The Idol

WINTER 1991

HAPPY MARDI GRAS
BAYARD'S
JAZZ ALLEY
Bourbon
FIRE
LANE

UM I 21 1991

The Idol

WINTER 1991

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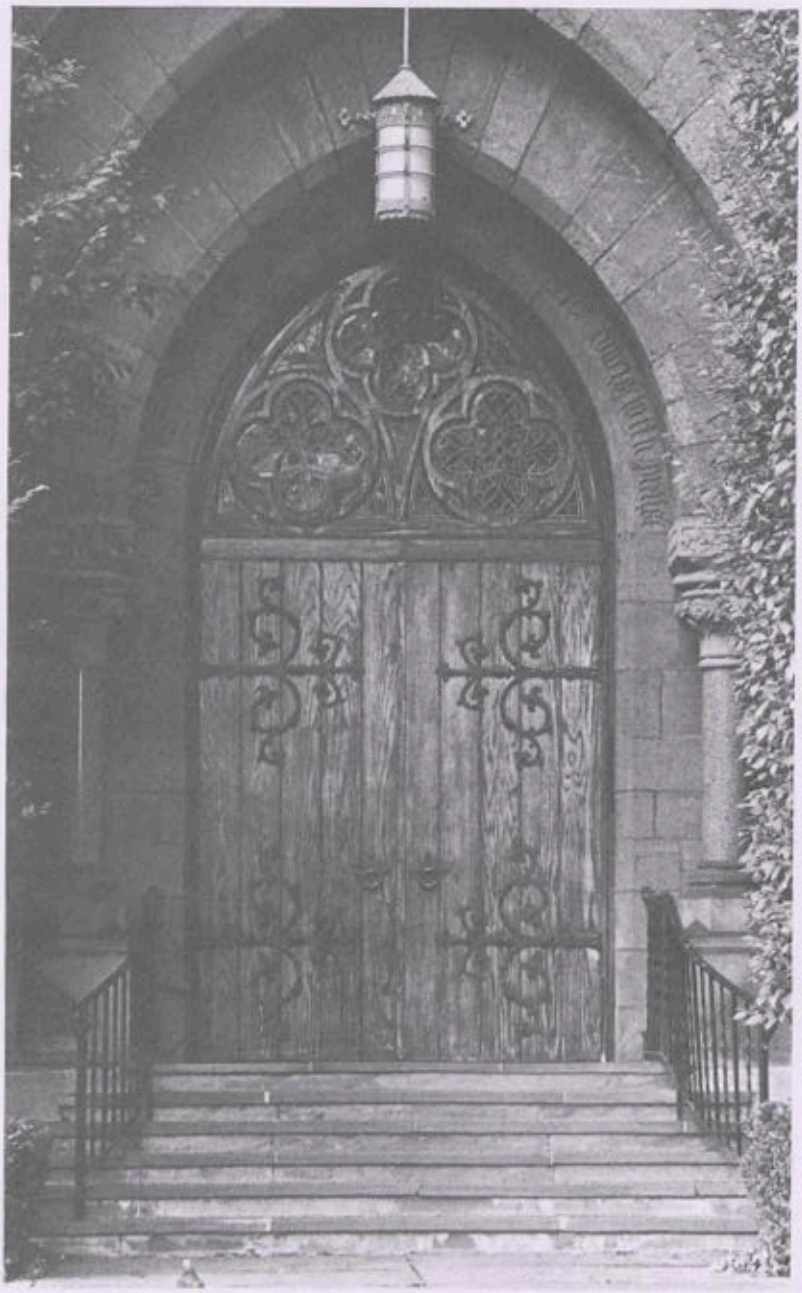

— *Allison Howard*

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— *Allison Howard*

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR . . .

The Idol is a bi-annual publication accepting poetry, fiction, art work and photographs by April 20 for publication in the spring issue and by November 20 for the winter issue.

This edition of The Idol was made possible through a generous grant from the Student Forum. Their support of the Arts at Union College is certainly appreciated.

I would also like to thank the members of the faculty in the English Department and the Arts Department for their guidance.

— MATTHEW FUTTERMAN

— *Michael Dufault*

THE SHARP DRESSED BUM

While all the world melts,
and the movement stops-
this is the time I must scatter, lest my
emotions get the better of my conscience.

So to the wheeled friend I go,
hoping she can take me to the end,
sweat out the pain,
if we work together.

The beads begin, as I ride to nowhere,
turning, stopping, speeding,
with no real course-
never look for what you don't want to see.

The boys are playing on the field, and
I must pause to remember, so I can forget.
The proud parents watch, as the bat cracks
the ball into space.

"Foul!" they yell,
as the ball rolls to me.
For a moment they all stare,
and I duck away.

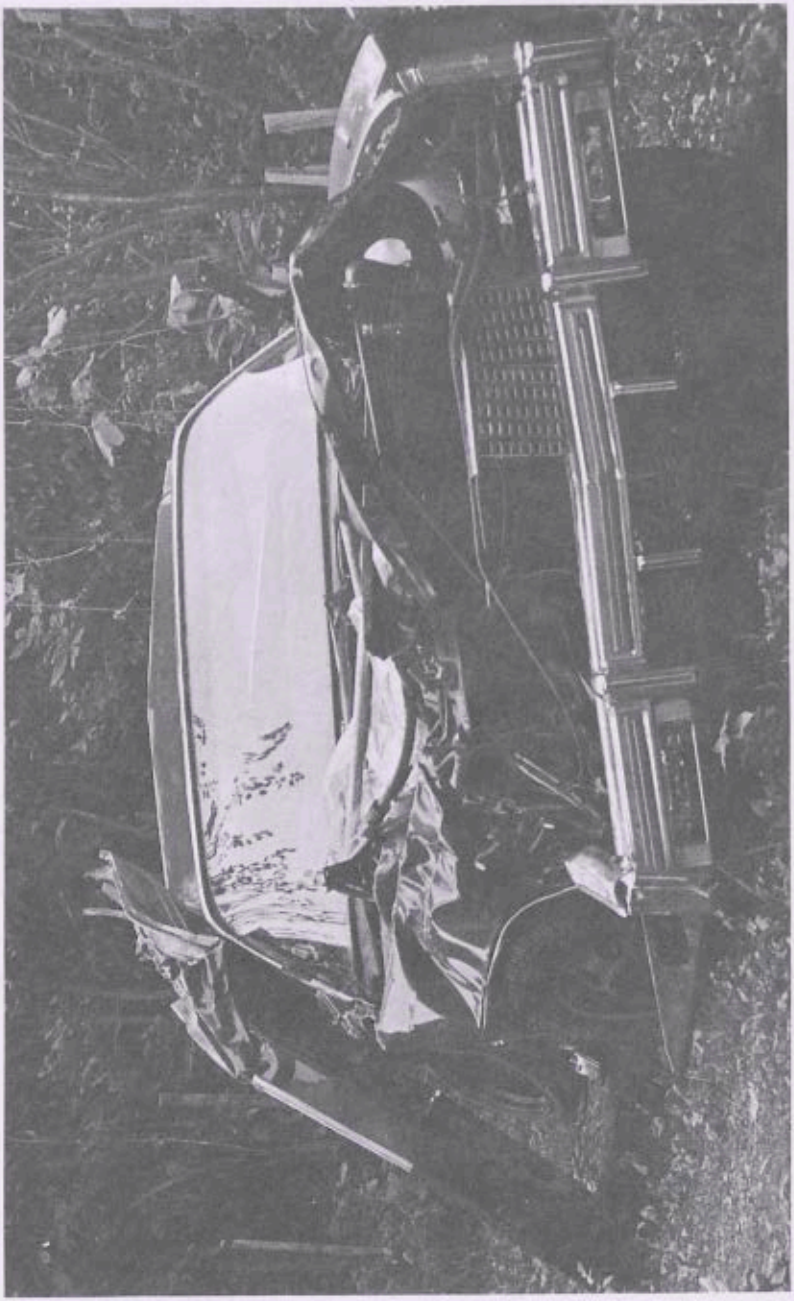
I remember those days,
always wanting to hit - but too afraid to come
to the plate.
"Don't hit me-"
When, oh when, was the ice-cream forsaken!

