Spring 1980

The Carroll Quarterly, Spring 1980

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LOVE'S FOOLS

When seeing prancing stars through dancing eyes
And feeling passion's heat melt walls of ice
Or dreaming Life's a song to rhapsodize,
Recall Love's Fools: remember one's advice.
Beware the poet's rhyme and minstrel's tune;
Trust not your soul to sonnets softly sung;
Entranced by Love's sweet sadness who's immune
To yearning sighs and pangs of heart cords stung?
Enraptured lovers' sanguine anguish shows
With days which pass like years between each kiss.
But he, who trusts a love that she outgrows,
May find himself balanced on a precipice.
If in such straits, buffoons--recall, pay heed:
Love's motley's worn by many fools who bleed.

Ray Dubray

THE CARROLL QUARTERLY

SPRING 1980

The CARROLL QUARTERLY is a literary magazine produced by an undergraduate staff, and written by the students, alumni and friends of John Carroll University. Manuscripts should be sent to the English Department.

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PURE MORNING

Alarming bells pound the morning ear;
Sluice of sun sears the morning vision.
Serene matron unfolds from the long, dark bed of night,
Austere sheets, soaked with light that
Soon will flap in lines like clouds across the sky.
Ice-cold milk poured floats severed peaches,
Orange slices of orchard sun.
Through the window:
Clean, white pouter skirts about the bath,
Startled under sub-sonic planes.
In the window sill, between closed glass,
A spider excretes its thin web
Once more toiling in the capricious light of earth.

DAS AMARYLLISLIED

Mit zitternder Hand schnitt ich den Stengel und
sah ihn wachsen--draussen in dunkler Stille
schliefen sie--aus einem Samen in Moos und Lehm,
kaum hielt sich die schwere Knospe auf dem schwachen
Stengel, neigte sich tief in die wärmenden Strahlen.

Ich wachte und durchwanderte die weisse Wüste,
hartnäckige Winde rissen die Leine mir aus der
Hand, ein eisiges Etwas griff mir ans Herz, als
zaghafte Musik die Luft bewegte und der roten
Blüten Trompeten den Zeitgriff schmelzte, da
wuchs mit zärtlichem Schauder das Amaryllislied.

/Trembling, I cut the stem and saw it
return--as dark silence befell the
earth--from one seed in loam and peat,
its heavy buds bowed low to the sun;

and I awoke from the silence of walks, of
cold winds pulling at my heart as faint
music filled the air, red cluster trumpets
melted time's grip, and with gentle shudder
the Amaryllis song stirred./

NOW, HOURS LATER
(After the slide show of two artists)

Now, hours later--
between wonted motions and
the bronchial sound
of the coffeemachine--
I fade from myself,
from my kitchen,

and the projector echoes slides;
common dailies set in space,
scattered between light and shade,
early works of the artist who
now paints ideal abodes
stone by stone, who ventures
inside to fancy without
tripart windows, towers
and gables enclosed below
with green-ivyed fence
a garden of roses where
an iron gate opens and I ascend
unto the romanesque portal.

And the slides move faster--
into the home of my soul
where the embryo grows,
the primeval seed, forever
alive and sustained,
where animal shapes evolve
as nether parts of my soul,
as mother-image with
full ripe breasts.
My sould spins along
sucked into the dark tunnel
of a whirl, reels toward
source and destiny, ascends
Dante's spiral and alights home,
lies limpid in her room
among three cows on the slide
to move out within fiats of shapes
now within me, woman, embodied.

I sink into the earth
I am soil
I am dust
immortal yet bound
I am the abɔde of the undying sprout.

SUDDEN DEATHS

Jim Gorman

My mother winks at me and says, just a pinch of baking soda, that's the secret. I tell her I've been told there are other secrets, like vinegar. She says, who's teaching whom here; baking soda keeps everything fresh. That's the only secret. And she winks at me again.

We are making a pie. I am 25 years old, her youngest child; she is 64 years old, or 65, or 66, depending on which document you have in your hands or upon her whim at the time. It is a late summer afternoon, a warm, close day, perhaps too warm to bake, but since it was my idea, something I wanted to do, or learn to do before my drive back to Ohio, my mother has indulged me. She has always indulged me.

