

1977

## The Canon, [1977-78]: Volume 8, Number 1

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# CANNON

DORDT COLLEGE, Sioux Center, Iowa

Vol. 8, No. 1

Soli Deo Gloria

## The Golden Age

—Dan Van Heyst

The great, steel-grey river slides by the town, cold, different, efficient. Emo sidles up as close as it dares, a small town not wishing to be pulled over the dirty ice into the river's larger life. It's an old people's town, filled with feeble and arthritic houses, a few withered victorian mansions, and some neat little bungalows. In one of the neat little bungalows, a white-haired couple sit at their kitchen table. They had tea and bread and an egg for lunch. With a little knife, grandma cuts an apple in half. She gives half to her husband. Carefully, each peels a half, cores it, and slices it. They eat each piece slowly, because it is a good apple.

At two mintues to twelve, the radio is

on to catch the news. The news is the same as yesterday—the same as lost year. The Christians are slaughtering the Moslems in Beirut. A cabinet minister has resigned, to defend himself in a perjury case. The princess wants a divorce. Finally, a dentist-office rendition of "Could You Ever Love Me Again?" interjects, and grandpa leans over. Click. Grandma puts the apple parings and seeds into her eggshell.

Holding the curtain aside, she wipes the film of moisture off a corner of the window with her hanky. They both turn to look out across the back lane. Outside, the neighbor, Mr. Strachan, who is a retired minister, is sprinkling a mixture of sunflower seeds and millet in

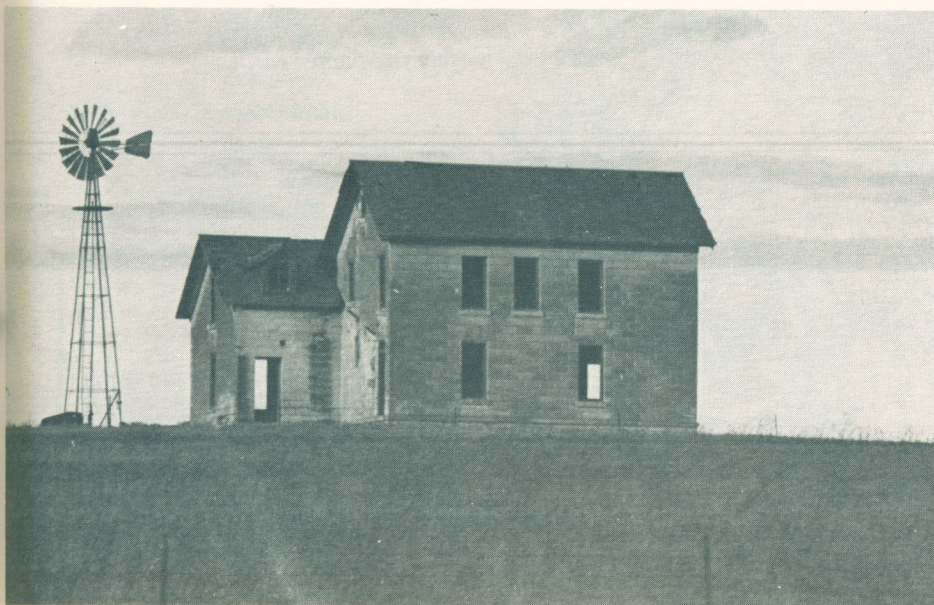
his bird-feeder. He seems oblivious to the madly disorganized school of sparrows fluttering in the branches above his head. Mrs. Strachan appears at the back door to empty a dustpan. Perhaps she is saying something about the ice on the back stoop. This reminds grandma of the time that Angus Hyath was laid up for four months with a broken hip. A long discussion follows in attempt to decide whether Angus's first wife died in '38 or '39. Somehow this significant piece of information eludes their memories. So they talk for a while about whether the mail-order company will send the rose-bushes before the frost is out of the ground.

Since the teapot is empty and cold, Grandpa takes the Bible from the cupboard behind him. The cover is almost worn through where his hands hold the book open. He puts on his reading glasses, and finds the place among soft pages that turn without sound. He began to read in a low and patient voice:

"And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, that Rezin the son of the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against . . ."

