

the pine branch



Stop.

The world is standing

upside

down

in

that peculiar

way

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—Editor

the pine branch

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GREEN AND GREY

Shoelace grass wavering, tenuous
snake lassoing a field mouse scattering
dirt through the green slightness

Some digestion goes on in the
feather-sharp grass as the bent and
gaunt moon shines overhead

snake wondering, mice scurrying, weather
changing, lithe mantises limping through

Rain jumps on mounds of dirt
the dampness lays a winding grasp on the hardness
of the ground

footprints and crushed bones
snake dances jumping and whirling
grass thrust downward by the wind
forms a cover of motion
as thunder rams like a jack-hammer
and lightning cuts gashes
in mud.

—Scott Cohen

AN ETERNAL

I hear the harmonica's strident sound
I'm crying but the harmonica's
gnawing does not induce my salty-clear tears
Nature's mysticism does this.

There is no sudden revelation
of the how or why, there is just
a morose thudding like
raindrops on a skin-tight drum.

A flippant hummingbird nibbles a berry
An omniscient kingfisher grates a fish
But shall I be self-sustaining?

—Scott Cohen





THE SUN

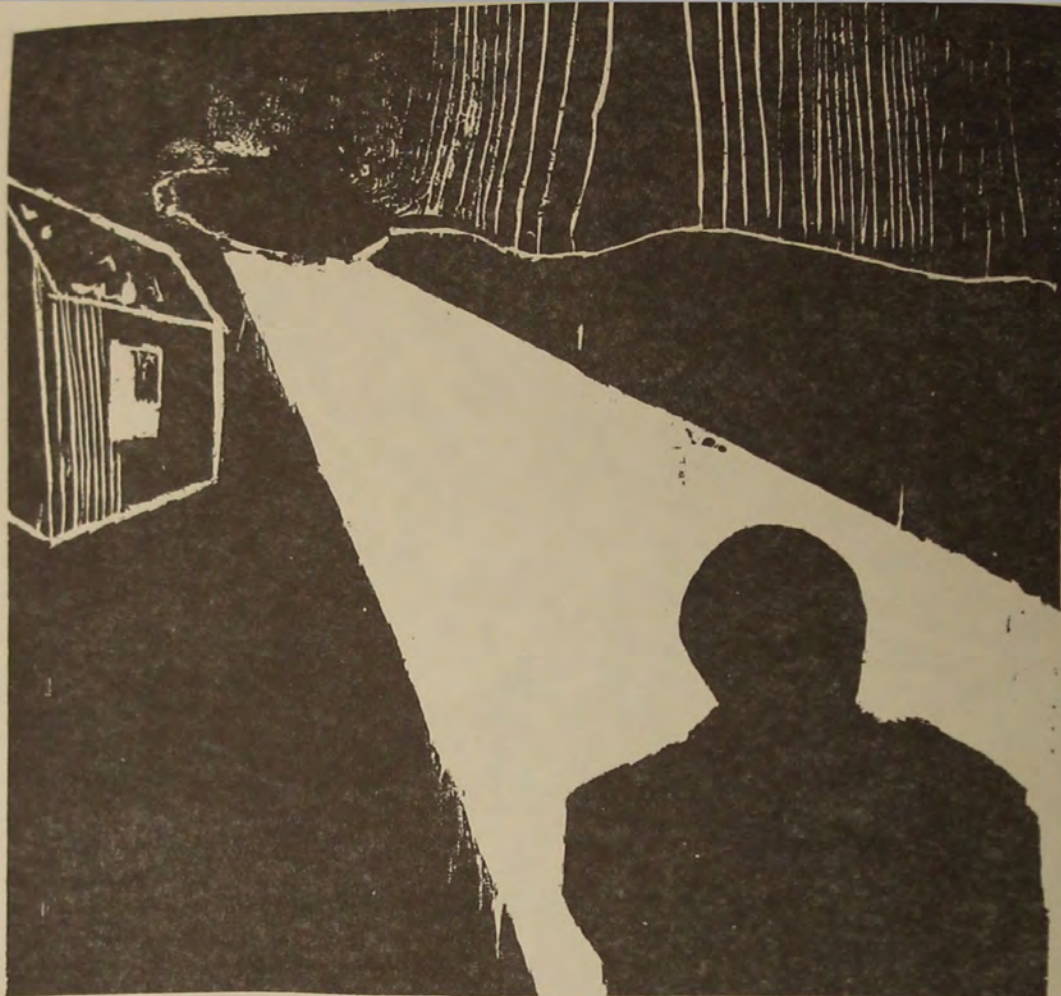
You, brilliant sun, are a bulbous
hip flashing at me

Your ferocity frightens me
You are finally clear above
the incessant motion of the mist

Laugh in sardonic gleams, char my futile lust
into blackened chips. But
I draw my sustenance from gadfly night
you fire-breasted sun; leave my tenuous
soul alone. It lies deep beneath
my winter white integument which is
shimmering in your light

You cannot touch my soul, amble away
burning your path with your flaming womb
scorching the grass seed into fruitless
trifles.

