



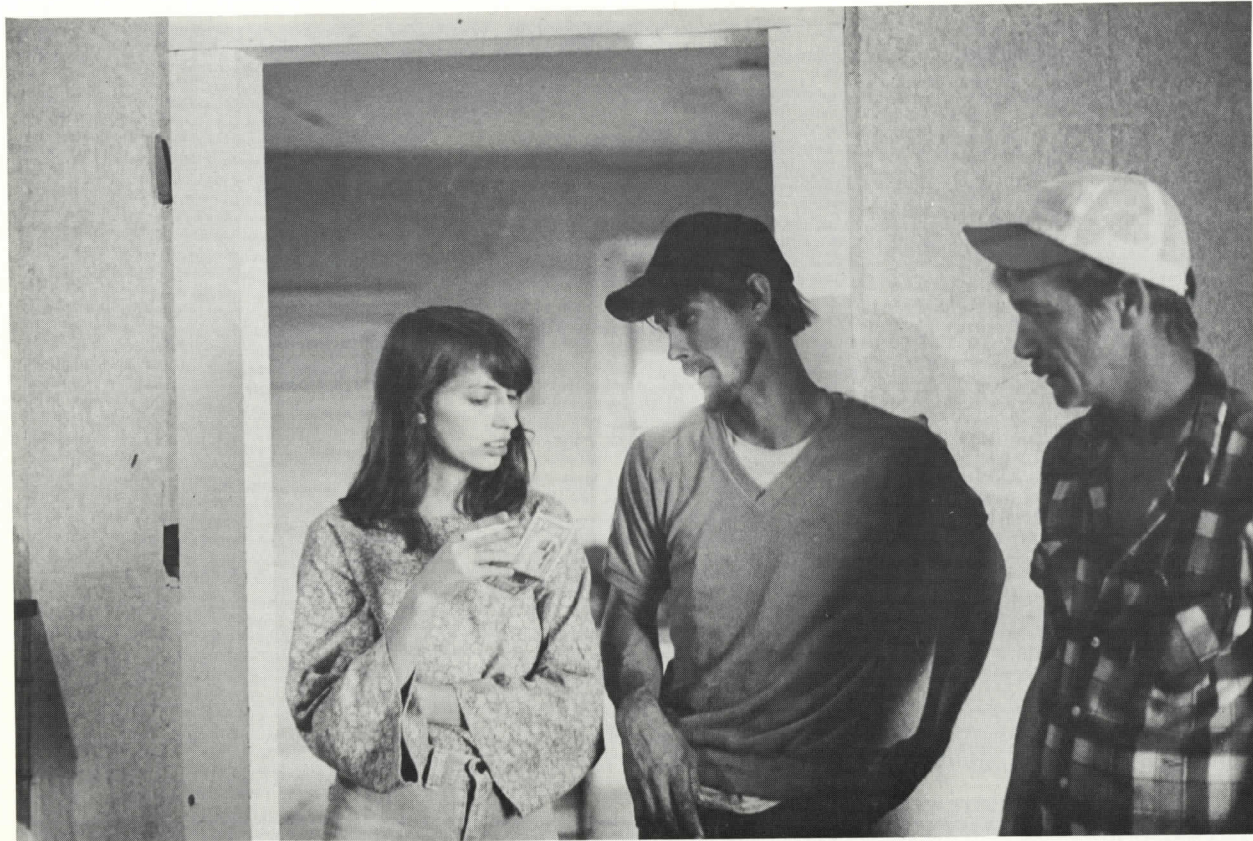
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Cover design by Scott Thomas



Christy Smith



Kathy Brady

My Sister's Life

is not her own.
it is an extension
of a man pounding
nails into roofs
demanding bag lunches
and a child banging
doors against walls,
refusing home-cooked meals.

it is a prisoner
of dream slamming
windows upon sills,
shattering reflections.

and she decorates
this drama of
pre-dawn arguments
temper tantrums
morning sickness
monetary emergencies
with k-mart portraits
and polyester roses.
clutters it with
piles of lace-trimmed
negligees and stacks of
historic romance.

she is teaching herself
french from a crayon-streaked
paperback picked up for
a quarter at some yard sale.
"c'est la vie," she sighs
from her dinette throne
in the kitchen, where the
men sip whiskey, there is
a pot of new potatoes
about to boil all over
that old stove.



Photo-Poem
Kathy Brady

Sie Hat Es Gemocht

Sie hat es gemocht, damals,
Wenn er rauschte,
"Ja, ja, ich liebe dich,"
Und von draussen konnten sie
Den Mann mit dem Gemüse rufen hören.
"Kartoffeln!" rief der Mann,
Rief er ganz laut
Und immer wieder.

Sie haben ihn gehört
Und sie wussten,
Dass sie keine Kohle mehr hatten
Und nicht so viel kaufen konnten.

Herbst war es
Und es war ziemlich kalt--
Zu kalt sogar
Die Füsse auf dem Boden
Liegen zu lassen;
Aber es war warm genug
Vor dem Feuer,
Wo sie lächelten,
Und er rauschte,
"Ja, ja, ich liebe dich,"
Damals.

