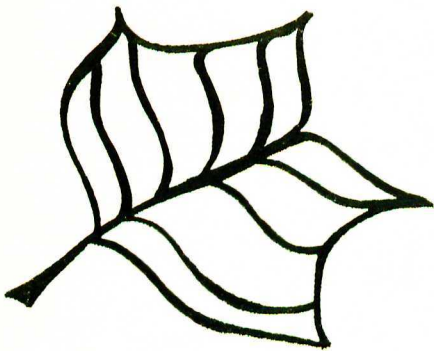


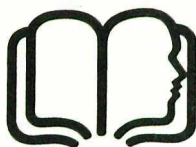
# Miss

Fall, 1983



How hard it is to escape from places! However carefully one goes, they hold you—you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences, little rags and shreds of your very life.

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)



BUTLER UNIVERSITY

# Manuscripts

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\*Denotes Freshman Writing



## Vehicle of the Fierce Bright

*by Larry Atwood*

Vehicle of the Fierce bright  
    blazon grappling the sky  
For nine raging nights  
    you hung impaled  
    on the shaft of a spear  
Rending your flesh in sacrifice  
    to a height beyond the reach  
    of raw fledgling man

Blindly you chastened the storm  
    with the fury of the  
    impassioned bloodless word  
Upon that windstrewn coast  
    littered with the consecration  
    of your seething vitals  
Beckoning up runes with blood  
    to widen the knowledge  
    of Odin and man

# Step Child

*by Sarah Hill*

I have labored to bring you here  
as I have for those whose eyes reflect my own,  
although you were laid upon me whole.  
I have studied and worried silently over  
the strange tilt of your chin,  
the unfamiliar curve of your smile.  
I have wished to shake them from your face.  
to mold your features into something I can see  
and know when I see it.

We smell foreign to each other.  
The touch of my hand is rough on your skin  
and you slide out away from me.  
Our conversation runs past itself,  
drips thickly down the walls,  
and dies on the floor.

I love you  
like an artwork in stone—  
not of my creation,  
senseless to my touch.

---

The public library—12:00 p.m.

*by Jennifer Aikman*

Old men, young mothers and babes  
And a closed-mouthed  
card catalog  
No sssshhh need apply.

# Primal Scream

*by Frank Werner*

I might have had a choice, but I waited too long.

There was a time when I could have stepped out. I mean, gotten out of this rotten world that now has be trapped. But that was long ago. And of course, I was younger then. I didn't know what life had in store for me.

Then I had the energy but not the brains, not the experience.

So, I spend my days as I am now. Waiting. Sitting on this park bench with a lot of other losers, waiting for something, anything to change, when I know it isn't going to. So I pass the time, maybe do a little panhandling, get by until the next freebie from the holy brothers.

God! Oh Christ, when I think about it, my brain begins to rage. My chest feels like I'm going to explode. My skin crawls as if it wanted to leave me. But I stay quiet. I mean, I sit and wait it out no matter how long it takes, and soon it begins to pass.

There's Louie sitting across from me. His long brown hair hangs shaggy and loose around his head. He's like me. He thinks about it too much. And sometimes for Louie, it just takes control and he can't do anything to stop it.

He just got out of the hole two days ago. Thirty days for disorderly conduct. He punched a rent-a-cop in the mouth. It all started because he wanted to see his boy. He could've got charged with assault, but his old lady pleaded with the rent-a-cop not to press charges. I don't know how she did it, but Louie only got thirty.

Only got thirty, what a joke. Thirty, sixty, a thousand days, they don't matter to Louie anymore. Not since she moved out on him. I guess she left because he took to the hard stuff. Man, what else did he have left! No job, no car, nothing was left for him except his boy. Now he's gone.

They hadn't been getting along for some time. But, even when he got drunk, it wasn't a mean kind of drunk. He just sat sort of silent and glassy-eyed. I guess she couldn't take it anymore, him not talking, just sitting and waiting. She never understood what he was waiting for, or why.

None of them understand what it's like to lose your job and be told never, I mean never, expect it back again.

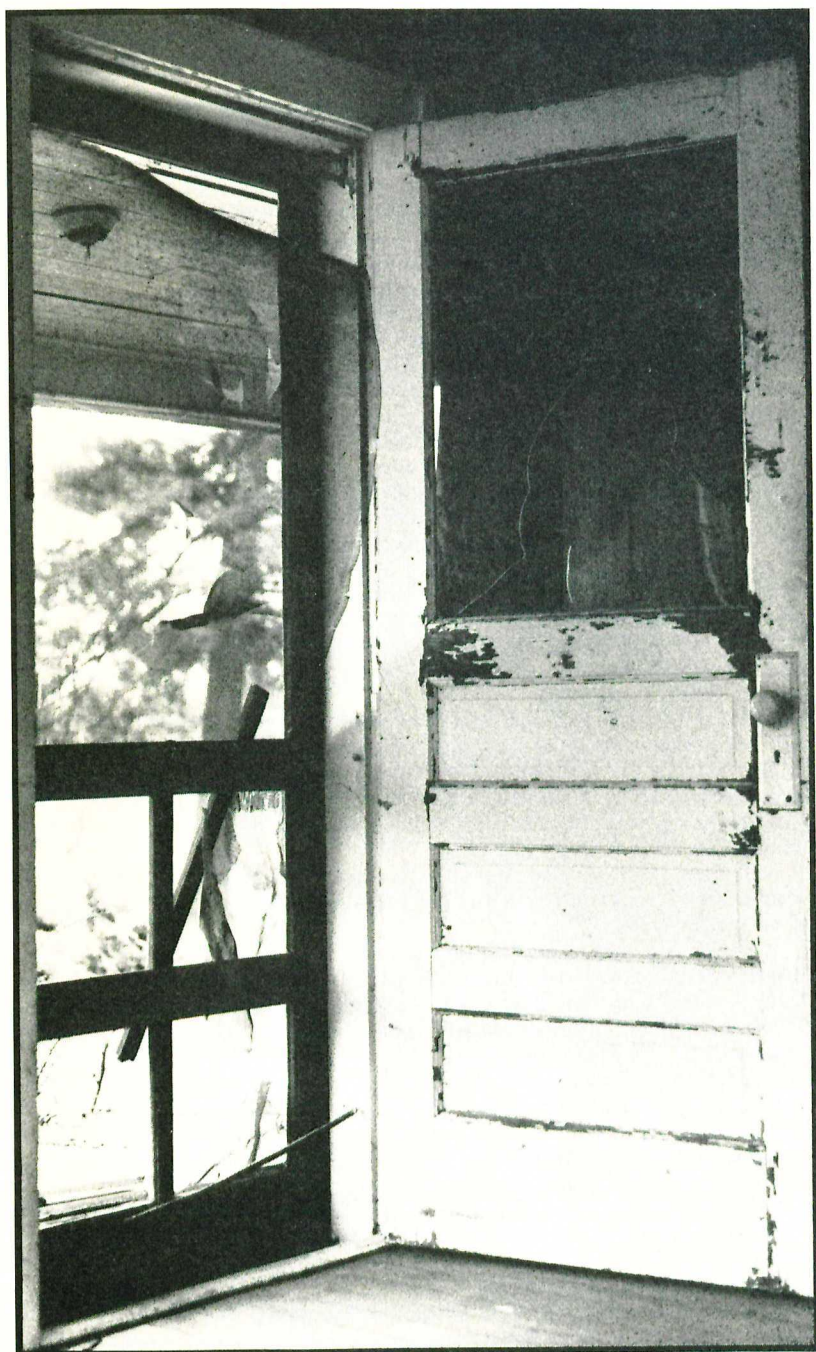
Louie and I spent half our lives living or working in the mills. Those mills—big, ugly, stinking, beautiful.

Once, years ago, Gary, Indiana, rivalled the world, even Pittsburgh, when it came to making steel. Least that's what all of us kids growing up in the shadow of those rusty brown smelters thought.

We knew there were lost of places in the world that made steel, but no place that made really good steel, the steel that came out of Gary.

My father was a steelworker. He lost his right hand in the mill. He thought he was ruined for life. But he came back, and went to work for the Union. He kept his pride and survived. Maybe things were different then. Maybe it was easier when you were a man with choices to make. Now, you lose your job and nobody cares; you're just another number. It coesn't matter to them that you don't have a paycheck, a home, wheels, pride. They still have their jobs.

When Louie and I had our work, there was nothing that would stop us from being on top of the world. Louie and I understood one another. Back in



school, we were a team that couldn't be split up. It was like we were blood. I guess we were pretty wild, between the two of us. I felt the rage then, but it was just kid's stuff, you know.

I can't get through to Louie anymore. I say something, but he just sits starin' at the world. He ain't mean, he just isn't.

Wild, yeah, Gary's a wild town. According to all of those psychologists and sociologists back in school, it's filled with violence, with just out and out meanness. Meanness, man, what do they know about meanness! At the end of the day, they'd drive out to live in the country while we stayed here. If they had to spend just one day, just twenty-four hours here, you'd find them bored stiff in the morning. The meanness would kill 'em.

Like my mother. That's what killed her, I know it is. All the meanness that surrounded her. They say it was cancer, but I know.

She told me to get out. She said, "Get away from this place, it'll only make you small like your father." I couldn't understand what she had against him. I thought it was the sickness talking.

I didn't leave. I was home here and didn't want to make my home anyplace else. I found a woman here. Had my eye on her for a long time. Took her out. And then, well, circumstances just took care of matters and we got married. I still think it was the right thing to do no matter how it ended up. The holy brothers disagree, but then they never did like how things turned out.

Man, that was one strange woman. Still is. I don't understand Joyce at all, but I guess she thinks she's doin' the right thing. Oh, we had a few really good years. For a while, we were a natural. But things natural always seem to end.

When we went dancin', everyone just stepped aside to watch us strut our stuff. There just wasn't a time when I didn't bring her some little something home. When I had a job.

And in bed, yeah, that was good too. I don't understand her. I tried to give her everything I could, it just wasn't enough anymore.

She was hungry for something. Things went all right for years, then the arguments started. I admit, it wasn't all her fault, but she just wouldn't ever see things my way. A man's got to have some pride. She could've tried to understand.

