, too,
One yellow lily in a blue china pot by
The front door would be super,
And one of those traditional nightingales
So as to appeal to the masses, you know.

I especially want to weave in homage to Yeats' "Leda,"
And probably include some reference to Eliot's tea.
And cakes. And ices.
All wrapped up nicely with a subtle clue to Eve in P.L.
So as to confirm that I am educated.
Can you help me? But

Jeez, nothing too obviously middle-class
No verdant gardens for God's sake
Nor sweet thick love
Nor blue twilight and
For me, phallic symbol serpents are OUT.

Do you think I could squeeze in, say about line 15,
Bogota, green emeralds and a jujube tree . . .
I mean, I adore Didion.
Me, Joking? No . . .

Be serious? Oh, sure, you mean like:
O Muse
I am loathe to harness the
Ambiguous eagle of happiness
And begin my Numidian flight . . . No? . . .
The K.I.S.S.* Method? Huh? Oh, more like:

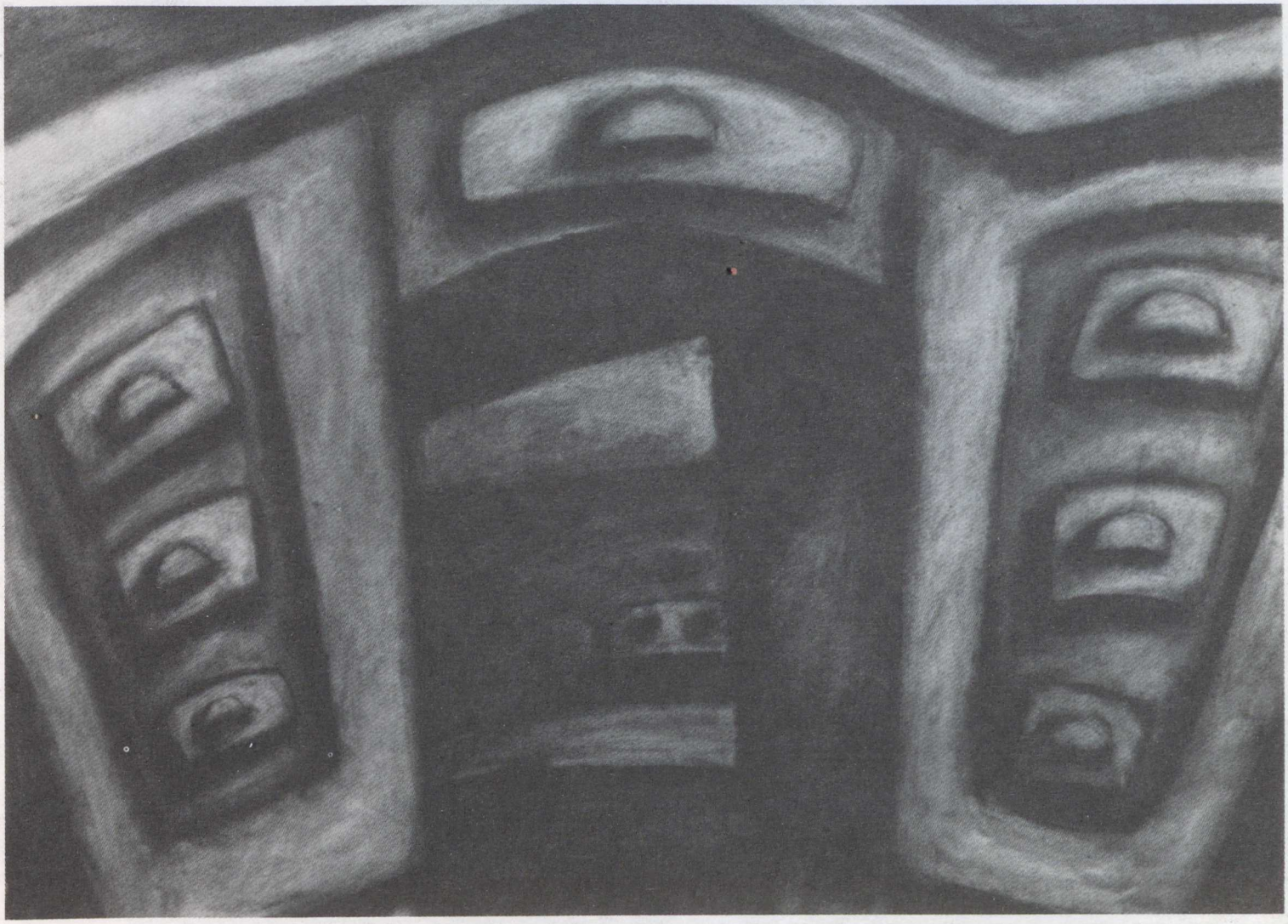
A naked old lady, dark-skinned,
Cross-hatched with the wrinkles of death
Yet feeling hardly born
Dances by a wall of plain green vines:
Morning light
Slight breeze
Sound of village bells . . .

Perhaps I shall have her
laugh, with her head thrown back
at the end.

Thank you, Sir. "Yes."

*Keep It Simple Stupid

Judy Hamm



Paul Stark **Desk**

Jordan David Dauby **Fourth State**

In the Plaza of the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe

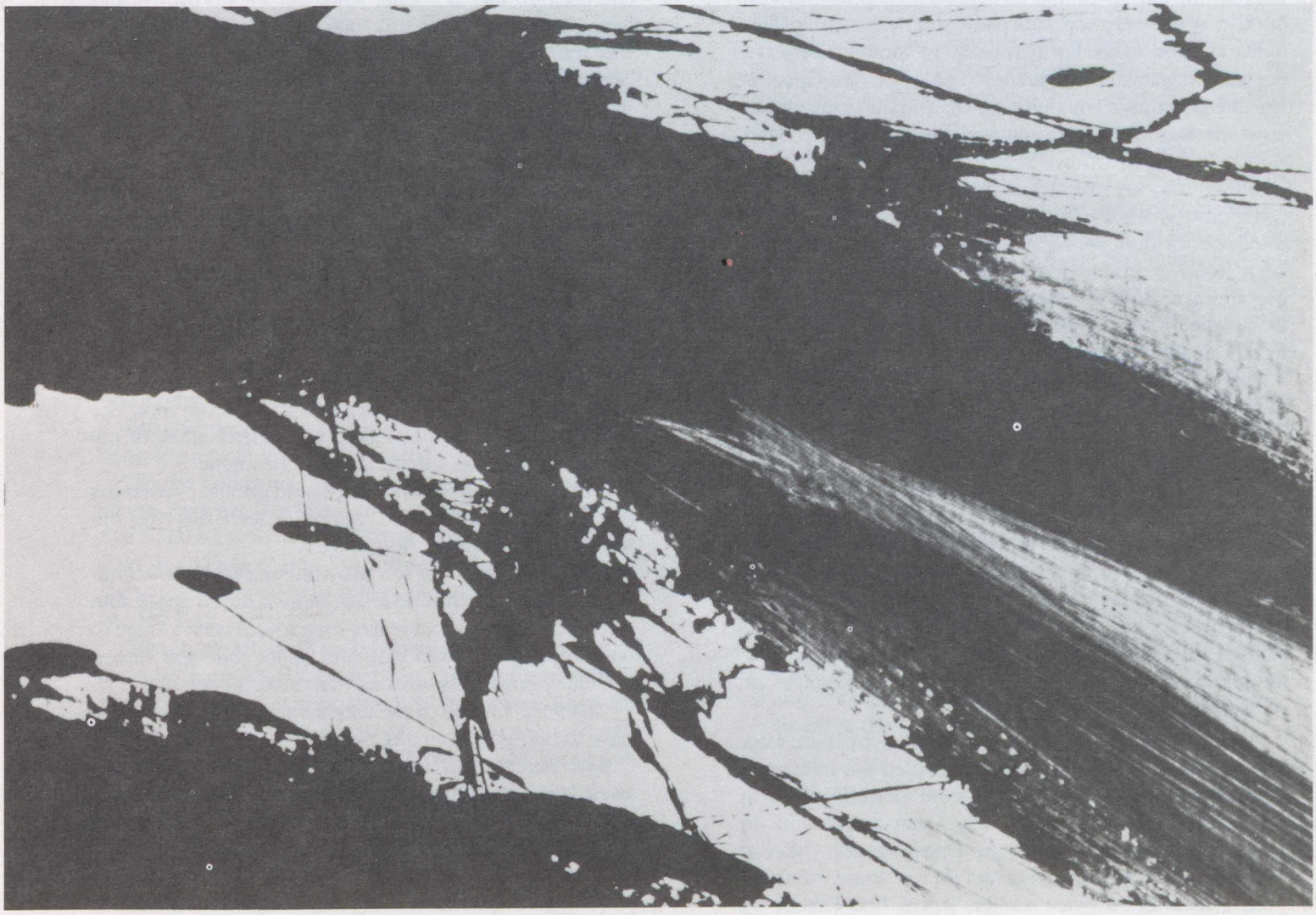
Faith knees its way
along the plaza.
Purify the aching bone.
The mind is a catacomb
that must be cleansed of rooms,
of hearts.
The throat and lungs
send up the fist.
The brain,
an empty tomb,
must shine!
These tears are the
Streaming sunlight of
Green.
This earth,
the miraculous concrete,
the Mother of God
Gives;
Los Indios,
the daily bread.
Los Indios,
the child, cradled dream.
Los Indios,
the last flaying hope:
Her own dead son,
risen up,
plumed and flowered,
whose wounded hands
Stream
earthward,
igniting
the faces
of dust.