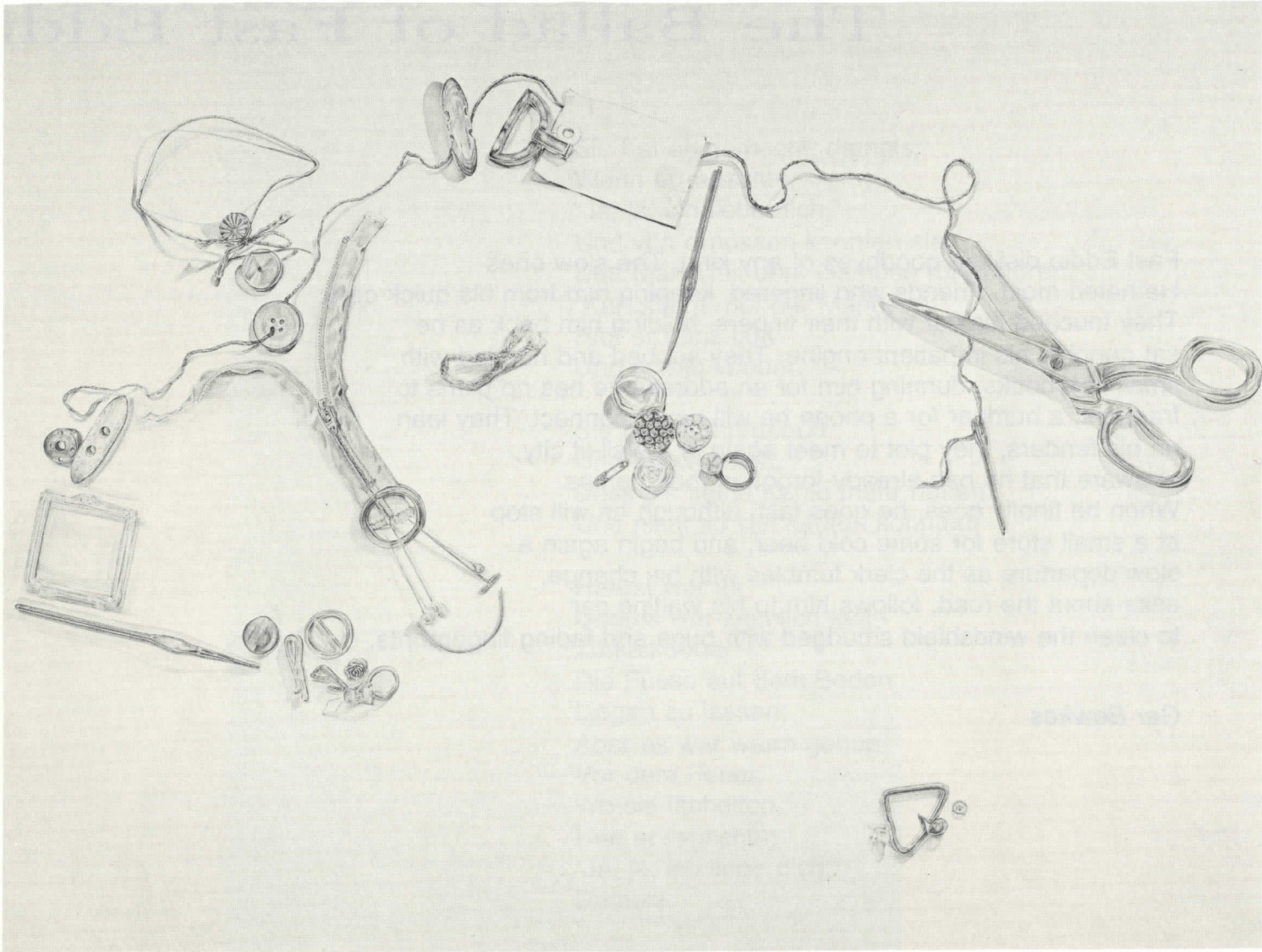
James B. Caret

(English translation page 30)

The Ballad of Fast Eddie

Fast Eddie disliked goodbyes of any kind. The slow ones
He hated most. Friends who lingered, keeping him from his quick cars.
They touched his car with their fingers, holding him back as he
sat gunning his impatient engine. They sobbed and nodded with
small notebooks, dunning him for an address he has no plans to
frequent, a number for a phone he will never connect. They lean
on his fenders, they plot to meet again in a well-lit city,
unaware that he has already forgotten their names.
When he finally goes, he goes fast, although he will stop
at a small store for some cold beer, and begin again a
slow departure as the clerk fumbles with his change,
asks about the road, follows him to his waiting car
to clean the windshield smudged with bugs and fading fingerprints.

Gar Bewkes



Pam Bohall

Ada

She stalks the outer edges of
The whirlwind of this house
Who was once the center.
Like an aged attic doll,
A gray-tattered fairy
Inveterately waving a broken wand

Too much time given over to function,
To soaps and pill boxes
Too many real words escaping
Or haply caught and twisted
Snatches of old concerns,
Of knotted floorboards and dimly-lit lamps

How careless
Not wanting to be saved
How utterly unlike us
To be the half-witted carrier of
An ashen torch,
Reminder of the best forgotten

Jenny McMillion

Nutty Cutty

Frederick Sharrow

The wind picks up the leaves strewn along the riverbank, swirling their ambers and crimsons high above the water. The geese have returned, preparing to settle in for the winter, bobbing up and down in the breeze-swept river, their chatter filling the air like car horns on a wedding day. It is always good to come home, especially this time of year. It is always good to walk in familiar places, with your senses heightened somehow, soaking up every detail of this place that you have visited countless times before.

I know by heart that I am really home when I stand beside this river. Images of times past flow through my mind, remembrances of childhood and adolescence, happy times, anger, calm, and frustration. I change and grow, get knocked down, and get back up, but this setting endures, constant, changing with the seasons, but still always remaining the same. The geese have increased their volume, alerting my attention to the presence of somebody approaching. I see two men walking a short distance upriver, one young, one older. The young man grips the arm of the older fellow. They do not speak; they just look out over the water, much like I do.

I recognize the older gentleman, and this recognition brings to me a new flood of emotions and images. We met here before, perhaps fifteen years ago, only he was alone and I was with a group of boys, maybe a half-dozen of us in all. This man approached us, attempting conversation, but we were not interested. Instead, we taunted him, circled him, and we each pelted him with pebbles. The meaner kids threw larger rocks. He chased us unsuccessfully, and we regrouped uptown, panting and laughing. The man's name was William Cuttingham. I think that every small town possesses a character like him, one who usually just blends in, going about his business, but one who occasionally stands out alone, usually at the provocation of a rowdy gang of young boys. Yes, children are cruel. We would invent reasons to crucify Bill, reasons such as accusing him of stealing one of our kickballs. Our hurtful task was easy, because Bill always approached us first. I could not understand that.

Bill Cuttingham was middle-aged, with a small oval face that was tinged with three different shades of red, topped with a stubbly black crewcut. We supposed he had high blood pressure. His left arm was crippled; I do not think he could straighten it out completely, so he would use it as a shelf to carry his groceries, resting the bag in the crook of the misshapen arm. When he walked, it was with an exaggerated swing of his good arm, providing balance. What always amazed me was that he could smoke a cigarette without breaking stride, inhaling each time his arm would swing forward. He smoked those filterless Camels, smoked them all of the way down until they burned his fingertips, which were stained a sickening, permanent yellow.