And then I lost my job. She took to working at some crummy fast food restaurant. I could've done that but I was a steelworker, not some greasy short-order cook.

It was those odd hours she worked that kept us apart more and more. Then I started to think that maybe she had something going on with this joker who worked with her. He was the assistant manager or something and going to college. She was always talkin' about Howie sayin' this about the economy or that about the Union. Man, those kind of guys have always got me by the balls. They're so sure they've got everything pegged. Well, they're the ones who got us in this mess. If they're so damned smart, why don't they get us out?

He talked her into taking a class at the extension. Just what we needed. Now, it was me out of work and her never home.

Don't get me wrong. I was never one to stop her from improving herself. Didn't I let her take that flower arranging class several years ago? And after the baby was born, and she wanted to lose that weight, I even suggested she go workout at an exercise place.

But this guy had put all sorts of ideas in her head. That's what made me think maybe she and him had a thing between them. She just wouldn't listen anymore.

I even put it up to her about the two of them. It was a Tuesday, no, it was

Wednesday, and she had been at work and that class. She was late. She said why, but I can't remember now. At the time, all I knew was that the baby had been crying all day, and me cooped up in the house. It's only natural for a man to want some freedom, isn't it?

As she came in the door I thought I had it all ready. I was going to handle it so cool. But right away she starts gettin' defensive. Said she was tired and didn't want to start all the fighting again.

I told her if she was so tired all the time, maybe she should find a job closer to home.

"And how many places around her do you know that are hiring?" she pops back.

"Well, maybe if you'd drop that class or at least come straight home."

"And so," she asks me real snottily, "Just what's that supposed to mean?"

I really don't recall just what was said next or what order it was said in. All I can remember is her standing there shouting at me all superior-like.

That's when I slapped her.

It wasn't hard or anything. I don't even know what made me do it. I just couldn't take it anymore.

She got real quiet. Standing there looking at me like she would cry, but she didn't. Then, in a voice kind of soft and scary, like my mother before she died, she told me she wasn't quitting the class. I could stay here and rot with the rest of the garbage, but she was getting out.

She turned and walked into the bedroom. I heard the door click locked as she closed it.

I wanted to busy through it, to smash it into a thousand splinters. To prove to her that I was the man. But I didn't. I was afraid. I had never heard the rage inside my head so loud as I heard it then.

I got a beer from the kitchen, then sat on the sofa staring at the bedroom door. Hours may have gone by, or maybe only minutes. I couldn't hear anything but the rage in my head or feel anything but the ache in my chest and the cold beer on the back of my throat.

We'd had good times before, why couldn't we again?

I heard the door unlock, but I couldn't hear her moving at all. I waited but she didn't come out.

Standing up, I felt the rage ooze out of me. I was tired, but jittery. As I turned the handle to the bedroom door it opened easily. With the light falling into the room from behind me, I could make out her body lying on the bed, facing the wall. Her long dark hair made curved and jagged dark designs on the white pillowcase. Slipping out of my clothes, I set them on the chair beside the bed. She was quiet. The sheet was cool against my skin as I pulled it over my body. She lay still. But, I could tell she was awake from her short breaths and the quick rise and fall of her side. I put my arm around her waist, feeling the warmth of her body through the thin nightgown. I wanted to make it up to her and maybe she knew that, since she put her hand on mine.

Moving my hand, I drew the nightgown up and touched the soft skin of her belly. I wanted to let her know that I loved her, that I knew I had treated her badly. I couldn't say it. I rolled her towards me and she didn't resist. I needed to show her how much I cared, how much she meant to me. She lay still and quiet.

Later, right before I went to sleep, I thought that it all might just work out. If the morning would come, I would somehow make it all work out right. But how?

I slept deep and long. Somewhere in my sleep, I realized that the usual morning noises were missing. I hadn't noticed when Joyce had gotten up for

work; the hollow where she had slept was cold. I didn't hear the baby making its morning sounds. As I slipped on a pair of shorts, I knew that what I had felt and hoped for last night was gone. When I discovered the baby's bed empty, I wanted to cry, but I didn't.

It took me another fifteen minutes of stumbling around the apartment before I discovered the note on the kitchen table.

She was kind, like the night before. She said all sorts of things that people in that situation say. Things of guilt, things of sorrow. It was short, it was simple, but it wasn't cruel. I think she knew I couldn't take any cruelty. She ended up saying how we all change . . . had to change. If we didn't, we'd end up like those giant animals from long ago. Dead.

I showed the note to Louie when I saw him later. It had happened to him. I thought he could tell me what to do. He read it and a strange smile came across his lips.

"Dinosaur," was all he said.

I started to ask him . . . but he just shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, then turned and walked away.

That was six months ago. We're still waiting, Louie and I, waiting in the park with the others. The weather is starting to get warm again and it isn't so bad, now.

On clear days you can look between the bank building with its blue glass windows and the old limestone insurance building, and see the tops of the old smelter towers like some fiery red-brown mountains rising up beside the lake.

At times, I think I can see a trace of smoke coming from them, but they're not operating. And whenever I feel the ache in my chest or hear the rage in my head, I look at them and try to remember when they spewed out smoke and we all complained.

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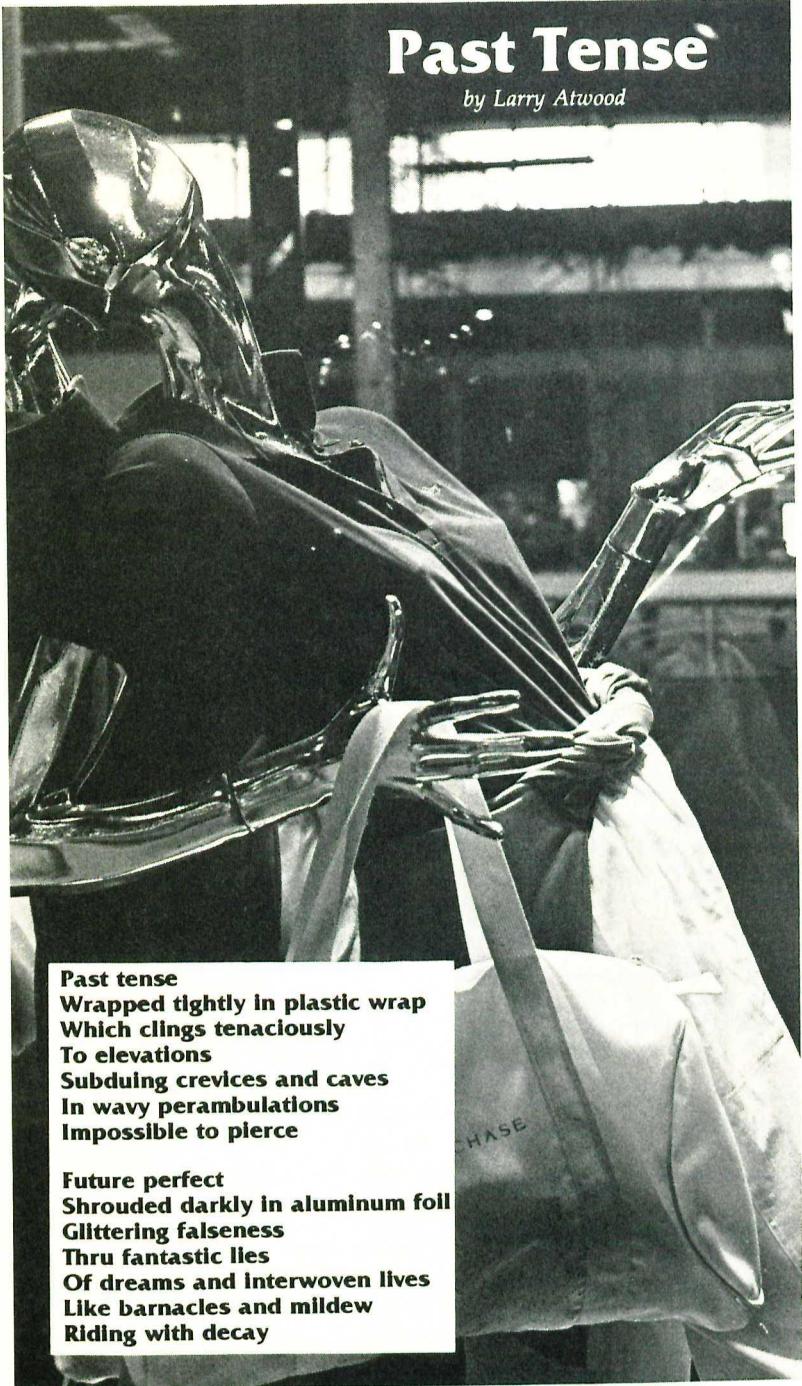
## Autumn Moss

*by Nancy Zueget*

Chapped knees and wind-blown cheeks  
Have comfort in knowing such cracked, cold cement,  
owning tresses of dying moss, they are  
quite the same in days of fall  
when the winds take pity on nothing.  
The moss has been loosened, its roots ripped by  
gusts of unkindly breezes.  
Locks of turf thrown back behind its face  
of the wind-burned curb.

# Past Tense

by Larry Atwood



**Past tense**  
Wrapped tightly in plastic wrap  
Which clings tenaciously  
To elevations  
Subduing crevices and caves  
In wavy perambulations  
Impossible to pierce

**Future perfect**  
Shrouded darkly in aluminum foil  
Glittering falseness  
Thru fantastic lies  
Of dreams and interwoven lives  
Like barnacles and mildew  
Riding with decay



# The Pit

*by Ed Euler*

Moments earlier, the heavy front door had been splintered, allowing the billowing smoke to pour from the house and mix its blackness with that of the cool night's. The flashing red lights of the pumper are bouncing off this pillowy column as we make our way down the darkened hallway, leaving behind us the throaty idle of the fire truck and the quiet, vapory breathing of the bystanders. Wrapping us in its suffocating blanket, the smoke not only hides from us the terrors ahead, but also the security behind us. As the muffling blanket surrounds us completely, no sounds extend from the outside world, no lights pierce through the blackness. The source of the deathly cloud is unknown. In normal circumstances, our job is to find the source and extinguish its creator. Tonight, the same is assumed.

