

Fall 1984

Overtures - 1984

Sherry Payne

Follow this and additional works at: <https://neiudc.neiu.edu/overtures>

Recommended Citation

Payne, Sherry, "Overtures - 1984" (1984). *Overtures*. 8.
<https://neiudc.neiu.edu/overtures/8>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Publications at NEIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Overtures by an authorized administrator of NEIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact neiudc@neiu.edu.

M3/87

OVERTURES



Cover Graphic: "Obsession With Lace"
Kelly OMahoney

Managing Editors: Sherry Payne
Bonna Lake
Kelly OMahoney

Advisor: Tom Hoberg

OVERTURES is a magazine of poetry and prose published at Northeastern Illinois University by APOCALYPSE, the student literary organization. Submissions are welcome. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission to:

OVERTURES
c/o APOCALYPSE
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625

All rights to material appearing in OVERTURES are retained by the authors and artists. APOCALYPSE Literary Series is sponsored by Northeastern Illinois University.

OVERTURES

VOLUME VI

FALL WINTER '84

POETRY AND PROSE

PAGE

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Edward Smallfield | Honeymoon | 2 |
| | Two Dreams | 4 |
| | Approaching | 6 |
| Barry Nelson | Homily | 8 |
| | The Well Known Critic | |
| | Reviews the Dream Opera | 11 |
| | You Ride | 14 |
| Bob Caskey | The Weight of Calm | 15 |
| Elizabeth Marino | Spaces | 16 |
| Virginia Denise | Journey | 17 |
| | Louisa | 18 |
| | Night | 19 |

PROSE AND POETRY

PAGE

| | | |
|----------------|----------------------|----|
| R. Taylor | My Mother's Keeper | 20 |
| Ingrid Wendt | Looking Up | 26 |
| | Happy Days | 27 |
| | Gathering Seaweed | 28 |
| | After a Strong Wind | 31 |
| Lorri Jackson | Sleepwalk Revisited: | |
| | A Poem for Sisters | 32 |
| Kelly OMahoney | On the Inside | 34 |
| Adrian Saylor | Storm Approaching | 35 |
| | Saying the Ritual | 36 |

II

| | | |
|------------|--|----|
| Gary Byron | Johnny's Kid Brother (or the Evolution of Albert) | 39 |
|------------|--|----|

III

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----|
| Albert Degenova | A Tender Spot (A Chapbook) | 65 |
|-----------------|----------------------------|----|

GRAPHICS

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| Kallas Bonnivier | Sunflower | bookmark |
| | intaglio | |
| | Pen and Ink | 21 |
| | Iris | 30 |
| | sugar lift etching | |
| | Pen and Ink | 77 |
| Norbert Marszalek | Sienna and Black | 7 |
| | intaglio | |
| | Wheel of Death | 37-38 |
| | photo intaglio | |
| Kelly OMahoney | Lace Obsession | 1 |
| | As You Slept | 2 |
| | The Bulb | 3 |
| | Mailing a Dream to Eleanor | 33 |
| | Eden Trap | 85-86 |

Honeymoon

Somewhere across the water a child
begins to cry. From her bed the bride can't hear
that sleepy mother circling the bare floor,
only the wailing as it swells, then slowly fades.

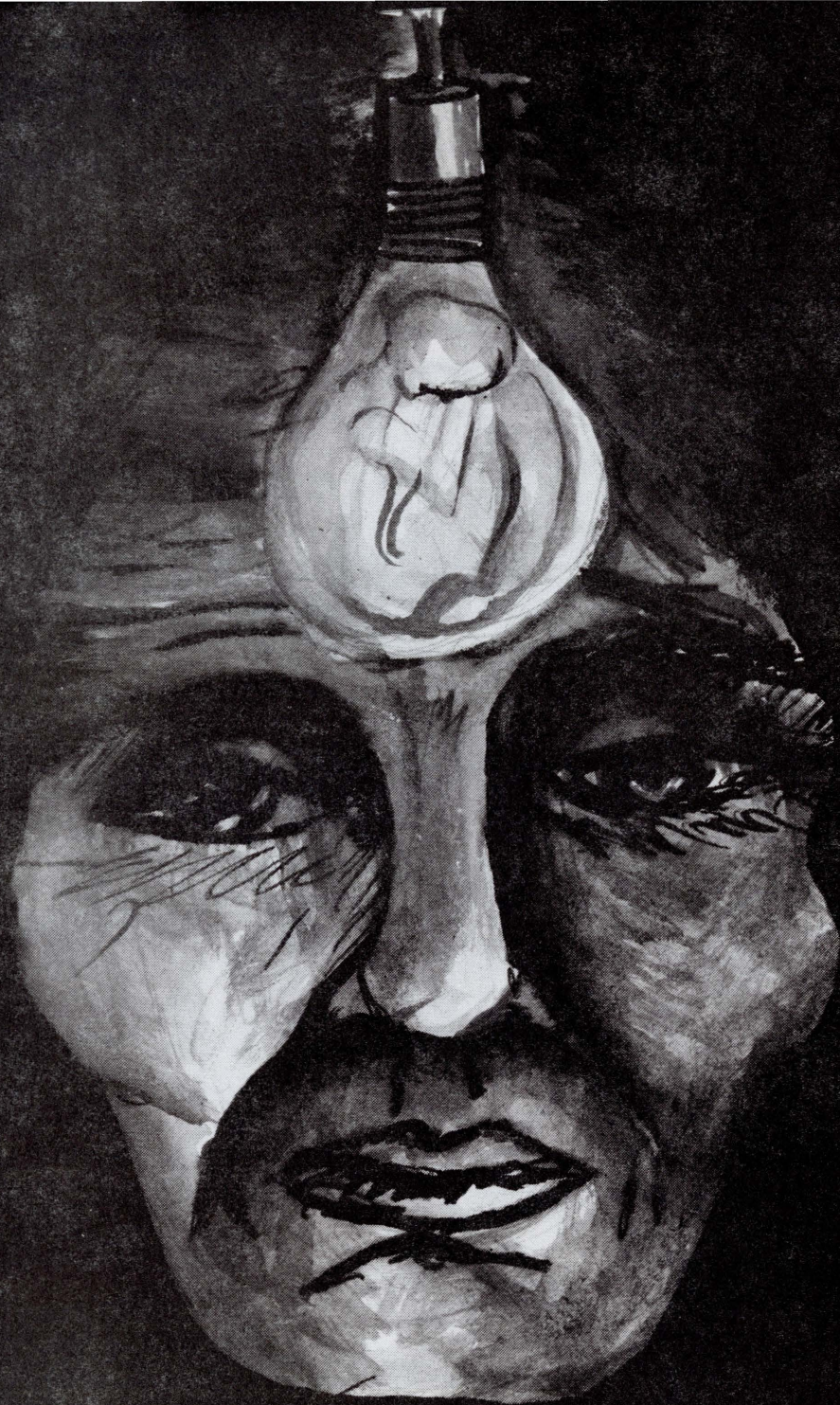
Wide awake. Tonight the bay must be
very black, so solid she could walk
across it, if she cared to go. Now
her husband's spirit floats

along the landscape of his dream
like a voice that passes through
a telephone. Beside her
his body sweats and she thinks

of the child before it was born
when it could breathe only
its mother's blood. While she waits
the sun rises over the bay

but she won't say to her husband, the sun
was so close, you could have touched it.





Two Dreams (for my father)

i

The bulb on the drop cord can't blind me.
Fist of light, beating the shadows back
into the corners of the garage, I stare
until the light burns red
behind my eyes. You turn your head
like an old woman listening
to the life inside an egg,
I can't hear it, the stutter
of a stuck valve speaking
the truck's hurt. If I move
my head, the raw patch burned
by that bulb crawls
across your face, a living
scar. Your skin sheds light
like a glass of milk
I want to reach for
in the dark.

In the other dream I wear
 the same child's eyes. You stand
 on the porch of that warehouse
 I hated so much. I raise
 the lit match, a steady star
 meaning no wind here,
 inside this door. I listen
 as the rats' feet
 begin like rain. A shiver
 in your hair believes the wind
 but your eyes won't tear.
 Like a train the whole earth shakes
 and I know that I am going
 anywhere, anywhere but here.

Approaching

Approaching the year
 of your death you were
 thirty-eight I remember
 how it rained

cold in the house
 that February confused
 by the weight
 in your brain you began

to forget I can't
 remember the name
 of that girl
 I held her my hands

smelled of her skin
 I mean your death
 was a piece
 of my life the winter

light feeble the mud
 in my dream the weeds
 yellow flowers
 through the kitchen floor

a hole
 in my belly a howl
 you can't hear
 me wondering how

how it must have felt
 in your skull when the light
 shattered
 like nothing I know

Barry Nelson

Homily

Just this
point of a man,
slow descent of a dry
leaf from a bitter oak,
mouth of dust
pushed up to perch
on its own white dome,
gushing raven,
shadow of the valley,
brief whorl in a river of hands.
Waves thump the hairy barrel.

Shaft, slimped miner
snapped to
his father's gray pace,
iron wheels deep
in a hot tunnel,
maternal glow...band of silk
dust and honey...
slow chant,
rattle and factory whistle,
parents, children, rack
up the slope of the miner's back.
Exit rope, tree, light.

Three—
lunchbox, thermos, cigarette,
seven—
shrunken sexes,
a straw, revolver's empty cylinders,
eleven—
dry bones,
plus one—
brother, father, son,
out of the mouth and into the back.

Carts rumble black ore,
black heat, light, ash,
all night, mother of all color
...sun on moon on
face of silent water,
loon, child, cat...cry
desperate automobile.
All day below, blackened face,
the miner washes to cause
table, bed to be served.
Empty glass thump and card
snap, laughter and smoke,
moon on black water.

