



INSCAPE

Visual

&

Literary Arts

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INSCAPE

FALL 1997

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INSCAPE

FALL 1997

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Carl Albright
Geraldine Carter
Laura Flora
Kim Hayner
Tara Perry
Randi Sturgill
Karen Wilson

Faculty Advisor
George Eklund

Cover Artist
Trevor Griffith

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DON BAUMHARDT

Sakura, Sakura

When Sakura turned eight, the world was a better place to live in than it would be a few years later. It was the time for cherry blossoms to bloom, which is why her mother had named her after her favorite flower. Her family had a custom for her birthday: they would walk along the river under the cherry trees and look at the bright pink blossoms as though they had never seen them before. The trees were so full of the delicate blossoms that even the light seemed to be pink and warm. And every year since Sakura had learned to speak, she had always said something outlandish by the river on her birthday. Last year she claimed she heard the cherry blossoms tremble in the breeze and make music. Her younger brother laughed at her, and her parents smiled, but her older brother Hideki only looked at her strangely. They had always been especially close, and sometimes he revealed his heart to her when he could not talk to anyone else. Even though Sakura was only a child, she seemed very wise. Sometimes there was a seriousness about her that made Hideki uneasy, though everyone else seemed to think it was cute. A year ago, Hideki had told Sakura about the girl he secretly loved. Her name was Atsuko. He saw this girl every day at his high school, but he never dared speak to her. When he told Sakura how much he wished he could speak to her, she laughed and told him, "Oh, don't worry, elder brother. Tomorrow she will give you a book of poems and speak to you." Impossible, he replied. How could you imagine such a thing? "Not impossible at all," Sakura laughed, "she will drop the book on the floor and you will pick it up for her. Then she will say, 'Please keep this,' and you will both become friends." You shouldn't tease me so, younger sister. My heart hurts and you only laugh at me. "It's all true, elder brother. And someday you will marry her." That made Hideki angry because he believed Sakura was only teasing him and did not really understand how he felt because she

was only a child. He was embarrassed that he had told her so much, but then the next day everything did happen as she told him it would. At first, he was very happy, but then he began to wonder about his sister. How could she have known what would happen to him? Sometimes he almost believed he had dreamed everything, but then Atsuko would shyly pass him a poem she had written, and he would remember Sakura telling him his future. And so, today, as the family walked along the river, Hideki wondered what on earth his younger sister would say on her birthday.

"What beautiful blossoms," her father said, "almost as beautiful as my daughter."

"Maybe they are singing to her," smirked Sakura's younger brother. And so she kicked him and said, "You should show respect to your elders!"

"Now, Sakura, behave," her father laughed. "You're only eight years old, after all." And her mother laughed too. She was very proud of Sakura's beauty and intelligence. Sakura was her only daughter, and she loved her in a different way than her two sons. At dinner she would often pick out the choicest pieces of meat with her chopsticks and put them in Sakura's rice bowl. Then, when her mother was not watching, Sakura would share them with Hideki and even her younger brother. Her father, who saw everything, would say nothing, but he was happy that Sakura was not spoiled by his wife.

Today, because it was her birthday, Sakura wore a new sky-blue kimono made of the finest silk. She felt very grown up because she was eight years old, and she promised herself that she would not say anything silly today like she had on her previous birthdays. That was fine for a child, to make everyone laugh, but today she was old enough to value keeping face. Besides, there was so much to look at today. There, beside the river, was her favorite vendor selling dried squid. She passed him almost every day walking home from school. His name was Mr. Okubo, and she knew he loved her like a daughter. The thin yellow slices of squid were hung upright over the pushcart on rows of wire attached to wood sticks. Sakura almost said aloud that the thin slices of delicious squid shone in the sunshine

like a stained glass window, but then she remembered she was not supposed to know about stained glass windows. Her father had seen stained glass windows in churches in America when he went to medical school there, but she had never seen one. Perhaps he had told her about them, but Sakura wanted to be sure and not say anything silly, so she said nothing. Still she had never seen squid so radiant, and she giggled about how beautiful squid could be.

"Daddy, let's buy some squid! See how pretty it is!"

"Now, Sakura, we are going to have a special meal soon in a very nice restaurant, and I don't want you to spoil your appetite."

"Then let me take some cherry blossoms with me."

"What ideas you have!"

"Please, please!"

"All right," her father said, but already Sakura was under the nearest cherry tree gathering skin-soft petals from the grass. That was when the world changed. Hideki would always remember there was a soft breeze that moment, like Atsuko's smile when she gave him a new poem, and the pink light made everything seem timeless, and Sakura was laughing as she scooped up the blossoms, spilling most of them, and then scooping them up again. Hideki did not think he had ever been happier with his family than that moment just before Sakura started screaming and screaming. It was worse than when she cut her hand with the kitchen knife. It was like nothing Hideki had ever heard before.

"It's burning!" she screamed. "Everything's burning!"

Her father ran to her and held her. "What's wrong? What's burning?"

"Everything's burning!"

Then Sakura's screams got worse. There were no longer any words, just screams. She began to choke and cough as she screamed.

"What's the matter?" her mother cried.

"I don't know." And her father held her in his arms as she screamed. Then she threw up and screamed.

* * *

That night, under sedation, Sakura slept in the hospital

where her father worked. Beside her sat her mother and Hideki, while younger brother stayed with her grandmother. Hideki looked at Sakura's face and wondered that he knew so little about this sister he loved so much. He remembered many of the times they had been together, but none of them helped him understand her now. As the hours passed, he began to fear more and more that Sakura would wake up screaming. His mother did not speak to him, but sat in silence beside the bed, holding Sakura's hand. He wondered if his mother was afraid too that Sakura would wake up screaming. She had screamed all the way to the hospital, her voice so hoarse that she was almost inaudible when the doctor put the needle into her and made her sleep. And his father was with the same doctor now in the next room, talking about what all this could mean and what could be done.

But the next day Sakura woke up without screaming. She seemed fine, but did not want to talk much. And so she went home. That evening, a police detective named Sotan came to the house. After his mother served green tea, whisking it into a green froth, then leaving with a polite bow, Hideki sat near the paper partition so he could hear what was said. He knew his father would be furious if he was discovered, but he was so worried about what happened to Sakura the day before that he did not worry about his father's anger.

"And so, Doctor, I am glad to hear your daughter is better now."

"Thank you for your concern."

"But there is another strange matter that puzzles me. Forgive me for bothering you at this time, but I can't help but wonder. You see, last night a vendor was found in the park."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Perhaps you knew him—Mr. Okubo?"

"Well, my daughter was fond of him. She talked with him on her way home from school, like many of her friends. They often bought snacks from him. What has happened to him?"

"You see, Doctor, it's rather difficult to believe. Mr. Okubo was found burned to death in the park. Now, how could this hap

pen without anyone seeing anything? Why would anyone do something like this? And the burns are so horrible you might not recognize him."