When Bill approached us, he would start talking away, all gibberish. The conversation would begin with Bill stuttering along, "Up in Ca-Ca-Cambria County, Cr-Cr-Cr-Cresson, Pa., fifty-seven, big flood. Fell ou-ou-out of the truck, state police barracks, you know it yourself." We enjoyed that phrase, "you know it yourself," and we would mimic him unmercifully. His face would turn a livid purple, and he would continue, "You think that's something, big knife, went to Tor-Tor-Torrance, you think you're smart, you're baked, go talk to the moon. You're all titched, titched!" We taunted, "Go talk to the moon, go talk to the moon!" Bill would look quickly back and forth at us, his face filled with an expression of fear or paranoia, and he would snap on his transistor radio, tuned to the Pirate game, and turn to walk away. Sometimes we pursued, other times we let him go. Walking away, he would turn every few paces and yell more nonsense at us. This would continue until we were out of sight or hearing range of each other. This scenario was repeated many times during my childhood, always with the same finale: Bill yelling at us, and we shouting back, "Nutty Cutty, Nutty Cutty!"

When I was a senior in high school, Bill's mother died. He had always lived with her; his father had died when Bill was eight. Bill never attended school, never held a job. I did not believe he was capable of either. My friend Floyd lived next door to the Cuttingham's, and he told me that the state intended to "put Bill away." I felt bad about this, maybe because of a sense of guilt for all of the trouble I had given him, but maybe it was more than that. You see, I do not believe I was any more perceptive than my other young friends, but somehow, during the teasing and ridicule sessions with Bill, I sensed that he was trying to tell us something. It was his eyes, deep and dark, darting back and forth. As a child, I perceived his movement to be panic and distrust, but now as a senior remembering Bill's expression, I saw a deep frustration, maybe a story he needed to tell, but could not come near expressing.

Floyd telephoned me a few days after Mrs. Cuttingham's funeral and stated that his mother had volunteered to go through the Cuttingham house and pack up all of the belongings. He told me that Bill now resided at the Polk Home for the Mentally Disadvantaged, and his house was for sale. Floyd asked if I would help him and his mother clean the place. I agreed.

The house looked about as I had expected: clean, but cluttered with an old woman's touch who could not afford many new things. I walked upstairs alone and found Bill's room. I hesitated for a moment, but curiosity prevailed, and I entered. Pangs of guilt increased, but I rationalized that I was not the only person who had tormented Bill.

His closet was filled with the old, familiar workshirts he favored, and I saw his scuffed-up steel-toed shoes poking out from beneath his bed. There was an old record player in the corner and a crate filled with albums. I picked through his collection, pulling out Stravinsky, Brahms, Gershwin, and Joplin. Strange, I thought, but then, "music soothes the savage breast." Much more unexpected was the floor to ceiling bookcase that extended across an entire wall. It was lined with all of the "classics," as well as a long row containing names like Gropius, Johnson, and Mies van der Rohe. What were these books, and why in the world were they in Bill's room? Moving to another corner of the room, I noticed a table upon which rested a thick stack of drawing paper. These papers were filled with beautiful pencil-drawn perspectives of skyscrapers and grand avenues. Each sheet bore the initials W.J.C. A shoebox was filled with leadholders, templates, and compasses, along with strips of balsa wood and cardboard. Floyd interrupted my discoveries, and we packed everything away.

The breeze off the water refreshes me on this October day, and I am again aware of the leaves and the wild geese. The young man is leading the old man downriver, proceeding towards me. The old man, old Bill, old "Nutty Cutty," is tossing bread crumbs to the waterfowl as he walks. Now, presumably wiser and educated, I am aware of what those strange books were, the strange names, Gropius, Johnson, Mies van der Rohe, aware of their architecture and philosophies. Bill is close now; I wonder if he recognizes me? He appears calm, docile, maybe unfeeling. I can see the scars along his pink temples, only partially hidden beneath the graying crewcut. A picture of the stereotypical mental "therapy" of cutting out paper dolls races into my mind. Bill is standing right before me now, and there are the eyes. Are they still searching, still frustrated, or is it my imagination? I think it is alright now, Bill; I think I know your secret. Paper dolls, hah! I believe you should be creating your "Great Glass Towers."

A golden leaf falls close before my face, and the geese are fleeing the river in a flurry of grace and sound, already forming their V-shaped flying formation. Bill is shuffling away from me now, and I have a compelling urge to reach down where the water laps against the shore and pick up one of the colorful, smooth pebbles that rests there. Maybe not a pebble, maybe a larger rock, and I want to throw it--throw it very hard at Bill's retreating head. I am not sure why; maybe just for old time's sake.

St. Abner

What if Martin Luther, steeped in outrage
and blinded by the sheer light of his mission,
had missed that door and tacked his Diet on a
neighboring barn, where only cows could catch
the significance, nodding and mooing and plopping
with their usual regard for the utter sanctity
of the status quo? —would the pope still billow by
in his well-kissed robes? And what of Calvin?
Did our grace precede the Fall? or were we
trundled up to salvation only after the rest
had chosen sin, the smack of flesh on flesh,
the pop and flow of verbotten liquids, the crack
of horsehide leather on piney wood— going, going,
gone, over the barbed fence and rolling past
gurnseys too damn dignified to give chase till the run has come home.

Gar Bewkes



“Toys”

Kathy Brady

An Easter Gift

Candleflame, wax, stylus, dyes
painstakingly crafted.
A Byzantine geometry of
Polish eggs for Easter dinner
in Tennessee (of all places,
sweet Christ). Casual
demonstration of a daughter's
talent.

*We had bought the kit for her
at a Polish bookstore in
San Francisco the year before.*

The tapestried aureate cross
embroidered on the resurrectional
white of Father Loicieneski's
vestments; my grandmother's
calla-filled cut glass vases
proudly displayed on the lace
altar cloth of Mrs. Klocko;
and the sweet soprano, sounding
Gloria in excelsis, above
the choir dazzled. These
merely prelude to celebration
outside the church after mass.

*Her artful eye leapt quickly
at design intricately complete
and divined its world replete.*

Around the mud-brown, stone
blocks of the outer wall
came Poles, sturdy in faith,
stolid-strong as our church.
They came to stand beside
white birch saplings and limbs
arched into pagan chapels
under which in peasant plentitude
lay Easter dinners waiting for
the blessing of sprinkled holy water
blotted by--almost rolling off--
the crisp, starched white linen
matching the white crispness
of the raised host at mass.