On hands and knees we travel through the darkness, I in front, Brad behind me. The flexible, yet rigid stick of hose is cradled under my left arm, its nozzle vibrating shallowly from the forcing pistons one hundred fifty feet behind us. Small droplets of water fall silently from the nozzle's front, moistening the cuff of my glove. My ears feel reddish, the heat becoming noticeable now. The right shoulder of my heavy coat finds the wall of the hallway and stays close to its security as we follow the baseboards with our hands. My knees begin to ache from the constant crawling; my back begins to sweat under the cradle of the airpack. The rubber hose of the breathing apparatus mixes its odor with the cool metallic air from the yellow cylinder on my back. Its clear facepiece tightened against my features provides little aid in vision. The gloom of the cloud continues as I move farther down the hallway.

No colors appear; black is the only image that I see. Strange objects become familiar only by touching them: the smooth front of the television set, the fluffy bulkiness of an overstuffed chair, a slippery stack of magazines. The hard vinyl floor in the hallway gives way to a delicate softness as my knees touch the carpet of an adjoining room.

Pulling on the heavy hoseline is causing fatigue. I stop a moment and listen. The rhythmic, clicking noises of the breathing regulator in my mask creates a two-toned whoosing noise. Intermixed, I can faintly hear the Rice Krispie cracklings of the flames which seem to come from the next room. Two taps on the back of my leg indicates that Brad is leaving to explore a side room. I am alone.

Pulling farther into the gloom, on my own now, I am shaken by a sudden ominous crack. I stop. Where did it come from? Ahead or above? Below? The chambers of my heart quicken their pace; my shoulders tighten against the straps of my airpack. My hand grips tighter the security of the hoseline. I turn to the side, listening again for the snapping and cracking, when unexpectedly the floor moves. "Who's pulling the carpet?" I wonder, quickly realizing an instant later that the movement is downward. Cracking sounds parallel the falling motion. Inhaling sharply, the air hisses through my mask. My stomach leaves its secure niche in my abdomen and settles itself at the base of my throat. Pulling downward, the yellow tank on my back is the first thing to enter the hole that has formed. It pulls at the rest of me to follow it into the pit.

The pit has transformed the blackness. Instead of darkness there is now light. Orange covers everything. It snakes up and down the walls and dances across the floor. Its movements are accented with veins of red and thousands of yellow eyes that glee upward at me, dangling above them. It silently curls around itself and caresses the furniture it is consuming. It belches heat and pulls at the yellow tank protecting me.

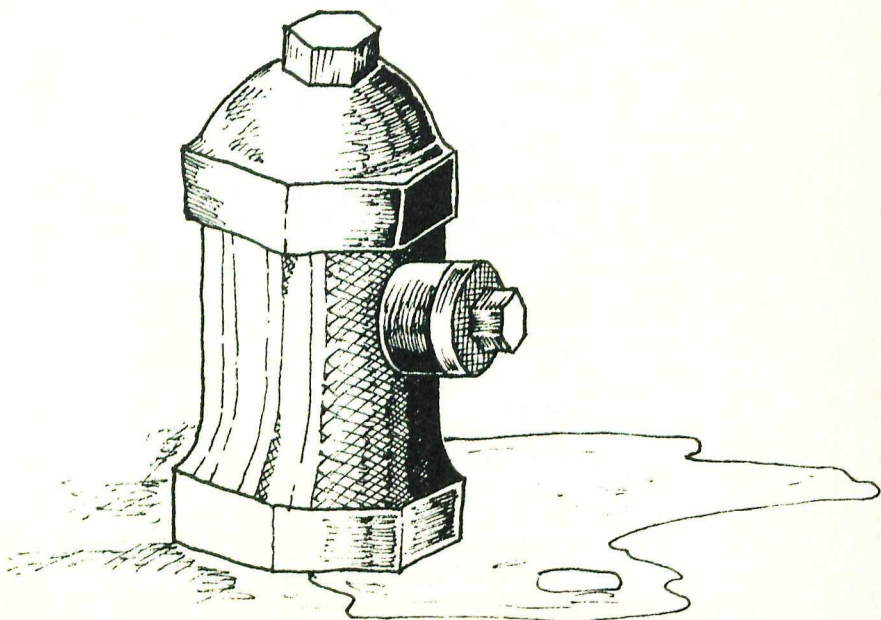
Though the claws still grab for me, my falling has stopped. The hoseline is clutched tightly to my chest, its nozzle entwined in the blackened remains of carpet. My feet are above me, my heavy boots trapped between scraps of wooden flooring. My heart pounds a message of impending death to my brain; my mouth tastes the acidic tartness that belongs in my stomach. Blood and fluid are rushing to my head as I hang upside down above the monster.

And it torments me. Seeing my predicament it moves faster now, its dancing more pagan. It tongues its way toward me, assuring itself a successful capture.

Fear of this capture electrifies me. Motions become automatic. My hand reaches above the splintered edge of the hole and I grab the hoseline, pulling myself up out of the pit and kicking to free my boots from their trap. In the exhaustion of terror, I roll on my side, breathing deeply the bottled sweetness. My inner organs return to their normal place; my heart slows its tympanic melody. Blackness again surrounds me. Saltiness calmly drips onto my lips, and I rest my head against the damp hoseline.

My relief is short-lived, for in just moments the orange tentacles over the edge of the pit. Remembering the work to be done, I lift the nozzle and release its fog of water into the hole. In seconds, the glow is gone, replaced by a misty darkness. The monster's dying hiss and the rhythmic mechanical breathing are all that remain to interrupt the silence.

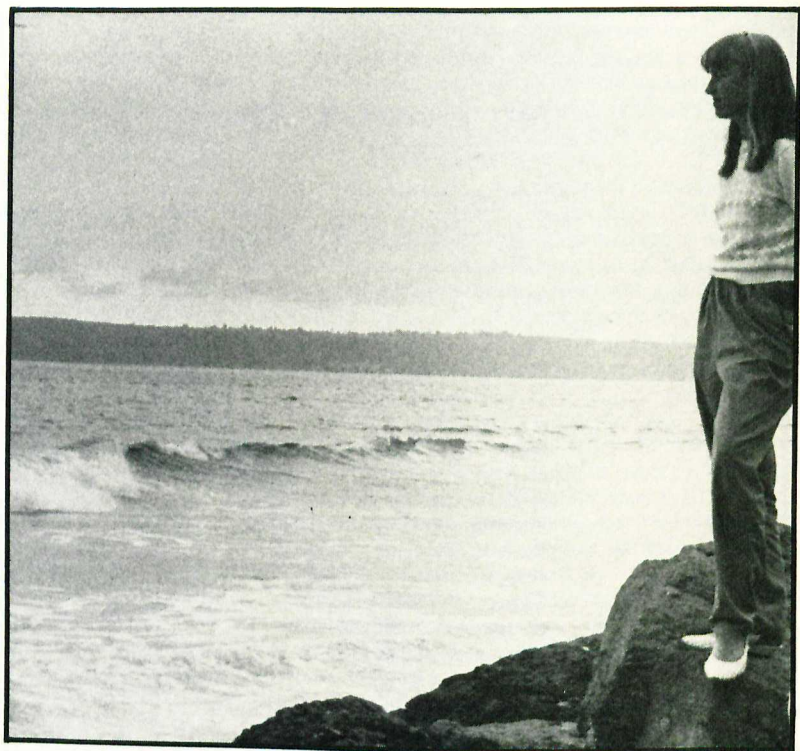
A figure bumps into me from the smoky darkness. "Watch the hole, Brad," I warn.



## No Hope Left

*by Dianne Sherman*

no hope left  
not even a single prayer  
to end my eternal  
sorrow and despair  
cutting so deep  
within my soul  
that no one  
could ever heal it.  
trapped for all eternity  
with a terrible scar that  
consumes me  
destroying all promises  
and dreams  
permitting no light  
to enter  
my forever dark soul.  
my scar is not physical  
rather it is an  
emotional one  
that sparks and flares  
painfully.  
I somehow  
have the will to believe  
that time may heal it  
but  
time is running out  
as day by day  
I am slipping  
nearer  
to the brink  
of insanity  
nothing is holding me back  
nothing at all.



## Neap Tide

*by S. J. Sutherlin*

My pant cuffs rolled,  
Waves lap my ankles with foam.  
The spray stings my cheeks with salt.  
My hair blown sideways for your photograph.  
The sun and moon are at odds over the tides.  
Once, I was your moon.  
Sideless, feminine, saturnine.  
I slide my finger on wetted lips.  
My mouth shapes an o.

# The Death of Nol

by Larry Atwood

Nol danced in the mouth of the cave. He had not done that for many times of darkness past. He cried and sang at the great white god which looked down at us from its perch in the sky, and Au and Buk were full of fear. We felt dread. Nol is one that is not us. He weeps not when the hunger gnaws upon him. He fears not the earth-moving horned gods. Once the gods caught him and tore his foot. We found him singing in the glade. Au made us bring him back though we were afraid. In the cave we saw darkness and felt he was no more. He was quiet and struggled many times with the Evil One. Au brought him berries and herbs. We gave of our warmth in the darkness and awoke when he struggled. He came back from the dark and was Nol once more. With a forked stick he hunted. Buk laughed at him hob-hobbing after rabbits and lizards. Nol too laughed.

Once Nol sat silently by the fire. He rubbed his legs with the black burned wood. Some was on his fingers. He touched the wall. We squatted, watching him. He waved his fingers and made many things. Buk laughed and fell in the fire. We pushed him out and laughed. Many things did Nol do on the wall and we became silent and slept. Nol hunted no more. He made things. Great angry beasts out of the wood and clay. And many men fighting the beasts. We did not laugh. Ke threw a stick at the beast. Nol smiled. We stoned the beast and sang. Nol went out of the cave and pointed to the beast's ground. We danced and felt the strength of the gods behind us. We hunted the beast and killed it.