I measure the flour and salt and begin kneading in Crisco. My mother reaches across my shoulder to sprinkle the dry dough with baking soda. Then she opens the bag of apples, accepting only the firmest, and begins peeling away the red skin from the creamy fruit. Her fingers trust the knife's edge while her eyes watch me. I am watching the dough and my fork, but from being her son for so many years, I can feel her eyes on me. I watch my hands. In the center of both our right hands, there is a dark mole. None of her other children, my three older sisters, have one on either hand. The mole makes me her special child. When I was young, she was fond of taking my hands into hers, holding the backs of them up near her face, and telling me that the mole on my right hand would some day move. I'd wake up one morning and find it on my left hand. Then my life would be changed. It had happened to her. Her mole had switched from her left to her right hand when she was 27 or 28 or 29, the year before she married my father.

My mother lights the oven, bending, holding a wisp of her grey hair away from the flame of the match. In the space of four or five minutes, while we wait for the oven to heat, she tells me the story of her mother. As she talks she plays with an apple and won't look at me. I carry the crusty bowls to the sink and pretend to busy myself washing them, but a slight hesitation in her voice as she starts tells me to leave the bowls alone. I stand at the sink, looking away from her out the window at the street where I grew up and at my new car, and listen to her. It is a simple story, she says, and it all happens in the months following the war, as if my grandmother

didn't exist or my mother couldn't remember her prior to the war. The story is about my grandmother's four sons, all of them younger than my mother, all of them dead now. Each served overseas, two in Europe, two in the Pacific. Only one, my Uncle John, was wounded, a minor wound in the thigh. Every night of the war, while my grandfather listened to the radio for news, my grandmother and my mother went together to a dark bedroom and prayed the rosary for the safe return of the boys. My grandmother knew all odds were against her. With four sons in combat, how many could she hope to have back? She spent the days of the war tormenting herself. Which one, which two would not return? Toward the end of the war, she told my mother of her bargain with God. She had asked Him to spare her sons and to take her in their place. And yet, because she knew she was cheating God, she despaired. What was one old woman's life to bargain for four young men? My mother didn't expect God to take her mother seriously, but in the weeks following the war, with three of her sons home and Johnny safe in a hospital in New Jersey, my grandmother took sick, something mysterious in her stomach, her gall bladder or something rupturing her spleen. But it was none of these; it was something as simple as her appendix. Her doctors did not find it, though, and she died on the third night while Johnny was still below Albany on the train.

I fell in love with my mother at the age of 13 or 14 or 15. I remember sneaking around the attic, looking for her wedding pictures and finding, at last, not one or two or three, but a cedar-lined boxful, 15 or 20 pictures in gilt frames. Most of them were the same size, oil-tinted copies of the photograph that had hung for years on her bedroom wall. Its recent disappearance had begun my search. This was the official wedding portrait: my father in his dress uniform, already a heavy, balding man, lightly touching my mother as if she were a doll. Her dress is silly, I thought then; its train fans out in front of her like a cloud, hiding her feet. She looks as if she might at any moment rise out of the picture, out of my father's hold. But there is nothing dreamlike about her face; her left eye is drawn together in a devilish squint, the beginning of a wink, her smile is relaxed to the point of indulgence, her lower lip open and moist. These portraits were framed and tied in packages of three or four, copies to be sent to relatives, I guessed, but never sent.

At the bottom of the box I found an envelope of prints and negatives, pictures I had never seen of the honeymoon in Niagra Falls. There were a dozen of my father in uniform, my father in bright, flowery short-sleeved shirts, my father before the Falls in ridiculous poses. And three or four of my mother in quiet poses. Very

seldom did she smile or wink at father's camera. Instead her large brown eyes are wide open; they dominate her thin serious face. From these pictures I learned that I was my mother's son. My sisters were fair-haired and plump, my father's blue-eyed girls. I was dark-eyed and angular. I could see my body under my mother's loose dresses. We were both a series of lines and points, hips and shoulders and knees. My mother had grown heavy, grown away from looking like me, grown plump and grey like my father with the bearing of each succeeding child.