David Williams

Waitressing, Summers at the Saddle and Cycle Club

I'll never forget
When the chef chased us with live lobsters,
or how, when he wasn't around, we'd fling
spoonfuls of caviar at each other,
or how, after the last cookout, we smeared Peggy
with a half a cake. I remember digging my fingers
in. We got it in her hair, and you splashed
ketchup from a filled-to-the-brim bowl on the
clean counter and laughed at my anger.
Do you remember when Danny smeared Mike's car seats
with grape jelly, and Mike took revenge on our
great assistant manager by spreading peanut
butter on his desk, chair and shelves?
The only thing sacred was fresh raspberries. Carmel,
whom J.J. called the terrace slug, used to pilfer
raspberries from plates, place them one by one
between her lips, pressing tongue into the hollow,
and mumble, "Better than sex."
Bill, that night watchman from small town Indiana,
said she had breasts like peanuts. I'll never
forget when he popped a cold, minature quiche
into his mouth; said that it was the worst hard boiled
egg he'd ever had . . . "How do them rich people
eat such garbage?"
The worst was cold yogurt soup with its pureed
vegetables, splash of wine. Sounded like puke
when poured into bowls.
I don't miss the twelve hour shifts,
but when I'm wrapping leftover macaroni and cheese,
I know, like I know the colors of varicose veins
or the price of eggs,
we won't be that young again.

Catherine Ward



John Santoro **Bird Man**

They Lost My Baggage in Zimbabwe

(for Bob)

by Laurie M. Johnson

Tracey Spencer. Yeah. That was the guy's name. Spence, they called him, but oh. He wasn't so slick as his namesake. They might as well stuck a stiff in 'ole Spence's chair for all the help he gave me and the other sorry GI's who crossed his path. Good God, was it two years ago? And they said I'd be laughing about it by now. Huh.

It all started one hot August morning. I woke up to one helluva hangover and orders on my bureau that must have put me in the stupor to begin with. I was being transferred to the Folkland Islands, specifically Cue Tipp Swab Peninsula, discovered by an American in 1816.

Good lord the boredom, the deadly boredom that awaited me in that strange tubular shaped bit of rock and tundra. Men came back from the Swab with eardrums punctured by the silence permeating its barren stretches. At one time the population exploded to a staggering six, and in the best tradition of the Department of Defense, thirty population control specialists were dispatched to educate the natives on the newest contraceptive devices. Another seven were sent to actually supply the sundry barriers,traps and snags. For two years the Swab witnessed a population growth of unparalleled proportions as specialists did their duty to train the natives and the government issue devices did their duty and broke. But I've been sidetracked.

Suffice it to say, this set of travel orders was not welcome news when it arrived and that morning I was paying the price for duly appropriated self-pity. When I was in boot camp I remember the Sarge saying "You pay for everything somewhere along the line in this man's army." Obviously he was speaking of tours like my previous ones in Hawaii and Washington State.

This particular hot August morning, as I stared at the set of travel orders spinning on my bureau, I realized it was my duty, nay responsibility as a member of the Department of Defense to report to the nearest Installation Transportation Office and set my affairs in order. There was the movement of me, my household goods and unaccompanied baggage to consider. Like the trusting soul I was, I hitched up my issues, rearranged my cap and sallied forth. However much I might wish to ignore them, it was my moral obligation to process my travel orders, taking care not to fold, spindle or mutilate them OR my Army Provisional Pass OR my Airline Service Request, as yet unfilled-out.

It was a drab, green day. I staggered to my issue jeep, checked the oil, filled it up and recorded the mileage. I had no idea. No idea what was in store for me. Nothing in accordance with the regulations, I can assure you. In twenty minutes I was there—the Transportation Office at High Brass Junket Depot, a center for top secret briefings.

As I mentioned twice earlier, it was hot. Exactly 95 degrees with a humidity of 95 percent. If the clouds weren't quite at the saturation point, the Contractor was. Yes, the Contractor. The Commercial Contractor who had taken over the Junket's office. THE Contractor. (You know the one.)

When was the last time I had visited the office? As I recalled, it was two years previous, and the good 'ole reliable issue employees were slogging through unair-conditioned paperwork and unaired issue GI's like the fly-blown tail on a hot, wet donkey. "No more," I said aloud. There was only one lonely WAC at the far end of the room, talking to a kid behind a desk who looked like she should be cheerleading for her Junior High football team. Maybe she was the counselor, I mused. Long nights on the island might not be so bad if I had someone to talk to . . .

But it was not to be. I was greeted by a woman who resembled Carol Channing and didn't move her teeth when she spoke. When I mutely showed her my orders, she ushered me to a man, who, but for his age, would have been a cheap slo mo substitute for MTV rockers. It was Tracey Spencer. Spence. Spence looked up at me with pensive eyes, flicked his cigarette into an ash tray shaped like the Taj Mahal and did not smile, though he reeked of Sunshine and Summer Eau de Toilette.

"Please, have a seat, Mr. . . . " He glanced at my orders. "Mr. Minor. Ah yes, Member Minor, we've been expecting you. Not utilizing our resources to the fullest today, are we?"

I explained, to the best of my knowledge, why I looked like a stale fig newton.

He placed a form in his typewriter. "Rank?"

"Major."

"Member Minor is a Major. How nice. Serial number?"

And so it went until Spence came to a trouble spot. The Standard Carrier Alpha Code, or the destination of my stuff. He picked up a thick, stapled document.

"Let's see . . . Outbound household goods . . . overseas . . . The Contractor shall . . . Mmm . . . Well, this cites the Joint Travel Retulation. Wait a sec."

