

Fall 1986

Overtures - 1986

John Bergman

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OVERTURES

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NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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1986

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Overtures is a magazine of short-fiction, poetry and graphic arts published at Northeastern Illinois University by Apocalypse, the student literary organization. Submissions are welcome. Do not examine this issue in an attempt to discern the tastes or biases of the editors. Send us your best, most original work. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission to:

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Apocalypse Reading Series

Each year, Apocalypse sponsors readings by poets and writers. We try and represent the full spectrum from the nationally known, often published, to talented, but as yet unpublished, local poets and writers.

Because of deadline and publishers' approval considerations, only **Mr. Eady and Mr. Salisbury** appear in this issue.

RALPH SALISBURY

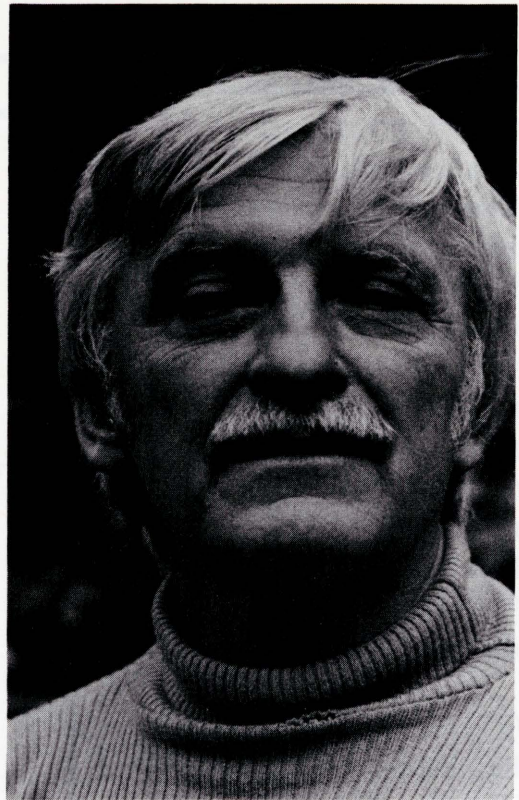


PHOTO BY BARRY LOPEZ

GOING TO THE WATER

*This is to take oneself to the water with,
to help oneself....*

Corn-stalk shadow a black sea-horse --
from a soda-straw nose
to a question mark tail --
this ocean-green house-paint washes against
a shore of air

whose Sunday clarity reaches to
quiet factories, that raise
red-brick priest-fingers, as if they would bless
even us, in the Ghetto.

But police beat us when we march
for justice. I've lost my job.
The garden has shriveled to
one spindly sea-horse
shadow, and when the rent is up, next week,
it will be time to move on
to where I'm not known.

My wife's body is the only shelter our baby
will take from here, but, in roof-moss green from
the leaking cooling-unit I climbed to fix one final time
just now, albezia-seedlings'
little paired leaves were flared
like wings, small claws dug in as if they would lift
the whole house -- making me think of Hummingbird,
the Yunwiyas' mystic wrestler of medicine from the Gods,

and think of my family working hard in the fields
but not getting enough to eat,
and still we'd sing the centuries-
old songs, from our sacred ground.

Tomorrow, I'll search again for a job,
which someone more compliant will probably get.

Today, soda-straw nose, question-mark tail --
and green wings nimbused by sun -- have raised
the spirits of a man who must feel like a child again
for his own child's sake soon and stay
able to fight but ready to play.

Ralph Salisbury's Cherokee people were spared the Death March to Oklahoma, their escape secured by the martyrdom of Isali and his sons. Life, until he turned eighteen and went into the Air Force, was about as close to the old days as possible -- hunting, planting, and finding spirit-awareness in Nature-- even though he grew in Iowa, far from the old ground.

Among his outstanding credits, Salisbury has been guest editor of *A Nation Within*, an anthology of contemporary Native American writing, as well as being Director of Creative Writing at the University of Oregon for two years. His books include *Ghost Grapefruit And Other Poems*; *Pointing At The Rainbow*: Poems of a Cherokee Heritage; *Spirit Beast Chant*, published by Blue Cloud Press; and *A White Rainbow*: Poems of a Cherokee Heritage. He has also published work in a number of Native American anthologies.

Salisbury, a professor at the University of Oregon and husband of poet Ingrid Wendt, read at Northeastern November 25, 1985.

CORNELIUS EADY



PHOTO BY DAVID I ABRAMS

DANCE POEM


People who want to be dancers
Should know the rules:
Learn to love yourself.
Be ready for failure.

Don't have poets for friends.
They love to eat.
They're a constant temptation.
On top of that,
They will try
To put a dance
Of life
Onto paper,
And demand that you understand it.

You will need medicine:
Powders for your feet,
Salve for tired muscles,
And maybe,
At times,
When your art permits,
Someone to rub it on.

Cornelius Eady was born and raised in Rochester, New York, where he attended Monroe Community College and Empire State University. His first book, *Kartunes*, was published in 1980 by Warthog Press. He has worked as a Poet-In-The-Schools in New York, Vermont and Virginia, and he was the Margaret Banister Writer-In-Residence at Sweet Briar College from 1982 to 1984. Among his many awards, Mr. Eady has received a 1981 National Arts Club Scholarship in Poetry at the Breadloaf Writers Conference, a Millay Colony Fellowship and fellowships from the Ragdale Foundation and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. His latest book, *Victims Of The Latest Dance Craze*, published by Ommation Press, has been named the 1985 Lamont Poetry Selection, an award that has been likened to the "Oscar" of the poetry world.

Eady now lives in Lynchburg, Virginia, with his wife, artist Sarah Micklem. He read at Northeastern March 11, 1986.



WHITE ORCHID

What was uttered
hovers there,
above lavish tongues,
on staked stalk,
in mid-air.

Donald Edwards

ECLIPSE

A VIGNETTE

I am a contradiction. A maze of dark passageways and bright sunlight. I am earthen desires, blessed with an insane intelligence. I am air holding still and breathless after a storm of irony colored rain. I love myself so dearly that I sit and watch for hours my face to change. I write of love and music. Bending rhythms against my ear. Watching notes lay thick and blue against the page. I am the story that will unfold.

It is three o'clock as I cradle the phone in place. I only have an hour. I have to meet Eli at four. It always takes a long time to prepare myself for him.

