

Affinity

Harry Yankuner

ON THE loading dock sits a small woman, bundled against the cold, her ruddy face swelling as she slowly takes a drag on a cigarette. Her hoarse voice seems in harmony with her appearance, and her hand movements reveal a gold-colored ring on her middle finger. When she laughs, her face wrinkles, her eyes seem to disappear, and her broad smile shows but two teeth. Below her in the alley stands her companion, whose speech is impaired by a cleft palate. The women's laughs are gay as they share a candy bar and talk of mending a dress. Off to the side stands an elderly night watchman, his hands stuffed into the large slanted pockets of his unbuttoned navy blue pea jacket. Farther back on the dock is another man dressed in a faded sweatshirt, a pair of baggy pants, and a torn leather cap. He runs his fingers through the coins in the pocket of a blue and white apron with "NEWS" printed on it. Out of a small room at the end of the dock floats the aroma of freshly brewed coffee.

The walls of the room are lined with stacks of newspapers that reach to the ceiling. Behind a wire partition at the end of the room is a small office for the distribution of papers. Around the room people are sitting on low stacks of papers and rough wooden benches. In a corner sits a woman rolling a cigarette. A short stocky man is standing by a water fountain, stuffing something into his already bulging pockets. The room is close, heavy with stale tobacco smoke.

A guffaw rings through the alley and the sound of shuffling feet approaches the room. A man, obviously fuddled with drink, stumbles down the stairs. Familiar with the man, the people continue their light talk. Unable to gain the others' attention, the drunken man, cursing, leaves the room. The woman who has been sitting on the dock outside comes in and the men greet her with "G'd evenin' Mrs. NEWS" (clearly she has been here a long time). Her bright cheery face adds warmth to the atmosphere, and for a while the men tease her with offers of marriage. The papers are late and anxiety sets in, giving the atmosphere a sudden quietness. Then a strident voice pierces the silence, "Get out here, you tramps—here they come!"

As the papers come sliding down the chutes, the alley comes alive with activity. Men grab their carts and push forward to be first in getting their papers. A man hurries out of the room with a hot cup of coffee in his hand and a pigeon feather stuck in his hatband. The papers are handed down and put into the carts. A truck picks up several riders and their papers to be dropped off at distant places in the city. Quickly the people leave for their assigned corners.

"Mrs. NEWS" is already on the corner with her wagon of papers. Across the park the neon flashing lights illuminate the night.

Cars racing down the streets, mufflers loud, gears whining. A car pulls up and the window opens for a paper. It is quiet again, and the only sound is the hoarse voice shouting, "Pay puh."

Above the Lake

Jenny Ellis

THE RISING sun casts a shadow of the mountain onto the surface of the small Austrian Lake, Schwartzee. Miniature woodland flowers, varying from shades of white to deep purple, spring back up and make anonymous the footprints following me on the flower-clad lowland. The sun is now rising above the horizon; and with the advent of dawn, the rams and sheep appear. Over the rippling waves of the lake I hear the distant bleat of a mountain goat. The crisp, clear mountain air draws all my worries from me. As I slowly ascend the mountain, I can see the ominous thunderhead. The fallen timber strewn across the path creaks and groans underfoot, as I imagine it must have done when the thunderstorm struck. The icy rivulets quench my constant thirst, and the rhythmic waterfalls, trickling gently over the embedded moss, relax my taut nerves.

Higher up on the the mountain, smoke of the alpine cottages rises gently to mingle with the ever-increasing haze of the late afternoon. One of the cottages' stone walls intercepts my path. Here, after stopping to check my boots, I view the magnificent white peak towering above me. A native once attempted reaching the peak of Mount Bernine in this same region, but lost his direction in a dense fog. He gave up in despair, but I never will. Thick snow now covers the expanse which lies before me; and from the snow slope on which I stand, the sheep appear as toy animals grazing on a child's green blanket. Suddenly, a deep rumbling echoes across the valley. My tension and fear grow together. My heart beats faster as I recognize the distinct thunder of an avalanche. A mass of billowing froth rises in slow motion. Endless seconds pass, and cascading snow and ice flow like white taffy from beneath the froth, gaining momentum every second. I will conquer it—this magnificent force of the heights. I will reach the peak.

The struggle is taking its toll of my energy and determination. I am weakening. The avalanche appears to be stopping, but ever so slowly. Suddenly the surging is upon me. I feel my feet slipping—then the sensation of cold ice cuts against my body. With every ounce of my seemingly waning strength, I quickly try to grasp for a friendly branch, but a paralyzing helplessness seizes me. The struggle is over. I have achieved nothing.

As I gain consciousness, I am weary with disappointment. However, I see that something else has become lighter. In the east approaches the dawning of a new day. With the birth of this day will