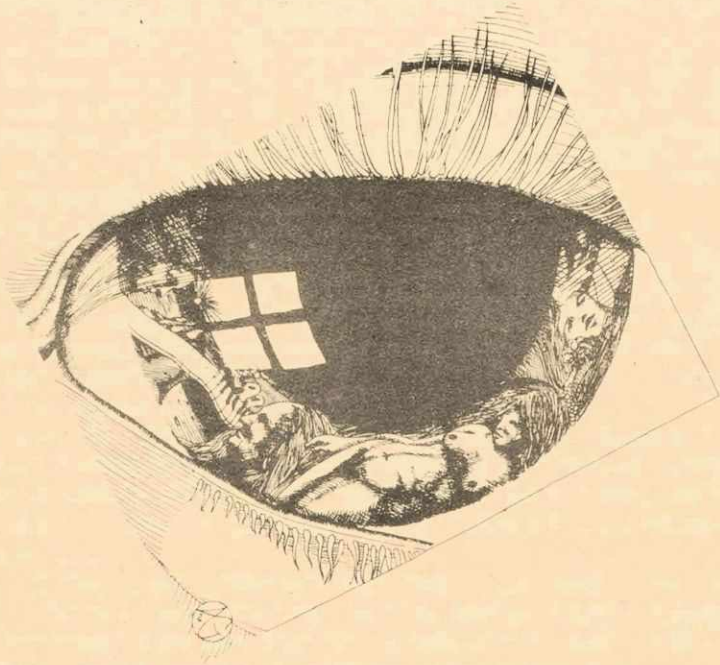


Rain

by bruce m. lantz



The rain fell softly. Not fast enough to irritate or bring forth a barrage of umbrellas, but just enough to blur the dismal upsurge of urban construction. The bricks and dull grey mortar were wrapped in such a haze that one could almost neglect the existence of these testimonials of civilization, or at least pass them off as a series of ghostly mirages.

The city-dwellers relied on the rain to help them forget their sodden lives, lives which were not unlike drops of water: ceaselessly falling with no rise in sight. For most of these people scurrying through the early evening toward their home fires and frightening papers, life was not as bad as it might be, nor was it as good. In fact it was hardly life at all, but a kind of existence which discouraged any thought for fear of what might rise out of the dead and buried aspirations of not too many years past.

So it is little wonder that these, with their quiet chains and invisible bars, failed to notice a tiny slip of a woman pressed against the darkest shadow of a tobacco shop entrance. With the timidity of a starving mouse she edged a few steps forward from her retreat to peer round the street corner and, in doing so, enabled a well-placed street lamp to capture her features in its faded yellow glow.

To give her age as twenty-two would seem to be an accurate estimation until you saw her eyes. To be sure, they were the only notable feature in an otherwise plain picture: they were large and round and a delightful shade of hazel — the kind of eyes to fall in love with, only no one ever did.

Those eyes were hard and brittle; they didn't look, only glanced, and then ran away. There was shame in those eyes. They had never looked upon a loving home and tender parents — but they knew the life of the street well, too well. The hard life and easy death, never knowing when the next dollar comes, knowing all too well just how it will come, and often not giving a damn about either — that was the life of those eyes.

They were accompanied by a set of tiny wrinkles, but these were not from worry. Oh to have worries! How can you worry when you have no choice, no alternatives to be weighed. These wrinkles came from the steadfast knowledge that tomorrow would inexorably follow today, and it would all be the same.

Time after endless time, this woman of the rain-swept night was drawn from the security of her nook by the sharp staccato of approaching footsteps, but inevitably she returned, downtrodden still further by the blunt club of refusal. Who was this image in the night and what was her purpose? How could she stand there in the dark, through a downpour of rain and refusals? The only sad reward for her efforts was a laugh, a nod, a joke, but always nothing; in the end there was nothing.

Perhaps she could still recall when the rain had given her shelter as she waited for a lover who, for a brief moment, had held and caressed her existence with his hands. Where was he now, with all his faults? Where was the someone who could know her, who could be kind and gentle and pretend to understand? Where was anyone? Who could tell her that she was living in a world that felt no pity for one small woman that didn't fit? Where was the one who could show her that there can be no room for a perpetual loser with a sensitive nature? The passwords belong to those who are hard and cold and quick. She could know none of them, but no one told her.

At regular intervals a muffled ringing wavered across the soggy air, telling all who cared to listen of the inexorable passage of time as it moved through the darkening night, carrying all before it. This, if nothing else, placed the woman on equal ground with humanity itself: they were all rushing toward a time when there would only be fear — a kind of terror at the unknown. She would be equal with the best of them then, but would that day ever come? It seemed so long. All that time could do for her now was to add deep lines to a harsh face as footsteps came and went. Only the woman was still and quiet in her place.

And no one came. No one stepped out of the rain with a warm smile and a friendly arm. The night could give her the shelter and strength of darkness, but it could not produce the one true hope — a future. So as the black night turned over and showed a twilight morning the young woman relaxed against the doorway and slipped into familiar resignation. Yet she didn't leave immediately. To be sure, there was little chance that her hope would suddenly loom up out of the rain, but still she lingered. It was not unlike walking a familiar street, looking for a familiar face, and yet fearing the discovery.

Finally the dawn peered through the veil of mist and the earliest factory workers eased from their homes, cursing the wet that was by now so much a part of them. The woman attracted little attention as she pulled her battered coat a bit closer to her wasted frame and silently, listlessly, made her way down the street until the softly falling rain opened to shelter her in its caressing mother-arms, and at last erased her from view.

Poem, 1969

help —
my mind has fallen
into disrepute
accompanied by
clanging gongs
crashing symbols
and the tinkling
of fallen memories

watch —
as the shadows
of the softening night
distort tomorrow
and blend the past
into thoughts
that have no meaning
but emotion

hurt —
as day falls into dusk
and your mind
slips into shadows
that will remain
long after the sun

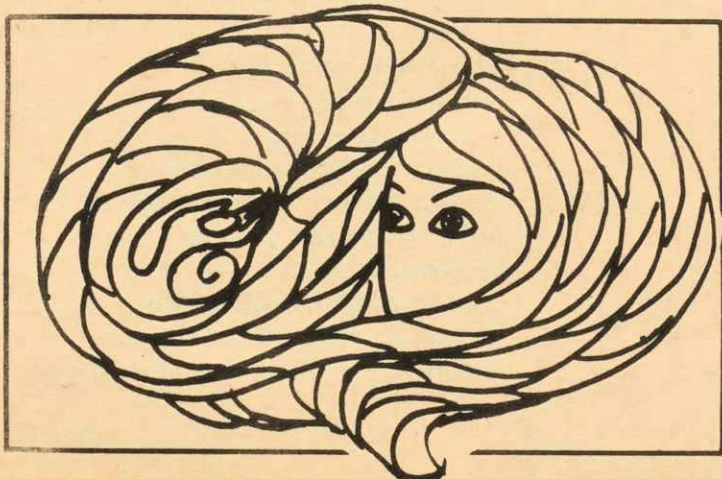
love —
as your mind
grows to the one
beside you
touch her hand
accept her gift
and sleep

bruce m. lantz

The mornings seem colder now
is it just the fall
leaning in on us,
or could it be
the empty bed
where you should be

Not knowing
the answers
I turn toward the door,
dragging my tattered cloak
behind me.

j. dey



ONION SOUP CONTRIBUTORS

In which Gazette staffers and others so inclined venture into the world of the arts. Creativity and criticism will ne'er be the same.

stephen r. mills, dorothy wigmore, jim dey,
bruce lantz, A. E., "anonymous".