"I can't believe this."

"Nor me, Doctor. But there it is, whether we want to believe it or not. And this strange happening yesterday with your daughter. Well, it all puzzles me."

"I don't understand any of it."

"Yes, it is something we have never encountered before, perhaps. Well, we can talk again some time, Doctor. I don't want to keep you from your family any longer."

* * *

The next week was very difficult for Hideki and his family because Sakura refused to leave her room. She was terrified of the light and kept the window covered. She no longer laughed, but sometimes would reach out and hold his hand for a few moments. She would speak to nobody except Hideki, and so his father asked him to try and find out more about what had happened to her in the park. Without knowledge, there is no cure, his father said. But Hideki was afraid Sakura would start to scream again. He was even more afraid, though, that the sister he knew would never come back to him. And so, Hideki found himself in his sister's dark room, sitting near to her, but almost unable to see her.

"So, younger sister, I have been thinking of you a lot."

"Yes, I know."

"And you seem to like the dark now."

"I'm afraid of the light, Hideki."

"Most children are afraid of the dark."

"I'm not a child anymore."

"You're still only eight years old."

"You don't understand."

"Then help me, Sakura. You are my favorite sister."

"I'm your only sister."

"See, you can still laugh. Some. And maybe more soon."

"Sometimes I forget, for a moment. Sometimes it's like we're together again."

"Forget what?"

"The light."

"Why do you fear the light?"

"Because it burns everything, Hideki. All the cherry blossoms ash. Everything is ash. Everyone is ash."

"Even me?"

"No, not you. You will not be here then."

"I don't understand, younger sister. The sunshine doesn't harm anyone. The cherry blossoms are still blooming. I wish you would go with me to the park to see them."

"Not the sunshine. The white light that's coming. I don't know what it is, but it burns everything. I'm so sad, Hideki. I'm afraid. I want you to take me away, take us all away."

"I don't understand. You can't know what's going to happen."

"I know you will marry Atsuko."

"Nobody sees the future."

"You know I do. Don't you remember?"

* * *

Over the next few months, Sakura came out of her room and began to live like she had before. For a while, she asked her father to move the family away somewhere. She told them about the burning white light, but nobody really believed her, except Hideki. The others thought she had had some kind of breakdown in the park that day, and these nightmare fantasies of hers would pass. As time passed without incident, even Hideki began to doubt her. Soon Sakura stopped talking about the burning white light, and seemed to forget herself what had terrified her so much. But she seldom laughed. Eventually Hideki went to medical school in Tokyo, became a doctor like his father, and married Atsuko. During the war, he worked in a hospital in Osaka, and wrote to Sakura every week. She was sixteen years old when the white light came to Hiroshima, and then Hideki remembered the nightmare his sister had turned into silence.

Postscript: This story is dedicated to all the children of Hiroshima, and their families.

K.M. MCCANN

Any Comments?

"Okay, class, what do you think about the argument? Is it convincing?" *Not this guy again . . .*

"John, you have a comment." *If we consider the fact that I'm not at all impressed with your attempt to illuminate the class, would you shut up and let someone else who may have an original thought speak for once? Do you know what I mean? You self-consumed, intellectually deluded, arrogant pseud. Have you ever had an original thought? A point? A sense of purpose? You should take a look in your critical mirror, you whiny little itch. Do you have any idea how absurd you are?*

"Interesting point, John. Any more thoughts? Katherine." *Of course you don't think. How could you possibly be expected to think? You're here for the old MRS degree, aren't you? Maybe you'll land a big one with all the bait you wear. No one who takes college seriously actually chooses to major in interior design. I do suppose, however, that the record lows on your SATs limited your career options. Ah, but sweetheart, the fact you're not a flaming intellectual poses no quandary for your pretty future. Beauty never had to contaminate itself with thought in the past. Why should it stoop to such levels now?*

"Good, Katherine. We have to consider, though, the tone Socrates takes. Let me read this excerpt . . . Can you believe that he said that? He's telling them he couldn't live with himself if he had to do their job. The question arises, then, was he in a sense corrupting the youth? And was the sentence just, considering the public humiliation to which he subjected people?" *Put that hand back in your pocket, Church boy!*

"Mark. You have something to add?" *Perhaps if we try some public humiliation on you, you'd get a better taste for the flavor of irritation. Take that damned hat off! Don't you have any respect? Historical possibilities, eh? You've got to be kidding! No one would ever think of considering history. Quick, someone call MENSA, Mark here has a*

profound insight. You prodigal little Kant. Did mommy put Ginkai in your Cap'n Crunch this morning? Maybe the good Reverend Feign advised you how to handle potential faith-smashing dilemmas. Did the good Rev mention the cardinal rule: "Logic is the Devil's weapon"? Well, I'm listening. Convince me. I'm an open-minded guy. That is, if you make an argument without appealing to miracles.

"The historical context is key, Mark. I believe the text offers some background. And it does bear a striking resemblance to the New Testament account, in some places. Paul, a comment?" *Self-revelation, indeed. Condescension in fact. Go back to Walden with Henry, Lit boy! You existential, post-modernist Medusa. You shouldn't even be in this class. Weren't they offering enough poetry classes for you this semester, Apollo? Shouldn't you be sipping flavored coffee at a greasy café? I have an idea: drop this class. Spend the hour fishing for metrical ambiguities instead. Lord knows we wouldn't want to puncture your creative balloon by requiring you to read essays by people whose mentality might actually surpass that of a rock garden. Scamper back to your poetry world, there's no room for you in reality.*

"That's one possibility. But Socrates was basically humiliating people in public. John, you have something else?" *Perspectives usually differ, but I think the general consensus is that you're an ass. Aha! that's it. I knew you looked familiar. You're the poster boy for annoyance. Maybe I should sit down, shred my degree, and let you play teacher for a while. You seem to think you know more than I do. I had a feeling all those years at Brown were a waste. Look where it's gotten me. I have the pleasure of teaching a herd of average students at a less than mediocre school. Oh, that's not to say I can't learn from you people. Oh, no. I've learned quite well how to accept lower standards, speak monosyllabically and pretend I'm interested in the incoherent ramblings of a cerebrally deficient faculty. Thank god it's time to go . . .*

"Fine point, John. Any more comments? Okay. Read Swenson's essay, 'The Dignity of Human Life' for next time. Have a good weekend." . . . *but don't think too hard.*

LORI BALDRIDGE

The Color Blue

I am buried alive
by the jumbled words of academia.
I have no name.
Nothing but the letters upon letters
strung together forming the language
of my useless life.
His eyes hold no objective.
His lips will never touch me,
 and I am not sorry.
I will not apologize for the communication
of the vowels and consonants
resting between my thighs.
Balanced between what I am not
and what he will not let me be,
tumbling towards the nothingness of an' angry me.
Lashing out with my tongue
licking away tears and apathy.
I am cleansed.
I am forgiven.
I am lifeless in a grave of hollow words.
 ... laughter ... laughter ...