After dinner, grandpa walks down the street between the river and the town, to the post office. It is his habit. He goes every day, even it it's snowing and windy like today. Grandma sometimes goes with him, but today she is knitting a sweater for one of the grandchildren. When he comes back, she will ask him eagerly if there are any letters. There are twenty or thirty

(Continued on page two)



## Anonymous

—Cal Meuzelaar



## THE GOLDEN AGE . . .

(Continued from page two)

grandchildren, maybe one of them would write. But there is only a flyer from a seed company. They sit down in their arm-chairs, sighing, as outside the front windows the snow blusters and piles up in the driveway.

Every winter, a few blizzards like this dump ten or twelve inches of snow on the town. Old men, fondling memories of a hard day's work, heartily attack the heavy drifts. Three days later, the sons-in-law take leave of their offices in Winnipeg and drive over for a funeral. This is the age of funerals, the Golden Age.

All interminable afternoon, the men hunch around a card table at the Golden Age Club. It's in the basement of the public library. They shuffle over to the coffeepot, grunting about Archie Beadle. He's in the hospital. His daughter—she's on pension now too—can't put up with him. He gets into things, he forgets things, and she can't lift him anymore. So Archie sits in bed, watching game shows on T.V. He's waiting. He's number six on the list for the nursing home. In six funerals they're going to move him. Maybe the hospital will trade him for an old lady dying, and then he can get out of there sooner. Maybe . . .

### A WATCHED BEAN DOESN'T HATCH...

*Anxious little boy  
with your one small finger  
digging dirt.*

*Wide eyes bear down  
ignorant but aware,  
amazed by the miracle  
locked in a half buried  
bean seed.*

*It's so hard to leave miracles  
alone.*

—Neil Culbertson

## FLORESCENCE

*Roots? Roothairs rather,  
Springing from th etaproot,  
Taking thier shape and hue—  
White, yellow, brown, red, black—  
From the variegated soil  
Where they are appointed to grow.  
But what farmer, gardener, lover  
Of flower planted the seed  
Of the primal plant? For the root  
Identifies, objectifies, synonyms  
The person of the planter;  
Yet here is a riddle:  
Even though some thriving roothairs  
Are already in and of the root,  
They can never become the planter.  
Yet here is another:  
Although by blight and rot  
And drought some radicles  
Are severed from their source  
And die, and though the ground  
Is hard and bonedust dry,  
The taproot, deep as time  
And deeper far, conveys a living  
Water rich as blood  
So even pinched-off rootlets,  
Decayed and cancerous,  
Can live new re-engrafted  
To exfoliate the beauty  
Of the root—once deemed uncomely—  
And push up sweetness from the soil  
Into a brightness of blossom  
That hales the advent soon  
Of a sunless radiance in the heavens  
And the perfect fire-purged earth.*

—Merle Meeter

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## Short Story

## The Man Who Drew The Plans

—Keith Voss

"Does it meet your standards?" he asked. It was the first time he had broken his concentration during the hour I watched him.

"Yes, of course," I said.

"You do some sketching too, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you bring some of your sketches next Saturday, and I'll see if I can give you a few pointers, okay?"

He said this as he carefully peeled the tape away from the corners of the sketch, which he then rolled up and slid into a long, black tube. He tucked it under his arm, folded his easel, and bent at the knees to pick up his wooden stool. His long, thick mustache all but circled his mouth and dotted the exclamation mark formed by his Roman nose. As he peered over his shoulder, though, his bushy brow seemed to aim a question my way.

Not only was he an artist, but also an architect. Buildings of his design stood

in our city and other cities in the area. The Architect, as he was known in our city, had made his family wealthy through his talents. His wealth had no bearing on the clothes he wore, however. They were quite ordinary. His pleasures were simple. Before I gained enough courage to approach him, I had often seen him sitting behind his easel on a terrace in the old rich section, sketching the landscape. He loved to spend his Saturday afternoons in that neighborhood.

