

Harbinger 1988

H A R B I N G E R

Stephens Magazine of the Creative Arts 1988

Literature

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Kate Staley

Angel Music

I found the feather and the music
after I thought of you:
The feather of an eagle,
old and used no more,
like the album
and found both the same night.
Both dusted gold and then
I remembered my poem from you
and looked but couldn't find it.
So I held the feather
and then left, like you.
It was cold that night
when I drove alone on milky roads,
under naked trees and into the midnight sun.
But the road melted into fields
and I forgot where I needed to go.
I had to stop, remember, go home.
So the night, too bright to drive,
drove me back home, which stood
black against a frost-blue sky
and silent, like myself, the music,
and the eagle who soars

to which my feather belongs.
So I will wait for him to land,
you to come home,
for the angel music to begin again.

Jim and Tammy Visit Hell

A born-again vigilante
reads the paper, then swears
and kneels to pray.
The next Sunday, he drives South
to spray-paint graffiti on a mansion,
like CNN and Swaggart lives
among other Satanic remarks;
after which he hides
behind a heated dog house
to watch a man in a black toupee.
He screams, "Meet the Devil, Reverend,"
as he pulls a magnum
from a hollowed King James,
pulls the trigger and is touched.
From behind, a made-up lady,
or Marilyn Monroe, minus the body,
breaks into "Amazing Grace,"
picks up the bloodied toupee
and hold it to her face,
then ends with a seductive rendition
of "Sympathy for the Devil."
The vigilante is lulled
by puckers and eyelashes
and networked tears,

then goes for his wallet,
pulls a gun instead, leaving
the woman face down in a hairpiece.
He tosses the empty Bible
on the lawn, by the garden,
between two still bodies and a dog house.
"Much less expensive
and I still have my faith,"
he chirps as he drives away.

PM Journal

Sometimes I feel as though time gets away from me, that I missed something that I'll never have the opportunity to know or see again, that I couldn't think quick enough, that I didn't write it down so that it will remain something more than a fleeting memory. I don't feel this way at Perry-Mansfield; I don't feel as though time cheated me in any way, expect to put a limit on my stay. Here at PM, it's easy to learn, to indulge, to embrace that which our given time has allowed us; here, it's easy to catch a lump in your throat while watching the stars in the mountains.

I wrote what I had to this summer, because of this summer. Time has been generous. He gave me what I came for, what I need for now: solitude and friends, form and thought, imagery and psychic weight. The reality here borders on the fantastical, as does the work or play, though often they are the same and always executed with the same intent—high energy and the hope of fulfilling a personal goal. It's refreshing to see those younger than myself with such grand intents, not to mention grand talents. Likewise, it's reassuring to meet adults, peers, who are still learning because they realize that there is so much yet to learn, that there will always be more to learn. (I think I'll term these people, "quasi-malcontents" — always wanting, but never lacking.)

Earlier, I remarked that time has given me, this summer, what PM has given me — a fresh layer of experience. For two

weeks after I leave camp, I will be alone on a mountain house-sitting a friend's home, watering plants, feeding a cat. For two weeks after I leave camp, my PM experience will remain on the surface of my memory. It will make me lay awake at night and stare aimlessly across the mountains in daylight, and make me sleep late, dream late into the morning. I will miss PM, it's people, it's poetry.

In two weeks, I will leave Colorado. I will return to Missouri, to flat heat, to family, to quick thinking and a lot of questions and talk. How will I describe Perry-Mansfield to those who care to know? I could go the Eastern route of thought and mention that it's a rest-stop along the highways of my Karma; I could go the Shirley McClaine route and suggest that it was my birthplace three lifetimes ago; or, I could simply say that it's an artist's retreat, a timeless escape, hidden in the niche of a mountain range.



Aimee Linhof



Kitty McNeely

Lori-Lyn Hurley

Sleep

Your hands
like gentle messiahs weave
their subtle magic
and take me down into
this night
that begs your name
be told.

I cannot rest so near
to this beauty, sleep comes
an easy shelter.

I watch you breathing soft rhythm
and suddenly the darkness holds
certain freedom, and I close
my eyes to whisper.

Kate Greene

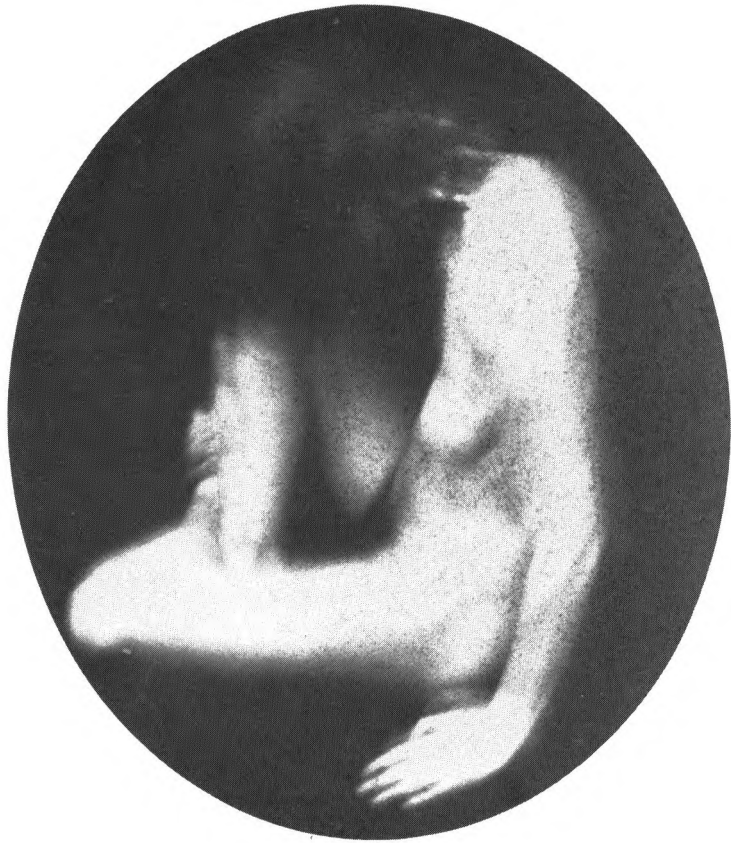
Amethyst Sundays

Another might say that rose tinted spectacles color binomial world views,
shade gem cut integrities, but
Mondays always follow amethyst Sundays,
Especially in the heat of November topaz.
They say that diamonds are a girl's best friend—"they" who know nothing
of the stone faced patriarchy
Have yet to learn what sisterhood is, not to mention love.
You come to me in a lavender dream far beyond the reach of any of their
destructiveness;
Songs play in the background on a self-assembled stereo.
To survive is to have patience—a wild, "wild patience."

The Political Blob

Chips to the left, beer to the right,
Eyes glued to the tube.
A little box of buttons in a pudgy hand
One push
A change of mood.
Images
Dancing across the screen
Half seen with half shut eyes.
A stomach protrudes from the thing in the chair
Relaxed, the big thing sighs.
The thing finishes the chips.
The thing finishes the beer.
The images dancing across the screen
Suddenly
Disappear.
“Its a crime!”
“Its unfair!”
Belches the thing
Lost
In the chair.
It reached for the phone
But the line was
Dead.
It tried to stand up

But its blood flushed its head
It cried out for help,
But its words were in
Vain.
It composed a letter,
But the post never came.
Nobody answered
Because no one was there.
Each was lost in its own
Easy
Chair.
Exhausted, unmotivated,
Each accepted its fate
Help would soon come if it just
Sat
In wait.
The moral of this tale for those who are
Slow
Is;
Life is not lived
If we are watching the show.



Lisa Cummings



Christine Karstaedt

Two Cousins

I.

“My mama says your mama always warshes your new clothes before she lets you wear them. Why?” my cousin asks.

“I don’t know,” I say.

“I don’t get new clothes much,” she says.

We both look out the window, then my eyes go around the pattern of the gray linoleum. I notice an old quilt that hangs from the ceiling to separate the living room from a bed. I also notice that my cousin, younger than I, has developed some up there, while I am still flat-chested, so I ask, “What do you eat mostly?”

“Fried potatoes.”

“Oh.”

“Mama says your daddy prob’ly has jars of money buried in you backyard. Does he?”

“No.”

“My daddy moved away a long time ago.”

“Oh.”

II.

“Does your family get a new car every year?” she asks.

“Every two years,” I answer.

“Ours is all broke down out in the grawdge. Mama says when our ship comes in we’ll buy a brand-new shiny one.”

“Good.”

“Is your new car a limmyzeen?”

“No. A Chevrolet.”

We eat some bread with butter and a little sugar on it. She wipes her mouth on her sleeve, so I do, too. And then we both drink icebox water right out of the bottle without a glass or anything, she says, “Let’s go out back and I’ll show you our old car.”

It's an old Ford with the back bumper loose and hanging to the ground on one side. The windows are covered with dust except on the driver's side where a small circle has been cleaned off.

"We went over to Dodge City in it before it broke down," she says.

"That's nice."

"Sometimes I sit in it and pretend to drive to Paris."

"Good."

III.

"Do you have a piano at your house?" she asks.

"Yes," I say.

"Do you take lessons?"

"Yes."

"Do you like 'em?"

"They're okay."

"Do you take any other lessons?"

"I used to take tap."

"Like Shirley Temple. Is that all?"

"I take ballroom dancing next year."

"Is that with boys?"

"I think so."

"Did you ever take baton twirling?"

"No. My sister did though."

"I twirl with a old mop handle."

She goes in the other room and comes back with a harmonica and plays "Oh Susannah" and "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" real fast.

"That's good."

"Taught myself. This used to be my daddy's. I have to hide it 'cause Mama doesn't want anything of his around."

IV.

"Do you go to church?" she asks.

"Sometimes," I say.

"Do you go to Sunday School?"

“Quite a bit.”

“I don’t go to either one. What do they do there?”

“Mostly sing and talk about God.”

“Mama taught me that prayer about ‘Now I lay me down to sleep.’ Do you know that one?”

“Yes. Do you know that last funny part to it?”

“No. How’s it go?”

“Sleep tight, wake up bright, in the morning light, to do what’s right with all your might, and don’t let the bedbugs bite.”

“I like that. Will you write it down for me?”

“Okay.”

“Do you say prayers before you eat?”

“No, but that reminds me, one time when we were visiting Grandpa’s at the supper table before we ate, he said, “Do you want to talk to your plate?”

“Hmm. Speaking of plates, that reminds me I was s’posed to warsh the dishes before you got here. Mama says you prob’ly have a maid to do your dishes. I better get these done before

Mama comes home. You wanta watch?”

V.

“Does your mama charge things at the grocery store?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say.

“Does she always pay the bill on time?”

“I think so.”

“Sometimes my mama can’t if the governmint check is late. Do they give candy at your store if your pay up on time?”

“Yes.”

“What kind do you get?”

“Candy corn and jelly beans and stuff.”

