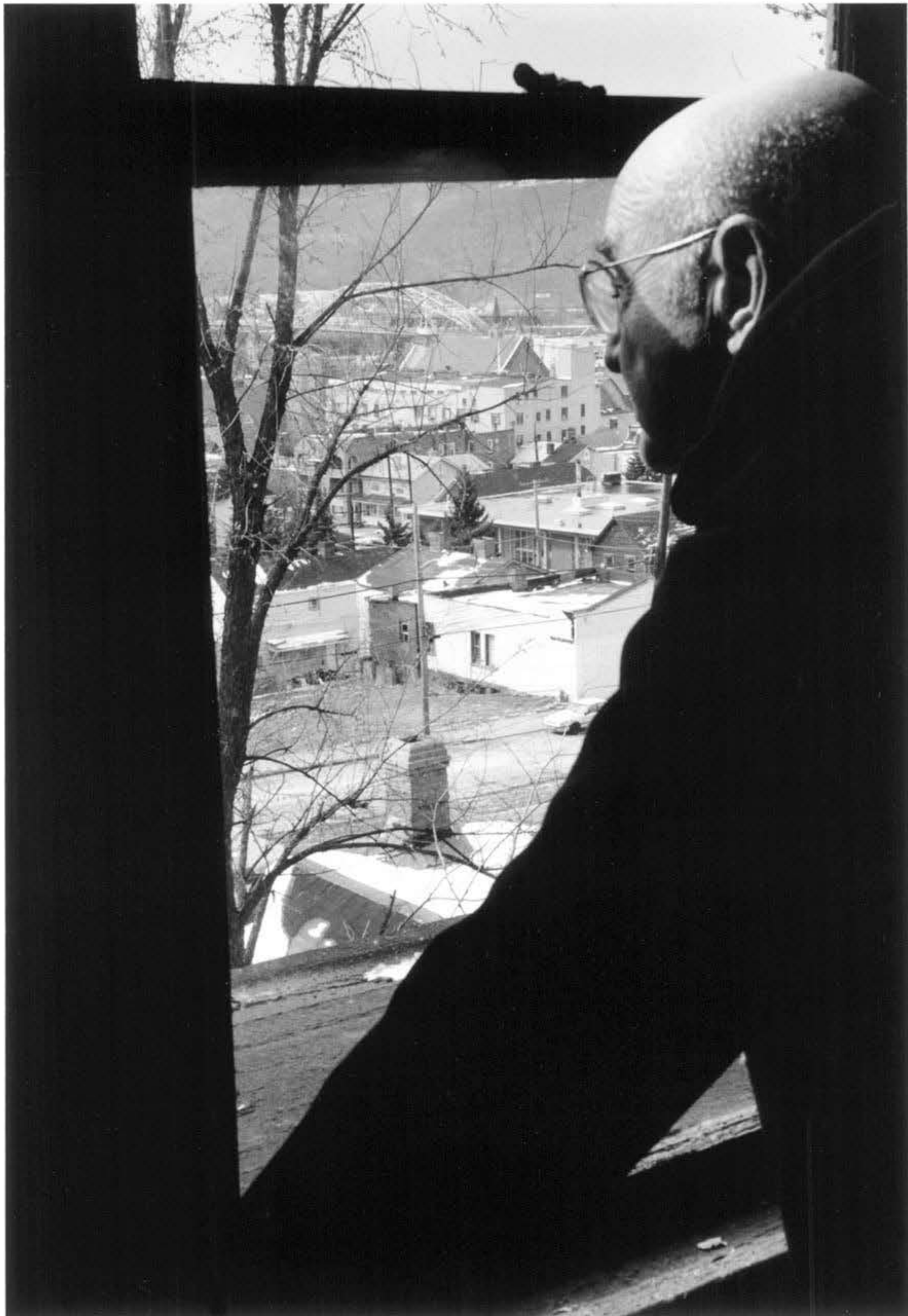




MCKEESPORT

PA



As a child, I did not understand that I was a prince,
and that my father was the king.

Although we did not live in a castle,
and father worked in the mill,
I began to realize that in the realm of my dreams,
I was the dauphin.

Through my bedroom window I could see
a spectacle of turrets and minarets

float above the soiled city below like an iridescent mist.

My imagination would be both my wand and scepter.

And there would be no boundaries to my domain.

The House I Once Called Home

This abandoned wooden box is
the cabinet where my family's
curiosities are stored.



I now reopen all its shuttered
windows and unlock all its
boarded doors.