The next Saturday I returned to find him finishing the shading of a veranda. Between the Architect and the mansion were a rolling lawn and a low stone fence. Stately cypress trees stood evenly spaced on either side of the mansion and the colonade blended into the pattern.

"So you're anxious to learn something," he said as if he knew how slowly the week had gone by for me.

"Yes, sir, I am."

While he spoke, I found myself in line with the infinite blackness encircled by his irises, which were a lustrous brown—surrounded by his bushy eye brows and weathered skin. He spoke with his whole face, his mouth acting out each line, and his brow rising and falling with his intonations.

"How about if we would go to the office at the construction site? It's just a short walk and I'd like to bring my things back—maybe show you around a bit."

"Sure," I said.

I had taken the drawing courses that my high school offered, and had been doing sketches and drawings on my own since then. I showed him my best sketches and it wasn't long and I was spending every spare minute with The Architect and my drawing. We made a habit of meeting in his office behind the new building each day after school.

(Continued on page six)

## RESTHOME

Old man,  
wistful eyes  
defying  
your white  
worn walk,  
you tremble  
back  
to your  
room, the  
syncopated  
slide of  
your slippers  
echoing  
your raspy  
gasps;  
you should  
stop finding  
life so  
interesting  
or it  
will  
be gone;  
or  
would you  
rather?



—Pat Leegwater



## Christian Theatre:

# Truly a "Lesson in Flight"

—play

Friday, February 11th we were privileged to experience something newborn. The Christian Theatre Artists Guild, a company of artists who have only been organized since last spring, gave their first performance of a fresh play in our new Tepaske Theatre.

This article is gleaned not only from my own thoughts but also from the discussion that has gone on during the New World Theatre Consortium. So it's become both a review of Theresa Skorseth's "A Lesson in Flight," and a report on the ideas we have been sharing as Christians involved in theatre.

Here's a synopsis: Fra Beatifico, a monk, brings a young man, Giovanni, to Florence to study under the renowned Leonardo da Vinci. There, Giovanni is turned on to the joys of art and science through da Vinci's varied interests, but he is also pursued by a wench, Lupina, who models for the artist. Beatifico is nervous about this, wanting to retreat to the monastery—and Giovanni is torn. Da Vinci suggests a friend, his virtuous Mona Lisa, and she helps him to discover "where he's at." Giovanni's new vision is tested when he must deal with Beatifico's death, a fellow student's frustration, and Lupina's passion. It is the story of a youth, who, released from four sheltering walls, must come to terms with a much more complex creation.

Theresa Skorseth develops a group of characters to carry out Giovanni's story. There is the old monk bound by a legalistic lifestyle—superstitious and suspicious but not without the compassion with which Jack Hastings infuses the role. "Curiosity is a sin," he says. This is the other—worldliness that Giovanni must escape. Leonardo da Vinci, embodied with cuddly good humor by Jim Spon, offers the opposite. He is a Renaissance man—filled with a zest for life. He is involved, it seems, in everything the world has to offer. Meanwhile Zoroastro, the fellow student, is an off-shoot of this quest for knowledge. He has made his goal so

obsessive, so narrow, that he is wringing out his life. He must fly or die trying.

Lupina (her name means she—wolf") is a little harder to understand. She is pretty and engaging, she gets what she wants—a lot of attention, usually—and she'll be what she wants: whether a thorn in Zoroastro's side or a rose in Giovanni's buttonhole. Sharon Davidson plays the role with a flippancy that betrays the agony the girl is surely heading for.

The characters are interesting and very real. There are conflicts between them, in their own lives, that could become whole new plays. Like the conflict between da Vinci's innovation and Beatifico's fear of change. And there is Zoroastro's intense struggle with the elements. But if this is Giovanni's story, then somehow we've got to hang onto these exciting three dimensional qualities, and still keep the real focus on Giovanni. Supporting characters can sometimes lead us off the track instead of keeping us more firmly on it. Scenes involving them must be carefully controlled and steered into the main story line.

