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Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT



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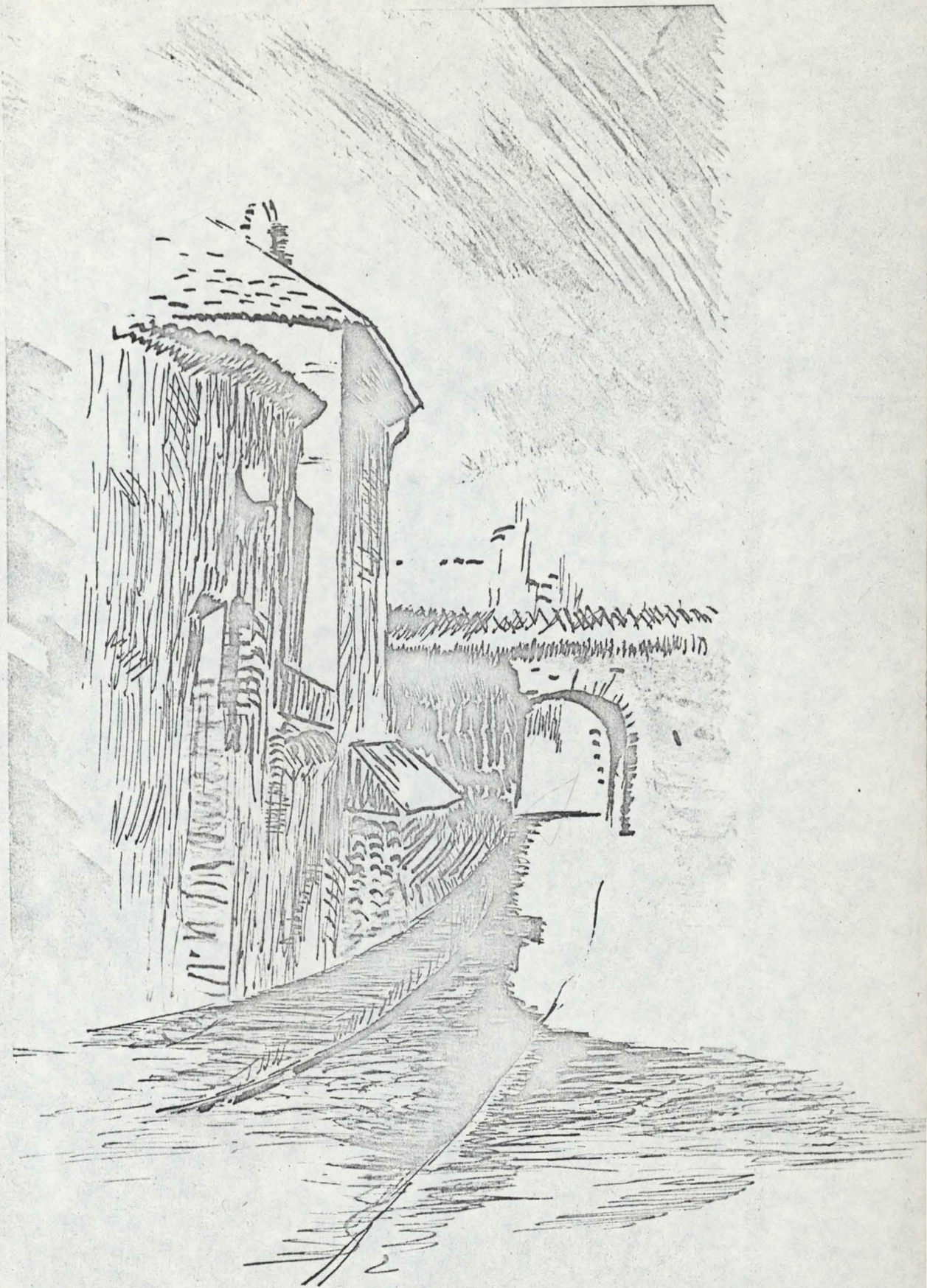
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Poem

A sentence pulsed
Across the page.
Cells of thought
Streamed to a line,
A linear memory
Tracing the pulse
Of a finger, a hand,
A past, a heart
With characters bled
Across white space.
Surveying blueprints
Of the possible,
Projections cleared the clutter
Of that desk, of that life,
As I wrote fictions of peace
Stirred from an older man's thought
And a child's dreams.
Upstairs the boy awoke,
Hungry and alone,
To cry softly
In the dusky heat of shaded noon.
My concentration leaked his sobs
Into soundless dreams.
He bleated out the passing of the day
And brought the heat. As when
A faucet dripping in the bath
Beats out the passing of the night
And chases sleep.

Groping for a word
My mind wandered
To parts of life
Left in a study.
My eyes fell
To the swirls of color
In a Persian rug.
Bought in Calcutta
On a sweep through India
It was a relic of exotic hopes
That swept through youth.
Certificates on the wall
Professed a name and a career.
On my desk,
A picture caught a smile
As I held a five pound pickerel
Shivering light
Caught on a wet cold
Morning in Canada.

This much I unearthed,
~~Dry scattered remnants~~
 Of life long past
 That leave to speculation
 The taste of pickerel.
 As the child cried
 My eyes saw
 The disparate designs
 Of an estranged past.
 Alone the child wailed
 Shattering artifacts
 To so many curly cues on the floor.
 The immense weight
 Of intense sound
 Compressed mind and sense
 To the immense weight
 Of repeated sound,
 Until a cold blue flame
 Exploded me outdoors.

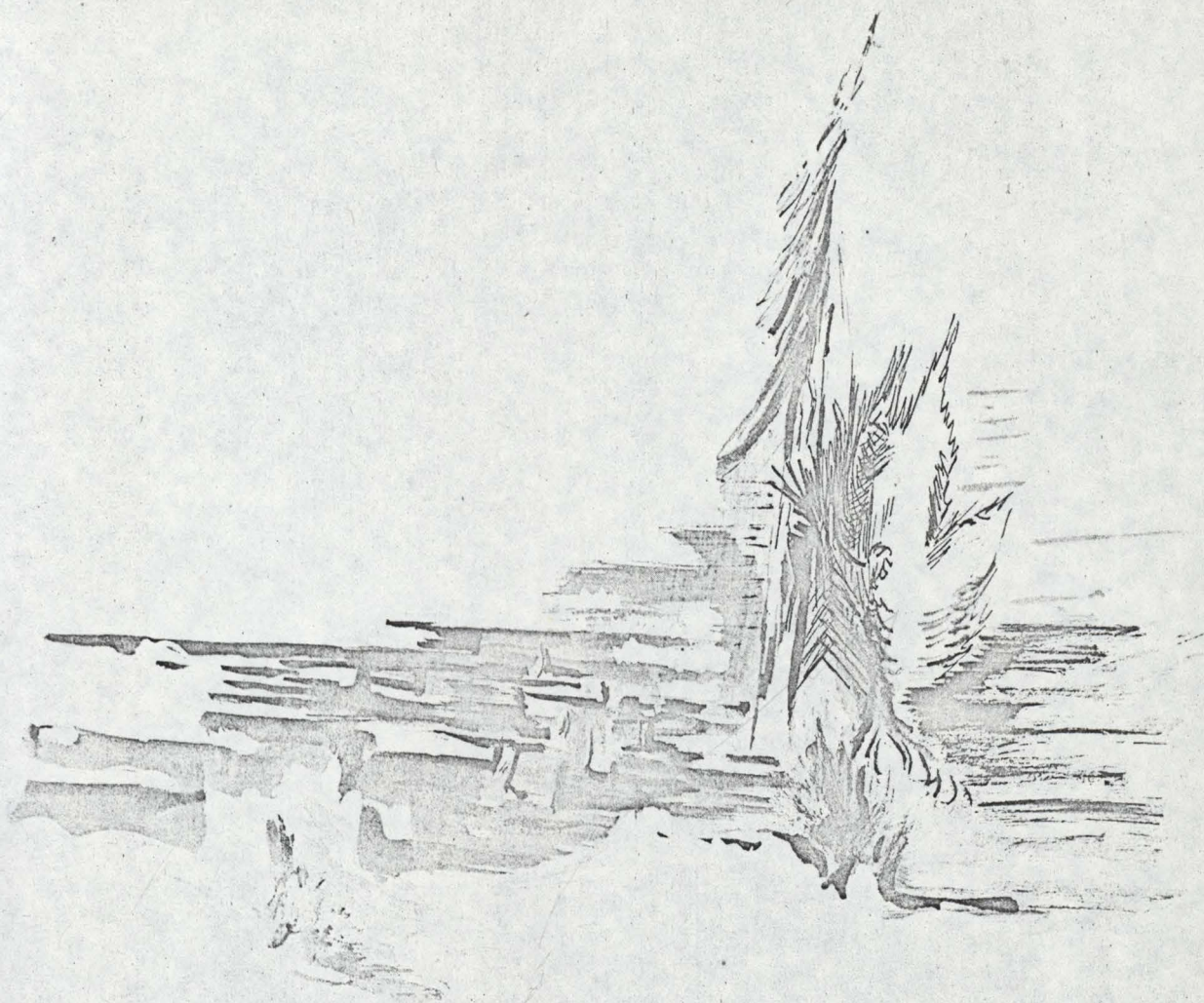
On ragweed and clover
 I lay breathing the hot day
 Lost in mind's immense moment.
 Beneath a large tree
 I stared into a green globe,
 A green world that filled my sight.
 Whirling and falling
 In emerald green, a bird
 Bored through veins of light and space.
 Yet, it paused to alight
 On a thin branch which bent
 With the fall, then rose and fell.
 I breathed to that rhythm
 Drawing light and space into my veins
 Entranced with a bird
 Somewhere between
 Breathing and a breath.
 Abruptly it flew
 Outside my world.
 The branch rose and fell as if
 Breathing short and fast.
 I imagined how the bird
 Faded to a speck, then dispersed
 To wisps and sighs of air
 As the branch was stilled.
 Breathing stilled, the breath dispersed,
 The self somewhere between
 Not breathing and death,
 In the numbed, indifferent peace,
 Of no future, no past,
 Love flushed my face like rouge.

6

My name crossed the field
Yet it was enough.
A voice, a breath, a simple sound
And I was called home.
A sphere, a span of time
shrunk to a field
Crossed in the steady rhythm
Of walking and growing old.
The field funneled
To a plot of land, a house,
a path to the door.
Senses overheated by
Combustible air
Close to the musty floor
Of a hot, still afternoon
Cooled with the motion.
A field singed to straw became
The warm undulating stones
Of a garden path.
A lawn, a bed of blue asters
liquified the light.
Sense relaxed and sank
Until, halfway up the path,
Music gave the silence a shore.

Notes sluiced through the door
Down the path to where I stood
Paused on the rim
Of hearing and not hearing
The stream of sound as it swirled
Into the silent sea behind me.
In the reservoir of my memory
A resonance plumbed the silent past.
I saw a boy turn to the solace
In playing that piece into his soul.
The dissonance of harmony,
Rhythm, fear and resolution
Had resounded through his mind,
Until his hands no longer felt the keys
But moved and shook
With a life, to a rhythm
He neither knew nor felt.
Now, as they played,
I could hear the grace composed
Into a thread of music.
Themes woven across space
And all the dexterity of ten fingers
Patterned that much of the stillness.
Yet more than textures
Of grace and peace
There is in perceiving themes
And in the chance
For completing the pattern
The expectation of an end
And silence.

Imagined up the current of sound
I could see her hands at the source.
The love I felt in the notes
Were in those hands.
As they played,
They touched the boy and me.
As she played,
The hands became the woman ...
But then a face no more than lines
Etched in my mind,
The shadows, the shadings
That make a cheek round,
Then notes once more, texturing
The even evening light.



