

## WE WILL NOT SEE THE CAVE

One touch, one touch passed between me and the wife.

It started from the boatman.  
He brushed dust from my back. He brushed me  
and I acknowledged it; when he showed  
me, always without speaking, that the wife's back  
was also streaked with dust, that I should brush her  
because I was closer, I edged toward his half

of the circle, unwillingly raised my hand.

A simple gesture, that smile  
spread from person to person. The priest  
now waves his hand at the mouth of the cave.  
He holds no light, so we will not see the scenes  
inside he is describing. He does have light,  
but he dislikes the husband. At tea, he screened

this man, found he was strong but would not draw near.

The wife, the boatman, the guide  
and I shrink from the feel of the cave  
and move together; I am closer  
than I have been to anyone for years. The husband feels  
he can brave the cave. He cannot. He has not passed  
the test of contact, he has nothing to fear.

(Pagan, Burman, December 1984)

-- Roger Finch

Tokyo, Japan

## HARD TIMES

Garbage is piled up along the streets. The empty oil  
drums that were placed in groups of three or four ever-  
so-often along the sidewalks are filled and buried be-  
neath mounds of plastic bags full of debris that is  
constantly being deposited there. Now it has just about  
completely hidden the sidewalks, the curbs and is gradu-  
ally trying to close off passage in the streets. It's  
hard to walk anymore. People have to step their way  
around however they can, always careful not to slip down  
amid the rot, stink and flies that swarm so thick they  
darken the air.

Rats, of course, are scurrying about, always keeping  
themselves just out of sight when someone passes close.

If one stops and stands still for a moment, fixing his eyes on a single point in the garbage, he can glimpse their quick seething movements, long hairless tails slithering in and out, over sour milk cartons, dry curled tortilla from a week ago, plastic bags and throw-away diapers. Their tails lap about like little snakes. If he stares long enough he begins to distinguish their dull bodies, beady eyes and whiskered snouts.

As if the garbage were not enough, the sewers have begun to back up. This evening there were three or four inches of "black water" standing in the parking lot, slowly expanding, gradually creeping toward the front door. Its foul odor hangs like a stubborn presence, a morbid reminder in air already darkened with smoke, rot and flies.

No one is really surprised at the way things have gotten. The cries that echo above the late-night streets from dark unknown corners of the neighborhood, prices so high that all legitimate commerce has come to a virtual stop, the constant stealing and animal brutality that have come to reign, the garbage, flies, rats and even the backed up sewer waters that seem intent on consuming everyone are really no surprise. Everyone somehow knew, or at least suspected, that sooner or later it would come to this.

What is surprising is the party going on in one of the dry corners of the parking lot. There is singing and dancing to the music of guitars and the not-so-rhythmic percussion of empty cans, bottles and sticks. Of course there are no record players and colored lights like before. There hasn't been electricity for weeks. But these people make their own music late into the night. It is now after three A.M. and they are still going strong.

It was found out today that the nearest urban water well, where hundreds of people had been standing three hours a day struggling with the crowd to get a bucketful of brackish water, has, as everyone knew it eventually would, gone dry. No one knows what to do now. They can survive without electricity, gas and plumbing, but they have to have water.

It's impossible to sleep. No one knows if it's because of the way things are, fear of how they are going to be, or the noisy celebration going on out in the corner of the parking lot. Why do those people keep on with their crude music and dancing? What in hell is there to celebrate?