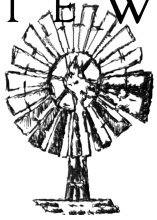
A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA
WESTVIEW



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WESTVIEW

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Western Oklahoma

HARD TIMES/GOOD TIMES

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

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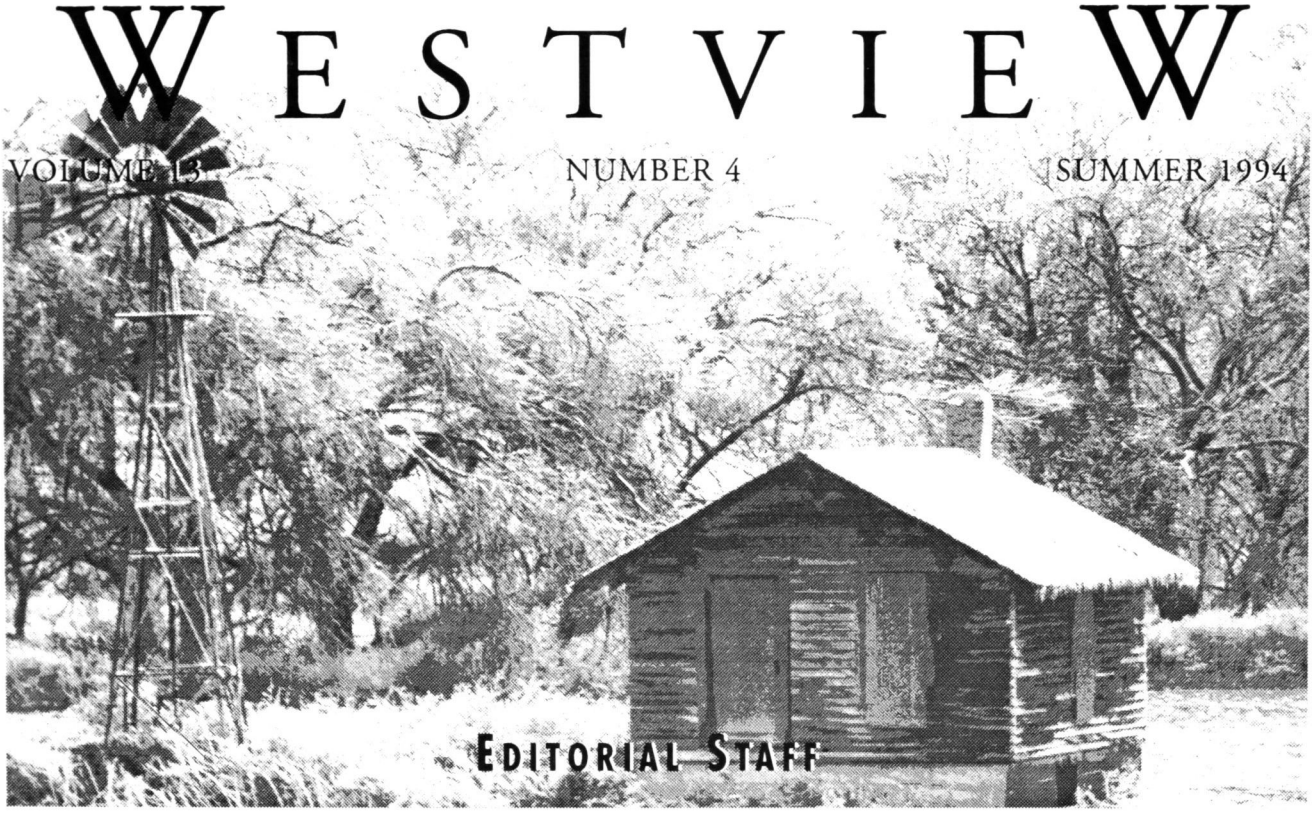

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Stylesheet

1. Mail submissions flat in a 9"x12" envelope. Include a SASE for possible rejection.
2. Submissions should be typed; prose double spaced and poetry single spaced on 8.5" x 11" white paper. Artwork: graphics-pen and ink on white paper; photos-5" x 7" or 8" x 10" black and white. Send copies of photos since they may not be returned.
3. We use themes related to Western Oklahoma, as well as non-thematic work of high quality by writers from elsewhere.
4. We accept and enjoy both free verse and formal poetry.
5. Please limit prose submissions to 10 double-spaced typed pages.
6. Include a brief biographical sketch.
7. We welcome submissions on a 3.5" disk formatted for Microsoft Word, IBM or Macintosh. Please also include a hard copy of your submission.
8. Address all submissions and correspondence to:

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   Southwestern Oklahoma State University
   Weatherford, OK 73096

Westview Future Issues

Western Oklahoma Terrain—Rivers, Lakes, Hills: Fall 94.

Western Oklahoma Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: Winter 94.

Deadline: 9-15-94.

Western Oklahoma Artists: Spring 95.

Deadline: 12-15-94.

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The Dance

Lance Windyboy Whitecloud

My dance is the one called the Southern Straight
And when I dance I know each step is sure.
The thrill of the hunt I will recreate
I wear beads, a roach and an otter's fur.
My song is gentle, of harmony and grace
When I dance my silver bells will rattle.
The beat of the drum determines my pace
If I step out of beat, bells will tattle.
As I dance looking for a quarry's trail
My movements reflect the grandfather's way.
I know my family will never fail
My spirit soars high on a windy day.
I hold my head up and full of glory
This is my Southern Straight category.

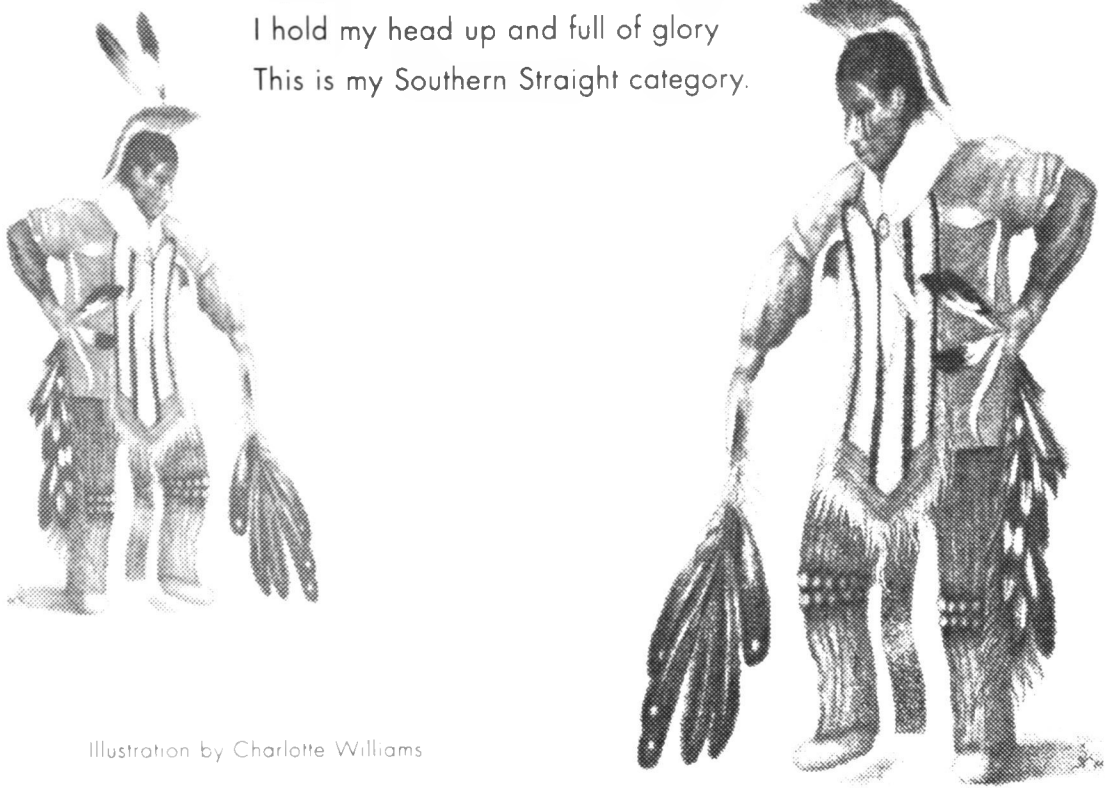
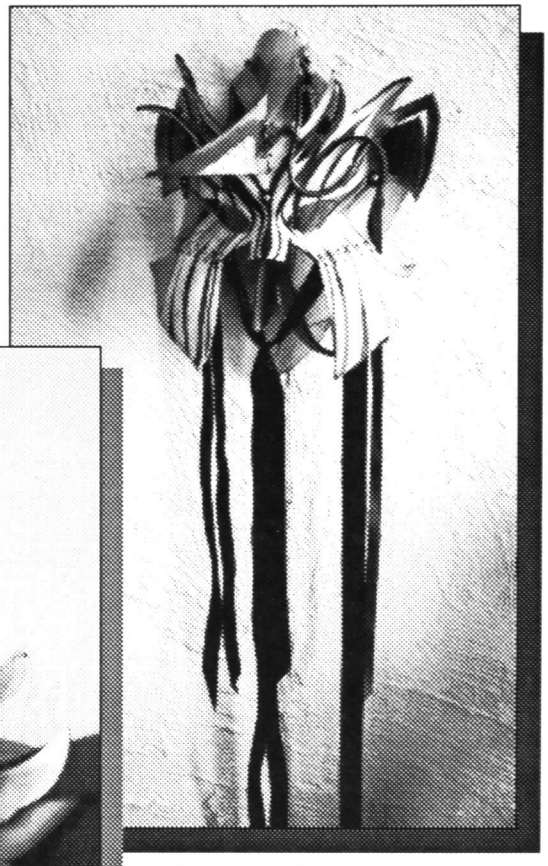


Illustration by Charlotte Williams

G. Patrick Riley

MASKS

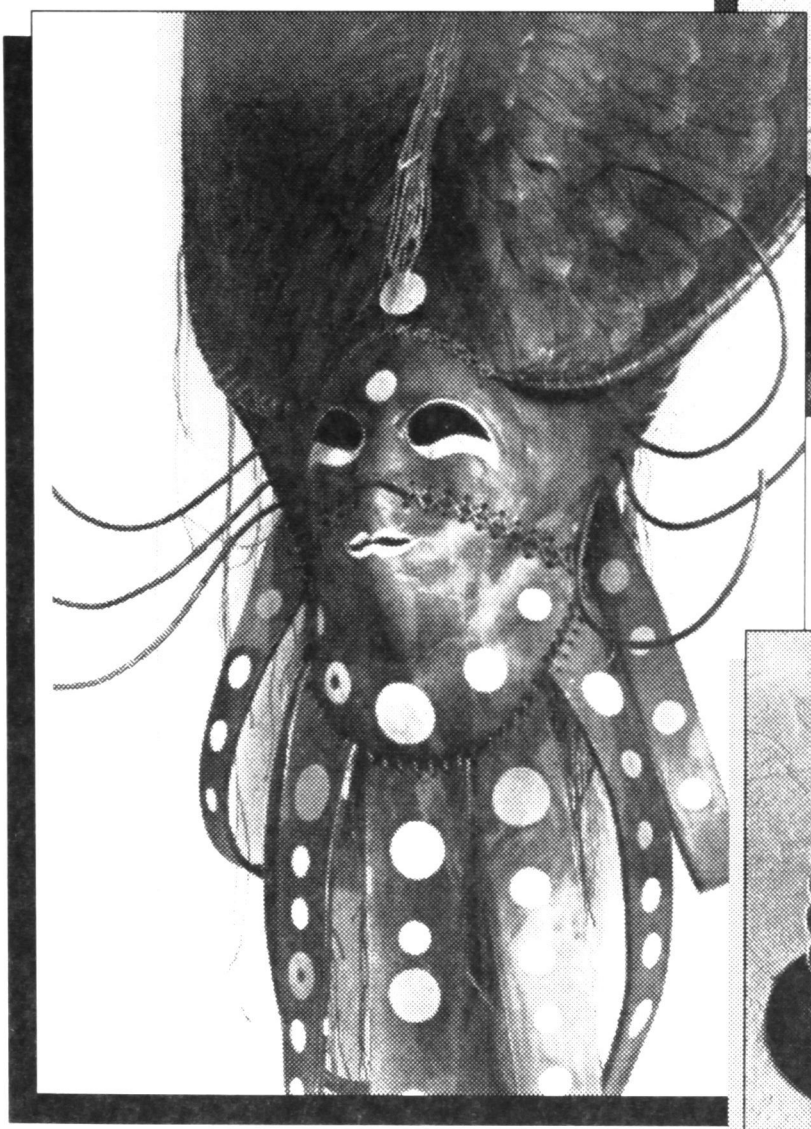


White Eagle Mask

War Mask

Blue Eagle Mask

Mr. Riley's masks are modeled by Semahoye Deere, age 9 of Colony, Oklahoma



Medicine Woman Mask

Spirit Mask

Angel Mask

An Interview with Patrick Riley

Michael McKinney

Prior to joining the Southwestern Oklahoma State University Art Department in 1991, G. Patrick Riley taught art in the Oklahoma City public school system for 25 years. Additionally, he has worked with the State of Oklahoma Arts Council as a residence artist. His artwork is listed among the collections at the Oklahoma State Art Collection, in the Little Rock Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas and in the Kennedy Center in Washington. Most of Riley's work is with mask making, but he also works in fiber and paper as well as sculpture. He has a major sculpture in front of the cancer center at the Baptist Hospital Complex in South Oklahoma City. Additionally, Riley's work has been purchased by several major corporations around the country including AT&T, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco, and Kerr McGee. His latest undertaking is a mural project in the town of Colony, Oklahoma.

Westview: What do you feel art is, and what is your distinction between art and craft?

Riley: I come from a background where art is an expression that an individual makes recording concept ideas and documented ideas such as paintings and drawings, things like that, in a particular time space continuum and relating to a culture in some way. In our society that relationship can be through a thought process, per se, like where you think certain thoughts and you arrive at a conclusion. Or it can be an intuitive thing where it just comes naturally. So for me that is sort of how I see art.

Westview: What got you interested in doing masks as a medium?

