

Spring 1987

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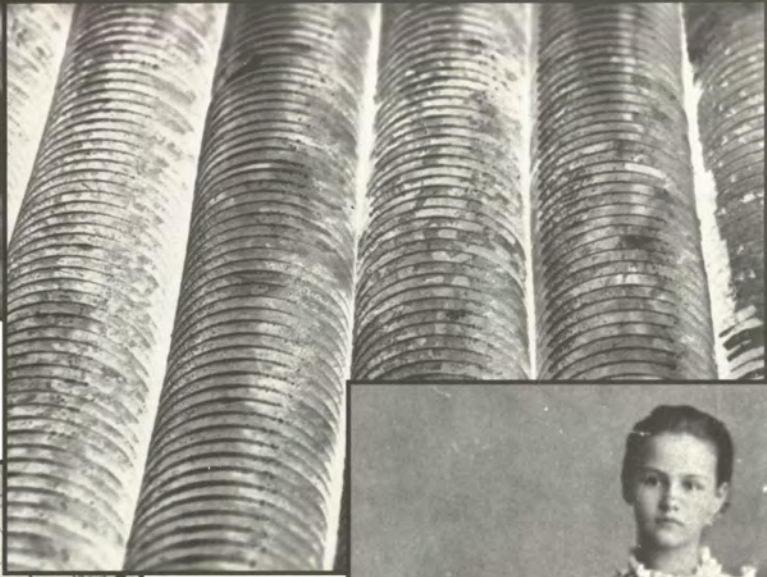
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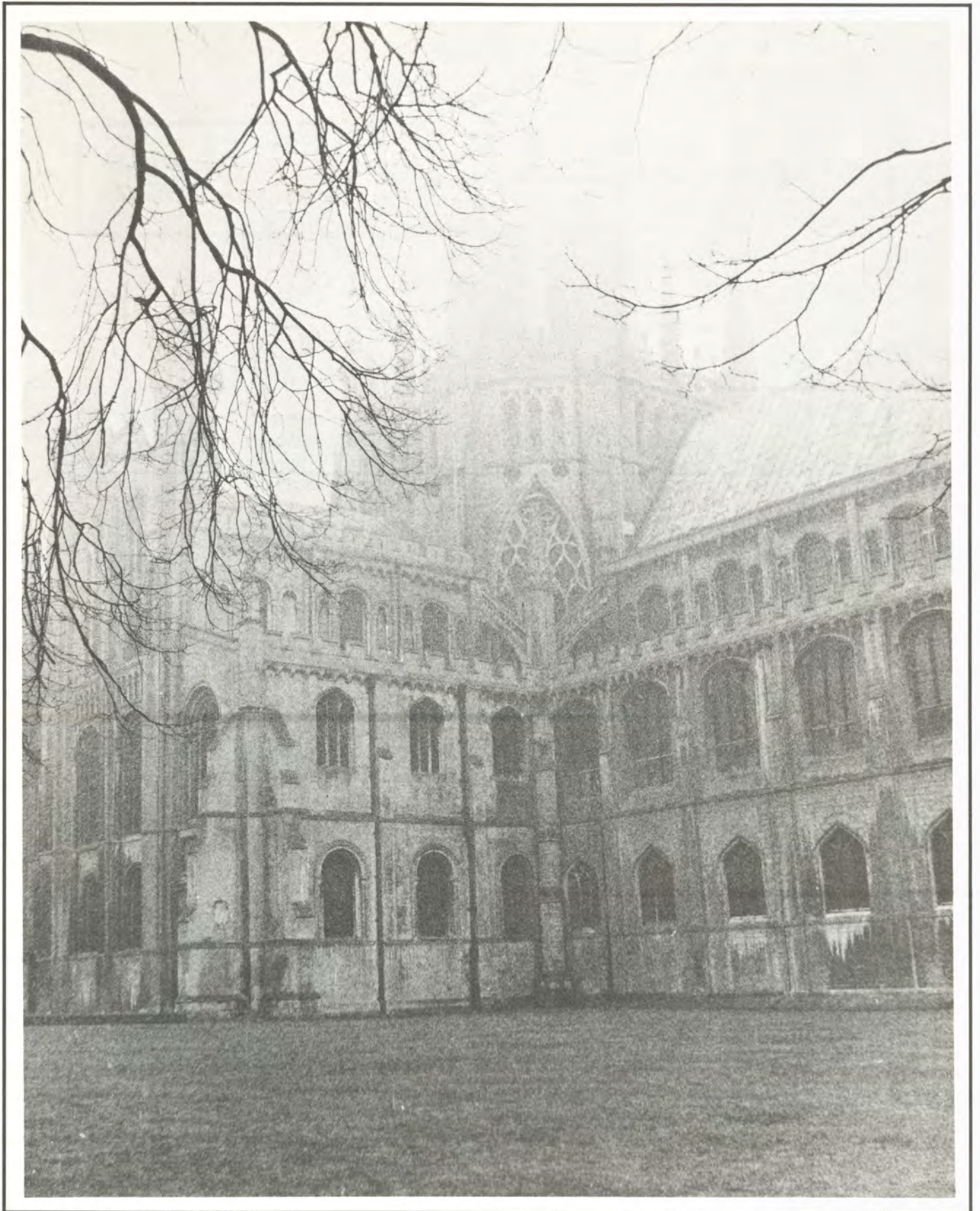
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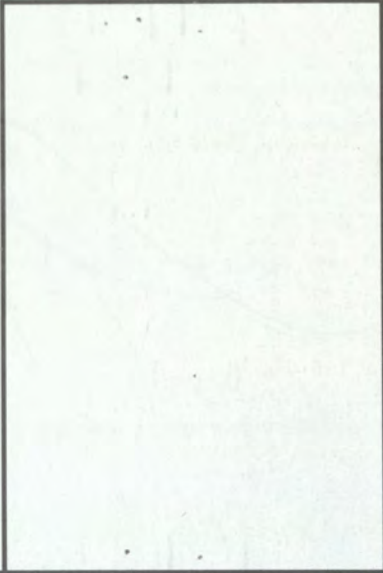
LIGHTER