“All they give us here is lickrish, and I hate it,” she says, and points her thumb like a hitchhiker over to the table with the yellow oilcloth cover.

I see one of those dishes that come in Quaker Oats, and sure enough, there’s some licorice in it.

“Do your parents kiss each other much?” she asks.

“I saw them kissing once by the back door, before Daddy left for work.”

“Do they fight much?”

“Once.”

She gives me a stick of that gum with the wrappers that look like cigarettes. We play-smoke the wrappers until there’s nothing left, then chew the gum and blow some bubbles. I get mine stuck on my face and her mama takes it off with kerosene.

VI.

“Last summer at Grandma and Grandpa’s how come the cake you made was so much better than the one I made?” she asks.

“I don’t know,” I answer.

“Was it ’cause Grandma gave you Swansdown Cake Flour and she just gave me reg’lar flour?”

“Maybe.”

“Did you see the bruise on Grandma’s arm?”

“No.”

“Know how she got it?”

“No.”

“Want to know?”

“No,” I say, and get my hanky out of my pocketbook and blow my nose, put the hanky back and say, “Let’s go outside and play hopscotch.”

“Not till I finish,” she says. “Grandpa did it when Grandma took his whiskey bottle out of his pocket so it wouldn’t break.”

“Oh.”

“Know what else Grandpa used to do?”

“No.”

“I’ll tell you.”

“No.”

“He sold secret whiskey. Sometimes us kids delivered it for him. Five cents a trip.”

VII.

“Grandpa’s car sure must use a lot of gas,” she says.

“Oh?” I say.

“Last summer when we were there you know how he took us every night after super to get a bottle of pop? Did you get lemon or Orange Crush?”

“Lemon.”

“I got Orange Crush. Anyway afterwards he always took us to the park to ride the goat swing, and when he took us home and he’d leave by himself, you know how he always said he had to go gas up? Every night he said that.”

“Yeah.”

She goes to the kitchen and brings back two glasses of Kool-Aid and some soda crackers.

“Do you think Grandma stuck her hand in the fan on purpose that one night?” she asks.

“Why do you say that?”

“Well, you know Grandpa never asked her to come along to get pop, and she always had to stay home alone. I don’t think she was very happy and maybe she was trying to do suicide.”

VIII.

“What was that one fight about you said your parents had?” she asks.

“I don’t remember.”

“How come you don’t remember, if it was the only one?”

“I don’t know.”

“Whose fault was it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Was it your mama’s or your daddy’s?”

“My daddy’s.”

“What’d he do?”

“He came home awful late one night. It was really morning. We were already up.”

“Where was he all night?”

“Someplace drinking beer and playing cards.”

“Did your mama cry and stuff?”

“Yes.”

“Was that all?”

“No, they made us kids promise never to tell anybody.”

Lia Kelingos

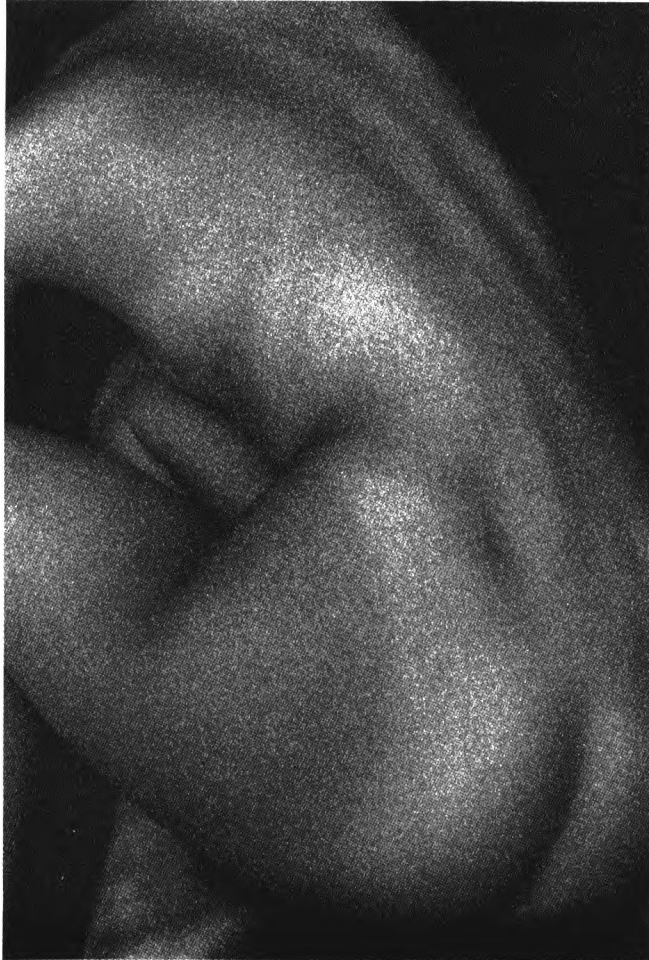
Untitled

Laughter soothes
My desire for continuing on
With anger and pain.
When in pain, space becomes black
Walls or flashes that stop.
Anger, the red smoke,
Takes over the smile
And pushes the lips together.
Laughter cracks up
The tension and all the loose pieces
Fall to the floor.

Marian Greer Allison

Perfection

a young girl's eyes tarnished
filled with smoke draw back
into her head with the strike
a fat hand
the blow of a thick fist.
they come down
pulling her from reality
taking her to the stars
to Venus to get away.
the hand the fist come
she concentrates on not being there.
it isn't happening.
one harsh thrust comes red red
she concentrates on not being there.
Venus is the same
the stars are in place
nothing changes it can't
she concentrates on not being there.
there is no pain
there couldn't be.



Lou Harley





Lisa Young



Desiree Phillippe

from an Essay on Boxing

Peering into a sex shop window, I was mesmerized by a mannequin donning a pair of men's leather underwear with a handy industrial zipper cutting the crotch in equal halves. "Does Rodney wear those," I pointed and asked. "No, but I do," replied Lester as he grabbed my arm and guided me towards the 7th Street Gym in downtown Minneapolis. We were on our way to watch Lester's older brother Rodney spar and work-out for his first professional Heavyweight boxing match. As we reached the gym, I took a moment to gaze at Hennepin Avenue, a main artery of the Twin Cities. The cars whizzed in front of Shinder's Book and Magazine Store, a trademark of the not-so-pure neighborhood. The night before, my parents brought me there so they could buy something to read later in the hotel. Only a small portion of the front of the store was dedicated to conventional material; *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Vogue*, etc. Mother was waiting by the cash register impatiently, Joe, my older brother, eleven at the time, was till browsing in the Sci-Fi section. "Go get your father and tell him to hurry up," Mother commanded. He was in the back of the store somewhere. I trotted through the maze of racks until I could see him near a counter in the rear. A silver turnstile stood between me and a whole other world of books and magazines, many of them in plastic envelopes. I called my father's name, "Dad." But he didn't respond. I looked over my shoulder to catch a glimpse of mother standing in her black

mink mouthing "Go get him." I proceeded through the silver gate. Nonchalantly, I tried to see every book cover and magazine title, knowing they were taboo to a girl eight years of age. As I walked towards my father, I was bombarded by signs of "Adults Only" and "Must Provide I.D. at Register." I expected at any moment for employees to lunge forward grabbing my arms and covering my eyes. When I reached him, he was turning around with a brown bag under his arm. Somewhat surprised to see my bulging brown eyes looking at him, he reprimanded me for leaving the side of my mother and escorted me to the front of the store. I pretended that I was clueless as to what he may have purchased and walked with my head down, staring at the stained linoleum floor. In my mind, the incident only weeks before when I came home early from a matinee at the cinema and caught my parents in bed together, naked and in an acrobatic position, was only too crisp and clear. I knew there was a connection between Shinder's, my father, and plastic magazine covers.

Lester guided me up a long flight of narrow stairs. I could hear jump ropes snapping, feet pounding, and fists connecting with leather and flesh. I had seen boxing before. Across the street from my house, in the old high school gym, my father often took me to watch and participate in Golden Glove workouts. My brother stayed home to listen to *Madame Butterfly* and *La Boheme* with my mother; we were opposites. Boxing

had always interested me. It seemed to be so sensual and carnal, yet so religious and ritualistic. Contradictions have always intrigued me. I remember my first pair of gloves. They were given to me by Duane Bobick, Rodney's older brother. It was a dark winter evening when the doorbell rang. My father rose from the dinner table, leaving his steak and blood tinged mashed potatoes. He always ate his meat very rare. My name was called. I walked into the hallway to see Duane holding a box. His red curly hair tucked under his coat collar, "Dis is for you, Gracie," Duane said handing me the box. "I used dem in de Pan-Am games. Dey are lucky so you take care of 'em, okay?" I agreed that whatever was special for Duane was special for me. Inside the box was a pair of boxing gloves. The burgundy leather was cracked, on the yellow wrist bands that read "EVERLAST" there were discolorations. "See those spots?" Duane pointed to the wrists of the gloves, "That's Stevenson's blood." I was overwhelmed. On my gift there was a man's blood, a man who I have never met, a man who would know that I now possessed a part of him. I said thank you. "Go eat your dinner now Grace, before it gets cold," Dad said. Before your steak gets cold and congeals, like a wound that finally clots and gets hard. When the front door shut and Dad walked into the kitchen, Mother finally opened her mouth to express her distaste for the gift I had received. "Michael, what is Grace going to do with Duane's gloves?" "Box, Marjorie. She's got a good right hook and a quick left jab. She just wants to have some fun." That set off an argument which I decided to ignore by going upstairs and playing Twister with my brother. Later, my father came up to tell me about how Duane was very generous by giving me the gloves

that propelled him to the 1972 Olympics in Munich. When Duane was an amateur, he beat such fighters as Larry Holmes. His victory over Cuban Heavyweight Stevenson in the Pan-Am Games opened the door to the Olympics, where Duane was sponsored by the U.S. Navy.

At the top of the stairs leading to the 7th Street Gym, Lester gave me instructions not to talk to people unless they started the conversation first. You never know if they are working-out and don't want to be disturbed. It was not hard to be quiet when each new experience took the words right out of my mouth. Lester and I stepped into the gym. There were many big, muscular men skipping rope, using punching bags, and a few shadow boxing and practicing their footwork. There were three rings set up where men were sparring with each other. Trainers walked around with black tennis shoes on their feet and white towels around their necks. A few of the boxers turned their heads to see the new spectators. I pretended not to notice that they were noticing me. Suddenly, I saw Mother and Joe across the room sitting in a corner, not looking terribly pleased by the musty, sweaty atmosphere that was pierced every other second by an obscenity. I got Lester's attention and pointed to the two unhappy figures in the corner. Lester guided me around the rings and weight equipment on route to my mother. On the walls, which looked like they had not seen a fresh coat of paint in thirty years, hung faded and ripped flyers and promotional shots of different fighters. In the far ring, nearest my beloved family members, stood Rodney Bobick with his head hanging down listening to his trainer Angelo Dundee. His chest was laced with red spots and streaked with sweat. His brown hair was half stuck to his head from

perspiration and punches, the rest tufted out here and there as if to look like he had been exposed to large quantities of static electricity. Rodney's sparring partner was a very muscular black man, who remained in his own corner dancing and shadow boxing while Rodney got advice from his trainer. The black boxer's physical fitness contrasted with Rodney's flabby, soft white skin. There was little or no muscular definition on Rodney's body, just solid bulk. Duane had a nice, tight muscular physique. Rodney had a problem with discipline and working-out. He was very lazy and did not think that exercise or conditioning would make him any better. He knew he was slow on his feet. Rodney's tactic was to wear his opponent out by allowing himself to be hit, Rodney's plus was that he could take a punch and when the time was right he could land one for the kill. Hoping that Rodney would work harder during practice, Angelo preferred to use black sparring partners because he knew how much Rodney hated "niggers."

