

THE MOON

I think that it's creepy—the way that it changes,
the way that it changes and sneaks off at dawn.
Sometimes it's lopsided. Sometimes it's round.
Sometimes it's glowing, and sometimes it's gone.

The moon makes me nervous. I don't understand it.
It's made of green cheese, Granddaddy said.
But sometimes it's blue, and sometimes it's white.
and sometimes it's orange, like processed cheese spread.

I might like the moon if it didn't change.
If the moon didn't change, I think I'd adore it,
the way I love my Mommy and Daddy,
and as I do them, I could simply ignore it.

That's the moon's problem. Nobody can trust it.
Sometimes it's round and sometimes lopsided,
and sometimes it sprouts sharp points at each end.
It could put out your eye, and leave you glass-eyed.

Uncle Jim, when he's drinking, tells me the full moon is a white ass hung in the blue.

The new moon's a black ass and the quarter's the half of his ass blown to heaven outside of Pleiku.

The moon must decide what it wants to be, no matter how dangerous, butt-like, or strange.

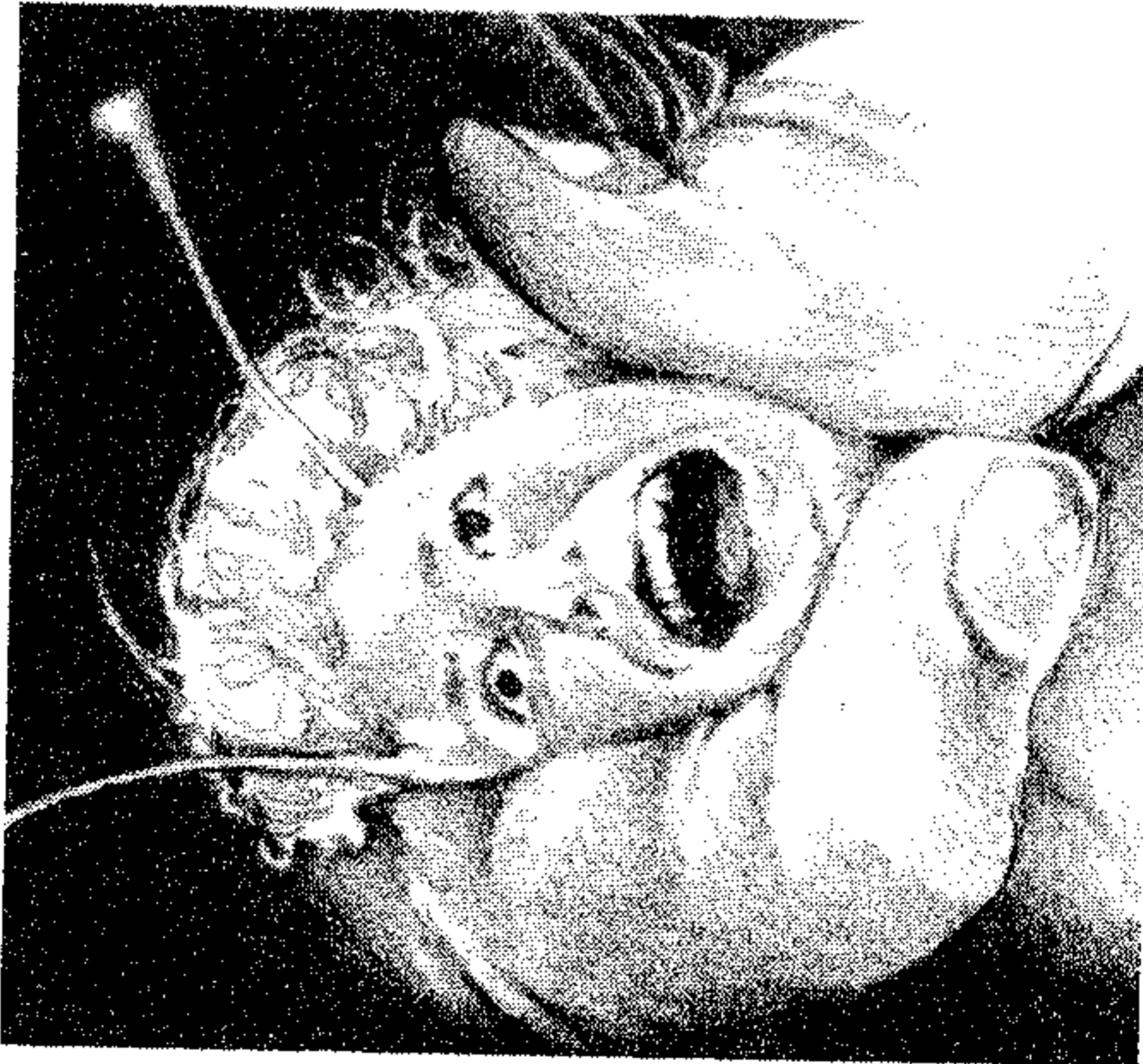
Let the moon be the moon it likes the best.