Riley: Some years ago I became unattached to European art concepts and became more involved in the concept of creation of art through American Indian and African concepts, which were more intuitive based than intellectual based. And as I did that, I also became aware of facial features identifying personalities. And so at the same time I was doing intellectual research on the human face, I was also exploring the intuitive creationism of other cultures, so I became interested in the mask. In other cultures the mask is very much a dominant part of the culture, and I have also been a seeker for some kind of understanding my whole life. What I found was a lot of cultures that view the mask sort of as an intermediary or messenger between the viewer and whatever it is out there, and so I thought there might be some reality to that so I started making masks to understand a little more about myself.

Westview: That is a very Eastern sounding concept.

Riley: Well I've been very Eastern for my whole life. Here I am a white guy living in a monocultural system exploring African masks and Asian masks and American Indian masks, and by getting into those, it led me to Eastern philosophy, so that I now practice yoga, and I've been to India. I practice Eastern philosophy in my life. And so the mask led me to a phase, and so I believe that the mask will lead you to what you're seeking if you use the mask in the right way.

Westview: I think that is the way a lot of artists look at things. I know that is certainly how I look at my writing. It will lead me where I am going.

Riley: As long as you're doing your art, you are in the right place if you are being honest within yourself.

Westview: Does your yoga have any influence on your art and vise vera?

Riley: Oh yeah. Number one, the yoga that I work on and do gives me energy. I get energy from practicing yoga. And because of the energy that I get, I produce work. If I didn't have the energy, I couldn't produce the work, and so a lot of times when I'm in mediation, I do not produce work that I figure out. I've never been that kind of artist, but I produce work that I see. So I see it, and then I produce it. I almost thought that was funny. But a lot of people talk about how they balance things, and they put this up here and that down there, and it all makes into a rhythmic picture. That's not the way I work. Sometimes I'll meditate, and I will see something, and I just go out and make it. So that's the kind of work that I produce. It's rather interesting.

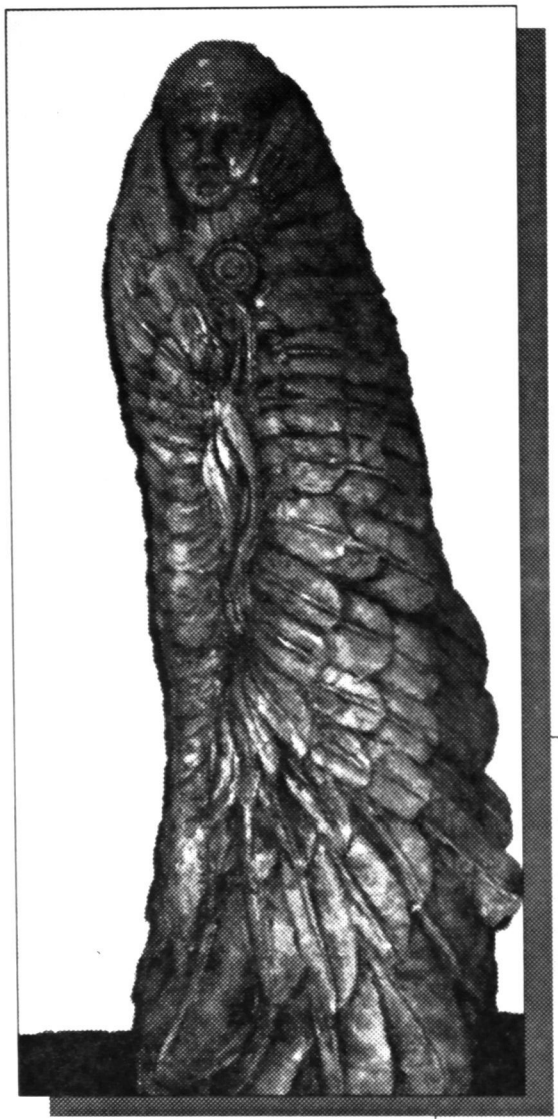
Westview: To me that is the way art works. I take a page of words and somewhere in there is a poem.

Riley: And it's just there. I have had all this training on how to balance shape, I use that, but basically most of the art I've ever made has just been art that's there. And I know it's there. So I just make it. And the yoga gives me the energy to do that.

Owl Mask

Fire Mask

Wind Mask



Eagle Totem

Western Stool

Elephant Mask

Photographs by Jan Bradfield

Westview: Do you think that in a modern culture the mask still has mythological representation, or could we now say that masks are more for camouflage than for ceremony?

Riley: As a mask artist, one who has made a lot of masks in my life, I've seen masks both as a ceremony and as a camouflage. Our society uses the mask a lot of different ways. Glasses are a mask that hides the eyes. Motorcycle helmets, football helmets, they are all masks. There are a few more; the astronaut mask, all the different bubble masks, they are all things we wear that find roles for ourselves in society, and if you look at the movies, we see things like the Star Trek facial mask. I feel like we are still very much the same human beings we were before we were industrialized. We just use masks that are technically more well built in our society.

Westview: Do you think the American automobile is a mask?

Riley: Oh yeah, the whole culture that we have industrialized is doing the same thing as a non-industrialized culture is doing; we just do it with technically more efficient materials, but we are doing the same thing; we are making masks with our industrial culture, and what I have done with my art in my masks, particularly with the leather, is the recreation of skin on skin. So I have taken the industrial concept out of the picture, and I've been making masks that are skin. So when you put them on you're not industrialized; you're who you would have been five or ten thousand years ago. You're the very same human being putting on a leather mask because leather is something that is not industrial. We have used leather since the beginning of the history of man. And so one thing I like about the masks that I make in workshops sometimes is to touch base with the self in me that isn't superficial, but much more concrete. And one way to do that is by using something that all human beings are used to, and that is animal skin. That is why I use leather in my masks, to relate to that. That pulls you out of industrialization. So I feel like we are continuing to be who we have always been, and we are playing in materials that have a little more flexibility.

Westview: How many shows do you do a year now? I know you did a bunch last year.

Riley: Right now I have a show, rather I have a mask that is in a show, in Tempe, Arizona, called Face on Face, and it is touring the Southwest United States, so that mask will be tied up for two years. That show will tour throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico I think. I not only make masks but also do sculpture, and I do paper pieces. I was just in a show in Oklahoma City, Fiber Works, at the Kirkpatrick Center. It was a juried exhibition of paper and fiber makers, and I just completed a piece for Prairie Dance Theater. They are going to perform an opening children's piece, so that will be opening. And I just had a show in Hot Springs, Arkansas last month (April). I haven't any major gallery exhibits scheduled for the next two years. I'll probably enter some competitions and make some masks on commission, but I don't think I will be going to gallery shows for about two years. I will probably end up having a show in Hot Springs, in 1996.

Westview: I know you have a piece in the Oklahoma State Art Collection because I have photographed it. How does having a piece in a collection like that make you feel as an artist?

Riley: Successful. One day, I was sitting around talking to the director and all of a sudden looked up and there was the mask up there. I said, "That makes me feel like whatever it was that I was after when I was a young artist." Having a piece in a show gives you the feeling that, at least in the local area where you are living, there is some recognition; that in fact you are an artist; which makes you feel good. People listen now. It gives you a certified—and I'm not sure that is healthy because you can get dragged down and say that is all it is going to do—it gives you certification. A piece in the State Art Collection, that is bona fide artist. I'm not sure that is real because a real artist doesn't work on the past but the present. But it does make you feel good to see it.

Westview: A great deal of what you are talking about now is this concept of paying dues in one form or another. Most of us as artists have paid our dues in one form or another to build the kind of artistic career that we have. A lot of that is built on achievement. What do you think your highest accomplishment or achievement artistically is as of this time?

Riley: There are a lot of things to look upon when you have a feeling that you are successful, that actually things have come. A lot of artists walk around going, "I never made it," you know, or, "I never got this," or "never got that." In my career, it is just the opposite. It seems like I've gotten everything, and so there are a lot of wonderful things that have occurred. I guess chairing a department here at Weatherford for the last two years is something that I had always wanted to do, and so when I chaired this art department, it was like I felt a whole lot of gratitude that I had the opportunity to do this because it was something in my life I had always wanted to do. I thought I probably wouldn't get to do this, but now I am, and it feels really wonderful. The other things that have happened are that I was commissioned to do a major large sculpture in Oklahoma City, and I produced about a twelve foot monumental sculpture for a hospital in Oklahoma City. It took me a year to do, and that was just a wonderful event. Not very many artists get a commission like that in a lifetime. Then probably the ultimate honor that I think has ever been bestowed on me was my selection for the 1986 Kennedy Center Teacher Program. And I was hosted by the Kennedy Center for three years. That is the ultimate art experience for me as far as being recognized as an artist. I really, really have a lot of gratitude for being able to be an artist in my state and be able to work with people in the state in arts expertise areas and be listened to. That is something I never thought would happen to me. People going, "Well come on over here and be an artist for a while. Come over here and share with the kids." I think for me the best thing that has ever happened in my career is sharing my life with people. Ultimately, when you look at all the individual art acts that we do, you look at all the stuff we produced, and you look at everything done, it gets down to survival, power, mind, and heart. The stuff I've done with my heart I think is by far the best stuff I've ever made. You know sharing with people that heart. The rest of it, the power trips you probably forget, the mental stuff you get mixed up on, and the survival stuff you sort of do, but when you share your heart with people, students, teachers and other people, that love you have in your heart for yourself and humanity, which is what an artist is doing, exposing where you're at, if your heart is in that place, that is probably the best thing that could ever happen. So that is what artists do. And you do it through your art, and if your art is a mural on the wall at college with kids, that is what it is about. If it is constructing a school for kids at Oklahoma City, then that's what it is about. If it is chairing a department, if it is building a sculpture, then that's what it is

about. I guess for me the focus is on the heart. As long as you are doing that, you know you're in the right spot. So the stuff I do with that in mind I consider to be the most important.

Westview: What value do you think schools like a magnet school in art have?

Riley: I think it is determined by what a group of people wants from their young people. If the arts are important in the system, then the value of the magnet high school is to place an importance on the arts in that community and actually say here's where we know it's important. It's not just part of the regular system, but we are actually going to pinpoint and make it one of our higher priorities. The value for that is based on the reality that you're giving to your children, and you can give a a work ethic, you can give scientific knowledge, or you can give intellectual understanding, and you can also give the freedom for artistic expression. And since we are a democracy, that is what we can give, so that the concept is for our children to see that kind of knowledge at a younger age. Then they are going to continue that knowledge when they become older, so that we have a society which acknowledges expression and acknowledges the freedom to express ourselves. This is what makes our society unique, is that we can do that. And at a magnetic school that is what we do. You're telling people that the ability to say and produce and visualize what you feel and think is important to you as a human being. That is important enough that we want to make it a major priority for you to have. With that in mind you attract people with that kind of feeling to your area. With that priority you build a more decent society, supposedly with free expression. Not too much; there should be limitations with free expression, but I mean really let kids know it is important for them to be expressive artists. I think it makes a major impression on a whole community when that happens, particularly on a school system. They start going, "Hey, this is important."

This mural is located in Colony, Ok. on Main St. It was created by Patrick Riley and Colony area art students.

Come attend

Colony's first

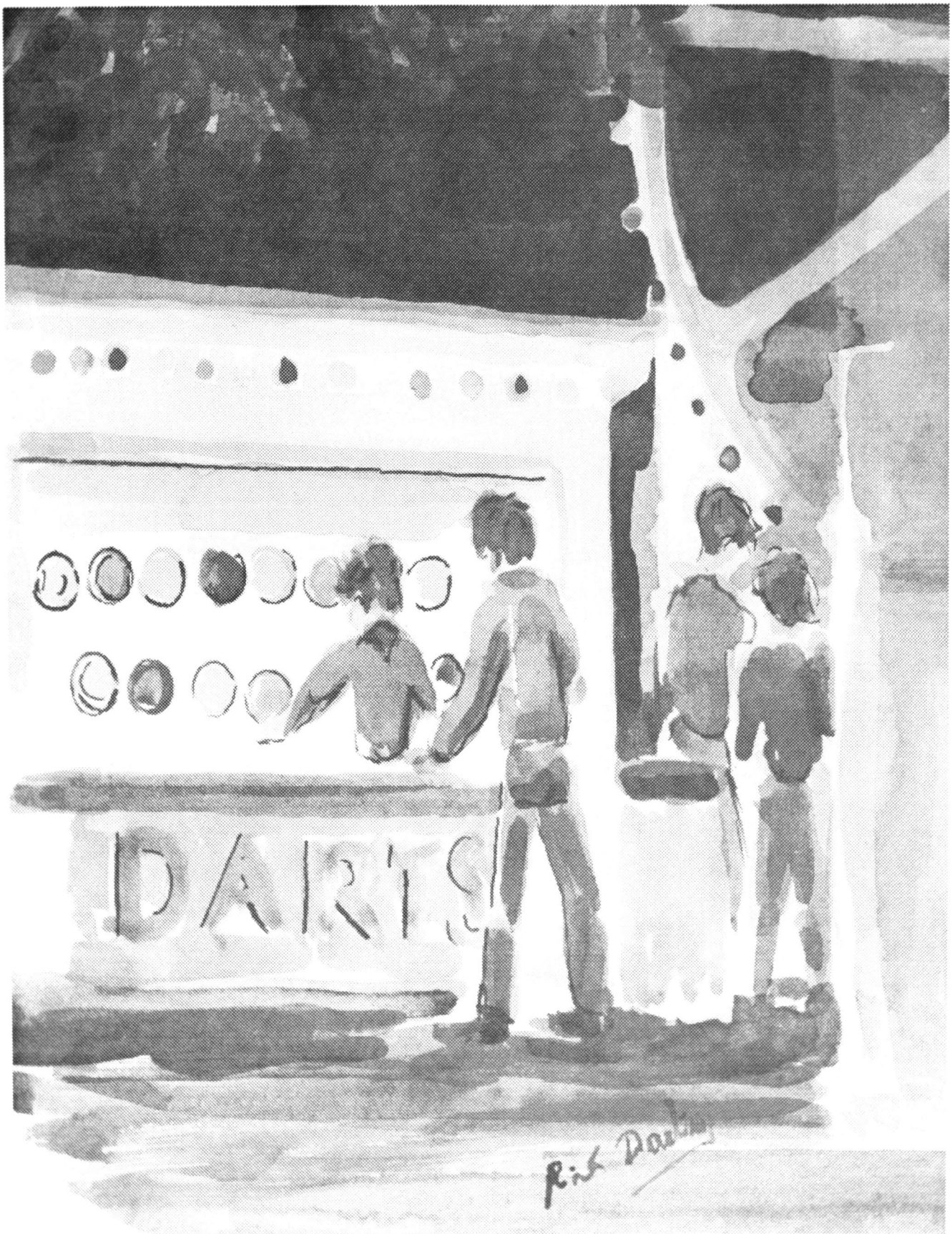
annual

a celebration of the peanut, Colony's economic base. The event will feature local artists, craft makers and talents from a variety of ethnic groups, including Native Americans.

