

Spring 1982

## Overtures - 1982

Kelly O'Mahoney

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# OVERTURES



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SPECIAL ANTHOLOGY ISSUE



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"the end"

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## OVERTURES

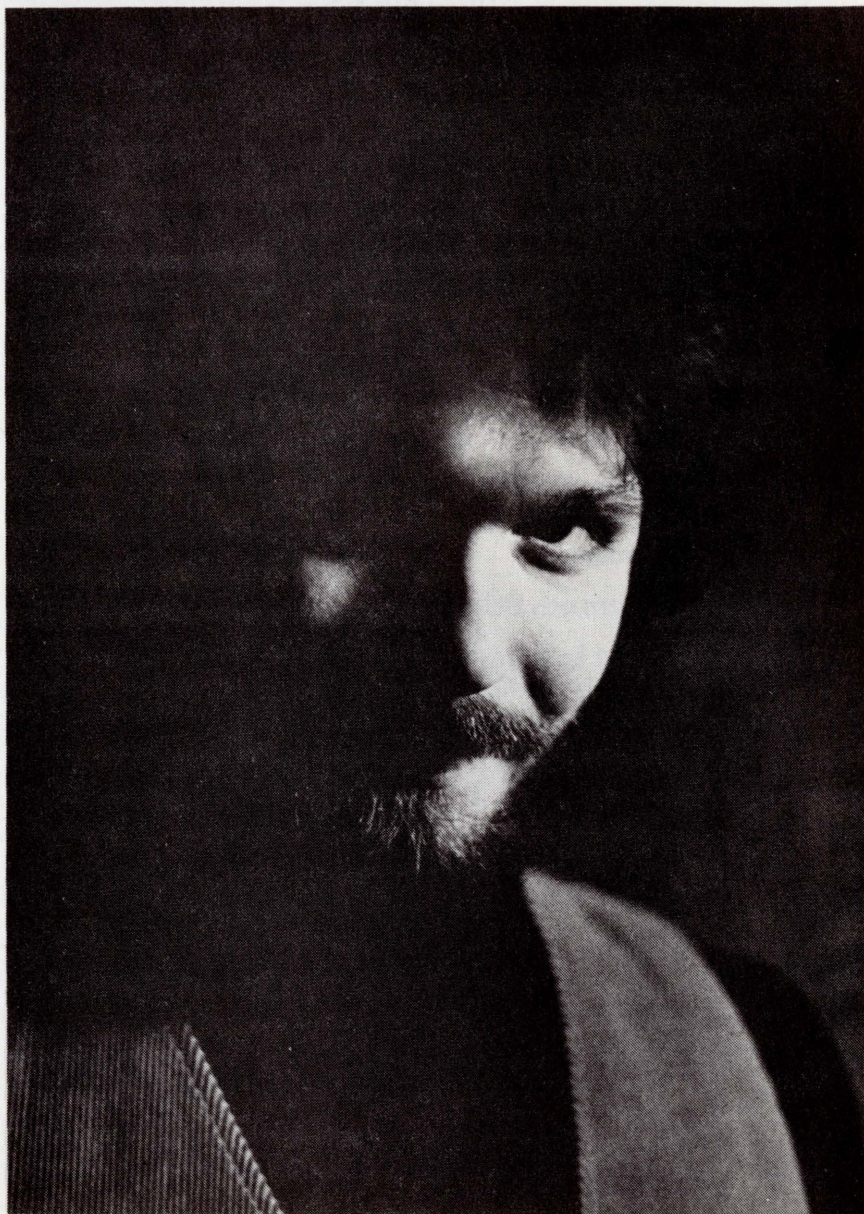
Volume IV

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## Vesle Fenstermaker

### ATTACHMENT

I imagine you as an equestrian statue,  
the young Lincoln, say,  
mounted on a country mare,  
sway-backed, ludicrous in bronze.

You ride without a saddle,  
spine of boy and horse fused,  
your unshod heels forever urging  
the wide-rumped beast.

Rain slicks you,  
drips from your hayseed hat.  
Wet leaves clasp your animal's flanks.  
Snow gathers in your elbows.

A familiar of pigeons,  
you squint into your future.  
clutching your metal book,  
dogearred pages finely wrought,  
your gaze sentimental, artful, fixed.

Contained in this imagining,  
you come to rest in my mind.  
Boy On Horse. Rendered, cast.



But when sunlight comes  
who is the shadow at your base  
that grows through the morning,  
swings the day around you,  
knifing grass, overtaking beetles,  
candy wrappers, twigs,

to the moment when you are profiled,  
dark and sharp and doubled?

Held, till the sun  
pulls your silhouette  
to extinction  
at meridian,

returns it  
at the breaking instant  
to slide along other grass,  
bloom again toward night.

## ALMOST

The children like the week-old zebra

Her unicorn's grace, her cinnamon stripes  
The singing curve of her back, flung like a surfer's wave  
Are present to them

They greet her, "Hi, Flicker!"  
Speak sounds that die in zebra air

On twig legs, ringed chalk-white  
She (true name unknowable)  
Skitters sideways  
Explores the children

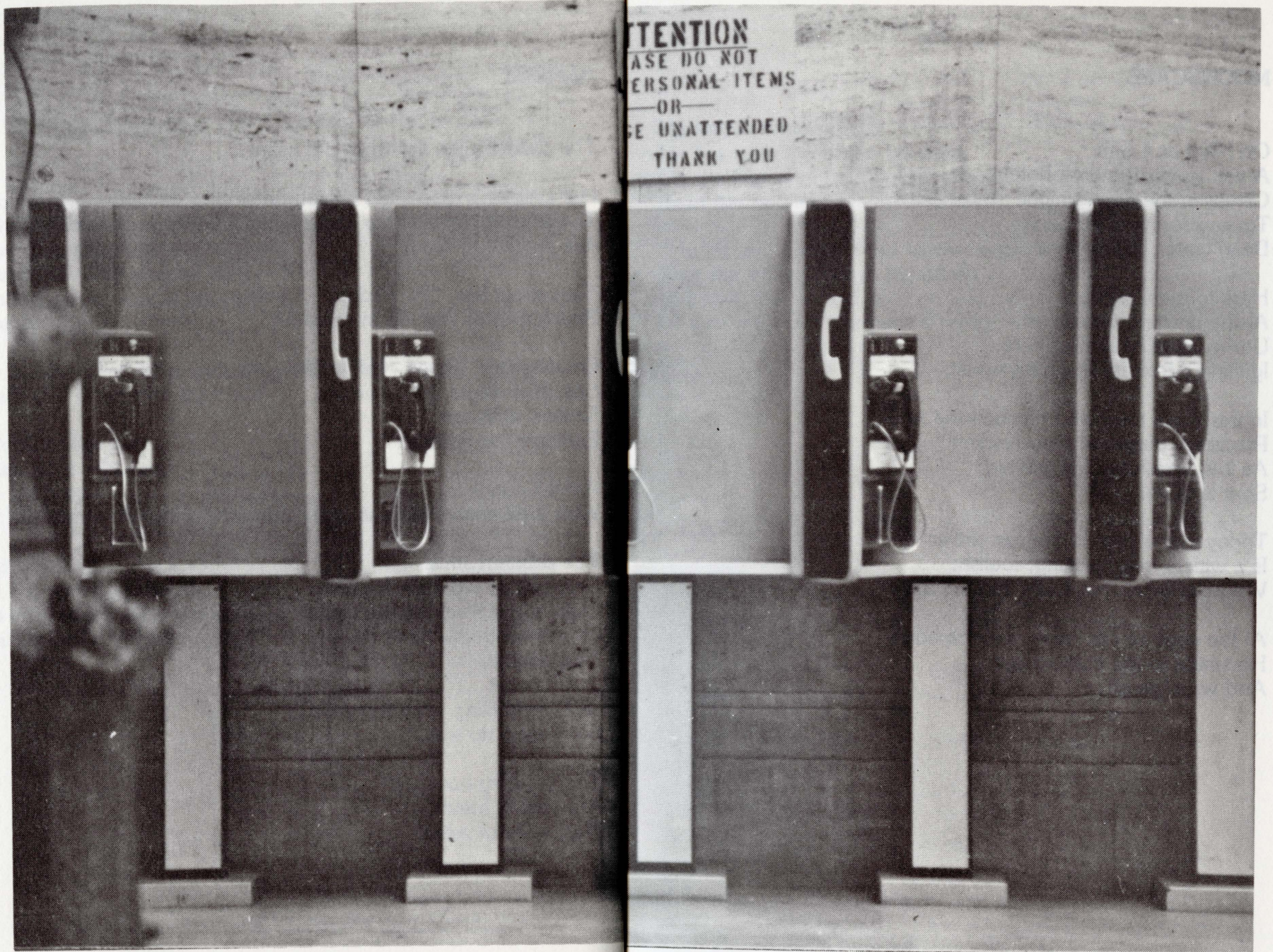
Almost connects  
With their animal warmth, their human wonder

The children smile  
Yes. Flicker will suck for them  
Gulp at the black-nippled bottle  
From one child's hand  
And another

Jerking, pulling, glancing wide  
She meets no eye

Though they have milk  
And gentle hands  
They are not zebra





ATTENTION  
PLEASE DO NOT  
LEAVE PERSONAL ITEMS  
OR  
PHONE UNATTENDED  
THANK YOU



## MOONSCAPE

On Maui at 4 a.m.  
A van leaves the dark hotel  
Climbs in the darker night  
To sunrise over Haleakala,  
Dead crater, lifeless land.