But make it choose once and then never change.

THE TOOTH FAIRY

Each time another tooth falls out,
I yearn to learn the truth
about what kind of crazy thief
swaps cash for my old tooth.

I'd like to catch her by surprise
when she flies near my bed.
If I could hold her in my hands,
I'd squeeze her tiny head
between my finger and my thumb
and ask her just one time
why Jason Farber gets a buck.
I only get a dime.



APOSTROPHES TO LUNCH

To a Flawless Slice of Bread

O flawless slice, I like you best
because your sandwich mate
is slightly smushed around the crust.
Please settle my debate.

Do you desire the top or base
of my baloney sandwich?
Should I bestow pink meat on you?
Or should I make a switch,

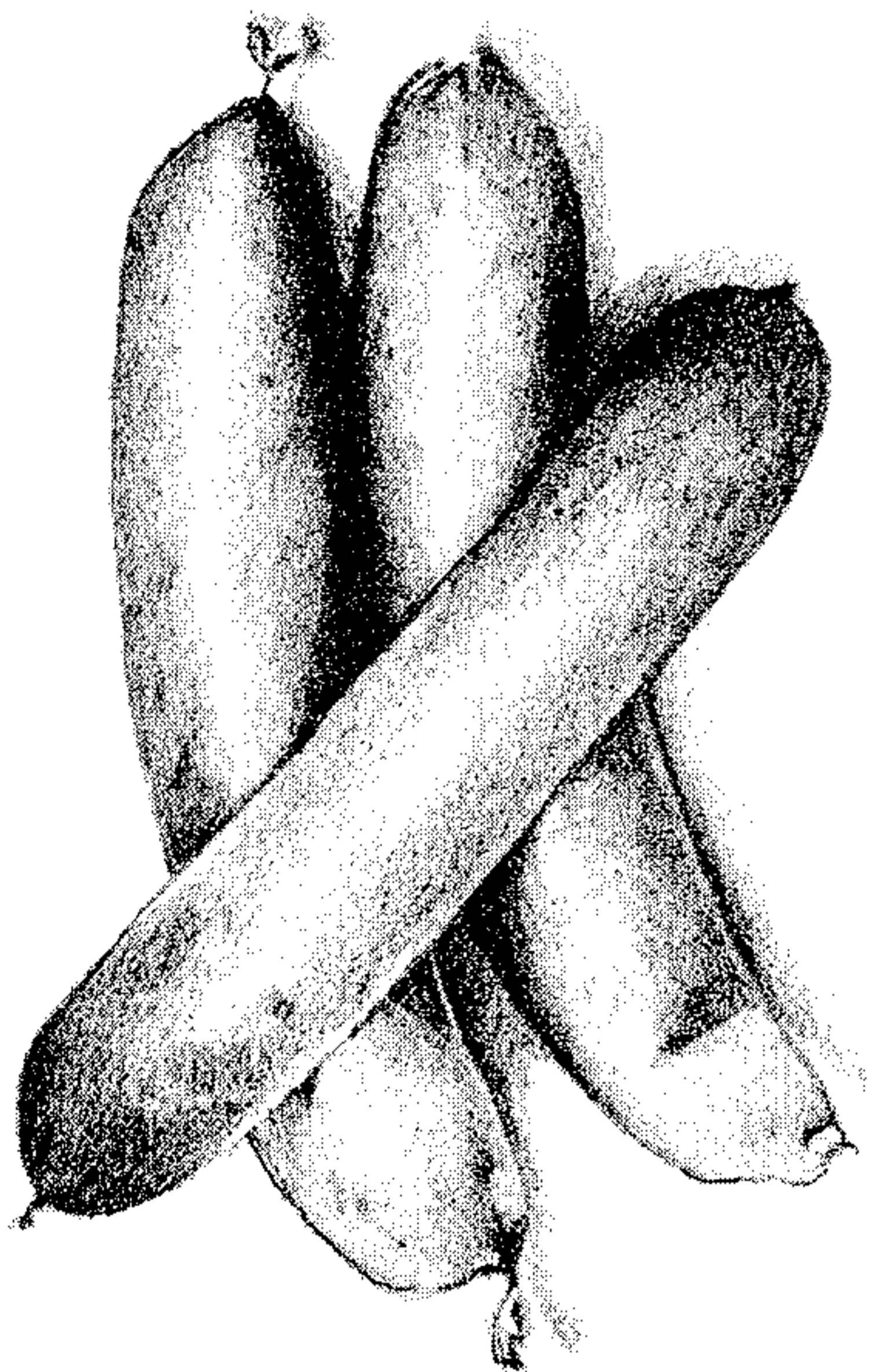
and slap the blemished bread face down
to hold my fried baloney,
then set you on it, like a crown,
with phony ceremony?