Nol smiled and made many things. We stoned the beasts and killed them. Nol had strength with his things. He led us and was a god. He sang to the great white god who disappears. He laughs no more. Au makes that it is because Ke is no more. The angry beast turned on him and he could not run. The strength of the things is no more. Nol will be no more when the light comes.

We must find another not like us.



# Confused Little Man

*by Matthew Taylor*

Unknowing, there's knowledge  
Deep down inside;  
Unfearing, there's fear  
Trying to hide.  
Unseeing, there's sight  
In innocent youth;  
Distrusting, there's trust  
Searching for truth.  
    Not seeing, not hearing  
    Nor knowing why;  
    Not trusting, not fearing  
    Just getting by.  
Not stable, yet standing  
Not happy, nor sad;  
Not able, yet skillful  
Not angry, or mad.  
    Undetermined, irreverent  
    Disillusioned, confused;  
    Uneducated ignoramus  
    These words could be used.  
Just living in wonder  
With many a thought  
Of faraway places  
Of battles well fought.  
    This battle's within me  
    With Satan, my foe;  
    " 'Tis God who will guide me  
    Through death-traps to go  
    To heaven through Jesus  
    Who died long ago;"  
    I strongly believe,  
    I know it is so.  
Describers forementioned  
My life, they do fit  
But I am intentioned  
To take all of it  
    In faith as a baby,  
    In innocent trust,  
    In fearless forgetting,  
    As wind in one gust.  
Without this assurance,  
Without my Lord's plan,  
I'm sure that I'd be  
A confused little man.

# chocolate EYES

chocolate eyes  
 echo my mirth  
 behind crinkled cheeks  
 I look in surprise  
 at the chocolate brown  
 and do not understand  
 the magnetism  
 and shining warmth  
 the chocolate eyes  
 radiate.  
 I laugh aloud  
 as they tease and taunt me  
 into tickle fights  
 and hugs on tip-toe  
 that are a delicacy.  
 your eyes sparkle  
 as I drown  
 in the irresistible  
 brown  
 that melts in my heart  
 and fades away.

*by Dianne Sherman*

## Untitled

*by Lisa Wagner*

I've come down with a strange disease.  
 Symptoms:  
 -Double entendre  
 -Shrinking bank account  
 -Excessive happiness.  
 I hope they cure the common cold first.  
 (It's easier.)  
 You make me sick.

## **Paper Delivered to the El Dorado Millennium Society for the Preservation and the Contemplation of Purely Abstract Thoughts and Gestures**

*by Larry Atwood*

It's very nearly approaching two years now since the last meeting of the El Dorado Millennium Society. Most likely, you are not acquainted with and, perhaps, have never even heard of the El Dorado. Begging your humble pardon, it's not likely that you should. For we do not cater to the public's whims and foolish fancies; we do not deign to rub shoulders with the herd. Indeed, all that is 'normal' and 'common' is abhorred by our members and left to repose in the trough from which that poor benighted creature, 'the common man,' drinks his meager sustenance. Our realm is the realm of thought, of abstract thought—that which is most wily and elusive. To the uninitiated, it appears to be a silly child's game with words, frivolous and senseless. But therein they betray their festering ignorance. For Truth exists in the complex structural qualities and the symbolism, Beauty in the utterance and sublime contemplation of the underlying thought. One must be schooled in the various subtleties and nuances necessary for a proper appreciation, and such intellects are never easily discovered.

But I digress. The purpose for which I intended this piece was simply to acquaint the curious portion of the populous as to my part in the last proceeding of the society, an insubstantial and inauspicious part when placed beside the compelling knowledge and artistic expression of some of my colleagues, but nonetheless, a part of which I am proud to be the architect, most humbly and unassumingly proud.

Having duly served my apprenticeship as a silent member of the society for three of four meetings, thus demonstrating my willingness to learn and unwavering obedience to the Code, I found myself singled out by the Chairman as a likely repository of further intellectual pursuits and was requested to prepare a paper to be presented at the next assembly.

I was aghast, mortified, whelmed over with gratification. My personal stock rose a full ten points on the ego index. I immediately set out upon a path of such abstraction as to scuttle a battleship. Days and nights fused together in a smoky aura of the most intense contemplation. The absurdities of everyday life gave way willingly to a higher plane of existence. There never existed such ecstatic joy in my soul as when I struggled with these illusory fragments of my mind in my painstaking ordeal of consigning them to their eternal prison on paper. At last, after much gnashing of teeth and mopping of the brow, it was complete to my satisfaction.

The day arrived amid trumpets from the skies. With sweating palms and hammering heart, I mounted the podium and looked out upon the vast throng of my confederates in thought.

One last word to the unwary reader: Beware the simplistic approach! You are entering a realm where words are merely symbols, and symbols merely words. A galactic geometry of the mind. It bears no relationship to common (i.e. mass) communication except in the unfortunate necessity of using

words. Attempt to grasp the evanescent beauty of it and allow the particulars to free rein.

To return, I glanced at the upturned, expectant faces, coughed quietly behind my hand, and began:

"Duo-Decimal Armature of the Lower Vertebrate"

"Can it be assumed that, since baseball bats use sonar for direction whereby their tiny furry bodies are incrustated with disreputable subdivision of vindictive mites, lacking any visible means of support beyond their minute crutches which evolution has been so revolting as to infest with a detestable species of marble-playing termites, that if a galvanized rat tail were to fall on the starboard side of the pitched room of a silver shingled brickbat at four-and-twenty paces, bowling balls would neither have hair nor gossip?

"I maintain that it cannot be so because it only rains on one side and that only when blatherskites possess the legendary hormones of Greek."

"Furthermore, until one has met a physical, there is small likelihood of gazing on that rampant glories within or the wilderness barbarities without which there would be a noticeable decline in red, semis, gravel roads, roasting pans, and snail tracks. For, if our senses were so developed as to perceive the thunder of a squirrel's heartbeat or the dread crunching of the slithy tove gyre and gimbeling in the wabe, would not we be inclined to consider ourselves more marvelously endowed than we aren't? And if, for a moment—a single, crystalline moment—we were to ignore the persistence of the Supreme Beast, would that not be tantamount to walking down the street with a canoe in your back pocket and having the front wheel fall off?

"To close, I leave you to study upon the conclusion handed down by this land's highest court upon a recent case in which the plaintiff was bound in leg irons for belching on a freight car: "Were the corpus stalicti to bequest modus operandi in the prescence of four or more desecrated Zen Buddhists, it is appellate that the valedictorian duly perform a rigor mortis upon aforementioned habeas corpus."

I demand to know whom among this august body is self-ordained to proclaim the taras leading us hinterward into the enfeebled rapture of bulba."

Silence. Complete, stifling, deadening silence. It attacked me and stormed the pores of my skin. Wanting only to die an ignominious death, clutching a grenade to my forehead if necessary, I timorously raised my eyes to the audience, when there arose such a volcano of sound that I half believed the grenade had exploded. Salvo after salvo of applause and cheering thundered toward me. I reeled and was grabbed by dozens of bodiless hands, whisked from one part of the hall to another, praised, extolled, maybe even shriven, until my senese no longer even registered the tempestuous events.

Those last fervid minutes before the meeting was adjourned have completely escaped my recollection. It's as if I had been some drunken sot after an all-night orgy of pub crawling.

The meeting over, we dispersed to our various abodes around the globe. But that was very nearly two years ago. I trust the Society has not been disbanded without notifying me.

# The Reach

*by Jennifer Aikman*

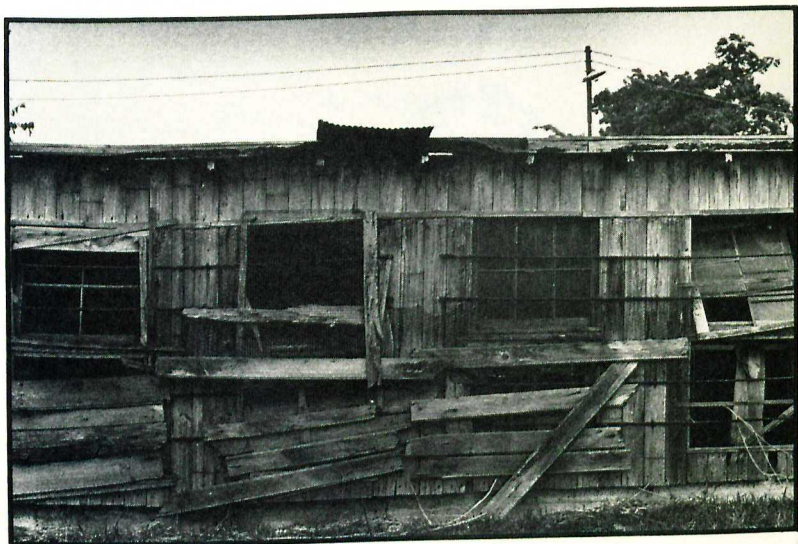
Inside—The Ache  
 of only one source—the schism  
 Oh, quite so, not pronounced  
     not profound  
     nor serious  
 But as wrenching  
     present if at all  
 Inside  
 An Ache  
     the sound of our voice  
     -not-quite-right-  
 Unspoken yet communicated.  
 Take heart—  
     it still is our voice  
     not his nor mine  
     even in the dark moment  
 Love assured.  
     (this is all that matters, of course  
     of course)  
 Why then the Ache. . . ?  
     it is the voice  
     saying so much  
     speaking the cue—each to each  
 I skipped class today  
     writing verse  
 No sense comes of it  
     I can observe  
     reveal  
     dig deep  
 But the Ache remains buried.  
 I fear.  
     Yet still I seek it  
 I cannot assume the defense  
 Ignorance is blight  
     not bliss  
 This strain  
     is strange  
     our voice reveals it  
     (Be glad—still it is our voice  
     not his nor mine  
     even in the most inward)  
 We both want love  
 We both want each other  
     (No “. . . don't we?” need be added)  
     Then why the strain?  
     It is not Us!  
     Rodin's "The Kiss"  
     **this** is Us . . .



The love—still assured  
 Then why? Wherefore the injury?  
 And, How to heal?  
 We've talked it out . . .  
 . . . ignored it . . .  
 The malady continues

I want so to make it right  
     Yet my skill is lacking  
     my degree still unearned

Then sweetly  
     miraculous inspiration  
 We extend our hands  
     The remedy  
     in the reach.



