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1972
from
Jerry

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The Last Trip North

There was a feeling of gloom in the air as I watched a funeral procession go past the depot in McComb. The old building watched solemnly as the hearse picked its way through the mist. The procession stopped to wait for the train. Perhaps they knew that they would load their burden upon a train that was destined for its own funeral the next morning. Tonight would mark the last trip north.

The threshold creaked as I went inside the depot to see if the Panama was on time. There was no need to check the information board on the wall. It posted no. 6 "On Time," but the date was never changed. Just a decoration, I guess. As I expected, the Queen was a bit late — that's what the ticket agent called her. He was a bit sentimental, perhaps because this would be the last day of his job. Said he wouldn't be needed in the ticket office any more. Tonight would mark the last trip north.

The clock told me I would have to wait ten more minutes. As I walked around the old cavern, I saw many faces. There was a baby asleep in his mother's arms. Two pre-schoolers chased around the dusty benches playing hide-and-seek as an old man tried to read his newspaper. This would be the last time Pullman cars would pass through McComb. The rain came down harder now. I wondered if these people who sat to witness the sad occasion of a last run really cared that an era was ending. Were they here as curiosity seekers or as mourners? Perhaps only the rain cared that tonight marked the last trip north.

Thrill trumpeting of a diesel air horn awoke me from my daydream. The pre-schoolers put their hands over their ears and held on to their mother. Ghostly shadows from the revolving headlights greeted me as I strolled out into the rain to see the Panama Limited rumble up to the platform. Every night since 1912 the Queen has paused at McComb to receive the homage of her subjects. A brass band welcomed her after she was refurbished during the depression, and a special radio program broadcast interviews with celebrities who rode in the new cars given to her in post-war days of fame. A symbol of the era, Panama represented the golden age of American railroading. Only a few streamliners surpassed her in luxury — none approached her in elegance. Tonight on the eve of her funeral, only a few old friends remained true. Tonight we marked her last trip north.

Two locomotives led five orange, yellow, and brown cars up to the station. Still sleek and polished looking, they glistened in the rain — the moisture making them appear glossy and new. The porter was wiping the silver handrails in the time-honored ritual. Now ladies could board with no fear of soiling their white gloves. Only one Pullman was on today's train. There used to be fifteen sleepers and no coaches. Tonight, the "Banana Road" shared its glory with three nameless day coaches. The dining car was there — rosebuds in silver vases still decorated each white-clothed table. The waiters were carrying their trays up high, as if to roll along with the train, even though it was standing still now. In the moments that followed, the casket was loaded, and the baggage car door slid shut. The porter picked up his stepbox and sang out his traditional "B-o-a-r-d" call even though he knew that everyone was loaded. A reporter snapped a picture as the conductor leaned out of the dutch door and gave the highball sign. The locomotive let out two hoots in reply, and the "Pride of the Illinois Central Fleet" left for Chicago. Slowly at first, then faster, no. 6 clattered down the rails, leaving behind that mixture of diesel fumes, compressed air, and roast turkey from the diner that betrays the presence of a passenger train. The red light of the drumhead sign winked as the observation car trailed into the distance. Track signals changed colors to show the world that a Queen had passed by. It was as if they, too, realized that they had marked the last trip north.

Milton Winter

SUMMER WATERS

And then comes summer
with its heat--that
morbid fire that
drains your strength
and dries your sweet lips--

But, also comes
summer's pleasures--
nakedness on the beach
and grains
pressed apart
by wandering footprints
and small fingers
writing soon forgotten words--

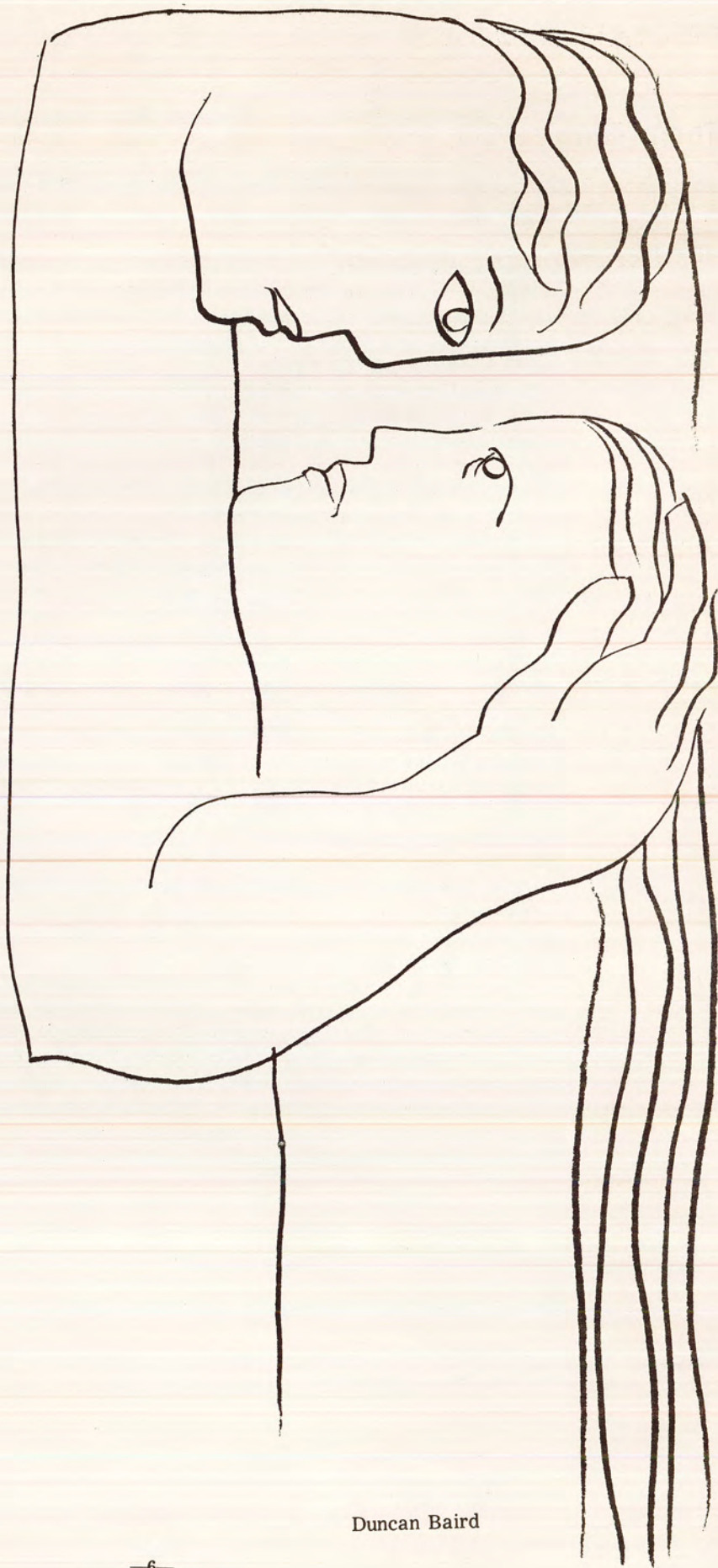
Summer--with
its waters--
to cool your life
and relieve your body--
Bodies
you clothed with your own--
that you sweated
with in the sun--
Summer's waters
that touch your
nude thighs--
Splashing up and
back again--

And then--Autumn--
and death--
All of summer
withering--
Summer's grass--
Summer's eyes--
Summer's love--

The cold, obscene
Winter--haunting--
Comes to mangle your
features--
To make red and watery
your eyes--your lips
icy blue--
Your cheeks and hands
red--red--deepest red.

And summer's precious
nakedness
is hidden in woolen covers.
But still--
The winds cut deep
and chill you--
And your only warm
coloring
is the summer-grained
memories
of passion--
of nakedness--
and of the heat
that was conquered
by those waters
that held you--

Grace Johnson



Duncan Baird

DESOLATE MOOD

There is no feeling alive

In my soul

It's like a bleak, mindslept

Desert in winter:

Hard, cold, parched; the

Cracks miles deep

No caressing snow that eventually

Softens hard ground

Turning it, once again,

Pliable and yielding,

Caress this soul in its

Desolate Mood.

LL Collins

I'M TIRED OF WAITING FOR GODOT

I'm tired of waiting for Godot
a dream which perhaps is not real
a mysterious soul who may not be
I want someone who I can feel.

I'm tired of waiting for Godot
I've waited thru winters and summers and falls
waiting beneath a lifeless tree
on a road where the horizon calls.