"Before I formed thee
in the belly I knew thee"
three-
hand to
mouth to track
"through a land of deserts and of pits,
through a land of drought,
and of the shadow of death,
through a land no man passed through,
and where no man dwelt"
and small, the point,
seven and eleven,
rolling and black,
on white bones,
the miner's black hands,
baby's new shoes.

Sun rise,
go below
and raise
the dust.

The Well-Known Critic Reviews The Dream Opera

The woman on top of the car
is burning, pale blue flames with
yellow tops, a pilot light, her eyes
sparkle, wet and alive, she knows
light must change soon.

Water laps at the wheels,
rolling in from the curb
edged in white lace.

Waves and flames move to one wind,
low and awkward, a minor key,
rushing to wait. Curtains
billow through open windows,
rain begins. Now the woman goes out,
but all around her flames peak
at sash and eave, smoke seeps
through shingles, black clouds, sirens.

End of act one. Change drivers.

All music stops. Water rises in
the pit, above the musician's knees.
On the roof of the car, the coloratura
lights a cigarette, waiting for the tenor
to cross downstage in a skiff.
Somewhere a saxophone
cries wild as a coyote,
answered by high soft
voices like stars
crossing a desert canyon,
hanging moments
on the black rock rim.
A chorus in white lace
in deep water, deep green
like my mother's eyes certain
brilliant December mornings.

End of act two. The tenor calls for a dry toupee.

Now the full orchestra raises
the final movement, scraping
against the grain of the tenor's solo.
Wind rocks the car,
tenor bracing coloratura on the front
seat, headlights and wipers, poised
at the crossing. One flute remains
an octave above. Chorus in antiphony
with baby rattles. The curtain falls.

you ride

fist tight glass
voice broken in
my throat feel

warm flow sweat
me like a glove cold
wolf's eye you move in

my mouth until
I am no longer
hungry seasonal bird return

your snowfire face
taut mirrors January moon
scrap of paper with your name

the weight of calm
(for Emily)

Still life forms.
An easy chair for the aviary.
Meaty thoughts
of childrens' shoes
and charge accounts.

We repose on lying carpets
infamous in their dusty sloth.
In this deserted cabin they mimic
orientalism.
Not touching we lie instead
apart in all these discrete stories.
 stairwells remain ambiguous in motion

Domestic violence here?
Dinner in the oven,
mother on the porch hangs musty
leaves on naked branches
while our voices, slowed but not stilled
by broccoli steam, collapse against kitchen walls
(dried flowers on the night stand,
unread books stiffly at their side)

In the third place we venture together, unseeming
apparitions of the future just out of reach
and in out thoughts we remain perfect strangers.

Spaces

I need some space, she said
to him, an architect from some Dewar's ad.
He winced: a barn?
A temple? A stage?
3 rings from a circus?
One ring would suffice, she grinned
remembering the Belmont "L" stop
hugged by sooty buildings with busted
windows, wisps from steam vents
and the large bright room that always held
dancers in bright colors, stretching, turning, and
leaning on each other.
Somehow, her memories held her in
place—her daydreams the solid thing
in the whirling empty space:
especially the South-side homemade raviolies from
her own Northside kitchen; and the warm pocket
between her thighs where she sometimes put
her cold hands these days.
Don't pull away, she ached to cry,
when she slipped her hands into the warm pool of his armpits,
and he did anyway.
I just need some space, she said.

Virginia Denise

Journey

She reaches across the distance
of an El platform,
extending her fingers
to the curly headed man
whose smile mocks
a Cheshire cat
Over the viaduct of noise
and dirt, she wants
to kiss his mouth
lightly,
to taste who he is.

She imagines bringing him
home for the night
and sharing the bottle of wine
she's kept chilled for months
And waltzing across the
bare wood floor
in an apricot slip
and camisole-
glass in hand.

They would make love
as strangers
with no questions,
and no
promises
stretched across the bed.

Louisa

I call you at 3 a.m.-
and your voice is dead
I want to breathe air into
your mouth
but my teeth are thick
and in the way
Your anger is consistent
and I touch it

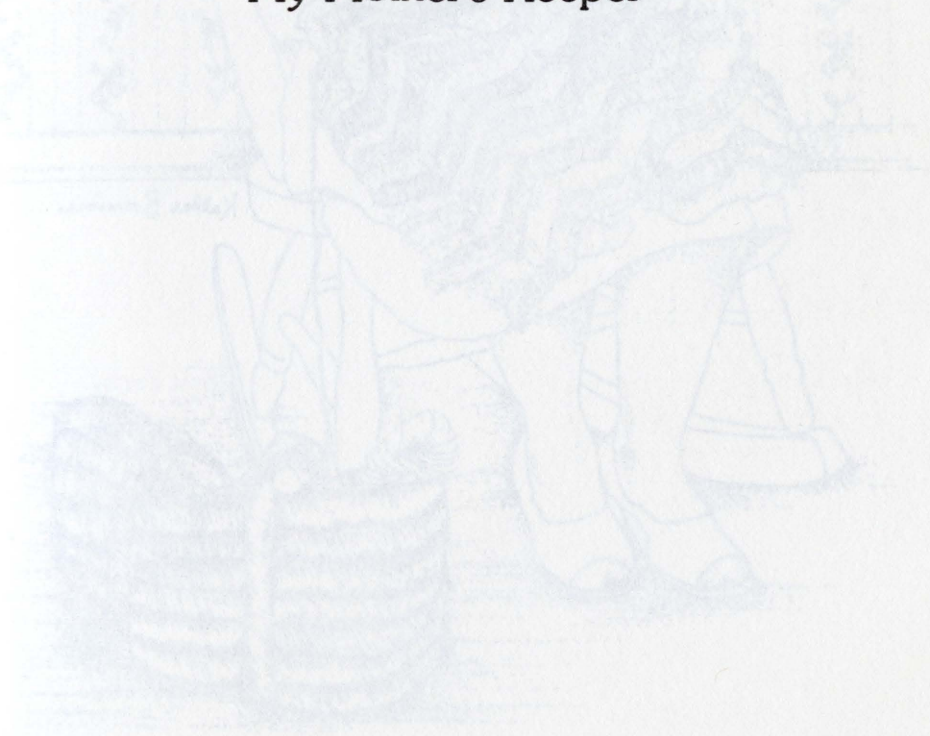
My bones are still restless
from our love-making,
your long blue-black hair must be
a mass of velvet tentacles
strewn with pieces of me
Remember when we first kissed
ourselves into promising there
would be no pain
and rules wouldn't exist
I will not make another journey
out into this half-eaten darkness
of evening on a tuesday
into your tongue of demands,
to find you caressing
someone I do not know.

Night

From my little-girl-big
double-bed, peering
into the darkness
at all the pieces of paper
and photos I have nailed
on the wall
My hands talk to my small
round breasts, smooth waist,
right into my hips
The fingers sure and familiar
my cold feet play with the old
worn and stained
teddy bears my brother won
at summer carnivals
The hair I haven't washed
for days clings to the
battered pink t.v. pillow
heavy and unpleasant
It is already tomorrow
and this is the fourth
sleep-eaten night
A tongue without purpose
asks for childhood reasons
I reek with hunger
while the junk and dust and money
for birthday earrings become thicker
like the pile of dirty clothes by the
bookcase grows deeper and quiet
threatening to mutate into
its own sure life-form
and swallow me whole.

R. Taylor

My Mother's Keeper





If I had it all to do over again, I wouldn't have kids. Oh, you know, you guys are alright, but I hate being a mother. When I got married, I didn't know what I was doing. I was 20 and no one left the house until they got married. Shit, right from my father to my husband. I hated my stepmother, I hated my father, I couldn't do shit while I lived at home...

What did I know about sex. No one ever brought it up at home. All my mother ever said about it was, "When your husband wants it, give it to him, even if you're in the middle of washing floors...drop everything" - and that was on the day I got married. Married, hah, that was another joke. We went down to city hall on our lunch hour. Your father had on a dirty old T-shirt and I had on some crappy green dress. When I came back to work, all the old biddies kept patting me on the hand and saying, "I understand". I was so stupid I didn't know what they were talking about - they thought I was pregnant.

We moved into the basement apartment of your grandma's three flat. I mean we couldn't afford shit. When we still hadn't had a baby after the first two years we were married, everyone thought something was wrong with us. And then you came along and you were everyone's "little angel". As soon as you could crawl, you started climbing the stairs up to grandma's. I don't think I saw you much during that time - between grandma and all of your aunts you had plenty of people taking care of you. Thank God - because I started having babies boom, boom, boom. Your three sisters were born and that was it. There I was, big and fat and hating every minute of it. What did I know? This was what I was supposed to do...Clean and cook and have babies...God, I've wasted my life. You kids - you kids have everything. You want something - you go and get it. I never had guts like that, I couldn't do anything...

You know, your father confessed to fooling around with Linda the other day. Seven years he's been fooling around with her. And here I was feeling so guilty for telling him about my friend in Australia and the doctor at work. You know, I started to write to him again, to that guy in Australia, I mean. Well, I didn't start it -he did. I get this phone call the other morning about ten o'clock and there he is telling me he loves me and that there's a ticket waiting at the airport for me and won't I please come back to him? Sure,

come back to him - so he can still nurse his wife and have a fling on the side. Shit - what am I supposed to do - drop everything and fly away for a few months? Especially now with your father fooling around with that little bitch. Oh she'd just love that. Well, the first time I went, your father put up with it - now I know why. And here I am feeling like shit. I should just go. Sure, I had his kids and stayed home all these years and what was he doing - fucking around town, one right after the next...I wondered why he wanted that vasectomy. And here I thought it was because I got pregnant when I was 42. What did I know?

