

Fall 1989

Fall 1989

Valparaiso University

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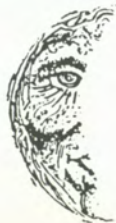
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THE LIGHTER





# The Lighter



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Krista Steinke





Laura Gatz

## Escape

The smoke, like fog across a distant moor  
 In England, whispers to the empty night  
 Its song of sixpence, rye and mercy for  
 Those four and twenty blackbirds. Set to flight  
 By Greenpeace, which alarmed the Scotland Yard  
 And sent the king and court to jail, the birds  
 Escaped without a nod or thank you. "Guard  
 The future from such wrongs and spread the word  
 That we will not forget."

Mike Chasar

Black heart and gun metal gray  
It's been so long since our races with the sun.  
The devil's riding a black falcon  
on my street. Sweet orange blossoms,—  
    venus fly trap.

Rain mixed with mud and oil  
    The cars run it in,  
Man arose from that car, and made his promises.

Now-silhouetted against a gray film  
    inside the windshield—the stage de Macabre:  
Passing headlights illuminate—drops of water on the glass.  
    Turns them into blinding pixels  
    of light, against the night.

Car rolls past again  
tempting youths in pinned collections.

(on the capture of an Argentinian friend in the 70's)

Robert Lawrence



Eric Levin



## Remembering Laverne

Sometimes I wonder if the mustiness, like an old book  
 being reopened, the odor  
 of your house, was there even before you were.  
 I always hated that big house, hated  
 how month-old newspapers shrouded all  
 the furniture, like sheets draped over what's left  
 in a place after someone dies.  
 I only recently learned

what a davenport is. But we always sat on it, nibbling cordial  
 cherries whose chocolate had not so recently  
 begun to whiten. Their sugary, sticky juices clinging  
 to my lips, our subjects seldom varied. We often came back  
 to Laverne. I knew her story but still  
 listened. The musty  
 words recited themselves in my head, as routine  
 as breathing.

She was snatched from your tight grip  
 too early. Her small, ten-year-old  
 hands so often braided my own  
 Mother's hair. Her polio-deformed legs  
 are still helpless, and the black tire tracks etched  
 on her small bookbag run over you  
 whenever you think  
 too much. Your few tears are for the white  
 angel who grows yet another pair of wings.



Laura Gatz

Sick also  
 from the cherries and the blue  
 liquor we shared, the mustiness  
 is a cloud hanging over me. But an orange  
 sun illuminates the motionless dust  
 in the room that smells like old, and resurrects  
 the yellow, red, blue lead glass in your window,  
 the kind no one owns anymore. And I return  
 the cherries to the shelf with Laverne, where they continue  
 to whiten together.

Erica Langenegger

## Insomnia

I lie on the floor  
looking up at the stars.

Bicycle knobs flash in the night  
as luminescent ninjas  
peer through whisky bottles.

The paper tree hasn't grown,  
but my hair has...

My father's birthday is Thursday.

Jeff Miklos



Laura Gatz



## If the Cock Hadn't Crowed

This, I suppose, is one of those “Most Embarrassing Moment” stories that you might tell your friends if you were all drunk enough. Except that some people around here are taking it a little more seriously than that. They say my screw-up had effects of gargantuan proportions on the religious beliefs of the entire world. I’m not sure I believe that. Christianity was a pretty weird concept to begin with. Who really would have bought it?

You see, I knew this guy—he was sort of a rabbi—named Jesus. I followed him pretty much through his entire ministry. He called me Peter, which means rock. He wanted me to be the foundation of his church. Later he changed my name to Sandy. But I’m getting to all of that.

Once I was a fisherman. A simple life. I made nets, threw them over the sides of boats and if I caught anything I got to eat and maybe buy a new pair of sandals. If I caught nothing, I went hungry and had dirty feet. No big deal. No one paid any attention to me except my brother Andrew, who I worked with. We were pious enough, I guess. Maybe we drank a little too much when our catches were especially good or especially bad. But neither of us went out of our way to do anything against the Divine Plan.

Then of course he came along—The Son of God, The Son of Man, The Holy Saviour, The Messiah, Jesus Christ of Nazareth Who was Supposed to Turn Out to be a Big Hot Dog in Religious Circles Some Day. He had enough names to require an Appendix to this story. I think he made most of them up himself.