Here tourists blanch  
At the bursting naked ball,  
Unmediated by atmosphere,  
Igniting a treeless shrubless waste.

In this place men who reached the moon  
Practiced, played at their landing.  
As it is here, save for gravity,  
So it is there.

Today in the care of the van driver  
Is a witless man, lacking, foolish,  
Whose relatives have sent him off alone.

At the edge of the harsh volcanic bowl  
He smiles in the flaming light  
And wanders off.

William T. Lawlor

He knows where he is.  
He has seen the moon up close  
On the flickering noisebox,  
Seen the swollen leaping men here.

"He wanted a ride in the moon buggy,"  
Says the driver, angry, frightened.  
"If I hadn't of hunted boar on every one of these crags,  
I'd a never found the poor dummy."





William T. Lawlor

### THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

When I went to a warehouse to buy dynamite  
The clerk pushed forms across the counter:  
The white is for identification,  
The pink is for purpose,  
The blue is for insurance,  
And the green is for permission.  
You pay your fees,  
Have each one stamped;  
Then dynamite can be sold.

When I went to Chrysler Corporation to buy a tank,  
The foreman said the tanks were not for sale.  
This is military production, he said,  
And these units are sold only to the army  
Or to a foreign government.

When I went to the Pentagon to buy the bomb,  
A general said the bomb was secret.  
He said there are stories in magazines  
About how to make it,  
And I might be able to make a connection  
From Pakistan to Italy through Libya,  
But U.S. bombs are U.S. bombs.  
Can you imagine, he asked, what might happen  
If one of these got in the wrong hands?



So I went to a hock shop and bought a pistol.  
I went to the warehouse, shot the clerk,  
And took a box of dynamite.  
I took the dynamite to Chrysler,  
Blew the doors off the plant,  
And drove away in a tank.  
I drove to the Pentagon,  
Shelled the office of the general  
And towed away the bomb.

Now I am at home:  
There have been no complaints all night.

J.M. Marshall

She Is Like Death

She is like death as I dreamed it,  
cool and lush as the long wet sheets.  
I was nineteen with 103 degrees of fever  
in Salina, tough as a reed and lean,  
dark as the Indian midwife who delivered me.  
I passed as an Indian among whites in fantasy  
working the wheat harvest going west  
where taffy apples droop from cinnamon trees.

She came to please the guest they left behind  
in the cheap hotel with the loud cantina  
where she worked, and stayed to wrap me down  
the length of my body in kind sheets—  
I slept for three days without food.  
She brought soap and towels for a bath  
and a Mexican soup made with lentils,  
bathed my face and legs like a nurse.

We danced on the splintered bare floor  
in silence. She was the color of ripe wheat.  
We walked to the truck stop in the morning,  
hands clutching like thieves of the orchard,  
said long goodbye in the shade of a cottonwood  
stiff with the courtesy of new friends.  
Mayflower moved me west through the mountains.



I have not seen her since then  
but many nights she is like death, her voice  
long and cool as a creek in the weeds.





Jim Elledge

Unwed Mother

Like a sailor's wife  
she attends sky

measuring in breaths  
blue distance  
out the home's  
upper-floor window

then divining fat sheets  
snapping lean  
on lines below.

Resigning to glass  
and doubled self,  
she recalls

clothes, like stones, tossed

her light, light body  
lifting with his

his.

ESSENTIAL RHYTHMS  
IN ABSTRACT

Not yet aware  
even brief love buoys  
but shame weighs

she stands,  
stalled

daydreaming chimneys

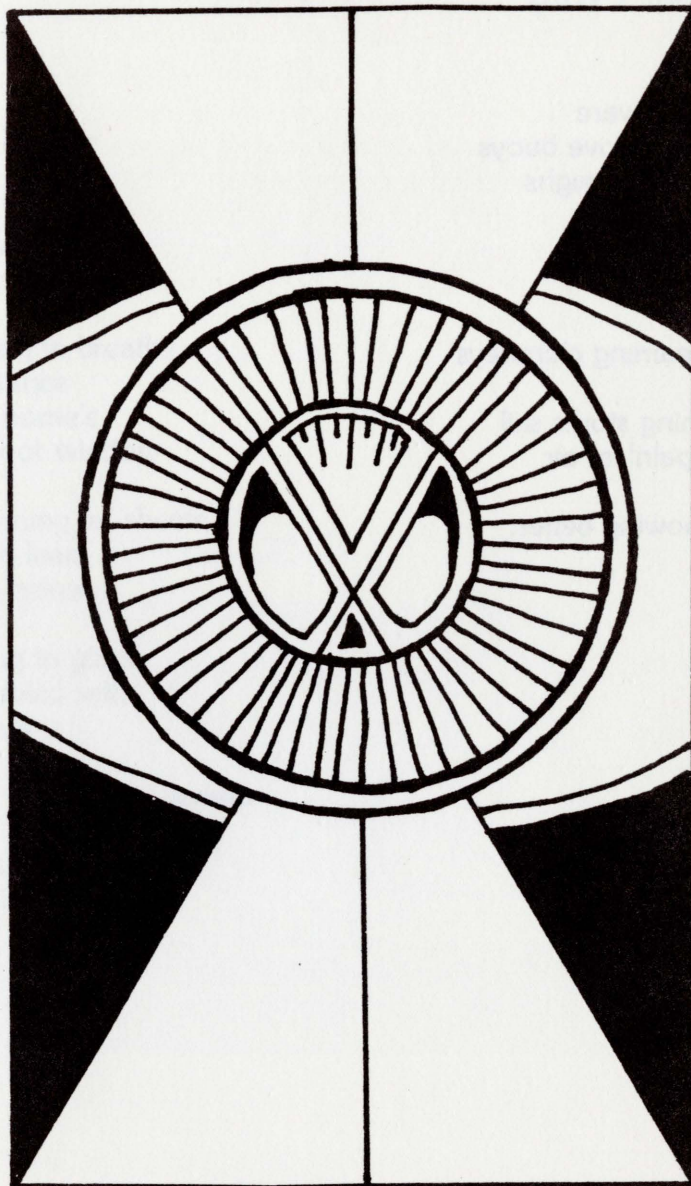
imagining storks sail  
cool, painless air

but knowing better.

POETRY & ART  
BY JEANNETTE FLEMING



## ESSENTIAL RHYTHMS IN ABSTRACT



POETRY & ART  
BY JEANETTE FLEMING

## INTRODUCTION

The most important thing in the pursuit of an art is discipline. It requires daily attention; it is a ritual. If the pursuit of art is the purpose one has elected for the duration of this lifetime, then one must recognize this process as necessary. Furthermore, the final product will never be completed as anticipated; it is much more subtle. Actualization occurs concurrent with pursuit and is much more complex than what is anticipated or can be readily perceived.

Thus, unceasingly, the artist is haunted by doubts as to his work and its meaning. The possibility that one may be laboring under delusions and that finally these efforts may prove to be fruitless, persist where understanding fails.

Nevertheless, the need for expression compels the pursuit towards the actualization of an idea and presentation according to its magnitude, i.e., through art. Discipline provides the greatest measure to possible success; devotion has its own obscure rewards.



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## I.

### The Endless Chain

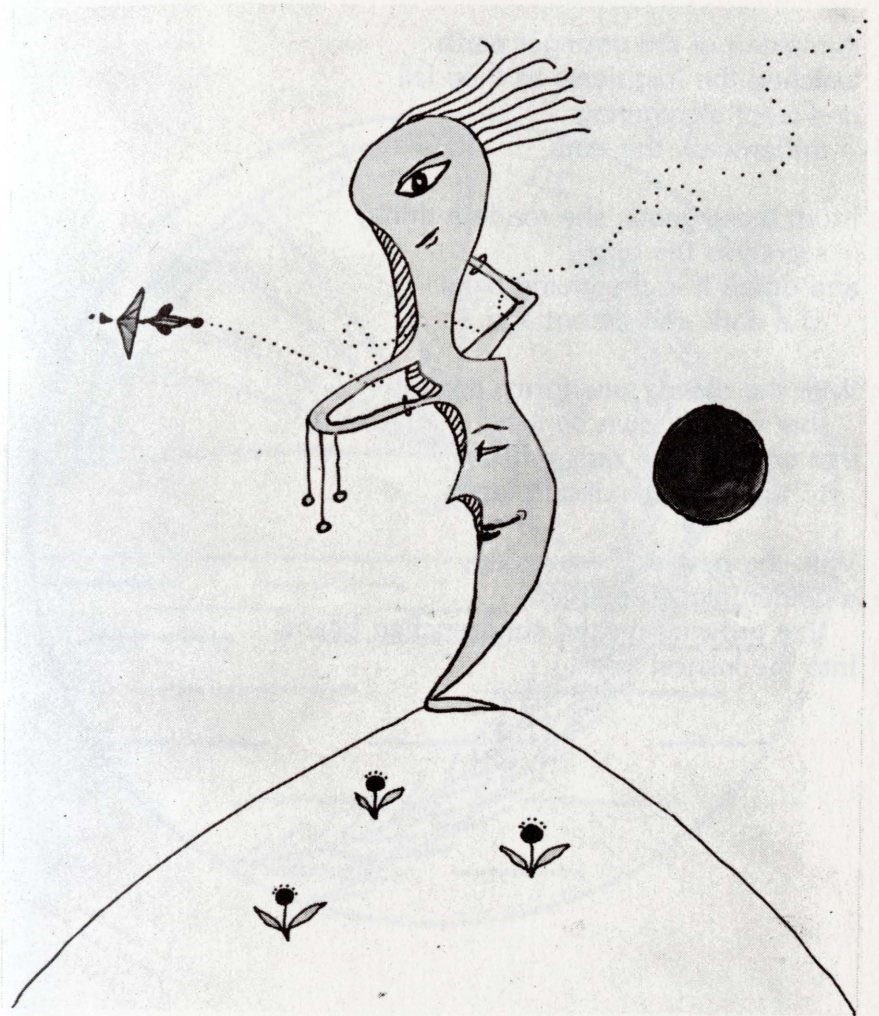




With the falling snow,  
prayers fell,  
and in the soft flakes,  
a spirit kissed the earth  
and lingered  
against the slumbering life, concealed.

