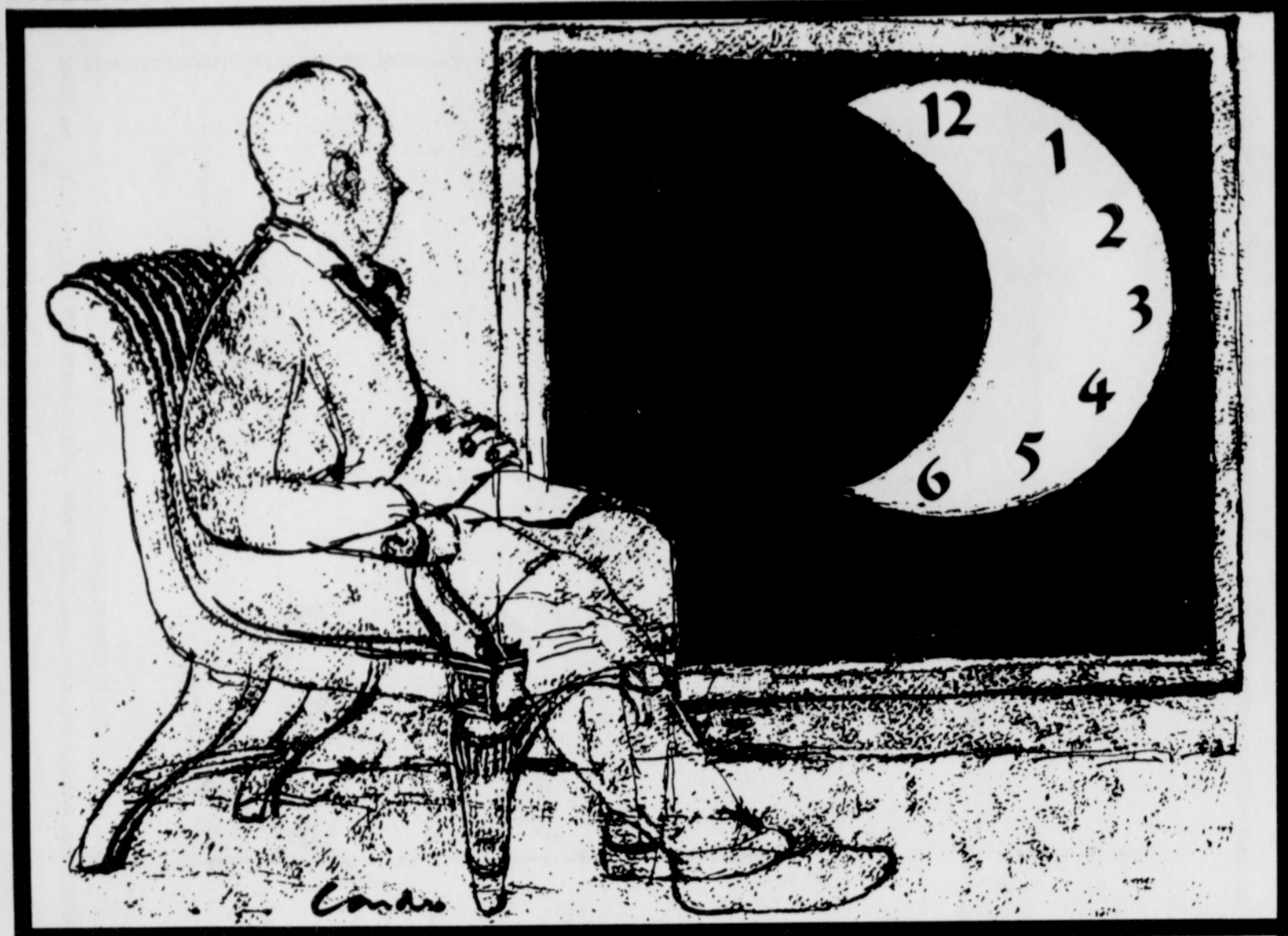




HORACIO FIDEL CARDO

INSOMNIA

BY JIM McCAFFERTY

2:15 a.m.

The snow lies cold and white on the lawn, tree shadows blue and somber, footprints lacing and crisscrossing the serene whiteness. It is crisp and clear, the moonlight almost glaring. I stand in the window admiring the winter wonderland. The dog breathes at me. He wants to go out. I open the door and shiver at the chill blast; but he trots out and starts on his appointed rounds. He must guard. He marks each tree and bush with patience and dedication. No creature wild or tame must be permitted to violate his domain. *What aim! What control! What capacity!* But through his perseverance we are not bothered by deer, raccoons, bears, elk, woolly mammoths, or meter readers.

2:45 a.m.

I wander the house, look out the back windows. Through the trees the river is a black emptiness; only channel markers winking green or red break the dark. I notice that the living room, too, is a winking, glowing being -- the TV clock glows green, the VCR flashes its ready signal at me, the smoke alert is a point of red, even the cordless phone has a light. In the kitchen the stove and microwave each have glowing clocks telling slightly different times, time being a relative thing and not to be considered absolute. In the bedroom are more lights -- the night light, clock radio, the rechargeable flashlight, the amplifier and CD changer that also has a clock -- unset, because only the electronic genius who designed it could figure out how, and he's in Japan somewhere. Even the guy who wrote the instruction manual couldn't master it (or the language, either; he's in Japan somewhere too). The cordless razor in the bathroom is also illuminated in case you have a compulsion to shave in the dark. A thousand points of light, most of them red.

3:05 a.m.

I check the door; no dog. He has wandered off into the woods, marking the trail. Such dedication. At times he lies in the snow on his bare belly, watching, alert, mindful of his responsibilities. You'd think he'd freeze. You'd never catch me doing that, even in midsummer. There are ants and lawn moths in the grass. Worms too probably.