He didn’t look like much then. He was just some out of work guy who wanted to learn the fishing trade. I’d taught lessons in net tying and fishing before, mostly to rake in a few extra bucks when the catches weren’t so good. That year the fishing had been fantastic. We didn’t need the money but we sure did need the help. And this guy seemed nice enough—real mellow and everything. I couldn’t imagine him ripping us off. So we took him aboard.

It didn’t take long to teach him everything I knew. I never did ask him, but I’d always had the feeling he’d been some sort of fisherman before we met. I never had to show him anything more than once, and some things he seemed to figure out on his own.

In about a week, the three of us were back out in the boat and raking in more fish than the market could handle. I eventually made the decision to limit ourselves as to the number of fish we sold or we’d drive the prices so low that less fortunate members of our trade would starve to death. And it wasn’t us, me and Andrew, who were causing multitudes of fish to swim into our nets.

It was him.

He had this knack for fishing. We’d be sitting there with nothing in our boats and nothing in our nets and he’d say something like “Let’s try it over there just a few feet.” And we’d go over there and pull up more fish than I ever thought our nets could handle. Or he’d say, “Let’s just try dropping the net over the other side of the boat,” and there we’d be, only half afloat because we had so many fish on board. Once, when we were really struggling—we’d only caught about five fish in six hours—I suggested we call it quits for the day. “Wait, let’s try something,” Jesus said and pulled our net back into the boat. He took one of the few fish we’d caught





Stacy Lavres

earlier and twisted its body into the net. Then he dropped the net, sort of baited with that fish, back over the side. In a manner of seconds we were hauling up enough to feed thousands! “They just needed a little encouragement,” Jesus said.

So, for a couple of weeks we lived in luxury. We were well fed, well dressed, and happy—Andrew and I, that is. We divided the profits into fourths—I got two fourths (I owned the boat), and Jesus and Andrew each got a fourth. But Jesus never spent his. He ate only fish that we caught and never bought any other clothes. He never smelled, though. He never seemed to save his money either. I don’t know where it all went. Looking back, I guess he was giving it to the poor behind our backs.

I just realized something: for weeks Jesus lived and worked with us and he never mentioned religion. None of us did. I guess we thought it wasn’t important. We were all Jews. Jesus looked like a Jew and acted like a Jew and now I know that he was a Jew. But he never said anything religious until one day just after we’d pulled another fish laden boat up onto shore. He said, “Come with me and I will make you fishers of men.” I guess that wasn’t really religious either. It just sounded religious.

He said that and I thought, “This guy has already made us rich beyond our dreams. Why not follow him?”

But he made us do a strange thing. He made us leave behind our wealth and all our changes of clothing and our boat and all the fish in our boat and everything else we might have picked up along the way. We could wear the clothes we had on and that was it. I became just a bit suspicious right then, but I still followed him. Followed right at his heels as though he were leading us to the promised land, which I suppose he was.



We picked up ten other guys within the next couple of days. Most of them were fishermen and Jesus sort of seduced them with that same line: "Come with me and I will make you fishers of men."

And then Jesus started his ministry and we were all supposed to be his apprentices. Unfortunately, he never told us what it was we were doing. Jesus would stand on a hill with the wind blowing his hair into his face and he would preach brilliantly and his audiences would just sit there and gasp in awe because even though they didn't have any idea what he was saying it sure sounded good. And it was our job to sit there and gasp like the rest of them. That was it. That was apparently all we were supposed to do. Of course, none of us was sure. Maybe we were supposed to be doing something else. Actually, Jesus did put me in charge of the group's finances. That was a joke. We had no money.

We soon discovered that Jesus didn't really need any help. We all felt like extra possessions. It wasn't quite fair; he'd made us leave all our extra stuff behind and then brought a whole bunch of extra people with him. I think we did serve one purpose though. I think we were like that fish Jesus baited the net with. We sort of started the crowd wherever he went. As long as we were there, listening to his every word, other people thought it might be OK for them to be there too. It's just a theory.

Slowly, though, he started to let us in on secrets. He started explaining those teachings which didn't seem to make any sense. Until, of course, he explained them. Then, he'd tell us not to tell anyone what he'd just clarified for us. Strange way to found a religion. We were supposed to be learning to be teachers but we couldn't tell anyone what we'd learned. It was then that I started wondering if Jesus always meant what he said, or if there

was a mysterious little tiny wink in there somewhere that you could catch if you watched closely enough.