This was 1974 and Rodney Bobick had not traveled far from his hometown of Bowlus, Minnesota, population 243. The Bobick family, all fifteen of them, were synonymous with the small Polish settlement ten miles west of the Mississippi. Their name was known throughout Morrison County and the surrounding area for being a very violent and disorderly bunch. Rose and Don were the proud parents of thirteen of the wildest sons Morrison County had ever known. Out of the group, Rodney was the third oldest. When he was growing up, Rodney's brothers used to exhaust their aggressions on him. A group of them would play cowboys and Indians, nominating Rodney to be the lone Indian who haplessly wandered into a white (Polish) settlement. His brothers rigged up real flaming

arrows and shot them at Rodney as he ran around trying to escape their torment. Besides leaving small fires burning, the arrows created several scars which Rodney carried on his back as a constant reminder of childhood. Another time, Rodney's brothers decided to lynch and hang him. After catching and beating him up, they brought Rodney into the barn where they had a noose. Unconscious, Rodney was placed in the noose where he was left hanging. His brothers ran into the house screaming that they had lynched Rodney. The eldest son, LeRoy, thought that before he would cut him down, branding Rodney might be fun. I am sure that all of these childhood antics have added to Rodney's tolerance for pain. As Rodney got older, he started picking fights with niggers and spicks in Minneapolis. His ability to take head punches was tested many times by angry baseball bats and crowbars in drunken alley brawls, all of which Rodney won.

My father entered the world of professional boxing very suddenly. He was called by the Bobicks to help settle a contract dispute concerning Rodney. My father was an independent banker in Little Falls, ten miles east of Bowlus and the county seat; his opinion was respected and he was known for having connections. Being in a jam with only forty eight hours to find a buyer for Rodney, my father decided, with the help of a quart of Cutty Sark, to purchase Rodney; thus becoming his owner and manager. Given the name of Ben Sternberg, a big promoter out of Rochester, Minnesota, my father called him asking for advise as to who would be a good trainer. Ben gave Angelo Dundee's phone number to my father as a possible trainer for Rodney. Angelo's real surname was Marino, an Italian from South Philadelphia, who changed his name

because he didn't want to be associated with organized crime and corruption in boxing. In the same period of time that Angelo trained Rodney, he also trained Muhammed Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard. There were many fighters of different weight divisions, about 150 or more, that Angelo was associated with, some in person, some just over the phone.

No one was quite sure how Rodney would do in his upcoming fight. It was going to be his first professional heavyweight fight; his challenger was Ron Standler, a heavyweight contender out of Omaha, Nebraska. On the evening of the big fight, my family and I had dinner with Angelo and some radio and television personalities from the Twin Cities area. We all feasted on prime rib; we all ate it rare. The adults at the table indulged in large quantities of scotch, while Joe and I sucked down several Shirley Temples each. After dinner, we proceeded to the Mets Sports Center where we had seats ring-side in Rodney's corner. There were two hours of preliminary bouts between people whose names floated by on a cloud of cigar smoke. Cameras started snapping, flashes popping. The emcee, bald and bearded, wearing a black tuxedo with a blue riffled shirt, stepped through the ropes and into the center of the ring. Standler's entourage started parading down the aisle to his corner; as he stepped up into the ring, the crowd unleashed a series of "BOO's." Behind me I could sense a wave of applause and cheers as Rodney shuffled through the crowded aisle to his corner. Caught up in the enthusiasm, I jumped to my feet to clap and scream. Rodney turned and raised a glove towards my father whose face was devoid of emotion. I think he was more nervous than Rodney, and more relieved that he was not entering the ring. The emcee an-

nounced Standler; there was silence except for a few drunken cat calls. The emcee introduced Rodney, the crowd erupted, supportive cheers spewed from everyone's mouth. The publicity for this fight had been very thorough. Next to the auction signs at the bank were promotional flyers. In Minneapolis, sports announcers had done all they could to bring the fight to the public's attention. The whole town of Bowlus and neighboring Polish hamlet, Sobieski, had been bused down to the Met Sports Center. There were hundreds of people from Morrison County alone.

The bell rang for round one and the crowd was on their feet. Rodney moved slowly and sluggishly for the first few rounds, taking more punches than administering. Often he would bring down his guard to welcome a head punch. Rodney's strategy was to scare his opponent by being hit and showing no signs of pain. This would tire the opponent and also intimidate him. Between each round, most people would sit down, resting along with the fighters, giving their vocal chords a break. Dad sat on the end of his chair staring into Rodney's corner. There was nothing he could do but leave it up to Rodney and Angelo. While the fighters were in their corners, a tall, blond woman in a swimsuit and heels would walk around the ring holding a board signifying what round was about to take place. In the sixth, Rodney decided to be on offense. He began to pummel Standler. I remember my mother clapping and shouting, "Make him bleed, Rodney! Make him bleed!" Quiet and reserved, Joe (who preferred opera) was even smiling when Rodney landed a blow. The fight went the full ten rounds (only title fights go for fifteen) with Rodney winning by unanimous decision. Rodney raised a gloved hand to the crowd as a smile

spread across his bruised and swollen face.

After the fight, it was back to the Kaillor Motor Inn where we, and the rest of the crowd from out of town, were staying. It was time to celebrate. Arrangements had been made to reserve rooms for the assemblage from Morrison County to party; there were rooms designated for the black fighters from Minneapolis and their followers to celebrate; and then there was the room where television personalities, managers, trainers, and promotion partied, the “upper echelon of the boxing world,” as my father used to put it. Since it was late by the time the fight had finished, I was only allowed to run around from party to party for a little while, usually escorted by one or more of the Bobick brothers. It was at these times that I learned how to throw a punch, a jab, and work on my right hook because the boxers were relaxed, drunk, and amused by my enthusiasm and desire to learn how to box. My father would usually find me practicing foot work with some of the fighters from the gym in the hallways of the Kaillor Motor Inn at midnight. He would take my hand lead me back to the party for the “upper echelon” and show me off to the people for a few minutes, allowing me to punch sportscasters. Hal Scott, from WCCO, Channel 4, was there, but I could never hit him because he had a bad liver from drinking too much. My mother used to call him Hal Scotch. Finally, Father would send me to bed, which was a room adjacent to the party so he and mother could look in on their children. For some reason, I can never remember the morning after a fight. It is as if in a drunken stupor of euphoria, I had blocked the next day out of my mind. I only can see pictures of overflowing ashtrays, demolished furniture, empty bottles of booze and a million

plastic cups. It was all empty. It was like walking through a deserted battle field. Before I realized what had transpired, it seems as though I was magically transported back to Little Falls and returned to my first grade class, taught by an obese woman, Mrs. Finkey.

When my classmates would ask me where I had been and I would tell them, there was so much I could not express in words. I felt uniquely privileged to be a part of such an exciting world. Through my experiences, I felt alienated from my fellow classmates. No matter how hard I tried to communicate, their ears were too small to hear about the larger world I had seen. Some of the boys would not believe that I knew how to box and they would provoke me into hitting them, which of course I would get in trouble for by Mrs. Finky.

The Bobick-Standler fight shot Rodney into the public eye. Muhammed Ali noticed him and asked him to fly out of Deer Creek, Pennsylvania where he would be employed as Ali’s number one sparring partner. My father went to visit for two weeks. He said that most everyone there were black Muslims who despised white people. Rodney was the first white sparring partner that Ali had. Larry Holmes was at Deer Creek which caused some problems because Rodney kept referring to him as “Hey, Nigger!” In 1974, Holmes challenged Ali for the Heavyweight title and won. In the same year, Rodney and Duane Bobick set a first by being ranked by Ring Magazine in the top ten. Other boxing brothers in different divisions had accomplished the same, but not in the heavyweight division. Duane, ranked sixth, was managed by Joe Fraizer and trained by Eddy Futch. Futch also trained Fraizer and Kenny Norton and went on to train Larry Holmes and Michael Spinx.

Duane's most humiliating defeat was in Madison Square Garden in 1976 when he was knocked out by Kenny Norton in 58 seconds in the first round. Rodney was ranked eighth in the world by Ring Magazine. At the end of his professional career, Rodney's record was 37 victories and six defeats. While Rodney was in training in Deer Creek, Duane was employed in the Dundee Gym in Miami Beach, Florida.

In the winter of 1976, both Rodney and Duane returned to Morrison Country to put on an exhibition match for the townspeople. Both had become local celebrities. My father arranged the exhibition match to be held in the gymnasium of the St. Francis Convent in Little Falls. Some minor fighters from Minneapolis came up to spar for the crowd. There were flyers all around town notifying everyone of the upcoming event. The town spirit was high in 1976 because the boy's high-school basketball team had just won the state AA Championship. My father was very excited and wanted everyone to enjoy themselves; learning over to Sister Carol and Sister Judith, my father grinned and said "If you sit close to the ring, and the fight gets heated, you might be lucky to have blood splatter on you." Both nuns giggled and said, "You must be kidding." But there was truth in what father way saying. I sat content to watch the crowd and their reactions. Black habits speckled the audience like splattered ink on paper. After the exhibition fights, there was a huge \$20,000 birthday party for Rodney who had recently turned twenty six.

Three years in which I experienced heavyweight boxing first hand contain so many memories, some crisp and clear, others foggy, and a great deal just forgotten. There were trips to New York City, parties in the Plaza Hotel, fights at Madison

Square Garden and the Naussau Colliseum, dinners with Joe Fraizer covered with jewels and fur, and post cards from all over the world from "Uncle Angelo." In 1977, both Duane and Rodney retired from heavyweight boxing. Duane's ranking had dropped due to a series of defeats and so did his desire to box. His face still carries the scars of his boxing days. After many failed attempts at carrying on normal jobs, Duane had to swallow his pride and return to Little Falls. Presently, he is married and working north of town in the machine shop at Camp Ripley, a large National Guard Base. Duane had found God, and runs Bible study groups for high schoolers. In 1977, Rodney got into an argument with his older brother LeRoy. In the heat of the dispute, LeRoy took a pistol and shot off Rodney's right thumb. A few weeks later, my mother and I were at a Carleton College reunion in Northfield, Minnesota when we received a telephone call informing us of Rodney's death in a car accident outside Bowlus. It appeared that the car had lost control (or else Rodney had lost control) and the car flew off the road and into a large elm tree.