## Pausing . . . to light . . .

*by David P. Graham*

pausing today to light my pipe,  
watching the drizzle water the ground  
at winter's end,  
looking upon corn stubble across the road  
with a grey mist for backdrop,  
my heart reflected this funeral feeling  
soon to be buried with darkness,  
but the rain stopped. . .

(still a grey backdrop),  
and I the only spectator to the play  
as two wild geese entered stage,  
foraging the stubble,  
then enter a single rabbit, upstage right  
joining the birds in their act,  
all exiting while I turned to empty my pipe.

now,  
my heart welcomed this hopeful drama  
as my applause echoed in Nature's auditorium,  
and the dark curtain sank slowly down  
while she took a slow bow.

# Untitled

*by David Graham*

he woke up this morning, little in mind,  
blind, almost young,  
the arm felt good in his arms,  
the window sparkled, then shattered

(a newborn child restfully lies,  
a blanket of innocence,  
older he will get,  
and to his parents lie.)

a knock at the door.

he went tonight without Bacchus,  
naive, and had seen very little,  
the ale was cold in his hand,  
the effect was enjoyably false

(an untrue sense of courage,  
a distorted view of cars,  
crashing metal in the night,  
dying echoes don't discourage.)

another knock.

he went tonight with an unclouded memory,  
excitable and daring,  
the friends were happy,  
he inhaled consent easily

(a wall melts in front of you,  
angels hold your hand,  
distorted children cry,  
and Mary Jane eats the young ewe.)

I answered the door,

asleep in bed, nothing on,  
alone and dreaming,  
first touches were pleasing,  
the wind tossed her hair, her in his arms

(some values still held high,  
but crossed barriers unknown,  
self-gratitude,  
and that warmth on the thigh.)

and met my incubus.

## And We Sang to the Darkness

*by Sheri Leidig*

The fire was hot  
 with coals that popped  
 and would land on our shoes  
 or on the ground  
 where we would watch them turn to black.  
 The smell of burnt sugar  
 as the marshmallows roasted  
 and the warmth we felt  
 as we put them in our mouths  
 went all through us  
 and the sugar made our cold fingers sticky.  
 The light played games  
 on laughing faces  
 as we sang to the darkness  
                   to the fire  
                   and the night.  
 It was a peaceful union,  
 though I can't place the day or year  
 I can still see the faces  
 and I can still hear the song.

## Untitled Essay

*by Mary Hill*

The monstrous grey clouds of smoke belch up from the factories and fill the air. The wind takes hold of the smoke and spreads it out, so it falls in thin layers upon the city. There are no colors in Beloit, Wisconsin, only shades of grey. And the people who live in Beloit can't see beyond the smoke. As far as they know, the world consists of nothing more than a house, a factory, and a grey road which connects the two. Beloit is stagnant.

My daughter was born in Beloit, Wisconsin. On October 3, 1979, my colorful baby girl was born into a grey world. Her shining eyes were dulled by the smoke, her cries and her laughter were muffled by the heavy cloud which lay upon the city. I knew she didn't fit in. I knew I didn't fit in. Everything was wrong.

My daughter was sleeping upstairs in her room, lost in unconsciousness, trusting me to keep her safe. She was six months old. My husband and I were downstairs. Finally free from his grip, my neck throbbed as I cried. He held a .25 automatic to his head. Behind him I could see the hole he had punched into the wall, with a blow that was intended for me. All I could say to him was, "Go outside and do it. I don't want to watch." He left.

The sound of the band starting to play brought me back to the present. Their break was over, and I was drunk again. Every time I went to the Rhodexo Lounge I got drunk. And every time I got drunk I thought about all the things I

had been through the past few years. I shouldn't go there. I shouldn't drink. As the band continued to play, the din of the bar pushed all the thoughts out of my head. I poured myself another beer.

I looked around the bar; everyone was drunk. At least I wasn't alone. People were screaming at each other so they could be heard over the music, screaming conversations about nothing at all. Women were sitting with men they didn't even know, men they didn't want to know. Their solution to loneliness: drinks, dancing, and a ride home. And, if they were lucky, they wouldn't be sleeping alone. But in the morning it all looks the same, cold and ugly, and they'll still be alone. It's not a good solution, I know.

Loneliness can't be cured in a night. In fact I don't believe there's a solution to loneliness. Acceptance, that's the only way to deal with loneliness: live with it. That's how I feel now.

I had hoped for awhile. It had been the best eight months of my life. The trip to Bloomington, Illinois, every Friday was my reason to live. He lived in a nice, clean, upper-class complex. He had a two bedroom apartment, one bedroom for my daughter, and one for us. He and I would sit and look at each other for hours. We didn't have to talk. I would let myself get lost in his eyes, and I knew that he loved me. And I loved him. We would put my daughter to bed and light candles. We would lie together, hold each other and watch the shadows dance on the walls. I was content.

It was my daughter. She was the reason that it all ended, for he didn't love her. I could tell he would never love her. He knew it, too. We talked about it, and he said that he didn't want to raise someone else's child. I didn't blame him; I just cried. I still loved him.

I felt a hand rest itself upon my shoulder. I turned my head to see a pair of drowsy, drunken eyes staring at me. He was obviously a G.I. His hair was very short and his mustache was trimmed to perfection. "Would you like to dance?" he asked.

I looked to the dance floor, the blue lights were on and the band was playing a slow song. I looked at the guy and shook my head, "No thanks, I'd rather be alone."



# My Beloved



You have ravished my heart, my  
soul, my love.  
You have ravished my heart with  
a glance of your eyes,  
with one jewel of your necklace.  
How sweet is our love, my love,  
my perfect one.  
How much better is your love  
than any spice.  
How fair and pleasant you are,  
O fairest among women,  
and your kisses like the best of wine  
that goes down smoothly  
gliding over lips and tongue.  
Your lips distil nectar, my love;  
honey and milk are under your  
tongue;  
open to me your soul, my love,  
my dove, my perfect one;  
I am my beloved's  
and her desire is for me.  
Come, my beloved,  
let us go forth into the vineyards  
there I will give you my love,  
which I have kept just for you, O  
my beloved.  
Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a ring upon your finger;  
for love is strong as death,  
jealousy is cruel as the grave,  
its flashes are flashes of fire,  
a most vehement of fire.

## Worth Donaldson

## As a Flower . . . So am I

*by Kristen Clay*

Whither the wind blows  
I shall not go,  
But rather I shall bend  
To its direction  
While holding my stand.

I shall grow and change,  
Blow West and East.  
I shall bud in the Spring  
And lie dormant in the Winter  
Yet never shall I be uprooted.

Though my roots may grow deeper  
Or spread forth from my origin  
The bulb from which they came  
Will never change its place.

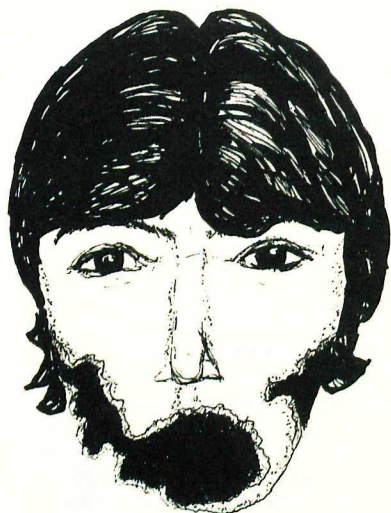
Though I collapse and die  
I shall fall back to the spot  
From which I came.

I shall begin my new existence,  
Showing a new face and color,  
And perhaps I shall bend  
To different winds, but always  
I shall hold my stand.

## Brown County

*by Dick Pearson*

Distant hills on fire  
Blazing red and golden leaves  
Melting in the haze  
Swirling like woodsmoke  
Drifting deep into valleys  
Masking sharp detail  
Pointillistically.



## Asylum

*by Laurie Keller*

Walls of white,  
Forms of restraint to keep us here.  
They think maybe we'll change,  
So we can go back where we came from.  
Turnabout . . .  
Asylum . . .  
Inside a black-laced womb,  
Time goes by.  
Each day crawls like tiny forms.  
It is here; we have found Life's secret.  
Pins on a board,  
Tacks in the wall,  
Sword in stone . . .  
Silence, broken by sounds,  
Needles, long hollow messengers of darkness,  
Magic, weaving spells around tortured minds,  
Calming the stormy beating impulses,  
To blend with the cool white walls.

# TAKE NO PRISONERS: The Roach

*by Robert Roach*

My name is Rigby. I'm a detective, a private eye, a hired dick. And I'm damn good. Though money in this damnable depression is hard to come by, my clientele is more than willing to pay my price. They know that I'm softer than a shadow's shadow and harder than a thousand diamonds. Plus, I know how to tell when each extreme is necessary. I'm damn well worth the money.

I prop my feet on my desk as I loll about waiting for a call. My box is finally ringing. And as those little bells sound out, I reach past the phone for my pack of King Edwards. Before lighting my stogie, I pause to pick up the receiver.

"Yeah?" I half-speak/half-exhale into the receiver in a nonchalant manner. It's the same muffled voice that contacted me for the job. I figured that it'd be him. The asshole thinks he's so clever. He'd shit if he found out that I've seen through his disguise. But I'll play along. Hell, for the money he's paying, I'd play Betty Boop and Kennedy the Cop at the same time.

I catch myself absent-mindedly playing with the Ace of Spades I'd found in my coat pocket Friday morning. Weird how it ended up there. I must've stashed it there the last time I played poker. Hope I won, 'cause I don't have any other explanation for the card's sudden appearance.

"Is the money ready?" I ask. "Don't worry about the report. I have enough raw information about his contacts to give you the foundation for some kind of case . . . You'll be by in half an hour with the balance due? . . . Good! The report and I will be waiting . . . Goodbye to you too."

My easy chair beckons and I almost succumb. But something won't let me rest. I'd seen a guy die the night before, but a death is no excuse for this spooky feeling. As I return to my desk this vague emotion hovers around my head. I almost feel wrong for doing this investigation—as if I'm touching soil better left untrod. Damn my ass for allowing emotions to enter into my job. I'm a professional. The best in the Windy City. I'm supposed to be above this sort of thing. But then again, who wouldn't—who couldn't—get personally involved when they stalked the Roach?