Duane Michals

Sonny returns to the house of ghosts,
Where he was born seventy years ago.

A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMOIR WITH VERSE



Summer 2003

My HEART remains a recluse in this dead house.
Steeped in the reverie of what used to be,
I keep my vigil for another day,
before I too fade away.

This house was built of wood
cut from my family tree.

It was deprived of most amenities
and until I had grown beyond a boy,
this POVERTY did not embarrass me.

How strange I should recall this faded stain
after all these years.

These rooms were our little theater's mise-en-scene
where we performed our daily dramas sans proscenium.
I have returned to fulfill my deal with FAUST,
and the shades of this dead house.

I who have been most BLEST,
now with this incantation put this place to rest.







In this very room, on a February afternoon,
when Margaret was twenty and Jack was twenty three,
I became to be.

Here stood the bed, where I first cried and mother bled,
And above the bed a cross hung on the wall,
the day the midwife came to call.

Over there, a chair near where the vanity used to be,
its mirrors now scattered everywhere,
like shards of forgotten memories.

My yesterdays are this debris,
and I alas am seventy.



Sunday Afternoon on High Street

I believe we leave echoes of ourselves behind,
in those rooms where our lives were first defined.
Sometimes there is a moment redux,
when the flux of time becomes transparent.
It is a reverberation of recall,
a subtle sense of recognition within a shrouded familiarity.
Suddenly the clarity of second sight
Mother says my name, "Duane, Duane."
"Daddy's home, it's time to eat."
I seat myself at the table. The soup is ladled.
I know it once again, like a bite of madeleine.



McKeesport is a myth in the fable that is my life.
It only exists in the library of my imagination.



This photograph is a fossil,
a fleeting moment preserved as a specimen of time.
on film, the way ancient insects are in amber.
Time is a string that threads together
each indivisible instant like pearls
of an infinite seamless necklace.
Eternity is the absence of time.

By a serendipitous intersection of time and place,
the threads of my families' lives were woven
together into the fabric of this shared ~~the~~ moment
in Andy's photographic tableau of our clan
in the garden long ago.

Prince Valiant



IN THE DAYS OF
KING ARTHUR

BY HAROLD R FOSTER



Synopsis: PRINCE VALIANT RELEASES THE TWO LOVERS AND STANDS BACK, A SATISFIED SMILE ON HIS FACE. SURELY THEIR ROMANTIC PLIGHT WILL STOP THE WAR !

When I was fifteen I first discovered desire
in my favorite Sunday funnies.

It was in a paper owned by Hearst
that Prince Valiant freed Aleta from a curse.
But everything went wrong.

He was captured as she escaped,
and his captors stripped him to a kind of thong.

This nudity was new to me.
Suddenly a strange awareness.

