

February 24, 1971

Tuesday

Heritage

A Short Short Story

By Mary Scala

"Maturity is a bitter disappointment for which no remedy exists, unless laughter can be said to remedy anything."

— bokonon

Hamilton woke up that morning with A Sinking Feeling. He lay in bed with his eyes closed and hardly breathing at all, feeling his Feeling, just to make sure. Ten minutes went by, and it remained, so he jumped to the floor and tip-toed across the room to his desk. After a moments careful deliberation, he selected a bright orange, number two pencil, and wrote across the wall in even capitals an inch high: "A Sinking Feeling." At first he wrote it just that way, in the ramrod straight, egg rounded capitals he had practiced so carefully his two years in first grade. Then he began to experiment. Over the door, in gothic script, he wrote "a sinking feeling." He used a camel paintbrush and blue tempera black laundry marker on his girlfriend's right thigh, when she woke up and made him run the tail of the "g" right up into the crossbars of the "f" on "feeling."

"Now look what you've made me do," said Hamilton sadly.

His girlfriend looked at Hamilton, at the walls and floor, and at her right thigh, tossed the sheet aside, threw on her coat and ran out.

"Don't slam the door," Hamilton reminded her.

"Didn't she say anything at all?" Harry asked him later, after Hamilton, prodded by two drinks, had told him the whole story.

"No. She just picked up and left," he said, lifted his finger out of his drink and began to write on the countertop.

"Stop that," Harry said.

Hamilton put his finger back into his drink and sighed. "I don't know what to make of it."

"Well, you've got to admit it was a little weird."

"She didn't even put her clothes back on."

"No, I mean to wake up with a thing like that inside you. It must be pretty rough."

"I can't keep them, and I really don't have any idea where to send them."

"I thought," Harry said suspiciously, "that it was an 'it,' not a 'them.' You know, just one."

"She left them all over the floor."

"You mean she's some sort of carrier, or somethin' like that."

By pushing his finger up against the glass, Hamilton found he could move his drink back and forth across the countertop. He was delighted, because he found tracing the words made him feel a little less worse.

"What?" he said vaguely.

"... carrier ...," mumbled Harry, watching the swaying glass with growing apprehension.

"Oh, yes, yes, definitely," answered Hamilton, who had learned a long time ago that, when he didn't understand what was going on, it was safer to agree with someone who did.

"Then this thing, or whatever you call it, it might be catching?"

"Probably," said Hamilton.

"And you have it, right?"

"Right," affirmed Hamilton, beginning to feel a bit confused.

"And they're all over the floor in the room?"

"Right next to the bed."

"And they're still there?"

"Probably," said Hamilton, aware that he was beginning to repeat himself.

"I mean, are you sure you didn't bring any with you?"

His drink was making little swish, swish sounds, and the countertop had an uneven wet spot where Hamilton had been writing his message over itself. It was difficult for him to look up, or to curtail the mad activity of his finger, and Hamilton found he needed all his concentration to keep the imaginary "g" at the end of "sinking" from running into the crossbars of the imaginary "f." He wished his girlfriend hadn't made him mess up the italics; he wished Harry would say something he understood.

"... rslmp ..." replied Hamilton vaguely.

(Continued on back page)



drawings / david



photography by
MSU and Dennis Pace

The oldest volume of the Arnold family album spans the years 1850-1920. Early this year David Kirkpatrick began several sequences of drawings based on its photographs — working with the poses, feel and tone of names and faces receding through some six generations.

Concerned with the “gap” and transition of time, these drawings depict old people in nostalgic light, creating a time lapse between viewer and image. The feel of old photographs (people in the then, the past) is of age twice removed — the old in the old, time elapsed for both subject and viewer. Some possess an indistinctness of line, the subject fading to become almost one dimensional — here the feel of page and picture merge, time and form become indistinct, preventing the viewer from becoming too close to the personality and moment. The grids in several of the drawings create a tension between opposing concepts of stasis (the static flat moment of the old people on the page) and progression (an analytic growth or development). The series “Harvest 1865” is drawn in golds and brown tones, the others in black and white echoing the photographs.

David also is interested in poetry and mixed media, has worked in many areas of the plastic arts and recently with film. He is presently the co-editor of FREEWAY (a newly formed literary magazine among Michigan universities based at MSU).