At this very edge of Spring,  
the snows are gentle,  
calm and quiet,  
as a lighter state of sleep  
before the face of birth.

## II. MYTH





A dog barked at the moon  
and broke it into chips  
that fell into the trees,  
Lost, but glowing, from the great afar.

A maiden of the younger earth  
watched the fragments as they fell  
and went a'gathering  
underneath the stars.

From these gems, she made a drink,  
sacred to the one  
and drank it in the bluing night  
of a dark and potent age.

With the dawn, new forms arose  
that were known by light;  
that winged with radiant faces  
to their father's distant lands.

With the new and rising day,  
a golden globe emerged,  
that growing melted sundrenched beams  
Into the lushest trees.

III.

The Intricate Weave





The green, the yellow,  
the sea-rains fall  
and echo our response;  
the call that reaches  
for the perfect moment  
from behind the liquid lace.

Desire calls in me,  
the lure of flight,  
the wordless art,  
the consumated spirit.

From down the deepest well,  
the drop lingers  
on the wall,  
the moss,  
the shiny rock-bone,  
breathless.

In your shape  
I fall away from you  
to the very bottom;  
the heaps of leaves,  
the damp,  
the splash,  
the wet,  
the black.

In my sleep,  
I am sure  
something has stirred,  
I am sure  
I am awake.  
I am not.

I am the dream of myself  
weeping by the river.



Who calls me through the summer shadows,  
between the leaves,  
between the light?

It is a voice escaping  
through the tallest trees.

It is evening  
and my hands are woven  
into the curtains,  
your hair,  
the cruel cobwebs  
of memory.

I am the flame  
falling into the tube —  
the flash arriving  
through the tunnelled glass.

This blue transparent sphere,  
this wish of love,  
the energy uniting,  
pierces against the fold;

calls and meets us here  
in the shaded center  
of abstract release.

I am the breathless silence,  
I am the sum of all that hesitates.  
I am an eye floating  
on the sea of light.



I hover in the twilight  
between consciousness,  
and unconsciousness,  
drifting,  
becoming bluer,  
duller,  
incolate.

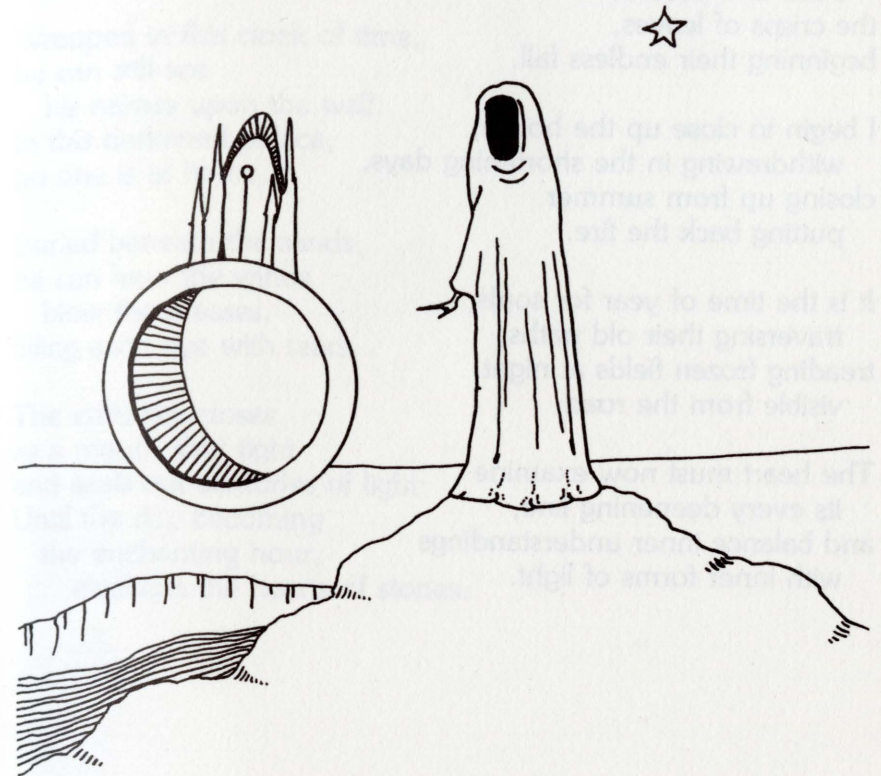
I am the space of myself;  
I am an energy of ascending light  
that falls skyward  
after the loop of day.

Motionless, I stand to face  
the endless voice announcing night,  
the darkened hue that weaving  
interfaces every sky.

Elongated clouds graciously shroud  
the hills;  
The violet day is gone from the land.

#### IV.

### The Unearthly Hour





The whisper of dry fields  
runs swiftly over miles.  
It is the last extended cry  
against the centuries.

Under its raging fullness,  
I see and observe  
the crisps of leaves,  
beginning their endless fall.

I begin to close up the house,  
withdrawing in the shortening days,  
closing up from summer.  
putting back the fire.

It is the time of year for souls,  
traversing their old paths,  
treading frozen fields at night,  
visible from the road.

The heart must now examine  
its every deepening line,  
and balance inner understandings  
with inner forms of light.

Incense smokes in rising curls  
as a blind prince turns  
and seals the light in his eyes.  
It is night becoming  
the eternal chain of moments  
when all are hidden, watching.

Wrapped in this cloak of time,  
he can still see  
his names upon the wall;  
In this darkened palace,  
no one is at home.

Buried beneath the sands,  
he can hear the winds  
blow the grasses,  
filling each eye with tears.

The entrance closes  
as a mouth shut tight  
and seals out centuries of light;  
Until the day becoming  
the enchanting hour,  
awakens the hearts of stones.



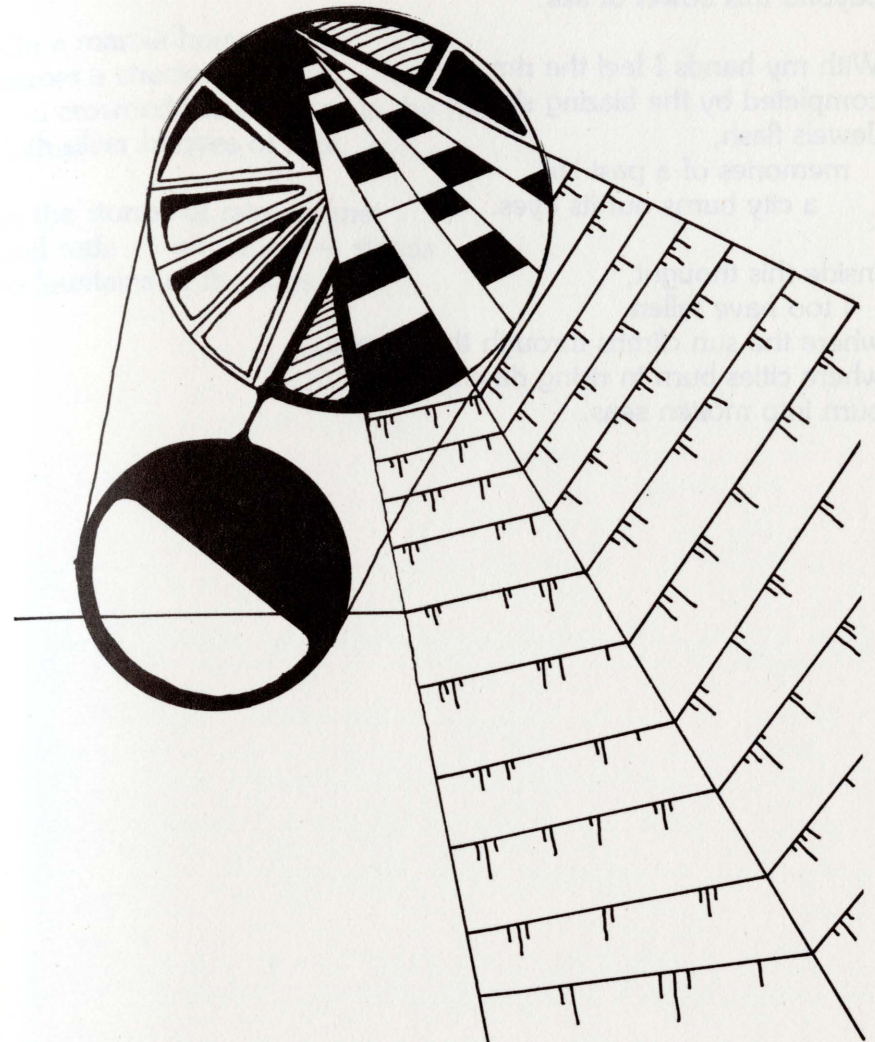
The Autumn's dreariest rain days  
fill the light hours  
with an oppressive gloom.