Peanut products will be available, along with other foods, crafts, art, entertainment and more.

COLONY, OKLAHOMA

October 1, 1994


DARTS

Clouds Glide: A Fragment of the Oklahoma Spring

John Graves Morris

A gusting and subsiding wind blows
A newspaper and its rictus of bad news
Across the park as I trudge,
Shoulders hunched, eyes narrowed,
Ears numbed. In this almost spring,
The withered landscape hunkers down
Under my feet, croons its scratchy lament.

From behind suddenly drifting clouds,
Color seeps back into the air,
A blue that hurts the eyes.
Redbud branches quicken,
The fingers of breeze riffle
The purplish fringe on the wildgrass,
Gathering the black-eyed susans into a
Yellow and maroon wave.
Prairie dogs chirrup. Grackles chatter.
Hawks dart and soar and glide.
On the rising air and at such a height,
The mind cannot but yield
To the boundless earth arching its back,
Loosening its impenitent breast.

Illustration by Velvet Rogers and Paul Messerly

Mr. Targood's Notes

Matt Hughes

Late in October of 1849, four gentlemen sat at a game of cards, occasionally pausing to glance up at the ceiling as they puffed on their cigars.

One of them was the local physician, Dr. Morrisey, while opposite him sat Dr. Estenbach, a renowned authority on madness and abnormal mental states. The third man, who occasionally arose from his chair and went over to the fireplace to stoke the fire, was a neighbor—a Mr. Targood, a gray, thin, unprepossessing man of considerable means. He appeared to be in declining health and complained often of being chilled, even in summer weather; and this evening was cold, indeed, with a wind that whirred in the eaves of the old house where they sat and pursued their card playing.

The fourth man was the brother of their host, who was upstairs in his bedroom, presumably fast asleep. The host was named Thomas Faraday, and it was because of him that the four were gathered about the table, playing their cards with an inattention that in other circumstances would have seemed remarkable. His brother, Isaac Faraday, was a widower in his forties, and like Mr. Targood, a man of some wealth and influence.

When the hall clock struck eleven, Dr. Estenbach threw his hand in and said, "My dear Dr. Morrisey, when did you say it would happen?"

Morrisey adjusted his spectacles and said, "Patience, Dr. Estenbach. Any moment now, if it happens at all this evening. As I explained, he doesn't do it every night."

"You say his man will come down and tell us?"

"The instant he shows signs that he's nearly ready."

Dr. Estenbach snorted. "Ready! You make him sound like a pregnant woman!"

"You will have observed," Dr. Morrisey said dryly, adjusting his spectacles again, "that such things must go through their proper phases."

Estenbach nodded. "But is the servant to be trusted? Will he know the right time?"

Morrisey frowned. "We could scarcely wait in his bed chamber, could we? I asked for you to come here tonight because I thought you should witness such an extraordinary phenomenon. Trust me, there's still time. He may do it tonight."

"I hope you're right." Estenbach breathed, shaking his head. He puffed on his cigar and started to pick up his cards, when the servant just referred to appeared at the entrance to the game room. All four men turned to look at him.

Approaching Dr. Morrisey gravely, the servant—an old man with a posture curiously bent to the right—said, "I believe he will walk tonight, sir."

Morrisey glanced instinctively at Mr. Faraday, their host's brother, and seeing that he remained impassive, turned back to the servant and said, "Are you sure?"

The old man nodded. "He will walk." Then lifting his chin a little, he continued: "Will the gentlemen come to watch?"

"Of course," Mr. Targood said, climbing to his feet. "That's what we've all been waiting for, isn't it?"

"Yes, "Dr. Morrisey said. "And have no fear,

Raymond; as I assured you, your master will not be harmed by any of this business."

Raymond nodded. "As you say, Sir. Then, if the gentlemen will all follow me."

"Indeed we will, " Mr. Targood said in a voice that scarcely concealed his excitement, while Dr. Estenbach walked over to the fireplace, parted the screen, and threw his cigar into the glowing embers beneath the log. Mr. Faraday stood smoothing his hair down with the palm of his hand, as if he were about to step onto a public platform.

The four men then proceeded to follow the old servant upstairs and walked down the long dark hallway toward the master's bedroom, where they noticed that the door was not quite closed. Opening it, Raymond stood aside, allowing the others to enter.

Two candles were burning brightly on the mantel above the bedroom's fireplace, which had not been used this evening, in spite of the sudden chill in the weather. Dr. Estenbach took one of them in his hand and carried it over to the bed, where the old servant pulled the bed-curtains aside. Then the four men stood and observed their host, evidently sound asleep but with his eyes wide open, staring unblinkingly up into the darkness.

"That's a certain indication he'll walk," Dr. Morrisey whispered. "Isn't that so, Raymond?"

The old servant nodded.

Dr. Estenbach, however, seemed not to hear. He leaned over and peered into the unseeing eyes of the sleeping man. When he moved the candle closer, he stared hard at the pupils. He then felt the sleeping man's hand and found it extremely cold, and his pulse beat was so slow it seemed that his circulation had almost ceased.

Dr. Morrisey, after a brief glance at his patient, watched Dr. Estenbach, who appeared to have been almost hypnotized by the sight. Finally, he stood up and took a step backwards.

"How soon will he arise," he finally asked in a low voice.

"Within the half hour, Sir," Raymond answered. "Almost certainly, although he sometimes stays abed slightly longer."

"But he will walk," Dr. Estenbach muttered, half questioningly.

"He will walk," Dr. Morrisey assured him, and at that moment Thomas Faraday's brother put both of his hands over his face and breathed into them, as if he could not bear the sight any longer.

2

At the whispered suggestion of Dr. Morrisey, Raymond closed the bed curtains, and they all retired in silence to the farthest corner of the room, where they stood against the wall, waiting. Since they were nearer the high cornices beneath the roof, the moaning of the cold autumn wind sounded louder than before.

Raymond went to stand by the door, leaning to the side as if to better hear his Master's command should he speak. However, though often witnessed by Dr. Morrisey—as well as his brother and servant— the patient had never been heard to utter a single word while he walked in his sleep.

A half hour passed without any movement from Thomas Faraday's bed. The bed curtains hung absolutely still, and all of those watching found themselves thinking of the patient as they had seen him, scarcely breathing and staring open-eyed and unmoving up into the darkness. When the clock in the downstairs hallway chimed the three-quar-

ters hour, Mr. Targood withdrew his large silver watch from his vest pocket and peered closely at it in the gloom, trying to verify the interval struck. Still there was no movement behind the bed curtains, and the only sounds were those of the wind whirring continuously through the high eaves of the house and the sounds of the men breathing as they waited.

3

Then, shortly before midnight, the bed curtains were violently thrust aside and Thomas Faraday swung his legs out of the bed. Upon his features there was a distant, vaguely troubled expression—not at all consistent with the cheerful demeanor of his waking moments. His gaze drifted over those present as if they did not exist. Slowly and methodically—although with somewhat jerky movements—he took off his nightgown and put on his clothes.

When he was fully dressed, Dr. Estenbach lighted a third candle from one of those already burning, and approached the patient, who appeared almost to be awaiting him—as if he could hear but not see his approach, or as if he might be *thinking* of him in the act. When Dr. Estenbach put the candle close to his eyes, Thomas Faraday did not blink, nor did he appear to be aware of any presence other than his own in the bed chamber.

After what seemed a moment's indecision, he went over to his bureau and withdrew a pistol from the upper right drawer. Seeing this, his brother gasped, but Dr. Estenbach turned his head and held his finger to his lips. The patient, however, heard nothing, and replacing the pistol where he'd gotten it went out into the hallway.

All of the men followed him as he went downstairs, Raymond following and carrying an extra candle that he himself had lit. The shadows of all the figures bounced and glided unevenly upon the walls. Morrisey whispered to Dr. Estenbach that the patient would have walked just as swiftly and confidently even if there had been no light to show the way.

Going to the door of his study, Thomas Faraday paused a moment and the flickering candle light was sufficient to show the frown on his face. He appeared indecisive, and yet Dr. Morrisey and Raymond had said he often acted in precisely this way.

"He seems to be looking for something," Mr. Targood whispered, and Dr. Morrisey nodded, patting the older man's arm for him to remain silent.

They followed as the patient entered his study where the dying embers of a fire remained in the grate.

Once inside the study, Dr. Morrisey and Mr. Targood lighted extra candles so that they might better witness the behavior of the somnambulist. Dr. Morrisey had hinted at what was to come, and all of them stood there transfixed as the patient did precisely as predicted: he sat at his desk, opened the drawer, and took out virtually all of the contents, consisting of various papers, a pen knife, a seal, a nub of wax, three quill pens, some lead pencils, an India rubber eraser, and a sheaf of unused foolscap.

Having laid these on the desk top, Faraday then furiously mixed them together, rumpling the fresh

sheets of paper and scattering them, along with some sheets that had been written upon, all over the desk top and even sending a few floating to the floor. Then he sat for a long moment, seeming to ponder upon what he had done; after which he painstakingly gathered everything together and replaced it all as neatly as possible back in the drawer. At this instant a look of great distress suddenly came over his face and he opened his mouth, appearing to be crying out in pain or anguish. But no sound was forthcoming.

Seeing this, all of those present felt a deathly and inexplicable chill, as if they had just witnessed a fellow human suffering some kind of torment that was literally too great for expression. The poor creature repeated this silent cry several times; but as before, no one heard, nor did anyone know what it signified or what was behind it.

Suddenly, Thomas Faraday gathered himself together, stood up, and strode hastily from the room as if he'd heard a shout or call from without. In the hallway, he paused and stepped into a closet where part of his wardrobe was kept. He emerged from the closet holding a key and strode firmly toward the outside door.

At this instant, Dr. Estenbach coughed slightly, which was the first sound poor Faraday seemed to hear, and the effect upon him was instantaneous and dreadful: he stopped and stared all about, looking through his visitors as if they were not present at all. His facial expression was one of the most intense fear.

It was then that Mr. Targood heard Raymond whisper to Dr. Morrisey that all of them must remain quiet, for if his master was awakened now he would awaken "out of his mind."

To this, Dr. Morrisey nodded rapidly, whispering, "I know, I know!"

By this time, Faraday had opened the door and stepped outside into his courtyard. The wind would have extinguished the candles immediately, so they were all placed on a table by the door. Nevertheless, there was a bright, full October moon, which shone down upon the courtyard so brightly that Faraday's actions were quite visible.

All of the men stood in the doorway and watched the patient as he went to the stable and, picking up a large stone, beat upon the wooden side. From within, his horse whinnied—as if answering his master's call—and when Faraday dropped the stone and turned away from the stable, he was seen to be smiling.

It so happened that two of the kitchen servants were working late that night in preparation for a great meal to be served the next day, and while Faraday was crossing the courtyard in the direction of a side door that led into his billiard room, there was a loud noise in the kitchen, as of several empty pans being dropped. The effect upon the patient was startling: he froze in the posture of a man trailing wild game, and then after a moment's quiet, he crept softly forward to the kitchen door and leaned forward with his ear to the wood, as if trying to overhear what was happening within.

But he soon grew tired of this and walked briskly into his billiard room, where he circled the billiard table as if surveying the area for the first time. Once, he turned around so sharply that he bumped into his brother, but instead of being alarmed, merely pushed him aside with the back of his hand, as one parts a curtain to pass by, not seeing his brother at all.

Then after what appeared to be a moment's deep pondering as he leaned with the heels of his hands upon the billiard table, Thomas Faraday sighed and left the room, where he proceeded to the front hallway, turned up the stairs and walked to his bedroom.

All followed him silently as before, two of the men carrying candles, the servant Raymond at the rear.

After the patient had undressed, put his nightgown back on, and retired once again, Raymond pulled the bed curtains shut and nodded to those present.

Downstairs, Dr. Morrisey said, "Now he will sleep from eight to ten hours like a man drugged."

"How will he awaken?" Dr. Estenbach asked.

Dr. Morrisey turned to the servant. "Raymond, tell them how he will awaken.

"After he has slept a sufficient length of time," the old man said, "I will go up and open the bed curtains and recite the Lord's prayer."

Dr. Estenbach blinked and shook his head. Mr. Targood suffered a brief coughing fit and turned away as politeness requires. Faraday's brother said nothing but kept rubbing his hand over his face, as if he had just walked through cobwebs.

"And that's all?" Dr. Estenbach asked, of no one in particular.

Thinking it was he who was addressed, however, Raymond said, "That's the safest way to awaken him, Sir. Other ways have unpredictable effects."

Dr. Estenbach narrowed his eyes a moment and thought.

Then the four men paid their respects to one another and left the premises.

On the 8th of January, following, Thomas Faraday left his bed chamber in the middle of the night and walked out of his house into the darkness. His old servant, Raymond, was ill and could not follow his master, though he later testified he'd heard him leave.

When Faraday did not return the next morning, however, a search was initiated, and shortly after noon his body was found floating just under the ice of a pond, several feet from where he had broken through in his passage directly across it. His brother had discovered the drowned corpse, smeared-looking and twisted in its light clothing. Later, he said it was like seeing his brother's image in a flawed mirror, and he wondered if the poor wretch had gone forth thinking it was summer.

But who could answer such a question? Why he had come to such a place...or where he was headed, or thought he was headed, are all insoluble mysteries. The servants claimed that their master had behaved in his usual manner the day before, but his sleepwalking had become so frequent that they had noticed that Mr. Faraday had talked to himself more than usual that day; although he was often discovered talking to himself, which everyone assumed was merely part of his general eccentric behavior.

4

The facts of this case history, as presented above, have been reported variously. The patient's brother talked of it often up until the time of his death some years later, but wrote nothing of the matter. Dr. Morrisey made brief notes, generally matter-of-fact, that have proved useful in filling

out details. He seemed to feel that his major responsibility in the case had been relinquished the instant he called in Dr. Estenbach as a consultant, for the latter was acknowledged to be one of the world's authorities in such forms of madness.