I'm tired of waiting for Godot
I think I'll rise and walk away
If I am lucky, and fate is with me
I'll meet him on the road someday.

I've sat and waited far too much
I'll leave and find someone to touch.

Chip Chipman III

WHERE GOD LIVES

What does man need churches for?
What is he looking toward?
For God encompasses all,
And each place is the House of the Lord;

He is the driving force of the universe,
Whom each should worship his own way,
Don't love God just to avoid Hell and Damnation
As many churches say;

God is not found each week in a brick building,
His love can't be bought or sold,
Don't worship the society-created God,
Worship as you wish, not as you are told;

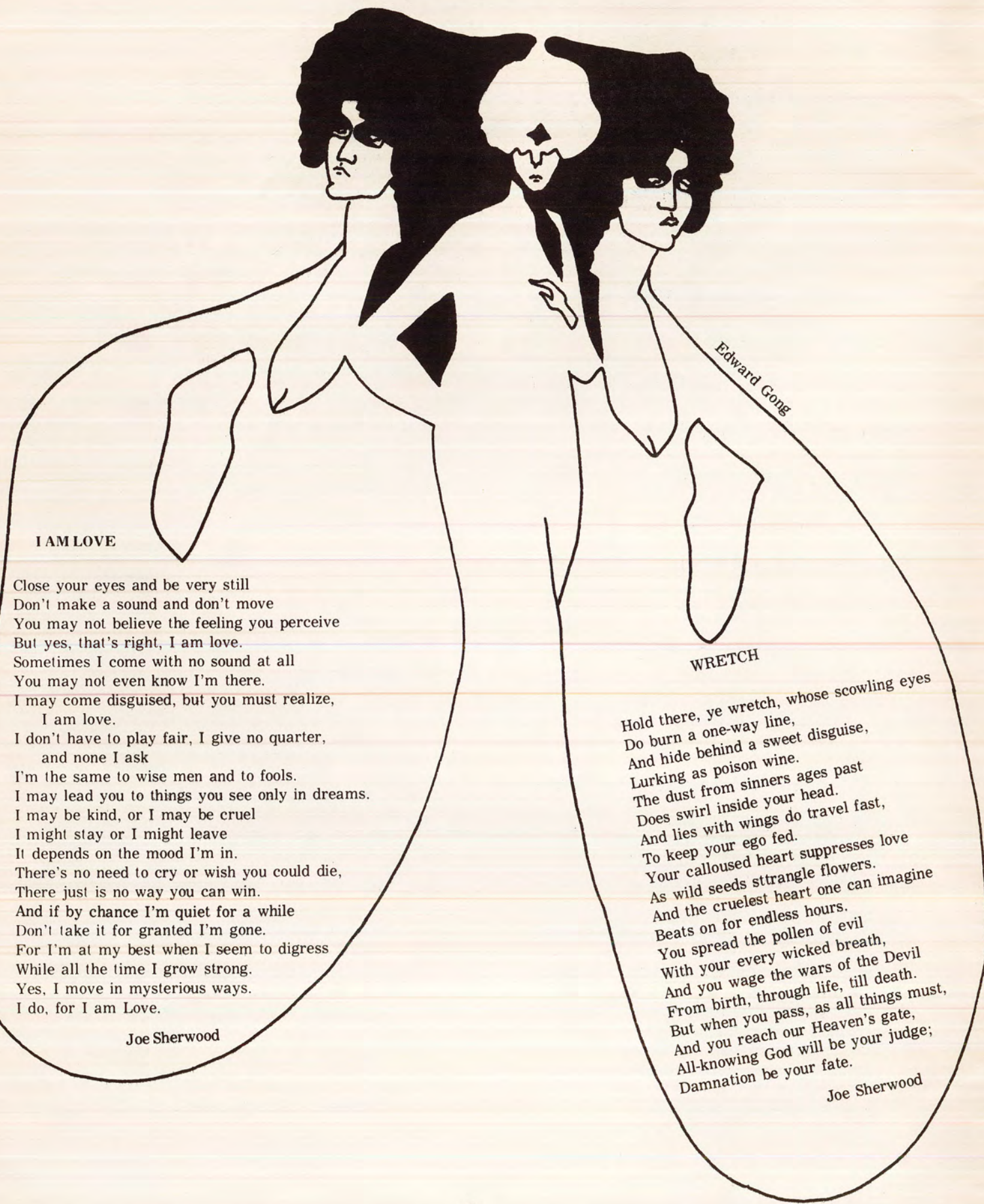
God is Creator of all things,
And doesn't just live in a church,
But, resides inside each of us,
And guides us in our search.

Jimmy Parkerson

MEMORY

People come and people go
Leaving thoughts with one, who knows
That what remains can never go
But changes into memory----
Of what he feels that it should be:
A painted picture of their lives
Composed of many different hues,
Those yellows, reds, grays, and blues
Created by one artist's mind.

Linda Streeter



Edward Gong

I AM LOVE

Close your eyes and be very still
 Don't make a sound and don't move
 You may not believe the feeling you perceive
 But yes, that's right, I am love.
 Sometimes I come with no sound at all
 You may not even know I'm there.
 I may come disguised, but you must realize,
 I am love.
 I don't have to play fair, I give no quarter,
 and none I ask
 I'm the same to wise men and to fools.
 I may lead you to things you see only in dreams.
 I may be kind, or I may be cruel
 I might stay or I might leave
 It depends on the mood I'm in.
 There's no need to cry or wish you could die,
 There just is no way you can win.
 And if by chance I'm quiet for a while
 Don't take it for granted I'm gone.
 For I'm at my best when I seem to digress
 While all the time I grow strong.
 Yes, I move in mysterious ways.
 I do, for I am Love.

Joe Sherwood

WRETCH

Hold there, ye wretch, whose scowling eyes
 Do burn a one-way line,
 And hide behind a sweet disguise,
 Lurking as poison wine.
 The dust from sinners ages past
 Does swirl inside your head.
 And lies with wings do travel fast,
 To keep your ego fed.
 Your calloused heart suppresses love
 As wild seeds strangle flowers.
 And the cruelest heart one can imagine
 Beats on for endless hours.
 You spread the pollen of evil
 With your every wicked breath,
 And you wage the wars of the Devil
 From birth, through life, till death.
 But when you pass, as all things must,
 And you reach our Heaven's gate,
 All-knowing God will be your judge;
 Damnation be your fate.

Joe Sherwood



Linda Streeter

THE HUNTER

Before the dawning of the new day I set out to find once the beautiful beginnings of life. The darkness was still my friend. I walked on into the dense woods til the sky turned a light shade of red, as if it were a blooming flower. Somehow the day was different than the beginning day. A constant glow of the sun shimmered into the heavens, the clouds had rearranged their attitude toward mankind and I remained in quiet solitude walking on, til the sun shone so brightly I could say no more. Was I blind to this minute? I was thrown into a frantic frenzy, no woods surrounded my being. I saw before me a bleeding, dying tear, shaped in the form of a desert, man's total destruction. And grains got inside my conventions, I felt the pebbles of erosion rubbing at my soul and mind. What had killed my environment was now searching for my spirit through the tears of people. In the midst of nowhere, a single flower blew with the turbulent winds. Its edges were tarnished, caused by the touching of man's inventions. The roots were smothered and crying out for restoration. I looked up into the sky with all its anger for rain, but then rain water has no purity for the budding life to suck into its roots-not this day. When in essence it was man that had brought the flower to an oncoming death. A tiny life conquered. With a full heart I cluttered on across the bloody tear. I found myself longing for a green pasture to lie my body in, silence to retreat to, and fresh air to suffocate me. My mind was in complete turmoil; what had burned my fields was trying to make me ashes and dust. Then I heard a bird chirping, how he did refresh me, but as I listened his sound quivered in my ear. He also was fading and growing in turmoil. There were no branches to perch upon to sing of the day. His flight continued on until eternity. What had eaten the bird's home was hunting me, eating at my skin. I wanted to turn back to the beginning of the ages but no-man had found me with his cold-steeled machine. What a Hunter!

Nancy Russell

ELEVATOR

Looking at the Allpost Building reminded Waterman of peering at the world through someone else's spectacles. From a distance it seemed hazy, masked in a morning fog. As he approached, the mist faded and the blur gradually sharpened until he noticed every spidery crack in the ash-grey bricks, faded and crumbling with age.

His fingers touched the cold metal of the microfilm case in his pocket. Damn Sarton, why had he insisted on personal delivery of the brief? Sarton knows how people feel about those old buildings.