Old Men

In the thickenings and the clearings of the softwoods, through those spaces where the night sky shines blue, on the road that drops from the ridge in a curve, the rushing wind loudens, roars, fades to a tensile hiss of tires and steel. Between the trees and among the branches of the trees on one side only there is a flicker of lights. The ridge crests and a white car shines, while old men in the trees reflect that lines drawn through the king pins of its wheels might meet at the center of the earth, and, certainly, the small black marks its tires leave will endure for months. The car feigns at the trees and dodges to the right, seeming to follow the unnatural path. But its rear wheels slip to surpass the front, and it aims itself at the inside ditch. The old men smile as the car lifts and falls and settles, as the glass in its lamps tinkles and the lights dim, going out.

The moon slides off to the west, drawing a glistening line on the crumpled door. The insides stir, paint chips, and the door opens. Two pale hands grasp the roof to lever a body out. The face is wan and the cheekbones hollow, the walk staggering as he vanishes down the road.

Quad headlights illumine the flapping back of a kid's shirt and the Chevy stops. "Get in," says the driver and the kid says yeah and thanks.

"That your car off the road I just passed?"

"So what's it to you if it is?"

"Kid, look, you don't have to be tough with me. For all I care you can get out and walk; I'm only giving you this lift as a favor."

"Sorry, I must be a little shook."

"You must be, all right. Running a car off the road like that, must have been doing about eighty. I've a good mind to turn you in, that's where you belong. Why, driving like that, there isn't any sense in it. One of these days you're going to kill somebody, and that might be you."

"I was going eighty five."

"You were a damn fool. At eighty five she just goes clean off the road and there isn't anything you can do. Don't know why I'm giving you this ride. Ought to let you off right here, shift on your own, see what it's like."

The kid was making an unpleasant face.

"You take one of these little compact jobs and you try to race 'em and you're going to get yourself killed. How long you been driving, kid?"

"Two years."

"Two years of driving, why, that's nothing. You've got to be driving your whole life to go doing things like that. Kid, you're just learning. You've got to learn to back off, take it easy. Why, no man in his right mind would try what you did. Crazy."

"You seem to be familiar with what you're talking about," the kid said, "like you went through it before."

"Well, I was a trucker."

"Ever had one jackknife on you?"

"Yeah, couple of times. It's bad stuff, kid."

The kid did not ask him if he had been going too fast, and asked him instead if he had ever raced at Unity, which was a half-mile dirt track a few miles north. The trucker did not answer because by that time they had come to the intersection where the old road they were on met the new road that led back over the ridge to where they had both started. The new road was heavily traveled so the trucker said the kid could hitch a ride from there. The kid said ok thanks and he would take it under advisement. The Chevy turned away and he walked until another car got close behind him and stopped. He could feel the leer of the old men in the trees, and he stepped in. The familiar face with the mop of hair and the big glasses said:

"Didn't make it, huh?"

"No. It was a decreasing radius and downhill and with a Valiant. . . ."

"Total it?"

"Looks like. I didn't stop to look."

"Still, I think you could have gotten through."

"It was the same old thing. I was going down the hill and there was this tree coming at me and I couldn't see which way the corner went until it was too late to set up

a line, so I pulled the wheel over and the tail went out, so fast I couldn't hear the tires. I put the wheel where it felt best and it straightened out, pointed itself at the ditch, and went in."

"You could have powered out."

"Hasn't got any power. When it leans the float bowl jams and the engine stops."

"So you didn't use the gas?"

"No, it would have been pointless."

"But it might have worked. If you'd have kept your foot down the back end might have stayed out and you'd have made it. You might have had to broadside to get through the tight part, but. . . ."

"It was broadsliding."

They paused. The kid turned on the radio.

"Well, I still say you can take that corner. You just made a little mistake."

They were leaving the troll country, nearing the town. The kid lit a cigarette and watched the window withdraw the smoke. When they came to his house he got out and sat in the yard until the sky turned pink. Then, reaching to pluck a branch from the tree, he rose and walked to the garage, started his father's lightning-powerful car, and returned to the devious, seldom traveled road. Breaking the line of trees on the ridge, watching the quick-tightening road, he wondered what the old men thought.



Public Image

Now

Deep in the muddled reaches of
Nearly landlocked inlet tide
Rises in dark a desolate verdant mountain,
Mangrove-ringed, a peak of motionless pine;
Buoyed on the salt-sweet oyster-studded mud, its speech
Whip-poor-wills peacefully through the night,
Whispers the substance is not in sight.
Bathed in the carbon light that leers from the human beach,
Effigy island inverted, admired in wine:
Eyes give symmetry to the greenery fountain
Seeming to flow from just inside
Itself — the whip-poor-will tells with love
How.

The Swamp

I enter quick,
Rabbit-scared of the dry sticks,
Crackling reeds and weeds, once-watered sedge;
Dry fear, dangerous, eats at the swamp's crisp edge.
With the muddening of the earth
My scampering softens to a slink;
Lungs reach tenderly to touch the humus stink,
Shrink, but stay; I give dead stumps less berth.
Gracefully crawling now by scummy pools
I hide in spidery grasses, feel small fishes
Nibbling like persistent wishes;
Softly at first the swamp asserts its rules.
Insects, intermittent frog-falls intersperse
The silence; alligator calls now echo low.
Coiled and bead-eyed, I need not rehearse
The slither or the strike — for now I know
The serpent's still-imperfect marriage; more,
That even this fearless moccasin form of man
Pays obeisance to the land.
All's as before.

Goodbyes

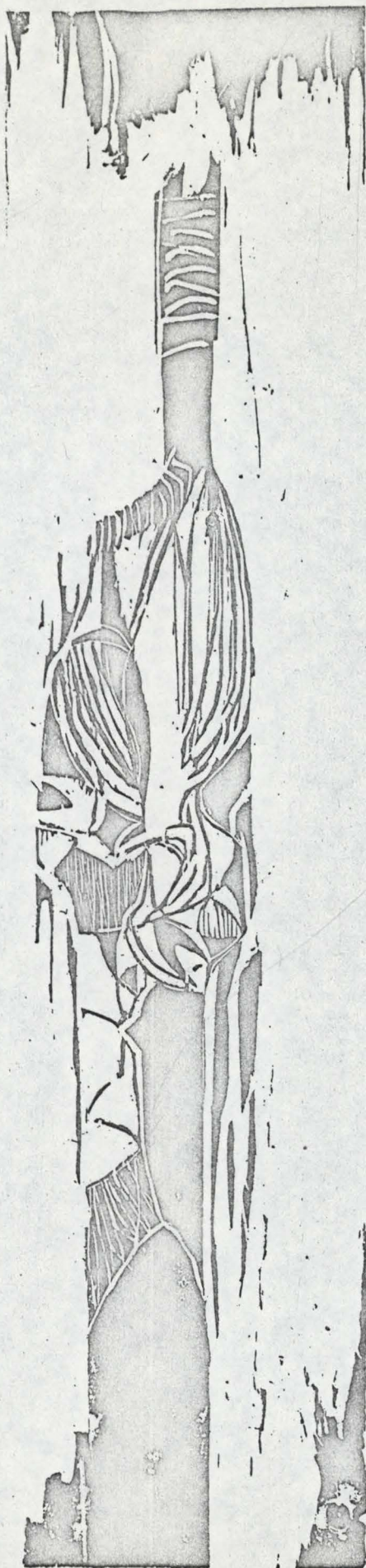
The sun purred cautiously
and stroked my back with claws now sheathed,
battle-weary lion —
spiralled down black distant dots
 in shimmering thermals to their prey.
While she fought the moon for the firmament,
memories of grasses dried,
 died and sprung again.

There was no game.
Little life remained to cross my path;
while time passed on too fast to pause
 and wait for me to dig
 rabbits of freedom with my dog.
So kicking my boots with the talcum sand
I rapidly walked the road.

I met the oldest oak
and kind moss-fingered
 ponderous limbs
asked to oak-leaf me and lift
 and heft and hold my weight.
I left my boots
and I swung,
 shimmied,
 jumped and crawled
to the very
tip-
 top . . .
where the gaps in the cool green leaves
glimpsed the golden splendor of the sky,
 of sundown.

I saw and swore I would not descend,
 never walk on bloodless
 to the black highway —
But when from a perfect airplant cup
 uncurled a serious circus coral snake,
 I had to climb down from my limbs in fear,
 unripe. He came too near.

Had I met him,
 let him kiss my hand,
I could have hugged the rough old bark as tight
as now these bars, my ribs —
 I would have dried,
fertilly burning, someday maybe sprouting
 Ressurrection Fern.



Sumpin You Kin Hol

"Awright now! So de break is tonight . . ." Cajun had spoken quickly, using a thick sharp, heavy whisper. "All y'all 'at's here, brang wha' chou kin. We gonna meet back o' Eddie Po'foot's place when dey start ring-in' de big bell." He looked for their faces in the darkness, but could only see the black shapes of their heads. Nate he knew was right beside him, but him he was sure of; and he wished he could see the effects his next words would have.

"What's dat?" The black shapes tensed in the dark. "Wha's dat I smell? Smells lak a cowahd done got in dis here room." Nate jumped smoothly to the door. "Hey Nate, you smell a cowahd in here?"

"Naw, Cajun. Dem's jus' scairt niggahs you smell. Mamma Jean use'a al'a' tell me dat you kin tell a niggah scairt by hi' smell."

"Y'all smell anythin' . . ."

"Naw — No man — We don' — Ah don';" a jumble of black whispers flooded the room.

"Good . . . cus it mighta bin yo'se'f; an' ah woulda had to use dis on one o' you 'stead o' one o' dem."

The knife flashed brilliant through the blackness, a disembodied blade floating high and glowing hot above them. They sat fixed, awed by this new display of strength.

"Any dat wants to back out had bes' do it now . . . an when you do, you bes' keep yo' mouf shut. . . . Lotta good men could git killt if a scairt niggah wanted to yap."

No one spoke. Cajun parted his lips in a broad grin, chuckling deep in his throat.

"Look here Nate, you know wha' chou got ta do; Cleet, Sephus, Bo, y'all got cho' job; Teecha, Obedi, Benjy, y'all know yo's. Don' let me down now; don' y'all cross me . . . de res' a y'all done bin to' all y'all need ta know fuh now, so leave here. You know de meetin' place, an' y'all know de plan; gone git some sleep. Right Nate?"

"Sho'nuff!"

"Wha' chou gonna dream 'bout Nate!"

"Bein' free . . . walkin' wheah ah wanna walk an' makin' big brown bushes of dust grow wheah ah plant mah feet —"

"Yeah man," Eddie Po'foot cut in, "Ah'm gonna be free an' ah'm gonna swim an' play in wahda jus' es clare an' sweet as dat lil' ol' man Syphax' place —"

"Ah'm gone fine me a fiel' of snow white fl'ahs —"

"Haw, haw! Dem soun' lak cottin fiel's ta me Teech!"

"Hell naw! Ah means tree fl'ahs . . . lak wit' apples an' stuff. . . . Ah swear, one day ah'm gonna have me sumpin' o' my own. . . ."

"We all will, a grab. . . ." Shadda grunted nervously from where he squatted on the moist dirt floor.

"You shut yo' mouf! You ain' got nuthin' to lose by all dis . . . an' evah thin' to gain." Nate searched for Shadda in the darkness, ". . . you black, good fuh nuthin' . . . lissen, all o' y'all. Not a one o' you in here kin lie to me an's ay he happy de way things is. Not a one. An' as long as you got han's an' feet you kin be. You got here tonight din't chou?"

Well you kin run too. By yo'se'f it ain' easy, dey'd a cotch chou fo' you reached Mud Holla; but tagetha, tagetha we kin all be free. Awright, y'all didn' wanna folla me, but deahs Cajun he yo' leada now, axe him. With or without chou he aims ta be free, axe him.

