

1969

The Fat Giraffe, volume 1, number 5 (1969)

Fat Giraffe

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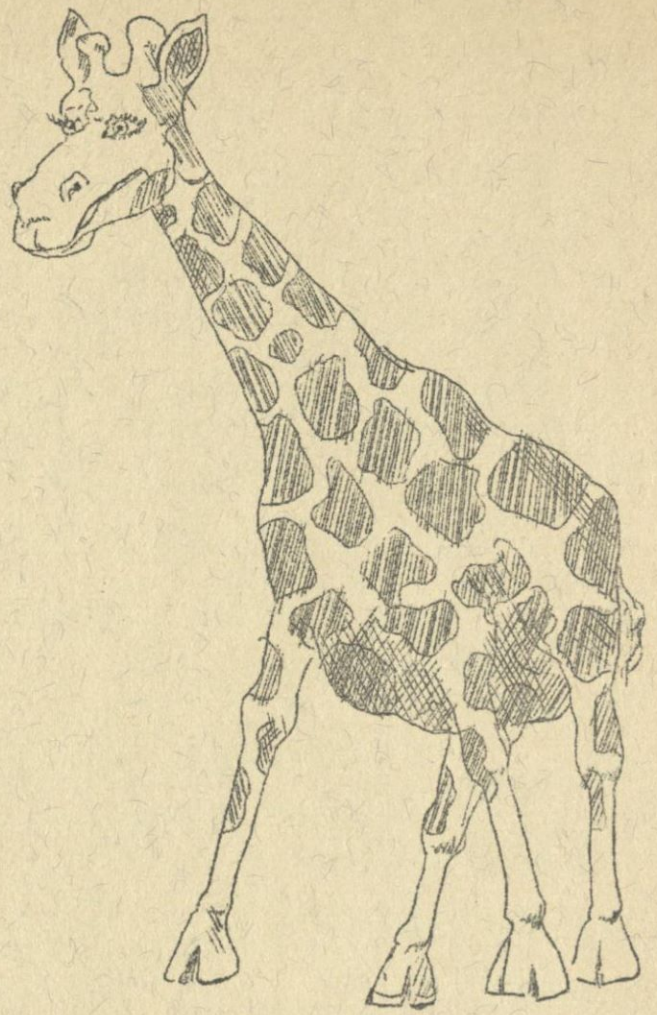
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Recommended Citation

Giraffe, Fat, "The Fat Giraffe, volume 1, number 5 (1969)" (1969). *The Fat Giraffe*. 4.
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THE FAT GIRAFFE



ONE
DIME

The Fat Giraffe is an independent, non-profit creative writing publication, issued twice per quarter by a group of students and faculty at Moorhead State College, Moorhead, Minnesota. Manuscripts (poetry, short stories, and short essays) may be submitted to any member of the editorial staff.

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ARBOREAL

People who live in trees
have eyes--gentle
as sloe berry, blue plum, ripe acorn;
maybe from bathing in deep distance,
bottomless blue, leafy border;
maybe from swinging through green vistas,
intricate air-borne architectonics;
sighting along diagonal sun-shafts,
watching the antic ground action.
From the vantage of swung-by-the-knees,
judge and ditcher go up-so-doun.

- Mary Anne Pryor

MAYOR DALEY

He pictures himself as a monument
gilded
America on a horse, robes girded
watchful, with a sword

But noble figures hardly fit Chicago
with its stockyards of people
herded to the polls, driven and prodded
along their sooty ramps

So instead
picture a huge mottled lump on a pedestal
brooding sullen, immobile
not quite featureless, though:
no holes for ears
but, like a one-holed bowling ball, a mouth
for mumbling and for feeding
and hidden pouched creases like a pig's for eyes
that blink out once a decade

- Joe Sanders

INSANE POEM

I am insane.
And it is hard to sleep
When each time I close my eyes
There is a vision
Of a young featherless bird,
With large featherless eyes.
And each time
The vision peeps
Twice.
Once
for
each
eye.

I am insane.
And my eyes are insane
But each eye seems
A bit more insane
Than the other.
And closely
In a mirror
There are two of me.
One
for
each
eye.

I am insane.
And I will rip
The vision of insanity
From my skull
Twice.
Once
for
each
eye.

I am blindly insane.
And I will die
With little regret
Sucking the end
Of a shotgun
And I will pull
The trigger
Twice.
Once
for
each
eye.