—Scott Cohen



WHAT CAN I DO

It was cold, in his body, outside the door and in other people's eyes. Walking down the frozen sidewalk, he realized his own hopelessness. His wife had died during the summer and now winter had come to deepen his loneliness. Looking at the unfeeling crowd, he understood that the only way he could overcome this profound grief accentuated by winter's unsubtle ice was to see Ollie Murdock. Ollie was an old school friend, who had never married. He was some kind of social worker. Ollie had never been a close friend, but whenever problems needed to be solved, Ollie solved them. Ollie had told him years ago "Look, Ted I'm glad to help people; it makes me feel like their cloth of superiority is removed when they come to me and they are just as miserable as everyone else."

Ted had always thought Ollie a superficial yet necessary person. After all who else would listen to his countless troubles. If Ted had been a religious person, he would have seen his reverend or clergyman, but long ago Ollie has steered him away from religion by asking him all-knowingly "If God made the world, who made God?" and "How can a man be born of a virgin?"

Walking slower now, Ted picked at his nose, looking around to see if anyone was watching him. His wife had always overlooked his bad habits with a sort of disdain to mention them. His wife had been affectionate but Ted felt there was a definite lack of communication between them. Ollie had said "A listener should feel great empathy when listening to someone's problems. He should get under the skin and pretend he were running that man's life."

Ted's wife had listened but not like Ollie whose whole face became intent at what you were saying. Ollie would feel empathy all right. And Ted's wife would give her advice in an off-hand way, not like Ollie whose pronouncements were wrapped in a stately and very erudite package "Perspicacity is next to Godliness, you must act accordingly."

Sometimes Ted's wife would invite certain uncouth people over to the house. These people had never heard of Bach, Beethoven, or even Brahms. Ollie had told him to overlook this limitation "You should not condemn the ignorant for their poor taste." His wife had never given him advice like that. All she would say was "Ted, get off your ass, and start working harder in your job." Ollie had told him that a wife should never prod her husband and should never use profanity.

Ted almost slipped now on the smooth uncertain ice which seemed to envelop the whole street. "Well, come to think of it Ollie can cheer me if anyone can." Ted was thinking of the time he had been dating Josie Bishop in high school. Josie was a beautiful girl, marred only by a lisp. Ted had gotten pretty serious with her; however all his friends kept mentioning her lisp and Ted began feeling as if everybody were listening, especially to her, and were wondering why he couldn't find a better girl to go out with.

He didn't want to break up with her so he went to see Ollie, about it. Ollie said, "we all have our defects and she's a nice girl, and breaking up is hard to do, but Ted you have to find another girl. I mean there are other fish in the sea and they don't have a lisp."

A cutting wind had started. He felt its sharp points ease through his trousers and go up in a jagged line to the nape of his neck.

Ollie had always told him that a high opinion of oneself was necessary for happiness and sanity. But Ted would underate his own capabilities and his potential employers would sense this inferiority complex.

"What can you offer us?"

"Nothing."

"Have you had any technical training?"

"Nothing."

Everything was always negative for him however Ollie had remarked that "multiplying two negatives would give you a positive."

The wind had caused his hands to become hard. He punched wildly in the air pretending he was fighting with Ollie as he had often done in his dreams. His mind was becoming clearer as the wind glided through what Ollie would call "the labyrinths of the mind." Ted looked around desperately for someone to talk with. He saw a young girl, crouching from the gusts. He asked her,

"What can I do?" I've got so many problems, some of them are paradoxical and . . .

"You think you have problems?" she yelled "Hell, mister my father is a drunk, my mother is a prostitute, I take dope, and my boy friend is a homosexual." And with that she hurried along, chuckling at her sharp wit which assured her an easy escape from people who bored her. Ted stood there, stunned. Ollie's words came back to him "Ted, I'm the only one who can help you, you'll have to come back to me." Ted didn't hesitate. As the harsh wind grated across his face he turned resolutely around in the direction of Ollie's house.

PORTRAIT OF A ROSE

*Fresh, green sepals cupping a tiny, crimson rosebud
Lying dormant like a chrysalis
Constitute a Genesis!*

*Minute veins branching out
To supply the bud with the birth of beauty or love
As it receives the nurture and care of Nature.*

*Now dawns the Awakening!
The emergence of the reality of love and its eternal existence
As the petals transform into a blossoming rose.*

*An upturned, blossomed face nodding toward the heavens
Signifying hopes as high as the supersonic, silver wings
Glistening in the cerulean sky.*

*A perfumed fragrance wafting upon the soft April breeze
To effect a vision
Of the innocence, sweetness, and beauty of young love.*

*A love intricately woven
Like the gleaming, silver threads
Of a dew-spattered cobweb near by.*

*Prickly thorns or piercing stabs of injury,
Through unintentional harshness and misunderstanding,
Resulting in an evanescence of the wounds*

*As the precious surge of forgiveness flows through our hearts
Drenched from gentle showers of teardrops
Like the blossom is bathed with rain.*

*The scattering of pollen produces new buds,
Just as the example of our blessed love
May produce a born glow of love in others.*

*Ultimately, an aura of magnificent devotion and tenderness,
Transcending the element of time and framing the rose
Like it envelops our two hearts in oneness.*

As the beauty of a rose — so is our love!