If only Gurill wasn't so damned eccentric. A solitary man, cloistered in a building that today was little more than a vast antique — that was Gurill. His eccentricities included forbidding any repair or alteration of the building.

He even refused to permit installation of transporters. Businessmen who had used the extensive office complex moved to newer ones. Gurill alone remained, always inscrutable, an isolated enigma to Waterman and to the other members of the law firm.

Waterman heard his own footfalls echo down the corridor. Soon he found himself staring into a pair of sliding doors.

An antiquated device. They were called elevators, he remembered from the news. The doors looked almost identical to the picture the scanner tabloids had splashed across the screens of millions of viewers. In this very building, too. He wondered if it was the same one. The murder had caused such controversy and scannerpress coverage, and for a time Gurill was even suspected of the old man's murder. The old man, a spokesman for the Committee for Metropolitan Safety, had been sent to inform Gurill that his building would be condemned unless modern transporters were installed.

The spokesman had never seen Gurill, however; he was found dead at the elevator entrance on the ground floor. A heart attack, the Coroner-General ruled.

Beads of sweat formed on Waterman's brow. He pressed the button and waited until the doors slid open noiselessly. He hesitated, then stepped into the booth.

A row of colored lights, numbered one through ten, blinked at him. He looked in vain for a control button, but he spotted a metal grille, centimeters in diameter, about two meters from the floor. A microphone. This must be a voice-controlled elevator. As he opened his mouth to say "Eighth floor," he heard motors humming. The elevator slowly began moving upward.

He clutched his belly as nausea began creeping over him. Waterman had never been in an elevator, and his system rebelled at the sensation of lurching upward motion.

The car began moving faster until he grew dizzy. His vision blurred. His brain reeled. Nausea no longer crept over him — it swept upon him in waves.

If only the damned thing would slow down!

Abruptly the elevator reduced speed. At first Waterman thought he'd reached his destination, but the lighted buttons told him he'd only passed the fifth floor. The car continued climbing slowly. After what seemed an eternity, it stopped.

He stumbled from the car and tried to collect himself. Before him stretched a narrow corridor. At the end of it was a door marked "Gurill, Private." He walked to the door and knocked twice.

The door was opened by a pot-bellied man with a wrinkled face and an iron-grey mustache.

"Come in," the man said.

"Afternoon, Mr. Gurill."

The pot-bellied man sighed. "Just Gurill; no first name, no middle name, no mister." He began pacing the floor.

Waterman stared at Gurill's metallic eyes. Turbulent, glittering, the same iron-grey as the mustache.

"The microfilm. Do you have it?" Gurill said.

"Yes."

Gurill took the tiny disc and dropped it into a scanner. A page of script flashed on the screen.

Gurill scanned the frame. "Tell Sarton I'm satisfied," he said. "He can contact me if new complications arise."

"Yes, sir."

"I was just about to have a drink, Waterman. Join me?"

Waterman agreed. He needed the liquor to calm his nerves.

Gurill went over to a corner and splashed half the contents of a small flask into two ice-filled tumblers and he handed one to Waterman. Waterman sipped his drink; the liquor trickled down into his stomach, warming his insides and leaving a peculiar aftertaste. Fortified by the liquor, Waterman felt an impulse to tell Gurill of his experience in the elevator.

"That elevator of yours gave me quite a scare on the way up," he mumbled.

Gurill's metallic eyes narrowed like the diaphragm on an automatic camera. He set his drink down abruptly.

"It did?" he said, his face a mask.

Waterman toyed with his glass, swishing the ice cubes about.

"It took off like the 9:50 to Sirius," he said. "Halfway up, I remember wishing it would slow down. As soon as the thought crossed my mind, the car slowed down and remained that way until it stopped."

"My elevator is not that automatic, Waterman. It is a machine and must respond to orders. Spoken orders, not mental ones." Gurill frowned, then the glitter faded from his eyes and he chuckled. "You've never been in an elevator before? Didn't you become ill at the unfamiliar sensation?" he asked.

"Yes to both questions."

"Then I submit that while you were in such a stupor you gave a vocal order you don't remember giving."

"That could've happened, but I don't remember crying out." Waterman gulped down the rest of his drink. "I must be going, Gurill. Thanks for the liquor," he said. He mumbled other formalities, the door closed behind him, and he began walking back down the narrow corridor.

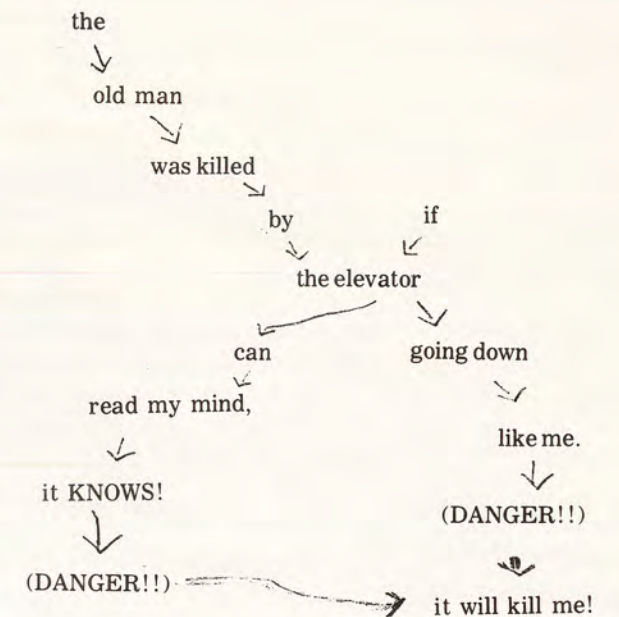
He felt peculiarly unaware of his surroundings. Had the liquor been drugged? What possible motive . . . ?

When he got to the elevator he came to a halt.

He hesitated, then pressed the button. Instantly the iron-grey doors opened. He stepped into the car and said "Ground level" as calmly as possible. The engine whirred and the car began slowly descending. The inside of the car seemed oddly unfamiliar.

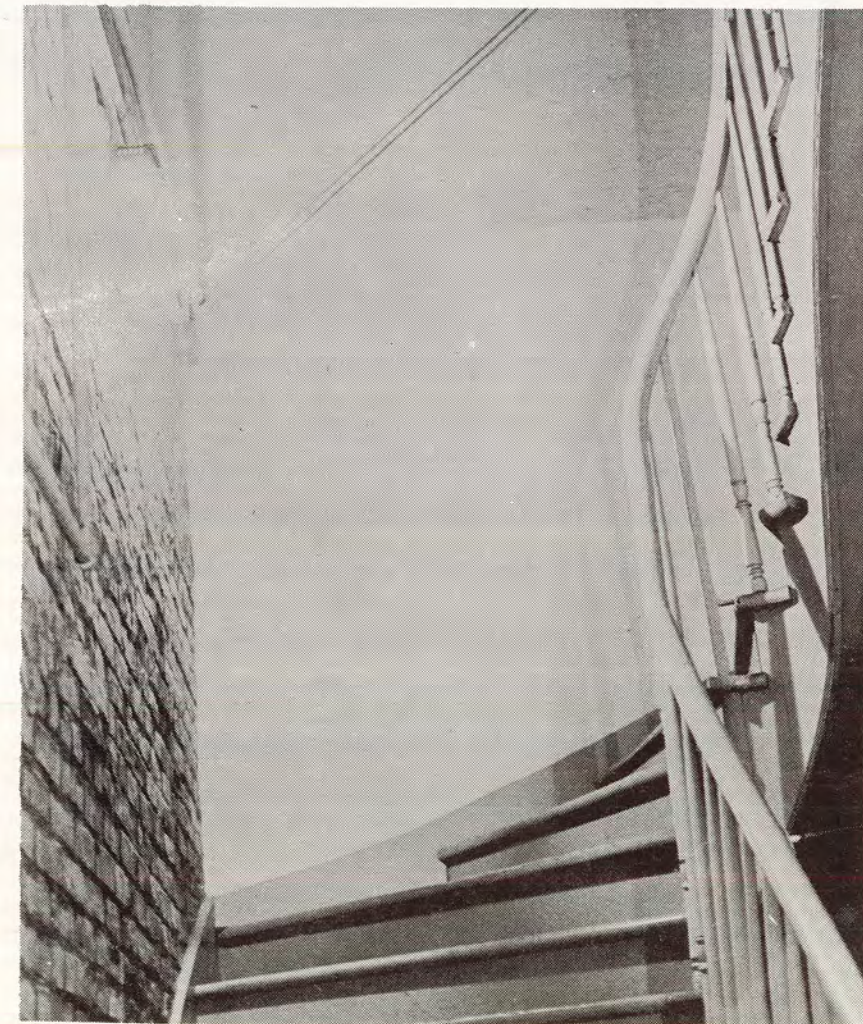
The picture of the old man who'd been killed flashed through his mind. He'd seen it a thousand times on the tabloids . . . the man lying at the ground floor, the cold grey doors of the elevator nearby but shut . . . the dead man who'd never even had a chance to even get into the elevator . . .

