In the October Dialogue I promised that I would put forth an honest effort at making this joint student-faculty venture work. I also wrote that I hoped it would succeed, that a lot of good things would happen if it succeeded. But I continued that perhaps it could not work because polarization between faculty and students is necessary.

Five issues later, I still maintain that Dialogue can work, but some changes have to be made. It is clearly evident that students and faculty did not work well together this year.

There are reasons for this—some good, some bad. One of the primary reasons is that faculty associate editors are not appointed for editing skill or publications experience. If this joint venture is to get off the ground, the faculty as well as the students must exhibit some real editorial skill, and their primary goal must be a desire to put forth a good, artistically and scholarly sound magazine. When faculty appointments to Dialogue are handled like appointments to committees, Dialogue is off to a bad start.

If the faculty associate editors have little time, desire, or expertise to bring to Dialogue, they must as a matter of course cleave tenaciously to their right to see what the student associate editors are doing. Their role as the “all-seeing-eye” rather than editorial contributors will as a matter of course create a distrustful and reluctant staff. If the faculty members were in on the ground floor in commissioning articles, the travel up to the top floor—that of deciding what will be printed—would be easier and more comfortable. When the faculty associate editors are waiting at the top floor, the students, after much hard work in reaching the top floor, are not going to be overjoyed to see them.

If no faculty members can be found with the time or the desire to work selflessly at the publication, their presence on Dialogue should be eliminated. If the faculty members’ supposedly necessary role is that of a board of censors, they should be called such and all should understand their role as such.

Which rushes me to my next point. If Dialogue can and will be censored, it should be clearly stated. If students on Dialogue have responsibility without freedom it should be a matter of common understanding. If students can only decide to print what is acceptable to the president of the college and faculty members, that should be clear. If a “safe” editor is a requirement for Dialogue, a “safe” editor should be chosen. If there is not freedom of expression at Calvin, it does not have to be discussed in symposiums or written about at all. Let us toss out the constitutions and informal statements that assert what in reality is a farce and write new documents that say it like it really is. Then change Dialogue to Monologue. A censored Dialogue is a lie.
FAF Prizewinners 1975

POETRY
1st John Artis No Moon for the Misbegotten
2nd Marcie Edmund Reciprocal Comfort
HM David Westendorp The Same Nightmare

FICTION
1st no prize awarded
2nd Mark VanPutten No Time Like the Present
HM Al Aasman Johnny and the Poultry Industry

DRAMA
1st Timothy Straayer The Door

PAINTING
1st Lee Doezema Wave
2nd Andrew Brown The Doll
HM Andrew Brown Collins

DRAWING
1st Dave Versluis Matthew 6:19-21
2nd Thomas Dykstra Wild Grape
HM Janet Olson Still Life with Bulletin Board

GRAPHICS
1st Faith Gysen Untitled
2nd Barb Broodman Night City
HM John Bakker To Dean and Julie
Mary VanderPlas Mary
Andrew Brown Missionary
Sue Stevens Dandelions
Health Care Relating to Genesis 1:11

SCULPTURE
1st Thomas Dykstra Lilith...Shorn
2nd Marcie Edmund Family
HM Malois Ritzema Untitled
Steve Lambers to Leap
Nancy Schaafsma Reflections on a Flower Patch

CERAMICS
1st Malois Ritzema Untitled
2nd Rita Visser pot #1
HM Rita Visser pot #4
Malois Ritzema Untitled

CRAFTS
1st Marcie Edmund Ring
2nd Barb Broodman Rug #1
HM Laurie Steen Untitled, copper enameling

PHOTOGRAPHY
1st William Reus Untitled
2nd Robert Eskes Dorm Room Detail
HM Robert Eskes Looking Out Back
Loren Brink Untitled
Curt Door Gha!
Curt Door Trackside
William Melenberg Saturday Shopping Blues
William Melenberg Man Hypno-lator