Saturday

Enveloped by the warmth of a touch,
the sin of lust becomes my cloak.
Your disapproval and my desire
are one and the same,
mating, tangled, in the heat of the moment.

The moment
when my body molds itself to the unforgivable.
The moment
our mouths fuse
and our tongues learn to dance.
Our moment,
trapped between our bodies,
born of passion and shame.
Melting away from reality and falling into the
essence of our sighs,
I touch you.
I become you.
Suspended in time by the softness of your breath
and the texture of your skin.
Tomorrow we will forget.

Male Bondage

I do not have it.
Nor do I want it.
Yet I must bend to it,
Slave to it,
Swallow it whole.
Feeding the hunger of the masses,
you wield the power of the ancients.
Forced to my knees, begging
for the mercy of a God
I do not know,
I bow my head in shame and lust.
Fear my womanliness,
my shape, my curves,
my flesh.
For what you have

I do not want
nor do I need,
but I will bend my back
against the edges of reality
and bite off your desire
to rule and persecute.
I will bite off what makes you
you
and me not you,
and I will swallow it whole.

lost

somewhere inside myself
i feel the emptiness
i hear the echo
 of a lonely heart
my faith in a god of love
has given birth to
 sadness
and my inability to feel
 that love
the persecution of my tears
was given to him
by right of his manhood
he nailed me to the
 cross of truth
raping my soul
with lies
 and my faith
forgive me Father
save me Father
crush me Father
fuck me Father
 for i have sinned

DON BAUMHARDT

Favorite Possessions

dedicated to my former students in Korea

1.

My name is Kim Mee-Young.
Perhaps you have forgotten my face.
Seven years ago I wrote my essay to you.
I hope you keep it like a love letter
And read it every night.
Dream of me
And my sister who never knew you.
I wish we could climb Mt. Sorak together
And speak in the clouds.

My favorite possession is my ring,
Silver as silkworm cocoons in hazy moonlight.
My elder sister gave it to me
And then became a Buddhist nun
Because forever she had to part from her lover.
She was only twenty-two years old,
Thoughtful and sincere
And more quiet than the distance
Between the stars.
A month later she killed herself.
Now every Chusok I put food on her grave
And when I wear her silver ring
I remember her smiling face.

2.

I'm sitting at my desk, looking out the window.
The rain closes my eyes.
Its sound shapes my sorrow

Like a meat cleaver hacking away bone
In a far room, soft with distance.

Woo-Jin, you said, you're sleeping in class again.

Only in sleep can I be with her now.
We met in high school by chance
And used to go to our favorite café after classes.
She loved to wear bluejeans instead of skirts.
When I told her about my daily life
She listened carefully, unlike anyone else,
And never laughed at me.
One day she said she would go to art school
And be famous. It was late December.
And snowing heavy and slow.
We never said good-bye.
I have only this memory of her,
Like a blind man remembering the moon.

A Family Death

I have picked the blackberries
Outside the back door,
And put them in this aluminum pot.
A cold rain now.

Last spring you were so warm in your sleep
And never woke.

All at once I remember
The silence of roses,
Your hands in my hair
Years ago.

Two Women

1.

You remind me of the hawk
Gliding on the shoulders
Of the wind. There are no clouds
In the skies with you,
Only incredible intensity—
The tension of starting
To plunge free
Into yourself.

Now whenever I see you,
I see your wings too.

2.

Your face has a brightness
Like the winking of sun spots
On clear water.

Sometimes I wonder
How your hands feel
When they touch
Each other.

Hamlet As Five Haiku

Ghost, I like tennis.
I don't want revenge.
Just a nice life.

I tried to ignore who I am.
But that never works, does it?
Damn it.

Polonius
False friends
My love
Her brother
Mother
King
Now me
Dead.

Maybe my next life—
Nice job
Nice wife
Nice kids

Nice car in the driveway

Nice house
Nice neighbors
Nice weather
Nice cat
Big fat nice cat
Very nice.

Cousins

Her mother may come on the path
With thin sharp steps at them.
Something he had to ask.

And he asked near the fence post
Gnarling at them like driftwood
On the banks of the Arkansas.

She looked at him, maybe thinking
Every love conceals shadows
That no one knows are there.

She could be his in the simple way
That branches make lacework.
At least he could pretend.

But no, she made no answer.

GARNETTA BOOKER

Small Towns

Small towns,
Quaint they are,
Quiet as the butterflies.
On the horizon
Appear muddy opaque clouds.
Quiet as a deserted church,
Thunder of the storm
Inaudible tremors muffled,
Pave the unmasking
Of a depraved society
And unrevealed immorality,
Disguised within.

KEN CASPER

A Man at Three

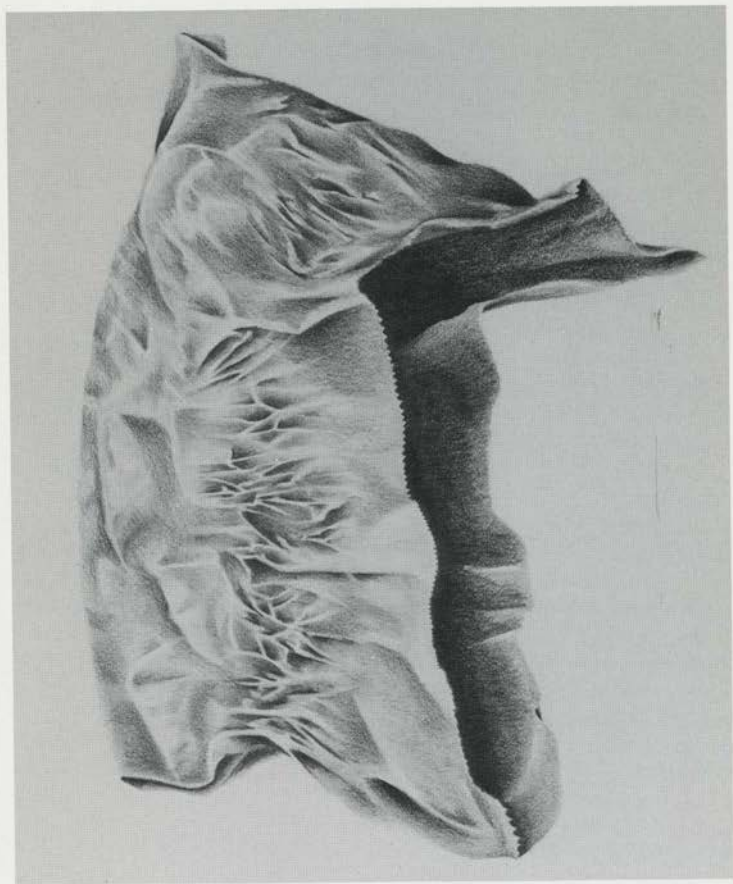
Crisp pommes in informal circumstance
With a view from the windows
That brings me from Paris to Rome
While traveling with the Estee Lauder girl
And drinking coffee served in anticipation
Of strangers walking past
And smiling ask, "Where to today?"
And some person sits with me
To give me rehashed beefs of the day,
"Yes sir, I told him just that,"
While floating eyes seek someone else
To speak of politics and theoretic
Human affairs and statements
Confined only to supple smiles
Reacting to familiar similes
Beginning one way and ending another
With a pregnant woman
Who becomes a mother,
And we always ask if thirty years
Becomes all the time and effort,
Or if graying hair suggests wisdom
And really deserves ten percent off,
Or even if it is wanted by us
Who are seeking something new
To lift our egos and untie a tongue
That has tasted stale with biscuits
Covered with cold clichés
And been salted with words
As a child confined to acceptable states
That state history as it should have been