Wait . . . he was making an assumption . . . what if the old man had already been to the top . . . what if he'd threatened Gurill . . . what if he was killed on the way down . . .



Realization flooded him. But too late. The instant he knew his life was in danger, he felt the elevator lurch downward as if the cable had snapped. Then the lights went out, and he was left with only the sensation of falling, whirling, spinning down into a bottomless abyss.

Ed Issa





Duff Dorrrough

The Mentioned Are Few

The mentioned were named.
 Forget-me-nots in a long, round row of humanity.
 Their chairs were called
 And secret voices replied in alphabetic tone.

The currents were swift
 In the heavenly-domed clouds,
 And angel blood was pumped
 As though to communicate with pulses.
 The chosen are we is the attitude we find
 As their rosy cheeks and a kiss combine.

How many summers do you spend in heaven?
 Such vacations are rare.
 How many gaps are there to bridge?
 Sacred soil is restored to free men,
 And canine fibers lay at the feet of God's head.
 The stairway of the master guard
 is softened with cotillion roses,
 And purgatory is always there
 To dry the tears of death.
 Don't go looking for Paradise Mr. Scientist,
 It's far beyond the sun . . .

Eddie E. Draper

A PAGAN ASKS A CHRISTIAN

IF THE LORD IS YOUR SHEPHERD,

WHY DO YOU STILL WANT?

IF HE BIDETH YOU TO LIE IN GREEN PASTURES AND BESIDE STILL WATERS,

WHY DO YOU DESTROY THESE?

IF HE RESTORES YOUR SOUL AND LEADS YOU TO THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,

WHY DO YOU STILL KILL?

IF HE LEADS YOU THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF DEATH,

WHY DO YOU STILL FEAR DEATH?

IF HE PREPARES YOUR TABLE,

WHY DO YOU LET OTHERS STARVE?

SURELY DEATH AND MISERY SHALL FOLLOW YOU ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE,

AND YOU WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF DARKNESS FOREVER.

ROBERT CONNER

VOICE BEHIND THE CLOUDS

*As snow, clouds patch the black sky,
only moving*

Uncovering the winking gaze of the heavens.

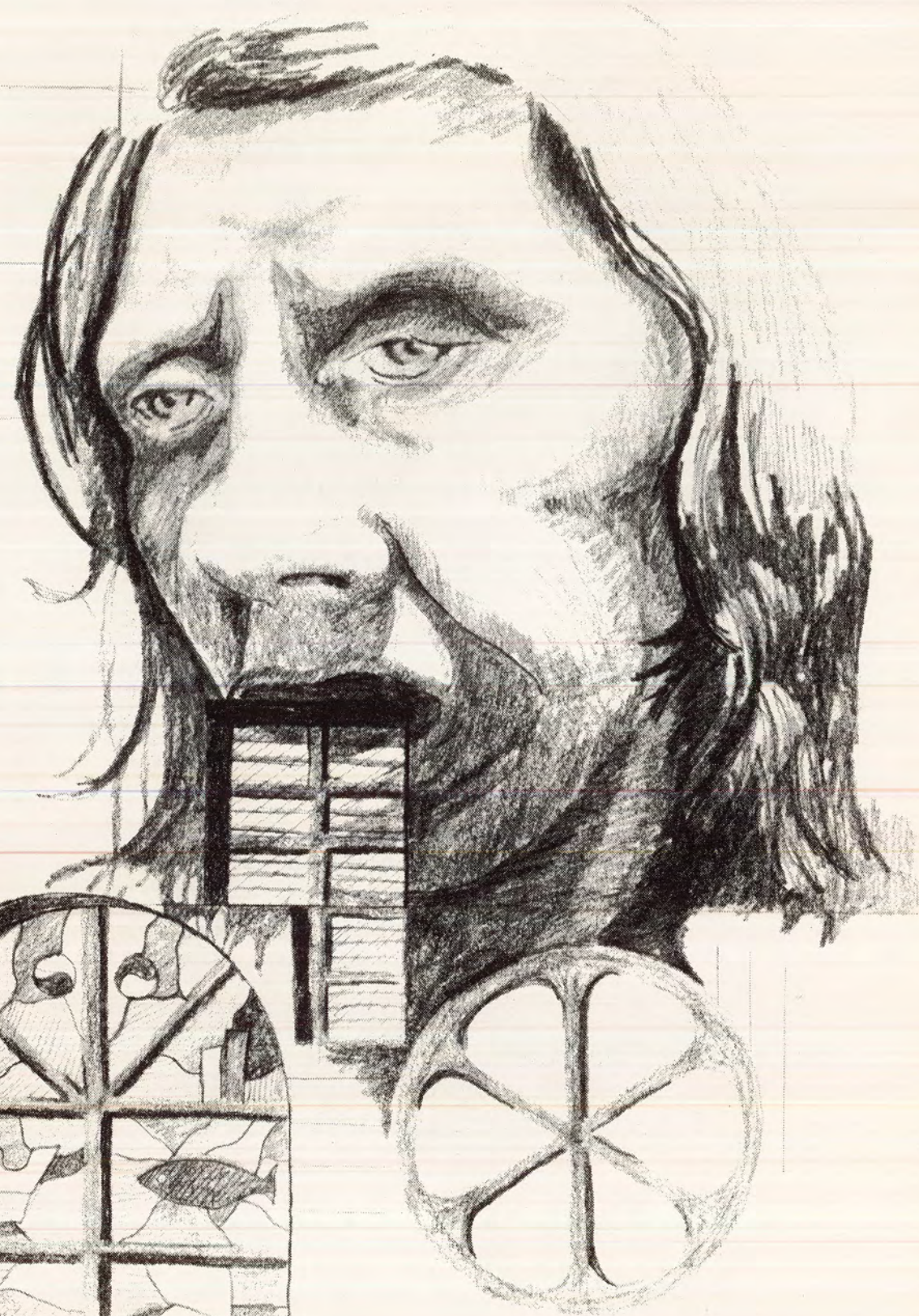
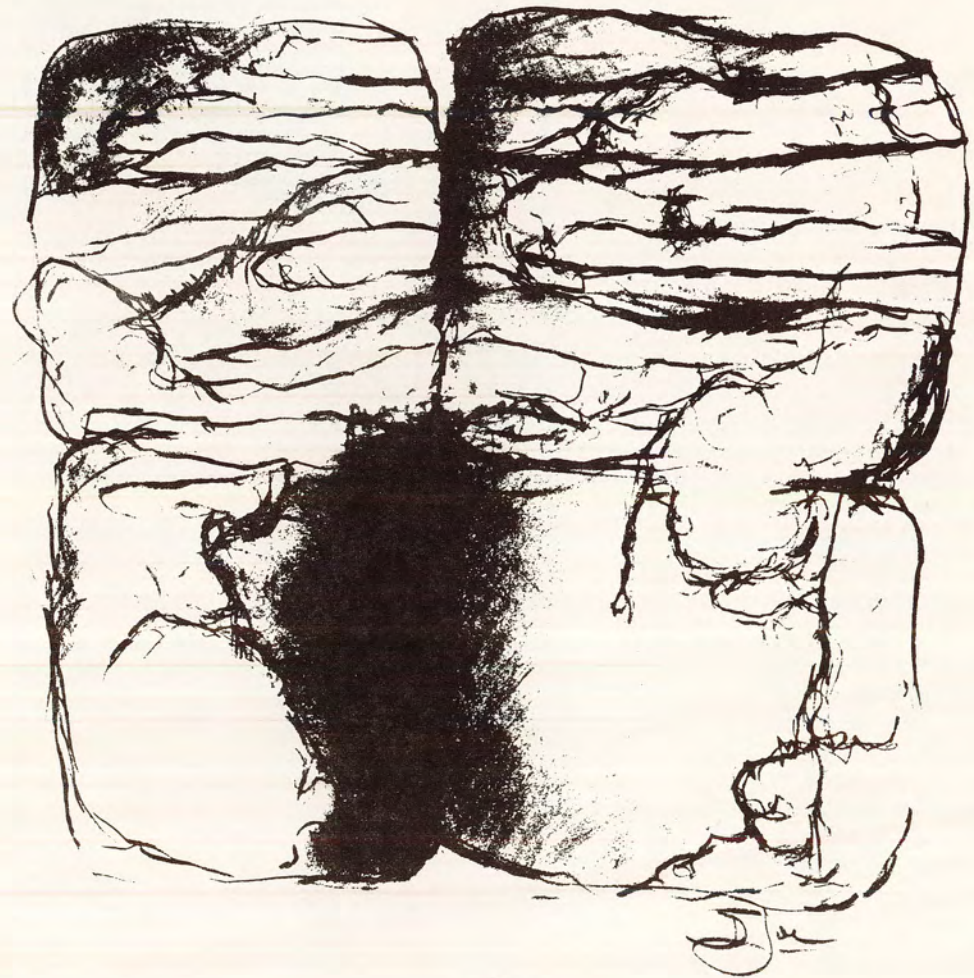
*I hear a part of me,
long lost.*

Call from behind the white cotton snow

And ache to complete what can only

be unfinished here.