Eli is sound. Silent sound in soft leather shoes. Silent black sound. Engulfing. Dangerous. The silence that is deafening. I know a woman. A woman of acquired desires. She has acquired a taste for Eli. Her name is Athena. Athena is a snake. I am searching for the answers to the questions. I swallow the myth that snakes are sacred. I throw it back. I find that snakes are snakes.

Eli knows. I see it in his eyes. I deny it. Eli sits silent laying it out in his head. He sits at the edge of the bed undressing. I shake him, beg him to tell me what all this silence means. He assures me it means nothing. I still long to have the spaces of silence filled with real words. He fills the spaces with movements.

Eli and I moving on cotton clouds. Eli resonating deep in my spine. Eli filling silent space with his sound.

COLLETTE ARMSTEAD

Then there is Feather. Wise woman and friend. I love her dearly. It is Feather I end the telephone conversation with. She says, "Girl, last semester I was a whore, this semester I'm a damn lesbian. I wish they would make up their minds."

"Somebody must have seen us when we hugged and kissed good-bye after lunch. You know it's a serious crime to express love and affection for another sister," I respond.

"People are sick. I wish they would make somebody else the main attraction," Feather says.

"No you don't. You know we both enjoy it very much."

"Only when it doesn't hurt."

"If it doesn't hurt a lil bit it ain't no good," I say.

"When it starts to hurt too much, you let it go," she concludes.

Life metamorphoses colorlessly, becoming an ancient black and white still-life, blurred and tattered about the edges. I wander in the darkness of my days. Poems cease to pour. I sing of mellow moons after a lunar eclipse. A loss of understanding. Eli is no longer. Athena looms bright and batikked along the landscape. Feather floats in. She peers at me. She counsels me to let go. I will not. Gracelessly, I crash against the technicolor fishbowl.



THWARTED

stopped
in the act, the first time
staring at the white-hot stars
In the dunes, but a shadow away
from the jewel-bright campfires of the ocean park.
The boy she fancied half god
scrambling to his knees; scarlet hair wild,
aqua eyes shrouded, no chance for words
nothing to say.
Her father towered above
like the last living redwood
in a burnt-out forest of ash and rotting stump,
then turned away.

That fall, she gave it away
to a man with no name.
Half crazy, raving,
she killed off her heroes one by one.
As good a way to die as any,
this symbolic suicide, the act of love
transformed to an act of death.
The strangers at fifteen, sixteen, seventeen
strangers' tongues frothing poetry,
mouths sucking dead rubberized flesh,
strangers' hands sculpting lust
from a frozen statue aching for life.

Twelve years later she finally realizes
why all the anger, why the despair
Dyes her brown hair red and finally cries
salt tears for a seabound boy,
half god and lost in time.

Kristine Rugen

SEEMING VISIBLE....

I can see right through the clouds
to the stars, like bits of broken bone,
but
you cannot see the woman who is standing
in front of you;

You insist on seeing her twin,
a younger sister, a film image latent
in her cheekbones and full mouth.

What we have is a difference of belief.

What we have is an inner disagreement
with the selves of others and our own selves.

We look at the sweet apple halves of our
hips, the brown, full pears of our breasts
and deny.

We turn from light to shadow
and in the silence of the image that
floats like a putrid moon above us
we cry, we cry like women who have
never known mothers....

Shani



IN HER / THE DAUGHTER GROWS LIKE THE MOTHER

This has been my body,
breasts first discovered and hidden
and discovered again under the supple changes.

A child's mouth fastened to nourishment,
a girl recreating my daughter image.

I am teeth, bones and shoulders,
a face in the mirror that is so often
that of the woman who bore me
who put her bowed-mouth stamp on this face.

Tears have run in rivulets down to the
memories of tears cried on the side of the bed.

De man done gone,

de man done gone again.

And mother, I grow to be like you
roundness all roundness and strong.
Fullness and sureness and telling signs
that link me like red flesh rope
to the first days, the days that nearly
separated our lives from the once true wellspring
of shared experience.

If I am graceful, my voice raised and my hips round,
it is you in me saying: please be all I want you to be....

Shani

WAITING IN A PARK

The snowflakes fell
today, like clumped up
laundry lint.

And in the blink
of a frozen-lashed eye,
anything and everything
was covered.

I squinted hard
to see you through that
fuzzy white mess,
but only patches of silver-grey
shown through.

No thoughts
of grocery lists today,
or of the PTA.

Only thoughts of a
well-wrought lover
with an appetite
for chilled vodka and beluga caviar.

And fine consideration
for his wardrobe and his Irish wolfhound.

I think of his
warm brass bed
with its goose down blanket,
while sitting on this ice brick bench,
wrapped in wet wool,
being buried inch by inch.

Karen Ford



FLEUR-DE-LIS

"Let be be finale of seem" - Wallace Stevens

Fleur-de-lis patterned wallpaper framed the bathroom mirror
you stood before, half-naked in slip and bra,
as you put on the colors, the scents of flowers.
How hard you tried to make yourself into yourself,
to face the world, that in the end you could not face.

Today in this midwestern winter
I thought of that place in Florida we used to visit,
where mermaid divers breathed through a hose
in their liquid atmosphere, and then smiling,
swam as bubbles rose in the blue sky of water.

And today at the Terra Museum in Evanston,
looking at Charles Courtney Curran's "Lotus Lillies,"
I thought of you. Two young women
sit composed in a punt.
All around them lilies rise from the lake.
The air makes its own fans of them,
and their pale yellow flowers open like magician's hands
revealing the sunlight that has vanished into them.
One of the women holds a parasol, which,
lit from behind, glows with the green of the lily pads
as her Victorian lap accepts the gathered blossoms.

Donald Edwards

END OF SEASON

The planet leans
to one side
like a phantom-ship,
listing. Pumpkins sag,
a peach is overripe,
my hand swells
the apple's curve.

Dry leaves collect
in unlit pyres.
I kick them--
impatient for the
smell of a bonafide
bonfire, the
charcoal taste
of autumns, past.

Clocks turn
back, curtains hang
limp. Gauze sails,
without breeze.
All this silence
thickens my blood,
makes me want
to shout, awaken
summer ghosts, and
act perverse--

perverse as
the Hunter's Moon
when it sulks
on its red haunches
instead of rising,
as expected
to, lightly.