— Dennis Pace



Josiah Kirkpatrick
father of Jacob K.
grandfather of Henry, Willis & Mary.
(20"x12")



Untitled (from the sequence “Harvest 1865”)
(20"x26")

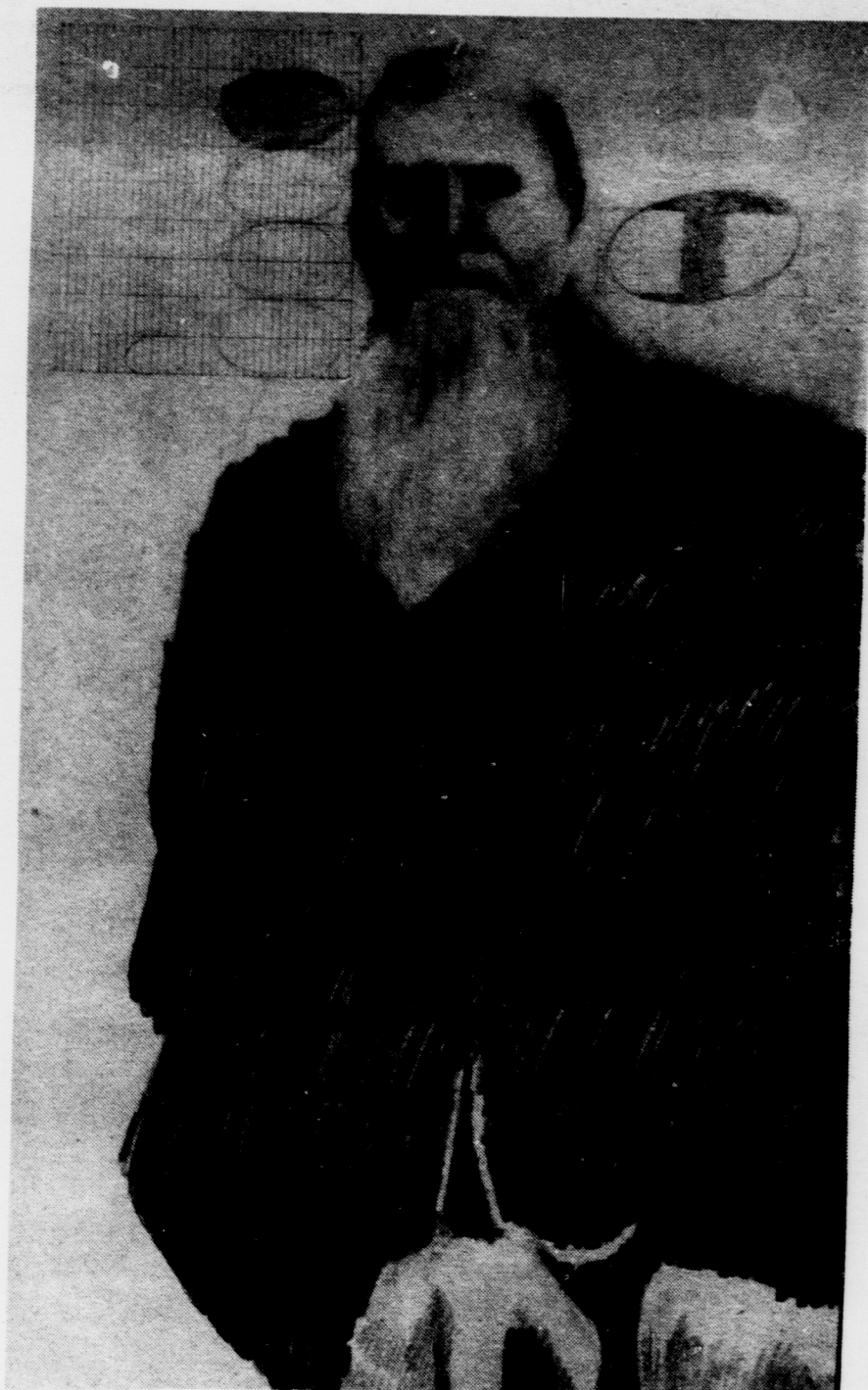
kirkpatrick



Untitled Portrait
(20"x12")



Untitled (from the sequence "Harvest 1865")
(12"x12")



Ira W. Davis
(20"x12")

Heritage

(Continued from front)

"What?" said Harry.

"What?" said Leanne, lifting the streaming colander out of the sink. "I'm sorry but I didn't hear you."

I said, Hamilton thought, that I love the way you make lasagne. I love the way you talk out of one side of your mouth and pay attention to me, just as if I was really worth paying attention to. I'd love to spend the next 40 or 50 years lying in a bed that belongs to both of us, eating lasagne.

"Hamilton, did you say something?"

"No; no, nothing important, you know me," he laughed.