Spence ambled over to a two-volume set of black binders on a wrought iron pedestal, flipped to the applicable reference, shrugged, went to a long row of what looked to be directories, picked one and spent the next fifteen minutes perusing its obviously fascinating contents.

"Z00903," he said to me with an amiable smile. "And I have to be right about this zero percent of the time."

As I watched the cheerleader still talking about the latest high level briefings, Spence patted me on the back. "All taken care of, Minor. The member is foremost in our minds, you know."

"Yes, I know. I notice you don't have much business."

"Well, we've had a rash of other installations misdirecting their shipments around us. Not enough of the private

business element around, I guess."

I was scheduled to move the day after my household goods left for the peninsula, so after having it picked up by Fast Freddy Freightlines and before getting ripped anew, I thought I'd pay one last visit to High Brass Junket. I was lonely and scared and needed a little counseling about the barren outbacks of the Cue Tipp's probing reaches and how to adapt. Would the Welcome Wagon call? What would I do when I wasn't protecting this valuable American ally? Was it adequately padded so as not to irritate my mucous membranes?

These were things I needed to know for my peace of mind, not that these alone could quell my growing dread of spending the next two years in a cloud. Gone were the population control specialists. There would only be me and the inhabitants, and though the population had doubled to a baker's dozen thanks to foriegn military sales and service, I still worried about loneliness and the thought of going two years before seeing another woman without a coat on her legs.

Anyway, I arrived at the Transportation Office. That smiling cross breed of a receptionist greeted me again through clenched teeth.

"Yes," she said, "The Contractor shall be courteous and polite at all times. I see here your household goods are already picked up by the Freight Forwarders and are heading for Africa. Oh, you must be excited!"

I pictured Ms. Channing less five front teeth but reconsidered when I saw Spence moving into the room. Surely he could clear up this grave misunderstanding.

"Spence, buddy, pal, I've got a candelabra kissed by Liberace in that shipment. I've got two bookends from Venezuela in there, pal. Tell me. Tell me my stuff isn't headed for the dark continent."

The cheerleader looked up and giggled. "You shoulda done it yourself, Major," she teased.

"To the Folklands?" I was on the edge of irate, somewhere between seething and the valley of death, and that's MAD. I would rent a canoe, load it with my authorized thousand pounds and ferry two thousand miles of shark-infested waters to stake out a new life in the Forbidden Zone.

"Now now, Minor, at ease," Spence cooed. "Let me call the carrier, give him slash her your code and see what he slash her says. I bet your shipment isn't even out of the warehouse yet."

But it was. I thought about Zimbabwe and about how maybe it wasn't quite as dull as the Folklands. There were fermented goat's milk and body paint to consider—both high on my list of sensual items to be missed, but nonetheless more interesting than fuzzy ground with a cardboard core as sterile and lifeless as, well, a cotton ball. No, bouncing bantus might not be so bad.

"Where do you have me flying to?" I asked.

"The Folklands, of course," Spence replied. "It was the code that was wrong on your shipment, not me. Our carrier didn't interpret it right. Now it's out of my hands. We, the Contractor, have met the Performance Requirements as stated in the contract. What more can you ask?"

"I could ask for my shit to be on Cue when I am."

"We have fulfilled all applicable requirements, filling out all required applications and processing them in accordance with regulations, taking into account the historical workload data. It is truly beyond us now. Sorry."

"Did you take into account my fist," I queried. The cheerleader swacked her gum percussively in the background.

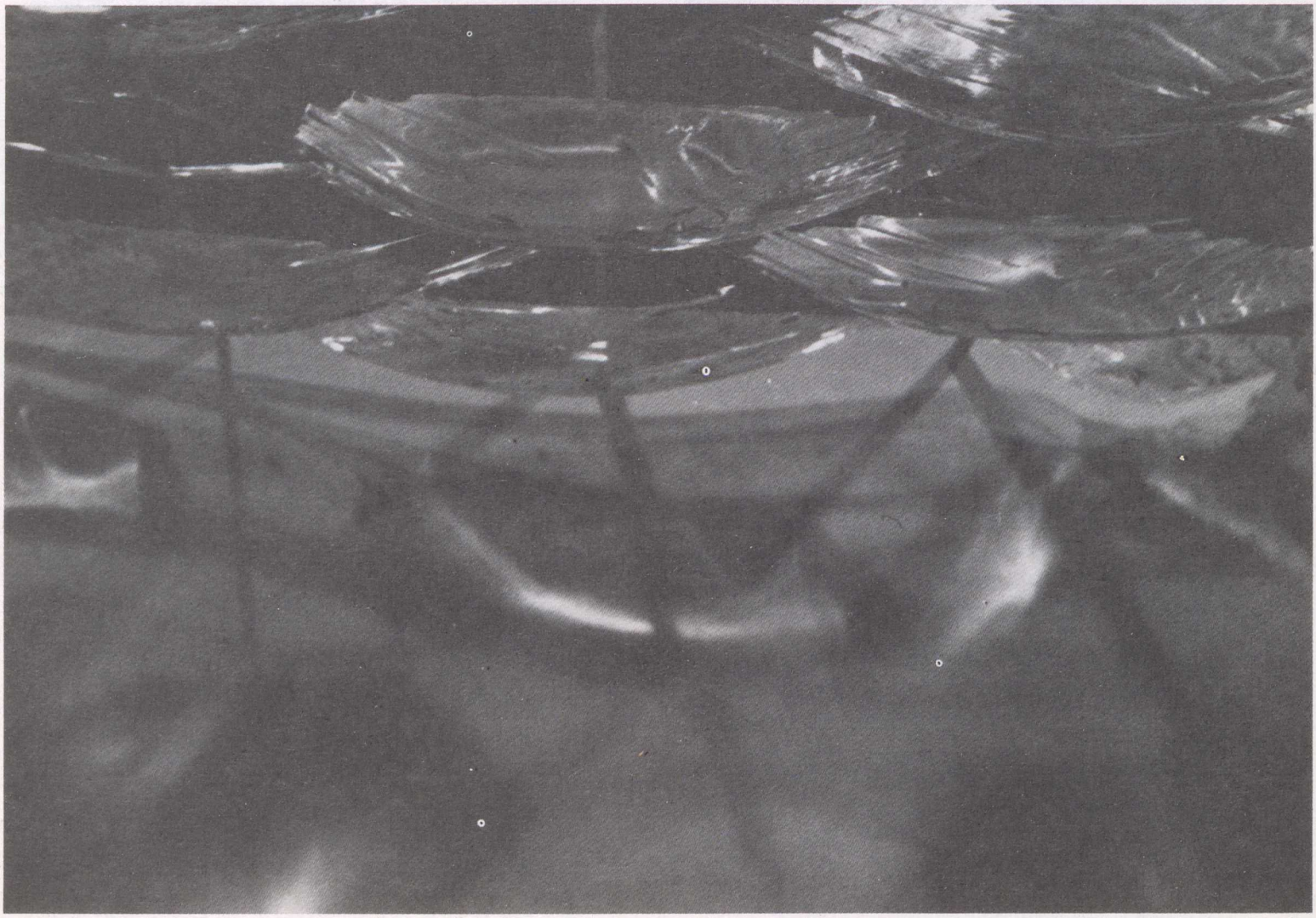
"That's not in the contract," he faltered, quickly thumbing through his precious narrative. "Not, but then the three people who wrote this contract didn't sign their names."

As I sat in my spacious Quonset hut near sparkling Spun Wrap Bay, Folklands, awaiting the arrival of my household goods (which had been delayed in Bantuland due to an infestation of tse tse flies) I reflected on the High Brass Junket Transportation Office, Spence, the bubble gum chewing cheerleader and the three stooges who wrote that nauseating contract. Who could they be and what motive could they have for writing a contract even a moron could follow? Oh, no doubt they were good-hearted people. They hadn't met the Contractor. The Contractor who shafted me and my household goods. THE Contractor. (You know the one.)