—Donna Spratlin

SPRING DYING

A tall frame
 moves slowly
 in space
Made slow by
 Death.

Death reaching
 through fingers
to grasp awkwardly
 piteous betrayal
 of themselves

The fingers tremble
 once, no more,
til looking minutes later
shows a crying, palsied hand
alive with fear
 of its own death.

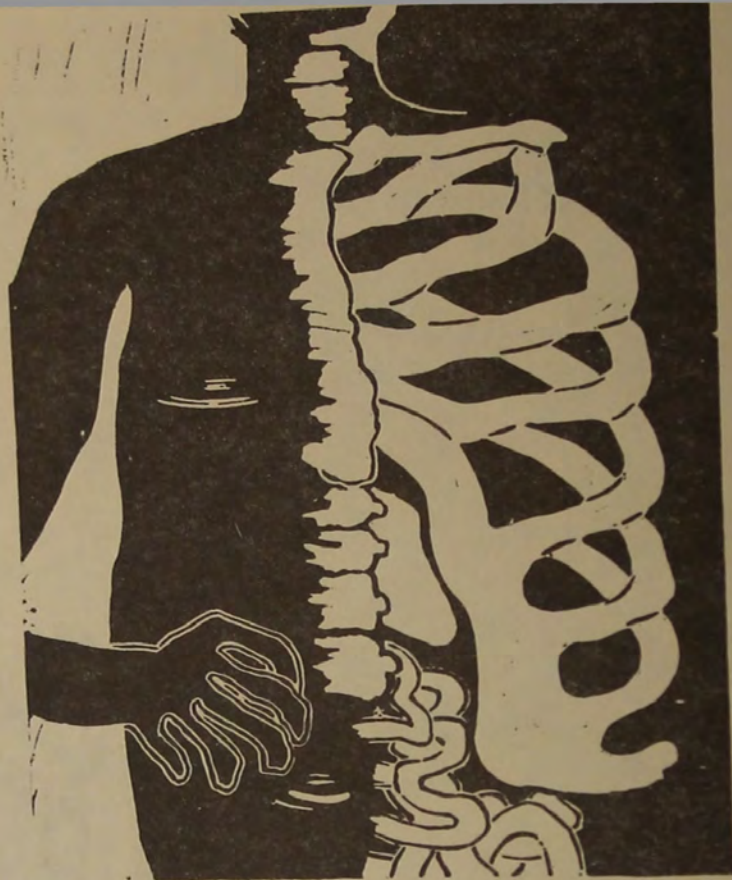
And the eyes
My God, the eyes
knowing with all the knowledge
with all the wisdom of a pathetic, wild God,
knowing and caring but pretending
pretending because
 Spring is birthing things and eyes
that know too much
 are crushed with the cruel beauty
of new, young things.

Eyes watching
 love
walk around them
 and laughter
and kissing
 and jumping
and running.

Eyes of a slowly
 strangled rabbit.
My God the eyes.



—Edith Moore



WE DIE WITHIN OURSELVES

We die within ourselves
In moments of gunneled corrosin
Lie and wait
An organism consumed in worms
Stagnent - stale - complacent
The cold pulselessness of plaster

A drop of purpose
Glow - heals corruption
To grasp the inner construction into unity
To shout HELL
to feel the bone and warmth of breath
Through the claminess of plaster
Growth boiling in your veins
the seige and explosion of spirit
To be awake - My God - To be aware

The black infuses the glow
gray envelopes and stagnates
We crumple soundlessly
In the silent slumber of death.
What death? The body moves
The death of vital
The death of inner being
secummed shattered self.

-Gail Allen

TIME

Time passes not in hours
A mass of moments compounded into a block
That floats into years to melt and flow in centuries
A clock ticks a universal second
Yet confined on the brief space of a clock
Time is moving, an eternal mass
It has not one face and can not be confined there
Its face is intimate and seen by a lone soul

A moment tears from its confines and glows
A moment to a day, an hour, a year
It often speaks in silent words
A thought of beauty isolated, the pain of defilement
An eternal masterpiece for the mind
To hold in contrast to momentless
Days - months - years

An hour short, an hour long
Contain the measured beat
That man imposes on an ascending sea wave
To throw its sea foam on the beach
The face of the clock is crushed
Its hands are bent and worn
Torn from the face and in a motionless position lay

Time escapes the mundane beats
The pores in notes of ecstasy, indifference, and agony
A melody unheard
A tune too gentle yet cruel for ears
It moves in gasps, it moves in tears
As slow as foam absorbed by a thirsty beach
Yet surging in an unbroken wave of height uncontrolled
Creating confines of its own by what it says
To a lone soul who walks its path and claims its tune.