To a Platter of Frankfurters

"Which one of you is my favorite frank?"
I ask my sausage links.

"Which one of you should I eat first?"
I wonder what meat thinks.

What would I want if I were pork?
Is it a hot-dog honor
to be picked first or saved for last?
Whatever. You're a goner.



THE GLASS HAMMER

My mother's knickknack crystal hammer
gleamed by her silver tray.
Oh pick me up and play with me,
I heard the hammer say.

I tapped it on the silver tray.
I tapped my sister's kitty.
"Put that thing down," my mother yelled.
"It's not a damn play-pretty."

Oh, I'm a hammer. Work with me,
the wicked hammer goaded.
I found a nail. I hit the nail.
The hammer, it exploded.

The doctors stitched my hands and face
and sewed up my right knee.
My mother gave me good advice.
The hammer lied to me!

The hammer said it was a tool,
although it couldn't hammer.
The better hammer was my mom,
who hammered me—goddamn'er.

PLAYING DEAD

Our father liked to play a game.
He played that he was dead.
He took his thick black glasses off
and stretched out on the bed.

He wouldn't twitch and didn't snore
or move in any way.
He didn't even seem to breathe!
We asked, Are you okay?

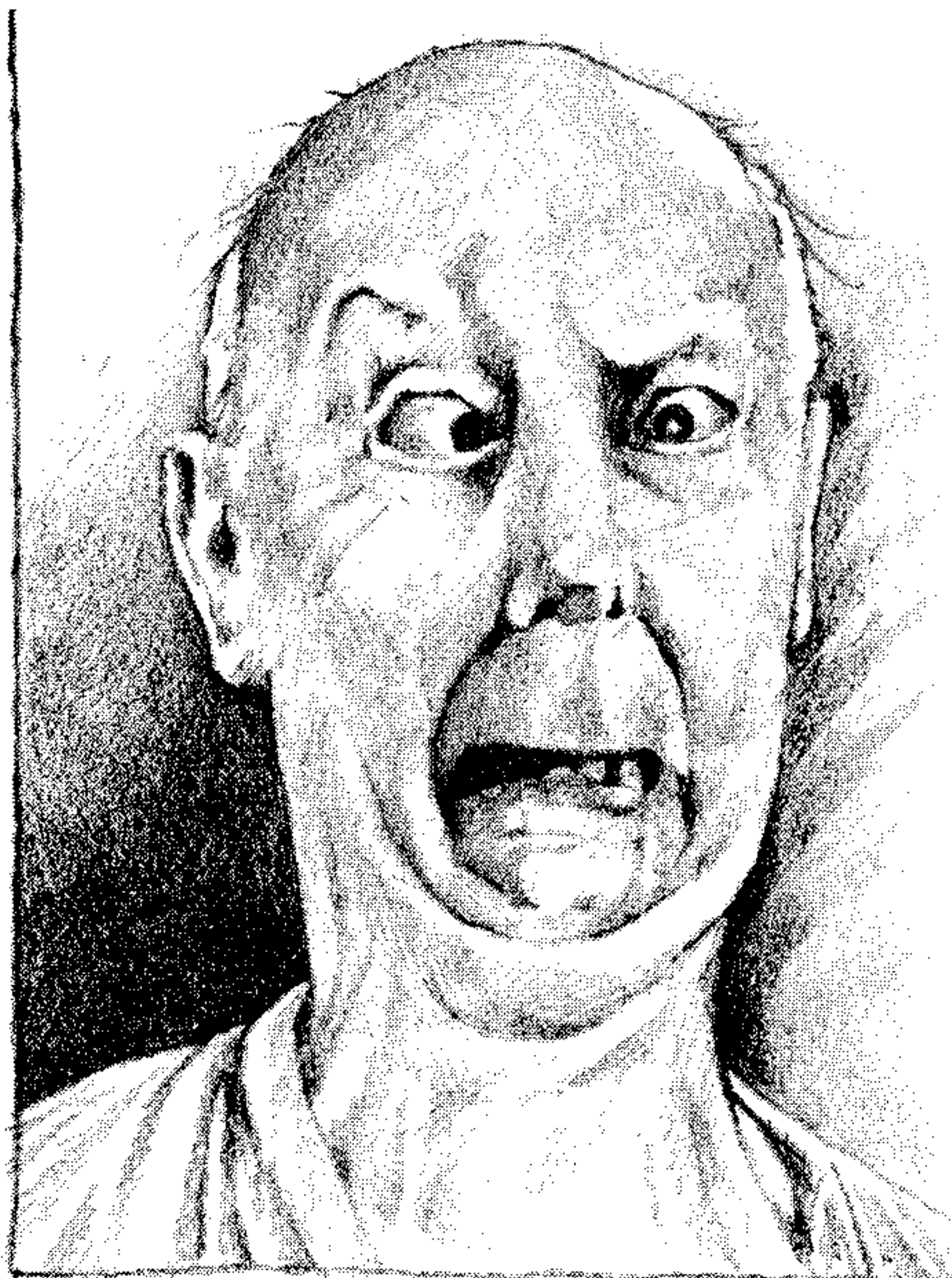
We tickled fingers up and down
his huge, pink, stinky feet—
He didn't move; he lay as still
as last year's parakeet.