I couldn't help wondering when, if ever, my stuff would arrive. Would the lip gloss on my candelabra be smudged? Would my bookends arrive with both ends intact?

As it turned out the Welcome Wagon lady visited me on my second day. She reminded me more of a Russian gymnast than a polar bear. And she brought me a lamp so I could see the four corners of my empty corrugated home. I wrote a letter by it. A letter to my congressman.

Now I'm the Contractor. T



Lydia Shalanko **Untitled**

Walking To The Creek At Night

The barn is a black wall against the stars.
I move from there,
the long way down the creek.
The dogs disappear,
and come back again,
off and on,
as we go toward the dark of the trees.
A few farm lights wait within the circle
of the horizon. Our house is
a single light on the hill.
The creek radiates a long glow
from the bridge,
the low water sound is the only thing.
It must be like the song of whales,
changing from season to season,
full of what we do not know.
The body of stars bends closer.
The big dipper has nearly sunk to the edge.
It is an old forgotten legend, that has become a
fossil in the sky.
I start back up the road
the gravel strewn by my random shoes.
But even this is an arrangement
I cannot see, that tomorrow will be
different again.
My little trail leads away from me,
caught in time,
meaning only:
I have walked under starlight
deep into the night.

David Williams

Ode To Something

It is sunny here
A blinding bare bulb
Pokes through
The light blue tissue sky
Smouldering

A furry green plain before me
Dotted with yellow stars
A white fuzzy nova
Spreads the seeds
Of a new universe
At my command

An ancient stone monster
Crouches beneath the rafters
Above me
Shooting his winged arrows
To pierce the thin near sky

A tiny rusty spigot
Circumcised
From a cement block
Drips

Within this still stone
Behemoth
Trickles a hidden spring

I am a gargoyle
On the steps

I want to be that bird
In the tree
Just watching and singing
Or that silent bird
Piercing the sky

The bare bulb smokes
I close my eyes
And everything
Is consumed
In orange radiant flames

Yet
I smell something's
Sweet fragrance
Coming from
The other side
Of the sky

So
For now
It is sunny here

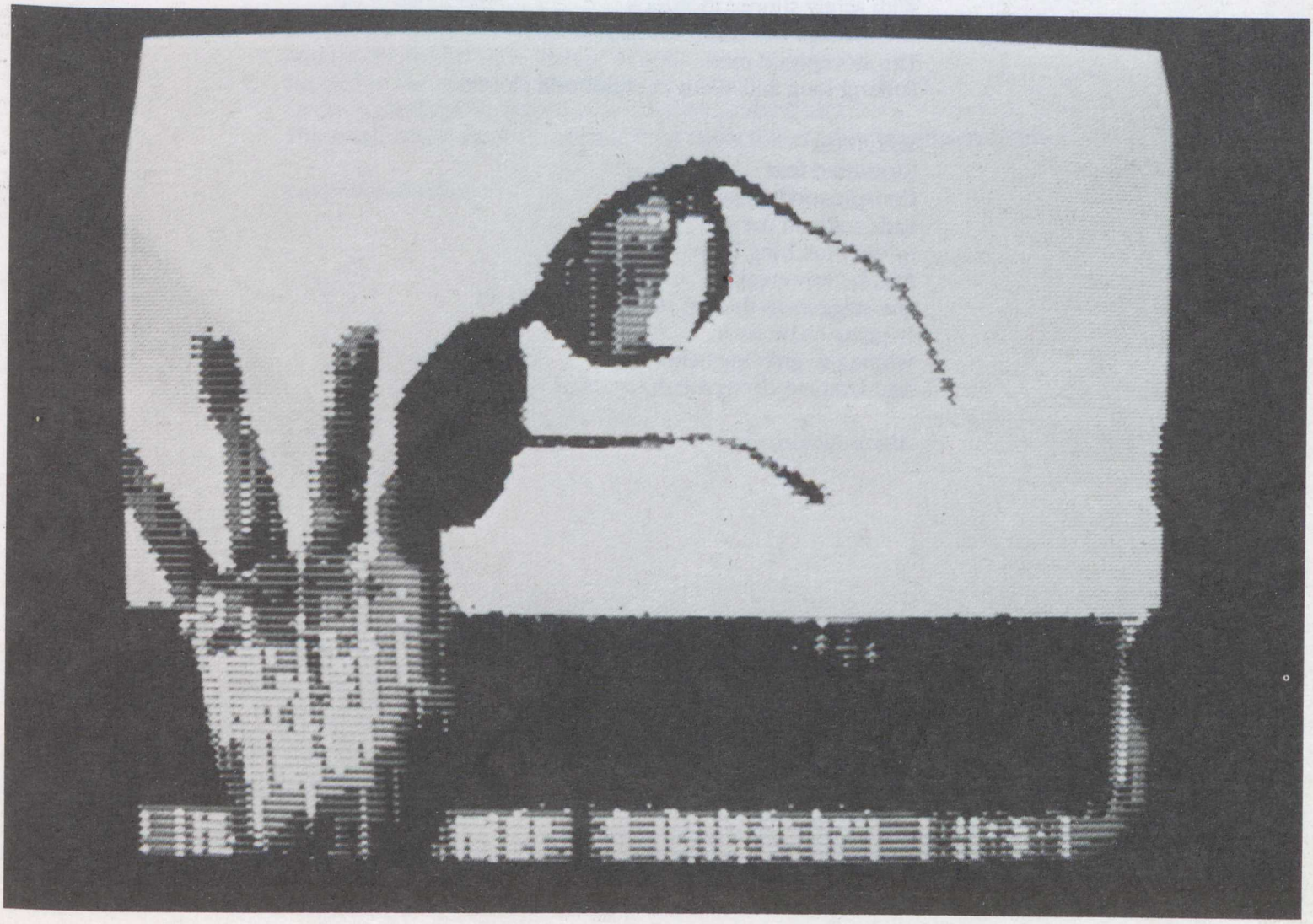
Paul Engel

Robert Apolloni **Zigga Sha Sha Boom!**

Picnic

We tunneled down the sandbox roads,
under the floating boughs,
the tight-fisted crab-apples
swinging overhead,
would soon be pressed to service,
soldiered into grandmother's row of jars.
And everyone was young, and there,
parading out the platters
of the wafting world,
the all familiar hands.
And the wooden balls cracked over the green,
and two grandpas chopped a dead tree down.
We scooted under the splintery tables,
and ran to the edge
of the yard, where the odd trees
hung their green beans down into the shadow of the creek,
where bull-frogs could come
splashing up, and terrapins
might inch their beaked mouths
through the grass, which was full of
chiggers we could not see.
We streamed back to the lawn,
chasing into the dusk,
till words danced around the woodsmoke light,
and the night caught little flames, further on,
we stretched toward;
pinching the bugs of green-gold light,
till they receded, with our fingers,
far from the voice of the fire.

David Williams



Terre Layng **Untitled**

Fear

Fear creeps up the stairs,
A drunken grandmother
Hunched and bowed
With a moldering load.
Upon her back
She carries a burlap sack
Of tuberous potatoes
Incubated in stagnant cellars
Where twisted, albino sprouts spread and grow.
With gnarly knuckles,
She clutches the roughened rawhide rope;
With scuffy slipper footsteps,
She invokes her confreres and consorts—
The stovepiped men
Lurking long and silent in childhood closets.