When I was barely sixteen, a sophomore in high school, my father died of a heart attack. My youngest sister had just gone away to college. My mother and I lived alone in our big house. We could afford it because my father's life insurance paid off the mortgage and because she received an exemption on the property tax as a veteran's widow. She began working again, returning to the Undergarment, a clothing factory where she had worked before and during the war. She worked as a floor lady moving around all day, directing the work of others. She knew the machines and the fabrics, and knew when a boss had set a rate on a job too high or too low. And she could tell an honest woman from a slacker.

While my father was alive, he drove the car everywhere. After his death, my mother had to teach herself to drive again. We owned a '66 Buick, the first automatic transmission she had ever driven. As she drove, she would keep reaching for the shifting lever and would marvel as the car shifted itself. In a few months, she discovered I had taught myself to drive the Buick by backing in and out of our garage and down the driveway while she was working. She encouraged me to get my license, and once I did, she handed me the keys and had me drive us everywhere.

My mother came to America when she was two or three or four years old. Her baptism certificate, an elaborate hand-printed Italian document, says she was two years old; her papers from Ellis Island say she was four. The year was 1917, the middle of World War I. My mother and her parents were officially refugees. They lived in Bergamo, a village north of Milan that had been taken and then abandoned again by the Austrian army eight or nine times. My grandfather owned a tailor shop. He had been ruined early in the war, having made six or seven hundren uniforms for the Italian army, but never being paid. He took loans from his two unmarried brothers, to put himself back in business he told them. Instead he took his family south to Genoa and arranged for passage to America, paying a friend to get his family a spot on a refugee ship.

My mother says she can't remember the crossing, or Ellis Island, or the three or four months she and her parents stayed with a cousin in Brooklyn. She says she can remember Troy where they lived with more cousins who owned a fish market. Her oldest brother was born there and she remembers her mother nursing him while her aunts and cousins cleaned fish in the back room of the market. When America entered the was on the side of the Allies, my grandparents moved to our hometown, an industrial village on the New York-Vermont border, to take jobs in a combine factory that had been rapidly converted into a munitions plant. My grandmother refused to learn English; when the war was over, they were going back to Bergamo. Her husband had promised, after all. She, not my grandfather, was the first to notice that the gadgets they were assembling each twelve-hour day were timing devices, parts of bombs to be dropped soon, she said, on Bergamo and Milano and the rest of Italy. My grandfather told her that America had entered the war on the side of Italy, not against it, but she wouldn't listen to anything about sides. He called her an obstinate woman. My mother saw very little of her parents during these months; she and her infant brother were boarded with an Irish neighbor, Mrs. Mulchahy, who taught my mother her prayers in English and some Irish and American songs and eventually enough of the new language to lead my grandmother around the grocery store.

A month ago, when my mother's doctor had removed a tumor from the bottom of her colon and she thought she was dying, and the house was full of us, my three older sisters and some of their husbands and many of their children and myself. My mother, waiting until she and I were alone in her hospital room, told me this story about Miriam Arism, her best friend when she was a girl. They met when they were 17, both having quit school to take jobs in the Undergarment. Every sewing job was a piece of work and soon my mother and Miriam were averaging 40 or 45 cents an hour because they were strong and could handle heavy garments like men's pants and coats all day. Miriam was the first Protestant girl my mother had ever met and she was just as polite and devout in her way as any Catholic girl. They worked together twelve years, from 1933 to 1945, sewing side-by-side on khaki Army uniforms the last four years. They were being paid well. They also spent much of their free time together, especially on Sundays, listening to the radio in each other's parlors and taking walks through the village streets which were crowded with groups of women, only women.

Miriam would talk of her boyfriend, Thomas O'Dea, a local boy who had hung around with them before the war. He was in France and wrote carefully detailed letters about the battles. She would read them to my mother.

Tom had an ease with other men. He could talk to anyone. Miriam called it a gift, a way of quickly establishing trust, even with strangers. His letters would be jammed with stories of other soldiers. He would describe a man in one letter, someone he had just met. My mother and Miriam would get down the Atlas and eagerly look up the man's hometown, Lima Ohio or Nashville Tennessee, and in the next letter Tom would tell them that the man had been killed.