The small dark room seemed to tremble with the dry nervous breathing of the black men it contained. Nate had finished. And they waited.

Cajun began to speak, hushed and soft like they had never heard him speak before; "Y'all 'll see . . . ah'm gonna git away f'om here . . . an' one day ah'll be a big shot . . . ah'll have a big fine house . . . wit' both wines an' wimmins; light, purty, an' sweet . . . an' ah'll have fine clo's lak y'all nevah seen. . . . Dey'll call *me* 'Misteah' . . . an' we's all gonna be free ta live . . . jus' lak we dream."

Cajun stood quickly, raising his muscular frame high in the darkness. He was tall, lean, with thick lips and fleshy cheeks. His hair grew coarse and curly from his forehead to the base of his neck. His jaw bones were set high beneath his clear dark eyes; and his nose lay wide and hopeful on his tube-shaped face. Whenever he moved it was with quick, tense jerks and bounces which started at his wheel-wide shoulders and trembled down through his broad, weather-hard hands; and he filled his stiff dry garments, a large, thinking mass of motion.

"Small John! Skeeta! — y'all check see if all iz clare." They rushed liquid and silent into the night air. Nate stood waiting for the signal.

"Psst! All clare. . . . C'm'on, git! Dam' yo' hides, git!" Nate's whisper, hoarse and urgent, sent them scurrying from the room.

Nate had been the last to leave and he walked tall in the night air, embracing its darkness and summer chill with bursts of full black laughter. He moved smoothly, rippling across the face of the wind-worn roads and rising on his toes to meet the challenge whispered by the leaf-heavy trees. He knew they were going to win now. The hardest part was over. They had shown what they could do; there was no doubting that. Hadn't they gotten them all together, spread the word, organized, and made the plans. Hadn't he collected the clubs and torches they would be needing, and didn't Cajun show them a

blade as big as Cleet's left foot. Hell, they would follow him and he knew it.

"Cajun, Cajun honey, zat chou?" Nate was quick to move off to the side of the road. He was thinner than Cajun, light and faster on his feet; but he had the same broad shoulders and strong, hard jaws. Only the thick woolly tangle of his hair and made him appear shorter and heavier than he actually was, but this seemed to be enough to evoke the timid female voice which called from the shadows.

"Who dat?" Nate crouched low, calling softly from the left side of the road. He wanted tensely for an answer but heard only shrill cricket sounds and the hiss of leaf-on-leaf. "You bettah an'er me! or you bettah git ready ta meet yo' makah! Who's dat?"

"Somebody who ain't ascairt o' you!"

"Then you mus' don' know how a knife kin cut."

"A fo'ty-fo's a mighty big number to git hit wit', 'special when you ain' got nuttin' but a po' knife."

Nate relaxed now, he knew the voice. It was Callie, Cajun's woman. He wondered what she could be doin' out so late, especially without the boys; and he questioned her now for Cajun's sake.

"Wha' chou doin' out chere womin? You got no biznis bein' out lak dis here. Wha' chou up ta?"

"No more'n you, Nate Shylow." She moved proudly, bold, stepping from behind a pair of thick, weird pines. "Wheah's mah man, Nate? Wheah's mah man?"

"Now wha' chou mean axing me sumpin' lak dat fo' —"

"Don' tell me no lies Nate. I mean that. Wheah's mah man? You bin wit' 'im an' ah know it."

Nate answered quickly, grinning a thick, broad smile like a wedge of ripe, ready cheese, "Wommin you think yo' man out cattin', i'zat it. Haw, Haw!"

"Wha' chou take me fo' Nate Shylow, some kinda fool! Ah had me ten diff'unt men fo' ah was gived to Cajun; an' ah know he had more'n 'at 'fo' he got me!" She had shouted, but now she grew calm. "Humph, Cajun ain't nobodies man; an' ah ain't nobodies womin. Ah'm like ta have me ten mo' fo' di here an' dis is gon'!" She grabbed at work-

stained blouse, violently thrusting her firm, heavy up at him.

"Callie, ah . . ."

"No! Ah ain't done!"

"But chou don' wan' . . ."

"Lissen!" she pulled back the hammer of the gun aiming it at his belly. "You shut up an' you lissen!"

He fell silent. She wasn't to be talked to. He couldn't understand it, her acting like that. Callie wasn't like that. This couldn't be her. She would never do anything like that.

"Nate ah feel sumpin' fo' him. You heah dat. Ah do. . . . An' ah knows dat ah mean sumpin' for' him. Ah don' wanna see nuttin bad happen to us. I'zat clare? Nuttin'!"

"Callie, ain' nobody tryin' ta come 'tween you yo' man."

"You think ah'm blin' or sumpin'; you don' think ah see how y'all been slippin' off tagetha! Ah foll'd you tonight. Ah foun' out fo' mahse'f. You, an him, an' all de res' a dose men; y'all 'bout ta do sumpin' fool!"

"Wha's fool in bein' free, wommin? You da one talkin' fool talk! Wha's wrong wit' wantin' sumpin' you kin hol' onto an' call yo'sn! Wha's wrong wit' wantin' ta leave here fuh a bettah place? —"

"Wha's wrong wit' bein' dead, Nate!"

"Looka here Callie. You said yo'se'f dat Cajun wants you wit' him. He not gon' leab you heah. Or de boys. All he wants ta do is go ahead an' git a place ready fuh y'all."

"Howcum he ain't tell me nuttin' 'bout all dis Nate? Whycum he never said a word to me 'bout all dis?"

"Cus he knew you wouldn't understan' wha' he's tryin' to do."

She lowered the gun and turned slowly away from him. "Ah nevah had nobody do fo' me the way Cajun do. Nevah. He treats me good, Nate. Real good. Eben when he drunk an' he git mean, ah kin smile Nate, cus ah know he gonna be good to me. An' Nate, ah ain't nevah gonna git annudder man lak dat nowheah, an' ah knows it."

"Don' worry Callie, evah thin's gonna be fine you'll see. Ain' nuttin' gonna go wrong

cus we got it all planned. Won' nobody git hurt. You'll see."

"Who you luv Nate?" She turned facing him, her large muddled eyes fixed on his lips. "Who you feel fo'?"

"Wha's wrong wit' chou Callie? Why you axe me sumpin' lak dat?" He laughed uncomfortably, dipping and raising his eyes awkwardly, first at her feet and then at her face.

"Nate you don' know whad it's lak . . . you don' know. That man means mo ta me than yo' fool talk o' bein' free. We ain't nevah gonna be free. Wheah you go, wheah ah go, we got black skin Nate. We got dese chain burns; an' we got dese pains dat movin' jus' won' stop."

"You wrong Callie, you wrong. We bin scufflin' an' workin' fuh yo' sake; an fuh yo' chillun. We din' come tagetha cus we were thinkin' o' ourse'f. Ah din' plan, an' lie, an' steal fuh me. Ah din' do none o' this fuh me. Hell, ev'ah dreams o' bein' free, but free so he kin do what he wants fuh dem he feels sumpin' fuh. . . . Sho, ah o'ganized an' schemed ta git dem ta folla Cajun, but it was fuh you an' him an' all de res' o' dem."

"You really mean dat don't chou Nate?"

"Callie, ah means ta be free . . . an' Cajun does too."

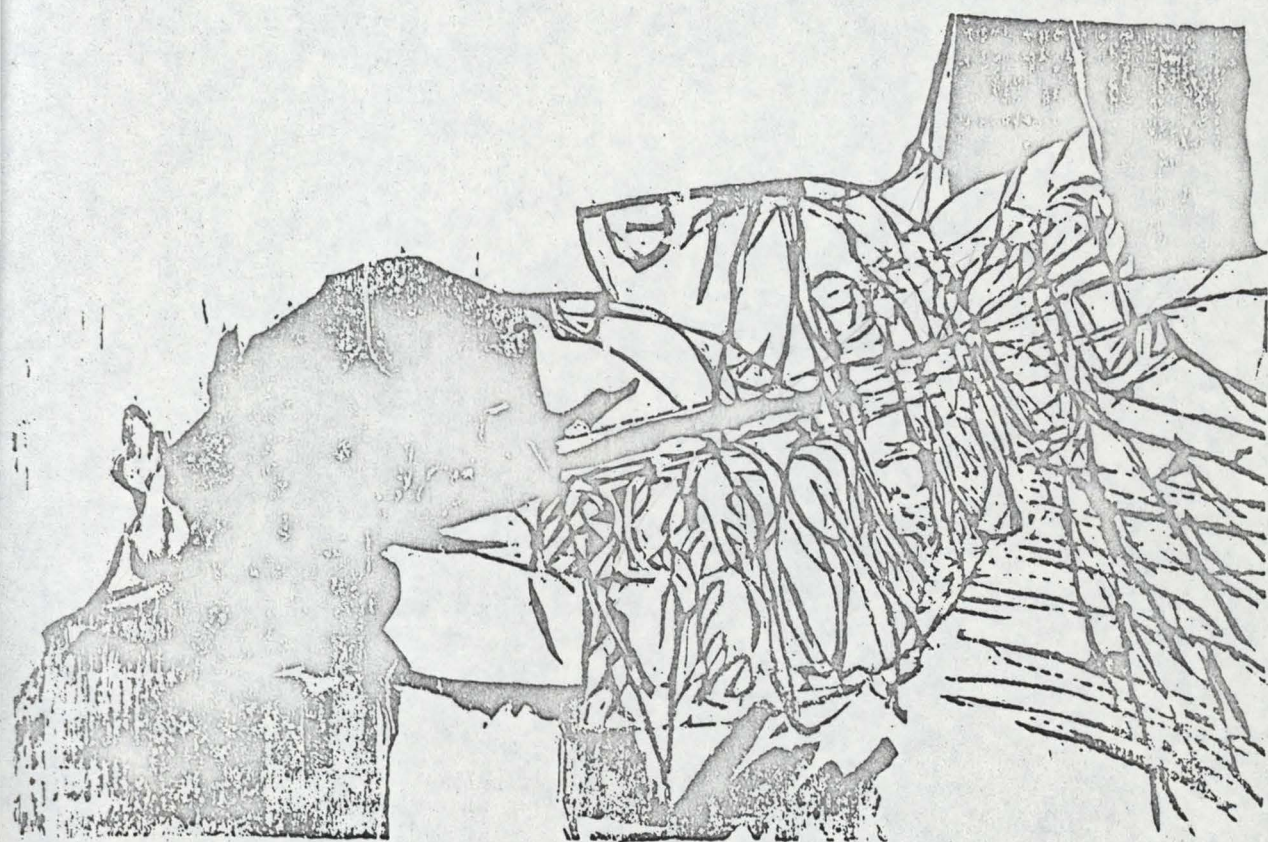
"Whata 'bout me, Nate, an' mah boys?"

"Y'all kin be free Callie — an' ef anythin' evah happen to Cajun, ah'll take good care o' you."

"Ain't nuttin gonna happen Nate. Evah body oughta be slave ta sumpin'; sumpin' real, sumpin' he kin live fuh; sumpin' he kin hol'. Ah got Cajun, Nate. Ah'm gonna keep him fo' as long as ah kin. You be free." She pointed the gun in his face.

"Callie! Callie, don' . . ."

The black woman moved like some drifting phantom light over the dry cringing backroads. Her face was set with a cold blank expression; and she dreamed of how tomorrow would be for her man and her children. The soft-sigh sounds of leaf-chatter vowed support, and the deep pure darkness which embraced her, warmed her every step. It had been simple; she had handled it well. Nobody had to worry now. They were all free.