Secret fear
Cloistered fear
Conspiratorial, martyr fear
Pads softly in my ear
As with lurching limp
And hollow creak
She staggers to the top step,
Begging to be let in,
Waiting to grab my hand
And lead me down the dusty stairs.

Alison Armstrong

Haunts of Old Sent Back to Tranquility

Freely, the aqua dolphin leaps through the crystal waves
And the tide growing less along the sun-bleached sands,
As quietly as a beet red crab scurrying to his seaweed home.
Before the sun melts to meet the midnight sea in a vibrant purple horizon
A daily love affair.
And as the dusk rolls in its misty cool air
There sails the Hispanola of phantom old
Grey weathered sails against a now ebony sky.
Listen in the distance
To the haughty laugh of a bearded sailor as the tattooed mermaid dances
upon his chest.
Off she goes, the phantom ship, by the moonbeam's milky path.
And on the brilliantly cockatoo sleeps
Nestled in the palm tree above.
As the aqua dolphin swims to its coral-rainbowed reef,
The small island sleeps protected by a starry dome and moonbeam cloak.

Lesley Dahlkemper

Vacancies

And I return
to the refrigerator
searching for a left-over crumb
but all that's left is cold

He'd seen one once,
a place where shadows walk
motionless
between sterile ceramic walls
and each visitant
is a mother duck
to be followed
by duckling inmates
gabbling for affection
living to bum a cigarette
from mamma
who doesn't smoke
and even if *he* did
he hadn't a light
to give them

So I rustle the pantry
a few empty tins
old box tops from might have beens
and a recipe for if onlies

He recalled how
after a storm
he'd seen a solitary earthworm
drudging itself
across a sidewalk
he put it in the grass
"there ya go, fella"
and spent the day
saving earthworms
and catching cold

It wouldn't matter
anyway
I couldn't find
the silverware

Leif Camp

Paul Stark **Suburban Landscape**

Ode To Death

A small black cross at the top.

In loving memory of:
(Insert any name here).
Born: blah, blah, blah.

Mass: Divine Savior Church
Downers Grove, Illinois,
Sunday, April 20, 1984,
At dawn.

Interment:
Clarendon Hills Cemetery

On the bottom
Left hand corner
In tiny print:
Bonello Milano
Copyright
Printed in Italy.
(So you see
This is not my poem).

On the bottom
Right hand corner:
ETERNA— series.
(Most of us
Are not of the
ETERNA— series).

On the other side
Is a crucifix
And a lamp with three flames
And a palm branch
Also: *HOLD HIGH YOUR LAMPS*, Luke 12:35

Paul Engel

Israel—The Promised Land

Barbed wire splits the warm bitter sea
Snakes onto the patrolled shore
And digs into land the color set apart for
Wasteland on topological maps.

It searches but finds today, Christmas 1984,
No nimbi
No doves
No rays of light from God to Virgin, gold-painted
By Fra Angelico

Only Coke cans and postcards
impale themselves on the
barbs criss-crossing the
goat-shit lined paths
leading up to the Christian places

It scars the ankles of its windows
Blackened and soured by all this barbed business
And the machine guns
And the sweeping dry sand
And the clicking of cameras
And the pounding of tourist feet.

Judy Hamm

Bruce Hackney **Untitled**

John Plus Susan

by Judy Hamm

A square of dusky pink sunlight illuminated a scrap of notebook paper taped to the old refrigerator. Boldly written in the slanting backhand of a young girl it declared: "Dad called. He will call back at seven. **BE HERE.** Where were you anyway, Mother???"

I wanted to rip the phone off the wall. Instead I stomped into the darkening bathroom and threw up in the stained marble sink. I hadn't seen her father in over two years but I was continually forced to listen to his ravings over the telephone. The years following our divorce continued to be verbally abusive years, years of harassment with him stalking my every move, of him breaking into my apartments, of him reading my mail and irritating me in innumerable ways both privately and publicly. He was court ordered not to call unless there was an emergency, and then he was not to talk to me but only to his note-writing daughter or to Charles. But every week he invented an emergency of sorts. And every week he managed to time his calls when I was home alone. I imagined him parked in his big black Buick around the corner keeping constant surveillance on this house. The notewriter was only thirteen; five more years legally to go before all the emergencies that John could ever invent concerning him and her would be invented and over.

I stayed inside the thick book-lined walls of Charles' stone house now, huddled near the warmth of the fireplace, soothing myself with scraps of operas and Mahler symphonies, avoiding John's insults and fists, only opening the front door a crack to catapult out his daughter—apple of his eye, by god—for weekly junk food orgies at all sorts of odd hours . . . in between visits to pay his bookie I imagined.

I grabbed onto the side of the bathtub now as a dizzying, sickly emptiness rose from my stomach to my throat. I imagined I heard John's deep singsong voice: "I haven't any money to pay support I'm not playing games I know you think I am but the job's going poorly and I had to have a new car . . ." I pressed my hands flat against my ears but I couldn't keep his whining from sneaking into my brain, "I got another speeding ticket and what do you expect when I have to be on the road as much as I do, no I can't pay her hospital bill this week tell them to go screw themselves I'm doing the best I can." I imagined him keeping a daily appointment book expecially for excuses, filling in a whole month's worth at a time.

And there were the letters, his intimidating sarcastic letters that came to me when he couldn't reach me by phone. Page long lies professing his twenty-four-hour-a-day concern for the welfare of our poor misunderstood daughter, our baby who had not had a fair start at family life; his blond blue-eyed creation and coincidentally our last connection.

He had goaded this daughter into refusing to eat her meals with Charles and I, "Remember, you don't have to do anything you don't want to, Hon. You ol' Dad is behind you 100% never forget that."

And to be sure she never forgot, there were trips to the race track, dinners in French restaurants, airplane trips, stereos and video games. She learned well and refused to speak one word to Charles for seventeen months now at last count. I imagined John had a continual smug look of delight across his high-cheekboned face.

"Why did you have to remarry," she snarled at me, "when Daddy *said* he would take care of us all."

Stop hiding. "**BE THERE** . . . You be there, Mother." The note-writer's thick curlycued letters glared at me from the edge of the wastebasket where I stood shredding the note. I could hear her stereo blaring overhead. I knew she was about to begin opening and slamming drawers, dropping things—heavy things, attention getting things—breaking dishes and hair dryers again until I would want to wring her neck. Notes, notes . . . notes gave me the shivers.

For a long time I kept secret notes. I thought her father was drunk every night, but my days were so patched together with a lopsided combination of loneliness and pain muted by seeing that the kids didn't ride their bikes in the street and got to piano lessons on time and ate their vegetables, that I couldn't be sure it was *every* night. I felt it was important to be absolutely sure he was drunk every single night or it didn't count. On small sheets of pink paper with green lines, I carefully charted out the day of the month, whether or not he bothered to come home for dinner and what state of drunkenness he returned home in after the taverns closed—on a very fair scale from one to ten. Sometimes I wrote these notes quickly in shorthand shivering in a cold sweat imagining what would happen if he should find them. My notes soon proved what everyone else in that small town already knew; he was openly, overtly, raging drunk—not only every night but every day as well by then. Even with written proof in my hand, I could not let go of my suburban marriage dream and so I continued to buy toaster ovens, carpeting and glossy paint for the kitchen cabinets.

An early evening chill swept through the house and it was with shaking fingers that I buttoned up my sweater as I walked to the bedroom closet to search for the slick green paper portfolio that I still kept these notes in. I wanted to see them again but perhaps it was not a good idea to dredge old feelings up. A bit wary I stopped at the stairway and shouted up to Susan, "I'm home, Sunshine, how are you?" No reply. I shouted louder knowing she was defiantly sprawled on her pale green carpeted floor watching afternoon soaps. "Susan, I'm home."