Gertrude Rubin



GYPSY AUTUMN

Last year a gypsy fixed my kettle and his woman
snared tomorrow in the network of my palm.

Last year, a lamb was stolen from the fields of Farmer Brown.

Last night at dusk, the trees were patched with rust and gold.

Some strangers camped in Johnson's field,
their horses have a wild and tangled look.

Early morning heard the women's bangles as they aired the quilts,
stirred greasy cooking pots and shook their spoons at boys
chipmunking round the camp, cheeks pouched with food.

A Romany with leather face and yellow teeth
lounged loose-limbed up against the wagon wheel.
He smoked brown cigarettes.

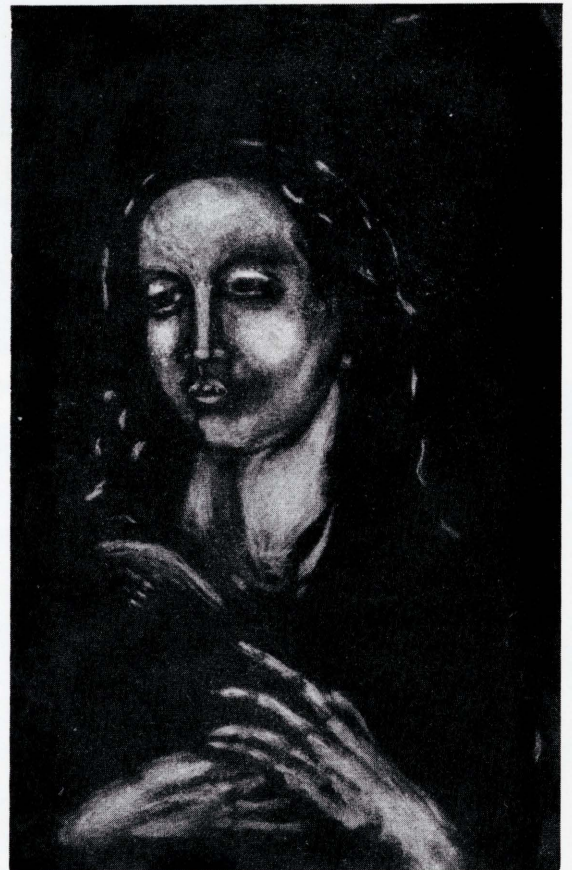
Tonight I watch, secure behind my door.
I crave the touch of hard brown hands and
want the smell of wood smoke in my hair.

Myra Stahl

THESE FORTY YEARS

These forty years have seemed like but a day
so woven are the frayed ends of our hours
that minutes now contract.
Our spirit flowers boldly,
widens more the less our stay.
Time's embroidering blends different strands
but with such pain -
how sharp and quick and fine
when we were careless,
erring in design
and rashly disregarded love's demands.
Ravelled from mistakes
our tattered love is still a seamless fabric
and survives,
for the deepening selvages of night
have knit our lives into a weft so close
that we can move from discontent and doubt
with much amiss
to, *mirabile dictu*,
this.

Mary Wren Small





SUNDAY

The morning after
yet another night before,
you lit the pipe
and passed it to me
across the black and red kitchen table
like an ancient Chinese
lighting a stick of incense
to place at the foot of the corn goddess
in hopes of fertility.

Someone said,
Did you want to attend services?
and your eyes locked on mine
as you said, *We just did.*

Kristine Rugen



PART-TIME HUMANS BY JANICE TOBEY

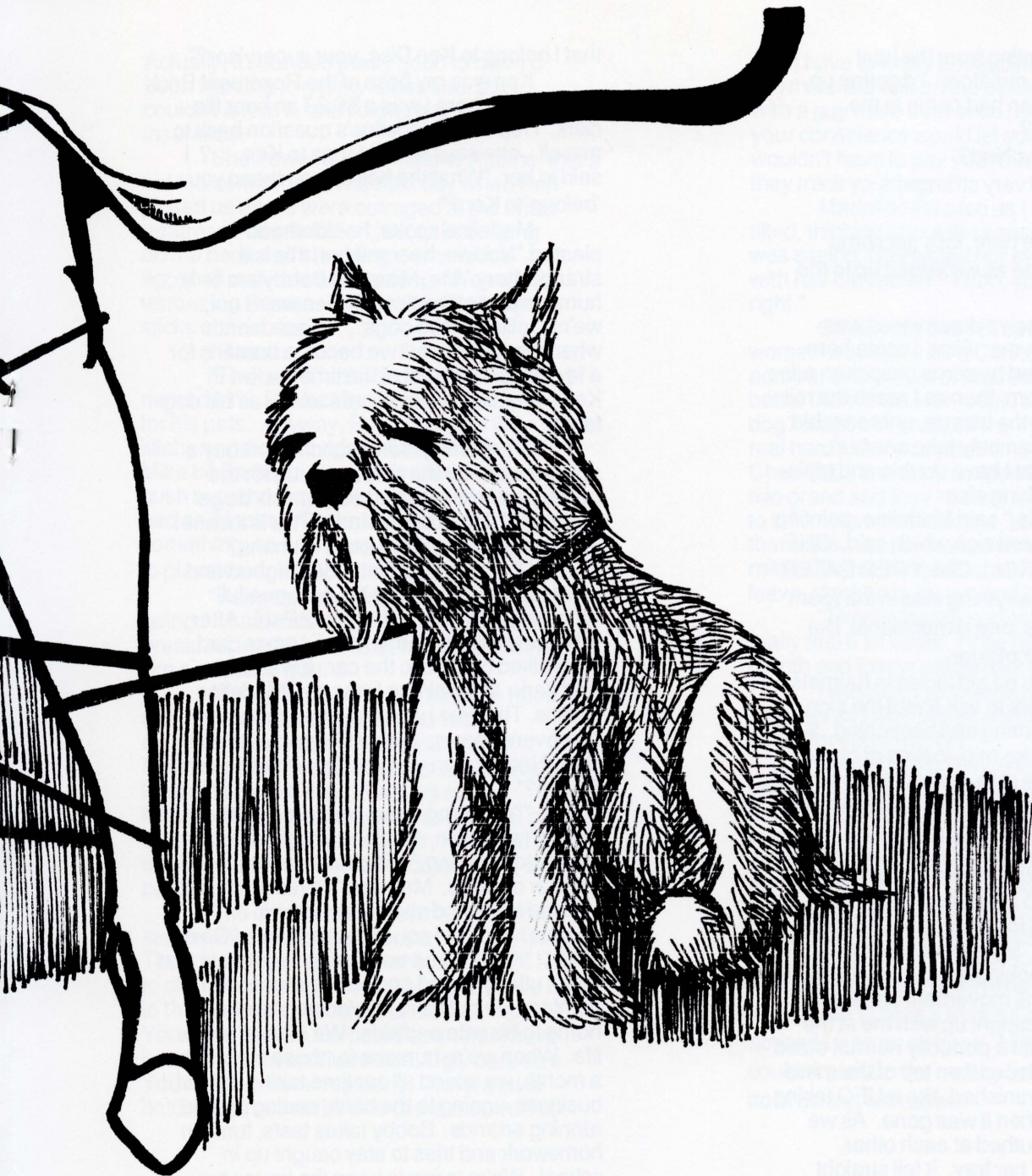
"This is the slowest line I've ever stood in my life!" I complained to my sister, Madeline.