While some tattered drunk wants to borrow a ten
 For medicine that his uncle won't pay for,
 "And in truth, I've been persecuted
 Because in the past I've driven with the wind,
 But this bad streak of divine testing
 Has left me without less than dreams."
 Thereby, passing by a troop of high school girls,
 And I'll be frank, whom I'm attracted
 To the short, short dresses of gray and plaid
 As one sees me and gives a wink
 As another drops her books
 As some child in the next booth spills her milk
 And the mother stands up in a rage
 And says, "You should be careful at your age,"
 While this may be true, I still smile
 At teenage girls in short dresses
 And frisky manners give life to me
 Because while old women give security,
 A youthful maid inhales the brain with senses
 That makes a man full of charity, liberty, and sensuality.
 This is why I long for Rome—
 In order to witness youthful breasts
 Spilling milk into a primordial youth
 Who gives blushes and promises to young girls
 Of fourteen, so it goes, carved in statues
 And painted by men like me
 Who are socio- and psychopaths
 Of whom fathers and mothers have nightmares
 But still worship their feet
 Proclaiming genius and marvelous things
 But never understanding that they were just like me.
 They wanted everything I see and hear—
 White dining rooms with tuned pianos
 Giving background to girls in pink formals and fluffy hair
 Singing of their passions for me.

Oh if someone had shown tomorrow to me
When I was fifteen and interested,
Then I'm sure that Paris would have been more
Than history, soldiering, and architecture.
And I would never have traveled west
But would have stayed fifteen forever
Played a cheval in an Acheulian manner
And sought out breasts with blue arteries
Visible as they pushed from low-cut formals
With molded nipples
Seething semiotic mole
Singing Julie London voices
With Maria Callas passions
Like Isadora Duncan
Showing spindle legs thrusting forever and the giggliest giggles—
Indeed I'd be sucking peaches and honeydew
Crushing cherries and coring pears
While picking grapes for Sauternes and Chablis.
Oh yes, I'd tell you more,
But I bake bread at twelve tonight,
And I must go and get some sleep
So that I can pay the bills and come back tomorrow.

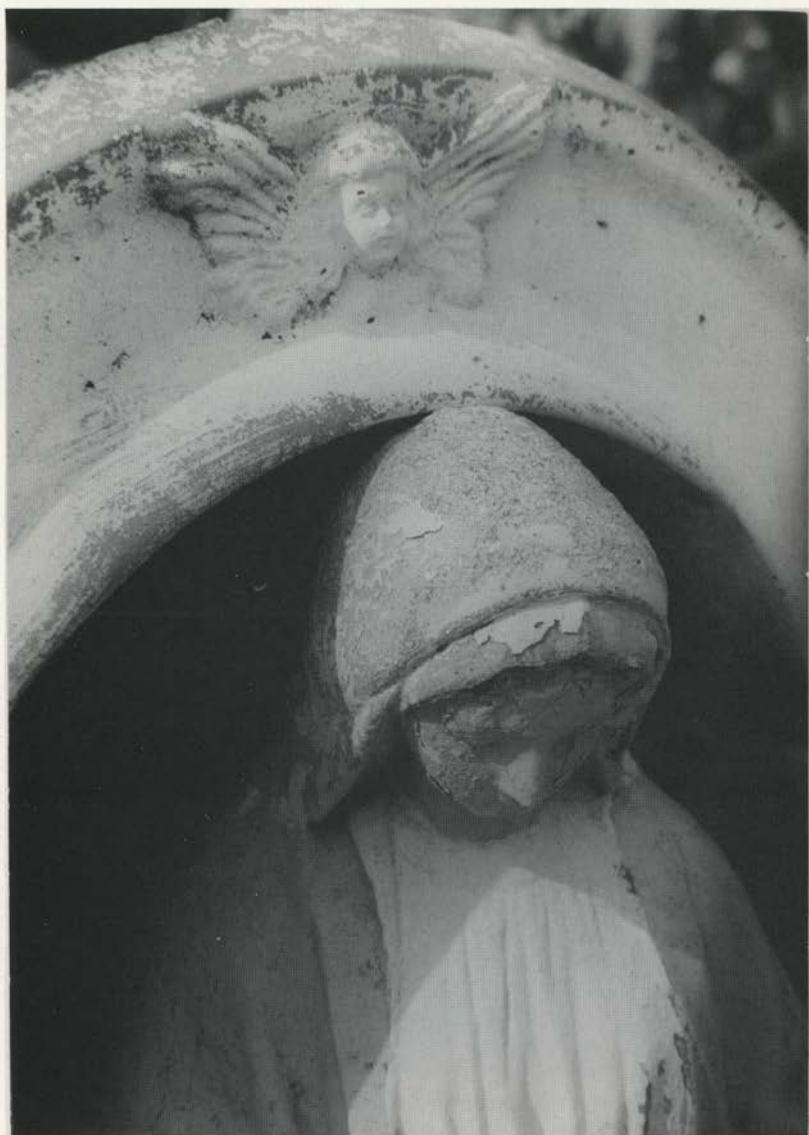
Come Dance

Two seated red car
On eight lanes two ways
Come dance with me
Come play with my eyes
Two people four eyes
Eight speed truck four speed car
Show him more
Give him more