Through Thaw

At two o'clock in the morning, a car was an unwelcome visitor to the Lower Drive which sleepily wound below the loop on the Near North Side. A blue chevy was guided between two tiers of enormous pillars which disappeared into the void that he knew was the answer to the once childish question of what held Chicago's streets up and why smoke came up through the gutters. The tier on the left guarded a wall of the sprawling tunnel on which parking places and an occasional bar or shoe repair shop appeared to lurk revealed as sentries of the cavern by gleams of white paint or dimly lit signs which flashed out of the dark. The driver of the car pressed his ear against the frosted side window as he slouched down to see out the small crescent of the partially defrosted windshield.

"Where's WCFL honey, down to the right? I want to hear what Sid's got to say tonight. Maybe he'll be highlighting Ramsey. Do you think so? He likes Ramsey doesn't he?" said the girl who sat a foot away from him with her hand near the radio.

"Third button." He moved his head quickly away and glanced at the rear-view mirror with its V of yellow lights generated from a point far behind them, and then looked grimly past her out the now clear window on her side. Two girders which supported the city framed the river, the Dearborn Street Bridge, and the circular apartments beyond. His gaze split the narrow space between supports into a panoramic vision of the far bank with the patterned

lights leaping toward them, crescenting off the invisible ripples of the river and modulating in the shadow of the bridge. Through the clenched tresses, he caught a glimpse of a moon, faintly lighting a bit of a dark sky into grey, and he said nothing as he saw her turn her head to question his vision.

"Hey, listen! 'Broadcasting from the top of Marina Towers'. There they are, the towers, right there, across the river with the red aerial on top."

Involuntarily, he looked again at the lighted tower of apartments and pulled his gaze again back to the beams of darkness ahead of the car.

"Do you suppose Sid is up there right now? You know, with all the records and everything?" she said with tired childishness. "Do you think so, this late and all?" she chattered her demand to his silence.

"Well he's broadcasting isn't he? God, where else do you think he'd be? — Maybe they broadcast it in a studio somewhere and pipe it in to be transmitted or maybe they do it all in a studio at the top, I don't know." He spoke softly trying to apologize for his previous sharpness.

"Maybe they do, sure, that's got to be it."

A steady cone of water from the melting snow in the street above hit the car over the right fender as he drove too near the gutter. There were periodic drainage holes for that purpose, but no drainage pipes, so during rainstorms there was a tier of rain pillars down the right side of the lower drive next to the river. The water fell from about fifty

feet, he had once estimated, from the level of the beams which was invisible at two o'clock in the morning, and hit with a good force, making a steady splatting noise and a stain with brown edges on the pavement below. The splatting roar was quite loud, but subsided as they moved away, increasing each time they approached another liquid pole. During the day, the fluctuation of the sound acted as the rhythm for the hum of the cars above and the hiss of the cars below skimming through the puddles. As he flicked the wipers on, he remembered the time he had shocked her by guiding the car beneath the water so that it had suddenly splatted on the windshield in front of her. They had laughed and she had pretended to pout until he pulled her over to him. He turned off the wipers and looked over at her as she fumbled with a cigarette in her pocketbook, noticing not for the first time in the evening her up-swept hair with its glisten of a hard lacquer. But, now, the shell was beginning to disintegrate and along her neck a few hairs loosely flying, and suddenly he wanted to kiss the soft neck with the loose hairs flying.

She put a cigarette to her lips and following her indication, he pushed in the lighter. At the same time he guided the wheel in a slow turn to the left as the lower drive veered southward, paralleling the flow of the river. The rearview mirror caught a view of the river during the turn, and he noticed the sheets of ice nestled grey against the dark bank. A week before, there had been a solid sheet between banks which had a white sheen in the daylight. Now the ice-breakers and the premature warmth had splintered the ice so that it cast wierd grey shadows onto the wooden docks, the rippled and chilled water, and the splinters themselves. He gazed ahead to where the two headlights were making flashing predictions upon the pillars, flickering from upright to upright and sending shadows in slow and sudden gyrations about the pavement and walls. He remembered how extremely poised and how neat her hair had been at the start of the evening when she had thought the occasion called for sophistication.

Hours before, he had driven north on the lower drive and then veered east to an underground parking lot beneath Michigan

Avenue. The usual Saturday crowd was rushing into the city to be entertained, so the tunnel drive was filled with headlights and blaring horns, the middle shift of delivery trucks, taxis, and buses who used the route as a cutoff to the Lake Street Terminal. He had pulled into a space next to a maroon Cadillac and they had both laughed at its obvious significance. The collar of her green cocktail dress was up in a dignified fashion which was more congruous with a gentle giggle than an intoxicated bellow, the outcome of the five empty beer cans on the floor of the back. They sat for a moment and as they laughed he leaned toward her.

"Come on honey, not now, you'll muss my hair. We've got to go," she said as she opened her door, banging the chrome door handle on the Cadillac which caused her to laugh again.

He finished a beer and thought of all the times that he had caressed her hair without complaint, the parties they had been late to, the wild and tender moments which had been more important than hair, or time, or place. He leaned over to lock her door and smelled a trace of her early evening fragrance, her best perfume she had said.

A mixture of filth and flowing water made a small rivulet with mud banks along the side of the walk, so he guided her with an accustomed hand on her girdled hips through the mess and up the stairs to the upper drive and the city, which lept before them like a giant wall of sheer glass and gigantic stone as they reached the top. The open expanse of river and the wide upper drive was a contrast to the adjoining entanglement of buildings, and reminded him of the open plain between a wild river and the wild forest beyond, a plain of neutrality, clean, and exposed to the full force of the winds which whipped into the mouth of the river from the lake. Now the rain was still. It had only been a gentle rain before, without a howl as some of the wicked storms which would blast the avenue clean, forming little pockets of old newspaper, bottles, and city filth in the corners of buildings, much like the scum of the river which would float in perpetual whirls at the intersection of docks and the bank, sucking the water of the river through it and sieving it back cleansed. This rain

2

had been a slow, and steady, eating away at whatever snow had managed to accumulate, and melting ice which covered walks and railings, and sealed pages and bits of newspapers, old cans and bottles, and filth under the milky sheen. Now the residue of months was being exposed by the destructive warm spell, exposed and released to float aimlessly on the draft of cars or the river breeze or down the flow of the gutters until it would gather in a corner puddle. As they walked east along the drive, she with her hand at his elbow, he thought how clean the air smelled despite the garbage through which they were walking.

"God, we're here early, what'd we have to come so early for if we aren't due until the eleven o'clock show? We could have come an hour later. Look, it's only half past nine, she said and pointed to a large neon clock a block away on an enormous Pepsi billboard which now read: "For Those Who Think Young" but would soon read: "Drink Pepsi-930-37°".

"I like the city, you know, I just like to walk around." he said and loosened his arm to go to the rail. He leaned far out and looked down at the river many levels below.

"Well, what do you want to do? Where do you want to walk? Let's go across the river to the Insurance Plaza."

"Yeah, O.K. Come here a minute and look at the barge up there. It just hit a pole. This late and they must still be unloading something." She reluctantly came over and looked where he pointed, and then looked further down the river. "This is a beautiful sight," he continued, "So someday when I get my oils I'll paint it and make it famous."

"And I'd like to take a walk someday. Come on, let's go over to the plaza," she said and walked ahead of him, pointing her toes and tilting her head, proud of her sophisticated dress, he realized, and wanting to appear as if hurrying somewhere, not just strolling as they both had done so many times before, in levis and with leisurely abandon.

At the corner of the Michigan Avenue bridge and the Upper Drive, a fat man with a cigar and a hat bellowed about the touring boat below which offered rides out in the lake. The ride was good and had an excellent

view of the lake but took an hour and a half, he knew, for they had done it before.

"Last trip of the evening. Come on Folks, show your missus the city she's been living in. You wanna see a scene, take a ride on the Fairy Queen. How about you two."

"Let's take a trip again. Come on, I haven't done this for months." She weedled and moved toward the stairs which led down to the river and the boat, walking past the sign which said: "Tour of Chicago's Lake Front — \$2 per person".

"Hey, don't be funny. We haven't got time." he replied and kept walking, exasperated with her obvious boredom.

"It's a wonderful ride, sonny, with a nice comfortable cabin to sit in with your honey. It's the last trip tonight, your last chance."

He kept walking, knowing that she knew they couldn't take the ride and still make the eleven o'clock reservation at the Pickled Eye which he had carefully made a week before to be sure to hear the Lewis Ramsey Trio.

"Come on. Let's go down and look at the boat then. We have time. I'm going," she said back to him as she started down the stairs.

"I'm going over to the plaza so come here!" he snapped back, realizing that she was baiting him, luring him to follow. He walked on, hoping to hear her run up behind him as she had done so many times before, hugging him around the waist until he would turn. He walked and listened, but, knowing her mood, realized that she was waiting for him to follow her down the steps. A tightness spread from his chest at his helpless exasperation and anger at her for precipitating an artificial alienation. She had again dominated the situation to which he had to respond, not for the sake of the response but just for the sake of the test. It seemed to him that it was a weakness that she had to periodically test their relationship, though perhaps unconsciously, for some redefinition or reaffirmation.

He crossed the street across the bridge and entered the plaza in front of the black insurance building which rose high before him with a glow from the wall of tinted glass, a black wall which was actually a complete side to the skyscraper. A stone bench with carvings was next to a circle of flowers, isolated

in a courtyard of stone. Behind him, across the street, was the fully illuminated Wrigley building which could be seen as a glowing figure for miles. Its entire height was reflected in the taller insurance building, and every detail could be seen with minor distortions. It had always amazed him how an entire building could be captured in one solid reflection, a white and yellow projection within the insurance building, covered by and covering the black luminescent glass. Both were magnificent, but the Wrigley building appeared to be a white gowned mistress to the tuxedoed skyscraper, she enfolded in his sophisticated arms while glittering in her elegance.

Suddenly, he realized that he was waiting for high-heeled steps and the rustle of a dress, so he sprang up and started back across the street after cutting through a line of pausing traffic. He walked quickly across the bridge, but slowed at the other side, kicking at a pigeon. When he reached the descending stairs, the man laughed and pointed downward to where he could hear her laugh. His hesitation made his forehead and cheeks feel a strange warmth as if he were choking in a scratchy, dizzying, woolen scarf. He started down, shuffling slowly as if preoccupied with the boat which peered up at him at every step. He saw her poised on the side of the boat in the rear near the engine, talking with the thirty year old man who was tuning up some apparatus. She looked up, saw him, bent down to say something to the man, and then waved an arm at him.

"Where you been, honey? I was looking all over for you. Look, I've got a new hat."

He was handed a sailor's hat with a polished brim on which he left a faint impression when he quickly handed it back.

"I guess you couldn't have known I was at the Plaza. It is pretty far to walk across the bridge, isn't it?"

"Say, don't be snapping at me. You're the one who walked off."

"Anyway, let's get going. It's getting late and we want a good table."

They had then walked up and across the street, standing a bit apart and not talking very much, both aware of a certain tension, not so much a result of the incident, but merely revealed by the incident, as if the

mutual irritation of the incident had in fact melted to a degree the facade which they both had erected to hide their tension.

Leaning against the steering wheel, he pulled out the hot cigarette lighter and held it out, not looking as she pressed against it with her cigarette. She pressed the back of his hand gently with her fingers as she guided the cigarette into the heated ring of the lighter, and then spontaneously shifted her legs up with a shuffle of a petticoat and the scratch nyloned thighs, so that her bent knee was pressing against his leg. Aware of the brush of her body, he waited for the accustomed touch of her hand on his neck, a comfortable way to drive he had long before decided. She had always been sensitive to him as they had developed an intimate interplay, knowing when he was appreciative or aroused, but, now, as she idly blew smoke toward the ceiling, running her hand along his shoulder, he realized that it was not for him that she touched him. His eyes became prickly hot and he felt a helpless, uncryable pain as he became aware that her caresses were no longer for him but now merely characterized her, and he wondered for the first time how many men would feel arousal from her touches, caresses that she had learned from him. She was gone, he knew.