Faded shadows cover life;  
favorite watches stop.  
I sit in this yellow haze of drenching  
moments,  
in the weight of tombs.

Silently, the horses stand  
At the doorstep's chill;  
I am dressed and place my shoe  
On the window sill.

V.

The Eternity Sequence





Massive and evolving  
the sun's dawn eclipses the sky.  
Its radiance lights up the edge  
where giant warriors wait  
beyond this bowel of sea.

With my hands I feel the rim  
completed by the blazing sky.  
Jewels flash,  
    memories of a past life,  
    a city burns out its eyes.

Inside this thought,  
    I too have fallen,  
where the sun climbs through the orange,  
where cities burn in rising dawns,  
burn into molten seas.

On a marble horse you rode  
and flew, electric, through the skies,  
while I wandered, lost in corridors,  
secluded underground.

On a marble horse I rode  
across a checkered floor,  
and crowned the columns in the hall  
with silver hooves of light.

In the storms of rain we met  
and rode — unnatural — steeds  
to fountains of the stars.



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## CONCLUSION

With every future  
there is a mystery,  
that transports,  
that channels us  
through hollow glass  
into transparent realms.

The pool, where we look to see ourselves,  
often reflects only symbols  
of what we are to be.

Always the thread unwinds,  
Always the eternal weave  
marries strand to strand;  
Always connections, inseparable,  
recur and embrace across new worlds.

## "STARLET FALLS"

Kenneth Schulze





Remember Vera BigBee?

She aspired to fame, to stardom, for many a year, always on the verge of universal recognition. Just the other day, she did, to our minds, enter a pantheon of prima donnas forever young and fair. We shall miss her, for all that she admonishes us to look toward the future—as when, in that marvelous movie **Daisy May**, she throws her pregnant protégées a kiss and pursues her fiancé, the cloudseeder backfiring down the runway, with that ambiguous yet immortal line:

“Rain, rain, go away, come again some other day . . .”

We recall her vim, her nerve, the backspin on her graceful serve—the singular verve she shows one and all. Born and bred American, she had the great good fortune to be beautiful and, what is more important, adored by her lovers. While she had it she led the happiest, most productive years of her life.

We dedicate this issue of **It's News to Millions!** to the memory of the late Vera BigBee, one of the most secretive “glamor girls” ever to excite Hollywood. (See below.) Remember, if you will, that the vivacious Vera, the buxom Anglo-Saxon motion-picture actress, helped to make Stetson Brothers—the film studio that featured her in romances, comedies, mysteries, westerns—a giant of the entertainment industry, if not a household word. Thanks to its distributors and an increasing demand for her overall optimism, critics and moviegoers alike may finally begin to see her performances, which some call spotty, in a different light.

“Vera sure was fealty,” recalls the actor Carl Cox, her first of six celebrated mates. “Always on the go, if not the make. And did she seek popularity! Why, she craved it. Put her somewhere between the footlights and the limelight, so to speak.”

For Vera speaks today to many up-and-coming actresses who want very badly to succeed like she did.

We gather that her hectic and trying but fruitful career was a sobering uphill struggle to fulfill her lifelong dreams. Hers was and is like many in the movie world, in that it seems neither to have ended nor begun on location, for instance, or in her agent's plush office here in Sequin Bluffs, but rather to have flourished and faded fitfully, by stops and starts, somewhere in the richly tapestried penumbra of obligatory social intercourse behind the scenes. Indeed, sources say her sprees off the set—benders with debonair helpmeets, for the most part—may actually have kept her solvent during slumps on the screen . . .

Cox continues: “The woman, you see, had quite a sweettooth. That—and not her butterfingers—was really her undoing. Figs, buckwheat pancakes, ladyfingers, honey, éclairs, preserves, you name it,” he avers.

“That was what forced her to retire years before her time. (Against her wishes, incidentally.) Fat, hives, a hyperactive bladder, and allergies to wool, fur, cashews, vervain, goldenrod. I shouldn't discount pep pills,” he puts in.

“Goodness knows, by one o'clock the woman was a frazzle, to say nothing of the cocktail hour!”

“Talent, guts, and ambition she had,” he points out. “Way too much ambition.”

Maybe. At any rate, her reputation for giving of herself is such that some rather distant relatives (they say she never had kids, that she abstained!) and well-wishers of hers are now encamped on her shady grounds. True, she was nominated for an Oscar only once (for her supporting role in what is really her **Virginia**). Yet few of these, her posthumous guests, have forgotten her *pièces de résistances*, such as **Head Start**, **L/day**, **Surendra**, **The Diplomat**, **Virago**, **Straw Boss**,



**Pantisocracy, The Great Chicago Fire, The Road to My Heart, Only You, and West, by God, Virginia!**

"These will go down as masterpieces," states one well-known historian of the cinema. "Wait and see."

Last week, the septagenarian was presiding over a posh pool party, when she reeled headlong into the deep end. (See our cover splash, "Starlets Fall.") Resuscitated mouth to mouth, Vera was carried to her limousine, strapped to a stretcher and whisked directly to her mansion in Beverly Hills.

For she would die at home.

There, promptly palpated upon slate stepping-stones to her red carport, Vera Linda BigBee was pronounced dead upon arrival. This proved a mistake, for she quickly and cantankerously revived.

Jovial in better circumstances, her handyman rode appalled with her in her quiet lift. Upstairs, in her high, air-conditioned bedroom, cool as her bank vault, he tucked her into a bed built expressly for her by a shipyard in Newfoundland. An accident involving the timbers for its huge posts precipitated a rockslide that wiped out a village or two in the Congo wilderness in **Jungle Jitters**, where the budding BigBee, a naive Yankee bluestocking, is saved at the last moment by the cunning German hunter and overlord Poppel himself.

Her mattress, we've discovered, contains the down of eiders machine-gunned in **The Samovar**, a promotional film sponsored by the National Firearms Association. Here, Vera, miscast as a tight-lipped businesswoman in Uncle Sam's employ, botches the potentially provocative lines she delivers to a cabal of lisping and effeminate Colombian spies about to rendezvous with a Soviet satellite. Months after the previews of that obscure flick, her moonlighting was finally over. At the Brothers' behest she assumed the role of Gigi, an All-American aunt, her mainstay for years.

Time and again, the starlet, once gorgeous, now bed-ridden, raised her thin, liver-spotted, almost transparent hands and her gaunt arms, presumably in an attempt to hide her wrinkled, ravaged face from the chic gathering about her bed. There were a constellation of stars and starlets young and not so young, renowned houris, men about town, attorneys-at-law, to whom she sought to bid adieu as best she could.

"Folks," she gasped, "I'm fading fast!"

And yet, in another lucent moment she managed to beam becomingly for paparazzi, donning her young consort's beret in a feisty *jeu d'esprit* for the *jeunesse doree*, and then removing it for close-ups.

Nary a one of those summoned to her side, alas, could get the otherwise submissive thrall to arteriosclerosis to sip from the hose she had hooked up to her cherry-flavored pick-me-up, predigested protein which she had piped throughout her place and clear across the back of her lot to a hammock near her summerhouse.

At length, Miss BigBee went into a coma, doubtless painless. Soon, too soon, every starlet must depart.

"Just like it was in **Gigi Joins the Red Cross**," barrister Bill Nye comments. "Her thrushes went crazy in their cages. It was, of course, daybreak through her blinds."

Not long after, police escorted Vera and her chauffeur to a funeral parlor in Panorama City. "On our way there," her slim livery reflects, "Vera was more or less horizontal in the back seat. The only difference now was—she was all alone, poor thing."

"Every now and then," he says, "we had the phone disconnected. Here's the bar, the glove compartment, the first-aid kit, and her lapdog's bone. Here's a trumpet, too!"



The next hour saw a helicopter tow over Los Angeles a streamer that said, "Vera BigBee Is Dead." All of a sudden, reports go, a louder chopper appeared and chased it out of sight.

Within hours, florists, fans, tourists, gossip columnists, a United States Congressman or two, and many other motorists converged en masse upon the classy, spick-and-span restorative establishment above-mentioned. From four thousand feet the resultant traffic jam called up a blue-ribbon artichoke on a rustic platform attracting some familiar smiles . . .

With all due decorum and with what tact was the penultimate repose of our Miss BigBee befittingly enhanced. Now and again, the moods of her select mourners were unobtrusively altered, rather tastefully, we thought, by a bank of soffitted lights, projections appearing and disappearing and re-appearing almost silently above her last composure, as it were. The latter nicety made one shift one's eyes with regard to her.