We pushed our fingers up his nose,
and wiggled them inside—
Next, we peeled his eyelids back.
Are you okay? we cried.

I really thought he might be dead
and not just playing possum,
because his eyeballs didn't twitch
when I slid my tongue across 'em.

He's dead, we sobbed—but to be sure,
I jabbed him in the jewels.
He rose, like Jesus, from the dead,
though I don't think Jesus drools.

His right hand lashed both right and left.
His left hand clutched his scrotum.
And the words he yelled—I know damn well
I'm way too young to quote 'em.



I RODE MY BIKE
OVER HILL AND DALE

I rode my bike over hill and dale
and over rock and rill—
though I'm not sure I'd know a "dale"
as I zoomed down the hill

unless it had a sign on it
in big and bright-red print.
I might have recognized a rill
if given half a hint,

and I might be surprised to know
a fen, a lea, a mead
was something I saw every day
(and not just when I read)—

as I went flying down the hill
too fast to ask, "What's that?"
of all the things I hurtled past—
until I hit a cat.

I wobbled, fell, and broke my crown.
I learned it as it healed,
so now I know the blood-soaked skull
the schoolbook name concealed.

MY LAST DREAM

The last time I remember dreaming
I woke up in the black night screaming
about the wild dogs in the park.
They chased me through the moonless dark
and I could feel their cold, wet noses
sniffing at the printed roses
on my gown flapping down the street.
Forty wild dogs nipped my feet.
Shrieking out my desperate prayers,
I raced to my house, up the stairs,
and leapt into my narrow bed.
Forty wild dogs, their teeth red
from other children they had killed,
burst through the bedroom door and spilled
onto the bedspread over me.
Three were gnawing on my knee
when I woke in the black night screaming.
Mom and Daddy, their eyes gleaming
in the moonlight from the window,
said, "You've put on quite a show.
Don't let us hear another peep.
Shut the hell up and let us sleep."

WITCH

We drove into the country,
way down a red-dirt track
then stumbled up a path,
and bushwhacked to a shack.

She only had one arm,
she only had one leg,
she only had one eye,
a bright-red Easter egg.



“Come here and hug your granny,”
the old witch squawked at me.
Go on! my mother whispered
and shoved me with her knee.

Did she have an understanding
to give me to the witch?
I'd heard of Rumpelstiltskin.
My face began to twitch.