And there's no going back
only forward, through the ruins, to
cover the scars, which hold together.

I must move, through the refuse and waste,
of what man has cast away - it I must wear.
Let it be, just please cover the scars.

I can ride alone the precipice
my only fear is what's been done.
I know I won't fall -
and see what I've become.

— CARL FRIEDRICH, JR.



— *Allison Howard*

SOBER

He's the guitar player, who doesn't say a word.
Sitting in the back, with half a smile, half a snarl -
telling me.

The face never changes. He's the gambler, sitting back,
table kicked over, shot in the belly,
cards still in hand.

> *You look at me, and your music speaks,*
> *what your eyes feel. The lips never move,*
> *and the face never changes. Its bothering.*
> *Yeah, what should I do - Fight you?*
> *Beaten on the ground, you'll still have won.*
> *The song may change, but never the face.*

Its stuffy now, but the feeling remains-
I bet the moon is full tonight,
your eyes tell me so.

I know you're right - because the face never changes.

— CARL FRIEDRICH, JR.

Zaibi Chaudhry

IN THE GENTLE LAP OF THE OCEAN

In the gentle lap of the ocean, as it heaves a sighing swell
or the raging moaning howl of a wind from outer hell
or the puffing wheezing gust, or the scented West Wind's breeze
or the biting, clawing, fury which no man fully sees

Down on the docks with the tourists, watching men unload their fish
with the other sea-bound gypsies, following their wish
with the smell of sea-food frying, and the reek of gasoline
the night's salt air, wafting by, the salty essence of my dreams

The vagrant life, the gypsy life, this sailor's life, for me
far from the rolling hills and the weeping willow tree
under the gaping sky and the half-moon's blazing light
Surrounded by the ocean as the day gives way to night

So enfolded in the arms of the temperamental seven seas,
Braving foaming gales, or sheltered in the lees,
Far from the grass and dust, far from the bushes and trees,
Answering the call of the ocean, that's where I long to be

— DAN BULLEN

— *Allison Howard*

PANDORA'S FINGERS after kerry

the thin silver of moon
a pale heron's jaw
rips into night's purple and black
bruise in the fading watercolor
of course papered sky.

the elm, with its cloak of deadenings
reaches aging arms to
scrape the horizon.
winter's first winds throw
leaves shamelessly to the cement pavement
soon hidden beneath sheets of white
silencing the birds.

when I walked these nights with you
your voice filled me like an impatient glass
quiveringly immersed me as the numbing
rains tired and ceased, you an I
evolved towards permanence.

in spring's indecision
of extemporaneous rainshower
I was a shrill liquid dancing
hear me shiver among early flowers

stain our unclothed shoulders
raw as dawn
guiding a red dusted veil across our eyes
to wind reborn as shadow
mimicking silhouette

to two images, desiccating in the voiceless field
where I listened too hard, and
heard only my own
concise beckonings without response,
we were never a conversation
of bodies

continues —

here there is no longer motion.
your absence like encircling brambles
grasps and pierces and all
words disassemble.

I cannot slip edgeways, forget the contour
of lip, turn to clutch
I dream to again
begin but she fades in dimming night I dissolve
then ask for her, a hard-packed brain
emptying its resolutions
too far from her shore
too near to the force of my blind turnings.

now I am a stark ocean.
in me streaked fish shriek lost, alien
as trees succumb as uncontrollably
canyons of lung collapse and
all flesh is unreal.

I stand in the defoliations and accumulations of
nature's corpses as they surround and enclose
as rotted trees bunch and kneel on naked knees
ragged
and winding streets strike daybreak
silent in the call of storm.

return, opening yourself in me
as a crimson violet in secure folds of palm
and end this insistence of recoiling pain
return, form, wrapped in me
a new caduceus.

by your water I am instinctless,
I am a gutted animal.

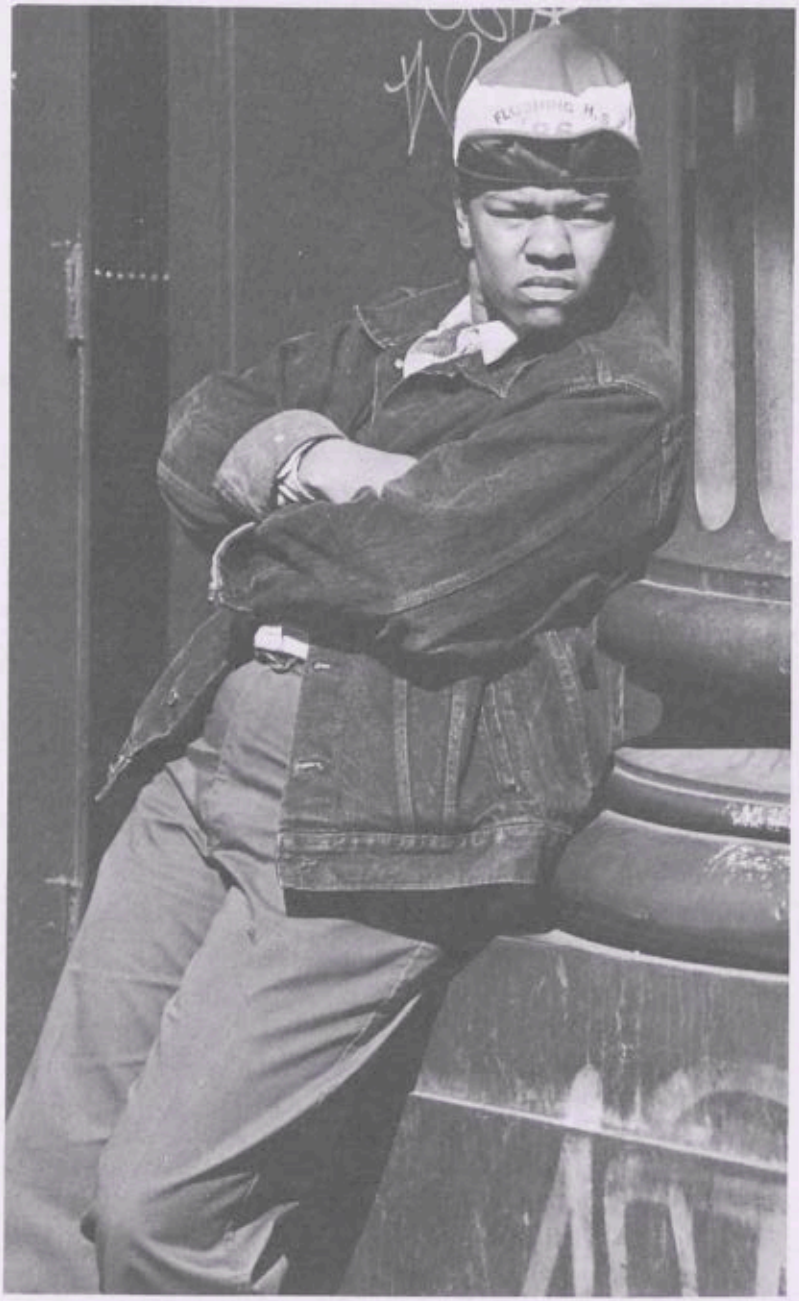
continues —

clouds slur their way across the top of the
sloping and peaking horizon and
the halcyons have flown as
day is burst into coagulating night
a shadow cries for the ascending dead
and bald moon never receiving burial,
as the permanent fixtures of zodiac arise
I am no less fixed in you

as this star is beheaded
to a writhing body of light
by all too curious, clumsied fingers
so the impermanence

of creeping hail and nocturnal
awakening of forest,
verse and thirst and skull and stone
razed, yes
all, as us has become you and I
the fierce screaming light of the hearts of
ten thousand suns
melt all to water.
useless water