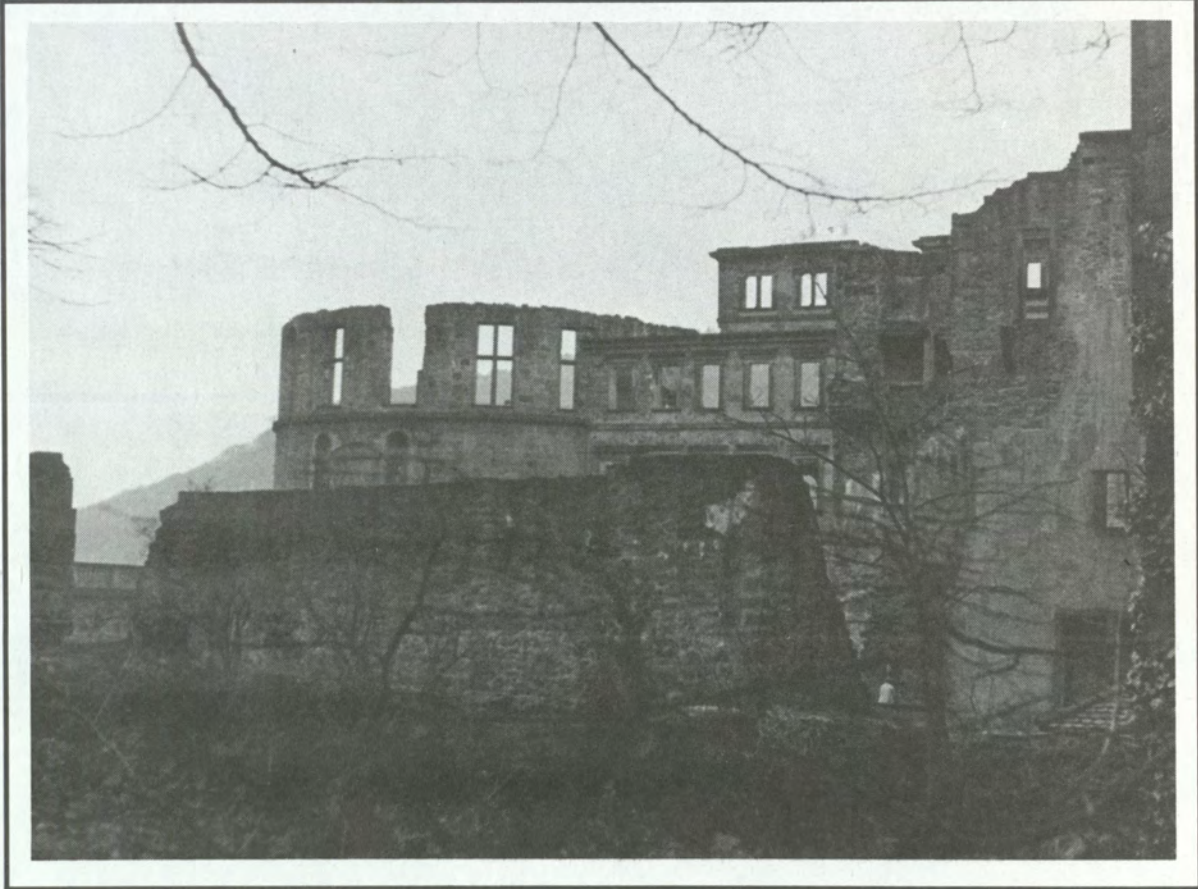


Enshrouded in Fog

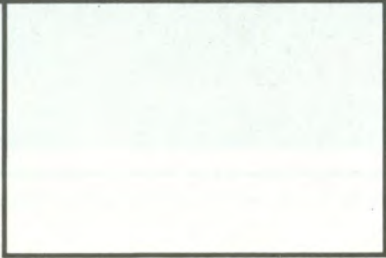
— Ann Rehfeldt



Last Breath



— Christine Dyba

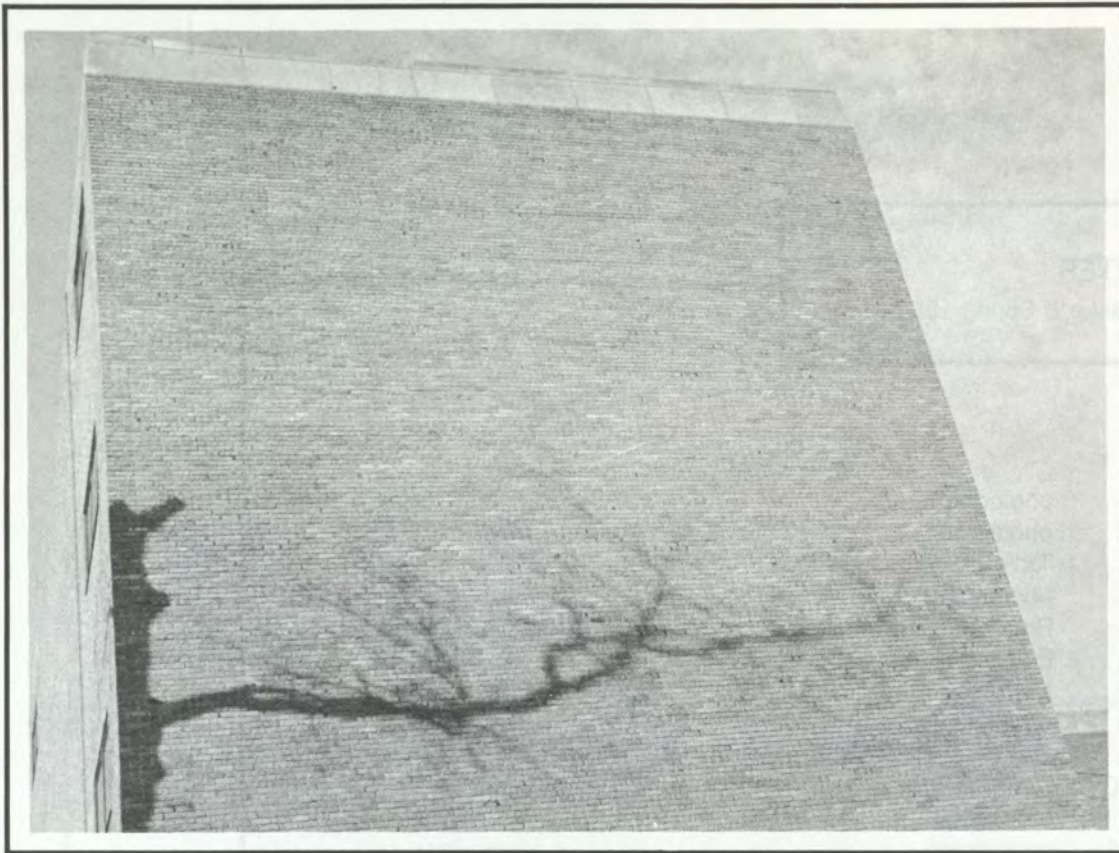


THE LIGHTER

Volume 32 Issue 3 Spring 1987

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VU's magazine of creative experimentation and expression



— Barbara Hoel

Breath of Night

Wrinkles of linen white wash
my sight Inching fingers slowly
brush the warmth of you Across
your chest I stretch my hand
to cover morning-pale skin
As your lungs expand under
my hand, the first current of morning
slips in an open window soothing my cheek, threading
through strands of hair Sun, mist-heavy, pushes
against ashen clouds like the day you showed me
wind and waves Coasting over the water, spray
in our faces, we laughed in the sun Our fingers found
smooth fragments of stone to fling toward the horizon
Waves, breaking into splash and foam, danced about
your ankles as the rocks slid along the surface You smiled
while the sun slowly freckled its way across the water
Light fractures as it penetrates
glassed pane, gently patterning
the rug Yawning apart your lips
search for new breath and I quietly
flatten myself along the mattress' edge

— Polly Atwood

Erasable Runways

The room reminded her of sixth grade.
Smelling chalky hot and leaving that certain taste
in your mouth,
the one that is always there before the janitor mops up at night.
The chairs were empty, not completely pushed in
and the blackboard wasn't washed down.