*Each wary dip into a font of dye
revealed new colored figures
in the mosaic of her egg.*

There lay not symbols of ritual
commemoration to His risen spirit,
but sacramental substance
required and cherished by men
who dug, by carloads, hard
black coal from earth. The things
themselves, consecrates of work
and earth. There were hams, geese
(a Polish favorite), and ringed kielbasi;
rutabagas, carrots, potatoes--sweet

Silent Birth

and white--wintered in cellars for
the holy feast; then golden brown,
eggwashed crusts of poppyseed and nut rolls;
and, for a boy, most glorious,
the colored eggs of eastern Europe,
oval labyrinths of circles, squares,
angles, arches and colors which led
the eye through the elaborate symmetry
of a world without beginning
and without end.

*Ancient mystic that night, she
polished runic symbols of her craft
displaying the egg in self delight.*

Frank R. Ginanni

To the girl child of twelve,
suddenly all things conspired
in an abundant world to transport
her to awful moments of blissful
balance: an apple blossom veined
with the flushed pink of a girl
discovered at her secret bath;
the blood tipped, parchment
petals of dogwoods, purified by
their crimson etchings; young thighs
gripping and firm flanks seating
the rhythmic feel of a flowing horse.

Suspended in that puzzling-ache-
of-a-place between need and fear,
joy and pain, she gave quick tears
struggling with another birth--
a birth etched in the corners of her
clean lipped mouth and trembling the
filaments of her lowered lashes--
a silent birth I silently attended,
helpless, in glory and despair.

Frank R. Ginanni

“He is the vine; we are the branches”



Julie Jack

Subconscious Interrogation

I see two faces in the dark
Exerting forces over me
That I cannot control.
But do I want to?

First is the countenance of frailty
Steeped in century-old tradition
Striving to be the puppet-master,
Afraid of strings being cut.

Lucifer is also here
Adept in manipulation
Of the marionette soul
But is the talent exercised?

Both are close enough to touch,
Yet I cannot reach them;
One burns at the touch,
the other, sealed in ice.

Still this game of
Cardiac tug-of-war goes on,
The one at the fulcrum
Waiting for victory or death.

M. E. Lowe

First Place

Laughing Man

As sleepy cows plod to the waiting barn,
The sun crashes into the sea of horizon haze
Leaving the stark chill of late fall and the wisp
Of a farmer's chimney hanging in the still air.

Opposite from the polished dunes of fleeting dusk,
A sienna ball lunges forth to conquer the nightscape.
Charging ever upward and changing hues,
It hurdles the woods and asphyxiates the twilight.

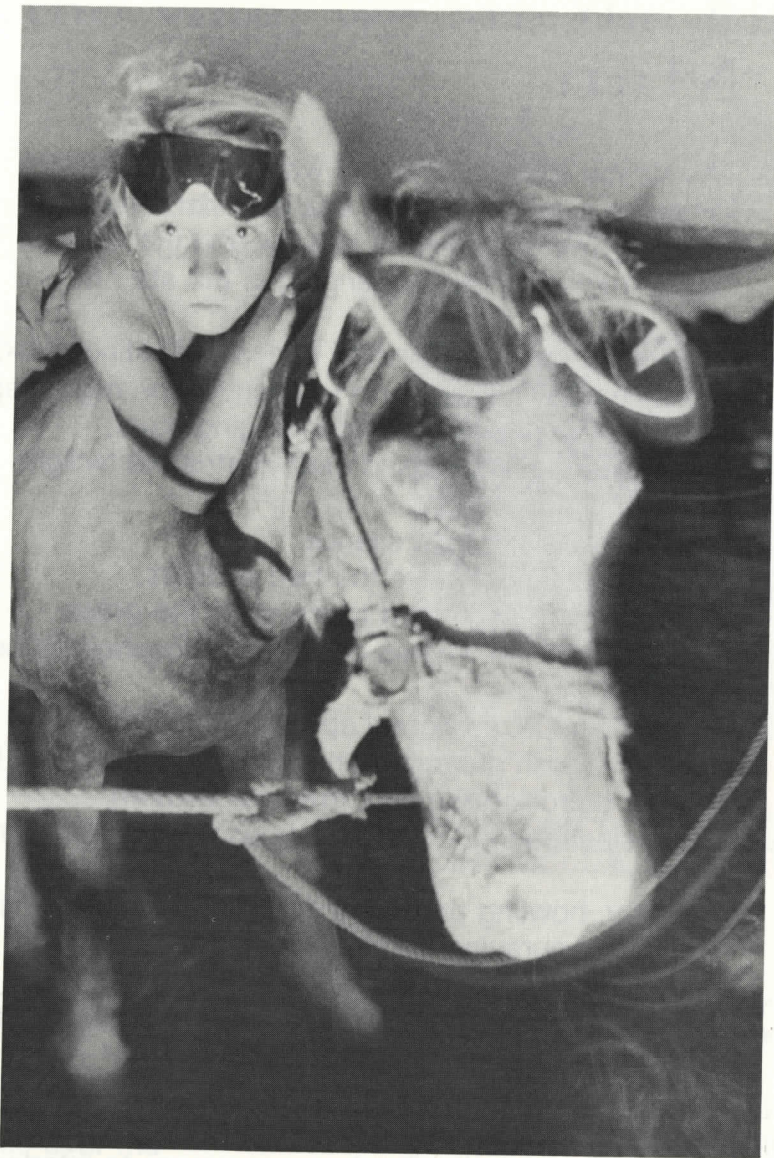
In the deafening cold silence
The Bright Angel slays the tree warriors,
Leaving them wounded to die upon the grass
Like massacred whales on a dark phosphorous beach.

The luminous, corporeal specter grins haughtily--
Its white flesh gleaming brightly upon a speckled blue rug
Boldly patrolling the dim, irregular verdure--
As it slashes the shadows viciously and without mercy!

Hungry, howling predators accompany the laughing face,
Stealthily pursuing an elusive, frightened quarry.
The shrieks of a victim echo across the valley
And then fade away as a soul succumbs to voracious, savage jaws.

The killer laughs aphonically as it wanes past the zenith,
Absconding the blazing ember over the far perimeter.
Tomorrow night it will return once more to interlope,
Counting coup upon the dark and silhouetting the eyrie...

