



“Get At Me, Dog”

By Maleec Blue

At 6 o'clock on a Saturday morning, Tony (not his real name) loads a 65-pound gray brindle pitbull terrier named “Sir Jinx” into the trunk of a maroon Buick. Having been through the routine, the dog hops straight into the trunk and curls up amid a plastic bucket, a tin of car wax and a roll of paper towels. Sir Jinx snuggles against the back seat and puts his head down as Tony, his owner, shuts the trunk.

A chosen few of Tony's friends—me among them—pack into the car, anticipating the fight Sir Jinx will engage in later that day. The smell of Aqua-Fresh toothpaste fills the air, as Tony, extremely excited, blurts out his prediction for the fight. “Fellas, I can feel this one,” Tony says. “Jinx is gonna take this dog out today.”

Nearly 10 years ago, Tony decided to raise and fight pitbulls. Having been reared around the animals, he had extensive knowledge of how to handle and train the breed. By the age of five, Sir Jinx, Tony's first dog, became a two-time champion of the heavy weight division.

Dog fighting in some parts of the world is legal, but in the U.S., it's not. That fact doesn't stop people—from experienced breeders to novices—from doing it. There are many underground systems of dog-fighting in the U.S. Owners, breeders, trainers and gamblers keep track of fighting dogs in numerous journals, some of which are sold as magazines. The journals list in code the outcomes of dog-fights around the country. The journals are not elaborate publications and aren't available at the corner newsstand. In fact, they are difficult to come by—unless you are involved in the fighting game. The journals are passed along from hand to hand and, sometimes, go through as many as 10 or 20 people, so their covers may be torn off and their pages barely held together.

I've been raised around pitbulls all my life so I have seen the positive and negative aspects of having a dog in the fighting game. Although I don't fight the dogs myself, I know people who do, mainly for the money they make from betting on the fights.

When Sir Jinx was two, Tony fought the dog four times. With the encouragement of his father and brother, he began to fight the dog on a national level, traveling up and down the East Coast, gambling on the outcome of each fight. Tony was noticed in the fighting journals, which gave him the publicity he needed to really start making some money by studding Sir Jinx and selling the puppies.

Tony, 24, has been interviewed for articles on pitbulls many times and has even appeared on television, commenting on laws concerning ownership statutes. Tony has a growing kennel of dogs, which he keeps in his house and backyard and at friends' homes.

His association with the dogs keeps him on the go, checking out dogs in other states for possible fights or breeding. Tony raises his children around his dogs and insists that pitbulls are good with small children because kids have a tendency to be kind of rough, and since pitbulls have a high tolerance to pain, it's hard for the kids to hurt the animals and cause them to become angry. Tony's father fought pitbulls, and he took Tony to see a lot of the fights, so, for Tony, fighting dogs is more a way of life than a hobby.

As we pull up to the abandoned house in which the fight will take place, the owners of the opposing dog meet us and we head toward the house. A soft wind blows. Leaves rustle down the concrete walkway as we make our way to the ramshackle gray abandoned home. Sir Jinx notices a cat in the bushes surrounding the house and tries to chase it. As the dog strains against the leash Tony holds, Sir Jinx's muscles tense and the well-trained musculature of the dog becomes obvious. The leash tightens around Tony's hand and squeezes the blood from it. His hand instantly turns pale.

“Whoa, slow down, boy. You'll have something to get after soon enough,” Tony says.

“Damn,” Henry-Hank, one of the guys who rode along with us that morning, says with amazement, “he looks pretty strong! I bet he takes this dog out in no time.”

“Yeah, I trained him for 11 weeks for this one. This is the best shape he has ever been in,” says Tony, confidently.

The smell of mildew overwhelms us as we walk through the doorway. Spider webs hang in every corner. Layers of dust at least three inches thick cover the deserted furniture. A book lies on a table. I pick it up and dust it off. It's a *TV Guide* from 1974.

“Eww, shit, this place stinks! This is the only thing I hate about coming to see these fights,” grumbles Carlos, another guy who came with us.

I put the book down and we make our way toward the basement, passing through

the space that may have once been someone's living room. As everyone shuffles by, anticipating what is going to happen in about a half an hour, the wooden floor creaks.

Large sums of money are won and lost on these dogs. Some people may find that fighting pitbulls is cruel, but the fact of the matter is that the dogs were—and still are—bred to fight. There is no doubt that the animal is bred as a performance dog and has been for centuries. However, it's bred for dog-to-dog combat, not dog-to-human combat. The media has contributed greatly to the downfall of the breed's reputation among the unknowing. As a supporter and breeder of pitbulls, I feel a responsibility to all who love these animals to let it be known that pitbulls are no more aggressive than your average golden retriever toward humans. Like any other dog in existence, pitbulls can be trained to attack, but simply attacking at will is not a part of their nature.

A dog is trained for several months in advance for a fight. Just like humans in training, the animal is placed on a well-balanced diet and exercise program.

Tony walks his dog three miles every morning and then at night, takes him out again and puts him on the treadmill for 45 minutes.

As the fight gets closer, Tony increases the exercise and changes the dog's diet. Two days before the fight, the dog is made to rest in the house. Like prizefighters, these dogs are well taken care of.

I've witnessed a dog being trained for a fight and it's hard work. As you train the dog, you also train yourself. You and the dog develop a bond, which will be crucial during fighting, because both of you suffer while running and walking. After you've been with him for a few weeks, you automatically know if the dog is truly tired or if he can go for a few more minutes.

As we make our way down the steps, the third stair from the bottom gives out. "Oh, lord, help me," screams Henry-Hank, his arm flailing as he falls a short, but painful, two steps to the ground and lands on his face.

"Are you okay, Henry-Hank?" asks Carlos, snickering as he tries to hold back his laughter.

No one else shows as much restraint. We all laugh at Henry-Hank as he sprawls on the filthy basement floor.

"Yeah, I'll be all right. Just help me up," Henry-Hank grouches.

After brushing himself off and regaining his composure, Henry-Hank points out a bloody carpet sitting in the corner, apparently waiting to be used again. The stains from recent battles fought on the carpet are still damp and shiny.

This house is the perfect spot for a dog-fight. Paint has peeled and fallen on the floor all around the edges of the basement, two broken water tanks are posted up on the wall in the far corner near a door that leads to the backyard and there are no neighbors to overhear the dogs barking and snarling. In just a few short minutes, that crumbling basement will become a pit for fighting dogs.

Originally, pitbulls were bred to hunt rats in England in the early 1700's, but things change over time. After a while people began fighting pitbulls for sport and bred them accordingly. The pitbull probably has the highest tolerance to pain in the animal kingdom, which is why some of the dogs fight to the death. Pitbull fights are not usually carried on to the death when supervised by the owners, but if two dogs that don't like each other get loose, death is a distinct possibility.

When I was young, my father owned two male dogs, a German Shepherd and a pitbull. The shepherd was the older of the two and was dominant, until one day, when my father was at work, the pitbull got loose and decided that he wanted to be the king of the yard. When my dad and I got home, we saw that the pitbull had nearly killed the shepherd where he stood. The shepherd lay curled up in a ball in the corner, at the door of the fence. Its fur was caked with blood, as the pitbull

rested with its jaws tightly clamped around the shepherd's neck. I felt kind of bad for the shepherd, since he had protected me from the time I was a toddler. My father managed to pull the pitbull off the shepherd by himself, only because the only dog that was still fighting was the pitbull. I went out to feed the shepherd a few days later. That's when I found that he died from the wounds inflicted on him by the pitbull. My father estimated that they had been fighting for about two hours.

The paint-chipped basement is filled to capacity. The two dogs stand ready to get it on. As soon as they see each other, the two well-trained, experienced fighters try to get at each other, pulling their owners toward the center of the circle of men. Frustrated by not being able to get to each other, the pitbulls begin barking. Saliva runs down the sharp fangs and out of the mouths of the angry beasts, like water from a faucet. He asks each of the owners if he is ready to let his dog rumble. Ready to let Jinx lock up with the other dog, Tony nods.



it doesn't hurt the animal. Like babies in most of the animal kingdom, the mother can pick up the baby by the back of the neck and transport it from one place to another.

Jinx escapes from that bite and goes to work on the chest of the other dog, sinking his fangs deep into the flesh of the growling beast. Jinx begins to shake him like the same pendulum. Suddenly, Jinx relaxes his bite. The other dog has somehow managed to squirm around and grab hold of Jinx's front leg. I guess that the bite really hurts, because Jinx decides to return the favor.

"Get low, Jinx! Shake that leg!" Tony shouts, as Jinx grabs the front leg of his snarling opponent. Five minutes into the fight, blood is everywhere. The pit is a whirlwind. Eight screaming observers yell at their respective dogs to be strong.

If you've never seen a dogfight, you probably wouldn't be able to tell the difference between which dog is winning and which one is doing all the bleeding. Slobber and blood are splattered over the walls and the clothes of everyone who has the balls to stand around the pit. The referee gets it the worst. He looks as if he has just come from a paintball game.

In a proper fight, the referee is neutral and has to be in the action to determine if either dog wants to surrender. If the dogs fighting don't have a high tolerance for pain, the referee is in deep trouble, as are the handlers of the dogs, because an animal in severe pain will try to bite anything that comes near it. For that reason, people-biting dogs are never used in fights.

It's common knowledge among people in the fighting game that a dog that bites people out of fear is not "game." A game dog is a dog that will fight, whereas a "cur" is a dog that won't fight, so a cur absolutely can't be used unless the owner likes to be bitten.

As the dogs wrestle and tumble with one another, they manage to roll up the legs of Carlos. Since this is the first fight he has actually viewed from the pit, the dogs scare the bajesus out of Carlos.

"Hey, g-g-g-get those dogs, man," he shrieks, as he tries to climb the peeling wall.

Laughing at him the loudest is none other than Henry-Hank.

"It isn't very funny when everyone is laughing at you, is it, Carlos?" asks Henry-Hank, tickled.

After about 40 minutes the dogs begin to tire, so they hold their bites. It is time for "the scratch."

"Watch your dogs, fellas. I think they're about ready to scratch," says the referee.

The scratch is the part of the fight that usually determines the winner. Once the dogs have been successfully broken up, they are taken back to their corners and restrained. The dogs are then released one at a time. The dog that was on the bottom is released, and he has 15 seconds to cross the middle of the pit. If he doesn't, he will be declared the loser, but only if the other dog crosses the middle of the pit on his opportunity.

It is the opposing dog's turn to scratch. The owners of the dogs pull the dogs apart and get them ready. Panting and bloody, both dogs appear beaten. The owner of the other dog lets his dog go. The bloody, worn out dog just sits there, panting and slobbering in one spot. He doesn't want to go on.

It is Jinx's turn. Upon being released, Jinx shoots toward the other dog as if he hasn't started fighting yet and forces the other dog to continue to fight.

The fight is over. The referee and the owners wait for the dogs to stop fighting and rest again, which now takes no more than two minutes. They brake them up.

Sir Jinx stands victorious. Tony collects \$2,500.

-Flipside

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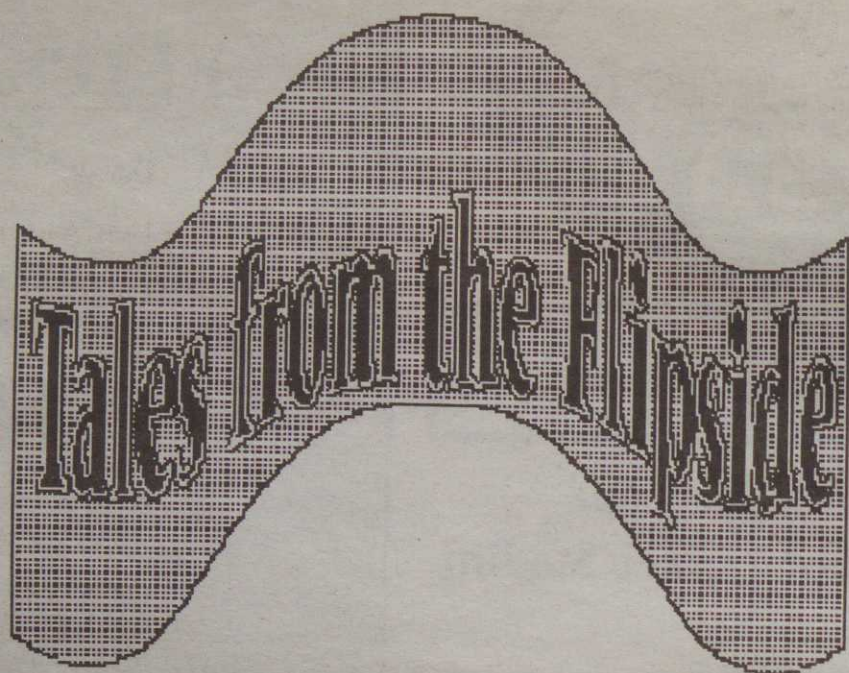
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For all their help and support, the Flipside Staff would like to thank: William and Claudia Bennett; Joy Helsel; Doug Levering; Beth Natali; Ron Forsythe; Jay-R Wheeler; C. L. Miller; Our Families; Phillip Morris, Inc. (for keeping Mary Ellen relatively sane); The Dentist; The Frito-Lay company; Pepsi; Mr. Coffee (and MaxwellHouse); Cartoon Network; and Winnie.

FLIPSIDE is published as often as possible by the Professional Writing Program of the English Department, California University of Pennsylvania. Opinions expressed in this magazine are not those expressed by California University or its Council of Trustees. Writers, artists and photographers are invited to submit materials for publication to FLIPSIDE, Dixon Hall, California University of Pennsylvania, California Pa, 15419. Guidelines are available, GASE must be included if you wish a response or materials returned. As is the case with most enterprises of this sort, the sole reward for publication is publication itself. Production assistance generously provided by Student Publications, Student Association Inc., California University of Pennsylvania. FLIPSIDE is designed and laid out in the Student Publications office at California University. Any resemblance found herein this publication to persons with access to a good lawyer is strictly coincidental.



Kosher

Neil H. Lederman was sentenced to serve 11 months in jail for writing bad checks, but he only ended up serving three weeks.

Lederman a 43-year-old Orthodox Jew was released because the Fairfax County jail could not afford his kosher meals.

Lederman will serve the rest of his sentence under house arrest. The special meals would have cost the jail an extra \$70 dollars a day according to Chief Deputy Sheriff James R. Vickey.

Phallus Erection Fails to Bring Rain

The mayor of the town of Sena, in northern Thailand, used an odd method in an attempt to end a six-month drought earlier this year. Mayor Kitisak (one name only) ordered the installation of 24 six-foot-long phalluses throughout the town. According to local folklore, these giant phalluses would bring rain back into the region. In an even stranger twist of fate, the citizens of the town rebelled when raging fires, instead of rain, sept through the area immediatly following the installation.

Killer Goldfish Claims One More Victim

On January 29, 1998, one Michael Gentner was at a friend's house helping him clean his fish tank. His friend had told him that one fish had outgrown the little tank and was eating the other goldfish. Seeing a possible solution, Gentner scooped up the fish and tried to swallow it. On its way down, the five inch fish got lodged in his throat. His friend called 911, but the EMTs arrived too late.

Local authorities investigating Genter's death said that while the fish's owner did little to help the suffocating Genter, they could not file charges against anyone because stupidity is not against the law.

Ever wonder why male to female sex change operations are on the rise?

Where is my testee?

One morning a doctor was called to the ER. When he arrived his patient had seriously injured his scrotum.

His scrotom was swollen twice the size of a grapefruit and there was a jagged zig-zag laceration.

Several days earlier the patient had injured himself at the machine shop were he was employed. He closed the laceration himself with a heavy-duty staple gun. As the doctor examined him he saw the one inch staples, eight of the staples were retrieved and the left testicle was missing.

The patient confided in the doctor, telling him he was an unmarried loner, and he usually didn't leave his machine at lunch time. When he was alone he began masturbating by holding his penis against the drive-belt of a large floor-base machine.

One day as he approached his orgasm, he lost concentration and leaned too close to the belt. His scrotom suddenly became caught and he was thrown into the air a few feet away. Unaware he had lost his left testicle, and too stunned to feel the pain, he stapled the wound closed and continued work.

Adding Insult to Injury

An Israeli housewife's battle with a stubborn cockroach sent her husband to the hospital with burns, and broken ribs.

The wife, terrified by the cockroach when she discovered it in their living room, stepped on it, tossed it in the toilet and sprayed an entire can of insecticide on it because it refused to die.

Her husband returned home from work, went to the toilet and decided to have a cigarette. He then threw the cigarette butt in the bowl, and the insecticide fumes ignited, seriously burning his private parts.

When the paramedics were called to the house, they laughed hysterically when they heard what happened and dropped the stretcher down the stairs, causing the husband further injury.

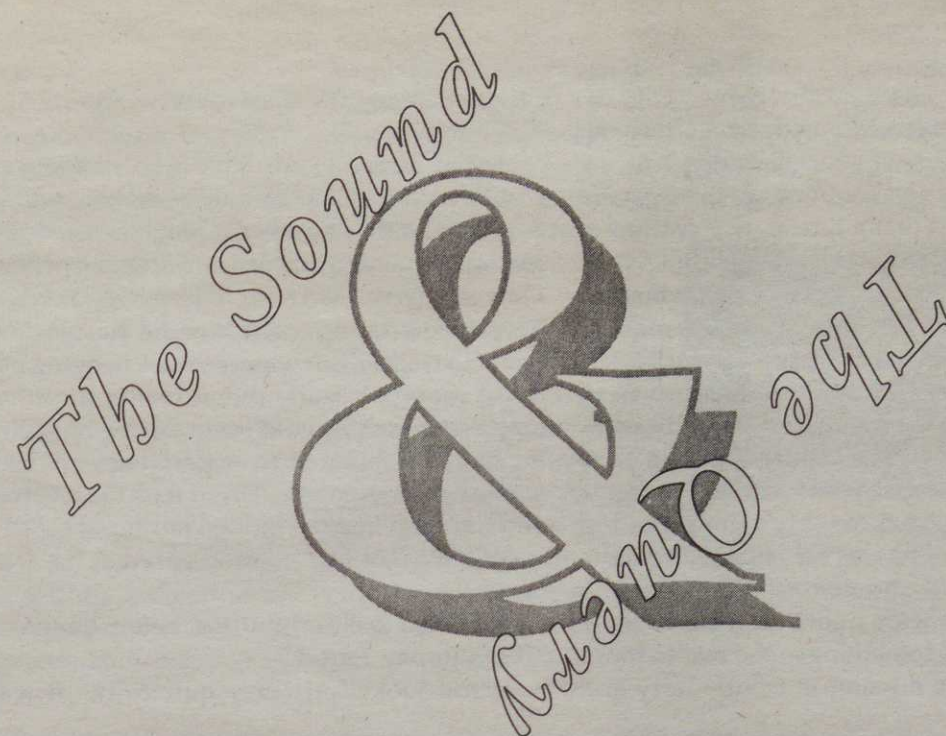
SOME PEOPLE SHOULD NOT REPRODUCE

A WOMAN FROM JACKSONVILLE BEACH, FLA. HAS BEEN CHARGED BY POLICE FOR SELLING HER DAUGHTER. SHE APPARENTLY SOLD THE 2-YEAR-OLD CHILD TO AN UNIDENTIFIED BUYER FOR \$10 BEFORE HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS. THE WOMAN WAS ARRESTED AFTER CALLING A FLORIDA POLICE STATION AND REQUESTING A BACKGROUND CHECK ON THE BUYER.



\$2 million vs. disease

The winning candy wrapper for the Snickers NFL Shockwave MVP game is lost somewhere in the Sioux Falls Landfill. Tim and Shirley Garrett's teenage son accidentally threw the \$2 million dollar wrapper away. Sioux Falls mayor Gary Hanson is refusing to let anyone search for the wrapper for fear of chemical and biological hazards.



Flipside:

I want you to know that you have fallen blindly into my well-laid trap. By not publishing the short story I recently sent to you (which was flawless by the way), you have set off a diabolical chain of events which are both irreversible and catastrophic. I knew that you guys couldn't tell talent if it were standing right beside you and smacked you in the face, so I deviously linked the rejection of this story to a series of major, earth-shattering events (some cosmic). The end result of your foolish actions will be the destruction of everything you hold dear. You have lost, I have won, my story was good, and you know it.

Fistandantilus

Dear Flipside:

I recently sent you a copy of my masterpiece titled "Sucking."

It has since been brought to my attention that the language therein may be a bit inappropriate to some readers. With this realization, I have enclosed a copy of my politically-correct revision which I have renamed "Bumping Ugliers." I hope you will consider it for your publication.

**Very Truly Yours
David Englehof**

Dear Editors

My 2-year-old daughter is developing a weird habit. She doesn't go to bed unless I read her Flipside. When I read the stories from Flipside to her, she becomes calm and falls asleep right away. The stripper story in the past issue seems to work the best. I think she is a little too precocious for her age. So next time you print the magazine, please make sure to edit all of the adult content.

*Sincerely,
Madonna*

Dear Flipside:

I am the president of a nationally recognized organization (IOMA) which assesses and rates magazines. My organization has reviewed and compared thousands of separate publications and we have found your magazine to be quite lacking. Besides ranking among the lowest in high-gloss content and overall shine, your magazine also managed to rank dead last in full-page color photos and catchy advertising. These deficiencies must be rectified if you ever hope to have a successful magazine. We will be happy to reconsider Flipside should you ever decide to replace most of the literary content and put a thick coat of gloss on it. Sincerely,
Donald Trimbough III
President, International Order for Magazine Advancement

Dear Flipside:

I love your little twice a year magazine. I think it is so cute. I wish my parents would have bought me a magazine as simple as yours when I graduated from school. If they had, I wouldn't have had to write so many books about things that I suck at.

George Plimpton

Flipside:

While cleaning out the bottom of my parakeet's cage, I happened upon your magazine (it must have come in with the rest of the junk mail). Since everything that happens is divine providence, I decided to read through the legible parts (parakeets can be quite messy) in order to determine the will of God. Upon reading several of the articles you call literature, I was able to decipher the divine truth behind this act of God. Some things in life are exactly where they need to be.

*Thank You
David Finklestien*

Dear Flipside:

I am writing this to you because I feel that we share something in common. No one seems to understand how difficult it is to be this much better than anyone else. To put your competition at a level far below your own results in so much petty jealousy and even loneliness. After reading your magazine, I finally feel like I have someone to share in my isolation. How many times can we be expected to hear that we're the greatest ever, or that we are heroes? This places unfair expectations on us and can be a source of great stress. Amazingly exceptional superstars like ourselves need to rally together and let the world know that deep down, underneath all of the skill, talent, and overall incrediblness, we are just average, ordinary people who are just trying to do okay. Keep up the incomparable work.

Your Kindred Spirit
Michael Jordan
Basketball Extraordinaire

Dear Flipside,

I was wondering how you guys sleep at night? The language you use and those stories you tell offended me so much that I lost sleep. Horrible, horrible stuff! Now don't get me wrong, I've offended some people in my time and said some things that were pretty bad, but you guys should be deprived of ink and paper and be censored by the Walt Disney Corporation.

-George Carlin

The Lincoln's engine idled for over five minutes in the dusty parking lot of the Dirt Kicker's Saloon. Terry McNickel leaned into the steering wheel and squinted at the run-down joint. Terry saw a two-story wooden farm house that displayed large cracks and was gray from age. The saloon's structure appeared to be a solid block laid in the middle of the forest with an obtuse triangle thrown on top for a roof. Dirt Kicker's Saloon's front porch was a long row of shaved logs that extended out from the front of the shack, and the logs supported a rickety row of two-by-fours for a railing that rested in front of two sleeping Harley-Davidsons and three rusted pickup trucks.

Terry fell back into the Lincoln's seat. An unmistakable look of repulsion was on his face. He turned to his right to see Jerrod Hagggar's pale expression and heavy eyes sitting motionless in their sockets.

"Do you really want to go in there?" Terry asked as he placed a cigarette, that seemingly came from nowhere, in his mouth. "I mean, just look at this place: disgusting."

"What do you care? You're just dropping me off."

Jerrod peered at the saloon. He tried to look inside the two front windows but saw only an orange fog from what looked like a smoke-out in the saloon. Between the two windows was an off-white door. Red spray-painted letters read: Dirt Kicker's Saloon.

"I just wondered why you wanted to go to this place of all places. We're 60 miles from Nashville and I saw a lot of nice places for you to eat on the way, but why this place?" Terry took a deep drag on the cigarette while he waited for an answer from the silent Jerrod. "Not to drink, right?"

Jerrod inhaled the floating cigarette smoke and could think only about the smell of wood stain and the taste of beer. He didn't look away from the saloon. "Martin told me that they make good steaks here. Maybe I'll have a steak and potatoes... and I guess I'll order a soda or something."

"How long has it been, Jer?"

Jerrod paused for a moment. He took off his cowboy hat and examined the inner lining as he calculated the answer. The moon shone on Jerrod through the windshield and showed his face to be a stretched leather bag with wrinkles that weren't carved deep enough to look like dried lacerations, but close. It was a face that didn't fit the gray hair that was pulled back in a pony tail. But the one thing that appeared on the man were his eyes—shiny baby-blues that seemed tired now.

"One month. Maybe a month-and-a-half, maybe."

Terry killed the engine. The only sounds were crickets squeaking around the car and frogs chirping in the distance.

"Have you talked to your sponsor?"

"Why bother? Just one drunk talking to another. Besides, if he really does know what I'm going through, he'll understand why I'm not calling him."

"You could've talked to me when you had the chance. I mean, we've seen each other in the studio every single day for the past—what—four months? I'm a busy man, but I can always set aside time to talk."

Jerrod let out a small laugh, almost a snort. "Some of them say I shouldn't talk to people who aren't alkies."

"Alkies?"

"Alcoholics. We drunks have to have some sense of humor or we'll go mad."

Terry said nothing.

"I mean, they push everything on you: family, religion, your health, chores, therapy, helpful hints: 'stay active, find a hobby, stay away from old friends, blah-blah-blah.' The hell with that."

"Sorry I asked," Terry said as he twirled the cigarette between his fingers. "Just curious to

see what it's like, that's all."

"Then I would suggest an open AA meeting to answer any other of your questions."

Terry frowned and snubbed out the cigarette in the ashtray. At that moment, two patrons of Dirt Kicker's, a man and woman, stumbled out of the door, their faces molded with gut-busting laughter while they doubled over each other in a drunken waltz to one of the pickup trucks. The guy was dark-bearded, a fat shape of flesh dressed in flannel, sweat pants, muddy work boots, and an oil-soaked red baseball cap. The 25-or-so-year-old girl with long dirty-blonde hair could have been the guy's daughter, but probably wasn't. She was very thin with a tight, tight T-shirt that showed off her doorknob breasts. She also wore tight blue jeans to show the guys she had something in the rear to make up for what was missing in front. Terry and

and by pressing her chest to the window.

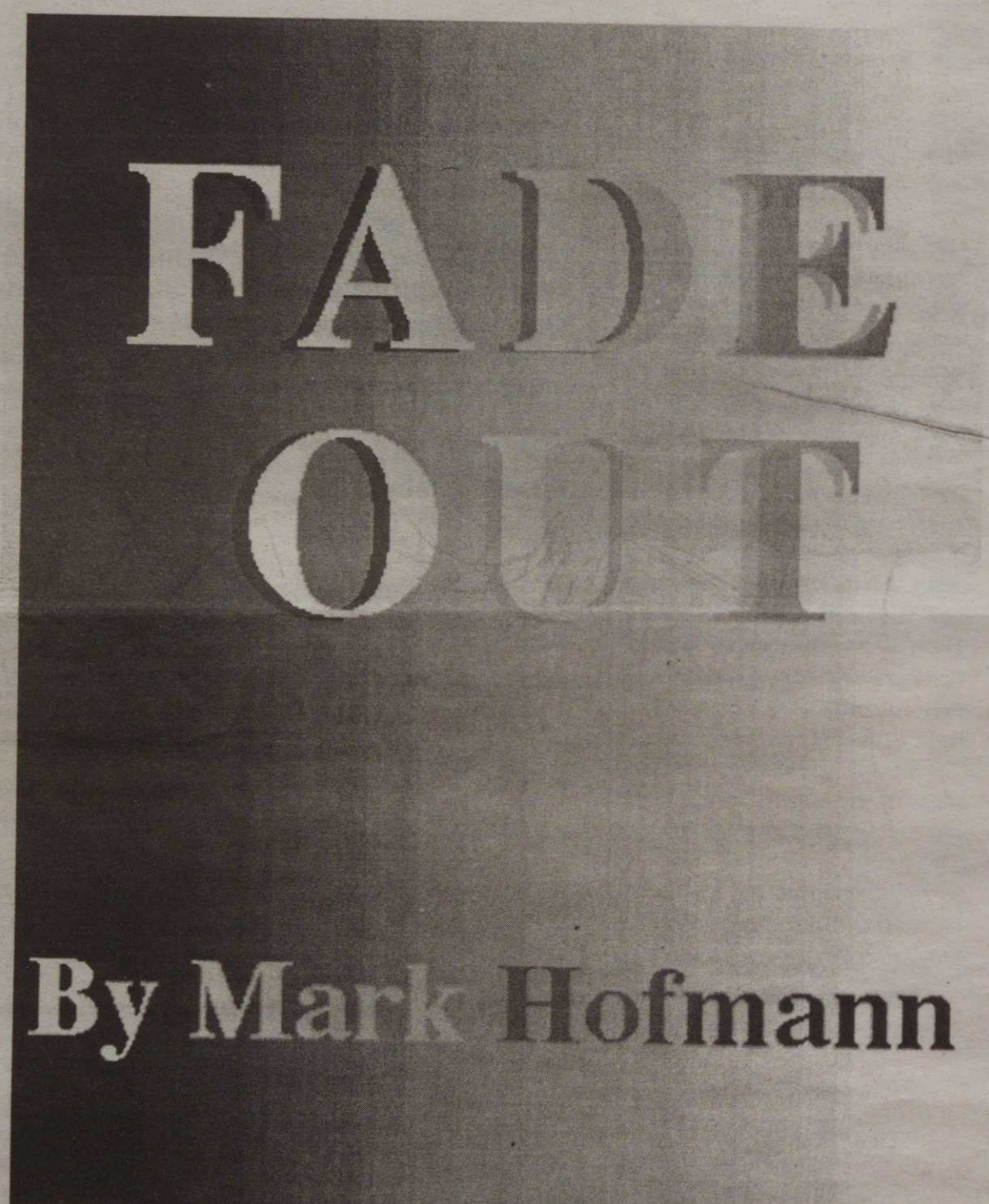
"Jerrod."