And then the miracles! I always got the feeling Jesus hated doing the miracles, that what he really wanted to do was teach. But the people didn't care about the Blessed-are-those's. They wanted to watch the blind see and the deaf hear. They wanted to see Jesus stop boys from foaming at the mouth and they wanted to hear the screaming demons flee. Maybe then, after all the excitement, they might listen to a few words, perhaps hoping to learn a bit of this hocus-pocus. I must admit, I was always a bit more impressed with the miracles than with the teachings.

There is one miracle I remember more clearly than any other: his first one. Since there was no one else around to impress, Jesus must have done it out of pure compassion for the leper who lay at his feet pleading and pronouncing his faith. And Jesus said to him, "Your faith has made you well." There's that religious sound again. The man was healed instantly and Jesus sternly warned him not to tell anyone of what had just happened. Did Jesus wink as he said that? I don't know. I do know that the man went and blabbed the whole story plus some to everyone and everything within a five mile radius. The news got around quickly and after that we never had much peace.

We went though a lot. More miracles, more teachings, more explanations, a Transfiguration here and there, and a bunch of other stuff that would take pages and pages to describe. But those will all be other stories. I have already strayed from my original intention which was to tell you how I screwed up and how I got in so much trouble with the Big G-Man. That is, the Father.

Let's suffice it to say that in some places our fame grew.



In other places our infamy grew. Unfortunately, hatred seems to inspire more action than love.

Most of the hatred was directed toward Jesus and very little toward us. I guess the people who hated Jesus recognized us as the do-nothings and know-nothings that we were. Jesus started to talk really weird through all this, telling us he was going to suffer and die, and what kinds of things we were supposed to do after his death. It all sounded like a lot of hocus-pocus again and none of us was quite sure what was going on. But we kept following, we kept following.

Except Judas Iscariot. Judas turned in Jesus to the authorities.

Another thing just occurred to me: Jesus never got upset with Judas. He never got upset with anyone. Except some money changers in a temple.

And he got upset with me.

Twice he became angry and called me nasty names. The first time he was talking about his death and how he would have to suffer and how he would rise again after three days. Now, he'd done this on a couple of occasions already. I wasn't sure if something weird was going on inside his head or what, but I was pretty sure that no one was going to hurt him. Especially not with twelve full time bodyguards hanging around all the time. We would have been delighted to use our swords. It would have given us something to do. I figured Jesus was coming up with these delusions because of stress. You know, the pressures of being the Messiah and all. So I took him aside and tried to console him.

"Listen, Jesus," I said, "I don't know where you're getting all this stuff, but we all love you and care for you very much and some of us even have an inkling of an idea who you are and what you're doing here. So don't

worry about it. Nothing's going to happen to you."

"You know who I am and what I'm doing?" he asked. "Ha! You haven't listened to a word, have you?" Then he really blew up. "You idiot! . . . No . . . Satan! Get away from me." Then he kept mumbling for an hour or so about who was on the side of God and who was on the side of man. Frankly, I was scared. I'd seen him bring the dead to life with a touch of a hand and a few words. It occurred to me then that he could probably do the exact reverse if he wanted to.

The other time Jesus got upset with me was the Big Screw-up.

It turned out that Jesus was right; they were going to kill him. He told us when and sort of explained why. It didn't make any sense to me, but then very little did. On the night before his death he told us that we would all fall away from him after his death in order to fulfill some prophecy or something. Well, I never put much stock in prophecy anyway and I had never felt better and enjoyed life more than since Jesus had taken us from our fish and our boat and all my precious money, so I had no intention of leaving him, death or no death. I told him that some of the younger guys might fall away, who could blame them, but I would never fall away. He told me I would deny him three times before the cock crowed. I wish I would have watched more closely to see if he winked.

Several hours later, the authorities came and got him, Judas leading the way and pointing Jesus out with a poisonous little kiss. They didn't seem to care about us. We just followed along. We were always following and following and following.

Before I go any further let me tell you that we hadn't had much sleep and we were all exhausted. I also don't



think any of us understood what was going on. My mind was jumbled by a combination of lack of sleep and strange new concepts that it wasn't ready to accept. Keep that in mind before you sentence me to the eternal fires of Hell.