Dan N. Clark



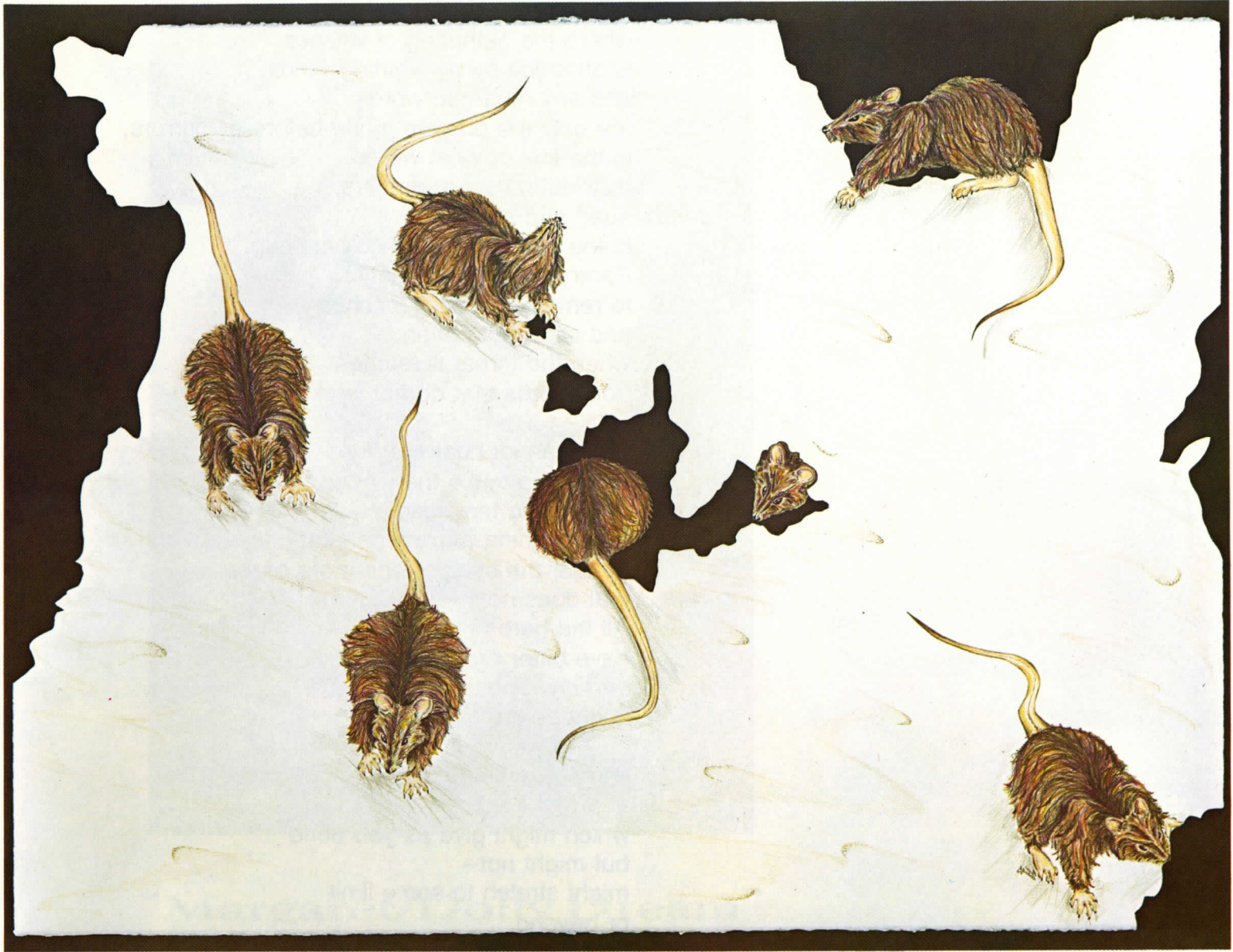
“Margaret/Dolly Dream”

The Failure of Folk Medicine

What I know, I know from covens
where the gathering of witches
is attended by no whirling winds,
and any muttered words
are only the prayers made before all mirrors,
in the talk of what we do,
distilled in cool green jars,
aged and steeped
in the stain of a cracked blue cup.
Pantry hags pour a kettle
to remedy anybody's aches
and stir a hot potion
when the throat scratches
from words that do not work.

But I cannot heal with these, I think.
I shrink to touch the wound,
tender and too close
to something moving beneath
to bear the sting of one more probe
that does not heal.
All the herbs I know
have bitter roots,
and any poultice
might patch
only to weave itself
into surrounding skin
and make a scar there
which might give as you bend
but might not--
might stretch to some limit
or beyond
and tear open again
the soft under flesh
no witch must touch.

Dixie Highsmith



Protocol Analysis Phase One

The blank page glares
then jeers

then pen--my current
favorite--is put to paper. Doesn't
matter. Doesn't matter
what you write--write.

So words appear giving birth to new words and killing
off others in my mind. (Who monitors?

Shouldn't ask. Not my duty. Write.

I-Me? I-Thou? i-i-i? Who cares.)

Delightful schizophrenia (an abused word,
though still meaningful) and

then pen and hand before me

swell to Monty Python size (reference limits understanding,
but gratifying) not to squash unsuspecting intruders

but to invite them to the page.

(To what end?) No matter. Write.

The monitor is

leaving. The pen continues

uninhibited. Useless but enjoyable activity...

I'll be yanked from the control group...

Robin Altinyeleklioglu



Janice Dawson

First Place (tie)

View from a Window

I have watched from this window
too many times to give it up now.
Like the photograph I keep for talisman
against darker days.
The cornered light here is pure
and air and sound carry vision
in all directions.
I have seen things.

In the carnival field,
a girl waits, in the bright balloon,
for warm air to take her up
and for the tall man to come striding
hard through the thick straw
strewn with discarded ballast
and the watching crowds.

And then, too, when someone lifts a child
to wave at colors in the sky
and the pale girl looking up,
what storm there is
threatens only wind and motion
and a faster flight.
The rope's beating hum in air
promises.

The cool face in the photograph
has seen children waving at balloons
and a girl scanning skies
and the woman watching at the window
for the real dream--

The hour is late, afternoon
in a long, slow draw
and I would lure you into the dark hall,
to the stairs
while the dying day thumps
against the window before the rain
and the balloon's rising will be
nothing compared to this--

Oh, you can dream enough from windows.
I know that from looks,
from your pure eye in the picture.
But filling up the time with visions
does not change the fact
that you are holding something
close against you, under your black overcoat,
like one more starving infant
who cannot love you
and will not eat from your hand.

