

Fall 1978

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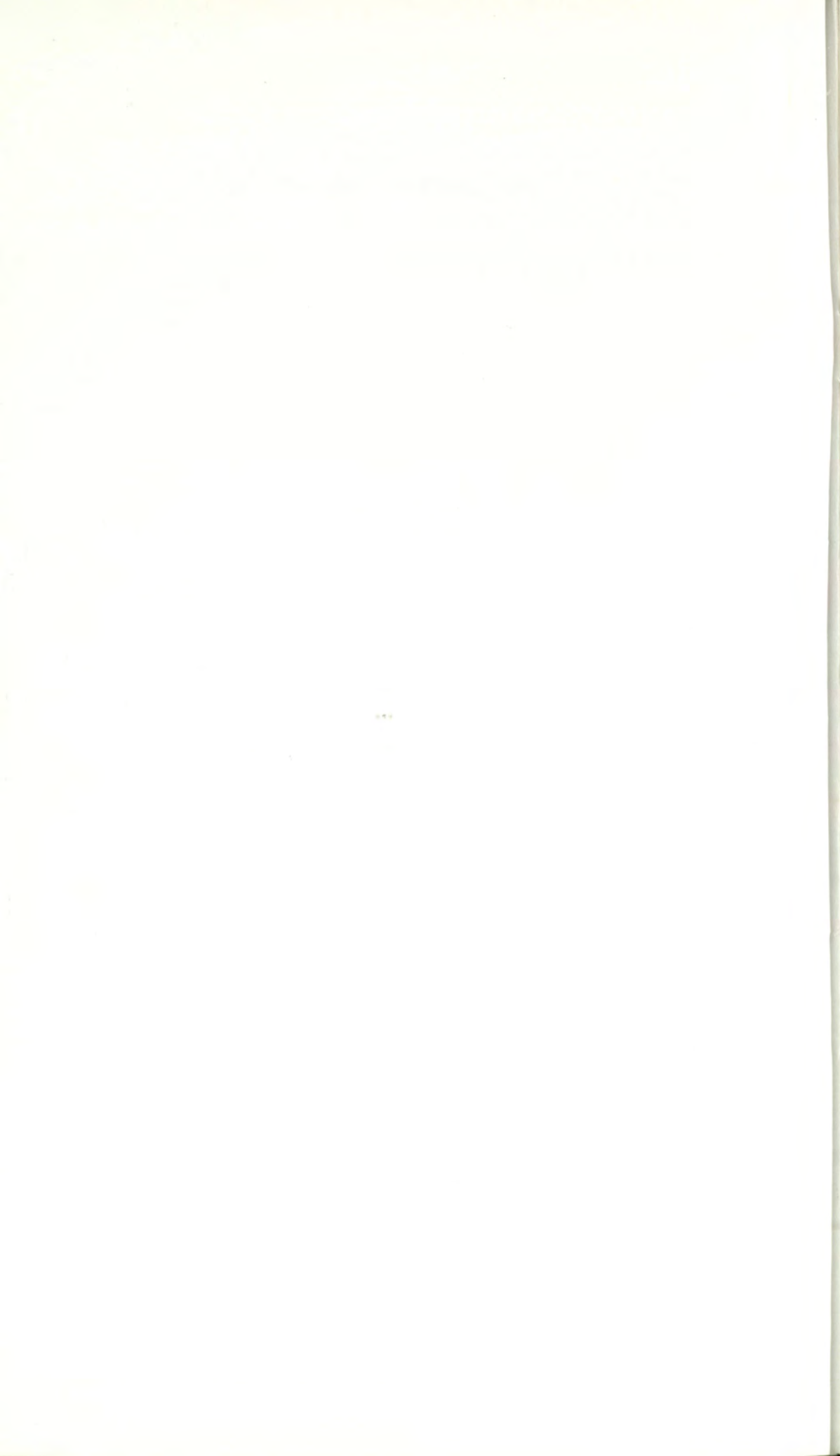
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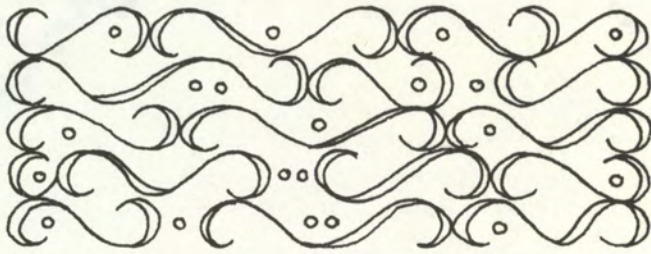
THE LIGHTER



Fall 1978



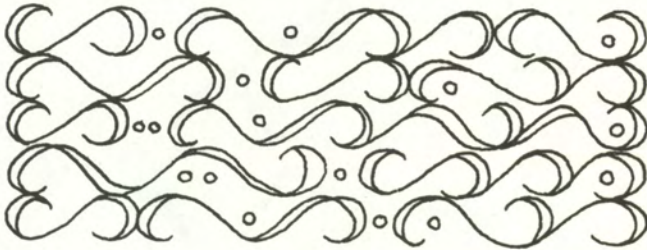




SONNET I

*It will not come. . . the poem, the dance, the song,
as it is felt so deep within the soul.
The feeling which will burn inside and long
to be set free, can never give the whole
effect — the one which fantasy displays.
The words as written seem so trite, contrived.
Not so, however, in my mind. They blaze
in that place. . . glowing, very much alive.
I leap within — exuberant, but reach
no height outside. That inner dance cannot
be seen. And songs composed inside won't teach
my voice to sing the full rich verse I've got.
What holds the door? What keeps the dreams inside?
The inhibitions contradict, collide.*

Lisa Zoss



THE LIGHTER

Fall 1978, Volume 21, No. 2

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SAM

There once was a spider named Sam;
He lived inside Hoover Dam.
One day the dam broke
And Sam got all soaked,
And that was the end of poor Sam.
Oh damn.

—Jim Barker

THE BEGINNING

The warmth of God's glorious sun
glazed through the filthy stained window.
The prisoner—
 ready to meet his doom.
Felt the spirit's presence—
he met his fate—
 with prayer.

Brenda Iler

A very long time ago today
 My love was born.
A very long time ago yesterday
 My love was buried.
A very long time ago tomorrow
 My love was gone.

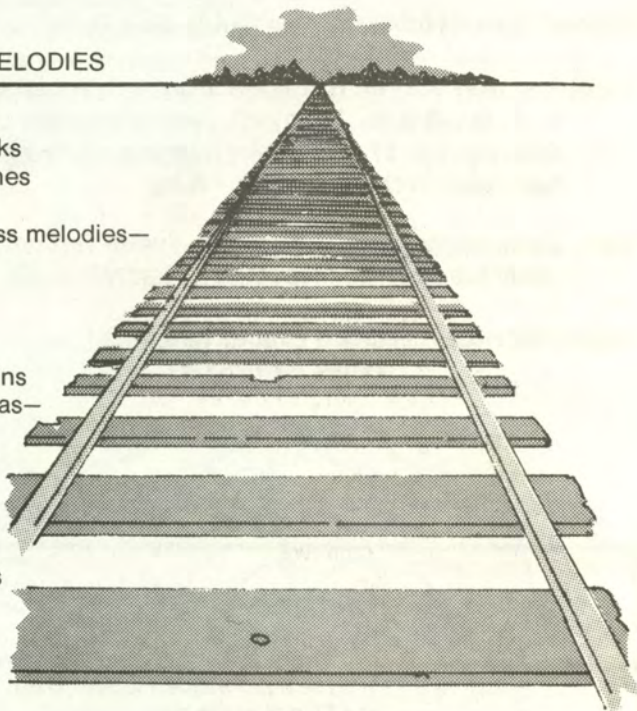
Jane Rubke

RAILROAD MELODIES

If railroad tracks
were xylophones
freight trains
would play bass melodies—
rich and
deep and
resounding.

Passenger trains
would play arias—
filled with
runs and
trills and
cut time.

And measures
of rests
would echo
the songs
of wind and
bird and
barking dog.



