3 A.M.**

edward l. williams, III

varicose veins twist across the broken streets, and dull gray shadows sway beneath the sallow light of skeletal lampposts.

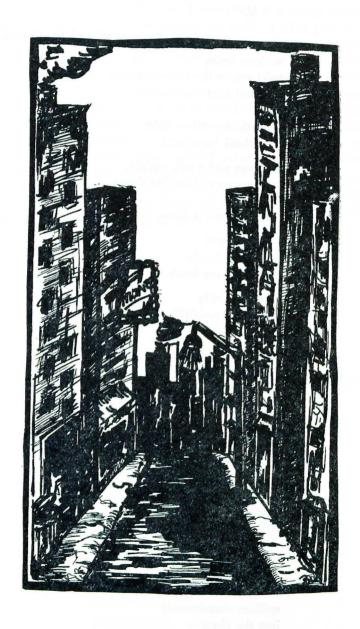
darkness wears silk tonight, and love oozes from her throat like honey spilling down a honey jar.

i am fingered by sodden hands that claim my heart.

"but i am only twentytwoyearold!" i protest,

my words spraying in a mist and catching in the web that the mysterious black-eyed woman spins.

sibilant echoes
twitch convulsively
beneath my ribs,
burgeoning madly,
rising,
until finally
i hear the sonorous roar
of surrender
clanging down eternal halls,
spilling thunderously
into the abyss—



"take me," i whisper.
"take me in your arms!
I AM COME TO YOU!!
HERE!
MY SOUL . . ."

the city lies on its back like a cancer-eaten giant not yet dead, and not even darkness removes the stench of mangled hearts and souls that are imbedded in its pavement.

neon lights flash beside the scarlet wounds while the heart slows.

here
i write my name
within the cracks and crevices.
here
i infest my blood with its disease.
here
i take my leave of love—

here my leave of life,

no longer bold to call you darling, no longer strong to take you down, unable

even in death

to destroy your image.

^{** (}For proper reference, see *The Crack Up*, F. S. Fitzgerald, "Handle With Care.")