—Gail Allen

VAN GOGH

Early in the morning I take up my paints and brushes and go out into the countryside.

I go out into the light to express my feelings and to capture all that is.

I pick a place in the field under the sun where I can paint as I feel: "And all that is not Voltaire."

Yellow, orange, greens and blues glisten in the morning sun.

The soft colors go to my canvas with the coolness of the morning as I work on.
The light increases as the morning goes toward afternoon and the wind moves the landscape in rhythmic patterns.

The fields move in life, the trees stroke the sky, the sky moves on its way with clouds of constant change.

My brush moves as they move.

I now see yellow in everything that the sun touches and the landscape seems to move more.

The sun gets closer: the eyes hurt,

The sun awakes the colors, the greens become brilliant, the yellow glitters, blues glisten, the oranges glare, and all dance in the sparkling light.

As I paint, I go faster as the sun pulsates the landscape,
I concentrate on capturing part of what I paint, but that which surrounds me clouds my concentration.

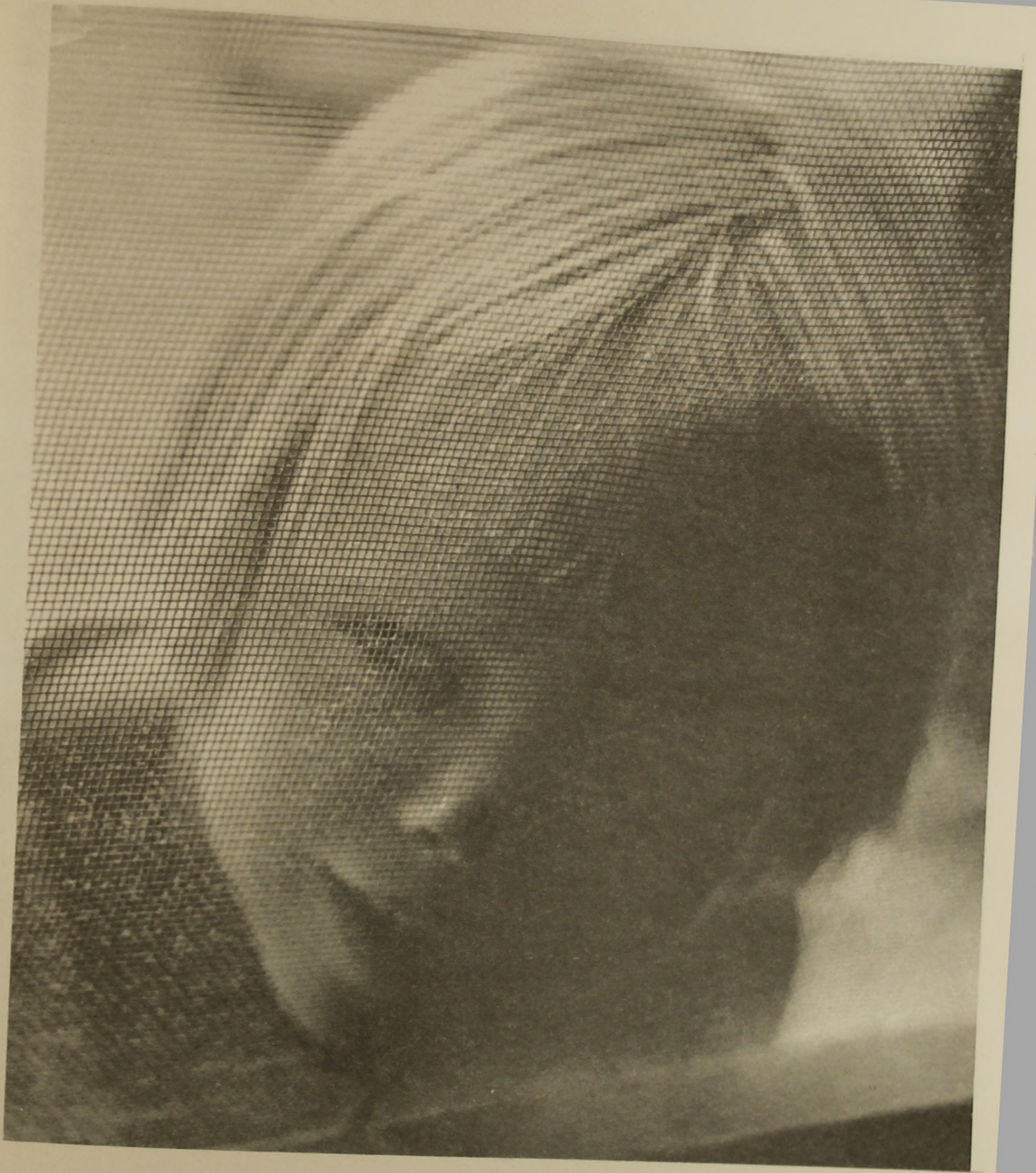
My eyes close, the impression of the sparkling light is still there.