Jerrod turned to see Terry with a large wad of bills held together by a thick rubber band in one hand, and in the other, a long-barrelled .357 Magnum pointed toward the steering wheel. How did Terry get a hold of Jerrod's gun? Did he remove it during a session or did the gun drop out of the leg holster when he was changing in a motel room? It really didn't matter much, as long as it wasn't EXHIBIT A in a drive-by shooting or at the shrine of an obsessed fan—if there were any left, of course. Jerrod took the revolver and tucked it into the hidden holster.

"What's that for?" Jerrod gazed at the wad of money.

Terry had to clear his throat before he spoke, "It's your pay, Jerrod."

Jerrod looked at Terry quizzically. It was



Jerrod watched as they went to the first truck of the three in front of the saloon. The guy searched uncaringly for his truck keys while the woman waited on the passenger side of the truck. She tried her best to yank open the locked door with no success. Their smiles, their laughter never diminished.

Terry shook his head in disgust as he reached behind into the blackness of the Lincoln, and after a brief search, brought out his leather briefcase. He tampered with the combination and then the brass latches popped open. "I came across some of your earthly possessions you may want back." Terry opened the top of the thick briefcase and dug inside.

Jerrod had to see if the man got into the truck. He wouldn't feel right if he turned away from such an unrehearsed comedy. After the bearded guy found his keys, he elevated himself into the hydraulically raised Ford. The bearded guy decided to play a game of "I may unlock the door or I may not" as he tapped the lock on the passenger side, on which the girl would beg by little jumps up and down on the Ford's running board

and now could feel its weight at the bottom of

Jerrod's first change of expression all night. "You paid me yesterday. Don't you remember? It was a large stack of bills like that." Jerrod reached inside his denim jacket, but couldn't find his pay. When Jerrod started to check his other pockets, Terry held the money out farther and Jerrod froze. Did Terry find Jerrod's money? Jerrod remembered having it not so long ago. It couldn't have fallen out. The denim jacket's pockets had snap-on buttons—but it's not there now! Before Jerrod retraced his steps, Terry spoke up...

"This is your last pay, Jerrod. It should make up for what you lost or spent already." Terry held the money in front of Jerrod's face, but Jerrod refused to take it or move at all. The wad of bills came to rest on Jerrod's lap. Jerrod could only look at the money, and for the first time in his life, thought of the money's purpose as something alien. There was nothing to be gained, but only lost from Terry's gesture, the last in a 13-year partnership. "Your last pay"—the words made Jerrod feel as if he had swallowed lead and now could feel its weight at the bottom of

his gut.

"I thought my contract was good for another three records."

"Did you really read the contract, Jerrod?" Terry wiped glazed sweat from his upper lip.

"I signed after Martin told me what I was signing for."

"Jesus, Jerrod, Martin's just a stage hand, you know?"

"So what?"

As if Terry had them masterfully palmed in his hand, he produced another cigarette and tucked it be-

aren't into the lonely acoustic guitar, sitting on a stool, singing solo anymore—at least not around here, not anymore. They still do it like that at the 'Opry but you know you can't go back..."

"Cause of the time I was drunk."

"Right." Terry kept his eyes on the gray ash of the burning cigarette. Jerrod's eyes did the same. "You can get a job on a showboat or at a theme restaurant. You can play acoustic for a new band that comes in the studio you could do work

can do that for you, Jerrod." "No. I'll stay here for a while. I can get a ride back." Jerrod picked up the wad of money and stuffed it in the

started the engine and pulled the long black Lincoln out of Dirt Kicker's lot, the sounds of R&B pounded steadily from inside.

not to twist and break an ankle. Jerrod paused before he pushed the swinging door open. The door had translucent white paint over

He stood and watched the car disappear in the back roads in a low cloud of dirt and he didn't quite care if Terry looked back or not.

pocket of his denim jacket. He opened the Lincoln's door and felt the brisk night air on his face, better than the interior of leather and

He stood and watched the car disappear in the back roads in a low cloud of dirt and he didn't quite care if Terry looked back or not.

Jerrod didn't want to see him again. He remained still after the cloud of dust settled. Jerrod walked toward Dirt Kicker's. He passed the three Harley-Davidsons and heard a moan from the opposite direction. The bearded man sat in his red Ford diesel with his wide-eyed head tilted back, mouth gaped open, his breath heavy, and his hand clutched to the frame of the passenger side door. Jerrod looked towards the passenger's seat to see that the girl was not there. In a moment of the bearded man's ecstasy, his head turned to Jerrod and said, "The fuck you lookin' at?"

Jerrod ignored him and stepped on the logs that made up the porch of Dirt Kicker's.

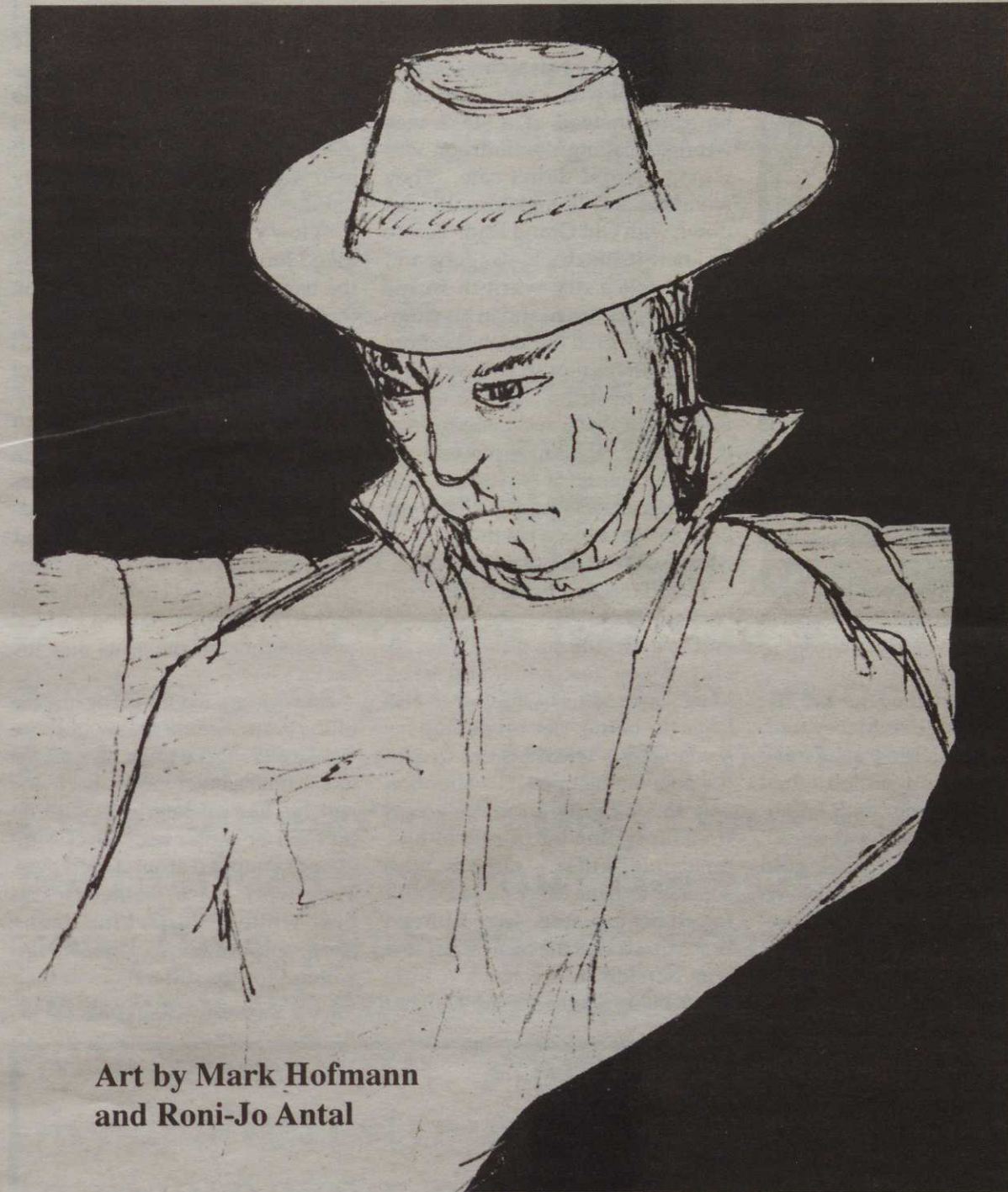
Although some of the logs were small and some were huge, all of them seemed ancient, but they were sturdy and didn't creak

when stepped on. But below the cracks between the logs, sat a small stagnate creek that was there for no reason except to define the porch's purpose. Jerrod walked across the long logs to the front door, taking care

puke-tan paint chipping away at every edge. The original coat of paint on the door had letters that read "Men" above a faded stick figure. Jerrod pushed the door open to Dirt Kicker's. The door swung open. Rusty hinges squawked.

Jerrod noticed that the whole place had an orange hue. He looked up to see white, yellow and orange light bulbs wrapped around the many criss-crossed rafters like Christmas decorations. The lights hung from the front of the saloon to the end. On the back wall, a torn and abused Rebel flag faced the saloon's door. Below the flag was a jukebox that looked like three milk cans tied together with dead neon tubes. The viewing glass was shattered and the song labels were peeled like wood chipping. To Jerrod's right was the bar—a cheap countertop that looked like it had cardboard siding for a base and dirty blue bathroom tile for the top. Oddly, there were no rows of bottles behind the bar, but rather a flat-surfaced restaurant-style grill. The grill was inactive, but showed many white cuts and brown burns on its surface. Next to it was a white meat cooler with a padlock on the front latch. Above the cooler was a cardboard sign, yellow with age, that read "Best Steaks Around" in black crayon.

Four people sat at the three-sided bar. A man and woman were seated together at the far end. He wore a white muscle shirt that was ghostly faded. Jerrod couldn't tell if the shirt said, "Viva Las Vegas" or "Rivera Last Night." The



Art by Mark Hofmann and Roni-Jo Antal

tween his lips. "Martin was influenced by a higher power."

Jerrod said nothing, but felt the wad of money growing heavier on his leg.

"A power higher than me." Terry made his first drag a long drag.

Jerrod had words buried in his throat, but he refused to permit them past his teeth.

"It wasn't my decision. The big shots at the record company thought your style was fading out. You do know that guys like Garth and Travis are the big thing now. They're like these pop singers and the R&B singers with synthesizers and electric guitars and back-up singers. People

around the studio, you know, to help out the technicians or something on that sort of line."

Jerrod winced at that—the 47 of his 62 years spent studying the guitar and learning to sing now seemed insignificant to the big business that Terry represented. He started to feel uncomfortable in the Lincoln's leather seats. Jerrod squirmed. The cigarette smoke seemed to make the car too hot.

"Are you okay, Jerrod?"

"Fine, but I don't think I'm hungry for steak anymore." He wondered what kind of drinks they served in Dirt Kicker's.

"Do you want me to drive you back to town? I

smoke. He shut the door and the electronic window slid down. Terry leaned over the passenger seat, his face in view behind the win-

Walking through the door in the first place was wrong, sitting on the stool was wrong, getting a bourbon instead of a steak was wrong, smelling the bourbon was wrong—Jerrod didn't care.

dow frame.

"Jerrod, if you need anything, you know where you can find me."

"Okay."

"Good luck, Jerrod."

The Lincoln's window slid back up. As Terry

to the front door, taking care

man's large-lens sunglasses looked too big for his face and little mustache, but so did the brown hair that poofed up at the top and fell long on his back. He was drinking what seemed to be a screwdriver that settled in

SOUL OF SEOUL

By
김성중
Victor Seong Kim

Editor's note: Although 'Mark' is a fictional character and his adventures in this story are likewise made up, Victor Seong Kim is a native Korean, and the portrayal of Korea here is, although a composite, accurate.

On Oct. 15, 1996, the Asiana airplane descended on Gimpo Airport, located outside Seoul. As the announcement of its arrival echoed in the plane and the passengers unbuckled their seatbelts, my heart began to pound. Having never visited an Asian country, I didn't have the slightest idea of what to expect from this one-week trip to Seoul, the capital of South Korea. Actually, I was not merely on a trip, but on a mission to complete an in-depth story for *The Science World* magazine on the International Science Exposition that was being held in Seoul. The reporter who was originally assigned to the task was injured at the last minute, and the story was handed over to me.

When Andy, my editor, asked me to go to Seoul, I was not very excited about the prospect. "Come on. You can't do this," I almost bellowed in protest. "I don't want to go to the country and have no interest in writing anything about the Expo. Find somebody else."

But he was obstinate, "No, Mark. You are the only one who can replace Jim. Don't be so silly. It will be a lot of fun. I have already arranged a host family for you. You should be glad that you are being given this opportunity."

Finally, I gave in, reckoning that a one-week jaunt in an exotic location with all the expenses provided by the magazine company would not be so bad. Andy gave me a stack of documents about the Expo and asked me to include some "spicy facts of the host country." Andy said, "We want the article to be sort of a travel piece with a special focus on the exposition."

So before I departed for Seoul, I asked myself, "What do I know about South Korea? I did see the landscape of the country on M.A.S.H and some of the Olympic games a decade ago. Yes, I heard about the devastating Korean War and the belligerent student protesters. Then what else?" With little time left for any more research, I wasn't quite sure whether I was the right person for the task. But what had been done was done. Instead of regretting the decision, I convinced myself that it would be an incredible experience, and I would pull it off successfully.

According to the plan arranged by the company, I was supposed to lodge at Coryo Hotel for one night and then the rest of the days with a host family. For three days before I boarded the plane, Andy had pumped up my head with praises about South Korea. He told me that Korea has 5,000 years of history; South Korea is one of Asia's strongest economic powers, and its per capita income exceeds that of many European countries including Greece and Portugal.

However, none of what Andy told me made any impression. Raised in a hick town in Arkansas, I was basically still a country person. The only foreign land I had ever set my foot on was Mexico, and even then I traveled there reluctantly for a magazine story. They said the world is broad. For me,

America alone was pretty darn broad.

Korea was the second foreign country I visited in my 30 years of life. When I walked out of the plane, I tried to imagine what would await me. And for some reasons, I envisioned Seoul as a decadent, foul-smelling and dangerous city bursting with unpleasant sights. The fact that Seoul was constantly threatened by North Korea didn't ease my anxiety.

However, I soon realized that my concern might be misplaced. When I stepped inside Gimpo Airport, I found it no different from other major airports that I had been to. From the hasty walks of businessmen in suits to heavily made-up stewardesses and spotless setting, I could not detect any trace of a 5,000-year old Asian country.

As I stepped outside the airport, I saw a long line of cabs waiting for customers. I approached the one nearest. A driver was leaning on a car, smoking a cigarette. At the sight of me, a huge smile spread on his face.

"How are you doing, Sir?" greeted the driver, putting out his cigarette.

"I'm fine, thank you," I replied.

After we got inside the car, he asked, "So where would you like to go, Sir?" Despite a slight accent, his English was excellent.

"Please take me to the Coryo Hotel."

As the car entered the city, the sights became increasingly familiar. A scene of towering skyscrapers and hordes of cars spread outside my window, reminding me of American cities.

"How big is Seoul? Is it the biggest city in Korea?" I asked the driver.

"Yes, Sir! It is. In fact, it is one of the 10 biggest cities on earth," boasted the driver.

I arrived at the Coryo Hotel at 2 p.m. The hotel, again, greatly resembled those in the Western Hemisphere. By that time, I felt almost betrayed by Seoul's outlook as a modern city without any trace of its history. I wanted to explore the city. A bellboy informed me that I could easily walk to Myong-dong, Seoul's most trendy downtown area. But, as I entered my room my body resisted every step; my eyelids were heavy

and my legs ached. The 15 hours in the cramped economy seat and the jet lag seemed to have depleted my body. I tumbled on the bed and soon fell asleep. After I awoke, I took shower and put on fresh clothes. Feeling more energetic and refreshed, I strode outside the hotel.

It was 6 p.m. The street was brimming with cars and the sidewalks with people. The sun had set already, and luminous neon lights poured down upon the street. People were rushing down the sidewalks. As I looked on, I immediately sighted two long-legged girls who looked every inch glamorous models. Both were trim, and heavy make-up was slathered all over their creamy skin. One girl was wearing a slinky, form-fitting suit, and the other a cleavage-hugging slip dress. It was chilly for such skimpy attire.

Obviously, the desire to flaunt their bodies had precluded putting on jackets or sweaters. They were talking and giggling. Their voluptuous figures and the exhibitionist outfits shattered my stereotype of Asian girls as petite, shy and reserved. As I stood in awe, bedazzled by their sensual, exotic beauty, they began to demonstrate what seemed to be a lesbian affection: They slowly leaned on each other and one girl draped her arms around the other's shoulder. "Man, I don't believe this," I blurted out. "I didn't know that lesbians in Korea are so brave."

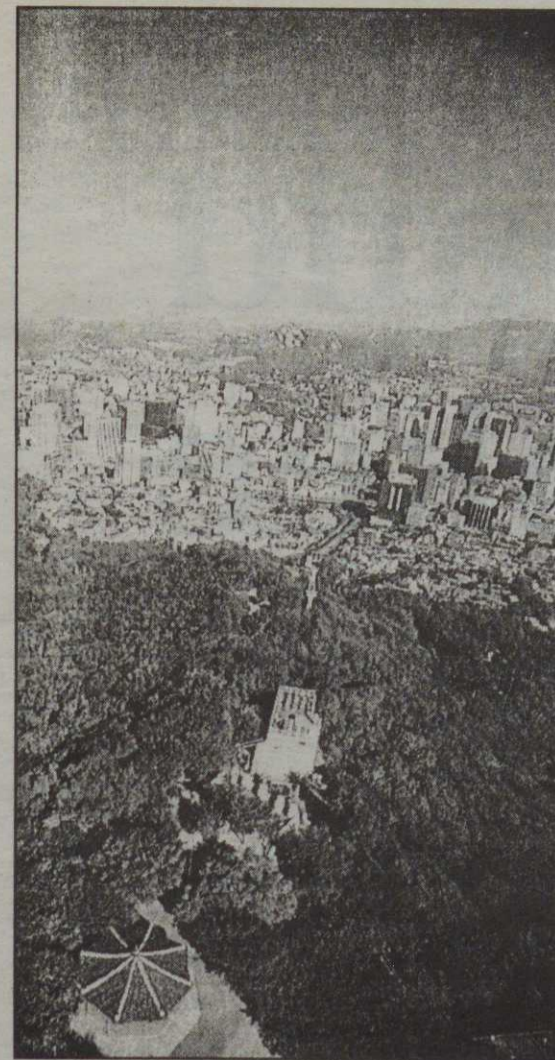
However, soon I began to notice a large number of what appeared to be same-sex couples. In many cases, when two girls were walking together, they were either holding hands or putting their arms on the each others' shoulders. Even some teenage guys were holding hands. Couple after couple walked by holding hands, and a significant number of them appeared to be same-sex couples.

As I strolled slowly, gawking at the passers-by, I found myself lost in the crowd. Fortunately, I saw a policeman checking on a parked car. "Excuse me, Sir! May I ask you a question?" I shouted, as I approached him.

The policeman turned and shrugged with a puzzled look. He uttered something in Korean. It was obvious that he could not speak English. So I said to him, "Myong-dong! Myong-dong," hoping that he would understand my pronunciation.

"Oh," he uttered, as he nodded. He looked around and suddenly flipped his middle finger, pointing at the street on our left side with it. I flinched to see the policeman's obscene behavior. He looked congenial and almost diffident for a policeman, yet he was still holding his middle finger, muttering, "Myong-dong."

"Thank you," I said. But as soon as I turned back from him, I grunted to myself, "What a weird asshole!"



As I followed the policeman's direction, I reached the street with a sign that indicated "Myong-dong" in English. There were no cars, but stores, restaurants, bars and swarms of people crammed the street. A few ultra-chic salespeople were selling fabrics, furs, scarves and handbags. From the display windows, Calvin Klein, Tommy and Victoria's Secret items were sumptuously screaming their universal popularity. Also, American fast food places such as McDonald's, KFC and Pizza Hut were juxtaposed on the street with Korean food restaurants. The whole street seemed to be scintillating with lights.

In this area, fashion was edgy. Korean guys with blond streaks in their hair walked with green-eyed Korean girls. Some looked as if they had just finished photo shoots for magazines and strolled out to the street. The hypnotic view of the Oriental urban zone held my gaze until I lost sense of direction. While I looked around, trying to figure out where to go, two Korean girls shyly approached me.

"Hi! Are you an American?" asked the girls. With their svelte figures and ruddy cheeks, both appeared to be no more than 15 years old.

"Yes, I am from America."

"Uhm. We just like to talk to you to practice our English. Do you mind talking to us?" asked one girl, blushing.

"No, not at all. My name is Mark, Mark Taylor. What are your girls' names?"

"My name is Minee and her name is Young."

At that moment, my stomach growled loudly.

"Are you hungry?" asked the girls, stifling their laughter.

"Yeah, I'm starving."

The girls suggested that I go to Pizza Hut. Minee said, "You will find something traditional there." Although I wondered what traditional food I could possibly eat at Pizza Hut, I decided to follow their advice. After all, it was their country and they should know what they were doing.

In Pizza Hut, they ordered something called Bulgogi Pizza.

Bulgogi Pizza was definitely the most zesty and exotic pizza I had ever eaten. The girls explained that Bulgogi is the most popular Korean barbecue beef, marinated in Korean soy sauce, sesame oil, garlic sauce and a touch of sugar. The concoction of Bulgogi and pizza created such a unique taste that I finished it in only 10 minutes.

When we were about to leave, I saw more same sex couples holding hands. I was curious why homosexuals in Korea are so open. So I asked Minee, "Is this a gay area?"

"What? What is a gay area?" Young asked.

"You know, the place where homosexuals hang around all the time. You know what I mean by homosexuals?"

The girls nodded their heads, still giving me a be-

fuddled look. They briefly talked to each other in Korean. Then Minee asked, "Why? What made you think that?"

"Just look at them," I said, pointing my fingers at two girls with their arms around each other.

"You mean 'them'?"

"You think they are lesbians?" Young prodded, pointing at them.

"Yes," I replied, with an assured voice. Then suddenly they burst out in loud, reverberating laughter. They were cracking themselves up, and everyone looked at our table, curious to see what was going on. Between their laughter, they murmured some indecipherable sentences. I felt my neck tense and cheeks flush.

"Sorry, sorry. You, you are totally mistaken," Young stammered, as she composed herself.

"You know, it is O.K. for girls to hold hands in my country," added Young, still laughing. They talked to each other in Korean for a while, with some people nearby smiling as they eavesdropped on the girls' conversation. The girls then embarked on lengthy Korean cultural lessons.

Lesson number one: Korea is still a conservative nation despite the scantily clad women and the Westernized look of the city. Therefore, the incidents of open homosexuality are so scarce that few would suspect your sexuality even if you hold hands or wrap your arms around a person of your gender. Interestingly, while Koreans are accepting of hugs between people of the same gender in public, public kissing or hugging between people of the opposite sex is likely to raise eyebrows of onlookers.

The girls added that the nation is still imbued with traditional Confucianism.

"You know, especially old generations are so conservative and closed-minded. About a decade ago when Cyndi Lauper's concert was broadcast in my country, some parents complained that her concert was not suitable for T.V. We're talking about Cyndi Lauper and not Madonna here." Minee scowled, feigning a look of disgust with the smoldering conservatism of her culture.

But, according to the girls, the sexually repressive atmosphere contributed a lot to shaping Korea as an AIDS-safe and drug-free country. AIDS or drugs are simply not on the minds of Koreans.

I also learned that the use of a middle finger is not considered to be a rude behavior in Korea. People commonly use the middle finger to point at something. Although Koreans are aware that the gesture expresses an insult in America, the use of the middle finger is not rare in their country.

As I listened to the girls, I thought that something was amiss; here I was sitting with what appeared to be junior high school students, listening to their lectures. Then again, the way they talked sounded far too mature for junior high school students.

So I interrupted their cultural lesson by asking, "Are you girls students?"

"Yes, we still go to school."

"What grade are you in?" I asked.

"What!" They exclaimed as they looked at each other. They talked to each other in Korean. Then Young looked at me and said, "We are graduate school students."

"Sorry! We didn't wear any make-up today, but we are already 25 years old," added Minee.

And so I began my one-week sojourn in Seoul. After exploring more of Myong-dong with the girls, I parted, heartily expressing my appreciation for their help. I tried to hug them, but they shunned it. Remembering that a kiss or a hug in public places is considered highly inappropriate, I just waved.

The next afternoon, I met with Mr. Tong Park's family, my hosts during my stay in Korea. Mina Park, his daughter had studied at Penn State University and was a friend of Andy, the editor of *The Science World*. She was supposed to take me to stay with her family. She had silky hair, porcelain skin, and wore a stylish outfit.

Her family's house was located in a posh area called Appugong in Seoul. The house was adorned by a small, yet exquisite Oriental garden filled with trees, flowers, and a pond. Inside, I was introduced to Mr. Tong Park, Mrs. Yunja Lee, his wife, and Jinho Park, his son.

I found it strange that Mr. Park's wife had a different surname from the rest of her family. "In Korea, women don't change their family names even after they get married," Mina stated matter-of-factly. Then she snapped, "Women are not property. Why do we have to follow our husbands' names?"

"Well, but aren't Orientals more sexist than the Westerners?" I asked myself.

As if she read my mind, Mina said, "Of course, Koreans are also very sexist. But it all depends. My mom is a principal of a high school."

"What? Really?"

"Why are you so surprised?"

"Well, I don't know. It is somehow hard for me to picture a Korean woman as a principal."

"Why?" Mina raised her voice a bit, as if she were insulted.

"I don't know. I guess it is just one of my preconceptions," I mumbled and changed our topic.

"By the way, your mom is wearing a traditional costume. It's gorgeous," I said to Mina pointing at Mrs. Lee's dress.

Mrs. Lee's outfit was just like the one I saw in the airplane's promotional magazine. She was the first person I had seen wearing traditional clothing since I had landed in the country. Her dress seemed to be made out of silk and was flowing elegantly. Yet it looked uncomfortable to work in. I admired the dress, then said to her, "It is so beautiful." But Mrs. Lee averted her eyes with a baffled look. She smiled cordially and murmured, "O.K. O.K.," her voice barely a whisper.

"My mom doesn't speak English," said Mina. Mr. Park and Mrs. Lee were middle-aged, with some gray hair and thick glasses. Mina informed me that Mr. Park was a professor at Seoul National University and Jinho was a first grader.

The family's living room was replete with traditional furniture, antiques and iridescent porcelains. Interspersed with them was what looked to be a thick, old document lodged inside a glass case. Even a glimpse revealed that the document was something the family cherished.

"What is it?" I asked, pointing at the book.

"Oh, that. That is a book of our family history," Mina replied.

"A book of family history?"

"You know, the book that tells us who were our ancestors and how old our family is and so on."

At that moment, it dawned on me that Koreans are proud of their long history. Mina continued, "The concept of history is very important to us, and that is why our father treasures the book so much."

"So according to the document, how long is your family history?"

"It is two thousand years."

"Two thousand years!" I exclaimed, my eye-brows arched. Although I used to think, "What difference does history make in our present life?" I began to feel like an infant standing before that precious family document. At the same time, a surge of melancholy swept over me. Having grown up with adopted parents and little knowledge about my real parents, I was envious of Mina, who could trace her ancestors as far back as 2,000 years.

While I gaped at Mr. Park's collection, Jinho, Mina's brother, sauntered up to me, muttering something in Korean. "He was wondering whether he could touch your hair," interpreted Mina, slightly frowning at Jinho. Jinho said something to Mina with a zany face. Smiling, Mina translated, "My brother has never touched blond hair. He wants to feel the difference between your blond hair and his own hair."

Smiling, I stooped and said, "Go ahead. It's just like your hair." Cautiously, Jinho touched my hair, then

Continued on page 35...



The Heart and Soul of Yankee Stadium

By Jeff Iampietro
Art by Derek c.f. Pegritz

As I gaze out the window of my friend Mike's rundown 1991 Jeep, heat rises from the convoy of vehicles waiting to take the Major Deegan Expressway exit. I turn curiously and ask Mike, the driver, "Is this our exit?"

He answers yes, and I ask excitedly, "Then the stadium is around the corner?"

"Yes," he replies, adding sarcastically, "It's right around the block so it will only take about 20 more minutes." Mike and I, along with our other friends Jarrad and Brian, are frustrated by the traffic, the confusing maze of New York highways and the lack of air conditioning in the Jeep.

The 90-degree heat on this sunny, blue cloudless afternoon has my companions salivating at the thought of jumping into the Harlem River. While they entertain thoughts of swimming in that cesspool, the words "20 more minutes" are stuck in my head: "20 more minutes" until I return to the "House that Ruth Built," the stadium in which Reggie Jackson flasted three consecutive home runs during the 1977 World Series, the home of Maris, Mantle, Gehrig, DiMaggio, Martin and all the other Yankee legends who made this playground perhaps the single most famous stadium in professional sports—Yankee Stadium.

But most important, "20 more minutes" until I have my picture taken next to the plaques honoring these legends in Monument Park, the shrine dedicated to the pantheon of Yankee stars, and then grab a seat and risk life and limb amid the sinister blue-collar fanatics in the right field bleachers.

The previous summer, on my first visit to Yankee Stadium, I was helping to celebrate Mike's birthday, with our friends Michelle and Julia. We were late that night and had to hustle to our seats before the first pitch was thrown.

As I watched Dwight Gooden warm up, I vividly recalled the school reports I had written and presented about Babe Ruth, and the tiny figurine of Reggie Jackson I received on my 18th birthday.

As I looked around the stadium that night, I felt as if I had been transported into my television set. This was the first stadium, other than the toilet bowl, Three Rivers Stadium, in which I had watched a baseball game. Three Rivers Stadium is a light grey bowl of concrete that lacks charm, beauty or any sense of history, other than Franco Harris's Immaculate Reception, of course. The artificial turf at Three Rivers paled in comparison with the dark

glow above the left field wall.