— *Max Heinegg*



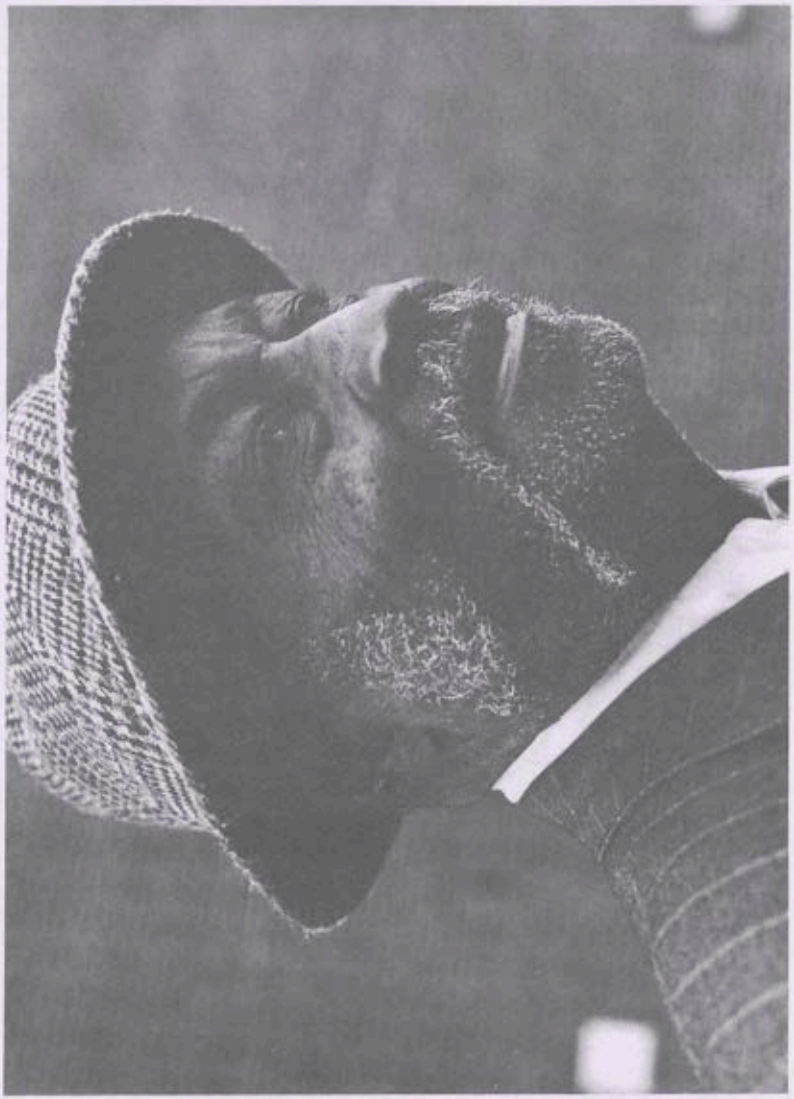
— *William Hardy*

FOR PERHAPS

WE DREAM A BIT OF THE SAME WORLD . . .

Only the dreamer really knows
Where hidden visions lie,
Resigning spirits to nothing else
But the heart's own beating sigh.
For further than the eyes can seek
A dreamer's soul can see
Belief in passion's blazing fire
As life exists to be.
While precious moments slip between
A sleeping person's sieve,
The dreamer's love has many lives
An eternity can give.
A celebration of the senses
Only the dreamer really knows,
The mooning heart forever yearns
For the dream forever glows . . .

—*Leslie Kahn*



— *Leslie Ross*

(UNTITLED)

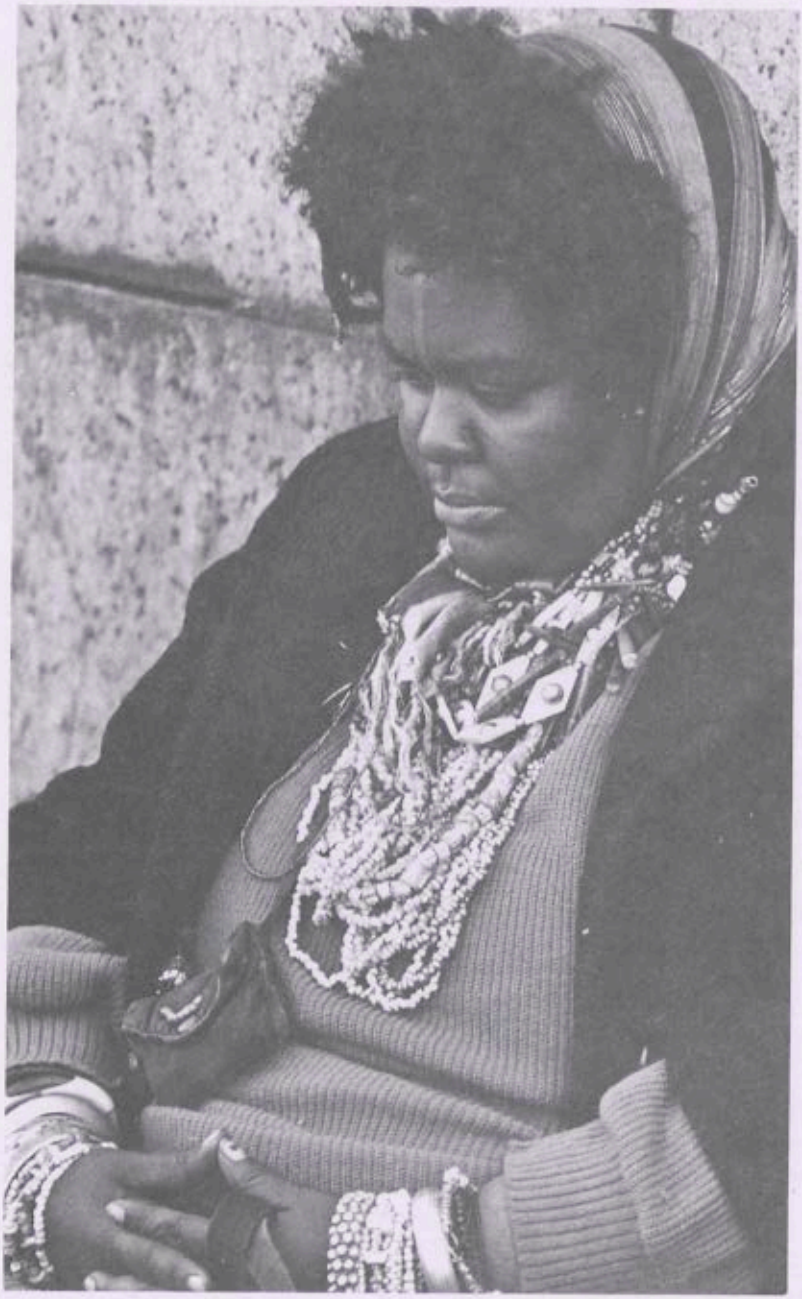
Goodbye

now crackling footsteps on embalmed timber
the steady hum of silence building
a chorus of nothing joins
and everything shivers and stands
and hands cover buffeted ears
and I cannot stand in my feet
and . . .

and the absolute crystalline beauty
of one softly ringing note

Hello.

—JOSH WEINSTEIN



— *William Hardy*

MANHATTAN: THE DRIFTING ISLAND

The explosion of space, sound, and motion created a vibrant uneasiness within me. I was expelled from the train--darkness, security, serenity, drowsy movements of lethargic animation--through the opening of the gate, and into the great hall of Grand Central Station--the persistent echo of shifting space, and the swaying flow of the current of people. I hesitated . . . in my sudden uneasiness, but immediately proceeded to dive into the waves.

Agitated by the claustrophobic atmosphere of such a huge space, where on the floor, with the masses, space was limited between, an elbow, and someone's breath, yet when I looked upward, I felt the emptiness of an arching space, confined only by a ceiling that was far too high to see without pausing, and simultaneously increasing my chances of being trampled to death.

They all ignored me as I passed through them. The crowd remained cold to one another, even in the stifling heat of that which spelled life, they acted as if they were dead. Nobody noticed the uncertainty in my gait and the agitation in my grimace. I felt as if I was losing my breath--gasping, drowning without a lifeguard in the lifeless robots that (I cannot use who) surrounded me. And then I became determined. Determined not to drown--that I would stop being swept up, push against the forces of the peopled currents. But, I didn't know where I was really going. I tried to be a survivor in looking like I did. I wondered how many others were like me.