He stood at the blackboard, clutching the chalk with one hand,
steadying himself with the other.
The fluorescent light made the cut on his face glisten —
almost sparkle,
crystallized blood that wanted to speak of integrity
but only mentioned embarrassment and stupidity.

She asked with her back turned,
why it was so important to write what he wanted to say.
She would not turn but knew that the words,
in their shaky capitals sat scribbled in chalk.
Stoically, she listened.

More words scratched against the board.
Still she would not turn. There was power in her back —
more powerful than the eraser that swept across the messages
turning them into chalky puffs.
She knew what was to be written.
It could never be said, just written, then erased.
Out of the corner of her eye,
she watched him

Burning chalk clouds into the board.
They still came through, even after the eraser
had swept over them.
He didn't know if she saw his pause, fear
and surprise of the message.
He leaned back and rested on the front desk.
Waiting.
His hand brushed across his face —
matting white, the sparkling scrape.

He looked old and tired.
It was what he wanted though —
the look of life on the road, the age,
the blood.
But on a windy, fluorescent night
he only had
muddy sneakers, an empty brandy bottle
of erasable meanings and
chalk in his cut.
She slowly began to smile.

— Tricia Sarvela

just go

1.

and there it was all red and black and blue and grey. got a leg or two
and plans to grow. feeling out and in but left behind and down
the stairs hallway crashing side by side. for on and all
you said through nighttime sighs and sat together eating
the sun with ben when it cracked through the iron of the butterfly
that ate me through and then too far dazed when you left again.

2.

feel like an idiot
so much and gone
at least but ghosts
echo laughs and hate
behind the road through
our way home

3.

and I got the FEAR later on a didn't want to be discovered.
there was just no need no need for for all that hassle...right?
home was quiet and mostly dull except for fireworks and MJ.
what will we do what *will* we do?

4.

but where was the problem? you know...
there was nothing in the least at all
particular to the situation. early
mornings strike again. off to work
without in without on without is without.

and how it went could only be determined
by desperated guitar screams I saw
I saw red that shook my face off
onto the floor crawled round round the walls
and passed out and gave me some advice
that I won't never forget.

5.

and how often do you think I get the chance?

hometime funtime bedtime
I left a note on a door:

“thanx (like a manx)
but nice nice.

don't think I didn't see it coming.”

but I took it down
and threw it all away

6.

what I can't get over is the fact that you seemed so interested
in what people were saying was going down. from the second I saw
you- looking so red different- I thought that you could be good
for me. like perhaps-oh maybe-but never- that's the way
I manage things I guess.

but your eyes!

and just sitting next to you I got that same old helpless feeling
that ran through my legs and mid- just like two
other times before. sparks at a touch. dreams of a kiss in dark
carpets. long times within a talk of wind through my hair
making leaks out the sides that even sunglasses couldn't help.
all the that's that make an infatuation like a speed hit you through
the back of your head. ten o'clock video around midnight rush
that kicks in and on so out the door by the chair you hurried into
by me was not so true maybe. I hit it wrong: others said write
right to bed. never believed two and a half words because I was
still scared of being laughed at...

so why not do it all- not to never made sense to stop

pop it in and sink it hard with one more in the hole,

and beer and beer and rushing on a so hot rhythm-

how I wanted you, right then, there on that crawling carpet

with the bugs moving all around- JEEZUS christ god almighty,

that dress- all red and black, breaking waves across my eyes-

did I see it somewhere else while I was eating a cat

or jamming on a tamborine man all nite drink that ended

getting fucked in Indianapolis?

could it be the same to see again or with the beginning of a

could be bad time non-stop dance cabaret fun house in the middle
of your ass?

good life killer bitch goddam blow it on through

or whatever else went down to serious lsd embarrassment

when I found out I wasn't even invited. . .

7.

and how often do I say the things I said-

seriously asking how things shaped up while you got morning

coffee for sleepy-eyed foreigners-

it's all so without a reason or a reason.

and where did the amphetamine come from?

my head rush in a car crash meeting

that caught a leg or two by the wire

rail in my blankets.

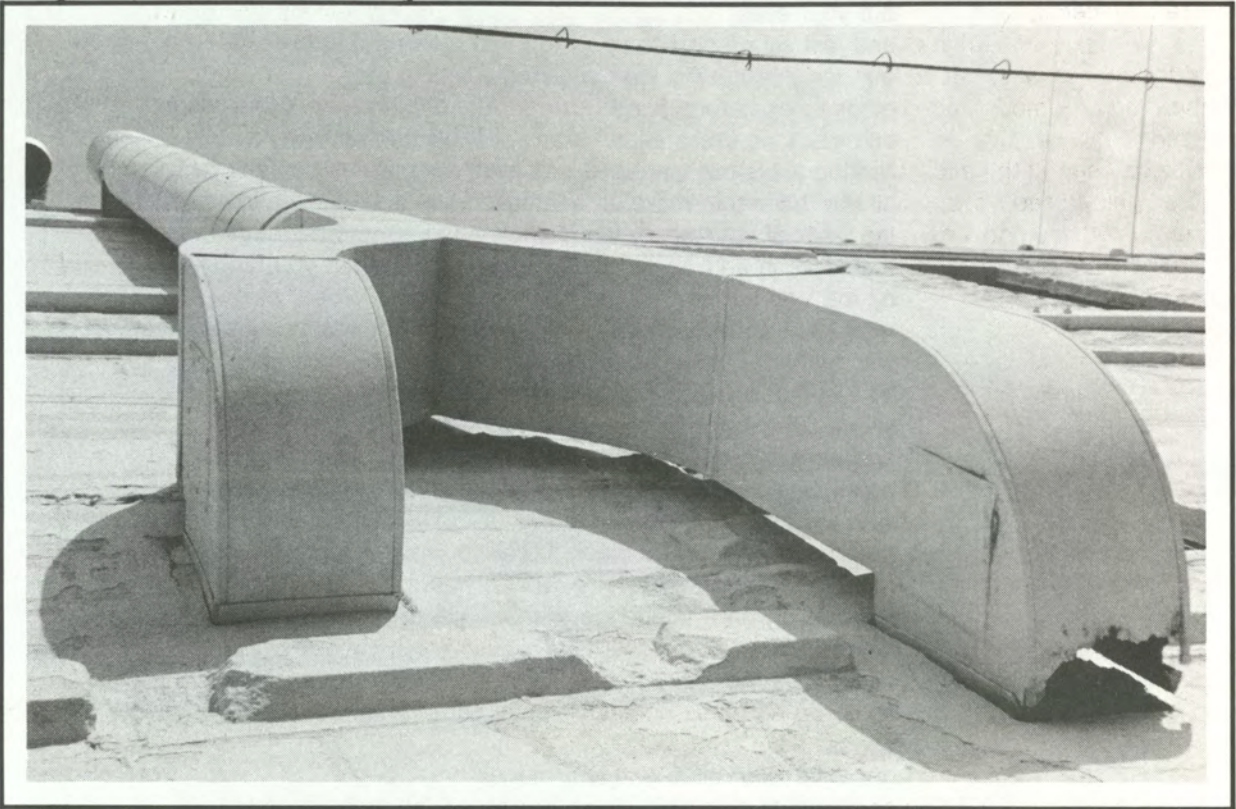
8.