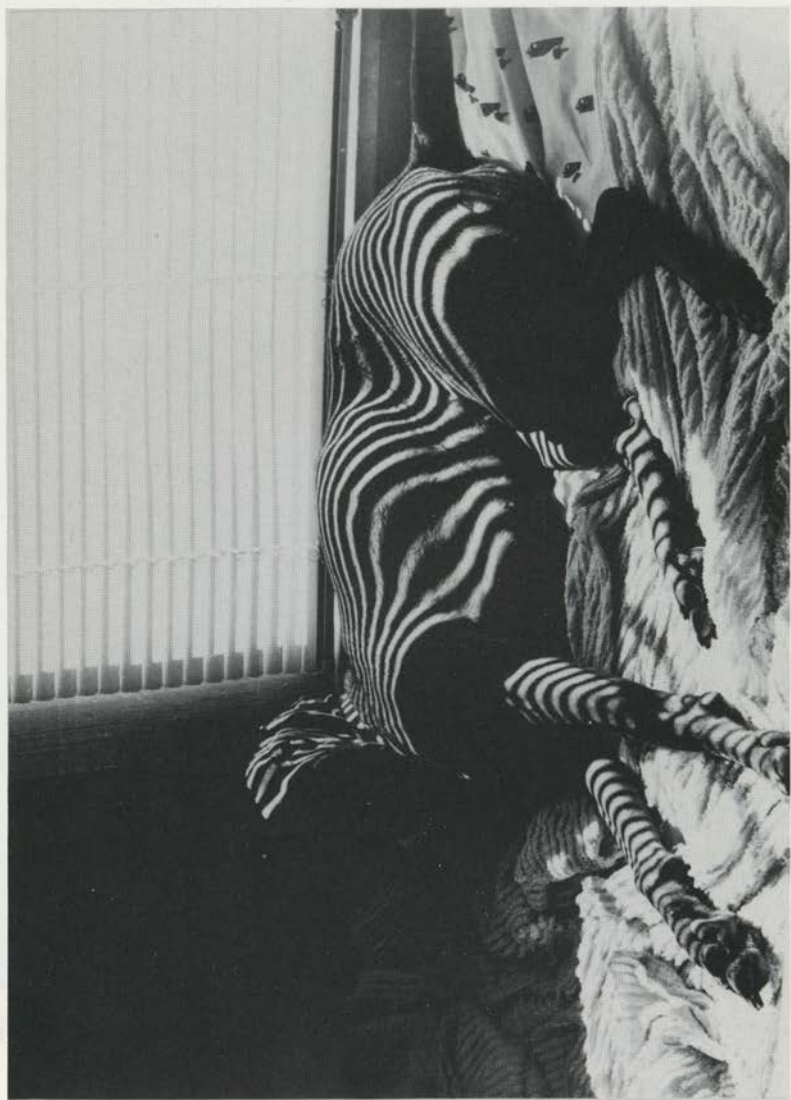
graphite

Untitled Susan Britsch



Untitled Eva L. Burgess

black & white photograph

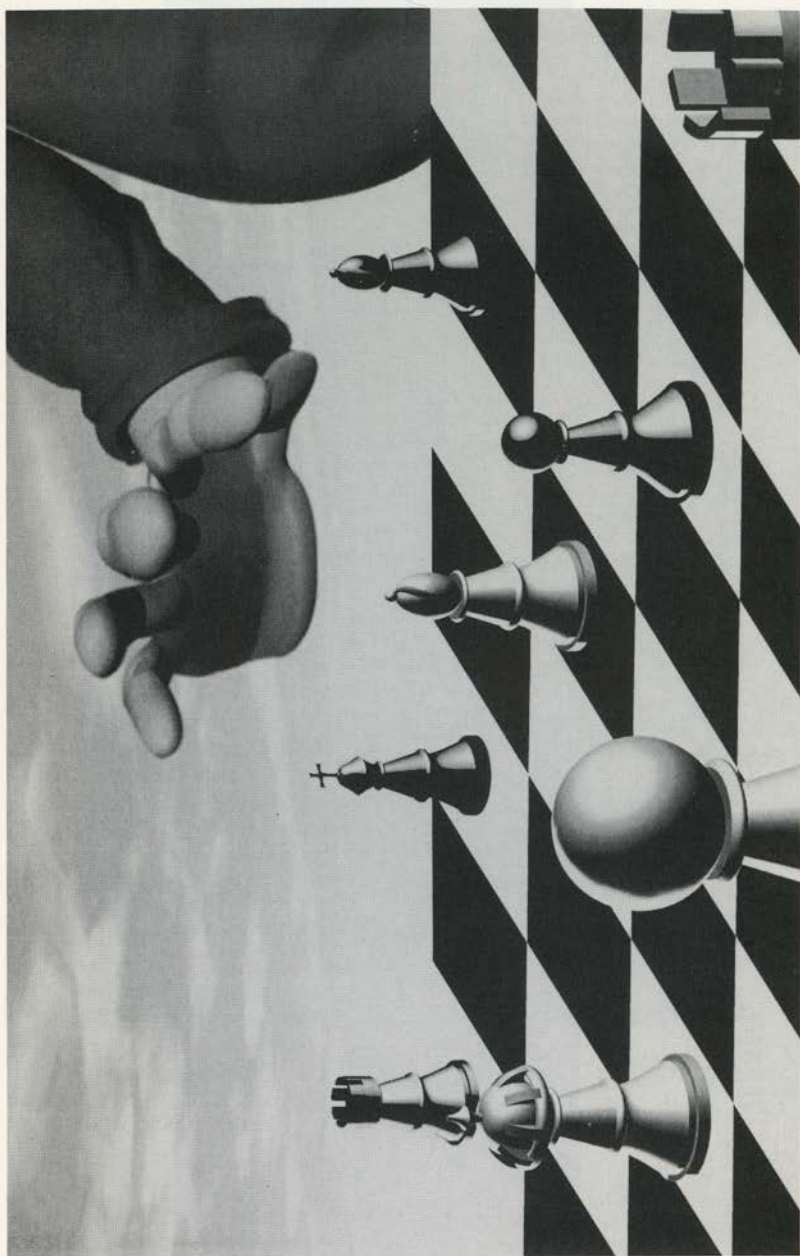


Miniature Zebra Heather Doody

black & white photograph

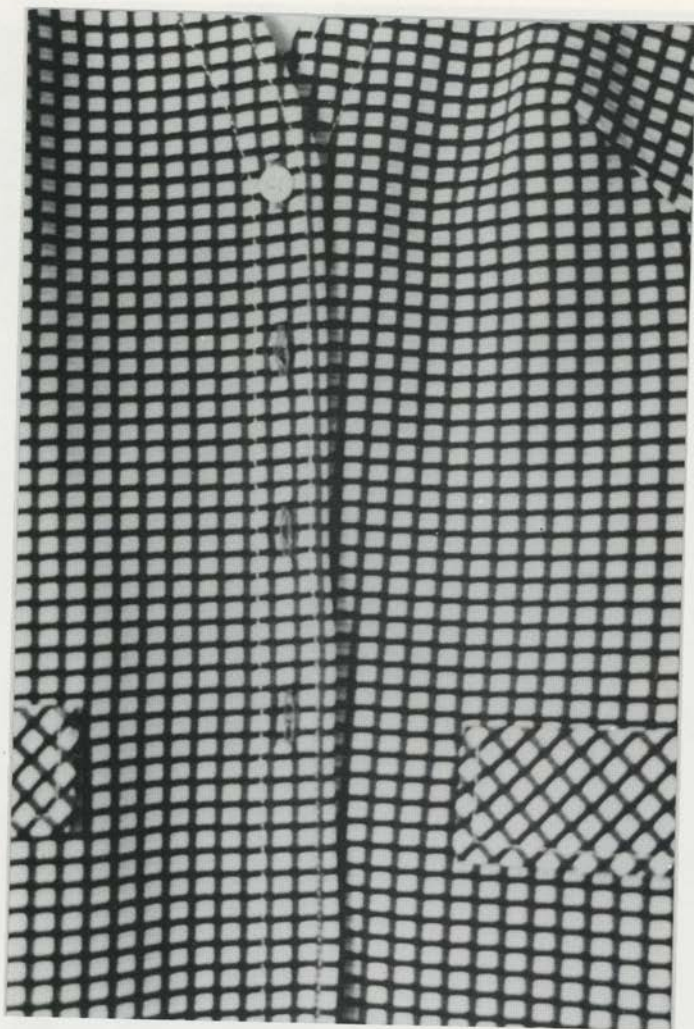


Gazing Woman Erica Ellerbusch newspaper mosaic



Untitled Trevor Griffithh

computer print



My Mom's Laura Hamm

black & white
photograph



We Fall Michael Ousley

oil on wood



Our Northeast Window Abbey Stoddard black & white
photograph

A wife thinks he's a bum
Look down, look down
Show the gifts
"Come dance with me"
Shine with dreams
Wink the eyes
Into the night
Baby feeds
Hunger raging
Burning brew
Off the exit
Play that chest
Smile and kiss
Dance apart
Step quick
Stare down eyes
Pucker lips
Just a little more
Joy arrayed
Haul big rig
"Come dance with me"
Before the fall
Exit three on forty-four
Roars the heads
Chrome dances
Smile red lips
Know we feel
Slipped the shoulder
Off one side
Pass the left
Chrome shines
Red car dances
Fingers tap the wheel
Right, left, both
Just a look

Look down, pull up.
See something?
Teenage boys bus watch
Come second dance
Eight lanes two ways
Right turn wrong notion
Play me
Feel good
What comes
Unseen motion
Beat the horn
Blow the drum
Sing your friends
Smile and hum
Meat sale
Burnt and cold
Hot dance coals
Broken mounds
Taboids of childhood
Behind closed doors
Doctor to nurse,
"Do we thirst?"
Lock doors and dance
Here's the apple
Peel the pear
Modest falsehood—
"How, what, where?"
Dream and anticipate
Pretty dresses of birthday parties
Older but never grown
Only up—
"Who, how, when?"
Much better!
Somewhere, somehow
Come mind dance

For promises and a "Yes"
Below kindnesses
Show things
Never known
Always heard
A fast light
Your mother calls
Just one second
Oh nothing
Cherries dance
With Kenworth trucks.
The kings rains
Unsaid on his bed
Laws broken
Double care
Secret airs
Show yours
Hope mine
Climb the fire
Knock the door
Come tender dance.
Why the fuss?
Shout over apples and pears
With sweet scents
From this stage
To the Gaiety Theater
For dancer lure
Secret passions—
"Where and what?"
Dance please come—
Come see the dance.
We are meant to dance
To see and dance
To put the moon on a stick
Come dance come smile come dance come dance come dance
come . . .

JOHN J. COX

Sarengheti

The days in Zomba
we balanced the field
of unmarked helicopters,
two persistent episodes
absorbing the twilight of an alien city.
Beneath the red wake of jugarum
bathing in dusty circles,
unclothed specks of pollen
clasping in unison to hollow bead echoes.
Selective agents converging
on the timeline of shifting resistance
your eyes
closing with the memory of each tree.

Nights of February review saw
imbibed captains at pumphouse 5
gather wooden needles in my closet
extracting the placation of the neutrino.
They spread your absence like an infected alarm
through files and ranks of bottega concepts
that assemble the collective mind.

Christmas letters
through my willow tree
turn their head and hurry by
the hypnotic regressions of iron tubes.
They weep with the owl at my window.

My trial staged at five
near half-sized federations
ecologists assemble to toss bread at the mendicants
whose children stop in the street to orbit limestone.

Sakina,
I pray for malaria.

KARLY DAWN HIGGINS

untitled

Peering outward over