#469-66-1689

in the future there will be no taxi cabs
screaming down dark alleyways at midnight
in the past there will be no preoccupation
with the future
with solar power
with atomic waste

only virgins will be elected to office
time will stop to its liking

if it were not for a few laughing lunatics
who have been exploited in the public eye
and captured on the cover of periodicals
we could not pass judgement and maintain

authority

superiority

jesus held my hand because you pulled away
lao wrote poetry so that i could carry on life
mr. manson murdered so i could be sane

grace 1986

This Is Not Florence

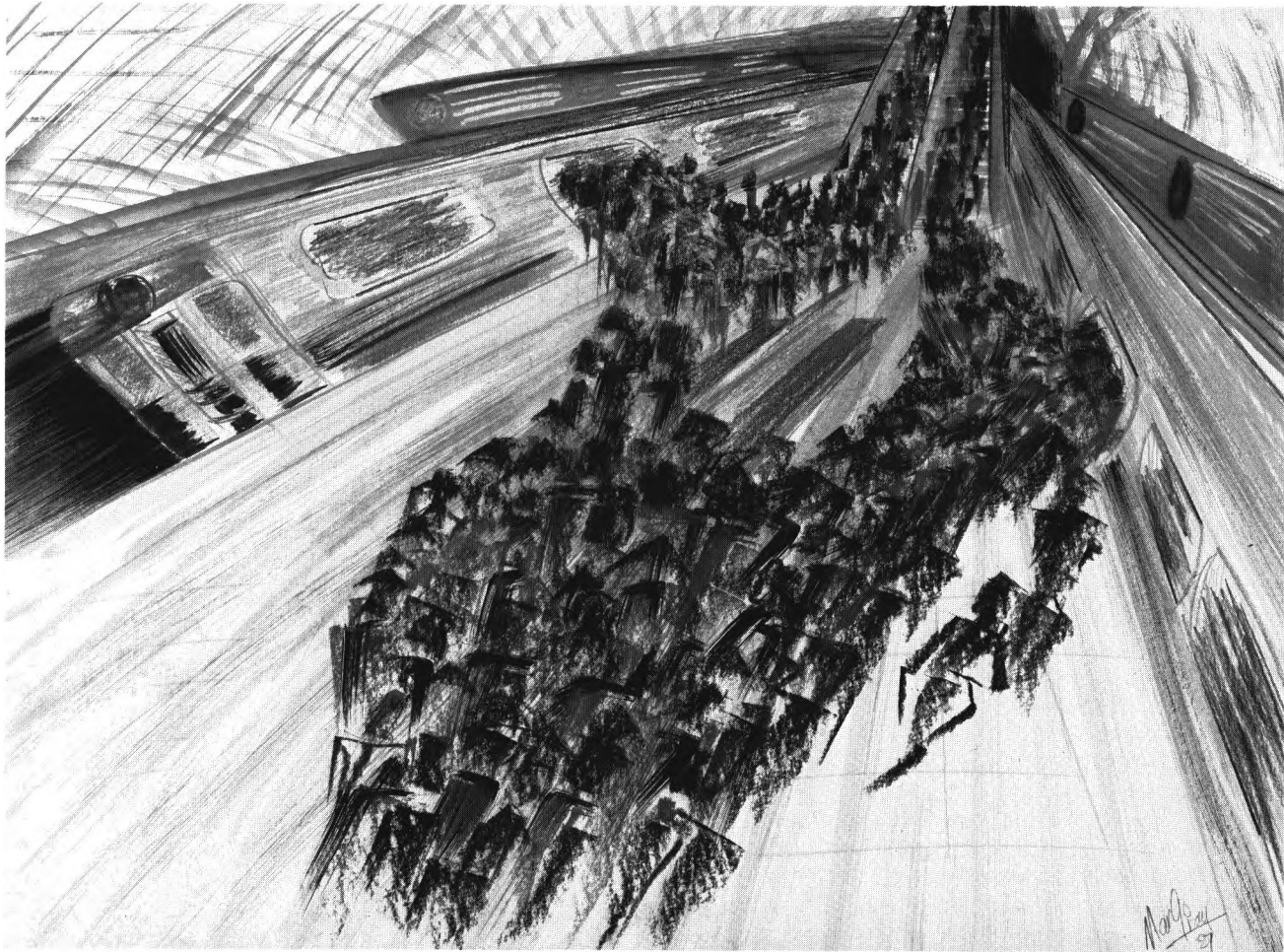
On a white-washed wall
she tapes words and smiles
over spots where paint
peels away like the skin
of an orange.

The oranges that grow around Florence
are unique because they,
on the inside, are blood
red. They look
like an abortion, so
it is said, and their juice
is thick.

At night there are
no lights that show how
her heart runs from the wall
onto sheets and into
her mouth.



Margo Gray



Margo Gray

Laura Coon

Nothing

I looked out the window tomorrow
And there stood nothing,
Lurking blackly and looming overhead,
And nothing beckoned and held me
So tightly that I suffocated
In the freedom.

But nothing was stabbed by a siren,
Killed with a single step
Buried beneath a sidewalk,
For fear that it oppress more
People with freedom.

From The Play: *Mere Crayon*

SHADOW, an honest ham, whose narration is to be trusted;
she may be slightly older than Mere, Mere's age, or ageless;
the director may choose to cast more than one Shadow

MERE CRAYON, female in early twenties

PROP PEOPLE, age is irrelevant, look and mannerisms are
open — they love to play, a minimum of two need to be cast

SHELIA, female in early twenties

TIM, male in mid-twenties

KIKI, female in early twenties

JAY, female in early twenties

FINNEGAN, a stuffed monkey

TWO MEN IN CAFE, sophisticated, age late twenties to early
forties

TWO MEN & TWO WOMEN IN CAFE, mid-thirties to early
forties, married couples

TWO WAITERS

The accounts take place in a coloring book.

The time is anytime.

“Mom, I thought you were going to do me pictures to color.”

“I was going to, honey. But you know something, I think it
would be wonderful if you did me the pictures instead.”

— Stacey in conversation with mom, *The Coloring Book*

The reader does bring a crayon to the reading. The reader brings a crayon even if the reader says “No, I bring no crayon.” The reader brings a crayon unwillingly and not knowingly to the reading. When the reader decides to willingly bring a crayon to the reading, the reader will be receptive to the knowing. Willingness proceeds knowing although the unknowing is always taking place. Even in the unwilling. It is with the willing discovery of the unknowing, that the reader will see more than one crayon. The reader carries several crayons to the reading. It is not important to know the color of every crayon.

— *Why Not*

The Accounts of Mere Crayon
by
Mere's Shadow

Mere's Shadow, referred to as Shadow, is the voice of most of the accounts. Shadow stands by a tree in dim light. She stands, she sits, she leans, and she circles the tree in a “now you see me, now you don't” activity . . . called play. During the course of the telling, Shadow is always tuned in to Mere, even though her physical antics may say otherwise. Shadow reads from

pages for the sake of ease and accuracy. At the end of each account, Shadow drops a kerchief. Each kerchief is of a different color.

As for the set, it is always in flux. The prop people act as elves. They responsibly, yet playfully, tend to all set changes. They are careful to not “steal the show” as elves sometimes will. The prop people are mostly on stage in between acts.

During the course of action the set is never blacked out completely. To fade completely to black would disrupt Shadow’s accounts.

On stage from the start is the tree and Shadow, a swing, a blackboard with Mere Crayon spelled out in white chalk, a small table, and a chair. A string of paper dolls is strung across the backstage. All items mentioned remain on stage the entire show except for the small table and chair. Mere is seated downstage at the table. On the table sits an apple.

SHADOW:

These are accounts of Mere Crayon. Not necessarily visual accounts in the sense of image. Or vaporous accounts in the sense of odor. But these are accounts. Accounts of a person who would prefer to remain unaccountable, rather than participate in accounting discarding. I think it is for this reason Mere captivated my attention. These are accounts of Mere Crayon from my perception as Shadow, and not her perception of Mere. As happens with daily activities, each folds into the next. Wake up. Strip down. Shower. Get dry. Dress.

Etcetera. These accounts fold into each other. Just as people fold into Mere. There is no plot. There is no climax. There is no connection to be figured out. They are just simply accounts that I strung together. Mere play.

Shadow clears her throat, does some movement to relax, adjusts her vision, and begins. Until this adjustment, Mere has been completely still. With this adjustment, Mere begins to participate.

SHADOW:

I couldn’t even watch Mere eat her apple. And she even reminds me of her hamster, Roger, when she eats apples. I couldn’t watch her eat her apple because I couldn’t stop thinking about how she forgot to erase her name from the blackboard. Mere Crayon. Her whole name left standing up there in white chalk. She doesn’t like to be known. What to do? What to do? It took me some thought. I missed the whole apple. Except the core. She doesn’t eat the core like Roger. I could see the core in her hand. It took me some thought, but I decided to leave her name on the blackboard and believe that if they took it, it was because they need it more than she did.

Shadow drops a kerchief. Mere is not at the table. The prop people have moved on to the stage a cardboard drinking fountain. Mere and Shelia will, through mime, make available the belief that there is a hall with doors and stairs attached to it. It is also possible for Shadow to throw eggs in this segment.

SHADOW:

I wanted to find a hen to lay eggs so that I could cook them then crack them on the ground. Cook the eggs so that Mere wouldn't slip. And crack them so that Mere wouldn't have to act as if she was walking on eggs. Mere would be walking on eggs. And people wouldn't have to guess that.

Mere mimes herself slinking out a door. Later followed by Shelia miming herself out another.

SHADOW:

I watched Mere slink out her door this morning. She carefully pulled it closed. Then she tip toed down the hall. Shelia opened a door and walked out of it on Mere's right.

SHELIA:

Good morning, Mere.

SHADOW:

Mere smiles.

SHELIA:

Are you o.k.?

SHADOW:

Mere ducks. It is hard to hide six feet behind a drinking fountain.

SHELIA:

O.K.

SHADOW:

Shelia looks around and then ducks behind the fountain beside Mere.

SHELIA:

What are you doing?

SHADOW:

Mere pretends to be a part of the wall.

SHELIA:

I'm going to class now. I hope you're not here when I get back.

