



TOWERS

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TOWERS' selections are determined by the vote of the members of Sigma Tau Delta, and are chosen as the best of more than 200 submissions made to the annual TOWERS' prize competition. Only the editor knows the authors of the entries at the time of judging.



EXPRESSION

by SARA MAXSON

Alone in a vastness of white sand
A tiny blade of life extends
Itself through its dry, rough bed.
Alone—but for wind and sound of sea.

In its desire for expression
The blade let the wind fan it
Across the smooth, white shifting sand
To form an encircling band, a sketch.

The blade, tiny tool of the wind
Bent forward, then back, then forward again,
Swaying with the moving life
That only the wind could give.

But soon the coming ocean tide
Reached greedy fingers to the sand,
Pulling shells, stones and sand to sea.
The calling of greed echoed waves.

Closer reached the hand of greed
To wash away the creation
Of the wind and blade—greed kissed wet.
With one last grasp—nothing.

THE MONEY GOD

by CAROL LINNE AHMED

"Good day, Mrs. Rath. I see you're right on time."

"Oh, I never miss a payday. Here you are, one hundred-fifty, even."

"All rightey. Deposited it shall be. 'Bye now. Hello, Mr. Alnes. How's the wife? Morning, Mr. Brian. How are you, Davy? Nice to see you, Miss Parner. Terrible weather, eh, Mr. Lamb? How's your trick knee, Mrs. Blount?"

The hackneyed pleasantries came and went with each customer, in as steady a flow as the people who poured through the great steel doors. One after another they came with their paychecks, their pensions, their bonds, and all manner of other currency. Thousands of bills flew through Christopher's hands and into the hungry drawer below the window marked SAVINGS TELLER. Would its appetite never be satisfied? It certainly didn't seem that way. Little by little, however, the influx of cash and people dwindled and ceased, until at 5:00, the few remaining stragglers were shooed away. The steel doors were coaxed to a close by two husky guards and the previous drone of voices was now replaced by the clickety-clik-clak of typewriters, comptometers, adding machines, tabulators, check counters, and coins being dropped into coin drawers.

Christopher tallied his receipts; then carried the heavy drawer over to the supervisor's desk, grabbing his hat from the rack as he went. Christopher was a big man — tall and muscular, about 32, not at all like most men that work in banks. His face was rough, like a stone that had been chipped at with a chisel to make features on it. With a solid stride he walked toward the little side exit for bank employees only, which was opened officiously for him by the blue-uniformed guard, and suddenly he stood in the bright light of the world outside. A gusty wind threatened to kidnap his jaunty

hat; his tie flapped impudently at his face. It was a fine day, yessir, a fine day, but he missed the smell of money to which he had become so accustomed in the bank. He sniffed cautiously, lingeringly at his hands, delighting in the smell of sweaty coins that still clung to them. Feeling quite contented with himself, Christopher Junket marched home with a slight smile parting his lips.

Home was a four-room bungalow in the residential district three blocks from the bank. The proximity of the two buildings eliminated the need for a car, while, at the same time, it provided what Christopher called his daily constitutional. Molly always insisted she didn't need a daily constitutional, especially when she had shopping to do, but Christopher wouldn't buy a car at any rate, so Molly kept her figure by hiking wherever she went, and it was a source of constant humiliation to her, since the other neighborhood wives drove cars to market, to bridge club, and to school to pick up their children.

Molly was wrist-deep in Mulligan stew when Christopher entered the kitchen. It was his favorite dish. "She must be softening me up for something again," he thought. "Mulligan stew means she wants to spend money on some tomfoolery or another."

"No!" he said to her. "Whatever the question is, the answer is no. No, you cannot have a mink; no, we cannot afford a new television; no, we cannot buy a car; no, you don't need a deep-freeze; no, whatever it is that you want."

Dinner that night was one long argument about converting from coal to gas heat, with Molly on one side of the table giving the disadvantages of coal and the advantages of gas, and Christopher on the other giving the reasons why they couldn't afford it. And it was true. They couldn't afford it. Christopher's salary from the bank met the payments on the house and furniture, and bought clothes and groceries, but outside of an occasional night on the town, his paychecks covered no more than these necessities. Yet Christopher refused to look for a better-paying job, despite Molly's persistent urgings to that effect. He loved the bank with its rustle of currency, its jingle of coins, and its stuffy, sweaty smell of just plain money. He was obsessed with the idea of money, with the thought of it; he was overpowered in the presence of it, and desirous in the absence of it. He wanted money, not to buy things with or to make life easy for himself, or to gain power, but to be surrounded by it. More than anything in the world, Christopher wanted money around him, beside him, on top of him, and underneath him. Money was his god, and he worshipped it as devoutly and as regularly as any Christian ever worshipped Jesus or as any Moslem ever worshipped Allah. And so, Christopher went on at the bank, surrounded by money, and Molly cajoled and pleaded and threatened in vain.

In the evenings after dinner Christopher had the habit of retiring to

his desk in the living room and working on his calculations. Molly never disturbed him when he was calculating. It wouldn't have done any good, anyway; he became so wrapped up in what he was doing, he never noticed anyone or anything. He just sat there mumbling a string of figures over and over to himself, figures that made no sense to Molly. They certainly didn't have anything to do with the household finances, and Christopher didn't bring work home with him from the bank. Long ago she had wondered just what these calculations were, but she had never been able to find out. Christopher wouldn't tell her.

"Not till I'm sure," he always said.

"Sure of what?" she would ask.

But he only replied, "Wait and be patient. You'll know one of these days."

So she had tried snooping, but that, too, revealed nothing. All she could make out on the scraps of paper in the desk were what looked to her like dates. Not caring much about figures and calculations, Molly had stopped wondering then and shrugged her shoulders, saying that everyone had their little eccentricities, and Christopher's nightly ritual with the scraps of paper had become an expected routine.

This night, however, Christopher did not work on his calculations. He merely went to the desk, picked up one piece of paper, sat down on the couch, lit a cigarette, and stared at the white slip in his hand. When Molly came in from the kitchen, she was surprised not to see him at his accustomed place.

"Why, Christopher — no calculations tonight?"

"No, Molly. No calculations tonight or any night ever again. I'm all through. I've got it all figured out."

"Got what all figured out?"

"The day the world is going to end."

"The day the . . . Why that's ridiculous! Nobody, NOBODY knows when the world will end. That's impossible."

"No, it isn't. I've got it all figured out. I know when it's going to end. Look. It's all right here on this piece of paper." The paper quivered as he held it up for her to see.

"But, Chris, that . . . Chris, that's . . . this Sunday!"

"Sure it is. The world began on a Sunday, so it's only logical that it should end on a Sunday."

"Oh, I don't believe it. You've gone plumb out of your head! How do you know the world began on a Sunday, anyway?"

"Why it says so right in the Bible, in the very beginning — in Genesis to be exact. It says that God created the world in six days and he rested on

the seventh day. The seventh day is Saturday, so the first day has to be Sunday. That's how I know."

"But how did you figure out this date? That's not in the Bible."

"Never mind how I figured it out. That's my business. Anyway, it isn't important. The important thing, Molly, is . . ." He drew her down into his lap. "The important thing is that you and I will be the only ones to escape."

"Escape? How can anyone escape if the whole world is going to end? That's silly."

"Listen, Molly. It's not going to be like what you think. There's going to be a war, with atom bombs and guided missiles and germ warfare. It'll come all of a sudden, with no warning, just — poof — out of a clear, blue sky. Nobody will know it's coming, except you and me."

"Where will we escape to?"

"I've dug a tunnel that goes deep, deep down underground. It's stocked with supplies that will last for six months. We'll be safe from everything that will be going on above ground."

"But, Chris. Sunday. That's four days from now!"

"Uh-huh."

"I don't believe it. It's just too incredible to be true."

"It's true."

"I don't even want to talk about it any more." She was out of his lap now, standing by the kitchen door.

"But, Molly . . ."

"No!"

"Molly, I . . . Listen, Molly. We'll be the second Adam and Eve. There'll be no one else. Everything on earth will be ours just for the taking, a modern Garden of Eden. You can have all the cars you want — cars, and jewels and furs, a fancy house, a deep freeze. And I, I can have money — piles of it — to sit in, to scatter to the wind, to sleep on. Think of it, all the money in the world!"

"Money?! Hah! That's a laugh. And you, such a skinflint. You'd take it all to the grave with you. You wouldn't spend a dollar of it."

"I wouldn't have to. Everything we need will be right here. All we will have to do is take it."

"You dumbbell! If there's an all-out war, there won't be anything left to take. It will all be destroyed."

"No, it won't. They won't bomb the cities."

"How do you know? How do you know all these things?"

"I just know."

"Oh." A long silence. You could see she was thinking. "Well, I still don't believe it. I think you've flipped your wig!"

And that was the end of it. Neither Molly nor Christopher spoke of it again until the next Saturday night. At about 11:00, Christopher picked up his little portable radio, turned to Molly, and asked, "Are you coming?"

"Coming where?"

"Down into the tunnel."

"Tunnel!" A sharp peal of laughter. "No, dear, I'm not coming with you into your beloved tunnel. I'm staying right up here, and when you come up again tomorrow from your molehole, I'll show you that everything is fine and that the world is just the same as it has been. End of the world, hah! Chris, you get funnier every day. You ought to go on television with those practical jokes of yours."

Very evenly and quietly Christopher replied, "It isn't funny, and I'm not coming up tomorrow."

"Oh, I see. You're going to live down there for good. Well, that's fine with me."

"I'm going to stay for six months."

"Well, goodbye, dear. If you ever get lonesome, just let me know and I'll come visit you for a day or two."

"You won't come then?"

"No."

"Please."

"It's just too ridiculous."

"Molly, I love you. Please come."

"No."

"Goodbye, then."

"Goodbye. See you in six months."

Christopher hesitated for a few moments, then left the house with his radio, a flashlight and a kerosene lamp. He found the entrance to his tunnel and descended the earthen steps he'd formed so patiently over the months. Down, down, down he went, the beam of the flashlight slicing into the velvet blackness before him, until finally the large subterranean room revealed itself to him. Around the walls were stacks and stacks of canned goods — meat, vegetables, condensed milk, fruits; 500 sparkling bottles of distilled water; assorted bottled beverages; boxes and boxes of dehydrated stuff — milk, pancakes, eggs, mashed potatoes; a neat row of cooking utensils and a portable camping stove; a supply of kerosene lamps and kerosene; flashlight and radio batteries, and cigarettes and matches; and a neat pile of blankets and pillows. The rest of the room was occupied by a table and two chairs, two air mattresses, a small library of books, magazines and

games, and several soft cushions scattered about on the floor. In each corner was a large box of money. Everything he needed was here, he mused; everything except Molly. Oh, well, she would come when she would hear the news. All he had to do was wait.

Turning on the radio, Christopher settled himself on a cushion with a book and breathed deeply of the earthy smell that rose up around him. Instinctively he sniffed at his hands, but was disappointed to find no clinging money smell. He plunged his hands into the box in the nearest corner and fingered some coins, then smelled his hands again. It was no use; the money had absorbed the smell of the damp earth. He missed the way it used to smell. It would be a long time before he'd smell that delicious odor again. "It's worth it, though," he told himself. "All the money in the world will be mine." And picturing himself on a throne of money, he fell asleep.