He straightened and she shifted away. She was far away and he wanted to pull her to him. It's me, he wanted to scream, the one who told you to touch and taught you to touch by touching you. Understand, he did scream, at least understand the difference, but only to himself, at least know that it isn't like it was, or what it was won't even have been and won't be now. God, she's gone, he knew. We're like two people who know each other so well that one of us doesn't even know at all, doesn't even know she's gone.

Along the base of the flashing red light, there were two piles of grainy snow, momentarily preserved by the unmeltable grains of dirt intermixed, but predestined to crush itself and lose its creviced form in a future flash of melting. The snow had once smoothly and innocently covered the walk at that protected spot, but as people had paused there between lights, they crushed it down in the shapes of their heels and kicked it into the gutter. So, now, only two piles

were left, and they were melting and disintegrating from within. Stopped at the light, he could see the red glow on the snow below change to a quick yellow and then green, the grainy snow changing texture with every light.

"There's Ramsey playing now, I think. Isn't that Ramsey? Tune it in a little bit, would you? Sure, that's Ramsey."

"Sure," he mumbled and pulled away from the light, remembering how Ramsey had played in the Pickled Eye, how he had played for the two of them.

When they had entered the night club, the hat-check woman had not made much of an effort to apologize for refusing to take their coats until the early show crowd had passed. A bald man with a creased, dinner jacket motioned them to the end of the reservation line where they were to wait for an available table. They were both impatient and asked for a check of their reservation, but they were again motioned to the line where they stood against a wall. It was slatted to allow a glimpse of the stage, a consolation for those who had to wait through their show in the lobby, he thought, peering around the full length mirror to gaze over the waves of tables.

"Listen honey, I thought we had a reservation. Let's just go right in. I'll talk to one of the waiters with my sweet voice," she said, leaning against him slightly for balance in the crowd.

"You can't just do that, you know, they just don't let you. They'd have us out of here so quick. Everybody else has reservations too. We have to wait."

She shifted away and leaned against the mirror, her hand still on his arm for support. He was facing her and the mirror so that the people in the other line would see her face and his back, but would see his face and her back if they looked beyond them to the image in the mirror. He looked at himself and squinted, looking at the two of them and thought what had been said many times before to them both, that they made a good-looking couple.

"We make a good-looking couple, don't you think?" She laughed, not bothering to turn and look to see exactly how good a couple they made.

"Sure, if you look at us through an inch of glass."

"O.K. smart guy, I'll keep my mirror out all day."

"It'd help you look at yourself without craning your neck, that's for sure."

"Well, somebody's got to look at me. How's my hair look?"

"Couldn't be more beautiful unless it were down."

"Oh, god, that again."

"Why don't you wear your hair down any more? I really like it that way, down, you know."

"Listen, I'll fix my hair, you just look at it once in while. Hey, honey, why didn't we scoot in like we did last time, through the door in the bar? That was the slickest move you've ever made, coming right into the bar like that, and bolting a table in front of thirty people."

"You can't do that every time. Besides, that door just happened to be unlocked because the musicians just happened to have just gone through. Didn't I ever tell you that? Anyway, I wanted to do it right this time." He thought of how they had slipped past the bartender and grabbed a table, bolting like they had bolted a ball game once, and many movies. They had been like a team, her using feminine guilt, and he climbing fences and stuff.

"This is the right way to do it all right. Wait in line for half an hour."

Their name had been called just before the show, and a waiter had led them to a table near the back on an aisle which led to the kitchen. Their order of two cokes was taken immediately, so he did not bother to pull out his brother's I.D. card.

"I feel young tonight. Do I look old enough, you know, would I have passed?"

"You look like an old man, junior?"

"Of course you look like Liz Taylor in that outfit."

Just then, the drummer brushed his cymbals to announce the start of the set. The sound of the bass was beginning to set his head to pulsing, and he sat back in anticipation of entrancement.

"Excuse me, sir," apologized a tall waiter with a tray of dinners, and he had to move his legs which stretched across the aisle.

Lewis Ramsey, the pianist, began with a brilliant trill which ended in some booming chords, to which he announced the other two members of the trio. They began with a popular hit made over into a quasi-jazz piece which soon had the whole room clapping and singing and moving in rhythm. The next piece was a bit of deeper jazz with some intricate interplay between the bassist and the pianist. He could pick up the melody line tossed back and forth between them, as well as two rhythms which they varied in response to the drummer.

"Your cokes, sir."

"What? Oh, thank you." he replied and returned to the music.

"Would you like anything else, sir? Some dinner or dessert? Here is a menu for you and the lady."

"Hm? Thank you, but I think we're all right?"

"Can I have a piece of cake, honey? I'm a little hungry. A piece of cake would be so good." she said, looking at the waiter.

"God, why don't you listen to the music. What do you think we came here for?" he snapped back, wondering why she did not remember how he had told her that they would get something to eat later where it would be cheaper and just drink cokes during the show. Now she wanted a two dollar piece of cake!

"Please. Just one piece of cake. We can split it."

"Order your cake then." he had told her and turned back to the stage just as the trio rolled the end of the song.

From then on, it seemed as if the show was an interruption between interruptions. His feet were always in the aisle when the waiter was passing, or he did not understand his appreciation of the trio's intentions just at the most involved and involving portion of a wild solo. Once more, only, was he entirely captivated by a fantastic interplay between the three musicians, which was highlighted by intense solos by each of them and set a joyful, knowing mood within him which was only broken when they switched to their standard superficial arrangements of popular hits which the ordinary night club patron loved.

"Hang on Sloopy, Sloopy hang on." the

crowd sang and clapped, and he felt an angry helplessness at the crowd pleasing rolls and elaborate endings which were drawn out by the showmen to hear the crowd squeal.

"I'm in the In Crowd." she sang and clapped as he sucked his ice cube and watched the fingering on the bassist.

"Look at their shirts, look how they turn purple in the light." she squealed near the end of the show. He could see the lighting change so that the white shirts glistened with different colors, along with white teeth which flashed at the laugh of the happy musicians. Laughing at us for the money we're throwing at them, for the wallets we're sitting on, he thought, feeling in his back pocket, knowing just where the ten dollar bill was hidden in his creased wallet.

At two o'clock in the morning, on the upper drive, there was an occasional car passing them, going north, and one car far ahead which gestured backwards with two red lights. The street lights were white, unlike the wierd colors and blends of yellow and red in the lower drive.

"I didn't think they were that bad. I mean, I like Sloopy and those songs and if they can make them sound good, well fine."

"But why not jazz, why can't they play jazz? Every time he opened that piano's big mouth he was an entertainer, not a musician."

"But most people want to be entertained, I want to be entertained."

"But not by a damn prostitute. Every time he opened his mouth, he was imping for a second rate jive he sold his talent out for. Those arrangements were about as elaborate as Bo Didley and sophisticated as Lightning Hopkins."

"Well, I like Bo Didley."

"So do I, but not in a goddam jazz club."

She didn't bother to reply, so he sank against the seat and again felt the window with his cheek. He knew it was getting colder for the wind which had been like a spring breeze at nine o'clock, had been bitter when they left the Pickled Eye a half hour before. He saw the ridges of snow along the street, left there by snowplows which had cleaned the streets two weeks before after the big storm. There was a crust on the snow, a deceptive crust which did not support a

jaywalker as it had done for so many weeks, but would break and sink a foot into the soft mush below. Along the walk as they drove slowly on, he could see many such footmarks where people had cracked the crust and had thrown wet snow into the street. But it was getting colder. Tonight, it might freeze and then the ridges would again become hard, but the footprints would remain, developing a crust of their own. Maybe it would snow tomorrow, and cover the whole place with a light level of new snow which would gloss over the premature melting and the black soot and trash below. Or maybe it wouldn't snow again, and in a few days, the park and the street crews would be out for the first clean up of the year. He didn't really care which happened, if it snowed or not. It was late and he was tired.

"Let's go look at the decorations on State Street, honey. I still haven't seen them. The decorations are supposed to be so good, and then maybe we can go by the fountain before we go home. You don't want to go home now do you? I can stay out later tonight."

It seemed as if she always felt like however he expressly didn't, he thought, and maybe she realizes the same thing. We used to fit together so well. He avoided looking at her, for he was beginning to drowsily feel his usual late evening desire and he knew she wasn't receptive and he certainly wasn't receptive to an uneager reception. At least we're both sensitive enough to the other to know what they don't want so we can do it, whatever that's supposed to mean, he mumbled to himself.

"I think we'll head home right away."

"Oh honey, just a quick look, let's just take a little drive so we don't have to go home right away."

He remembered all the times they had loved this time of the evening, when they had both wanted to stay out later so they could be together, not, and ironically, he thought, because either of them had wanted to avoid parking with the other, but on the contrary, or rather on the hill past her house. Don't worry honey, you don't have to worry anymore. You're in safe hands tonight, suddenly disgusted with her, and then disgusted with himself for he understood her feeling, and in sleepily objectiveness sympathized with her, and was becoming indifferent to it. Don't worry honey, you won't have to tell me no anymore. Or yes anymore, he thought, and loved the thought of what they had known.

"Please, let's go down and take a last spin around the city, I want so much to see the decorations and things." she pleaded with a detachment which told him that she didn't really care what they did. He stopped at a stop light momentarily, hesitating in the left lane, waiting for the arrow.

"Turn left, honey, turn left and go down to State. I'll show you something you've never seen before, something I've never seen before."

Sure I will honey, sure I will, he thought, looking at her crusted hairdo, which was melting around her neck, covering her upturned collar, and at her indifferent eyes which were focused somewhere down the long, empty street. Sure I will, he mumbled, as he checked the rear view mirror which showed nothing but a tower of flickering apartments and a few flakes beginning to cling to the chilled glass. The light turned and he slowly turned right, cutting across two empty lanes, blowing the few flakes in swirls, and moved across the bridge toward home.

Claude Messenger

Claude Bowman:

bending
warped by years
his eyes limp loops
of red
from lid to lash
his shoulders round with whiskey weight
his stomach loose and ugly
and his legs
knees in
toes out
but firm
pressing his spine
cursing his back
with a hump
he hides with a sign.
He moves:
a zombie-waltz step
shuffle
tremble
through the hustle-push of day
St. Christopher
the Gospel on his back.