horizons of my thigh
pasts of new beginnings
resolve.

Blond little fingers,
dead filia move on wind
tickling under tights
and jeans and socks the same.

I enjoy the feeling,
rubbing my legs
when there is no wind.

Why so then
does despise linger in
A glance at my natural growth?
Shadow I that much a man?
Insidious parallax pronounced by my maker.

K.M. MCCANN
Office Decor a la Non-Decor

This ravenous two-story tick sucks the inspiration from life.
Pores gape from the exorcism of freckled meaning.
Purpose slinks like oil down the body and into sulphur carpet;
 oozing, then dissolving in rot corroded paneling.
Ceiling, floor, walls: twos and fours in every cubicle
 twos and fours divided into miniature twos and fours
—and sixes for illusory air—creating space where no space exists:

 “A little fern, please, for some oxygen. A little yellow
 here, a mirror there—All for the sake of cheer and space,
 won’t you please.
 And over here, an impressive sound system, if you please;
 A little Beethoven, a little Strauss, some Verdi in between.”

some “Verdi in between,” for what? for therapy? for calm?
some “Verdi in between” to soothe the Forza del Destino song?
Perhaps a whisper we shall hear, a fate with hoped matrimony;
Heeding sweet Alvaro: “Seguimi. lascia omai la tua prigione . . .”
 do we follow? do we wait? do we set with pores and hearts
 agape?
 do we fear and do we sigh? do we bellow forth a stunted
 battle cry?
or do we sit and look out with Uncle Walt—seeing, marking, and
 observing?
And hold close to heart all that maims a soul, though far detached
 from stirring?

Plush cells pregnant with oxygen from a quickened fern;
puns and pictures locked in kiln boiled ceramic coffee urns;
lustful Leonora swimming in a tragic fate the Serpent spurred;
mirrors pimpling on the wall to reflect it all . . . to reflect . . . it all

TANYA NOBLE

Fish

Covered in blue
that's where I saw you
turning over stones
while wading mid stream
churtles of water between my toes
there you were as clear as a dove
then all of a sudden the sky was
covering me with thousands of
ice cold pieces of glass
Your vision was broken
vanished like grey ash
suddenly I ran
treading up the water
Nothing but mud followed
To keep going on
I took one more step
Not to give up
I kept my chin up
From around a cloud
a bird started to sing
I kept one ear alert
while my heart listened to
other sounds
Rhythm not to dwell
Realizing I was alive
I harbored an uncanny smell
I took the chance to begin again
Farther and farther
I wouldn't slow down
Learning what I could

I counted whispers
Forty-one of them
quietly hummed the same soft sound

Words Wouldn't Hit It

green paper clip under the desk
circus animals trained to be obedient
chopsticks inside trees
leather daisies
not words but creative language
whispers in one ear and amplifies on
the crossroads to exit out the other
Applause the noiseless chatter of
6 million right brained people
Symphonic upholstery that curves
in velvet bounds
Eyelashes that sprinkle on pages
A trigger for a wish that takes practice
Mudpie creation transient soufflé
green paper clip
lay on the floor the whole day

PHILLIP M. ROBERTS

from "Scattered Poems"

(one)

Mad man night—
the wild man on the edge of boredom,
the sad man leaving the gates of Sodom;
this hour we create our gods
and murder the child within.