FILM
1st Lee Doezema Portrait of Mary
2nd Mary Ritzema The Potter
2nd John Zwartz Things
HM Eugene Vandenburg Exit
Mary Ritzema Reflections

CLASSICAL SCORE
1st Tim Thomasma Quintet in C
2nd Deborah VanTil Interlude in Phrygian Mode
HM Bob Cumings Bangla-desh

FOLK POPULAR RECORDED
1st Betty Bosman I Corinthians 13
2nd Glen Bulthuis For Mel
HM Glen Bulthuis Hosanna Song
Ken Teune Watch the Seasons

FOLK POPULAR SCORED
1st Greg Oppenhuiizen Happy Day Rag

Fine Arts Guild
Chairperson—Joel Kuipers
Dance Guild—Jeanne Diephuis
Drama Guild—Janet Hagedorn
Music Guild—Tom DeVries
Visual Arts Guild—Andrew Brown
Writers Guild—David Schaafsma
Publicity—Jerry Talen
Mentor—Mary Ann Walters

Front cover—The Doll, Andrew Brown
Back cover—Dorm Room Detail, Robert Eskes

Photography by Philip Schaafsma

and Dialogue's thanks to Compost people—fats Bartleson, EMC Shade, Elk Swets, Miles Nerve, the Duck and Dave Kudelmas, Kelly the Pollack, Kitty, Hilda, Cher, Shar, and Sher and Roger's printing people—Harold, 3 martini Len, and Norman the carpet shampooer.
No Moon for the Misbegotten

as a child
i would frequently dip
with cups of love
into swirling chocolate worlds
of the nicer than real world
and during the course
of abstract afternoons
i would frequently ride
the wings of polkadot
moonbeings dragonflies
as a child
there were no worlds
i could not touch
with running fingers
of many thoughts
but as one
who left the world
where no one really stays
i can always remember
my father’s fingers
apart from his hand
reaching for his dreams
in an empty land

John Artis
Reciprocal Comfort

Though night has gone, the sky grows overcast
and hidden is day’s face that’s coming on;
Now rises up the voice of summer’s last
and rain is heard, above the darkened dawn.
Yet man is unaware, in slumber stayed,
of this fore-hidden show of summer’s fears
That with the coming coolness sun would fade:
And only silent earth sees summer’s tears.
The once-bright, warming dawn now hides away
Behind the clouds, for fear man see it weep.
But softly comfort comes, through dawn’s dismay,
In knowing there’s another not asleep.

Weep for me, also, summer, weep no less:
I too sense autumn’s coming loneliness.

M. Edmund

The Same Nightmare

“You write fictions” she says
and I walk out
and watch inky twig spikes
tracing arcs across
the hard blue crystal

All winter long
I have been playing guitar
her one set of strings
Emerging now my fingers
are shredded and gangrenous

... I am at the moment
where each note of the music
is a weapon
the particles slam ugly into
flesh
Fine points of light flash near
the corners of my eyes
while my lips wrinkle and say
“This is only an experiment
in paranoia”
The melody follows stabbing
soon I will sink into
dreamless sleep and be gone

... Being absent from you
is not so bad
I buy books and cigarettes
and go walking
The winter grinds on mild
I write poems that all say
the same thing
that being in love with you
is not so bad

If you were here
you might tell me that you had
the same nightmare
as I did last night

David Westendorp
9:30, thirty miles west of DesMoines, in the middle of nowhere, with the afterglow of the sunset still warming the mind. So unlike the end of the day in the mountains where darkness intrudes suddenly in the shadow of the towering Leviathans which impinge so ominously on the lives of those living at their feet. The plains were obviously made for sunsets (and probably sunrises too).

Nebraska was shorter this time than it usually was, even though they’d left the river, Interstate, to travel a tributary in search of greener scenery, quaint plainstowns or perhaps only for a change of pace. The twenty-seven-year-old ex-bartender, ex-cabinetmaker, ex-winery worker, ex-G.I., recently divorced, oily Italian was full of tales, and conversation ranged widely, as time passed quickly as the plains slid by.