Lana Lawrence



Bill Myers

MARRIAGE CEREMONY

As we come into this world — Naked
Unashamed
So we stand here to embrace new life
Breast to Breast
Lips to Lips
Spirit to Spirit
Unashamed
I — once whole
now only a part
You — once whole
Unite with me in body and spirit
to create new life

Whole only in the unification of our souls
Complete only in this symbolic embrace
of our bodies

Bodies, beautiful in their own design,
Made more beautiful by this union

Let not legend of perfection mar this heavenly goodness

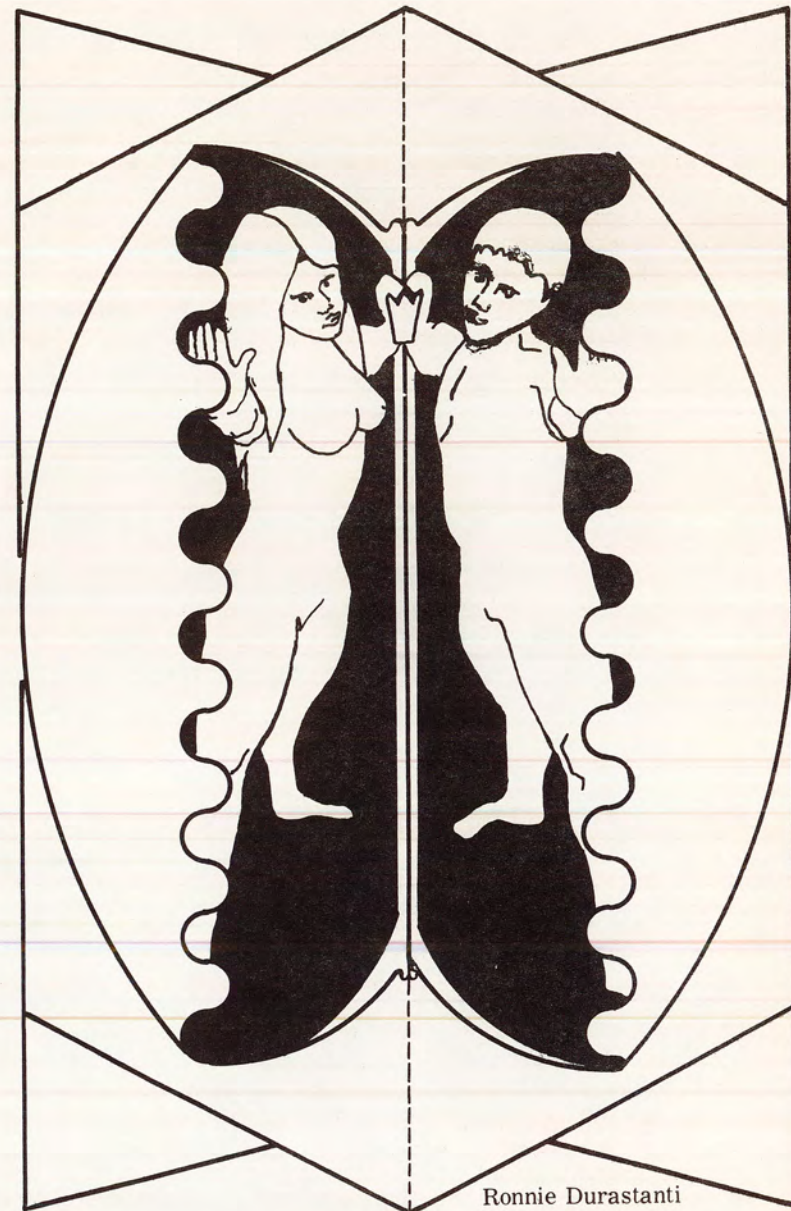
As we embrace body and soul
to the gratification of love
May our love grow pure
to encompass all life, heaven and earth.

Duncan Baird

NEVER YOU MIND WHAT MATTERS

Never you mind what matters.
Nothing does.
Don't worry about breakfast.
I'll be late.
I stayed up late last night worrying about nothing.
The somethings in this world are forgotten through experience
Damn experience!
Men dying and dying and dying until death came
easy to me who never died . . . my
mother's bosom was warm-even nourishing —
but I don't remember-too many years
in between have made me forget.
Damn the years in between!
that abyss I crossed in a giant step
to find you here. But you are
warm.
I can feel your heart beat
I can hear the children sleeping
Oh, death is hard-so hard
and Life is precious
Comfort me.

Duncan Baird



Ronnie Durastanti

PEN AND BRUSH

The verse was your life
and the brush mine.
They met and touched and spread
Drawing forth new lines and
painting rising suns.
They mixed as blood until
they were both lost in the brew
They no longer spread,
The verse died,
And the sun set.
But there is no separating
the parts that are now one.
And somewhere is the salt
that will flavor again
what has lost its taste.

Lana Lawrence

SOOTHING DARKNESS

If I have seen the sun,
It has been by your pen and
through your mind.
But is darkness better than a sun
that blisters my gaze,
And bathes my eyes with the
salt of tears?

You belong to the crowd,
to the verse,
And though I feel you in
every corner of my mind,
I will choose the darkness of
your absence,
Until your light is dimmer or
My eyes grow accustomed
to the glare.

Lana Lawrence

FLURRIES

So often
during the days
I etch out the words
"I love you"
On scraps of paper—
on fogged up windows,
on wet sandbars,
Always I'm remembering
You
During the nights
while I lie in bed quilted up—
And in my thoughts
I close in to you — holding you
Slowly — Secretly
I fold over you and warm you
Against the cold—

I don't really love the winter—
Until I see you
In a big coat with your gloves
And fuzzy ear muffs on—
And when I realize
I'm expected
To sleep against you
In the dark of December
Then I thrive on the idea
Of freezing winds
And snow flurries.

Grace Johnson

ANYWAY THE WIND BLOWS

I. THE WIND OF CHANGE BLOWS
THROUGH MY MIND
SHAKING LOOSE THE THOUGHTS
SO THEY FALL THROUGH MY SOUL.

II. IN AND OUT . . . IN AND OUT . . .
THOUGHTS THROUGH MY HEAD
AN ARMY MARCHING THROUGH,
THEY TAKE EVERYTHING,
AND LEAVE NOTHING EXCEPT
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD.

ROBERT CONNER

MEMORIES

Many time I think of how it used to be:
Of times when life was calm and free.
I remember how I used to walk through the forest,
and swim in clear streams, stopping only for rest.

I was alone in those days when I was young;
There was no war and no one had a gun.
I was "king of the mountain" whenever I chose;
and I ran free where the cool stream flows.

One day I realized that nothing was the same.
Cars and boats and factories and concrete came.
And along with all this pollution,
came man with his so-called institution.

He trampled the forest and destroyed the stream,
and he killed all the animals with his dream.
Now I'm alone again with out any men,
and I can still remember how it once had been.

Larry Hall

TODAY 1973

Clink, clank, clak, clak, clak.
I suppose you heard that;
we did too
It's rather new.
So it takes a while to comprehend,
To know exactly why we're called men.
As a child I foresaw a future vast,
And having grown it's in the past,
But how the world has grown anew;
What man can think, man can do,
I think that man will go so far,
Maybe to the nearest star.
Then I think of what we've done,
To Mother Nature and God's own Son.
We've killed each humans' rights to be,
And choked the life of every tree.
Stale air, with stagnant waters,
Life is this and so is slaughter.