Dixie Highsmith

A Creature's Story

Don Baker



Bill McClary

In the beginning, there was nothing, nothing at all. There was only a machine-like hum in this room where it all began. The room was dark, and there was a smell. It was the smell of machines and of rank, oozing chemical matter. There, just outside the window, was a spherical object. It was nothing more than a tumultuous, dark wasteland. On this sphere, there was nothing, nothing at all, just the howling wind.

Inside this dark room, there was suddenly light. Then, one could see a computer bank along that wall. This monolith of blinking lights, gauges and other instruments was the source of the hum that filled the room. There was a slight pause in the hum being emitted from the monolith. A large, metallic creature with bright, intelligent, blue eyes materialized out of the side of the gargantuan computer. It was connected to the monolith by a black cord. The Creature had a fixed smile on its face. Its eyes showed sympathy and compassion, but these emotions had no objects. There was nothing to share them with.

There was another pause, and seven small creatures similar to the first were ejaculated from the monolith. These creatures were connected by long, black cords to the Creature. These creatures in the same way that the larger Creature was connected to the monolith. The seven small creatures encircled the Creature, and this caused a tangling of the cords which the Creature had occasionally to untangle. When the small creatures had encircled the Creature, they began clicking in unison: "click, click, click, click, click, click," and then a pause, and they would begin again.

The Creature wandered about the room with the seven small creatures following it and encircling it with their incessant praise. The Creature stumbled upon a table covered with many bottles and jars. Some of the jars were filled with various powders, others with liquids, and still others with some kind of hard matter. The Creature immediately regarded the table as useless junk. It turned to the monolith and tried to express its despair. The monolith responded by turning itself off. The Creature peered out the window searching for an answer to its despair, and saw the tumultuous sphere. It began to wonder.

The sphere was encircled by darkness, just as the Creature once had been. The Creature wished that the sphere could have light as it did. Suddenly, there was light outside the window as well as inside. This shocked the Creature, but it liked it. It realized that light all the time was not good, so it reached out its hand and separated the light from the darkness, night. The Creature was tired, so it rested.

The next day, the Creature reached out and formed land by digging its hand into the formless matter and separating dirt and water. The land it thought of as earth, and the water, the sea. Then, it looked at the night and the day, and wished that there were lights to separate them. It expected this to happen because it willed it. Nothing happened. The Creature was puzzled. It got angry and told the small creatures to stop clicking. This they did. It looked to the monolith for help. The lights and gauges of the monolith remained dark and silent. Its anger rising, the Creature attacked the monolith. In the midst of destroying the gargantuan computer, the Creature found a large glowing object, a medium sized glowing object, and many small ones. It looked out the window at day and night and was inspired. It went to the window and hung the large object in the day's sky. Finally, it scattered the small ones in the night's sky to make up the difference. When it looked upon the result, it saw that this was pretty good. However, while appreciating the beauty of its toy, the Creature was again inspired. Doing some quick mathematical computations, it rearranged the glowing objects so that they would mark the fixed times in the progression of infinity. It was then very pleased, but very tired. It rested.

Then, being satisfied with the sphere, it moved on to the table. It was encouraged by its success with its first creation to try again. It toyed with the bottles and jars for awhile. Then, it began dumping the contents of the bottles on the floor. The result was a green semi-hard glob. It began shaping things from the stuff and came up with a plant. It wondered at what it had done. For the third time, inspiration came to it. It carried the plant to the window and hurled it at its earth. It continued this process until all of the land was covered with various plants. This process consumed a lot of time, and the Creature was tired. It rested.

The next day, the Creature began by just staring at the table covered with junk. It wished to create something that could share its love and compassion. It became frustrated from lack of inspiration, and it turned the table over, breaking all of the bottles and jars. This formed a stinking mess. The slimy, oozing liquid began moving of its own. The Creature was amazed. Slowly, shapes began to form and separate themselves from the liquid. Some of these things were small and some were large. Some lay flat on the floor of the room; others were elevated by legs. Still others floated in what was left of the liquid. The Creature loved all of these things and thought them beautiful. It only wished that they could return its love.

It went over to one of the things with legs and leaned down into

the face of the new creature. The four-legged thing had silky, brown hair, and this amazed the Creature. While looking at the four-legged thing, the Creature began oozing its own liquid from its face. This liquid fell upon the new creature, and the thing became a living animal. The Creature now understood that it could give these things part of its life. So, the Creature dripped its life onto the things one by one, and they became animals. Sometimes, the flow of the life-giving liquid would stop, and the Creature would have to open some new wound. The Creature became very weak after awhile and had to ask the original seven creatures who continually encircled it with clicks to carry the animals to its sphere. The last animal that it gave life to was the whale. The seven creatures tried to transport the whale to the sea, but they were not strong enough. The Creature had to help them.

After hoisting the whale into the sea, the Creature turned to find the seven creatures staring at something that had formed from the stinking liquid. It was a beautiful thing and the Creature loved it immediately. In its weakness, the Creature fell on the way to give the new thing its life-liquid. The Creature could not move.

It called over the seven and told them to take some of the liquid to the thing. The answer came from six of the seven: "click, click, click, click, click, click." There was silence and the Creature looked at the seventh little creature. The response of the seventh was: "click, click, click, click, click, click." The Creature pulled the cord of the seventh out of its side and told it to leave the room. The seventh did as it was told. The other six got a jar and some of the liquid that was oozing from the hole in the Creature where the seventh's cord had been connected. They went to the thing and poured the liquid on it. The thing became Man. Man looked around, blinked, and saw the Creature. The Creature interested Man for a moment. Then, seeing the sphere and the beauty of it, Man went to the window and leapt to the earth. The Creature lay there as the last life liquid oozed from the wound in its side and was happy for Man.

In the end there was nothing, nothing at all, just the howling wind.....





Doug Bell

Second Place

Guppies and Others

Joe Irwin

To whom it may concern.... No, too trite. To whom it may not concern. Cute but too restrictive. I don't want to ruin it for anyone, but I die in the end.

My mind is not real deep, but it's wide. So I can question many things but find answers to few. Perhaps there are no answers, at least none that can be found by questioning. Maybe I think too much.