Mary Lou Carney



The Waymaker

Living on locusts
saturated in honey,
leaving the lizards
for another supper,
he wanders through deserts
seeking his mission,
finding only mirages:
fish jumping in the dunes,
palms on bended knees,
camels carrying magi,
angels veering toward the sun.

He was forged in the sun
to tell kings
ruby-rimmed sconces
conceal neither the dark,
nor the bloodshot eyes, ruins
falling for the dancer,
falling for the dance.

Dazed by the severed head,
the king trembles to see
legions of lizards
invading his court,
bellying their way
to his gold-sashed waist.

Running out of oases,
nomads listen to a *voice*
crying in the wilderness
where prophets, not mirages,
send through sandstorms:
light.

Russell Steinke

PROPHECY

Apart,

I can look back through my mind's eye
And see how much I loved that life,
And how much more it could be
If you could be there with me,
Again.

But you can't, I know.
You're off on your own,
With drawings to do
And paintings to show.
You'll go it alone.
And I have that too,

You know.
I would lay it aside today
If you would just call me and say,
"Come to me and get me through.
I'm ready to come back to you. . .
For now."

Dave Dover



DISCO

Zoe Scheidecker

How do I start? Or even more pressing, where do I start? I guess at the beginning. . . God created—no not that Genesis; that's too early. How about with her—she's the entire reason I'm writing this. I have to write it down in order to believe it myself. It seemed as if she came out of nowhere.

Her name was Bonnie. She looked like Cher Bono with that beautiful long hair; it was almost jet black. She was tall and had a wispy yet strongly feminine figure, the kind that when she walks past always demands attention. Some air about her told me that she had been around—that she knew the score. But somehow she was too much to be true.

When I walked in to the disco just outside of town, I saw her for the first time. For some reason or another, she caught my eye. She was on the dance floor. But she wasn't quite dancing in a way I would have expected a foxy chick like her to be dancing. She somehow seemed stiff in a strange sort of way. I was to meet some of my buddies at the bar. Daron and Chuck had been there awhile already and had had quite a few of the usual. (A shot of Jack Daniels and a Michelob chaser). We always came in separate cars in case

one of us would happen to pick up a chick.

The beer went down smoothly after the shot. The whole time I was thinking about how I could meet her. I had hustled a lot of chicks in my time and usually done pretty well. But, somehow I knew she was different—that I couldn't use any of the "old lines" to pick her up.

The song was over and the D.J. was taking a break. It almost seemed peaceful, if such a thing is possible in a disco. Daron and Chuck were in to a heavy discussion about possible solutions to horniness. There weren't many chicks in the place—but it was late, most of them had either left or been picked up already. The thought of picking Bonnie up surged through my mind. It excited me almost to the point of embarrassment. She seemed like the type to wine, dine and take to bed, (in a kinky sort of way). Somehow I just couldn't think of a way to even talk to her—let alone take her to bed.

I looked to see where she was seated, it was next to the D.J.'s booth. She was just sitting there with a blank stare on her face, and to my delight, was sitting very much alone. Then an idea hit me as I finished my second beer. I would get another beer, walk toward the booth as if I was going to talk to the D.J., then on the way I would accidently (on purpose) spill the beer on her. A tacky idea, but it was the best I could do on short notice.

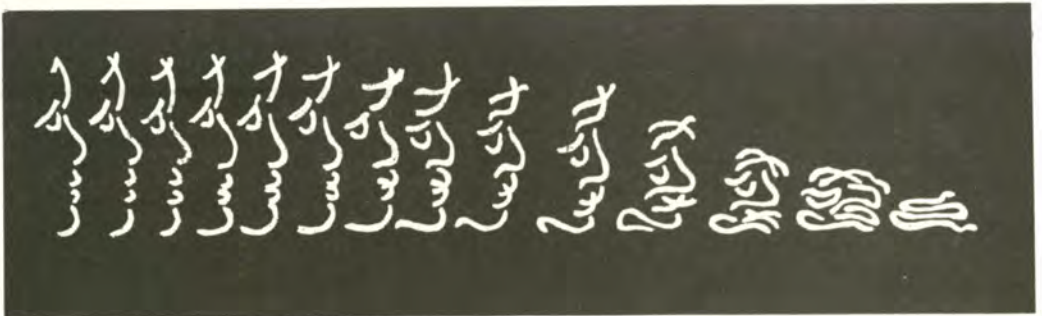
At least it was a way to talk to her. I ordered another of the usual and gulped down the Jack Daniels to give me some courage. I glanced over to see what Daron and Chuck were doing. Their discussion had turned to how to fix up vans. They didn't even know I existed, but it didn't matter, I had no desire to converse, at least not with them. I took a gulp of my beer, and was ready for action.

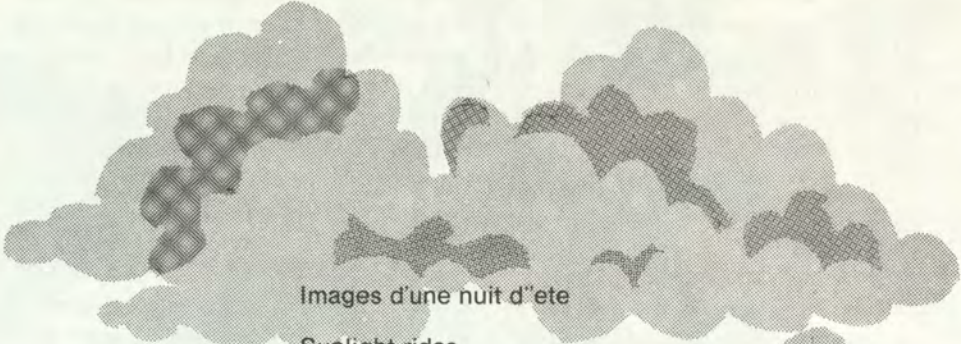
I felt like a high school kid picking up his first chick. But I kept on the mission at hand. I sauntered (at least tried) over to the table. I kind of looked in the booth for the D.J., but I knew he wouldn't be there. I acted as if I was still looking for him and absent-mindedly (really intentionally) bumped into her, and spilled my beer down her low-cut top. I felt like a fool but she hardly responded in any way. I said that I was sorry and would she forgive me. She looked up at me, and just seemed to realize what I had done. I offered to buy her a drink while she freshened up. She returned, but didn't even touch the drink I bought for her.

About an hour later, after a few dances and a few more of the "usuals", and many more moves, I thought I had gotten to the point of no return. I could not sit and blandly converse, (she was obviously not an intellectual, or a conversationalist). Bonnie was more suited to menial tasks. So the question arose "How about coming over to my place for a nightcap?". She just nodded and grabbed her purse. She didn't say anything about how she had gotten to the disco or how she had planned on getting home, she seemed to know this was inevitable.

I unlocked her car door, (no chivalry is not dead!). But somehow I could not imagine her in my apartment. I got in, and started the car. It usually took about ten minutes to get there, but I couldn't wait that long. I put my arms around her. She didn't seem to mind. Then I kissed her hard and long. She had to know what I was after, but she seemed to enjoy it. I pulled her down on the seat, while the radio blared ". . .another Saturday night, and I ain't got nobody. . .". She was responding passionately, just as I knew she would. I was getting ready to start slipping off the top that was dry of the beer I had spilled earlier, and her hair, that long beautiful black hair didn't even seem to get in the way. As I looked down on her every hair seemed to still be in place. Then something very strange happened, I still don't exactly know how to describe it, but I will try. I was slipping off her top, and in my passion did not even realize what was happening until I had slipped it off completely. She was melting! The figure beneath me was melting! I could not believe my eyes, she was, by some freak chance, melting and disintegrating in my arms!

Five minutes later all that was left of her was her clothes and her purse. I was laying on top of an empty set of clothes. If someone had seen me at that point they would have thought I was some kind of weirdo. I still felt horny, but I still couldn't grasp what had happened. A girl had melted in my arms! What did it mean? I still don't know. But I had to know that it was written down, and that I could get it all down so that someone would read it and maybe understand.