When he awoke, his watch said 9:30. It was Sunday. The radio spewed forth a fiery sermon by some Baptist minister. Christopher made breakfast for himself. He was drinking his second cup of coffee when it came.

"We interrupt this program to bring you a message of vital importance. We have been attacked! The enemy struck without warning earlier this morning at all our strategic military bases, and we are seriously disabled. We urge everyone to . . ." There followed a list of instructions and a string of reports on the enemy's progress to which Christopher only half-listened. It seemed to be a pretty one-sided war, with the enemy doing all the fighting. "All non-military areas, including major cities seem to be safe from bombing, but we cannot tell what effects the tremendous amounts of radiation released in the bombings will have. Thousands of people close to the bombed areas have already perished." And so it continued. On and on. Where was Molly? Why hadn't she come? Oh, well, there was still time.

Weeks passed, the radio announcers petered out one by one, until finally all the stations were silent. Molly hadn't come; she wouldn't now, he knew. Well, he had warned her and she chose not to believe. It was her own fault. Christopher lived with his dreams of money.

Exactly six months after the attack, Christopher emerged from his burrow as an animal that has been hibernating comes out of his cave for the first time in several months. He blinked his eyes in the brightness, for even though a low haze hung over everything, the light was dazzling compared to that of the tunnel. The whole world seemed a grayish color; his skin was tinged with gray. Cave-dwelling was not the healthiest way of living, he decided. "But at least I'm healthier than these poor souls." He stopped to look at a couple of corpses lying in the street. They were starting to decay. "Too bad you didn't know about it beforehand, hey, fellows?"

To anyone else, the silence of the city would have been disturbing, but

Christopher had only one thing in mind — money. He walked to the nearest trucking company and found himself a big semi that looked as if it could hold a fair amount of coins and bills. As he drove through the streets he mused at how untouched everything was — stores, offices, cars, baby buggies, telephone poles looked as they always had, except that there were no people around. No people save for a few corpses, and these were beginning to stink. Evidently most of the people had been evacuated in an effort to avoid radiation poisoning for as long as possible. Anyway the city looked as he had expected it to.

That day he made the first of his money collections, stopping at all the banks and big department stores. The day after that he visited the smaller business establishments and the day after that he checked all the places he had not been. During the weeks that passed Christopher traveled to the surrounding burghs and villages and to other cities in an everwidening radius until he had filled three rooms of his four-room bungalow with money, one containing coins and two containing paper bills. The fourth room Christopher reserved for his workshop.

In the workshop Christopher's imagination ran wild. He conceived and produced a mattress of ones and a coverlet of twenties for his bed, a chair of fifty-cent pieces with cushions of \$50 bills, several lampshades of \$1000 notes, throw rugs, bouquets, and curtains of fives, and hundreds of other small articles that he took a notion to make. He began rolling his own cigarettes using money for paper, and they tasted positively sumptuous. He papered the walls with bills and covered the tables with moneycloths. He dug a hole in the yard and filled it with money and every morning he climbed a stepladder, dove into his pool of money, and washed himself with it. He smelled of money, the house smelled of money, he had become the god of money; he was happy.

Several months of this monetary existence did not dull Christopher's appetite for it. Life was at its most beautiful when he began to feel the effects of the radiation still in the atmosphere. Christopher realized he was dying. Diagnosing his case as radiation poisoning, he set about digging a grave for himself, lined with bills of all denominations, and building a silver coffin of coins, also lined with bills. His final work of art was a funeral piece, roses, carnations, and lilies, all out of \$1 bills.

Christopher knew the end was near; the sky had been growing darker by the day. There was now only a perpetual twilight. Dragging his funeral piece out to the grave, Christopher recalled his last few happy months. He had achieved his goal; he could be happy in death. The god of money crawled into his money coffin and pulled to the lid. He could smell the most beautiful smell in the world — money. Christopher Junket sighed. "Well, Molly, you were right. I am taking it with me."

It was truly the end of the world.



THE DRIFT

by DON STEINER

I want to reach out and grab the me that no one sees. I want to reach the screaming soul of my desires. I want to reach out to someone. But the echo of my scream pounds in my brain. The cage of my heart admits no one. I am alone in the shadows of my pity. I approach and then fail because my soul is wild. My footsteps echo in the caverns of my soul. God, oh God, I am alone with pity as my lover. The smoke blinds my eyes, and I see distorted ruins of myself. I crumble and die alone. In the solitude of my soul I find peace that screams to me — climax — contentment. And then it begins again. It rains and I am not wet, safe in caves of emotion. I love so much I cannot love. I live so much I die.

MOBY DICK

by CHARLOTTE R. CARTER

I. Cetacea

How from the land did you come down, oh whale,
With lung, hot blood, and hairy skin, to breast
The water in swift leap and with your flail
Spank waves and sounds to deeps wherein your rest
Is not? No fish, but mammal you, who lies
A submarine submerged, or stalks for air
The narrow surface where your breaths arise
In steam, betraying you to those who dare
Your trail, earth-girdling in the furious chase.
Fit and unfit for ocean, you, whose ear,
Delicate, hidden, hears their roar who race
Fearless to hunt you down, now mad with fear.

Flipper and tail and fin are your disguise,
As far from grassy plain to sea you rise.

II. Ahab, the Hunter

The creature struck strikes back and so is game.
The hunter scorns the docile prey—poor sport
Is that. He whets his lust for battle on flame
Of blood fresh-kindled from harpoon's quick retort.
Turn, whale, and fight! He struck you first, and he
Will take your suckling young, your burdened mate,
Your injured old, your lovers, and with glee
Molest them all for his malignant hate.
The malice that he sees within your eye
His own eye holds; your feared, unholy white
Is only age; the hoary strange, the lie
He sees and speaks are from his own deep spite.

Bewildered man, you, too, are struck and know
The blind response, the hurt, defensive blow.

THE OLD SOUTH

by BARBARA TONIELLI

Hell-bent hovels clutching the earth,
Hills bounding bleak paved paths;
Dark skin covering languid bodies,
Worn wicker frames rocking lazy creatures;
Slick slimy smells snapping out in the air,
Infrequent passersby gawk in open despair.

SCHISM

by DENNIS M. RATZ

Oh schism!
You are life
What mask will you wear today?
Of clergy?
Child?
Or of intellect?
All of you —
Drinking broken tulips
With song-singing
And eyes held wide
With beads
And Miles and Diz
Coming through strong —
Voices — say to look away
And put on mask
To shade the beads
Of schisms —

DOWN THEY FORGET AS UP THEY GROW

by JOE CATANZARO

It was mid-afternoon — a very hot, summer day. The sun was hot overhead, and the air was heavy with moisture. Little gray clouds, dark clouds but not dark enough to be called black, were hanging over the city like ornaments on an unmerry Christmas tree.

Hubert walked slowly toward the grocery store on Alameda Street with his hands in his overalls pockets. Hubert was tall, at least for a nine-year-old boy he was tall. Small bubbles of sweat covered his tan face, and when a ray of sun managed to squeeze through the clouds, Hubert's face and arms shined. Further down Alameda Street, a group of boys Hubert's age played baseball in the street while a few smaller and younger boys sat on the curb and watched. As he drew closer, they stopped playing and got together in little groups. Every so often one of the boys would look at Hubert and laugh.

One of the very young ones sitting on the curb said hello to Hubert, but before Hubert could say anything an older boy yelled, "Hey, Bobbie, don't you know better'n to talk to niggers?"

Another boy yelled, "He's a nigger? Ah didn't know he's a nigger; did you all?"

"Why, he ain't no nigger. His ma's white."

"He's dark enuf though. He must be a nigger."

He walked on with an ease he had learned to feign a few years ago.

"He ain't no nigger. He can't be with a white ma."

"Yeah, but he's got a black pa."

"Hey, Hubert, what are you? Nigger? Or white?"

"I know what he is. He's a whigger."

The boys looked at each other, laughed, and called him a whigger.

"My old man says your ma's just white trash. That right whigger?"

Hubert turned to face them. His hands were clenched tightly, and the veins in his arms and neck and side of his face made ridges in his smooth body. Before he said anything, he turned and walked away. He blinked his eyes, but it was too late. A tear zigzagged down his cheek. He had done it all wrong. He should have fought them like a white man not endured them like a nigger; but he had done neither, and both, because he was neither and both.

It got darker and the rain had come slowly. Hubert didn't notice it at first. When it began to rain harder, he ducked under a tall porch. He stood watching and hearing the rain strike the ground, rolling off parched roofs, and beating against the window panes. Hubert thought how comfortable the sound of rain was. How safe and snug he felt with the rain enclosing him and shielding him.

A boy came running under the porch from the other side, a white boy. Hubert was about to leave his sanctuary when the other boy asked him if he wanted to play marbles. "For keeps," he added.

"I ain't got no marbles."

"Well, I'll borrow you some of mine. But remember, not for keeps!"

He was quite a bit smaller than Hubert, but probably was the same age. He seemed afraid of Hubert, not because Hubert was darker, but because he was bigger and might take his marbles.

"We'll lag to see who shoots first, O.K.?"

"You can shoot first if you want," Hubert said.

The boy took careful aim and shot at one of Hubert's marbles but missed.

"Your turn."

Hubert shot and he too missed.

"You got a lotta marbles at home?" Hubert asked.

"Yeah, but I just brought a few with. I live over on George Street, and I came over here to play ball with Jerry Maudin. You know Jerry Maudin?"

"Yeah, they were playing ball a few blocks down until it started to rain."

"I hope it stops soon so I can play ball with 'em."

"Probably will stop soon."

"Your turn."

The sun pushed the clouds away, but it still drizzled a little. The boy took his marbles, said good-bye, and ran down the street to join the other boys who again were playing in the street. A rainbow now was visible and the drizzle was slowing down.

Hubert walked a few more blocks down Almeda Street, then turned into a small grocery store. In a few minutes he came back out with a small bundle of groceries under his arms and began to walk back home. Again, as he came close to where the boys were playing, they began to yell and shout at Hubert. He saw the boy who had played marbles with him under the porch. He saw Jerry Maudin talking to the new boy and pointing toward Hubert.

"Hey nigger, hey whigger," they all shouted. But Hubert didn't hear them; he only saw the boy from under the porch standing there, not yelling or shouting or anything.

"We ain't sure whether he's a nigger or a white. What do you think, Joe?"

The boy from the porch stood motionless for a while then said, "He ain't black, and he ain't white. He's probably just like that rainbow — ya just don't know what color he is. He's a rainbow—all mixed up colors."

Mixed shouts of "hey, rainbow" and "hey, whigger" followed Hubert as he ran down Almeda Street. Far above the housetops, far above Almeda Street, and far above Hubert the rainbow cut through the endless blue sky.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

by JAMES BROLIN

Jump on! Hurry—Pick your horse.
One choice—don't fall off.
It's grey? So what?
Look!
People, stands, crowds, women,
Her—stop!
Too late.
Children, tints, flags, hats—
Going too fast—Slow down!
Can't? Why not?
Look straight ahead.
A blue tail in front
Blowing from
A wooden Butt.
Men, glass, sign, "Atten—"
What did it say? Slow down!
Only one speed?
Missing so much,
No one cares,
Look straight ahead
And miss everything.
Shirts, arms, dirt, clouds,
A hazy glance—no more.
Nothing permanent
I already forgot
Everything—
But Her—
Where is she?
Red, blue, grey, black,
A mass of colors,
Keep your eyes
On the blue tail.
You won't get dizzy
But you'll miss
Everything!