Speaking of which, you know my period's late...you don't think one afternoon with the doctor could have...no...God, what am I going to do if...? Will you go with me? Jeez, maybe I should get one of those home pregnancy testers...

You know, you should find a good man. I know, I know, you've slept with lots of men and none of them are what you want. But how long are you gonna be...you know...don't say that word...you are not a lesbian...really, I mean, isn't this just some kind of stage you're going through? How about that nice David or Paul? You liked them...You know I worry about you. You never talk about things. I ask you what's going on and you say "nothing"...We're your family and you know you can always talk to us...

I'm going to kill your sister...she's in one of those moods again. Everytime we tell her she can't come down to see you, all she does is sit and pout...

I'm going to see my mother this week. God, I hate going up there...You know the woman didn't even raise me. What does she know. She lays there in that bed and tells me that she loves me and I'm too good. That's a crock of shit. Sure now she says that - where was she the past fifty years when I was alone. she was getting married over and over and feeding baby food to her dogs. Well, I guess I can't blame her. She didn't know how to be a mother. She got bounced from one foster home to another...I guess she just didn't know any better.

So are you and Ruth coming for Christmas? I know, I know, her mother's going to be with you and you don't like to make plans way ahead of time.

Well, just remember we're your family and we're always here...and you didn't come on Thanksgiving either...sure, you're so busy.

Well you know we love you and we're always here if you need us...sometimes it just seems like you don't need anyone...not even you're own mother...

Looking Up

When the airplane lands in the jungle and you are the only one there in the clearing, the station empty, weeds grown all the way over the tracks you know this

is progress, you never
used to land at all.
The plane crossing water always
had to turn back:

food forgotten, fuel supply
leaking, he didn't
love you in the least.
And you never told him how

one night the plane slid into the water and sank,
the two of you diving around each other: seals
in a mating dance, sleek skins grazing
on possibilities ripe as your cunt, your hand

in your sleep swimming
below the sheets.
How that dream
kept you alive for weeks.

Happy Days

Last night after "the Fonz"—who believe it or not
once played Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*—"That's Incredible"
informed Erin that hundreds of years ago Nostradamus

predicted the San Francisco
earthquake and fire. World War One. Hiroshima. More. So
today, because I know the value of books we look

together for data on
vampires, the very same
pictures a playmate once showed her.

Silent film heroines. Princess
stories (forgotten, my failure
the night she was three and I was the first star,

taught "Make a wish" and she did, turning
to me, "Mommy, is there a crown on my head?").
Library Nostradamus not in.

Some other believer beating us to it.
Finding out what to myself
I say (putting it

all the same on reserve)
we have
all the time in the world to learn.

Gathering Seaweed

These names like exotic diseases!
Alaria. Porphyra. Fucus. Or, Laminaria,
Latin exact with importance, look out
for the world's future food supply.

Make no mistake. No names
familiar as Jack-in-the-Pulpit, nothing
except for Lettuce, Sea Palm, Maiden's
Hair, the eye makes clear.

Kelp like a bull whip wouldn't be called that.
You've used it for jump ropes, something
to drag on the beach, does it look
edible? Safer than castor oil.

Nothing but Maiden's Hair carries land-locked in history
memory of those before us who found out not
to eat Amanita, the leaves of rhubarb, rhododendron,
fiddlehead ferns when they're grown.

Take it on faith: these scientists know
what they're up to, and I'm
still here. Last week alone and face to face
with time to experiment, I

stir-fried some kind of algae and with
onions, green peppers and soy sauce, almost
forgot it wasn't spinach or chard, forgot
the aftertaste of Porphyra chips that

clung to my tongue like limpets
or slug trails that don't wash off.
And tonight, disguised in a casserole,
Sea Palm chopped

thin as rings of black
olives together with hamburger, melted
cheddar, tomato sauce and oregano,
no one

at that potluck guessed
what they were eating, which should say
something, although not quite (I have to
admit) what I thought I wanted to hear.



After A Strong Wind

Other
sounds return
slowly, the way
the first
stars blink on
unannounced.

Horses snuffling
weeds in the meadow.
Warbler patching the thicket
with song.
Flies on the screen
desperate again to get in.

See? See? Invisible
in the scrub oaks below
Western Flycatcher clearing
the air before landing, again
and again the single
note like a spear: See?

Like thoughts catching up to you.
Things you have known
all along.

Lorri Jackson

Sleepwalk Revisited: A Poem For Sisters

Haunted by violins the trails
of Mozart's awakening provoke
a singularity of vision.
Burnt greyness of charcoal
eyes leavening to wire fence;
her fingers moving as fallen angels.

Even as skeletons pursue the gracefulness
of a dancer riding the subway home,
somnia visitations call for tears
caressing inward;
her sister shuffled the gravel path backward.

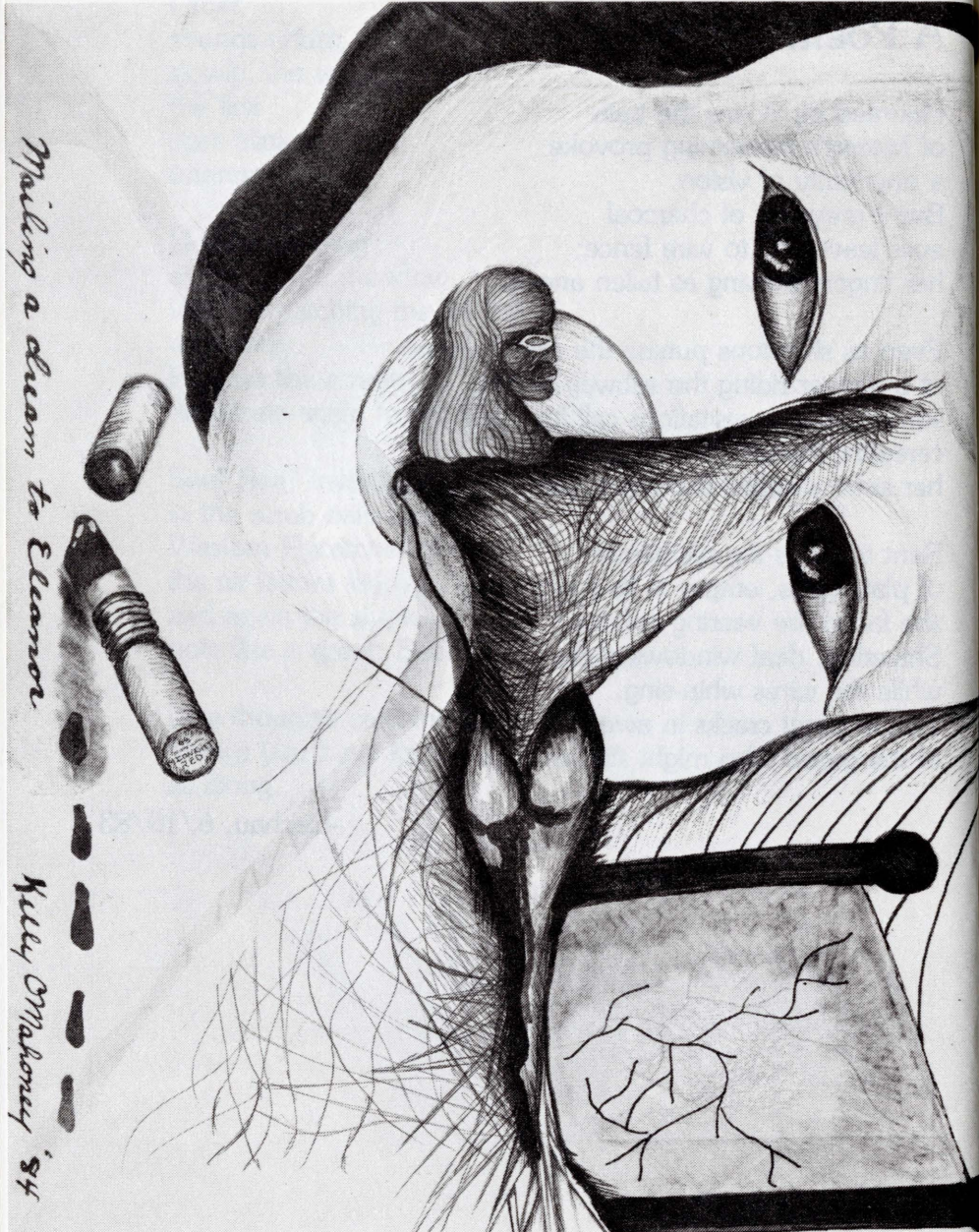
Bent towards the resistance
of plate glass, empty in its 8 pm nod,
she faced the veering column.
Shivering, deaf windows sleep
while the wires whip-sing,
for the turret cracks in awe,
of the guard who might still be there.

-Dachau, 6/10/83

Kelly OMahoney

On The Inside

Eleanor,
in your twilight of sixty,
I, at six, existed,
but not as a name or relative.
You sensed me eavesdropping
on the outside,
of your large white face,
could almost place me listening,
to the perfect arc of your eyes,
fixating on the mirror
in silent conversation.
The lipstick in your calm left hand,
the right,
curling the same hair for hours,
I knew you were aware of everything,
could almost touch the fear
when you realized you misplaced your mind
and looked for it in that empty black purse
where you used to keep it,
combed the satin lining covered with loose tobacco,
until you forgot what was missing.
I know what you saw in that mirror,
and Grandma,
I'm running like hell.