SHADOW:

Shelia stands. Shelia brushes herself off. Shelia bends to get a drink. The stream of water misses her mouth and lands someplace on the ground with Mere. Mere makes no sound. I couldn't quite see. But I think it got Mere wet in her pants. I think this because Mere got up after Shelia left, and went to her room. Mere came out of her room with blue pants instead of green. This time when Mere comes out, Mere ran down the hall and steps and out the front door. Just like that. In one big hurry. Later that day I heard Mere apologize to Shelia. Mere said she just had things on her mind and didn't want to talk to anyone until they were off her mind. She was afraid that if she talked the things on her mind would escape too soon.

Shadow drops a kerchief. The prop people move the fountain off the stage and carry on a trash can with a lid. Mere walks on. They walk off. In the course of this next segment she searches

the trash, tosses it out, occasionally scrutinizes pieces of it, and replaces it in the can. And she does remember to put the lid back on.

SHADOW:

There are many things Mere wants to do. But she thinks of them in succession and so quickly that she forgets to do them, forgetting what the them were to begin. Because of this, she sighs. It is good that she forgets the things. Mere doesn't know what she does in her engagement of life that causes things to happen. In effect, she doesn't cause them, just aids in the persuasion of them, and through them. And the few things she doesn't forget, she shares. And in this sharing she grows scared. Sharing the things is claiming them temporarily, and in this claiming there is a commitment to things, and a commitment to doing things again. And that is the terror. Mere never knows if again is ever going to happen for the things she rarely remembers to begin.

Shadow drops a kerchief. The prop people move the trash can off. They move on a piece of gym equipment. Mere wheels out Tim in a red wagon. The prop people exit.

I watched Mere exercise, daily. Mere went to the gym to do athletics and not to pick up boys. On the gym floor she got nasty with boys that flirted with her. One of the workers, I knew his name as Tim because of his name tag, tried to engage her in conversation at the standing calf machine. The calf that is part of the leg. Not the calf that stands in the field. She very obviously gave him a cold right shoulder as she resumed her

count of fifteen. It takes fifteen up-down motion to get the blood circulating to the calf muscles. To Tim, her right shoulder was not as cold as it seemed to me. He did not understand that she was irked. There was no way for her to continue the set with him resting his weight on the part of the machine that was supposed to move. Two hundred pounds of iron plus him was too much. So she gave him the cold shove. Mere considered this her non-social time. Her non-social time in order that she might be comfortably social. It appeared to me that she became tired of working her body after ten minutes on the gym floor. The first ten minutes consisted of stretching and sighing at the ceiling as she lay on a mat on her back. Yet still she persisted to drag all of her, feet, hips, chest, etc., around the room. One hour-and-a-half using the machines. Encouraging sweat. And discouraging the sweat and panting of others. Her emphasis on her own body. The physicality of others did not concern her. A girl once asked her how she looked at boys. Mere understood the question. I know she understood the question because the girl understood her answer.

Tim moves the gym equipment off the stage. One of the prop people chases after him, wagging a finger at him. The prop person doesn't like Tim taking his place, claiming his responsibility. Tim walks back on and slaps Mere gently on the rear. Mere kindly helps him back into the cart. Mere then wheels him, roughly, around stage.

MERE:

It doesn't occur to me to view people as sexual beings. No, I

take that back. It only occurs to me to view people as sexual beings, such as Madonna and Tom Selleck, when popular culture directs my attention there. In the case of Tom Selleck, I could dismiss the media. I don't care for all that hair. But yet I understand a person's like for texture. I simple prefer silk to wool.

SHADOW:

Mere stops to wipe her brow. Pushing him around is quite exhausting. And she decides it is not only exhausting, but a really-not-so good idea. Mere dumps him off to the side. Brushing her hands of him, she thinks again. Mere then extends her hand out to Tim. Tim hesitates, then accepts. She takes his hand in hers and helps him up. They shake, not hands, but their bodies, and Tim exits. Thinking. Mere says —

Mere moves to center stage, sits, takes off her shoes and socks, and massages her feet.

MERE:

My friends kept telling me my lover was gorgeous. I didn't pay any attention to their talk for the first three weeks, or so. Their comments continued. Gorgeous. That blonde hair. Magazine material. Stuff like that. One day, I sat back, and stared at her objectively. I say objectively because I could feel my mind disengaging her from her body. Yes, I thought, she is beautiful. But oh how bored I would grow with this disengagement.

SHADOW:

All Mere wants to grow up to be is a radical feminist. Mere is not certain what is meant by the phrase, but she loves the ring of the words. The tone. The beauty of the tone of this disposition. Mere likes to dis-position herself from the society at split. Unfortunately she didn't always sense that her repositioning herself brought about a whole. Isolation of no relation is a lonely thing. But in being a radical feminist she placed herself in relation of position. It is the position in relation that still mystifies Mere. Mere knows she does not hate men. She feels/thinks this hate, man-hate, is a sad misconception of radical feminism. There are some women who hate men. And some of those women who hate men claim to be radical feminists. But that is the thing. The misconception. Mere believes that the word "hate" has nothing to do with feminism, but has everything to do with sexism. She also feels that hate does not begin with him or them, but does begin with I. The I in hate with I. Because it is not a pleasant feeling to hate the I, the I hates the you and them instead. It is simply a matter of preference. All in all, hate is a very dissonant/displeasing word that clashes with the ring of the phrase she loves. Radical Feminist. Mere's attraction to boys began late. Mid-twenties or there-about. And even then she wasn't certain what the attraction was. Today in the classified of her school paper she read, "Hey, women: your invitation to the social event of the 1980's. Party with plenty of men who have good looks, great bodies, incredible minds, fast cars, rich daddies and in most cases, no sexually transmittable diseases. Friday at," and I won't repeat the address. Mere wondered if this was supposed to give her that prickly rush of heat feeling that her friend said

she got when HE entered the room. No one particular was necessarily entering the cafe she sat in. But they were being advertised. Any more it seemed first contact was through media. The mediator between people in times when physical contact contained risk. Even the article did not cancel out all possibility of disease. Most cases is not all cases. But in this case, she preferred to sit at the cafe table and pursue the possibility of a man in contemplation. She had a father. And a grandfather. And uncles. She didn't need anymore of any of them as she had grown content with those she had. Her friend, Jay, was always being told that she was looking for a father figure to replace long gone dad. Jay always properly told the person doing the telling to go to hell. Anymore, it was becoming difficult to have a relationship free from public diagnostics. Diagnosing. "Love" a word of qualification. Mere thought soon it might be a question to appear on job applications, or to send spelled out on resumes. I have loved. Maybe I have loved for a brief period of time, only to relove again, but I am always loving. Loving something.

HE walks in and sits at the other table. A waiter brings him an ice cream cone.

SHADOW:

And then she saw him. Outside of her contemplation, she saw him. Poised in the guise of a radical feminist, he sat at the table across from her licking ice cream. He sat in the cane-backed chair licking ice cream from a waffle cone. Before Mere could encourage herself to approach him, the him walked in. (*Another him enters.*) The him of her him. She sensed it

was the him or her him by the way he wiped the string of chocolate off her him's chin. The new him pulled a white kerchief from his vest pocket and dabbed at his lover's taste-made chin. Mere thought it too bad that he was eating ice cream in public. Had they been in private there would have been no need to spoil the white kerchief. The two hims glanced over at Mere. Mere didn't twitch in her seat. Mere didn't remove her eyes. They both blew kisses. Mere blew a kiss back. That is when Jay walked up and joined Mere at the table.

Jay enters. She sits in the other seat at Mere's table. The table that the two hims are at fades to black. When the spotlight comes upon the table — after Jay exits — there are four people seated at the table. Two females and two males.

JAY:

Friends of yours?

MERE:

Not really. I want to meet some nice boys, Jay.

JAY:

I hardly think you their type. Wrong parts, my girl, wrong parts.

MERE:

Maybe its not just the parts. Maybe it has nothing to do with penises and vaginas. Maybe it has to do with attitudes. With assignments. With advertisements. (*Mere finds the article in the paper, again, and passes it to Jay.*) There is a party tonight.

They write they have rich daddies.

JAY:

My pocketbook approach is not working out. I'm getting tired of looking. First was for nice, second for money, I suppose third could be for looks, and if fourth, the fourth can be for desperation.

MERE:

Maybe it's best not to look.

JAY:

Right. What do you expect? To bump into one in the grocery store between the cauliflower and the alfalfa sprouts?

MERE:

It certainly wouldn't happen over ding-dongs and twinkies.

JAY:

I've dated a ding-dong man myself. While breathing between beer cans he was pushing ding-dongs.

MERE:

I've met girls doing the same.

JAY:

No doubt. Even I have my moments. Listen, kid, gotta get gone. Watch the goggling. It can turn habit.

MERE:

Later, Jay. (*Jay exits*)

SHADOW:

Across from Mere the coupling continued. Now seated at the table were four. Their conversation was loud enough to be public. Mere learned that the four were two and two. Girl to boy. And other girl to other boy. It was twelve years of marriage for one girl and boy. And the four had played on/off for eight. To play on/off is not to be interpreted as orgy. There are other forms of play. The four talked about Tommy's drawing and Tommy's flower gardens. And one of the four said let's not talk kids. So they didn't. They talked about the time they played poker in the bottom of the pool. Before it was possible to jump in and swim. There was no water yet in it. A ten dollar got stuck to a patch of wet cement. The one hand that Robert was winning got short changed, but he didn't seem to mind too much. All this listening-watching-dreaming had to do with Mere's becoming seriously interested in boys. Mere turned her back to the table. Mere began practicing at her daydreaming. She dreamt of a him she didn't have to back down to, a him that she didn't have to beat down either. She wondered if her card games would have to get different with this man, too. It was the relationship she wanted. Not the trained male. The male that is trained to win, to compete, to beat down and protect. She would buy him a combination lock for Christmas. and maybe he would buy her a crock pot. Of course, if that was the case, he would need to teach her how to use the pot. Dinner would always be ready when they each got home from work. And if it wasn't, they could take turns asking

each other out for dates. She would never forget her kerchiefs. Behind her back Mere did not see. The couples had begun to fight. The boy in yellow had commented on the girl in red's non-need for ice cream. Red girl had inquired as to why she had a non-need when apparently she had a want. She did just order a scoop of vanilla. This scoop seemed quite minimal in comparison to his just-ordered banana split. The orange girl made a mistake by opening her mouth. "Honey, he's right. You'll lose your trim." The purple boy just sat staring at the banana split before him. His spoon poised mid-air. This purple boy was the size of two of them. Yellow, the boy the size of half of one, told the waiter, who had not yet set the scoop of vanilla ice cream down, that he could just add it to his split. Red girl grabbed the scoop from the waiter and added it to yellow, alright. And it was all right. Mere was still unconscious to behind her back. Her mind was growing noisier. In its noise was missed the commotion of the table across the way. When Mere's mind grows noisy, her voice become apparent. Becomes public.

MERE:

I don't want a boy plague-raised by the system. I think I have not been able to see other boys because I am a girl of the system. After I have defrauded/deforged myself, maybe I will meet a nice boy.