SUNRISE

by BARBARA JANIA

The sky was black . . .
No longer.
A strip of crimson rims the horizon
Suddenly
Without warning, without effort,
And remains a narrow ribbon . . .
Forever.

NO!
It diffuses silently, deftly
A century passes---slowly . . .
Into orange.
Deep angry orange
Born of the womb of the crimson,
The sign of a paler parent.

Rising---vapor of the fire,
Dying---painfully
Into a sickly orange
By the omnipotent black---Smothered!
Almost gone
But not . . .

Deep from the jagged caverns
Over the edge of nowhere
Springs a startling yellow
Strikes the forbidden black
Rashly---Challenges its power
Blocked---surely-----too weak

But its force---innate
Boils beneath the horizon
Expands---Enormous vitality
Explodes!
And suddenly
Blue---pale, thin---sweeps
And the black vanishes before it
Mystically
Miraculously

Light over darkness
Wins because it must win
Wins because it has always won
Wins because that's the scheme of things
Don't be afraid.

MILLIE

by ROBERT MANNING

The seventh of August, 1961.

Thump, thump, thump . . . the machine gun rapid bobbin shuttled back and forth in front of Millie. Click, Millie's foot snapped off the machine and she raised the small suit coat in front of her.

"Number 58 today, Vera."

Vera straightened up. She was hunched over the same kind of black sewing machine as Millie was using. Vera's bullet-shaped bobbin came to a stop. She turned to answer Millie.

"Well, I'll be darned . . . what's got into you today? Them sleeves you're sewin' on ain't that easy. Sure you're doing a good job?"

Millie raised one of her children's coats and showed it to Vera.

"Looks pretty good to me, kid." Vera raised her eyebrows.

"Don't forget what happened to Elsie when she got in a hurry last year . . . took 'em a full day to rip out the stitches . . . 53 shirtsleeves all sewed on backwards."

"Poor Elsie," Millie sighed, and she paused as if to give a moment's silence to those who served.

"But these are all good. I check every seam."

"Yeah, I know, kid . . . must be I'm just gettin' old."

Haaaank, the noon horn bleated before Millie's retort reached her lips.

"There's lunch, Millie . . . come on; I could eat a horse."

"OK." Millie assented as usual and swirled around on her stool to follow Vera past the rows of machines to the lockers at the far end of the plant. The noise of the plant slowly died as the workers plucked thread between thumb and thumb and filed into the aisle alongside Millie and Vera. There were 180 women working in the plant. Their sporadic chattering

replaced the hushed machines. Along the brick walls ventilation holes had been punched; they sucked out the smell of oil and the odor of clean cloth but left a thick haze of sweat and exhaust. The fans whirred an undertone. Several grey windows rakishly tilted out, letting in the city sounds; the noonday pulse of New York's throng released.

Vera strode slightly ahead of Millie, passing loud comments to the other workers in her aggressive manner. Most of the women were dressed alike: plainly. As they walked they untied white aprons from their waists. Most of the women were middle aged, the wives of working men, trying to add enough to the month's wages to indulge in just a few of the luxuries New York is so eager to parade. Without any need for pretense now, they burst like a fountain into talk. They compared their husbands and swapped recipes; they complained of bills and bandied comments on current T.V.

Millie unlocked her green locker, No. 85, reached behind her rain coat and pulled out a bag. She sat next to Vera on a long wooden bench and timidly bit into her bread. Vera was a strong vital woman with a husky voice and the smell of motherhood about her. Unpretentious, she grasped life by the throat and laughingly choked her existence from it. The undaunted vitality of this woman awed Millie, who approached life, as she did her sandwich, nibble by nibble, with trepidation. Vera understood Millie; she was the only one who did. Turning to Millie, Vera spoke:

"Look, honey, I've been meaning to talk to you."

"About what?"

"You know what."

"About last Saturday?"

"Yeah, honey, but not only last Saturday. It's been every Saturday since I've known ya. For four years I been trying to help you out."

Millie stared at her lap. "I know."

"Well I'm coming to the end of my rope. Now George wasn't a bad guy. I fixed up you two thinking you'd hit it off."

Millie still stared at her lap.

"He was fresh! He tried to . . . to make love to me."

Vera threw up her arms.

"So what's wrong with that . . . you should be flattered. I only wish I was young and full . . . like you." With that, Vera chuckled and patted her broad stomach. "Ah yes . . . there once was a time . . . Ho . . . but that was years ago . . . with two kids and a lazy husband all I can do is dream nowadays."

Millie looked at Vera, clasped her hands across her lap and murmured: "I wish I could — I only wish . . ."

Vera broke in: "Look, honey, you don't know what you're missing. Go get yourself a husband! You're 23, good lookin', with a figure anyone would be proud'a."

This was an obvious exaggeration, for Millie's figure was more plump than shapely. Her face was round with a ski-jump nose, as if someone had pinched a ball of dough. Her hair was curled like a Brillo pad, and her round ears framed her face. Still there was an attraction about her, like the beauty in a kitchen, if not modern and sleek, at least clean and tidy. Millie blushed at Vera's comment but said nothing, and Vera continued:

"I'll bet there's many a man who'd like to . . ."

Millie raised her head. "I know, sleep with me."

A little bubble of anger welled in Millie's throat. Vera went on. "Why sure, honey . . . I . . . I . . . guess so." Vera had never seen her quiet, shy friend react to anything this way. She picked up again, in a low voice.

"So he was a little fresh . . . all men are, honey. Just don't let them push you around . . . but don't deny yourself either." Vera looked away and spoke again, softer now:

"There's nothing like a man's hand running through your hair, the breath on your neck, and that good light feeling of having somebody . . . all yours."

Vera lowered her eyes slowly.

"Even if he is a lazy bum, I wouldn't trade those nights for all the dress shops in Patterson!"

Millie followed Vera's wide eyes.

"I'm sorry."

"You're sorry? Ho . . . never be sorry for anything. Just do like I tell you . . . and loosen that corset of yours. A man wants to know what he's marrying. Play it cool, honey, but don't forget we were made for pleasure, and you're a fool to deny it."

Vera looked straight at Millie, realizing what she had said was wasted breath. She placed her hand on Millie's shoulder.

"Why'd you ever come to the city, anyway?"

Millie shrugged, too confused to talk.

"You never let on much, do you? . . . maybe it'd be a good thing if

you talked about it, kid. Parents bother you?"

"Yes . . . a little bit; they're real strict. When I graduated from high school, I just wanted to get away — run my own life. I'd probably be back there now, though, except my uncle John, he invited me to the city one day, and I got this job and . . ."

"You're uncle still around?"

"He moved away."

"You have a guy waiting back home? You never talk about it."

"No . . . I just couldn't take my mother wanting me to get married . . . and dragging in everybody to look at me."

"Yeah, I know."

"And my father telling me what to do."

"Yeah, and that's all, eh?"

"Just about."

"No guys?"

"No, not really . . . but . . ."

A voice from down the row of benches yelled.

"Hey, Vera, come here! I got somethin' to show ya."

Vera turned to Millie.

"Be right back, kid; Mary's got another picture of her kid she's gotta show around." And she left Millie looking at her half-eaten sandwich.

The afternoon went by like the morning, so many coats per hour. Soon the sun began to slant through the windows of the plant, shafting columns of light through the dust. At five o'clock the plant horn blew the same deep throaty growl, and moments later the plant disgorged its workers onto the street. Millie called "goodbye" to Vera: "See you on Monday."

"OK, kid. Remember what I told ya."

Millie headed toward her flat, a bobbing head in the wave of workers, fanning out to subways, buses, and waiting cars. She walked unaware, until the crowd thinned, sewing the pieces of her mind back again. She walked with her raincoat primly folded over her arm; "You never can tell when it's going to pour," Millie would tell herself every morning. She took the plastic raincoat every day. She didn't want to take any chances.

Coming to a crosswalk, she waited, and the crowd grew behind her. The light turned, and she glanced at the people next to her to find if it was

safe to cross. "You just can't trust these cars to stop," she thought. The man next to her began to step off the curb, swinging his brief case in front of him. As Millie began to follow suit, a sudden push from behind sent her sprawling on the street. She looked up at the crowd. "I'm sorry," she squealed to the man who had accidentally pushed her. "All right, lady . . . my fault . . . in a hurry . . . ya can't stop to look at the scenery around here." He chuckled as he lent her a hand. She brushed off her raincoat and turned to nod a "thank you" to him . . . but he was gone, enveloped in the scuffle of feet. Motors raced again, and the cars started across the intersection. Millie scurried back to her perch on the curb and waited again. "That wouldn't have happened to Vera," she pondered.

In a short time Millie was laboring up the stairs to her apartment. As she puffed with exertion, she thought:

"They're getting steeper and longer every day; they're too long, these stairs . . . I should never have . . ."

But Millie continued on as she had for the last four years, stopping to rest on the third floor balcony. Each year the railing would sink deeper into her buttocks. As she rested today, she pondered:

"Oh, I got to lose weight . . . the doctor's right . . . I'm just killin' myself!"

Lurching forward, unsticking her sweat-soaked dress from her legs, she again nosed upward. Through a greasy grey window, as she turned on the landing, she caught Frank McCinty eating his supper. Like a fish in a bowl, McCinty kept one cold eye on her climb. A detached arm shoved a plate under McCinty's blurred face and the eye snapped down. Rounding the fourth floor Millie rested; she was facing her door. The queen bee had finally arrived.

Her flight was slower today, probably because of the heat . . . 180° in the shade . . . according to the grocer . . . but then you know how those Italians are for exaggeration . . . Millie chuckled out loud at this idea. Christo, the Italian grocer, always talked to Millie when she bought from him. His friendliness warmed her for a moment from the cold impersonality of the city. He would say:

"Meesa Millie, you looka so nice today . . ." and he would grin as only a Neopolitan can.

"Must be Christo's fruit cake make you looka so good. Theesa apple fo' you smooth skin, theesa bannan, fo' keepa you shiney hair, and theesa plum . . ." and he would pluck the fruit up to his cheek.

"Theesa plum fo' the pink spots on each'a you cheek."

With that he would pinch her cheek and she would blush . . . and wonder . . . does he do this to all the girls that buy here . . . someday I'll stop down the street and watch him . . . I bet he doesn't do it to all the girls.

Coming back to things, Millie searched in her handbag for her key. The broad plastic bag clove a notch in her fleshy arm as she groped with her pudgy fingers. Finally under a tube of orange lipstick she found it and with the flourish of a spastic fencer plunged the brightness of the key into the grey corroded keyhole. It slipped in, grinding with little metallic sounds, over the slots in the lock. Millie turned the key slowly, still pushing in, until the lock gave and the worn door latch slipped off. The door opened. The air, the hot trapped air of the apartment, rushed at her, swarming its arms about her. The fingers of an eddy slipped down over her back, along her spine, and sweat between her full-round breasts tingled for a brief second until the momentary coolness subsided. Millie opened her eyes again to discover her phantom lover dispelled into a warm invisible blanket wound about her.

A horn honked on the street beyond her alley. Millie wheeled and struck the door shut. She was alone. On the wall facing her was a thin mirror, once the pride of a Victorian household; now, brown with age, it reflected a girl of 23: Millie Dunlap, forgotten by the world. Somehow it happened, somewhere along the way Millie had been left off: 165 lbs., 5 ft. 6 inches tall, she was left off, left to her own devices . . . to rot if she let herself.