They took Jesus to the High Priest's house and took him inside. We all knew they would condemn him, Jesus had told us that. A couple of us tried to follow him into the house but they slammed the door in our faces. We were worthless fish to them, too small to keep, not worth cleaning, they tossed us away.

So we stood outside in the courtyard which was swarming with people all demanding to know what was going on. Hundreds of people each with a different theory about Jesus and who he was. The noise was deafening. It was hot and stuffy.

"You were with him, weren't you?" I spun around to find a pretty young servant girl looking at me accusingly. "You were one of his disciples, weren't you?" she demanded.

I remembered his words: "You will deny me." I had taken that to be a command. So I said, "No, I don't know what you're talking about." The girl went away. I was proud of myself. I had followed Jesus' command. I think it was the first thing I'd actually done for him since I left my boat to follow him. I was in the clear.

Suddenly, the little servant girl returned with another servant girl and the two of them began announcing to everyone around that I was one of Jesus' followers. "This one here," they said, pointing at me. "He's guilty too." I got a little flustered. They all started shouting accusations at me. I couldn't understand. What did I matter? I thought I was nobody to them. I began to doubt myself, but still stood my ground.



Krista Steinke

"No! You're wrong!" I claimed, with as much confidence as I could muster. "I don't even know the man. Leave me alone." This quieted the crowd for awhile. I felt like I was in the clear again.

A few moments passed and then several men approached me. I thought they might lynch me. "We know you were with him. We saw you! Besides, your accent gives you away! Come on, admit it."

I was so confused. Should I deny Jesus again? Why did they keep asking me? I must have done something wrong if they kept asking me. Why wasn't one denial enough? I must have forgotten that Jesus had demanded three denials. Maybe I confused it with the three days that



would pass before he rose from the grave. So many threes. . . and I was so tired.

Then thoughts came to me so clearly and suddenly that it felt like someone was putting them into my brain, like someone was shoving a scroll in through my ear. I honestly thought I was receiving a Divine Message. Jesus really didn't want me to deny him, I thought. When he told me to deny him, he was really daring me to not deny him. Just like when he told that leper not to tell anyone, he was daring him to tell everyone. When he told us disciples not to tell anyone what he had taught us, he was daring us to teach the world. The more I thought about it, the more I could hear Jesus' voice saying, "Come on, 'fess up. I dare you. I double dog dare you. No, I triple dog dare you. Bet ya can't do it, bet ya can't." It all made so much sense now.

If I admitted I was with him they would crucify me too.

And then came the thought which I am most ashamed of: I thought that if I confessed to being one of Jesus' disciples, I would become another saviour. And the other disciples (except Judas) might become saviours too. Imagine it, twelve saviours all together! What a religion we would have!

So I said it: "Yes. I am a follower of Jesus and one of his closest friends."

That was the Big Screw-up.

Somewhere, I suppose, a cock clucked but couldn't find the voice to crow.

They of course grabbed me, and once they had me the others weren't hard to find. I hate to admit it but I actually pointed out a few of the other disciples to the guards: "That one over there. No, not him. The one next to him." Forgive me, I thought I was acting out God's

Divine Will.

They threw us all into the house. Inside that house, I saw Jesus. Our eyes met. He wasn't pleased. He started calling me names. He didn't actually say any of the names out loud, but he was calling me names. He was calling me Satan, and if there were any names worse than Satan, he was calling me those too.

They hung us all up on crosses. Jesus in the middle and his disciples in a circle around him. Fourteen in all. There were two criminals there with us.

That snuffed out Christianity. It was supposed to become one of the most followed, studied, and practiced religions in the world. But you see, no one was there to carry on the message. Sure, people talked about it . . . for about a week. A few people cried. Then everyone forgot the whole thing except this centurion who kept babbling something about the Son of God.

They hung him up on a cross, too.

So you see, the Big G-Man isn't too happy with me. No one is quite sure what He's going to do now. I guess He'll have to come up with another Messiah, but I don't think it will do any good. I'm betting ten to one odds against Christianity ever having a chance again.