The glow was Monument Park. I could barely make out the park, some 400 feet away and slightly above eye level from the box seats. The bright glare from the stadium lights illuminated the shrubs and flowers surrounding the maze of plaques hanging from the surrounding tan wall. From a distance it was captivating. I shivered as I looked at the graveyard of the Yankee greats. I could almost see ghostly figures of the legends standing by their plaques watching the game. I had seen the light and wanted to follow it to the sanctuary.

I quickly asked the gang if they wanted to go to the park. Mike and Julia

stared at the shrine, I couldn't help wondering what it would have been like to see the monuments firsthand. What the hell, I thought as I turned and asked Mike, "What about next summer? Are we coming back?"

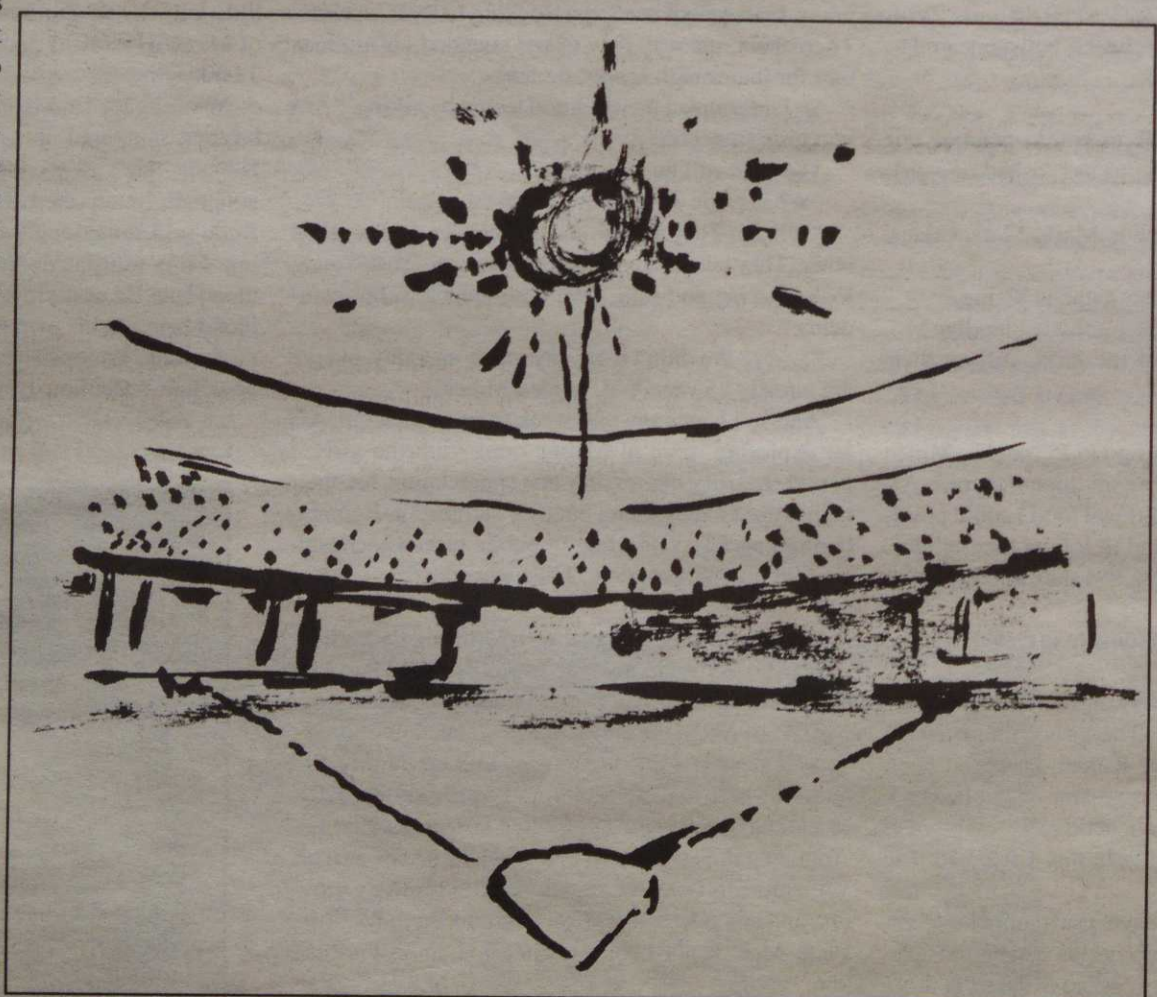
"It's a little bit early to think about that," he replied. I sat pissed off in my seat not paying attention to my friends as the game started. The first few innings sped past while I gazed awestruck around the stadium. Suddenly, during the third inning, I heard a roar from the bleacher bums in right field. A crowd of people piled on top of each other as if a hundred-dollar bill had been thrown on the ground. Security guards who had been standing at the top of each

aisle raced down to break up the ruckus. Two fans were finally pulled apart. By that time, a dozen security guards were there to intercept the flailing punches thrown by the two drunks. As the brawlers were dragged away, the rowdies in the bleachers started chanting "assholes" to the security guards.

The ejection of the two fans caught my interest. I repeatedly glanced at the bleacher seats, until I found myself more interested in them than in the game. I watched the cheapsat fans drink, fight and cheer. They behaved like the denizens of the rowdy "Dawgpound," the lunatics who filled the endzone seats in old Cleveland Memorial Stadium to cheer the defunct Browns. I knew from that moment the only way I could ever understand

the mystique of Yankee stadium was NOT to sit in box seats. I had to sit in the heart of the stadium, the bleacher seats, and visit the soul, Monument Park.

And sure enough, here I am on this



green grass of Yankee stadium. Yankee Stadium was perfect. The cloudless night sky, dirt infield and chattering fans made me feel like I was in Heaven. Looking around the stadium, soaking in the charm and atmosphere, I noticed

looked at me, as I started to stand and informed me access to the Monuments was permitted only before games. I slumped back into my seat. "What the hell kind of rule is that?" I said. They all ignored me. Nobody shared my pas-

hot afternoon, so close to my two goals that I can taste them. With excitement and frustration building, I find myself sticking my head out the window and yelling to the traffic, "Let's Go!!!!" Sadly, all I get out of my angry shout is a chuckle from Jarrad. The reality check leaves me realizing patience will be a virtue this day.

Finally, we find a parking lot. I climb out of the Jeep, eyes focused across the street on the stadium. As I pull out the tickets, I turn back to see Jarrad, Brian and Mike arguing over the beer we had brought with us. With them lagging behind, I have to assert myself.

I pull out our tickets, and with a surprised look on my face, say, "Texas A&M vs Florida ST." Mike's jaw drops and Brian and Jarrad stop, looking at me in bewilderment, as the thought of driving back to Mike's house in West Orange, New Jersey, and battling the traffic again horrifies them. Mike, believing that I could very well have grabbed Monday's tickets for the NCAA Football Kickoff Classic, ap-

ter the stadium. By the blank expressions on the faces of Mike, Jarrad, and Brian, I can tell that they, like myself, have no interest in souvenirs. We weave through the crowd. Brian leads, as we squeeze through the herd to get in line at the gate, located about 100 feet from the tunnel. The line moves quickly. I am dazed from the heat and long car ride. My body is sore. I just want to sit down and relax. The people ahead of us in line are trying to see what concession stands there are, and as I spot the man selling programs, we are suddenly next in line.

As I hand my ticket to the taker, I hear Mike ask, "How do you get to Monument Park?" The ticket is back in my hand before I can blink, and the man tells us to go all the way around the stadium to the outfield gate.

Silently, we step out of line and hurry around the stadium. As we circle the stadium, Brian and Jarrad, annoyed at having to walk to the next gate, start to question the idea. "This sucks. We were in," says Jarrad. Brian adds, "The line

Mike hurries ahead, looking for the entrance. I follow.

I can't believe what the ticket-taker told me. Just because I didn't spend 12 dollars on a ticket, I couldn't visit the Monuments. Why not? I can only come up with one answer, and that is no answer, so I continue on, attempting not to beat it to death and trying to be positive. Having come full circle around the stadium, we find ourselves in the only long line of the stadium.

With the Three Amigos looking across the street at the souvenir shops and hot dog stands, I finally break the silence I've held since my ticket was handed back to me. "Hey, what did he mean we couldn't get in Monument Park? That's ridiculous."

"I don't know," says Mike. "I think we are the only ones that care because I can tell Jarrad and Brian want no part of the Monuments."

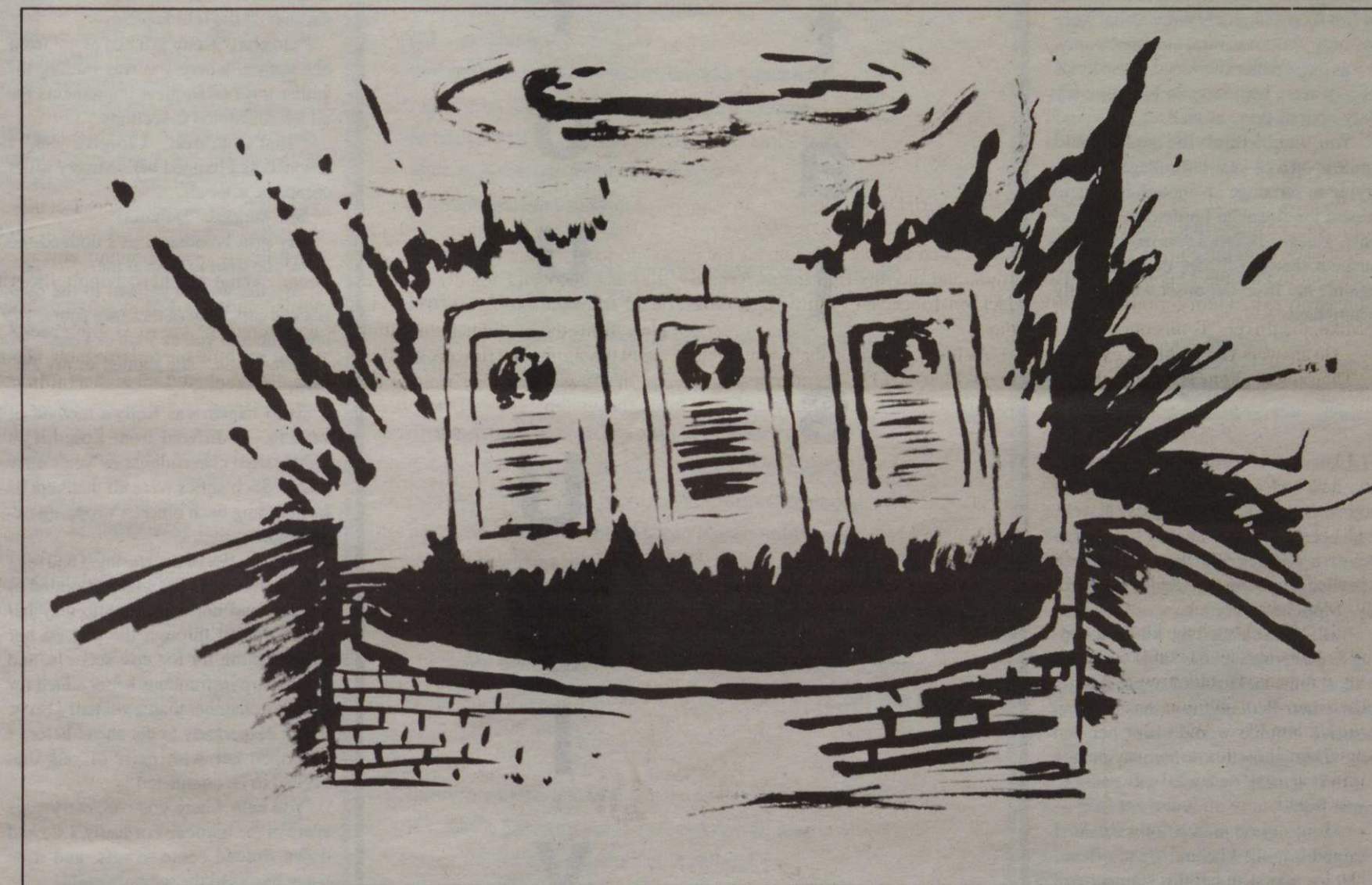
The line moves quickly enough for them not to bitch. I am at the end of my rope. I know the response of the ticket taker ahead will not help me on my

"I see more people here two hours ahead of game time than I do at a Pirate games unless it's a promotion day."

cut the gloom. I notice two small concession stands and restrooms.

The sun blasts my eyes as I enter the seating area. The Yankees are taking batting practice. Fans scream and pile together in the front section of seats, hoping to attract their favorite players or catch a home run ball. Young kids hold baseballs high above their heads and wave to the players, hoping for an autograph. A player throws a ball up to the stands, and the kid who catches it is mobbed, as his peers try to steal it away.

From the box seats, you don't see what the stadium looks like from afar. The whole stadium is in my vision and looks beautiful. The sun glares on the



pears relieved and thankful, as I explain I was just joking.

Now that I have their attention, I start walking to the stadium. Ahead of my friends as we cross the road, I approach steps leading up to a tunnel arches over the street. The tunnel is about 15 feet above the road and is covered with clear glass. The heat bakes the glass. An old man standing in the tunnel plays a flute. Sweat pours from his crinkled face down his chest and onto the change in the battered hat sitting at his feet. He slouches against the wall as we pass and nods as he plays.

Walking down the steps to exit the tunnel, I see the crowd massing around the souvenir shops and the gate to en-

better be short on this side."

I see the gate and short line. Brian is grinning. The extra walk must be worthwhile to him now. Brian always enjoys a shortcut, and often looks for it. I hold out my ticket as Mike again asks, "How do you get to Monument Park?"

"Why did he just look at the corner of my ticket twice? Not again!" My stomach tightens as the ticket touches my hand and the ticket-taker says, "The bleacher seat entrance is around the bend, and you can't enter Monument Park with a bleacher ticket."

We stare at him disgustedly. I leave the line confused, listening to Brian and Jarrad voice their complaints.

"This sucks."

"I'm sick of walking around the stadium."

"This is retarded."

As they resort to obscenities, Mike does not say a word. Knowing that it was time for somebody to take the blame, and that his familiarity with the stadium made him the prime candidate,

quest to visit the Monuments. I tensely wait for his response as I hand over my ticket and hear Mike ask once again, "How do you get to Monument Park?"

"Your seats are straight through the tunnel ahead and you are unable to enter the park," says the ticket-taker.

"Thanks a lot," I say sarcastically, as I walk through the turnstile. While the others go through the turnstile, I look around for a way to sneak into the park.

Finding none, I begin to bitch to myself: "This just isn't fair. WHY would you not be able to see it? New York sucks. This town is all about money. If this were Three Rivers, they would let you in. Stop! I'm at Yankee Stadium. I'm not about to ruin my day. If I can find a way in, so be it. If not, then I'll have to wait until next year. Hey, that's a good excuse to come again. We'll see."

I follow the gang to the tunnel, not seeing any possible way into the Monuments. It is dark in the walkway under the stadium. Only narrow shafts of light

grass, and shadows stretch across the field. The stadium seats seem to be very close to the field. I can see why the stadium is celebrating it's 75th anniversary. Not only does the stadium's history keep the city from building the new stadium that owner George Steinbrenner wants, but it is also still one of the most beautiful stadiums standing.

Mike runs ahead of us and pushes his way into the crowd; the look on his face is one that Brian and I have seen before at Pirate games. He wants a ball, and there is no sense bothering him for a while. Jarrad, Brian and I stand a few rows back from the yelling fans. I turn and say to Brian, "I see more people here two hours ahead of game time than I do at Pirate games unless it's a promotion day."

Brian laughs and agrees, saying, "That's the way it is when you're not a contender."

"Contenders are exactly what the Yankees are. They're on pace to break

"Reconile, girl. For some-day, you are going to bury her. Better get right with the lady."



The high for the day was supposed to reach 96 degrees, with a heat index of 101 degrees, because of the choking humidity in a state with too many lakes. But I was safe, it was only 10:00 a.m. and I was scanning the want-ads in my best friend's small but air-conditioned apartment.

My frustration grew as my eyes drifted down lists. Of course, anything offering a decent salary was nowhere near a summer job, and I wasn't qualified anyway, being only a junior undergrad in education at Cal-U of PA.

Two weeks, four temp services, and nothing to show but a one week assignment as a receptionist in a medical insurance company. I had come to Haslett, Michigan to avoid the slave labor jobs in fast food and grocery stores that were my only options in rural Greene County, but as the summer shortened, those kinds of jobs were beginning to look like my only options here, as well.

You would think the gods would smile upon a 22-year-old college student, trying to scrounge up enough money to lessen the financial burden on her parents. Not so. In fact, I was beginning to suspect that the forces that had been against me from the onset were finally triumphant.



I knew as I heard the door slam that she had had a bad day at work. Of course, it was a good bet any day at work had been crummy- an RN's day was never a picnic- and it was common knowledge among my friends and family. Mom hated her job.

Still, I had cleaned the kitchen, hoping to postpone the inevitable wrath for a short time, and decided to present my plan to her. Perhaps my enthusiasm and positive attitude would cheer her and ease some worry as to where my money for next semester's books was going to come from.

"Mom, good news," I said as I charged into the kitchen. "Jean offered to let me stay with her this summer so I can work and save some money for school and maybe even car insurance." I paused for a breath, knowing she heard me by the arched eyebrow. Her pause en route to the coffee pot was a bad sign; I should've waited until she had had her coffee.

I rushed on, attempting to salvage what I could: "Listen, there are at least five different temp services in the area, and the jobs are averaging \$7.00 to \$8.00 an hour. Lansing has a number of businesses and a huge hospital- work will be easy to get- and transportation isn't a problem. I have checked out the bus routes, and I can get to and from easily."

"Oh, give me a break! You won't save a dime," she said, her voice getting that caustic tone that signaled a vicious tongue lashing and a listing of all my faults, from my weight down to the fact that I hadn't made straight A's last semester.

"Mom..."
"You're going down there to party and waste the summer. Work? Hell, you can't even clean the damn kitchen right! Or the rest of the house! Christ, I work

Hospitals Make You Ugly

By Kelly Averett

12-hour shifts and have to come home to a mess." The tirade had begun. I knew it by heart. And while there were two other kids - my sister in high school, and my brother a freshman in college, also commuting from home- our financial problems were currently my fault because I was in the room at the time and proposing to get my own way on a plan she disapproved of.

As the inevitable barbs came, pointing out every shortcoming and flaw of my character- all for my own self-improvement, I imagine- I wondered how a woman so cynical and biting could ever even consider a career demanding care and compassion.

Reconcile. Yeah, right, professor. Sure. No problem.

For a change, I held my ground- and went to my dad, known to be cool-headed and reasonable. He approved my plan; I had won. I would be free of her constant demeaning and have the chance to prove to her that I could be successful this summer. More important, I would prove it to myself.



At the moment, Michigan was proving to be more and more a frustrating hell than a refuge, and my fear of failure was growing as the summer slipped by.

My growing anger and despair was interrupted by the phone. Newspapers

scattered as I dove to reach it before the answering machine could pick up.

"Kelly? This is Diane from Uniforce," her voice bubbling with sugary enthusiasm. "I think I may have a position you would be interested in if you are available..."

I grinned idiotically as I replied to her with equal cheeriness, accepting the assignment. Desperation doth make idiots of us all, at times.

And it got me hired as a medical technician at St. Rose Hospital in Lansing for \$7.50 an hour.



"Shit!" I hissed as the warm dishwasher ran down the front of my scrubs. In my rush to unload the nine-foot tall orange rack of its payload of newly washed basins, trays, and other miscellaneous containers, I had forgotten that some of the larger basins, placed on the cart at an angle, didn't always drain completely. Consequently, I was showered by used soapy wash water. My mood worsened because of the foul baptism.

"Gotcha!" Kelly grinned at me from her station, where she was putting together trays of surgical implements for all the scheduled C-sections.

"That's ok, dear. I forgive you," I crooned as I hugged her. Misery loves company, after all.

She jumped. "Dammit!" My grin broadened as I dodged the towel she tried to snap at me.

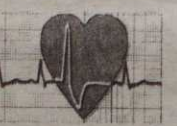
"By the way," I pointed to the over stacked cart, "half of these are yours. I'll bring them to you as soon as I can."

"Smart ass," she replied to my sarcasm.

Such banter was Kelly's method of venting. It differed from Rosemary's lighthearted cheerfulness or Sue's dirty jokes. Such antics were all that kept us from killing each other or dropping exhausted.

Still, in spite of her teasing, I had seen her shoulders slump when I pointed to the cart and noted the frantic way her hands moved through the pile on her shelf, rooting for forceps, scissors, and other sharp instruments better suited for a torture chamber than a woman's body, trying desperately to get ahead before I swamped her with parts of sets that needed to be completed.

You help where you can, carry your share of the burden. For Kelly, I slowed down, folded some towels, and took some basins to the wrapping table to be prepared for sterilization. The work would get done soon enough. It always did.



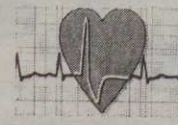
You never get off your feet.

If you are on cart wash duty, you unload and dry steel carts half as big as you are and push them to the back of the department, where they are loaded with surgical equipment for each scheduled case. Most of the carts have broken doors that like to swing shut (when delivered, they must remain open) or broken wheels that make pushing the cart an excursion resembling a drunkard's attempt to tackle a four-lane intersection. And you dry anything and everything that comes out of the washers. Or send it back if you find traces of blood, gobs of tissue, bloody bone fragments, or just plain unidentifiable substances stuck to instruments. Such "surprises," as they are affectionately termed, are the reason you always, always wear gloves.

Ah, well, at least you get to move.

At the wrapping table, you stand almost motionless, making your hands move without thinking, learning the patterns of how to fold the blue paper that wraps every piece of equipment before it is placed in the autoclave to be sterilized. And every time you are almost done with the last x-ray tray, or a batch of glass medicine cups, or bowels, basins, pitchers or burn unit trays, the girl on cart wash duty will pick that moment to arrive with the next pile of twenty or so more items to wrap.

You stand there, on your feet, for 8 hours a day. Oh, wait. You do get two 15-minute breaks and a half-hour lunch. You learn not to look at the clock.



Sometime after my fourth week at St. Rose, I felt something twist in my ankle. My shoes, I learned later, were not suitable for hospital floor work. There are many reasons, you see, that nurses were special padded shoes and support hose. After so many hours on your feet, you begin to feel the floor with each step, jarring your hips. Many nurses have knees worse than NFL veterans.

The next day, and for two weeks after that, I wore an Ace bandage on my foot—a wrap that I had purchased for myself since the hospital couldn't "officially" spare one out of stock. (My work load in no way decreased or lightened. In fact, it increased, since I was taken to the other floors in the hospital to learn what constitutes "pick-up duty.") Later I learned from Terry that I shouldn't have asked but should have taken one home from the stock in the back because it is a commonly replaced item that no one ever misses.

During those two weeks, Stephanie, a nurse from the OR, had her shoes stolen from the locker room.

"You shouldn't have left them out," Mary chided.

"Yeah, I know, but who would want my shoes?" she said, sighing.

"Never know. I left a catalog from JCPenney's on the table in the lounge, turned my back for five minutes, and it was gone," Stephanie said, her sympathy evident.

"There's always something missing around here," said Cheryl. "Doctors are the worst for it."

There's no place for honesty in a hospital.

Or compassion.

During my last two weeks there I was put on pick-up duty, mainly because we averaged a day-shift staff of 7 when there should have been 13 bodies to help carry the load. Pick-up duty consists of going to every floor in the hospital and raiding the soiled utility closets for dirty instruments to take back to the Sterile Supply Department to be cleaned (with the rest of the bloody surgical equipment) in Decontamination. In almost every closet there is a small refrigerator that must be checked for specimens- cups of urine (usually bagged, because they tend to come open), containers of shit, vials of blood that need taken to the lab for special disposal. You pick those up, avoiding any food trays that the staff on duty may have left there from breakfast or lunch for the cafeteria workers to pick up.

Easy enough, because you expect to have to work around the trays the moment you open the door and the smell of aging hospital food hits you. Sometimes it takes the cafeteria staff awhile to get around to all those floors.

If you do pick up in ER, for reasons

Hospitals Make You Ugly

They are at it again this morning cackling and laughing and gossiping like crows because there were five pedi trauma carts needed at 1 am today and a woman is getting a bilateral mastectomy- one of many on a long list.

But they're always like this- gossipy, childish, talking of soaps and their kids when a two-year-old is in surgery for burns on her lips and there is an emergency aneurysm to be done.

Judy is forty and always talks like a baby and her friends play along because she works 12 hour shifts, pulling cases of bright metal sharp instruments smelling of steel and blood. (Perhaps its the smell that starts it steel and blood that makes everyone nasty, causes biting and bitchiness, especially if you are slow or lazy because you've had 3 hours of sleep since last shift, and the department only has 3 people instead of 13.)

And everyone comes to work in bright colored smocks because this place can be so damn cold with our hair bound, wearing prison olive green scrubs that never quite fit right.

This is where everything gets sterilized, though something is always needed- and missing- and you stretch your tools to the greatest capacity because everyone needs basic plastic sets for 4 pm, and we only have 3. You flash it, or steam it, and try not to get burned by the autoclave when its door is open and you are assaulted by the smell of burning steel and rubber. That hospital smell.

Everyday there are over 50 cases to be pulled for surgery, ER, AMS, OB, and you push, pull, wrap, and when it's good, we get pizza or donuts. I got a cherry lifesaver today, Because they needed 5 pedi trauma carts by 1 am.

we could never figure out, you sometimes have to step over green bags that could contain either used linens or garbage. The rule of thumb is that if you have to climb over or wade through bags, ER doesn't get touched for pick-up. We still haven't found out why garbage is kept there.

Needless to say, you glove all the time on pick-up duty.

My third day on pick-up was particularly hellish. We were short staffed because earlier that morning, around 1 am, an ambulance had brought in survivors from a car wreck. No one knew the details of what had happened, but ER had ordered up five pediatric trauma carts stat. We were spending part of the morning trying to restock those carts in case

of another emergency. And then it hit me.

Five pedi-trauma carts. At 1 am, five children were seriously injured in a car accident. They were being treated somewhere, on some floor of this hospital. Or they were in the morgue.

I noticed how many incubators and other strange machines were in the halls of the pediatric ICU. I saw the sign on the door of one of the patients, a twelve-year-old boy, that read, in big black letters upon screaming yellow, "CONTACT ISOLATION. NO ADMISSION WITHOUT CONTACTING NURSE'S STATION." Precautions set up for a child so sick you couldn't even touch him, or enter without a mask for

fear you would give him something his weakened immune system could not fight off. I saw a small blonde girl, surely no more than five-years-old, blonde curls and pink pajamas, wave to me while the orderly wheeled her off on a stretcher too huge for such a little thing. Her free arm was wrapped around her teddy bear.

What does a five-year-old child need to be going to surgery for? Tonsils? Tubes in her ears? Something more malignant?

My nerves, frayed, for suddenly my armor was gone. I ranted to Terry on the way to the cafeteria for lunch.

"Shh," she stopped me. "You can't ask about that. If anyone hears you, the doctor or the family of the girl, you can lose your job. We don't talk about patients. All you can do is look on the schedule to see what surgeries are scheduled for today, though you really shouldn't do that..."

Confidentiality, not compassion. You could lose your job.

Near the end of the day, our supervisor passed around a bag of Lifesavers and told all of us in the department that we were doing a "great job."

A Life of a life? Or lives? Haha.

Five pedi-trauma carts

No, just a small treat to oil gears, make sure the wheels keep turning, the machine keeps running, and that the natives don't get too restless.

Besides, all good dogs deserve a treat sometimes.



I returned home August 19. My mother was sitting at the table, drinking coffee. A good omen. Still, her expression hardened as she asked, "What did you bring back?"

"Five hundred dollars," I replied. And when I told her about the girls in the department, the griping, the jokes, Stephanie's stolen shoes, she laughed. Not because there was anything particularly funny about the incidents, but because she knew the stories already.



Mom knows I am going back to Michigan in December. She didn't argue with me when I told her that I was scheduled shortly after Christmas. In fact, we haven't really argued for quite sometime.

She's lending me the soft white jacket she wears over her uniform when on duty.

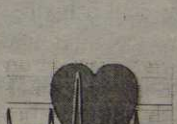
"To keep you warm," she said.



I dropped my bag and flopped into the worn red chair, positioning myself for easy access to the shrine of the coffee pot, waiting for inevitable invitation.

"You're grinning. In love- again? There's coffee. Cups, too." She handed me a cookie.

Welcoming both, I raised my cup. "Here's to reconciliation," I said, not spilling a drop.



Team Work

by Jamie Barley

"Hey, Michelle! Why don't you use that candyarm of yours and toss me a cherry Huggie?" I called to Michelle, a teammate on my Scott Township summer softball team.

"Sure, Barley, if you can catch it!" Michelle shouted back, flinging the small, cold, plastic bottle to me.

I loved spending hot, summer weekends playing softball in the 90-degree heat, with 9 girls, who were my friends and teammates since I was young. On Saturday morning we met at our home field at 8:00 o'clock for batting practice just as the sun peeked over the clouds. The dew rested on the grass, and I could barely see the first baseman from third through the fog. Mr. Folcik, our coach, waited for us with two dozen doughnuts and his cup of coffee. During batting practice most of us were still half asleep and standing completely silent. After batting practice we piled into our cars and carpoled ourselves to the field, where our parents later joined us. I can't remember when waking up early was so much fun.

I remember my first day of kindergarten. My mom dressed me in my best outfit, and snapped pictures in our front yard. I felt anxious to start school and make new friends, but it wasn't until the summer after my first year of kindergarten I made some of the best friends anyone could ask for.

During the summer of 1983, our township sponsored an instructional softball league. Hundreds of little 6 year old girls showed up at the field with their parents proudly watching, knowing their child would not be cut from an instructional league. There were 9 girls to a team, and that was the day I met the rest of my teammates. I never thought I would be spending the next 13 hot summers with them.

I knew Michelle before the instructional league even started, she lived right down the street from me. As we grew older, so did our friendships. I felt like I had 9 sisters. After games we occasionally had big sleep overs. We rented movies, ordered a bunch of pizzas, and stayed up all night talking and laughing. I knew those girls inside and out.

The years went by and those 9 little girls turned into young ladies. Finally, the summer everyone dreaded, the summer before our freshman year of high school.

We heard the horror stories of how the different cliques in high school broke up the best of friends from elementary and middle school. "Well, not us," I told myself. These girls have been with me more than half of my life and I thought that would never happen to our team. I tried to fight the inevitable. I

was a fool.