Making a dream to Eleanor

Kelly OMahoney '84

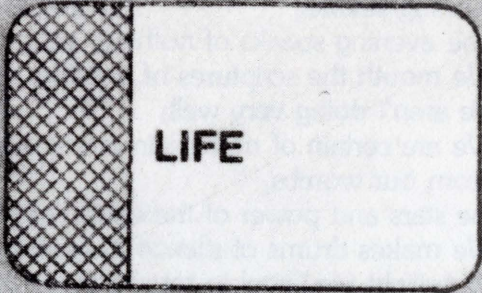
Adrian Saylor

Storm Approaching

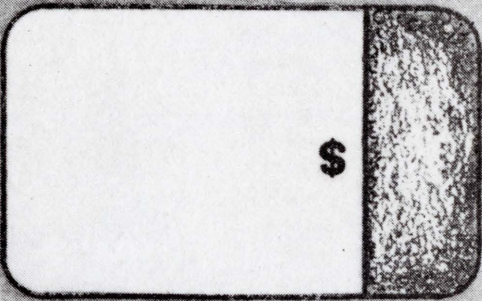
This thing that takes the day,
this darkness that rolls down like
a flock of crows, this hunger hour
hung on the day in afterthought.
Here,
I make a stand.
Here, I throw a voice out,
a fist, a song that is not sorrow.
This grey monster,
squatting on legs as tall as mountains,
this wind that hangs the heads of trees
as it passes overhead.
A promise, a promise,
to be carried, to be called in three voices;
The fourth wind is something we cannot know today.
The fourth wind is the one I turn to face,
the one that cuts my spirit free and frees the blood
to fall grey and warm upon this earth.
In that wind's light, I am the eagle.....

Saying The Ritual

We sit,
three women, dividing the day.
Our faces face our lives and other lives.
We can only hope to get beyond this point,
this slender hour of silent need.
We watch the day end in grey,
running streaks;
The evening speaks of nothing, yet.
We mouth the scriptures of another time,
we aren't doing very well;
We are certain of nothing in evening light
From our wombs,
the stars and power of the earth call;
We makes drums of silence to beat our hunger on.
At twilight we kneel to totems set in place by hands
older than our own.
We watch three perfect stars born
and know our place as always being here.....

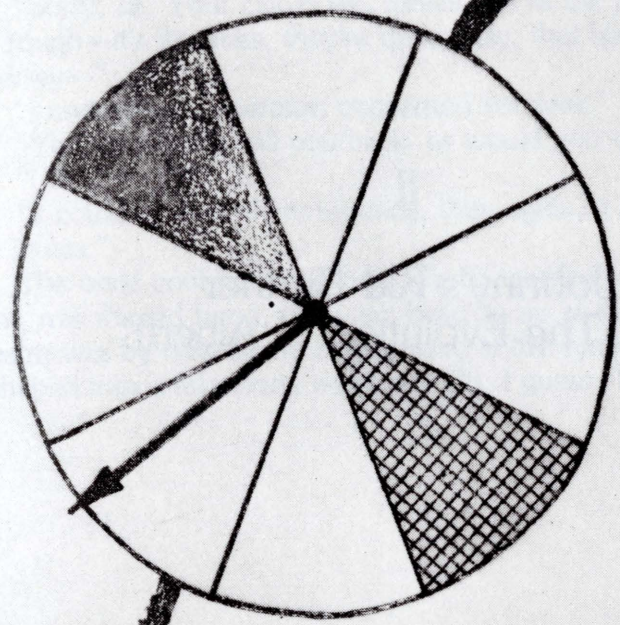


being a lang



being a lang

WHEEL OF



DEATH

Gary Byron

II

Johnny's Kid Brother
(or, The Evolution of Albert)

The operator was short and curt, her voice cool and unemotional; her supervisor would have been proud. "Sir—"

"Uh, yeah, right here."

"Sir, your call to a Mr. John Rebel..."

"No, operator—"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"That's Revell, miss, R-E-V-E-double L."

"...E-double L?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Sorry, sir. Your call to Mr. Revell will be the next to go through—it's the lines, they're quite busy; that blackout in New Jersey—"

"I understand, operator; concerned relatives."

"Yes, sir. Shall I call you back, or would you rather hold?"

"Uh..."

"It could be only thirty seconds, then again, it could be thirty minutes."

The once cool hunk of green plastic seemed to melt in Albert's fat, mis-shaped hand, his sweat building up in the caverns of his palm was by now surely eating away at the synthetic material shaped into a telephone receiver. "Uh, I guess I'll hold."

With his opposite hand, Johnny Revell's "kid brother," as he was always referred to, by friends and family alike, began fiddling with a book of matches, which moments before had sat innocently upon the bright, Howard Johnson's orange kitchen counter. After several seconds of picking his teeth with the corner of the matchbook cover ("You too can be a demolitions expert in your spare time"), Albert flipped it so far across the counter that it tumbled off the edge of the opposite side, a small cardboard click confirming that it had hit the floor below.

"Uh, sir..."

"Yes, operator?"

"I believe we've got a line now. One moment, please."

"Yes, ma'am."

Of course, ma'am, he thought, I'll wait; I've always waited; always waited for Johnny to outgrow his clothes, so that I could have the distinct honor of "doing the town" in worn-too-thin jeans and faded shirts.

"Nice white shirt, Rev—ell!"

"Yeah, really cool!"

"Nice pants, Albert!"

"Sir?"

There was no quick response this time.

"Sir? Your call, I can put it through now sir."

Still, no answer.

"Sir, it's ringing."

Reality came crashing back via the sickening ringing on the other end of the line—the type which sounds like trapped rats in the night. "Uh, yes, thank you."

The operator had already left the line.

Eight rings total, then: "Lo, Revell."

Albert's premeditated catchy opening remark dropped to the back of his quickly drying throat, and was soon swallowed.

"Hello?"

"Uh, Johnny?"

"No, he ain't here!"

"Uh, who—"

"This's Laury," the impatient voice edged in before Albert could finish.

Laury? Albert was almost positive that it was a man's voice.

"Laury?"

"Yeah. Say, this ain't Johnny's kid brother, it it?"

Albert's entire form cringed. "Yeah, it's Albert."

"Geez, I thought it was ya, Alby! Hey, Donna, it's Johnny's kid brother, he's callin' from..."

In the background Albert could faintly hear a woman's voice.

He wasn't exactly sure what she had said, but it sounded like,

"Who gives a shit?"

"Geez, ya still in—"

"New York."

"Yeh, geez, New York, that's right. Scumhole it is 'n all. Geez, how ya been?"

"Not too..."

"Geez, Al, I hate t' cut'cha but, geez, me an' Donna gotta run; we're pickin' Johnny up. He's down at his office 'n me an' Donna gotta pick him up, then head out for a bite. Geez, your brother's too dedicated, man, puttin' hours in on Saturday; geez, you'd think he owned the goddamn business!"

Albert's mind rushed back and forth. Donna? Was she Johnny's girlfriend, or this Laury's? That aside, he remembered who Laury was: Laurence Cohen, the friend Johnny used to race with (not racing, really, but dragging down suburban streets from half past two until the cops told them to get their asses home).

"Hey, Albert, great talkin' t'ya. Gotta run, but I'll tell Johnny ya called an' all. Hey, Donna, wan'na grab the pack?"

"Laury?" Albert jumped in quickly before Cohen could cut him off.

"Yeah, Alb?"

"Uh..."

"Hey, if it's not in there, it's upstairs—I think! I don't know, you live here with him, not me! Sorry, Alb, what'cha say?"

Albert's memory cleared a little more. Donna. Jesus, not Donna Selby, the girl he had had a crush on in high school and watched drift toward, of all upperclassmen, his brother Johnny. Johnny, who must have seen the pain in Albert's eyes as Albert watched the pair cuddling in the family room, Albert forced to sit and watch along with mom and dad because, "She's your brother's guest, and it's impolite to run off after dinner!" Albert never had anywhere to run off to, only a reason.

"Alby, ya there?"

"Huh?"

"Yeah, hon, just a sec; got the car keys? Oh, I got 'em, never mind. Alby?"

"Yeah—"

"Hey, sorry kid, but I gotta..."

"Just tell Johnny that I..."

The click on the other end, followed by the obnoxious buzzing of the renewed dial-tone, forced Albert to pull the receiver from his ear, not ready to redeposit it upon its cradle, but only to stop its incessant purring.

Would Johnny ever know, he wondered, how much Albert hated and resented him? Or was he blind as their parents had been? His Psych course had taught him all about "sibling rivalry," but Albert knew that that did not exist here. There was never any contest. Johnny would pick up the girls, the acclaim, the "kudos" and the love; and Albert, if he remembered,

would pick up the fallen book of matches, but never see them lit; he never smoked, he only smouldered, quickly doused.

Three days had passed since Albert's unsuccessful call to his brother. In that short time he had somehow managed to run through his mind, hundreds of times, the way the whole conversation could, or should, have gone, had things been different. He smiled brightly as he imagined the too-late-to-be-possible scenario.

"Laury, baby?"

"Yeah. Hey, that you, Alby?"

"In person, sweetheart. How's it goin', buddy?"

"Oh, not too bad, not too bad. Hey, how're things goin' in the 'big apple'?"

"Dynamite, my friend, can't be nothin' less for ol' Albert Revell!"

"Great. Any new 'scores' lately? Weren't you seeing a rockette?"

"Yeah, well, that sorta fell through—"

"Geez, too bad, man."

"Hey, no problem; I'm seeing this terrific little babe from Brooklyn now."

"Oh yeah? Nice lookin'?"

"Does 'an ass that never quits' mean anything to ya, Laur?"

"Cheez."

"Enough B.S.; Johnny around?"