After the war, Tom came home and courted Miriam and married her. It all happened in a matter of weeks. My mother was the maid of honor, stepping into the Methodist Church against her parents' wishes. Miriam and Tom drove south on their honeymoon. One day my mother got a post card from Philadelphia. They were having a fine time. The next day Miriam was dead; Tom had a car accident outside Hagerstown, Maryland. My mother tells me this story from her hospital bed in the early evening gloom. Beneath the covers she is hiding her rosary. She says, I'll never forget that name, Hagerstown. It sounds like a rough palce. Then she tells me that Tom O'Dea came back to our town after the accident--where else would he go? And that he tried to be friendly with her as in the old days before the war, and wanted to take her places he and she and Miriam had gone, but she never wanted to go anywhere with him.

Before her operation, I talk to my mother's doctor. He draws a U on a cafeteria napkin and a hairy circle at the bottom of the U. The circle is my mother's tumor, a massive fist of cells pushing outward, displacing her other organs. He thinks he can get it all. Odds are, he says. When I look at my mother I cannot see the circle; I see only a line that stretches down the middle of her body. For weeks she doesn't eat, for she can't get rid of what she eats. In the hospital bed, her arms are all I see; they are sticks, black and blue sticks bruised by needles. She doesn't trust her doctor, or pretends not to trust him, fearing his optimism is a lie. In the weeks before the operation, I come to believe her. Her body resists all attempts to strengthen it; it doesn't want to be opened. She is disappearing, I think. Her body is shrinking inward to meet the line of cancer. In another month we will have nothing to bury.

The loss of weight makes her look younger as well, more like the woman in the honeymoon snapshots. Her thin, drawn face begins to look like her mother's face. Her flesh has fallen away to show me my grandmother's bones, the sharp cheeks, the prominent line of upper teeth. Neither woman looks Italian; even when smiling, both look oriental, primitive, fierce. I realize these resemblances

from the picture of my grandmother that is encased in glass on the front of her gravestone. It is a month after my mother's operation. My mother and I have stopped at the cemetery on our way home from the hospital. We are carrying baskets of flowers, those still fresh enough to save. Instead of bringing them home to remind her of the hospital, she wants to place them here on the graves of her parents and brothers and husband. It is raining a bit, a fine, soft, warm, summer rain. My mother hasn't been outside in eight weeks. I hold an umbrella above her and tell her we should hurry, that she might catch cold. She says, don't be silly, and takes her rosary from her purse. She crosses herself. I hear the familiar Ave Maria, and hear her voice descend into a language I no longer understand. I switch the umbrella into my left hand and cross myself with my right, but I don't pray. I look around. I am standing in New York State; straight in front of me and to the east are the soft green hills of southern Vermont clothed in a mist. I look at the faces of my grandparents staring at me from their place on the granite monument. The photos are old and have lost their detail; the glass bubble further distorts them. My grandmother seems to be looking at me and away from me at the same time, very concerned with me and yet quite indifferent. I look around at the rows of elaborate monuments, some of them larger than I am, some of them gaudy and graceless, expensive drains on the living. My mother catches me. She crosses herself, ending her prayers. For a moment we both look to our left, down a hillside where there are three or four fresh graves, their mounded dirt yellow in the rain. My mother winks at me and says, someone is always dying, and puts her rosary back in her purse.

I have packed to leave. My mother has constructed a flat cardboard box to hold the apple pie. We stand in front of the porch taking snapshots of each other; we are like lovers in a strange town, having no third person to take one picture of the two of us. I take two of her in the wicker rocker, then one of her in front of the roses. She is still weak and needs my arm to climb the three or four porch stairs.

We talk about her diet and her walking regimen. Her doctor wants her to walk two miles a day. He says the walking will encourage her body to replace the colon tissue he has removed. I have mapped out a route for her in the neighborhood, but she is afraid of dogs, afraid of turning her ankle on a bad sidewalk, afraid of meeting too many people too soon, people like her children who, when they heard the word cancer, had her buried with her parents and her brothers and her husband. For awhile, she tells me, she will walk only the length of our sidewalk.

the first of three daughters.

I load my bags in the car. The pie is on the front seat next to me. The sun is out; the lawn, which I mowed yesterday, sparkles with dew. It is earlier than I think.