The day before Christmas break my senior year of high school, and the entire school was in an uproar. The last three hours of the school day seemed to drag on forever. Finally, the last bell rang, and everyone ran to their lockers, then to their buses. But not me. I stayed for basketball practice with 20 other girls eager to get home for the break.

I remember standing at my locker, trying to decide what books I needed for the holiday. The janitor pushed his broom up and down the silent hall. From around the corner, Michelle appeared. I immediately felt sick in the pit of my stomach.

Michelle and I have been friends since birth. Our parents were neighbors and friends before we were even born. Michelle and I went to kindergarten through 12th grade with each other. Plus we played softball on the same team every summer since we were 6, but here we stood without one damn word to say.

After our freshman year Michelle started hanging out with what I considered the "90210 Crew." They pranced around in a herd, wearing designer clothes, perfect hair and flawless make-up, their noses so far up in the air that they were in danger of tripping over their own two feet. Tina, our left fielder, also part of that crowd, won Homecoming Queen.

My crowd was quite the opposite. I loved sports, not the mall. Boys never tried to pick me up to go out with them, but if they were going to play some ball, they'd pick me up in a heartbeat. Jenn, our left fielder, had a boyfriend all through high school, but she loved to play ball as much as she could during her free time. We spent our Friday nights playing a

Boys never tried to pick me up to go out with them, but if they were going to play some ball, they'd pick me up in a heartbeat.

pick-up game of basketball with other guys. I found myself with more guy friends than I did girls, which suited me just fine since I wasn't big on shopping and gossip.

Michelle and I started talking less and less to each other in school as the years went on, to the point where we didn't speak at all during our senior year. All of those summers that we played ball together, Michelle and I gabbed about everything from a to z. But high school changes things, for better or for worse.

So there we were, Michelle and I, standing face to face in the quiet hallway. Michelle began to walk my way and I started searching frantically for some-

thing to say. Then I thought, to myself "Why should I say anything? Sure, that stuck up bitch will say hi to me now when her whole crew isn't around."

Just as I thought of something really rude to say, Michelle passed right by me and uttered the words, "Have a nice break, Barley," and kept on walking.

Unconsciously I blurted, "HEY!" She turned around to look at me. "You too, Chel," I said. She flashed a quick smile and headed toward the pool for swim team practice.

I remember a double elimination tournament vividly, at New Castle, PA., about 1 hour and 45 minutes from our home field. This tournament sticks out because it was the weekend of the hotel incident. The temperature felt at least 95-degrees that weekend. We arrived about 11:00 a.m., and we were scheduled to play our first game at 11:45 against Blackhawk, and if we won play again at 3:30. Our first game lasted long, going the full seven innings. But in the end we prevailed and beat Blackhawk in the first round, which made us extremely happy. One, because we earned a nice break, and two, Blackhawk fans have a tendency to behave obnoxiously, ringing cow bells, and screaming profanities at the opposing team. After we won, we relaxed. But where can you relax in 90-degree heat with people every where? Especially when you have no energy left and still must play at least two more games.

Well, our team always came prepared. Having packed enough food and of course cherry Huggies to feed a small army, we found a big tree to sit under, threw down a blanket, turned on some music and watched Toni put on a free concert for us. She would sing and dance like a lunatic to every song that came on the radio. Beth and Kristi made sure their make-up was okay. Jenn talked about what an idiot her boyfriend was being this weekend to anyone who would listen. I

would always get yelled at by coach for eating too much greasy food in between games. But no matter what we were doing, we always sat together.

The first day of school was predictable. You reunite with friends that you didn't see all summer, talk about what you did during those three months, and report to classes just to see if your friends are in the same ones.

My senior year started, and I just finished another summer playing softball with the girls. As I made my way to homeroom, I thought, "Three years ago, I was a freshman, so excited to be an upper classman one day. Now I wish I could go back to being a fresh-

man. That way, my teammates and I would still be our own little crowd."

The bell rang and I started walking to my first class. As I walked by Jess, our second baseman, and some of her gang, I heard one of them say, "Hey, isn't that the bitch that took your position at third Jess?"

"Yeah" she said with some attitude.

I pretended not to hear her. Jess lived in Collier Township, and because she wasn't from Scott township, she paid an extra \$50 every summer for the last 13 years just to play with us. I know she didn't mean what she said in the hall because Collier had their own softball team which she could have played for. But she paid extra just to play with us. I played third base and two summers ago I had tendinitis in my throwing elbow, so the coach switched Jess and me for that one summer. The next season I returned to third and Jess was back at second, just as it should be. After that incident in the hall, I wished the school year over, but it was only the first day.

A couple weeks went by at school and things didn't change. The only girl from our summer team I spoke to was Jenn, our left-center fielder. One afternoon I wandered down to the locker room after school to change for basketball practice and I smelled the stench of marijuana. As the bathroom stall door opened Christi and Toni stumbled out of a big cloud of smoke.

Toni, our catcher, was probably one of the funniest people I ever met. Christi, our right fielder, dealt with multiple personalities, and her mood swings were wild and unpredictable. The incident didn't surprise me one bit. Christi and Toni were always dare devils, trying to see how far they could go without landing in trouble. Over the summer they often smoked a few joints before games.

Christi immediately got defensive and grabbed me by my shirt, "Barley, you better not tell a soul or I will beat your ass!"

I didn't have the heart to tell her the whole school already considered her a pothead.

"Don't worry, I won't!" I assured her and she released her grip on my sweatshirt. Toni said "Don't mind her. You know how paranoid she gets. Just ignore her."

Toni grabbed Christi, and on their way out, Toni thanked me for not squealing. Which I didn't understand. Did she really think I'd squeal on my own teammate? But she wasn't my teammate, but a classmate.

I couldn't believe my own teammate threatened to beat me up, I was stunned. This incident was the only time the entire year I spoke to either Christi or Toni.

Three o'clock rolled around fast, so we put on our game faces and headed over to the field together. Moon Township, our next opponent played some big girls on their team, and, naturally, they made fun of us, saying we were "too little to beat them." Okay, so we were little, but we never were intimidated by anyone. And why should we be? I have enough trophies and ribbons to fill one bedroom in my house. Toni, who was as big as the Moon players, said, "Take it from me, the bigger they are the harder they fall." All of us began laughing hysterically. Toni always said something funny at the right moment.

We defeated Moon in 5 innings, 12-0, and loved every minute of it. We really wanted to rub it in their faces, by screaming "You suck!" and laughing right at them. But our coach kept us under control. As we

finished each game, I could feel our chemistry getting better. We were in a groove. We hoped the overnight rest wouldn't kill that groove for the championship game the next day at 2:00 o'clock. Instead of driving all the way home, we reserved three rooms at

ing and yelling as our team made its way onto the floor. As we weaved in and out of people to get inside, we ran into Danielle.

Danielle, our first baseman, went to Canevin Catholic. This encounter was the first time I saw Danielle since the summer.

"Jamie! Jenn!" she shouted, and hugged each of us. "It is so great to see you guys!"

We chatted for a minute about school and how everything was going, then parted and sat on separate sides of the gym. I would have loved to invite Danielle to sit with us, but I couldn't because we were on my turf, not hers.

Jenn and I made our way through bleachers full of students anxious for the game to start. We grabbed a seat, and then I realized we sat right behind Kristi and Beth.

Kristi was our pitcher and Beth the shortstop for our softball team. Sometimes at games and in between innings, the two girls pulled out their make-up bags, because Kristi and Beth obsessed over how they looked. They showed up for games looking as if they just left the Clinique counter at the mall. They wore porcelain baby doll faces and flaunted their slim and petite bodies, thinking Vogue Magazine scouted our games. They frequently suggested I needed a "make over."

Kristi turned around and when she realized Jenn and I sat behind her, an uncomfortable feeling echoed through every inch of my body. She turned back around with a snooty look on her face and whispered something into Beth's ear. Beth turned around seconds later to look at us, then leaned close to Kristi and they both started to giggle. I thought I sat on the wrong side of the gym. To this day I wonder what they whispered to each other.

The day of the Championship game, we arrived at 1:00 p.m. feeling confident, considering Elwood City, the team we played for the title, needed to beat us

twice to win the championship. The game stayed close and we were in a zone. Our team was so determined to win, no one could have beat us. We shutout Elwood City in a barn burner, 1-0, and were the 16-and-under champs of our district. The season couldn't have ended any better, because we won our last tournament of the 1994 summer.

The week after, our parents held cookout for us, and we played a game against our parents just for fun. After the game we exchanged our good-byes for the summer, even though we would all see each other on Monday at school.

My coach always told us sports would prepare us for the "real world." He said sports taught us how to hustle, reach goals and work as team. What he didn't tell us was what a bunch of bull it was. I really believed my coaches at the time, though I thought our team would always be friends no matter what. I don't regret the experience one bit, because it taught me

about the real world for myself. I just never thought the second we walked off the field, we would be complete strangers.

I really hated the fact we didn't talk in school, but I knew the way things had to be, whether I liked it or not.

As I headed downstairs towards practice, I glanced up at the 'class of '96' sign in front of the gym and felt my eyes start to tear up. I couldn't wait for the 90-degree heat of the summer and the playing of triple

headers during the summer to start. That way I could have my 9 girls back for just one more round of ball before we parted forever and went our separate ways.



She turned back around with a snooty look on her face and whispered something into Beth's ear. Beth turned around seconds later to look at us, then leaned close to Kristi and they both started to giggle.

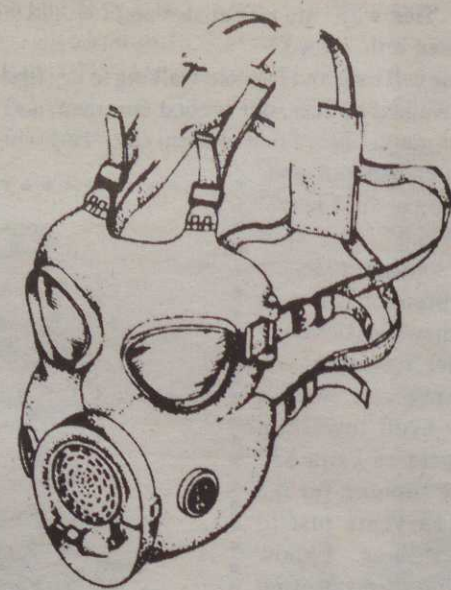
We all agreed and went down to the pool at 11 o'clock at night, and jumped in. About 20 minutes later, we spotted a security guard escorting our coach to the pool. Apparently, a couple of guests called the front desk complaining about the noise. Our coach just stood there silent, his arms folded across his chest, his eyes looking as if they might bulge right out of their sockets. He didn't have to say anything. We knew to get the hell out of the pool. Once we hurried out, he bitched up a storm for about 20 minutes, then we all retired to our rooms for the evening. We felt really guilty for upsetting our coach because he reserved the room for us, and paid for the pizzas.

One Friday night in January, our basketball sea-



son in full swing, Jenn and I arrived at the gym around 7:15 p.m., to watch our boys team play a home game against Canevin Catholic. Jenn and I walked toward the crowded gym. We could hear the students scream-

NERVE



TRAINING

By Brian Kiger

We arrived at the live nerve agent training center around 8 o'clock. We stood outside in the foggy air while armed military police officers checked our credentials. They shuffled us through the metal detector single file, like Nazi officers herding prisoners into the poison showers. We went on a tour of the grounds. Plaques lined the wall inside the lobby of the facility. On the tour we saw the rooms where the live nerve agent was monitored twenty four hours a day. We saw the rooms in which we would be doing most of our training for the next three days. A sergeant told us how terrific it was that the country had such a facility. I thought to myself that if something went wrong in the town below the facility would be filled with live nerve agent, killing hundreds of people and infecting more with toxic fumes.

After the tour we watched films about our training for the next couple of days. We were supposed to detect and identify the type of agents that were being used and then decontaminate different types of vehicles such as tanks and jeeps. The teachers laughed and joked about how the nerve agent kills. They would say things like, "It's not so bad until you start convulsing so bad that you break your own back." While I laughed along with everyone else I remembered the photographs we saw in our chemical classes earlier in our training. The photographs showed bodies covered with chemically burnt skin. Skin that was covered with blisters the size of oranges. The jokes went on for the rest of the day and everyone kept laughing as I sat there and chuckled and thought "What if something goes wrong and I get infected with this nerve agent? I don't want to die here in the butthole of the United States, Ft. McClellan, Alabama."

I was at the live nerve agent training center to complete my six-month training as a Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Warfare Specialist. I joined the Army Reserves to get money for college, but I had no idea that I would be forced to walk around in a building filled with toxic gas for five hours. That night I lay in my bunk staring at the tile ceiling, thinking, "What am I going to do? I can't just quit now. I've come too far to have it all to just end like this." I wondered if anyone else had the same thoughts. I sat up and looked around the dark room. Everyone was asleep. Sixty-two men dreaming of home or some other far off place. I was alone.

The next morning we awoke to trumpets blasting throughout the base. After a few miles of running we ate breakfast. At breakfast my paranoia kicked in again. I had trouble standing up straight. A sharp shooting pain in my stomach kept me hunched over. My mind started shifting into overdrive, "What if some of that gas leaked out yesterday while I was touring the facility? What if I've been contaminated?" The room started spinning around me; voices became muffled and unintelligible. Then as quickly as the pain came, it left.

We took the bus back to the live nerve agent chamber after breakfast. The clouds started to break and it looked like it was going to be a nice day, which is rare for Alabama.

On the outside of the facility there was an exact replica of the live nerve agent rooms. The rooms on the outside of the building had no roof, and the clouds started to collect as we practiced what we were going to do the next day. We practiced the

correct ways of decontaminating a tank. We used a portable decontamination device that looked like a five gallon gas can and a scrub brush that had a manual pump inside its four-foot handle and a hose that connected the can to the brush handle. The only difference between that day and the day to follow was that we were going to be surrounded with toxic gas that attacks the nervous system and kills you in such a graphic way. After the practice training, we had to get our equipment together for the next day.

The personnel at the facility checked our sizes to make sure our MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) suits fit correctly. MOPP suits are charcoal-lined suits that are supposed to keep out any chemical contaminants during combat. Our protective masks were the next piece of equipment to be checked. The masks are probably the most important piece of equipment that we have because they prevent any toxins from reaching the sensitive lungs.

We lined up in the main lobby and were told to go one by one behind a partition that looked like a voting booth. Behind the booth were two bowls, and we had to tell the instructor which bowl had the banana oil in it. Finally it came to my turn to go into the voting booth. I closed the blue curtain behind me. I smelled bananas, but I wasn't sure which bowl the scent was coming from. I sniffed each bowl again, and came to my decision that bowl number 2 had the banana oil in it.

After everyone passed the smelling test we were taken to the mask testing room. The walls were painted black, and had three glass domes in it at various heights. One by one we stood under the domes and instructors sprayed banana oil.

If your mask leaked you could smell banana oil. When it came to my turn I put my mask on and everything smelled like bananas to me. I couldn't tell if the bananas I smelled were just sprayed by the instructor, or if was I just thinking I smelled bananas. My mind started to race again "What if my mask has a leak in it?" I didn't want to cause any trouble, but I also didn't want to die over something as stupid as not telling someone that I smelled bananas. I raised my hand and told one of the instructors that I smelled the banana oil. He pulled me out from underneath the dome and felt around the seal of the mask. Then he adjusted two straps on the back. After making the adjustments the instructor shoved me back under the glass dome and sprayed the banana oil directly on the eye coverings of the mask then walked away. A few moments later the instructor returned and asked sharply, "You still smellin' bananas, boy?" "No, sergeant," I meekly replied. He pulled me out underneath the dome again and yelled for the soldier.

We finished the day of training and went back to the barracks to eat dinner. I didn't eat very much that night. I just kept thinking about what I had to do the next day during the live nerve agent training. I walked from the chow hall to the barracks by myself that night. When I was walking in the dark, I saw a platoon of new soldiers being marched back from chow. Five months ago I was one of those soldiers trying to march and remain unnoticed, so I wouldn't get yelled at by the drill sergeants. I wondered if any of these guys knew what they were really getting into.

My six months of training came down to this one day. This was D-day, the real

deal. We arrived at the training center and the guards checked our credentials just as they had done the two previous days. The instructors broke the company into groups and they issued us new MOPP suits, tennis shoes and uniforms. I dressed by myself so I could collect my thoughts and focus on the task at hand.

We put on the protective clothing, and the officers told us to put on our masks. I put my mask on and cinched the straps that keep it sealed against the face. I tightened my mask until it put a tremendous pressure on my head.

We walked out of the locker room into a hallway that separated the live nerve agent training area from the rest of the building. We faced a set of five doors across the hallway. All of the doors were black and painted with white numbers as big as the doors themselves. Behind each door was a different training room where we had to complete the tasks that we had been doing for the past six months finding, identifying, and decontaminating different kinds of chemicals. Only now we would be engulfed in deadly gas. We had to spend a total of five hours in the toxic fumes. There was a separate room for each hour of the five hours.

A disabled Jeep sat in the first room we went into. The walls of the room were covered in a mint green colored paint. I heard somewhere that mint green is supposed to be one of the most soothing colors in the spectrum. Tanks are painted that color on their insides in case the crew gets trapped inside they won't go crazy. One of the instructors told the fifteen of us to form a circle around the Jeep.

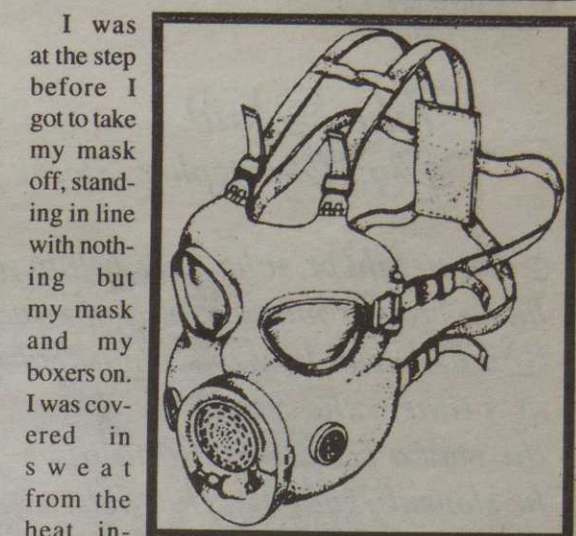
Two other instructors walked into the room. Their suits were made out of what looked like a sturdy plastic while ours were made of junky cloth and charcoal. Their suits had a self-contained oxygen tank while we had to breathe through stuffy charcoal filters in our masks. One of the instructors carried a syringe, and the other had an index card. The instructor placed the index card on the hood of the Jeep. I watched as the other instructor walked to the Jeep and pushed the plunger on the syringe. The smallest drop fell out of the syringe onto the index card. No sooner did the drop hit the index card than the M-8 Chemical Alarm in the corner started to scream. My body jolted when

I heard the alarm go off. I looked over at the kid standing to my left. He turned, and I was startled because I couldn't recognize him. I stared into the lenses of his protective mask to get a better look. Suddenly the kid lurched a little bit, and puke shot up to cover the eye lenses on the inside of his mask. I stood still with my hand covering my mouthpiece for a half of a second in shock at what I had just witnessed. Then I pointed frantically at the kid and screamed; "He's infected! He's infected!" The first instructor ran over and jammed him in the thigh with an auto injecting antidote needle. The puking guy was pulled out of the room by two of the instructors for first aid.

We continued the training exercises of testing different chemicals and scrubbing tanks with decontamination solvents. I thought I was doing a good job, but after about three hours of hearing myself breath like Darth Vader while the mask gripped my head so tightly, I developed the worst headache I have ever had. It was like someone was crushing my head in a vise. The pain was so excruciating that I thought I was going to pass out. The worst thing about the headache was knowing that I had another two hours left exposed to the live nerve agent.

My vision started blurring. My head felt as if someone hit me right in the temples with a baseball bat. My hands were starting to tingle, and the rest of the training was very difficult for me to complete. The smallest job became an enormous task for me even to think about. I felt as if I was drunk. I had to concentrate so intensely on what should have been the simplest of tasks. Two hours later the training was finished and our decontamination started.

There are about twelve steps in undressing in a contaminated area. The steps include taking off all of your clothes without letting any exposed skin touch the chemicals on the outside of the suit. The bad thing was that I didn't get to take off my mask until somewhere around step ten. Waiting in line to take off my mask was the worst thing in the world. I knew that I was so close to relief, but I still had to wait for all of the soldiers in front of me. I waited and waited until I got to go through. It took about another forty-five minutes to go through the decontamination process.



I was at the step before I got to take my mask off, standing in line with nothing but my mask and my boxers on. I was covered in sweat from the heat inside the protective suit. I watched as the soldiers in front of me took their masks off and ran holding their breath into the awaiting shower room. I stepped up to a line painted on the concrete floor; took a deep breath, ripped off my mask and my underwear, and took off running into the first set of showers still holding my breath. I scrubbed myself off as quickly as possible in the freezing water. I took off running again into the next set of showers, where I could finally breathe again. I stood in that shower for as long as I could. It was the first warm shower that I had in Alabama.

We finished up the training with another set of blood samples and were sent on our way. On the bus ride back to the barracks, I felt as if I was floating. It was a great feeling to know that I actually accomplished something.

I badmouthed the Army a lot before and since that point in my life. But of all my experiences in life, I would love to relive that bus ride again.

We graduated from advanced training two weeks later, everybody except the three people whose second blood test came back positive. We found out later that the kid who puked in his mask was not infected with the nerve agent. The reason he threw up was because he was nervous.



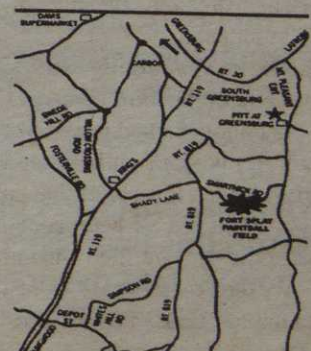
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The Void

By: Christopher Locke

My neighbor, who lives below me,
has a brother who's dying of cancer.
So he buries him one mouthful
at a time: exhausting
the vodka bottle nightly until
he slovenly nails at the table.
It's a pretty messy scene.
You never know exactly when he'll begin
with his horrible moans, nailing
them through the floorboards, crashing
them through my sleep
like eviction notices
taped to bricks. Once, during
a party I was throwing, it started.
Everyone stopped, wide-eyed,
and stared at the sobs rising
from my floor. I'd had enough.
I whirled down stairs and found him
sprawled on the couch,
helpless, like an octopus shaken
from a net. Looking at him, I felt
heat rising off his body the way
you feel sadness rise in the throat. I asked
if I could do anything: "Could you
just turn off the light on your
way out?" The lamp clicked
and he was sealed in darkness.
Above, I heard my guests' sloppy
laughter, my neighbor and I already
forgotten, their Champagne
a golden rope to happiness.

You Poets

By: Linda Clark

You poets out there, catch-phrasing word catchers, you
listen a moment to me,
You wearers of black, and smokers of clove, you
growers of little go-tees.
You poets who sit in at readings and slams, who
leer your withering smirks,
You insufferable snobs, who think you can sneer, and
trample a person's soul work.
You poets in clubs modeled after the cliques who
snubbed you in junior high school,
You self-absorbed thinkers, you bastards of bards, striving
hard to be tragically cool.
You poets out there, Narcissus still lives in your
empty unorthodoxy.
You artists elite, whose egos fly high above
scorned peon poets like me.
You poets out there, you listen to me, you are
not the enslavers of art,
And this peon poet thinks most of your work is as
hollow and dead as your hearts.

Hollow

Seeing You On a Street
Corner Downtown

By: Jackson Ahrens

I'm standing at the corner
Of 5th and Main,
Peering through my sunglasses
At the early spring traffic.
Cars and buses rushing by,
Along with the occasional motorcycle
Rolled out after winter's sleep.
With my black fedora tipped
Into the wind, I could be anyone.
I see you across the street.
After ten years, you looked older;
So would I, if you saw me.
I sit on the bus stop bench
And watch you talk to your companion.
A friend from work? A brother-in-law?
A stranger? No, it couldn't
Be a stranger—
You laugh together like friends.
The way we used to laugh.
You talk through the signal
And at the next, you part.
He heads south, downtown;
You cross the street toward me.
As you and five other people
Crossing the street pass right by me,
You stick your hands in your coat pockets.
I almost say something.
Behind me, you turn right
And head north, probably home.
But I don't know where that is anymore.

Volume 13 Number 2

Places

Visitor's List

By: Linda Clark

Once a year, my sister and I make a pilgrimage.
We travel endless miles
through the hazy green mountains of Pennsylvania.
We ride this road, guarded on the right by the rough red rock of
a man-made cliff;
on the left is a wide, pale green river- I do not know its name.

Hour after hour we ride, my sister and I,
bargaining over Garth Brooks or Tori Amos,
commiserating over this mission,
and we suffer like perfect, classic martyrs,
for this trip we are loath to take.

But onward, onward, a labor of love, we go to see our brother.

When we reach our destination and our brother's destiny,
we lock our purses in the trunk and pass through a door to a place
most people don't willingly go.
We sign the book, the Visitor's List, and a guard
lazily marks our hands with her ultra-violet pen.

We know he waits, our brother, my once-upon-a-time-protector...
he waits for us, his sisters, while my little-girl memories whisper
the big brother he used to be.
Just this once, can't that old big brother be waiting?

Through another dismal door to the Visitor's Area,
and there he is, my brother: eager, wild predator.
He smiles through the scratched and heavy glass,
at home with the dull yellow paint,
the fierce iron gates,
the dense inscalable walls.
At home in the riotous din of 2100 men,
in this alien warehouse for society's failure.

This is my flesh, my blood, this is my brother,
this wild jungle-dwelling stranger.
He bounces. He struts. He laughs. He talks his prison dialect.
He is at home here.
He is at home.

He resents us, our mundane belief in moral code,
but he masterfully exploits it to suit his needs.
After all, it's why we're here.
He's a model prisoner-
to the other inmates.
He has achieved excellence in evil:
unrepentant, unreformed,
unsorry.

My sister and I, we sneak our looks at the time, so
we don't hurt feelings he probably doesn't have.
She and I serve our sentence,
but I wish the guard would say we have to go.

When he does, my brother says he loves us.
I wonder what that means in his language.

My sister's and my departing pace is fast
out the resounding iron gate.
We sign off the Visitor's List, and we are free.

As we begin our journey back towards humanity,
I say to my sister that next year, I don't think I'll go.
My aversion is part of the ritual.
Next year, sister, I don't think I'll go.

Volume 13 Number 2



Filling the Gaps

By: Christopher Locke

Springfield was a dying
city, but I could care less;
I'd just made 150 bucks
waiting tables, running martinis
and pheasant potpies between customers,
their faces slick as lunch meat.
During clean-up, I smoked a joint
with the kitchen staff;
the chef invited me
back to his place. We smoked
crack in a 7-Up can.
We weren't glamorous,
but believed we were
something much more beautiful
and untamed. The chef held
the flame to take another hit,
but shook all over the place;
I lit the pipe for him. For hours,
smoke unpinned the slick curtains
of my throat; my heart was a small bird
before it discovers a windshield. When
I inhaled the last of it, I closed
my eyes and fell backward. He suggested
going to Hartford for more. I felt
the money in my pocket; how much
would this life cost?

Attention, Wal-Mart Shoppers

By Laura H. Tepe

Do I look like I need assistance? As I push the wheelchair and pull a cart and issue directions for the five-year-old: where to turn, when to turn, WATCH my ankles! And Gramma grabs for the flannel comforter with matching sheets and pillowcases, not small things, mind you, spilling merchandise into the aisle into our path like a child grabbing Hershey bars and Juicy Fruit in the check-out line. I stop to re-stock shelves catch my breath, ruminating the impersonal ways we conduct our hectic lives and make the terrible turn into the next aisle and the next. The store is a hundred city blocks wide with assorted goop stuck to the linoleum that perpetually gums the narrow wheels and Sunday drivers and I'm one of them, or just a hapless passenger caught up in our procession. We are a spectacle of drooling infant to toddler, the helpless and the well-intentioned moving a mountain of Christmas presents between us; many of which I suspect will be returned in endless lines the week after, for half of their original cost and customers stop, and stare, then continue checking off names on their lists, averting their eyes. My Achilles heel, stiff and bruised.

2

The baby tries to stand up in the front of the cart, bawling now, and the five-year-old crashes into a display of green and gold and mauve towels which tumble to the ground like so many snowflakes on a numb December day. And no one in the entire store elbow to elbow with frantic shoppers is considerate enough, or stupid enough, to ask if I'd like help. Maybe they wonder what it is they could do to help; I don't know. Some Advil and high-top sneakers and oh, yes, an assistant or the miracle that Gramma could—after seventy years without a driver's license—learn to maneuver a motorized cart without knocking shoppers down like bowling pins. I tell her I'll give her points for knocking down the gawkers, which we'll redeem later, like gift certificates from McDonald's. It takes three long hours to get from one end of the store to the other and I can't remember if I started out this afternoon or yesterday. Gramma complains that her cervicals throb, her head aches and I think, I think if I pinch her, with all due respect the bruise on her arm should make her forget at least temporarily, the pain in her neck. Then there is the issue of what's who's, and how to peacably separate the diaper wipes and gummy bears from the disposable undergarments and carnival peanuts much to the disgust of a catatonic cashier and I tell her What the hell. I'll charge it all. We'll worry about sorting it when we get home. If we're not too tired. If we can just get home, if we can just get this gaggle of gifts from the checkout counter to the parking lot and the van. The task seems monumental when from behind a rack of comic books and baseball cards my Angel appears wearing Khakis and a mint button-down, open at the neck, and asks Can I give you a hand? Miss?

PRICES SLASHED

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HELP WANTED

3

I glance over my shoulder. He is taking the bags from my hands and taking control of the shopping cart, and the baby, who will likely wipe her mushy cookie hands on his cool mint shirt. He's an Orthopedist and his Mother-in-law just moved in with them. He has a new baby and a Golden Retriever, he says, and I can almost hear him through the ringing in my ears. He escorts us through the automated doors, into the blue air and through traffic, following me to my van with the concave passenger door where a fence post hit it, and empties our purchases into the waiting rear doors. Have you got it? he asks. I nod. Thank you, I gush, Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I don't know how I would have gotten us all to the car. What did you say your name was? Donald? I will name my next child Donald. The five-year-old, who has pushed a cart he could not see over the top of for ten long miles, has had enough and is peeing, a long stain darkening his oatmeal-colored pants. Or my next dog, should I choose to have a hysterectomy. Merry Christmas, Donald.



