

# Red Ball

They crouch along the pavement  
at home, in their crevices and doorways.  
We try to pretend we do not notice them.  
We speak in loud voices of our busy day.  
Too busy to be bothered.  
Suddenly, from an unseen alley,  
a small child runs into me.  
I stop....  
My world has been disrupted  
by a child of another.

We, of the street, watch silently, but alert;  
ready to protect, if necessary.  
No one knows the child,  
but she is one of us.  
She was chasing a small red ball.  
but she has disturbed a woman from the crowd:  
a woman with a red hat and scarf.  
Moments ago, this stranger avoided our eyes,  
now she searches them.

The child stares up at me,  
with pure blue eyes,  
through dirty blonde hair which falls brazenly  
across her pale, thin face.  
She is no older than six.  
She is trusting, caring, vulnerable.

The red ball bounces into the street.  
It rolls down, picking up speed  
as it is caught  
in the stream of rain water and filth.  
It rolls toward an open drain.  
We all watch helplessly as it vanishes  
into the sewer, beneath the city,  
beneath the streets.

It is lost.  
Just as a mother somewhere has lost this child,  
just as this child, as many of these children,  
as lost her childhood,  
to the streets.  
Tears slip down the child's cheeks,  
mixing now with the falling rain.  
into the sewer, beneath the city,  
beneath the streets.

Poor little child  
Marrying for love  
Thinking it is right

Bonded to a ring  
The rest of her life  
Such security  
To which she clings

Secure in ignorance  
in pain  
Secure in locks  
from freedom and chance

Virgin in white  
Virgin to life  
If not from man  
Virgin to light

by Elys Carr

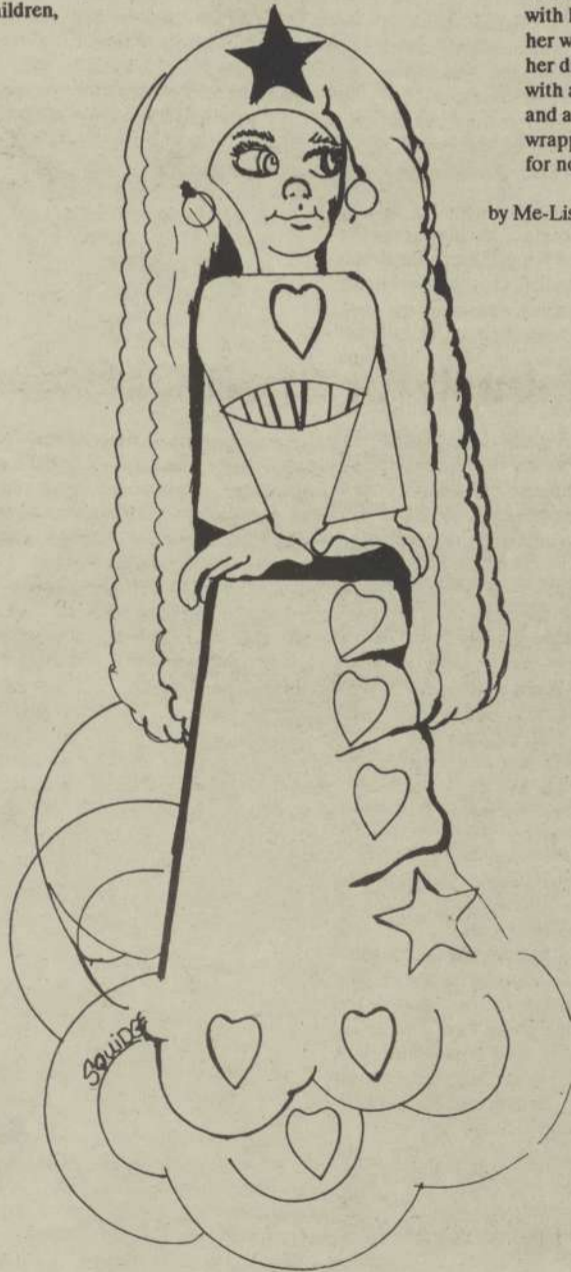
It is lost.  
Just as a mother somewhere has lost this child,  
just as this child, as many of these children,  
as lost her childhood,  
to the streets.  
Tears slip down the child's cheeks,  
mixing now with the falling rain.  
They leave a clean trace of sorrow  
in the coal and dirt of the streets.

The woman reaches out to the child.  
Gently, sympathetically,  
she stoops, and pulls the child's abused hair  
back, away from her tiny face.  
She wants to help this child,  
We all want to help.  
How?

The tiny face  
stares up into my own.  
Tears still fall with the rain.  
I am so sorry.  
Who are you?  
Where do you come from?  
Where is your mother?  
The child falls softly  
into my arms,  
and buries her face  
in the warm folds of my jacket.

Soon the woman is gone.  
She is swept, once again  
back into the crowd of her world,  
escaping the bitter wind,  
and the falling rain  
of the streets.  
The child turns to us on the pavement,  
She waves her tiny fingers.  
We are cold, damp, and hungry,  
but we gaze at this tiny child of hope  
and we wave.  
We wave at her,  
with her tattered clothes,  
her worn shoes,  
her dirty face,  
with a shiny new quarter clutched in her hands  
and a bright red scarf  
wrapped around her tiny shoulders,  
for now.

by Me-Lissa Cartales



NOVEMBER 14, 1988  
Lynn Baker

OH, MY ACHING BACK!  
MY SACROILIAC  
IT FOLLOWS ME AROUND ALL DAY  
AND WHEN I GO TO BED  
IT CAUSES DREAMS  
OF ANGRY SCREAMS  
THAT ECHO THROUGH MY HEAD  
WHEN I AWAKE  
MY BACK STILL ACHES  
BUT NOW MY HEART IS HURTING  
FOR THE THINGS I DREAMED I SAID  
IF A WISH IS WHY I DREAM  
THAN IT WOULD SURELY SEEM  
I MUST ASK FORGIVENESS  
FOR WHAT I AM THINKING  
AND SEND MY BAD BACK  
BACK TO BED!!!