Brian Jung



Eric Levin

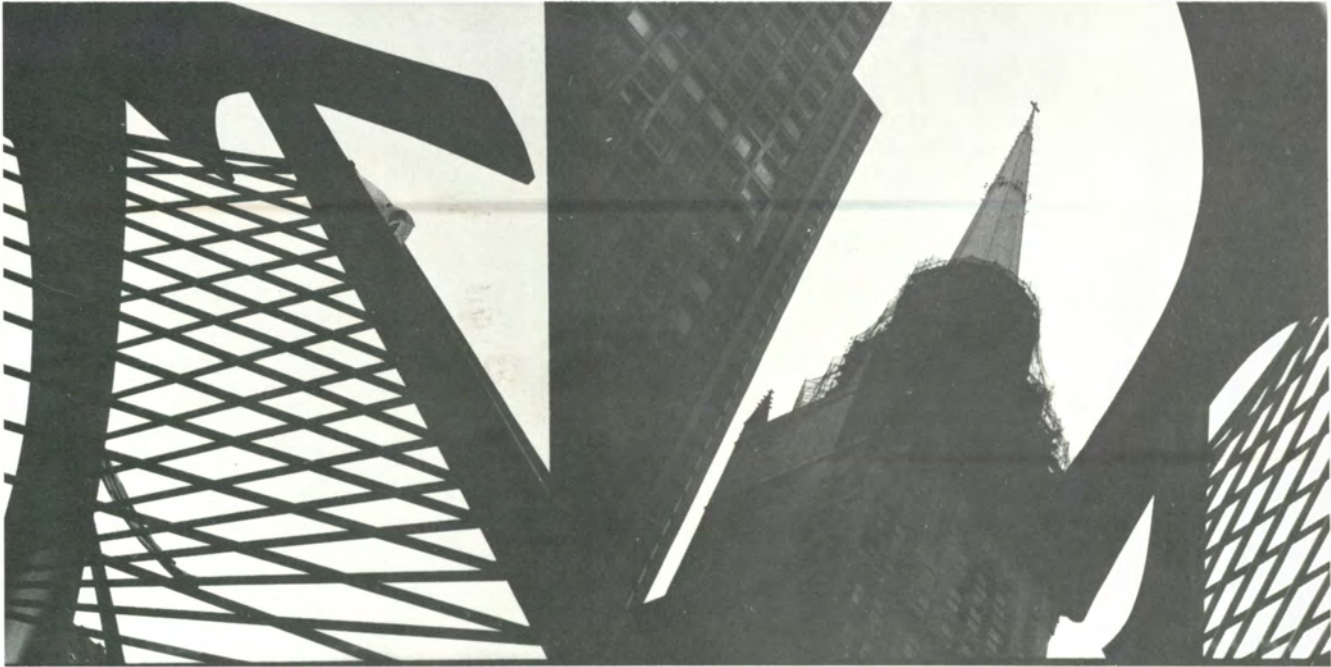
## Our Switch

Tears of smoke run down  
waxen faces peering  
between cold wire fences.  
Fires from buildings provide  
an eerie backlighting  
that forces shadows into  
the eyes and mouths of children.  
Old men, lined with ruined  
faith, raise voices toward song.  
A song, dark backbeat supplied  
by gunshot, that moves into dance.

An obscene line dance  
moving from shower to barrack  
to pit without hope. Most fall  
quickly, but some dance  
for years—friends thinning,  
as bodies do, into ash—  
until God takes their hands  
and dances with them.

Dave Donahoe





Krista Steinke



Gretchen Beck

## Dreaming the Death of Her Father

Her eyelids flutter, chest deep-inhaling the air of a world no longer his.

It isn't as she always imagined: the scratchy, half-expected phone call followed by a few too many drinks in an airport bar. Instead, her brother sits carefully on the grass by the new grave, holding her with one thin arm and reading paper back Whitman about bootsoles and blood. She can't breathe for sobbing.

Which is what wakes her, cotton sheets twisted tight around her chest. She knows, before opening her eyes, that it's not true, the years of Daddy's safe hands, voice soft and easy, warm red mouth whispering *my little girl not dead but gone*.