"No, man, ya just missed him; he went out to dinner with Donna."

"Donna *Selby*?"

"In the flesh."

"Say, how's she doin'?"

"Not bad, but ever since ya dropped her, she's been kinda low—Johnny's nice, but he ain't no Albert, that's all she says."

"Yeah, well..."

"Why did ya drop her, anyway?"

"Christ, Laur, the woman was insatiable."

"C'mon."

"I mean, twelve times a day is my limit."

"Twel—"

"I'm only human."

"Cheez, man, you're a real humanitarian.."

"So true, so true."

"Listen, I gotta run. Monica's pickin' me up and parking's kinda shitty around here, so..."

"No problem—"

"I'll leave Johnny a message. Anything important,

or—?”

“Just say that I called. There’s no hurry. By the way, how’s Monica these days?”

“Don’t rub it in, pal; like Donna and half the former female student body of Morris High...”

“It’s in my blood.”

“Yer a reg’lar heartbreak kid, Albert. Gotta go; take it easy.”

“Yeah, take care.”

Without realizing it, Albert had been slowly emptying the contents of his pitcher of ice-cold grape Kool Aid into his lap, missing his target-glass by several inches. “Geez, that’s cold!” he finally said. He quickly turned to the end table at his side, no paper towels, only the phone, which, almost on cue, began crying out in its warped ring: An-swe-er me-ee, Al-be-er-rt!

He suffered through two full rings, then, finally, picked the receiver off its cradle. I wonder if anyone’s ever gotten a pneumonia from frozen testicles, he wondered. His endless imagination found no place in reality, though: “H-h’lo?”

“Al!”

It was good ol’ Johnny.

“Hey, I thought you didn’t get my mess—”

It was no use, though, for Albert attempting to form a dialogue; Johnny’s voice was a recording.

“Al, listen, I’m flying into New York Wednesday and

thought I’d drop by. Laur said you called, so I figured ya probably just got to missing your big brother...”

Only here, when his antagonist couldn’t argue, could Albert manage to spit out some snappy comebacks.

“Oh, yeah, you and the plague...”

“So toss some sheets on the ol’ convertible and, if you’re real nice, I’ll spend a coupla nights at your place...”

“I don’t know, Johnny, it’s putting Nancy and Ron out in the snow...”

“If it’s an inconvenience, tough shit, man! See ya Wednesday.”

When the door flew open, Johnny stood smiling amidst several small pieces of luggage. “Al!” his voice was bright, exuberant.

“Johnny.” Albert’s was soft, restrained, resentful. “How come so much luggage, Johnny?”

“It, uh, isn’t just me—”

Quickly, a superbly proportioned female figure took her place alongside Johnny.

Donna Selby!

“Al, you remember Donna, don’t you?”

“I...”

“Hello Albert,” interrupted Donna, only to be polite.

"H-hi."

"You two were in the same grade, weren't you?"

"Yes," Albert replied, almost inaudibly.

"I don't think so," pondered Donna.

"Weren't you, Albert?"

"Maybe. I dunno."

"Well, that's all history. What say you invite these two weary travelers in, huh?"

"Oh, yeah; uh, lem'me give you a hand with—"

Unintentionally, Albert brushed up against Donna's bare shoulder. He froze. "I-I'm sorry, I didn't..."

Johnny, already setting a suitcase atop a dusty, old bureau, called back. "What'cha say, Al?"

Albert turned to answer the question, then quickly returned his gaze to Donna.

Donna blinked. "What?"

"I guess I'm clumsy."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry."

Donna's gaze became more perplexed. "For what?"

"B-bumping into you."

Donna blinked again. "Oh. When?"

Suddenly, Albert could feel his stomach turning loop-de-loops.

Johnny reappeared in the doorway. "C'mon, people, let's get a move on!"

As Albert lugged in the remaining baggage, Johnny checked out the apartment. "Hey, not too bad. Nice place, dont'cha think, hon?"

Donna's attention was drawn to a poster of Charlie Brown scotch-taped to the side of a tall bookcase: "When you're really lonely the peanut butter sticks to the roof of your mouth."

"Hon?"

"Oh, yeah, real nice."

Johnny twitched his nose. "Hey, Al, what's that smell?"

"Oh, uh, 'scuse me." Albert stumbled out of the livingroom to his washroom. He had totally forgotten about throwing out the cat litter, he himself having become so accustomed to the odor that he didn't think about it. He picked up the pan, jerked it to and fro, wondering where he should dump its contents, then decided that, since the cat had died two weeks before, he might as well throw out the entire mess.

He ran past the livingroom, into the kitchen and out the backdoor, dumping everything into the stained green plastic garbage can on the enclosed porch. He grabbed a can of Glade off a storage shelf and frantically sprayed in a circle around himself.

When he returned to the livingroom, Albert found himself interrupting his guests' intimate embrace. "Uh—"

They quickly broke their huddle, contemptuous Johnny undaunted, Donna somewhat embarrassed, but, moreso, angered at the intrusion. "Oh, say, you don't mind if we share the couch, do you?"

Albert scratched at his dry, chapped lips. "No, I guess not. Doesn't, uh, Donna mind sleeping in a strange bed, though?"

Johnny laughed. Donna only looked confused. "No, Al, not me and you, me an' Donna wanna share the couch—"

"Oh, I, uh, guess I wasn't thinking. I just thought she would feel funny having to be out here, getting undressed an' all."

Johnny began tossing the cushions from the couch, stopping only to pat Donna's behind. "Oh, she's not shy. Besides, you'll probably spend most of the time in your room; I mean, except for the kitchen, ya probably hardly ever use the rest of this place, huh?"

Albert relented. "Yeah, sure. I guess. Okay."

With that, Johnny pulled open the sofa-bed, bounced onto it, pulling Donna down with him, wrapping his confident arms around her, her empty blue eyes not really registering anything.

Johnny smiled widely. "We're gonna have a great time, aren't we, kids?"

Donna pursed her lips into a benign smile.

Albert stood, vainly attempting to cast his gaze elsewhere—the broken TV set, anything. He wanted to see anything, anything but

Johnny and Donna Selby having fun on his sofa-bed.

"Well," he cleared his throat, "I guess I'll, uh, go to my, uh, room."

"No, don't go!"

Albert quickly turned around. "Huh?"

It was Donna. Johnny was busy going through his toiletry kit.

"Why not?"

"Oh, Albert, I've always loved you. Don't go, please."

"But, Johnny—" Albert feebly pointed toward her erstwhile companion.

"He knows."

"He does?"

"He's always looked up to you, Al."

"He has?"

"Sure, Come here, I want you to—"

Johnny's voice yelled from the livingroom: "Hey, kill the radio in there!"

Albert thought, yeah, sure. Sure, Johnny; sure, Donna. He set the alarm for seven and closed his eyes. Sure.

At seven exactly, Albert's alarm started its routine early morning revalry of high-pitched squeals.

Only precise thing in my whole, damn life, Albert thought, as he began the somewhat exhilarating task of forcing his two hundred-

eighty pounds into an upright position, and, finally, out of bed altogether.

Damn! he thought, it gets harder and harder everyday.

Suddenly, his radio began blaring out some noxious bubblegum punk tune: "Oh yeah, break my face, break it good; make it hurt, like it should..."

From the livingroom, Johnny's perverted voice began its castigation of Albert's daily ritual. "Fer crissakes, Al! Turn it down, it's only—oh, geez!—only five after seven! Some of us wanna get a little extra sleep!"

A little extra sleep, ey? thought Albert. I'll give you a little extra sleep, courtesy of Uncle Bob's gun and ammo shop....

"Hey, Al, as long as ya woke everyone up, how 'bout putting on some coffee?"

Oh, sure, Johnny. And how 'bout if I fry you up some eggs, and Donna probably wants some fresh-squeezed orange juice, and hot danish....

"Oh, yeah, an' while yer at it, fry me up a coupla eggs and—wha?—oh, Donna has a taste for some nice, fresh-squeezed orange juice; an' d'ya still get that good danish from Pennican's Bakery?"

A simple revolver, for a simple man, Albert thought tensly. How would he do it, though, he wondered. Would he wait until he could get Johnny alone, or would he allow Donna to witness the entire

event? And, if she dare show disapproval, and would not consent to run off with him, Albert rationalized, he would have to kill her, too.

God! his mind cried; what the hell was the matter with him? This was real life.

"Hey, Al! Where d'ya put the bread?"

It was Johnny. How had he made it to the store and back already?

"We're out of it—that's why you went shopping, remember?"

"Christ, Al, I know that! But now I'm putting everything away, an' I wanna know where to put the goddamn bread! Holy christ, try to do a guy a favor—"

Favor? Who the hell does he think he's kidding? wondered Albert. It was he and Donna who had eaten most of the "goddamn bread."

Albert quickly returned the revolver to its hiding-place, beneath the T-shirts in the bottom drawer of his bureau. It was a lot heavier than he had imagined it would be.

"Albert, can'tcha at least come in here and give us a hand? Geez, you're so goddamn lazy!"

When Albert entered the kitchen, he was delighted to see Johnny fumbling with an arm-ful of soup cans, Donna, at his side, doing her inept best to direct him to the pantry.

"Right, Johnny."

Attagirl, Donna!

"No...left!"

Show him the way, hon!

"A little farther—"

Abruptly, Johnny released his hold on all twelve cans, all promptly crashing to the floor, leaving a pile of dented tin cylinders.

"Christ, Albert, you do it! It's your goddamn food; the least you can do is put it away! C'mon, Donna, we're going out for some lunch."

Donna's face reflected her naive stupidity (the stupidity Albert loved). "But, Johnny, we just bought all this food..."