The car is already warm and the aroma of pie fills it. My mother leans in to kiss me, one last kiss. She says, I think I'll do my walking now. I tell her not to over do. She scoffs at me and I drive away, going slowly up our street, watching her in the rear view mirror. She is in her first lap, walking steadily away from me, getting smaller.

DOWN BY THE LEDGES

Down by the ledges of the sandstone pier,
ore-boats falling out of my world,
I made a kingdom of afternoons
to shine in the faithful sun forever

and ruled beneath the surface gleam,
fathomed like a privileged otter,
limbs lightened in slow motion,
buoyed and free as in a dream,

an alien roc, my arms like wings
dividing cliffs of opal light
charting towns of wispy sand
that hide, outlandish, sacred things

or plunging like a crescent dolphin,
and then to rise, erupting, break
above adorned with trails of pearls
that flash from flesh, fingers golden

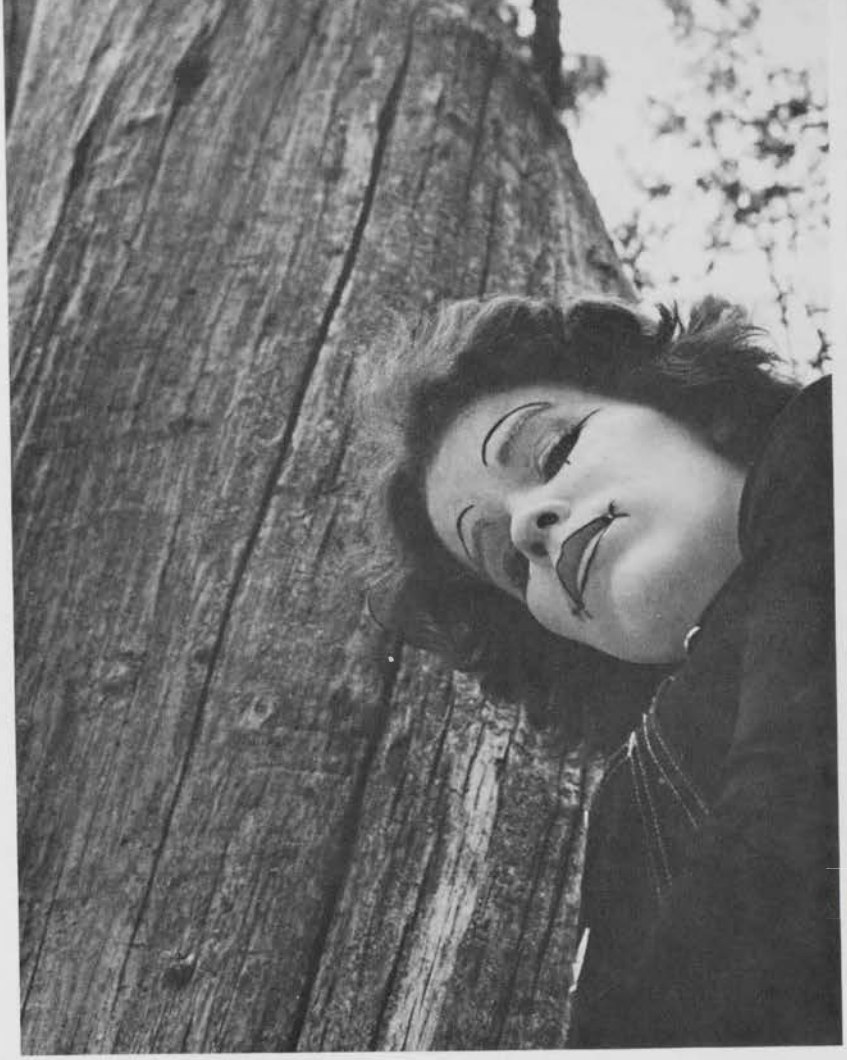
with the touch of underwater rock
felted with moss, my mind a deep
pleasure of power over days of green
without a threat of looking back

back in spaces of sun that are gone
before the stones slipped in the sand
when the only teacher of time's skill
was a rushing, magic setting of the sun.