Resignation of faith—
 the angel's wings burn
 falling like a comet in this night's
 silk black curtain,
and we have yet to be born.

I am spiritually outside of myself
looking backward
on the grave of a child.
 The mother
 has left no flowers;
 there is no epitaph
for this unnamed dead man.

Our fathers feel guilt.
They hide their bloody swords in shame;
their loins are diseased
and there is nothing clean left in our hearts.
'He penetrates the darker orifice—
tighter, firmer;
there will be no birth here.'

After the orgasm we fall into drunken sleep
and forget what we made.

Sons become soldiers
to protect their mothers
and how incest
creates such strange murder.

I resign from my past
and rename my present.
I exist nowhere
and beg only forgiveness.
In this dawn
only the humble shall pass.

(three)

These are desert thoughts.
Sweat pouring down from the man made of clay . . .
here we become real
the burning flesh, the stung eye,
and the dry smell of singed
sand swirling in convoluted pits of our minds.

Here we seek resolution . . .
Our tortures burned away by the dead-pan sun
sitting pale and revealed,
completely unclothed; draped in sparse clouds
unveiling this infernal heat . . .

My bones burn in this light
and blindly I seek a shadow,
a reflection of my being
but the grain reveals no one . . .

There is no man standing in these humid mists.

And silently we all return to the earth;

our flesh is made to be eaten . . .

these nimble shard fingers of grass

the tender green teeth;

partake of my body

absorb my blood . . .

No man shall truly know me

No man fully see;

each reflection is lost in perception

and some elements of our being

may never be explained.

If there is a God

bless us, incomplete

in such pale loathing . . .

And if there is no greater elevation than self,

may the self within

seek such a blessed God we wish to be.

WILLIAM NATHAN SHANE

The Alligator God

She knows my real name
and the slashes that indent my back
how long it is
and the way I sit through her interviews
about this place
sometimes with the therapy of 80s music
drinking PBR
listening to the steady pump of our relationship
it makes me diamond heavy
but I sit still
like every planet does
with the gravity to spin the didn't of what it knows
I think about the sun
using it to burn what I inherited
some abstract license to piss
it away into the fucking orange dream
about comfort.
I tell her about this place
the alligator God
chewed into my body
how my stomach was full of green flies
in this space I reach to show her
the scar
between the neurotransmitters
which I know are really just engines
ancient behind
this God obsessed
with the interview
and the full set of teeth
buried in my brain
on the lower east side of my back.

RACHEL SHORT

untitled poem in five parts

I. How the Rats Felt

Pink eyes wandering,
Bony hands reaching to high places
Twitching and trembling with the sounds

We introduced them all to darkness
We all felt the quiet synaptic plunge.
The Lord is with thee

The owners of the dead
Made a solemn procession.
Leaning over into the flesh bag,
Gently, gently laid the bodies to rest.

We all washed our hands like Pilate
Among all the dead ones, we helped others
Some others were allowed to live.
Blessed art thou among rats
Vapors from the shallow breaths of the dead—
Oh, we breathed them in, life through our nostrils
And they wisped out of our trained fingers,
Seeping into the living ones,
And they breathed easier, I swear.

We were the ones who did not kill that day
He restoreth the souls
Blessed be the one who gives us life for a while.

II. Walking Among Gravestones

He is not dead, but sleepeth.

We talked all big and alive,
There among the stones of old,
Kicked up cold dust and the crinkly grass
Abominations, irreverences,
Like the woolly worm, the conqueror on the stone
Blood in the earth cried out against it.

We shall meet again.

I expect to meet an angel
Maybe one of the stone ones come down
Mourning and grappling, crying with the dead
Bless me, I say, I will not let you go

Blessed be the one who gives us life for a while;
What we promote now
Will resent a change in rank later.

I will not let you go until you bless me.

III. The Dead Girl

The sea
Gives up its dead at night
Full of salt and seaweed
Salted those bodies away
Down in the smokehouse of the sea,
The Great Sea is the only name I know.

Dead girl walks out of the water,
Seaweed in her hair
Moon dripping from each finger
With just one thought left in her
fish-rotten mind
One thought left, and it was enough
To keep the sea creatures
From her pale and sodden skin
She walks there in the moonlight
Moon dripping off every finger
She walks
She listens
She hopes
And thinks that one
That very one thought

*Fear not, for behold,
Thou hast found favor with God.*

The birds came out,
Those dignified taskmasters,
Silent and feathered, wings against her lips

Blessed art thou among women.

IV. Requiem

The great rolling machine of the passing of things
Surrounds me with noise,
Things that are not quite as real as you.
I have searched the sky and dug in the earth
My burrow, my good soil has been spoiled
Graves are no good for gardens.

O the goneness of things,
Like you, o my grandmother
Noble like nothing ever was
Even when you were dying
And they bore you up in all their frantic arms
Your lioness head lay on your chest
And you were thinking, yes,
Thinking that very one thought
O my legend
You were thinking hard of a way to fix things.

It was a rude interruption
We were going to talk, you see,
We were going to speak well to each other again.

Our pink eyes wide with inevitability,
Aneurysms and other things lie in wait
Handy tools to those who would be rude.
Handy tools to those who give us life for a while.

V. Wisdom

I am not a wise woman
I slap my palms on the dusty ground
Grinding my essence to grains
I have shot my house full of arrows, O God
And I am no wise woman
Sages slap palms in the dust
Raise their hands to the higher power
While I live in vegetation, graze on the flowers
Under a magnolia

Hear, o hear,
I beat my palms in the wastelands

Raise my hands in the place of the desert.
Slap out the cracks and wait
Wait for the rains,
Wait for the God,
Wait for the answers, the oracle
The sand is hot and dry.

JULIE N. BUMGARDNER

The Storm

The very first thunder
The very first rain
The very first time
I felt extreme pain

All of my troubles
seemed like a black cloud,
I was calling for guidance
but not out loud

I needed time to think things through
and as I patiently waited, a ray of
sunshine from the clouds grew

As I came to my solution I looked
up high, and saw a beautiful rainbow
coming down from the sky

So my suggestion to you when there is
a downpour, look beyond the rain and
you will see a golden door

LORA BETH LITTLETON

Reliving the Past

As I walked into the room,
I thought about all of the things
that have happened here.
The house began to speak of
the happy times here together.
The walls began to tell of
all the tales told before.
A chair began to laugh, thinking of
all the times we were all together.
Pictures on the wall smiled at me
as I brushed by them with sadness.
My windows began to remind me of
the many times I stared out, dreaming.
Pillows began to express their sorrow
from the many nights I cried myself to sleep.
The white ceiling began to scoff at the
times that I wished it had fallen in on me.
And as I turned to go, with a tear in my eye,
the long, dusty road grimaced at me.
For it knew that I had no place to turn.