"Come to your loving granny,"
the old witch shrilly said.
Again my mother shoved me,
and this time smacked my head.

I inched away from Mom and Dad.
I swore I'd always hate 'em.
The witch smelled of used grease,
mildew and Mentholatum.

I struggled hard. I fought her.
I couldn't break her grip.
Who'd think it'd be so easy
to make a wheelchair tip?

Death has chosen: "Send Tommy over!"
Death has called me and I have to come
racing across into Death's freezing arms.
Now, I'll shot hoops in Hades' gymnasium.

I'll play Red Rover on the playgrounds of Hades,
B-ball and kickball among the deep shades.



THE CIRCUS IN THE TREES

I love to watch the gray squirrels leap
from limb to leafy limb,
tumbling like furry acrobats—
and every tree their gym.

The oak limbs are their trampoline,
and their trapeze the pines.
They stroll, like tightrope walkers, up
the looping power lines—

and sometimes they gnaw through a line,
exploding as it arcs,
and lighting up the evening sky,
cascading down as sparks.

DEAD THINGS I HAVE SEEN

I've seen a thousand possum skins
pancaked on the road,
a hundred armadillo humps,
and flat squirrels by the load.

But I don't think it's fair to count
meat once it's in the kitchen,
though if it's in the slaughterhouse
you can count pork or chicken.

I don't count Daddy's big-mouth bass
that's hanging on the wall
or Uncle Bill's stuffed threadbare moose
bought at the antique mall.

The deer Mom clobbered with the car—
that counts, and counts big time,
because I saw its tongue stick out,
and its nose drip yellow slime.

I count my sister's parakeet, which chirped
a frightened chirp and died,
increasing scientific knowledge
the afternoon I tried

to see how far his head would turn
before he crossed the bar.
Three hundred and fifty-two degrees
is one degree too far.

But I don't count Aunt Mary Jean,
since lying cold and confined,
she looked less mean and more alive
and her frown had slightly softened.

PACIFIST

I said I was a pacifist.
I wouldn't kill a flea.
All living things are sanctified—
at least as much as me.

But ants kept running underneath
my shoes, to my regret.
Mom gave me pinworm medicine,
and gnats drowned in my sweat.

Mosquitoes landed on my neck.
I slapped before I thought.
And when I saw my bloody palm
I wasn't overwrought.

My baseball glove is made of skin
stripped from a cow, and dried—
The chicken in my chicken pie
is not a suicide.

I'll stuff my mouth with misery
splendidly prepared,
and pray no fly is looking on
and that no mouse is scared.

I'll chew the suffering to paste,
deploring my delight,
then be a pacifist again
until tomorrow night.

AS SEEN ON TELEVISION

If Daddy held a steady job
I'd learn my long division.
I'd be a smiling Kool-Aid kid—
as seen on television.

If Mom cooked supper every night,
I'd know Dred Scott's decision,
like a four-eyed geek on College Bowl—
as seen on television.

If Daddy didn't drink all night,
I'd be a boy physician,
just like that Doogie Howser kid—
as seen on television.

If Mommy didn't cry all day,
I'd speak like a Parisian,
or at least as well as the ardent skunk—
as seen on television.

SURPRISE!

I slouched behind the kitchen door.
I lay behind the couch,
beneath the car, beside the hedge—
then I sprang from my crouch.

I bellowed like a gut-shot bull
when someone old walked by
because I loved to see Mom jump
and make that little cry

that sounds just like the parakeet
when someone plucks its tail.
My granddad reeled and grabbed his chest,
and Daddy, who'd jumped bail,

leapt out the nearest window, ran,
and we haven't seen him since,
except for one long strip of skin
left on the chain-link fence.

When I raced screaming through her room,
Grandma spat out her bridge.
The dentures flew across the room,
slick with mucilage.

Before they even hit the rug,
she grabbed me by both ears
and gummed my nose until I pledged
a mum, dumb, glum ten years.



WE BURIED THE CAT
BUT THE DOG DUG HER UP

We buried the bird but the cat dug her up,
cat dug her up, cat dug her up,
we buried the bird but the cat dug her up—
so we got in the car and smashed her flat.
What do you think of that?

We buried the cat but the dog dug her up,
dog dug her up, dog dug her up.
We buried the cat but the dog dug her up—
so we got in the car and smashed her flat.
What do you think of that?