That steering is accomplished through a "production concept." This concept, at the back of the writer's and the producer's minds, is the skeleton that will be filled out into human form by the words and actions of the players. We discussed two of these for "A Lesson in Flight." A panel member, Dr. Donna Spaan of Chicago, suggested that seduction unifies the play; seduction not only in the sexual sense, but also the seductions of science, or art, or religion. Giovanni must encounter all of these to become a man, but he must not become slave to them—as Lupina is slave to lust, Zoroastro slave to a flying contraption, Beatifico slave to a pietistic, joyless religion.

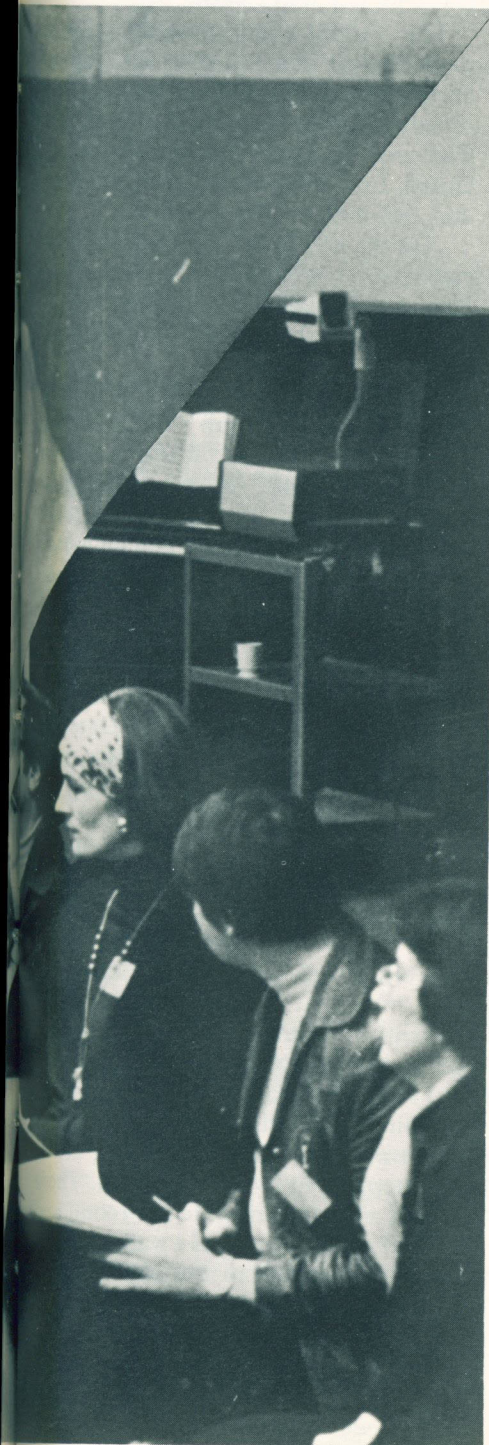
Another production concept for this show also discussed at the symposium closely represents, I think, the intent of CTAG and Miss Skorseth. In this case, the play is about the several different



New World Theatre Consortium  
flirts and panel members



by Dan Van Heyst



urgent Lupina (Sharon Davidson)  
 in Flight.”

ways in which people choose to live in God's world—that is, in a vertical relationship to Him. The relationships between characters then become secondary, reflections of that initial response to God. Beatifico serves the Lord with fear and trembling, he feels the law heavily upon him. He knows the map, but he doesn't dare enjoy the country itself. Da Vinci, on the contrary, worships God through his work in the natural world: science and art. He praises the Lord's creation by making imitations of it, from the reproduction in charcoal of a beautifully ugly face, to the imitation of the airy bones of a bird's wing in a flying machine. Lisa lives within God's grace by giving her love to others. She finds that this gives her strength to bear the pain of her own illness. Zoroastro is impatient with God and tries to bargain with him. And Lupina mocks the others' concern with spiritual things. Her focus is on herself—her own sensuousness, her own fancies. The play compares Giovanni to all of these as he works out his own response to the God who is there.