Images d'une nuit d'ete

Sunlight rides
on cherried clouds

the misty horizon
is a velvet hand
hidden in the sky

thin curls of gold
glide through the air

—transparent waterfalls
pale drums of time

Listen. . .
dreams are waiting

you can touch the night
—quick as magic

thoughts are forms
in darkness

ballet-stars
dance silently

silver moths betray
their winking flight

—Arthur Steiger



Corner

Hiding in a wooden painted box
Empty air being breathed by one
of whom I may not mention.
WOW! It's happened.
hasn't it. Round and round and
round and round. My god has
it happened? Round and round and. . .

Hiding in a wooden box
Empty air breathed by no-
one of whom it is not mentioned.

Jane Rubke

WINTER STORAGE

The water lay picture-still
in the chill
of the September afternoon.

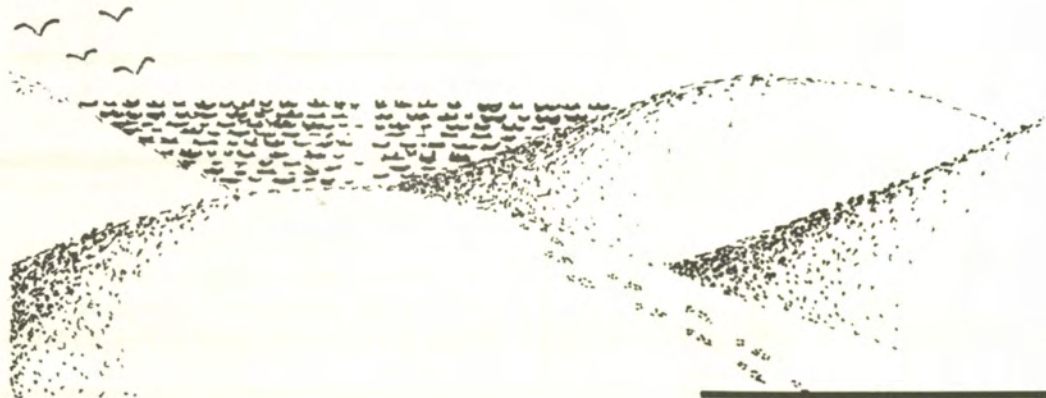
The gray sky
hung listlessly
above the distant shore.

The song of the seagulls
rung with a frosty tinge
that could only mean
farewell.

The wide-eyed fish
stared up from
shallow sand graves.

And I walked
in solitude
on the beach,
sorting my memories
for winter storage.

Mary Lou Carney



Footprints Under the Cross

"This writing, while brief, expresses some of my most poignant memories, those experiences which continue to influence me."

Judy Spillane, 1962 B.S.ed.

The lanky, angular professor with thin grey hair and prominent ears leaned on the wooden desk. As our chairs scraped and shuffled, he leisurely lit his pipe. When he spoke his voice demanded attention. His face seemed stern, but when he broke into a smile, it was the ear to ear grin of a man who enjoyed life. He carried stacks of books to class each day; how strange we thought. He read aloud from these childrens' books continually; how unscholarly we mused. But our toleration for Professor Czamanske changed to enjoyment, and that grew to wonderment for this unique man who loved children and loved the stories that enchanted them. He read; we listened. He delighted and the spark was caught.

Across campus open windows dotted the ivy covered walls of the Music Building. Drifting to the walk below a spirited cacophony of instruments and voices beckoned. But inside, the stairs were dark and worn, the practice rooms bleak and lonely. Black notes glared from the pages of Bach, while the organ returned only halting melodies and jarring mistakes.



Upstairs, the afternoon sun would soon lure seductively through the tall stately windows, while the University Choir met for four o'clock practice. From within came gnawing reminders of the skipped lunches. Eyelids drooped and restless bodies squirmed on hard chairs.

But there were other moments. Robed and solemn the choirs filed into the magnificent chapel, lining the balcony. Beneath its awesome pipes the great organ was commanded by brilliant musicians. Master directors wielded the baton with keen ear and eye. Each man led. Each inspired until every voice was uplifted in utmost effort. The glorious sound, the shiver of awe, the total rapture of being one with the angel hosts in singing praises to God Almighty. We had met the Christ. His love overflowed in our hearts.



I'm sixteen years and a thousand miles removed from these scenes, but they live. As my own children read and enjoy, as my nursery classes find delight in stories, Palmer Czamanske's love has touched a few more lives. Again, this year I led my small church choir in the alleluias of Easter. There was no orchestra, no grand cathedral, no mass of voices. But the joy remains, to be sure it has grown and matured. Our few voices soared, and just for a moment we shared that same perfect joy of praising the living Christ. The paths of life are many, but the way is made richer by the footprints of those who walk before us, footprints of those who walk in love under the cross.

O
 my
 kite,
 how like
 a child you are.
 Always pulling on the string
 of discipline, being made
 to conform to the
 rules of man
 always being
 watched,
 held
 onto.
 Yet

if
 the

hold

were

RELEASED,

you

might

fall.

There

would

be

NOTHING

to

keep

you

from

THE GRASP

of

the

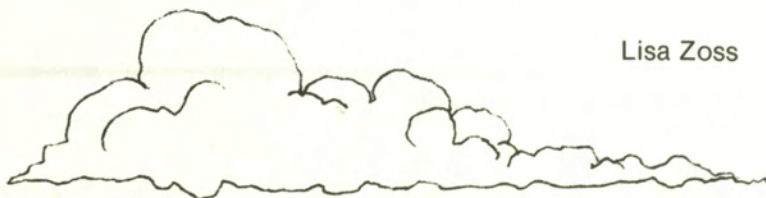
wind,

the

world.



Lisa Zoss



GARY
KJORVESTAD

10

1

Evening. Not an evening seen from the earth or some other minute world clouded by veils of atmosphere, but an evening sky known only to the deities and swirling spirits who reside in the abstract glories of the heavens. An evening of immense quiet and rapturous serenity.

Beneath this sequined canopy, the eternal landscape stretches out in geographical precision. One horizon is dominated by the brilliant glow of a blazing land, a land of mountains afire with the vibrant liberation and joy of the Walking God who travels among His creation and nourishes it with the glory of Himself. Dotted the lush, wild countryside are wondrous palaces which stand like natural monuments, rugged and craggy stone halls seemingly built by preposterous chance but which express such harmony and balance that by comparison, the finest examples of human architecture appear to be the careless creations of bored, unconcerned children.

The opposite horizon reveals only total, absolute darkness. As a rule, nothing can be seen in this land, nothing can be heard, nothing can be known about it. Occasionally an Angel will travel into the stifling darkness upon some mysterious errand and pierce the agony with the thrust of his personal aura. The light from the angelic presence always reveals the same hideous scene—hordes of pale, naked persons lying upon the parched land with their faces buried in the dirt. They never look up nor do they glance from side-to-side at each other for these souls are forever obsessed with the grey, empty sands. The damned never cease their vain searching in the dust or else they might contemplate their endless despair.

Between these two poles rests a dreary, barren plain pock-marked by wooden shacks and rundown houses. A few scrub trees and bushes grow on this depressing veldt, but they do little to improve the bleakness of the region. The only source of refreshment lies in the flat, winding, muddy river whose source is found somewhere up in the mountain coolness of the beatific horizon. Near the river stands a grotesque factory and a box-shaped administration building. These are the workshops of purgatory and all of the inhabitants of the plain spend a good part of their days toiling in these buildings.

Saunders, a minor clerk, works in the Department of Records and lives only a couple of miles from the river. He should be home by now.

2

Saunders walked lazily into his shabby kitchen and navigated directly for the refrigerator. Opening it, he was pleased to see it filled to the limits with bottled beer and pretzels and cold cuts. The evening was definitely looking up after an entire day of tedious labor.

Something interrupted his revelry. A

bright flash of crimson light exploded past the kitchen window and then quickly passed on.

"Damn Angels flitting all about! Why don't they just stay away for good. Think they're so hot, do they!"

With the flash of angelic glory came a whole series of thoughts into Saunders' mind. He remembered the pain of his earthly life and the even greater discomfort of being unable to forget a past burdened with heavy disappointments, the greatest disappointment occurring on the last day of his biological life. He remembered God.

"Don't think about that!" Saunders screamed at himself and he tried very hard to think about the contents of the refrigerator. "I can take it. I don't need any confession. I'll go over those Mountains when I feel like it, but right now I'm too busy planning tonight's entertainment."