Still breathing heavily from her climb, Millie gazed at her arms, banded by the tight arms of a white cotton blouse. Once my breasts were high, she thought, without even a bra . . . oh my, yes . . . I remember how firm my nipples were, rubbing on my dress. Millie felt a tingle run up her spine. She remembered eight years ago, almost nine years ago, at her first school dance, the Bennington High School prom . . . the beginning of the end.

Millie was all dressed for the evening. She turned on the brown kerosene stove so the room would be warm when she got back. Her small room glowed from the little orange light seeping from the bottom of the stove. Little shafts of white shot up through the floor from the kitchen below. She put out the white lamp on her bedstand and started down the thin pine stairway from her room. Opening the door at the bottom, she was met by, what she had feared, her parents sitting together at the kitchen table. Both parents had their eyes on her.

"Guess you're ready to go."

Her father spoke as if Millie had assumed her freedom. He was a thin wiry man. At fifty his face was hard and brown. His hands were huge, the thick veined fingers curled about the corner of the red and white table cloth. He was the boss, no one questioned that. Millie and her mother



couldn't deny his authority. Perhaps if Millie had not been an only child, then her mother may have been able to gather enough strength to have him listen to her ways. He was gone most of the day, either milking the small herd, repairing fences, or in town picking up a new supply of tobacco, finding out from society what his wife was thinking. For this Mrs. Dunlap had the telephone, a device Mr. Dunlap considered a modern luxury, for "womenfolk." Never did they talk together about their life; the farm, the cow with hoofrot, or the weather were common fare at the table, but personal problems and thoughts stayed locked up by the pride of independence. Millie looked at her mother, a clean simple farm woman, who meant work and food at the right times to her husband. An industrious woman, she still had a glimmer of the romantic, salvaged under her husband's regime: a pink gladiola amongst the peas, an occasional bouquet of dandelions on her window sill, or an extra fifty cents in Millie's lunch pail for her to squander with her young school mates. Tonight she was silent.

Millie answered her father:

"Yes, what's the matter? I'm supposed to go now; Frank's coming to pick me up."

"I'm reminding you — I let you go out with this fella from West Rutland on one condition."

"Father, I know . . . I will be in at 11:00 don't worry."

"Look, daughter, I know the West Rutland type."

"And I know Frank is a nice boy."

"I'm warning you if you ain't back here . . ."

"I'll get back in time."

"Now what's wrong with John Anderson; he's a good worker."

"He didn't ask me, father."

"Well . . . then the Harvey boy . . . his father's a right sharp miller."

"I don't know how good Mr. Harvey is, but his son is going steady with Jeanie Mills."

"Good sakes . . . you can only raise 'em up — girl, why d'you get these flighty notions — West Rutland! There's nothing wrong with the town of Bennington . . . and you gotta find something."

"Here Frank comes now — I can hear his car in the drive."

Neither parent moved as Millie opened the door and walked out to meet Frank; seconds later the car veered out of the driveway and down the dirt road to the dance.

The time passed quickly and soon the dance was over. It wasn't often that Bennington's small high school could afford a good band so most of the students were accustomed to informal square dances or rock-and-roll record sessions with an M.C. from the local radio station. Tonight the well-dressed, awkward couples filed off the gym floor scattered with occasional fallen decorations. Scuffing the crepe paper and punctured balloons in front of them, they passed the eyes of the principal of the school and his wife. The two sat perched like the "twa Corbies" on folding chairs in the corner of the gym. The thin bespectacled principal said not a word while his hen-like wife cackled on about the dance.

"My . . . Oscar, I've never seen this gym looking so nice . . ."

Oscar was obviously unimpressed with everything. At one time he was a lively principal and enjoyed working with youngsters, but, as is the case with many like him, the claustrophobia of this conservative Vermont town and his position as underpaid regulator of the town's morals had settled around him like a green mold. He was used to parents calling to ask about their sons' poor marks and their daughters' behavior after school. He was a man who had seen too much of the same thing, and repetition had droned him into a man of few words and even fewer ideas. His wife, plump and piquant, even in her old age, continued to chatter. Women in these small Vermont towns seem to thrive on domestic security. Being the principal's wife put her in a nice niche, and she was contented to stay tucked away, isolated from the world in the little town of Bennington, with her past and future within grasp.

"I certainly am glad . . . Oscar, are you listening?"

"Yes."

"I'm certainly happy for Millie Dunlap. Look at her out there with that new fellow from West Rutland. Doesn't she look cute . . . I just wonder how her parents ever let her out . . . you know that Mr. Dunlap . . . how could anybody be that mean to a youngster, never letting her go out with . . . ?"

"She's just about ripe!"

"Oh . . . how can you say such a thing! . . . she's a good girl and she'll make a good wife. Why Nora told me she even made that dress she has on."

And their conversation drifted off, like a fog that would rise curling around the white colonial buildings of the town, up past the church spire to hover in the valley air.

Millie and her escort glanced at the two proctors as they walked out through the doors of the gym into the thick summer night, midst the chattering of a swarm of released teen-agers. Millie's escort spoke:

"Sorry I don't know any of the fellas here. If you were in West Rutland, I could show you a good . . ."

"Oh . . . that's OK, Frank," Millie saved him.

"Let's just go talk or get a coke or something."

Millie had only met Frank once, at a football game. Then she was so nervous that . . . well, he was a handsome boy. She was not the only boy that had asked her, but he was new . . . someone to make the others a little jealous. Also, what little Millie had to offer a conversation would be new to Frank. Conversation was so much easier with someone new, Millie thought.

Frank grasped her hand, and they walked across the asphalt parking lot to the car. Frank was a strong, stocky boy of eighteen, with cow-licked brown hair and a broad working man's face. He came from a farm, but he could carry his end of a conversation with what a country town might consider "considerable learning." His pants were neatly pressed and the lifting muscles in his neck corded beneath a stiff collar. Millie's palm nestled in his long fingers. She felt his warmth moisten her hand as it swayed, linked in the night air. Next to his firm hard body she felt like a waif being led home by a kindly policeman. Only she was not a youngster, but a grown girl, with a figure to be proud of. Her simple dress was well filled and taut about her hips. A wide blue belt hid the nickel-round roll of flesh on her waist.

"Well, here we are," Frank ventured. He opened the door for Millie.

"Thank you," she piped. Millie was unused to this.

The car left the school behind quickly and the town lights faded. Blackness pervaded.

"Let's go to Joe's for a coke," Millie offered as a half-question, feeling less and less sure of herself in the quickening void.

There were no houses in sight now. Frank, without a word, turned the car into a side road and stopped.

"Are you afraid of me?" Frank looked her straight in the eyes.

"No . . . no . . . I just thought . . . well, I don't know you well and . . . I wanted to talk with you . . . but I meant near the rest of the kids."

"If that's what you want, O.K."

"My mom and dad . . . if they knew we were out here alone . . . I'd hate to think what would happen."

"You afraid of them?"

"No."

"You afraid of me?"

"No."

Frank spun the car forward on the gravel road and pulled the wheel around. They stopped in a field shielded from the road.

"Have you parked before?" Frank didn't look at her as he talked.

"I never was allowed to . . . I . . ."

Everything had happened so quickly that Millie was barely aware of what was going to happen. She stammered.

"You see, I got to work right after school . . . my . . . my . . . parents, they don't let me out much. I gotta get home soon or . . ."

"We've got time," Frank cooed now. His "learning" had obviously not come from books alone. He edged over to her. Millie's eyes were fixed on the neat white pleats of her dress. She had been so careful to get them "just right." Frank's hand came down on the skirt. Millie looked up. She could feel the heat of his body swell, and she inched back and down, then to the side . . . but she was blocked. Then the falcon dropped, and the prey quivered. Could she yell, could she fight, could she . . . but the long fingers were in her doughy flesh, kneading . . . kneading. She floated a moment and her eyes closed as she fell into the abyss of night. Then the pain struck, the ripping pain.

"No . . . no . . . no . . . no" and she feathered off into a guttural gurgle, like the primitive call of a baby crow. An unseeing eye rolled in the dark and her whimpering began, like the bleating of a lost sheep. She felt wet . . . and dirty, and ugly. The pain still was fresh. She lay alone, her eyes closed, lurching from her sobs. Frank sat up, looking at her, bewildered.

"What's the matter . . . what's the matter?" He could think of nothing else to say. Millie groaned:

"Ugly . . . so ugly . . . I feel so dirty."

Her blurred eyes opened partly.

"My dress, my pretty pleats . . . they're rumpled. Oh, I wanted to look so nice . . . my pretty pleats are all rumpled."

Frank looked up at himself in the car mirror. He started the car, turned on the lights and backed up. Millie, still lying on the car seat next to him, clutched her arms and legs up close to her and inched back into the warm fold of the seat.

"My rumpled pleats . . . so ugly . . . dirty!"

McCinty yelled at his wife in the apartment below.

"Well, for Christ sake!" and the words faded out. Millie straightened her dress, smoothing it by fanning out her palms and pinching the slack of the clean white cotton where it tightened. She took one last look in the amber mirror, leveled it on the nail and turned away, toward the center of the room, where the neatly-made bed stood. She stared at it, for almost a minute, reluctantly trying to bring herself back to the life she led.

Outside the window the city lights began to flicker on. The gilt fiction coverlet of night began to pull itself over the city's greyness. The light that hung on the building across the street came alive, pencilling a toothless welcome to the night.

"Rusty's Bar and Grille."

The streaks of blinking red and green slashed across the worn boarded floor, reflecting on the kerosene stove and the transfusion bottle of yellow liquid dangling in the corner. The hypnotic precision finally brought her to.

"Oh, my . . . I most forgot," she thought out loud, and she snapped on the one bare bulb hanging from the ceiling.

Hurriedly, without thinking, she prepared her dinner: a crumbled cheese sandwich. As she ate, the bread bulged out her cheeks, and her round eyes fanned the opposite end of the room. Neatly laid out across the coverlet of the bed was a pink cotton dress, dotted by a white bow. A pair of black high-heeled shoes waited in unison on the floor. On the pillow lay an imitation white carnation, with a little green sprig and wire stem, for her buttonhole.

With a whisk of her hands, Millie rose and reached into a drawer. Her hand came out clutching a brown bag of candy: shiny malted milk balls. The imitation vanilla smell made her swallow. She popped one into her mouth and crunched the stiff froth between her teeth. Umm . . . mm, she dotted her lips and popped another onto her tongue. And, thus, dessert ended her meal.

Undressing as she walked to the bed, Millie's eyes fixed on the white carnation. She dressed quickly, but with care. Everything was smooth and tidy before she pinned on her corsage and tightened the large bow across the crest of her breasts. With a sailor's cap and high boots she might have passed for some hyperthyroid Victorian child on her way to church. Millie tied down her wiry brown hair with a slick nylon kerchief and tightened it into her chin. With her bag of candy in one hand, she flipped the lock on the door and turned to leave. Millie was off to the movies.