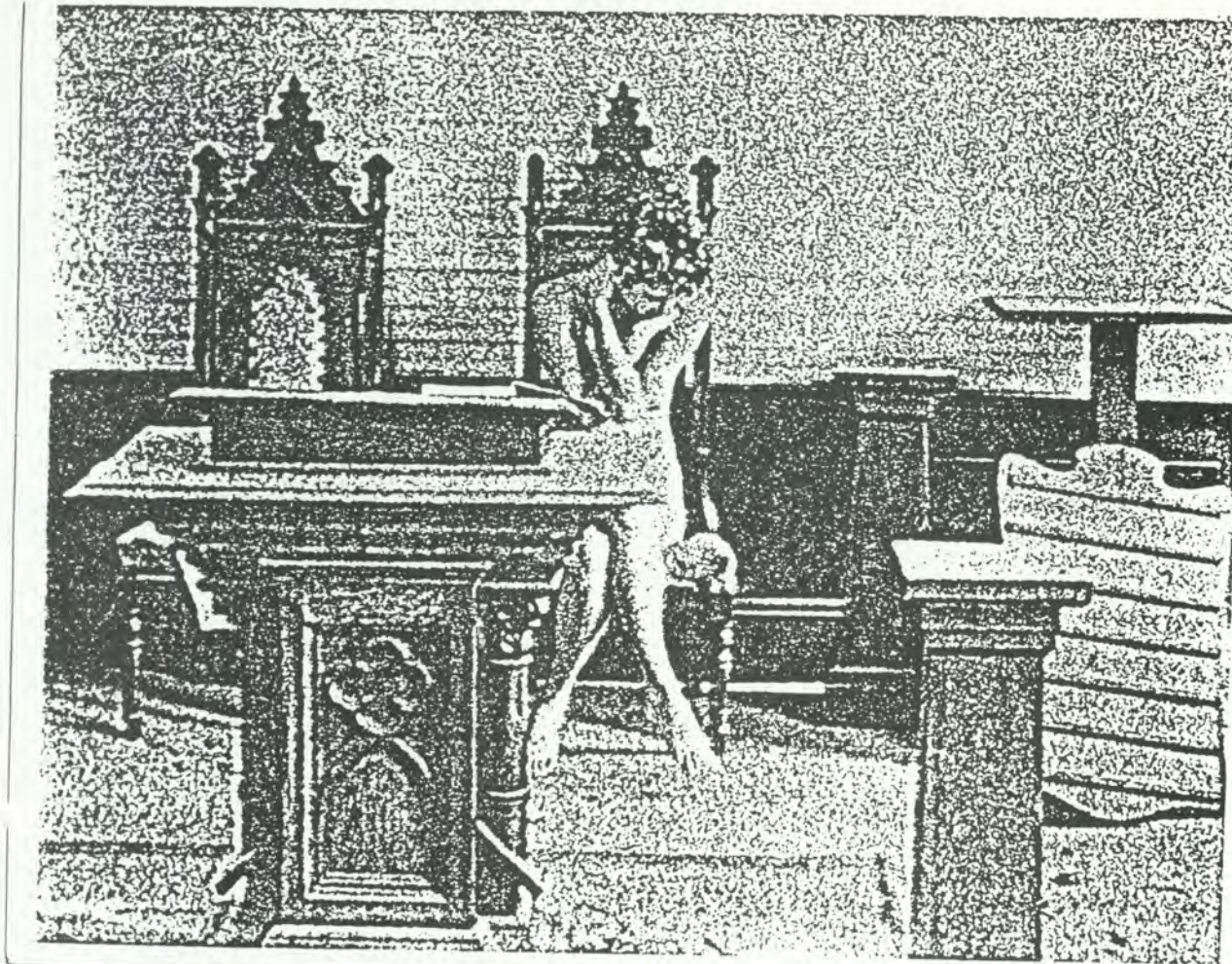
Celeste Duder





Eric Levin





At night while I lay in bed, and waiting for sleep to come  
The moon is still in the mood for making shadows cross my head.  
I heard November's wind at the roof, like December's chill  
about to cum.

I'd grown accustomed to lying like that.

And softly as that wind, (as was my custom),  
I intoned my chant to you.

Robert Lawrence



# Debris

Scraping barnacles off bar tables,  
I clear the fogged, the dirty  
mugs half-empty with last night's beer.  
Old ashes, stale chips left  
stagnant from the surge.