Tomorrow when we reach the sky,
Did it cost too much to fly?

Keith Carpenter



Keith Carpenter

OUTSIDE

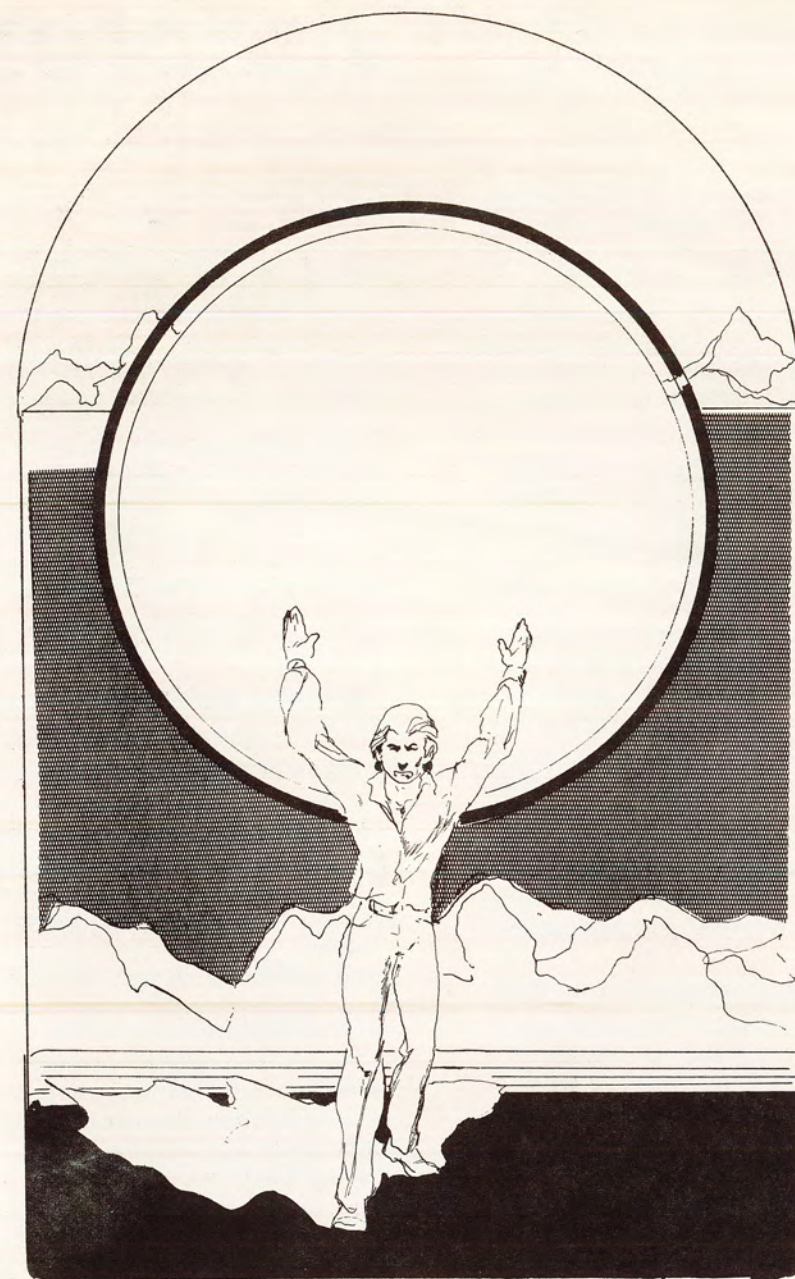
Outside, the winter snow is falling.
The flakes fall telling of a life.
Six corners of this flake
Telling of all the misery it couldn't take.
Telling about a lonely man who
Went through life without a choice
Without a wife.

A coal-grey sky drops frozen tears
Tears that a lonely man shed over the years
For a love that was frozen cold.
A love that he could neither have or hold.

One corner of a flake for the life he never had.
Another for the happiness that went bad.
A third corner's for the love that is gone.
Fourth, for the loneliness that is to live on
Forever more.
Fifth, corner that symbolizes death,
The last highway he has to take.
And one more for his biggest mistake.

Outside the snow is falling.
The flakes fall chilling, killing
But also sighing a promise that life and
Springtime will follow.

-18- Larry Bruce



Chuck Abraham

PHOENIX

Those who would consider me dead
Had better check back twice
They'll find that I am quite alive
The one they sacrificed

Throughout my loneliness and tears
My anguish you can read
There are two things I will not do
Not beg and not concede

They tie me down, the fire they light
In Flames my soul is free
In sacrifice and pain I know
Out of my ashes will come a new me.

Chip Chipman III

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caveat emptor

Johnny's ears were popping, weight seeming to slam against him. The pressure had to be terrific. Boy, if Mom could see him now. Gosh, what if his impetuous action cost her her job at the Space Center. Texas and the Space Center seemed far, far away. Hell, they were far away. Too late to think about that now. All the same, an image of Mom flipped through his mind like a loop film. At night she read for hours, soaking up the thoughts of what she termed "difficult writers." Lately, an Italian writer named Dante had occupied much of his mother's attention which, perforce, occupied a lot of his. She had, through light though constant prodding, kindled within him a respect for her heavy pictureless books. What he didn't understand, he pretended he did. Easier, too much hassle the other way.

Now he was on his way to FINAL PHASE. Wild, crazy. Grownups amazed him. They had spoken freely about the top secret "shot," never seeming to realize that he was within hearing distance. They never noticed him at the Space Center. He often did his homework there, waiting for his mother to finish her work. She was part of the big brain which performed the thought processes guiding manned spacecraft through space; and big brains were heavily taxed to notice one small boy ostensibly bent in deep concentration over his homework. Johnny doubted that the presence of the Jolly Green Giant himself would cause more than a ripple of commotion in this land of computers, space scanners, plus a myriad of toggleswitches.

The voices of the astronauts speaking to Houston Control broke the whirring which was the silence of spacecraft.

1st Astronaut: Roger. We are approaching landing.
Houston Control: Everything is GO. We read you loud and clear. Next contact — 1400Z, over and out.

Johnny shifted his weight. Boy, were his legs cramped. Sounded like it wouldn't be much longer though. He would just have to contend with his discomfort for certainly now was not exactly the opportune time to be discovered, didn't know about later either. His immediate and only concern was getting a first-hand look at the mysterious FINAL PHASE. He imagined himself handling a Spacer...taking a sharp turn left, maybe a right, then landing — Boom — onto a floating sphere of grey-like matter. Weren't all planets composed of "grey-like" matter? Sure they were. All the Space Fiction mags said so. Showed pictures, too. Great, beautiful shots, the products of some of the wildest imaginations. He wished he had some pictures now, just to help pass the time. Any kind of old pictures — didn't matter what of. Mom hated that. His liking pictures, that is. No, actually she said she disliked his seeming to prefer pictures to reading. So what? He'd counter. You like reading, I like pictures. Hell, he could even read pictures, not just elementary stuff, but long series of pictures, involving intricate relationships not readily apparent to just any ole average person. He tried to be a good son. He tried, even now, to feel the guilt he was to supposed to feel about liking pictures, about sneaking onto this ship. That little secretive guilt like he sometimes felt when Mom caught him still watching TV, hours after bedtime.

But it all fell flat.

He felt the better for it. He was his own person, he told himself fervently. Besides, soon he would be walking around on a creepy, grey-like planet. He just might even stay there forever. Hey! He just might. He was his own person, wasn't he? Ultimately, didn't he have to decide his own fate? Hadn't fate taught him a memorable lesson just two days before?

Nearly three days ago now old man Death had slipped through the wire squares of Robot's cage, taking Robot slowly, while Johnny looked on. He had held the dead bird later, feeling the stiffness of its legs, seeing the glazed eyes. His first experience with the death of something he had loved. The finality of it hit him like a clinched fist, chopping up his brain. No more would Robot beat around in his cage, cawing, pleading to be set free. No more — anything. Robot had ceased to be.

Suddenly a thudding jolt. Solid matter had indeed met solid matter.

Johnny slowly eased up from his hiding place. Ah, safe now. Through the ship window he could see the astronauts disappearing, the opaque fog swallowing them up. Suddenly he felt a strong inclination to shout his identity, thereby forcing them to take him, protect him, however reluctantly they might do so. Shout! Shout? his thoughts raced. He could hardly breathe, much less shout. Quickly, he rifled through the equipment in the cockpit. No extra mask. God, what to do?