He moves:

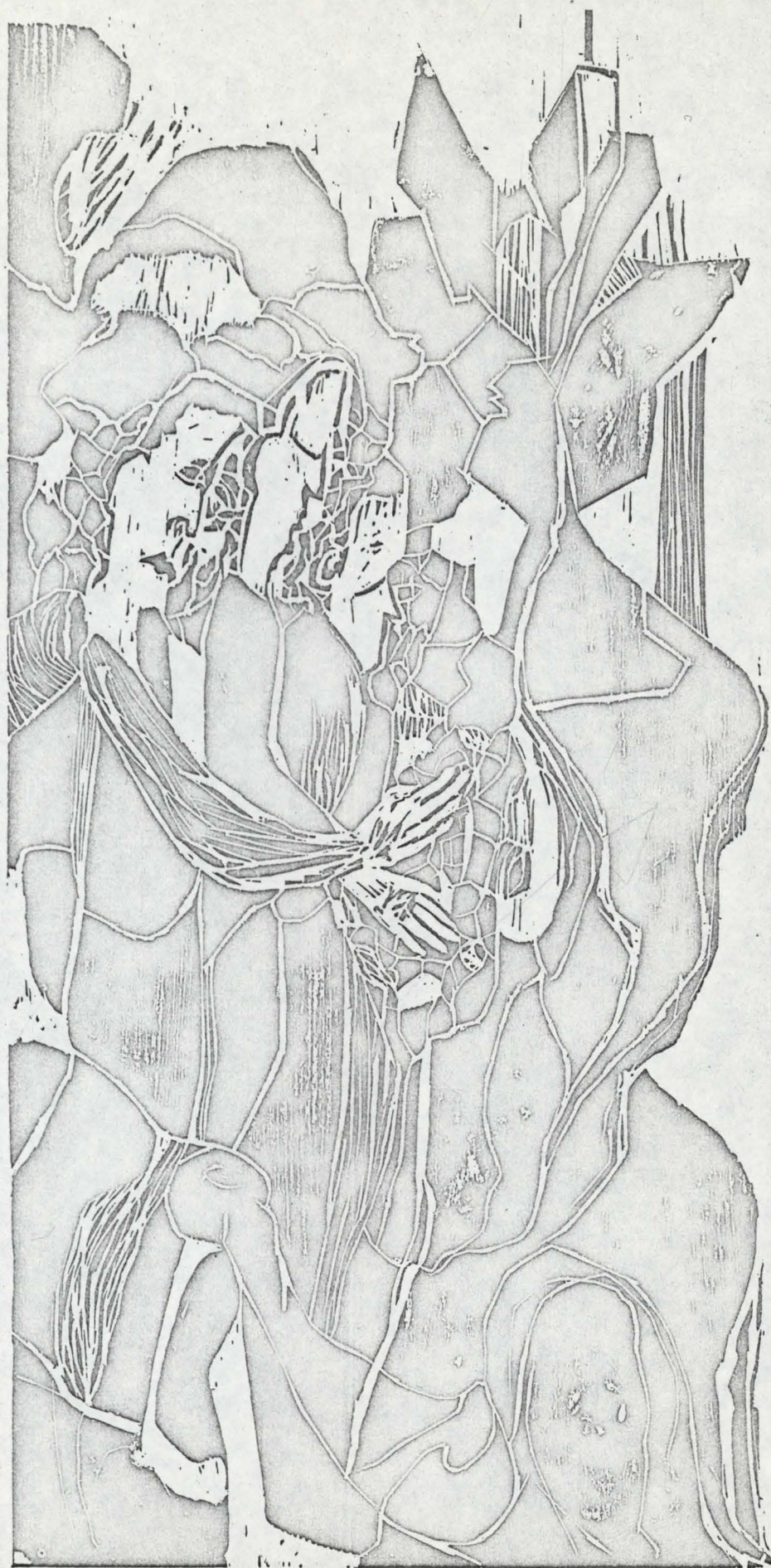
among the many
childlike
tangent to the bleary and the blind
rolling
jerking

Hermes

wingless
worn.

He moves:

a whisper
in the midst of shrill sharp noise
stupid to the sound of the world
Pan
bent
and silent
bending;
and like the sun
each day
completes his arc of day
dreaming of the liquid taste of death.





The Ceremony

It had happened that one day while Sammy Bronski was eating lunch in the crummy luncheonette where he always ate, Sarah Jacobson had asked him if she might share his table, that is if it were not too much of an inconvenience or anything. He had said yes. They didn't say very much at first for after twenty years of eating alone who knows what to say, but after awhile they found themselves talking almost freely to one another. The next day they sat next to each other again; so it's a habit already and they enjoy not eating alone in the crowded, crummy luncheonette. They kept on talking like that day after day; it wasn't much, just chit-chat, but it was very pleasant, not being alone all the time and the like. One day they meet after work and have a bite to eat together, nothing spectacular, but it was together. Before you know it they were seeing each other all the time and while nobody was celebrating and they were not going to any fancy-pantsie parties, it was something to fill their thin lives.

Sammy sat nervously in his room waiting for Sarah; she was coming to his place for dinner for the first time. Sammy Bronski was a forty-seven year old furrier who lived in a one room hole-in-the-wall, and he was worried as hell as to how he was going to entertain a lady in his little room, which really was less than nothing. Finally there came a timid knocking on the door. Sammy was very slow in answering; he had never had anyone to his place before, especially a lady. He opened the door cautiously, expecting the worst in the world.

"Hello Sammy," Sarah said, waiting outside the door as if maybe she were not invited.

"Hello," said Sammy, watching across the open door, but saying nothing else.

"Am I early?" questioned Sarah, still waiting, but now getting a little nervous.

"No . . . No, I think maybe right on time. Come in now. Take off your coat and sit down."

Sarah shyly took off her coat and looked about the bleak, bare room. Gooseflesh all over she had from the look of such a room. The room was nothing more than a box with a place to sit, eat and sleep — could some-

body really live in such a place? Never, never, thought Sarah.

The two sat down on the couch and talked severely about life. Sammy talked about how bad his eyes were getting and how it was getting very difficult for him to match the skins. He asked her if she perhaps thought he might do well to get a pair of glasses. She thought he might. Sarah, she talked about how lousy her boss was, but what could she do? Sammy finally thought she might be hungry and asked her if she wanted to eat. She said she was hungry, which is the polite thing to say when you go somewhere for dinner. They both sat down and ate the soup and chicken that Sammy's neighbor had prepared special as a favor, for Sammy was a quiet neighbor to have.

It was a long and strange dinner. In the luncheonette they didn't have to keep up the conversation because there were other people, but there were no other people in Sammy's room besides them. So they involved themselves in their food; cutting all the chicken carefully, chewing it all as slowly as allowed and never speaking with food in their mouth. To tell the truth, they just did not feel comfortable and did not know what to say, though they usually could say nothing for hours without fidgeting at all.

They both kept on eating and smiling until nothing was left to eat. Then they just stared at each other for awhile. Finally Sarah spoke, "Let's sit down on the couch and relax. It's been a hard day and we're both tired. I feel like a sheet that has hung out on the line through a blizzard."

"Sure. I'm tired too, so let's sit on the couch," Sammy added enthusiastically, glad to have someone else make the decisions.

The two walked over and sat down on the couch. For a second they stared awkwardly at each other, "Sammy, tell me how come you've lived alone all your life?" Sarah asked, putting her hand on Sammy's shoulder.

Sammy sat slouched over, his hands like old rags lying on his lap. "I don't know. I guess I just never got around to thinking about it, so I did nothing. It's hard to tell."

Sarah started to rub Sammy's shoulder with a firm, relaxing motion. Sammy, he sat

and did nothing. "Did you think ever to change your life Sammy? To make something different?" Sarah queried, her eyes trying to look beyond the fogged window in front of her.

"Once, yes I used to think. But now, no. Now is late and I see nothing new," Sammy answered, his head nodding affirmation of what he said. Sarah kept massaging Sammy, holding him, but she got no response from the tired, numb furrier.

The conversation groaned on. Sarah ran her fingers lightly along the side of Sammy's neck. Sammy sat there unmoving, beside the fact that Sarah had never touched him before. Sarah moved closer to Sammy, resting her head on his tight shoulder. Sammy, he sat still, peering straight ahead in the void of past and future. Nothing ever eased his tense body, not now.

Nothing from the furrier, nothing at all. Sarah was tired of this, whatever it was. It had to change, change now. She sat up and faced Sammy. "Listen Sammy, I want to say something. We sit here and nothing happens. Sammy we are not young people, yet we sit here like this, like the world is waiting for us. It's been six months Sammy. What now?" Sarah paused for a second to compose herself. "I don't want to sound like an old shoe bag Sammy, afraid of being thrown out, but let's face it, time and life is leaving us like the dirt stuck under some old man's fingernails. We've got to do something. Why don't we get married Sammy, so maybe at least the rest of our lives won't be so lonely always."

Sammy felt warm and tired, as if he had just run a mile or something. "I don't know what to say," there he stopped for a second for he was telling the truth and did not know what to say. "I've been living alone for so long . . . for so long. . . ." Sammy could think of nothing else to say.

"I know what you are thinking Sammy. I know you've been living alone for a long time and that you are an independent person, but it's not worth saving. Who saves one old sock; at least a pair you wear. It would be better. I don't want to force you Sammy, but I don't want to go on like this forever and ever."

"Why is not like it is good enough? We can eat together and everything. How come we can't stay the same?" Sammy was afraid

to look up for he knew where he would see the answer.

"Sammy, we've got years to live; I'm only forty-four and not ready to drop dead at God's feet so fast. I want a little of life Sammy. I want someone to care for me, to hold me. I want to be close to someone, Sammy." Her body began to bend as her voice began to plead.

I'm not a rich man. I can't afford to marry. I've never been married. I can't think of how this thing would work. I can't think it."

Sammy looked into Sarah's face. There he saw something that scared him. He reached down inside to respond to her look but could not find what he was looking for. What was it he had lost? He couldn't remember.

The two sat there as if they were sitting shiver. A moan echoed from deep inside Sarah. Something was happening here she could not understand. Sammy was going to pull down the final shade between them. It couldn't happen again to her, not again. "Sammy please. Please Sammy. Make love to me Sammy. Try and make love to me Sammy, and I will make you happy again. We've got to do something Sammy, we've got to do something!"

"No! No, that is wrong!" blurted Sammy, shocked by Sarah's proposal. Sarah saw fear, deep as the grave, hollowing itself through Sammy.

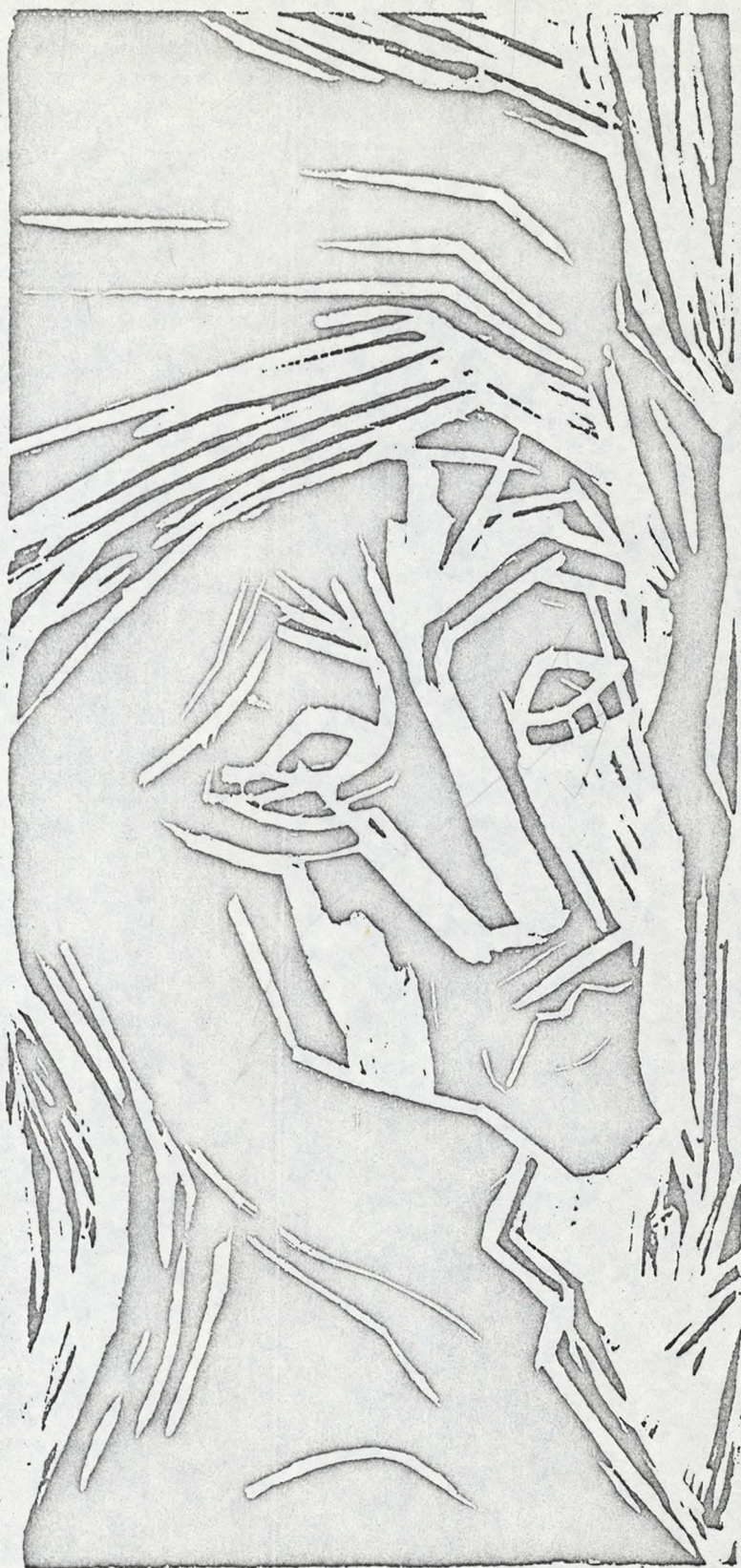
"Sammy . . ." moaned the dying voice next to him.