"Jesus Christ, Mother, what do you want me to do about it, dance a jig. I'm busy. Get off my back."

I pulled the portfolio out of the closet and perched on the edge of our big old brass and iron bed. I untied the

green ribbon wrapped around it and dumped the contents out onto the feather comforter, knowing I was delving into Pandora's box.

Most of the things in the resulting pile were typically sentimental: a few love notes, a white linen handkerchief used in my TM initiation ceremony, a note from a favorite aunt who calls me "Angel," a French postcard sent to me twenty-five years ago from a favorite teacher, a pressed flower.

I could hear Susan furiously stomping around overhead again as I continued to sort through the papers. I found a school composition written by this youngest daughter when she was seven and wore a shy smile and was very very quiet. On wide-lined cheap school tablet paper she had penciled: *I love my mother. She is nice and she is pretty. And I will never leave her. I will live with her even when I am grown up.*

We had done a lot of hugging back then and shared a lot of Oreos over the good grade she had received on her composition. She had written this at a time when I feared for her sanity most. Because among the many things my pink notes don't say is the fact that she was born into a household in the worst stages of drunken craziness. Her father was reaching his alcoholic bottom. I'm not sure that Susan ever saw him sane or quiet or loving for the first eight years of her life. When I was pregnant with her he beat and kicked me until I bled and then smashed his car into my car so I could not drive myself to the hospital. Months later she refused to be born. They had to go in and yank her out yowling, homely, bald with a big nose smashed all over her red face. But born she was; born too late to know what the older children hopefully remember: that John once had an infectious smile and a streak of tenderness.

Just when Susan was about to have her sixth birthday, John came home for dinner one evening, late in the month of May, and tried to shoot us all. Too drunk to aim, he shot holes instead in all the old plaster walls before the police arrived and jailed him.

Once locked up he threw himself against the bars and roared murderous threats with such ferocity the entire jail shook all night long. The next morning a wide-eyed policeman told me that he had never seen anything like it. I had, repeatedly.

Susan appeared at the bedroom doorway. "Are you crying again, Mother?"

"No, just feeling a little discouraged."

She offered no consolation and waited for no explanation but refused a hug and marched out of the room with a "Tut-tut." I felt sorry for her, for what she'd been through. All the relatives feel sorry for Susan.

Holding the notes stirred up memories of how we all had wept away that warm summer, the children and I, barricaded each night in the upstairs bedroom with the soft yellow rose-patterned wallpaper. Hiding in the dark with the pale patchy quilts and the telephone and the heavily bolted door and the view of the street through the lilac bush branches. Waiting. Watching prowling cats and late passerbys. Waiting. And we tried to catch what sleep we could, two to a twin bed. And every night when the corner taverns closed John came and screamed out my name and smashed through the windows and kicked holes in all six of the downstairs doors, trying to get back into His House. And every night the police came, guns drawn, and chased him away. And every night I was weak-kneed and stupified. And every night my older daughter buried her head in a pillow and cried herself to sleep before dawn but this younger daughter just clutched tightly at my clothes and looked at me with afraid big blue eyes that demanded "why don't you do something, Mommy." And every night my fourteen year old son tried to be a man, double checking locked doors and comforting his sisters as best he could. Every morning I prayed to God that my ex-husband would die a blazing horrible death before evening came again. But he never did.

Only once did he come up to the house on Maple Street during the day. The police had finally taken his driver's license away and he used this as an excuse to come on foot to beg a ride to some unnecessary place that humid summer day. He caught me off guard. He walked right into the house as if he still lived there, letting the screen door slam behind him, calling my name. Talking to distract him in the cool shade-drawn dining room, I shuffled the children upstairs to our yellow rose wallpapered room, giving my son a wink and a hand signal to bolt the door. It was that day that I first noticed how old his eyes had become. By now he had lost his job, his family, his friends. I knew he was tired of this game but he wasn't sure how to stop. He would let no one help him. His clothes were not clean. His thin blond hair hung in his eyes. One of his shoes was missing a buckle and flopped when he walked. He was sleeping in his car these days in the Country Club parking lot where out of respect for what he had been, they did not disturb him. It made me sick to my stomach to see him so unkempt. And although he beat me because I would not give him a ride, I cried for his pain that day instead of mine.

I did not have the luxuries of time and sanity to record who did what to who between the green lines of my pink paper that summer, nor for two after that.

Our bedroom, Charles' and mine, is completely dark now and I turn on the little lamp over the bed, the iced pink notepapers still shaking in my hand. I notice they are from the first three months of some undetermined year . . . three typical months that were repeated over and over faster and faster for a nine year run. The big finale being those summer months on Maple Street in the yellow room in the once cozy hundred year old home that now

had holes in the plaster walls, holes in the doors, holes in the windows. When I sold it, the warm soft woodwork and the once safe nooks and crannies were as scarred as all of us. Sixty performances, eleven furniture smashing events Ladies and Gentlemen, with a few sickening physical encores in the two following years between times he finally agreed to be hospitalized.

Susan broke into my thoughts again, "Do you suppose you might consider making supper one of these days." I began to shuffle the things back into the portfolio.

The ringing phone startles me back to reality. I know it's him. The bile rises once again in my throat. When will he let me be? When will he stop ruining my life? In a split second I tear the first page of old notes into long thin pink strips and let them flutter to the floor. By the sixth insistent ring I am done destroying all the notes and am doing a Susan stomp all over the pieces that litter the bedroom floor.

Susan runs down the stairs from her attic domain. "Jesus Christ, answer the phone, Mother. I told you he was going to be calling. Can't you ever do anything I say." She picked up the phone.

"Not now, Susan," I stammered, ashamed of myself. The idea that I could refuse to speak to him was alien to me.

