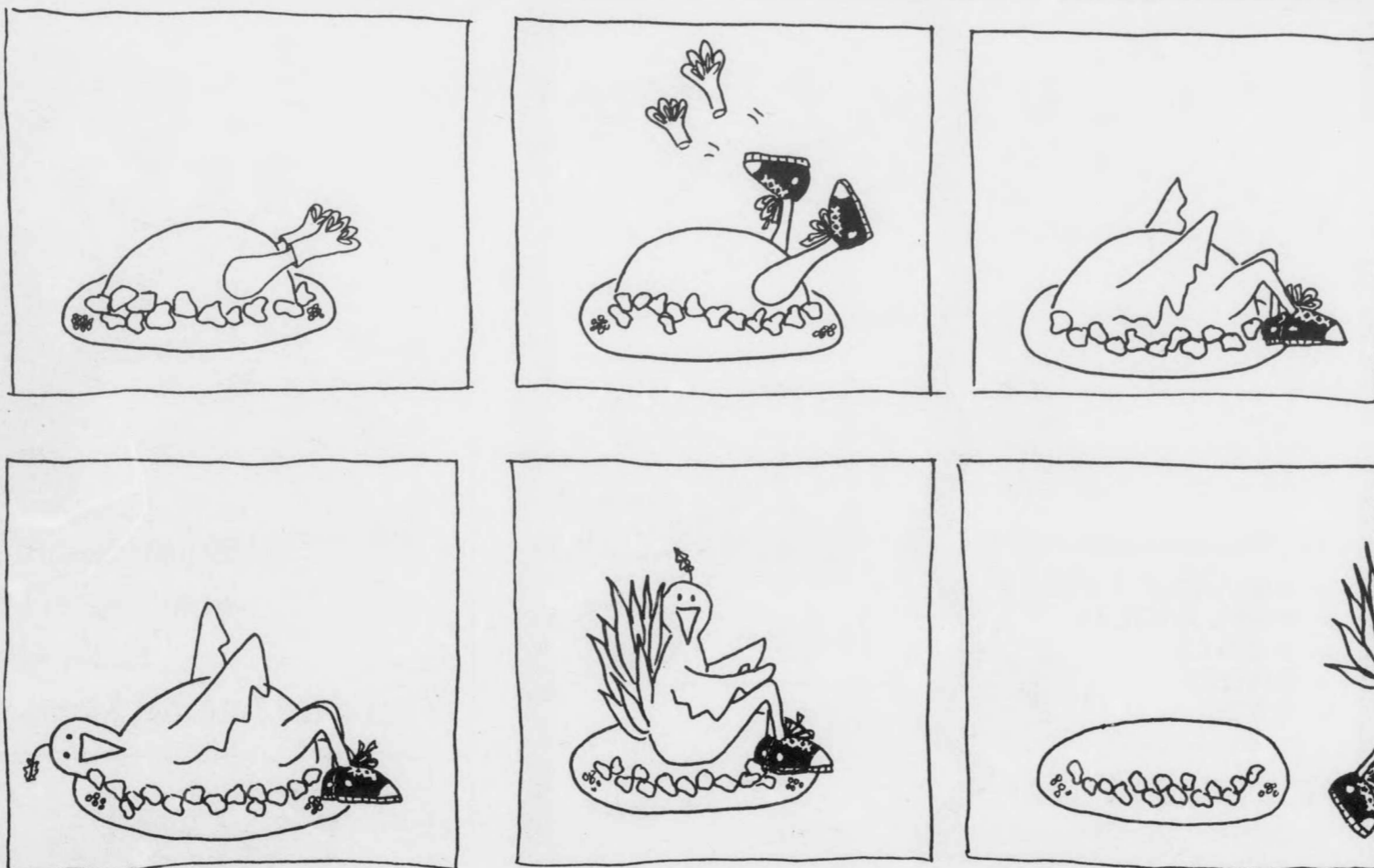


Happy Thanksgiving all you turkey people

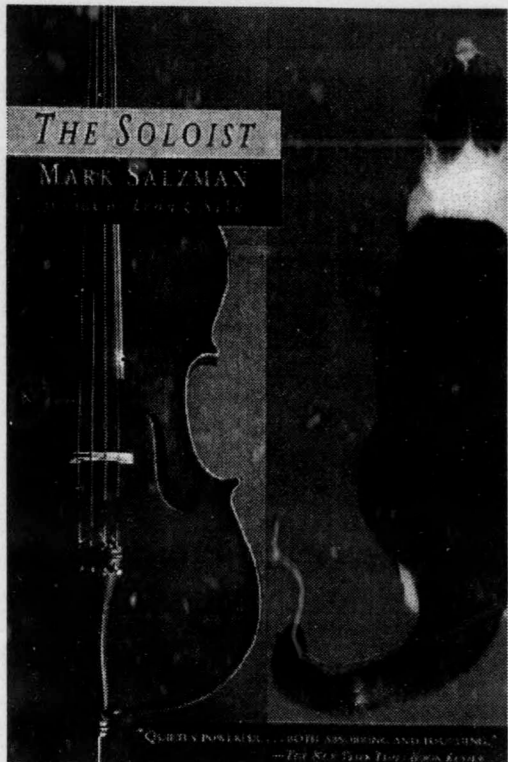


distractions 'toons by the funky nina botton



The Soloist Mark Salzman Vintage Books

by Mary Rogal-Black



The opening passag of *The Soloist* is an enthusiastic embrace. There is no gentle or familiar wooing of reader by writer, but instead, a fearless greeting: "Hello! I just know we're going to be good friends!"

The Soloist is Renne Sundheimer, a thirty-six year old professor of music. The promising career as a concert cellist he was propelled into at a young age by his talent and his mother has years since crashed and burned, and we find Renne in limbo, hopelessly waiting for his

musical gift to return. Salzman portrayal of the musician's inner life rings true, and is fascinating, simply for the glimpse into the mind of an artist.

Two changes in Renne's life prompt what we are to believe is the first movement in sixteen years, prompting an examination of his early experiences as a child prodigy and begin to bring him to an acceptance of what he has become. He takes on a young student, whose gift echoes his own, and he gets called for jury duty in a trial in which a young man is accused of killing his Zen master.

Written some time before O.J. became an historical event in American jurisprudence, the trial subplot of *The Soloist* has now gained a new layer of meaning. It is an inside view of a trial, as Renne narrates from the perspective of a juror. The strength seems to lie in Salzman's commentary on the factors that influence our judgement of other people. The contrast between the congenial personality of the male defense lawyer and the unfortunate ineffectuality of the female prosecutor, and Renne's conscious reaction to them is telling: "I felt myself resisting her arguments for the same reason that I don't like being talked into things by ungraceful people."