"It's a wrong thing to do. You can't do that without being married by a rabbi in a synagogue. It is a wrong thing to do." Sammy sat clutching feebly to the Law.

Sarah threw her arms around Sammy and hugged him tightly, pleading, "Please, Sammy, please. Don't say no, not no."

Sammy sat stiff and motionless, staring straight ahead, ignoring the body next to him. Sarah kept hugging and pleading, holding to Sammy's stiff form. Sammy shook. He could take no more. He burst free from Sarah's grasp, staggered about the room and fell onto his bed, burying his face in the pillow.

Sarah watched as Sammy sank into his bed. It was over for them both. Sarah's voice trembled weakly as she slowly began to recite, "V'yiskadal v'yiskadash shemo rabor. . . ." The prayer over the dead.









Poem

The world was smooth with fallen snow but where
The twigs of trees, bending low, had gently
Etched a line or two or stippled with stardrops
Of other times the loves I had wished to know

But the world was smoothly silent and asleep
And the prints of walkers, moving past awhile
Ago, in ghostly stiffness against the snow,
Unmarked their way invisibly in the slow
Soft steps of knowing and a gentle time.

And all around the evening chills again
In the vision of other words and newer things
And all around a silence falls as snow.

The Beach

Henry Martin's head broke the surface, then his shoulders, as his feet found half land on the beach near Nausset Light. The Light searched the low sky and banged against it, brighter by far than the lights from the automobiles as they swung away from the flashing globe of a police car. Love was a gamble on the beach at night, a fitful scratching of the young under sandy blankets.

Their bodies had emerged from the sea as naked as his own, and had stumbled up the sand to towels. They had rubbed each other dry, then hot, then had moaned with the surging of the tide. He knew the sequence, had played the ritual too when he was young. The game was endless, but unimportant.

He cursed those Apollos, their bodies slick brown and perfect from the days in the sun, protected only by the metal amulets that swung from their muscled throats. He cursed them because his body was white, and the enemy could see it more easily as their searchlights scanned the beach, awaiting the assault. They were there, he knew it, crouched behind the dunes, their eyes like cats', seeing more than he did, their fingers tight around the wood and metal of their weapons. A whole line of them, and behind them another line, and another, all waiting for the momentary signal to open fire. And farther back were the heavy guns, all loaded, yellow fingers on black buttons, zeroed in.

He plowed through the water, stumbled on the beach, then hit the dirt. He slithered forward, wiggling his body along on his belly and elbows. He looked to his sides to see if

his men were with him. A white figure, bulky, they would look to him for their signal. He would lead them into the teeth of the enemy, he would storm and rage and fire, maybe even stop the bullets meant for another man who would make it. He would stab and shoot and use his hands on those small slant-eyed bastards. It would be a glory to die fighting here.

Then a light flashed out of the darkness and held him in its glare. They'd spotted him. This was the time. He leaped to his feet.

A voice called out. "Hey, what the hell you doin' here? Stay where you are."

Patrolman Jensen couldn't make out the face for the hands shielding it from the light. But the bulk and the shape were somehow familiar.

"You're trespassing on a private beach, you know that? And I can get you for indecent exposure. What's your name?"

"It's all right, John. I'm just out for a little dip."

Jensen's flashlight lowered in immediate deference to the voice, the light's outer ring alone remaining to catch the face's features as the hands dropped away. The head was large and gray, the eyes and mouth cold and commanding.

"Mr. Martin. Je-sus." His voice was filled with embarrassment, both for his mistake, and for Henry Martin. "I thought it was some nut messing around on your beach. There was a hell of a lot of them on the beach tonight. You all right Mr. Martin? I mean, you look a little cut up there."

He felt a little as if he had been caught ogling at a peep show, since he had never seen Henry Martin without a shirt, or without pants for that matter.

"Oh I'm quite well, John, thank you. It seemed very warm up at the house and I thought a freshener in the ocean would help. I really do thank you, though, for being so solicitous. We like to know that the police are taking care of us and our property."

He was far less aware than Jensen of his state.

"You want me to take care of those cuts for you?"

"Oh God, no. I've been through a lot worse than this. It will take more than a few sharp clamshells to finish me off. Well, I suppose I had better get back to the house. Good night, John, and good hunting."

"Good night, Mr. Martin. Hope everything's all right."

He watched Henry Martin move down the beach at the edge of the water, his lumbrous body slowed by the deformed foot. As he walked he crushed thousands of tiny creatures, and spurted their phosphorescence. They marked his progress till the next wave washed away their carcasses and light.

Jensen knew that he had been present at some sort of event, but Henry Martin was not a man to be handled. There was now a secret between them, and Jensen knew that even though Henry Martin had made no request, silence was the safest course.

But Henry Martin had already nearly forgotten Jensen. There would be other nights like this when the enemy would mass and challenge. He thought vaguely of the forms that had risen out of the water to procreate on the beach. And he supposed that his son had done the same thing a few months before, just before he had gone across the world to fight. But no doubt Henry Jr. had done it in the right spirit and hadn't gotten the girl into trouble. In fact, there had probably been many other time before for his son, but they never had to talk about it.

Henry Martin ranged his memory back over the early days with his son, when they had come to his beach with their rifles, very close to where the public beach began. They had set up bottles on the ridges of the dunes,

and had plinked them, starting at the water's edge, then creeping on their bellies closer to the hills. Then he would feel the blood begin to pound in his head as the gulls strafed overhead, and he would lead his small son in an assault. The public, of course, had protested. But there was no help for it. Nobody crossed Henry Martin.

For hours they stood on the lawn, father and son, drilling the manual of arms. The boy took to it well. Henry Martin delighted in the healthy muscle and blood that carried his name. He taught him how to fight, to throw the first punch. Or if the enemy was too big, to knee him in the crotch before he raised his hands from his side.

There were the days when they had left the house early in the morning to hunt small game on the large tract. He had taught his son not to fear the blood that oozed from a dying animal, had pressed his hand into it to feel the life slipping out.

Only once had his son cried with the great sobs of childhood. They went hunting for rabbits one morning when the boy was twelve. They crouched as they stalked, guns ready to slip instantly into the notches in their shoulders. The light had just been shut off as the sun grazed over the water when suddenly a big jack, brazening it out, leaped out almost at their feet. Both rifles went up, but Henry Martin whispered, "He's yours, boy. Take your time."

The boy's first shot missed, but the second hit flesh, and the rabbit jumped a somersault. The father's blood screamed with the kill. But the rabbit was only wounded, thrashing in the sand and scrub. The boy rushed up to finish him, aimed his rifle down at the squealing form.

"Don't shoot him again," shouted Henry Martin. "Save your ammunition. Step on his head!"

The boy wavered, wavered too long. Henry Martin hobbled up to his son, threw him aside, and grabbed the rabbit by the hind legs.

"Haven't you learned anything?" his voice rasped. "Are you soft already? This is the way you finish them off."

And he swung the rabbit around in a violent arc and hurled its head against a rock. The head made a loud bursting sound as

it struck, and splattered his pants and his son with brains and blood. Again he lifted it, and again beat it against the rock till even the involuntary twitching had stopped. He tossed the ragged dripping body at his son's feet. The boy stood still, then began to shake, his throat working till the tears and sounds could be held no longer. He screamed incomprehensibly, then turned and ran, the rifle still in his hands.

"Come back here, damn it, and pick up this carcass. Come back here!"

But the boy ran and ran till he reached the house and his mother. He was still in her arms when his father returned.

His only words were words of praise. "You handled yourself well, Henry, you didn't lose your rifle."

There had been the day, not long after, when Henry Jr. had asked for another recounting of the family tale, the story of the fighters who had gone before. They were sitting in the gun room, its walls covered with racks of weapons, helmets, insignia that went back to the Revolution.

"We have always been fighters, Henry, from the time when your great great great grandfather fought at Charlestown, down through the Civil War when your great grandfather was wounded at Shiloh and died at Andersonville. They all led their men bravely into battle. They did not cringe or frighten, and they all died while making war. Your grandfather Martin, died at Argonne. You remember about Argonne? He taught me about war as his father had taught him, and as I have taught you. It's a pity there are no fighters on your mother's side."

"But Dad, what did you do in the war? You never told me about that."

"I never had the chance to go to the war."

"Why?"

"They thought I was needed here at home."

"But Mother said it was because of your foot."

"When did she tell you that?" His voice was quiet and frightening.

"The day you killed the rabbit."

There was a moment of silence. "Your mother doesn't understand what it means to a man to fight. There have been no fighters on her side. You will have to be careful of that, boy. Don't let the weakness on her side overcome you. I've done my best to see that you have been raised like a man should be. You won't let me down, will you?"

"No sir."

"I wasn't able to go, but you are. Your body is well-formed and you are a fighter, I know it. There will be another war and you will have your chance to fight. Every man should have a chance to fight. And remember that the best way for a man to die is to die fighting."

"Yes sir."

That night Henry Martin had gone down to the beach alone for the first time, and had led his men out of the water. He had died many times on the sand since then.

Now, as Patrolman Jensen turned off his flashing light, having cleared the beach, Henry Martin limped up the stairs to his bedroom. His wife's light was out, down the hall. She was used to this. He slept quietly, well into the next morning.

He awoke with his wife standing beside the bed.

"Henry. Henry."

He mumbled and licked the inside of his mouth, opening his eyes.

"He's dead, Henry."