I must paint faster to keep up with the movements under the sun.

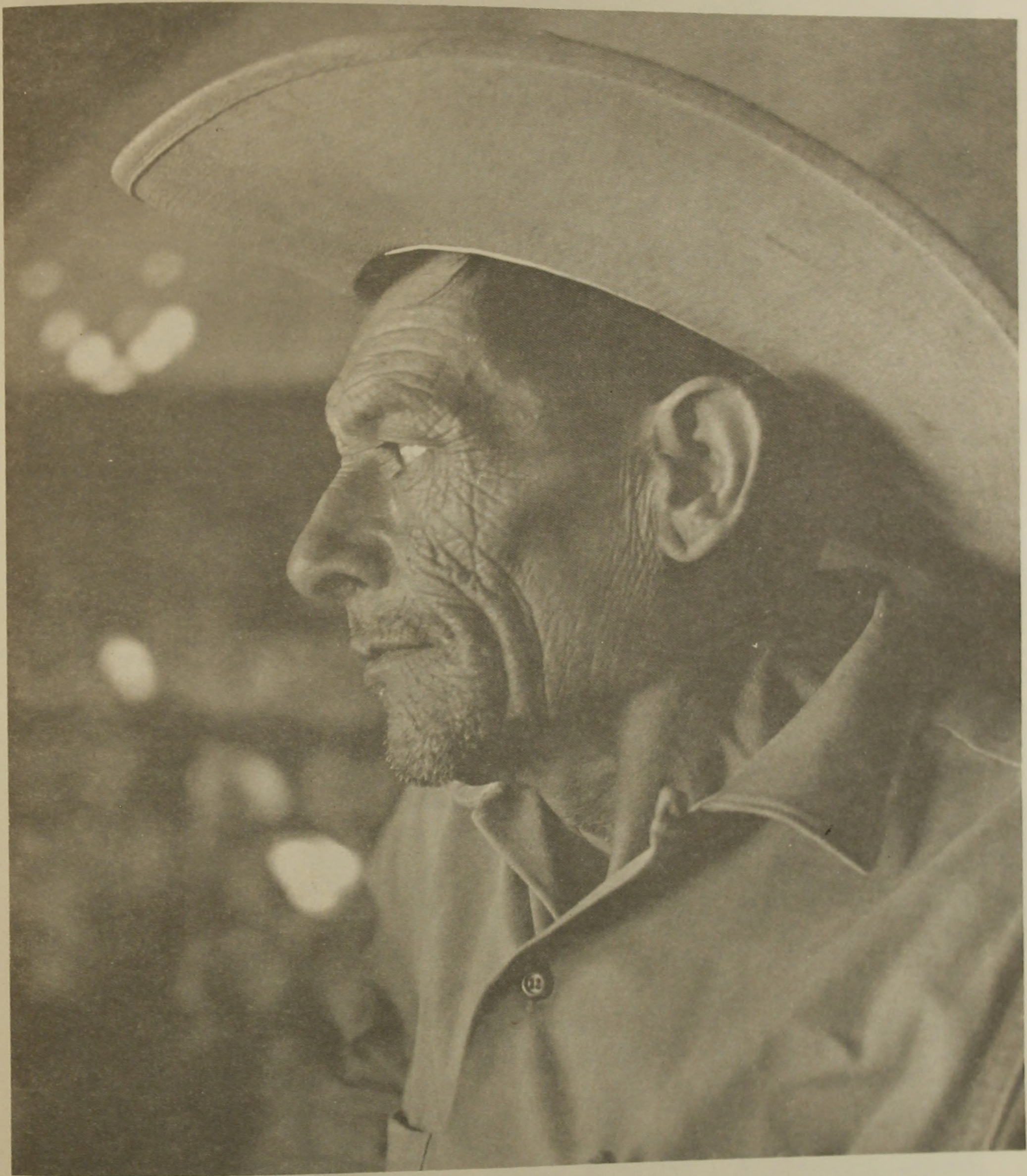
My eyes burn from the light.
I swim in the moving fields, the light throws me around, the color draws at my soul;
But I must keep up: the heat, the heat.
The color leaves; It is all alive; I must get it,