Passing the third floor, the McCinty apartment was quiet now, with the white glimmer of the television within. The second floor apartment was dark and the ground floor started her walking. The echo of her staccato footsteps on the wood died out in the alley. Grit spurting up as Millie's heels spun onto the broad, bright sidewalk. Millie's mind wandered, in its usual vague pattern, never reaching any conclusion, never attempting to reach any conclusion . . . it just wandered over the myriad lights, the familiar human smells, the faint noises from open windows. Her gait was mechanical, unconscious, but she showed an elation unlike No. 85 V.B. and B. Dress Co.; her face was no longer a tag, her body no longer a fleshy lump on a production line. Millie's head was erect and her arms swayed in unison to her legs. The city light became brighter, more colorful. Occasional sailors, huddled in indecision, cast low glances at passing ankles. Pivoting on one foot then the other, they would cup a cigarette to their lips, blow the smoke down over their pea jackets, and continue with their little silent dance. Animals, Millie thought, nothing to do but stand around and gaze — but she felt a tingle when their eyes fell on her. She strutted, blasé, pert as a peacock, past them.

Finally her eye caught a huge brightly lighted marquee spelling, in a Morse code of lettered bulbs, "Island of Love." She quickened her pace dodging an occasional slough, weaving through pedestrians with the grace of a fullback, until she arrived, wheezing, at the atrium of the elaborate theatre. Other plain theatres won't do tonight, she thought; tonight it's the best! Millie reached in her dress pocket and clutched some change, the exact change. Walking up to the black marble counter she unclenched her coins, ringing, onto the glossy surface. She glanced at the ticket and without hesitation swung into the silence of the theatre. Friendly, dim lobby lights muffled on the soft purple carpet, bathing her tired feet. How gentle, she murmured to herself, how fine and gentle. From somewhere in her, a regality began to show. Her walk up to the ticket-taker was almost a procession. She thought to herself:

"My train, boy, my train . . . it's rumped; straighten it."

The fantasy of her mind stretched out.

"How do you do . . . very nice to meet you again . . . Oh, you say the sweetest things, Franklin . . . Yes, I know . . . well, Mlle. Portnoy does only the finest work . . . I had it pleated especially."

"Your ticket, ma'm!" The young man broke her dream.

"It's in your hand."

"In my hand . . . oh, yes . . . how silly of me."

"Your other hand, ma'm," the voice droned.

Taking back her bag of candy she handed him the ticket and, in a blur of pink cotton, submerged into the blackness of the other world: the celluloid world.

The film was about to begin. Violins were whipping the names of the cast off the screen as Millie chose her seat.

"Excuse me . . . oh, I'm sorry . . ." She mouthed apologies to people's feet. At last she sunk into her chair and relaxed, exhausted.

The movie began. A malted milk ball slid into her mouth. She engrossed herself in the story, the feeble story of a gallant rake and an ordinary, sweet, young girl. But the plot was unimportant; she had already seen it four times. More and more candy was plucked out of the bag, faster and faster. Soon Millie tasted the salt of a tear on her lips. How much time had passed? She didn't know. She wiped it clean with a malt-flavored tongue. Her glistening eyes reflected the melodrama, ladled out to her like spaghetti on the technicolor screen. Her hands clasped together and reddened on her knees. The climax was coming. Each cell in her body heaved with gathering velocity until her whole frame rocked in the frail seat. She bent down her head and the tears, flowing profusely now, streamed between her breasts. Voracious fingers dug into her cloughy face. The empty candy bag fell to the floor. Quivering she raised her head again. Several strands of brown brittle hair clung to her brow; she brushed them back and bravely raised her eyes to the screen. But the film was over and the screen was dark.

The lights blinked on and the curtains slid to the center of the stage colliding in a flurry of velvet folds. Millie whimpered; her head bowed again. The sparse audience was gathering itself up, milling toward the exits. Unconcerned couples walked up the aisle in search of a word. They filed by her. Men, with cupped palms concealing their boredom, women, dotting the corners of their eyes, silently passed her, as she grovelled now for something to repair her streaked face. The overhead lights snapped on in a glaring crescendo. The piercing coldness revealed the gilt moulding for what it was: clipped, peeled wood. A hole appeared near the top of the purple curtain; dust on the stage showed footprints.

Soon she was all alone in the theatre. She peered around, rose and plodded to the nearest exit. The door squealed behind her and closed with a final "Ke-Lunk." Her heels echoed their grinding in the cement alley, scaring a cat from shadow to shadow. Now the caustic city met her ears. She turned and headed toward her flat.

SHE
by JOHN HOFFMAN

Beyond
the
Ivory-white laughter
there
is
no
SOUND

SHE
is
Somewhere in the night
and
all else
is
NOTHING

Beside
the
Grace
of
Sensuous thigh
there
is
no
SIGHT

Above
the
Gentle scent
of
Hair
there
is
no
SMELL

After
the
Firm surrendered breasts
there
is
no
TOUCH

Over
the
Delicately savoured mouth
there
is
no
TASTE
I AM NOT

CAPRICE

by KATHI DAVIS

Night fell
Silently.
I watched day break
And heard never a sound.
Nature does even violent things
Quietly.

The tide came in
Tumultuously.
The birds greeted the dawn
With wondrous clamor.
Nature does even peaceful things
Noisily.

by SANDRA SZELAG

the martyred trees of fall
lower listless limbs
and blood-stained boughs . . .
i am moved by gifts of self
for beauty's sake

OLYMPIAN HOLIDAY

by JOAN CAVALLARO

Crimson, foaming nectar
Poured from silver goblets
Reddens holy lips
Slips over gold togas
And winds at last
To green marble
Whose chill is immortal.

Sighs and screams of
Delight and desire
Snap the melodic murmuring
Of the lute and leave
The notes, like vapors,
To feed the flames
Of festive torches.



CRYPTIC

by JOEL R. POWER

Cast: Epimetheus

Prometheus

Kronos

Chorus — Spirits of the Lost Dead

Scene: The stage is divided into three zones of light — one of dim, clear light, one of faint, hazy light swirling with mist, and one of deep, murky blackness. Prometheus dressed in a subtle, yellow robe stands at the rear of the clear zone. He is a young man whose features are strong, firm, and positive. Surrounded by dark, swarming mist, Kronos digs a grave in the middle of the faint zone. A weak light illuminates him, and a wind moans as it sprinkles snow on him. Kronos is a gloomy, old man clad in a black robe. Beside him on his right is a small pile of dirt and a black coffin, both emitting gas; his task is half finished. The chorus stands near the front of the stage in the black zone and remains there throughout the play invisible to the audience. Epimetheus is similar but several years older than Prometheus and is dressed in a gleaming, white robe. The play opens with Epimetheus entering the front of the clear zone and walking slowly across the stage toward the faint zone.

Epimetheus: Fear stalks,
Strange murmurs and stranger omens
Haunt, plague the heart of man.
Ice forms on naked lakes,
Winter crushes the freed seas
With crystal spears which pierce,
Cut the water and cap it white.
In the still of night air,
The lopsided moon rolled even
Through a murky sky;
Marsh gas oozed over
The land in phantasmal shapes
Covering the earth in weird fumes.
The world became a cryptic dream,

And the stagnant air smothered
The struggling creatures of life.
Fear, dreadful fear
Leads me to the Lost Dead,
To hear
Snarled,
Twisted
Words of death.

(Epimetheus enters the zone of faint light and mist.)
Perpetual mist wraps the dead,
Crystalline fogs choke
The dead with damp vapors.
Damned Cimmerian land,
Death clings in your nebulous air,
And life feels the Stygian chill.
Lost, faint light dies,
Here where life and death embrace,
Entwine in a grotesque grip of woe.

(Epimetheus is almost to the zone of blackness.)

Chorus: Oh—oh, oh—oh, oh—oh, oh—oh, oh—oh.

Epimetheus: I fear this unearthly land
Of deadly chords that are felt and heard.

(Reaching the edge of darkness, Epimetheus stops and bows to the darkness
then reverently kneels and holds his arms outstretched above his head.)

Chorus: Sacrifice on the sacred altar.

Epimetheus: Lost spirits of forsaken ages,
Tradition guardians of hallowed soil.

Chorus: Noble Epimetheus, giant of man, speak.

Epimetheus: Strange forebodings linger,
Doom reaches for man.

Chorus: Aye, evil waits for man.

Epimetheus: The lopsided moon rolled even,
The marsh gas smothered the earth
With weird, prophetic dreams.

Chorus: The gloomy strokes of Kronos
Claw the barren ground.
The omens shriek,

Evil. Kronos wrongs
In the spiraled
Land
Of perpetual,
Shifting
Mist.

(Epimetheus rises, bows, and speaks.)

Epimetheus: Spirits of my father's spirits,
Souls of mother earth's full ebb,
Prometheus must know these words.

Chorus: With haste Epimetheus,
Seek your brother in the light.

(Epimetheus walks diagonally through the mist toward the light.)

Epimetheus: Kronos has watched
The steps of wandering man
With a vulture's eyes.

Chorus: Bleak, bleak this day ushers in
To shroud man's weak spirit.

Epimetheus: Kronos preys on frail man,
Prometheus shall, must know
That woe approaches.

Chorus: The wind, the dying wind blows grief
Upon a freakish silence, an awesome quiet
Which even the sun cautiously touches,
Diffusing shafts on the gloomy heath.
Hurry, Epimetheus, hurry,
Kronos grinds our lonely soil.
We the Spirits of the Lost Dead,
Spirits lost in the chaos of the earth,
The dark, the unseen, the unknown,
The realm past all thought,
Feel the biting blade of Kronos.

(Epimetheus leaves the mist and approaches Prometheus.)

Epimetheus: Prometheus, I come from the land of death;
The Spirits of the Lost Dead
Chant lost, woeful melodies,
Murmurs which only the heart
Can grasp and grasping shutter.

Their chorus of dirges chant,
Kronos wrongs man.

Prometheus: Kronos, custom-chained Kronos.

Epimetheus: Kronos does foul on the heath
Bathed beneath the mist.

Prometheus: Epimetheus, search the sacred shrine
And to the heath return,
There the silent illusions,
The grief of Kronos will fall.
Meet me on the heath of mist.

(Epimetheus walks swiftly into the mist. Prometheus walks slowly toward Kronos.)

Chorus: The lonely mist flows
Stretching slender fingers
Over frozen moors.
Kronos moves the hidden heath
Casting shadows into shadows.

(Prometheus enters the zone of faint light and mist.)

Prometheus: This mist burns the eyes,
Blights the body,
And scalds the brain,
Evil crawls upon the earth.

(The light of the first zone is gradually extinguished until the zone of faint light and mist is surrounded by blackness. In the rear, small lights of a town come on and can barely be discerned. A dim light shines phantom-like through the haze, and extreme isolation dominates the stage.)

Chorus: Village lights,
Village lights flicker,
Softly burn in the swimming mist
Futile, isolated like the old man.

Prometheus: Ripples spread the lights
And mirror etched seas
Which fade unequal in the dark.

Kronos: In this vault of raging mist,
Secluded tomb of time,
Man's misery will end.

Chorus: Mournful sky in sun decaying,
Groaning wind and snow,

Arid heath sunk in boggy mist,
Elemental death meanders unknown.

(Prometheus nears Kronos.)

Prometheus: Waist deep in murky sod,
Kronos spoons the slimy earth;
Lost in macabre schemes,
Kronos works woe
Under a cauldron of freezing steam.

Kronos: Shades of straggling night
Frozen with melting day
Will swiftly swallow this deed.

Chorus: Prometheus comes, a dim figure too
Struggling to ford the mist.

(Prometheus during the last speech has walked slowly to Kronos.)

Prometheus: Old man, why strain your limbs?

(Without looking up Kronos replies.)