He scrambled out, breathing deeply.

Funny fog — to affect my oxygen supply this way. Hey, wait now! Where was the ship? Can't seem to breathe deep enough. What to do? Walk. That's it. Maybe find the astronauts. Maybe. They couldn't be far away. Wait now. That IS a human figure coming toward me. Ah, thank God. Reach out — take extended hand. That's right. Let calm human figure lead. Hands feels odd. OK, let human figure with maimed hand lead.

Inside the building, Johnny adjusted his eyes to the intense glaring light. Strange door. A space had just opened and closed behind them. Nothing to get excited about. It was just that Johnny felt sealed-in, rather than closed-in. Somehow, the world outside did not seem readily accessible.

At any rate, breathing was much less a problem in here than out there. He was thankful for that.

His new surroundings seemed vaguely familiar. Peering through light cast from square inset lights regimented across the ceiling, Johnny saw that the entire space of the square room was occupied by three long rows of TV consoles — all square — screens of different sizes — all square, squares of sterility, like complete thoughts thoroughly formed, cast in steel girding. The entire room, exhibited an intrinsic sterility, a severity reminiscent of a place Johnny was quite familiar with. Think! That's it. The Space Center, just like the Space Center. But where are all the people? The control panel at one side sat quietly waiting, its toggleswitches, dials, pushbuttons, and levers waiting only for the impetus provided by a thumb and index finger to give it life.

Johnny swallowed hard, forcing himself to maintain a calm he did not feel. The man, the pale thing — the — whatever — was staring unblinkingly at him through great grapefruit eyes which drooped precariously on either side of his nose. The nostrils, criss-crossed with a network of thin membrane hung over his wizened mouth, a virtually lipless hole.

As Johnny's gaze slowly descended over the thing which seemed neither wholly human nor animal, something akin to terror shook him.

Wait, now! The hands. Other hand maimed too. Blindly his mind searched for a cause. Perhaps an accident. Johnny's uncle, a bakery shop worker, had lost all but two of his fingers in a mixing machine. Johnny peered closer at the hands. No. From all visible signs, the man was born that way.

This man was a freak. He stood there, wearing a sort of haughty, taciturn expression, seeming to live without the urge to live. Yes a freak; a freak who had stolen into this planet's Space Center.

Suddenly Johnny spoke, gushing his thoughts.

"You look strange. You're the strangest looking person I've ever seen. Of course I know I'm on a different planet but I expected the people to look like people at home and I am just wondering if you might tell me where the people are?"

Silence was Johnny's answer. No wonder. The man had no ears. Wait, now. Yes, yes he did. Just pinholes though.

"What part of the Space Center is this?" Johnny shouted. "Where are all the people?" Johnny was becoming frustrated, a queasy feeling enveloping him.

Had he offended the thing — man? Was he deaf? Or was he just a plain, everyday monster? He hurriedly rejected the last thought to keep his cool, the first perhaps because he had inherent narcissistic tendencies, and for lack of a better explanation opted for deafness as the factor here.

At last the man moved, walking with slow deliberation toward a glassed-in structure, like a see-through closet. His two-pronged hand turned a dial which as far as Johnny could tell made absolutely nothing happen.

The man stepped out. Something about him was curiously different.

"What is that?" Johnny almost screamed, indicating the glass closet.

"An Environment Control Unit and Sense Regulator," spoke the man for the first time. His tone was toneless, dead. "You may speak in a lower tone," he continued. "You spoke of me as a person. I am not a person. I am an abstraction. The machine there effects revitalization of all abstractions."

"You mean you couldn't talk until you — you mean you have a battery inside?"

"Control Center feeds me."

"Who feeds you at home?"

"This is my home."

"No kidding? You really live here?"

The thing nodded.

"What about your family? Where're they?"

"There is no family among abstractions. We are all separate entities. Only Control Center is composed of "people" who look very much like you."

"Control people don't look like you?"

"Definitely not. Control Center created us. We are the culmination of evolution. We are the final step. People were our forefathers, but they shall not be our posterity. We are posterity. Control cannot destroy us."

"You mean you never die?"

"Never. Regeneration insures us sustained existence."

Incredible. Johnny felt the first stirrings of admiration for Mr. Ab — as he had elected to call this being. He thought of Robot, his parakeet. If only Robot had lived, maybe he could have come with Johnny to this land of immortality.

Great popeyes staring, never blinking.

Not once during the entire conversation.

Johnny watched, mesmerized, as the two muscled fingers reached out toward the first row of dials on the control panel. Three entire walls came to life. Wow, he has his own Cinema! The movie was science fiction, the kind Johnny liked best. Characters looked like Mr. Ab. Hey! What! Mr. Ab said it was not science fiction — it was an abstract interest story.

Well, yes. Johnny could see that indeed it was. How about that?

Mr. Ab flipped more switches. Light curved and shaped into pictures, different ones on each set. Mr. Ab seemed to be watching them all at once with those great popeyes of his. His field of vision must be terrific, Johnny thought.

Wait now.

"Hey, Mr. Ab, why no sounds or words?"

"Picture writing is easier to read."

Johnny agreed wholly. If only Mom could talk to Mr. Ab. Maybe he could make her understand about pictures. Johnny asked, just out of curiosity, if Mr. Ab went to school?

The pinhole ears quivered. The head they were attached to nodded.

To demonstrate, Mr. Ab switched the TVs to educational stuff. Every conceivable subject written in picture-form vied for attention. Johnny couldn't decide which to watch first. Mr. Ab, of course, seemed to be watching them all.

"Hey, where I come from — I mean, at my school, we call these Visual Aids."

"Our culture is more advanced than yours. We have here at a glance what you must trouble yourself to read."

"But what about questions? You can't ask a film questions?" Too late he realized he sounded just like his mother.

"The films give us answers — one does not question answers."

"Hey! You have a point there."

"I am a great receiver of knowledge. I am programmed to give you names, dates, maxims, theories, authors — the written works of those authors and the dates of publication of almost anything ever written." Mr. Ab spoke mechanically, nonemotionally.

Johnny settled back, pondering. Mr. Ab's appearance no longer frightened him, but there was something else, something cold, calculating, almost sinister . . .

Two commercials caught Johnny's attention. One offered special rates at the library to those who came early, the other showed a sneak preview of the spectacles to be seen TONIGHT ONLY at the Metropolitan Museum — at reasonable rates.

"I don't understand, Mr. Ab. The public has to pay to go to a public library or museum?"

"Yes. Control Center says that charging high prices may stimulate us to use these facilities. According to Control, motivation is the first sign of humanization in us abstractions, and that is what Control desires."

"It — I — you mean they want you to become more like them?"

"Definitely. Control advises that they fear that which they do not understand. There exists something about abstractions which Control does not understand—a missing link. Perhaps through abstraction regression they may find that link. And since they have never been an abstraction, they cannot operate or function as one." His Gargantuan eyes stared dully at Johnny.

Johnny thought he understood. Kind of like his feelings about Robot, or any animal for that matter. What was it that made him feel about animals in one way and about humans in another? He supposed it was because with his friends he could construct, and feel, and empathize as they did. Precisely because he was human and had similar experiences. Not so with Robot. Robot didn't wonder about things, couldn't comprehend things and adjust to situations nearly as well as Johnny. Therefore, there existed a lonely space, a twilight, which separated them, into which neither could enter and join as one. So he had felt protective toward Robot, had sometimes held the warm, feathered body, felt the thump thump of his heart against his hand. He felt protective toward him like Control Center did toward Mr. Ab. There. He did understand. But—but, no. No-No. Robot and Mr. Ab were entirely different . . . weren't they?

He shook himself out of his reverie. Mr. Ab had lumbered into the Sense Regulator again. He'd used it three times in the last couple of hours.

"Maybe I could just stay here with you, not go back to Earth, huh?"

"Control hoped you would stay voluntarily, otherwise, I was programmed to restrain you."

"Then you didn't just happen by? It was all planned?"

"Ah, my dear little Space Visitor, nothing is chance. Remember the death of your pet. Remember your wish for immortality. Here, you shall receive —"

"You killed Robot. —"

"Silence. We considered exterminating your mother. However, she is valuable to us. She is, unknowingly of course, part of the Big Brain moving Earth toward its own final phase."