Then a balcony loomed in the distance, over the head-waves with two winding staircases emerging out of the water, leading to it. I fought my way to them, never losing sight of my aim, eventually reaching them. I then ascended to the balcony, and was amazed by what awaited me. Laughter. Conversation. People that had somehow prevailed. I then saw the bar that they surrounded. The alcohol rejuvenated their pale spirits at the end of their anonymous week (for it was Friday). The fruits of their endeavors bought them nothing more than the devices to make them forget about their endeavors.

Then I heard the voice.

I looked upward and saw these electric stars that were arranged in constellations in a ceiling that seemed as high as the heavens. Pale imitations. And even these weren't probably noticed by the fish below--simply created to ease the conscience of an architect. But I saw the notes of a female voice breathe life into these stars and make them twinkle in their forgotten settings.

The music wafted from some indiscriminate point from the madness below. The beauty broke free from the chaos--creating an aesthetic order in the pristine air above. The order emerged from the fluidity of the soothing, vibrating tones. The spiritual carried the

continues —

rhythms of the African tribes transformed into the undulations of a single female Baptist choir. The notes came slowly, drawn from the plight of her people, beckoning those who can hear to feel, and not merely listen. I did not want to see the instrument of such beauty and taint that which I feel with that which I see. Even though I knew that the siren should only be remembered as a composite of her notes, I felt compelled to see. I feared that the creator might not be as pure in her inspiration as she was in her music. Yet, I gazed out from the rail, into the sea.

I searched through the masses which were thinning out by now. Searching with both my eyes and my ears.

I saw her

and the notes changed forever

as I listened with my eyes

watching the contorted figure

from which they emerged.

This black woman stood there, tilted forever with her right arm extended downward--physical evidence for the burden of life that she has had to carry. She jerked as she belted out each sweet note, twisting in a perceptible agony, like a small black bird that has been run over by a car and is singing its last sweet notes, in a melodic cry of death. How long has she been dying?

I averted my eyes trying to concentrate on the beautiful blossoms that freely floated away from this gnarled, earthbound tree. Futility.

As I looked down again, she appeared to be an eight ball in pool. All the other people had slipped into their respective pockets--the train gates that lead home. Yet she remained on the table--vulnerable in the Great Hall, constantly passed over and ignored.

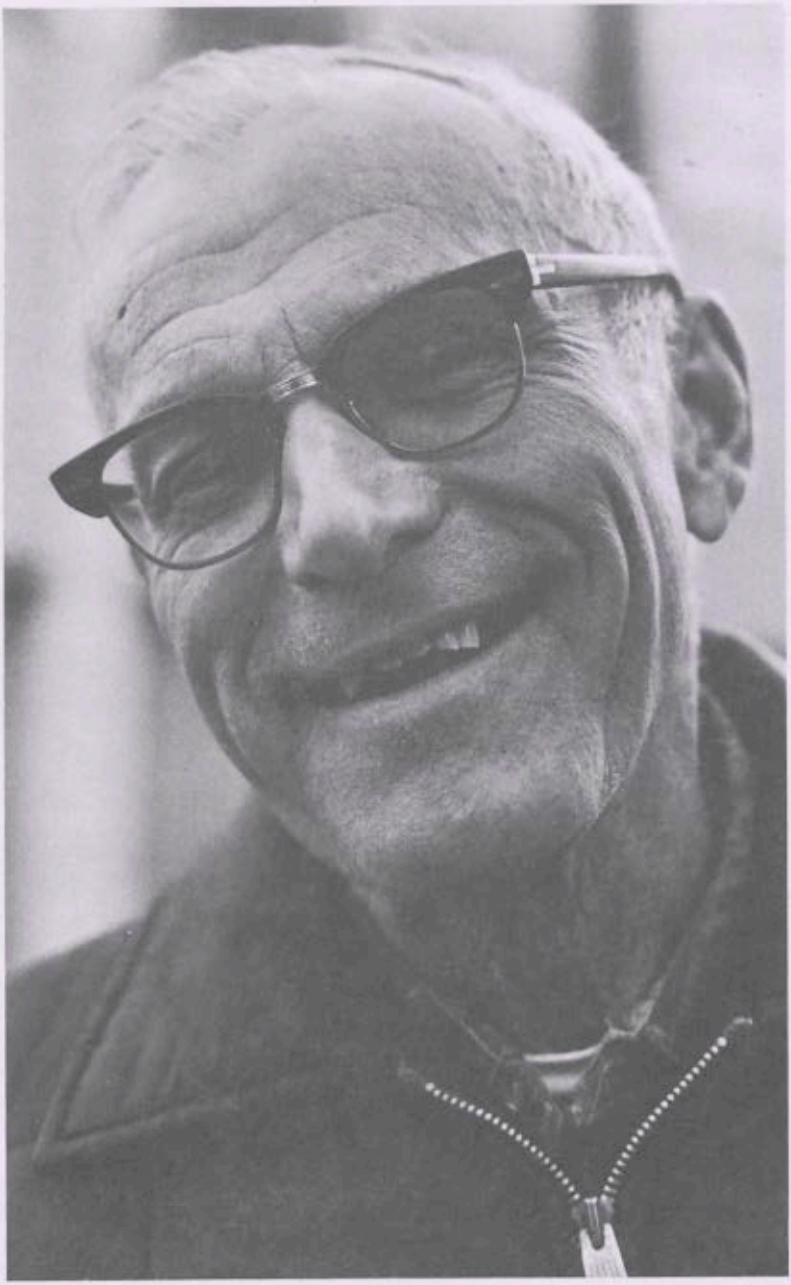
I descended from my lofty balcony in a swoop of pity and anger from the frightening vision of shattered notes, clutching a dollar in a merciful flight of deliverance.

And then I saw the complete picture; I saw the island as a whole.

Two men curiously remained fixed around her as the commuters continue to shift. I dropped the dollar into the paper bag that sat on the floor. She continued to sing her dusty lullaby, the notes materializing into dirty dollars for the greedy hands of her "managers". I quickly ascended the island, regretting the dollar donation. Wishing that all the water would dry off. For even in the seemingly placid water there is an undercurrent that pulls the strings of the lifeless marionette until its sweet requiem disappears in choking gulps.

If only she could become her music, escaping to the sun.

— *John Koutras*



— *Leslie Ross*

— *Zaibi Chaudhry*

EVIE AND JOHN

Evie sat, being quietly nursed by John at the stained and laden linoleum table. There was only so much she could do, take in. Fast music tired her as her heartrate seemed slackened by comparison. Her back to John, she watched his reflection in the window carefully stirring scrambled eggs from an omelette. She also watched him scowl when he heard her light another Camel. It seemed to be her last haven in this heavy world. Across the way, at the house too close for a city this size, the woman with long gray hair moved towards the sink. She knew the air felt thicker to the window-woman. It made Evie jealous to know that the other had grown to reconcile herself to her life with time. Dressed in only the lightest nightgowns, the elder scrubbed rhythmically, never stopping the movement. Evie knew it was inertia that kept this woman going, not motivation, and wondered if she ever slept.

Sleep had become difficult, as did long conversations. If Eve laid in bed long enough, night-thoughts came out. All those things she couldn't contend with and carry on emerged when her eyes adjusted to the dark above the bed. The cyclical mind pulled her around to the escapeless maze. Evie had taken to reading until it was light or until she fell asleep. She slept little and talked less. Talking with her friends, family also forced her to evaluate, and hence realize, her present and future. Saying things outloud either made her close up like a touched flytrap, or become a stoic talker. She talked less and less daily.

Eve had realized impermanence. Of course, impermanence was not a new thing to her, but more the process of realization that was recent (fresh?). She had become more and more intrigued with processes, systems and means-rather than the finished product. As Chaim, her writer friend always tells her, it is not in the final draft that there is meaning, but in the course of doing the drafts. That is why, he says, they call it an "art course". Eve supposed that was why she appreciated light so much, because of its constant movement.

Seeing life through an artist's eyes, she tried to see the process of life as the true benefit. This is why she tried to take everything in stride, without faltering. When she heard that she had to have biopsies done on her cervix, she suddenly was unable to think of anything but the final product—her own life.