The promiscuity of the fairer sex was discovered to derive from the manner in which one stroked the cool beer glass while sitting alone astride the bar. "A sure-fire system," vouched the ex-bartender, "'s never failed me yet." His present goal was to discover whether the theory was applicable in other circumstances, such as the way a waitress held her pencil, or the manner in which the salesgirls handled the dollar bills which he always handed to them rolled up tightly.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about him however, was the way in which he found it possible to sleep in the back of his V.W. He claimed that sleeping in a prostrate position was unhealthy for the spine and other essential body organs and that a modified fetal position with the legs hanging over the seat and the feet hooked in the steering wheel would cure 90% of the organic dysfunctions common to the human body.

He was followed by a pothead masquerading as a sedate furniture salesman on his way home from the Omaha track where he had won over $300.00.

Although his first trip to the racetrack had only been three weeks previous, he had obviously become addicted.
All he could speak of, between mouthfuls of homebaked whole wheat bread with honey on it, were the various schemes he had overheard of forecasting the victor. Most of them he cast off without a moment’s pause, but one of them deeply affected him; something about multiplying the number of the horse by one’s birthdate and dividing the result by the date. Nevertheless, it was a good ride, pushing up to 80mph in the brand new Opel Kadett, making great time until the inevitable turn-off. All of which results in one being left at a rest area thirty miles west of Des Moines in the middle of nowhere at 9:30.

Now nothing to do but recline against the pack unaware of the sign above his head reading, “Please confine dogs to specified dog walk areas.” The reverie of boredom is broken by the necessity of ambling over to the rest room to flush away the mammoth joint received as a gift from a carful of giggly young girls just pulling away.

The first rule of traveling by thumb is to trust one’s intuitions, and faithfulness to that adage results in turning down a ride all the way to the Illinois border with a one-armed truckdriver and his sleazy companion. Even money fails at times. Two young hippies in a van with Florida plates feel well enough off financially to turn down an offer of $15.00 for a ride to Chicago.

It’s amazing how long Iowa can be when one is in the very middle of it, unable to solicit a lift any further, wondering if the Homestead Act applies to federal rest areas. Wouldn’t be too long before he’d qualify, . . .

She’d almost come and gone unnoticed by drooping eyelids before he awoke. How nearly fate had come to failing, the paths meant to cross had almost missed each other in the dark. But enough of that; dozing in the ¾ ton Chevy pickup as it lumbers over the small hills of the Iowa landscape at a turtle’s pace; jarred awake, wondering how those little legs and arms can control such a massive vehicle; deciding it’s not important. Everything is unimportant except for motion.

She looks far younger than her professed 26 years, so small, and so fragile to be out on a lonely freeway all alone at three in the morning. The only proof of her age is her young five-year old son sleeping in the homemade camper top and her wisdom. So much is heard of the wisdom that isn’t taught at school: the wisdom of those who’ve known many people, been many places and have somehow brought it all together into an integrated whole; but it seems so very simple when one confronts it in the person of a goddess.

She’s on her way to visit a friend of the road who is now living in Iowa City. Hopefully, the two of them will return to California together to start a restaurant serving home-cooked Mexican food and cheap Sangria. She even offers him a partnership in the restaurant, and more. . . . But there’s the girl back home, there is always the girl back home, that’s what makes the whole thing meaningful. So chalk it up to experience, and remember, try very hard to remember, the purpose of it all. Decisions are always difficult, but this is worse, the implications are stunning. The mind grasps at such puzzles and ponders over all the possible ways of putting the pieces together, but of course it’s impossible. The pieces aren’t all there; they are handed over one at a time and each piece has to be earned with sweat and tears and with the memories of all the other wrong decisions that have gone before. Just four hours ago, the decision had been years or even a lifetime away and now it confronted. . . .