As for Dr. Estenbach's records, they show considerable attention given to Mr. Faraday's case, but the sum of his conclusions are disappointingly flat and conventional. After viewing the matter in retrospect, he swept all that he had seen into the single dustbin of his already-formed theory that sleepwalking is merely an instance of the brain abdicating its function while the spinal cord takes over. He notes, in connection with this and other cases, that action of the encephalic ganglia diminishes radically during somnambulism, and points out that the situation is very much like that of a person abstracted in thought, who can nevertheless find his way home without thinking about where to turn. This, he argues, is an instance of the spinal cord "guiding" the body in familiar activities, while the labor of the brain, or mental state, is far removed.

The oddest, and in its way most informative, account of this evening's events, however, surfaced many years later in a journal kept by Mr. Targood. Although this gentleman was quiet and studious, it is perhaps strange that he could prove to have been so occupied by Mr. Faraday's case and have had so little professional obligation in it, or have manifest so little of that occupation. But perhaps he did, after all, discuss what he'd seen that night at length; perhaps he had talked about it to his friends, along with his wife and family, even until they were bored with the subject; we have no way of knowing.

What we do have is his journal, in which no less than seventeen pages bear reference to what he saw that evening, along with a four page manuscript of ruminations upon the event. The latter is incomplete, and there is no way of telling whether Mr. Targood was writing down his thoughts merely to order them, so that he could make sense out of what he'd seen that evening, or whether he intended to seek publication of the essay in some form or other.

Like Dr. Estenbach's account—but on a quite different level (for it is, after all, fanciful)—Mr. Targood's commentary is fragmentary as well as incomplete, so I will summarize his thoughts upon what he'd witnessed that evening when he came to visit his neighbor, Thomas Faraday, without that poor creature's knowledge.

Mr. Targood was a man of some leisure, and it was in fact his curiosity about the human mind (along with the friendship and trust of the Faraday family) that had brought about his presence that evening with Doctors Morrisey and Estnebach. It is also evident that Mr. Targood had read some of the medical literature on the subject, and knew about Dr. Estnebach's explanation of somnambulism.

But he was not satisfied with this. And even though he was aware that he did not have the scientific background to question it publicly, in private he spun his own web of theories, letting them quiver tentatively before his imagination...knowing that they were not likely to be tested in any way, for their premises were in themselves too speculative, too insubstantial, too resistant to any conceivable test of empirical truth.

There was one incident of that evening that

stood out from the others in Mr. Targood's memory: this was Thomas Faraday's anguished but silent cry after he had scattered and then collected the things in his desk. Mr. Targood referred to it a dozen times in his writings, each time holding it a little differently in the hand of memory, the way one turns a gem to see all its facets clearly.

This gem, however, was not precious in the way of beauty, but woefully unsettling. For Mr. Targood began to think of Thomas Faraday's adventures as microcosmic, that is to say, as little lives bound by time and witnessed by sympathetic observers. Or (as he states in one place) boxes within boxes.

One such box was the scene at his desk, referred to. Could this not be viewed, Targood suggests, as a dialectic model of human life itself? We gather, scatter, and then re-organize the things of our days, and then viewing them afterwards cry out in anguish at the paucity of completeness compared to the lavish promise of meaning? But of course, the gods do not hear, even if they see and know; for in truth, the gods are themselves helpless.

This was one line of thought, but it is blurred and partially contradicted by others. For example, Mr. Targood asks rhetorically (this is in his journal, not in the essay alluded to): "If we could not hear him at this moment of pain and bewilderment, and if he could not see us at any time, is it not possible that he saw and heard things that *we could not* see and hear? And, were those things not true for him for as long as they appeared? And are not our lives themselves bounded by such provisional cautions, such contingencies and temporalities?"

I confess to finding this somewhat murky, although I think I know what he means, and am disturbed by it. As for the problems it presents, they are quite obvious: the fact is, the patient *did* hear his visitors upon occasion, and in fact his servant cautioned them not to awaken him suddenly, for if they had done so, he claimed his Master would awaken "out of his mind." And yet, their presence, while consistently invisible, was not consistently inaudible, as the facts reveal.

My inference from this (Mr. Targood does not pursue the idea) is that insofar as Thomas Faraday might have been thought to be conscious, we would have been as ghosts to him. When ghosts are said to be manifest, are they not more often heard than seen? Yes, they were no more than sounds and intimations to us. Such is precisely what the four observers were to Faraday.

And then there is this speculation, which I find near to being the strangest of all that Mr. Targood entertained: is it conceivable, he asks, that the patient had somehow slipped in Time? Or that he had possibly accelerated beyond the temporal progression we assume to be intrinsic to reality?

I confess I can make nothing out of this, but then it also has to be said that I can make nothing out of Time, either; nor to the best of my knowledge can anyone else. But let me elaborate upon Mr. Targood's notion further: it is known that such bodily functions as respiration and pulse rate, which are the clocks of our physical being, slow down while we sleep; but what if there is upon occasion a rare individual in whom this lagging goes beyond certain limits? What if, in short, such a person falls behind in Time?

Such a lag need not be long: only a fraction of

a second would be enough to remove one from sight. While it might be argued that one would be seen only as he was an instant before, this is not necessarily so, since that "instant before" does not exist at all, *now*. But what about the furniture, the things in the desk?

No, this is clearly nonsense. You can't have it both ways. You can't have Thomas Faraday, even asleep, occupying another time and still being visible to us if inaudible. Why Mr. Targood bothered to write such madness, I'll never understand, for the remainder of what he has written is in its peculiar way logical, even if fantastic and without valid premises.

It should be emphasized, furthermore, that the above idea does not occupy much of Mr. Targood's ruminations. It was no doubt merely a passing notion, and might well have been crossed out if Mr. Targood had gone over it later and thought about it more clearly. But it is so strange that I myself have mentioned it, for it is strange only in the context of our waking reality as our convention conceives it.

The most striking effect of Mr. Targood's ruminations in not a single insight that he was able to pluck from what he had witnessed that night, but the brooding premise behind all his notions: that his friend and neighbor, Thomas Faraday, might have been *seen seeing other things*. If he did not see his four visitors and servant, as was evident, whom did he see? Did he see others? Were there others somehow *there* to replace the reality of those who were not? Or was he alone?

And if his voice could not be heard by his visitors as he cried out from some inscrutable sense of pain or anguish, where did the sound of this voice exist? Might it not have been something other than a cry, after all? Perhaps some sort of lugubrious yawn? No, I think not. And, even though he heard his house, the kitchen servants, and Dr. Estenbach clear his throat...in what sense were those sounds obtrusive? And if obtrusive, into what silent world of sound did they obtrude?

And finally, even though all his behavior was bizarre in the extreme, and disjointed of purpose, yet each gesture appeared in itself to have had a completeness and finality to Faraday in his somnambulistic trance. And how could such satisfactions be legislated away by those of us who "do not speak the same language."

Such are some of the ruminations expressed and hinted at in Mr. Targood's notes on the subject. And fantastic as they are, they do not seem quite so strange in the context of the simple fact of Thomas Faraday's excursion that night, which one might easily believe was somehow an excursion into another world—one which we cannot know the way we know a goldfinch or a door knob, for instance, but one which we all have vague access to, whether we understand it or not. Such a truth might be cried out to the loudest pitch of which our voices are capable, but it will never be heard from without, only from within.

Dusty Fields

Alvin O. Turner

Sharecropper's daughter
used to making do
wept while her
daddy walked
barren fields in wonder,
his faith in land,
himself,
his god
fading
with every passing cloud

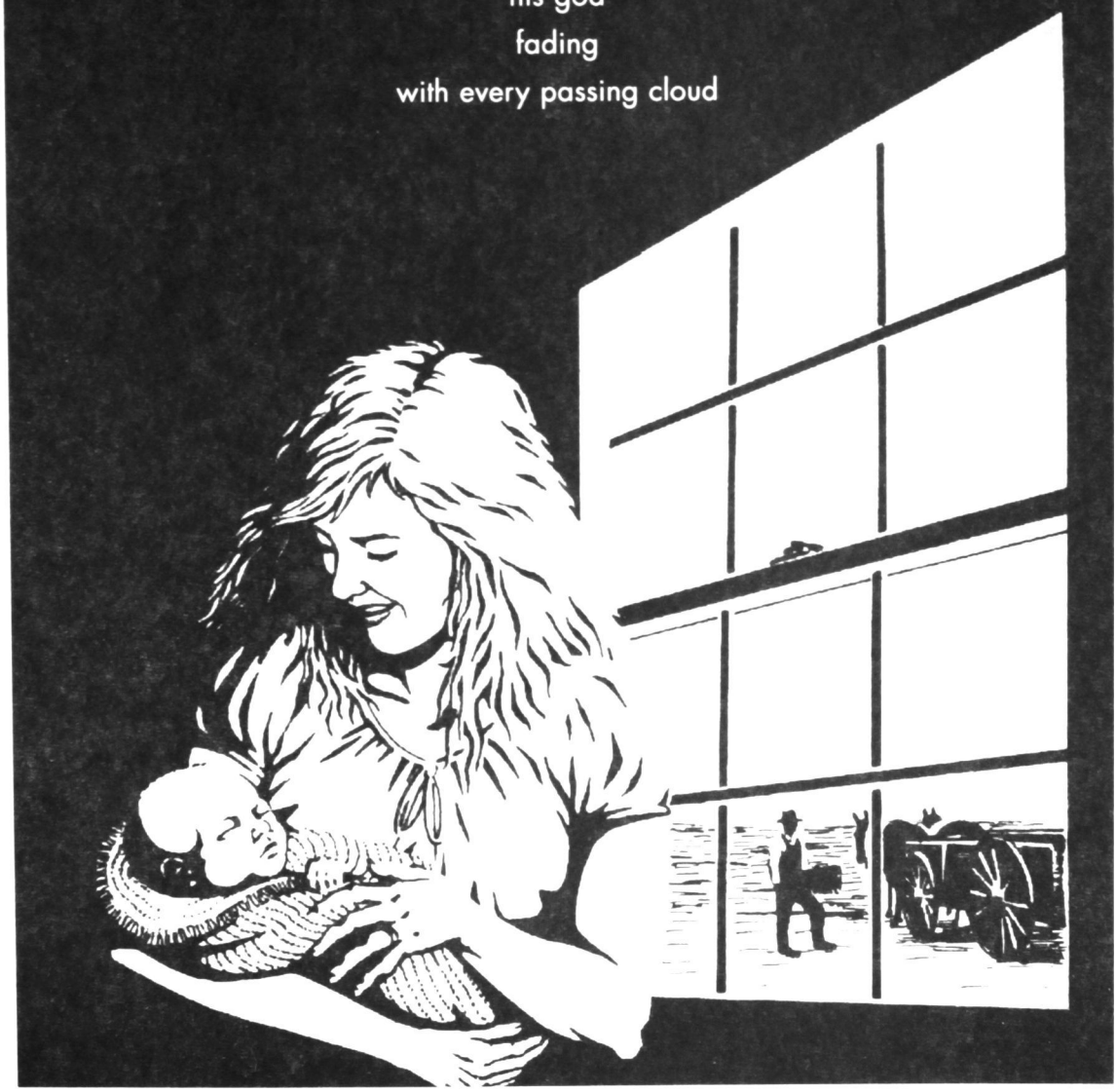


Illustration by Mickey Jobe

When the Heartbeat's Lonesome

Keith Long

The Montague Highway was not so busy in those years; sometimes it would lie silent for hours during the longest stretch of night. At those times, with both windows of the back bedroom raised high, urging a summer draft, the countryside could close in on a kid lying in bed and looking through the screen at the brilliant stars.

It was an impressive silence beyond the window. Heavier. The darkness was not broken by corner street lamps, the silence remained intact from the city sounds of squealing tires and barking dogs. Night flies might thump against the screen; a lone bird might call out beyond the chicken coop; the wind might find enough breath to rattle the resting leaves of the oak tree in the yard.

There was, however, one prevailing sound during those quiet, summer nights of my youth: in the distance, from a direction I was never able to pinpoint, the muffled popping sound of a pumping unit. It came through my window riding the random currents of the night breeze. Sometimes the wind shifted or died altogether and the steady poppopthumpthumpthumppop from the pump engine pulled back, out of sound. But then the Texas air curled back and the familiar heartbeat pressed itself again onto the consciousness of the night. It was the only constant of those long nights when I could sense more than hear the rest of the household sleeping away.

The thumping would come strongly into my ears and I would hold my breath to count the puffing strokes of the engine, imagine the vulnerable belts running around flywheels, pushing the horse's head up into the sky and then pulling it back down. The sound was synonymous with the image of the rocking units which dotted the countryside between our house and my grandparents'.

And yet, even then, the sound held more than that.

The image of the pumping unit would dissolve into the whispers outside my window and my imagination would take hold, and suddenly the steady heartbeat no longer belonged to something iron and mechanical; it became a living heartbeat, as if the sound itself held the promise of the country's sunrise. In the morning, I could not hear the heartbeat, could not make contact with it. The trucks whined along the highway, bacon sizzled in the kitchen, roosters, liberated from the coop, crowed the daybreak.

The heartbeat was out of earshot, but I felt its steadiness.

At the breakfast table, Papa Bart looked out the south window at a garden full of sweet corn, tomatoes, potatoes, blackeyed peas, green onions. Papa took his time in the morning, thinking. He spent a life working long and hard into summer dusk. He was too tired evenings to think.

I wish I would've had the sense to keep my ears open over the eggs, bacon, and biscuits. I was busy thinking about crawdads and squirrel's nests and hummingbird eggs and scaring mice in the barn with my BB gun.

Even at that, I heard some things.

"You can make people laugh with a good joke," Papa Bart once said while his coffee cooled. "You can make them cry with a good story. But you can't make them think. Make them, you can't."

He reached up, pushed his painter's cap back, scratched his forehead.

Then the day began.

The 10 acres set askew against the highway seemed a carnival to a 12 year old. There were dirtclod fights in the garden, ripening plums and grapes in the orchard. There were bluegill to be caught in the spring, pigeons to chase in the barn eaves, lizards to chase, seldom to catch. There were strange, mosscovered rocks on the hill above the chicken yard, an old trash dump full of blue and brown bottles in the back pasture. There were ducks and chickens and cows and ponies. There were locust shells by the hundreds; spiders, huge ones, hung from the webs on the back of the wellhouse. There were squirrels to tease, quail to whistle up.