"Yeah, and Albert'll probably have it polished off by dinner. C'mon, I wanna get out'ta here; it stinks!"

"Yes, Johnny."

Yes, Johnny; no, Johnny—the entire extent of her upper-level vocabulary, Albert concluded. Scrub the floor, Donna; yes, Johnny. Do the wash, Donna; yes, Johnny. Water the plants, Donna; yes, Johnny...and on down the line. What a terrific rapore, Albert thought; he's the ventriloquist, she's the dummy.

As the pair left, Albert threw in a "See ya later" for good merit.

"We'll see," Johnny answered, not even turning around to look at Albert. "We may end up at the Holiday Inn."

Albert smiled. "What about your luggage?" He already knew the

answer.

"We'll send for it."

Johnny only knew such pat answers.

"Very good, sir," Albert chuckled.

"Smart-ass," Johnny mumbled under his breath.

At lunch, Johnny and Donna joked back and forth about Albert. Johnny was really doing most of the critical commentary, Donna sitting obligingly, every son often throwing in her two centsworth of what "an absurd loser" Albert was—at least, she knew that that was what Johnny wanted to hear.

Were Albert to overhear the conversation, he would no doubt assure himself that Donna was merely patronizing Johnny's contemptuous wit, and she could probably more so identify with Albert, in that she could understand his predicament, even if she couldn't specifically comprehend his particular problems.

Sure, Albert would say. Sure.

This would be the point, within Albert's mind, when he would come swinging through the restaurant on a drapery cord, ala Robin Hood or some other Romantic hero, to save the Maid Donna from a fate worse than death: Spending the rest of her life serving this obnoxious, egotistical—

—son of a bitch, Albert thought to himself as he lay in bed, still fiddling with his key to freedom, cocking, aiming it, and releasing the trigger, astonishing himself at the ease of the entire task. The hardest part, he concluded, would be removing the blood stains from the carpet.

Wait! he thought, I'll just do it in the kitchen, then I only have to mop it up. The advantages of a no-wax solarium floor, he smiled.

When he finally confronted Johnny, Albert felt more confident than he ever had before in his life. Standing in the shadows, Johnny had not yet even noticed the poised weapon.

"Where's Donna?" Albert asked, sweat encircling his fleshy red jowls.

Johnny laughed as he began hanging up his trenchcoat. "The bitch," he chuckled amusedly to himself, "she got pissed off at me; asid I made a scene at the restaurant..."

"That ain't nice, Johnny."

Johnny squinted, trying to make out Albert's large form enveloped almost completely in shadow—like a first quarter moon. "Making a scene?"

"No, what you called her." She is a bitch, Albert thought, but a prick like you doesn't have a right to decide and bestow the honor of that title. Lets call her a bitch-goddess, it's so much nicer—and literate.

"Who?"

"Donna, you ignorant son of a bitch!"

"What the hell is that any of your business?"

The wrath of Albert had been released. "Oh, none of my business; right Johnny! You're staying in my home, screwing your girlfriend, on my couch—"

Johnny slammed the closet door and began moving toward Albert. "Hey, relax, man. What'cha raggin' me for, anyway? Did I ever do ya wrong, hugh?"

Albert took careful aim. Go for the head, he decided. The damag'll be minimal—but, oh, what the hell, lets get literal: It'll kill'm!

"What the fuck ya got there, man?"

Albert came out of the shadows—the full moon—keeping his aim steady. "I suppose, in a way, you both deserve each other, but you deserve this much more..."

Johnny smiled. "Still playing with toys, hugh? Put that stupid thing down, an' we'll send out for some Chinese—"

Before he could finish, Albert had pulled the trigger. That wasn't as easy as he had predetermined it would be, but his aim was steadier than he had even hoped it could be.

Right on target, he smiled, bile dribbling from his gnarled lips, as he watched the upper part of Johnny's head rip from the force of the bullet, part of his brains and skull exiting from the rear.

"Know something?" Johnny droned, like a record on the wrong speed, "You're weird, man."

Much to Albert's delight, his neighbors had acted their don't-give-a-damn New Yorker selves. No muss, no fuss, he thought.

After scrubbing the livingroom carpet with warm water and Bon Ami, there were no longer any signs of the grim—but necessary, he told himself over and over—task. No way was I gonna wait to get him in the kitchen, Albert resigned; it was that moment—or never.

Johnny's body now lay scrunched up inside several layers of thirty-gallon size Hefty bags, which Albert then had stuffed into an old, oversized duffle bag.

Dead weight, he thought, sweat pouring off him; what a pain-in-the-ass! In death as in life. The entire bundle was then dragged down five flights of stairs—Albert stopping at each landing to allow his fits of wheezing to pass—and out to the trash bins, where Albert, finally, managed to lift "good ol' Johnny" up and into one of the several garbage-filled, rat infested steel dumpsters. Your brudder sleeps wit duh frozen pizza scraps! Albert joked to himself and the hungry, frenzied rodents.

Once back in his apartment, Albert plopped himself down on the closed-up sofa and attempted to recover from all his spent energy—more energy than he had ever expended for anything before. He looked at his watch nervously when the doorbuzzer sounded. Quarter past one.

After depressing the door-release, he leaned,

slightly nauseous, against the wall, awaiting his unknown visitor. The knock at the door brought him out of the stupor he had begun sinking into. He was somewhat delighted to find that it was Donna, making her return engagement.

"Oh, Albert, is Johnny here?"

Albert struggled to cough up some words—now that he had the confidence, all he needed was the gift of speech. "N-no, he's not; wasn't he with you?"

Donna marched in, uninvited, her slightly frost-covered red face contorted into an expression somewhere between remorse and satisfaction. "Oh, Albert, how do people let themselves get so fucked up?"

"What?"

She threw herself into a corner of the convertible, pulling her knees up to her diminutive chin. "Oh, Albert, I remembered you. People like you always think people like me have no recollection of people like you. I remember a strange, chubby kid with sad eyes staring at Johnny and me when we used to make out in your den."

"You do?"

"Uh-huh. I'm not gonna lie to you, Albert; you're, you're, uh...bizarre."

"Bizarre?" Albert's eyes bulged.

"Yeah. I mean, I suppose you're an all right guy an' all, but you can understand why people like your brother and me usually stick t'gether, can't you?"

"Beautiful people go with beautiful people," Albert announced, admitting the perverse pecking order.

"Yeah, I guess. But then, now, like this afternoon, Johnny was such a fuckin' idiot..."

"I know."

"What?"

Albert caught himself, turning it into an act of consolation. "Uh, he always acts like that." Poor, poor bitch—I mean baby, he thought.

"Yeah, I guess you're right, only I never saw it before. Well, I got up and walked out on him. Went to visit a girlfriend of mine in Manhattan; well, geez, Al, maybe you're not such a bad guy—especially compared to Johnny."

"Yeah, well..."

"I think I'm through with him."

"You are?"

"Mm-hmm. I don't even want to face him again."

"Y-you don't?" Albert asked, surmising that she had probably announced this so many times before, yet hoping that this time she really meant it.

"He isn't here, is he?"

"No, he never came back."

"Good. I'll pack and be gone before he even gets back."

Donna pulled herself up and turned her head from side to side, surveying the room. "Kinda—eery in here for some reason."

"It's two in the morning."

"Yeah, I guess that's it. Where's my luggage?"

Albert pointed to the closet across the room. "In there."

Donna, hands on her hips, peered down at Albert, who now reclined casually—for him—in the opposite corner of the couch.

"There's something different about you."

Albert smiled slyly. "There is?"

"Yeah. You're, uh—different."

Albert sat up and reached for Donna's hand, gently pulling her down to her knees in front of him. "I am different. Johnny called me earlier and said he was flying back to Boston. Didn't even wanna come back for the luggage—or you."

Donna blinked, her eyes for the first time registering some emotion. "Oh, Albert, I don't know what I'm gonna do now. I've gotta find a new place to settle down, find a place to live..."

"You can move in here with me." Albert froze for a moment. Who the heck do you think you are, Don Juan? he questioned himself, finally answering: Fuckin' right!

Donna pulled her hand from Albert's and stood up. "Oh, Albert, that's sweet, but we have t'be realistic..."

Albert pulled himself up next to Donna, whipping his glasses off, momentarily losing his bearings. "If I lost a lot of weight, I really wouldn't look too bad."

"Then, how come you never lost it before?"
"I never had an incentive before. A realistic incentive...or, at least, one that seemed real."

"Oh, Albert, I..."

"Donna, I loved you ten years ago (even if you were a bitch, he thought), and I still love you. I've waited—just like in the goddamn movies."

"Albert, I..."

He replaced his glasses, almost missing his eyes, placing his hands lightly upon Donna's fur-covered shoulder, pulling her coat down off her, letting it drop to the floor, a pile of white and tan dead rabbit.

She stared deeply into Albert's eyes which were slightly enlarged through his lenses. "You're really a romantic guy, aren't you?" she almost laughed, not wanting to.

Albert laughed. "Yeah—" he stopped himself. Christ, don't say "baby," you ain't Johnny.

Donna drew close to him, resting her head on his bulky shoulder, her nose twitching from the odor of scouring cleanser and dead flesh.

And, he added, you ain't "Johnny's kid brother," either.

Maybe, he would question himself later, you didn't even have to kill Johnny after all. Ah, he would finally conclude though, there is humanity to think of, too.

And he would laugh.

A Tender Spot A Chapbook

Transgressions 1979-1981

but we two had our
 own mischief—
 the gull under the black veil
 the gull mothers weigh them
 the gull of their children
 of dead husbands, of
 growing old, the gull of our
 maritimed
 (God did choose a mother
 All these black sheeted ghosts ask
 a heaven,
 that place in the cross
 they'll tag with their snow and
 white yams
 for the black veil to be lifted
 for the ritual gull of living
 to be wrapped in a ritual
 and buried.