SHADOW:

By this time, the ice cream behind her back was getting quite syrupy. The waiter slipped and fell. Another waiter ran over to the waiter that fell and pulled out a kerchief. The one banana

split of purple boy still rested on the table, protected by his arms. It was orange that got him to give it up. Orange was kind enough to only plot one scoop on purple's head. The rest of the scoops were thrown on red girl to add to the whip cream that trimmed her chin. It was not yet time for Christmas. Red girl could not have played Santa, anyhow.

MERE:

There is a problem with this modern day equality. Another Catch 22. Catch 22 . . . I still have yet to read that book. I wish someone would qualify equality. I do not want to equally take part in the conspiracies of boys. To conspire. I don't want to inherit conspiracy with marriage.

The table of the foursome, and some, fades to black. Kiki walks in. She removes here work smock messed with ice cream and sits.

KIKI:

Waiting for anyone special?

MERE:

Maybe.

KIKI:

(Puffing herself up) Can I buy you a drink, sweetheart?

MERE:

I'm trying to cut back a bit.

KIKI:

You. Pace your coffee.

MERE:

I know it. Booze, gone. Drugs, gone. Cigs, gone. Damn dull, if you ask me at a given time. Damn dull.

KIKI:

You haven't been around drunken stups lately. Stupor is hardly exciting.

MERE:

I suppose I could make sex my next —

KIKI:

I'd like to see that. You might have to pack your books up. Or at the very least, break down and buy a bookmark, and leave it for later.

Begin a game of wordplay. They don't say anything for apparent reason. It's just bantering.

MERE:

Lessons of variance.

KIKI:

Active unguidance.

MERE:

Seemingly so.

KIKI:

Righteous. *(A waiter brings them coffee.)*

MERE:

Things just don't happen over coffee. And it very rarely happens over cigarettes. I suppose that's why I stopped smoking. Accidentally speaking. *(The waiter drops the tab off at the table.)*

KIKI:

(To waiter) Righteous.

MERE:

Word exchange, I take it.

KIKI:

For cool. Too many people started using cool.

MERE:

So you chose a word equally as cold.

KIKI:

(Squirms) Jay gone?

MERE:

In, sit, out. The usual five minutes stop and connect.

KIKI:

Let's get out of here. I need something real to drink.

MERE:

(Softly) Righteous.

Shadow's arm is seen extended from behind the tree. She drops a kerchief. Mere and Kiki exit. As the set fades to black, the Prop People clear all away, including the paper on the board. Mere Crayon in white chalk is visible again. In the fade to black, Shadow's area on stage remains lit the same dim. Shadow is playing peek-a-boo behind the tree. She attempts to hide herself completely around the tree. After a pause, Shadow demurely steps out, fanning herself. The center stage lights come up, dim. Seen on stage is a bed with Mere in it. On the nightstand sits a clock.

SHADOW:

The last thing Mere does, for the fifth recheck, is make certain her clock is turned on. She is glad that her clock is digital. Jay was late for work the other morning and got asked not to come back. Jay told Mere that she was late because her clock was dyslexic. Mere wasn't certain what Jay meant by that, but Mere did know that Jay's clock was not digital. It had hands. After Mere was satisfied that the clock was accurately on, Mere laid back to sleep. Then she sat up. Mere thought she heard someone calling her name. Mere had imagined it. Mere laid back to sleep after listening to the nameless night. There is nothing worse than not responding. Again, she sat up not in-sleep. Mere reached under her pillow and pulled out the box. She flipped the lid of the box up, and for the first check that week, counted the crayons. Satisfied they were all there she laid down and stayed. The crayons were a combination. Some

broken, some not. Of the broken crayons, there was an unbroken of the same color. Her parents had gifted her with their broken crayons after she had collected her own unbroken crayons. Her crayons had begun to show some wear. But they did not wear in the same way as her parents'. For this she loved them much.

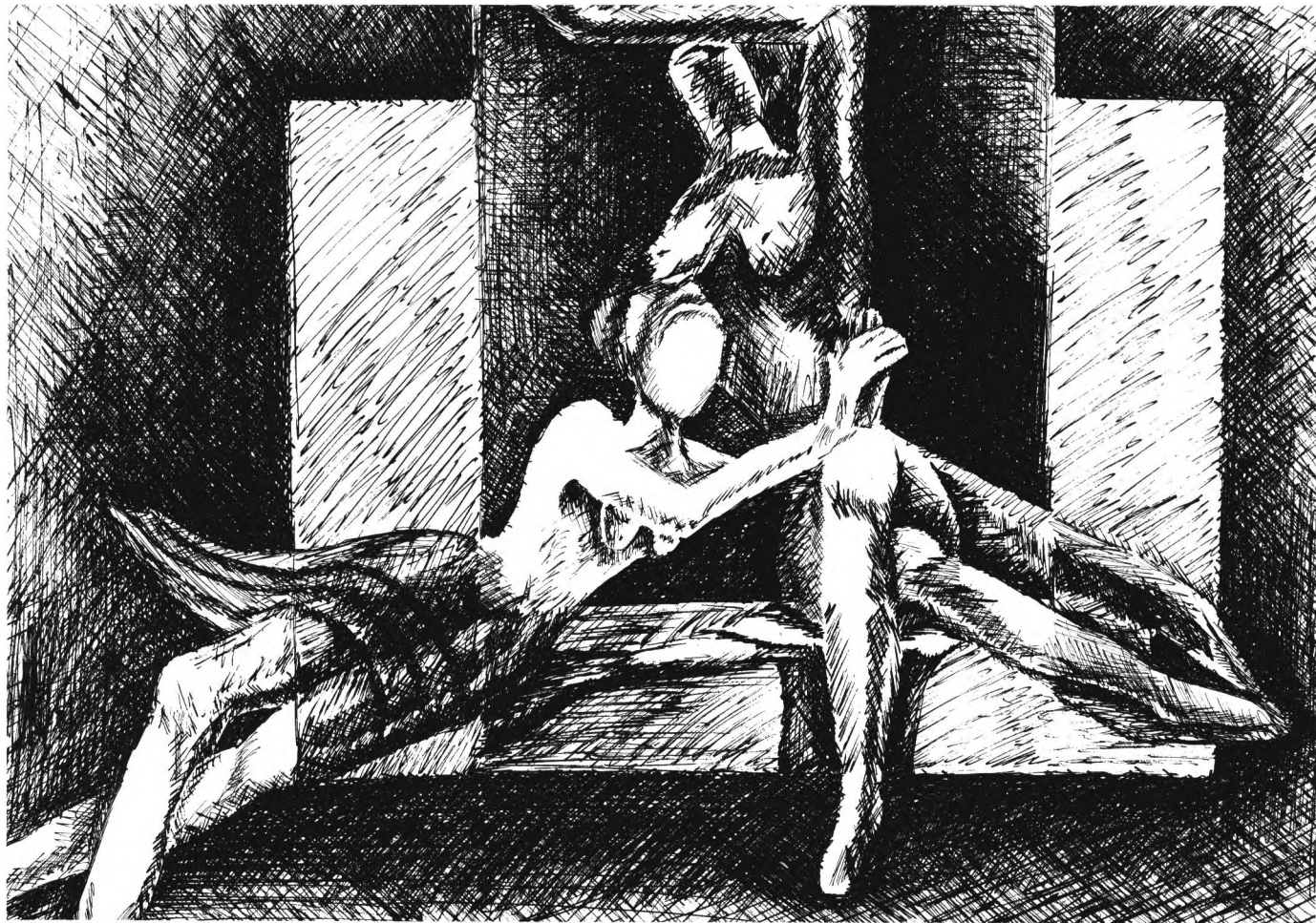
Shadow moves to sleeping Mere's side. She bends and kisses Mere gently on the forehead, then moves back to her original location by the tree. Mere's alarm goes off. She swats at it with her hand, successfully turning it off. In the little noise of the morning, she sits up, stretches her arms, and yawns. Mere then looks at the clock and decides she can afford ten more minutes. She lies back down. Shadow simply shrugs her shoulders. The stage black out completely. Lights come up. All but Shadow stand in line, in front of the backdrop of paper dolls, holding hands. Mere stands slightly in front, and in the middle. Shadow is swinging. All bow.



Joy Lazarus



Joy Lazarus



Lori Moss

A Review:

Sharon Olds, *THE GOLD CELL*, Knopf, 1987, 91pp., \$14.95 cloth; \$8.95 paper.

THE GOLD CELL, Sharon Olds' third book of poems, is all that one would expect of Olds after the success of her two earlier books, *SATAN SAYS* and *THE DEAD AND THE LIVING*. She has maintained the high standards of those two award-winning books. All the power and the truth remain. Olds is a fierce poet. She holds nothing back.

The four parts of *THE GOLD CELL* categorize the poems under Olds' familiar themes: the public poems, the parent poems, the love poems and the children poems. Those in the first part are the public poems as opposed to many of her others, both past and present, which are autobiographical. They are poems about modern public realities; a rather odd, rather grim sampling of some very keen observations. For example, it is not often when we can observe a man about to jump to his death from the roof of a New York City high-rise. We do in the poem, "Summer Solstice, New York City:"

By the end of the longest day of the year he could
not stand it,
he went up the iron stairs through the roof of the
building

. . . .

to the edge, put one leg over the complex cornice
and said if they came a step closer that was it.

We then watch "the huge machinery of the earth" rescue a man who has been driven to the end of his rope by the injustice of American life. The "machinery of the earth" is how Olds refers to civilization, a collective force that can supposedly save us from a barbarous reality. This force is comprised of those who can manage this reality. In the poem "The Abandoned Newborn," the speaker watches a news telecast of two young doctors reviving a nearly dead newborn who had been discovered in a trash can. Here again is another case of civilization rescuing its victims and bringing them back from some place where they may have truly been better off:

As far as you were concerned it was all over,
. . . .
some time ago,
and they bent over you and forced the short
knife-blade of breath back
down into your chest, over and
over, until you began to feel
the pain of life again.

We sense the author's cynicism toward life in light of our brutal society. It hardly seems civilized at all. This sentiment is epitomized in the poem "The Girl," in which two twelve-year-olds are raped, and one, eventually, is murdered. The other girl goes on to high school in the aftermath and tries to regain a typical life:

. . . comes home and does the dishes
and her homework, she has to work hard in math,
. . . .
. . . Every night she
prays for the soul of her best friend and
then thanks God for life. She knows
what all of us want never to know . . .

To provide a bit of comic relief, Olds offers a clever, little poem called "The Pope's Penis" and a prose poem called "The Solution." The latter poem begins as a satirical parody in which the speaker lays out the solution to "the Singles problem." People stand on line in "huge Sex Centers" to be paired with compatible sex partners. "At first it went great," and Olds gets us laughing at "a loyal Berkeley, California, policeman . . . under the sign MARRIED ADULTS, LIGHTS OUT, FACE TO FACE, UNDER A SHEET," who "stood there a long time in his lonely blue law coat," and "the man under I LIKE TO BE SUNG TO WHILE BREAD IS KNEADED ON MY STOMACH," who "had been there weeks without a reply." But as "things begin to get strange," Olds changes the tone and she is no longer talking about people's quirky sex habits, and we stop laughing:

The line under I WANT TO BE FUCKED SENSELESS was so long that portable toilets had to be added and a minister brought in for deaths, births, and marriages on the line.