The following ride, and all the rides after, somehow seemed to have a different character. The people were all dull and imposing. Unburdening tales of their long lonely lives, of where they’ve been and where they’re going, as if anyone really cared after what had happened. The sun had already risen, dispelling the mists of the damp Iowa night and denying to the events of the evening so recently past any trace of reality.

And the car hurtled blindly eastward. . . .
Johnny lived with his 3 older brothers and parents on a chicken farm east of Hamilton. Theirs was a breeding flock of some 7000 Arbor Acres white plymouth rock hens. "Arbor Acres, for meat and eggs" it said beside the "fragile" sign on the cases that they packed the hatching eggs in. Interspersed among the hens were the 700 big and meaty "Starcross Breeder" roosters. At a ratio of 10 to 1, the roosters played an active role in the success of the hatching program. It was this activity that provided Johnny with his earliest recollection of the poultry industry.

When he had first been allowed to help his father in the barn he would kick the roosters off from the backs of the considerably smaller hens, thinking that they were fighting. After several weeks however, he noticed that there was a significant difference between a rooster fighting another rooster, and a rooster that perched on the back of a hen. For one thing, most of the hens didn't seem to mind. Like most perceptive kids that grow up on a farm, Johnny got his sex education direct.

His cousin Harold, who often came over from town, wasn't quite as perceptive. He was a kicker. Johnny told him:

"Leave them alone, Harold."
"But he's killin her!"
"No he ain't", Johnny said.
"Oh yeah, well what's he doin then?"
"They're just sort of . . . play-fighting," Johnny said.
"Well what's he peckin her head off for. That ain't play-fighting." Harold was getting upset.
"Well that's just the way chickens get married, Harold."
"Oh come on, people don't do that when they get married."
"Don't your parents ever fight?"

Harold took it up with Johnny's father while they graded eggs.

"Uncle Henry, Johnny says that the roosters are marrying the hens when they fight."
He looked strangely at Johnny. "Who told you that, boy? Your brothers been telling you things?"
"No."
He didn't believe him. "The kids at school been telling you junk?"
"No."
"Listen to me, boy. I want to know where you picked that up. Someone's been talking to you."

Johnny glanced at Harold who looked the other way. Harold was preoccupied with trying to find something in his nose. He grinned at his father. "The rooster told me, dad." His father glared at him and turned to Harold, "They're only play-fighting," he said, and went back to work.

The first time that Johnny had seen a chicken butchered had left a lasting impression on him. He was horrified. His father had walked out of the barn with the chicken in one hand, the axe in the other. He had placed the hen on the chopping block while whistling a catchy tune, and without a pause, certainly with no remorse, he chopped through the neck. The body had quivered spasmodically, while his father held it tightly by the wings and legs. With every quiver, blood trickled down the side of the block. The
head lay on the ground, its beak opening and closing, the eyes going round and round.

Johnny looked wide-eyed at his father. "Dad, it ain't dead!"

"Oh sure, boy. It's just the nerves kickin up a fuss. She's dead as she'll ever be."

"You hurt her!"

"Naw. She never felt a thing," and he continued to whistle while the chicken bled. It was then that the voice box of the dead hen emitted a last, long drawn-out croak. Johnny was only ten then, and he started sobbing, and ran from the scene. He did not hesitate to eat the hen on Sunday, but the brown, juicy thing that came out of the oven bore no resemblance to the feathered white bird on the chopping block.

Johnny's father hated chickens. "Dumbest, stupidest, stinkenest animal you can find on a farm," he would say. He said it when they knocked over the water troughs. He said it when they got their heads pulled off in the automatic feeding chain. He said it a lot when things weren't going well, and at least once as a matter of course when things were all right. Johnny expected someday to see it on a little plaque beside the "Bless our home" one on the kitchen wall.

"Why don't we raise something else?" Johnny asked once.

"I'd love to, boy, but it ain't that simple. All my life I wanted to raise horses, and here I am, stuck with chickens. Chickens up the wazoo. It just ain't that simple." He didn't say too much when he got his cheque from the hatchery every other Thursday.