Songs of the Snow



Stalingrad

by E. Howkins

White star on white water
white voices crocheting themselves
into sentences brittle as glass
Aryan limbs blackening like bad fruit
Aryan fingertips caramelized like linen
stiffened in tea

In loosely-knotted groups, they sit
and slice the snow like a roast
arrange it neatly on empty plates
and raise a cold toast from empty glasses
The world they are set in, like hard blue
diamonds on their prongs, is as dark white
as the inside of an avalanche

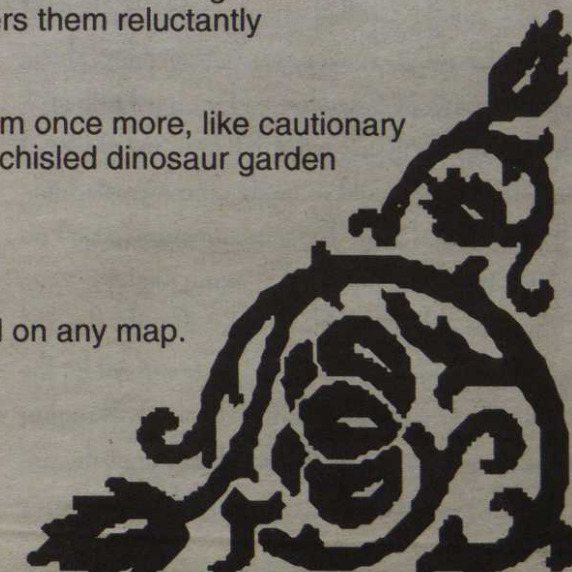
German songs, hollow as flutes, seive them-
selves through the spume of Russian ballads
A man with an empty half moon on his boot tip
sings a stanza of "O Tannenbaum" as men,
swaddled tightly in snow, sit breaking lumps
of invisible bread

Several of them draw the profile of Napoleon
in the snow, with the tip of a skinny stick
and hope drains out through a hole in the heart
One by one, men are hammered into sculptures
by a mallet of thickneige ice

The Russian ground marbelizes beneath them
and coughs out their bones like a thorn
in the throat and the desultory seasons,
dragging a thin needle of ice and a tinted
thread of sun, sew what remains into a
loose tapestry of sorts

Here and there, a dry bone catches on a belt
buckle, like a fish on a rusty hook
A field of limbs browns to the color of
winter wheat
Only the snow, allows them a meagre mantle
of respect and covers them reluctantly
with its white wing

In Spring, they bloom once more, like cautionary
tales, suggesting a chisled dinosaur garden
crumbling away
in an old museum
in a dark alley
seldom visited
and no longer listed on any map.



Where Swans Also Die

by Jess Prochilo

Across the years and frozen lake
I'll go this birthday morn to take
a look at where the summer swans
glide forth with new life in their wake.

The ice-locked island's off upon
the lake's deep breast... it glimmers yon,
all hooded now in winter hoar,
all hushed now that the swans are gone.

In bygone summer from the shore,
this island seemed a dream that bore
a fairyland where wings were sail
that breezes filled till hearts would soar.

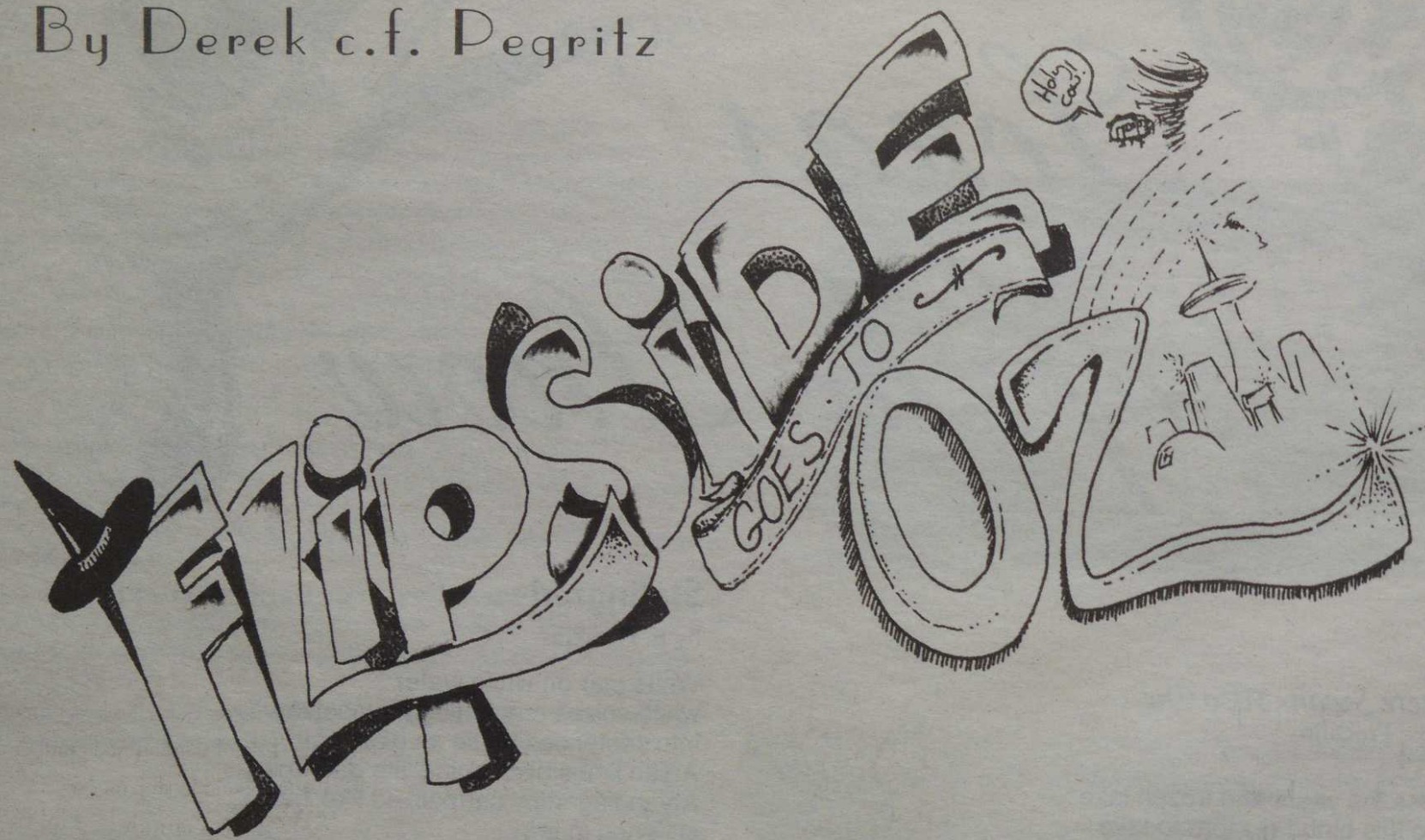
But here and now the frigid trail
ends at an isle to make hearts quail:
a barbed bonescape!—here's death's debris
...and wings now stilled in ice-sheet shale.

To think things fair and far should be
so near and drear when I'm fifty...

I turn back toward the shore to see
my daughter wave across to me.



By Derek c.f. Pegritz



Art also by Derek c.f. Pegritz

You know how the story always goes: young, innocent farm girl gets put in charge of bigtime college magazine through some bizarre mutation of fate and class scheduling; stress drives the girl to the very brink of exhaustion and sniperdom; girl contemplates mass murder . . .

The bad thing with cliches such as these is that, well, whereas they don't work in fiction, Real Life seems to revolve around them. Such was the case when Noele took command of the legendary *Flipside* . . . She thought she was prepared—but within days of assuming the helm, in came a veritable Noachian Deluge of manuscripts from writers as far away in time and space as that strange foreign land of Canada . . . all of whom apparently thought the very height of creation was compounding shirt-ripping teenybopper grunge-rockin' angst with prolific overuse of cussin' and random usage of sexual contortions that would've made even Pegritz himself sit back and say: "Daaaammnnnn! Ain't no way the human body has that many joints!"

And not only that! Three days after the flood of literary garbage began, the *Flipside* was hit by the American Parents Crusade Against Naughty Behavior with a morals lawsuit because of the use of the word "stanky" in a certain article in last year's issue . . .

So there in the *Flipside* office Noele languished

hour after hour, waiting for Edgar Snyder to return her calls for legal defense and stuffing self-addressed stamped envelope after self-addressed stamped envelope with rejection letters and, quite frankly, pondering insane acts of movie-of-the-week-worthy violence.

She'd licked so many envelopes that day, her tongue practically stuck to the roof of her mouth, and she was giddy from all the glue she'd ingested . . . She never noticed the thick black clouds clotting up the sky, or the rising wind, or the hordes of students running and screaming: "Oh, God preserve us! A tornado cometh!" She simply laughed to herself and said: "Tornadoes in southwestern Pennsylvania? *Get real!* I think I'm hungry for a lettuce spinach and carrot burger supreme, now where could I get one of those on campus? Ah hell, I'll just head over to the Union and grab a bag of Cheetos."

Noele stepped outside of the office and next thing you know, she was spinning up into the twister, zipping round n' round, high above the world, thinking: *Now, if I'm not hallucinating this, it'll certainly make a hell of an Endgame!*

Sometime during the trip, she passed out from the spinning—well, who wouldn't?—and when she woke, the *Flipside* office was stable and grounded once again . . . though, of course, it was a bigger mess than usual. "OK," Noele told herself. "I think

I licked one too many envelopes today . . . I guess I'd better get something to eat—that glue's given me one hell of a case of the munchies."

But when she opened the door to step outside . . . California University of PA was flat out gone. No Manderino Library. No World Cultures Building. No collapsing Student Center. No Monongahela River!!! Instead, all around her lay a strange terrain of cheap, thrift store plastic flowers and tiny plastic homes and tiny plastic people, a small throng of pissed-off midgels wearing goofy lawn-gnome uniforms . . .

"Oh, wonderful," Noele sighed. "All right, where's Judy Garland?"

"Don't even start that &@#&&@% 'Looks like we're not in Fayette County anymore' bullshit already, girly," griped one of the midgels, a particularly sourfaced little man with a pair of cats winding around his ankles. "And don't even tell me you're the *@#&&@% new editor of the *Flipside!*"

"What it's to you, shortly?" she grouched right back. "Who the hell are you, anyway? The Mayor of Lawn Jockey Town or something?"

"You know me, you ditzzy blonde! Do I look like some fruity Lollipop Brigade loser? I'm the mighty (!@#&@% Joe Szej, one time—and probably the best ever—editor of the *Flipside*. What the @&#&@ are you doing here, anyway?"

Noele shrugged. "Idaknow . . . I think I got caught in a tornado or licked too many stamps or something. Wait a second—since you were an editor before me, maybe you'd know this: how the hell can I get in contact with Alan Natali? He's supposed to be around to help out, being the faculty advisor and all, but every time I go by his office it's locked and no one knows where he is? Do you?"

Joe shrugged. "Got me. He's been impossible to find ever since he moved . . ."

"Where'd he move?"

"The Green-Tinted Cubic Zirconia City, I'd heard. It's right at the end of—"

"That yellow-brick road over there I'll bet?"

"Nice to see the blonde hasn't reached all the way to your brain yet—you can still recognize the story that's being ripped off here."

"Ha ha ha, funny man. So, you gonna accompany me on my long and hard upcoming journey to find the mighty Alan?"

"Like hell! I just got Tomb Raider 32 for the Playstation—I still gotta get out of the *@#&@% World Trade Center with the nuclear bomb. Sorry, babe—you're on your own."

Great. Figures.

So Noele set forth on the yellow-brick road to find the mighty Alan . . .

and, as you no doubt expected, she soon came to a cornfield—actually, a very overgrown backyard—in which hung a ratty, tattered scarecrow wearing an oversized black leather

coat and a black cowboy hat spattered with crow doody. As she approached the scarecrow, she overheard it speaking with a crow perched on one of its elbows:

"Aw, don't even tell me you liked that stupid movie," he was snorting at the crow. "I mean, Brandon Lee wasn't even in it, and the body count was waaaayyy down from the first one. Admit it, you just liked it 'cause you're a friggin' crow!"

"Wait a sec," thought Noele. "That scarecrow looks familiar . . ."

"Hey, Pegritz!" she shouted. "So you ended up here in Oz, too, huh?"

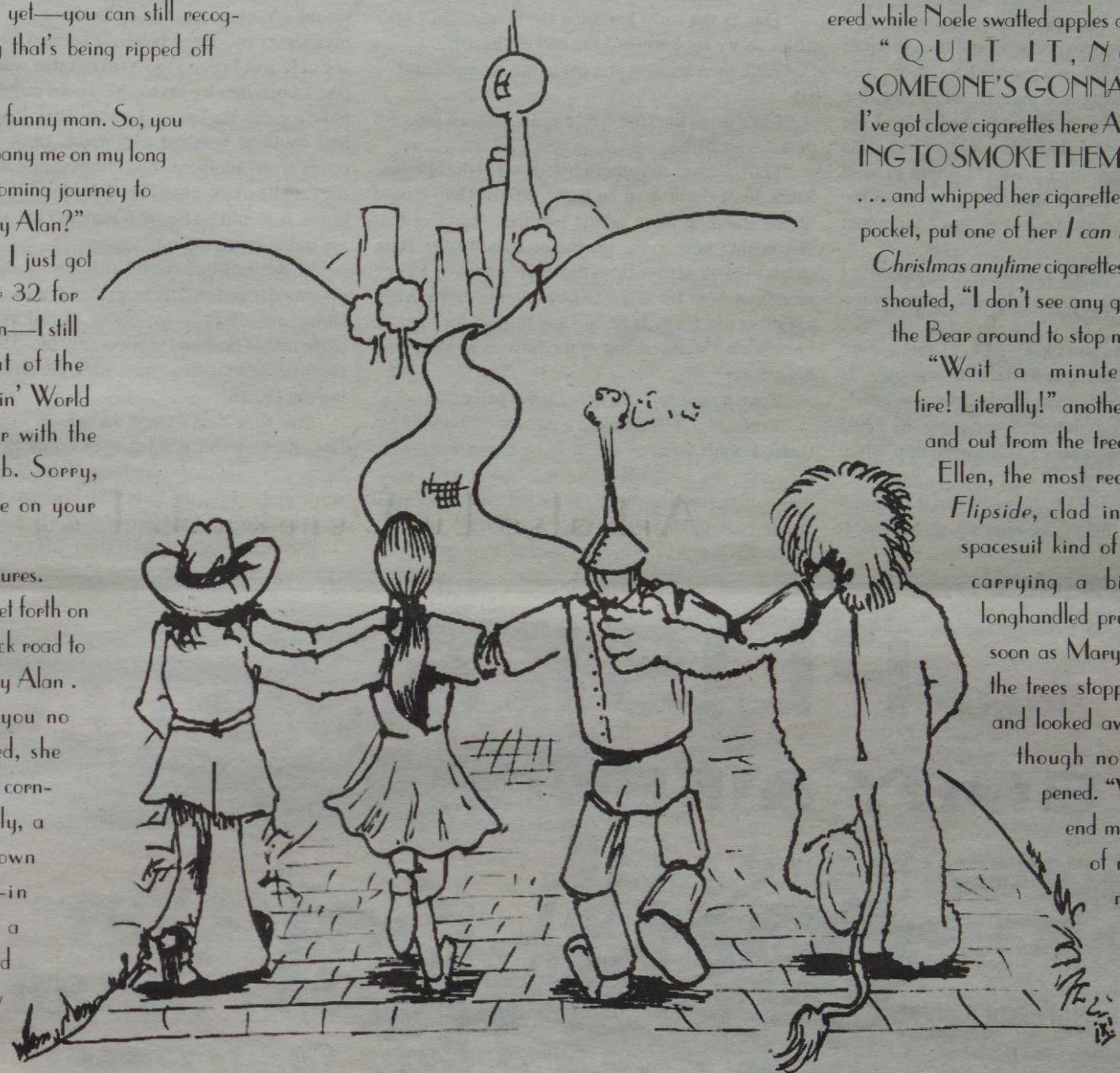
"Long time no see, baby," the scarecrow replied with a sleazy wink, the crow on his shoulder instantly forgotten. "Saw your tornado. Bet that was fun."

"Yeah, kinda . . . Well, how'd you end up hanging from a stick in a cornfield?—last I heard you were moving to Boston or something."

The scarecrow shrugged. "You try getting a job with an English degree these days. Nothing was panning out back home, so I figured I'd give this over-the-rainbow place a try . . . Ha! I got drunk on some kind of poppy margaritas and blew all my savings in a Munchkinlander nudie bar and ended up spending the weekend with some green skinned chick with a broom . . . Oy! Next thing I knew, it was either go into scarecrowing or go home in shame and penury."

"Cool. Hey, I'm gonna see if I can find Alan over in the Green-Tinted Cubic Zirconia City . . . You know where he lives?"

The scarecrow thought for a minute, then shook



his head. "No clue. But, hey, I'll come along and help you find him, if you don't mind . . . He still has my copy of *The Redneck Poser's Encyclopedia of Goth* and, dammit, I want it back!"

"Sure. But if you try to hit on me at any point, I'll punch you."

The scarecrow laughed as he hopped down from his rack and brushed the crow do-do off his shoulder. "Believe me, I will . . . Get me around a good-lookin' woman and I lose all my brains."

Next the travelers came to an apple orchard—on, well . . . a big field of apple trees with a fence around them and a sign that read **MARY ELLEN'S FREE RANGE APPLE CONSORTIUM**. "Damn, looks like everyone's moving to Oz these days, trying to make a buck," the scarecrow mused. "Well, great!" Noele said. "If Mary Ellen's here, I know she'll help us find Alan—she always had

the mystical ability to track him down wherever he might be . . ."

Just then, an apple came zipping through the air and knocked the stupid cowboy hat off the scarecrow's head. Pegritz jumped back and whipped a shank out of his coat pocket and shrieked: "**ALL RIGHT, H A N D S UP! WHO WANTS TO DIE?!?!?!?**"

"Like you're gonna do anything with that knife, stickboy!" a rough voice growled from the copse of trees. The tree that had spoke—yep, we've got talking trees here—laughed and flung another fruity missile. Another apple, and then another, flew out of the orchard to assail the travelers. The scarecrow, true to form, threw himself into the ditch and cowered while Noele swatted apples away.

"**QUIT IT, NOW, OR SOMEONE'S GONNA BE SORRY!** I've got clove cigarettes here **AND I'M WILLING TO SMOKE THEM!**" Noele shrieked . . . and whipped her cigarette lighter out of her pocket, put one of her *I can make it smell like Christmas anytime* cigarettes to her mouth and shouted, "I don't see any goddamn Smokey the Bear around to stop me, so . . ."

"Wait a minute! Hold your fire! Literally!" another voice yelled—and out from the trees stepped Mary Ellen, the most recent ex-editor of *Flipside*, clad in a rusty metal spacesuit kind of contraption and carrying a big ol' pair of longhandled pruning shears. As soon as Mary Ellen appeared, the trees stopped their flinging and looked away, whistling as though nothing had happened. "Why do I *always* end managing a bunch of no-account juvenile delinquent trees wherever I go?" she muttered to herself, then turned to the travelers.

"What the heck're you doing here, Noele? And is that Pegritz shivering in the ditch over there?"

"Yeah, that's strawhead, all right," Noele answered. "And why am I here? You didn't see the tornado?"

"You took the tornado in?" Mary Ellen looked incredulous. "There're much faster ways to get here, if you don't mind taking backroads, and soon as they finish the Mon Valley Expressway extension of the yellow-brick road—"

"Yeah, fine, but . . . We're looking for Alan. Do you know where he is? Joe told me he moved to the Green-Tinted Cubic Zirconia City."

"Yeah, on River Street," Mary Ellen promptly answered. "Want me to take you there? I've got a nice old rose bush for a nanny to watch my daughter for a few hours, and I don't have to start negotiating that new contract with

continued on page 42 . . .

Yankee cont. . . .

the franchise and league records for wins in a season. It also helps when Ken Griffey Jr. is hated and is in town," I reply.

I finally feel excited again, as the talk of how good

"I think if we get past the security guard, we get in," I say.

"How will we distract him?" asks Mike.

"I don't know? Look, he's walking away. Let's go!"

"Hey, you can't go in there! Nobody is allowed past this point!" yells the security guard.

"So much for that. Maybe we can walk around and get in from the other section of bleacher seats. Do you know how to get there, Mike?"

"Yeah, follow me," says Mike.

Looking over Mike's head to see the stadium from the section of seats located behind the Monuments, I wonder how anyone could actually see the game from here. We must be 500 to 600 feet from home plate, and people actually sit here.

"Hey, Mike, do people pay to sit this far away?" I ask.

"Yeah, and they don't get to see the monuments either," replies Mike.

"This is the only entrance to these seats," says Mike, as we look toward the end of the aisle.

"Well, then how do you get to the monuments?" I ask.

"Let's go to the first row and look down into the park," says Mike.

"Look at all of those people looking at the plaques. They don't deserve to be there, Mike. That should be me standing there taking pictures. Look at that guy posing next to the plaque of Babe Ruth. How about the jerk across from the main walkway telling stories of how he saw Mickey Mantle drive down his street one time. If he had any respect for Mantle, he wouldn't stand on top of the flowers surrounding his plaque."

"Take a picture from here," says Mike.

"I refuse! I will not take a picture of it until I am there. I don't want to see or think about the monuments the rest of the day. This is bullshit! Let's go to the seats before I explode. Plus, if I take a picture it would have those jackass fans in it. That would only make it worse. I'd never be able to look at the pic-

tures. I'll always have that jackass in my mind when I think of the park. I have to go there now, so someday I won't have to listen to a jerk tell me about Monument Park."

I follow Mike to the seats, disgruntled. Brian and Jarrad are already sitting in seats in the five rows from the top.

"Why did you guys sit here? The rows in front of us are open," I ask.

"These seats are in the shade," answers Brian.

"It's a good idea for now, but when the sun faces us, there is nowhere to hide," I say.

Brian answers, "Well, it's better than nothing."

The three of them laugh and agree, while I smile to humor them about their desire to be comfortable, which overrides their interest in the game. I look up as a Japanese family takes the seats in front of us, leaving us stuck in the seats we have.

About 10 minutes before the start of the game, players have cleared the field, and the grounds crew is putting the final touches down. Two Jamaican women walk up the aisle and spot the seats behind us. One wears a Yankees shirt and the other one has a Mariners jersey on. Even better, it's a Ken Griffey Jr. jersey. He just blasted the Yankees this week in ESPN (the Magazine) by saying he would rather retire than play for the Yankees. I better keep my eyes open. She could be bombed with debris from the bleacher bums at any moment. The last place I want to be is in the middle of the crossfire. I don't think I'll warn the guys. It would be funny if they got hit, since all they are doing is staring into space.

As the sell-out crowd fills the stadium, we are crammed together. The heat intensifies with each body sitting ass-cheek-to-ass-cheek. I roll my sleeves up to battle the heat and work on my tan. Two teenagers wearing Ken Griffey shirts walk the aisle, antagonizing the crowd.

"Are they nuts?" says Jarrad. A man stands up. His cheeks swell and his eyes bulge as he glares at them. His wife pulls him back. A few fans stand, and someone yells to the kids, "Sit your ass down before someone does it for you."

The lads coolly stop in their tracks, and without

"I think if we get past the security guard, we get in," I say.

What a thrill it must be for a young Little Leaguer to stand next to the Japanese icon.

looking at the fans yelling at them, make their way to their seats. We laugh at them, as they sit down.

"That was great. As long as the crowd is like this, I'll have a great time. It won't be bad either if Griffey hits a few out," I say to the guys.

Brian and Jarrad nod, as they stand up to make a run for a cold drink. Mike looks tired and catches his breath, while I continue to search the stadium for memorable moments.

Two sections to our left I see a stirofoam head waving in the air. "That can't be, wait it must be, it's Head! Al Snow's imaginary friend that he takes to the ring for his matches in ECW." Al has become a wrestling sensation since bringing the Head to the ring with him. The entire section is filled with teenagers who start to chant for their favorite ECW stars. Someone wearing a Dallas Cowboys jersey stands up to join in. Suddenly, the crowd turns on him and chants, "Dallas Sucks." As he sits down to avoid the onslaught, everyone seated by him stands over him, screaming "Dallas Sucks," as he cowers. As the chants die down, Brian and Jarrad return with drinks.

The stadium announcer introduces the Japanese Little League World Series team that competed during the week in Williamsport, Pa. They run out of the dugout hand in hand with the Yankees. The young Japanese players stand on the field at their positions with the Yankees, as the national anthem plays. I notice that Hideki Irabu is the starting pitcher today for the Yankees. What a thrill it must be for a young Little Leaguer to stand next to the Japanese icon. In front of me, the Japanese family stands proud. The

The boy just received a lesson: heroes do not always win...

father and grandfather take each son by the hand. A tear begins to roll down the grandfather's cheek during the song, as he looks at his grandchildren.

The anthem ends, and Brian and Jarrad offer some of their soft drinks to Mike and me. Mike takes a

huge gulp of Jarrad's and immediately calls for the vendor and orders one of his own. In seconds, he finishes his drink. I can almost see his body regain color with instant rejuvenation. While Irabu warms up, we spend the time not talking but looking at the people, nodding and laughing when we see people who look funny to our standards. Jarrad points out a guy to our left; he has a tattoo of the Yankees symbol on his arm and has his face painted white on the left side and blue on the right side.

Irabu throws the first pitch for a strike. The entire bleacher section is shouting for Yankee shortstop Derrick Jeter. Jeter turns and nods to the crowd. The crowd roars and starts to chant for the first baseman, Paul O'Neil. He doesn't look at first, so they chant his name until he turns and nods. The process continues until every player is called upon and responds.

I remember playing Little League, and my friends would be at the games. They would yell my name to get my attention. Knowing it would get me in trouble with my coaches to look at my pals, I always looked and gave them a gesture to make them laugh. I felt loyalty toward them for coming out and supporting me.

"That's cool how the players appreciate the fans whether they be in box seats or cheap seats," I say to the guys.

Mike agrees and says, "They do that every game. It's called Roll Call."

Smack into right field for a single, drive to the gap for a double, there's a homerun. It's now 3-0 for the Mariners. The Jamaican women behind me start to argue, their accents noticeable. The Mariner fan is loving it, while the Yankee fan is calling for Irabu's head. The Japanese family is quiet as they watch their hero get shelled in the first.

As Seattle opens a big lead in the first three in-

ings, the Jamaican women are a blast. They argue constantly. The one rooting for the Yankee's yells with a strong Jamaican accent, "Get him outa there."

The other replies, "No. Keep him in there. I want 10 more runs!"

Her wish comes true, and so does mine, as Ken Griffey Jr. uses his picture perfect swing to send one

in the first row of our section. The crowd boos just as they did when he came to bat.

Finally, Irabu is pulled and is booed by the fans who stand and shake their fists while shouting obscenities as he leaves the field. The father of the Japanese family looks at his son and smiles, hoping to cheer him up. The boy frowns. The father looks at the grandfather, and they smile to each other. The boy just received a lesson: heroes do not always win, and when in New York, nobody is a hero on past merit; your standing in the heart of the fans changes second by second.

"Wow, it's the sixth inning already!" I say.

"You think this is going fast?" asks Mike.

"Well, yeah, it seems as if the Mariners have been at bat the whole time."

Mike responds, "Nothing else is going to happen. We saw Griffey hit one out already, it's unlikely anything memorable will occur the rest of the game. We already saw a home run from Griffey. We're sitting in the bleachers we have funny people around us, what's left?"

"I don't know. Maybe he can hit another or somebody else will go deep. If nothing else, I can watch a future Hall of Famer in center field. Plus, Derek Jeter is turning into an all-star. There is Darryl Strawberry. Remember when he was the best hitter in the game, and A-Rod who I think is better than Jeter," I say.

continued on page 44 . . .

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Wasting Time...

by Derek cf. Pegritz

(Original 4-Track Demo [0:45/120 b.p.m.])

Only one of ten'or'twenty at the table in the early hours of a Fridaysummered night, you sat away and in the universal lamplight threw no shadow as I chattered on with valentine and sean and rev'rent julie, heartbeat cracking rote devices, gorgeous loops of nothing hallowed by the ravesped tempo their wanting, from the box of mayfly bones that hard July had cut from me, exposed to dry and crumble, wasting time in Eat'n'Park...

(Ambient Version [1:45/000 b.p.m.])

Only one of ten'or'twenty at the table in the waning hours of a Fridaysummered eve, you sat away and in the universal lamplight brewed to keep the night awake you cast no shadow as I rattled out my rote devices at the end of valentine and sean and rev'rent julie, heartbeat muffled in disgusted echoes of the donor rib...yet still continuing that dogday lockstep even though in days they'd all be gone to this and that and I'd be days past caring. Now you laugh along with me as I recant the indirection of those scrapyards evenings, wond'ring at the salvage of these after years, that time bought costly at the price of now, since we knew nothing in the nights spent wasting time at Eat'n'Park...



Cobweb Girls

(Original Mix)

Cobweb girls that tremble at the vaguest breath, that float with dustmote elegance across a reverb'd beat—for this I've come, my corner and my counting eyes, a dog among the fairies, obvious but hidden. Cobweb girls all lace and shade and not a trace of mechanism, distant still as shadows blown upon a stone horizon.

(Xaos Remix: "furturelined")

Cobweb girls / a vision fixt / the memory ablative scored by time / developer lined sour in the grooves / but no / a faded plate, all silver lost and only this / the vaguest faces / lips like breath and eyes like metal blank anonymous / a recollection cobweb fluttering in neural breeze / the names like dust in sunlight / there too small to see / this past in brownian motion / plate corroded / yes, this was a second of my past / gone nowhere / I returned and went about the program of my life / the pictures faded / negatives gone bright / the grainy darkness turned to light / and all those cobweb girls still cluttered in the attic of my thoughts / the plates corroded / all more precious in my future for the scatches and the loss of name.



**T
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My name is Toddie and four weeks ago I found out I was pregnant. No big shocker, I guess, since I'd been sleeping with Jimmie for the past six months condom free. He's the only guy I've ever been with and I think I thought I just wouldn't get pregnant. Actually, deep down a little part of me secretly hoped it would happen. I don't know. There's not a whole lot going on down here in Transylvania, Louisiana. Just cotton fields and a general store where I like to hang out, hoping somebody with ID will buy me a six pack, hopefully Miller Lite.