THE RIDE FROM THE GUTHRIE

The headlights of the red MG slid two beams monotonously along the road and into the night. His head drooped and began to bob slowly above the wheel. A drugged sensation tugged at his eyelids and they began to blink slower and slower until they closed. Gradually his shoulders stooped in a comfortable arch away from the seatback and his fingers lost their grip and hung heavily on the wheel. The car drifted off the road onto the rough gravel shoulder at 70 miles an hour and the outside front wheel thumped sharply into a six-inch rut in the gravel, lurching the driver awake. He gripped the wheel and swerved the car sharply back onto the road.

Jeff Pearson sat up and held his shoulders back too far, so that he was uncomfortable. He forced his eyes open so much that his brows arched high into his forehead, and it seemed that they were the only things keeping the heavy lids up. For a while he played with the blinker switch. He opened his window. He played with the radio. He played with the heater-defroster switches. And Sarah, her head resting on the window as she nestled into her door, slept on without waking.

The trip was a bad idea in the first place. It was Jeff's last day of vacation, and since he'd gotten almost no sleep for the first 13 days of his two weeks, he'd planned to sit around in his apartment and do nothing for his last day. He hadn't planned to see Sarah. But his brother called from Minneapolis and complained sarcastically about not having seen him all summer and how it sure as hell would be nice to see him since they were brothers and yes he could get tickets for the Guthrie so zip down here then. He called Sarah.

"Well, listen, I might just as well go back to work asleep as exhausted, so it doesn't make any difference. Besides, Curt got tickets for the Guthrie."

"It's okay with me. What's playing at the Guthrie?"

"Sartre's No Exit."

"Mmmm."

"Yeah, it should be all right. Listen, what time do you have to work on Monday?"

"Noon."

"I've gotta start again at nine, so you'll get more sleep than I will. Um, let's see--I'll pick you up in an hour, okay?"

"Fine."

"All right. Bye."

"G'bye."

When the play got out it was eleven thirty and they had 250 miles to drive. But Curt suggested coffee somewhere before they took off. They could talk awhile and it would wake everyone up.

Curt's wife wanted to stop at the Ember's 24-hour place on Lake Street because she wanted their strawberry pie. The women went to the washroom after they ordered so Jeff and Curt got to

talk to each other alone. Curt was the older brother and he wanted to know about Sarah.

"Well, kid, you gonna be ready to go back to work tomorrow?"

"I'm gonna be so damned tired they'll think I contracted malaria."

"Been using your nights to the fullest advantage, eh?"

"I told you that on the phone. I'm gonna be so whipped tomorrow I won't know what I'm doing."

"You and Sarah are getting along pretty good then, eh? That's good. I thought you two were fighting all the time. You said you were sick of it in your last letter."

"Yeah, it's wierd, all right. Sarah's been around a lot but she's very funny about it."

Jeff finished his glass of water and began jiggling his glass to dislodge one of the ice cubes stuck on the bottom. He saw that Curt wasn't satisfied. "She just doesn't talk about it much, that's all. She's just quiet about it."

The girls came back about two minutes before the waitress brought their order. Jeff asked for more water which he drank quickly so he could fool with his ice cubes as he talked. By the time they paid the check it was almost one a.m. Because he had a lot of driving to do, Jeff made his goodbye to his brother very short: he promised to write and thanked him for getting the tickets. Curt and his wife headed for their apartment in Bloomington; Jeff and Sarah headed for Highway 52 West.

He went back to playing with the radio; he had to lean forward slightly to reach the tuning knob and he kept his back stiff as he did it so that it would irritate the muscles in the small of his back. Radio stations droned in constantly but few were clear; those that were clear were "easy listening" stations that played soft, low key instrumentals laden with trombones and saxophones. At one point he got a sibilant blast of static and played with it, running the tuner back and forth across the spot to make the speaker blip and screech. But after a while he began to lose the awareness that it was his hand causing the noise and the electronic scraping began to hypnotize him. He knew he was losing.

"Sarah. Sarah, wake up."

She turned her head, stretched her arms slowly and sat up.

"What's the matter? Tired?"

"I've been falling asleep for the last half hour. I went off the road once."

"Why don't you pull over and rest for a minute?"

"It won't do me any damn good. That stuff only makes me sleepier."

"I wish I knew how to drive your car."

"How sleepy are you?"

"Not very. I'm fine, really."

"Then talk to me. I'll wake up if we talk awhile."

Sarah talked to him for five minutes but wasn't really mindful of her job. She talked of nothing important, and when she could think of nothing else to say, she stopped. Outside, the dark, hilly countryside lay covered by a cold, cloudless sky and

she leaned back quietly and looked up at the stars. Jeff began losing again. His eyelids fell shut and he snapped his whole head up as if that would keep his eyes open longer.