We were building food mountains on our cafeteria trays, layering them with lettuce piled on top of dumplings on top of pierogis. Topping it off were three crispy, teeny croutons which kept falling to the black checkered tiles. I picked them up and

placed them back on the peak of Mt. Food.

"Yes, Nadine, it's really slow, but look at all the people," she said. It was the busy breakfast hour and people were clustering like ants in the big square room. It reminded me of the cockroaches I'd seen swarming near my wastebasket earlier when I'd turned the light on.

Madeline shoved her tray forward on the stainless steel counter and it crashed



into the tray in front of her. Its owner whirled around with a killing look on his fat face. "Oops, sorry," she giggled, "I'm **very** sorry, sir." He rearranged his cheeks and turned back around.

As the line moved ahead a half tile at a time, I wondered why I was going to a class that morning. "I've been out of high school for nineteen years, why am I going to a homeroom?" I asked myself. It was odd, but I knew I **had** to be there at 8:00 AM, just like

I knew I was female – I didn't have to check my birth certificate or look in the mirror. It's already 7:55 – I still have to get my food, eat it, talk to Madeline, stack my tray and walk down the halls to class. In five minutes. Sure, **no** problem.

I felt I was dreaming but I wasn't. I'd had a nightmare earlier at home in bed about climbing hot foggy stairs with ten pound weights on my ankles. This Sunday, August

16, I woke up sweating from the heat clanking out of my radiators. I'd gotten up, gotten dressed, then had come to the cafeteria. "Didn't I?"

"Whatja say, Nad?"

"I feel very strange; I don't understand . . ."

"Well, come here, let's get some rolls," said Madeline as we edged up to the next section.

The oppressive dreaminess was starting to unnerve me. First, I come here and find I'm required by some unspoken rule to go to a homeroom, then as I reach the roll counter, I find that the bizarre, unbreakable rule here is that I can only take one bun, despite the fact that I have double and triple servings of everything else.

"Look at this," said Madeline, pointing at a big white and red sign which said, 'ONE ROLL AND ONE ROLL ONLY PER EATER.'

The sign and everything else in the room looked flat, lifeless, one-dimensional, like a color-by-number picture.

There were no old ladies in hairnets behind the counters to ask about the sign, just the food, steaming and beckoning. Some of the buns were like mini-loaves of bread; some were double rolls connected by threads of dough, cunningly shaped to look like one roll at first glance.

This was a test. The rolls were alive, conscious, trying to fool me. "They won't win," I thought. To Madeline I said coolly, "Please pick a roll for me, I have to hurry to the next counter." My heels clicked as I marched away, looking out the corners of my eyes for suspicious movement under the glass. Madeline caught up with me at the noodle counter with a perfectly normal-sized dinner roll. She placed it on top of the mess on my tray and it vanished, like a UFO taking off. It was there, then it was gone. As we gawked open-mouthed at each other, Madeline let go of her tray. It fell straight down, like an elevator with a cut cable, but none of the food was dislodged. Madeline made no move to pick up her tray, stuttering, "N-Nad, did you see that, Nad? Where'd it go?!" I didn't care about the roll; what amazed me was that not a crumb on her tray moved—it was like the food was sprayed on.

I picked up her tray, pushed it at her and said, "Forget about it." They won, I thought. Why was I letting a batch of baked flour, eggs and water make me so nervous?

To distract us, I walked to a table, sat down and started talking. "Yeah, my old Chevy only has a few more months left, it hardly starts after it's rained." She was staring at her forkful of spaghetti, not hearing me.

I shook her arm, "Uh, Madeline?" With no preface she said, "Nadine, did you know

that I belong to Ken Disc, your supervisor?"

Ken was my boss at the Roxement Brick Company, where I was a \$6.23 an hour file clerk. I replayed Madeline's question back to myself—she says she belongs to Ken . . .? I said to her, "What the hell do you mean you 'belong' to Ken?"

Madeline spoke, her forehead pleated. "Nadine, hear me out, this is a strange story. Me, Mike and Bobby are only humans part of the time. When we're not, we're Collies; we're dogs. . . Each month when the moon is full we become humans for a few days. The rest of the time we live in Ken's heated, carpeted breezeway as his dog family.

"That cheap sonofabitch won't buy a space heater for the office or a rug for the copier, but he heats **and** carpets his **dogs'** quarters?" I gasped to Mad, "This is insane! What do you do when you're humans?"

"I'm getting to that." She sighed and went on, "About six months ago, one full moon night, we ate out at Chez Paul. After Mike paid with the American Express card, we walked outside to the car. It was late and dark. One minute I was me, Madeline Kollins. The next I was looking down at my fur covered paws. I was still me, but I was a dog. Nadine, can you possibly imagine what it's like?"

"I'm having a real hard time believing this conversation, let alone imagining what it's like to be a dog," I said, shaking my head to clear my ears. Madeline's eyes shone with uncried tears and she bit her lip so it wouldn't quiver. I squeezed her arm, "Go on, Mad." "Ken saw us wandering the streets that night, utterly dazed and licking ourselves for comfort. He put us in his van and took us home to his wife and kids. We started a new life. When we're humans for those few days a month, we spend all our time taking care of business—going to the bank, seeing people, running errands. Bobby takes tests, turns in homework and tries to stay caught up in school. We're trying to keep the house but it's getting hard to pay the mortgage. Our savings are nearly gone."