Kronos: Purpose guides.

Prometheus: What meaning must change the earth?

(This question annoys Kronos enough to make him look up. He is startled by the young man's appearance and stops digging but quickly begins again. He digs and talks.)

Kronos: A grave, it is a grave I dig.
Death the immutable law,
Death must be loved.
The sins of fierce, panting life,
The virtues of soft, waking life,
Vanish, cling to the rocky womb,
Grasp the fallen ash.
Death must be loved.

Prometheus: All life leads.
But is this the place,
A heath of lonely mist?
Loved ones prefer the village grave,
The sanctuary of a church sheltered plot.

(Kronos stops digging.)

Kronos: Death feels not the flux
Of thunderous pulse;

Death cool lies in the earth cold.

(Kronos resumes his digging.)

Prometheus: Who do you bury, old man?

(Kronos replies as he digs.)

Kronos: Souls flow like sand
In splinted splendor,
Bodies rust from ice
In faded grandeur;
The grave waits for no man.

(Prometheus looks at the coffin and the grave with consternation.)

Prometheus: Thought eludes thought,
What do you bury if not man?

Kronos: More than man.

Prometheus: Bare the tombstone,
Chiseled letters will speak.

Kronos: No monument,
No stone adorns.

Prometheus: Rows of stone stand alone,
Marble pillars must raise
The final mark of death.

Kronos: Unfrequented,
Unmourned this tomb.

Prometheus: Why place the grave in endless caves?

Kronos: Cryptic are endless caves.

Prometheus: Old man, what do you bury?

Kronos: I bury the blood of man,
The wafer of the soul,
I bury the heart of man,
The white food of life.
With this grave an essence dies,
And man will wither, cry, and fall.

Prometheus: What demon will drives your satanic soul?

Kronos: Man sins,
Man usurps the fowl
In flesh corrupt,
From creation evil distills.

Man deserves not life.

Prometheus: Tainted sin scorches man,
All bear the burning brand,
By what tribunal do you judge?

Kronos: Weary time,
From time, truth's thorn grows.
I judge
By the years
Of eyes dimmed by
Life.
Rotten life,
The fested spark,
The vile violence of ancient waters,
All creation claws
With the struggle of life.

Prometheus: Struggle clutches the cloyed soul.

Kronos: Man fights,
Kills, for
Man is desire
Flaming in war;
Man respects not life,
And life freezes dumb, unrevered.

Prometheus: The spark of life alone
Commands man's piety.

Kronos: Man knows only the vulgar.
Disgrace and disgust
Crown his soul,
All have seen the vulgarity of man.

Prometheus: Life rises above the obscene,
Blackened blocks pave the road
To man's celestial light.

Kronos: Man sees not the way.

Prometheus: Torturous red paths of stained rocks
Rise before and after climbing man.
Only the noble accept the pain,
Only the pure choose
The razor of the lofty way.

(Kronos stops digging.)

Kronos: Once a creature more ape than man
Groped through the mist.

(Kronos points to the mist at a vague form. The form pauses long enough to suggest a primitive man, then vanishes.)

Prometheus: The creature stumbles.

Kronos: In the primieval past
Brutes made force the law.
Brute fought with brute,
And the mute watched;
The life of man is writ
In wet vermilion.
Survival is nature's law.

(Kronos starts digging again.)

Prometheus: Man lives above the beasts
With a pregnant heart.

(Epimetheus walks in swiftly.)

Kronos: Savage man rapes with the beast.

Prometheus: Man created the sanctuary.

Epimetheus: The intangible realm
Of the soul's dominion.

Kronos: The grimy, visible world
Found the animal man.

Prometheus: The soul searches for harmonic light.

Kronos: Ephemeral images fade
Before man's feeble grasp.

Epimetheus: The human soul spills poetic.

Kronos: Man would shame the earth
With ignoble dust.

Prometheus: Man is noble though he errs.

Epimetheus: His soul walks above the dust.

(Kronos digs wildly and talks.)

Kronos: Man grovels in the dust,
Chaos, only muddy chaos.

Epimetheus: Proud creatures erect,
Man touches the heels of divinity.

Kronos: Promise never grew.

Prometheus: Man walks sentient on the earth
Grasping for the myriad stars.

Epimetheus: Oh rapturous voice of man,
Spring sounds with every word.

Kronos: Man chants dismal dirges
Of the stagnant beast song.

Prometheus: Would you sacrifice the lamb?

Kronos: The tiger multiplies.

(Kronos digs furiously now, his task almost completed.)

Prometheus: What will you?

Kronos: Seize the sacred source
From the chilling caverns
Where man screams lost
In the mystic void
With only a bitter fire.

Prometheus: Brother, how does the shrine?

Epimetheus: Kronos stole the sacred fire.

Prometheus: You dared touch the fire.

Kronos: The flame barely flickers,
Man fails the fire.

Prometheus: Fate declares the flame to fail,
But man gives his heart to burn.

Kronos: Man has failed the dream of dust.

Epimetheus: Man dreamt the dream of dust.

Kronos: Man's misery must end.

(Kronos lays down his spade and lifts up the coffin.)

Chorus: Eternal doom.

(Both men leap for Kronos. Kronos drops the coffin and fights with them. After a short, violent struggle, Prometheus is thrown to the ground. Kronos frees himself momentarily, picks up the shovel, and raises it to strike Prometheus.)

Epimetheus: Prometheus, the killing spade.

(Epimetheus leaps to grab Kronos as Prometheus tries to get out of danger. Epimetheus fails to grab Kronos and is struck with the shovel. He screams, falls.)

Epimetheus: Brother, save noble man.

(Epimetheus dies. Prometheus grabs Kronos before he can swing again and strikes him savagely until he knocks him unconscious to the ground. Then Prometheus runs over to Epimetheus, bends down, and gently raises Epimetheus in his arms and cushions his head.)

Prometheus: Lovely Epimetheus,
Whisper sweetly,
Speak gently to your brother,
Sing your songs
Of green, green fields
And skies deep, deep blue.
Epimetheus,
Your blood-rinsed rinsed locks cry
And none hear your fragrant lay.

(Kronos tries to get up. Prometheus lowers Epimetheus lovingly to the ground, and then jumps on Kronos beating him brutally.)

Prometheus: Flesh of flesh,
Soul of soul,
Greater love hath no mortals
Than Epimetheus and I.
Vengeance must be mine,
For I am my brother's keeper.

Kronos: Spare me, Prometheus.

Prometheus: Never.
No more shall you see
The skies lost to Epimetheus.

Chorus: Those who prostitute life
Reap twice the wrath
And feel twice the pain.

Prometheus: You must die.

(With a final crush, Prometheus kills Kronos and rises to face the audience.)

Prometheus: Man, noble man must live;
Noble life must be preserved
Despite the paradox and pain,

The anguish and salt
Of displaced blood and tears.

Chorus: Life bleeds of sorrow and pain.

Prometheus: Noble spirits must bear
The fair vessel of life, the soul.
Noble spirits carry the cryptic soul.

Chorus: In all the world
Only man has the cryptic soul.

(Prometheus walks over to the coffin and as he raises the cover, brilliant light oozes, blazes from the coffin.)

Chorus: Wondrous light,
Glorious light.

(Prometheus continues to lift the lid of the coffin but turns his head to avoid the blinding light, then returns his head and stares directly in the dazzling light.)

Prometheus: Celestial light.

(Now the light of the coffin is the center of attraction, and it lights up the middle of the stage with dim light flanking the sides. The coffin is completely open.)

Chorus: Earth dust whirls,
Bell anthems peal,
Mountains upon mountains
Of light
Streak
Higher, higher.
Ethereal light pours
Scintillating streams
Of blazing,
Promising,
Transcending light.

Prometheus: Marvelous light,
Light which dawned on birth,
Torch of mortal dreams.

Chorus: Seize the light, Prometheus.
Take the light to man.

Prometheus: This burst of fire,
Radiant torch,
Earth laid star,

I will bear to man.

Chorus: An earth laid star belongs to man.
Cherish the mortal star.
Cherish always the light of man.

(Prometheus reaches inside the coffin and picks up the light and holds it over his head. His face glows as he looks at it.)

Chorus: His face glows transcendent with the sacred source.

(Prometheus reads an inscription off the light.)

Prometheus: Hope, the crown of the soul,
Hope, the sacred source of life.

Chorus: Hope, the jewel of hope,
Hope, the true treasure of man.

(Prometheus holds the light a few seconds longer then sets it down on the lid of the coffin. He picks up Epimetheus and carries him to the grave. Carefully he places him in the grave. He picks up a hand of dirt and sprinkles it in the grave.)

Prometheus: Epimetheus, my brother,
With you always my love
Will burn of man's love
And shroud your grave,
For hope, darling hope was bought
Through your tormenting pain.

(Prometheus then shovels several spades of dirt on the grave.)

Chorus: Man must always mourn,
Mourn love's loss,
But forever hope will burn.

(Prometheus stops shoveling and picks up the jewel of hope.)

Prometheus: I will walk East to the rising sun.

(Prometheus walks off with light of hope leading him. A new voice has joined the chorus.)

Chorus: Prometheus will walk East
And meet the rising sun;
Prometheus will carry hope to man.
Hope, the crown of the soul,
Hope, the sacred source of life,
Hope, the fire of man,
Hope, dearest hope, glory of glories.

NATURE'S PREPARATION

by CAROLYN FANELLI

A just-drawn curtain of cloud caused the sun to cast only a faint glow;

An ominous silence pricked the trees to attention;

A retreating breeze violently roused, then merely rippled the lake's surface —

As if obeying a sudden command, the earth stood expectantly still.

From some unknown source, the gentle breeze came to life, grew, and quickened to build, and build, and build —

The clouds started to move together, faster, faster, and faster —

From a gentle stirring, the trees began to sway, to swing, to bend, to bow and scrape to the stronger will —

Then the clouds collided:

And the rain came.



"DELIRIUM TREMENS"

by MIKE HALL

When the world spins,
and everyone says it stands still,
When spice and flesh have deserted you because
 of anger,
Don't go to the prairie and drink,
Because the dogs run in packs at night
and love the flesh of confusion.

FALL'S MEN

by WALT HADEN

Like painted leaves against the hunter's moon,
Some men do hang and shed a cold, deflected light
As empty as the hollow wind,
Ephemeral as the tinsel night.
Fitful beams glaze over garish faces
Till lunared leaves wax cold at dawn;
Exhaling Autumn huffs her curt eviction:
The cobbles run their painted rivers.
Fall's men move on.

by MARGO GARIEPY

Black smoke-curls;

a portrait of diffusion in blue.

Leaves, verdant, wear

smudge-dirt over vivid green

only to cleanse themselves in early rain.

And voices, in loud, clear resonance

echo the victory of Spring.

Wind-lips sputter, shake trees. Toss branches to the blue.

Grass giggles (hear the fields whisper) and sun swells in Pride.