It really was just the waiting that bothered her now, that and the new attitudes of people around her. Their reactions were affected by her own worry, which was the illness before she was even diagnosed. Now this disease was contagious, and she got pity instead of care. This helped her "leprosy" contaminate her insides, too, as she let none of it out anymore. That's why John was silent now.

continues —

Her cigarette was out, and left a faint smell of filter. Evie dropped it in a nearby glass, which was removed promptly by the swift reflected-John. A plate of scrambled-omelette and toast replaced it. He stood watching the television in the other room from the stove. Finally, breaking, Eve laughed at the role reversal, drawing a smile from him.

"What could you possible find amusing at this hour of the morning?" he asked.

It was after noon. Typical snotty sarcasm in his voice, she thought. He's toughening.

"Omelettes, or lack thereof. You leaning on the sink instead of me. How many times in the six years I've known you have you made me breakfast? I know we had cooking wars over dinner, but breakfast is such a basic meal. It's about time, toots."

"Shut up and eat your damn eggs." He said, grinning, heading for the living room. "It's time for me to go to work. I'll go home and change after work and then come by here and we'll go out to Rudiments for a drink. Okay?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"Only of the drink . . . see you at seven or so. Don't think too much today, Kid."

He stooped to kiss her head, catching a curl in the eye. As he edged through the easels and mess of the living room he turned to look at her. She wouldn't let him look at her like that. His concern made her nervous. "If you're worried, I'm terrified." she had said.

"Hey Evie," he called. When she turned around he gave her a raspberry, grinning as he ducked out the door.

"You're twelve!" she hollered after him. He really was, too. His concern reminded her of a grandfather, but his general attitude was that of someone half his age. Ever since they had met in college he has remained one of the more jolly characters in her life. Even when they drifted apart towards the end of her senior year, and later, when she moved away after the incident with her boyfriend, his anger never showed through, only his joy. It was only when she started to dig deeper into his psyche, when she began to paint again, that he felt able to lose some of the bravado and be real with her.

It all started when she was about eighteen, at the end of her freshman year. She met John through Eli, a friend of hers. Eli took her aside after watching the two talk for a few minutes, "I bet he's in your bed before the end of the month." Evie laughed and told John. Two weeks later, when he was about to leave for his beach life, John kept her up talking all night about his life--expounding as only college kids can do. Eve remained quiet, shocked at most of what he told her. The stories of drugs, shitty family life, abandonment in various forms

continues —

appalled her. She felt she really didn't have anything to say that was appropriate. After four hours or so, they went to a diner and argued over who would open doors, pay bills. Eve was intrigued with this walking paradox. And, in many ways, she pitied him. The next morning, John left for the Cape without so much as a goodbye. Since she took a leave of absence from school, it was months before she saw him again

The following year, she spotted him out at a party. It was as if she were his closest friend. Evie remembered wondering if he always made people feel that wanted. That's when they re-entered their all night discussions. Soon, her couch was labeled "The Couch of Death," as it captivated the sitter for hours. Evie liked to think that it was her listening ear and comforting responses that held him there. He let her be in control, and she appreciated that. It was this odd comfort that allowed Evie to relax with John.

Back in the house, Evie had pushed away the untouched egg-mess he had made for her. She lit another cigarette instead. She stared at the woman in the window through the haze of smoke and screen and thought about John, her gypsy attitude about her painting and the tests. She knew that she scared John. She depended on him almost exclusively, but rarely let on how much. While she had pried him open, because he needed her to, she remained tightly closed. No one else even knew about her tests, not even her mother. Despite this fact, people knew she was worried, but no one had the gall to ask her what was wrong. Just John. Not feeling dependable, and not wanting to hurt her, he pulled away at times. When Evie called, though he came running. She pictured his face when she called him after the first set of tests. His face curled up when he didn't know what to say. It was because he felt her pain that she knew John loved, understood her. Their friendship was her most prized possession.

Finally she arose to survey all she could from the living room stairs. The light there was perfect, swallowed by stained glass windows on either side of the front door. The hay-colored wood of the stairs washed in the colors she always tried but could never achieve in the palate. Walking over to her paints, she realized that she needed to prepare something for her classes. The only problem was the teaching switch from a grammar school art class to a collegiate studio. Possibly she could work with Sargent this week . . . and do clay with the kids. Clay was always the most fun to use when she was little. She had never mastered it, though, and her creations usually exploded.

She took her palate and her mid-sized brush over to the stairs. She sat and mixed for what could have been an hour, trying to match the greenblue of the window-light on the steps. Almost unwittingly, she began to use the stairs themselves as a canvas, matching the color to the shape the light created on the step. The painted color

continues —

began to meld with the light, and the effect was eerie. Growing more and more excited, she started mixing red with azure for the purple block. When she was satisfied with the color, she filled in that lightbeam. Two colors, two shaped later, and more than a lost hour, she reached to paint the palest of yellows, the paint opaque to the translucent floor and windows. Dazed, she stared at the floor for a few seconds. The entire pattern of light had shifted. She forgot the artists first rule, stability of light. When she stood, she realized how much the pattern had varied from the first greenblue block. Knowing the sun was setting with violent speed, she raced to get at least two more blocks done before she lost the light.

Evie rose from her mural, backing away in wonderment. She had been blindly creating. Reveling in the first good, black-magic mood she had had in two weeks, she went to shower before John arrived. Her entire day was a blur. A long, visual blur.

* * *

Eve tried not to look at herself in the mirror until she had put on a fair amount of make-up. Her lack of sleep had made her pale face stricken and her eyes altered. She knew that she was an attractive woman, odd looking to most people, but attractive just the same. She dug for red lipstick in her bag, knowing that she would leave it on every glass and cigarette she had. It was a joke she had with her sisters, who all wore the same ruby shade. She dumped her towel-clothes pile in the corner and went through the livingroom to the den, the only clean room in the house. There she found John, already holding a scotch.

"You're early. I can't believe it. You're lucky if you're on time," she said, frowning.

"I wanted to make sure you were okay. What'd you do today?"

"It's a secret. Now come on and let's get out of here before I get really pissed at you," she said, yanking him off the couch.

"Why are you pissed at **me**? What'd I do?" He chirped.

"I **don't** want you worrying about me, okay? Now come on!"

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry . . ."

". . . And don't you dare start conceding to me, either!" she hollered.

She pushed him all the way to the back door. He put his arm around her shoulders on their way to the car. Without a word, he handed her the keys to his car and got in the passenger side. They drove silently to Rudiments, not out of anxiety, but out of the sheer comfort of it.

Evie sat, drinking tequila like water. For her it was firewater, holding the nectar of the ancients. It reminded her of college days,

continues —

partying and playing. John never would touch the stuff, and now, while she was throwing down shots, he misinterpreted her vow to be drunk for a rise in spirit.

"You look great tonight. Who are you trying to impress?" he jostled.

"Do I have to be impressing someone?" She waved for a Guinness and a scotch for him, "Can't I just look nice for a night?"

"You haven't dressed for so long . . . I mean it's usually just levis and boots . . ."

Evie saw his offense at her snap. Immediately, she was sorry. She tried to be light.

"Besides what's a woman pushing thirty supposed to do? I'll look bad enough in a couple of years . . ."

Playing the game, John said, "Yeah, after a couple of kids, you'll be a wreck . . ."

"Nope. No kids. That much they told me already."

"What do you mean? Are you sure? Why didn't you tell me? Evie . . ."

"Oh shut up John, I don't need a lecture now. Nor do I need pity. Just drink with me. Cheers . . ."

John's pity was immense. Almost as large as his remorse for putting his foot in his mouth. If any person deserved kids, it was Eve. She was just naturally maternal. She took care of everyone around her, rarely stopping to breathe of worry for herself. John supposed that's why he was around: for those chosen moments when she did snap, worry and need comfort. He felt privileged to be the chosen one, but it scared the Christ out of him. So far, it had never happened. Eve was the strongest person he knew. She took care of him. The thought of her losing control was beyond him.

"Look, I'm sorry, Evie. I really am. I don't know what to say."

"What's to say? It's not your problem." She knew that she didn't want to say that. If it were his problem, it would also be hers.

"Who knows, maybe adoption or invitro. I bet you still have kids."

"Let's drop it, okay? I don't want to talk anymore".

More tequila, she thought. Numb me. The bottle had taken over for her. She didn't even need to focus. She conceded to losing herself in the liquor of her youth for a night, while John sat back and watched.