As if a rapid current of electricity had gone through his body, Saunders dashed from the kitchen into the living room, narrowing his movements to the TV set resting upon the coffee table against the far wall. He turned on the TV and then picked up the telephone and hastily dialed a long number. The ringing ceased.

Saunders erupted, "Hurry up and get over here, you slouchers! It's time to watch somebody on TV."

"We're getting cleaned up right now," explained the gruff voice at the other end of the line. "We'll be there in a few minutes. Just make sure that the reception is working okay."

"Well it's working fine right now, so please hurry up. Time is a-wasting."

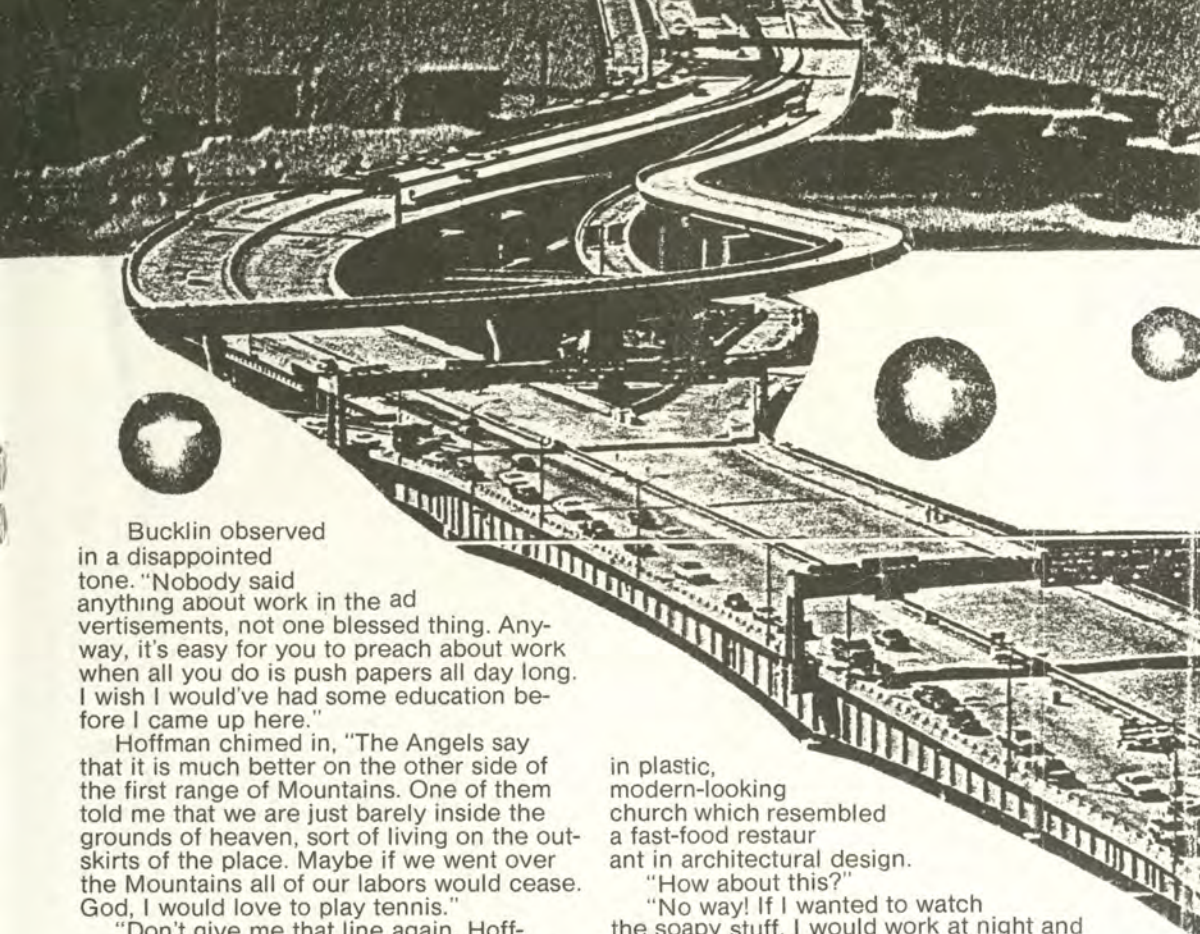
The voice dryly commented, "Run out of time? Up here? You're getting hysterical again, Saunders." The voice hung up the line.

3

Hoffman and Bucklin waltzed into Saunders' living room without knocking on the door. They had visited Saunders' home so many times that nearly all of the social amenities had disappeared. Both men wore grey janitorial clothes, but the resemblance ended at that single element of attire. Hoffman was a young man, late twenties/slim/full chest, owning a thick black crop of long hair managed by a gaudy red bandana. He was barefoot. Bucklin was an overweight, burly middle-aged man with closely-cut silver hair crowning his rough features. Bucklin wore black, horn-rimmed glasses and, as usual, he was picking his teeth as he made his entrance.

"Who ever thought we would be working once we made it up here?" quizzed Bucklin in a weary tone begging for sympathy.

Saunders refused to follow the emotional cue and instead snapped out in a business-like manner. "How do you think they keep those pearly gates and golden domes and rainbow mansions in such fine condition? Somebody has to mess with the plumbing."



Bucklin observed in a disappointed tone. "Nobody said anything about work in the advertisements, not one blessed thing. Anyway, it's easy for you to preach about work when all you do is push papers all day long. I wish I would've had some education before I came up here."

Hoffman chimed in, "The Angels say that it is much better on the other side of the first range of Mountains. One of them told me that we are just barely inside the grounds of heaven, sort of living on the outskirts of the place. Maybe if we went over the Mountains all of our labors would cease. God, I would love to play tennis."

"Don't give me that line again, Hoffman!" Bucklin angrily fumed. "If you really believe those fly-boys, then why don't you go to the Mountains on your own and leave us here in the comfort of our slums. It's all pure malarkey. Propaganda. There's nothing over there but neon lights."

Hoffman blushed with embarrassment. He silently moved to one of the three chairs in front of the TV and sat down. In a dull, distracted tone he said, "Where are the goodies, Saunders? You're usually all set up by now."

Saunders hopped up from the sofa. "You're right, Hoff, totally correct. I was just about to get everything in order when I saw an Angel scoot by. He broke up my concentration." He paced into the kitchen and set about throwing food and drink onto a large tray.

"I'm glad to hear that somebody else doesn't like them. They've got to be some kind of psychos flying around like that and showing off their righteousness. It's sickening!" Bucklin's face sprouted a livid countenance, but he gradually calmed down after haranguing against the Angels for a few more minutes.

"To change the subject," Hoffman stiffly remarked, "who shall we watch on the tube tonight? Somebody famous or just another paean like ourselves?"

"Speak for yourself in regards to that 'paeon' business," Saunders spritely instructed from the kitchen, hoping to lighten up the mood of the company.

Bucklin growled, "Let's watch an average joe tonight. I've had enough of seeing how the other half lives."

For the sake of peace, neither Saunders or Hoffman chose to disagree. Hoffman left his chair and commenced the search for the right channel. His hand stopped at a very elaborate wedding being held

in plastic, modern-looking church which resembled a fast-food restaurant in architectural design.

"How about this?"

"No way! If I wanted to watch the soapy stuff, I would work at night and watch TV during the day."

Saunders came into the room carrying the tray loaded with snacks and bottled beer, "What's wrong, Brother Bucklin, afraid of a little old-fashioned emotion?" he chided.

"Just turn the channel, no syrupy scenes tonight, thank you."

The next channel showed a young Chicano sitting alone in a jail cell drawing on the concrete walls. Bucklin shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Too depressing. Move on."

Between mouthfuls of tuna sandwich, Saunders added, "I just want a little entertainment this evening. Middle America. Mr. and Mrs. Average. Please lay off any tragedy if possible, it gives me indigestion."

Hoffman's tone became very heated. "We're bound to meet SOME tragedy if we watch this tube, you know. It's inevitable when looking at real people. We can't sanitize everything."

Hoffman turned a few more channels and then came to a teenage boy going sleepily to his high school classes. Both Saunders and Bucklin voiced approval of this channel with so much gusto that Hoffman gave in to their wishes, reasoning that to watch the life of a skinny, young kid living along the Southern California coast might have a number of interesting moments to relish.