We buried the dog but the kids dug him up,
kids dug him up, kids dug him up,
we buried the dog but the kids dug him up—
so we got in the car and smashed him flat.
What do you think of that?

We buried the kids but the cops dug them up
cops dug them up, cops dug them up,
we buried the kids but the cops dug them up—
so we'll sit in the chair where Ted Bundy sat.
What do you think of that?

THE COUNTY FAIR

I breezed by bumper cars
and past the Ferris wheel
and found the roller coaster
because I love to squeal

as the cars clank slowly upward,
groaning near the top,
before the screaming falters
and—one, two, three—we drop!

From gut to gullet, shudders
trembled through my chest
each time we cleared a peak
and clattered down the crest.

I stopped and ate a snow cone,
a deep-fried Chocolate Swirl,
a corn dog, half a pickle—
then rode the tilt-a-whirl.

I tilt-a-whirled three times
and roller-coastered four
before I found the sideshows
and started to explore.

I watched a man eat razors,
a lady sawn in half,
the crawfish boy, a dwarf or two,
and one six-legged calf.



I watched a woman strip
to a shiny black silk scrap
before I saw her beard
and upchucked on my lap.

DESERT ISLAND

What would you take to a desert isle,
my teacher wanted to know.
I told her my Bible. That made her smile.
A copy of Robinson Crusoe!

She liked that one too. I mentioned my dog.
And pictures of Mamma and Pa.
She sniffled. Her glasses started to fog.
She sighed, and even said aaaah.

I mentioned my schoolbooks, and gave her a grin.
She looked at me and squinted.
She wanted the truth? Ten barrels of gin
and every *Penthouse* printed.

OUR NEIGHBORS' LITTLE YAPPY DOG

Our neighbors' little yappy dog
yaps all day on their lawn.
At dusk it takes a little nap
so it can yap till dawn.

At breakfast, sleepless, we make plans.
Mom says she wants to shoot it
while Dad wants to snatch the brute,
and, like a football, boot it.

And if it cleared the power line,
he'd raise his arms and call,
It's up, it's straight, it's good. Three points!
Of course he'd spike the ball.

But in the end we all agree
my plan will leave it deader.
I want to feed it—tail-first, slowly—
into the chipper-shredder.

THE BOY IN THE WHEELCHAIR

When I am walking down the hall
gossiping with friends,
Walter motors up behind
and wallops our rear ends.

Our books go flying in the air,
we crumple to the ground,
while Walter points at us and laughs
before he zips around

our bodies twitching on the floor,
taking special care
to crush our outstretched fingers
as he rolls past in his chair.

He's broken Betty Thompson's leg
and Harold Snyder's knees.
and sidelined half the football team
with ankle injuries.

Each night when I'm alone in bed
I pray to God and beg
that Walter will be healed and walk
so I can break his leg.

AT CAMP

Everyone says the deep woods are soothing—
you won't hear leaf-blowers or car sirens throbbing.
You'll slide into sleep to the singing of crickets,
untroubled by mowers or Mom's drunken sobbing.

While I lie in my tent, wind tears at the canvas,
and I hear something savage creeping outside,
scuffling the dry leaves and sniffing my trail.
Mom could sleep better, she said, if I died.

What is it that howls out there in the darkness?
What is it saying? Why does it prowl?
It loves the full moon, fresh meat and hot blood—
howling for howling, the best kind of howl.

Late Sunday night when my roommate's bare foot
awakened the green snake I'd hid in his bed,
he screamed, and I howled back a maniac's howl,
the shriek of a demon freed from my head.

The demon is me and I'm starting to like him.
He answers the night with a shriek from my bowel,
a howl for the moon, fresh meat and hot blood—
howling for howling, the best kind of howl.