Dad always came home to a cold case of Miller Lite, and I think I drink it to keep my memories of him alive. It really sucks being 'underage'. I have to sneak in to see 'R' rated movies (I won't turn 17 for 11 more months), I can't buy smokes, and I can't go to the only cool hang out in town, the Speak Easy, cause I don't have a fake ID. So maybe I felt like shakin' up my pathetic life a little by playing Russian Roulette.

My parents really wanted a boy in the worst way. They tried for years, and finally I came out. I think that's why dad left. At least that's what mom always says when she gets mad at me for not doing something she wants me to do. Mom tried to get my dad to stay by naming me Todd. It worked for a while, too. Especially since she'd have Gus, the town barber, cut my hair in a crew cut and she'd dress me in little overalls and boots. Unfortunately, the older I got, the harder it was to hide my natural femaleness. (I was the first girl in my class to go from flat to C cup. Those things really get in the way when you're in the fifth grade, hanging from the jungle gym during recess. Not a pretty sight.) After dad left, mom let me look as female as I wanted and I started going by the name Toddie.

Sure, I caught some abuse from other kids for my wacked out upbringing, but I was lucky in that everyone in town was too backward to make a big fuss over it. I think every family has their secrets and it's known that 'if I don't bag on you, you won't bag on me'. I think there are more ghosts living in Transylvania than people. If nothing else, the houses are full of secrets. Every one of them.

Lately I've begun a strange habit of going to the grocery store for no reason other than to stand in the aisle with all the different kinds of diapers and baby stuff. No one knows my secret, so I have to pretend like I'm really shopping for tampons if anyone walks by. It never fails to amuse me, seeing all those boxes of Tampax and O.B. lined up right next to the Huggies and Pampers. Is it just me, or is there something wrong with that picture? I guess they want to keep it convenient. I mean, if you're not buyin' tampons you're probably getting ready to buy diapers. One way or the other, in a single aisle they've got you covered. Maybe they put it all together so embarrassed young girls grabbing tampons can see what they have to look forward to. Who knows? I look at all the brands of diapers, the plastic baby bottles, the formulas and I wonder what my baby would look like. It's really up for grabs since I have black hair and Jimmie's a blonde. He would totally freak if he ever found out. He's a year younger than me and definitely not dad material. I take a closer look at the towering row of baby necessities. The pic-

tures on the packages all show a smiling baby, or a gentle mom cradling her infant. It all seems so alien to me, and yet I can't ignore the power I feel knowing there's someone inside me. It's pretty intense. Sometimes, when I'm alone in the Piggly Wiggly on Friday night when only the occasional customer passes through for a bottle of wine, I'll stand close to the row of Luv's and whisper as quietly as I can to my baby. I don't have long, drawn out conversations or anything, just 'hello in there, how are you?' 'things are OK out here, look, there's a special on Huggies Pull Ups'. The neatest thing about being pregnant is that you never are really alone. Think about it. I can be all by myself at home, in the shower, or out taking a walk, and there's always this future person tagging along with me. Pretty cool, I guess.

Mom and I live in a trailer right inside the county line. She's not home much, so I usually have a lot of time to myself to sit around and enjoy the peace and quiet. Out back of our 'steel heap on wheels', as I like to refer to our home, is a rusted out old swing set, a crumbling dinosaur of faded orange and blue. It's the only thing that dad left behind, the last thing he assembled for his family, sweating and swearing till it was complete. Mom tried to rip it out of the ground after he left, but he'd done a good job ramming that monster in the thick red Louisiana clay. Every spring when the winds stir up across the southern states, the dried up joints of the swing set cry in breeze, begging for oil.

From my pullout couch in the trailer's living area where I sleep, I can hear the swings creaking, now only used by tiny ghost children or long dead relatives. That play area is no more safe for a little kid than a light socket would be. Sometimes I tell stories to my invisible kid, stories about the swing set and my last memories of dad. Mom doesn't like hearing about him, so I have to save them for my stomach.

I am alone now in an unfamiliar place that I know is right where I need to be. I got here an hour ago and the nice lady in the little office off the waiting room explained everything to me. She wrote all my information on a long piece of paper attached to a clipboard, and I noticed that her teeth were perfectly white and straight. The wallpaper was covered with lilacs, and she told me to have a seat in the waiting room, the nurse will be out to see me soon. All around me are young couples holding each other's hands. No one is talking. I am the only one here by myself. Instead of flipping through a year-old copy of *Good Housekeeping* (yuck) I try to pass time by focusing on the receptionist who's scheduling an appointment for someone on the phone. The receiver rests on her left shoulder and she's twirling the phone cord around the fingers of her left hand as she writes.

Soon I'll be called in and when I leave I'll be alone again. Completely alone. No one will be tagging along, no more trips to the Piggly Wiggly for private conversations amongst baby wipes and pacifiers. I knew all along I'd end up here. I know the kid will forgive me. Kids need more than rusted out swing sets and a teenage mom. I've thought long and hard about this. It's the biggest decision I've ever made and I need to do what's right for both of us.

"Toddie Reese...!" The young woman in the nurses uniform is calling around the room, looking into each of the young girl's face for a response. With a deep breath I stand and follow her through the door.

-Flipside

by Ainsley Keller

The Liberation of Marian K.

By Randall Lvey

They left the dirty deed up to me—telling Marian Kelton that she no longer belonged in our little group, our weekly soiree, whatever term best fits it. After all, they said, Robert, Marian's husband, had been my friend, not theirs, and it had been me who had invited Robert and Marian over for drinks and talk. (True, true enough, and I'll even admit an ulterior motive: rumors had gotten round that Robert was unhappy with his current brokerage and was looking around for another house, and I saw my chance for a little, what do you call it, inveigling. So there.) But I loved Robert like a brother, really, and couldn't count the number of scrapes he'd gotten me out of in college. And he was generous too, bringing every week bottles of fruit liqueurs for the men and boxes of Godiva chocolates for the women. (I mean every week he came in loaded down with this stuff!) And he was quiet and unassuming, too.

But not Marian. Oh no. Marian had that determination all dull rich people have to be liked, to be the life of the party (at least the ones I know). She'd come in every week with her quiet, dignified husband, dressed outrageously, like something out of an old black and white RKO picture, like Rosalind Russell or something, in a damned feathered boa or a marcelled cap or even a sequined dress (that didn't always hide her potbelly but usually emphasized her gummy overbite and stubby nose.) She had the grab of a professional wrestler and took every man's forearm in it and wouldn't let go, putting her face real close to theirs and laughing this abrasive laugh, this hyena's laugh or donkey's laugh. She knew all the cliches from television and the familiar catch-phrases from low-brow movies and the "words of wisdom" from the ladies' weeklies, and she'd repeat them like they were newly minted from her own mouth and expected us to laugh like we were hearing them for the first time. If things got too quiet for her and all the attention was being directed someplace else, she'd race over to the Steinway and pound out a childhood favorite like "Heart and Soul" (about the only tune she knew) over and over until it tired her out. Through all this show, Robert stood by helpless, too quiet and unassuming to do anything but laugh a quiet, unassuming, embarrassed laugh.

And when Robert died of a sudden and massive coronary, Marian continued to

you. I love all of you." We'd breathe a sigh of relief, thinking that meant she was about to leave (I mean, my God, what better, more grandiose exit would you need than that? Anything else would be anticlimactic). But she didn't leave. She was one of the last people to go, sometimes the last. We called a taxi for her when that happened. We couldn't stand the idea of her staying overnight.

The camel's back broke the night Marian announced to us her new philosophy—total honesty. "It's the best policy," she declared, like she had coined the phrase right then, and said that henceforth and forever more she would be frank and forthright in her dealings with other people. No hedging, no fudging. Whatever came into mind and mouth would come out. That was the problem with human relations, she pontificated—nobody said what they really meant. To show us she meant it, she set about criticizing everything in her direct vicinity—oh everything from A to Z. Sacred cows of the moment. New York City as a whole. And us too, standing there with our drinks in our hands and our mouths open, not believing we had let her cut in on the time we normally spent gossiping or doing our own criticism. She chastised us for the way we dressed, spent our money, raised our kids, took our coffee, everything. At some point she got cruelly and honestly confused and got so personal a couple of people left the room.

"Now then," she said once she had her inventory done.

"Don't we all feel better now that that's out of our systems?"

"She has to go," Deborah, my wife, said flatly and sternly. "Enough is enough."

"She's vulgar," Annie Edsall added with this anguished upturn of her top lip.

"White trash with money," David Meador said, using a term from his South Carolina boyhood he liked a lot and used frequently.

"Paul, you have to say something to her. Ask her to leave. Tell her we don't want her here anymore. She's overstepped the bounds."

They were right, of course. Marian had to be told. What she had succeeded in doing was not only making us hate her but despise each other too, her "enablers," you might say, who let her come back week after week and never said what we felt or what should have been said.

"Me?" I said, like they'd accused me of some capital crime.

That's when they reminded me that Robert had been my friend and it had been me who had invited them here and it had been me who had paid attention to Marian like she was interesting and had laughed at her jokes. So there.

It had to be done surgically, quick but clean. Lop it off. Get it out of sight. So as the buffet line was forming, I took

Marian by the arm and led us into the entrance hall and came right out with it, the objections and the offenses of the others and

the consensus that she didn't belong among us anymore. (I didn't mention she had never belonged.) She had gone too far, I said. She had

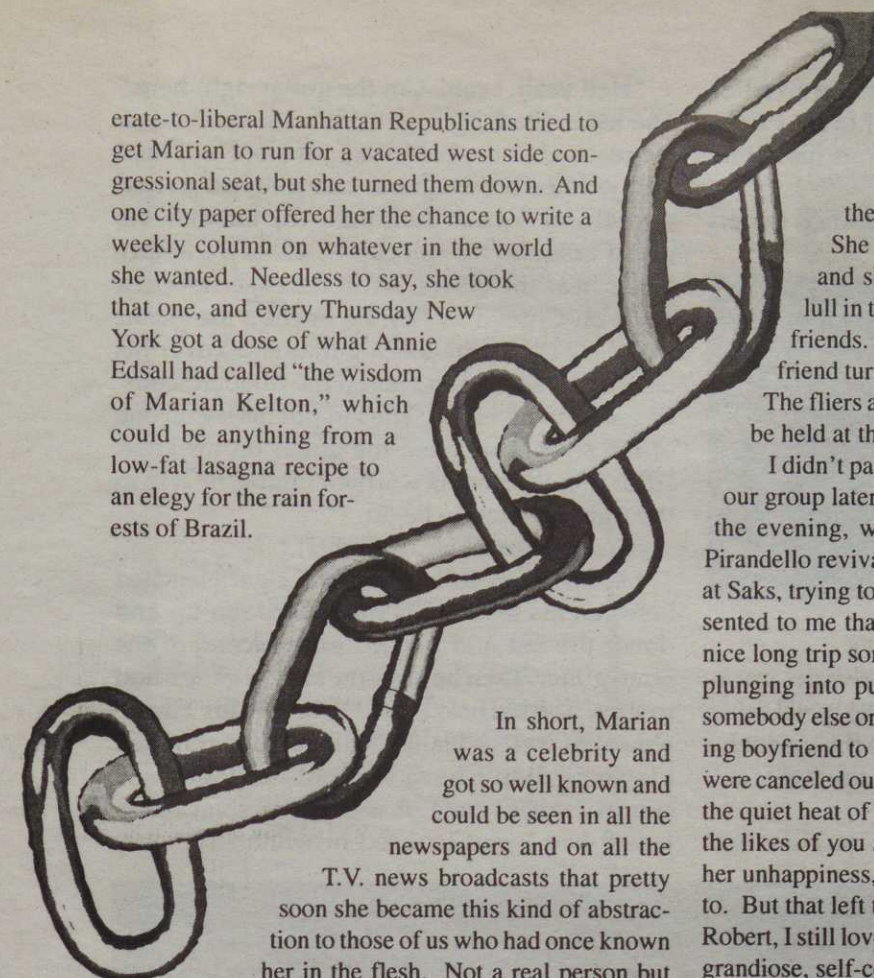
hurt too many feelings. She smiled at first then let out one of her loud laughs that shook my face and hair. No wonder she thought I was joking. None of us had been gutsy enough to broach her until then. But I didn't laugh with her this time. This time I held my ground. And when she saw I was serious, her laugh and smile died away and she stood there in her shiny dress and heavy make-up like a clown pantomiming sorrow. "I'm sorry," I said and gave Marian her coat and opened the door for her.

But it wasn't the last of Marian Kelton. Oh no. One morning, a few months later, Annie Edsall called, all beside herself. "Have you seen The Times this morning?" She's on the front page. That obnoxious Kelton woman. She's a social activist now. Putting all her theories into practice, I guess." We checked right away and confirmed Annie. Below the fold in a clear black and white photograph, joined arm to arm with a couple of scruffy looking men in overcoats outside city hall, stood Marian Kelton, our old dinner mate, our Demosthenes. She had doffed her boa, her marcelled cap, her sequined dress, all that, so we could only recognize her by the uneven tier of her nose, mouth, chin, and, of course, by her name in the caption. She and her friends were protesting homelessness in New York City. Oh not any specific grievance, just the idea of homelessness itself. They even quoted her: "The

limousine liberals who dwell in the highrises and penthouses of Manhattan had better take their blinders off where this issue is concerned, or one day they'll find themselves engulfed by it." Annie laughed on the phone at hearing it again. "Isn't it precious? Now all of New York can share the wisdom of Marian Kelton."

And that was just the start. It was like a floodgate had been opened or something, and here was Marian Kelton's name and face all over the New York Press, connected with some cause or another. You would read or hear about some protest or sit-in or hunger strike, and there'd be Marian Kelton in the middle of it, as outraged as anybody else, with her big jagged mouth opened and her fist raised. The doozy was seeing her carted off in a police van during an illegal sit-in in front of a research lab experimenting with animals, handcuffed like a common thief. It must have made for some fabulous copy, this woman of considerable means hoisting her petard against the corrosives of modern New York. I mean it was the best thing since Patty Hearst grabbed that semi-automatic under the SLA banner. And Marian was no partisan either, no ideologue. She'd as soon argue for a capital gains tax reduction in front of city council as she would some anti-vivisection point. (Well, why not? The rich are beleaguered minority too, even in Manhattan. Why shouldn't we have a champion, one of our own?) What surprised us was Marian's eloquence on these issues. Out the door with her boa and her sequins was the rambling speaking style she had forced on us week after week. Now she was as smooth as any professional politician and more knowledgeable. She, or somebody, had clearly done her homework. This amazing transformation, however, didn't stop us from poking fun at Marian during our get-togethers. Oh no. "Marian the Gadfly," Deborah dubbed her, and that was one of the milder ones. At least one of us saved her quotes from the papers and we took turns reading them out loud in Marian's old style. Tom Barstow, the comic among us, slipped off to the bathroom and came back in near-full Marian Kelton get-up, with her boa and heavy rouge, her abrasive laugh and wrestler's grip. We laughed until we hurt.

But not everybody laughed with us. A group of moderate-to-liberal Manhattan Republicans tried to get Marian to run for a vacated west side congressional seat, but she turned them down. And one city paper offered her the chance to write a weekly column on whatever in the world she wanted. Needless to say, she took that one, and every Thursday New York got a dose of what Annie Edsall had called "the wisdom of Marian Kelton," which could be anything from a low-fat lasagna recipe to an elegy for the rain forests of Brazil.



In short, Marian was a celebrity and got so well known and could be seen in all the newspapers and on all the T.V. news broadcasts that pretty soon she became this kind of abstraction to those of us who had once known her in the flesh. Not a real person but somebody mythical, made up, a larger than life sort of character, like one of those crusading matrons from some nineteenth century social novel or those skirt-wearing, ax-toting suffragettes and prohibitionists from American history books. So imagine the jolt I got one afternoon, mulling at the Columbus Circle entrance to Central Park, reading the inscription at the base of the massive Columbus monument: "To the Valiant Sea Men Who Perished in the Maine, By Fate Unwarned, In Death Unafraid": when I heard this scragging kind of laugh come at me from my left. It came a second time. I knew the laugh, and knowing it made me turn to it, and that's when I saw Marian Kelton, just entering the park, strolling toward a bench. Marian Kelton in the flesh, not the newsprint, not the T.V. signal, but the flesh! I recognized her by her laugh (unmistakable if you've ever stood or sat through a whole evening of it) and her uneven profile, her small nose, her jutting grin. She had a companion with her, an unkempt man in a grimy overcoat who I later realized was a famous advocate of the homeless and had staged hunger strikes and sits all over the place to draw attention to his cause.

Something reflexive made me call her: "Marian! Marian!" The two of them turned. Marian smiled uncertainly, but when she saw me, her smile collapsed to a frown (the way it had when I drove her out of our apartment those oh-so-many months ago). Curiosity, not regret or the need to set something right, made me go to her and lay my hand on her arm. "Marian?" She was dressed soberly, completely in black, and had her hair pulled back from her face, which, while unfortunately making the discordance of her features all that more obvious, at least made her seem a little younger. "Hello, Paul." She introduced her friend and didn't say anything else. "Marian?" I laughed, staring at her like some star struck fan, and said, "You've burst out all over, haven't you? Talk of the town. Woman of the hour." I paused and giggled. "But why?" "Why what?" "This. This social activism. Why are you doing it?" She stared at me, and her stare punched a hole in me some place because her eyes were unpainted now and showed a depth and seriousness I hadn't seen there before. There was something to Marian Kelton! She wasn't a clown anymore. She didn't grab me hard and howl in my face like a monkey but stood back all dignified like some Mother Superior. She answered with a slight lilt to her voice. "Oh I got tired of gripping martinis and unfolding on chaise lounges." I laughed, she didn't, the reverse of what happened when I threw her out of our apartment months ago. She kept staring at me like she wanted to hurt me with her eyes. Then, her voice fueled by dry force, she said, "I'm lonely, that's why. I miss Robert. I still love him, and I cannot stay in that apartment without thinking of him and it nearly killing me. And I'm not good enough for the likes of you and yours, so I've turned to these people,



who need me, who appreciate me." She paused to let all that sink in. "Here," she said, reaching into the right pocket of her black trench coat. She brought out a handful of white papers and shoved them at me. "If there's ever a lull in the conversation, pass these out to your friends. It should amuse them." She and her friend turned around immediately and went off. The fliers advertised a "rally" for the homeless to be held at that very spot the following week.

I didn't pass the fliers out or have much to say at our group later on that night. I spent the first part of the evening, while everybody else fawned over a Pirandello revival or an exhibition at the Met or a sale at Saks, trying to untangle the enigma Marian had presented to me that afternoon. Why hadn't she taken a nice long trip somewhere after Robert died, instead of plunging into public conscientiousness? Or married somebody else or gotten herself some young, good looking boyfriend to amuse her? But all those possibilities were canceled out by the memory of Marian's hard stare, the quiet heat of her words—"I wasn't good enough for the likes of you and yours." I didn't want any part in her unhappiness, so I rejected that right away, or tried to. But that left the more powerful statement: "I miss Robert, I still love him." She could have made up some grandiose, self-congratulatory reason but hadn't. And that's what got to me, the fact that during all her clowning at our parties and all her social activism, Marian loved and missed her late husband. I missed Robert, too. He was a good man. I didn't want to tell the group about my running into Marian, because I knew how they'd react, but I did tell, as a kind of exorcism, leaving out our conversation but leaving in her acquaintance with that professional protester. "She attracts bums like a magnet," one of them said. "They'll drain her dry," said another, "and good for them." Confessing didn't do any good. It only made the memory of Marian's eyes and voice all that more vivid, more impugning.

In the days that followed I found myself tracking Marian's "progress" across the New York press, anxious for a mention of her name in the papers and disappointed if no picture accompanied it. Why want a picture of a homely woman? Because there had been genuine power in Marian's stark new look. Nothing theatrical but real. How unMarian Kelton-like, to be sober and sincere. How unlike most anybody else I knew. Sincerity wasn't a common commodity in the circles I frequented, where people strove all the time to get financial or intellectual one-upmanship over each other. Marian Kelton wasn't in the race. She had the tenacious eyes and the iron-flat voice of honest, hurt sincerity. It would have been easy—and maybe understandable—to flick her activism off as just a grab for attention, but all I could remember were her words: "I miss Robert, I still love him." It attracted me, as an oddity, a novelty, and I got so carried away I went looking for the fliers Marian had thrust at me, promoting some "unity" rally. I found them. The rally was scheduled for that afternoon in Central Park, at the Columbus Circle entrance. I took off early from the office and headed over there.

I stood half-hidden by a hedge. They had a dais set up near the monument, and Marian stood on it in her austere, protest black dress, unmade, her black hair strained into a knot at the back of her neck. She was talking to her friend, the pontiff of homeless protest, who then turned and addressed a mixed group of about fifty people—scruffy young people, a reporter or two, Greenwich village leftist types, you get the picture. He spoke in all these empty generalities, making reference to "the people" and "the cause" and so on, speaking in a style as ragged and grimy as what he had on. Man, it was deja vu all over again, and I was back in 1969! But Marian came on next and washed away the grime with her coherent remarks and her aristocratic attention to facts and her firm resolve. She made a striking figure against the iron-cold Manhattan skyline, and like before I thought of the suffragettes and the prohibitionists, just as homely as Marian and just as determined. I was impressed, and I'm usually not by political speeches. I left after Marian, so as not to spoil the memory of her remarks. She had spoken out of grief, I knew now, not "social conviction," and that made it all the more powerful.

A few days later she turned up again in the papers. She and a couple of other women had been arrested for throwing rocks at the plate glass window of an "adult emporium" on Forty-Second Street. "Women are not slabs of meat to be ogled and devoured by men" was Marian's only comment on the incident. Deborah, my

wife, wrinkled her nose at the story. "That Marian doesn't choose sides, does she? Left or right. Whatever gets her name in the papers." I winced some at the remarks, feeling a little protective of Marian: all I could remember was that calm, principled woman in command of her facts, not an opportunist, on that platform a few days before.

"Robert's been dead almost a year now. Can you believe that?" was all I could say to Deborah right then.

And, a week later, Marian made her last, most shocking appearance in the press. Annie Edsall called us with the story, a front page item in The Times. I will insert it here, edited, for the record: "The body of Marian Hilliard Kelton, 49, heiress to the Hilliard clothing store fortune and widow of publisher Robert Kelton, was found last night just inside the Columbus Circle entrance of Central Park. Kelton apparently died from multiple stab wounds to the face and throat. Police have in custody Kenneth Wayne Gambrell, 21, a homeless man with whom Ms. Kelton had been working in a city-wide program called To Move Youth. Witnesses saw Kelton and Gambrell leaving a Fourteenth Street homeless shelter together, and police later found Ms. Kelton's wallet in Gambrell's possession."

That night, at our weekly group, I sat sullen and quiet, nursing a vodka martini, while all around me ground on the usual automated games of whist and parchese, the office and salon gossip, the jacked-up enthusiasm over some play or book, the laughter over somebody's rival's downfall. Only the date had changed. The script and procedure of these activities remained just the same. I watched it all like I would some old movie, with all the suspense and surprises gone.

We carried this predictability with us to the dinner table an hour later, where the discussion of the comings and goings, the triumphs and faux pas, of various Manhattan demimonde, socialites, social climbers, social dropouts, social pretenders was about as tasty as the congealed salad. My wife Deborah was one of the chief servers of this "feast" of gossip and it upset me. Not one of them mentioned Marian Kelton or her violent demise, even though Marian's presence hung thickly around the room. The clown and the gadfly. In dress outrageous sedate. Laughing and scowling, above all making one simple, unadorned statement: "I miss Robert. I still love him." It took me, martini-boozed, to point out the fact.

"Marian Kelton," I said when the din hushed, like I was announcing Marian into the room. "Her ghost is all over this place. Feel it?" You could have heard an hors d'oeuvre drop.

Deborah frowned with wide eyes then smiled. "You really think so, Paul?" She knew what havoc vodka martinis wreaked on me. I nodded.

"I thought we exorcised that demon a long time ago," somebody else said softly. "You were the exorcist, Paul."

"She almost asked for it, associating with that sort of riffraff."

"She asked to be killed?" I slurred. "You really believe that, Annie?"

"It was bound to happen." "What could she be thinking? Did she crave attention that much?"

"Yes. Like a child. Anything to be seen." "And with her breeding, her background. God knows who or what she left in her will."

"God knows." "Some society for the prevention of cruelty to drunks, probably, since that's what she really was." Everybody laughed, Deborah the loudest, I guess to disassociate herself from me.

"No, no," she hollered. "For the prevention of cruelty to clowns! That's what Paul called her. Remember all that rouge and make-up?" Another laugh followed.

"She's dead, for God's sake!" I shouted over them, silencing them again as the room spun around. "And she loved her dead husband. Robert? Remember Robert? She missed him. Don't you? I do! And I think she was a noble creature, bearing a wound like that and not thinking of herself. I'm not sure I could." That's when I stood up, scooting the table forward a little, and made a clumsy about-face. I left the dining room and the apartment for the street, giving all the ones I'd left behind a chance to make the proper judgment on what I'd just said. It was full-dark outside. I had missed the gaudy, beautiful, fruity, noble, rouge-red sunset and took the loss with some sorrow, like the lost chance to talk to an old buddy. So I stood in the cold dark and searched out the hard, iron-flat skies for an uneven profile, a sign of courage.

Fade cont. . . .

faces and body sizes, they would be triplets. The three talked. Occasionally, their laughter became louder than the others in the bar and then

"Hey, 'C, you better get that thing fixed or you'll lose your best customer." J.L. said as he removed a short, tubby cigar from his white jacket.

Macey's smile widened as he reached under-

The guitar wanted to be played; touched, strung, picked, and ripped upon so it could make the best rhythmical sound ever heard by human ears.

deminished.

Just as Jerrod downed his second glass of bourbon, the fat cowboy put down his paper-back and pointed at Macey. The cowboy shook his finger as he looked for something to say.

"Hey, 'C, when are ya goin' to get that piece of shit juke fixed? It's goddamn depressing in here. I need to hear some Merle Haggard. I might as well go home to the wife."

"Whenever I get the time, I'll take a look at it, J.L."

"At least play some Waylon Jennings to make me forget about her."

Jerrod couldn't help smiling. He almost started to laugh. The cowboy could've been a production manager from the sixties because he sure sounded like one of them: smooth and convincing.

Macey let out a hearty laugh and slammed his hands on the countertop in front of the cowboy, J.L., and said, "You crazy ol' drunk! You say the same thing every friggin' night! Besides, the juke won't play any of the records 'cause the thing that spins wont spin."

neath the counter and produced a tin puck-shaped ash tray with a green Bic lighter resting in the center. "Couldn't do that to the man who eats enough of my food to keep the lights on, now can I?"

"Goddamn right, 'C." J.L. lit his cigar and puffed away, ferociously at first, but then casually eased into the act.

Jerrod's arm poured the bourbon into the bottle for the third time. He was loose and free-spirited on an empty stomach starting to fill with Old Grand Dad when a voice called

over from the other end of the bar. "Hey, J.L.," It was the kid with the Red Man and Styrofoam spit cup. "If I can play some Hank Williams for you, will that make you forget about your wife?"

J.L. considered the kid's offer for a moment. "Can you play 'Your Cheatin' Heart?'"

"Hell yeah, I can! Got the guitar right here."

The kid smiled, his eyes wide with excitement. He reached at the bottom of his stool and held up a tattered brown guitar case that had started to peel and flake at the sides. The kid took the guitar case and his spit cup to one of the empty tables near the bikers. With the eagerness of a child on Christmas day, he opened the guitar case. He threw the black guitar strap over his neck and shoulder and raised the wooden acoustic guitar to his chest. The kid put his leg on one of the seats and rested the guitar on his knee. After a few moments worth of tuning, he was in the right position to begin.

"Your Cheatin' Heart, right, J.L.?"

J.L. swiveled in his seat, the cigar clenched between his teeth. His puffy eyes ran up and down the kid and paused for a second at the Strat' guitar. Then he gave the kid the get-go nod to start. The kid broke into "Your Cheatin' Heart" almost as well as Hank Williams, and although his voice didn't have that old-fashioned sad country singer tone, it was better than many Jerrod had heard in a recent while. The only

He had to wait and chew it up, make it easier to sort out . . .

problem was that the kid played the wrong keys of the song. It was just too flat. That didn't seem to bother the others in the bar. The brunette tilted her head to the beat of the song and her man swayed along with it. Macey also nodded along. The bikers watched the kid but they showed no

emotion. J.L. sat still, smoked his cigar, cracking a smile every so often.

Even Sandi stepped out of that room, wiping her hands with a dishtowel. Jerrod looked back down to his drink and finished the rest of the third glass—he couldn't stand to hear a song played in the wrong key. In the midsection of the song, Jerrod, feeling the effects of three bourbons on his empty stomach, couldn't hold his silence any longer. When the kid started to hum a line of the song, the guitar quieted and Jerrod spoke loud enough to be heard by everyone in the saloon. "Wrong key."

Everything stopped. The music died and the kid looked at Jerrod with a shocked expression of disbelief as if Jerrod had kicked the chair from under his foot. Everyone else in the saloon froze. They all looked at him the same way—mouths straight-lined, heavy eyes accusing. Their eyes burned into Jerrod. They waited for what he had to say next.

Jerrod poured some more bourbon in the jar and downed it in one gulp. He looked over to the kid and said, "Sorry, kid, but I can't stand to hear something out of key. If you're going to play something, play it right or don't play at all. Now that's a hard fact to swallow, but later 'n life you're goin' to throw it all up again on someone else. That's what they told me, that's what I'm telling you, and that's what you're going to tell someone else down the road." Jerrod poured himself another drink and studied his old, foolish face in the reflection.

All was quiet until the kid spoke up. "Ol' timer, you sure do talk a bunch, but why don't you show me what you mean?"

The bourbon was almost on his lips when Jerrod paused. "Show?" he asked as he placed the jar on the counter top.

The kid held out the guitar and smiled a tobacco stained smile. "Yeah, show me."

The last thing in the world Jerrod wanted to do tonight was play the guitar. He just wanted to have a good time drinking and spending all of the extra cash until God knows what happened to him, but there was something about the guitar that seemed inviting. The guitar wanted to be played; touched, strung, picked, and ripped upon so it could make the best rhythmical sound ever heard by human ears.