OLD ISHMAEL

Old Ishmael, they called him,
because he lived alone
on a point at the far end of the bay,
and they fancied him to have been
one wounded by the sea.
He was, to the natives of the place,
harmless enough,
and though he scorned their petty ways,
he wasted little time
to laugh at their expense.
His eyes were ever searching sky and sea,
and it was said he could predict the storms.
When a gale hit, he stood a constant watch,
a vigil for the victims of the sea,
and in the storm's wake,
he steered his small skiff for the wrecks,
not like those who rooted amidst
the flotsom for some find,
but searching waves and broken decks
for signs of life.
Those he found alive do not forget
his silent, grey-bearded visage
as he lifted them in enormous arms,
and brought them, dazed, to the harbor's aid.

But this was not his only work--
after all who lived were safe,
he went back to comb the waters for the lost,
lifting them likewise, wrapping them as well,
and bringing them to rest, at last
on a rocky beach by the point;
there he buried them with awful ceremony,
and his sorrow thundered through him like the sea.



SECOND SECTION

When I went to the circus that had pitched on the waste lot
it was full of uneasy people
frightened of the bare earth and the temporary canvas
and the smell of horses and other beasts
instead of merely the smell of man.

. . . . .

Yet the strange, almost frightened shout of delight
that comes now and then from the children
shows that children vaguely know how cheated they are
of their birthright
in the bright wild circus flesh.

--D. H. Lawrence

TWO-RING CIRCUS

David Schultz

The old auditorium went dark and my three-year old nephew stood on his seat with one hand stuffed in his mouth and the other pointing at the glowing floor just below our feet. He was finally getting his circus wish.

The band sounded, wonderfully off-key, Mr. Ringmaster shouted over the cliche that this was the greatest show on earth, and out of the tunnel they came.

The elephants led the way. They looked almost holy, tired martyrs, stepping carefully beside the sloppy line of hard-muscled showgirls bulging from the unfair size of their raggedy red bikinis. The horses and chimps and dogs, wagging plumes and capes and showdust, prodded on by their trainers, reminded me of the half-willing queens who walk in the empty yellow lights on Euclid Avenue. I laughed. Who were they trying to kid? It was a job, no matter how they made it look. Even the clowns were bored.

Bobby was blown back by the parade and put his hand on my shoulder to steady himself. "Look, look, Uncle Rich!" he kept saying, but I was watching the workers set up the lion's cage away from the lights. I wondered how many times they had assembled the cage, and how much money they made.

I called a vender over and bought another large beer and a bag of salted peanuts. I worked into the peanuts and concentrated on balancing my cup while Wolfgang von Braun tamed the lions and tigers. The cats' bellies swung like waterbags and their eyes were fat like they had been overfed and given a sedative. If Wolfgang snapped his whip near enough and hard enough, one of the yawning cats would snarl reluctantly. When he put his head into the lion's mouth, Bobby's face collapsed and he lost his balloon.

"The lion's going to eat him!" he announced.

I laughed. Maybe Clyde Beatty risked his head in the old days, but there was no risk now. Not the way they've made pets out of the animals.

After Wolfgang, I took Bobby with me to the men's room and stayed in the outer hallway where you didn't see the

circus. I lit a cigarette and followed the aristocratic legs of a long woman pacing cooling in front of a pay phone while she played her tongue around an ice-cream bar. I smiled her way. We were by the souvenir stand and I bought Bobby a cowboy hat as part of a little bargain that he would let me smoke another cigarette before going back in.

He finally pulled me back inside in the middle of my third cigarette. The monkeys were on now in center ring, dressed in sailor suits, riding motorcycles for bits of banana. I laughed and bought another beer. Bobby was so lost watching the star chimp play the violin in a pink tuxedo that I was able to steal some of his precious popcorn. I thought he should have been asleep by now and I could have snuck him home without a fight. But he was still shining.

"How do they do all that stuff?" he asked me, bewildered by monkey genius.

"They learn fast," I said, "because they don't eat unless they do the right thing. They don't understand what they're doing."

I told him I wanted to leave but he wouldn't. So I bought him an ice-cream bar and drifted out to find the girl with the aristocratic legs. Maybe she needed a ride.