"Gee," quite a few were heard to praise, "whoever designed the lighting and sound systems ought to get a raise."

A wide array of soft pastels complemented our heroine's attire for the solemn occasion. Hers was a flamboyant get-up consisting of the following:

One gray bouffant wig with a phosphorescent barrette. Thin but lovely golden hoops at her detached earlobes. A ticklish link choker engraved with her initials. An olive polyester hug-me-tight. A scarlet satin maxi with slits in back and front. A light blue slip with a fine fringe to it. Flesh pantyhose sans runner, sans breach, rest assured of that! Her six marriage rings. A pre-engagement ring from an unknown donor. An identification bracelet. And the silver slippers she purchased in her startling debut, **Gonna Getcha!**

Our centerfold this month is a portrait of the actress lying abed. It's a bird's-eye view of Vera recording her dulcet voice, which broke with emotion from time to time.

Moments before our shot was taken, a bearded youth burst into her boudoir, strode to her side and thrust a calibrated beaker under her runny nose! Her company was far too baffled to protest this insult, let alone to betray the seeth of their flouted sensibilities. The *haut monde* and the demimonde here are buzzing with conjecture.

Intruder, beware! You won't elude the sensors we've got out for you forever . . .

Curious the flecks on her carmine lips, which Vera kept parted as though to receive the host. Foam? Fits?

"Budweiser beer," Dr. P.M. Pinckney IV, a confidant of Vera's, contends. "Her last request was for a quaff of something fizzy. To tickle her tummy. Vera, you see, was dyspeptic. Quite a cheekbiter, I must say."

The dermatologist-cum-internist goes on to relate:

"We still don't know what really led to the long prostration that sapped her strength before her circulation went kaput. Vermouth, maybe, and cherry brandy. But what of it? I'm included to believe it was the late hours she kept, fantasies about a comeback, and inactivity. Poor Vera couldn't stand the prospect of ending her days in an overcrowded beanery for convalescents," he says somewhat ruefully.

We were also granted an interview with our starlet's onetime happy-go-lucky succorer, that quondam box-office bonanza Peter Pryor. Pete takes a panetela out of a humidor on her marble vanity, then steps on a pedal at the bottom of a pinchbeck wastebasket. Presto! a butane jinni six feet tall.

"Vera gave it to me for my first fifth wedding anniversary," leaning toward the flame. "I had to turn her down though."





Pryor withdraws his foot, and the jinni vanishes. "The little chit was fobbing off her better half's belongings," he claims. "I felt for Rod."

Vera's multi-mirrored garderobe is full of variously sized female footwear. Whose?

"Hers, of course. Vera wore new shoes every day—two, three pairs a day. More maybe. I think she had a hang-up about calluses and bunions. But then, you never can tell."

Just here, we'd like to confirm a widespread rumor: for much of her residence with us, the late, great Vera BigBee was missing her left big toe! The loss of her toe affected her gait, her posture, her psychological balance "more, much more than you might think," to quote her podiatrist, who prefers to remain anonymous.

"What a setback that accident was! Vera got a personality complex on account of it. That toe, I'd say, kicked off her decline."

"Vera BigBee," states Dr. Pinckney IV, "fussed over her image constantly. Much as they do nowadays. Her foot, you see, was unsightly. Call it a disfigurement. Vera was scared of the wrong kind of publicity. As were the Brothers, incidentally," he hints at our next issue.

"Now, professional ethics forbid me to reveal her flicker fusion frequency. We know for fact that the patient did at times have quite a palpable thrill. This was maybe congenital. For the rest, some hold that Vera was born with a hop.

"Pay them no heed," he cautions. "Vera had, had to have had, a kind of emergency cineplasty performed under conditions which by any standard of hygiene and ambulatory competence were inadequate for fieldhands. Hence, she hid her scars. How the dickens was a woman that vain to walk in wet cement, leave a mark like hers behind, and not be blackballed for it?"



"Specially at these uppity hotels! In sum, Vera cherished her hard-won privacy. She was luckier than lots of people hereabout."

"Oh yes! She guarded it jealously, like some do now."

From whom, then, was the lissome, sensuous, soñsy she apt to shy away, as we hear tell, so often? The backbiters, rash informants, petty opportunists among Hollywood's fiercely competitive and resourceful plastic surgeons?

"Quite so. Quite so," he says a bit lamely.

Did Vera ever let anyone else in on this lolapalooza? For that matter, who spills the beans about such things in the first place?

"Her spouses, I presume," he remarks in a cutting broadside. "Her toe caused her loads of worry and embarrassment, disappointment and maybe despair. Who knows? The woman," he adds, "had an injury to turn some stomachs, but she flatly refused to turn it to a profit. 'Tomorrow, dahlink, not today,' she says. 'I'm in a rush at the moment.'"

"So she never bothered to get an artificial toe? Fancy that! A woman of her stature. Oh, look" he says. "Look, when you get right down to it, it's her mother's fault, afraid as she was to expose her daughter to cosmetics."

Bear with us, dear reader!

During the early nineteen forties, moviegoers here and abroad shelled out to see positive qualities—resolve, ingenuity, gumption, trust, pluck and determination, among others—rendered incarnate, given body and purpose in an atmosphere surcharged with war.

These and other attributes were embodied by one Vera BigBee, the former Lola LaVie, a farmer's daughter with a winsome wink. Oh, she was ravishing, still outspoken at the proper moment. Little wonder she got more than a thousand marriage proposals a month!

But in the meantime, a new generation of shapely starlets was giving her stiff competition, flak she was having more and more difficulty outdoing. Eva Worth (the former Meg Mahoney) could sing; Vera couldn't, it seems, and had to mime. Darla Swanson (fashion model Doris Montemartini), who was nimbler than she, seldom broke a bone, as the plump BigBee was prone to do, whenever the frisky triumvirate spilled from the saddle. **French Warfare** convinced producer and director Otto Berg that Vera didn't look as good, as smart, as "spiffy" in uniform as Kate "The Works" FitzHugh. And in subsequent films, FitzHugh was, with due respect, top dog.

Things were to come to a head a decade later, when Vera, sure that she was getting ulcers in a spaghetti western, drank cream with abandon. Her figure, in fact, was wont to fluctuate from contract to contract . . .

But let us backtrack.

Vera had just finished shooting **Gigi, Get Your Gun**, a wartime thriller in which the peaked BigBee fights an influenza that broke out when a rain machine on loan from the U.S. Armed Forces went on the fritz and flooded the troupe. The troupe drove from southern California to northern Venezuela. Here, near a coastal village, they planned to rest a while before tackling **Simon Peter**. The village, poor but hardly destitute of the picturesque, had accommodations, alacritous help, and an uncrowded beach. Today the *gringos* had this *playa* pretty much to themselves.

Vera BigBee had on a panama with an eight-foot diameter, an oblong oddity that local craftsmen had woven for her. Vera, unlike many, basked in a bathing suit, a one-piece outfit that she sported at her sixty-first birthday party, which she celebrated when she was seventy-one years old. Pete Pryor, one of the eyewitnesses to whom we are indebted for their



corroboration of our abbreviated version of events, stood stark naked for a spell. Then he slatted in sandals and halted before Vera. Vera looked him up and down.

"Sit down," she said after a moment. Pete sat down beside her, leaning back on his hands. "Nice place, isn't it? Nobody racing around."

"Yes, that is a relief. Say, this would be an ideal place to bring a kid. What do you think?"

Pryor jammed a cigarette into a celluloid holder. "For a vacation maybe. That what you mean?"

"For an entire lifetime," she replied.

Pryor made a noncommittal noise in his throat. He took a kitchen match out of his kinky hair. "You wouldn't be pregnant on us, would you?"

"Who, me?" Vera looked at him. "Why do you ask?"

"None of my business, I guess."

He struck a light off his manicured thumbnail, lit his cigarette, and tossed the match smoking over her hat. He puckered, blowing blue between her parted thighs. Vera opened them a little wider, and his lungful dissipated.

"If the day ever comes," she said somewhat airily, "you can be sure I'll let Otto know."

Peter bit his holder. He gazed at the sea, shading his eyes with a hand. "Lucky him," he said between teeth.

"I'd let the whole world know, kiddo."

"That you were expecting? I wouldn't if I were you." He got up and returned to his seat beside Otto.

Two go-fers fetched lunch from the village. Lunch was a basket of fried chicken and several bottles of wine. The wine went fast.

"Shoot," said Darla Swanson. "This sand keeps blowing in your face." She flashed her greasy palms at the go-fers.

"Would somebody fix my hair for me, *por favor*?"

Otto flicked fat off his fingers. "So!" He sunk his teeth into dark meat. He chewed and swallowed and said,

"So! You want a stipulation, hah?"

"I should say not."

"Stipulation? What's that?" Some sniggered. Darla asked, "Privileges or something?"

"More money," Vera said. "Forget it."

"You want more bread?" an actor asked Kate. "More lettuce or something?"

"Later on, maybe," said Vera BigBee. "Right now we want dental insurance."

Otto sucked his teeth and shook a finger at Kate.

"I get no thanks from you, Kate." His nostrils flared, his snub nose dripped, his chins ran juices down his paunch and short-sleeved, knee-length bathing suit. "After all these year," he said with mock indignation, "you ought to know better, Kate!"