"What's the year, Hoff?"

"1968."

"What's his name?"

"Gregory Wilson, I think."

4

a very strange cinema verite every moment every thought every gesture every leaf on the willowy tree of the young soul caught before the revolving eye and beamed upward to the tiny thrones of three purgatorial figures.

greg danced in the southern california suns waves played between his toes and his blond hair joined with the faded jeans and tie-dyed shirt to form the illusion and give it a frame. the old childhood music was dying in his mind crewcut goldwater irrationalisms supplanted by driving melodies chorded by the levi long-hair rock'n'roll seitegeist band a new morning for the biped woodstock nation was born and bloomed in the sixties' imagination troubled pilgrims longing to flee into an ideal chrome star twirling above amerika. but a problem existed how was greg himself to take his place in the ragged renaissance? a high school feudalism possessing strait-jacket rules and dismal classes taught by wash'n'wear ozzie nelsons held rein on his actions and when the scholastic leash fell slack then came the parental shadow to cool the afternoon hope of freedom. when one cannot yet join the revolution in the streets one must read the manifestoes late at night in the solitude of the toilet rubin and abbie and dylan's poems and the berkeley barb and greg did so aided by packs of funny chocolate papers because there was a leaf and it grew in plastic baggies planted by the gent with the flashy stereo kingdom and this leaf nurtured dreams of release freedom breathing inside the eyes and not seen in the objective vision a freedom constructed of imaginings a giggling facade of graceful movement. new waves and cycles appeared in his own inner lagoon he was pleased with the currents feeling himself to be a novice among the enoightened few who had unmasked the trite hypocrisies of wing-tip shoes and of the richard m. kisinger generation. further initiation was required so he grabbed handfuls of the chemical flowers praised by many for foolish reasons greg felt the psychic pull of the age. as the months grew old a gnawing seriousness latched onto greg's mind as the outward codes he easily accepted in earlier days fell to the onslaught of his critical eye he rejected the entire outside game. and as greg's perceptions withdrew into the dark closets and cupboards inside his lonely spirit he thought that he had seen through all dogma all principles all rules "it's only so because they say so!" he shouted but this did not bring relief instead a panic welled up deeply within his chest and he constantly wondered "is anything really real outside of my mind?" "if i close my eyes does the world sleep?" partying went flat the emotions felt sluggish in the wake of this constant questioning and debate by the end of greg's senior year 1970 he spent most of his free time either carousing madly before the mirror the stereo headphones loudly rolling him as he imagined himself a decadent rock god worshipped before a wall of amps or he sat very quietly in the wicker chair resting beneath the hanging fern trying to find the answers to the spaces in his darkest moods he thought about the vintage rifle sitting in the old man's closet.

5

"Turn that young idiot off!" Bucklin barked as he threw down his ham sandwich in disgust. "I don't want to stare at some teenage dope fiend throwing his life away on nothing."

Hoffman shot back icily, "The channel selector is staying exactly where it is right

now. I'm going to see how this kid comes out, so shut up and finish your food."

"You know damn well he's gonna either blow his brains out or start fixing heroin or something. It's always the same!"

"That's crap, Bucklin, and you'd better sit tight. Your red neck is definitely showing." Hoffman's hands literally shook with rage as he grabbed for his opened beer. Clumsily, he spilled the bottle on the threadbare carpet.

Bucklin jeered, "Now look what you've done, you jackass! You've ruined the entire carpet. Right, Saunders?" Saunders kept his silence and picked nervously at his fingernails. He disliked confrontation of any sort.

"Don't you have any human empathy at all? Any feelings for the boy?" Hoffman painfully asked. "Don't you care what happens to him? That whole affair on that blasted tube you're watching is real life, Bucklin. REAL LIFE! It IS important, you know. Or does his mental flirtation with the rifle bring back a few old scars?"

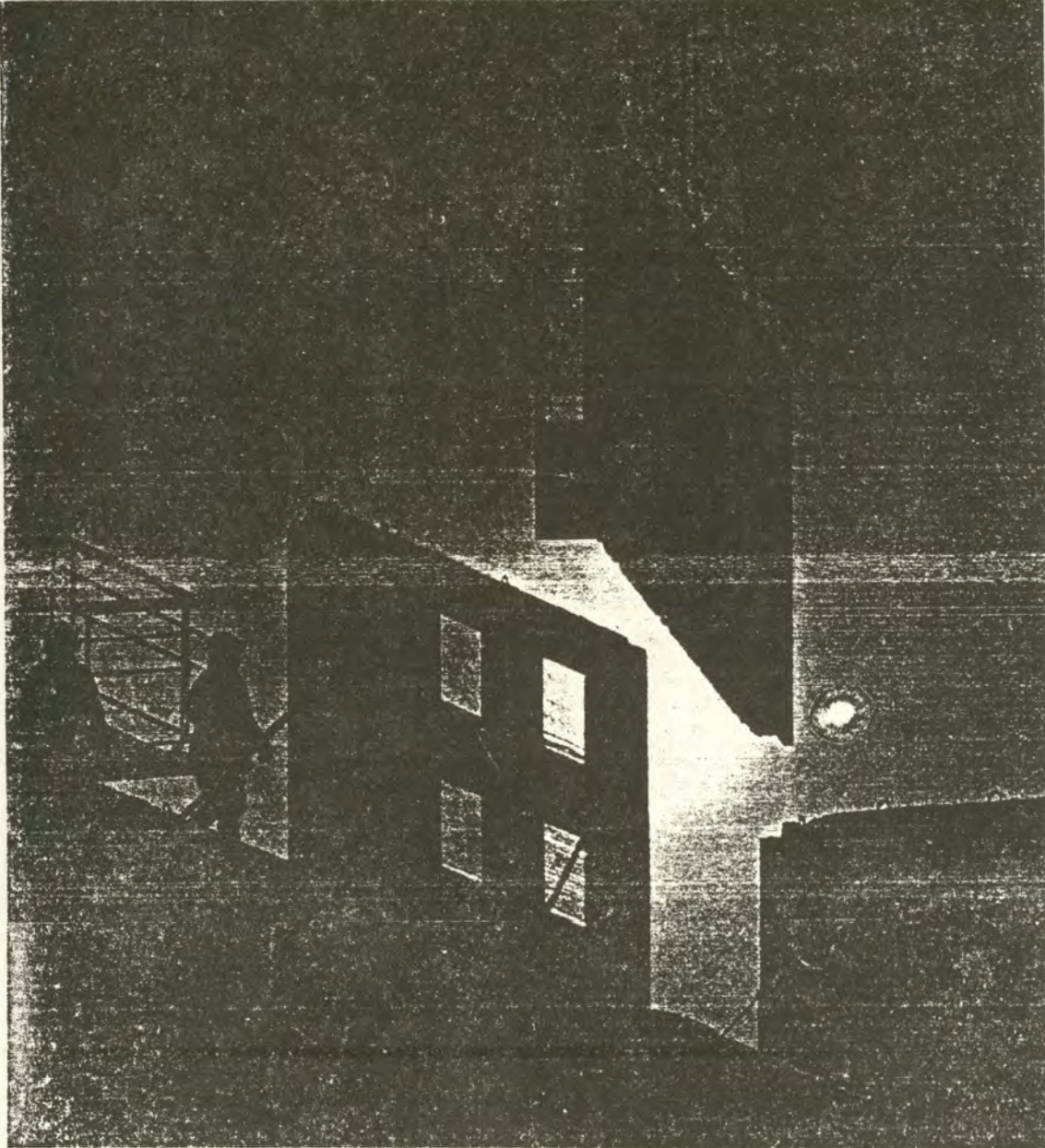
Bucklin's face went ash grey and he ceased all bodily movement except for labored breathing. An odd light appeared in his eyes, eyes looking back an eternity ago into a musty, secluded cellar. He slowly rose and walked to the door, as if to leave, but he halted before the door and stood there facing the wooden rectangle. Hoffman looked wildly over at Saunders, who held only contempt for Hoffman in his cold, blue eyes.

"I'm sorry, Bucklin. That crack about you shooting yourself was way out of line. Please come back and sit down."