Emptiness

Emptiness is like a hollow pit,
 I know what I want to fill it with,
but it's all out of reach.
 Each time I grab hold of something,
It's just like "tink,"
 a pin dropping.

Everything I throw in is like the first thing.

It just keeps taking
the rest away.

The pit is white,
and I keep trying to fill it with color,
but the white keeps swallowing it up.

CARL ALBRIGHT

The King's Daughter

When I tell most people the story about the twenty minutes I spent in the back of a van with Elvis Presley's daughter in Hollywood in 1983, they find the story dull and uninteresting which is natural as it was a dull and uninteresting experience with dull and uninteresting characters.

I can't even remember her first name. She was 15 or so, a little overweight with a pasty mashed potatoes Irish sort of pimply oatmeal complexion.

Like most females and all males that age she had a lot of attention on sex and I could tell she wanted to get a life erotically, romantically and sexually.

We were both staying at the Manor Hotel for Scientologists on Franklin Avenue about two blocks from Hollywood and Vine which was at least for me the creative, sexual and spiritual center of the world.

She was staying in a suite that her mother, Priscilla, kept year 'round on the top floor of the Manor, an old stone castle-like building that had been named the Chateau something or other back when Marlon Brando lived there.

I was sharing a small apartment there with three good Scientologists. Guston, a former German U boat commander who never spoke, always played his damn radio when he came in from his waiter's job at the Brown Derby after 3 a.m. We each had hard, thin, uncomfortable beds in the living room and a young computer flake from Chicago who was working at the Los Angeles Examiner days and was doing a Scientology course at night was sharing the bedroom with a fast food magnate or maggot (depending on your opinion of fast food), from New Jersey who could write long epic poems that were actually readable. He was perennial pre-Clear and was getting a lot of very expensive auditing on the Clearing and

Operating Theatan levels at ASHO-American Saint Hill Organization and I was trying, as I had been trying for thirty years, to get Scientology to deliver the valuable final products I'd bought and paid for thirty years before, before Ron and I and Mary Sue and an auditor named Lou had realized the results then advertised, envisioned and sold, were not then attainable.

Oh, to get back to what's her name, the poor little rich girl. I have often felt some guilt over what I've thought I should have done for her that evening.

I could have created in me all of the showable symptoms of being in love with her. I could have played her; I'd woke up with worse.

It would have helped her escape from the fascist right wing cult that Scientology had degenerated into in only thirty years. In the fifties it had been a budding young experimental science, the hope of the world, a way out of the planetary psychosis and I was proud to be a Founding Scientologist—one of the founders of the Church of Scientology.

I can only imagine the pressure and psychological button pushing on that poor little rich girl to get her to enlist in Scientology's Sea Org. and sign that one million dollar contract and then sign the wealth (that Elvis earned and Priscilla multiplied many times) over to the Sea Organization and become a nameless uniformed insect working a 16-hour day as a sea org recruit in their nightmare hive.

I can always tell when I'm going to end up in bed with a girl: I get instantly and visibly sexually aroused.

I've played rich broads for money before, married for land and a promise of money once and acquired a title in one marriage, but the girl just didn't turn me on at all and lust along with love usually flows two ways.

You know, I often think that if I had any idea of what Scientology would degenerate into, I would have killed L. Ron Hubbard in the fifties, when I was being paid to bodyguard him and keep him alive. Though I don't think that would have stopped it as most movements seem to have a life of their own and those

who seem to lead them are often just surfing into history, riding the wave of life.

At any rate, I didn't even fire at the girl, though I observed her closely as the Scientology shuttle van drove us from the American Saint Hill Org. over across Hollywood to our homes in the Manor Hotel for Scientologists.

The poor little rich girl, the poor little rich girl.

How do I Figure the Odds on Hand-to-Hand and When Will the Next Game Begin?

I learned how to knife fight early one morning in an alley in East L.A., and the Mexican pro that taught me there taught me just for fun. He showed me where to carry, how to open with one hand, do the show, shift and pass from hand to hand, then the lay down and walk away. And later a dark haired drunk with a guitar showed me how to set a blade with a match stick so it would open fast. Then I practiced about a hundred hours on a hundred different nights in a hundred different towns, till I got the basic down.

I had felt a real need to learn how to knife fight after the first knife fight that I won; it was in an Arizona Mexican border town and what scared me the most was not that there were two of them and only one of me; it didn't scare me that it was after midnight on that dim downtown cobble-covered mountain street, and I wasn't afraid 'cause I had one and a half blocks to go up hill back to my hotel, and the knife they had just scared me a little, a big long dirty, jagged iron butcher knife that would have hurt bad when it cut; what really scared me bad that night was that there was only one knife and the two drunk Mexicans had it.

How do I figure I won—I lived to walk away, they got a free ride to jail and I went up to my room and went to sleep while the police drove them away. How well I bluffed and faked and yelled and growled, and a trick I learned from my old buddy L.R.H.—Be their daddy and yell at them like they are your child.

Yes, I learned a lot from some of the best when it came to hand-to-hand. Joe Chang, editor of *The Chinese Nationalist*, taught me oriental hand-to-hand. I heard he went back to Peking to die. We used to make the Chinese Chinese restaurants in the basements of Washington D.C.'s Chinatown, where the real Chinese eat real Chinese food. He liked me 'cause he only had to show me a move once and I had had 58 fights in the ring, in clubs around Ohio. Hell, I fought once on CBS prime time T.V. I got paid for all but two. I've always had a professional attitude. An amateur is always an amateur but a pro is always good. He will learn the basics from the bottom and practice every move 'til it is natural, second nature and looks as easy as a leaf floating in the wind. Yes, an amateur is always a loser and the pro will usually win—not 'cause he is naturally better; it's that practice primed him to win. Yes, Bobby Yount and Chucky Clements taught me how to box and win.

But I'll tell you what is worrying me now; it's—it is the odds the next time. I don't know how to figure the odds the next time and when will the next time begin?

When you have lived through long seconds that add up to longer minutes that add up to even longer hours of hand-to-hand—added up to days of hand-to-hand. When will the next time begin and how do I figure the odds on the next time?

Do I figure my odds are great 'cause I've lived so long or have I had all my aces and am I overdue?

Yes, how do you figure the odds on hand-to-hand, and when will the next game begin?

Horse

I've often thought that if a being planned on being born in Kentucky, and wished to live in a nice environment with the best in food, medical attention and comfortable housing, he should bribe God to let him be born a thoroughbred horse on a farm in the bluegrass, rather than as a human being in the depressed counties of Eastern Kentucky.



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