Jerrod was off the stool. His drink left behind, he walked toward the instrument, a head buzz bringing him to a satisfied happiness. The kid, who didn't seem angry or hurt by Jerrod's remarks, unclipped the strap and handed Jerrod the guitar. Jerrod held the guitar. It felt light as air. Every part of it seemed to fit in all the grooves of Jerrod's hands. He looked up at the kid, who had a red guitar pick displayed be-

tween his thumb and forefinger. Jerrod shook his head, reached into his coat pocket and took out a silver pick. Every guitar player carried a pick with him and the silver pick was Jerrod's favorite.

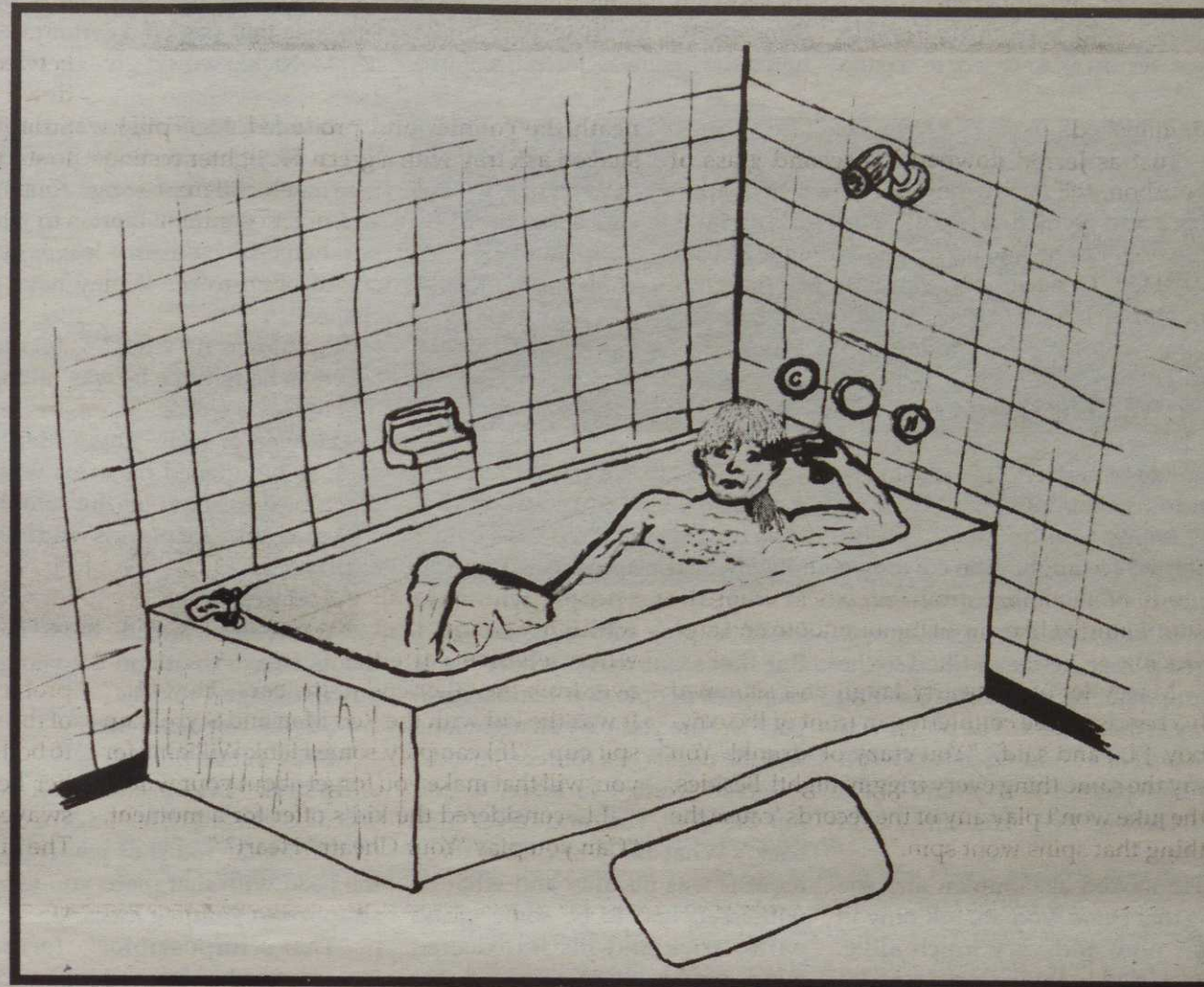
Jerrod started to play. The sound the guitar made was full, clear, and flawless. His hands touched strings of silk and the pick seemed to pass through thin air. Jerrod played the introduction to "Your Cheatin' Heart," and he sang the lyrics before they came into his head.

As Jerrod sang, everyone stood up and moved closer to him. They sat with looks of antici-

ipation, and he could still feel the vibrations, strong and full and in those vibrations he could hear the notes and the rhythm, and the beat, and it sounded better with every passing moment. Jerrod could hear them forever.

"So that's the right key?" The kid said as he broke Jerrod out of his trance. "I thought so. I'm not really into Hank Williams. I'm more of a George Jones kinda guy. You like George Jones, Jerrod?"

"Ah, I met him once, pretty nice guy. We played together out in Oklah—" Jerrod paused, not by what he could remember about George



tion like children around a campfire ready for a scary story. Even the bikers turned their chairs around and watched Jerrod, smiling and nodding as if they knew what his thoughts were as he played. Before he knew it, Jerrod finished the song. There were no applauses, no hoots or hollers, and no slaps on the back or high-fives. Jerrod didn't care, because the guitar was simply the best he'd ever played. He held the in-

Jones, but by what the kid said. "How'd you know my name?"

The kid gave him a know-it-all smirk, "I've known since you've walked in, Jerrod."

Jerrod was in shock. A fan! "You know my songs, my albums, what?"

"Yeah, something like that." The kid scanned the saloon. Jerrod followed the kid's gaze and saw the people at the bar, J.L., Sandi, and the



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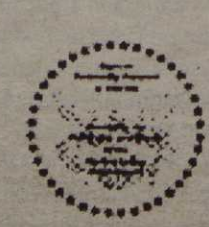
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three bikers sitting in a semicircle around Jerrod and the kid. Only Macey was behind the bar, leaning with his arms folded over the bathroom-tile countertop. Macey's sombrero was off, exposing a balding, sweat-soaked head.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the kid said as he stuck out an open hand. "Codey Denver, but that's just my stage name. Beau Thompson is my Christian name."

Jerrod shook the hand, though still wondering what Beau and the rest were hiding from him.

"Hi," said a friendly female voice. Jerrod looked over to see the

it on the floor.

The glass shattered as a small puddle of bourbon spread at his feet. Jerrod looked back to Macey, "And who are you, Macey? Are you a music teacher I can't remember?"

Macey laughed and shook his head. "Why, I'm nothing to you, Jerrod. I was a performer once too, but I faded out like everyone here. I was performing for many years, before you were born and probably your dad also. I played on the road for wooden nickels and soda pop dimes, but I loved to play and I hated the business, Jerrod, just like

The glass shattered as a small puddle of bourbon spread at his feet.

brunette to his left, in a chair, her hands folded in her lap. "My name is Floureen Alberts."

Jerrod's head was struck with a memory of an album cover—no, a poster! Floureen was on the brown-tinted poster, her head tilted to the side and her pearly whites flashing away at the camera. The poster was on a wall of a building in Nashville. He had passed that poster years ago. He was five. His father held his hand.

He looked at Floureen and she was that same woman, but only in color now and very much alive. Jerrod tried to think straight and it was like trying to swallow something that was too big for his throat. He had to wait and chew it up, make it easier to sort out. Before that could happen, the man with the large sunglasses spoke next,

"Name's Bill Poncho, Jerrod. Lead guitarist for 'Poncho's Posse.' One of the less-known great one-hit-wonder bands."

Bill's name and face meant nothing to Jerrod, but the band's name was familiar because Martin and Terry would mention that band time to time in the studio along with another band, a trio of Texans dress like bikers who were called . . .

"Texas Toast," said one of the bikers. "I'm Redge, this is Randy and Redd," he said as he leaned back on his chair and patted his amigos' backs.

Jerrod looked over to Sandi, who smiled and winked. "Sandi Cheyenne. I played in a local bar when you were just 17 and you lied about your age to get in to see me play."

"My God!" Jerrod jumped back and away from the group. He suddenly remembered something and pointed to J.L. "You're Jacob Lancing, the producer! I talked to you once! I talked to you about a contract and you said 'no' to me!"

J.L. shrugged, "Sorry, son. It was a bad year for me. Don't take it too hard."

Jerrod went to the bar to fetch his drink and stopped. He looked at Macey questioningly. "How much of this did I drink?" Jerrod asked as he picked up the drink only to drop

you and just like everyone here. No matter how long ago it was or what style or what era it took place in, it was always business. And business is what drove people who once loved to play into business men. But that's out there, where life is cruel and people don't understand you. In here you play all night long and the nights last forever, Jerrod." Jerrod wanted to leave, to bolt out the door, run, and never look back. What he heard from these mouths was insanity and what he witnessed had to be some grand parlor trick and his intoxicated mind would accept anything that would normally sound outlandish. He wanted to tell them that his thoughts, this moment in time, were not real, that they were impersonators; but then he saw Floureen again and was taken back to a simpler time when he heard the music and fell in love with all it had to offer.

The saloon was silent. Everyone waited for what Jerrod had to say. He turned to Macey and asked, "You're dead?"

Macey nodded. "But you don't look that way, Macey. You look—"

"Jerrod, trust me. Everyone here has died at some point." Macey waved his hand past the group. "I—I don't see how . . ."

"Pneumonia," Floureen said as she touched her throat.

"Lung cancer," said Bill Poncho. All three members of Texas Toast spoke at once, "Bus crash."

"I was murdered two nights after you saw me in concert, Jerrod," said Sandi Cheyenne.

J.L. coughed and said, "I was playing pool with Dusty Keats when I had a heart attack and died after Dusty sunk the eight ball. I had five hundred on that game."

Jerrod looked at the kid, who only shrugged and said, "Tractor accident, 13 years ago. What can I say, Jerrod? I never really wanted to make the big time, but always played like I was ready for it. I guess that's why I'm here."

Jerrod looked back to Macey, "And you, Macey?"

Macey opened his hands as if he caged the answer in front of him, then clamped them together again. He showed his lower lip and said, "Well, what can I say? One day I fell asleep and woke up in this place. A man stood over me and introduced himself as Terry McNickle, but some people know him as Martin Channing, Jimmy Dallas, or Willie Stemperton. He told me to fix up the place the best I could so others could come. He said every decade or so, someone new will walk through that door, someone that passed a certain test Mr. McNickle would give on occasions.

"And Mr. McNickle was right. Every 10 years someone new arrives with different songs to sing and not so common stories to tell, but then again someone leaves every so often to see if they have a chance . . ."

"A chance of what?" Jerrod asked as he felt like he was falling into Macey's words.

"Heaven or Hell. This," Macey said, as he opened his arms wide like a bird to show off the saloon. "Is a purgatory for players who love to play."

"And to sin." "You're right, Jerrod. But to me, this is Heaven with an occasional power outage."

"But I'm not dead, Macey." Macey's cheerful look grew cold and pitiful. "Oh, I'm afraid you are. You died yesterday, Jerrod, in a motel bathroom. You shot yourself in the head with that piece you keep strapped to your leg there."

"That's impossible!" Jerrod screamed as he clutched his hands over his ears, his eyes squinted until he saw purple and yellow spotted fireworks dance in a dark background. "I can't be dead! I'm not

"Fifteen minutes of fame, 15 years of agony that follows. Then I put an end to it."

dead!" Macey's serious mood did not change, "I know it's hard to accept, Jerrod, but I want you to answer me this: How did you get here today, what did you do this morning?"

Jerrod was about to speak, but his mouth hung while his thoughts sank into quicksand. What did he do this morning? Waking up in the morning was so common, but where the hell was it? It wasn't that condo, it wasn't that apartment, and it wasn't that motel room—but damnit, it had to be somewhere?!

There was a motel room with crumpled sheets, booze, steamed bathroom windows, and a cold steel barrel against a sweaty head. Jerrod heard a gunshot between his ears, a buzzing sound, ferocious and loud. Then silence . . .

When he woke up, he sat in Terry McNickle's Lincoln, outside Dirt Kicker's Saloon. He watched Sandi Cheyenne get into a truck with a bearded man who was on his way to Heaven or Hell.

Jerrod felt his knees hit the wooden floor with a dull thud-thud. He curled like a poked worm: it was like dying . . . again. He stayed in that position for a long time until everything was out: tears, cries, screams, and voices. Only one thing remained and that was music, guitar music that was sweet and familiar to his ears.

Jerrod opened his eyes to see through the cloud of tears.

Two snakeskin boots stood by his head. He rubbed his eyes and looked up to see a silent Macey above him with a stern look on his face.

"I remember now," Jerrod said. "I put a bullet through my head but I can't remember why."

"You were drinking, Jerrod," Macey said as he extended an open hand. "You were drinking hard."

The powerful pull of Macey's arms eased Jerrod to his feet. "Of course, I know now. I was drinking because I didn't want to play anymore. Playing became a job with nine-to-five hours, being told what to play and having them tell me how lousy the records have been selling with every passing year. I couldn't take it anymore." Jerrod laughed. "Fifteen minutes of fame, 15 years of agony that follows. Then I put an end to it."

Macey walked towards the group of dead musicians, picked up the acoustic guitar, and asked the wide-eyed Jerrod, "What was one of your favorite songs to play?"

Jerrod remained still and thought about his discography, but not for long. He walked towards the guitar. As Jerrod strapped the guitar on, Macey gave a fatherly gesture as he placed his hand on Jerrod's shoulder. "Forget about the past," said Macey. "The past is where everyone keeps their mistakes. If

we're foolish enough to repeat our past, our problems follow us wherever we go. You now have a clean slate, Jerrod. I want you to be happy here as much as you want because you might want to go out that door." Macey paused, looked over to Sandi and smiled, "And Sandi will give you a good-bye gift."

Everyone in the room started to laugh—even Jerrod felt dead weights turn to feathers on his chest as the room's atmosphere became cheerfully bright.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Jerrod announced to a group of all smiles and swaying memories. "Here's a little diddy I wrote while in the bathtub of a Howard Johnson's hotel in Kentucky, 1966. The song's called, 'Heaven Help a Gambler Man.'"

Jerrod started the introduction to his favorite song and he felt good again . . . and again, and again, and again.

-Flipside

Seoul cont . . .

yanked back. "Thank you," Jinho muttered as he squatted down in front of me. While sitting down, he seemed to scrutinize me, as if he were checking out a chimpanzee in a zoo. There was a curious, yet mischievous look on his face. He tapped on my feet and suddenly pinched my leg. "Ouch! Hey!" Then he grinned impishly and erupted in a puerile guffaw. Grimacing, Mina yelled at him in Korean. Still giggling, Jinho sprinted back to his room.

"I'm sorry! My brother is still a child. He's very curious about everything. I think he found your blond hair, blue eyes, and height pretty unusual and interesting."

"Well, it is natural for a kid to be curious. Don't worry. I didn't mind him doing it." My eyes were still fixated on the family document, but Jinho's mirth dissipated the brief sensation of sadness.

That evening, Mrs. Lee prepared tasty, authentic Korean cuisine. Each person had a bowl of rice and a bowl of soup. Then there were a number of side dishes, which we shared. I instantly recognized the savory taste of Bulgogi, whose combination with pizza I had immensely enjoyed. Also Mrs. Lee had prepared another similar meat dish. According to Mina, it was called Kalbi, which used beef ribs marinated in a similar sauce to Bulgogi.

There was also a pungent, yet still palatable vegetable dish called kimchi. Mina explained that kimchi is a fermented Chinese cabbage seasoned with red peppers, garlic, and fish sauce. According to Mina, traditionally, housewives in Korea select a day during the fall and cook a month's supply of kimchi in one day. Then, they place the kimchi in a big crockery jar and bury it in the ground. The food ferments, creating a uniquely piquant taste.

While I was regarding the Kimchi, Mr. Park said something. "He asked you to taste it," interpreted Mina. I hesitated since Mina's explanation didn't whet my appetite and worse, I hated the garlic smell. In fact, my previously robust appetite waned at the thought of spoiled cabbage with a strong garlic aroma. But in the end, I tasted it out of politeness. As soon as I crunched

the leaf, a burning sensation spread in my mouth. "Water, water," I murmured. The family laughed. Mrs. Lee handed me a pitcher of water and I had to drink two glasses to numb my tongue.

While we ate, they seldom talked to each other, yet made a lot of slurping sounds.

"We don't talk much when we eat. But, it is polite to make noise," Mina said with a smile.

"I sort of figured that out."

"You know, when I first went to America, I lived with a host family. I still remember the first dinner we had together. I noticed that they looked a bit uncomfortable when we ate together and I didn't know why. Later, I learned that it is considered disgusting in America to slurp, and I was slurping the whole time when we ate. Can you imagine how embarrassed I was to learn that?" Mina recalled with a slight blush. I snickered to myself at the picture of an elegant-looking Oriental lady slurping at dinner. "Try it. Don't be afraid to make a noise," said Mina.

So, I tried slurping myself. Actually, it didn't feel bad.

I spent the rest of the week mainly gathering all the necessary information for my article. I visited the exposition site, met with other journalists, and explored

more of the city. The International Science Exposition boasted numerous futuristic, eye-popping inventions and scientific gizmos, which encompassed computers with voice-recognition technology, 21st century vehicles, three dimensional screens and highly innovative robots.

Along with the scientific exhibition, each country set up a booth for its cultural promotion, providing enough fodder for my article. I talked with people from all over the world. One common topic was our impression of the host country. Some were amazed by the city's renaissance as a modern metropolis without any visible scars of the Korean War, but others were suffering from serious homesickness, tired of pollution, the noise, the crowds and the traffic jams.

Mina also took me to four ancient Korean palaces, all located in Seoul. I was particularly impressed with the tranquil charm of the Secret Gar-

den, which was attached to Changduk Palace. Filled with ponds, pavilions, and wooded areas, this intricately designed mammoth garden was built for the royal family. The garden's salient feature was its rustic splendor. The landscape was rich in lush colors of various trees, shrubs, flowers, as well as lovely ponds and elaborately constructed ancient buildings. As I took a

stroll, I felt strange walking on the same alley that had been trodden on by kings and queens for centuries. The imposing ambience bespoke the authority the royal family once enjoyed.

"What happened to the royal family?" I asked Mina. "We no longer have a royal family. I heard that some of their descendants still live in Seoul, but they live as common people."

In Kyongbok Palace, I saw a gorgeous 10-story pagoda and a grand pavilion surrounded by water. In Tuksu Palace, there was an aesthetic monument, which was, according to Mina, built in honor of Queen Min, the country's tragic heroine.

Mina informed me that Queen Min died in the early 20th Century right before Japan colonized Korea. Mina told me how she admired the queen for her patriotism and courage.

Actually, that evening, we watched a musical based on the life of the queen, titled The Last Empress. The musical was like the Korean version of Evita: born from a poor family, Min experienced hardships as a teenager, but by dint of her good looks and charm, she won the heart of a king. After she became a queen, she assumed the leadership of the country, helping the efete and indecisive king. In doing so, she protected the endangered country from the encroachment of Japan, Russia, and China; she shrewdly exerted her diplomatic skills by creating wars between Japan and China and then between Japan and Russia, all the while keeping Korea safe from the skirmish.

Aware that no nation could touch Korea as long as Min led the country, the Japanese military secretly recruited vagabonds to murder the queen. Sooner than 15 years after she was assassinated, Korea fell at the hands of the Japanese military.

Mina was in tears throughout the performance. "I read about her as a child. She was so desperate to protect Korea from the superpower nations. I can't imagine how she would have felt to see the country occupied by Japan and then split into two different nations, North and South," she said, sniffing.

"Is North Korea a completely different nation from South Korea?" I asked.

"Of course, the South Korean government doesn't even allow us to enter North Korea, and keeps its strictly anti-Communist policy."



TRI COUNTY

S O U T H

OUTDOORS

The next day, Mina and I visited the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas. Instead of driving a car, we boarded a northbound tour bus full of foreign tourists. It was also my first time outside Seoul.

When the bus glided out of the city, another side of Korea spread out before me. We passed rice fields, mountains, and traditional houses. As we approached the border, the scene became increasingly panoramic.

"In five minutes, we'll arrive at the Demilitarized Zone. And you will be able to see North Korea with a telescope," announced a tour guide, adding, "The DMZ is a 4-km-wide, 250-km-long corridor that completely separates the North and South. After the Korean War ended in 1953, no civilian has been allowed to enter the zone, and the place has been totally uninhabited. Both sides of the DMZ are fortified by heavily armed soldiers."

After making tortuous turns up a hill, the bus entered a parking lot that overlooked the East Sea. The tour guide announced, "Now we arrived at our destination. If you want to make a tour on your own, please make sure to come back before 6 p.m. The bus will leave here at 6 p.m." When I got off the bus, the fresh air touched my nose. Birds were chirping and a distant melodious sound of streaming water filled the air.

Mina first took me to a big statue of a goddess that faced north.

"She is a goddess of mercy in Buddhism. They built this statue in the hope that she will take pity on the divided country and reunite the two," Mina said.

"Wow, it is so big and beautiful!"

The statue was white and held some kind of ornament, like rosary beads, reminding me of a statue of the Virgin Mary.

"So Buddhism is South Korea's #1 religion, huh?" I asked.

"Actually, no! Christianity is the most common religion in South Korea. But Buddhism was introduced to South Korea a thousand years ago, so it is deep-rooted in our culture," Mina explained, while I was looking away to the forest below.

"That is the DMZ," Mina indicated, pointing her finger in the direction I was looking. "And over there," Mina said, raising her finger, "there is North Korea."

"Let's walk over there. There are telescopes." I suggested.

A couple of tourists were using telescopes. I went to the one nearby and deposited a coin. "Mina! You wanna try first?"

"No, go ahead. I have been here before."

Through the telescope, I saw small hills and forests. There was nothing urgent or dangerous about the scene. It was hard to feel a trace of the bloody war that killed millions and destroyed the whole nation.

"So what do you think?" Mina asked.

"Well, it is hard to believe that you guys are not allowed to go to that place. I mean, it's right there. North and South used to be one country."

"Yeah, it's pretty sad!" Mina said, looking at the north pensively. We stayed there for a while in silence. Then I suggested, pointing at the building nearby, "I think that is enough. Let's go inside."

Inside, they were playing a film about the Korean War. The film was narrated in Korean with English subtitles. We sat down and watched. According to the film, on June 25, 1950, North Korea attacked South Korea, and within a month, conquered almost the whole of the South. UN troops arrived at South Korea at the last minute and saved the country by pushing back the North Korean army. I was surprised to learn that about 20 nations sent their troops for the war, including the



U.S., Britain, France, Italy, Canada, Ethiopia, Columbia, etc. The bloody scenes of war made a stark contrast with the serenity outside.

After the film, we had dinner. Mina said, "I hope that the two Koreas will be unified soon. Sometimes, I feel guilty of all the prosperity South Koreans have here while North Koreans are starving to death."

"Maybe it'll happen soon. At least, you guys are trying."

"No, our government is still hostile to North Korea." Locking her eyes on mine, Mina continued, "That's why some students are protesting. They want our government to take a more affirmative action toward the unification of the two Koreas. Sometimes, the students can go too far."

"Do you think I will be able to see a Korean students' demonstration before I go back to the U.S.?"

"Forget it. It rarely happens."

"But I used to see a lot of it on TV."

"The media always exaggerates and tries to make everything sensational. You know that. You are a journalist. You'll be extremely lucky if you see one before you leave and..." Mina was interrupted by a loud announcement from a speaker.

"Oh, it's time to go. The announcer says the bus will leave soon."

Mina said as she stood up.

"Already?" I said, as I glanced at the clock. It was almost 6 p.m..

"Yeah, you'd better go to bed early. You have to leave tomorrow morning."

As I got on the bus, I thought of the violent Korean students' demonstrations. Frankly, I wished I could witness one. It was not because I would derive a perverse pleasure in other people's struggles, but because I just wanted to learn the truth about the demonstration. But soon my morality intervened, and I said to myself, "Oh, let's forget it. I'm not gonna be able to see it."

So, I gave up the hope. But the next day, I did witness a student protest.

After I said farewell to Mr. Park, Mrs. Lee, and Jinho, Mina was driving me to the airport. We followed along the Han River. In the lambent light of autumn, Seoul seemed to cast a resplendent glow. I saw boats floating on the river and people bicycling along the bank.

When we made a turn and entered a narrow one-way street, the traffic suddenly stopped, followed by a roar reverberating on the street.

"It must be a student protest," said Mina as she rolled down her window to peek out. I sensed an alarm in her voice.

Soon, we saw the street besieged by a teeming crowd slowly marching down the road and through the cars. Some were holding big planks with Korean words written in red and black, and others were shouting in unison with florid glows on their faces. I swallowed as my mind reeled. The scene left my senses temporarily whirling like a dervish.

"Shit! Look at that!" My blood vessels were pumping with excitement. "Where's my camera?" I asked, as I stretched to the backseat and grabbed my camera bag.

"Don't be excited. You might miss your plane," Mina said, fidgeting her body.

A hint of a visible apprehension flashed on her face. I was gripped by a sense that the scene of a demonstration was not something she got used to." She looked outside. Irked by the delay, she grumbled to herself,

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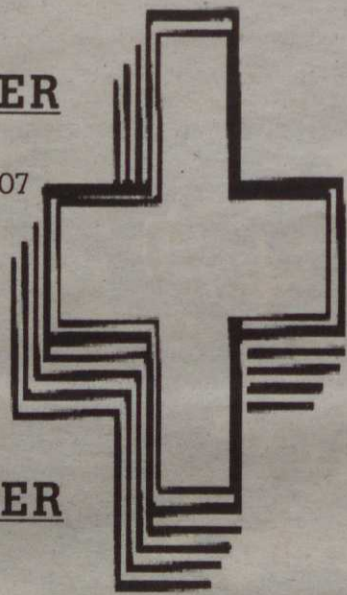
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"Gee! I don't believe this."

"It is O.K. It's amazing. Look at the people out there," I said to her excitedly.

"What?"

Ignoring Mina, I took out my camera and snapped pictures of the swarming mass. The majority of them looked like students, with one third consisting of females.

While I was clicking the camera, I sighted two familiar faces. Although I was unable to identify them at first, I soon realized that they were Young and Minee, the girls I met in Myong-dong. Albeit sluggishly, the car was still moving.

"Stop the car! Stop the car please!"



"Why? What's the matter?"

"I know them."

"Know who?"

As soon as Mina completely stopped the car, I whipped out of the car, yelling, "Minee! Young!" Minee and Young were still plodding and shouting something in unison with others. Their resonant chorus buried my voice.

Even when I dashed to their side and stood in tandem with them, they didn't notice me. "Hey, Minee! Young!" I tapped on their shoulders. At the unexpected sight of me, their eyes opened wide and mouths dropped, then turned into huge smiles.

"Mark! Oh my God!" Young cried out.

"Mark! What a surprise! I thought you left already."

Unlike the stylish outlook they displayed at Myong-dong, the girls appeared somewhat shriveled this time. Young's skin was tan, and Minee's hair was tousled and tangled as if she hadn't combed it all day.

I smiled and said, "Actually, I'm on my way to the airport right now. By the way, look at you guys. You guys are protesting!"

"No, I wouldn't call this a protest. We are just voicing our hope for the reunification of the two Koreas,"

Minee said, her eyes sparkling with resolution. Young nodded and a look of conviction flickered on her face.

"I'm sure your government will take notice of this. Look at all these people! It's pretty amazing."

We heard a whistle. The police had arrived and were trying to clear the street. But the whole scene looked much more peaceful than the protests I had glimpsed on T.V. Unlike the image of recalcitrant, intransigent, and unruly crowd TV projected, the students seemed to be rather docile before the police.

I heard Mina repeatedly honking at me. With the arrival of the police, the streets were clearing, and the cars were moving faster. Hurriedly, I took my business card from my pocket.

to board. "Oh, we barely made it," Mina said with a sigh of relief. It seemed as if she had been more worried about the plane's departure than I was. I couldn't have cared less since I would have had an excuse to extend my stay even if I missed the plane. In fact, I wasn't totally happy that I arrived there in time.

"Well, I guess this is it," I looked into Mina's eyes for a lingering second and said, "Thank you! Thank you for everything. I really had a wonderful time."

"You're welcome! It's been a pleasure."

We exchanged a handshake. "I know that this is not proper in your country, but," Then I gave her a little hug. She seemed guarded a bit,

"Hey, guys, I've got to go now. If you ever visit America, let me know. It has my address and phone number."

"Oh, no! You have to go now!" Young exclaimed as she took the card.

"Bye, guys!" I bided a farewell.

"Oh, well, have a nice trip!"

"Bye-bye!"

Mina kept honking with her car slowly moving away and I had to scurry fast to catch up.

"Gee, Mark!" Mina said with a reproachful look as I got in the car.

"I'm sorry. I had to talk to those girls"

"Who are they, by the way?"

"Remember the girls I told you about? The girls I met in Myong-dong."

Policemen were clearing the crowd out of the road, so the car began to move fast. I looked back. The girls were still waving at me. I waved to them until the girls left my sight.

Because of the delay created by the demonstration, we arrived at the airport much later than we expected. So in haste, I checked in my baggage and stood in line

but accepted in with cordial warmth.

"Hope to see you someday, Mark."

"Yeah, I'm sure I'll be back here someday."

Then I turned back and took a step to the gate. A series of images were flashing through my mind. The faces of Minee and Young, the scene of Myong-dong, Mr. Park's old family document, the DMZ, student demonstrations, and Mina's face were all collaged in my mind.

I looked back right before I entered the gate. Mina was smiling at me. I waved back to her and the whole nation.

I had never had a week that was so extraordinary and educational. I felt like I had become infinitely richer in experience and my mind broadened. As I was stepping inside the airplane, I heard someone saying from behind, "I'm so sick of this country. I'm so glad to go back home."

Was I happy to go back home? No! I wanted to learn more, experience more and grow more. The plane took off quickly, but I felt as if I had left my heart behind. "Someday I'll come and get it back," I said to myself as I was looking at the dim sight of Seoul.