Damn, it's cold. I'm supposed to be taking notes, History 2-0-something. The historical stream of chalk swims across the blackboard. Everything in this room is cold. Cold steel desks set one behind another like monuments to dead idealism. Grey concrete blocks surround us as the inner walls of this highbrow mausoleum. Dr. Logg likes to think of himself as a physician and his students as intellectually ill. He never said that, but I sense at times he feels like a doctor looking into the eyes of a terminally ill patient. That's his bed-side manner, I guess. But, I'm digressing.

I read somewhere, I think, that a Russian author left a suicide note that was so long he could have jumped from it to his death. Knowing society--as every pseudo-intellect claims to--I'm sure Cliff Notes were available to the next of kin. Mine is not really a note of explanation. Hell, it seems the time to go. But I fear my departure will be misinterpreted. People may think I simply lost my balance in the salty waves of misfortune. That's not it. Baseball season is over. I've got some tough tests coming up. And reason has failed me. (Maybe not in that order.) It just seems the time to go.

Some old Greek said that everything is water. What he meant, I think, is that reality is as unstable and volatile as the ocean. Those Greek guys were smart, but I'm not sure mind-altering drugs weren't an adjacent pursuit of philosophy. Nevertheless, I like the image. If everything is water, then I think drowning is the thinking man's suicide. Add to that the "leap of faith" from a bridge, and the act is almost justified poetically.

Out of habit, I always ask Dr. Logg to slow down a bit or to repeat something at a quarter after. But I think I just, quite studiously, asked him to repeat his opinion of New Coke. Filled with the self-importance men associate with their opinions, he repeated. Fearing flagrant disinterest, I must pay him attention a few minutes. He is a very animated man; everything moves to insinuate point. In this dead building it is as if he were trying feverishly to assimilate a heartbeat.

Every part of him gesticulates except his toupee which doesn't move. Something about that toupee makes you want to pet the man. It is like a thinking cap made from dog hair. I think now he is confident that I'm paying attention with special interest in future soft drink references.

So back to the business at hand. I'm too young to claim any kind of insight, but it seems to me life is like eating crackers. Soon you get tired of plain crackers and you start on peanut butter. Eventually you're hooked on oysters and maybe caviar. It's the ladder to hard drugs applied to appetizers applied to existence. Finally, you die nauseous with a bad taste in your mouth. If you believe in reincarnation, you begin again with celery, maybe. I see ahead the glutony of life and prefer to stop at the cracker stage--thirsty but disciplined.

Teaching things that might be useful in a trivia board game or at most on a T.V. game show, Dr. Logg discourses. Outside, the sunshine doesn't betray the coldness that waits. The light breeze playing through the bald trees looks friendlier than wind chill. It looks like a warm summer day. The sky makes no attempt to block the warming sun, instead challenges it to fight the winter. Dr. Logg's stagnant classroom is not the most neutral place to contemplate the question of suicide.

"Mr. Trout." Dr. Logg calls his students "Mr." or "Miss" so the progression of respect is to address him as "Dr." He finds comfort, I assume, in self-congratulating nouns.

"Sir?" I answer.

"How would you answer the question?"

"Perhaps if you rephrased it, sir." (This was an old trick learned immediately in the process of matriculation, but it didn't work.)

"The question, phrased exactly as before, Mr. Trout, was 'Are you paying attention?'"

"No sir, I was not." (Aren't the suicidal brave.)

"Is your preoccupation of greater significance than a grocery list?"

He had me there. "No sir."

"Who is laughing?" I wasn't laughing. His interrogation continued in another direction. There's not much a doctor can do when the patient refuses the medication.

Why am I here?

The cycle of existence is set up so we go to school, get a job, get married, and have children so they can keep the teachers employed. Then we die prematurely and leave all our money to a woman who already said she didn't marry us for our money anyway. Excuse me for being disillusioned. If God exists, he's got some explaining to do. And if he gives me some answer like, "You know, I had a feeling something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it," I'll at least bruise him good before the angels pull me off.

Everyone is aborted into the wide, wide world swimming. We are like guppies cast from our aquarium into a polluted river. Maybe I'm taking all this too seriously. Rock and roll and pass that joint, right? Are dead brain cells a prerequisite to tolerance? I can say no. I want happiness. I really do, but if I can have it only in moderation, then I want nothing at all. This is not a suicide; this is a murder. I was framed.

Anyway, goodbye.

It's a little embarrassing to reappear after saying farewell forever. But my story didn't want to end right there.

Outside it was getting colder and clouds had begun to assist in the fight against the sun. I walked to the bridge on the edge of town. On the east side was the city at its thickest; the west bank and beyond was wilderness. With my sweaty hands almost frozen to the cold bridge, I saw an old man fishing, but his line didn't reach the water. There I was ready to jump, and this man was waiting for fish to leap from the black river and give themselves up. His straw hat was old; the top had completely worn through. It sat on his head like a tattered, mock crown. He was a small man. His name was Jesse, but everyone, it seemed, called him "Jes Crazy." They said the hole in his hat had caused his brain to melt. And it didn't seem to have solidified in the cold weather. I walked toward him.

"What kind of bait you using?" I asked.

"Bait's not that 'portant." He reeled in his line. "It's more hitting da right spot."

"You had any luck?"

"Nope," he said as he cast again.

The pole was thick, and the line looked strong enough to stop

an unsuspecting barge. Looks more like you're fishing for men, I thought. I asked him if he had ever caught anything from this bridge.

"Been a long time. The fish have to want to be caught."

"That seems to be putting a lot of responsibility on the fish," I said. He didn't answer. I stared into the dark water as it began to snow. The silence annoyed me.

"Do you think the fish know you are up here?"

"Nope. Fishing is a quiet thing."

At first, I was intrigued that a being could exist so unaffected by rationale. It wasn't ignorance. It was the complete contradiction of reason. The kind that exists everywhere, but on this bridge it stood like a chasm and made me angry.

"The fish couldn't get hooked if they tried. The damn line is ten feet above the water!"

The old man looked down squinting and jerking the line. He smiled awkwardly, "I had a feeling something was wrong, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it."

Snap. I picked up a stone and struck him hard where his hat left his head unprotected. He fell. Blood flowed from the briery straw brim into his mouth. He lay under me, and I threw the rock at him. I kicked him in the side, and my foot felt the air come from his lungs. Easily, I lifted his old body, and leaning against the cold steel, I dropped him. Struggling against gravity, his hand found the fishing line and the hook at the end. He had anchored the pole well, and it supported him. Suspended, he screamed, "Reel me up!" He tried to support himself with his free hand; his dangling feet walked on the winter water.