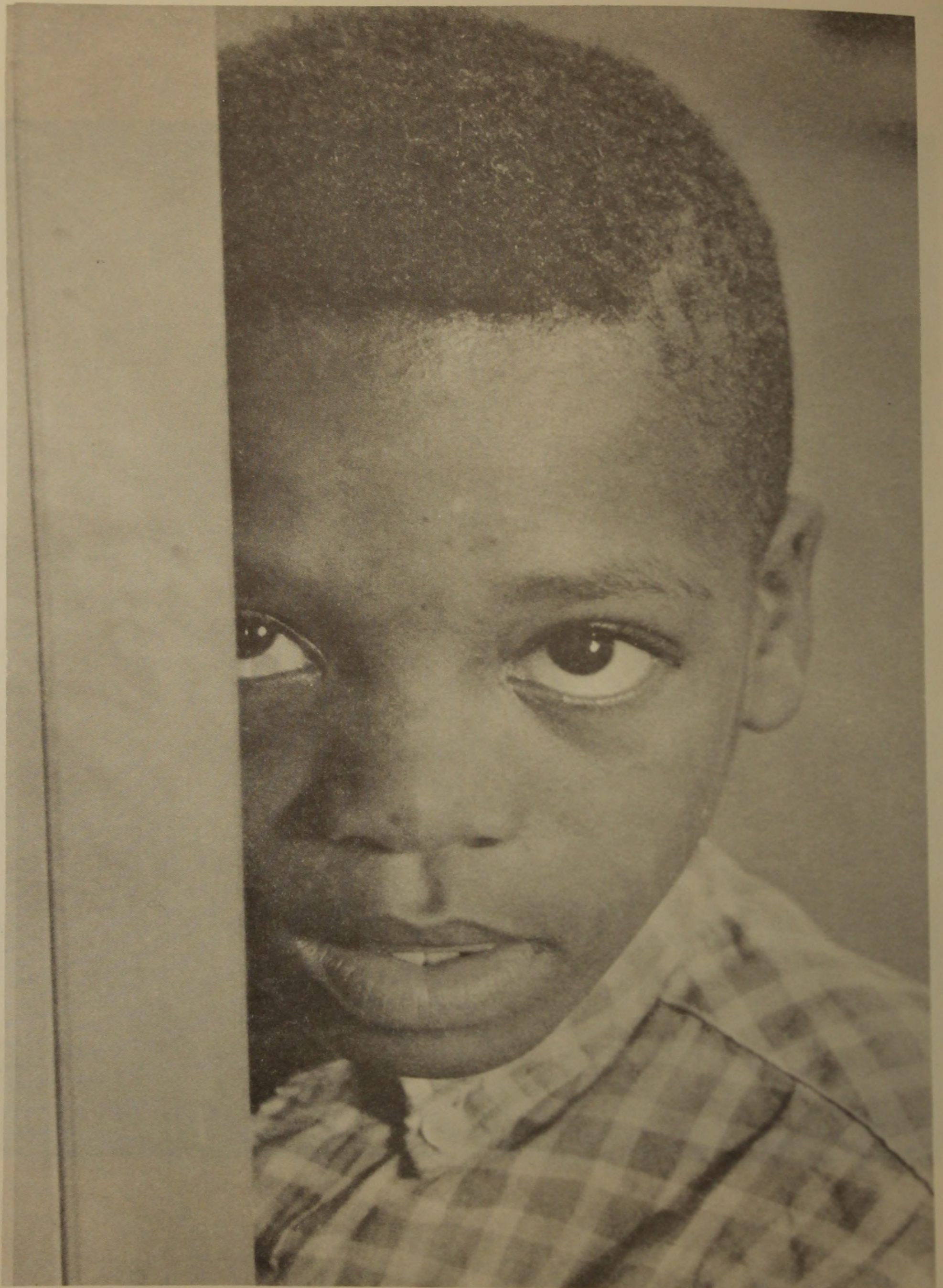
My body strains as the pace increases.
I just cannot give enough.

—Mike Nelson









I HAVE BUT A FLOWER

*I have but a flower
a reminder of days of old
that went untold
the beauty of which has
faded with time
but shall forever be mine
a reminder of days long ago
though its radiance now gone
forever from sight
a sight which only mine eyes might see
but it is brighter and prouder now
than some may ever be
This wilted flower
which crumbles at touch
has died as all must
but as my eyes lie to rest on thee
tears are brought forth
for none to see
for they are the tears
for the years so long ago
and of the one I loved so
who like the flower
has passed away with time
but lives on in mind
Both were proud
and both are dead
and tears now I shed
for the one I loved so
and for you flower
the only reminder
of the untold love we shared
these tears you
may only see
and only you
may bring.*



—Milton Hamlin

TWO REFLECTIONS AND A RECOLLECTION

I

barking dogs in the night
 piercing screams of
 sirens
a peculiar yet familiar smell
 of life emanating from lifelessness
the hum of the monster-like
 street sweeper
drunken laughter
 flashing neon
 go go goodyear
 beer on tap
we never close
 the promise of the restless city

II

standing gazing in at the salt sea candy
 being maimed and abused
 by a false mechanization
of this whole existence
i realized for the first
 or perhaps the last
time
 how complexity has smothered
the simplicity which i adore
and then the immense contract
 between the two sides of
 this life overwhelms me
as i listened the one last time to the soft restless roll
of the atlantic
 almost stifled now by the drunken shouts
of the sailors
 whose axistence only ricochets off
the sea of life like the smooth stone of aristotle

THE WORDS OF MR. JOYCE

With the light of the dawn, the breath of the hallway became greater and the length shortened leading to sure fate for those who might find hope and fortune and satisfied mind for the day. The duties of the early day were completed and put away to be used and tested and soiled until tomorrow and another day. The walls echoed "pill call" and the floor, the ceiling and all the corners hushed to listen to the early morning melody of open doors and was still as the fellow patients searched the morning papers or old magazines and waited the call of breakfast which was to be fed downstairs.