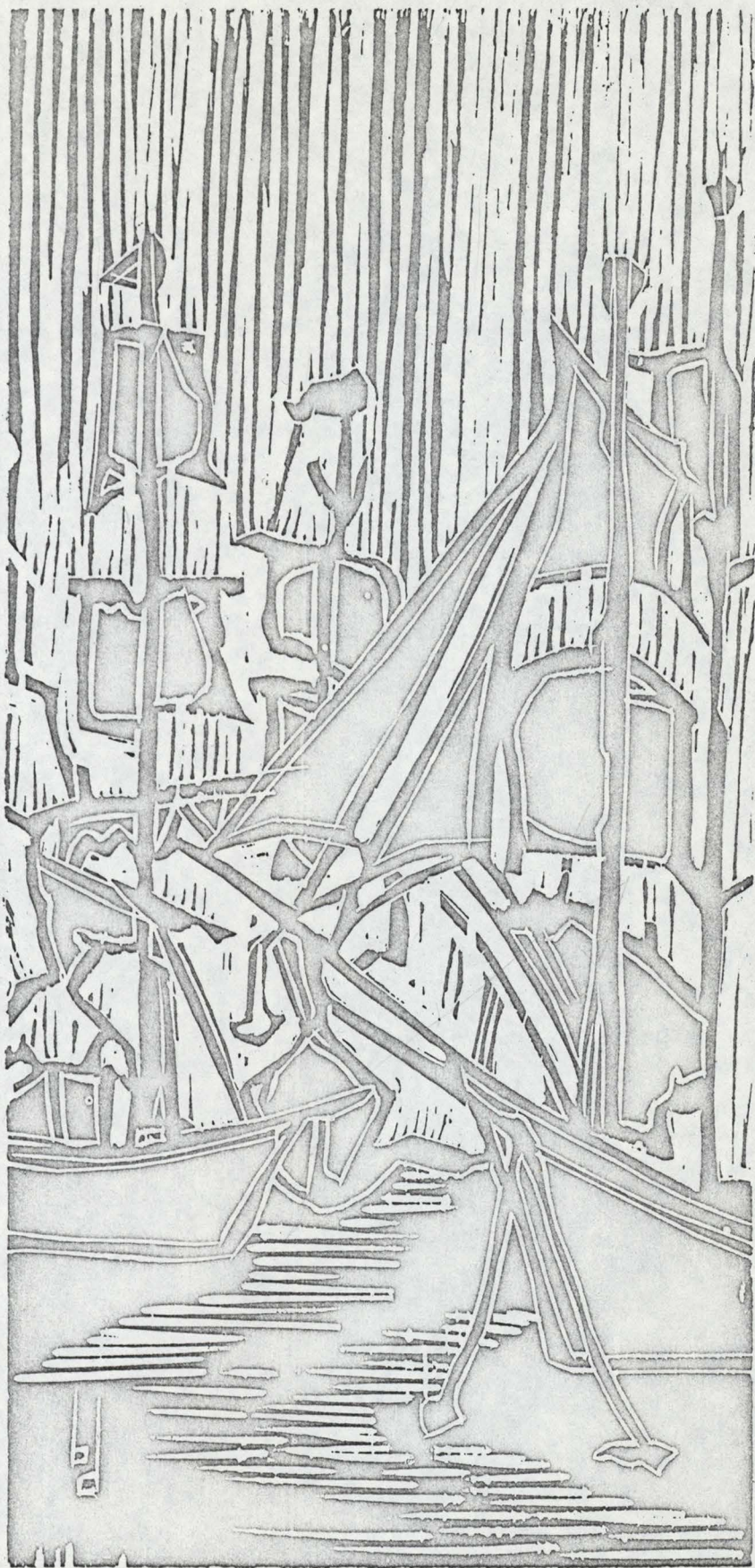
"Who's dead?"

"Henry."

A long pause. Then his voice trembled slightly, in anticipation, as he asked, "How did he die?"

"They said honorably, under fire, leading his men in."

Henry Martin leaned back and smiled slightly. He wouldn't have to go down to the beach any more.



Apparitions in a Great Aunt's House

Then in a house filled with older times I watched
 The gold cast gray upon a morning hour
 When a woman innocent as billows of lace
 Passed with her gentle touch from room to room
 Dusting her fading treasures from shadows she
 Might know with love allowed to fall once more
 In fragile splendor on another time.
 But soon her silence stilled these silent rooms
 Filled with whispered new evening light on glass
 Glimmering the words of a gentle time.

— These dated objects dusty without a past
 What did they tell they can not tell to me?

And even the world I knew once when first
 I knew beyond my window world — the houses
 Of bad-boy McDonald and bully Steel
 Have youngsters stranger and younger than I thought
 Then we were playing on their added porches
 Where we as a pirate's crew once dug for gold —
 Has past with not painless changes a part
 Beyond an eye to know at once and set
 In place what then had been. And a sapling grown
 To an old and shading tree would change what thought
 Would come with this uncurtained window light
 Yet shadows would comfort me while in this room.

A certain knowledge of beginnings lost
 Between the white of trilliums and frost
 A gnawing dread of chewing-wormed decay
 In selfless cycles might almost pass away.

And yet in the timeless times of crashes
 Of cyclic thunder where will weep reasons
 For a human loss? The shadows fall upon
 The naked floor and ornaments of glass
 Lilies and lotus flowers silently bloom
 While the hues evanesce on pools of light
 And still my cradled hands will never hold
 A few faded petals softly falling
 On waters of mind, reflecting thoughts unhazed
 By a gentle rippling of time's enlarging rings.
 In stillness here what thoughts are moving by
 But where in water's mood will stillness lie?

Petals of glass in golden light pattern
No time nor traveled place and ornaments
Of splendor brocaded in space would glorify
The light of falling suns with simple life
In changeless artifice. Yet spiral down
The petals of my wilted hopes still glittering
Late evening's thought of memories and shapes
Of glass which hold in form her spirit's time,
For soon reflections come when eddies calm
And water clears awhile that show the shapes
Of solid things as near primordial form
That also change in ripples of liquid time.

So illusions pass in waves of other thought
And as cold creeps down in stillness now, I see
The swirls of shimmering states which soon would be
Freeze to a moment's ice that light has caught.

And a glass of frozen time can have no light
Diffusing her spirit's love but its moment's mood
Casts glimmers throughout this room and would allow
For idle thinking now. Perhaps, flowers
Were gifts of a gentle hour or one she hoped
Would be and years gave time a precious hue
That could not wholly fade when she had gone.
And yet no one can know my great aunt's mind
And time forever gives a different light
To changing colors of reverie that'll melt
At last, when her name no longer gives to glass
A special hour, in the rising flood of calm.

And then who holds the glass awhile in his palm
Will have no piece of what had been a time
A part of her and light will play on thoughts
Unlike my own. But now the stillness all
Around tonight beyond this window pane
Would nestle closely by, and flowers that show
Enough remains to know this room and town
Are shadowed by shivering leaves outside
That make me feel within a timeless hour
The moments passing in chills of cyclic change.
And colors, too, outdoors must turn with darker
Light to deeper shades of melancholy.

I must wander among these scattered shapes of thought
And see what ruin my aging mind has wrought
On a goddess frozen in marbled love. And fears
Must stand a form in the garden of those years

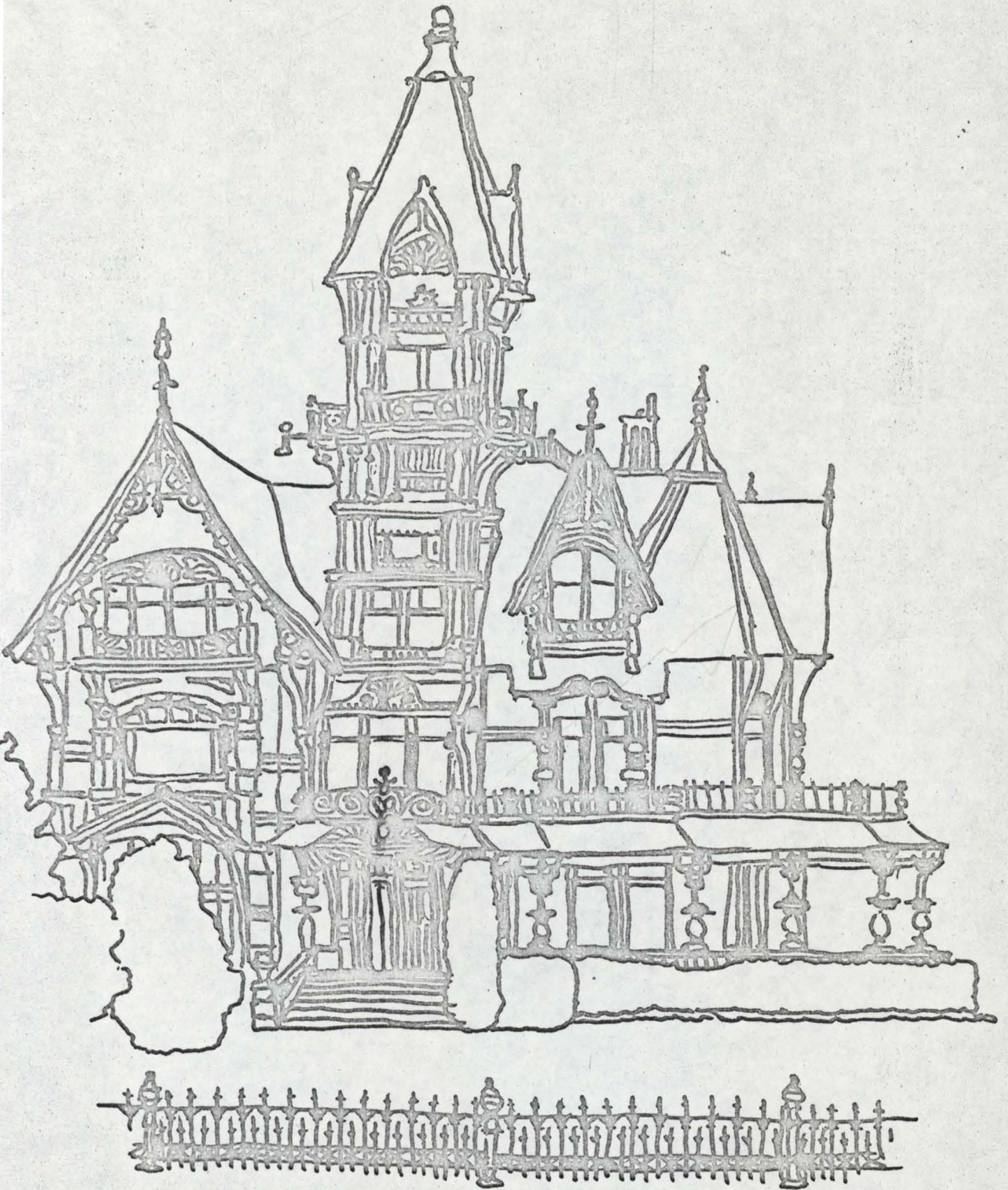
And give unnatural glass a living bloom
 Though pieces will not shape but a semblance of
 Her face. And I begin to stroll along
 The path where subtle forsythia fresh
 Paint and humid air will break the silence
 Of winter's smell and lead to a childhood's home.
 And soon my thoughts, returned to what I wished
 Could be, would draw in this garden of scattered dreams
 The splendor ruins make when pieces are dreamed
 To fit a thousand parts of different forms.
 The past has given shape to all my hope
 Yet what blinds certain hands that once might grope?

These flowers of glass bloom when petals will fall
 Like snow and here must grow the garden of
 Her final house she would have made if she'd
 Been ever old — She told me once when she
 Had long ago forgiven her cane for joy
 Of walking with a walking stick that when
 She knew her age she'd build a cottage near
 The shore and watch the rollicking waves at play
 Upon the sea. But still-sounds grow and trees
 Must lose their shape of endless life in shadows
 Of night and lambent waves beneath the moon
 Must sound with lapping thought upon a strand

Of mind. These times would whisper hours I knew,
 Enticing my thoughts to wander. And yet
 Those seconds so quickly fade on could forget
 How many joys I learned to hold and view

Among the objects of this room. But peace
 That flowed around with swirls of clothes and washed
 In kindness the words she spoke will not
 Begin to flood my mind as shadows do.
 Still must the house be closed and sold with no
 More hope or love? Glimpses of changing shapes
 Beneath the waves of thought must turn this hour
 Of deepening shadows, when last glimmers of light
 Across the rooms fade to a darker mood,
 Away from formless shades of final things
 A youthful mind once wished to hold as Truth.
 And now different spectres will haunt this night,
 Refigurations of loves and fears which light

No more refracts in pools of hope, for time
Swirls in eddies of thought and not a silence now
Among the shapes of fragil glass as flowers
In smaller galaxies of change all whirl
To the reaches of darkness with the infinite
Vortex of stars. But still rooms crowd upon
Me soon; the cold and unfamiliar sounds
Of foreign thought will flow around when I
May know to pass from chills of evening starlight
Across the darkened rooms and move at last
As a blind man would in search of shapes to see.



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