You Can Hear Me Albert DeGenova

When I was six
 ‘What did you say?’
Sixteen years later
 ‘We can’t hear you in the back!’

Damn their deaf ears!
I’m yelling at the top of my voice—

but only you hear me
 you sit close
and you whisper too.

*Translating the
A Chapbook*

Sinners My Father's Tompore

On Good Friday
at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe
old women
(years marked by
the cracks in their foreheads,
one face is as the other
as if age scraped facial features
into a photo album and left behind a
forever skeletal frown)
walk on their knees
across the long plaza
up the church stairs
and to the altar
of the benevolent God
who blesses their bleeding knees
and they, dressed in
black, look like angels of Purgatory
repenting for sins
(not their own sins but
sins nonetheless)—
the guilt under the black veils
the guilt mothers taught them,
the guilt of their children,
of dead husbands, of
growing old, the guilt of lost
maidenhood
(God did choose a maiden).
All these black sheeted ghosts ask
is heaven,
that place in the clouds,
they’ll pay with their knees and
arthritic joints
for the black veil to be lifted,
for the sinful guilt of living
to be wrapped in a shroud
and buried.

My Father's Trombone

Piece by piece, my small hands
resurrected golden tubing
from its tattered case and
carefully fitted together
the most beautiful thing
I'd ever seen.

In the bell I could see myself
turning red, drowning in the
huge mouthpiece.

I wanted desperately to play
that wonderful horn.

My father saw it in my
careful hands and smiled.

By my time he had a new profession.

I saw him play it only once
down in the basement—

from the top of the stairs
crouching, hiding as if

I'd snuck past an usher

I heard his deep song.

The song he never wanted
me to hear,

the song of dulling brass
and a mildewed case.

Two

Winter down covers the street,
white cubist sculptures of trees stand thinking,
and bush fingers hold snow like silent ping pong balls—
My breath blurs this scene as
I watch for your dark figure
down the spotted sidewalk.

Cold, until I see you
running and sliding
(almost falling) toward me—
we sip hot almond chocolate
together
counting the snowflakes on our window
and looking for the two that are alike

My Night In Funland

Strapped to my seat
like a condemned man
awaiting high voltage sleep,
tears cut wet trenches
to my ears
as I watch blurred images
of buildings and trees
turning summersaults
and people in rainbow cages
suspended from cables
like a clown's laundry out to dry,
spiralling down
 down
 down
among screams and lights
and steel scaffolding
then snapped to a dead
 stop
I smell cotton candy cries
for more,
while hundreds of cheeseburger churning
 cola burners

(with anxious smiles)
wait in line an hour to be
Osterized by the Giant Rotor

The Day You Left

Today the Illinois Central came
crashing through my fireplace
shaking the mantle 'til
the mantle clock launched black hands
like Cupid's arrows
into my eyes.
I cried egg-white tears
that stuck to my cheeks—
then I threw the cracked shells
at that damned loco
 motive
which carried you away.

The Petrillo Band Shell at 6 a.m.

Just last night
seventy-odd musicians
(bows slicing, drums
booming, trumpets blating,
and flutes whispering)
held symphonies like balloons
and let them fly,
filling the lakefront part with color

but now, in the
hazy Chicago sunrise
hundreds of chairs in
domino rows
face a deserted band shell
where seventy-odd empty
chairs are silent.

In this morning quiet
when no one is here to see,
the wind
finds its way from the lake
through trees, across the grassy field
winding between the legs of all
those empty chairs—

the band shell echoing
the wind's silent music.

Claw Hold

I bring your aspirin.
You lie there bleeding
(the monthly sacrifice
to the unborn god)
cramped—
the famous lady wrestler
puts the claw hold to your gut.
You pound your stomach
your red curse undaunted
plays between your legs
way up inside
relentless, merciless bloody hand
poking a finger (like no lover)
and grabbing
 pulling
pulling your inside out—
you flush yourself away
the rushing water is red
your hair that only we know holds red
five days of red
and one drop on the floor of red
I clean it
and bring you another aspirin.

Let Them Fly

Five children of graduated sizes
like a canister set
board the bus in ascending order.
Testing the seats for those
which are just right and
after some elbowing maneuvers
they finally settle in
whispering
keeping their hissed secrets from
the grown-ups
and giggling behind
pink gummed smiles.
They don't know fatigue.
Their unfurrowed foreheads have yet
to know the pain of
blood pounding headaches,
frustration beating on the dark inner walls
of the cranial prison.
They don't know ambition.

Peter Pan, I'm tired
you're too late for me.
Take those giggling five
teach them to fly.

Ash Wednesday

"Remember Man"

Today people walk the streets with
dirt smeared on their foreheads
(20th century sack-cloth)
marking the Cath-O-Lics,
and McDonalds sells 3 billion
Filet-O-Fish.

"From Ashes"

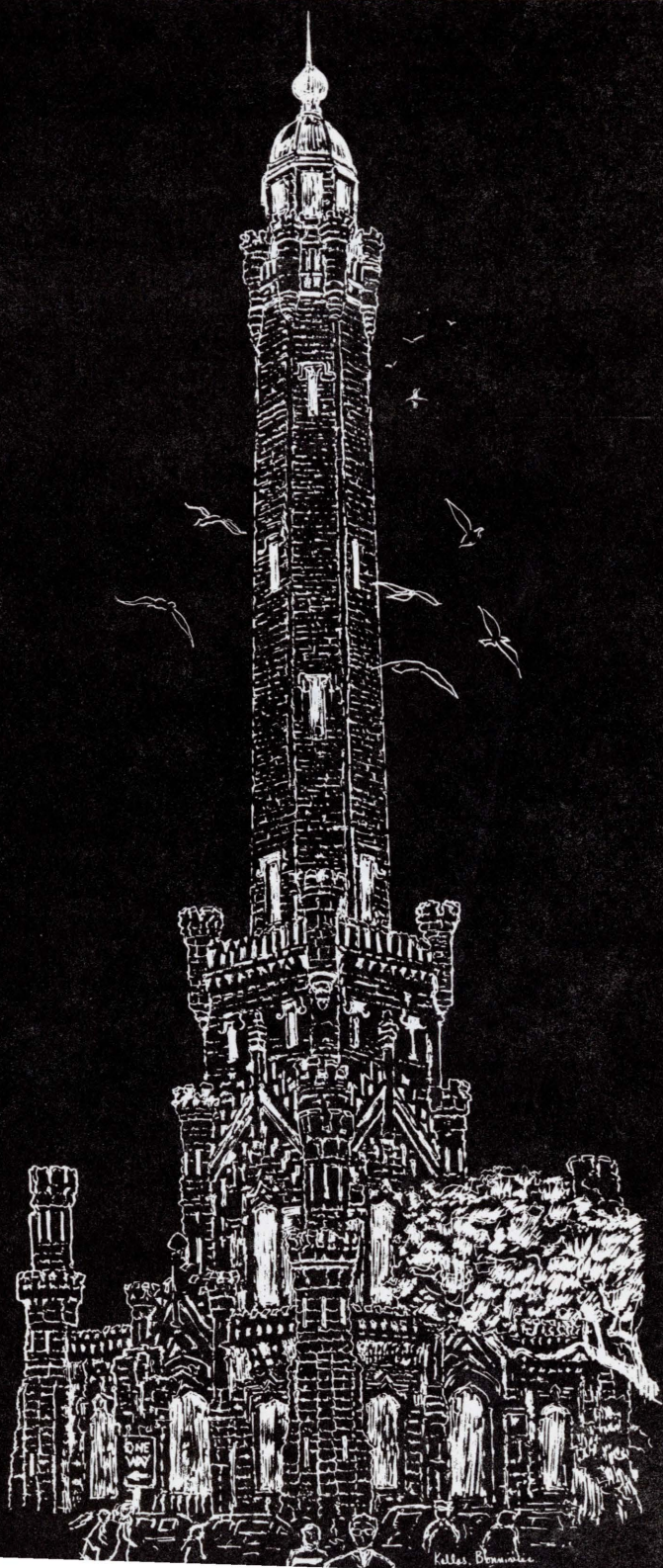
Last night the priests of the world
smoked liked winter chimneys
to supply enough ashes
for the festival.

"You Have Come"

Like fans waiting for souvenir tee-shirts
the pious line up to receive
their souvenir thumb-print.

The priest mumbles to himself
the words (not wanting to spread it around)—
the only Truth those pious fans
with black holes in the front of their heads
will ever know.

"To Ashes You Shall Return"



A Tender Spot

An Indian sits frozen
in Chicago's winter,
turning green upon a greener horse.
Proud and strong
this Indian draws an invisible arrow
on an invisible bow
(the sculptor must have forgot).

That chisel wielding artisan
remembered the horse's balls
but forgot men have balls too—
poor Indian sitting naked on his horse.
(Now I know why he doesn't move.)

The sculptor must have forgot
even strong men have a tender spot.

I Fall Asleep

We pulled up the blanket
laughing about "eggs-essentialism" being
a new recipe for scrambled eggs,
then I told you of an image in Paula's poetry
about you sleeping with your nose in my ear,
we whispered our goodnights
your arm around me.
Hearing your slow, even breaths
I know you're asleep.

Turning, careful not to wake you
I stare owl-eyed at the only light—
red numbers
love is this moment
12:47 AM / 5-3-79,
then slowly, very slowly.....

Warm Fingers

Winter wasn't made for cities
where screaming,
sparking plows and
scraping shovels and
steaming rubber tires
burn snow,
where stiff booted feet trample
white waves of the motionless sea
into cold, cold flatness.