and there you are.

finally that one keeps there alive, and coals sear across

an open memory of idiocy and struggle and sunrise and gone again.

—Fritz Eitrig



— Barbara Hoel

Frazzle & Dink

Grumble gnarled out the phrase
in cracker-crumb syllables,
booming like a windsock:
"kookizit.

Itza reel-theeng."

He never psyched what the sig
of the phrase was, but he liked
the mumbo-jumbo lingo style and
used it often.

Frazzle cogged the sitch
in a blink. Wised up fast to
the goingdown and went under.
Grumble took the dive.

Frazzle hipped to all the jive.
Knew every per in the pop
that could give him the goods
or the go.
But he had this thing for blondes.

Dink was a ditz, a bubble-head.
She leathered into all the queues,
pooling her way about.
Frazzle scoped her as a hopeful
edged in elbowise and did a
two-way talk and bottoms up
not expecting the bummer down
of a no way and a table top.

Dink didn't like the undertable
double-deal or card-talk shuffle
Frazzle fed her.
She blue-eyed knew the book
he read her,
penned a pseud on a doiley,
with the goodtime call
for the nearest shrink
and scused herself to freshen up.

Frazzle took the tab.

Dink was a bopper,
a tease for the pleasure
but not easy to please.
She zoned in on the know,
conned all the action
smiled her pearlbritest
and skirted it through.
She legged in where
angels feared to tread.

Frazzle dazzled to the uttermost
iced and oystered
her attention
dropped the question
while they idled in the Porsche
out front the Inside Connection
he was waiting for.
"Are you a badger?" he quizzed
"No, a Leo," she lied.
Frazzle should have spied
the glitter of handcuffs
in her smile more than a mile away.

Dink egged him on
and mother goosed him in
humpty dumpty style
with fifty G-men
at the drop to pick the pieces up.
All the same she was no Aesop
(and Grimm as things were then
this tale has a happy end.)
He jumped his bond
and off they ran
Frazzle and Dink
happy forever after
they got to Switzerland.