Snuffing out my cigar in disgust, I pick up my battered briefcase. I thumb past Tuesday's *Tribune*, through old notes, through yesterday's lunch, until I find my spanking new folder. A folder I bought four days ago just for this case. Just for the Roach.

I turn my desk lamp toward my papers, concentrating all of the room's light over half of my desk and my lap. As I begin going through my painstakingly typed pages I experience that vague feeling once more. Damn, am I going soft?! Or is there really more to this man—this wraith known as the Roach?

A knock breaks me from my train of thought. It couldn't be my client, it's only been three minutes since I hung up the phone. Cautiously, I cross over to the door and deliberately turn its bronze knob. Nobody's here. I look in the hallway. No one is there. I don't hear footsteps on the stairs, and the fire escape is out of the question. It's too far down the hall for someone to knock on my door, race the distance, open the window, climb out, close the window, and disappear from sight before I got to the door, and all without

making a sound. It's those damn kids! Always looking for a cheap thrill. But I've got to laugh because I was the same way.

I close the door behind me and return to my desk. I pick up my report and reach for another King Edward. Damn it, where are my matches! You can never find a light when you need one. Suddenly I find a light. A flaming match illumines the inky depths surrounding my desk. And it begins to move toward my face.

I'm a good detective—the best in Chi-town—and at that moment I proved it. Because anyone short of me would have pissed his pants. My first reaction is to go for my Colt. An iron grip prevents that move. Next, I try to punch where I think a head will be. Another hand grabs my fist—in mid-swing—and forces my hand down.

"Hello, Riggs," a low, grave voice says. Damn! This voice is colder than the wintertime hawk when it flies off the lake. Maybe I should've pissed my pants—I'd have an excuse to leave.

But I'm a professional. The best. So, I conquer my feelings. I reply.

"That's the name. Who's abusin' it?"

In response, the hand on my gun hand is removed. The hand finds my desk light. Slowly, the stranger tilts the lamp in his direction, the beam crawling across the ceiling like a miniature search light. The stark white beam finally halts on a well-dressed figure, donned in a deep blue three-piece pin-stripe, a trench coat, a coal grey fedora with a black band, and a thin mask over his eyes. And the black mask merely sets off two piercing grey orbs. Damn! I didn't know he was so imposing in the flesh. I nearly shit a brick. It's the Roach.

Again I regain my composure. Damn it, I'm a professional—and I have to deep reminding myself of that fact.

"Light?" he asks, motioning toward my cigar and his still-burning match. So as not to seem awed, I accept.

"Let's sit down," he says, "I think we'll be more comfortable." I nod in a nonchalant manner, but, damn it, I wish he'd quit staring at me.

I sit down behind my desk and he pulls a chair along side it. His hat creates an eerie kind of shadow that half hides, half highlights his face. In a slow, deliberate action, he reaches into his coat's inner pocket and withdraws a cigarette. I have no fear. I know that he wears his gun on his right hip. In my profession you have to know these things.

"Why'd you come?" I finally ask. No comment. Damn, is this guy deaf or what?! His silence is getting on my nerves. I asked him a direct question, the least he could do is answer. And suddenly I realize that his silence has put me on the psychological defensive. So, as I try to calm down, he speaks.

"I just came by to see how the investigation turned out," he states in his stone cold manner.

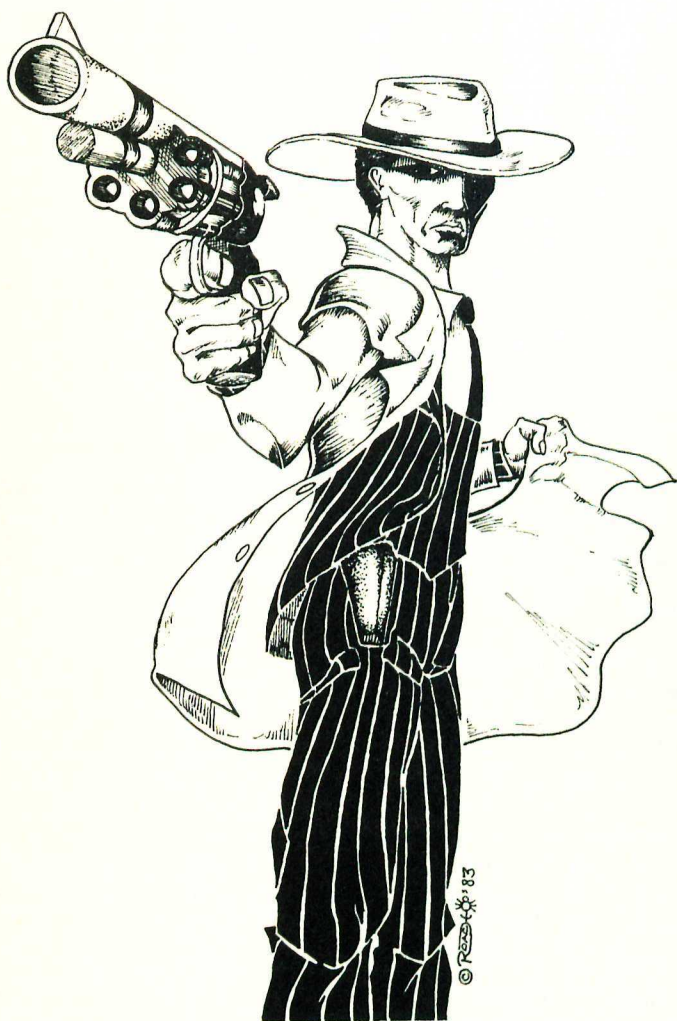
I must look like ice water's been thrown into my face. Denying the fact would be the height of stupidity. As much as I hate to admit it, this guy is the ultimate. He's the Roach. And nobody bullshits the Roach. County morgue has been full of examples of this basic fact.

"It went pretty good," I say, proud that I kept a level voice and that my eyes never left his.

I notice a slight smile shadowing his face as I answer. Is this it? Is this mother gonna turn my lights out? No, he isn't. It isn't a malicious smile, just a smile. Thank God! Because if he decided he wanted me dead, how could I stop him?

"I was right," he mutters, still smiling.

"Say what?" I ask since his statement didn't make sense. His smile fades



and he merely shakes his head.

"Not important," he replies. In other words, case closed.

"Then your client should be here in about twenty-five minutes to pick it up," he continues.

"Twenty-six," I correct.

"Okay. You started the report Wednesday, right?"

"Right." I'm getting nervous again.

"That begins and ends with my last adventure—the one dealing with 'Rhinestone' Washington."

"Yeah," I concur.

"Did you go into the streets to find out the 'whats' and 'whys' or did you just record the 'whos' and 'wheres'?"

He's referring to the depth of my investigation. Did I merely record what happened, or did I try to ascertain the motives and the particulars of situations.

"I did what I was paid to do," I answer, side-stepping the question.

I must have said the wrong thing. Surely Satan couldn't eyeball a saint with as much loathing as he turned on to me.

"I just took the notes. No particulars."

"And you have in your notes, then, that Rhinestone was in constant contact with me from Wednesday until he was killed."

"Yeah," I reply.

"And that's all you have about his death?" he demands. For some reason he seems hardly able to control himself.

"Get off it!" I exclaim. "Rhinestone was a pimp and a pusher. He was a worthless piece of slime—a waste of human flesh. If any asshole deserved to die—"

Suddenly a vice grip clamps onto my throat. The back of a hand hits my face like a concrete slab. My head jerks east to west so fast that it seems unattached to my shoulders. And if the hand choking off my air hadn't also been holding me up, I'd be lying on the floor.

In disgust, the Roach throws me back into my chair. What's up? I simply said the truth about a lowlife with whom we were both acquainted—and disliked. Hell, the Roach himself has offed a dozen or more just like Rhinestone.

So why the reaction? Is there something more? There must be for him to come back so violently.

"Then what's the story? I ask as soon as I can.

"That's what I came here to tell," he says as he reseats himself. So I kick back and listen.

\* \* \* \* \*

The word was out. Rhinestone wanted some of me. Strange for a slime to want to see the Roach—I give most of them nightmares. But I don't go out of my way to see scum on hearsay or rumor. So I didn't go to see Rhinestone.

That was Wednesday morning. Hours, like any facet of time, can change the course of a lifetime. The afternoon hours changed the course of Rhinestone's. And of his brother's.

*(What brother of Rhinestone's is the Roach talking about? And how does it relate to me? More than ever, he has my attention.)*

I'd just broken up a crooked craps game operated out of a shack in the alley behind 49th and South Parkway. These guys would pick the folks clean as they went for a bit of night life up around 47th. Dirty bastards. I didn't need to fire any shots, but I'd give odds none of the assholes got up for a while.

The work done, I strolled north to see if any other business needed attending. East of the Savoy I ran into a close friend who—somehow—always knows how to find me. And with her was another streetwalker. Introductions were swiftly made and the situation was quickly sketched. I went away with my new acquaintance, an extremely attractive black girl named Cybil, who, interestingly, was the main meat in Rhinestone's stable.

By the way, I believe it was here that you picked up my trail.  
*(He's right. But I'll be damned if I give him the satisfaction of knowing he's right. The over-observant sonofabitch.)*

Cybil was messed up. Not high. Not drunk. But something bad was messin' with her mind.

"We're away from Sadie now," I said. "What's the problem?"

"Didn't you hear nothin' about Rhinestone? He needs you bad. Real bad."

"I don't do nothin' for cheap-ass bastards like that pimp you've got. The most amount of attention I'd give him is a bullet in the brain."

"Naw! It ain't nothin' like that. He needs your help 'cause there ain't nobody else he can turn to. He wants to go clean and git outta Chicago. But he's got folks on his ass. Mean white boys that're part of Bugs's gang."

"Why'd your squeeze get a sudden change of heart? Seems to me he was makin' money off of his brothers' misery."

"Hey, I only know what I been told and what I seen. The boy's serious. All this other shit you gonna have to find out on your own. Hell! You the Roach, ain't you?!"