3:20 a.m.

Well, what's on TV? A guy selling woks: a guy selling car polish: a guy selling a vegetable slicer: a blond, chubby lady with mascara streaming down her cheeks selling hysteria. Don't need any of that. An ancient movie, giant ants eating L.A. Go for it, ants!



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3:40 a.m.

A scratch upon the door: the wanderer has returned. He comes in limping, snowballs clustered between his toes, and lies on the hearthrug patiently pulling the muddy balls out with his teeth and depositing them on the just-cleaned rug. I retire to my bed, pull the covers up high and try to sleep. The warm bed begins to take over. I float gently in a warm cloud, drifting, drifting... The dog is breathing in my ear. There must be a bush he missed.

"Scram," I whisper. "Go away, go to sleep, you're not going out again." Muttering to himself he leaves the bedroom.

4:07 a.m.

Drifting, drifting... The sound of gnawing from the other room. Is he chewing his bone or the bookcase? I give in, throw back the warm covers, step into the frigid air, let the dog out. He goes happily off to a shrub he's visited several times, as evidenced by the multiple tracks around it.

Why is it so bloody cold? The thermostat, set at 70, allows the temperature to plunge to 55 before pumping it up to 80 some, giving an average somewhere in the 70s, plus or minus a few. If we can land men on the moon, why can't we make a thermostat with a little more precision. I stagger back to bed; the sheets are still a little warm. *Drifting, drifting...*

4:12 a.m.

Scratch, scratch. I ignore it. Maybe he'll freeze to the front steps. Maybe a wolf will howl and he'll remember his ancestry and go back to nature. Maybe he'll roast in hell, as I now fervently wishing. No luck. *Scratch, scratch.* To protect the finish on the door I get up and let him in. Smiling, happy, isn't it time to play, have a cookie, a little drink of milk? No it isn't. **GO TO SLEEP!**

4:27 a.m.

The wind comes up, the trees thrash about, the power lines creak and hum. The dog gnaws something; if it is the bookcase, the hell with it. The refrigerator, normally a quiet, servile nonentity, begins to thrash and grind. The blood pounds in my head. The furnace comes on, the pipes pop and groan, and there's a strange *chee-deet chee-deet* that I can't identify. The hell with that too. *Drifting, drifting...*

5:18 a.m.

The dog down the street begins to bark. The dog in this house wants to check out why. He breathes in my ear. "Go away." He wags his tail, knowing that it's banging on the closet door like an African signal drum. I let him out, climb back in bed, and finally drift off.

7:34 a.m.

"Get up, get up! You'll sleep half your life away!"
Why am I always so tired?

Jim McCafferty lives and sometimes sleeps in Astoria.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I was particularly struck by MPMC's article "Just Say No to the War of Drugs" and R. Louis Richards' "Regeneration" in the March/April issue of the *North Coast Times Eagle*. The two articles together offer the key insight into the malaise of the acculturated mind. Surely the strictures of condition are invisible bars to free thought. Even worse, complacency within the subtle limitation of societal habit breeds, feeds and rewards the fear of new ideas. In regard to the legalization of drugs even so-called liberal minds hesitate at the edge of these supposed icy waters -- "Might we fall off the edge of the planet?" A Columbian leap of faith, faith in the individual and rejection of the ruling plutocracy is necessary to understand how the best solution to this thing called the "drug problem" is also the easiest and cheapest one. In a society that nonsensically glamorizes violence of all manner and censors the act of making love, I suppose it is only silly to wonder why the clear and simple logic of drug legalization causes such paranoid consternation.

Keep on truckin'. Help free thought.

~DAN ARMSTRONG, ASTORIA

TO THE EDITOR:

It was nice to see Robert McNamara's recent apology for the Vietnam War, even though it came 25 years too late to make any difference. He is not telling us anything which was not known or widely believed at the time by opponents of the war.

I would be more interested to hear him apologize, while it still could make a difference, for the environmental and economic devastation of 2nd and 3rd world countries caused by the World Bank under his guidance.

The international debt crisis of the '80s and '90s, and the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs, which were forced on debtor nations, have accelerated destruction of rain forests for export, and the impoverishment of 3rd world peoples, to insure that debt payments are made to American and European banks.

When McNamara finally leaves the World Bank, we may look for him to echo President Eisenhower's ineffectual departing remark, "Beware of the military/industrial complex" with something like, "Beware of Northern bankers out for a fast buck."

Twinges of conscience by these men, after sitting in the driver's seat (Eisenhower for eight years; McNamara at the World Bank, for decades) leave me a little cold.

~HARRY JOHNSON, ASTORIA

TO THE EDITOR:

The United States is perilously close to losing its most basic fundamental, one which underlies and sustains free thought and open debate, the public agreement to disagree. We are losing our civility, replacing it with intolerance, hysteria and threatened genocide. It seems as if we are more fractious and divisive than since the end of the first American Civil War. Our argument is still the same; race and gender, framed now in terms of wealth, rich against the poor, white male CEOs and congressmen versus ghetto blacks and single mothers.

The real issue is the disparity of wealth. The religious rightwing is determined to begin a second Civil War, but their obsessive conservatism is fueled by the wealthy who support every move against libertarian leftist ideas and persons. Thus the wealthy, whose affluence is based on public money paid by the poor they incessantly impoverish, are the real revolutionaries because they are the source of the dissolution of the society that indulges their insatiable avarice.

"There's as much money in the country as there ever was," Will Rogers said during the Depression, "but fewer got it."

~HORACE UPDASH, CAPE FEAR



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