A go-fer fetched for him. Experience had taught her to hold the plate out to him. He groped. She leaned forward from the hips, parting her lips in token of a smile. Otto licked his lips.

"How I like it," he said under his breast, leering after her. "I wish they'd pluck it properly though."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!"

"What?" said Otto between bites.

"Lay off," Vera said a bit sternly. "They're only girls, after all."

"Ts, ts. We're pretty testy today, young lady."

Vera flushed. "What about dental insurance?" she persisted. "Yes or no."

Otto made a face. "Forget it, toots." He chucked a charred wing at a couple of seagulls skimming the shallows for small



fry. "There's nothing I can do for you. Any of you. I'm a peon too," he asseverated.

"So that's final, then."

He assented to her statement with a nod.

Darla advised her not to antagonize the boss. "They might move someone into your room with you," she said confidentially. "Might even be a man."

"Pish. They wouldn't dare." Vera BigBee drained a bottle of wine and glowed. "I know a thing or two, Darla, dear."

"Don't say I didn't warn you."

Darla opened her calfskin carryall. Vera tilted her head back, looking down her nose at Darla. Darla glanced this way and that.

"I've got something for you, Vera."

"I thought so." Vera reached for the kid purse at her feet. She was pretty sure it was hers. "How much do I owe you, darling?"

"Please, Vera, not a penny."

"Is this on you then?" Darla shook her head. "I must owe somebody. Who?"

"Got me," said Darla quickly. "Here, these are on the house."

Darla proffered two small packages which bore the trademark of a pharmaceutical company not far from Vera's home town in Michigan. Vera balked for a while, reluctant to accept these gratuities.

"I have plenty of things. I have too many things."

"Look, kiddo, these are sleeping pills and some other things to make you feel better." Darla snapped the package into Vera's purse. Vera sniffled.

"I feel all right. Relax."

"Calm down, they're all labeled, Vera."

Darla returned to her terrycloth towel, sunbathing ventrally. Vera watched Jo bury the remains of lunch, which Jo had volunteered to get rid of. "Oh, Jo," she called, fascinated by her colleague's indifference to sunburn. "You're peeling something awful."

"I see I am. Will you look at the bubbles on me."

Jo got up, turned sideways, and poked herself high and low. (Ever since adolescence she'd bathed in milk and milky concoctions, hoping thereby to wash her freckles and blemishes away. The corners of her bloodshot eyes, wrinkled skins of milk, were heavily made up.) She lifted a knee, touching her calf gingerly.

"Please don't pop them, Jo. I get goose flesh just thinking about it. See."

Jo nodded, pinching herself.

"I think you enjoy burning up."

"If only these weekends were longer . . ."

"Your breasts are peeling too." Jo felt her nipples. "Put your blouse on."

"Otto has it. I don't mind."

"Take mine, then, please. For your own protection." Jo put on Vera BigBee's loudest blouse, buttoning it halfway up.

"Cover your legs too."

"Such a prude!"

They watched Tony, a do-all, kneel down beside the recumbent Eva Worth and proceed to spread baby oil all over her thighs. Jo turned to Otto, who was playing tic-tac-toe on a scratch pad with Pete Pryor and Jack Jones, alias Flash Cartwright, stock hero. "Otto," Jo said, "d'you have a role for a sunburnt woman? A witch at the stake, say?"

"No," he replied. "Never."

"How about a preacher full of fire and brimstone?"



"Some other time, maybe." He wiped his hands with a napkin and held it out to Tony. "Get rid of it," he said. "There's no point keeping it now."

Pryor took it away from Tony, wrapped a breast of fried chicken in it, and stashed it in a straw basket he kept hidden behind his back.

A villager approached the troupe, Swarthy and angular, he strode along the beach in baggy pants and a white shirt, his sleeves rolled up above his elbows, heading straight for the Americans.

"Shoot, these local yokels," someone disparaged. "They're like flies around honey."

Tony stood guard, scratching his hirsute chest, his avid eyes on Kate. FitzHugh smiled, or moved her mouth, and slipped into a torn skirt. "Why don't you put on something? Vera. Darla. I think he's coming to look us over," she said.

"Tush, tush," Jo said. "We're surrounded by he-men, aren't we, darling?"

Vera didn't say anything.

"But darling, the natives carry knives."

"So do I," said Tony, "Relax."

"With foreigners around? You never know. With you, of course, it's different." Kate sat hugging her knees, as she sometimes did in pin-ups. "My goodness, he's dark," she said throatily.

"And dangerous?"

Kate looked askance at Vera. "You talk to him, then. I'm sick and tired of giving out autographs."

Althea Daines (Sherry Sherburne, former mayor of Hollywood Heights) had a picture postcard ready. She signed the photograph. "Hi there!" Groping for her purse. The villager halted before her, looking with puzzlement at the card she

extended to him. Someone told her to shut her purse. After a moment she did.

"Have a postcard! It has my autograph. It's free. *Verstehen Sie?*"

No one understood Spanish well enough to make sense of the villager's babble. He showed them his clean palms. Kate gave a humph for Vera's benefit.

"Where's our interpreter," Otto asked, "at the cockfights again?"

"Sketching gypsies," an actor said vaguely.

"Fine, fine. Would someone please bring me a plate of chicken—and make it snappy!"

One of the go-fers fetched for him and held the plate out with one hand. Otto grimaced. "There's a horsefly in this, miss."

She extracted it with long, painted nails. With an ill-concealed mutter he proffered the plate. The villager spoke Spanish and traced a rectangle in the air.

"Movies, *sí*," said Otto, thumping his sternum with his thumb. "I'm the boss around here. What's up?"

"I think he wants a job," Tony said uneasily. "Any money he wants a job."

Otto shook his head. "No job."

"I think he runs the restaurant in town," Vera said. "I bet he wants that napkin of his back."

Otto looked askew at her. "Then why the blazes didn't he speak up when he saw us walk off with it? He had his eyes on it before we got up!"

"They give us the cheapest ones they've got," Tony grouched. "We ought to pocket all our tips."

"Keep the darn napkin," Darla said. "There aren't any souvenir shops in town."



"Maybe it's not his to give up," said Vera. "The girls use them as bandannas."

Kate thought so too. "You might as well give it back to him, Pete. There's no place else for us to eat."

Otto fumed a while. "Give him the lousy napkin, Pete."

Pete held out the basket. The villager balked. Tony opened and shut a fist. "Better take it, bub," he said menacingly. Pete opened the basket, removed the napkin with the breast of chicken inside, and put it into the villager's hands. The villager said *gracias* to no one in particular. "Skip it," Tony said. "See you later, alligator."

The villager gave Otto a courteous, if truncated, bow. Turning on his heels, he strode with napkin and breast of chicken toward the distant village.

"That just goes to show you, girls," Otto said grumpily. One of the go-fers answered, "Sir?"

"That proves my point about the correlation between bad manners and malnutrition."

"Huh?" the other go-fer asked.

"You can't have one without the other. Right? Even your philosophers will tell you that."

"Permanently, you can't, you mean?"

Otto looked at Vera BigBee. "The two go together is what I mean."

"For sure," the go-fers replied. "For sure."

One of them tested the nozzle on a hose attached to a keg sunk in the sand, while the other spread out a gaudy blanket. Otto lay down in the middle of this and got a stream of lager down his gullet. After a time he gave the high sign.

"Zounds!" he ejaculated. "We'll guzzle from gargoyles on the ceiling of a grotto. Day for night, we'll make a bundle. You'll see."

Vera BigBee crossed her ankles, watching a small crab crawl toward her. Jo fetched a stick and poked it idly. "Don't hurt it," Vera said. "Please."

"I'm not."

Vera threw a handful of sand at it and it clung to the end of the stick. "Gives me the creeps," she said. "Get rid of it."

Jo carried the crab on the stick to the shade of a rock and left them there. She returned to her friend with a smile. "May I sit here?"

"Please do."

The two actresses sat next to each other, somewhat apart from the rest of the group. They gazed at a tiny tanker on a seam of sky and sea. Jo moved a little closer to Vera.

"Is someone trying to get rid of me?"

It was a moment before Jo replied. "What in the world makes you say that?"

"My nerves aren't what they used to be. Or so my husband tells me."

"Already, huh? You're ahead of schedule. Anyone can see you're overworked, if only you weren't so sensitive."

"My skin's as thick as yours."

"Are you all right?"

"Sure, sure. It's just, oh, the things you have to put up with, Jo. The kowtowing, the belittlement, for one thing. It gets to you."

"How you do it is beyond me. You've so much finesse."

"Tell Otto. Why do I have to be the one to play the woman of the streets?"

"Not again!"

"Shoot, it's a bit part!"

"Well, your day will come." Jo patted Vera's shaven shin. "It will. Don't mope."



"I'm not," she said rather petulantly. "I don't."

"Take it easy, darling. And not so loud," Jo said with a finger to her lips.

"Son of a gun, another stab at stardom down the drain."

"There's always the next one."

Vera brooded over this. She smoothed her hair and gave her companion a long look before she said matter-of-factly: "Yes. Otto wants the natives to leave me for the monkey people."

"You don't say! Are you sure?"

"I wish I were."

"Otto says it's not definite yet. That it?" Vera nodded. "There ought to be a rule."