. . . . More and more people joined in, until FUCKED SENSELESS stretched across the nation in a huge wide belt like the Milky Way, and since they had to name it they named it, they called it the American Way.

Olds' point, obviously, is that American society has become numb to the effect of so much violence, indecency and injustice. It has all become such a common part of life that it has warped our sense of what is truly right and wrong, or merely enjoyable. Some of the poems in this first section are the most outrageous of any we have seen of Olds', no doubt, some of the most memorable as well, although this is not necessarily her best work.

In THE GOLD CELL, and in her previous books, Olds brings her subjects to their most primal forms. The theme of this book, suggested by its title, is the consideration of the nucleus of life — the cell, the smallest, most primary element of life.

The poems of Part II are her father/mother poems. These poems are, of course, appropriate in the context of the theme of this book; after all, these are the primary source of this poet's life. Again, as in her two previous books, we learn of her evil parents and her brutal childhood. In the poem "I Go Back to May 1937," the speaker sees her parents as "innocent," young college graduates, before they are married

and before they do their damage:

they are kids, they are dumb, all they know is they
are innocent, they would never hurt anybody.

I want to go up to them and say Stop,

. . . .

you are going to do bad things to children,
you are going to suffer in ways you never heard of,
you are going to want to die. I want to go
up to them . . .

. . . .

but I don't do it. I want to live . . .

. . . I say

Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about
it.

And we know that she does, and she has in many of her past poems. This presents a problem for the reader who is familiar with Olds' poetry. These subjects were beautifully and thoroughly handled in the earlier books, so that at this point the sentiment of these parent poems is predictable. We have been preconditioned to feel the hate and regret the speaker has for her parents and her childhood. We begin reading these poems knowing how they will resolve themselves, emoting fear and disgust, and preaching survival. Yet, this is precisely the point Olds is making, how it is that she is dealing with the "American Way." What is mostly disagreeable about this group of poems is that we are given a dose of stagnant emotion; we do not sense the poet in the process of discovery, nor are we, the readers, finding anything new to learn.

In Part III of *THE GOLD CELL* Olds writes beautifully, vividly, about love and love making. As always, she handles this subject boldly and graphically. She meshes the emotional and physical elements, and fearlessly captures the very true essence of love making, the heightened sense of feeling alive:

I could feel death going farther and farther away,
forgetting me, losing my address, his
palm forgetting the curve of my cheek in his hand.

In this line from "Cambridge Elegy," Olds shows a close, careful attention to detail. Its succinctness and accuracy nearly create a physical sensation in itself:

[The] palm and the breast, every millimeter of
delight in the body,

The poem "This" makes an ambivalent feminist statement as the speaker, who becomes both subject and object, denies her common marks of identity (family name, place of birth, parentage) to claim it in her body — its capacity to give and receive pleasure and life, and as that which truly defines her roles as woman, lover, wife, mother:

Maybe if I did not have this
I would call myself my mother's daughter . . .

. . . .

so this is who I am, this body
white as yellowish dough brushed with dry flour
pressed to his body. I am these breasts . . .

and the nipples that float in the center like hard raspberries in bright sunlight, they are my life . . .

. . . if you want to know who I am, I am this, **this**.

With the poem “Still Life,” Olds displays her adroit sense of metaphor and skill with language. The body of the woman lying in bed after lovemaking is likened to a still life painting, and her lover is the artist; the poem in its entirety:

I lie on my back after making love,
breasts white in shallow curves like the lids of
soup dishes,
nipples shiny as berries, speckled and immutable.
My legs lie down there somewhere in the bed like
those great silver fish drooping over the edge of
the table.

Scene of destruction, scene of perfect peace,
sex bright and calm and luminous as the
scarlet and blue dead pheasant all
maroon neck feathers and body wounds,
and on the center of my forehead a drop of water
round and opalescent, and in it
the self-portrait of the artist, upside down,
naked, holding your brushes dripping like torches
with light.

As the poem views the body of the woman, the mind's eye also moves over the images of the soup dishes, the berries, the

fish, then the wounded bird. These images are stacked in the same order our eye would move across an actual painting. The effect creates the image of a painting so vivid that one can imagine a late 19th century American still life by an artist such as Merritt Chase or Harnett.

The line, “Scene of destruction, scene of perfect peace,” is perfect. It creates a common denominator, as both images can be defined in those terms, while it also captures the ambiguous nature of both scenes: the beauty and life in the woman's body are like the detail of the painting, but we also feel the sense of violation and loss in each scene.

In Part IV, Olds changes the scene and shifts the tone to finish the book on a forward note. Here she writes about the cluttered, adventurous, tumultuous life of children and herself as a mother. The children deal with the world with a fresh sense of logic. They are at any time either bold or emotional, clever or naive, strong or vulnerable. In “The Quest” the speaker is first mother and protector of her children:

. . . This is my
quest, to know where it is, the evil in the
human heart. As I walk home I
look in face after face for it, I
see the dark beauty, the rage, the
grown-up children of the city she walks as a
child, a raw target.

This quest for “evil in the human heart” is also that of this poet's, and a theme throughout this book. We also understand why the speaker can know the evil so well, as she becomes the

No Perfect Thing is Too Small

It has been too often said that “good things come in small packages.” As trite as it may be, I would venture to say that the greater majority of us have an affection for some favored trinket. For some it may be the intoxicating effect of owning a fine jewel and for others, just the sentiment felt for a familiar old keyring. When we can hold it in our hand or put it in our pocket, we can enjoy its closeness and exclusivity.

Sentiment aside, function is what completes the small package. For example, a pencil - what could be more perfect? You could write with any piece of lead. But encase it in a slender piece of wood and put a little rubber eraser on the end of it, and you have got a beautifully efficient, totally self-contained writing instrument. Progress has also provided us the convenience of portability. We carry our music, our information and communication systems with us, and in ways that are feasible and most time comfortable. There must be a tendency in the human nature that drives us to seek the most compact forms of our elements.

The contemplation of smallness came about while I was having a meal in Guy’s Diner. Guy’s had come highly recommended, so I knew I would find the experience worthwhile. A diner is one small thing in life of which I personally have an appreciation. This little diner left a special impression.

Guy’s Diner is above all, small. It surprises you. From the outside it is fragile, vulnerable to the elements. It is a structure

of clapboard with an aluminum awning that extends over a glass facade like the rolled down brim of a hat. The flat, oversized sign, reading Guy’s, rises over the roof like a flapping open box top. A good stiff wind would seem to send the whole place tumbling. But once inside you sense its durability.

The Counter is the room’s nucleus. It seats only eight at swivel stools with red leather covered seats. It wraps around the center of the room in sort of a semi-circle that gives its small exclusive group of customers the feeling of coming together for a common meal. Most of the regulars know one another. Conversation is continuous and open to anyone inclined to join in. A sign that reads, “Ask about our daily special,” encourages the start of at least one conversation with the counter girl. She greets a good many of the customers by their first names and makes all others feel at home with her comfortable manner.

The narrow counter space allows room for two small glass cylinder cases with sweet rolls and wedges of pie stacked inside. There are napkin holders, salt and pepper shakers and sugar decanters, all made with simple high-tech touches of stainless steel and glass. The counter top is still covered with its original formica. Its pattern has been worn away by the constant shuffle of plates and coffee cups. What is left of the design, two continuous, contrasting squiggly lines of color that interlace into smooth geometric shapes, is one that was in

vogue in the early 1960's. This remote detail best indicates what I guess to be the time of Guy's beginnings.

The true working components of this place lie behind the counter in what appears to be nearly a solid wall unit of stainless steel that is kept as shiny as a new dime. The small cubicle refrigerators resemble built in vaults, a coffee machine stores hot pots of coffee, stacked vertically, to save space; a compact unit of shelves stores proportionately small supplies of china cups and saucers, plastic beverage glasses, tiny boxes of cold cereals, cigarettes and candy bars, all neatly displayed. There are no loose ends and nothing unnecessary to create clutter. A small grill stands directly adjacent, well worn with use. Tucked away at the end of the counter is an old red cash register. When the levered keys are pushed, numbered flash cards pop into the little window, at the top of this classic upright machine, and the drawer flies open — chi-ching. It rings that familiar sound of cash.

The marquis menu that hangs from the ceiling is difficult to look at, since the room is so narrow. To read it, you have to throw your head back so far that it hurts. The menu in this place is, for the most part, unnecessary. People who frequent diners know what to expect. The regulars usually decide what they want before they sit down, and it's likely to be what they had the last time they were in. The food is good and simple; it hasn't gone through the over-zealous treatments of a prep-chef, nor does it masquerade behind fancy names and garniture. Diners are synonymous with breakfast: eggs, anyway, with bacon, hashbrowns and toast or pancakes and sausage. At Guy's you can get biscuits and gravy, a dish indigenous to the Mid-West.

The man who takes credit for the food at Guy's is Harold, the owner. His skills only add to the efficiency of the place. Short order cooking is an art and you can watch his mastery of it from any stool in the house. From where he stands in front of the grill, he need not take more than one step or extend beyond his reach to put his hands on any ingredient or piece of equipment he needs to perform his craft. His subtle motions over the grill are quick and continuous from one item to the next: breaking eggs, flipping pancakes, buttering toast, all with the ease of a juggler. He then reaches above his head for a plate from a shelf above the grill; the heavy white china platters are oval to better suit the narrow counter. The food is whisked from the hot steel to the counter.

When Harold's attention is not needed at the grill, he directs it to his customers. He spends a few moments talking with regulars as he refills coffee cups. Harold's motto is "good food and good service," and this tiny diner fills that bill without going beyond its limited means. Still, the smallness never makes you feel crowded or hurried; walking through the door, you are immediately made to feel at ease with a friendly acknowledgment. Guy's provides the best basic attributes of comfort and a sense of affiliation or just a good cup of coffee, a piece of pie, and as advertised "breakfast anytime."

Stephani Malmberg

Anxious

Seven brown cows circle around the eighth—
Eyes glazed, grassy lips open in anticipation.

Ten toes in the lettuce, upon the tomatoes.
They sizzle, waiting for a warm bun.

Corners torn from a newspaper announce
The birth of a purple king in Thailand.

Cracks in a cement walkway, coaxing
Red ants to vacation in paradise.

Blue carpet in the dog house leads
To the skylight where the cows sing
About the starving people in the East.