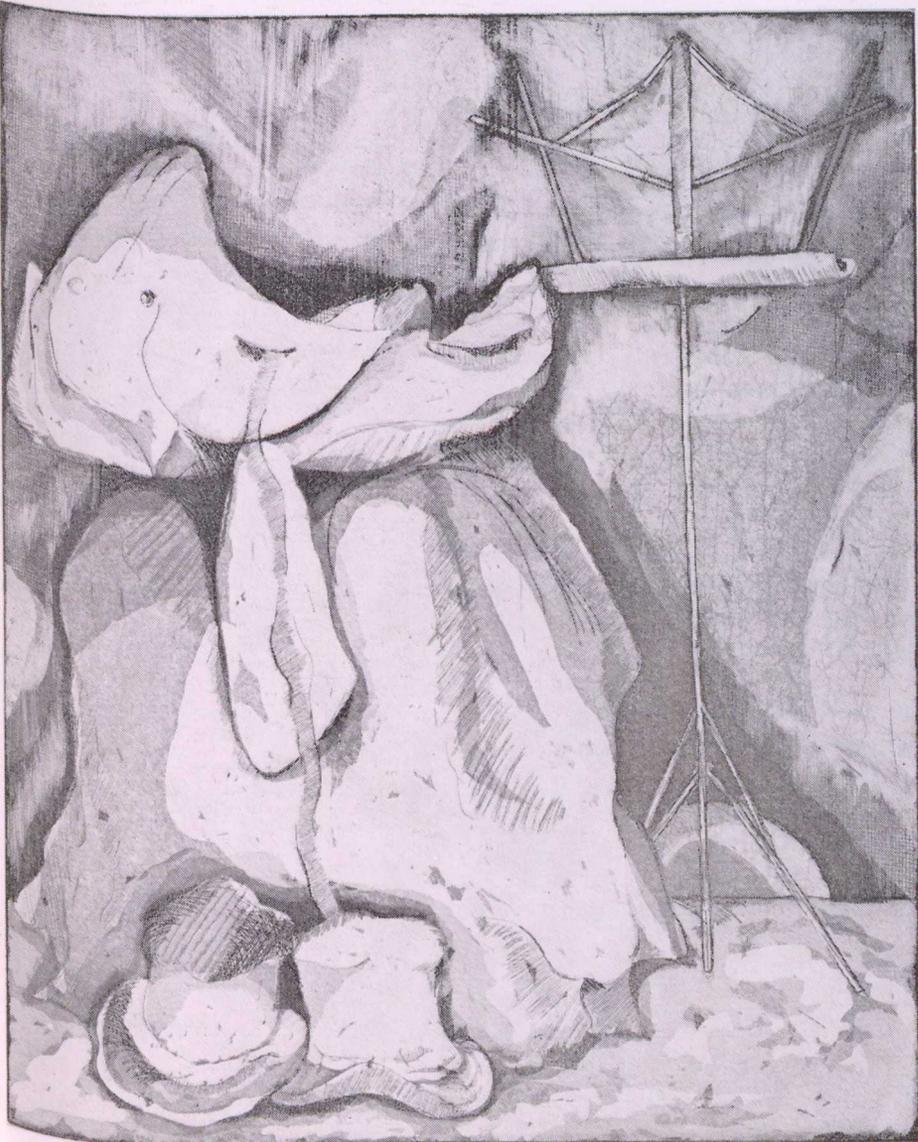
Grass-gossip,

ostentaciously sun,

lispings wind,

aerial boughs;

Joyous lyric for the exile of the Cold.



AND HE BECAME MAN

by JOAN CAVALLARO

I was here when
Silent screams awakened
Me from a nightmare:

When I writhed in
A sweat made frigid by
The Fires of Hell:

When the turquoise
Morning was scarlet
With my blood.

But now there's no
Nightmare, no one to warm
My shivering limbs.

I'm here, O, God,
The nails are tearing
The flesh from my feet.

HAIKUS

by BRUCE CLAIRE

The driving rain plunges down, inconveniencing
the people I hate.

A pebble of thought, revealing its private
damp-side, overturned by conversation.

A bamboo pole, glinting golden, impales the
dry beach by itself.

Floor tiles, holding edge-hands, offering
their strong little backs up to me.



THE LOST WAY

by CAROL LINNE AHMED

The Men of God tell me that I have a soul,
But should I not know myself better than they?
The Men of God tell me, too, that He will care for His own;
But how many of His own have starved to death this day?
The Men of God tell me to forgive mine enemies,
But the Lord punishes sin unto the fourth generation.
The Men of God tell me to love my fellow man —
But once out of the pulpit, they favor segregation.
The Men of God tell me it is wrong to kill,
But each religion's history is drenched in blood.
The Men of God tell me the Lord purged the world with rain,
But are men better now than those before the Flood?
The Men of God tell me that I have lost the way —
But all I do is sigh and ask, "What way?"

"FOR A NICKEL OR A LAUGH"

by MIKE HALL

The suitcases came on padded feet; imported goat and domestic cow with fancy locks and simple latches, lovers, scholars, farmboys, wits.

Dagos, Swedes, agnostics, and Romans all unpacked together. Slowly diplomacy crumbled in little bits and they coagulated in nasty little bunches of twos and threes that rolled and shifted for just a nickel: but mostly for a laugh.

Lover jeered scholar; scholar ribbed farmboy and wit knocked them all. Swede slandered Dago, agnostic reasoned nonsense, and Roman said they'd all go to hell.

In nasty little bunches
In funny little clumps
that would roll and rotate
for just a nickel:
but mostly for a laugh.

THE ENTRANCE

by DENNIS M. RATZ

His Majesty stood second from the right along the columnade of dignitaries. They were all there: Mr. Napoleon, Miss Venus, Mr. Lee, Mark Anthony, just to name a few. An undergraduate air surrounded each sidewalk traversing Elgin Park. It was early morning. The sun was beginning to reveal the hidden expectations of the day. It was a good sun, an autumn sun, which highlighted each personality in Elgin Park.

"Hello, Mr. Napoleon," Charlie said. "How are you this fine fall morning?"

Charlie sat down. It was a small, white, stone bench. Charlie sat there every day. The chill autumn wind began to stir the orange and yellow leaves at Charlie's feet. He looked up at the sun and pulled at the collar of his navy-blue flannel coat. As he brought his head down, he smiled.

He raised his right hand to his brow and said, "Good morning, Mr. Lee. What a fine horse you have there. If only I had a fine horse like that, why I'd . . ."

Charlie looked around. He knew that he was always the first to arrive. From sun-up until the first commuters came rushing through, he knew that he had the whole park to himself. He felt good in the early morning hours. Everything in the park was his, his alone, and he could sit and talk to his friends: Mr. Napoleon, Miss Venus, Mr. Lee, and all the others.

He would sit on his bench all day near his friends. And if he didn't talk to them, he would just sit. Regardless of the sun, he would always get a numbing chill which forced his withered structure into a humped pile of bones. He pulled his frayed collar tighter around his neck trying to get warmer. But it was no use.

Charlie began to talk to his friends again. Whenever he thought he had gotten enough courage to face the traffic of the day, he stopped talking and just sat there. He was ready now. He just waited. He knew that his friends would always listen to him. They gave him courage, at least for a while. It was going to be a good day. Charlie had a good feeling that morning.

and anyway, the wart on the end of his nose felt fine. Everything was going to be all right; it was a sure sign. He pinched his wart for reassurance and smiled. It usually gave Charlie trouble, but today was different. He loved Elgin Park. It was all he had. He thought, "If only I had a fine horse like that."

After nine o'clock, all the early commuters had gone. Charlie was all alone once again. His cramped body was stiff from his humped position. He began to stretch, but some children were running through the park. Somehow Charlie didn't hear them. Now, he only saw things, many things that didn't matter. He just watched and waited, hoping that no one would see him. The children were gone and Charlie crossed his thin legs trying to get more comfortable. But he ached; his creaky frame ached from head to toe. Then he felt the wart on the end of his nose and smiled. He looked up at Mr. Lee, but the reflection was too bright. He put down his head and just sat there. He waited for the morning hours to go. Sometimes the time went by very slowly, very, very slowly. "But today," he thought, "perhaps I could get someone to play chess with me." He always carried a miniature chess board and chess men in his left coat pocket. Perhaps today, maybe this afternoon, he could find someone to play chess with him.

The twelve o'clock chimes rang. Charlie jumped up, for he was beginning to doze off. He looked up at the church steeple and thought that he had better get some lunch. He made the two block jaunt back to his rooming house. Charlie was glad that it was only two blocks away from Elgin Park.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Wolfe," Charlie said.

"Well, if it isn't old Charlie. How's the park treating you these days?" Mrs. Wolfe asked.

Charlie usually said nothing more to Mrs. Barney B. Wolfe. But today was different. He had to say something. He just had to. Once again, he touched the end of his nose. "The park," Charlie said, "the park was good today. My friends thought it was good, too."

"Poor Charlie! Leaving him live here for almost nothing. Some people just don't appreciate a home these days!"

Charlie turned around and walked up the two flights of stairs leading to the attic. It was a hard climb, and Charlie was glad when, at last, he was seated on his bed. He wearily looked up and gazed at the images thumb-tacked on the two-by-fours. He had pictures of all his friends: Miss Venus, Mr. Lee, and all the others. He began to smile, but it wasn't like being in the park. He hurriedly ate and made his way back to the park. He was anxious to get back to his white, stone bench. "My, that Mr. Lee has a fine horse," he thought as he walked along.

Charlie was glad to be on his bench. He looked around hoping to see some good sign. He once had so many good things, but now he could only sit on his bench. For Charlie, these last seven years had been truly monotonous: the same meals, the same place to go and sit each day, the same people to watch, and then at night, the same four walls of his room. Once, he had been interested in things: his wife, his son, his job, but these interests were now gone, for his wife was dead, his son had moved away, and he'd been retired from his job. Even all his old park friends were gone now. But now he had images and dreams. They were all his. After all he had a right to something. Charlie glanced over at the park entrance. He had passed it many times, but today he was even willing to look at it. There were so many things worth looking at. "If only a horse," Charlie thought. "They are so pretty."

The afternoon sun furnished a comfortable blanket for Charlie as he fell asleep. In the afternoons, Charlie's perpetual chill would almost go away. The voices of the returning commuters usually woke Charlie up, but today, Charlie couldn't wait that long. He was surprised to see that it was not yet 2:00 o'clock. Charlie looked around methodically, as he usually did after his nap, except that he did it with more ease in the afternoon.

Once again, he felt his nose. He had to, for it was a good sign. As he brought down his hand, he stretched them in front of him. He had good hands for his age, for he had not spent his years working with his hands. He had worked as a clerk in a clothing store, making his living by appearing neat and well groomed. He put his hands down; they didn't matter now. So many things didn't matter now.

But Charlie knew hands were still important to so many others. There were still hands that were in use and still accomplished something. He often wondered what kind of hands the artists at the park entrance had. He had passed them every day, but he only had one objective, getting to his bench. There he could sit among his friends, and when afternoon came, he could sometimes look at the park entrance and wonder. He didn't know who those people were, for he had never bothered to find out. He usually saw the same faces out there by the entrance, but most of them were usually men. Lately he had noticed a young girl. He couldn't figure out why a girl took to painting. In his younger days, when he was up on things, he had always been told that all the great painters were men. But the painters at the park seemed to be different. They weren't famous, and anyway, why did a girl, such a pretty girl, take to painting?

Charlie brought his head back and gazed at Miss Venus. He liked Miss Venus. Miss Venus reminded him of the young girl who was painting at the entrance. He had a Miss Venus once, and he had married her. But things like that didn't matter now. All that mattered now was a good sign.

Charlie wanted a shred of recognition, some sort of meager place that he had held before.