There was the front porch swing, where Granny Pollard and I sat for hours, drinking ice cold pop and playing a game in which we guessed the color of the next car to come along the highway. There was Skeeter, a small, black dog of Border Collie origin, always good for a game of fetch, always several steps ahead of me on my excursions over the farm. There was an old red Farmall tractor and a rickety green wagon that Papa would hitch up in a spare moment for a bumpy trip around the grounds.

In the evenings there were domino tournaments in the spacious kitchen, cousins in kneetorn blue jeans, a myriad of lightning bugs to chase through the corn fields, and Cowboy Danny Hodge on championship wrestling, live from the Fort Worth stockyards. And later, after the last Pontiac had pulled out of the circle drive, Danny Hodge had unmasked some fat stranger, the lights had been snapped off, and the traffic along the highway had fallen to nothing in the longest hours of night, there was the heartbeat, still pumping, over some hillside I never discovered.

So these days I wonder.

I wonder if, after the embargo of the 1970's that threatened to end our weekend trips to Texas, after the oil boom of the 1980's that pulled the outskirts of Bowine out to the frontporch steps of my grandparents, after the widening of the Montague Highway so that it could handle all that energy traffic...I wonder if that heartbeat still pumps, still rides the night's quieter breezes.

It calls me, I admit. It invites me back down, to lie again in the back room. But I resist, for I fear those tiny 10 acres may not live up to the magical quality that my childhood painted upon it.

It wouldn't, and it shouldn't.

Papa Bart was right the morning I had my ears open. I can tear back into those days so easily. I can laugh along with my Papa Bart as we pitch house files into a spider's web and watch nature come center stage. I can laugh with my Granny Pollard when a red Corvair (the color I always chose) sputters into view from behind the white picket fence.

Or, I can go back and cry about things. Over that simple love that exists in a warm kitchen, on a cool porch sing, in the happy dust of a jostling tractor ride. Some people don't know what I mean. I'm sorry.

As for the rest, Papa was right about that, too. I'd rather not think about it.

Four Men Stack Hay in the Back Mow

William Jolliff

This barn has not been used for twenty years.
We work like slow wood bees, my father, my brother,
myself. Blades of light wedge through the cracks

in dry pine siding and wrap our dust grey shirts
with hornet stripes. We sink our hooks between
the wire bands, dragging bales from the wagon

to the back wall. My brother drops, sits a moment
on the mow's edge, then falls six feet to buck
the last bales. Eaves fill with khaki balloons.

Finished stacking, we form a line three forks
abreast to push the chaff across the floor.
Tongs catch on tongued boards, and muscles strain

in hidden bales—work my grandfather left
undone—that wait like hives abandoned
in an orchard gone back to woods. We're strange

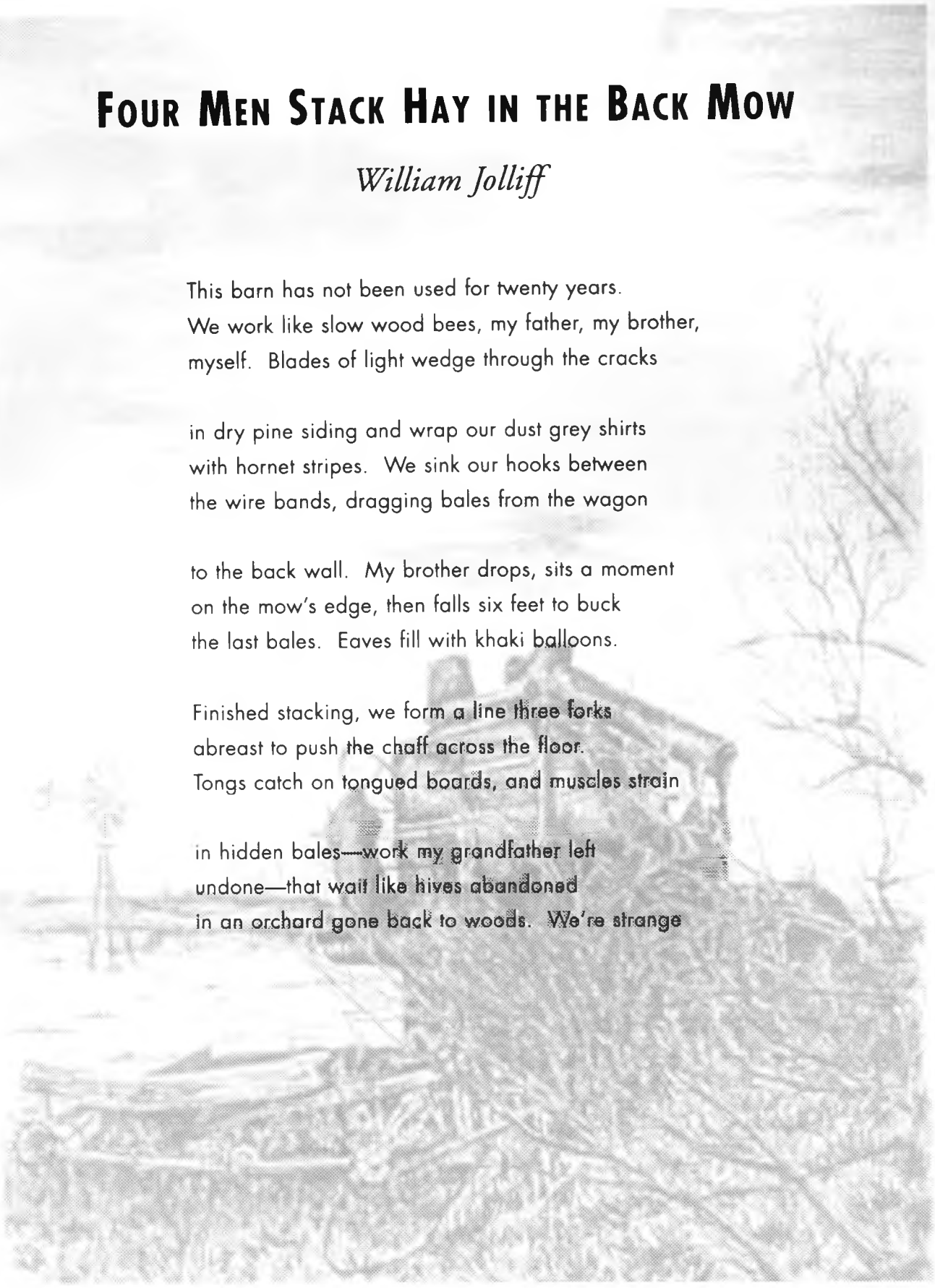


Illustration by Rodney Cloud

to one another's work, but hold the even line.
A stack settles on the wagon, and in the morning
we'll haul it back to the field, mix it with the new.

This good day we've spent together, moving hay,
it shames us that we've never caught the habit
of talk. At dusk I shower with a hose

in the barnyard, eat fresh berries and tea,
shoo the bees away from my son, and listen
to his babbling. This is my work: to catch

his words, to hook and stack his first words.

Untitled

Kenneth Rose

I spent a lot of time
in the dilapidated
apartment
set in a row of
identical apartments
furnished in early
salvation army, but
the rent was
sixty-five dollars
a month, all bills
paid, furnished
and the girls didn't
seem to mind the
frayed furniture
the threadbare carpet
that greeted them in the
living room, or
the cracked linoleum
in the bedroom
they even tolerated the
red and black brocaded
bed spread, a wedding
gift from I don't
remember who many years back
they kept coming

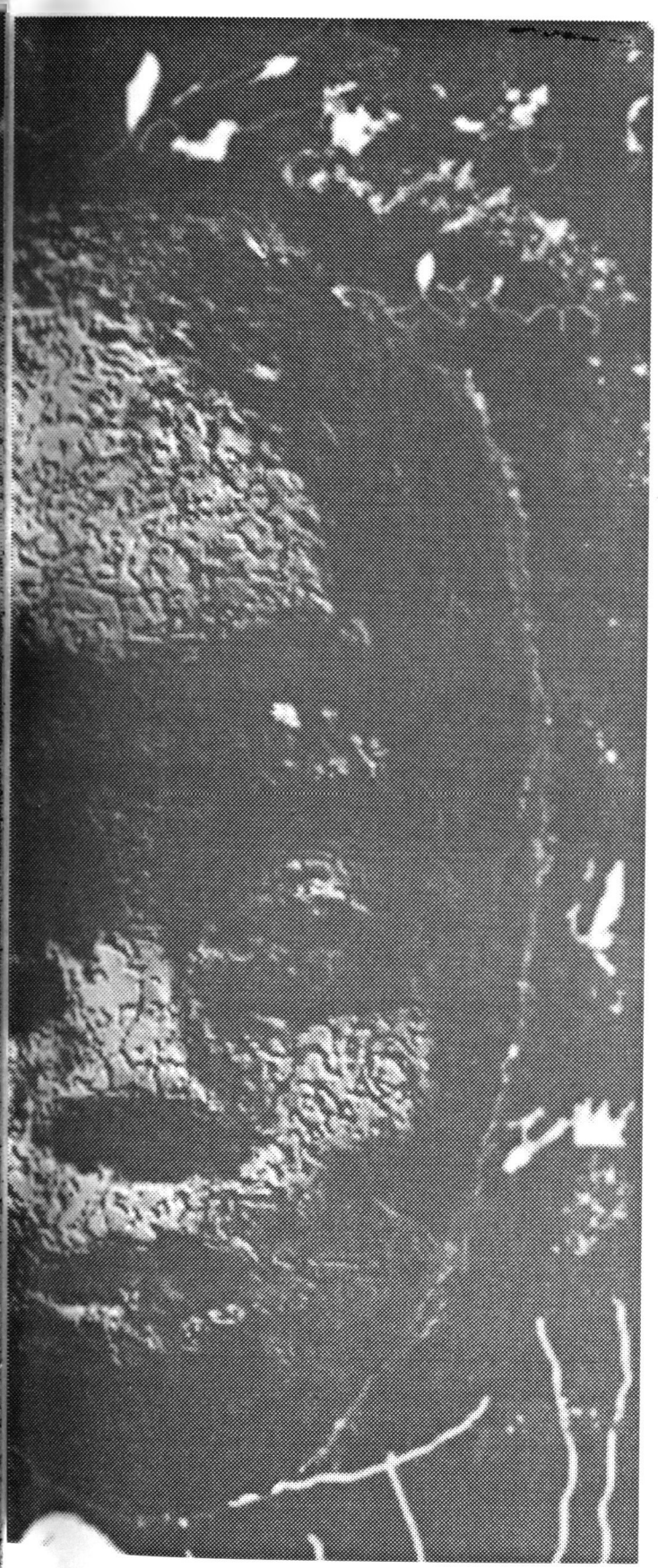


Illustration by Tracy Kent

but
none ever stayed
very long
most of them were
half-crazy or bent on
self-destruction,
but
it didn't make me any difference
I was in an emotional limbo too
and
eventually
I managed to scale the ledge
that protected sanity
from people like me
and
once over the top
I never ventured near enough
to drop off again

Beyond Hog Heaven

by Pamela Rodgers

A slab of cheddar,
4 slices of bread,
a pound of boiled ham,
a layer of cream cheese,
a pile of lettuce,
four slices of tomato,
a glob of mustard,
an even larger glob of mayo,

and some pickle slices—not exactly a juicy steak, but it is a well-stacked sandwich, the kind Wendell Smith loves to eat. Since the Jane Garfield incident a few days ago, he's managed to eat five sandwiches like this. Wendell enjoys the big snacks, but often while he's eating them, he thinks about eating a big steak instead—his favorite food. He leans to take a bite of the sandwich and feels his belly push against the edge of the glass table top. As Wendell chews, he tries to forget the look of over-concern Jane Garfield had given him three days ago when he'd stood in her office. He tries to forget those dark half-moons under Jane's eyes, her helmet-like hair cut, and how the downtown river front view in Jane's office had been spoiled by the haze from her cigarettes. It had been hard to keep from coughing. When the bank had turned non-smoking a few years before, Jane had ignored the policy. It was her right to smoke, she'd said. No one had argued. Everyone had broken the rules now and then. Everyone. Wendell notices the side view of the half-eaten sandwich he's devouring. It looks like the layers in an archeological dig. He takes a bite and remembers how back in Jane's office he had begun to cough. In the middle of a hack that had almost stopped his breathing, Wendell'd heard Jane raise her voice, "I'm afraid this charade is over, Mr. Smith."

Wendell takes another bite of the giant sandwich—ham, tomato, mayonnaise. He feels himself relax.

Three days ago Wendell'd lost his job at the bank. Jane had said it was because she was tired of seeing him take an extra five minutes at lunch time to return to his desk. There were some other things, too.

Well, maybe the Fig Newton she'd found smashed in between a couple of file folders, and maybe the jelly stains on the Goodman loan papers, well, those might have been a little messy. But the accident he'd had with the copy machine must have been it. Wendell remembers how he'd accidentally tipped over a salad he'd been eating into the guts of the copy machine. The paper had jammed and...well, pretty messy. The copier repairman had said that most of the parts in the machine would have to be replaced, because Thousand Island didn't clean off so good, especially after it'd gotten baked on by the motor like this stuff had.

Wendell couldn't help it, he loved food, he'd told Jane so. "You love to chain smoke, and I love to eat." Jane'd gritted her teeth, "Clean the candy bars out of your desk; you're fired!" Wendell'd told her they were just empty wrappers.

After he pops the last chunk of the sandwich into his mouth, he remembers he needs to give the

lawyer, Ronald Trapp, a call. Wendell'd picked the guy because he'd seen him advertising FREE CONSULTATION on TV. Trapp had a sculpture of a 3 foot-tall Spanish bull in his office made out of a bunch of little multi-colored plastic toys. Wendell couldn't wait to pit this guy Ronald against Jane Garfield.

At his free consultation, Wendell'd told the lawyer, "This is a solid case of prejudice against chain eaters." Jane could smoke, chain smoke at work, but he couldn't eat at work, and that wasn't fair. He was going to sue the bank into rehiring him.

But when Ronald gets on the phone, the lawyer's voice is strained. He speaks slowly, carefully, "I'm sorry, Mr. Smith, very sorry, but you simply don't have a case against First National."

"What do you mean!" Wendell says, "After all, these people down at that bank, they're prejudiced, anyone can see that. I want to take'em to court!"