FAT JOHNNY

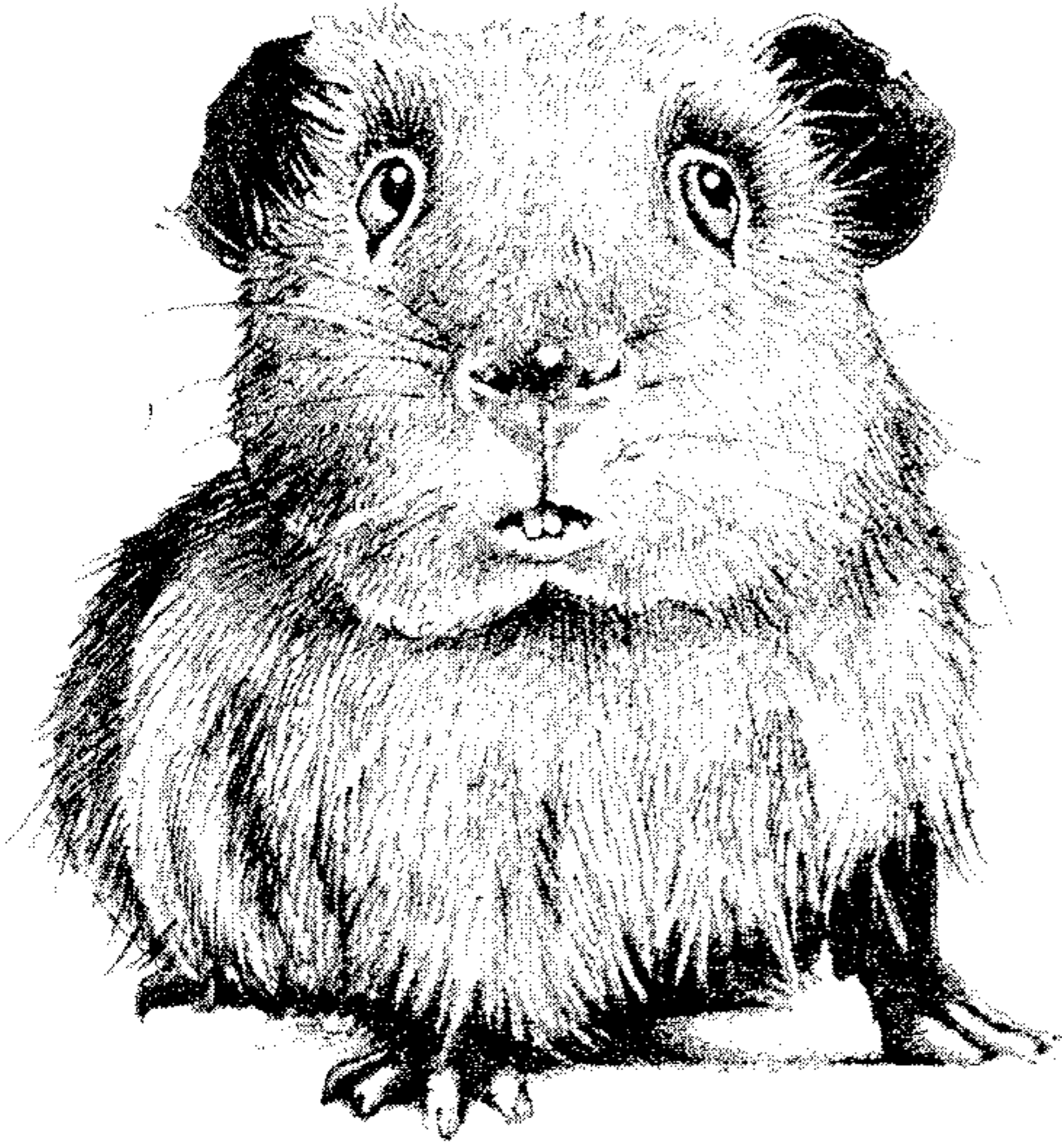
Fat Johnny's mom re-nailed the pantry door,
re-locked the fridge, re-emptied the bread bin,
returned un-nibbled Snickers to the store.
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.

She checked beneath his bed. The sight was chilling.
Where did the green-fur on the rug begin
to turn to blue fur on the donut filling?
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.

Mom sighed, and said she'd buy more cottage cheese.
Alone, Fat Johnny slipped into the den.
His stomach fluttered like a hive of bees.
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.

The sofa yielded Zotz, four TV clickers,
nine un-popped popcorn kernels, one pork skin,
and something that looked, but didn't taste, like Snickers.
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.

Her home's so clean Mom canned the cleaning service.
But Johnny's starving. He has a ravenous yen.
And Minnie the guinea pig is looking nervous.
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.



Mom loves how Johnny licks the cabinets clean:
and the floor's as shiny as it's ever been—
though she wonders why she's low on Vaseline.
Even Fat Johnny can't chew a dry saltine!
Fat Johnny's on a diet once again.