The implications of jury duty are explored by Salzman to a thought-provoking degree. The idea of making a decision about the guilt or innocence of a person, based on ambivalent testimony and the juror's personal perspective is compelling. And, in welcome relief from the O.J. trial, it is religion, not race, that is in question here.

At the same time, the court subplot illustrates why I want to call Salzman a promising young author rather than a truly captivating writer. The court scenes seem unnatural, as though they've been carefully researched and Salzman is unwilling to stray from what he is sure is authentic. If he had taken a bit more poetic licence with the trial, he may have better maintained some of the artistic excitement he started out with.

continued from page 14

glad that I was teaching Gloria English because the English Institute system is still weak in Korea. She says Gloria is happy about it too. She signed off by saying Take care in Korea and Good Luck. It was a beautiful note, and I felt quite moved by it. I asked one of the Korea teachers to write me a thank-you know, and I signed it and gave it to Gloria.

I've put some ginseng tea in a small box and am sending it to you. I'm sure you'll like it.

Oh, dancing was tonight, and I've just returned in the last hour or so. We went to a classy place and rented a song room. It has a Karioke machine in it. We also danced in the main room. It was fun, but too expensive.

I still miss home heaps. Bits of scenery here will remind me of Canada sometimes. I feel comfortable here, though. The language barrier is a little frustrating sometimes, but it isn't too bad. I am aware of standing out in a crowd here (the only white person for miles, sometimes), but being surrounded by all Asian people doesn't make me feel lonely or alienated.

Your friend across the ocean,
Marcus

A Harvey's hamburger is not art.

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