"Well, eating disorders Mr. Smith, I'm sorry, but this type of suit just isn't my forte. I'm afraid I'm going to have to bow out this time."

Wendell is holding the receiver, wondering what to say next, when Ronald issues the final stab. "Mr. Smith, I do wish you luck, and if you ever need a lawyer—some time in the future perhaps...." The lawyer's voice changes to sound like it had on the commercial, "You just keep me in mind."

Wendell hangs up. "Sure," he says out loud to himself. Something in the lawyer's tone had reminded Wendell of high school, of being teased and tortured, and blamed for everything from the smell in the locker room to the flat tire on the school bus.

The day he'd graduated, Wendell'd whooped excitedly as he'd run out of the gymnasium with his facsimile diploma raised high in one hand, his cap in the other. His mother and father had stared speechless as they'd watched him rush past them out onto the wide lawn of the school and collapse in an exhausted heap of extra-large gown. For Wendell, high school had been one of life's cruelest experiences, or so he'd thought at the time. Before he'd graduated, Wendell'd arranged to start working at the bank—unaware that the Jane Garfield experience would be just ahead.

Deciding to look for another lawyer, Wendell finds a name in the yellow pages and dials. After Wendell has waited a long time on hold, a voice finally reaches him with an apology. "Mr. Logan will return your call."

Wendell hangs up and makes his way back to the refrigerator. He opens the door and starts pulling out left-overs and setting them on the table: part of a cake, a bowl of peaches, something wrapped in tinfoil, a pink Tupperware container of spaghetti sauce, a half-empty plastic liter of Diet Pepsi, and the rest of a loaf of Roman Meal bread.

He dips a piece of bread into the spaghetti sauce. Some of the red sauce drips. It stains the tee-shirt he's wearing, but he keeps eating. Ignoring it. He's thinking.

Thinking, as he takes a sip of Diet Pepsi, then grabs the peaches. Thinking, that the name, Cling peaches, doesn't make sense for the most part—they don't really cling to anything. And,—Black Forest? He looks carefully at the cherries, the cream frosting, the moist, melt-in-your-mouth chocolate cake. After the cake, he begins to unwrap the tinfoil surprise.

It's 4 chicken legs. He takes a big bite from one of the legs. It tastes...well, his favorite food is steak, like the one pictured on the billboard going into town. Every time he thinks about steak, he imagines that picture, the dark grill lines, the steam swirling. His mouth waters as he thinks about the tender, juicy meat. He'd seen the same billboard everyday on his way to work:

FREE 76 oz Steak!
IF EATEN IN AN HOUR
AT
The BIG RANCHER
40 Minutes Ahead

He takes another bite of chicken leg and pretends it's steak, but it just isn't as satisfying. He hasn't eaten at the Big Rancher, but before he'd lost his job at the bank, Wendell'd been able to have a big steak anytime he'd wanted.

As he gnaws one of the chicken bones down to the cartilage, he considers the size of a 76 ounce steak. Wendell remembers what he'd heard Jess Clayton say one time. Jess was one of the guys who worked in accounting and knew how to figure numbers real fast in his head. Wendell remembers discussing the big steak with Jess at the bank's cafeteria. Jess had commented that, "76 ounces would be a little over 4 and a half pounds of meat—if it didn't include a bone that is. And you pay big if you can't eat all that, right?"

"Yeah, I guess." Wendell had said.

"I think I'd get sick," Jess had commented. "And, what if they give you extra stuff on the side to fill you up—you know, like salad, and french fries?"

Wendell tosses the remains of the crumpled tinfoil and chicken bones into the garbage. He goes to the couch and punches the remote. Oprah speaks slowly into a microphone. Wendell closes his eyes, the rumble of digestion relaxes him, relaxes him, to sleep.

* * * *

Next? A World War II pin-up blond in a bathing suit poses with him in a "before" picture. The steak? It's steaming in front of Wendell on a special, giant-sized platter. The steak is two inches thick and it covers almost the entire top of the small table. An oversized checkered table cloth is tied around his neck and he poses, smiling, his fork in one hand, an immense serrated knife in the other.

The steak is delicious! He eats, but just as he polishes off the last morsel he smells cigarettes. Then he hears a noise. Laughter. His eyes flutter open. Laughter...from the TV.

It's late afternoon. There are shadows on the carpet by the window. On TV, Granny is stirring a giant black cauldron next to the cement pond. Ellie Mae asks, "What's ya cooking Granny?" Wendell switches channels—a burger ad. His stomach growls. He forgets he's waiting for the lawyer's phone call, turns the TV off and grabs his car keys.

The plan, is to take a drive around town to get out of the apartment for a while, but something makes Wendell pull onto the interstate. Within minutes he's driving past the giant steak on the Big Rancher billboard. He goes past signs for McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Wendy's, Hog Heaven. The sun is in his eyes and even the sun visor all the way down doesn't help. He tightens his grip on the steering wheel, and his stomach gurgles as he barrels down the highway.

Minutes later, Wendell's car pulls into the Big Rancher's parking lot. An old man wearing a two-

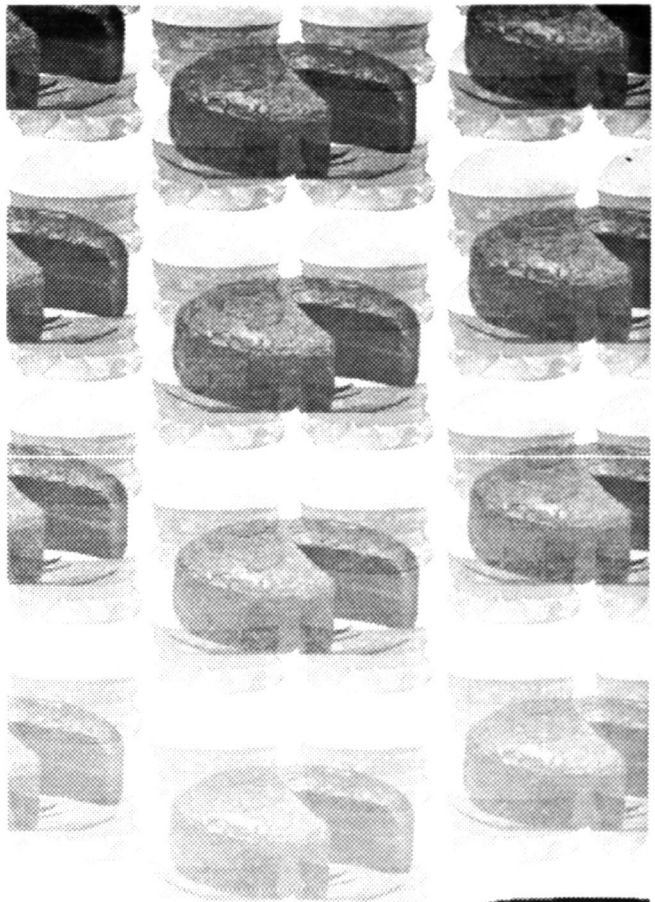
tone western shirt with a bolo tie greets Wendell at the door. Next to the doorway is a picture of the giant steak. In small lettering the sign reads:

- Please Note -
If you cannot eat
in an hour,
you will be charged
- $45.00 -

The man grins as he asks Wendell where he'd like to sit, "...in the Pond Room—that's where the bar is, or the Pasture Room—that's family dining." Wendell remembers what Jess from the bank had said about having to pay if you couldn't eat it all.

The host explains how the Big Rancher Special works. "If you can eat it all in an hour," the man says, showing Wendell the sign above their heads, "you can have it for free, and if you can't...." Wendell decides he'd better interrupt.

"Look," Wendell says, smiling, watching the man's eyes as they turn from a gleam to a glare. "I'm not here to eat, see." Wendell clears his throat, considering that at this point there are no other options. "I mean, I'm here to apply for a job," his voice cracks slightly, "I'm a cook."



Sweet Time

Mark Spencer

Dave sits in his old pickup truck in front of The Sweet Time Dairy Bar in Portsmouth, waiting for Lori. About a hundred yards away the Ohio River flows by high and muddy. The Sweet Time stays open all year, and even on cold, damp nights like tonight, customers stop by for ice cream cones and sundaes. The McDonald's down the street sells yogurt now instead of ice cream, but The Sweet Time still sells the stuff that will rot your teeth and clog your arteries.

Lori gives her patients little booklets that tell them to avoid anything that tastes good—at least that's how Dave sees it. He has always been suspicious of dentists trying to make people feel guilty for eating sugar and for not brushing and flossing ten times a day. When he's kidded her about being a rich dentist, Lori has insisted that dentistry isn't as good a career as it was in the old days before fluoride was put in everybody's drinking water. Her saying that supports his belief that dentists are secretly glad their warnings are ignored by most people. Dentists love cavities and gum diseases—money in the bank. A dentist one time told Dave's dad that Dave needed ten fillings. Dad took him to another dentist who said he needed only three.

You can't trust anybody, Dave believes. He winces thinking about what Lori did to him two years ago. She put him to sleep and drilled holes through four of his front teeth. He guesses she could have done worse. He squeezes his knees together while he looks at The Sweet Time, a small hut (green like a bad tooth) with dirty windows. Lori drilled holes through four of his teeth because, she said, she loved him so much.

She pointed out that, with him unconscious, she could have drilled his eyes out so that he could never look at another woman.

He hasn't seen her for two weeks. When they talked on the phone yesterday, she said she had to tell him something. Her voice sounded sad. It had a catch in it when she told him she loved him. Of the things that can be wrong, Dave has focused on the possibility that she has breast cancer. There's always something on TV about it.

Last night Dave had trouble sleeping. He kept thinking about how he was going to get to make love to Lori for the first time in two weeks.

He kept thinking about breast cancer.

Two years ago, Dave lost a lot of sleep. He wanted Lori to leave her husband, but she wouldn't because they had the dental practice together and because of her little girls. She also didn't want to risk losing her house, a restored 1817 stone mansion. Dave figured she mainly didn't want to hook up with a bum like him, a small-time farmer.

Lori's kids are eight and ten now. During that bad time two years ago, Dave got his first glimpse of them. He was driving down the Appalachian Highway one Sunday morning on his way to help an old farmer repair some fences his cows kept escaping through when Lori's Caprice Classic suddenly came up behind him and then passed him in the outside lane. Her husband was driving, and her kids were in the back seat. The four of them were dressed up. Lori stared straight ahead, ignoring Dave.

He pressed the truck's accelerator to come up beside them again to get another look. Her husband was pale and thin and had orange hair and an

orange beard. No wonder Lori wanted a lover, Dave thought. The little girls had orange hair and big splotches of freckles—ugly kids, really. The Caprice pulled ahead again. Dave drove faster to catch up. The little girls were staring at him. Lori's husband was saying something, probably about the jerk in the pickup truck. Lori just stared straight ahead. Dave wanted her to look at him, to acknowledge him in some way. He didn't like being ignored as if he didn't count. His face felt hot, and he pumped the accelerator so that the truck roared. Then he noticed a dog, a cocker spaniel, in the back seat with the little girls. She's never told him they had a dog. That made him even madder for some reason.

Illustration by Jan Bradfield
Photographs by Frankie Herzer

When the Caprice slowed down, he slowed down. Lori's husband honked at him, and Dave honked back and flipped him the bird. Suddenly, the Caprice cut into a left-hand turn lane, and looking back, Dave saw it pull into the lot of a Methodist church.

Lori threw a fit the next time they saw each other. She picked up the phone book in their motel room and threw it at him. She told him he was stupid and crazy and dangerous, and she cried. Angry, they made love. She slapped, pinched, and bit him. Finally, they just held each other. She admitted that she like the way he cared so much.

He got to see Lori only once a week usually. Often, around eleven at night while he watched MTV, Dave would suddenly be hit by a vision of Lori in bed with her husband. All the sexy women in the videos on MTV reminded him of Lori.

One Friday night when he was feeling miserable, he went to the Quicky convenience store on the highway and talked the check-out girl into going on a camping trip with him that weekend. She was bone-thin and always looked sleepy and moved lazily.

Dave's and the girl's shadows were big on the wall of their dimly lit tent. It was almost like having a mirror. Dave liked the narrowness of her waist and hips and her skinny thighs, but she kept her head turned to one side and seemed distracted.

When he looked around, he saw that she had her hands above his back and was making shadow animals.

Lori shows up at The Sweet Time, but she doesn't park. She pulls in, turns around, and Dave follows her Caprice up Water Street. There's a nice restaurant along here called The Riverview, but they've never eaten there because Lori is afraid of being recognized by somebody. Dentists are famous in a small town. In fact, Lori and her husband recently started running an ad in the county paper each week with their picture: The Harrison Family Dental Clinic.

But Dave had no idea who she was the first time he saw her. They were both shopping at the Kroger supermarket. He had picked up six or seven women in grocery stores since his wife died. Often they came on to him first, asking something like whether he knew where the hot sauce was or what kind of light bulbs burned brightest. (Even in kindergarten he had had the girls after him; it seemed God had given him looks and nothing else.) He noticed Lori giving him the eye by the frozen food section, and he asked her whether those Lean Cuisine frozen dinners were really as good as people claimed. She told him he needed his teeth cleaned, to make an appointment for a Wednesday. She gave him her business card.

Her husband never worked on Wednesdays. She told Dave that Ed usually drove into Cincinnati on Wednesdays to visit buddies from dental school or to do some kind of vague research at the university library and that he never got back home before midnight. Lori said she was almost certain he had a woman there, probably some young thing with an overbite; Ed thought overbites were really sexy. She pointed out that all the girls—the receptionist and the two dental assistants—who worked in their office had overbites.

The first time she and Dave went to a motel, she said, "Instead of me wearing black panties or something like that, Ed would rather have me put on some fake buck teeth, I think."

The time she drilled the holes in Dave's teeth they met at her office late at night. He was worried because she said he definitely had mouth cancer.

He still doesn't know how she found out about the camping trip. It's disturbing to think she has mysterious ways of find things out about him. He wonders whether it's true that the F.B.I. has a file on everybody.

She parks along the flood wall. When she gets in the truck, they kiss. She tastes like peppermint.

"I thought I saw one of my patients back there at the dairy bar. That's why I didn't stop."

That's okay, but I was startin' to worry where you were."

"I would have met you on time, but the baby-sitter was late."