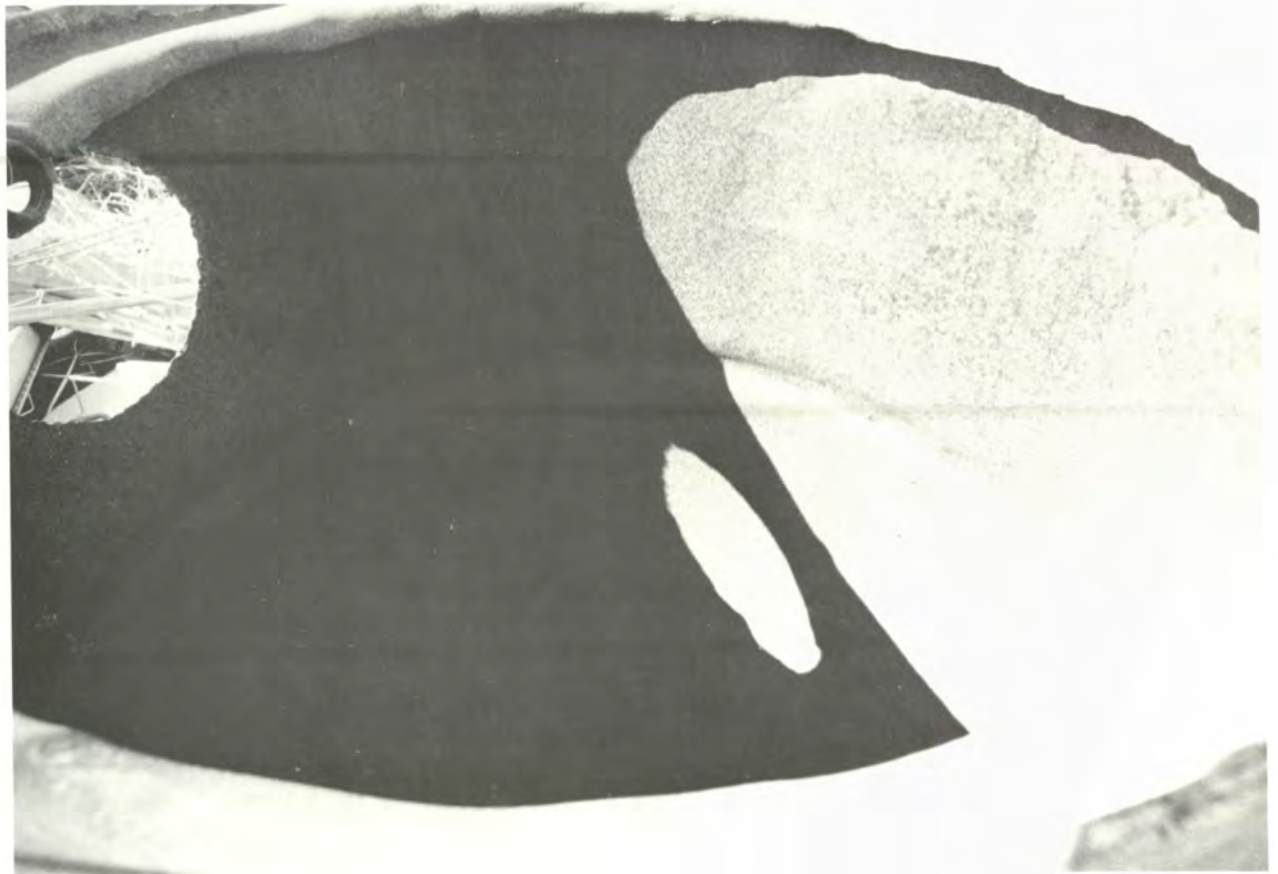
While the boats lean toward their finish,  
there is only this quiet  
left-over debris. Sitting at the bar,  
you clutch whatever you can  
drink on tap.

Boats find their course  
past your hunched, plaid shoulders.  
White triangles scattered  
slicing deep blue paths  
that cut  
into the sea. You flounder

to find a grip  
only leading you somewhere  
ungraspable. The center of the ocean  
silently wavering under  
the sky's cold, white stare.

It is only this  
yawn in time  
that is sharp, that I can see  
you bobbing  
lost in blue.

A gray gull careening  
along the horizon's black line.



Ilse Masselink

Eric Levin



Kevin R. Loza



# The Lighter

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CENTER OF THE EARTH