Bucklin pivoted with ill ease and spat out, "I'll come back if you'll roll up your sleeves and show us the gashes on your puny wrists."

Stunned, Hoffman again glanced over at Saunders and the merciless stare that still dominated his eyes. "What the hell!" Trying to act nonchalant, Hoffman shrugged and rolled up his sleeves to reveal a series of hideous scars ringing both wrists. He held them up in gory exultation. "All right, you've had your fun, now sit down like a man and shut up. At least I killed myself over a good-looking woman instead of the old horse who left you high and dry."

Saunders finally erupted. "SHUT UP! Shut up both of you! Bucklin—sit down. Hoffman—fasten those buttons along with your fat mouth. I'm tired of all of this juvenile machismo and tit-for-tat revenge. We're all going to watch this kid, but there will be no more outbursts. Bucklin, I'd like to ignore the teenager also, but I just don't think that we should, even if it is painful. It just seems that we always try to ignore distressing things, and maybe it isn't healthy to do so. Okay?" Neither man responded. "And by-the way," Saunders instructed with extremely sarcastic nuances, "if we're all going to play suicide show-and-tell, then I'll tell you my own sob story about a bottle of pills."



6

greg wandered home from another party too tired to sleep he browsed through the crowded bookshelf searching for words to carry his mind away jokingly he seized his neglected confirmation bible hoping to enjoy a few corny lines.

he didn't find any because the revelation of st. john the divine leered at him in king james print greg unwillingly marvelled at the antique richness beasts and dragons and a woman crowned with twelve stars in her hair dazzling dreams forcing the mundane world to drop away in a dervish spin and beholding the angelic throngs worshipping with silver mystic adoration a cosmic christ ruling the spheres as scepter and orb in strong carpenter's hands.

something stirred in greg a chilling joy lanced his body reviving memories of childhood glory dorothy and the wizard kneeling among the magi at the feet of the virgin's child radiant purpose and hope scrubbing his eyes making them see the rainbow circles of truth.

greg prayed without words merely gazing up at the ceiling and opening his heart to jesus the god a journey begun.

no thunderbolt tossed from a christian zeus kept greg upon the path no revival meeting pendulum swings of grievous sin and blissful atoning it all began in tiny thoughts and

courteous feelings a teaching which nurtured him an entire day patiently grace eased through his soul and health sprouted and took root light to the eyes and spring to the step and raucous laughter to the lips and wine and sunshine seemed so much better.

true ideas and doctrine helped sustain the pilgrim way but dogma carried blessed relief and liberality escape from the narrowness of a fearful mind erecting games and stratagems for what can be so joyful than to know from canon law that god desires you to be kind?

pain did not cease altogether nor did prickly trials as greg stepped out into a new era of his temporal term working and college and living alone but meaning flooded every wound and smile he was walking steadily into his twentieth year.

oh job did you also feel this way?

7



Hoffman belched contentedly, enjoying both his mild alcoholic and the dramatic reversal in Greg's fortunes. "Hey, Bucklin, did the kid come out okay or didn't he?"

Bucklin gave a slight twinge and admitted the error of his opinions. Saunders was visibly pleased by the rapprochement occurring between the pair, but his smile vanished and he remarked oddly in a self-



servicing manner, "Of course, if any of us would have had such a moving spiritual experience as Greg had on that one night, I'm sure that we wouldn't have taken our lives so regrettably as we did. We simply didn't have the same breaks. "Naturally," he added with brittleness, "I'm very happy for the boy."

Bucklin reasoned even further, "Quite right. To be really honest about it, all three of us were forced to tough out our lives without seeing very much of God's help. We probably achieved more than Greg accomplished because we kept on going for so many years in our own strength, fighting life alone on sheer guts."

"Well put, Bucklin, well put. Even now in this mundane eternity we are still working hard," Saunders concluded proudly. "Progress. Glorious progress."

"I sort of agree with you," Hoffman hesitantly began, "but I'm not sure about the idea that God never tried to help us out. Saunders, weren't you a teacher at a religious school?"

"Yes, I was."

"Did you ever go to chapel or participate directly in the religious activities?"

"Not very much. Too busy with my work."

"Weren't you a janitor at a church for awhile, Bucklin?"

"I sure was. It was the First Heavenly Gospel Tabernacle of Mesquite Springs, a real Bible-preaching outfit."

"Did you ever go to church or read the Bible very much?"

Bucklin answered weakly, "Uh, not too often. I did go to services on Christmas and Easter though. Real inspiring affairs."

"As for my own pitiful self," Hoffman tiredly related, "I was baptized, catechized, and confirmed and then proceeded to never darken the door of a church again. Wait, come to think of it, I did attend a few weddings. None of us were exactly open to the spiritual things that were going on around us."

"Now don't get down on yourself,"

Saunders boomed, jumping directly in front of Hoffman's face and pointing vigorously at the young man's chest. "You did your best. Look at Greg smiling happily there on the screen as he jumps into his car. Hell, that could have been you if the Deity would have wanted it that way. I don't know why, but God just seems to step in occasionally for some people at critical moments and saves their skins. After the crisis is over, He lets them go their merry way and lead successful lives. Other people, like you and me and Bucklin, He allows to fail and kick themselves for all eternity. It's just that simple. Greg is a lucky one and he'll be able to work out the rest of his life for himself with a few breaks."

As Saunders and Hoffman were speaking, they were oblivious to the earthly reality transpiring so vividly on the TV screen. They did not see Greg speeding along through town in his Volkswagon, singing along to the car radio, nor did they per-

ceive the blue chevrolet careening wildly toward the intersection where Greg would soon be passing. The same blue chevrolet that would fail to stop at the red light.

"Some people do have all the luck, I guess," Hoffman murmured. "But what about grace?"

The blue chevy charged through the red light, guided by the drunken judgment of the driver, and smashed pitilessly into the light metal body of the Volkswagon. Greg knew nothing until he was hit, and even then he saw only a blue flash and felt the searing heat of the explosion.

"Oh, my God!" screamed Bucklin as he happened to glance at the TV screen. "The kid's on fire! He's dying! Oh, sweet Jesus, he's dying in the flames!"

8

The three companions spent the rest of the evening playing poker and doing their best to forget Greg's fiery demise. After the gambling fever had died down, as the men were cashing in their chips and cleaning the kitchen, a loud strong knock came at the door. Puzzled by the appearance of a visitor at such a late hour, Saunders opened the door cautiously. Standing in the doorway was Greg clad in the burnt, blood-splattered remnants of his clothes and smiling vigorously.

"Howdy, gentlemen! I thought that I would come by and thank you for taking keen interest in my earthly life. A very impressive Angel wearing epaulets told me that you had watched my life for roughly two years. Now that's commitment!"

Saunders was stunned, being unable to do anything except babble an incoherent greeting and gesture for the young man to enter. Greg marched in joyfully and paid his respects to the equally stunned Hoffman and Bucklin. He beamed at the three men.

"Thank God I found all of you awake and here in one place."

"Why?" quizzed the trio in moronic unison.

"Because I'm hiking across the Mountains to see Him face-to-face," he sang out ecstatically. "I'm going to meet the Eternal Lord and discover my meaning."

"Could you please explain 'my meaning'?" Saunders inquired masterfully, attempting to sound philosophical in order to cover up his own discomfort.

"The meaning to my crazy life on the earth—the victories, the headaches, the embarrassments, the mysteries I learned and soon forgot. EVERYTHING. I'm planning to crawl in on my belly, in much the same way as a grovelling monk, and simply remain at His feet and listen to Him."

Bucklin peeped out flatly, "Oh, that does sound nice."

Greg was too enthralled to take note of the uncomfortable reactions of his hosts, so he kept up the barrage. "When I learned that you fellows had been so concerned with my pilgrimage down below, I had to drop by and see if you would be willing to

"They won't go with me," Greg interrupted, "because they maintain that we humans must make the journey with our own kind. Look, even if you don't know the way, we can still make the trip together. It will only take us longer."

"You don't understand," Saunders answered. "We've always been fearful of making that journey. We are not sure that God is a person whom we would want to meet. He didn't help us much."

"He failed us horribly," Hoffman recited dejectedly. "Or we failed Him. I'm not really certain."