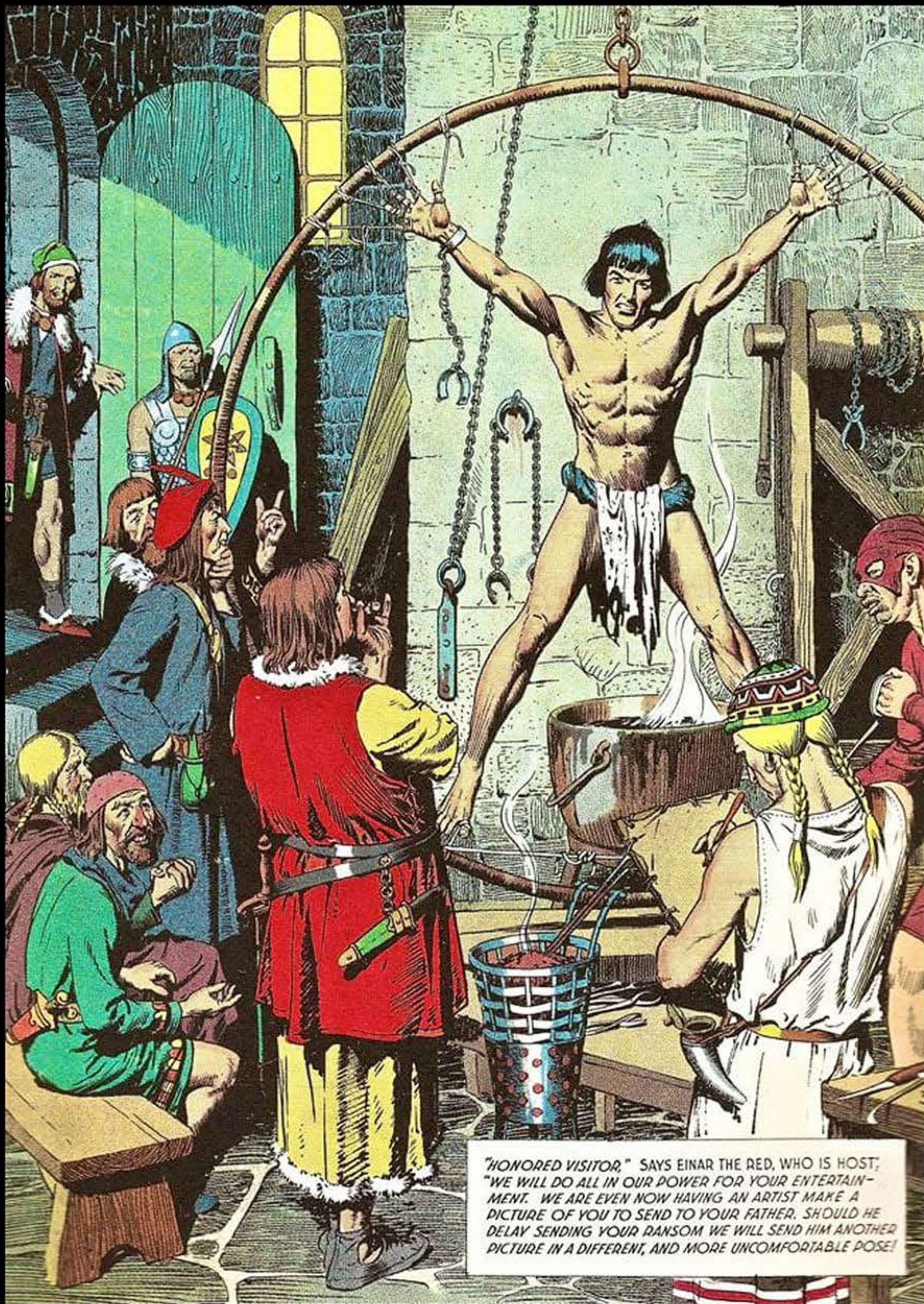
Some buried yearning stirred.

What was this curiosity that urged me to touch?
I did not understand that this novelty was
desire for a man.

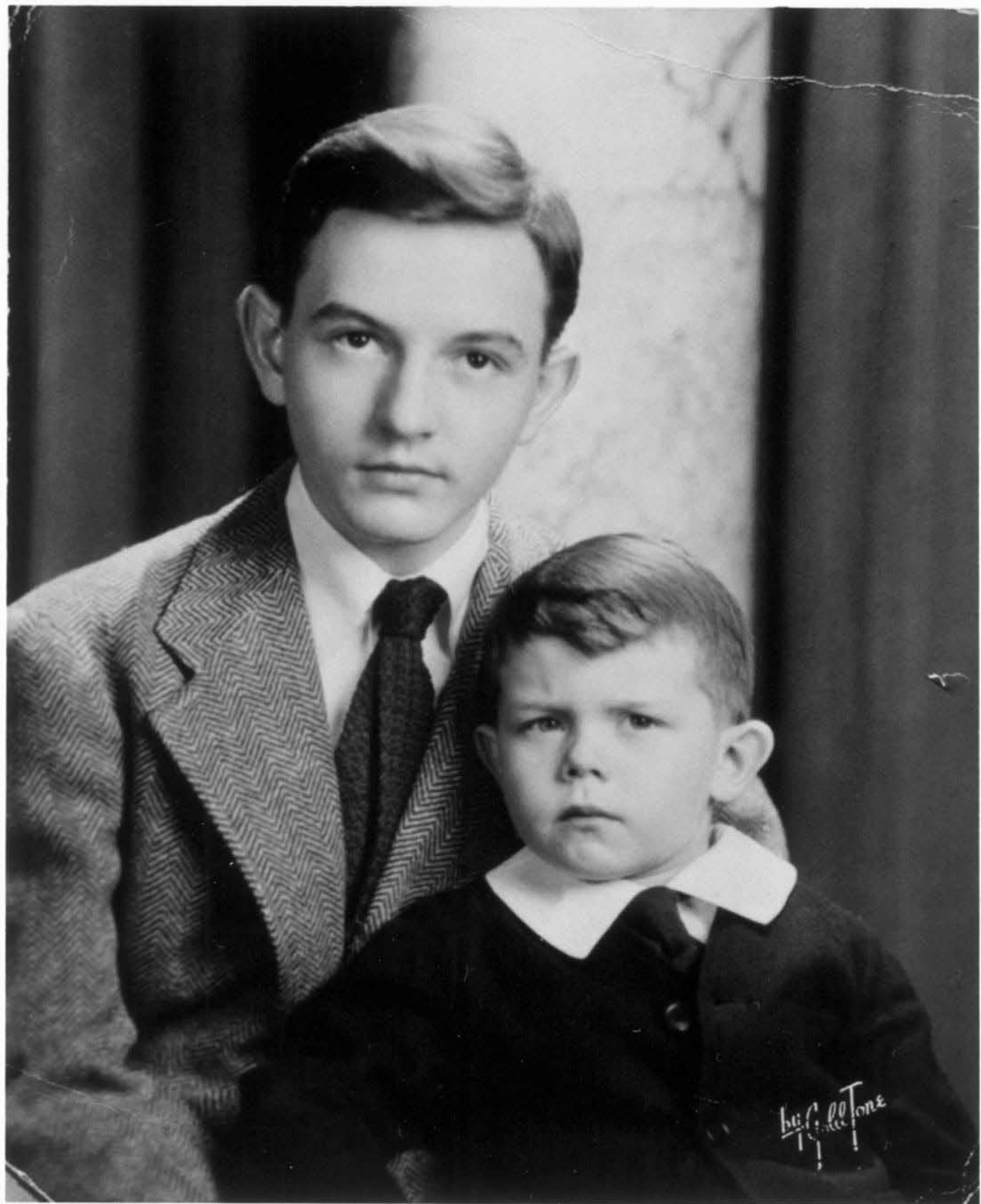
I hid the comics in a drawer,
so I could peek at his physique encore.