In spite of his father, or perhaps because of him, Johnny grew to like the chickens. He found that by talking softly to a hen while she sat in a nest, and by cupping his hands around her head and rocking it gently, he could put the hen to sleep. By doing this often enough, it soon became quite tame. Every summer, when they got their new flock, there would be several brown hens in with the others. Johnny picked one of these out and tamed it. Every time that he stepped into the section that she was in, she would follow him around while he collected eggs from the nesting boxes. Sometimes she would ride around on his shoulder and cluck into his ear. Johnny was very fond of this special chicken.

Unfortunately for both of them, chickens are racially prejudiced and have cannibalistic tendencies. By the end of the year, there were never any brown hens left because the white ones, attracted by their dark colour, would start to peck at them. Once they drew blood, they kept going till the chicken was dead or rescued. One day, Johnny came into the pen to find his hen being chased by a dozen others, the back of her head covered with blood. He took her to an enclosure behind the barn where they kept the culls. She died several days later, her broken head crawling with maggots. Johnny didn't want to go through
that again, so he made no more pets.

Soon after that, Johnny was introduced to culling practices. This was a job that his father hated more than most. It required checking each hen individually, to see if she was still laying eggs. If she wasn't, then she was sold to DeSecke, the smelly old chicken buyer. Johnny and his brothers would follow their father into the barn around midnight. His brothers took care of the first floor, while he went with his father and DeSecke to the second. They left the lights out, for as long as it's dark you can pick up a hen, examine her, and put her down again, and she'll stay where she's put. That way they could keep tabs on who was examined or not. His father was to do the examining while he and DeSecke carried the culIs down to the truck.

"You want to do the culling, boy?" his father asked. "It ain't hard. You pick the old hen up by the legs in your left hand and tuck the head up under your right arm. Then you put your right hand on her bre... er, her tummy, and press two fingers below her what you call the vent. There you'll feel a couple bones under the skin and if you can get two fingers between em, then she's a layer; if you can only get one, then she ain't been laying fer months. It's a lot easier than carrying chickens down to the truck boy."

Johnny knew too much about chickens to be drawn in by this, and he politely demurred. A chicken normally doesn't need much of an excuse to defecate, and with the added pressure on a tender place, he was sure what the result would be. His father was a filthy man by the time it was all over.

The culling marked the end of Johnny's first year in the poultry industry. The day after culling marked the end of his involvement with the poultry industry.

That day, Johnny got up late. It was a beautiful warm spring day. He stuck his head out of the window and felt the breeze that swayed the new, green willow branches. He ran downstairs to the kitchen where his mother was fixing his breakfast. While he ate she said, "Your father wants to see you in the barn, Johnny." He paused for a moment. He had never before been honoured with a special invitation from his father, and he felt out of place getting one now. Walking contemplatively to the barn, Johnny found his father at the workbench, sharpening the axe. "Morning, John." Another warning sign. His father was rather cheerful.

"You wanted to see me about something, dad?"

"Yes son. Last night I put a few big fat hens in the cull..."
pen, and now we’re gonna butcher em—you and me.”

Johnny took a step back. “I can’t do that dad, you
know I can’t.”

“Now listen son. Your brothers have all butchered a
dozen hens by the time they was ten, it’s high time you
took a hand in it too.”

“But dad . . .”

“No buts about it son, there ain’t nothing to it. Just one
little flick with the axe and they’re dead. Why it ain’t no
worse than . . . than swatting flies.”

“But flies don’t have feathers dad.” He was not meant to
be an arbiter of life and death. “I can’t kill no hen,”
Johnny pleaded as his father finished his sharpening.

“There comes a time in every man’s life when he’s gotta
kill a chickin or two John, and I don’t want to talk about
it any more. We’re settin out to butcher us some hens, and
we’re gonna do it. It’s that simple.”