"Oh, God!" Madeline wailed into her folded arms. I felt like I was participating in some wacko 'Queen For A Day' show. The story was so heartrending I wished I could have given her thousands of dollars and a washing machine to ease her situation.

"Let me tell you about life as a damned dog. Last week, Ken gave us all flea-baths. Then we went to the vet for shots, an ear cleaning, and—get this—neutering! All in the same day. We were **neutered**. Poor Bobby."

I smiled weakly and said, "Well, Mad, you don't have to take the pill anymore."

Actually, it sounded pretty good to me. I'd been wanting to get my tubes tied, but I couldn't afford it, and I didn't have any health insurance.

She frowned. "Somehow, Nadine, that's not too comforting. The next day when Ken picked us up we were outraged at the unfair treatment. In retaliation, we've been lying on the beds and shedding on their nice eggshell wall-to-wall carpeting. We've been terrorizing Ramses, and we won't chase sticks or Frisbees."

"Ramses?"

"The cat. That's what 'Ken the pervert' named him. But luckily, he has a soft spot for his pets. Anyway, Bobby peed in the kitchen and on the carpet in front of the TV. Mike bit Barbara, Ken's wife, and once a day I push over the dog chow. That stuff tastes as bad as it looks. Ken knows we're mad about something, so he's been feeding us hamburger to placate us. What a *moosh*."

"Keep talking, Mad, I've got to get going," I said before I began shoveling my breakfast in with both fists, my jaw chewing like a machine gun.

"To top it off, Mike and I tried to have sex, right in the front yard. The whole neighborhood was there, pointing and laughing. Ken turned the hose on us. We're tired of living like this. We can't even function in our own house as dogs. You can't open doors, use a can opener, wash dishes, turn on the oven. You can't do anything with paws."

The only time I'd seen my sister look sadder was when she wrecked her brand new Thunderbird the day after she bought it. I had to cheer her up somehow. "Madeline, you have to think positively about this. Let's compare: You have heated, carpeted quarters. I have heat in August and bare tiles. Ugly bare tiles. You eat good food regularly. I have a lot of hotdog entrees at the end of the month. You

don't have to worry about birth control anymore like I do on the occasions I have sex with a guy more than once. Best of all, if your conscience would let you, you really wouldn't have to pay your bills. How could they track you down?"

Madeline listened as I talked, her head tilted, thinking about the sensible stuff I was saying. She wiped her eyes and smiled with half her mouth. "Yeah, you're absolutely right."

Great, now she felt better, but I felt worse. I wanted to be a Collie, too. I had to admit it, every facet of Madeline's life was better than mine. How could I turn into a dog? Maybe if I crossed my eyes and wished real hard? I sure couldn't charge a dinner at Chez Paul; I owed American Express about two grand and they had cut me off. I wanted to talk more with Madeline, but I had to go to that class – as a human with all my miserable human problems. We got up to leave, stacked our trays and hugged goodbye.

"Thanks for the pep-talk, Nadine. I really feel a lot better. I'll be back next month and things will be a lot better."

I watched her walk away and called after her as I also began walking. "Yeah, better for you. Bye, Sis."

When I got to the classroom door, I opened it and looked down to make sure I didn't trip on the step. Then I looked up to see an opened satchel in the middle of the clustered desks. It contained neat stacks of hundred dollar bills. A red and white sign propped against the chair had a big arrow and said, 'FOR NADINE KOMINSKY.'

I babbled deliriously to myself, "MONEY! I'mrich!mrich!mrich!mrich!" As I ran to the case to grab a handful of bills, I noticed I was on all fours. All furry fours. I couldn't pick up the money because you can't do anything with paws.

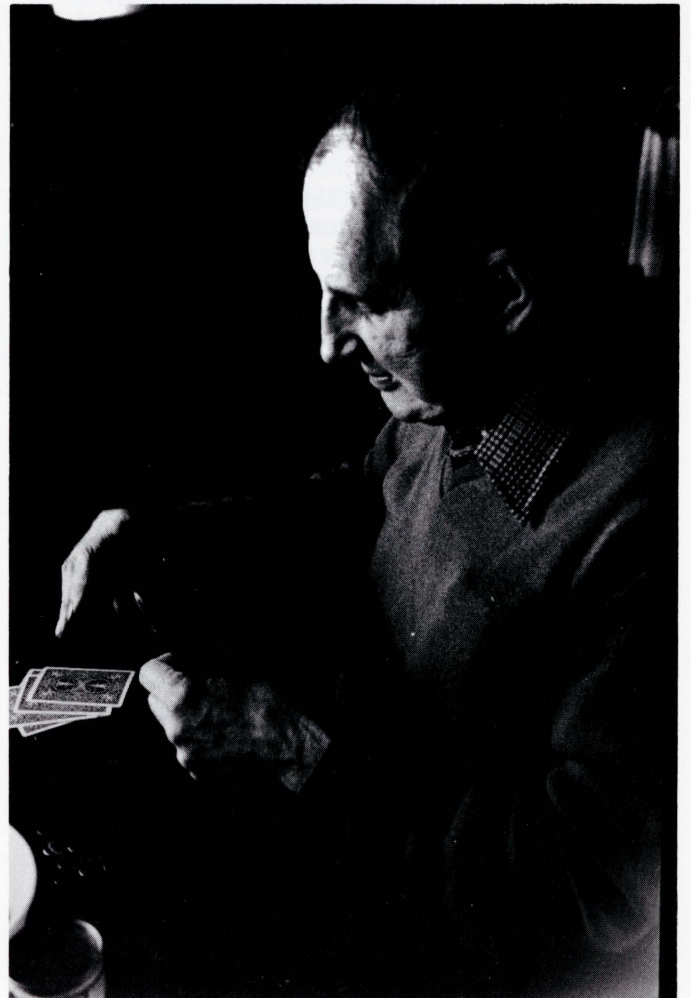
DAD

When he stood, his two knees clicked
like an unloaded pistol,
catching the shooter unaware
that he was on empty.