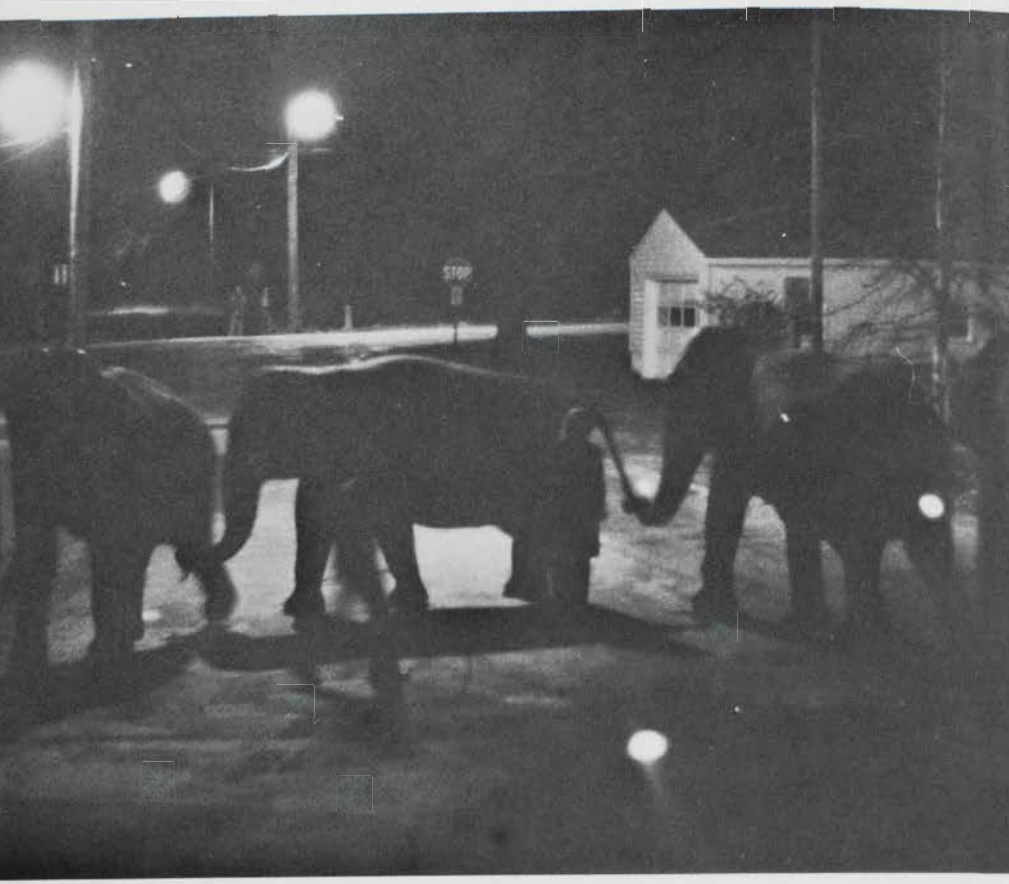
I don't know how long I was gone and I was glad to find him where I left him. I forgot about the girl. It was a stupid thing to leave him alone, I told myself. He didn't seem to notice me. I put my beer down and followed his eyes and saw the Fabulous Flying Fortunatos risking their lives for us on the high trapeze and I wanted to believe in it again and the old auditorium began to sway dangerously around the bright swinging figures, and then I saw they worked over a net. It was lousy laughing at the circus. I looked away to how it was when Aunt Dee took me and for one clear drunk moment I was afraid for the Fortunatos and I put my hand on Bobby's shoulder and I tasted all the colors and my mouth burned with the music and the smells. So small. So small.

The cold lights surprised me and I hurried out to the car to beat the rush, reminded of the envelope of job reports Ed Langer wanted in the morning. A load of work and I wasn't walking so well. Bobby straggled behind, scaring away lions and making monkeys do flips by fanning his balloon around like a whip. I hustled him into the car and revved up the engine. It was cold and black out.