Charlie tried to get comfortable on his bench. His heart flickered with anticipation for he realized that his wart felt good. He felt his left coat pocket to see if his chess men were still there. He held his hand in his pocket for a long time, for he remembered the time at the clothing store when he had received them for Christmas. He had never learned to play chess, but it was the only thing he had to remember his old job. He had always wanted to take up the game, but one thing after another seemed to occupy Charlie's time. And he never wanted to be beaten by something as silly as a game. "My, what a fine horse you have, Mr. Lee," Charlie thought to himself.

The chimes rang five times and Charlie knew that the park would soon be filled. Once again, he looked at the entrance. All were gone. Only the young girl was left. Usually, all the artists left before the crowd came through. She seemed to know what she was doing and she was so pretty, so damned pretty. Charlie had let most of these fancies escape him. But now, somehow, he couldn't dismiss such a pretty thing. It had been so long since he had seen something so pretty. He could see that even the brisk autumn wind didn't spoil her composure. She kept busy at her task and she radiated something that Charlie had known so long ago.

The young girl just kept on painting. Her long black hair blew in her eyes, but she didn't care. It was autumn, a good autumn day, and she was an artist. A young man came up behind the artist and just stood there. But she didn't notice him and kept on painting. The young man lit a cigarette and paced back and forth. He would wait for her. The wind blew the orange and yellow leaves at the artist's feet. She looked down and smiled.

Charlie looked up at his friends once again, for in a few minutes they would be going their separate ways. "My, Mr. Lee," he said out loud, "your horse sure is swell."

Charlie could hear the six o'clock special coming. He was usually half-way home by now, but on this day Charlie was even willing to face the evening traffic. The sun was going down and he knew that in a couple of minutes the park would be like a race track. Some had to drive clear across town while others had to board the bus to the not-so-far places. And others, like Charlie, only had blocks to go.

The park filled up in no time and Charlie knew that it was time for him to go. "Good-bye, Mr. Napoleon, Mr. Lee, Miss Venus. Good-bye, everyone," Charlie said as he forced himself from his bench.

He began walking down the sidewalk leading toward the entrance. Everyone was passing him, but Charlie didn't care. He really didn't want to leave anyway. The others were all in a hurry, but not Charlie. As he

reached the entrance, he tried to look up at the young girl who was still painting. But he couldn't. He felt the pangs of his heart beating, and he just couldn't look up. The young man waiting for the artist stared at Charlie. Charlie didn't see him. He looked down at the leaves and walked back to his rooming house. It was a place to go. Others were going some place, too. As he reached Mrs. Wolfe's place, he decided not to go in just yet, so he sat on the front steps. He couldn't go up to his room yet. He just couldn't.

"What's going on, Mr. Charlie Collins? Don't you get enough sitting? You're just like all those statues you sit with all day."

Charlie didn't pay any attention to Mrs. Wolfe. He had lived in her house for seven long years. She had a bad tongue, but Charlie didn't care. He just tried not to listen. He just always presumed that business had always been bad for her. But Charlie didn't care about Mrs. Wolfe, and he just sat there on the front steps.

Charlie woke up early the next morning. He always woke up early now. Sleep didn't matter to him. It was just one of those things people do day after day, and sometimes they don't need it. Charlie didn't. He hurriedly dressed and went to the park. The morning was a good time for Charlie, and he was glad to be in the park.

"Hello, Miss Venus. You look very pretty this morning. You never change."

Charlie was on his bench and he was glad. He looked up at the sky and then at his other friends. They, too, had not changed. But this day Charlie didn't feel like saying "Hi" to them all. He thought, "Miss Venus on a horse. My, she is pretty, so very pretty." The air was much colder than the day before, and Charlie hunched himself on his bench.

Charlie looked at the entrance to see if anyone was stirring around yet. He caught the images of two people nearing the gate. He could see a young man and woman holding hands in complete silence. He wondered who had invaded his early morning sanctuary, the refreshing silence that Charlie knew every morning. He could hear their footsteps as they entered the gate. They echoed a thousand things that Charlie had known once.

"Good-bye, Laura. I'll pick you up at noon. Try to work on something fresh," said the young man. He kissed her and walked briskly down the sidewalk.

Charlie smiled. It was the girl artist. He could see her face more clearly now, for she was away from the shadow of the fence. It was a pretty face. Charlie loved pretty things. He wanted so much to go up close and look at her. He saw her take out her painting gear from her broad leather bag. Charlie crossed his legs to get more comfortable. He looked up at the

sun which was beginning to peer from behind the huge clouds. He looked around at his friends and just sat.

He must have missed the early morning crowd, for when he woke up, the clock on the Catholic church tower read eleven-thirty. The sun hurt Charlie's eyes and he covered them with his hands. After a while he could see clearly again. He began to look around. The park was empty except for the figure of the young girl painting at the entrance way. She seemed very occupied and didn't even bother to glance around. Charlie was stiff from lack of movement all morning, but he was afraid to move, for he thought the pretty artist would notice him. So he just sat there.

He finally had to make some movement, so he looked up into the sun, once again, but it wasn't so bright when he forced himself to do it. It was something he had to do and he was glad that there was a sun to look at. He could remember the long hours he had spent lying under the sun at the beach. "But it was the same sun," Charlie thought. "The sun will never change."

"Laura, let's get some lunch!" Charlie heard a voice say. It was the young man who had left her in the morning. His voice startled Charlie, for the sun had left him with flashing circles, and he couldn't see them too well.

"Fine," said the girl, "let's go to the Vic." As she turned around to meet her young friend, she brushed up against the small portable easel, and the canvas fell to the ground. The young man laughed. He looked up at Laura and just laughed and laughed. Laura looked downward at the painting and smiled. She looked up at her young friend and began laughing also.

"C'mon. Let's go, you nut," the young man said. He held out his hand and they continued laughing as they walked down the street.

Charlie watched them disappear around the corner. He felt that they must be in love. They seemed so happy when they were together. Charlie got up to go home. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all day. He said good-bye to his friends and started for the gate. Charlie looked around and walked toward the entrance.

He looked up at the sky. The sun was still bright. When he brought his head down, he could see the young girl's canvas being blown away by the wind. He ran over. It blew against the gate and Charlie picked it up. "My, what a fine horse you have there, Mr. Lee," Charlie said. He began to laugh. "Hello, General Charlie Lee. Charlie on a horse." He laughed. He put the picture down by the entrance. He made his way to his rooming house. He was still laughing but he had to. The air was getting colder. Charlie felt his nose. It was cold. He knew that the snow would be falling soon.

TO UNDERSTAND

by BARBARA JANIA

Some day I will understand what to do with beauty.
The reason for the cool, clear water of a noisy stream
Burdened with foaming, frothing, frosty bubbles
Born of the passionless intercourse of water caressing the
jagged bottom

The brilliance of yellow sunlight
Melting the liquid in a fiery whirlpool
The sound of cascading waters.

Oh God—Tell me now to preserve this beauty,
Show me a better place than memory
A more sure haven than recollection.
The cloud moves stealthily to shield the sun;
My water turns from yellow-green to black;
The white froth turns gray,
And the universal echo of cascading waters turns ominous,
And I am afraid.

THE CALLING OF THE SEA

by SARA MAXSON

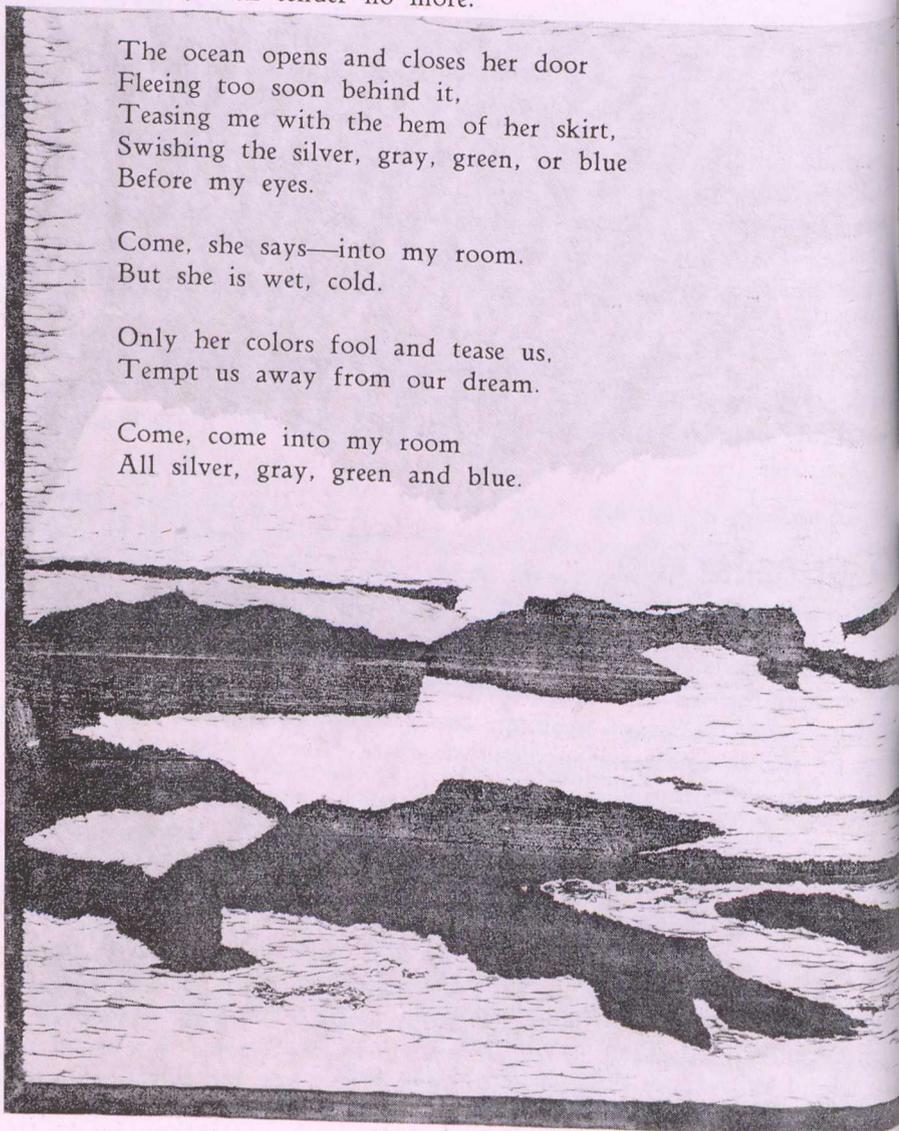
Her undertow swaying to and fro
Pushing, pulling, giving, taking,
Endlessly-soft, then strong,
Weak, then tender no more.

The ocean opens and closes her door
Fleeing too soon behind it,
Teasing me with the hem of her skirt,
Swishing the silver, gray, green, or blue
Before my eyes.

Come, she says—into my room.
But she is wet, cold.

Only her colors fool and tease us,
Tempt us away from our dream.

Come, come into my room
All silver, gray, green and blue.





AWARDS

POETRY

First Prize ... Moby Dick ... by Charlotte R. Carter

Second Prize ... "She" ... by John Hoffman

Third Prize ... To Understand ... by Barbara Jania

PROSE

First Prize ... Down They Forget As Up They Grow ... by Joe Catanzaro

Second Prize ... Millie ... by Robert Manning

SPECIAL DRAMA AWARD

Cryptic ... by Joel R. Power

JUDGES

Paul Burtness

James McNiece

Arnold B. Fox

William R. Seat

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