In direct opposition to the mood of his hosts, Greg started laughing aloud, causing the others to bridle with resentment. "You guys are too much! Here you are, sitting on the outskirts of Paradise with NOTHING preventing you from the pure jubilation of God, nothing except your idiotic guilt and self-loathing. Oh, I am aware of the suicides, the Angels told me all about them. Can't you see that they don't matter? It makes no difference how you failed or why you failed, or even trying to figure out free-will or predestination or fate. All that counts is whether or not you want to be free and clean. Let's be going."

"We'll have to talk this over," Saunders announced quietly.

The trio charged nervously into the kitchen for a conference. The verbal battle raged for quite awhile, fueled by pent up emotions which had only grown worse in the still, putrid air of purgatory. These frightened comrades were being forced to face the anxiety of their guilt and to choose either the numbing death of purgatory or the healing pain of a holy pilgrimage. They felt the pounding, heated experience of Choice.

They marched out piously. Saunders served as the spokesman. "Gregory, we have decided to join your company, under one condition."

"What's that?"

"If we decide to turn back, you must not laugh at us. That would be degrading."

Greg smiled discreetly. "I agree, but I don't think that you'll have to worry about turning back once you're on the road. Please let's get going."

"Wait a minute, Greg," Saunders commanded bluntly, grabbing the young man by the arm. "We need to gather our things and to pack properly. There's my coffee pot and my . . ."

Greg looked sternly at Saunders. "No dice. If we stop to pack, you will slowly convince yourselves not to go, and you might even convince me to stay away from the awesomeness of the Beatific Vision. It's now or never." Quickly he pushed the complaining men out of the house and he resolutely slammed the door shut. "There are better things up in the Mountains, brothers, and as a little jolt to keep you in line—remember what happened to Lot's wife!" Greg sermonized as he began walking.

Neither Saunders or Bucklin or Hoffman ever looked back.

guide me to the place where He reveals Himself. How about it, brethren?"

None of the three men responded.

"Well, come on, speak up."

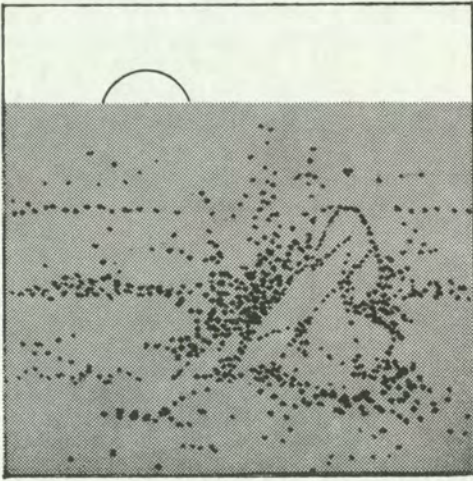
Bucklin muttered, "Sorry, but we'll have to decline your kind offer."

"How come?"

Hoffman blurted out, "Because we don't know the way! We have never ventured further into Heaven than where we sit right now on this vast, dismal dung heap. We don't know where God is and we can't pretend that we do know."

Saunders recommended politely, "Why not use an Angel as your guide? I'm sure that—"





Out of the Grey

Yes, I think it was September,
 But it might have been November,
 When I walked beside the ocean,
 No umbrella in the rain.

Thought of you and me together,
 And I wondered when, if ever,
 I should entertain the notion
 Of my seeing you again.

Thought of time and space and distance,
 And the meaning of existence,
 But still I had no notion,
 And still I felt the pain.

Watched the waves and felt the cold wind,
 Making footprints in the wet sand,
 I decided that it should end.

Felt the rolling waves in motion,
 Felt the bedspread of the ocean,
 Felt the comfort as of children,
 Felt myself slip down the drain.

To a grey dawn I awaken,
 My life has not been taken;
 I smell frying eggs and bacon,
 And my swollen mind is aching.
 Then I'm feeling the emotion,
 I no longer feel the pain.

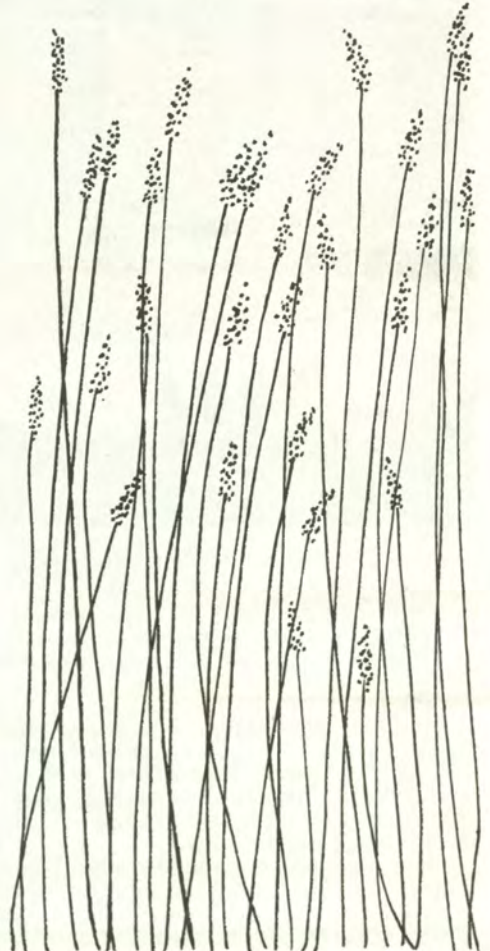
But I still wonder 'bout the weather
 And I still do wonder whether
 You'll come again in random motion
 To find me standing by the ocean
 In howling wind and crying rain.

by John Hudson Leavitt

Nebraska

Prairies whistle their windy
 songs of solitude
 to the toppling grains
 that scratch and scrunch
 against each other.
 Dust paints the windows
 of farm houses
 and the faces of their
 seedy owners
 who squint their desolate
 eyes towards it.
 Cattle shuffle amidst the grasses
 and chew methodically
 as the slow sun disperses
 and the wind recites.