-Flipside

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TRUTHS

By Peggy Sapphire

We had been talking of truths.
Hers,
mine
and the
Only.

An evening stroll
along a boardwalk mecca
for those drawn
to the eternal pulse of tidal surf.

My mother, more cynic than sage,
with eight decades as proof.
"The truth is, 'that's life' explains it all."

Two white lights appear
above the ocean,
the clouds becoming aura.
We become mute,
watching their silent motion,
slightly arcing paths.
Then dimming, dimming,
vanished.
No trace.
A minute. Maybe two.

I ask my mother,
"How do you explain that? Now will you relent?"

"What's the truth about that?" she asks.
"It's a mystery."

"The 'it' is a mystery," I say,
"but how you saw it is your truth."

And I have mine.

"Yeh, well, it's a mystery that will never be explained.
No one will tell us the truth.
That's life."

"...strange lights appeared off the coast at about 6:45PM Saturday.
And appropriately enough, it's likely the incident will never be explained."
Press Journal, March 8, 1998

APOLOGIA

By Lucille Abato

You're welcome to the leftovers of my life,
to the many times washed clothes whose
grease stains no amount of commercial
cleaning products will remove.

You're welcome to the food on the paper plate,
wrapped hastily in foil, that I leave on the sprinkler
standpipe for you, replete with plastic cutlery,
which I know will not service a second meal.

You're welcome to these small things
I can do for you. It makes me feel good
to help someone less fortunate than myself,
but don't ask me to talk to you or let
you pet the dog or get too close to the children.

I fear you and whatever made you this way
...I fear the unknown diseases you carry
which could be transmitted by the rats
who gnaw at the cardboard boxes you shelter
yourself in each night.

Yet my heart aches for you, you, whose
driving demons command you to sleep in
urine soaked clothes, demand you encase
mottled, ulcerated feet in broken shoes.

And so I place cast-away clothing
atop smelly black garbage bags
and give you 3 day old food
hoping you won't starve.

But it gnaws at me that you suspect
I'm really not charitable.
It gnaws at me that you know
you're welcome only to
the leftovers of my life.

C
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BOCCHERINI AND BAGELS

By Jackson Ahrens

*This is the time;
Time that is fleeting.
See how it slips away.
You turn around and - it's gone.
Three seconds. One day
That will be all that it takes.
No second bite of that
Toasted sesame bagel with cream cheese.
It would have tasted good, too -
What with Boccherini's quintet
For Strings #6 playing
As if from heaven itself.
Three little seconds:
Barely enough time to remember
The name of that girl, that summer,
That salty taste of skin
And the cadence of her laughter.
Maybe it never really happened at all -
Just the whimsical memory
Of a man confused over time,
Trying to gather what slips away,
Like she did without returning
A single letter. Packets of messages
That could have been sent to deep space,
"I am here. I am here. I am here."
Not the eloquence of classical strings,
But it goes on forever,
And each of us takes up the refrain.*

AVICIDE

By Lucille Abato

Perched round the black marble fountain
huddling for warmth and strength,
the pigeons are holding a pow-wow
expected to last the moon's length.

Their claws click in musical cadence
that martially drum out a dirge
for the death of the water not flowing
in their fountain since summer occurred.

Their feathers are greasy and matted
with filth they just cannot remove
they hunker and dwell on the old times
when pigeons lived well, not abused.

The flapping of large wings alerts them
to straighten and stiffen their legs.
For the speaker, One Feather White Old One
has not been a leader who begs.

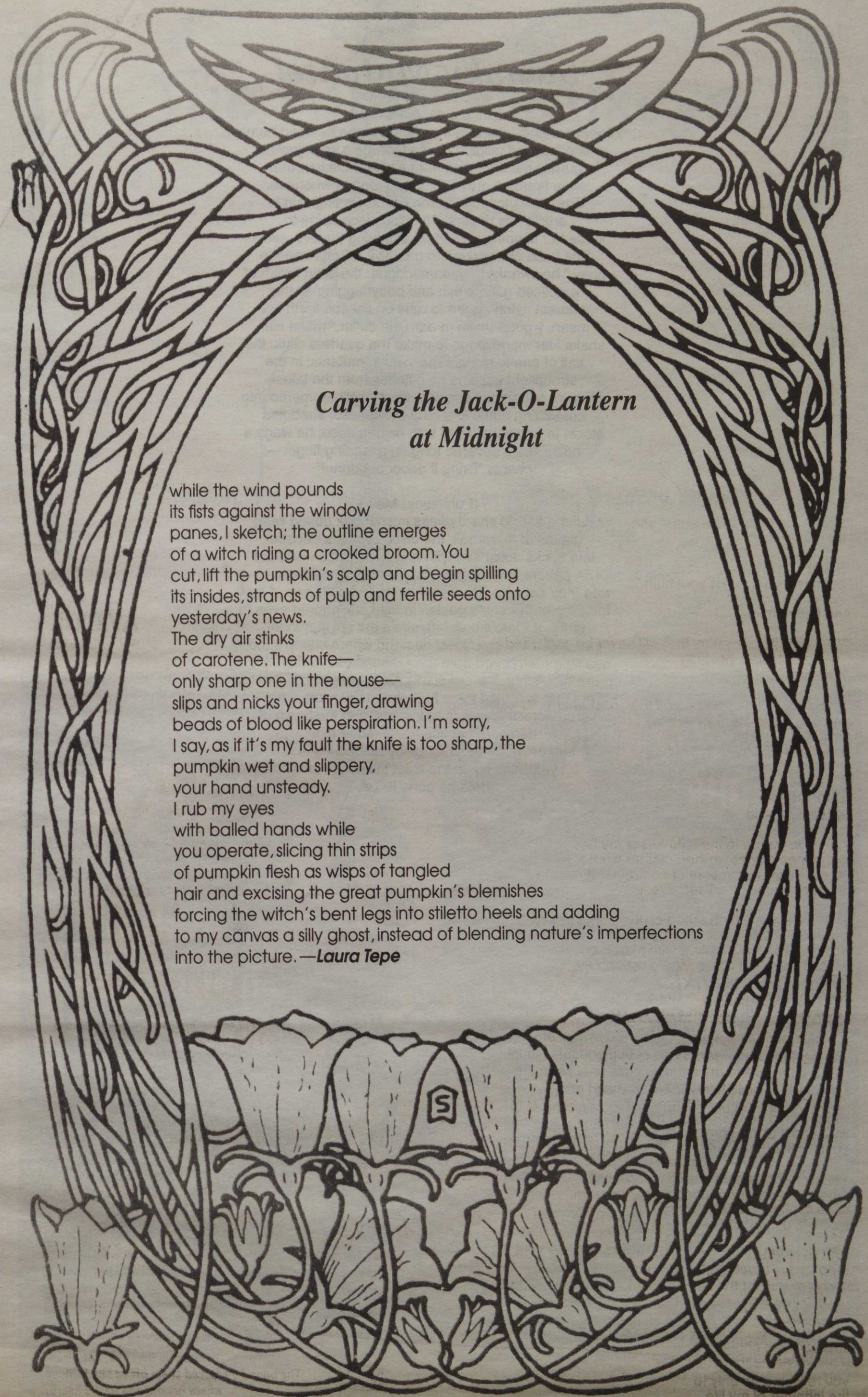
He stretches his beak and speaks clearly,
his keen black eyes scan left to right
as they count more than 400 members
all seeking relief from their plight.

How can he deny they're not doomed now?
That man won't change all that man's planned?
Feather White's nation will perish.
Their lives held in only man's hands.

But his brethren rise to deny this.
Deny that they'll all be destroyed.
"It's only because of man's tax cuts
that we feel we are left in this void."

That night a squad comes with netting,
holding cans with spray tops and white masks.
They spray at the pigeons around them
who waddle and sputter and gasp.

Before dawn the job has been finished.
The park is devoid of the birds.
The squad's trucked them off to the furnace
where never a coo will be heard.



**Carving the Jack-O-Lantern
at Midnight**

while the wind pounds
its fists against the window
panes, I sketch; the outline emerges
of a witch riding a crooked broom. You
cut, lift the pumpkin's scalp and begin spilling
its insides, strands of pulp and fertile seeds onto
yesterday's news.
The dry air stinks
of carotene. The knife—
only sharp one in the house—
slips and nicks your finger, drawing
beads of blood like perspiration. I'm sorry,
I say, as if it's my fault the knife is too sharp, the
pumpkin wet and slippery,
your hand unsteady.
I rub my eyes
with balled hands while
you operate, slicing thin strips
of pumpkin flesh as wisps of tangled
hair and excising the great pumpkin's blemishes
forcing the witch's bent legs into stiletto heels and adding
to my canvas a silly ghost, instead of blending nature's imperfections
into the picture. —**Laura Tepe**

Swanky Mutants!

by Derek cf. Pegritz
(Bring it on, Alan! Mix)

"Yeeehhhhhhh," the swanky mutant at the railhead hems, a hingebacked tailpipe driven through a satin jacket, guiffing mentholation from a stokehole leer that often spurts a gush of wicking tongue whenever She—the pinspotbattered carman losing skin in articles as rippling She flings legs aside to lose her flapping centerfold at paying threats—when She bubs close enough to promise. "Gotta see the beav," he swanks in mutant tongue, the satin hwish of practiced gabble thin and bodyhugging as the whorest nylon agged to runs on fishhook teeth—"I mean, y'gotta make 'em *earn* the dollar," make Her shake Her moneybags to make the quarters clink, the call of one to more... The swank, mutantic in the strobelight eczema he catches from the latest dancer's squamous sequins, grins, wellhammered into something equal to a carpart likeness; straddles stools to "mow the lawn" with hairpin nose; he wags a dollar like a severed tongue, a leading finger—chants "Bring it oooooooonnnn!"

(Funkabeat Mix)

Like a flaccid shard of ass in spandex poxed with flakes of mirrorball, the disco swank a decade late hocks dollar sex with free apperance—and the payers and the players in their louny linen wag their cancers "Comere!" through the tibbows of their fortified breath—she's golden in their schlagered eyes (a proof of Plato's bullshit), she's the splatter in the parkinglot the swankiest demand where cheap's the quality remembered from their Bandstand youths...It's a drunk ping sight, the dickclarks gone to seed beyond the pot that sprouted them in teens—their roots a futile grab across their arid baldspots, and the blush of denyterrio enticements faded to a tenspot eagerness for gluey smooches and a yearbook b.j. in the toilet stall of swanky dreams gone K-Tel.



Time to Swank!

(A Swanky Mutation)

by Derek cf. pegritz

Time to swank! The infomercial DJ sways at 3AM, when housewives and securityguards slouch drained n' midlife dry as midnight's final beer can, knuckled under after Conan, tired and empty-pitchereyed and old enough to fear recycling—so the latenight huckster stabs his pitch a little deeper than he could by coffeelight: IT'S SUPER SWANK HITS OF THE SEVENTIEZZZZZZZ!—the allnew, allold, allswank allyoueverneed of Continental dirtydancing epics, \$18.95 plus shippinghandling per—but you get tenyes *ten* of disco's dubioust greats on every—call now, feed the genes, the glam recessives, recessed since your swankedout twenties, burned out by the herpies treatments—yes, you know you want the sacred memories sold back to you at cost by tens, each rarified to Compact Disc, all grit and noise and all bad things remastered out...and you can even see yourself in music-mem'ry's underside, a pure reflection graced with rainbows, exactly as you were...

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OZ continued . . .

the trees until tomorrow, so . . .

"Great!"

"Plus, I know Alan still has that disk with my resume on it—I have to get out of this free range orchard business and fast before I set a match to those damned trees."

"I gave him a copy of my resume to proof and asked him to write a reference letter for me about a month ago and I still haven't heard from him!"

"What is he doing living here anyway?" Noele asked.

"It's a long story. Let's just say he lost his keys while—I can't stress this enough—painting his dining room. I think the combination of the fumes and the stress of his book deadline—not to mention the fact that he was simultaneously trying to rebuild the staff at Flipside and the newspaper—sent him over the edge. Anyway, he finally took that sabbatical he'd been gripin' about for years, then him and Betsy threw everything they owned into a few garbage bags and they headed here."

"That's Alan for you," the scarecrow mused, sweeping ditch-dirt out of his hair.

"Why'd you . . . Where'd you get that metal suit?" Noele asked Mary Ellen as they set off along the yellow-brick road again.

"You saw how those trees were!" Mary Ellen snorted back.

high in the gaps between the shrubbery. "Oz sure is going to hell anymore," Mary Ellen observed as they passed a group of trees shooting craps by the roadside.

Suddenly, a halfhearted growl trickled out of the underbrush and the group froze in their tracks.

"Oh, please don't tell me I'm

you doing in that getup?"

ian shrugged. "I went to this cool rave over in La-La Land with a couple of my friends who are hardcore club kids and they dressed me up like this. I'm getting to like it, actually."

"It's you, man," the scarecrow said. "We're all going to see Alan—you know if he's home?"

"Should be. I stopped over at his place just yesterday—he borrowed one of my dad's books on the history of football leagues in Oz and my dad wanted me to pick it up before Alan forgot he had it."

"Cool," Noele said. "So, you coming with us?"

ian shrugged and joined the party. "Sure, why not? The club scene in the Green-Tinted Cubic Zirconia City's really been heating up—they've even started getting a bit of a Goth contingent, too, Pegritz. Lots of girls dressing up like the Wicked Witches n' all that. I know you dig that."

"Yeah, as long as none of 'em have green skin . . ."

Suddenly, a halfhearted growl trickled out of the underbrush and the group froze in their tracks. "Oh, please don't tell me I'm gonna get mugged in Oz!" Noele huffed

Exasperated, Mary Ellen threw her arm up into the air and hit herself in the head with the arm of the clunky suit. "&*^%#@##\$! orchard business is for the birds."

"Oh, I kinda like it," Noele shrugged.

A few miles further up the road, they entered a dark and malevolent forest of tall, rotten trees . . . Burned-out cars lay along the road and litter rose

gonna get mugged in Oz!" Noele huffed and dug into her pocket for her wallet.

"Why would I do that?" a voice said from the thicket, and out stepped ian a bennett clad in a tattered, mangy lion suit and a smart grin. "I know you all and I know none of you have any money, so why waste my breath?"

"ian!" Noele shouted. "What're

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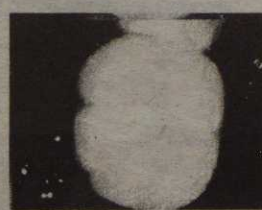
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Welllllll, the sojourners finally reached the Green-Tinted Cubic Zirconia City—which, in case you're wondering, is a tawdry, affordable knockoff of the much larger, much more expensive Emerald City much as Atlantic City is a knockoff of Las Vegas. There, among the green glass casinos and strip clubs and such, they turned past the Wizard's Inn and left onto Big Business Street.

There, Noele stopped to admire a pair of ruby Doc Martens in a shop window.

ian and the scarecrow stood around outside Glinda's House of Really, Really Good Witches and debated whether together they had enough money for a peep show—until Mary Ellen went around, distributing smacks to the head, and reminded everyone of their mission.

Finally, finally, finally they reached River Street, and ian led them up to Alan Natali's new house. They approached the door and, after fifteen minutes of polite tapping and then hard knocking and lastly violent banging, the door cracked open and a mysterious face

poked out. "Whadda you want?" it asked.

"Where's Alan?" everyone asked in unison.

"Get ready for the anticlimax," the doorman said. "He's gone bass fishing. He oughta be back tomorrow sometime. Maybe."

"Like we all didn't see *this* ending coming!" ian grouched and sat down on the front porch steps . . .

And so they waited, and waited, and waited, and eventually moved the entire Flipside operation onto Alan Natali's front porch as they waited for him to return from his latest bass-fishing expedition . . . But Alan, you see, was a long time in returning, for he had been captured by the Bass King himself and was imprisoned for life deep in the Bass Nation's darkest prison beneath the Monogahela River itself.

His only hope for escape was the Super Super Flipside staff.

"Hell, I should've occasionally let them know where I was. It will take them a year to realize I'm missing," Alan mused to himself as he wondered if he could work the slimy-sea-

weed-decor into his next book.

After three days of waiting, Mary Ellen said, "Guys, I've got a bad feeling about this. Noele, you better go grab that staff of yours."

"Why?" Noele asked.

"So we can indoctrinate them into the Super Super Flipside staff and give them their superhuman powers and stuff," the scarecrow answered.

"Superhuman powers? I knew there was something you guys wouldn't tell me when you conned me into this job!" Noele said, looking from ian to Mary Ellen.

"Yep, and my SUPER MARY ELLEN suit is at the dry

cleaners. I never picked it up after that time we had to save the city from . . ."

"Hey that isn't nearly as hard to remove as the clay from Mars," ian chipped in.

"Forget it," Noele said. "I'm gonna have a cigarette before I go get those guys."

Three hours later, she returned with her staff only to find them furiously debating whether or not starch weakened the supergravity-o lining of their suits . . . but more about that and the great Flipside River Odyssey next semester.

-Flipside



Yankee cont. . . .

"I didn't look at it that way," responds Mike. "I guess you really never get the chance to see these guys in Pittsburgh. I see why you're still interested in the game with it being a blowout."

Just as I am ready to respond to Mike, the last out of the inning is made. I watch Griffey run off the field and as he heads to the dugout, Chad Curtis, the Yankee outfielder, is being restrained by teammates, as players from both dugouts run onto the field. With a dugout brawl about to begin, I reach for my camera.

"Did you get the picture?" asks Jarrad.

"Yeah, I got it. I hope it turns out good," I respond. "Too bad they didn't fight," says Brian.

I laugh at the comment, knowing I should have expected it from him since he loves to see a good fight at hockey games. "What happened?" asks Mike. "I don't know. The teams almost got into a fight but then they just walked away," Brian answers.

Brian invites us to get a drink with him. Mike and Jarrad follow him, while I stay back to people-watch.

A girl hangs over the side of the second deck, waving to the guys in the bleacher seats adjacent to the main structure of the stadium. They begin to ask her to lift her shirt, and she responds by teasing them. She grabs her shirt as if she is going to pull it up. The guys scream, "Do it." She winks at the crowd and smiles as if she is ready to do it. The guys start to stand and some get their cameras ready. She grins and pulls her hands off of her shirt and be-

gins to laugh at them.

The gang returns, and I tell them what they missed. They laugh when I hear a smack and see the ball heading our way. "I told you he could hit another one," I tell Mike.

The boos are loud as Griffey crosses home plate with his second homerun of the day. After hitting two today and one yesterday, he has pulled away as the leader in homeruns in the American League. The two teenagers who walked around wearing Griffey shirts earlier now have the confidence to stand and cheer, as the bleacher bums yell obscenities at the Yankees. To punish the Yankees, they allow the few Griffey fans to cheer. "You can't beat that. Two homeruns from Jr.," I say. Jarrad says he never saw a great player hit one out in person. Brian agrees, and I add the most memorable homerun I saw was foul. I remember it only because Nolan Ryan hit it. I can finally say I saw a legendary player have a great game. The two Griffey homeruns are a story for me to tell for years.

Finally, the Yankees manage the third out. Before the second half of the inning starts, I look for the girl hanging over the wall. The guys start on her again. She reaches down and pulls out a sign for Ken Griffey Jr. The section boos her and chants, "You're a whore." The girl retaliates. She reaches again for her shirt. This time she pulls it up. Underneath is a tank top. That trash enrages the section. They call her every dirty name they can think of. She laughs at them and waves her sign, becoming one of the few to ever stick it to the bleacher seat crowd. She manages to have them lust for her and then

turn their lust to hate because they can do nothing about it while she stabs them in the back.

I can't stop laughing and turn to see a little disappointment in the faces of Mike, Jarrad and Brian. I laugh again to myself at the guys for actually thinking she was going to do it. Darryl Strawberry is up. Fastball down the middle: crack that's gone. I hurry for the camera to get a picture of him running the bases, as the crowd cheers loudly for the man who has battled drugs, alcohol and personal problems.

"You were right, Jeff. It did get better. This game has it all," Mike says.

"Hey, they are down like 10 or 11 to 3. Why are so many people still here?" I ask.

"That's the way it is when you have a team that is this good. It's never over, or maybe they just enjoy the game and are real fans unlike in Pittsburgh," says Mike.

That comment touches a nerve with Brian, who argues with Mike and says Pittsburgh fans care more for their teams than New York fans.

I look back to the game just as a pitch is thrown.

"Hey what was that?" yells the guy behind me.

"He hit him intentionally," screams someone else.

The Yankee bench charges the field. The Mariners bench joins them at the pitcher's mound. I grab for my camera and see out of the corner of my eye that the bullpen pitchers are running on the field. The Yankee and Mariner bullpens are next to each other in the outfield near the monuments. The Yankee and Mariner pitchers sprint side by side to

the infield. A few minutes and about five pictures later, the arguing by the players is over and each team heads to their respective dugout. The players from both bullpens walk back together, accepting the incident as a part of baseball.

"This has to be the best game I have ever been to," I say to the guys. "It was almost perfect."

"Well, to me, it was perfect," says Mike.

"I agree; this was the best," says Brian.

Jarrad laughs as the inning comes to an end, asking, "What will happen next?"

The Mariners are put down in order and the Yankees come to bat for the last time. Griffey stays on the bench for the final three outs and along with the fans standing at the railing in the first row that is clearing out, I feel robbed of one last chance to see the star. The Yankees are quickly down to their last out. Brian, Jarrad and Mike have been stretching and standing for the whole inning as they wait to leave. I hear the final strike called, stand up, follow them, and look over to the Monuments. Mike says, "I still think it was perfect."

I respond, "I don't know. It was the best game I have ever been at but something was missing."

I continue behind them, walking down the aisle, looking at the Monuments. As we stand at the tunnel to leave, I don't look at the field one last time with the rest of them. Instead, I look back one last time at the monuments. "Someday, and that day will be perfect."

-Flipside

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END GAME

FOR THE LOVE OF ROCK AND ROLL, BABY

BY JOSH WALTERS

It was a crisp January evening and I stood waiting impatiently outside the back doors of the Civic Arena in Pittsburgh. Despite the chill, nervous energy warmed me. I had never met anyone truly famous before and was about to sit onstage with the band Aerosmith while they tuned their instruments and practiced before the show. My sister-in-law had won front stage passes through a local radio contest and invited my wife and me to go.

Following what seemed like an interminable wait (more like half an hour), we were ushered inside and groped thoroughly by two immense men. I was relieved to find the word "security" stretched across the vast expanse of their shoulders. I felt like introducing myself, as is appropriate with such heavy fondling, but something in their demeanor held me back. As I passed the checkpoint and ventured into the hall beyond, I decided not to look back and check on my wife's progress, preferring instead to assume that she would not be searched as thoroughly as I.

Twelve other lucky souls had won passes through various means, and excited chatter filled the air as we waited for everyone to make it past security. The band representative, a scroungy little guy with his chest puffed out as if his band pass were a charity badge and two security clones rechecked our passes before leading us onto the stage.

A pair of tables had been set up on either side of the stage and the band representative told us "sit where you like; the band will be out shortly."

With this brief statement, he strode from the stage as if there were many more important things to do and so little time. Heightened tension gripped us all with his abrupt departure and we realized that no further instruction was forthcoming. Nervous questions began ricocheting among everyone, with no satisfactory answers given.

"How long will the band warm up?" asked a mousy woman sitting beside us. "Will Steven Tyler warm up with the

band?" my wife asked nervously. Her concern proved to be contagious and quickly spread throughout the women.

"He damn well better," replied a scantily clad woman seated across from us. The word "groupie" was all I could think of at the time, so I wisely remained silent.

The conversation about the popular lead singer naturally brought about the next question. "Can we touch them?" wondered another woman in the group. That query instantly elicited a chorus of private smiles and flushed faces from all of the women. A knowing look of mutual inferiority passed between us men, reassuring one another that we

was left to do was sit, wait, and trade impassive stares with the barbarians posted nearby.

After becoming bored with attempting to match the expressionless faces of the security guards in a staring contest (a hopeless battle anyway), I slowly took in my surroundings for the first time. Not the stage and its mass of metal bars, instruments, speakers and props, but out toward the stands which towered empty all around me.

Looking out into the stands

My trance was broken by the rustling of the band coming onto the stage and by the excited whispers their appearance evoked. We all moved to the edge of our seats and craned our necks, wondering what would happen now. The moment of truth was upon us.

The band greeted us casually with hellos and walked up to their respective instruments in a business-as-usual fashion. All five band members were present and I was instantly surprised by the age so clearly etched into their faces. No one screamed uncontrollably, as fans sometimes do, which I felt was a good sign and helped hide the fact that we all felt like overwhelmed children.

As the band tuned up their instruments and played through several of the songs they would perform that night, drummer Joey Kramer and guitarist Joe Perry never paid us a scrap of attention. Their demeanor suggested they either existed at a higher level than we commoners or had simply tired of such things long ago. Either way, their distance and self-immersion, even from the rest of the band, made me wonder whether or not everyone in the band had truly renounced their drug habits, as they had publicly proclaimed.

Bassist Tom Hamilton and guitarist Brad Whitford were both friendly and produced a lot of smiles and small conversation which, while pleasant, was unfulfilling. Their comments and questions were of the ordinary type you would expect when meeting anyone for the first time. There was no rock star quality to it at all. That banality gave these bits of conversation an obligatory feel and, although an improvement over Joe Perry and Joey Kramer, it did little to bridge the gap between heightened expectation and reality. In all fairness to the band members, however, there was little they could do to have met our fantastic expectations of rock stars.

In complete contrast to the rest of the band was colorful lead singer Steven

were not alone.

All I wanted to know was whether or not we would be able to hang with the band. Would they come out onto the stage, warm up and simply leave, or would we be able to engage them in conversation? There would be nothing special to me about watching anyone tune up instruments and leave, Aerosmith or not.

When we realized that no one was going to answer any of our inquiries, all that

from the front of the stage allowed me to glimpse the unique perspective of the band. I could envision seats filled to capacity with thousands of raving fans pouring their affection onto the stage. The energy of the crowd would electrify that which they focused upon, creating a continuous flow between audience and performer. Excitement shot through me like wildfire as I imagined myself in the center of that magical interchange of energy and enthusiasm.

Tyler. A power plant of energy and playfulness, the man was amazing to watch even during a rehearsal. He came strutting onto the stage with complete confidence, acknowledging our presence in-

... their distance and self-immersion, even from the rest of the band, made me wonder whether or not everyone in the band had truly renounced their drug habits...

dividually with a smile, a handshake or a deeply appreciative look (these he reserved for the women and distributed them regardless of beauty). He was dressed in ridiculously tight leopard skin prints and covered with colorful scarves. He stood out from the rest of the band, dressed casually in jeans and T-shirts, like a peacock amongst a flock of quail.

Besides being a talented showman and singer, Steven Tyler has an outgoing personality. From wickedly harassing the crew about their work and ability to blatant flirtation with wives and girlfriends, we never knew what to expect next. He was all over the place, talking to everyone, table dancing seductively, and asking opinions on all sorts of things from the mundane to the bizarre.

"What's your favorite song?" he asked a woman sitting next to us.

Barely waiting for a reply, he

launched right into his next question, "What's your favorite sexual position?" As the now flustered woman groped for a reply, the madman simply flashed a wicked smile and strutted across the stage towards the other table.

"Have you ever seen an ass like this?" he shouted as he strode away.

I decided not to bother with a reply, and could only hope the question was not directed at me.

Despite being unable to overhear the conversation from across the stage, it was obvious from Tyler's facial expressions and the reactions of the people at the table that they were receiving the same. Any doubts quickly disappeared as he began gyrating his hips wildly towards their table.

Having finished displaying his amazing hip flexibility, he galloped back toward our table. The excitement of not knowing what to expect next intensified with each bound. As he neared the table, I realized he was moving far too fast to stop in time. Bracing for a collision, I closed my eyes instinctively and hoped for the best.

There was a sudden whoosh, and I opened my eyes to see Steven Tyler flying over the table. On the other side of the table was his target, a hapless roadie whom he shook mercilessly before running back to his microphone.

This manic activity went on through the entire warm-up. Between completed songs and abandoned screw-ups, the man

was never in one place and never said the same thing twice. Even while he was singing, there was no respite from his playful energy. He was continually pulling people out of their seats to dance and sing with him or speaking volumes to the women with his fiery eyes. Never did the vibrant lead singer relax his intensity or fail to entertain thoroughly. There was so much playfulness to everything he did it was impossible to be offended even by his wildest acts.

Simply being there and meeting the madman known as Steven Tyler would have made this an event I would never forget, but the best part was yet to come.

After the band finished playing, we exited the stage with the band. We were to be ushered out to our seats for the show and the band was headed to their dressing room. As we were leaving, Steven Tyler put one arm around my wife and the other around my shoulder and walked

He was all over the place, talking to everyone, table dancing seductively, and asking opinions on all sorts of things from the mundane to the bizarre.

with us. He asked if we were married and I told him that we were. I went on to tell him that I proposed to my wife during an Aerosmith set at Woodstock ('94) while they were playing the song "Dream On," which is my wife's favorite.

His reaction to this surprised me to say the least. He expressed his delight and said he was very flattered. He gave both my wife and me a sincere hug and announced the news to the rest of the entourage. A loud cheer followed and before we knew it, he pro-

duced a set of backstage passes for us to get autographs and photographs with the band after the show. His sincerity and trust took me off guard and I was only able to stammer out a crude thanks

His sincerity and trust took me off guard and I was only able to stammer out a crude thanks through my disbelief.

through my disbelief. It had never occurred to me that he might take what I said seriously and react to it in such an honest manner.

The concert that night was excellent. I was able to watch the band members as they played before me with a new perspective. It seemed like I knew each one of them personally now in one way or another.

Afterwards, I met with the band in a back room for autographs and photographs. There were a lot more people in the room, which made it more impersonal than earlier, but it was nice to get a few priceless mementos of the occasion. The thing that will always stand out the most in my mind is the brief conversation I had with a superstar and the sincere interest he showed in my less than epic life.

-Flipside

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The Ape Man Cometh Issue



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Mark Hofmann's strange tale of a C&W singer's last gig

Jamie Barley remembers what it was like to just play ball

TODDIE struggles with a most difficult decision in a story by Ainsley Keller

Brian Kiger finds out if he has the nerve

The FLIPSIDE superheroes journey to the Land of Oz

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Poetry by Laura Tepe, Derek c.f. Pegritz

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Fall 1998

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