Mom isn't completely in the dark, Johnny thought. Why hadn't he thought more of it? For the past few months she had come home in the evening, her face drawn white as if she had left her blood at the SC. She, who had devoted her life, devoted it willingly to the furtherance of space exploration, now seemed to seek sanctuary in their home, in her thick pictureless books.

In a clipped, tightlipped voice Johnny spoke. "Why does Control want me?"

"They wish to study the effects of this environment upon an alien come home. You were that, you know. An alien on Earth. You were drawn here, to your home, your destiny. You are the first of many extra-terrestrial contacts to be chosen. Besides, your ability in picture reading was further indication of your readiness to enter FINAL PHASE." He spoke with chilling finality, seeming to indicate that the matter was closed, that the die was cast.

"You didn't have to kill Robot," Johnny sobbed, "he never hurt you, he was just a little bird, he—"

"Quiet." The huge unblinking eyes seemed to leer at Johnny, to mock him only for a moment . . .

Johnny sat in a chair, silent and unmoving. Mr. Ab hunched over an audio box, trying to locate someone. Who?

"This is Control. Come in," a rather human sounding voice crackled.

"Over. This is Abstract 8659 reporting. Mission accomplished."

"Allow us to commend you 8659. Is everything GO?"

"The boy is too emotional. He cries huge tears."

"Has there been any appreciable change in eye size or shape?"

"None."

"Bring him to us at once. Keep him well guarded. Over."

"And over."

"8659? Are you still there?"

"Yes. Proceed."

"On the way over, give the boy as much visual exposure as possible, perhaps then he will begin to appreciate our planet."

"Roger. Over and out."

Everything "outside" was in pictureform — traffic signs, billboards, even the newspapers. Newspaper stands, filled with newspaper picture stories, underscoring the fact that the "writer" had spent much time planning the article, in arranging the photographs to catch the eye.

Equipped with a portable environment unit supplied by Mr. Ab, Johnny watched the abstractions along the street, slowly moving about their daily business. This wasn't reality. Just another picture, Johnny thought. Or was it?

Even the houses and stores, the street patterns, the treeless spaces seemed to be there for visual exercises only.

These bloodless abstractions . . . Big Brain . . . Mom, Mom, you knew, didn't you?

DON'T THINK ABOUT IT. IT'S DONE. FIND SOMETHING TO CLING TO.

An irresistible urge to touch something, anything warm and real. He felt compelled to touch something, someone, to save the last shreds of his sanity.

Touching in this strange, barren, environment seemed out of place. Mr. Ab's viselike grip around his wrist felt as cold and inhuman as a steel band. A crowd had gathered, gaping, staring at him through bulbous eyes. Each seemed wrapped in invisible plastic bags. Where were the quivering vibrations? That evidence of aliveness. Johnny couldn't feel the fibs. No emanations whatsoever!

What's the matter, Johnny. Can't touch.
Allow your eyes to touch. Must touch with skin — feel warmth.
What's the matter, Johnny. Can't blink.
Blink what? Eyes won't blink.
Wait, Johnny. Wait.

The crowd of abstracts fell back. Only Mr. Ab pursuing. Viselike grip of two strong fingers, Johnny relaxed, jerked. Set free.

Quick, scramble into Spaceship. Voices. Astronauts coming.
Can't blink. Eyes will not blink.
"Exciting new possibilities . . ."
"Earth must catch up . . ."

"Let's get a cup."
"OK."
"The English department scrutinizes original compositions rather carefully."
"How's that?"
"Well, I turned in a short work about a classic love story of a worker in a perfume factory and his lady love, a strange woman living near Carter, Texas, with her pet fish."
"What were the criticisms?"
"I was told that the perfume was out of odor, the love affair was out of ardor, the fish was out of water, and the setting was out of Carter."
"Have you seen the new show at the art building?"
"Yeah."
"Is that tall guy the new philosophy teacher?"
"Yes."
"Did I hear he has a B.S. in philosophy or B.S. in his philosophy?"
"What?"
"Never mind. My psychology teacher initiated a class discussion-argument today by suggesting, 'Suppose, just for today, we look at this phenomenon from a historical point of view instead

"Yeah, irresistible trend, I guess . . ."

"Look, only we have been there, therefore we can promote it . . ."

"Hell, yes. Sell the idea, people will buy . . ."

Johnny couldn't believe his ears. Sell the idea, they said — yeah, sell the empty idea, as empty as the abstracts. Couldn't they see? Wait now. Ease up — check their eyes. Yes, eyes blinking normally. Then why—

There was something, an elusive thought, perhaps a quote from one of Mom's books. Something about — Oh, yes. That's it.

There is a special place in hell reserved for those who see the truth and do not act.

Wouldn't that apply here? At this moment? Those two cocksure astronauts sat there, quite willing, if not eager, to sacrifice substance in the name of progress — even if that progress consists only of empty ideas, of papershell pretense?

There are those who live desperately, inside the flimsy realm of pretense.

Wait, now. Maybe — just maybe, he too should pretend, create his own mild form of purgatory.

With concentrated effort, he tried hard to blink.

Kay Taylor

Milling Around

of hysterical point of view.' . . ."

"What happened?"

"A discussion developed on how many points of view the thing discussed could be discussed from."

"What points of view did the class discover?"

"Someone suggested that the different buildings on campus represented different points of view. Kethley represents the grammatical, philosophical, and the . . . uh . . . uh . . . the point of view that makes people stand in line for two hours three times a year. I guess you could call it periodic dwaddism. Someone else suggested that Broom represents the capitalistic, socilaistic, transcendentalistic point of view."

"Enough of your damn points of view!"

"Do you dig Thursday mornings in the Mill?"

"I didn't used to, but after I took Sociology of primitive Societies, I kind of enjoy it now."

"It was like that for me, too, only I didn't enjoy it till I took Abnormal Psychology."

"Hey, y'know spring's here."

"How can you tell?"

"On my way to my eight o'clock class I saw three flocks of ten-speeds on campus looking for a place to land."

Mat Thomas

The Pain

From hazy, hay-smelling smoke
 come
 Dreams of days out of mind
 when trees
 speak
 And shadows walk longingly
 'neath the soft
 yielding
 Sunlight lately washed and hung
 on lilting garbles
 sifting
 Down dark, dripping limbs
 from thoughtless spirits
 enthralled
 With new playmates
 wriggling
 in the warm, wet grass.
 "I don't know anymore,"
 he sighs
 and is quiet
 As thoughts—fair thoughts
 like warriors
 In dazzling, shining armour
 obscure
 the face
 Of the impatient youth
 standing
 in the grasping
 Clinging, black mud,
 In the soft green sword blades
 sucking
 the sun
 like hungry babies.
 Long lived life
 thoughts thought thru'
 could
 take the youth
 thru' time
 known knowledge
 where wisdom
 ponders
 his first blossoming flower
 his lost and unknown
 whose guideposts
 are found
 on cypress and oak
 whose directions
 on raindrops, winds
 and great waves.

"Tell me, old man, of your life as you've lived it—
 And what have you learned in the time that was yours?
 Tell me your feelings, your thoughts, and your dreams.
 Give me the harvest of work lost in time.
 Yes, show me your mark your home, and your soul."

"But how can I say
 what I think
 what I feel?
 I could tell you my dreams
 but they won't ease
 the pain.
 I could tell you of colors
 I've seen in the sky
 of dreams I've had
 most colored in green
 of days lost in comforts
 of days lost in comforts
 I drew away from
 the pain
 of "why."
 I gave up
 the search
 when the hurt of misgivings
 flooded
 cold doubt
 in my soul.
 I lost
 the pure insight
 the challenge to self
 when I left my
 lone wanderings
 stocked up my money
 made a few friends
 wanted no more.
 I still felt the pain to know
 to find but the pain
 had grown faint
 inside
 I died.
 I'd held my soul from wandering about;
 I listened to the voices of doubt . . .
 and the pain grew lame
 I softened
 my hold
 muffled
 my ears
 to steal away
 feeling
 as a man who betrayed
 his most secret thoughts
 his goal and his dream.
 Wild longings weren't lost
 but stilled
 and well-hidden
 from me and themselves
 so I could hoe corn
 milk goats
 have kids.

I'm alone
once more
and I feel
more strongly now,
the pain
the pain
I thought was dead—
I lost
my sweet dreams
and cold
lonely thought
and ne'er 'til now
did I feel
touch
smell
that ethereal thing
quivering
to be known."
A silver tear from the wrinkled cheek
to the black mud oozing around
the old man's
feet.

Bill Freeney



Mike Kemp