His body, hunched over,
like a diver,
ready to make the plunge,
inching a little up,
then

a
little
down,
like an elevator
caught half-way
between floors,
hoping soon
to level out.

Betsy Katz



MARY JANE

On the hat shelf
above the hangers
in a varnished crib
with a teddy-bear decal
the doll Mary Jane
sleeps forever.

She is even more tired than I am.

Having to represent so much:
unreal orange curls
held by stitching and
gold barrettes
eyes demure blue, stuck open,
pudgy knees
that eventually peeled,
stuffed cloth body
torn where the arms join
from continual dressing, undressing--
slacks set to calico sunsuit to
ruffled pinafore.

Changing clothes was her life
and it wore her out.

Eleanor Gordon



HOPSCOTCH

In the lost evenings
of September,
we colored the cement
with chalks,
mapped out the squares,
the known territory
we craved.
The cricket called to us
through the dahlia-soft dark.
And we followed,
hopping,
in the leaf-edged air,
landing
in a space we could name.

Mary Hess

ASTRONAUT

Raccoon, you worshiped something much too close last night.

I've heard of washing rituals when you feed
and racial memory
a giant coon with strobe-hot eyes
that mutters,

*Come put your forefeet on the asphalt,
sniff the alien reek,
feel the rush of wind upon your black-ringed fur.
Come celebrate the light.*

Twin lasers cut the night into lunar arcs.
The exploration ends.

What hunger did this other world excite?
Did you know the shiny juggernaut that left
you crushed along its careless path?

Myra Stahl

HURRY DOWN, HURRY

Lit in tornado light,
they ran to cellars.

The storm leaned,
cracked its teeth
on the black farm roads,
scattered crows
deep in the hissing corn.

Illinois. Big sky.
One, three, then five
descend.
Witches hats. The noses of sharks
stood on end.
Nowhere to run
but down.

Gregory Brosofske





HARDROCK JOHNSON, TOY DETECTIVE
BY
ANTHONY LETRICH

T

he wall of soap bubbles completely surrounded the Hasbrite Toy Industries building. Behind a hastily erected barrier, I sat flirting with the trigger on my machine gun.

"You can go home now, little man," New York State

Police lieutenant George Petrie said, his voice barely audible over the crowd of onlookers wondering why a toy manufacturing plant had disappeared behind tons of soap bubbles. "My men have this situation under control. Claus steps one foot outta that building and we blow him back to the North Pole. That's the least he deserves after what he did to my boy on Christmas."

Although I disagreed with Petrie, I was too tired to say anything. For the past twenty years, I, Hardrock Johnson, tracked down and eliminated those responsible for manufacturing junk and passing them off as toys to the children of the world. Toys have always been an important part of my life: before becoming a private investigator, I served as Chief Elf of Operations under Santa Claus. I resigned from that post, however, after a dispute involving the fatman's refusal to accept royalty payments from the *Santa Claus Conquers The Martians* motion picture severed our relationship. Now, on the eve of my retirement, the most difficult and potentially volatile case of my entire career was reaching a climax.

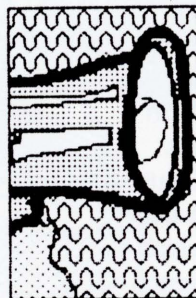
The last two months have not been kind to my former employer: the "GO JOE" Action Missile Launcher" transformed Christmas into a decidedly redder one after hundreds of launchers inadvertently fired real shells into the waiting arms of anxious little boys. Naturally, Santa Claus was blamed for the massacre, but I knew from experience that Hasbrite was the sole maker of 'GO JOE' products. The United Nations, refusing to believe that Santa would distribute toys not constructed at the North Pole, called for his immediate arrest and execution. Now Santa, after eluding authorities for several weeks, had kidnapped the president of Hasbrite in a

possible attempt to force a confession from him. Meanwhile, Santa's elves, armed only with Bubble Guns, created a barrier around the entire plant in a desperate attempt to keep authorities out. But George Petrie, one of many parents faced with scraping parts of their children off the wall on Christmas morning, was threatening to transform this incident into a personal vendetta against Claus.

As Petrie reached for a megaphone, beads of perspiration paraded down his forehead. "Attention Santa Claus! Lay down your weapons and release all hostages! We promise no bloodshed! Repeat, we promise no bloodshed!"

Although Petrie sounded sincere, he would not be satisfied until Santa uttered his last HO-HO-HO. The fatman's fate now rested on my shoulders. Leaving my protective barrier, I ran towards the building unnoticed. There are advantages to being only three feet, five inches tall after all.

After nearly drowning in a sea of bubbles, the Hasbrite building appeared before me, only to disappear again as my vision became impaired by the stinging soap.



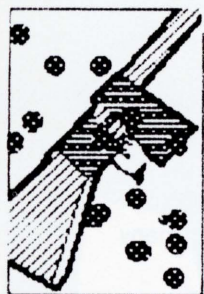
"Use this handkerchief to wipe your eyes," the familiar voice of Cocoa Latowski said. He flung the object into my hands. "Good to see you again, Johnson. Its been—how long? Twenty years?"

"At least," I said, returning the handkerchief to my former best friend and present occupant of the title Chief Elf of Operations. Behind Cocoa, a dozen of my former coworkers stood, their Bubble Guns trained directly at my head.

"Somehow I knew you just couldn't resist being onhand for the downfall of Santa Claus and his merry band of elves," Cocoa intoned sarcastically, the smell of alcohol on his breath almost overpowering.

"You're wrong, Cocoa. Despite our

falling out, I believe Santa's innocent. His only chance rests with me escorting him out of here." I tightened the grip on my machine gun. "You're in the way."



"You'd shoot us, Hardrock?"

"If I have to. Let's face it, Cocoa—you and your boys are expendable, Santa isn't. Now move."

Cocoa momentarily contemplated firing his

Bubble Gun, then stumbled to one side.

"Good choice," I said, approaching the entrance to Hasbrite. "Oh, not that it's the best time to mention it, but Gilligan's Island went off the air in 1967, not 1968."

"Any reason why you mention it?" Cocoa asked, a puzzled look on his face.

"That wrong answer was included on one of the 'Trivia Stuff' cards your boss left under the tree this Christmas. You boys better pay closer attention to their work, Cocoa, or I'll be forced to punish them. And remember—I use bullets in my gun, not bubbles."