"Sarah, just as, um, a number to toss out, how many guys have you gone with?"

Sarah turned her head but stayed low in the seat in her stargazing position. "Ever? You mean ever since I started dating?"

"Yes."

She sat up straighter and began to think. "Let's see. Oh, I don't know how many. Why do you want to know?"

"Just curious, that's all. I mean, what kind of a number is it? Thirty? Ten? Forty? How many?"

It was funny to her at first. Even flattering. She smiled a little as she thought; Jeff grew impatient and cut in before she could answer. "Well, never mind that. How long did you go with Jesse Trevors?"

The thoughtful smile fell from her quickly; she looked at him once, turned her head, and directed her gaze ahead of her, through the windshield. "I was very hung up on him. He was three years older and played in a rock group and everything."

"How old were you?"

"Sixteen. I used to go to dances all the time and I'd talk to him during breaks. He was quite attractive and went out with a lot of girls. He was--"

--How long did you go with him?"

"About two months. It wasn't like the way I feel about you, but at the time I was very hung up."

"Young and immature, huh?" But he wasn't smiling--just delivering questions.

"But I really wanted him."

"What happened?"

Sarah didn't want to talk anymore, but she knew he wouldn't let her stop. "He wanted to sleep with me." She kept talking to explain it correctly. "I didn't know what to do and I didn't want to lose him. He acted like I was a child not to. He made me feel very bad about it. But I wouldn't, so when the group went to South Dakota that weekend he went to bed with a whore."

"What about when he got back?"

"He took out other girls and slept with them."

"Was that when you started going with Ron Paulson? God, he's a greasy bastard."

"I never went out with him once. All kinds of guys called me after Jesse dropped me. They knew he slept with girls and they thought I was one of them."

"A victim of circumstances, so to speak."

She wanted to stop. She didn't want to look at him. He was calm and very patient.

Interstate 94 stretched ahead evenly, without flaw, and it too seemed willing to wait a long time for her answer. Sarah looked off the road and saw that at least the dark farmyards were not against her. The gentle rolling hills moved tranquilly about thick, ancient windbreaks that belted each cluster of wooden buildings. Lying dark or dimly lit with a single yardlamp, the

farms seemed not at all lonely for all their isolation. Sarah looked at her watch. Ten to four. She had about an hour to go.

"Some of them weren't so bad. I mean, some of them really liked me, but they all had the wrong idea about me. Then for a while nobody would take me out. The only one that really understood was Dave Halverson; we've been friends ever since I can remember."

"Always just a friend, huh? Why didn't he ever want to start anything with you?"

"He did. All along I guess. We even went out sometimes. Then once when he took me home he said he loved me."

"What was wrong with him?"

"Nothing. He was very nice and very good looking. I don't know. I just couldn't love him. But we're still good friends."

"I'll bet he's not too happy about it."

She answered numbly, and almost without feeling. From now on she would just give answers to his questions. "He goes out with other girls now. I don't know. It was like trying to love your big brother."

"D'you mess him up pretty bad?"

"I tried to explain everything. I think he understands now."

"Mm."

They came to an approach which marked the temporary end to the Interstate; the last 30 miles would be two-way traffic on Highway 52. It was an older road with many hills, bumps, and curves; driving would be much more interesting. He threw the gear-shift into third and then pulled it back to second and listened as the engine revved at each shift and power raced through the transmission to slow the car. The MG made a bouncing, indifferent attempt at obeying a stop sign and was off again as Jeff pushed the stick into first. It seemed like crawling after running at Interstate speeds, and Jeff was anxious to get going; he moved quickly through the gears, enjoying the throaty rapping of the engine as the tachometer needle bounced wildly with each shift.

To his right and just behind them the first fallow ridge of sunup burned yellow-orange against the black farmlands, with fewer and fewer hills as they moved into the Red River Valley. Above the orange, the sky faded to lighter and lighter shades of gray until finally, as the sun rose above the hills, it turned a weak yellow-white.

Jeff thought non-committally about whether he'd ask her out again, and whether she'd go out with him if he did. He thought maybe he would, and wondered if he should apologize now or later. Since apologizing on the phone as he asked her out would seem too manipulative, maybe he would apologize before he took her home.

Sarah sat turned away from Jeff and watched the dawn silently; she felt tired and weak and slightly too warm. Jeff was awake and knew he would make it all right. He slouched a bit in his seat and settled himself for the last few miles.