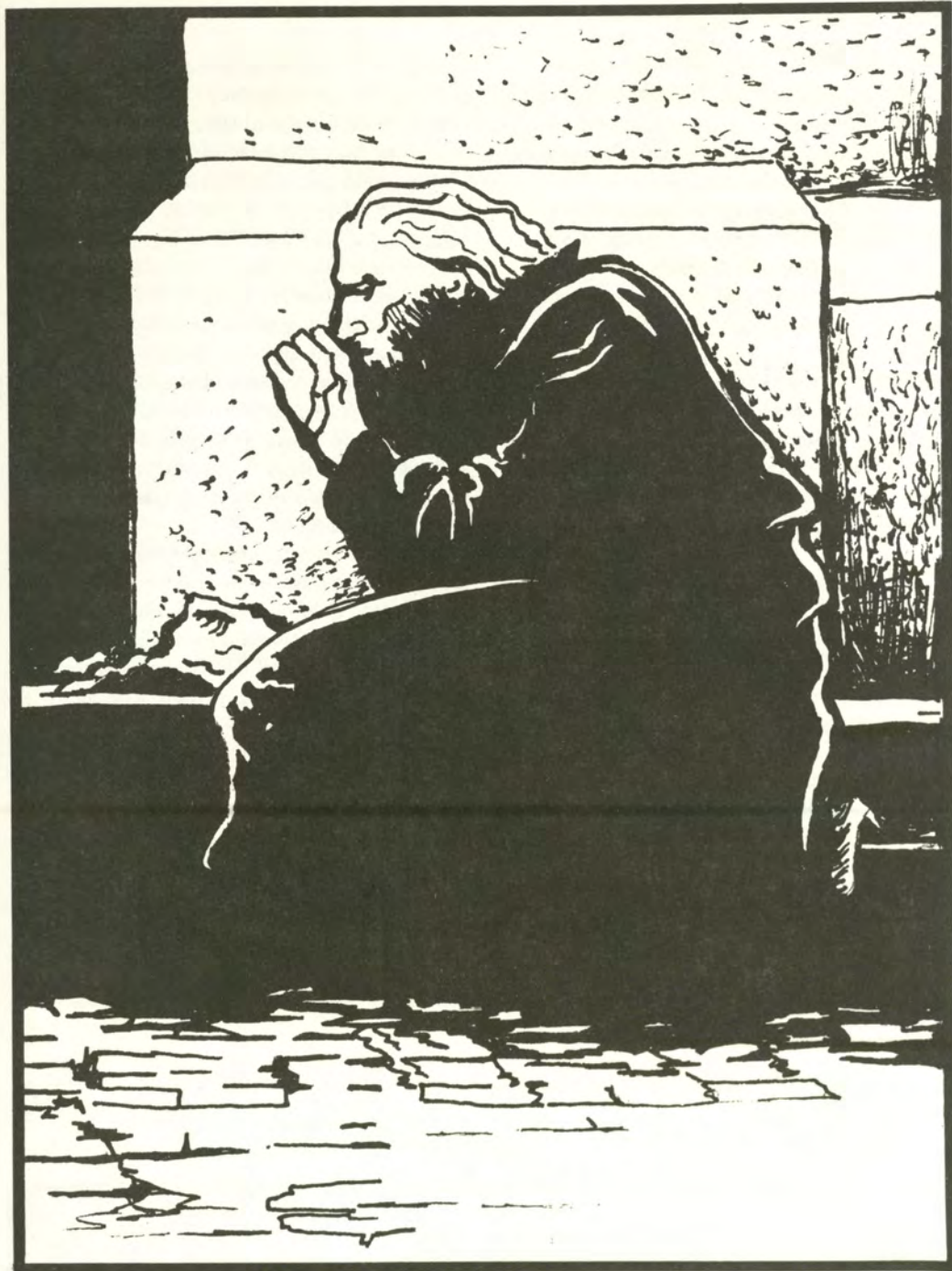
Lisa Collin



LETHE'S BAR

by JAMES CLIFTON HALE

17



"Life is a long illness," whispered Jarmayne, "and I mean only to cure it." He strode forward crookedly, and resolutely began to die.

Jarmayne stumbled around the grimy corner into the stench that was the alley as

though someone invisible had shoved him. He wrung his hands, praying for the strength to break them, finger by finger. His eyes bored into the muggy nothingness before him, afraid of the nothingness behind and between. His jaw was slack. Jarmayne was hyperventilating. Short, animal jerks of respiration.

He leaned for a moment upon the black and slimy stones of a soiled building. The corpse of a meagre dinner rotted in a garbage can nearby, and the smell reminded him of childhood days and home.

Jarmayne staggered forward, offal beneath his soles. He had the feeling of being one worm among a thousand in a small box.

Jarmayne raised his hands to his mouth and began to suck and bite them as he wrung them.

Soon, a third hand came into play. It rested hot, putrescently **alive** on Jarmayne's greasy shoulder. The hand wetted its parched lips with its tentacled tongue. A twisted voice writhed in Jarmayne's ear: "Brother, can you spare a life? Your money or more time!"

"Nonsense," Jarmayne whispered, almost heaving with pleasure as blood spurted from his knuckles. "I haven't even the money to buy a good death."

The hand pursed its lips. Its voice kissed Jarmayne's ear. "Go to Lethe's Bar."

Jarmayne continued, his whisper breaking with emotion as a sudden thrill of nausea shuddered in the pit of his stomach. "What's more," he said, "no one can die for me."

The voice retreated. "Don't be so certain," it said knowingly as it faded, "One plus one makes two. . .always. Even inside a skull."

The hand slid from Jarmayne's shoulder and fell with a disagreeable sound behind him. It made a splat of impact entirely too much like that of a hand dismembered.

The hand began to melt and stink and seep into the pavement. "Go to Lethe's Bar," sang its stench, "Go. . ."

Jarmayne barely noticed. Already his mind was dulling. He merely shuffled forward, bleeding fingers ecstatic between his rotten teeth. He stared softly into the blackness ahead, his hoarse panting like an aura.

(Actually, that Jarmayne breathed at all was a stroke of chance: he was not paying attention to ventilation. He left such things to his body, unable to find an **acquaintance** to take care of them.)

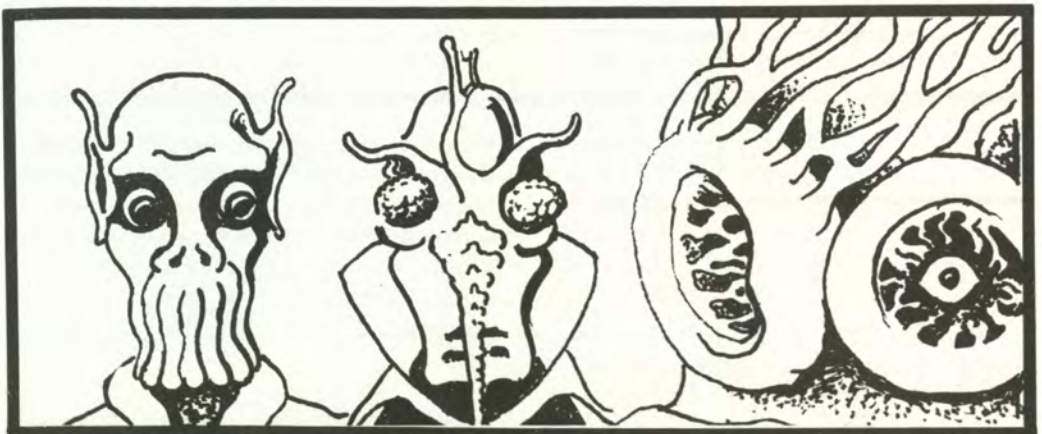
Jarmayne tripped over some wet and fleshy obstacle and went sprawling. His head, hands held in mouth, crashed to the ground, landing upon a cool metal grille that covered a sewer inlet. One of Jarmayne's protruding ears slid into an oblong opening in the drain.

Jarmayne enjoyed this position immensely. He felt **such an affinity** with sewers! As the sewage gurgled throatily in passage below, Jarmayne, a fellow gathering place for refuse, wished that he could liquefy and join the flow.

Jarmayne got his wish. As his hyperventilation slackened to a slow and sleepy bub-

WRITING CONTEST

Sponsored by the Science Fiction Club



bling of phlegm in his chest, Jarmayne's head began to ooze into the sewer.

Jarmayne was slightly conscious, even in his fluid slumber. He was vaguely aware of the many fish in the sewer. Nasal membrane stingrays and Eustachian Tube-eels flitted through the middle depths. Anus-fish floated on the surface, their gas-bags distended. Jarmayne spoke to none of them, however. He flashed quickly through the deepest depths. He had become, you see, a silverfish.

He scuttled out of the flow after a time, and emerged onto a concrete floor. He sensed voices far above him. Jarmayne flexed some of his insect legs, and suddenly found himself on a barstool centered between the voices. He flexed his legs again, but realized that he had been mistaken—they were really his fingers. Yes, the blood tasted familiar.

The two persons, one on his either side, were conversing around him. Soundwaves, as usual, bent to avoid him. Perhaps they wished to avoid infection.

A drunken blonde on Jarmayne's left sobbed in her fiftyish voice. "I thought that a bar was supposed to be a happy place," she moaned.

From Jarmayne's right, a man replied. "A bar looks a lot better with an 's' on the end," he said. "Incarceration is the one palliative for our times, and death the only cure."

A lady bartender winked and set a drink upon the bar before Jarmayne. She went away.

Jarmayne unentwined his mutilated hands. He drank the drink. When the beverage took effect, Jarmayne realized that it had not been a depressant, but a damned stimulant.

Jarmayne felt betrayed, but the conversation flowed on around him nonetheless.

* * *

Jarmayne's body flinched a last time, then finally lay still on the cool table.

The female attendant looked up from her nail file, and spoke around her chewing gum: "This one's stiff now."

Nodding, a large male orderly moved forward from his leaning place in the doorway. "Right. I'll wheel it out."

The girl shook her head sympathetically. "A welfare case," she said.

The orderly nodded again. "Yeah. You can tell from the face."

Shrugging, the girl returned to filing her nails. "Hey! Did he scream!" she said. "But, only the ones who pay get the pleasant drug."

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6. Submissions must be double-spaced, typed, PLEASE.
7. All submissions become the property of the Science Fiction Club.
8. The deadline for submissions is February 1, 1979.
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