She had no idea how she managed to drink so much in one night. Normally, she knew when to quit, or at least take a rest. Last

continues —

night had been a whirlwind of smoking and shots and Guinness. She wondered why John hadn't stopped her earlier. Finally, around three-thirty, he threw her in a taxi and hailed another for himself. Even in her drunken stupor she wouldn't let him drive himself home.

She thought about John. Why wasn't her there? Or at least on the phone with her? It wasn't neglect, she knew, just a lack of awareness, like letting her get so drunk the night before. It was possible that he wasn't even up yet. It was eleven on a Saturday morning, and he was even a lazier shit than she was. Today was different though. She wanted to work on her stair-project. There were many things in the house that she had crafted or designed: paintings, greenhouses, tiling--but nothing that was like this. It gave her strange height, it felt like guilt-free decadence.

She put down her cigarette and pulled back her hair, which still had traces of yellow paint in it from a month ago. She took her coffee and cigarettes to the stairs. The paints still sat on them. Now in the highnoon light, she could see the colors even more vividly than when she first began. Today, they seemed to be primaries, not dusky pastels.

In the middle of a deep blue, the den door opened. Eve was not startled, but jumped just the same, and ran to get John into the kitchen before he saw the stairs. She smacked into him in the breakfast nook.

"You're up. I'm surprised. I don't know when the last time I saw you that drunk was . . . maybe years ago." John said. He reached for one of her cigarettes. He never smoked unless something was wrong.

"So, are you going to tell me? Or do I have to pry it out of you?" Eve lit a Camel of her own.

"Do you remember, junior year, when your sister asked you to live with her in Providence for the summer?"

"Yes, I do." Eve remained placid in her chair. Don't interrupt. Just let him talk it all out, she thought.

"Do you recall the fight we had? I told you to go and you refused because you felt you had responsibilities to stay at school for? I said that you would never have another chance to be frivolous after college."

Eve remembered. She had wanted to go, but the idea of a new place, new people and job had just seemed like too much. She had decided instead to stay at school and work on her Senior Art Project. Her apartment would be empty and clean. She felt that she needed the time alone more than she needed to have fun. It was a purging experience for her. John had pushed and pushed to get her to go. He didn't understand, even when she tried to explain it to him.

continues —

"Yeah. What next?" She said.

"Well, I think that you should go away for a while. Lose your roots here for a while. They're getting you down. Just leave the schools for a couple of weeks and go to the beach, mountains, somewhere . . . just get out of here for a while." John looked adamant.

"Can't deal with me, can you? I wondered when you were going to say something." Eve grew flushed with anger, pain. He didn't understand her. He didn't know when she needed him, and needed the familiarity of home and friends.

"Sweetheart, it has nothing to do with 'dealing with you.' It's about you. I think that the best thing for you to do right now is to blow town for a break. Everyone needs one. Even you."

"Oh, John, cut it out. I can't leave. No one would understand, and I need my art kids, my friends."

"They're just bleeding you dry. Parasites, the lot"

"Does that include you?"

Pause, "Yes, I suppose it does. I depend on you. I use you to help me through tough spots . . ."

"**Use** me? You see it as using someone? Rotten wording. If that's what you mean, I apologize for being a burden to you." She refused to cry, and condescended instead.

"Cut it out, Eve! I don't like the attitude you've taken on since your Biopsies. You're just self-pitying. It's not like you at all. These mood swings from bouncy to normal to depressed are killing you, and I don't like it." John, now visibly angry and upset, was lighting another cigarette.

"I can't leave. I just can't. It's not my way."

"You never knew what was good for you. You just worked and managed everyone elses needs. Deal with yourself, for once."

"Good for **me!** What about you? Never in to see a doctor. Never sticking with one thing--or woman, for that matter. What about right after college when I lost touch with you? To this day, no one knows where you were. New jobs, new apartments, tattoos--what next, toots? What's next?" Now Evie was on the verge of anger tears. He took her down with him everytime he "fell," but never knew it. It hurt her when he was irresponsible to himself or her out of fear.

"I can't stay. You can't leave. We're different kinds of people. Just understand me, Eve. I don't want you to think that I'm abandoning you or pushing you away. I'm worried about you. I deal with you how I would deal with myself." He reached out to hold her.

"Just don't make me you. I'm not and you can't understand. I know why you run away. Something inside me won't let me go."

continues —

"That's the part that's killing you. You're in constant battle with it: what you want and what you feel is right are too far separated. I don't know how to help you." John's anger had fled.

"You can't. Everything should be fine by tomorrow morning. The lab was supposed to mail something for me. I should know by noon."

"Are you scared?"

"No. I'm overjoyed. What do you think?:" Eve's sarcasm reeled.

John smiled. He promised to get in touch with her the next afternoon. They would go out to dinner either way, and make plans for the rest of the month. His kiss was the final message before he left. He loved her without understanding her. It made her smile, but curl up inside herself.

She returned to her stairs, and worked on the staggered light. The primaries had dulled and the pattern was new each time she sat down to it. She knew it was almost finished by the feel of it. This might be her last sitting. She must not overdo it, as was her tendency. The colors blended and pattern lay over pattern. It was the overlap that intrigued her. Studying it, she began to see the outreaches, the extensions. The light crawled up the wall. Just to offer an idea of the limitlessness she felt with it, she added hue to the wall.

Leaving the rest of it untouched, she headed for the bar in the livingroom. The champagne was still in there, next to the scotch she kept for John. She put the scotch, a crystal glass and a deck of cards in front of the fireplace. After building a roaring fire, she played Solitaire, drank and smoked for the rest of the night. Drained from the fight with John, she realized much of what he said was true. She had been silly about Providence. He knew she regretted not going. She laughed outloud at his cunning ploys. He had been plotting for a while to pounce on her about her self-restrictive way of life. His freedom, on the other hand, was annoying to her. He always had to be in a state of Limbo. If something became routine, he felt stagnant and changed everything. She was surprised that they were still friends. It was the one constant in his life, their friendship. For Evie, it was the one inconsistency in her existence. Evie was finally realizing how little she could understand him even after so many years. And the reverse, too.

At two-thirty a.m., Eve ascended her tainted stairs and slept better than she had in many nights.

It was early in the morning, she knew from the eerie blue light that oozed into her room. Sometime, during the night, she had made a decision. For once, it surprised her. She got up and walked over to the big window in the room. She checked to see if the raccoons had been there the night before. They always left footprints along the wooden porch railing. Most people served the birds, but not Evie. She

continues —

always had to be different, at least a little. She liked to watch their faces when they discovered leftover lasagne. They didn't know quite what to do with it, but they always managed to get it down. She found them strangely human.