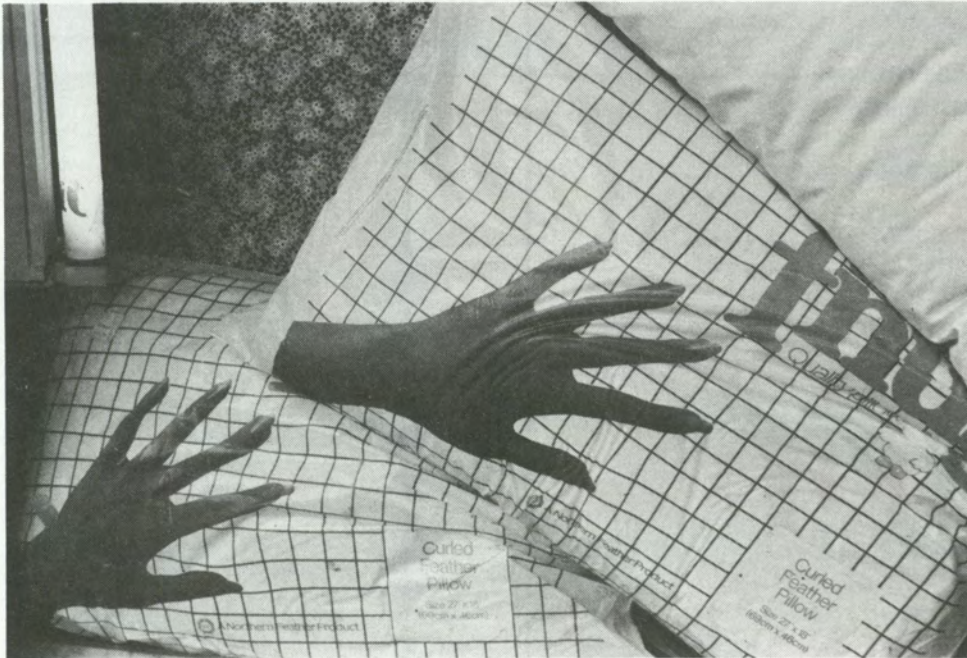
—Paul Fackler



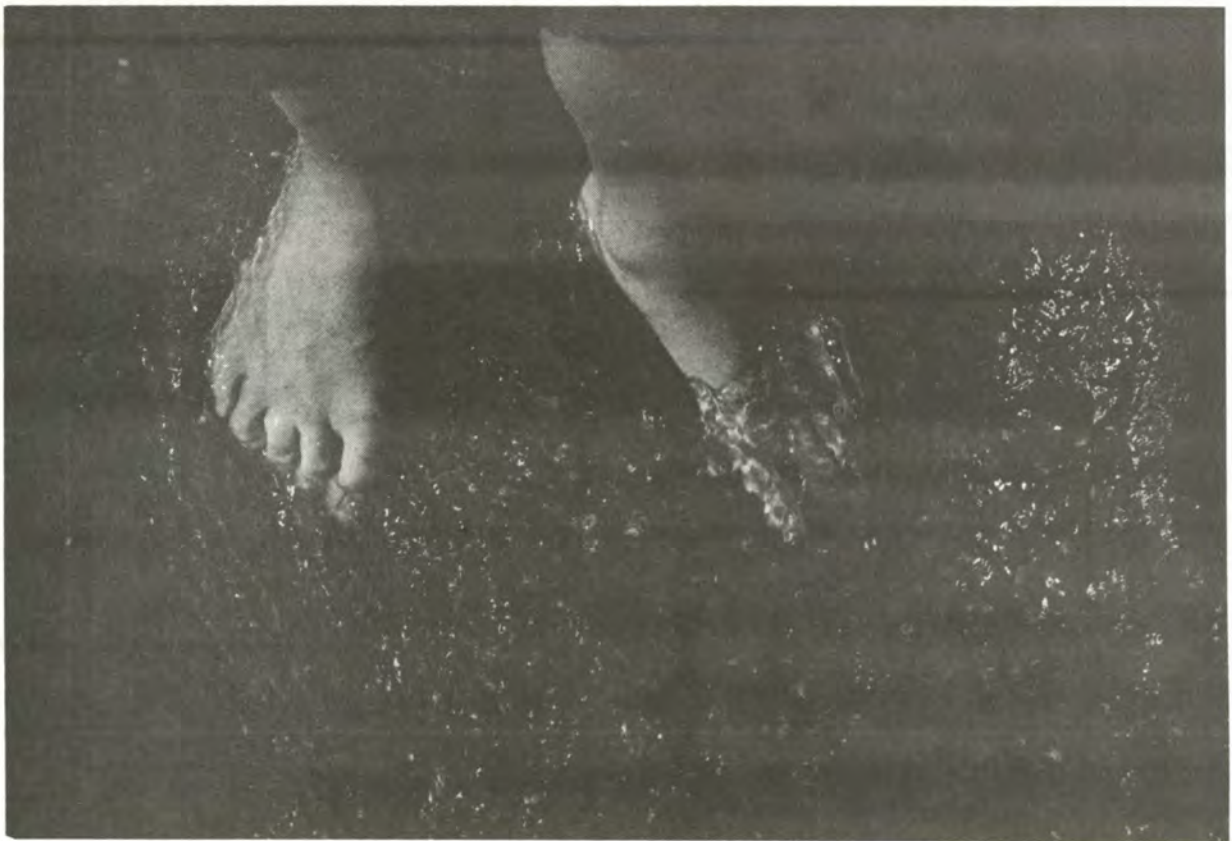
Downtown

Art Head Fred
is tired of bad acid
Miss Hippy Jane
is tired of bad times
Jim thinks we all need
a bag of popcorn for the pigeons
Mary thinks we all need
a shopping bag and a big heart
Art Head Fred
left his vodka bottle
on the corner downtown
Miss Hippy Jane
told me to listen just listen
she held a pamphlet in her hand
Jim likes dark coffee
he told me Kerouac was God
Mary watches the Brady Brunch
through the corner store window

—Andy Shaw



— Bill Rohde



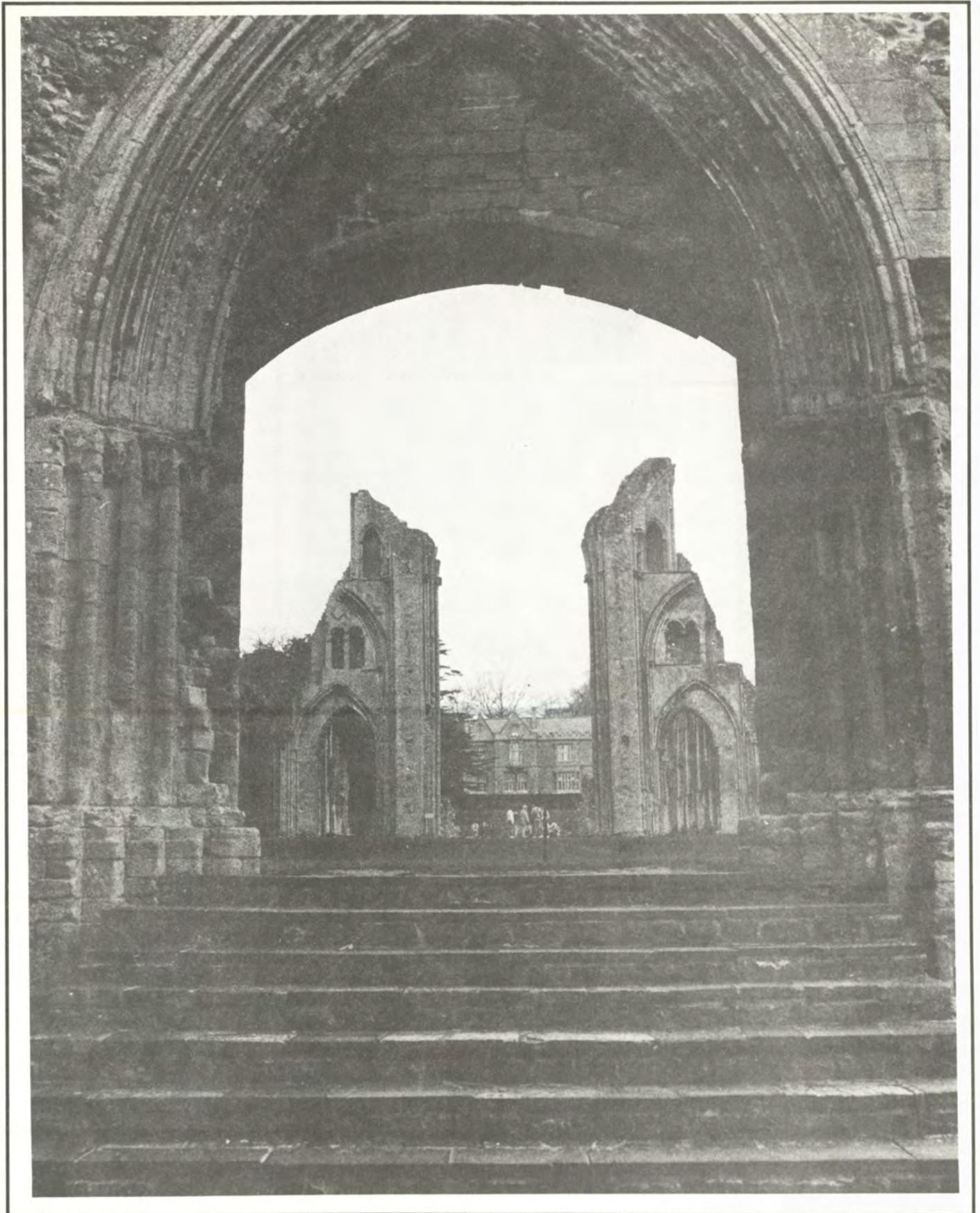
My Feet

Susannah and the Elders

Sun sways to and fro
on the stem of evening,
and the sumac opens orange
and deepest yellow.
Shallow smells of cold
burrow somewhere in our being,
though we hadn't yet thought it possible.
Cattails,
the cream of all my toes,
go howling
into an eddy
made by the final toe of evening
pulling from the pool.
And through the trees, to glimpse
her arm lifting her weighty hair,
one would think some fawn
was raising its head from a thicket of vine.
All that we are
seems to weigh nothing
in this veil of light and leaves
as she weaves back onto the bank
shining first one golden limb
then another.
Yet we cannot seem to move —
only smell the husky herbs
of the hour,
watch yellow moths that swing about
like the sway of her mouth.
Suddenly we are filling
with the vagueness of her light,
knowing her name
without a single brief touch.