The shuffled papers rattled while the empty stomach cavities growled, making unaware the footsteps breaking slightly with every stride as Mr. Joyce, whispering, muttering, spoke with the silence of the passageway now growing long, growing narrow, growing afraid, growing lonely:

It is the Goddam truth and God in heaven above
knows it, too, that it is nothing but the living
damn truth. I don't believe there is a court or jury anywhere that
would convict a man and believe what you said. That would
convict a man in sin.
It is the living truth.

Of whom, about whom, against whom, with whom did this gentle man speak with babbling words and chatter? Was it mother, stepfather Ovie, Aunt Lockie, or Mrs. Joyce? Only the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and the doors who shut their rooms away in secret shared the despair, dejection, despondency with which Mr. Joyce spoke.

What was the living truth? Was the light that prevailed during the day the answer or only an illusion in which Mr. Joyce talked to people, ate, labored among others, and wrote (in another's pen) letters home.

For in the mid of the evening, the sun fell away casting only shadows on the ceiling, against the walls, into the floor to be trampled upon by the slow and unsteady footsteps leading the tiles down into the deep corridor.

The doors became afraid and quickly closed into the surface of the walls. The light switches alone, were brave enough to protrude into the path of the false image coming closer and farther away.

The end of the hallway drew farther away and smaller in perimeter until the walls, floor and ceiling swelled and became a spiral of no end.

The footsteps moved far into its depth and returned to go again and again until Mr. Joyce would tire of the whispers that now were stereoed as the strides became longer and spoke the words of Mr. Joyce:

People know how you live. People watch you, and
they know what you do and the kind of life you
live; the lies you tell. Sin! in! Sin! You're
living in sin; that is all it is and God in heaven
above knows it is the living truth. Why would you put
me in a place like this hell to exist and die?
It's the Goddamn living truth and God in heaven
above knows. It's the living truth, living truth,
sinning and the living truth . . .

Listen as the day rooms, dormitories, baths and nurses' station gossip, only gossip, only gossip as the never ending hallway echoes and whispers of sin and living truth—the words of Mr. Joyce.

THE FOURTH SHADOW

The rain had left the sky quite bare,
For only a few stars had made appearance there.
The street lights dispersed through the last drop of rain,
And cast three shadows about me on the ground.

One was tall and dark and thin;
Two was much shorter and slightly dim;
Three was tallest of all but almost vanished in the grass.

One of these characters must be me.
But just which one of the daring three?
The light will soon fade away for now,
And my answer be found somehow!

Just before the light was lost
The three were as one;
Perhaps the whole of me.

I walked slowly on
Puzzled by this plight,
Then, I turned and looked
And behind was another
Who followed me home that night.

—Eddie Vickers



THE HOSPITAL CEMETERY

Behold! Before me lay
In dry sand and broken stone
Held by roots of wilted branches,
The evidence of the last deception — the hospital cemetery.

Iron stobes, named with numbers,
Bearing rust of loneliness,
Why stand you bent, tilted, guilty
Of the sin you cannot repent?

Why like troopers do you follow
Across the barren, eroded earth
To count the dead that for fear of knowing
Must be buried in secret death?

When did you first accept
The role to comfort, mourn, love
The forsaken bodies of those
Who sought a greater rest?

Did not the rain and thunder beat
Upon the stones and gravel
As in combat to make
The slight remembrance flee away?

Does the recollection of days past
Erode the heart of the living
That have placed you here
To record the fate of the forgotten?

Was the burial performed in glory
When the clouds, the tempest ceased
And was the holy scripture read
To put the mind, the heart at ease?

Does the same of pine boxes
Filled with wrinkled skin and bone
Decay with the storms of peace
While the mound of earth does sink?

Thus after days of torture, cruelty,
The final resting place was made;
Making the end of the story
Seem taken care of in the grave.

—Eddie Vickers



WINTER WARMTH

The warming pan by the fireplace hung,
And the old iron kettle a lazy tune sung;
The flames of the fire danced with glee,
And the children in its warmth, laughed merrily.

Out side the cabin it was dark and cold,
And approaching the cabin was an old man, bold;
He peered at the windows, at the door he knocked,
But the windows were bolted and the door was locked,

This cold, old man was old man winter,
And the warmth of the fire wouldn't let him enter;
As he turned from the cabin, he shrugged his shoulder
And the weather outside began to grow colder.