The dialog that fills out this skeleton is the work of an artist with a fine ear for the rhythm of the language. She gives her players the well-tuned phrase—the truly poetic image. Fra Beatifico is summed up in “you little brown hen.” Astro and Giovanni exchange “Do not imitate me” . . . “Do not set me a bad example.” And nothing can match the polish of a tag line like “Ah—I shall paint a Saint Jerome with a magenta robe!”

Jennifer Martin, also on Saturday morning's panel, teaches acting at Iowa State. She explained that more could have been made of this excellent dialog through patient timing, to make transitions from one mood to another, or to provide motivations for a line. A silence, a gesture, a raised eyebrow, can tell us that the line is born from the action, and not the action from the line. The verbal is only a fragment of a full communication, and the verbal aspect is rich in this play.

Images of wings and flight work in the play. We must learn to fly with the freedom that comes of a heart rescued from self-centredness, self-pity, and meaningless frustration. This flight imagery is continued in the set, especially in the placing of the flying machine stage-piece, through a hybrid of stylistic and more realistic or animated elements. The screens

forming a visual wall for the studio are decorated with sketches from da Vinci's Windsor sketchbook. A careful relationship is made between the colors in costumes and set—a pallet that makes me think of “the moment between cloud and storm” (Lupina, Act II).

In the scene with Mona Lisa, the stage is bare but for the wide backdrop. As our attention focuses on her, we realize that she is set in the dreamlike landscape of da Vinci's original painting.

There is a danger in this handling of Mona Lisa. She too easily becomes a good fairy or an alabaster saint to whom Giovanni must flee to have his soul restored. She sits and does nothing but talk in this idyllic garden setting. And Giovanni goes back a new man, ready to teach the others. Then, in rapid succession, each of the supporting characters have their spiritual experience. Zoroastro, frustrated and hurt at his latest failure, cries out to God and tries to make a deal. Beatifico, on his deathbed, realizes how little he has partaken of God's available grace by living a sterile and unimaginative life. And the bad girl, Lupina, ends the play in remorse for her sin and a cry for forgiveness.

This all falls together too nicely—we want something more credible. Perhaps it would help if Mona Lisa shed some of her blue and white purity—on—a—pedestal and instead brought her insights with her to an involvement at da Vinci's place, where the real conflicts are taking place. But the play carries, in spite of the difficulty with Mona Lisa, partly because of a careful and dramatic handling of the conclusion. When Giovanni finds that he cannot forgive Lupina, she appeals to him—to his godliness, his integrity. But he stupidly walks out on her. She is shocked. All the frippery of lies and silliness fall away and she weeps.

But that's not the end. If she only cried, whether for Christ or Giovanni (perhaps in her confusion the two are one) we would just have another melodramatic, sugarcoated ending. Instead she pulls up slowly. She stiffens to defy them all, to muster her pride, to claim a victory. But the crazy laugh I hear is not a victor's laugh, nor even the chuckle of a satisfied deceiver. It is a hollow, desperate guffaw. Lupina laughs because she knows no hope—and to those with no hope, the world is obscene, and sadly laughable.



## THE ARCHITECT

(Continued from page three)

When he could get away, he would meet me at school to see the drawings I had worked on the night before.

The people at Terry School of Architecture offered a position to The Architect each year, and each year he turned it down. He didn't want to teach such large classes and, besides, he didn't want to give up his work in the company. I had it good and I didn't deny it. There were plenty of students who wanted to study under him.

Children in our neighborhood learned much from him. He often found himself promising them he would "come over for supper and tell stories." The parents, usually out to impress him, felt left out when he paid most of his attention to the kids. He always brought sketches along with which the adults could be pacified, though. To have one of The Architect's sketches on the living room wall went along with having status. Much bragging went on about "knowing" The Architect.

Sunday was our day off and almost every Sunday afternoon we walked through new levels of the building as it neared completion. Rolls of linoleum lay on the cold, smooth cement. High, narrow windows with the red—and—white brand stickers still on them let clear light into the rooms. The smells of fresh paint and wallpaper glue pressed the unabused goodness into our consciousness. Pursing their iron lips at us, the elevator doors reminded us of the long walk up. We often sat on five-gallon cans and looked out the window at the smoggy city. These impressions crept into my mind each time I would remember stories The Architect told while we were there.