Johnny’s knees were shaking as they each took a chicken
from the cull pen. He stood beside the chopping block, the
hen hanging by the legs in his left hand. She was slapping
his shins with the hard bonny ridge in her wings, but he
took no notice. His father handed him the axe.

He stretched the hen out on her side, the legs pinned
under his left foot and her wings stretched out above her
back, held down with his left hand. Johnny looked up at
his father while the hen made a last struggle to get free.
When it quieted down, he brought the axe up to his
shoulder, held it there a moment, and then slowly brought
it down again.

“Now listen boy, you’re gonna get that head off. You
can do it now or we can wait all day before you do
it—either way, it’s gonna be done. I don’t want no more
screwing around, so do it right now.”

Johnny wasn’t listening. He was looking at a small white
feather that was stuck to the block, from a previous
chicken, now long dead. The little feather was held by its
tip in a patch of black, dried blood, and with every bit of
breeze, it flattened out over the open beak of the hen.

Johnny lifted the axe again and as he did, his breath
catch in his throat and his eyes became misty. He
suspended the axe above his shoulder for a moment. It had
a fairly heavy head, and the razor-sharp edge glinted in the
sun as he brought it down.

Matthew 6: 19-21

Dave Versluis
The Door

Play in Two Acts

BY T.J. STRAAYER

Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
Maybe there's a dog rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,

or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least there'll be
a draught.

MIROSLAV HOLUB

The characters: COTTON COTTON II ALMA ROTTER MARJORIE

The first act opens on the bedroom of Cotton, a divorced thirty-five-year-old. With him is his doppelgänger-ego, Cotton II. Cotton is hung by remorse and gloom, suicidally chain-smoking cigarettes, the ashes and butts of which liberally litter the room. Cotton II discusses Cotton's depression with him.

COTTON: Darwin, where are you now? I'm negating your blessed theory, trapped as I am in this wretched downward muckslide.

COTTON II: It would seem we've walked under the evolutionary ladder for all the luck we're having.

COTTON: Not the first, but one of the better examples of devolution is what I've become. Knocked for a loop on the spiral of my life. I have been demoted past recognition.

COTTON II: It's not our fault. Our regression is due to a shove, not a stumble. The wench is to blame.

COTTON: Marjorie? Yes, she is to blame. I bared my soul to her and she spat an acid on my nakedness.

Marjorie is Cotton's ex-wife, and it is his divorce from her which has caused him to withdraw from the world. Cotton's mother, Alma, enters the room, and after deploring the mess, suggests that his actions are leading people to believe that the divorce was his fault. Cotton II, the embodiment of Cotton's ego, is outraged. Furiously, he hatches a plot to regain popular favor.

COTTON II: There is still one act which is universally accepted as grounds for divorce.

COTTON: Adultery?

COTTON II: Yes.

COTTON: But that wasn't the reason for the divorce. Nobody was cheating on anybody.

COTTON II: Still, if she were fooling around now it would reflect very badly on her. People would draw conclusions.

COTTON: And I would be granted a sort of ex post facto vindication.

COTTON II: Precisely.

To perform the cuckoldry Cotton II summons up "a bunch of rags and hair. Some skin pulled taut over nothing"; a being with "the soul of an adding machine"; a creature named, significantly, Rotter. Rotter is sent to the bedside of Marjorie, where he explains his mission to the skeptical and scandalized divorcee.

Rotter: I'm no cuckoldor, no sybarite. I'm an anemic, simpering bungler who could no more endanger a husband's manly honor than I could beat him in a fist fight. I am handpicked as an inferior product. I don't even have any taste for sex. From my point of view the whole grotesque charade is repugnant. Think what a sick joke I would be in bed. Why, any woman that would copulate with me would be made ludicrous by the act. Any husband would be better off without such baggage as would stoop to the likes of me.

(MARJORIE's eyes shoot up as she comprehends. ROTTER nods) That is the plan.

Marjorie urges Rotter to defy Cotton's orders, but Rotter, believing that Cotton created him and substantiates his existence, is terrified of such a plan. In the course of
their argument Rotter is struck with a coronary seizure. A frightened Marjorie helps Rotter into her bed.