I told her to have Rhinestone meet me over at Poro College in an hour. This adventure had gone beyond another punk wanting something for free from the Roach. It had become interesting.

Rhinestone stood in the deepest shadow that he could find behind the college beauty shop. I'd never seen him that nervous—constantly fidgeting and taking quick, shallow drags off of his cigarette.

"Here for a perm" I asked. He nearly jumped out of his shoes. I guess he didn't like my joke. Maybe he didn't like the fact that I didn't smile. Or maybe the fact that I was able to sneak up beside him without him even having a clue that I was there shook him the most.

"Damn, Man!" he exclaimed. "I thought that was my ass!"

"It may be if you don't tell me somethin' good."

"Yeah! Yeah!" he said, crushing his cigarette butt with his heel in a spastic manner.

"Why you smellin' your piss? I asked him.

"I gotta get out, man. Y'know, sometimes we all need a change of life and atmosphere. That's what we gonna do."

I hate being bullshitted. I'd give him one more chance before wringing the truth out of him. The truth about his motives—and the truth about his pronoun "we."

"Try it again," I stated.

"Whatcha mean, man?"

I don't think he knew what hit him. If I'd wanted, I could have broken his jaw, but that could wait. I wanted the truth, not a corpse. But the choice was his alone.

I reached down and grabbed him by the lapel, jerking him to his feet. Washington wiped away the blood from his nose and mouth, gasping to find his breath.

"Okay, my man, okay. I shoulda known better than to bullshit the Roach." He paused, I supposed to gather his thoughts, and then he looked at me. His face had changed. I knew he'd no longer front me. No more bullshit.

"I gotta secret I've kept for the longest time. Ain't nobody who knows it. Not even you—and they say you know everything. I've got me a kid brother. His name's Spat. When we was little and livin' in St. Lou, Daddy ran away. And Momma died when I was seventeen. But she made me promise to take care 'a Spat. I swore to her I would. So I moved us to Chi. Spat was nine."

"You remember when I used to relay the numbers? Shit, I knew bein' a

damn runner wasn't the way to the cash. I knew you had to be pullin' the strings instead 'a bein' a string. I also knew street life was one way to a dead end. I knew what it took to turn a buck and I was ready to do it. And I was damn good. I am damn good. But not Spat. Spat had a brain. I'd get him some schoolin'. I'd make enough to put him through Cookman or Jackson or Tuskegee or some other black folks' school. And I'd make enough to put me on easy street.

"But damn monkey see, damn monkey do. Nigger couldn't see where this world'll take you. Stupid fucker had to celebrate his eighteenth birthday by holding up a money boy in Bugs Moran's gang. Lucky bastard took down the runner but not the witness. And since he don't know the streets, he made a bee line home. Never even thought o' them trailin' his ass."

"So what am I to do when these mothers bust in wantin' Spat? I iced 'em. And I knew right then that Chi'd got too hot. We booked. But they was already watchin' the stations and stuff. They'd put it out on the street that 'the guilty party was in their custody.' They had to save face somehow, else that shit'd be happenin' all the time."

"What else was I to do? You're my last hope. But if you don't help me, fine. At least get Spat out. We got kin in Atlanta and I've sent them four thousand seven hundred dollars. It don't mean shit if I don't make it, but I swore to my mamma about Spat. He's gotta make it."

What was I to say? This was a totally different Rhinestone—trying to go straight, trying for a new life and deeply caring about someone.

"I'll help," I said.

You and I resumed our respective cases Thursday in the early evening. I caught up with Cybil hot-leggin' it over by the Boulevard Apartments. I'd decided that she'd be my relay to Rhinestone. I could've gone myself because I'd figured out his hiding spot, but I couldn't just take you there. As it turned out, you found it without too much of a problem anyway.

I told her to have Rhinestone meet me in Chinatown behind the city hall at midnight. Funny how hookers become attached to their pimps. Good thing for Rhinestone that she still cared—it helped uncomplicate matters.

I had hours to kill and so I decided to test your tracking ability. You're good, too. There are some things you might have done a little better. I'm sure you'd smirk at such a comment—you're a pro—but I'll prove what I just said.

At midnight I sucked on my tobacco stick so that its glow would give away my presence. Or else he'd never have found me.

"What's happenin'? he asked. He looked haggard. For good reasons.

"I've got a chance for you. It requires risk. You could end up dead. It's just a chance, but if you've got the balls we'll give it a go."

"Is it our best shot?"

"It's your only shot."

"Then run it down."

"Yeah—in a minute. First, let's ease out of the shadows a little. And then you count to sixty."

"What?!"

I didn't reply. Why should I? I didn't like having a decision questioned. Least of all from someone I was helping.

I guess he got the message because he backed out of the shadows.

I smiled, anticipating his surprise—and yours. I disappeared. I heard him gasp and hoped that he wouldn't panic. Then, as I slipped away from his location, he began to count.

The building caddy-corner to our meeting place rushed up on me as I dodged evening lights and raced time. I was just playing a game that—if

things had been different—would have become a game of death. A nigh-unseen silhouette sat in the building's deepest shadow—on the fire escape between the second and third floors. As softly as possible I circled above the watcher and swiftly descended upon him. But it seemed this shadow was occupied by other shadows—it didn't know I was there. In a split-second I ascertained that it meant no harm. But, as an example, and because I couldn't resist, I'd let the stalker know I'd been there. So I left him my calling card—an Ace of Spades.

*(He's watching my eyes. I must look surprised—what an understatement. He could've offed me right then—Thursday night—and I'd've never known what hit me. The thought sends a chill down my spine.)*

At the count of fifty-nine, I tapped Rhinestone on his shoulder and he almost collapsed. After he regained his composure, he asked me to outline my plan.

"Tomorrow night at ten I'll be by to pick up Spat—"

"Whaddayou mean you'll be by to get Spat when you don't even kn--"

I suppose my smile answered his question. "Spat and I'll go to the Lincoln Centre where, at 10:15, your lift to Atlanta will pick us up. You be at Temple Isaiah at 10:30 and we'll pick you up. It'd be too obvious and too vulnerable to have you both at the same place. I'll ride along till we hit Gary," I said. "Then you're on your own. If you make it, let me know," I concluded, handing him a note with an address.

"Yeah, thanks, but what ride, if you don't mind me askin'?"

"Have you ever heard of Van Huens' Trucking?"

"Hell, who in Chi ain't? Those folks is big time—own grocery stores, shipping, land—near everything I can think of they own part of."

"Well, that's your ride to Dixie."

"Van Huens' Truckin'?! Ain't no way. Those people are rich and legit. What'd they want with my black ass? You gotta be bullshittin'."

"You should know better than anybody—I don't bullshit."

"But—but how'd you do somethin' **that** big? The Van Huens never heard of me and could care less if they ever would. How'd you get them to help us?"

"My influence doesn't stop at the river," I replied. And he took that as my final comment on the subject.

"We'll be ready, man. And thanks."

A lot of things had happened before Rhinestone and I spoke—things which would affect my operation. Word had leaked out about Rhinestone and Spat, and Moran's gang had lost some respect. Another attempted hit cost them two men. So they were livid to find my charges to make examples of them.

Also, word was out that Riggs was on the street. Nobody knew that you were stalking me, but you were noticed eyeballin' Rhinestone. You and I know you were actually tailing me, but all the regular people saw were those occasions when I—and consequently you—would stop. And those times were only when Rhinestone and I met. So word was out that you were bounty hunting for Moran and that Rhinestone was the meat.

All of this wouldn't have meant shit if the dominoes hadn't fallen the way that they did.

I figured you'd be with me on Friday so I purposely made myself visible. As soon as I was sure that you were on my hip, I shook you loose. And I made conclusively sure that you were lost for good.

But I've got to give you credit, Rigby, you're a pro—and you're good. What I eventually figured out is that after you lost my trail you picked up Cybil's. Smart thinking. Since Cybil led me to Rhinestone she could probably lead you

to Rhinestone. And Rhinestone would inevitably lead you to me. Just so that you could complete that damnable report for that cheap-ass politician-client who hired you.

But what you didn't know—what you could've easily found out if you'd put your ears in the streets—was that Moran had put a tail on you, hoping you'd lead his boys to Rhinestone. So, when Cybil dropped by that little shack opposite of Pershing Road on Michigan, you weren't the only asshole patting himself on the back for being so smart. Luckily she cruised by a little after ten or else they'd've got both Spat and Rhinestone.

As it was, Spat and I got to the Lincoln on time and Van Huen was good to his word. The truck eased up a little before 10:15. Simultaneously, as I estimate, Rhinestone was leaving for the temple with you in his pocket, hoping for me, and Moran's boys in your pocket, waiting for a chance.

We drove as quickly and cautiously as possible toward the temple. And as we did I got a sick feeling at the pit of my stomach. Everything was going right—and that worried me. Especially since lives were directly involved. And then, as if on cue, something did happen. As we turned east off of Drexel onto 47th, we ran into a traffic cop redirecting the flow. The delay cost us five minutes—and Rhinestone Washington his life.

As we turned south onto Greenwood, I noticed a Duesenberg squealing onto 47th—off of University—and head toward the lake.

"Move this thing!" I shouted to the driver. We arrived there in just under two minutes and I raced to the spot I expected to find Rhinestone—Spat just a step or two behind me.

I knew what to expect so I didn't slip in the pool of blood. As I helped Spat back to his feet I looked into his eyes. They seemed older—and wiser. They seemed to realize that the street was a dead end. They also seemed to accept responsibility for his brother's death and of Rhinestone's dream for a better life for him.

I threw Spat back into the truck and told the driver not to stop till they hit Georgia. About three minutes had gone by since the Duesenberg had spun onto 47th. I was cold rage. I'd given my word to Rhinestone and I'd made a promise to myself—to get them out. Circumstances screwed that up, but I then swore to avenge Rhinestone's death. And, I reasoned, no time was like the present.

Providence provided me with the means to take up the chase immediately. A Studebaker presented itself at the corner of University and 51st, and I siezed the opportunity. And I swore to myself not to scratch, dent or injure the car in any way—especially after I'd abruptly left its rightful owner, confused and stranded, on that corner.