Desire had whispered in my mind thoughts
I never heard before.

Now as I decline, in the ripening of time,
I've forgotten just what those thoughts once were.



"HONORED VISITOR," SAYS EINAR THE RED, WHO IS HOST; "WE WILL DO ALL IN OUR POWER FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT. WE ARE EVEN NOW HAVING AN ARTIST MAKE A PICTURE OF YOU TO SEND TO YOUR FATHER. SHOULD HE DELAY SENDING YOUR RANSOM WE WILL SEND HIM ANOTHER PICTURE IN A DIFFERENT, AND MORE UNCOMFORTABLE POSE!"



My brother Timothy and I were born,
nine years and nine days apart.

Mother liked to play games with names

Tim was to have been Anthony.

Wisely she had a change of heart.

It was ~~too~~ much a clue to what I cannot share with you.

I should have Stefan or Valentine.

Instead I was dubbed Duane,
after Mr. Shaw's suicidal son.

He was my doppelgänger,

One the patrician, the other plebian.

THE two Duanes passed each other on Cornell street

two weeks before the deed was done.

Our eyes ~~did not~~ recognized each other,
but we did not say "Hello" or "Goodbye".



Grandmother's garden has become a feral forest,
wild and grand, worthy of Miss Havisham.
Nature has forgiven us our trespasses
and reclaimed its natural domain.

Twigs have grown to trees.
Dense ivy undergrowth chokes the path with thickets.

Ancient roses cloak the fence,
and Anne's spruce has grown up to the roof.
The weeping willow of my youth has
fallen down without a sound.

Squatter racoons in the house peek
from the dining room at squirrels
playing hide and seek.

The woods have won.
The shy house sees no summer sun.
Soon there will be no trace,
that once someone lived in this place.



How strange to see mother and Sonny in nineteen thirty three.

She clung to him more than he clung to her.

Margaret and Jack were without hope,

when they eloped to Greensburg, where he kept his word.

They pretended to be a family, like actors pantomining two different plays on one stage at the same time.



Cyril's young bride died too soon.
Something black grew in her womb.
He never saw his Eurydice again.
Cyril became a ruin,
Until Annabelle made him well.





Mother did not love my father. She loved another.

Margaret lived a secret melancholy.

The life she chose to live was her great folly.
For you see mother believed she had sinned.

And of course, Catholics don't divorce..