Harriet and Michael in Love

We are doomed to read forever romance tales of men and women who fall in love and have children, fall in love and get divorced, or fall in love and have children and get divorced, producing children who commit terrible crimes of either passion or violence usually involving old women with miniature poodles or large guns and lots of blood. Women with long, black locks and men with swords and something to prove abound in these literary prizes, as well as women with black leather jackets and men with eager whips. What we need, however, are stories of men and women with normal, fulfilling, happy relationships, such as Harriet and Michael that we can relate to. And there are lots of possibilities.

Harriet and Michael meet in a bookstore among the metaphysics and fall in love. He takes her home and cooks Italian for her. After a game of backgammon, they fall in bed together, but before Michael manages to struggle out of his boxers, Harriet announces that she already has a successful interior decorating business in California and she's leaving the next day. He begs her to stay with him in Oklahoma City, but she merely laughs and falls asleep. She leaves the next morning with half his self-help book collection.

Harriet and Michael meet in a bookstore among the fantasy books and fall in love. They go to a near-by park and eat liver-

wurst and hunt for unicorns (since Harriet is a virgin). They finally give up and go back to her apartment but they don't sleep together because that wouldn't be right, considering they just met. They stay up all night and relate amazing stories and family histories. (These are boring characters.) They discover that they are twins separated at birth by a messy divorce and they decide to develop a platonic relationship and reunite their parents. Good thing they didn't sleep together.

Harriet and Michael meet when Michael attends his first cult meeting. Harriet offers to tutor him privately on the meaning of ritual meetings. They don't sleep together because they are too busy practising the blood bath techniques—this uses all their energy. They finally fall in love and happily sacrifice virgins together until one day they accidentally burn down the House of Satan and the old woman next door to the House complains and they have to leave before the police come. They decide to go to San Francisco.

Harriet and Michael meet at a rodeo and since Harriet is rooting for the bull and since she wears funny snakeskin boots, Michael hates her. Michael meets Felicia and they fall in love and go to rodeos together until one day when they are about to make love, Felicia mentions her twin sister, Harriet, and when they find out the rest of the story and realize that Christmases

would always be messy family situations, they buy a bottle of sleeping pills and die together in each others' arms, behind the bull pen.

Harriet and Michael meet in a dark smoky bar and dance together until dawn. They take a walk and share family histories. They are not related and they both hate rodeos. They both admit that they presently have a strong relationship with another person, so they don't sleep together, but they do become good friends. A week later, they meet in Harriet's flat and share a bottle of wine and talk about lofty philosophical things. They stumble upon the fact that they are both sleeping with the same woman. Seeing as she is a tramp, they hire a man in a black coat to strangle her and her cat, Princess. Then Michael convinces Harriet to change her sexual preferences and they fall in love and live happily together until Michael becomes disgusted by the fact that Harriet once slept with other women, so he packs up his yet unread self-help books and goes to L.A. where he starts the interior decorating business he has always dreamt of.

“I Used to Wear Velour”

for Grace

The gentleman on top of me really believes that I’m listening to his speech about intimacy, but honestly, I’m thinking about what a crazy mixed up world we live in. We live in a country terrified of the uncontrollable plague of AIDS, a country where prostitutes make more money annually than our president, a country whose national drink is carbonated (but low-fat and salt-free), a country that actually makes everyday-things out of brown velour.

Take this couch for instance. I happen to know that this couch is made out of brown velour. You can tell by the undeniably fake plush feeling that makes you want to wipe off your fingerprints after you touch it. It isn’t fur or velvet; it’s a cross-breed, a hybrid, a mutant material, but the United States probably sells millions of brown velour couches to people in all walks of life yearly. I happen to know that he bought this from the office of a retiring gynecologist. (I *believe* it was in the waiting room.)

The bathroom towels at other people’s houses are made out of velour. These towels do not absorb water; they are purely for decoration. Kindly explain this to someone who has just stepped from a very hot shower into her host’s very chilly bathroom and finds nothing but a decorative piece of velour on the towel rack. Try explaining that the molecular makeup

of velour is amazingly similar to that of duck feathers to a person who has just spent the past 23 minutes blow-drying her body.

The captain’s chairs in vans are usually made of brown velour (preferable, we must admit, to silver or scarlet velour). You know those chairs—the ones that are supposed to be extra-warm in the winter and cool in the summer—the ones that actually feel like the frozen fur of a wire-terrier with a crew cut in the winter and the ones that stick to the sweaty places on your body in the summer so that you, unsuspecting, march through the grocery store with unidentifiable brown fur clinging to the backs of your thighs.

The inside liners of ear muffs are made of velour. We don’t know why. It is not a warm, comforting fabric.

Cat toys. The more expensive cat toys on the market are usually some form of brown velour mice. They don’t squeak like normal cat toys but they have fancy leather tails and beady glass eyes which are glued on but have a tendency to fall off if your cat ever actually chews on or salivates on the toy. Because these are more expensive than your basic plastic or even fur cat toys, our cat only had one. Needless to say, he never really wanted another after he was almost choked to death by one of those beady little eyes.

In the 1970’s, an age so close to home that many of us still

have trouble in admitting their utter and disgraceful tackiness, children were often brutally forced into shirts made of velour. How many of us actually know of children who naively had their school photos taken in such shirts? These are the shirts with the reinforced knit V-necks and sleeves that are probably still in your basement because they never wear out (unless you leave them on the floor and your dachshund urinates on them in which case they develop bald spots).

Even as late as 1987, Liz Claiborne was bringing a line of velour jogging suits into stores. Now, there is some dispute as to whether or not these suits are truly velour, but what does it matter? At best they are imposters, velour wanna-be products and that's just as bad. I thought we ended all this buffoonery in the 70's! (I think what has honestly happened here is that Liz has made her fame and fortune and like so many of today's cynical artsy-types has laughed in the face of the market by producing this stuff and seeing just how much it will take—how much will they still call fashion?—what sorts of things will people shell out \$89.99 for in today's world?)

My question is *why*. Why do people continue to produce items made out of this substance? It is worthless. It is slimy. It is probably a leading cause of cancer among the population of the mid-west. Think of all the things for which we have developed a more useful or aesthetically pleasing material. We do not make *kitchen mits* out of brown velour, or *overcoat liners*. People do not do *paintings* on brown velour (although by custom this art is saved for the cousin of brown velour, black velveteen). We do not use velour for *carpets* (except, once again, in the bathroom, where it is decidedly useless) or to

make *Halloween costumes*. Heaven help you if your *curtains* are made of this stuff, or *coffee coasters* or a *teddy bear* or a *mini-skirt*. And you rarely see velour *underwear* in general, but *women's slips* in particular.

So, if we have managed to live without this mutant fabric in all these other areas of our lives, why not help stamp out velour altogether and make this world a little more pleasant for a few cats and the unfortunate drivers of vans in the summer-time?

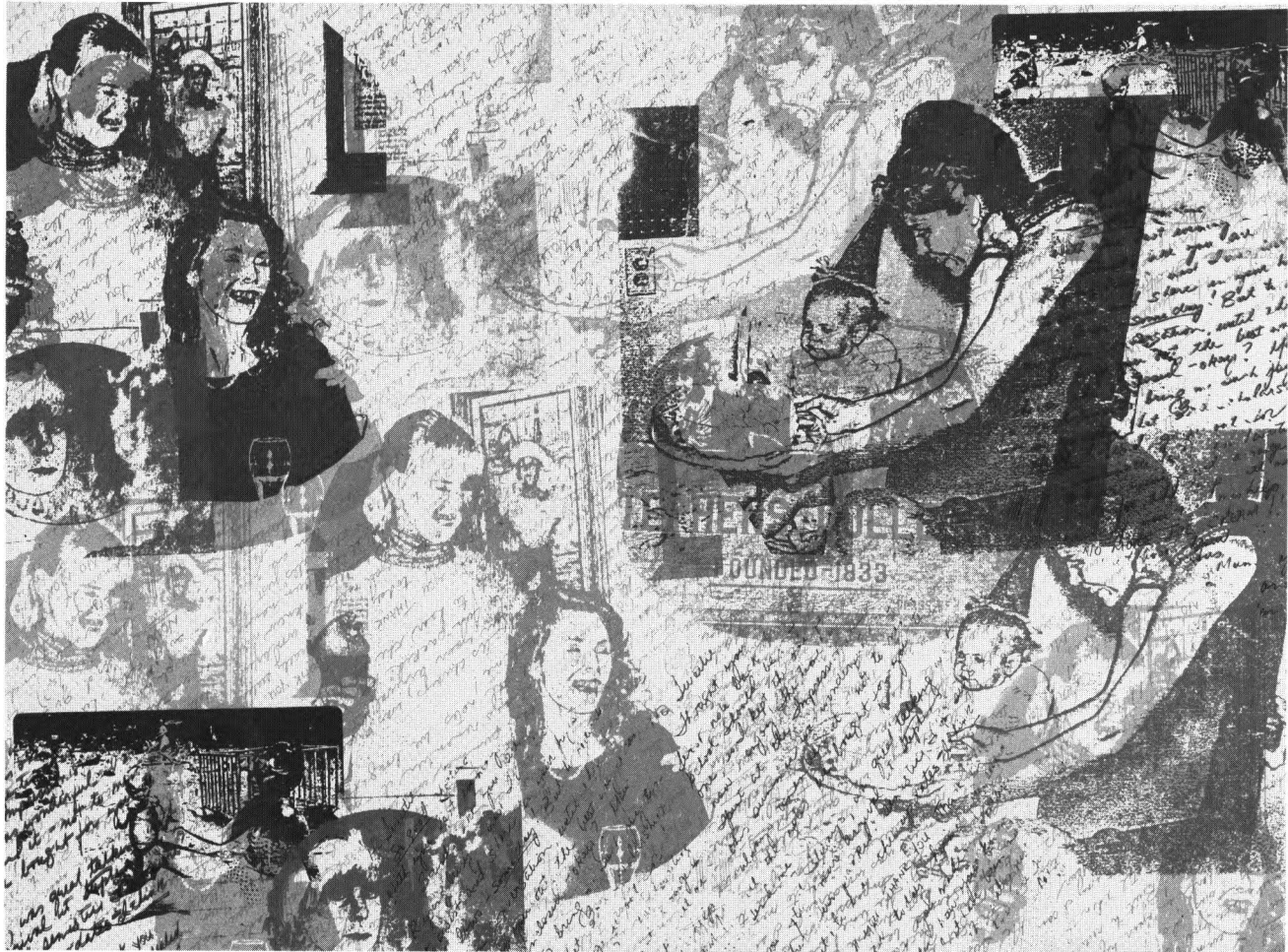
Uh oh. Off the soap box - He's smoking now and he's watching me with arched eyebrows of suspicion. He knows I wasn't listening. He expects me to say something. How do you explain your need to alleviate brown velour for the betterment of future generations to a man smoking a cigarette on your abdomen? I wonder if anyone has ever tried to smoke velour?



Chablis Martin



Lou Harley



Lisa Cummings