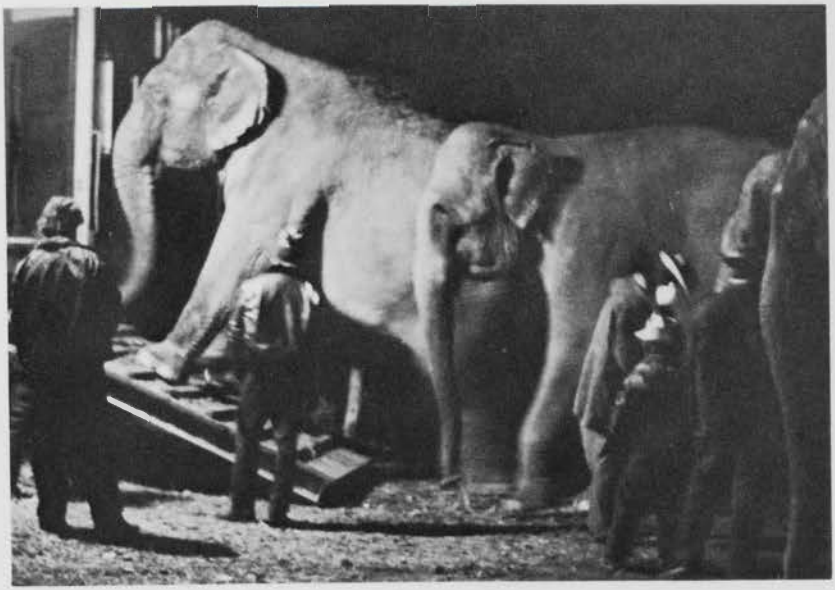
"Are we going to play Speed Racer?" he said, adjusting his cowboy hat, getting ready for some fast action.

"This is no time for games," I told him. "Just sit still while I try and get us out of here."

He refused to be quiet and kept bouncing on the seat--flying with the Fortunatos on the trapeze.



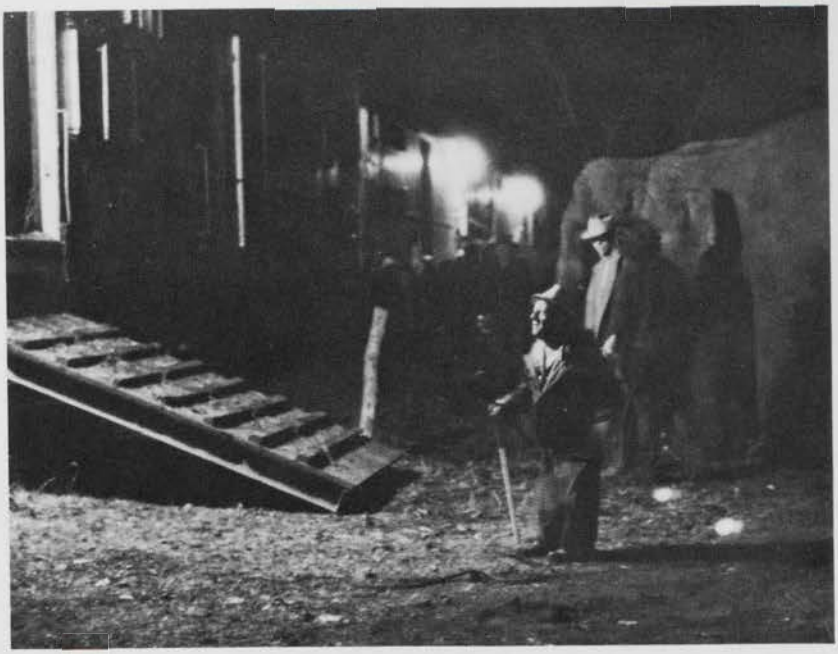
The elephants, huge and grey, loomed their curved bulk through the dusk . . .



and sat up, taking strange postures, showing
the pink soles of their feet and curling their precious
live trunks like ammonites . . .

and moving always with a soft slow precision

as when a great ship moves to anchor.



The people watched and wondered, and seemed to resent the mystery that lies in beasts.

from "When I Went to the Circus--"
D. H. Lawrence

She was a clown.
No, the whole circus.
Playing every role as if born
        to it,
Swallowing flaming swords,
Guessing my weight with painful accuracy,
She amused and enthralled everyone
But me.
I only saw the tightrope walk:
Performed without a net
To please me.

She pleases others now
Who let her fall and walk again.
I'm not surprised she's gone though:
When no one comes
The circus leaves town.

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