One story I will always remember was about The Architect's only son, Franklin. Shortly after he was born, The Architect's wife died. Franklin's Grandparents helped The Architect raise him. He was often discouraged, and was usually too stubborn to let anyone cheer him up again.

"But one morning it was different. Grandpa was getting fed up with the whole business," The Architect said. "It was during the spring, and it was raining something fierce. Things weren't going well for Franklin in a couple of classes at the high school, and the complaining began the minute he got out of bed." Impersonating his

father's voice and facial expression, The Architect continued,

"Good morning, Mitter Mopes!" (Mr. Mopes was a nickname the family used on Franklin when he complained. It came out "Mitter Mopes" because Franklin's Grandpa hadn't put his teeth in yet.)

"Oooh, . . . I see you're every bit as cheery as yesterday! You know boy, everybody has dare rainy days, but Mitter Mopes, he has to go an' stick his head unner da 'tupid rain spout!"

The Architect said that Franklin wasn't paying a bit of attention until his Grandpa went to the closet and put on his dress hat. Except for the hat, he wasn't dressed yet. He looked ridiculous as his well—built two hundred pounds stomped out the back door in a pair of BVD's, which hung loosely from his shoulders down to the middle of his calves. With one hand he held onto the rim of his hat. With the other, he pointed at Franklin through the rain and the open door.

"Lissen!" he boomed. "Da Lord maket' da sun to rise on da evil an' da good, an' sendet' rain on da just an' da unjust. Why do you t'ink you have to stand unnerneat' a dark cloud all da time?"

He was standing directly under the thick column of water that was pouring off the roof of the porch out the end of the rain gutter.

"Then," The Architect said, "he came back into the kitchen and wrung his hat out on top of Franklin's head. We all laughed ourselves silly—even Franklin."

The Architect and I began to visit buildings that other contractors were putting up. The first time, he just said, "What's wrong with it?" and handed me a notebook. We walked around for quite awhile before I found even one thing they were doing wrong.

"You'll get the hang of it," he said. "When Franklin was your age, he couldn't tell a blueprint from a road map."

The Architect owned Central Gateway Plaza and Gateway Contractors. His real interest in the company was the supervision of construction. Franklin was the manager of the plaza.

"Franklin couldn't care less what the place will look like in ten years," The

Architect said. "Because of time agreements on other jobs, our company can't always do the work at the plaza. I a contractor gives him a good bid, he jumps on the deal no matter who the guy is. For the last few weeks, he's been pushing me about more expansion of the Gateway. Sometimes he runs the plaza as if I don't exist."

The Architect's unusual attitude made it clear that Franklin was getting on his nerves. We walked down to the office in silence. His normally lucid eyes were red and his eyelids were half closed. I set a cup of coffee on his desk and left him to his thoughts.

On the way to the parking lot, a fellow supervisor I remembered seeing at the Kent Construction job, grabbed me by the arm and threw me up against the wall.

"So you're the blasted kid that follows the old man around," he accused. "What the world are you trying to prove, anyway—snooping around, making like fool inspectors? First he beats every dumb bid we make. Then when we get a contract, he stands around pointin' things out to you, and that idiot inspector Sanderson sees our mistakes. Just give him this message from his friends in the business. Tell him if he wants to live to see Gateway finish that building, he'd better stop acting like he owns everything. You go what I'm sayin', kid?"

I was sitting in the den trying to figure out how to tell Dad about it when Franklin called and said his dad hadn't come home yet. He had called the office and there was no answer. I told him that we had been on the eleventh floor that afternoon, and that he might be up there.

I drove around to the rear of the building. His office was lit up, so I made my way past the shipping crane and stepped up to the open door. There wasn't a bit of warmth in the room, and I could see my breath as I walked in. I grabbed the keys to the new building from the pegboard.