As I stepped into the main office building, the elves had already forgotten about me and were busily debating the Gilligan's Island question. Cocoa attempted to put the blame on JoJo Peterson, head of the Trivial Research Department, while Peterson insisted that editor "Knock Knees" Diller should have caught the gaff, since he was a big fan of the show. Their arguing faded to a whisper, however, by the time I reached President Robert Bell's room. Using the butt of my gun, I managed to smash the lower portion of the door in half and cautiously entered.

"Who the hell are you?" Santa Claus roared, momentarily distracted from his task of sawing at a thick rope at the end of which Bell spun, feet first.

I stepped into the light. "Hardrock Johnson, toy detective."

"Hardrock?" Clause's eyes narrowed, then glimmered with recognition. "Hardrock Johnson! Why, the last time I saw you was the day you resigned as Chief Elf after that petty little argument we had. Good to see you again, my boy! But really, you must start washing your clothes more carefully." Clause's last comment, an obvious reference to my soap-

encrusted clothing, failed to amuse me or Bell.

"For crying out loud!" Bell screamed, blood beginning to rush to his head. "Get me down from here! Can't you see what that madman has planned for me?" Directly beneath Bell, two of Santa's reindeer, whom I recognized to be Dancer and Comet, shifted nervously, their sharpened antlers ready to pierce Bell's sweating flesh.

"Put down that saw and get away from the rope, Claus," I said almost mechanically. "I believe you're innocent. Kill Bell and you become the criminal everyone thinks you are."

"But Hardrock, Hardrock, this creature deserves to die." Santa reached for a crumpled piece of paper on a nearby desk and threw it down to me. "That, Hardrock, is a contract Bell made with one of those many troublesome terrorist organizations to manufacture purposefully deadly toys in an attempt to eradicate the children of the United States." I skimmed the contract, confirming what Claus had just told me. "Now, although I'm not very good at these things," Claus continued, moving backwards toward the rope, "I'm afraid I sentence Robert Bell, president of Hasbrite Industries, to death...."

With that, the rope finally snapped.

In a blur of motion, I jumped for the nearby desk and shoved it toward Dancer and Comet, bumping them out from under Bell. He crashed into the desk head first, rolled off, and pulled out a service



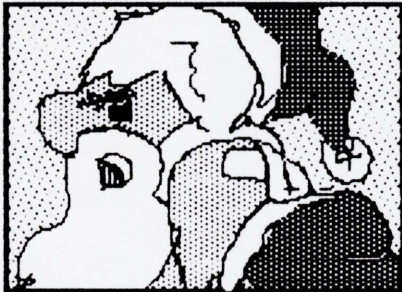
revolver from the top drawer. Immediately, Bell opened fire, striking Santa in the left shoulder. Without hesitating, I squeezed off a round of ammunition into Bell's chest, his body hitting the wall with a sickening thud.

"One thing I can't stand is a toy manufacturer turned bad."

* * *

Santa Claus was not being a very cooperative patient. "Young lady!" he howled. "If you cannot remove the bullet from my shoulder, then please find a professional who can." The nurse gave Claus a cold stare, but refrained from saying anything that would guarantee coal in her stocking next Christmas. As I approached Santa's makeshift hospital bed

outside the Hasbrite building, he buried his eyes into the pillow, ashamed to look up at me. But I wasn't ready to tell the world that everyone's hero, Santa Claus, was also a makeshift executioner.



"Our little secret, Pops," I finally said with a forced smile on my lips. Santa HO-HO-HOed weakly as if

to thank me. "Only next time," I returned, "save the vigilantism for Charles Bronson."

Nearby, George Petrie had just completed questioning Cocoa and the other elves.

"Everyone of 'em is a candidate for Alcoholics Anonymous," he mumbled, pausing long enough to direct a steamroller into a wall of bubbles.

"Working year-round at the North Pole...getting paid next to nothing. Geez, Hardrock, Claus doesn't even have a Walgreens up there. Now I know why you quit." For the first time in months, Petrie allowed himself to laugh. "You're not gonna bring Claus up on

charges?" I asked.

"I guess that contract Bell had with those terrorists speaks for itself. And the bullet wound Claus caught pretty much proves you acted to save him. Of course, the bill for all this damage is gonna be sent to Claus, although how he makes any money giving his stuff away I'll never know. But hey, why question a myth." Petrie laughed again, only much louder and longer this time. Perhaps he had finally let his child stop haunting him.

Suddenly, a police officer rushed us from behind. "Lieutenant! Lieutenant!" he shouted.

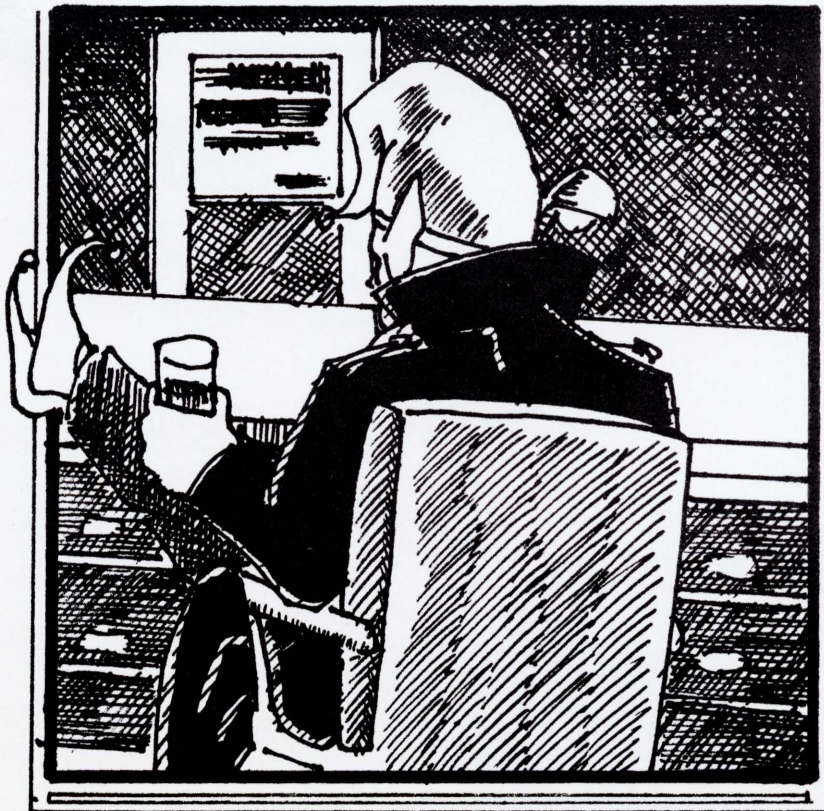
"What is it?" Petrie snapped.