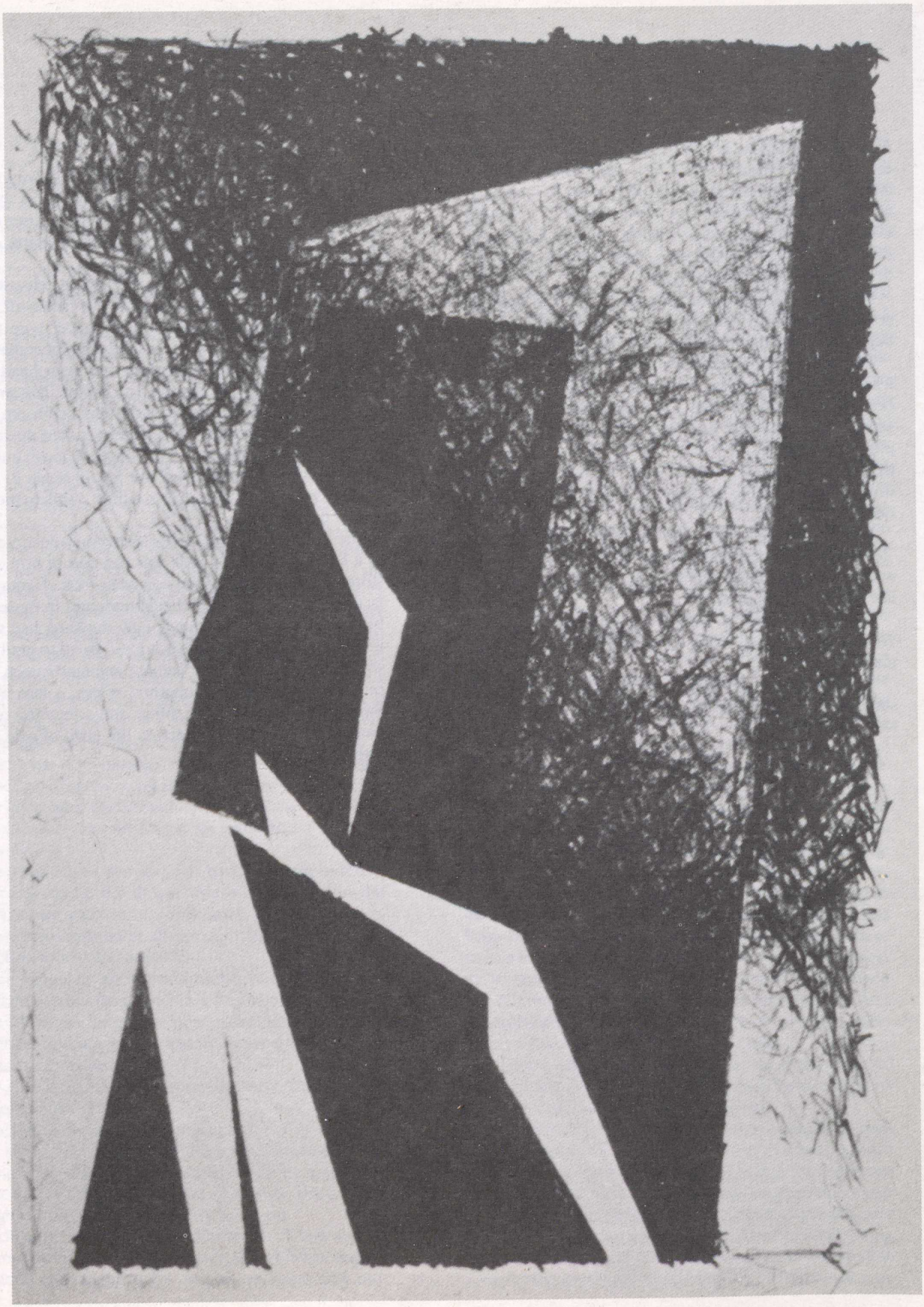
"Mother, now!" she demands, "He wants to take me somewhere very special and he has to talk to you, now. Now, Mother."

"Not now."

"I hate you, no one understands me, I'll show you all." She slams down the phone and turns and kicks the wall before running up the stairs to her kingdom, her untied shoe flopping on the stairs, her bangs hanging in her sullen eyes. My guilt level rises.

I begin to cry again, crying from nervous exhaustion to the point of choking. When will all the calls end? When will he go away and leave me in peace? I go to the bathroom, consider throwing up and remember that I had read you should put a paper bag over your head as an antidote to hiccups and crying. I sit on the dark wooden floor, my back in the corner of the tiny bathroom like a fool with a Piggly Wiggly grocery bag pulled down over my head. The crying stops and I begin to laugh and stop short. Inside the garbage bag the pieces begin to flutter into place, one thin torn strip at a time. I sink to the floor sadder than before—

The threat to my future is not sitting outside these walls in a Buick . . . Susan's look was not one of hurt as she stormed up the stairs; it was a familiar look of smug satisfaction across those high cheekbones and in those deep blue eyes. Gotcha. My huggy ugly duckling had grown into a swan before my eyes but I had failed to notice that she was a vicious, haughty, father-pampered queen, snapping out her powerful inherited wings. A rare bird of Swedish descent breaking things and screaming out my name in the midnight air across her lawn of pale green carpet. ▣



Kelly Day **9:35 PM**

Hiroshima Lovely

Hiroshima lovely like the eyes that used to glow
Hiroshima lovely like the diamond in your nose
I can hear your island laughter
just before the blow
I can hear your silence after
all has come and gone
Hiroshima lovely tastes of salt and fallen flesh
Hiroshima lovely tries to breathe but cannot catch
fighting for your precious marrow
dogs rip you apart
whining for the bigger pieces
pulling at your heart
Hiroshima lovely they forget you even lived
Hiroshima lovely this is how it all begins

Peter Neiderbach

passionate interlude

a traumatic experience
totally interlaced with meaning
is to be chosen above riches

who truly shares your concern
in the thickness of the night
when all of your self-respect melts
and drips silently to the floor

anguish becomes a prelude to being
when abstractions obscure the truth
mortal awareness contradicts life
    in so many ways
    for so many days
    you can't count them
    with your calculator

causing a scene in the library
consuming pages out of a dictionary
lost within a current periodical
searching desperately for a footnote
amid the rumble of words at war
    with sentences defeating paragraphs
    and photographs finding glory

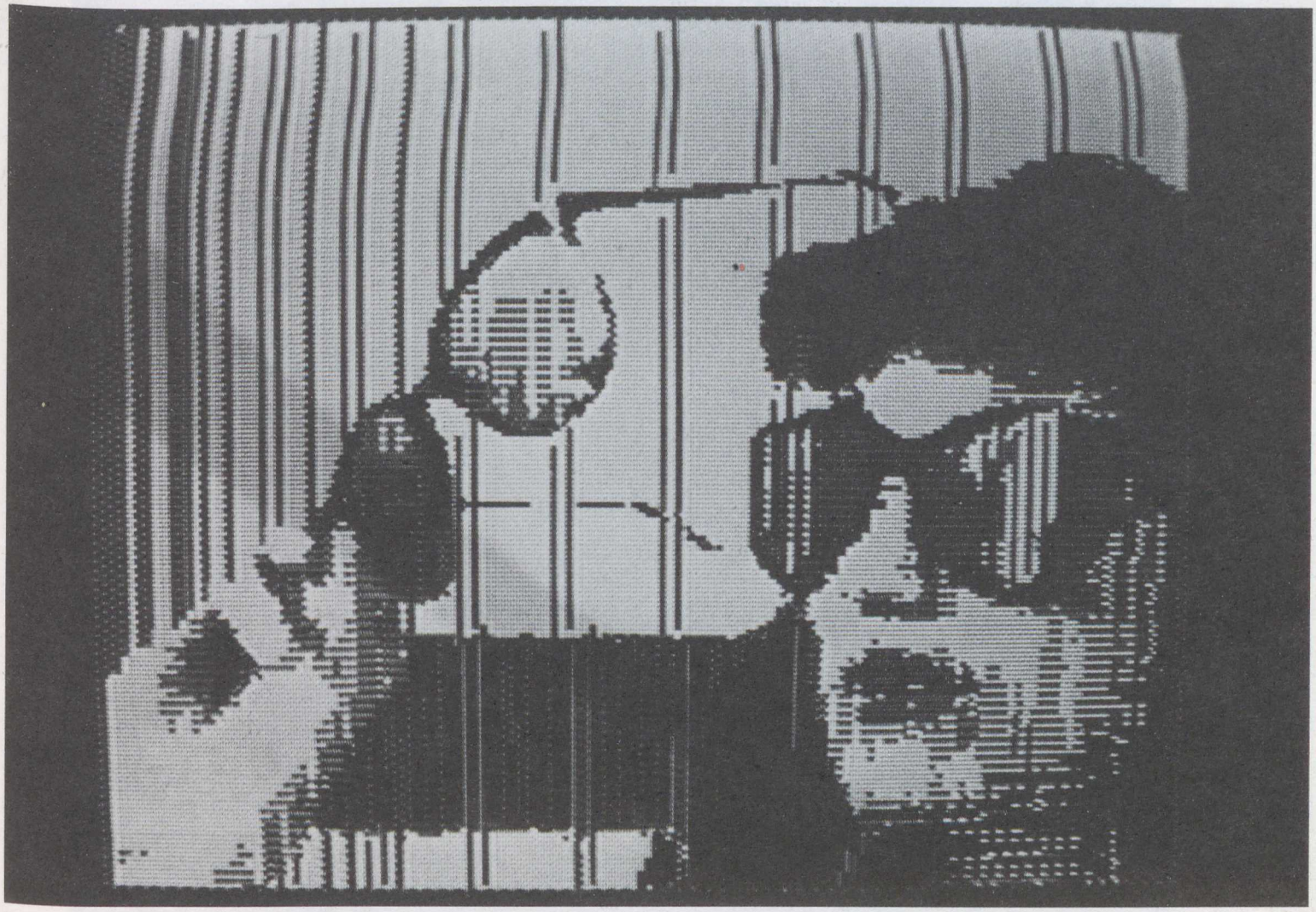
stealing someone else's I.Q.
while the world looks to the left
no one could ever know for sure
that you are what you claim to be

