



Fall 1966

North Wells, Chicago

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North Wells, Chicago

June, 1966

Curl-coaxed hair obliterating virility
Quivers in rhythm to the stamp of heel-high boot beneath it--
Coyly winking a wink at the soot-brown giant gliding by in glaring masculinity.
Pale black-blotched skin twitches lustfully for a moment
Then lies still in mottled disappointment.
Muddy mocha trousers tapering to a point over sword-sharp ankles
Sag in harmony with the gelatinous muscles of his face.

His cohorts, Dylan-capped, bell-bottomed, surround him,
Swaying to a distant rhythm that only they can hear,
Believing themselves to be caught in the groove of life's pulsing beat.
Loose-fleshed, paper-textured arms snake limply
Round light-boned shoulders of eel-haired girls
Who gaze up at vacant faces of scraggly-bearded, flaccid boys--
Secure with knowing It's happening here.
"And can you show me to the Buddhist Temple?
Because my baby needs the hanky-panky."

Grumbling sightseers pass--frown--shake their heads in melancholy ignorance
Of where the young lions of yesteryear have gone.

Cars, packed like a deck of cards, crawl in jerks
From sweating corner to sweating corner--
Horns bleating in various-pitched wrath
At the pattern of leather-glistening motorcyclists woven through traffic--
Pounding--astride their wincing seats--with the throb of love.
An icecube--rainbowing neon-free night lights--drops from wide-open window
On black-leathered stillness checked by a stoplight.

On scuffed sidewalk discarded putty of spit-faded gum--
Clings to cement--smacks free to such shoe soles
Moving too quickly to notice sticky stowaways.

Blinking black-blue sky backdropping eye-easy lights gropes downward
To join in oblong loneliness the drowsing of Dr. Scholl's
Which lies, unknowingly scorned, in dreaming stone.

Red-sounding jazz, moaning blues, trickle from smoke-dark speakeasies--
Their streetfronts clogged with restless swingers
Snatching at jigsaw music in futile effort to make it whole again.

Awe-soaked tourists crowd in bayberry-scented shops
Tended by shining primitives--fluid in the grace of the In Set
And contemptuous in sneers at outsiders' willingness to patronize a gimmick.
Color-crusts shelves meet drooping ceilings
Cluttered with leaping hues of hanging movement.
Brittle-brilliant Tiffany shades shed light in slices
Through open doorways into the jangling street.

Rude colors jostle down paint-brushed alleys
Panting with people--blistered with shops.
While sour-white concrete shapes courts
Jutting with corners--clanging with clatter.
Tarn-quiet streets turn aside and reach into stillness
Stringing apartments in rows like beads on a string.
Flat-front houses smelling of age
Swell huge with gaudy doors and stained-glass windows.

h Wells, Chicago

, 1966

Heavy-hued stone crouches low and level
Forming modern-harsh homes with tamed-sterile courtyards.
On nighted streets hulking dogs pace sedately with owners:
Haughty afghans, patient danes, straining shepherds--
Wheel onto Wells and bay the threshing people.

Boy and girl--hands tied together in sweat-warmed affection--
Cruise down middle sidewalk crunching plate-sized cookies--
Embedded in greasy paper--between half closed jaws.

Tattered rebel exuding ethnic churns music from dented harmonica--
Stopping only to sing tunelessly at intervals wind-scattered words
That fall like bird droppings to the pavement.

Red-clad popcorn man in flimsy flaming T-shirt and boiled lobster slacks
Slouches placidly in scarlet wagon with useless wheels--
Stirring urine-toned butter in battered pan.

While a trembling boy--dove-colored eyes--love-tousled hair--
Stands lost in a shopwindow world of knee-high leather
That only he among all around him
Could wear with transcendent beauty.

Sheila Dillman