POEMS FROM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

I
(for don van dam)

titles on the rooftops the
rising hills

chimney the winding street
wharf
ripples at sparkling distance

sailboats her
where the water ends

numerous

people

spread-out sails

white as wings

II
(for tram combs)

Fruit on the waterfront
St. Thomas the blue sky
over the unloading
the ships'
slow rock a warm rhythm

as if the colors were pale
the crowds of white piers
span the flashing blue holding
men and is water deep where
feeds the fish this near

thin

even the sidewalks are full
where the movement is endless
choked up, running away

where the sea fills up the sea



III
(for clet gundy)

the night running
stars, and
later, the moon

the soft
of its light around
the buildings becomes warm
cross-weave of
phone wires

the signs flap in the wind

on the ships the painted
stacks, weaving sleepy sailors

the sea's rhythm

steady or wild
it is to be felt it is
a woman

down by the store
also framed in blue, steep
sidewalks, the cracked
sidestreets, different
lights

around frenchtown

the night was a simple coat
stretching fingers
and arms

the moon had watched it all

—roger sauls



a turtle in a white balloon

Why, why, the thousands of spectators screamed. (Excuse me; I must be exact.) Why, why, why, the three thousand four hundred ninety two and a half spectators screamed.

They screamed while they leaped from the grandstands onto the green grass. Only sixty eight were trampled to death, plus the one half, for she had only one leg and could not easily run.

Still screaming why, why, why, the herd ran to the matador (Don Guillo) and pleaded for the turtle's sake. For the turtle, they pleaded, for the turtle.

The matador, never listening, tossed away his orange froufrou cape, and he lifted the green-blue turtle from its aquarium. Matador Guillo's very sexy assistant (of shapely hips and tender lips) filled a white balloon with water and presented it to her very sexy employer.

Not hearing his audience's screams and gasps, Don Guillo put the turtle into the white balloon. Seventeen hundred ladies fainted (and sixty-six men). Everyone else ran from the arena, tearing their hair out.

Matador Guillo was carried with the mob and immediately murdered. (They blew up a tire, filled it with water, and put him into it.)

But the turtle, Alone, in an empty arena, the turtle in a white balloon remained.

If he punctured the balloon, his water soaked into the ground.

If he didn't puncture the balloon, he soon consumed all his oxygen.

Why, why, why, screamed the turtle.

when you get a friend to join

We keep score for business reasons.

Judge for yourself.

Uncommon discoveries occur when you pamper
yourself.

Why can't a woman's be like a man's?

Life is short.

Women are wonderful enough.

Never before has so much gone into
so little.

It's not fake anything.

Then, I know where I'm heading.

[The ancients, exploring beyond known
horizons, chose the scallop to
symbolize their quest.

Your profile reads "sophisticated."

How do you make 11,000 voices jump
30 miles?

You can tell he knows pedigreed
seed by the shirt he's wearing.

"You're not Alice."

What's guaneco inside, stormproof
outside and a apt to party as
to market?

You just can't trust an elephant to
deliver a message.

How elegant is simplicity.

You can't get the whole picture in
just a day or two.

—james lineberger

(*Ed. note: compiled from NEW YORKER ads.*)

eight and two (is, are) ten
allegories by james lineberger

on a log, cuckooing

Many eons ago, in a land of snow white mists, an urchin returned home after seeing the world, His clothes were more ragged, and he had gained two and a half pounds.

As he wiped his feet on the ratten doormat, his mother opened the door, spanked his bottom, and snapped, your supper is cold; where have you been?

The little one knew if he told the truth she wouldn't believe it. So he said, to Afghanistan, stabbing wild elephants with my wild knife.

Where have you been, the mother repeated.

Out in Egypt, learning how to belly dance. And I fell in love with a browned harem lady, mumbled the boy traveler.

Where have you been?

Oh, I ran to the drugstore for a double ice cream cone (one scoop chocolate, one scoop vanilla), and I got stranded on a stool top that wouldn't stop spinning.

Where have you been?

At Sam Fong's noodle factory, making egg noodles to send hungry yellow people in the Baptist Church.

Where have you been?

On a log, cuckooing.

THE BASIC ONENESS

The basic oneness of a warped pot
Yawn in monotone overtones
The chewing battles of mankind
Shattered in collected jiblets of hardened clay
dropped piece by piece in surrounding crinkles
That shout the same crinkle in varying depths

Words merge, thoughts merge
the whole conception of ideas merge
dropped piece by piece
wet by the common water of disillusion
and dissolve into the frail weakness of
a human bond

The pieces cry their independence — their uniqueness
their abundant knowledge of human nature itself
the liquid quenches their thirst
oversaturates their porous sides
attaches one to one in a common cry
that has no division
an unintelligible mumble
uttered from a common mouth

—Gail Allen