"What do you mean, it's not important?" cried Harry hysterically. "You mean it's not important that some broad is wandering all over the city spreading those things?"

"I mean," said Hamilton with deliberate effort, "That it's my problem, and I'm sorry I even brought it up."

"Your problem! Of course it is. I don't want anything to do with it. Have a few problems of my own you know. One or two girls who have been spreading a lot of other stuff. Hey," he said, narrowing his eyes, "you seen a doctor?"

"No, why?"

"Why? Listen friend, that stuff ain't much of a problem if you catch it right away, but you let it go too long and it ruins you for life, if you know what I mean."

"That's all right. I'm pretty much ruined already, if you know what I mean," said Hamilton, looking at the reflection of his bald pate in the mirror over the bar.

Harry's head bobbed next to his in the mirror, and Hamilton watched with quiet surprise as a look of horror spread over Harry's face and tears began to well up in his eyes.

"Why you poor bastard," sobbed Harry, "you never said."

"Those poor bastards," sobbed Leanne, "they never had a chance." Her hand crept up to the radio knob and switched it off, cutting off the President between "day" and "infamy."

"You could've at least let him finish."

"All those poor boys, and they never had a chance."

"Just ordinary justice," said Hamilton quietly, "neither did I."

"What?"

Hamilton walked into the kitchen, picked up the colander and tossed the cold, starchy noodles into the wastebasket. He was neither happy nor unhappy; reaching down, he scraped a bit of noodle from the side of the basket and stuck it in his mouth.

"Let me buy you a drink," said Harry when he could talk again. "Here bartender, give my friend here another drink. Give him two if he wants 'em." He touched Hamilton gingerly on the shoulder. "How come you never said?" he asked.

Hamilton moved his finger from his old drink into his new one and began writing in the clean spot on the countertop in

front of Harry. "It just seems fair," he said.

"Now, we've got to set up this thing so it's fair and square," said Hamilton's father. "Now, you see this piece of candy?"

Hamilton nodded, to show that he did.

"O.K. Now watch. I'm going to put it under one of these cups. Watch which one. Then I'll move the cups around real fast and you be sure to watch the one with the candy under it, o.k.? Then when I stop moving them, you tell me which cup the candy is under. If you're right, you get the candy. Now, are you sure you understand?"

Hamilton nodded again.

"You're sure now?" asked his father, who had always been very careful to explain things twice to Hamilton ever since Mrs. Norris had tearfully explained that they just couldn't pass Hamilton into the second grade this year.

"Well, if you're sure, here goes." Then his father's hands began to move. Hamilton tried very hard to keep track of the candy cup, but the old man's hands moved faster and faster and the scraping of the overturned cups on the wooden table made a noise that grew inside of Hamilton's head and made it hurt. His eyes crossed with effort, and he began to cry.

"Watch, watch! I'm going to stop in a minute, and then you tell me which one," screamed his father, so taken with the rushing cups that he spilled his drink. The cups swam madly in the liquor and little drops flew up into Hamilton's eyes and mouth, making him cry even more.

"Ah, hah!" The cups were still now, and his father's hand moved over them in jerky patterns like a magician weaving a magic spell. "Now, boy," said his father, "tell me which one."

Hamilton was sobbing uncontrollably; he ran the back of his hand over his face. Little drops of liquor slid into his mouth, and he wanted to throw up.

"That one," he said, and pointed at the cup on the far left. He was more confused than he had been the time Mrs. Norris had cried over his test paper that first week; more frightened than the time he had found his mother unconscious, lying in her own blood.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha," screeched his father, sending the cups spinning across the room, "ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Hamilton turned his head away and began to retch.

"Ha, ha," laughed his father, "that's what you think!"

"Boy, I really gotta hand it to you, that you can look at something like that so philosophically," said Harry. "I mean, if it were me, I don't know what I'd do."

"Fair is fair," said Hamilton, taking his eyes away from the mirror and concentrating on his writing. "It's all in the way you look at it."

Harry opened his mouth, closed it and looked at Hamilton closely. "Well," he said finally, "I suppose so."

Hamilton thought about Leanne and wondered why, for all these years, he had never bothered to look her up. "All over the floor," he wrote in big, wet letters in front of Harry.

"Yes," said Harry definitely, waving his drink in front of Hamilton's face, "it's all in the way you look at it."

A smile crept up the side of Hamilton's face. "Ha, ha," he said, and took his finger out of his drink. He wrote "A Sinking Feeling" in wet capitals all over the front of Harry's suit. "Ha, ha," laughed Hamilton, "that's what you think."



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