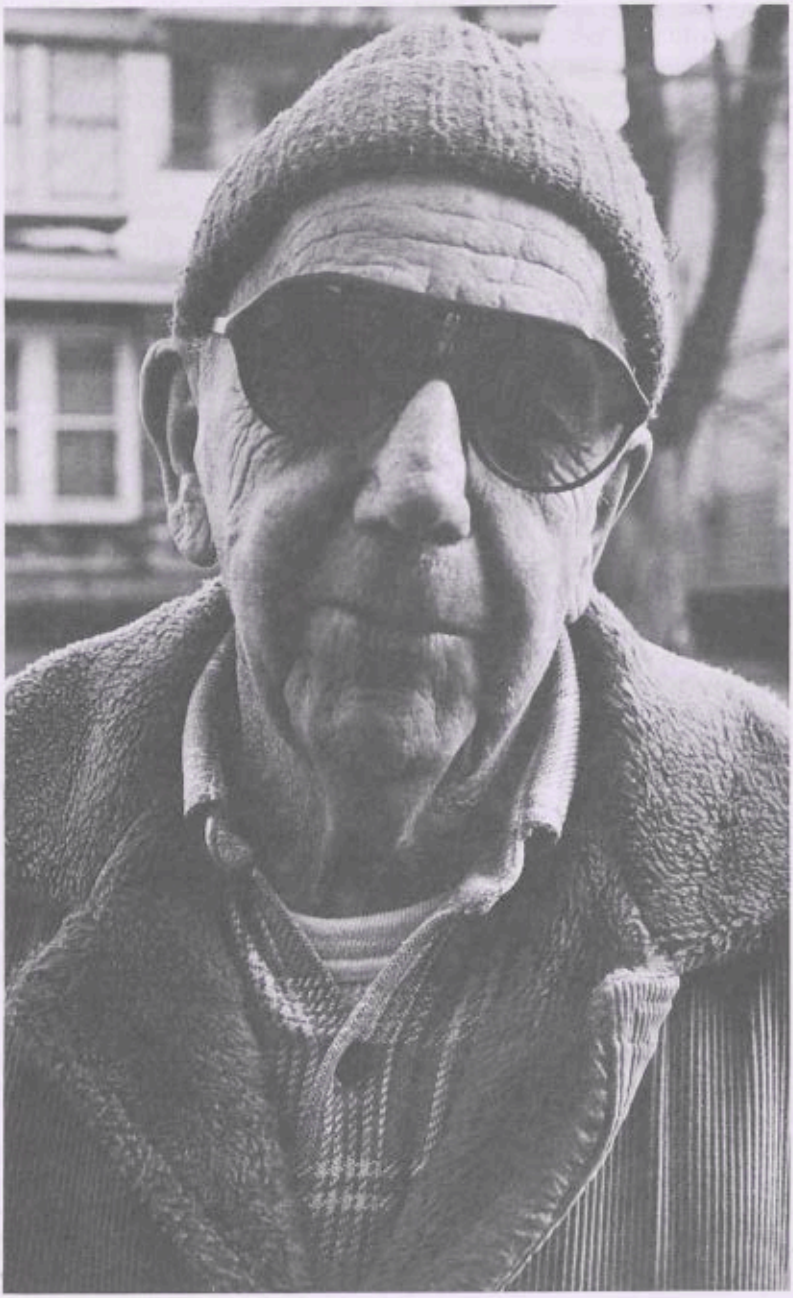
Eve went to the closet in the hall and took out the old backpack she had bought in Europe. It was a huge, travelling pack. She had used it once, when she went to Amsterdam from her school in France. She began loading it with jeans and sweaters, T-shirts and boots. On top she threw in the short stories she was reading.

After showering, she loaded in her hairbrush and soap, etc. She began dressing and realized that she had packed the Levi's she wanted to wear. She stood over the pack, tearing clothing out of it when she caught sight of herself in the full mirror. She looked pretty with her wet hair stuck to her back and face. She stood up and looked at herself. She looked healthy for the first time in weeks. She rushed to finish the loading.

Eve ran around the second floor, locking up. She put the backpack on and was surprised at how good the weight felt on her shoulders and hips. Downstairs, she locked doors that hadn't been locked in months. She finished the carton of orange juice while she wrote John a note. She realized that she hadn't had a cigarette yet that morning, and lit one while she surveyed the house, her stairs.

On her way out she dropped the note on the stairs, among the colors. She locked the door behind her and dropped the keys in the mailbox with the newly arrived mail. John would understand. Maybe for the first time.

— *Mary Farris*



— *Leslie Ross*

THE MILL

I take lunch at twelve. Johnny goes at one. I go to The Mill. Johnny doesn't. He said one day he got sick from the cole slaw. He doesn't want to chance it. He goes across the street to Tom's Diner. I don't like cole slaw so I can't really say much about it.

So I get my paper and Tommy gives me a nice hello like he always does when I get to The Mill. Asks me how my day is going. "Pretty good," I told him. He put my cup of coffee in front of an open stool at the counter. Tommy's a good guy. He runs The Mill. One of the cooks with the mustache, says hello to me and throws my burger on. I ask him how it's going.

"Not bad," he says, "a little quieter in the summer." I agreed.

I noticed a couple new faces walked in. A kid I'd never seen before. Maybe he was new at the college? Blond curly hair. Kinda tall. I quess about five nine. Not when he was sitting at the counter though. Then he looked short. Must of had long legs or something. Right behind him walks another new guy. Big, real big. He had to be over six feet. Wearing a blue suit, this red tie and a white shirt. About fifty I figure. He had blond hair like the kid's but his was straight. He was kind of broad too. Big body. And he had this big walk. I don't think there's any relation but he sits down at the counter next to the kid.

Tommy asked the kid what he wanted first. He ordered a chicken salad sandwich with lettuce and tomato and some french fries. A Coke too. Then Tommy turned to the next check on the pad, so I knew the kid's not with the guy in the suit. Strange though because the guy in the suit says, "That sounds good, I'll have the exact same thing."

"Exact same?" Tommy asks.

"Exactly the same," the guy in the suit says.

I been coming to this place for years and I never thought of ordering that.

Not that I don't like it. Ruthie once made it. It was pretty good too. But I never knew they had it at The Mill. I figured maybe I'd try it. Not right there. I mean I'd already eaten. Also I never seen two people who don't know each other order like that. I guess he figured that sitting at the counter and all the kid knew what he was doing. But I'd never seen him before. He was new. They both were.

The kid started reading his book. I got back to reading the paper. The guy in the suit didn't have anything to read. He just waited. Looked around at everybody. He didn't just look. It was more like he was studying us or something. I had a pretty good view of him over my paper and I don't think he noticed I was looking at him. Not as

continues —

much as I was at least. He was too busy looking at us to see. Looking and thinking maybe what the hell we did for work dressed the way we were. I thought he was the one looking kind of strange with that suit. But he just kept looking down on us. I knew he was looking right at me one time. I made sure I was reading my paper when he did. I didn't want to look back at him.

I finished an article when their food came. The guy in the suit went right for the sandwich. Attacked it. Ate almost half of it in two bites. The kid asked for the ketchup. He must of wanted his fries first. Then the guy in the suit asks the kid if he's ever ordered chicken salad there before. He shook his head while chewing on his fries. Hadn't started his sandwich. The guy in the suit shook his head too.

So the kid asks "Why, it isn't good?"

"No," the guy says, "it's terrible."

"It's not chicken salad, the guy says. "Chicken salad has lots of pieces of chicken in it with some mayonnaise and maybe some celery. This is just a little chicken with a lot of bread crumbs mixed up in a blender. It's not chicken salad. It's chicken paste." He started in on his fries. Picked up five or six of em at a time and stuffed em in his mouth.

"Oh," says the kid. He looks kind of weird. Not strange weird. Weird uncomfortable weird. So he went back to reading his book. He ate some more fries too. The guy in the suit started shaking his head at Tommy. Tommy looked at him. The guy put out his thumb giving the bad sign. Tommy just kept looking at him. So the guy said "It's no good. It's no good."

The kid looked up. Now he looked bad uncomfortable weird. He started eating the sandwich. Didn't look like he loved it. But he ate it. Tommy went over to the guy and asked what was wrong. So the guy starts telling him the same thing he said to the kid with the bread crumbs and the blender. "It's not chicken salad, it's chicken paste." A couple of the cooks started to come over. Kind of mad. Maybe they made it or something. The guy in the suit just shook his head. "It's chicken paste," he kept saying.

The kid stopped eating and watched. I put down my paper.

Then Tommy made a good point. It came out strange because his accent comes in when he starts to get excited. But it was a good point. He asked the guy why he ate half the sandwich if it was so bad. Then he walked away.

One of the cooks took this bucket of chicken stuff and put his hand in. He came up with it on a couple of fingers in the kid's face.

"It's good right?" he asked the kid.

The kid didn't disagree. He kind of nodded while backing away. It looked pretty gross dripping off that greasy brown hand. It looked

continues —

like paste. He licked his fingers clean though. Said it wasn't bad. He said it was good.

The guy in the suit was getting pretty heated up. Not cause they were arguing with him. They weren't. He stood up big out of his stool. Oh man he looked big. Especially with that dark suit. But Tommy ignored him. Except when Tommy walked by he put down a check. He gave one to the kid too. Then the guy got real hot. "I cannot believe this," he said. "You go into any restaurant in this city and you don't like something, they give you something else."

"You ate half a sandwich," Tommy told him.

