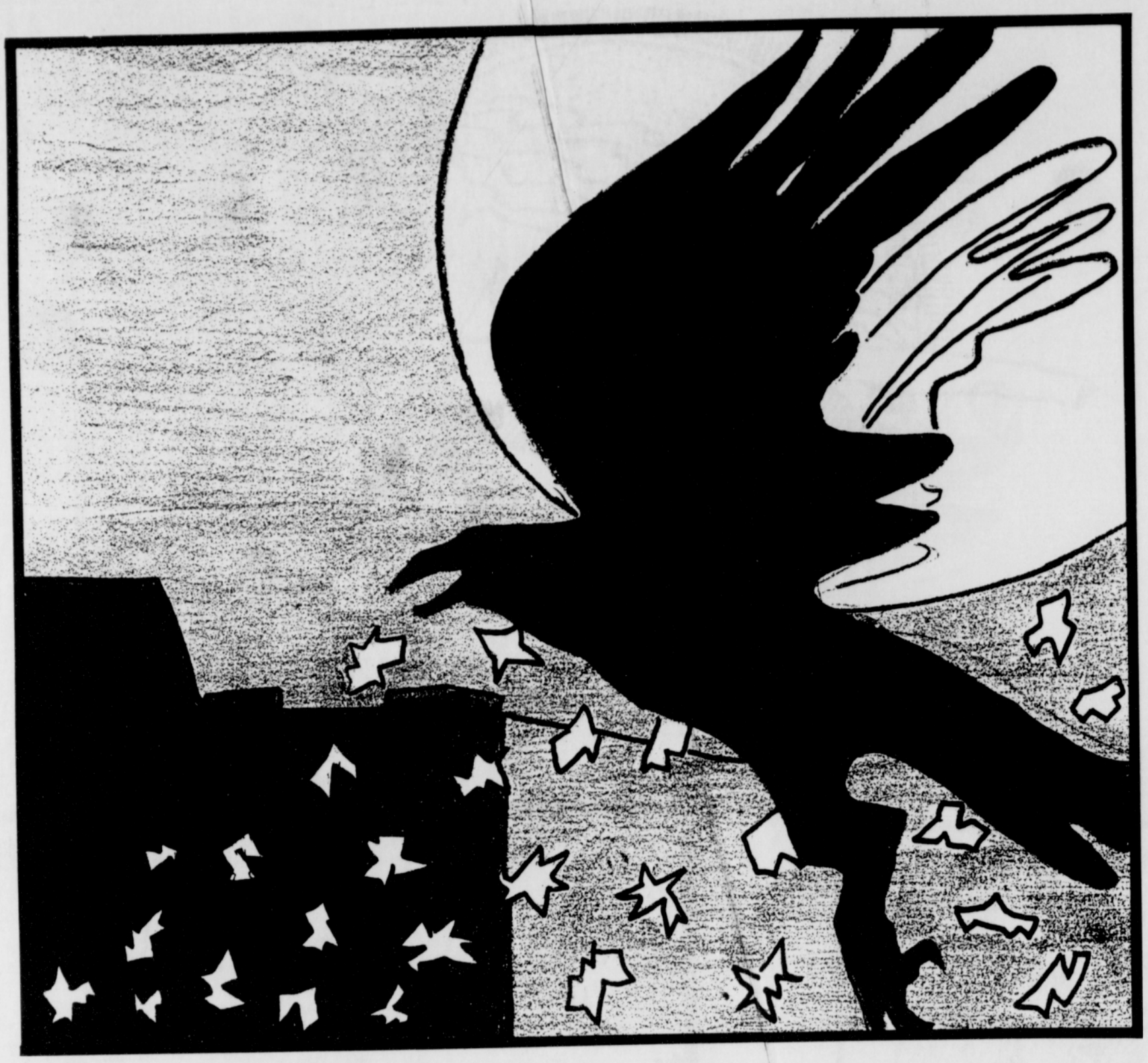

WALKING TOUR OF ASTORIA

POEM BY JUANITA HUEBNER
DRAWING BY GAYLE STARR

here, where time is washed by rain
when space is marinated by water
here, in a tripled horizon of ribbons: aquatic, terrestrial, aerial
where rivers are confluences of endless fingers feeding the palm
of the ocean
the land drunken and emerald
and where the undefined pewter sky seldom dissolves from its neutral
mirror into a blaze of blueness
here, in days, in nights, in all seasons
in motion
moving with the mind murmuring it's syllables, its paragraphs
rhythmed into neighborhoods and green-flamed forest
without a map
with only an open wonder
distant, alone
with the mind rolling forever like languages of salmon and sturgeon
through these rivers
against a backdrop so familiar, so wordlessly known...

burrowing inside the velvet and wax mingled by a single plant
the azaleas burning like red christmases and conversations of leaves
and going underneath, down toward the precious burdens of seeds
seeds folded by the old hands of the wind into rich, dark earth,
mazes of roots
a seed falling through whispered cities of misted trees
pulled by gravity toward a subterranean birth...
and below, where privacy is so extreme
it loses its shape
where tunnels are long thoughts of unspoken sentences
where questions sink into the subsoil of language
burrowing below,
all the misfortunes, the lost belief crushed into the faces of strangers
hearts cocooned like bottled storms
like boxed blackness wishing to ascend, to break ground
and to begin to walk...

to walk into swallowed hours
the night so enlarged by sound
the endless chorus echoing up the slope
a chorus of seals feasting on sushi within an old wooden amphitheater
of houses
cupping sound and water in a haunting music
the music like a soul in a strange aquarium
whirling out like a river of incense
above the disappearing grid of pilings capped with moss
pillars holding up a vanished history
a history of work and resource and politics
harvests of sea and wood by unending mouths of promises and lies.

walking
where more of the dead than the living walk with us
trapped in quicksands of insomnia
the night covering it's eyelid over the town with the moon
the moon, the stone navel of the sky, pure, patient
old, and ivory
a silence passing through the air
through the doors of eyes
and along smooth, pine-stained strands of light
along arrowing spines of trees
above the great celery girders of the bridge
and straight through the woven logic of a spider's web stretched
between a streetpole and an early star harnessed to an
october sky.

walking
dispossessed of what crowds and collapses the acquisitive world
a world nauseous from the fanfare of technology,
of trinkets, of estrangement's profusion of artifacts
walking the trainless tracks, split rock and rusted rail
and toward a burnt horizon of embers
a bum's park coved by wild lilacs and cardboard
a place of stories made fluent by cheap wine and solitude
told to rock-ringed fires
told over and over again
the smoke winding and thinning from a final bed of ash.

and again walking
the senses spreading to invent new adjectives for what is beautiful
the senses electric in a dervish of leaves
in a ripe labyrinth of berries
in a crow's dance of ragged wings in a sky salted with stars
the senses spearing the flying fish of gossip and contempt
using their cold, hard bones as combs for the snarls
throwing the rest into a limitless gallery of waves and moons
as circular and redundant as the town's memory...
the senses like acid and sugar in a balance
the senses flowing like twenty fingers over the braille geographies
of sex and secrets...

and walking
the legs carve elusive limbs and twigs into the unanimous fog
the foot arcs a path from onesself to onesself
receiving horizons and letting them loose
every image carried for awhile like water in two joined hands
seeing, erasing
and each moment moving, pausing
becoming the passage which walks itself...