I didn't see Franklin anywhere, but when I came to the stairs, I could see that the door had been propped open with a bag of mortar pigment. I ran to the eleventh story. The hall door hadn't been hung yet and I thrust

(Continued on page seven)



UPON LOOKING AT A FRONTIER MAN'S  
GRAVE (Prior 1890)

Charred white bones—  
remnants of proud men  
now subdued  
now dead.

Come, walk here—  
breath the foreign air  
that flushed hot  
through flesh.

Once swift soft rivers  
laced these mountain sides,  
once deep dark shivers  
racked these very stones

Men, trees, stood as one—  
oak doors to the land  
barring the spring rush  
that flooded the west.

Hold this thaw on land,  
stop man from running  
as a slide of sand  
down the back of earth.

They are gone now,  
the doors are open wide  
the oak is dead; decayed at last.

Charred white bones—  
remnants of proud men  
now subdued  
now dead.

—Bonnie Kuipers

a toilet paper  
square slid  
off a roll  
and chose the ground  
thus wrinkling itself  
into the stench of  
the hot privy  
torn under heel  
driven into dirt  
desecrated by flies  
until a child  
not reaching  
the yellowed roll  
on the high ledge  
grasped the dust square  
to blow his nose  
then sniffing  
the privy smell  
withdrew swiftly  
stuffing into his pocket  
the square to be  
scrubbed soft  
and white at  
the jeans  
next washing

—Pat Leegwater

## FEEDBACK

The Cannon staff encourages readers to  
respond to all published material. Letters  
may be dropped off at the switchboard.

—Dave Groenenboom





## "THE ARCHITECT"

(Continued from page six)

flashlight into each room, calling as I ran. As I came to the end of the hall, I heard a set of footfalls heavier than my own. After I rounded the corner, someone knocked me down as he ran past. I turned over to see only his back. The beam of his flashlight was slashing through the darkness as he ran. In the adjoining hallway, another beam of light was directed obliquely from the floor to the wall just below the ceiling.

Foreign sights and sounds filled my senses. My heartbeat throbbed in my head. The newly-laid carpet sanded my shoes as I forced my shaking legs toward the light.

On his back lay The Architect—gripping his flashlight in one hand. His dry lips were pressed together, and his eyes . . . his eyes! I shuddered and my breath leaked out as I sank to my knees at his side. The skin around his eyes was an ugly contrast of black and red. His eyebrows were gone and his watery red eyelids had obviously been burned. I was sickened by the smells of gas and burned flesh. His lips peeled apart as he tried to speak. I gripped his arm with

both hands. A blue electric sign from across the street flashed through the large window in the adjacent room and illuminated his face.

"It's me," I said. "Did Franklin get help?"

"Yes," he whispered, "but it's no use."

Neither of us moved or said anything for several minutes.

"My eyes. I'll never be able . . ."

"Who did it? Who did this to you?"

His body grew limp and the beam of his light slid down the wall. I looked down to the street below. The lights of the ambulance flashed through the windows on street level—persistently searching out the dying—and the dead.

They lifted him into the lighted ambulance while I looked on from the sidewalk. The circling beacons cast alternately red and white reflections of me onto the long curtained window behind which The Architect's body lay.

I was to be one of the pallbearers. The Architect's family invited the public to the grave-side service. In attendance were dignitaries from our city and others, families from the neighborhood where he spent his

Saturday afternoons, and those who knew him only through his achievements.

We slid the casket into the black hearse and the procession headed downtown past some of The Architect's buildings. People stared out of storefronts and I could see their heads slowly turning like remote control cameras as they watched the hearse leave for the grassy hillsides and cemetery grounds. Like a candle holding penitents in a darkened sanctuary, the cars meandered slowly past the memorials. We took up the hearse and set it lightly above the ground.

Of the people who gathered for the service, I'm sure not many knew The Architect's first—or even last name. Rev. Klein had to look at the notation in his Bible to get it right. He struggled to get through the details of "who The Architect left behind." Then he closed his Bible and spoke fluently on The Architect's contribution to the betterment of the community and to the field of architecture.

"Most of us knew him as the man who drew the plans for . . ."

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