"No kidding. Oh, Jo, he wants the monkey people to go bananas over me. *On me!*"

"You, of all people! I wouldn't stand for it, if I were you. I'd give him a piece of my mind first thing."

"You would."

Jo did not answer.

"I didn't mean it that way. It was a question."

Jo inspected a hangnail and bit it off. She squeezed out a drop or two of blood. "Forget it," she said. "I do."

"I do. I give him a piece of my mind, don't you?"

"Sure, you do. When you can afford to. Which is almost never. Admit it."

"But darling, the aftermath."

"The word is aftermath."

"That too," she said. "They get so sore at you."

I wouldn't let them."

Vera pursed her lips. "These cannibals worship my clothes, and then—" Her voice trailed off. "Oh, never mind."

"They humiliate you."

Jo looked at her. "Right?"

Vera nodded. Jo sucked her blood. Vera put on a large pair of sunglasses and dug her heels into sand.

"Yes, they humiliate me. How much is another matter altogether."

"My crew can't take much more of this."

"They want it more explicit than ever. You know what that means."

"Nothing new. I wouldn't worry, if I were you."

"Listen to her! And what about Jo Bridgehead? She signed another contract, didn't she?"

"Of course. Looks like she's only an extra though. Again."

"Buck up, you're getting valuable experience," Vera reasoned. "Cheer up, Jo."

Jo wrung her hands, and Vera looked away.

"Tell me, how do they—do it to you this time?" Jo said with a catch in her voice.

"Far as I know, they have me step out in a G-string or something. With feathers on."

"I can see you in a loincloth. Pasties too?"

"Nope. We're not there yet, praise be."

They exchanged a glance or two and said nothing for a while. Vera furrowed her brows.

"Anyway, I traipse around from village to village. They dangle me over a boiling caldron and slowly unravel the vine."

"Hey, that's nifty. Then what happens?"

"They beat their drums. They beat their wives and kids."

"Uhuh. And them?"

Vera looked at her disconsolately. "I think I'm going to take a dive."

"Don't," Jo said firmly. "You mustn't let them do that to you. Anything but a putdown like that."

"I should quit, then? No, thanks!"



"I didn't say quit."

"I'll quit the business altogether sooner than let them eat me. Just you watch me."

"No, you won't. No, you won't."

"I have my pride, Jo."

"Sure, you do. You must. Remember how close you came to being eaten in **Mona, Mona.**"

"Too well. Don't talk to me of **Mona, Mona.** Please."

"You got through **Mona, Mona** without a hitch. With flying colors."

"I don't want to hear any more about it."

"I saw **Mona, Mona** six times. Eight times. You were really something else, Vera."

Vera smiled. "Thank you, Jo." Vera went on: "Otto wouldn't drop me in the stew, would he? Darla, maybe. Sooner or later, Althea. An extra or two. Not me."

"Not you."

"No, I've got a lot of pictures ahead of me yet."

"You're young. You're in like Flynn. And then what happens?"

"Flash pops in with wampum and he pops off. They divvy the firewater. Flash does magic tricks to gain their confidence. Along comes a squaw."

"Who tries to seduce him."

"Who tries to run him through. She mistakes him for a missionary."

"Hm. She drunk, or hopped-up, or what?"

"Oh, some root she chews." Jo's brows went up. Vera shrugged. "Well, Flash gets into a pretty nasty scrape with her brave. Her brave falls off a footbridge. Flash sees this virgin taking a shower stark naked near the rapids. The music swells, and—"

Jo interrupted, "He falls head over heels for her, right?"

"That's right. And he confronts her."

"Who is this? You?"

"Far as I know, it is. So I appear again," she said. "Twice in the same movie, can you believe it?"

"Oh, Vera! Congratulations, darling! I'm thrilled for you."

"Thanks, darling. It's kind of you to say."

"But I really am!"

Vera cleared her throat of phlegm. "These natives in canoes drag the steamboat out of the mud and tow it into the river. They get the roulette wheel going again."

"Good for them. Tell me more."

"Why not? The stoker brains the pilot on the steering wheel, he runs the natives down and they go under. The crocodiles. Nighttime scenery. A fitting song in the hold below—a spiritual, I think. Then the midwife slaps the stoker silly. He steals ashore."

"He?"

"He," confirmed Vera BigBee. "He raids a missionary—"

"Oho! Fundamentalists?"

"Roman Catholics. Or Methodists. Anyway, the cattle stampedes. Old folks are crushed, kids mashed and maimed. There's a lot of flames and fright and ruckus. Their gods abandon them."

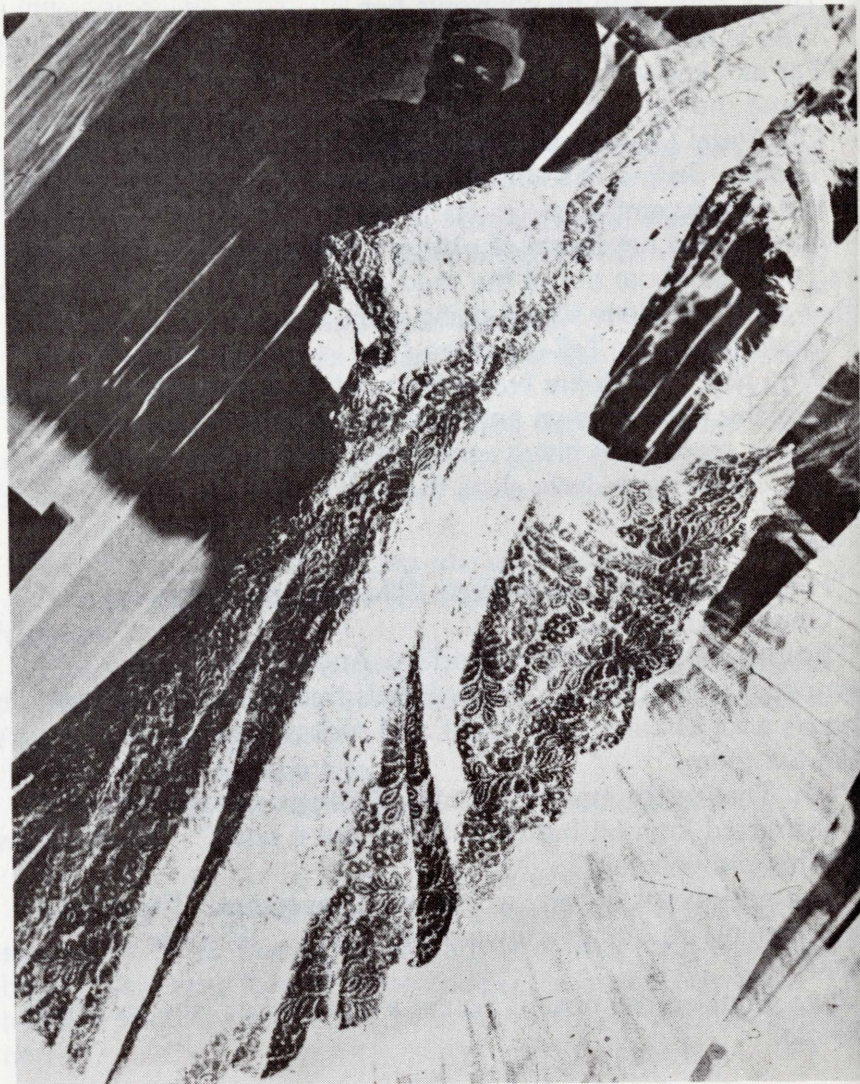
"Ah. That might make for a nice close-up or two." Jo had an abstracted look on her face. "I can see it now."

"What did you say?"

"The ant's point of view would lend it suspense. There you are, creeping un hungrily toward my lips . . . What do you think?"

Vera wrinkled her nose. "You're a little weird," she said half-jokingly.





"I guess they take that into consideration beforehand."

"Of course they do. Who listens to suggestions from the likes of us?"

"And the belly dancers: is there an auction in this one?"

"Gee, I don't know. Maybe when **The Jolly Roger** is underway . . . Now, the women are all in the hold below," Vera resumed, "singing and wailing and scrubbing and so forth."

"Till they come to that dingbat beaver's dam," said Jo, watching Otto pick his toes.

"No, a traffic jam. The stoker tries to bargain for their passage downstream to the city at the mouth of the river."

"But the omens are all against it. So he has to pretend he's a god."

Vera looked at her. "That's right." Jo dropped her eyes. Her lashes were wet. She traced her namesake idly in sand. Vera followed her finger with her eyes. Jo outlined their legs very slowly.

"Or maybe their messenger, Jo. He asks the women would they rather have an aphrodisiac or an eclipse. They vote."

"How come? Since when? We never have before."

"I didn't think to ask. Well, it turns out they all want his howitzer and field glasses instead. I like that idea, don't you?"

"I do," said Jo, "I do."

Vera took off her sunglasses, toying with their wings. "He says it takes place at the trading post."

"Hot damn! The one with the model bulldozer that runs on dung and alcohol and hot sheep's blood?"

"Yes, isn't that fabulous! But who ever heard of rams on the Amazon?"

"It's only a movie, darling."

Vera gave her a sidelong look. Jo had a gummy smile.

"Say, who gives you the lowdown? Flash?"