"Don't forsake me! Reel me in!"

I left him there. It was still snowing, but it melted as it hit the shiny, black street. I walked back into town. Nothing can save me, I thought. The wet snow on my cheeks seemed to revive me. Slowly a smile began. Then, I was laughing. My open mouth dared the falling snow to come in and die.



“Molested Mindy”

Kathy Brady

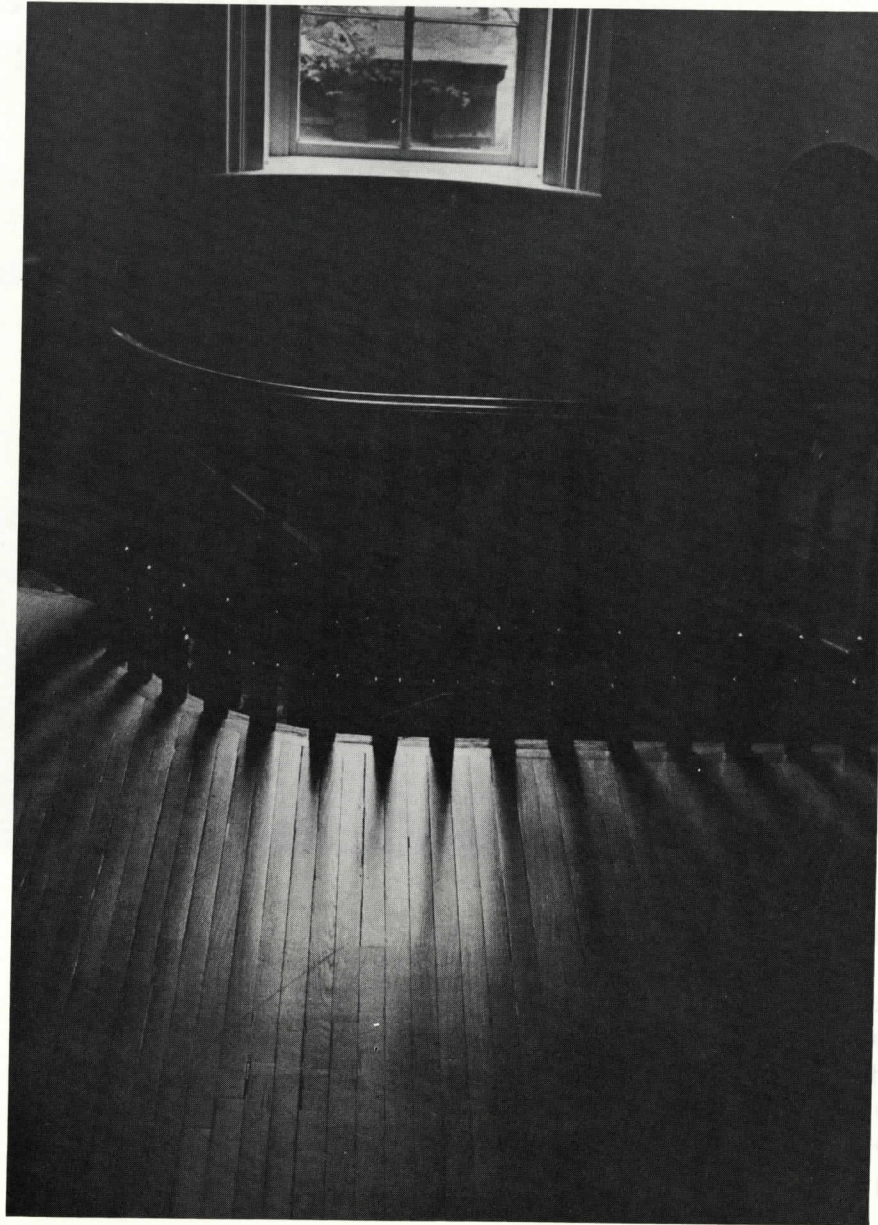
Abschied

Sage beim Abschied nicht Adieu,
sag' nicht Lebwohl,
nicht Ciao oder Tschüß
sondern Auf Wiederseh'n.

Halt' meine Hand und sieh mich an.
Geh' nicht und winke nur.
Bleib neben mir
und sei mein Freund.

Mußt du einst geh'n,
schau fest mich an.
Dann sag' mir leis
Auf Wiederseh'n.

Ortrun Gilbert



(English translation page 30)

Christy Smith

Don't Say Goodbye When You Leave

She Liked It

She liked it, back then,
When he sighed,
"Yes, yes, I love you,"
And, from outside, they could
Hear the vegetable-man shout.
"Potatoes!" shouted the man;
He shouted very loud
And again and again.

They heard him
And they knew
They no longer had any money
And could not buy as much.

Fall it was
And it was pretty cold--
Too cold in fact
To keep their feet on the floor;
But it was warm enough
Before the fire,
Where they smiled
And he sighed,
"Yes, yes, I love you,"
Back then.

James B. Caret

Don't say Good-bye when you leave;
don't say farewell or Ciao
say "until we meet again."

Hold my hand and look at me.
Don't just go and wave;
stay next to me
and be my friend.

If you must go one day,
look me in the eye
and then tell me softly:
Until I see you again.

Ortrun Gilbert



Christy Smith

Creativity is cyclical. The artist does not begin at one point and develop on an ascendant plane to another. We move through stasis, where there is "nothing, nothing at all," neither vision nor creation, toward chaos and a bombardment of images, great and small, "k-mart portraits / and polyester roses." Chaos is the frustration of knowing the vision, but having no release for it. The agony of "the blank page" which "glares / then jeers" belongs to every artist. We have felt the rats eating away at us, suffered self-devouring delusions, agonized in a frenzy of images for some unified meaning. We have known epiphanies, those "awful moments of blissful balance," and thereafter have we hungered for meaning among the images. The artist has many names for his gods and many answers.

The drive to experience epiphany moves the artist into a new stasis, the imprisonment of the voyeur. We "have watched from this window / too many times." The creation is no longer life experienced firsthand, but the vicarious agony of life experienced only through the window. We fill our time with images to hide the agony of the life we don't live, the agony too real to face, the darkness into which we dare not look. This is a new stasis, one marked by new agonies, one from which introspection is the cure and which must result, if we are to move at all, in a new series of images with their accompanying epiphanies, creations in which we come to comprehend ourselves.

D. Michelle Adkerson

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