mouthfuls of hatred
suspended on your forehead
tasting like postage stamps
sent to a 'friend'
    in the best of times
    with the best intentions
    for the best of reasons

twin nightmares awaken you
from your restful sleep
into an emotional blitzkrieg
bringing suicide and hopelessness
                and sympathy
                and a funeral

ad infinitum

Aaron Wilson Hughey

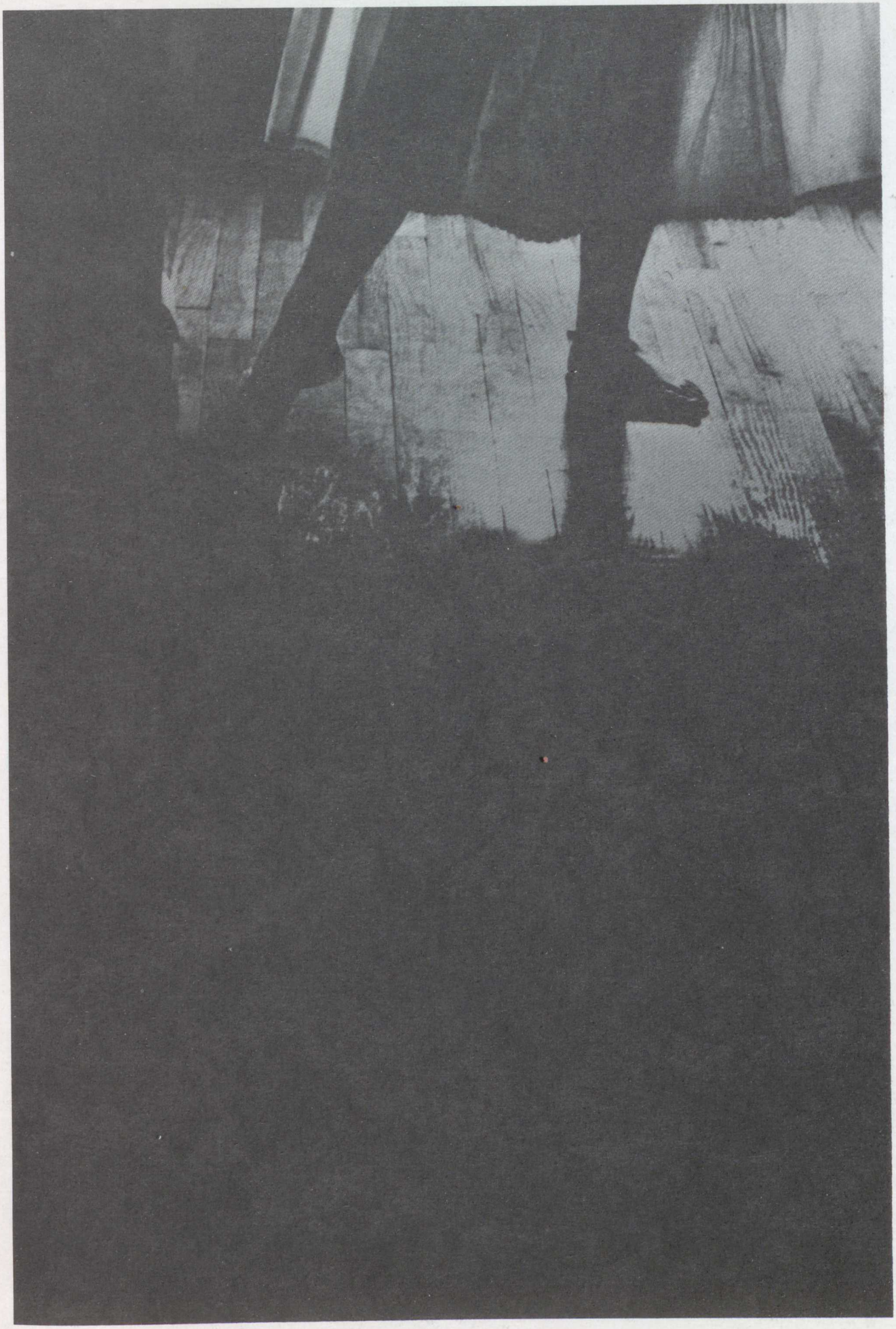


Terre Layng **Untitled**

dormire, to sleep

The air turns chill as autumn firmly bursts
Aloft the flecks of feathers flying fast.
The ripened leaves mellow, as if rehearsed
To season sad thoughts of sunny greens past.
For slowly hibernation has begun—
The simple silhouettes of black look stark
And naked in the glaring crabby sun.
So quickly daylight hastens into dark.
The striking color blazes sulphurous
While chasing yellow cinders seared to dust.
Tingling talcum slowly flutters listless
And weary; frigid features start to frost.
The cycle's slipped, not into subdued
And senseless death, but sleep—to wake renewed.

Christina Braezinski



Howard Quednau **Untitled**

Reading Too Much Kafka This Summer

Swatting and smashing is not enough,
I flip those dirty little black
And yellow spotted beetles onto
Their slippery backs,
Pull their crawly legs off snappp---snap, snap---
Pin stick their invisible eyes
And set a match to them until they pop
. . . Metamorphosis!

Judy Hamm

His Father's Grave

I stood behind once
in late morning sun,
while my father knelt
at a granite stone—
bearing our three names
in one—on brassplate.
He clipped grass squarely from its edge
and shined tarnished metal with rags;
his bent back rocked and heated
beneath the heightening suns.
He left a wreath there to wilt.

Now, in late afternoon
shadows shift through the trees;
no one stands behind me
crouched and scrubbing their names—
hot backed with aching hands
holding a shredded rag—
fast as the sun declines,
when twilight clots the sky,
staining the horizon
and soaking over earth,
crusted soon to pure black;
and I offer no wreath
but sip at the darkness and rise.

Dan Riggle

Unfinished Loneliness

The dried grasses lie broken
and scattered
clumped upon the dusty earth.
The air is dry
filled with the nothingness
of a calm stillness.
Though there may be more here,
the emptiness prevails.
Voices can sometimes be heard
(a mirage? a wish?)
but they are far away.
Walking on, there is no path to follow.
Nothing seems to change -
nothing else moves on.
Still those voices always seem to remain
within earshot
But never nearer.

Neil Mikota

Howard Quednau **Figure**

From Your Earth

With my knife
I cut
your world apart

sun weightless
hanging
from the trees.

Gus Vasilopoulos

(Untitled)

stirred by something, slow
the dryest thought
of movement (in the air).
Like a curtain, hanging there

a trellis of grapes, or ivy
(something creeping anyway)
covers the wall—outside
the wall the wind

blows on. A kit inside
hung up like a rug (moving
like a drape) in the air
moves in the afternoon

Richard Cermack