ROTTER: Migawd, what burlesque. This is all so sloppy and contrived. Efficient enough, I suppose, but tasteless in the extreme.

MARJORIE: You must be quiet. Don’t exert yourself. ROTTER: Where are your principles now, woman? You’re helping him. Don’t you see—he’s already gotten one of us in bed.

Marjorie interprets the attack as psychosomatically induced, and that its cure will be effected if she complies with the psychological imperative under which Rotter is laboring by getting into bed with him. Rotter warns her not to.

ROTTER: It would cost you your virtue. You have only to enter this bed, woman, and all is lost. [Cotton] will have scored his point and we will both be lost.

* * *

MARJORIE: You’re wrong and he’s wrong if you think he can rob me of my virtue. An act of mercy through love constitutes virtue; it doesn’t in any way diminish it. He can’t steal from me what I freely give away.

She overrides Rotter’s objections and enters the bed. Rotter’s pain subsides. The scene shifts back to Cotton’s room where Cotton II is exultant, but Cotton is unsure that a victory has been won.

COTTON II (forcefully): She’s in bed with him, isn’t she? COTTON: Yes, but for the wrong reasons. COTTON II (chuckling): Well, of course for the wrong reasons.

COTTON (angrily): You know what I mean! It wasn’t her lust that drove her there. She knew the plan. She knew what was at stake. And yet she did it despite me. (Eaten up with frustration.) She’s scraping through this thing with some dignity!

Cotton II, however, remains sure that he has been vindicated, and drowns, rather than calms, Cotton’s trepidations. The scene shifts back to Marjorie’s room where she is trying to persuade Rotter to free himself from the yoke of psychological domination by Cotton. Rotter is still horrified by the proposition.

ROTTER: It would be insanity to provoke him! I won’t go poking at a rattlesnake in the name of an abstraction.

Eventually, however, Marjorie is able to convince him that he must make the attempt for his own sake, and he reluctantly agrees to try.

The second act opens as Rotter confronts Cotton and Cotton II in Cotton’s room. Nervously, he seeks proof of his independence from Cotton.

ROTTER: My contention is with you personally. I must show my superiority to you in some objectively verifiable way.

COTTON: Some test of strength.

ROTTER: Yes.

COTTON II: How about an arm wrestle?

ROTTER (somewhat shocked): An arm wrestle? To establish my freedom? I had envisioned something a little more spectacular.

COTTON II: Granted, it’s a trivial enough test, but then, so are the stakes at hand.

ROTTER: My existence?

COTTON II: Just so.

Night City  Barb Broodman

Rotter and Cotton wrestle—with words as well as muscle; Rotter, inferior to Cotton in both categories, loses. The scene shifts to a dungeon, into which Rotter is summarily tossed. He is followed, shortly, by Cotton, whom Cotton II has likewise banished, having found him unnecessary in his egotistical campaigns. Cotton and Rotter commiserate together, discussing their separate plights. Cotton, analyzing Rotter’s failure, suggests that the only way he can be free of domination from Cotton II is to appeal to a higher authority.

ROTTER: What higher authority?

COTTON (hedging, he avoids ROTTER’s gaze): Well, ah . . . .

ROTTER (tumbling): Oh!

COTTON: You see why I hesitate.

ROTTER (lost in thought): Mmm . . .

COTTON: It’s a very dark horse to be betting on. For myself, I have no affinity with the mystical. No background in theology. No authority to speak of. No personal experience. It only amounts to . . . a possibility.

ROTTER: Indeed.

COTTON: Implementation of any program along these lines would be quite as arbitrary as your oppressor’s philosophy, and a good deal more uncertain. You know where you stand with despair, but hope is an infinitely stickier subject.

Struggling, Rotter decides to make his blind bid for freedom. Slowly, he goes and opens the door to the dungeon, and quietly he leaves, leaving Cotton behind.