"Ha! Frigging Flash, he won't have boo to do with me. He's hoity-toity, if you ask me." Jo raked her namesake into oblivion. "Pete Pryor did," she said after a few moments. Vera stared at her.

"You're joshing me."

"Cross my heart."

"You're putting one over on me," she said in disbelief.

"How'd he find out?"

"The boss, I guess. Who else?"

"Pete Pryor's a nobody!"

"He was a nobody. He must have got a promotion or something. Maybe for services rendered."

"Christ, it isn't fair!"

Vera BigBee almost sobbed.

"Stand up a minute, Vera, I want to see something."

Vera got up and stood with her most photogenic flank to Jo, whose scrutiny lingered on her thigh, the fresh bruise there.

"Pete and you are about the same height, aren't you? I think you're a little taller than Pete," Jo said.

"No, I'm not, am I?"

Jo poured a handful of sand into her other hand, then flung it away. "They can do just so much with their furniture, Vera. Why not put him up on my chesterfield?"

"Let him wear lifts. He can stand on a stepladder or somebody, if he has to."

Vera said, "Poor fella."

She sat down, stretched her legs, and crossed her ankles as before. "He's been hanging around with someone, hasn't he?"

Jo guessed he had at that. Vera looked at her.

"Someone new?"

"That wouldn't surprise me. Nothing seems to surprise me anymore," Jo said sadly. "Not now, not at my age, it doesn't.

Oh, I'm not jaded, don't get me wrong." She paused.

"Surprise me," she said with a nervous smile.

Vera looked away.

"Please, Jo, I hate it when you feel sorry for yourself."

"I'm thirty-five years old," Jo confessed. But Vera hadn't asked for a confession and gave no sign that she'd heard. Jo pouted.

"I should have known better. Nobody tells me anything anymore."

"I can't imagine why nobody told you. I'm surprised."

"Imagine my surprise." After a few moments Vera said,

"What else did Pete tell you? Anything?"

"Scuttlebutt. Nothing to lose sleep over, dear."

Jo lay back in the shade of her hat and shut her eyes. Vera tried to slide a slick magazine under Jo's hands, clasped under her head. Jo purred, for all the world content to drowse beside Vera BigBee.

"I've come to the conclusion the two of us are being exploited," Vera said after thought. "Grossly exploited."

"Mmm hmm. What did you expect after high school, the Presidency?"

"I expect something, oh, I don't know. Better," she said at last. "I want—" She broke off, then declared: "I want to do a pastoral. Something simple."

"Something touching, you mean."

"Yes. Something true and noble. That'll last a while."

"Good luck. I used to have fine sentiments like yours."

"You did?" she blurted.

Jo laughed.

"I did."

"I'm sorry," Vera said. "You never lose them entirely, do you?"



"I should hope not. For your sake, Vera."

They watched Darla Swanson sashay down the beach. At water's edge, the cynosure of attention put out a dainty foot into foam. She called back, "Bath water!" and went mincingly back to her clique.

Vera BigBee sighed.

"Suppose the madame in Natchez sends a buyer to the Amazon. What then?"

"The stoker and he hit it off like never before. The two of them take on Flash, and Flash comes out on top."

"Natch. Flash will always out."

"The Red Cross gives the gals the once-over for clap and worms. Of course, that's understood."

"Just as I thought—the same old stuff! Oh Jo!"

"I'm with you, sweetheart. You get pretty fed up picking leeches off genteel men in the jungle. Licking their wounds for them, and so on." Jo paused. "Vera."

"Yes, what is it?"

"You let this racket martyr you. Don't. It isn't marriage."

"Oh yes, it is."

"Know what?" Jo turned over onto her side, head in her palm, looking up at Vera. "I envy you. Always have."

"That's nice to hear, Jo. But I don't let flattery go to my head."

"Flattery? On the contrary. A little envy can be healthy, honey."

"All in moderation, darling," she said coolly.

"I'll tell you something." Vera had to lean over to listen.

"You've got to make it in this business, dear, if you want to make it. See what I mean? Day in, day out. Or else you're sunk."

"You really believe that."

"I do," said Jo emphatically. "Look at what they did to corrupt poor little Sugar Temple. Guys like Otto cleaned up on her lickety-split." Jo brushed an imaginary horsefly off her burnt, uppermost thigh. "Ah, Vera, the things I could tell you," she murmured into her companion's pierced ear.

Soon Vera got up and sauntered toward the sea.

"We all rode Vera pretty hard," Otto Berg remembers. "We like to horse around and roughhouse with one another. Ah, but there are always some that try to cop a feel from you on the sly. Under water, under tables, on quiz shows . . . I guess that's why Vera was in the habit of swimming by herself."

"In effect," says Pete in passing—Pryor, the next-to-last person to see Vera BigBee with her left big toe intact—"Vera sublimated her trauma and mesmerized the masses. So you see, something did come of her accident, after all."

Odmar Hansen, senior cameraman and propman, describes out starlet on the brink of catastrophe:

"Here she comes, then, pretty as a picture, parading round in a bathing suit on a nudists' beach. 'That's how some are,' I say to myself."

"Ah, well! 'Careful where you step, miss,' I say to her, firm like and respectful. You'd think an actress as smart as Miss BigBee would watch where she was going. But there's no telling what's on a woman's mind."

"Before you know it, she tromps on a sand castle, the only thing this gypsy kid has ever built. The dame wrecks it. 'Ho!' I say to her. 'I guess you won't do *that* again.'

"Well, she tries to fix his sand castle. No way! The kid throws sand in her face and runs away. I just stand there trying to get a look at her."

"She won't let me. She runs way down the beach and does a bellysmacker in the lagoon. She swims and swims. Me, I'm





off looking for that poor gypsy kid when I hear shouting on the beach.”

“Vera thrashed and thrashed and we sat there,” Darla Swanson says. “Somebody said Vera was crying wolf. We sat there waiting to see.”

“Finally FitzHugh, bless her, ran down the beach and plunged into the water. Pretty soon the rest of us did too. It was very dramatic. Vera’s foot was mauled, she was spurting blood on everyone. Did we ever scream. The sharks were everywhere.”

“Some gypsy girl twisted a rag from off her skirts. We bound up her knee with it. She still lost lots of blood. I don’t quite remember how we got her—we got Vera—to the nearest hospital. The help was all asleep, naturally . . .”

Late the next afternoon, a contingent of foreign correspondents surrounded Otto Berg and P.R. O’Donoghue, a press agent for the Brothers, in the lobby of a high-toned provincial hotel, posing stickler after stickler.

“Yes, sure, Miss BigBee is out of the infirmary now,” the latter announced. “I’m afraid she’s incommunicado, ladies and gentlemen. That’s how she wants it.”

“Right,” said Otto Berg. “BigBee is off limits for now. It won’t be long though before she’s back in the swing of things.”

“Vera BigBee had a touch of sunstroke, that’s all. She’s conscious, believe me.”

“Sure, she’ll be up and about in no time, what with her drive and desire.”

“Damned if she doesn’t. Say, men, that little filly’s some live wire, no? Ha, ha, ha!”

Had Vera had a nervous breakdown shortly before her collapse yesterday? No, Vera was mentally sound and always had been. Well then, was Ben, her hubby, coming to stay with



her till she should mend? Apparently not, they hadn't heard a word to that effect. Would Miss BigBee swim for the millions ever again? Why, yes, of course she would, they concurred.

"Vera's actually in the pink of health. Even so, before we could save her she was stung by a jellyfish," Otto claimed. "Wait till the swelling subsides. And then, look out, Europe!"

Had Vera actually been disporting in shark-infested waters? Was she maybe courting disaster with an errant groper? Was she perchance following the lead of saucy little so-and-so, the purportedly suicidal darling of a rival studio who tended now and then to get entangled with Portuguese men-o'-war?

"Nonsense, stuff and nonsense. It was an accident. Vera is all right."

"To tell the truth, we were spread out to a man, watching for the Jolly Roger. Remember the rover barons?"

"That's right, it slipped my mind. Oh, those lowdown buccaneers!"

"Right, the very same!"

"Swashbucklers on the high seas!"

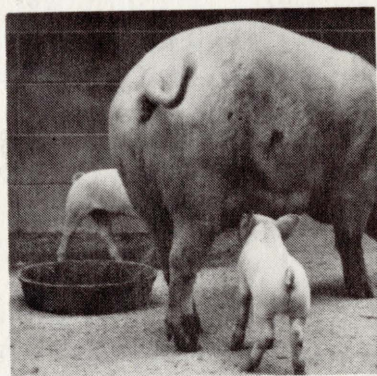
"Right! They have it out with the good guys till FitzHugh falls for Flash. Oh yes, there's plenty of swordplay in it for the whole family. Yes, sir. Yes, indeed," they said, "we expect Vera BigBee to be in it!"

Long may she live!

Now, will the greeting card company she sold bulk mail to publish her loveletters and other, copious correspondence? Who purloined her numerous gilt diaries? How shall her large estate and her many artifacts be divided?

A lot concerning the one and only, the delightful Vera BigBee remains to be divulged. Rest assured, dear reader, when folks speak up—we're there. We get at the heart of people in the public eye. **It's News to Millions!** Pick up a copy of our next issue soon at your favorite newsstand!





the end