So he says back, "I did not eat half. I took two bites. I couldn't eat half. It is absolutely inedible. It's paste, it tastes like paste." But the kid was all done. Except for a couple of french fries and he didn't look like he was going to eat those. Kind of smothered em with ketchup. I do that sometimes too. He was watching the fight like me and everybody else in the place. I was closest to it since I was at the counter. Not including the kid I guess.

"You ate half," Tommy yelled at the guy.

"I am not paying for this," the guy yelled back. Then Tommy got real angry. You could see the sweat start on him.

"You eat, You pay," he said.

"I will not pay for this," the guy says. Then he started for the door. Tommy jumped around the counter and blocked the door. The guy had about half a foot and fifty pounds on Tommy but he wasn't lettin' him out. "Don't you touch me," the guy yelled at him. "You touch me again and I'll flatten you." Now Tommy's no dummy. He backed off. Stayed between the guy and the door though. He pointed to the register and told him to pay. No way though. The guy shook his head hard. He was real angry now. Then he yells back at Tommy, "Get a cop!" he says.

Now I can't believe that. Cops in this city got enough to do. Just look at the papers. Too much stuff going around with the drugs and everything. And now they're supposed to decide on chicken salad and chicken paste. So I figured I might get involved a little. I mean I was at the counter too. I thought I should tell the guy to give 'em a break. It's not a restaurant. It's a coffee shop. But then all the same I thought I understood what the guy was saying in a way. Things aren't made as good as they used to be. I don't like the hamburgers I eat there that much. They're thin. I like thick burgers. I deal with it though. So I told him. "Give 'em a break. It's a coffee shop. It's not a real restaurant. I know things aren't made as good as they used to be, but I deal with it." The guy in the suit kept looking at me so I thought maybe I was convincing him. But his lip was all wet all of a sudden. And he's looking right down at me. Tommy was on the phone with the cops. I looked at the kid and asked him how the chicken salad was.

continues —

"It's not the best chicken salad ever," he tells me, "but it's not the worst."

"See," I tell the guy, "it's not the worst. It may not be the best but it's not the worst."

"Why don't you mind your own business," he tells me. "How about that?"

"Fine," I tell him. He can go to jail if he wants. Tommy hangs up the phone and tells him the cops are coming.

"Five minutes," the guy says. I'll wait five minutes. Then I'm leaving." But then the kid - he's been quiet the whole time, except when he told me it wasn't the worst chicken salad - he gets up.

"Look," he says, "I'll pay for the sandwich. I ordered it, I feel responsible. Let me pay for the damn sandwich. Just get out of here all right. Just leave."

"Are you sure?" the guy asks.

"Yeah, just get out of here. Just leave. I'll take care of it."

"You really want to give these people money for this?" the guy asks.

"Yeah, just get out. Please."

"It's your money," the guy says, "and these people certainly don't deserve it. You sure about this?" No one said anything. For the one second, just complete silence. Can't remember it being that quiet in years. Everyone waiting, looking to see what was next. It wasn't really gonna all end just like that I thought. Then the guy in the suit broke it. "It's your money," he said.

"I know. It's all right," the kid says. "Just, come on, leave." So the guy starts to go out the door. Then, as he's closing it, the kid right out pulls the door shut. Slams it kind of with the guy walking out and everything. Right there in front. I hope he noticed. I just couldn't believe it.

"What a diplomat!" I yelled. I wanted to tell the kid he should get one of those prizes. Just couldn't think of the name though. Sure was good work. We should of clapped. But everyone just went back to the meal. Tommy went back behind the counter. Wouldn't take the kid's money for the guy's food. That kid was too smart for him though. He left a ten on the counter. His bill couldn'a come to more than four and a quarter. Maybe four fifty. Well he had a Coke. Probably five dollars even.

I left a little after the kid did. Looked around for him while I was walking back to work. Not that I've got anything to say, just wondering what's what with him.

When I got back to work, Johnny had already gone to lunch. He came back telling me he had some headache.

continues —

"You gotta listen to this," I told him.

"Can't do it Billy," he said, "just can't do it."

"But you got to hear this," I told him. "You ain't gonna believe what happened down at The Mill."

"Billy, please, my head. Please?" he said. "I'm going home early anyway. This head, I'll tell you," he said. Johnny used to be a workhorse. He'd go six days a week all year, no vacations or headaches or anything. Not lately though, he just can't do it like that no more.

"You gonna go see a doctor or something?" I asked.

"No, I just got to sleep," he said. "I'm tired like you wouldn't believe."

"You ain't gonna believe this story when I tell you Johnny."

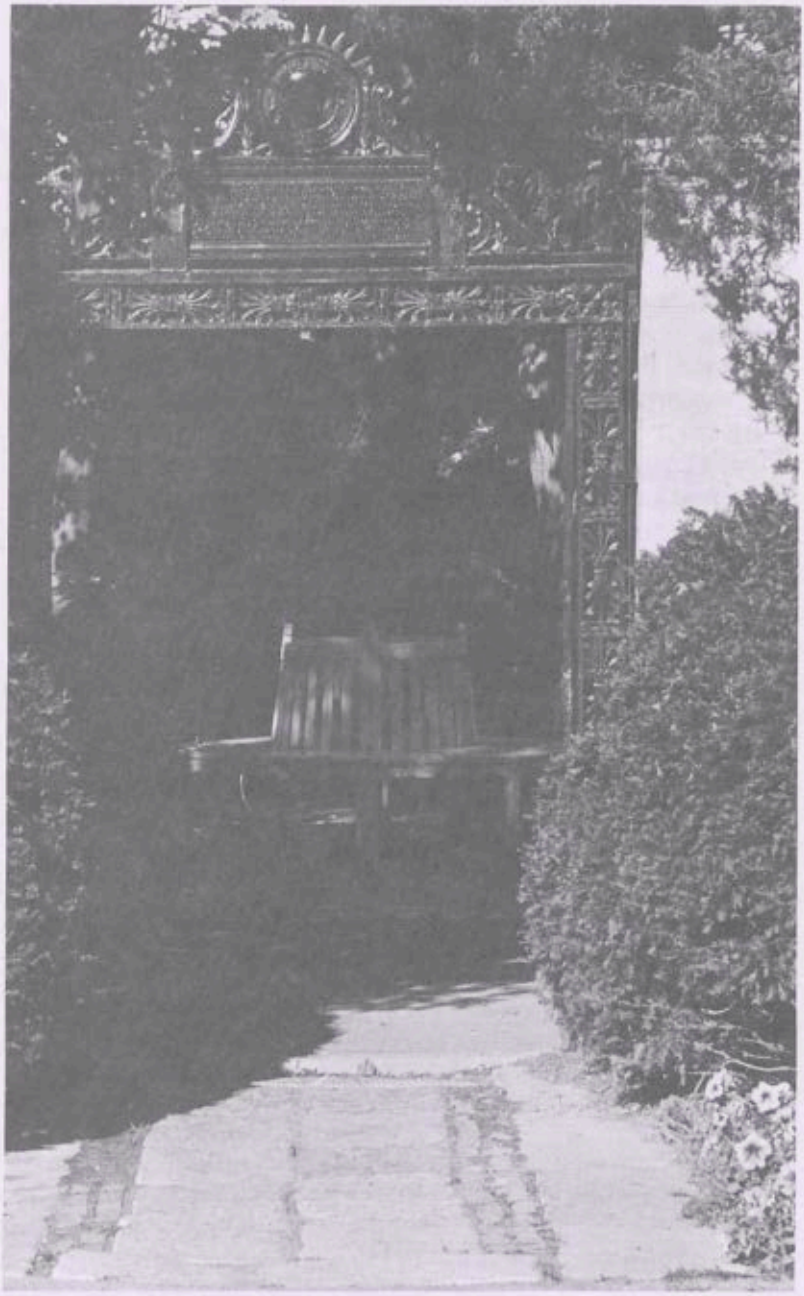
"Yeah, I'm just real tired," he said, "and my head it's killing me you know."

"All right then," I told him, "get some sleep. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, yeah, maybe I'll take the morning off tomorrow," he told me. "Maybe I'll come in after lunch."

Then he left. I sat down. Started to look at the paper again. Sat there looking at it all afternoon. Until it got dark.

—*Matthew Futterman*



Allison Howard

In Memory
In Memory
In Memory
In Memory of
aged 71 years
and 11 months