"Bad thing about Wednesday nights is you got to find a baby-sitter that's not Baptist." Dave has said this he doesn't know how many times, but Lori always smiles. "What do you have to tell me?" he asks.

"We'll talk later."

"Are you sick?"

"No. Let's just have a good time now."

They can see the lights of tugboats as they drive along the river and lights on the Kentucky side. Dave is giddy with lust. They smile at each other every few seconds, and Dave squeezes her thigh.

Lori likes to wear a lot of jewelry—broaches, necklaces, bracelets, rings on every finger, studded belts. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires. More diamonds. She sparkles all over.

Dave has accepted seeing Lori only three or four times a month, accepted the fact that money and children bind her to a man with orange hair. His acceptance of the situation has been gradual. It's like a handicap he's learned to live with that causes only occasional pain.

They go through Aberdeen and across the bridge there to Maysville, then wind up a mountain, on top of which is their favorite motel. It's a bright vision in the night. The El Rancho. Flood lights illuminate giant blue steers and golden bulls and white horses all made of plaster and spray painted—and other animals, ones you don't find on a ranch. A purple zebra. A pink giraffe. They all graze in the parking lot.

After a while, when they're just holding each other, he says, "I love you more than my truck."

"Your truck is a pile of junk."

"Yeah, but I love it. It's the one thing I don't owe any money on."

"You're good to me."

"I gotta be. You're a scary woman. You and your dentist drills."

"Do you have to bring that up all the time? I capped your teeth for you after I did it. I was insane to do that. I've grown up a lot since then."

"You mean I can see other women and you won't come after me. Lady dentist from hell." He pretends his finger is a drill and forces her mouth open.

"I was jealous then. It was stupid."

"I forgive you." He pretends his finger is a drill again, and she sucks it.

It's drizzling outside when they leave. The giant animals in the parking lot seem to Dave like reminders of the dangers of the world they're returning to. The pale-pink giraffe makes him think of Lori's husband.

The vinyl seat of the truck is cold. Lori looks older than she did a few minutes ago, but she still looks good. She has confessed to him that she used to drink a lot. Chugged vodka when she was fifteen. Now she goes to AA meetings, has for five years. Dave thought booze always ruined a woman's looks. He fears that one day all that past abuse will go off under her skin like a time bomb. He remembers the way Dad looked the last few months he was alive, the broken vessels in his nose, his slack jowls, the sloppy belly.

Dave drives down the mountain into Maysville slowly. Fog has swallowed up the town. The Ohio River has vanished. Dave's truck creeps along. As they approach the bridge, Lori says, "I need to tell you something."

He forgot he was worried about her. "You're pregnant."

"No."

"Then you must want to borrow money." And he laughs.

"I was going to tell you back in the room, but . . ."

The bridge makes a high whine as they cross it. The truck feels unsteady, wobbles. On the Ohio side there's a patch of bright street lights, and Lori's jewels sparkle. Then there are no lights, and Dave can barely see her beside him. He starts to worry

again. Breast cancer. He squints, trying to see through the fog.

"I've been seeing somebody else," she says.

For a minute, Dave forgets to breath. "A man?"

"I've been seeing him for ten weeks."

"That's impossible."

"No."

"But... How? I mean, how do you manage to see me and somebody else, too?"

"I've had to lie to Ed a lot."

"I didn't mean how do you find the time. I meant another kind of how."

"It really has been awful."

"I bet it has."

"You don't have to be nasty. He's a nice man. He's a lawyer."

"What's his name?"

"You don't know him."

"What's his name?"

"Bruce."

"Bruce," Dave says softly, his hands squeezing the steering wheel. He hates her. She's a broken down alcoholic who whores around.

"I didn't plan anything to happen. He's married, too."

"I thought only fags were named Bruce."

"He's going to tell his wife about us, and I think I'm finally going to make a break from Ed."

"You'll leave your husband for this guy? What about your dental practice? What about your kids? Huh? What about your lousy *house?*

"Dave, honey, I'll always love you. But I love Bruce, too. And I have to be practical."

A long time ago, she told Dave about a real estate agent she'd had an affair with before he came along. He wonders now how many men she hasn't told him about. Once when they were making love, she said nobody had ever made love to her the way he did. *Nobody.* The way she said it implied large numbers. He thinks she told him about the real estate agent because she thought he'd laugh at her story of how the guy could talk just like Donald Duck, how sometimes he did his Donald Duck impersonation while they were in bed.

She's crying, but he doesn't care. He considers slamming the truck into a tree.

"I'm going to miss you," she says.

"You're the craziest ____ I ever met."

"Fine, Dave. Be a child."

"Jesus. You loved me so much you nearly killed me two years ago. What happened to that love?"

"I'm a complex person."

"You're a nut."

The fog continues to be thick along the road to Portsmouth. Some red and blue and yellow lights appear suddenly, and he pulls off the road. The lights are neon beer signs in the windows of a run-down bar. He pulls into a slot between two cars. A Miller High Life sign blinks a couple of feet from the hood of the truck. The cab is filled with shadows and colors coming and going. It is as though Lori is there one moment, her face red, blue, and yellow—then she's gone, swallowed up in blackness.

She says, "Tell me you still love me. It would make me feel a lot better."

Dave glares at her. He wants to beat her. He wants to beg her not to do this to him. He hears faint music coming from the bar. A whiny pedal steel sound.

THE EARRINGS

Fred Alsberg

She sits beside me
on the plane,
a girl with silver earrings,

hoop earrings,
which dangle three fine-linked chains,
three small stones,

that chime lightly,
when she turns her head
to talk.

Illustration by Velvet Rogers

The Visit

J. R. Prince

Out of the corner of his left eye he could see his faint reflection in the driver's side window of the pickup. The image seemed to be driving while he watched, caught up in a dream without content. He had been driving into the quiet of the night for over an hour on a nearly empty highway, a highway that he had driven untold times, a road that ran untroubled by any turns for mile after mile, with a silent rhythm that kept no time. He liked driving at night. He liked feeling separated, cushioned, and free from the demand that he be human. A long trip at night could leave him numb and disoriented, unsure at his arrival of the time or his reason for being there. More and more, he liked feeling numb.

He drove along with no sense of motion, but in fact he was driving at an ever-increasing speed, so he covered the hundred mile trip back home as quickly as can only be done on a good highway on the high plains. Out of the corner of that left eye he watched himself drive down the last stretch of dark highway and come to the edge of the small town where he had grown up. As he turned onto the cutoff into his old hometown, he felt the highway's rhythm fade. Pulling onto the poorly paved street behind the high school, a street he had driven down almost every Friday and Saturday night not that many years ago, he felt himself being tugged back to awareness, which he fought back as best he could. Don't expect too much, he thought to himself, don't get your hopes up. But underneath the numbness he felt a warm thrill in the pit of his stomach.

The street was small, lined on both sides with small one-story frame houses with low wooden front porches, dirt two-track driveways and carports. There was no curb, only a ditch on either side of the street. Here and there were the remains of elm trees that had died of the blight. There weren't any street lights, but the stadium lights from the football stadium next to the high school parking lot were lit up and managed to light up Potter Street as well.

Turning into the driveway of her house he heard the soft crunch of gravel under his tires, a sound that shook away the last bit of his driving trance. A lump appeared right below his rib cage, making it hard to breathe. The palms of his hands began to itch. He was in no hurry to get out of the truck, so he sat inside for a minute or two to catch his bearings. Whenever he came here now he wanted to run away instead of doing what he was going to do, which was go up to that door and once again subject himself to the open hatred of her family.

A dim yellow bulb on the porch shone down on a fairly new Harley Davidson motorcycle, which must have belonged to her brother Gary. It sat between the inside track of the driveway and the side of the house, just where the house met the porch.

In the carport, he could make out her old white Ford Fairlane, a car she had left at home when she had moved in with him in Wichita Falls back when he first started working there. In the back he could see a baby seat, a new one, not the one they had bought together.

Well, he thought, it's now or never. He crawled out of the truck, noticing how stiff he was. He knew he should have been here earlier, but after work he had gone home to change to fresh clean jeans and put on his best pair of boots, and to get on a nice shirt. Still trying to impress her, but for no reason, he thought. Standing at the door, ready to knock, he found he couldn't bring himself to do it just yet. Instead, he tried to peek through the three little diamond shaped windows to see if her old man was sitting in front of the TV, but he couldn't see anyone. He cleared his throat and lifted his hand to knock, then quickly dropped it again and checked to see whether his shirt was still tucked into his pants in back. Then he decided to take a closer look at Gary's new Harley. Nice motor, he thought, I reckon he must be making money somewhere. A thorough inspection of the motorcycle exhausted his delaying tactics, however, so he sighed and gave a little knock on the door; then he knocked again a little harder.

She answered. She still looked as good as she had when he first picked her up at this door for their first date. He appreciated her looks and the rest of her good points still, but too much water had passed under that bridge. He cleared his throat, and said, "Hi, hon. How you doing?" He noticed with some irritation that his voice cracked when he first started talking. He shouldn't have jumped right in from driving a couple of hours like that.

"OK." She had her arms crossed tightly across her chest, and he saw in her eyes the same look he must have had in his. She looked at him cautiously, with a kind of weariness or exhaustion, a look that asked only for this contact to be a quiet one. He, on the other hand, had his balled fists shoved deep into the pockets of his jeans, with his shoulders hunched over like he was just waiting for the next bomb to fall. He noticed with relief that the rest of her family didn't seem to be around. He also noticed that he could hardly breathe.

"You're late."

"I know, I couldn't get away from work fast enough. I'm sorry."

"Yeah," she said. "Yeah, you sure are, Travis."

Uh-oh, he thought, here it goes. But in fact it didn't go at all. He didn't react to her taunt, and she really didn't have her heart in it anyway. It was just a habit, one they both had and one they both hated in the other and in themselves. But maybe now they were moving beyond that. If so, divorce had its benefits.

"So where's your family?" he asked.

"They went out to the show over to Lawton. They won't be back for a while."

Damn, he thought, that's lucky. All I needed was that crowd sitting around here looking at me like I was a dog with mange.

Maybe they won't be around tomorrow morning either, he hoped against his better judgment. Where else would they be on a Saturday morning?

"Is he asleep, Mary?" Travis asked. "Can I see him now?"

Mary's look softened then. This, she knew, was the question Travis had driven a hundred miles to ask. For all his faults, and God knew there were a lot of them, Travis loved their son. Every time they spoke about little Jason, she couldn't help but imagine what it would have done to her to lose him

the way Travis had lost him. Ever since the divorce she had a recurring nightmare where someone else, not her, not anyone she knew, had taken custody of her baby, and it terrified her so much that she would awaken with the shakes and almost run into his room to see if he was still there. Now, she knew, Travis too just wanted to go into his room and see if their son was still there. Even if "there" was a place where Travis himself could not always go.

"Yeah, go on in. If he wakes up that's OK."

"Thanks. I'll try to be quiet."

Travis walked down the narrow hall to the room where his eighteen-month-old son was sleeping. As he stepped down the dark corridor his chest tightened up and he began breathing so shallowly and quickly that he was on the verge of hyperventilating. His eyes were burning. Oh God, if he wakes up he can't see me crying. I've got to get a grip on myself, he thought.

Some people have flashy divorces that almost seem fun, leaving no apparent lingering hurts. At least that's the way it seems to be for people who have inherited a lot of money, borrowed a lot more, and spent it all naming things after themselves. But for people like Travis and Mary, with no property to speak of to wrangle over and with a desperate need to end their private war, what caught them both off guard was that it hurt so much. The greatest part of that hurt was bound up in the little boy Travis found sleeping in the little room near the end of the hall.

The sight of his son hit Travis like a fist in the solar plexus. For the first nine months of this boy's life Travis had been the one who bathed him (Mary never did it because Travis wanted to so much), who changed the diapers whenever he could be at home, who got up in the middle of the night because he was the light sleeper and he selfishly wanted to hold the baby in the quiet and dark. Even when he saw the baby every day, just looking at him when he slept made Travis cry. When little Jason laughed or smiled Travis howled with laughter. These were feelings that Travis had never expected to have, that he could never tell anyone except Mary about, and that even she had no patience with since, of course, they had been in the process of deciding that life with each other was hell on earth.

Jason had been the happiest of children throughout the collapse of his parents' marriage. Of course they had tried not to fight in front of the baby, and of course they had failed. Now he would never hear them fight again. Travis hoped that was worth it. He had to believe it was.

On the night they split up, Jason had been sleeping fitfully, going through the pains of teething. Travis and Mary had been at some friend's house, and were coming home much later than they had planned. Jason had fallen asleep in Travis's arms on the sofa there, and Travis himself felt a little too tired to move. Mary had said, more than once, that, "Maybe we should think about leaving." Travis had agreed each time she said it, but neither moved and so they wound up staying on. Finally they did get out of the house, and as soon as they got to the car Mary started in on Travis.

"Why wouldn't you leave?" she said.

"I said let's go a dozen times," he said.

"But you never got up to leave when I said we ought to leave!" she shouted.

"I said OK when you said we ought to leave, didn't I?"

"Then why didn't we?"

"I don't know. Why didn't we?"

"Because you didn't get up!" she yelled.

And on and on it went just like that—"I said," "you said that I said," "I said that you said," until both of them were screaming, while Jason slept through it all in the car seat. The fight raged on, fiercer and more pointless as they tore at each other in the confines of a closed car, with no room for escape.