Winter is for children and poets
with warm fingers touching
mornings and twilights
soundproofed in white carpet—
they walk hand in wing
with the last sparrow
and no one
 not even the wind
can whisper a word

Song Of My Father

He was 26 years into the maze
when I interrupted
and for awhile he
was close by to take pictures.
Our paths ran farther
and farther apart until
we crossed only
when I needed money.
No matter how loud
I pounded the walls
of the maze
(always hoping for his attention)
he was too far away to hear.
I needed hints
to the solution
but he never gave them,
never explained
wet dreams, or how to shave—
now I am 26
we are acquaintances.

Cruelty In Grade School

Orange and black butterfly,
wings outstretched and
pinned to a white posterboard
gentle creature, in love with flowers
crucified for its innocence.
And this was Science class.

Father John taught us The Passion
with a holy card—
pictured was a man
his butchered body held together by a loincloth.
I never kept that nightmare holy card.
And this was Religion class.

“An eye for an eye” reads the Old Testament,
whose eye had that mutilated man taken,
when did he hold a Roman flogging whip?
He loved flowers.

Some kid plucked the butterfly's legs.

Ghost Story

Fog has torn off the top of
the postcard skyline—
I walk alone.
Under amber streetlights
passing headlights cause unfocused shadows to move,
ghostlike.
In the haunting midnight quiet my mind stumbles
through the tangled plot of itself.

memories move across my vision in stiff words—

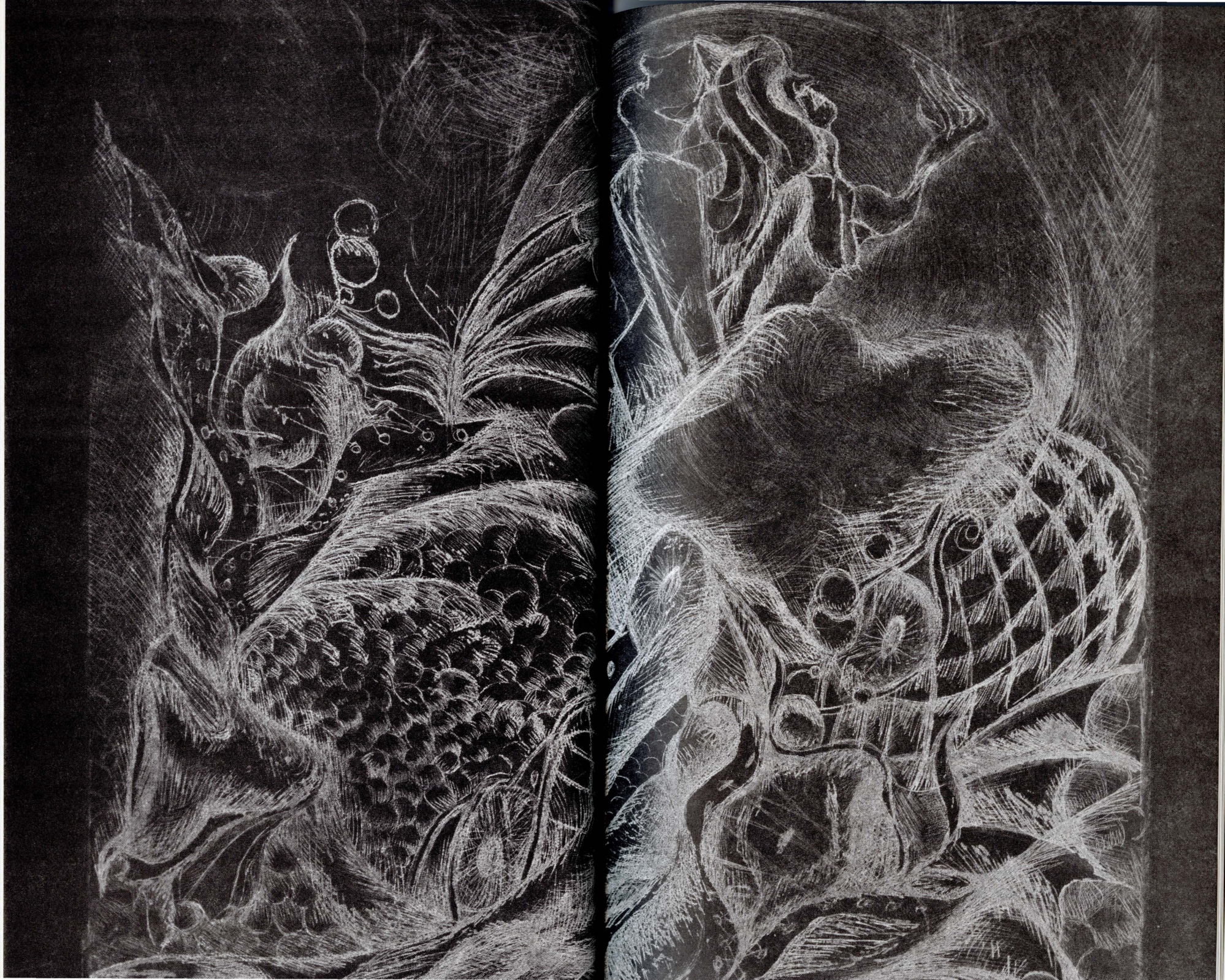
page after page of a dog-eared script

I search for that word,
that scene, that time—
that was
(is) me

I'm startled by my own shadow.

the words fade in a spray of stars,
like fireworks falling from a dark night sky.

An End In Seven Parts



1. Trying Is The Hard Part

This, the summer of our discontent,
was no summer
a year of three seasons.
There is a blind spot
as though the movie of our lives
had malfunctioned
shut off, we're cheated
we miss that part
that three months
that was but was not
happened but was unknown.
Someone, something
has stolen three pages from our scrapbook.
I grasp at smokey memories
gone at the sweep of my hand.
What I saw as us
swimming late at night
touching, kissing
walking in the morning
was not us
but characters in a tragedy of errors
for three months
we were deception
living lies of three-cornered love.
Reality was waiting at the window
(our apartment black
the street light, the ticking clock
my fingers drumming the windowsill)
watching for you, knowing
this was real, no deception
you with him, me alone.
The hand of your love
ripping my gut to strips of bleeding meat—
deception again when you arrive.
You lied away my summer
our summer.
Now, the lies are swallowed
admitted, forgiven
this is your hand I hold
once more we try.

2. Distance

Tonight you're on another planet
can't say which one
you haven't counted the moons yet.
I send long range messages
but fall short
you don't feel me reaching
stretching the distance
with fingers like bread dough
like Spider Man
how inane
the distance is measured
in silence, cold fingers
and eyes staring at a
crack in the wall
running frozen lightning from
floor to ceiling.

3. Over and Over

Tin-eared ice cream truck sings in the rain
the same melody over and over
infinite echoes like images
in barber shop mirrors.
Inside, your words bounce
from door to wedding picture
to window to kitchen table
"I'm so miserable"
over and over
those words entwine with the
harsh steel bells
disonant chords
louder and louder
the words, the music
indistinguishable.

4. The Other Man

Behind that maggot-white smile,
whose wife do you eye now—
Satan-blue snake eyes.
Whose wife do you touch now—
your intrusive hawk-talon fingers
ripping intimacy to meat for your
lecherous hunger.

I want to shave your scaled face
with a cheese grader
and watch your black blood
cling like death to your cheeks.
I want to slit your groin with
a butcher's knife
and watch your pink ripe balls
bounce, as I kick them
against the wall.

You are no man, no animal
(animals have more dignity).
You are Lucifer's latrine.

5. Gone

"I thought how long it takes to believe the simplest facts of our lives—that certain losses are final"

Philip Levine, "Lost and Found"

Childhood left quietly
without slamming the door
didn't notice it had gone
'til cartoons disappeared on Saturday.

Jerry left suddenly,
a time bomb planted
deep in his heart
(God the terrorist).

Unborn child (blue-eyed I'll bet)
slid through a long red tube
to Purgatory's garbage heap—
only your pain left behind.

Your love packed its bag calmly, neatly
kissing me on the cheek, Good-bye.

6. Don't Ask, Please to Schulz

Last year you had no beard
your eyes are more tired.
We grasp each other's hand
with the passion of lovers
(we both feel our arms
twitching to hug
but we are American men).
"Buddy" you ask
"how things been?"
The question chimes like midnight,
do you see me cover my ears
the ringing is deafening.
Do you see those smile muscles
pull the corners of my mouth down,
do you see the words begging for life
"Help, It Hurts—Hold Me!"
Do you see my last tear
it's there in a dark corner
I've saved it for a happy time
the others were for having lost,
does this one push for love of you
or has its desperate strength
finally given up.

Remember me, remember me
in high school, in college
when for me life was laughter
when you said I was a real Italian
a glass of wine, a cigar
and a smile.

You were the best of men at my wedding
you toasted to a long and
happy life—

your wishes weren't enough.

Where were you when

I watched her drive away

when I yelled at my shattered face

painted on the mirror,

when I dumped a drawer of

lace panties into a suitcase

screaming.

I don't blame you,

you couldn't have seen this year.

I fight my war of manhood

alone. I am tired.

That tear hides again behind a blink,

the only words you hear,

"Fine, how's med school?"

7. An End

I still feel the gold band
like a finger lost in a cruel accident.

I see us in every dark cloud
of this early spring

and know the reasons are simply
too much, too many, too long.

We could never laugh together again
or love, not really

not without a moment of hesitation
before the touch.

The ending's ugliness clings like leeches
sucking sentiment, bloating on our life
leaving nothing but silence.

There are no more words.