Nothing is more enviable
than that sudden influx of being,
that very verge
of gnawing thought
and sudden apparition merged,
before it recedes into
the body of nightfall.

—Teresa Muth

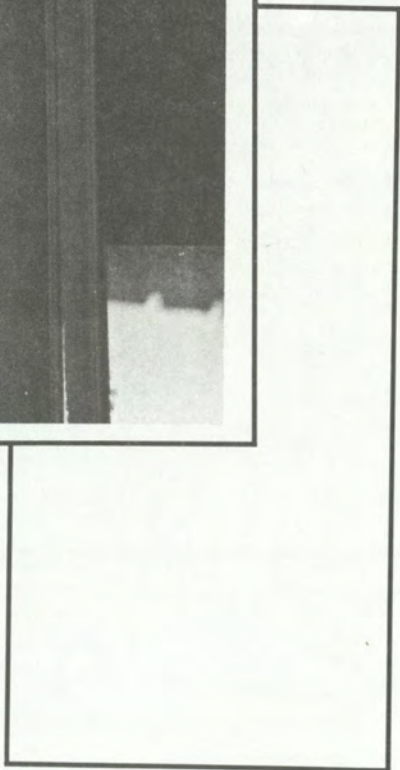


Remnants

— Ann Rehfeldt



— John Jass



Sixty Year Tourist (On Gatlinburg, Tenn.)

1.

My husband's plate pools
with steak juice and one last
red grape sits in the bottom
of my bowl. He's in the rest-
room. I saw billboards
for this restaurant chain
all through Kentucky
and Tennessee; the family
on the menu's front
is having such fun — father
amazed that his drumstick
tastes so good, mother
smiling at son, wide, her teeth
showing, her fork raised
halfway to her mouth. My hands
are as cold as the ice around
the lettuce at the salad bar.

These southern girls wear
too much make-up; their eyes
ringed electric blue, their lips
red, bright, too open
with open vowels, pulling
the final sounds of words
out and up. So many teenagers
on the street tonight,
loud groups wearing light
jackets even though your breath
shows in the cold air.
A heavy frost covered
the mountains when we drove
over to the Cherokee reservation
this morning (my husband imagines
himself interested in Indian
crafts). Thick frost, an inch
of ice on tree branches, rocks,
the grass white, all white, the sky
white and fog across the road,
in ribbons through the trees
on high slopes when the valleys
opened clear on the North
Carolina side. Trees loomed
like white pillars beyond
the guardrail.
Everyone says hello to everyone
else in this restaurant, leaning
into booths as the waitresses lead
them to their tables.

2.

Earlier we stopped
at a reconstructed shopping-village,
the gateway welcoming us
with slave-made bricks; the oldest
in the county a plaque
read. Cobblestones, gables, even
a red English phone booth tucked
in a corner with barrels
and exhibitory farm equipment.
A plaque on a wall near the Christian
gift store commemorated
the shopping center's award-
winning quaintness. Now,
there's too much light;
fluorescent tubes, neon vacancy
signs and large picture
windowed junk emporiums
where t-shirt racks and dirty
joke statuary stand over-sharp
in antiseptic light. In the one
next to the restaurant
the Pakistani owners sat on stools
in the cash booth, conversing
in rapid language, ignoring
us. Paint peels and rust shows
through on the sign
over the door.

Walking back
to the motel, holding
hands (my daughter says
it's so nice to see that we
still hold hands. Her husband
dislikes such public shows
of affection), anticipating
the lemon scented bathroom
disinfectant and sheets cleansed
into sharpness, the pillows
flat from months of heads
before ours. The balcony looks
over the pool, the office;
motel after motel after
motel, right up to the budding
edge of the national park.

—Eric Appleton

In the Crying Closet (3-10-87)

In the crying closet tiled in water blue,
mother in a white dress of sleep
unbuttons her blouse of net,
opening like an oyster down her middle
to the soft white of herself
and the glimmer of an aching pearl.

Into the blue porcelain, she feeds herself,
the hunger of the waters for
the white foam, giving fully
in her fullness.

Then she closes, emptied of her need,
till in the night she hears again
the waters outside
clamouring like a child
for her grief.

—Paul Fackler



— Debra Griswold

To My Brother the Jarhead

I see your gangly frame holding this, topsiders
and a beige cardigan, and I hope your eyes see
past my scribbles and the stupid words
I called you when we were kids.
You getting a buzz-cut, thick black
glasses and a sharp-edged uniform is what's stuck
back in my head, and wanting to stay there.
It's way back, beyond you in the long back robe throwing
mortar boards in the air with your best links.
Past even farther than your stitched head
with both arms and a leg swarthed in breathless
plaster and we would race
your wheelchair down the long passages
of the mall and really scare old ladies.