"We just got a call on the radio. There are unconfirmed reports of a Cabbage Patch uprising in New Rachel. The Governor is requesting our immediate presence there."

Petrie looked down at me. "Deal you in one this one, Johnson?"

"Why not?" I answered wearily. "The Love Boat is a rerun tonight anyway."

Retirement would have to wait. So long as the life of one child was being threatened, there would always be work for Hardrock Johnson, toy detective.





ALL THE LONELY POETS

Now I know my trouble. Writing
fatigues, like digging. Pitching up
words shovel by shovel
wrenches my back and neck.
And when I've dug up the loose dirt,
dredged the solid mud,
the clay all the way down
 to where gravel and stone begins,
 I can see I've only got a hole
surrounded by blankets of sky.
It probably tires the sky too
to have to take the trouble
 to surround
 all the lonely poets.

Robert Mills

DEVIL'S DOORWAY

We get along like the rocks
in that rock formation.
They push each other
at just the right angles
and small ones
hold up big ones
as often as
the other way around.
Tourists lean here and
cut their initials
but nothing's budged yet.

Only if the stones themselves
would shift, take in the
cold or heat to crack,
then
what defies gravity
would fall
random.

Eleanor Gordon

THE PROMISED LAKE

In the ads, campers pull silver trailers
Effortlessly on empty superhighways
Through bluegreen backgrounds
Of virgin timber, peeping deer, snowcapped
Mountains, crystal air; or the campsites-
One solitary trailer, parked twenty feet
From a lonely mountain lake, ubiquitous
Peaks behind, a grassy dell in front
With smiling wife and children
Decorating foreground, fisherman father
(Left Rear) ready to cast the white man's
First penetrating fly into the silent
Everblue lake: the American dream,
Conestogas without cholera, the
Pilgrimage to holy lakes beyond the prairie.

Long before dusk, the pilgrims gather
At the campsites, Woodall's Guide
In hand, the front seat cluttered with
Maps and Kleenex; in the back, the
Children limply lying on their pillows
Cookie crumbs and comic books.
Travelweary they wait in silvered lines
To be checked in at the gate, assigned
A number, directed toward the johns.
Once encamped, row by row
Beside each other, they shuffle around;
First within their own circle, then
Widening, rippling out to neighbors,
Giving and taking road tips, comparing
Rigs and loads and weights and dates.
The grownups unfold their aluminum chairs,
Throw the paper plates in the garbage can,
Sit back and smoke and enjoy the evening air;
The children loiter near the washrooms
Playing hide-and-peek
Within the perimeters of the moth-loved light.
The camp settles down. Now only a fragment
Laugh or random bump, the hiss of Coleman
Lanterns, a car trunk slamming in the dark.
And always, always tomorrow
They rise to seek the promised lake.

Duke Rank





FIGHT

A VIGNETTE
by

Collette Armstead

I am a fighter, always have been. While away at college being immersed in the American ethic, while struggling to politicize my way out of it, I find myself consistently confronting people who step on my toes in hardly crowded elevators. Pudgy, pink-faced studiers who drag my clothes from spinning machines onto laundromat floors. I think it is all accidental. I believe myself to be clumsy. I study dance.

The dance instructor tries to kill my sway. It took me and Big Sister half a summer to get my sway down. Sway or A?

I sway to classes along wide pavements. I get elbows, pushes, shoves. Next semester, I study self-defense.

June 1978: The Supreme Court declares Allen Bakke has been reversely discriminated against.

March 1979: Susan(Suzy)Waspoon, with the aid of her father, declares me a case of too much bad black talk. Mr. Waspoon contacts university administrators. The word is telephoned down to me, through a Black Studies professor, to remember that I am a mere guest in this country of classroom, better that I not express my opinion, les' I be deported.

Following my unofficial censorship, Ms. Waspoon tries to act as if I am invisible behind the classroom door. I play my part well. Quick. Quiet. Hand wrapped in hair. Flesh against bone. I gouge and pound. Her body is bloodless.

I am declared tacky by political, social and cultural organizations. I am also expelled.

At the university I am vulgar and unrefined. At home on East 93rd street, I am someone who can take care of herself. At home, I understand. It is a hand-me-down from my great-great grandmother. I carry engraved pictures of her striking back. Beating fists against broad backs that pretend to feel no pain. Punching. Slapping. Opening flesh with long fingernails. Teaching, *Fight, if you can't fight, kick.**

*Gerda Lerner, *Black Women In White America : A Documentary History*

THE LAST ACT

The marquee blinks a bloodshot eye
at a cast of characters passing in and out,
old theatre people looking through each other
at imagined rainbows.

The Flaherty Sisters, in grey sweaters, watch
cabbage roses wilt off walls of the old hotel.
Dust, in thin sun rays, spotlights cartons,
bottles on a window ledge.
Geraniums, green and dying, take their final bows.
Costumes with spangles, feathers, fur
moulder like dead animals, while pictures
of smiling girls shimmy from their frames.

Jack Henderson and his "sweetie" count their change.
Ninety cents falls like petals from a jar.
She looks at his greying tux
and longs to be sawed in half once more.
The El rattles by like the clapping
of a thousand hands.

Smoke halos "the funniest guy this side of Pittsburgh."
One shuffles and deals, the other frowns at the cards
as if they were naughty children.
They play out their hands once more
for an unseen audience.

Rudy Zisk reads the racing form at the front desk, yawns.
All is quiet except for the pipes
hissing and spitting like cats.

Gargoyles grin from cornice and lintel,
festooned with scrolls and leaves.
Bay windows bulging eyes scan the street
for yesterday's stars.
Paint peels, spiders spin, decay lives
at the St. Elmore.

Constance Vogel

“ What was uttered, hovers there...”*



*From White Orchid, by Donald Edwards.

OVERTURES