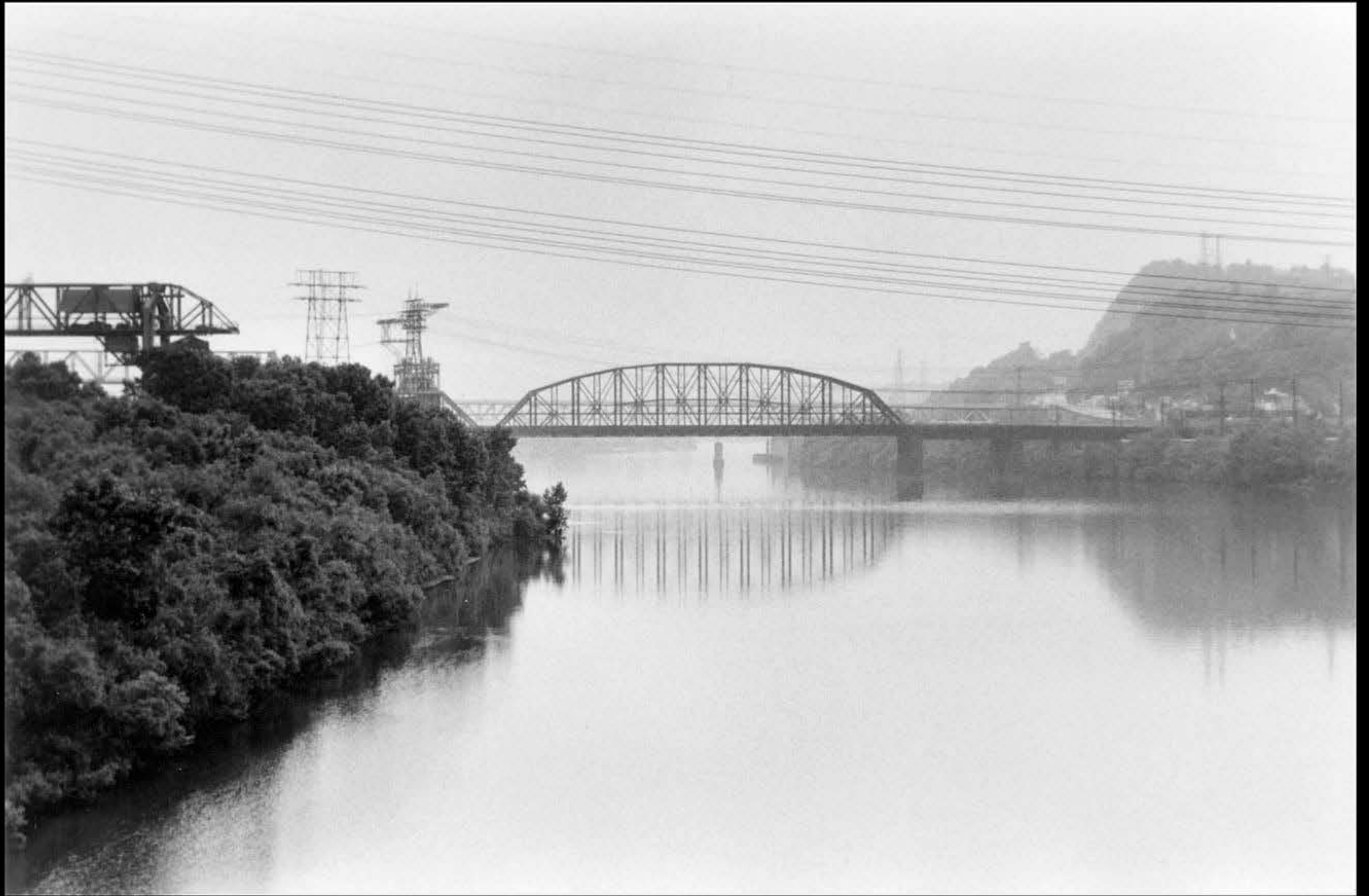


I hold plaster dust from the house in my hand.
This powdery debris like ashes in an urn, is
the end of our history.

It seems a peculiar irony to learn
that we must cease to be to know
~~the~~ the real of our reality.

Goodbye dear dreamers
in the golden gleam,

Sonny



I THREW A PENNY INTO THE YOUGHIOGHENY AND MADE A WISH
THAT I MIGHT FLOAT WITH IT

DOWN THE MONONGAHELA TO THE ALLEGHENY,

THEN FURTHER STILL BELOW THE OHIO,
UNTIL I REACHED THE MISSISSIPPI AND THE SEA.

THERE THE TIDES WOULD CARRY ME AWAY,
TO WHERE I CANNOT SAY.

SOMEPLACE FAIR AND NEW

AND I WOULD DO THINGS I HAD NEVER DONE BEFORE,

AND MY PENNY WISH CAME TRUE.

MC-301

Jerome Avenue Bridge and Business Section at Night, McKeesport, Pa.



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