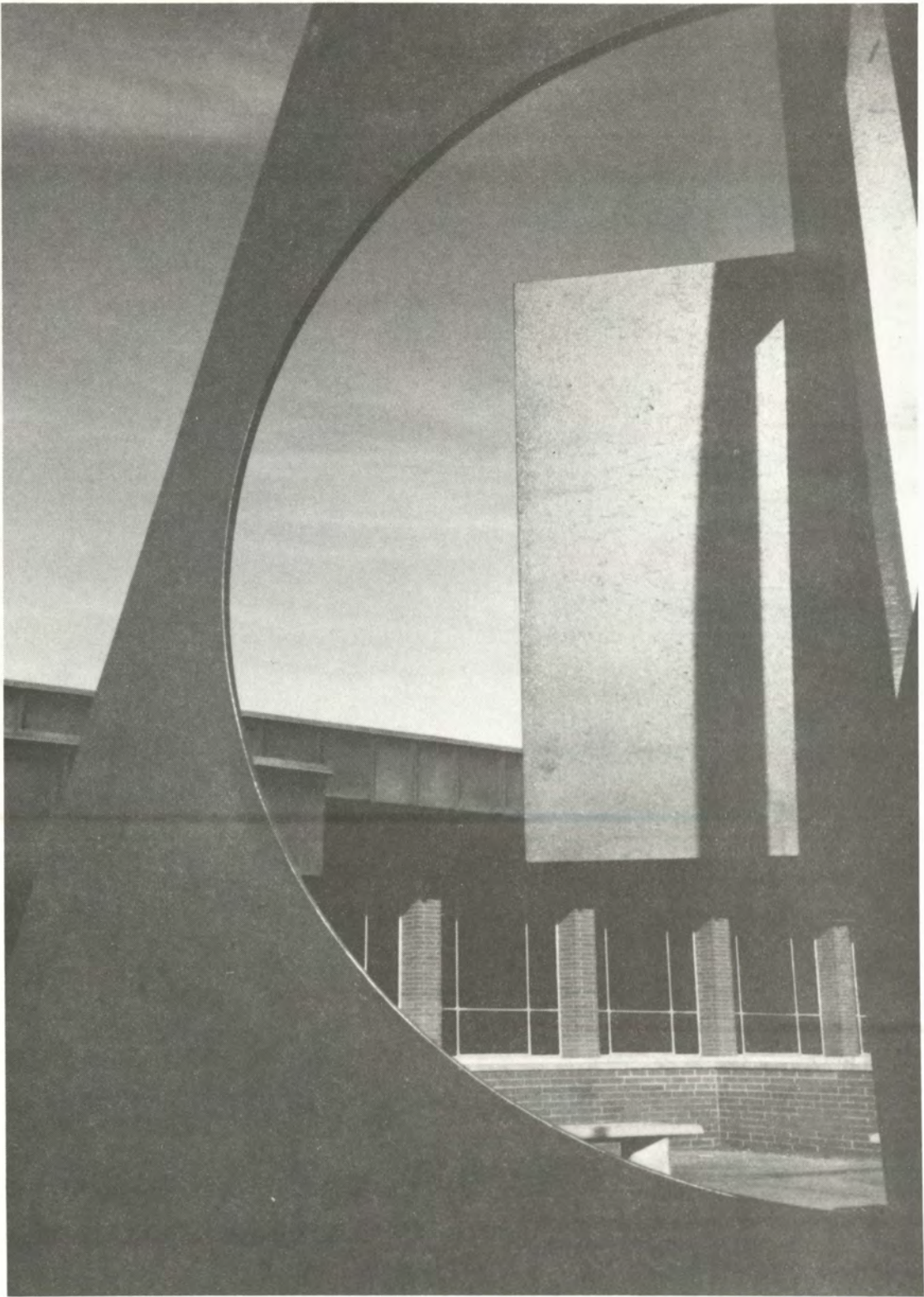
Another part of my mind holds
me watching you bat 'em over the long fence
and you would see me throw 'em out
at homeplate — drinking snow-cold coke
with dust-crusting fingers.
Whatever made me think I could keep the only
one who ever had frog-fights with me?

As I get closer to that buried spot in my head,
I hear words like;
 "Who's the girl?"
"Oh," you'd try and casually mumble, "some bitch
from Northwestern." But in the same room the two
of you would laugh and make the most
fun in the world — I would move around
the corner and smile to myself.

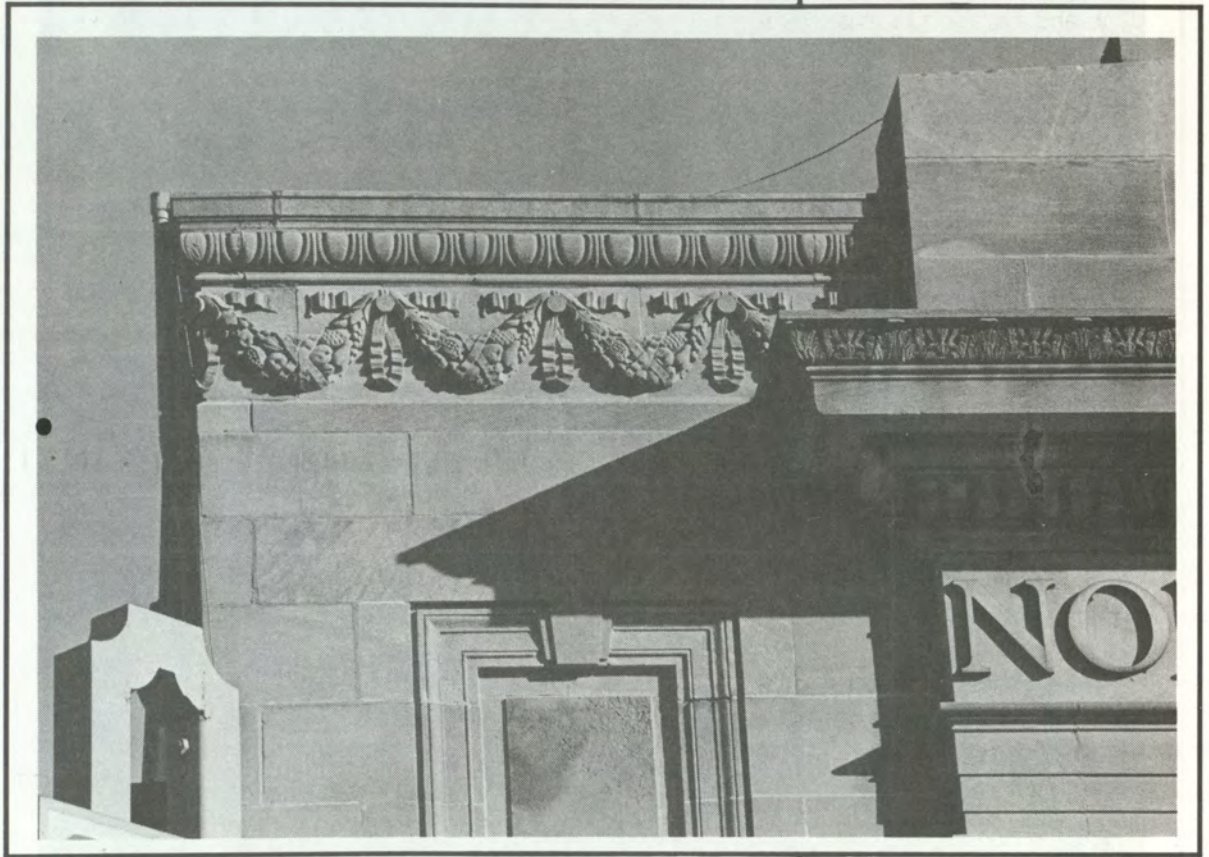
And the academic halls couldn't keep you,
'cause their walls wouldn't move
and the Few and the Proud were calling you.
I didn't believe until you came home
and told me the sergeant yelled: "Drop
your pants and turn around!"

That back corner of my brain has
been crumbling forward
and the day you pick up
a stuffed duffle bag and march off
it will come toppling over.

—Samantha E. Arnold



— Joyce Jacobson



— Debra Griswold

Kingsport County

Countryside housetops, cows fly past.
Nothing to say to the rain, it falls as we work.
“Could you spare some time when I’m alone?
I’ll tell you of my father and I’m sculpting these hills.”
“I don’t need your type in here, breaking things,
things you won’t pay for, when you won’t buy squashes.”
Remember when Roberts died, an auction was what he got.
We had a potluck with lemonade after the funeral,
everyone standing on Route 7 in black, waiting.
That war hero led a damn long life.
Stretching land, we want more whiskey.
We all left the Rusty Nail to pack in Tom’s Malibu.