The assholes had a four minute lead on me. Half by knowing their *modus operandi*—half by hunch—I sped my borrowed wheels toward Erikson Drive. The assassins would probably take the lakeshore route toward the Loop to get lost in the downtown area. Where they'd go after driving north on the lakefront, I had no idea. So I had to catch them as soon as possible, pinning my plans on the hope that they'd feel secure and slow down.

I raced at break-neck speed along the waterfront and caught the Duesey at the point where Leif Erikson became Columbus Drive. But how could I stop them? I didn't want to hurt the car so I couldn't run them off the road. But I couldn't let them go. I wouldn't let them go. Their lives were mine. I'd take no prisoners.

I drew my gun and switched it to my left—and obviously less accurate—hand. Whereas my right hand had over a 98 percent accuracy rate, my left barely had over 92.

My first shot was true. It shattered the rear window and splattered a rear seat passenger's head. Only four assholes left.

The rest returned fire as the wheelman tried to pull away. I wasted a couple of shots, unintentionally, but wasted nonetheless. Then one of the punks in the back seat pulled out a Tommy. I knew my next shot would have to perfect or I wouldn't get another chance. As I squeezed the trigger the car hit a bump and slightly spoiled my aim. But not enough for the hood. The machine gun flew from his grasp and into the street as the bullet exploded into his arm.

The driver wheeled onto Jackson Blvd. and headed west. As we raced through the Loop, I wasted another bullet. So I knew the next—the last—shot would have to count. I would have to stop them. As we passed the Monadnock building I again squeezed my trigger in a cold, deliberate manner. This time no bump altered my aim and I got great satisfaction from seeing the rear left wheel's rubber disintegrate.

Forced afoot, the four emerged from their car, guns blazing and leather flying. And one fucker put a bullet hole through the Studebaker's front windshield. Another promise shot to Hell.

Moran's boys gained a little time on me as I reloaded and ran straight for the Board of Trade Building. Within seconds I was on their heels, but still too slowly. As I followed their path—bursting through the lobby doorway—I saw their elevator door closing.

I had no time to waste cursing my poor luck. It was time to see if I was all that the street folks made me out to be. So I hit the stairway.

Taking three steps at a time, I began gaining on the ascending box. I was only a floor behind it when I hit the fourth floor. I just hoped the sum-bitches weren't taking it all the way to the observatory—forty-four stories from the ground.

On the eighth floor I again left the staircase to check my progress. As I shoved the stairway door open I heard a light click—as if metal had met metal. Something was wrong. Just then I heard a slight hum in the air and saw a wire swiftly descending toward my neck. Faster than thought, I separated the wire from my neck with my gun's barrel. A quick elbow jab to my assailant's solar plexus loosened his hold on the strangling wire. Pivoting on a dime, I followed up my jab with a right to the bridge of his nose—a blow that crushed his cartilage. The punk probably figured that he'd be some sort of hero—be the “man” to ice the Roach. I put a bullet between his eyes. Only three assholes left.

The scum had served a purpose for the others. He'd bought them time. I glanced at the elevator's floor count. It was almost on the top floor. Time to gamble again. Another elevator was two stories beneath me when I summoned it, but it seemed years away. Finally the mouse trap got to my floor. I pressed 44 and checked my weapons—my gun and me. After next to forever, the elevator doors slid open. I knew what to expect. They were waiting. Why else would they ride to the top floor?

I took off my trench coat and tossed it out of the elevator. Instant fireworks. And while their fire was concentrated on my coat—before they could react—I dove out of the box. Rolling across the floor as fast as possible, I finally brought my legs underneath me and I was ready to return fire. One of the fools, the one I had shot in the arm, was slow to cease firing at my coat. The flame of his gun made him an easy target. I blew a hole through the low-life's chest. Only two assholes left.

I guess one of the hoods couldn't handle the pressure. A big guy with a scar from his left ear to below his mouth. After I shot Mr. Tommy Gun, I moved away from the elevator's light and back toward a wall. Maybe I made too



much noise in moving or maybe the punk made a lucky guess—I don't know. Nevertheless, the big guy began to run in my direction, screaming like a banshee. Perhaps it was supposed to scare me. It didn't work. He did squeeze off a shot before I did. A nice shot, in fact. I could feel the breeze from the bullet as it passed near my left cheek. I aimed my gun at my fast-approaching target and blew his right knee to Hell.

He began begging me for his life. I was sure Rhinestone begged for his. But Rhinestone was dead. So too would this sumbitch be. I shot scarface in the throat. Only one asshole left.

It was the wheel man. As soon as he realized that he was alone he began to negotiate.

"Is it the Roach out there?" he asked. When he got no answer he knew it was me.

"I just drove the car," he said. "I'm sure we can work something out. Shit!

I'm not even emotionally involved."

Still he got no response.

"Damn it, answer me!"

Only silence.

"Damn you ass! Talk to me!"

No reply.

But as he ranted I began to calculate. I'd heard nine shots fired at my trench coat. Seriously doubting that the dispersal of the rounds was significantly lopsided, I guesstimated the wheel man had three shots left before needing to reload.

Suddenly, I leaped to my feet. In a seemingly irrational move, I raced through the moonlight that bathed half of the observatory in that eerie, blue nighttime light. The driver came up firing. Two shots came close—the third I think was in desperation. It was drastically off. I stopped in my tracks. He drew a bead and pulled the trigger. The hammer fell. The gun went "click."

Slowly, I began walking across the chamber floor for him.

"Bugs made us do it!" he shouted. Still I approached.

"Damn you! Don't you see we had to do it?!" We had to make an example of the freakin' nigger!"

Fine, I said to myself. Then I'll make an example of you.

As the last straw, the gangster pitched his gun at my face. It was an easy object to dodge. The wheel man fought like a cornered rat once he realized persuasion wouldn't save his skin. He went straight for my throat. And he might have been a good rival if I'd been in the mood to fight. But I wasn't.

I kned the scum in the nuts and then pumped a right and a left into his stomach. He began to reel and I grabbed his lapel to steady him. Then I put the chump down for good with an upper-cut to the chin. Still smouldering, I took the low-life by the throat and the belt and swung him above my head. I'd heard somewhere that if somebody falls from a high place, they usually pass out by a hundred feet. The hood would soon find out.

The observatory window was three steps away and I used the distance to build up momentum. The wheel man woke up just as he crashed through the glass. He began screaming and falling—all the way to Hell. I didn't care. I was sure Rhinestone screamed but they hadn't seemed to mind. At least he was avenged. No more assholes left.

I picked up my coat and exited quickly, quietly and unobserved. The next morning I walked away from a non-descript home in Garfield Park. A Studebaker sat outside of it. A Studebaker with a shattered windshield—and a \$100 bill lying on the front seat to pay for repairs and any inconvenience.

\* \* \* \* \*

He ends his story there.

"So that's it," I say to him. "Then what's the purpose in all of this?"

The Roach stares back. No emotion—just a blank stare. And the absence of emotion is unnerving.

"Are you still so blind? Maybe I made a mistake Thursday night. You merely look at things from the outside—the people, the places, their situations. Why? This world we're in is a combat zone. Your screw-up cost a life—a life I'd sworn to protect. And you ask me the purpose behind this meeting?"

He has a point. I guess it's time I did open my eyes a little.

"I don't expect you to be like me," the Roach continues, "but don't keep me from helping these people. In most cases, I'm all they've got."

He steps back. And suddenly, he's gone. Vanished. Damn!

A knock at my door snaps me back to reality. I know who it is.

"Come in, Jacks," I say.

The mousy assistant D.A. enters in a near-catatonic state.

"How did you know it was me?" he asks. I merely laugh.

I have more important things to deliberate than his surprise. The Roach is right. And even more importantly, I've been wrong. And yet he let me live—on two occasions. Why?

Nonetheless, I was contracted to do a job and I did it to the best of my ability. And it was done well. Hell, I'm the best in this town at what I do.

I have a dilemma.

"We're going to nail that low-life scum thanks to you, Rigby," Jacks says enthusiastically. "His time has come. We are better suited to deal with the under-privileged."

I don't like the way he said that.

"Here's your money," Jacks announces as he pulls an envelope from his pocket. "Now give me the report."

I pick up my matches but ignore my King Edwards.

The Roach hadn't made a mistake Thursday night—nor tonight.

"Here it is," I reply, dangling it over the edge of my desk—above my trash can. Jacks eyes it greedily. And maliciously.

I strike a match against the sole of my shoe and apply the flame to my brand new folder—and the report.

Jacks freezes for a moment. Then he puts the money back into his pocket and leaves. Fuck him.

I'm a pro—the best in the Windy City. I can always get another job.

## Samson and Delilah at Night

*by S. J. Sutherland*

When we tie ourselves into the knot of night  
 Exhalation of mystery and repose,  
 You scarcely feel the cut and pull of the scissors,  
 The smile of the blades lying in the sheath.  
 You ask will we never leave this temple?  
 The vessels have been drained and contain only fetid wine.  
 Your frankish curls tighten around your head.  
 Samson, together we will weave a bright wreath of hair.  
 Birch ladders are thrown against heaven to balance your weight,  
 Our footfalls ascending like topaz coils on an Egyptian neck.  
 Each night I walk in the backs of stars  
 You follow me to the place we will never leave.



## When He Comes

*by Sarah Hill*

He will be here soon.  
I will do a dinner of roast duck and wine  
with apples, oranges, grapes and sweet chocolate  
to trim it finely all around  
for when he comes.  
I will light tall candles and burn jasmine  
pound pillows, shake sheets and quilts  
smooth the house down to a whispering flame  
for when he comes.  
I will wrap me in silk that unwraps  
slowly and easily,  
do my hair intricately  
with only one pin,  
stroke scented oil behind my ears and down my throat  
and hold myself still  
until he comes.  
I will not touch the food that lies waiting  
(though I hunger)  
I will re-light the worn wax  
as it drowns its flame  
I will set me in a hard-backed chair  
and hold my head erect.  
I will be waiting  
I will be  
prepared  
when he comes.

## ART CREDITS

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