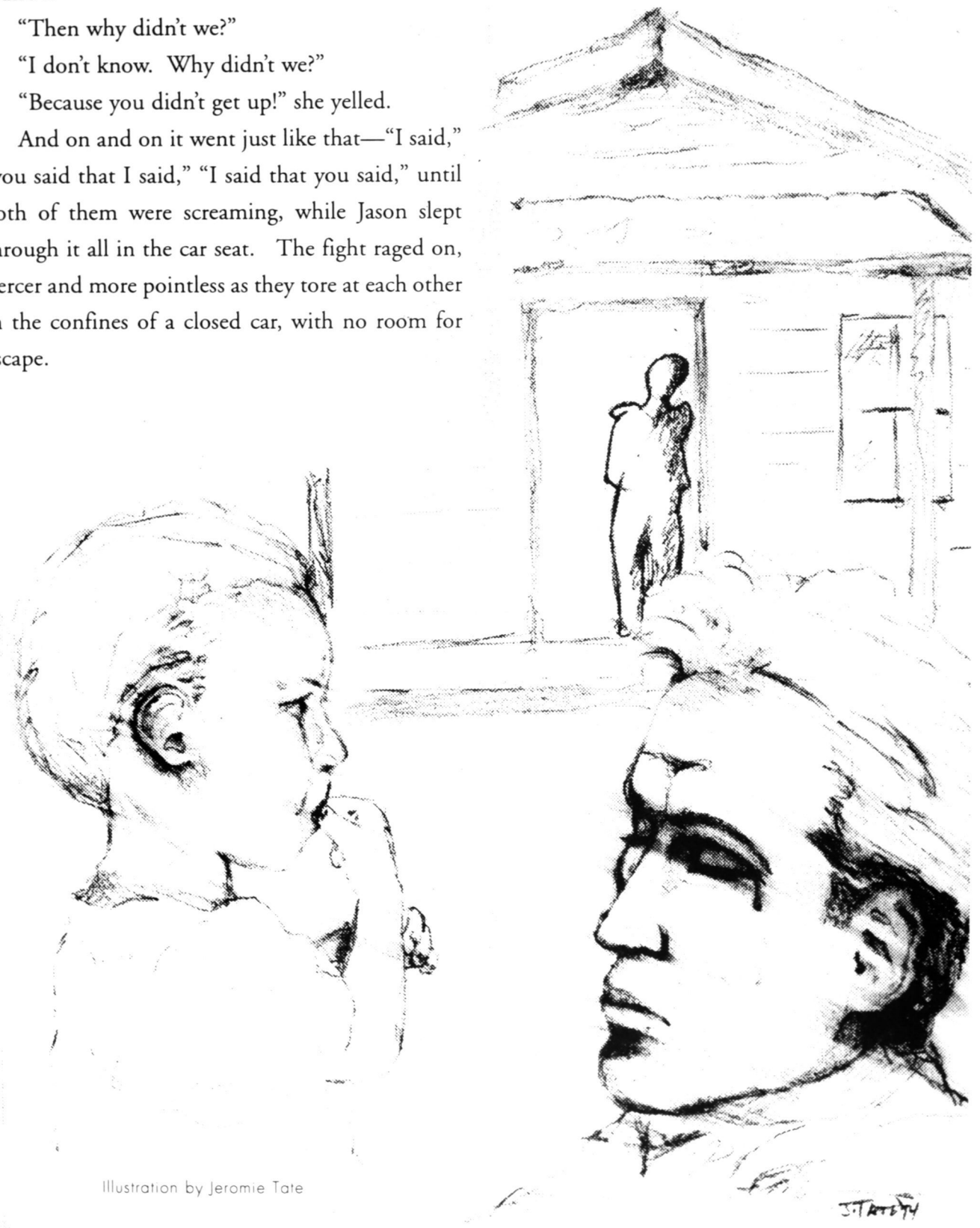


Illustration by Jeromie Tate

The fight continued when they got home, and while they put the still blissfully sleeping Jason in his crib, in the pajamas into which they had changed him an hour before while they were at their friend's house. She kept screaming how he should have stood up first, and he kept shouting, "I said OK when you said let's go."

And so it went, banal and stupid and deadly. Halfway through the fight, backed into a corner in defense of his position, Travis thought how easily he could have avoided all this, how he could have just apologized and kept his mouth shut while she burned herself out. God knows he had enough experience waiting her out. But then, what would the point be? Sooner or later he'd lose control, why not now?

Finally, the fight came to the point they usually got to. Mary screamed, "Get out, you bastard! Get out of here now!"

There was nothing new there, and nothing new in Travis' angry stomping out to his car. What was new was that, this time, when he got into his car and drove away, he didn't just drive around town and into the country for a couple of hours, cooling off. Usually he would come back home and find Mary asleep, or pretending to be asleep, and he would slide his way into bed beside her. When they had been to see the preacher who had married them to talk about the upcoming wedding ceremony, he had given them the same advice so many people give— "never go to sleep mad." But Travis and Mary had long ago found that only going to sleep, only escaping into exhaustion, could ever resolve their fights. Or at least end their fights; the next day they would wake either to a wary truce or sometimes a restored passion in one another, but resolution escaped them.

This time, though, when Travis left he did not come back. He drove a lot further than the outskirts of town. This time he felt the string snap. Without a coherent thought in his head and with his guts in a boil, he drove all the way to his hometown, up to his parents' house, and at two in the morning slipped in the unlocked front door, and fell across the bed in his old room fully dressed, and slept the sleep of the damned.

When he woke up the next morning, he couldn't remember exactly how an argument over when to leave a party had gotten so out of hand. He knew, though, that he had really blown it this time. He knew that not coming home was irrevocable, and he knew that when he did it he knew it. He had just voluntarily killed his marriage.

He didn't want it to end, but he was relieved that it was over. In fact, when he called her on the phone, while his mother politely and worriedly left him alone to call, he could tell in the calm, almost sweet tomes of Mary's voice that she too was relieved that one of them had finally made the move that couldn't be taken back. They talked for over an hour on the phone, able to say things to each other without anger and denial that each had been trying to say for all the long time since their lives had begun to crack apart. That was the end, months ago, when Travis last lived at home with his wife and his son, the baby he and Mary had shared into life.

Jason was not a baby anymore, Travis realized when he looked at his sleeping son. Jason was stretching out, losing his baby fat, becoming a boy, a kid, an entire person unto himself. But when he was asleep, softly breathing in his dreams, Travis

still saw the son he rocked to sleep when his first teeth were coming in. What Travis saw with sharp clarity, too, was the boy who would grow up thinking of his father as nothing more than a special visitor. What Travis saw was a boy who could easily wind up, would almost surely wind up, being another man's stepson, because Mary was still young and still very pretty and would not live the rest of her life in her parents' house. What Travis saw was a beautiful boy who would not think of him as the man who rocked him to sleep and sang silly songs to him in the bathtub, but as the man who lived somewhere else. What Travis saw was that nobody but he, Travis himself, would ever think of him as Jason's *real* father.

Travis knew that he mustn't wake Jason. After a while, he would have to slip out of the room and leave the house quietly. He would go spend the night with his parents, who would carefully avoid saying anything about this visit to their sleeping grandson, and spend the night praying that when he picked Jason up the next morning for a day's visit that Jason wouldn't cry for his mommy, like he did the last time. The day would go by, too fast for Travis, and leave him stunned and gasping for more. Then he would drive back to Wichita Falls needing the anesthesia of the road more than ever.

It was foolish to have even come by here tonight, he thought, and really good of Mary to let him. He should just leave the room right then and go out and try to have some sort of civil conversation with the mother of this wonderful child. But he couldn't leave the room. Jason's breathing hypnotized him.

What he did instead of leaving the room as quietly as he could and walk back into the living room was lower the crib side and lift his son out of bed. He cradled him to his chest and sat quietly in the rocking chair. Slowly rocking, he began to hum and then, very softly, to sing the only hymn he knew by heart, "Amazing Grace," all the verses, the way he had sung to this same boy every night when they rocked alone in the dark. He just couldn't help but do it. His throat burned as he sang, and the water before his eyes blurred his vision. What a fool I am making of myself, he thought, and Mary will be pissed as hell at me if she hears me doing this. God, I hope he doesn't wake up.

He did awaken, though, and listed his towhead to see his father, who was so afraid that his son would see only a stranger. But Jason gave him a bleary-eyed smile, reached up and put his hand around Travis's ear, grabbed his father a little tighter, and went back to sleep. And with that smile, Travis, finally, after lonesome weeks in tight reserve, remembered how to be happy.

Travis kept singing, still very hushed, but with a huge uncontrollable grin on his face. He sang all the verses through, over and over, until he realized the shadow of his ex-wife was behind him in the doorway. He looked up and saw that she was smiling a little and crying a little too. Awkwardly, she reached over and put her hand on his shoulder. He sighed and got out of the rocker to put Jason back in bed. Jason squirmed a little when Travis put him down, but he did not wake up.

Travis and Mary walked back to the living room together. Travis grinned a little because he was embarrassed that Mary had seen him with tears, but then the advantage of having gone

through a divorce together was that they had each seen the other show plenty of embarrassing emotion.

Mary stopped in the living room and suddenly hugged Travis. "Honey, I'm getting married again," she said.

The world collapsed. Travis couldn't say anything. Though he had always known it would happen, he couldn't say anything at all.

"I want you to meet him tomorrow when you bring Jason home. I promise that this won't screw up your visits with Jason. You know I think you're a great dad. Tom won't ever try to cut you out, honest."

I'm already out, he thought. I'm halfway out of my boy's life already. I'm just standing around on the edge of the action. God, just let me keep my balance well enough not to fall off that edge. God, that's all I ask.

Travis shuffled backwards and into the kitchen. He may not have felt welcome in this house, but he sure did know his way around it. After that piece of news, her family could spare a beer. He went to the refrigerator and pulled out a Coors tallboy. He stood at the sink, looking out the kitchen window at the dark and drank half of the beer in one swallow. Mary came in and watched him, not saying anything while he finished the beer. She stood silently against the door, one arm flat against her thigh, the other grabbing its mate by the elbow. Sometimes she thought she would never love anyone like she had loved Travis, and most of the time she knew that was a good thing. Right now she loved him with as much gentleness as she had ever had, a love that could treasure what was good in him even though she knew they only brought out the worst in each other. Travis turned from the sink and looked at her look at him. Then he crossed the kitchen floor and awkwardly offered her his hand.

"Well. I mean, good luck, sugar," Travis said. "I mean, you know, well, you deserve better than we done, I hope that you get it, really." But what about me? "I'll be happy to meet him, you bet."

"Travis, I want you to know you are a good man. I mean it. I'm sorry we didn't make good ourselves."

"I'm sorry too. But I'm never sorry we tried."

Travis stepped back toward the hall. "I'll be by a little earlier than usual tomorrow, if that is OK. Me and Jason, we got some special catching up to do, I think. OK?"

She smiled a little smile, the kind she used to have for him a long time ago. "OK."

"I gotta go back to his room," Travis said.

He walked rapidly back down the hall, into the room and leaned over and kissed Jason. "I love you, son."

Jason's eyes opened a little. He stirred, turned over to see Travis, and murmured, "Daddy." Then he turned over again and closed his eyes while Travis backed out.

He backed out of the room, out of the hall and out of the house. He backed around the new Harley Davidson, around the hood of his truck, slid behind the wheel, and then started to breathe again. In the dark of his former hometown at midnight he drove away. In the window he saw, reflected by the lights of his dashboard, the silhouette of a man in the window, his reflection, sitting alone at the rim of his vision. When he turned the corner the man faded away.

Contributor's Notes

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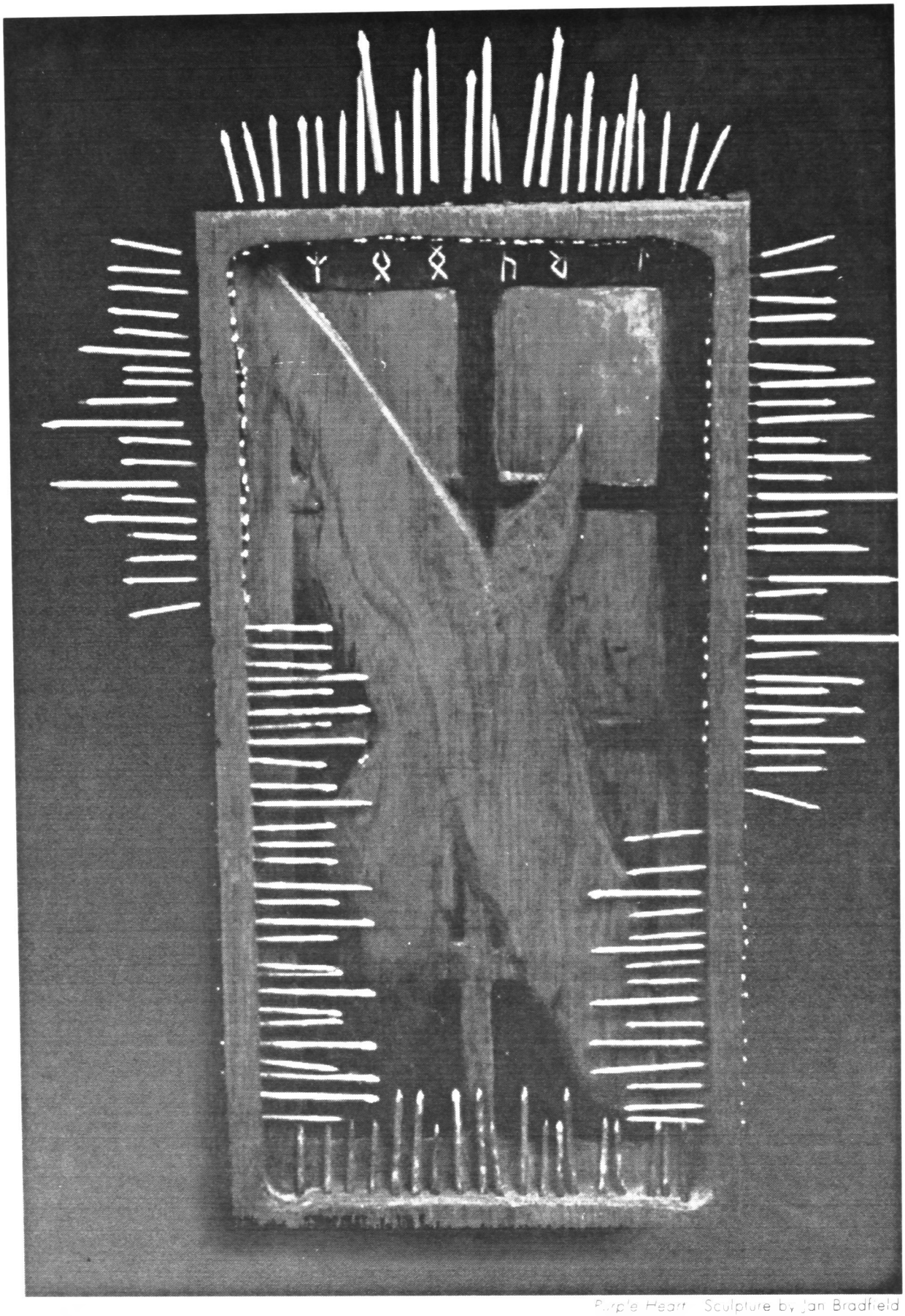

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