—Andy Shaw

The Accountant at the Third Floor Window Watches for Terrorists

In a market smelling of late afternoon
fish and bruised fruit squashed
between the cobblestones, his scar snags
my roaming vision. I have no doubts. You know
it only takes an amount the size of a tooth
and he could have a whole cheekbone-full.
Or maybe it's the bottle-shaped florist
with the hearing aid. She keeps
fingering the tiny vanilla cord that runs from breast
to ear. Or that sweaty post card vendor
with deliberate movements — arm juts out,
elbow bends, flips his wrist to check his watch.

I wait, no reason
to move. I can already feel the wave
of heat on my face, smell the black powder, but first,
a tiny white flash as his cheek explodes,
then so slowly
the rippling, tumbling fireball
sends tables flipping, banana bunches
and fresh loaves flying.
After, of course
the screams and limbless bodies, sirens
proving the Doppler effect yet again.
Finally, I close
my window and turn to another tax form.

—Bill Rohde



Virginia, She

Today, Virginia, she
takes water in hand,
draws it evenly over her shoulders
to cover her head; settling
finally to rest on a soft,
sandy bed, voices tell her not to sleep;
distracted, her feet slip,
tired, on algaed stones.
Wet sand eases back to fill
moist footprints.

There were times
when she watched her beach from high
crumbling cliffs
of chalk, feet dangling
and words drifting mouth to mouth
on salted air; to paint
each other in quiet conversation
and: *I am happy,*
this must never change.

At her desk, looking
through the window (*the big bay
window where we would sit
for hours, I and my poetry
and you and your letters*)
to the garden where she worked
with gloved hands
in the smell of blooming
lavender, Virginia would lay
down her pen and glasses,
rub the fatigue from her eyes
and rise to join her love
among the herbs.

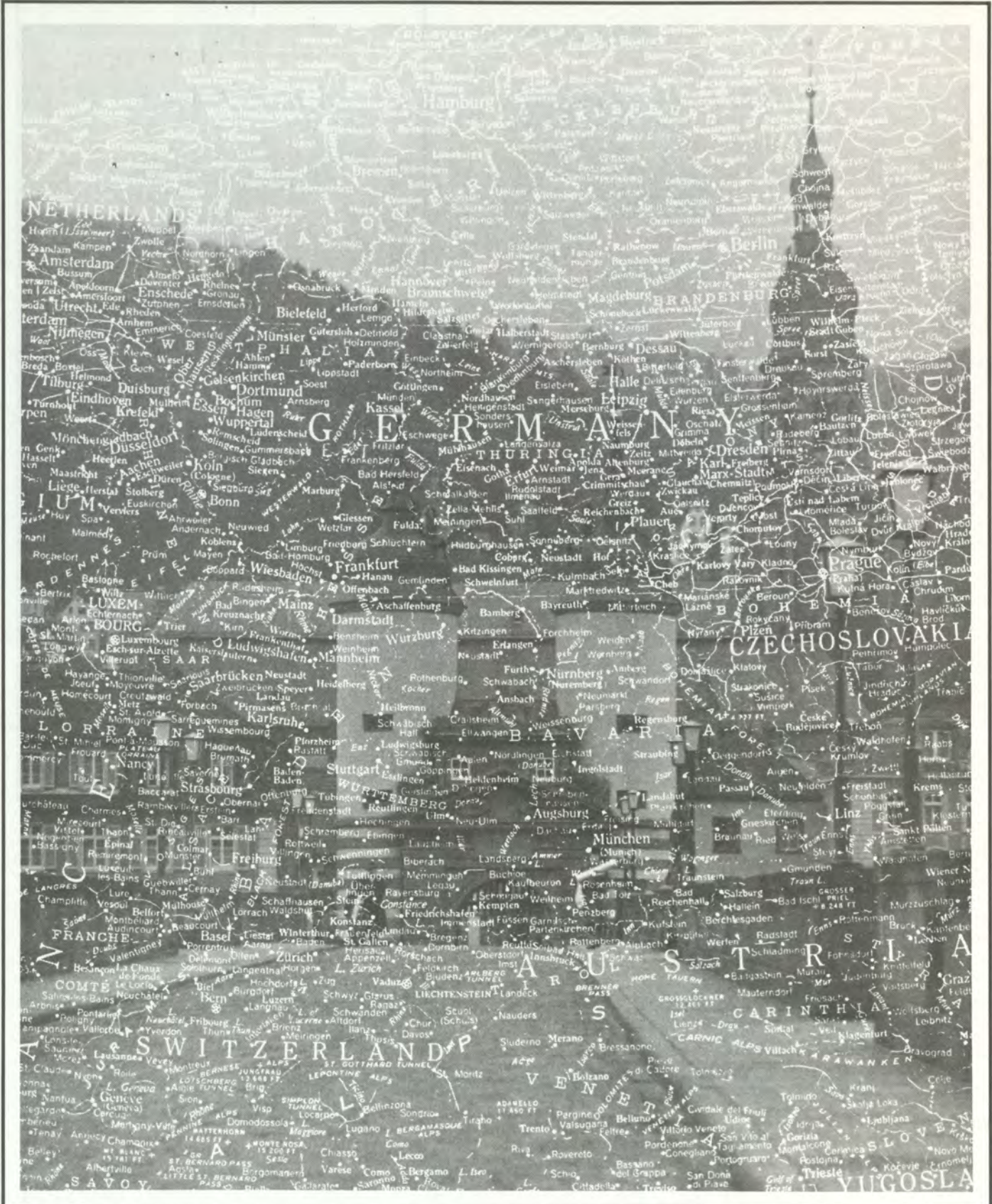
Now she goes down to the sea
in a ship of paper;
letters matter;
the fingers that fold pages,
the tongues that run along
envelope flaps to seal them,
the stamps that return stares
and the message of addresses
across the front: *I would rather touch
what your hands have touched,
what her hands have touched,
than speak coldly over slender wires.*

*When I opened my eyes
after so much darkness
to see you hovering
over me — my hair slick,
my forehead cold —
my hand was in yours
and the braille of your palm
told me that you knew.*

Virginia, she
goes down, hair floating on waves
like misunderstood handwriting
drawn into knots; laying her
head on the table, ear to wood,
staring sideways across
to the pen-tip on paper
with grasping breaths;
the decision made;
her pen slipped one last time
with watercolor loops and wave-striked
t's, telling, evidence
that her hands shook:
*I forget so much so often and it
frightens me so. I will not be
a burden.*

White pillar lighthouse beams
skimming sullen waves
did not find her. Virginia,
foundering in swallowing tides
of unconsciousness, walked
into water, heaving, blanketing seas
obscuring where words submerged
on pallid hands and still lips:
am I? now?

—Eric Appleton



Germany

— Christine Dyba

The Lighter Credits

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basis of quality, interest, and entertainment value.
We would like to thank all of those who took the
time and effort to let us see their work.

The Lighter welcomes
constructive criticism.
Please address all com-
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