

HEADLINES

by Michael D. Brown

FOOD STAMPS FOR LOTTERY TICKETS?

A supermarket transaction teaches humility to the proud thief, because the anomaly involved in using scrip in purchasing chance accurately portrays the necessity of donning the attitude even to a grizzly bear. Now and then, a razor blade behind a food stamp nonchalantly cuts morality to a standstill faster than a traffic light. Indeed, the demon above the public-assistance cheater secretly admires the trick. However, the cashier covering the register may be kind to a mother of twelve and drop six tickets in her little bag while hurrying her through the checkout process to concentrate on the young woman with falsely large breasts impatiently waiting behind Mom to spend her money which is real.

HEAD LINES

When the errant father hibernates, the line dancer returns home. She might dance with a bottle of beer in the privacy of their compact kitchenette. If she notices a spider, it means that a phone call from her sporadically concerned mother is imminent and she may begin reminiscing about lost glory. The plumber with a job to do next door takes a peek at her muddy tomatoes. Indeed, the bartender where she works often shares a shower with the plumber watching. With envy, the plumber sees her using a straw to inhale something from the surface of her kitchen table.

EXTENDED FAMILY

A bottle of beer satiates the cheater as well, with nine of her brood of twelve still under the age of sixteen and the eldest playing a three-card monte for spending cash in front of an apartment building several blocks away. A paycheck gets the most recent father stinking drunk, and a pickup truck provides income for the prior instigator while neither of these come to visit when they're flush; however, two or three of the poorest and most untrustworthy come to see their progeny and offer to pawn earrings, a bracelet, anything with a promise of acquiring food, but disappear shortly thereafter

with the goods and the idea. Mom believes that a short order cook who sometimes shares day old bread and leftovers may be a step-brother or a distant cousin or perhaps an unremembered brief attachment. Relatively speaking, the same cast of characters appear daily though their back-stories become hazier when hunger sets in. A union leader borrows money from a deficit, but forgets his original intentions to assist in the rearing of his daughter, and purposefully suspends a bowling ball over a carpet tack to feel nagging remorse. The tabloid fashionable retreat to secret though well-photographed paradisaical islands, and are increasingly replaced by the obese, the freakish and the kidnapped until the last sip of beer has dried in Mom's throat and apparent though unforeseen reality returns to lower expectations even further. Warranties are what made America great, although hers has expired and the mailbox will remain empty for another fifteen days. She can only sob into a paper napkin, wasting empty calories and barrel-aged nutrients.

CONCURRENCES

A blotched lottery ticket assimilates with the plastic tablecloth like some satellite of the gaudy green flowers in the print and the numbers blur. Two buildings down, the line dancer's cancer ridden mother dials her telephone but changes her mind and hangs up when a groggy voiced ex-husband says, "Yeah, what's up?" Seeking something else, he stumbles, finding nothing but a jar of cocktail onions and soft muddy tomatoes in the refrigerator. His daughter has carried two bags of groceries four blocks before being blindsided by a pickup truck and having same strewn on the avenue. Unhurt but dazed, she wonders what she and her fiance will have for dinner. Perhaps their tryst will proceed straight to the copulation. Furthermore, a statesmanlike union leader beams with joy, and roller coasts toward abstraction figuring all will turn out right though his daughter is living with a cowboy who befriended some white collar defendant related to a tuba player. The tuba player has lost a fortune in a three-card monte outside an apartment house on a street he rarely walks.

SUNSET, SUNRISE: MOURNING

The supermarket checkout clerk feeling good about having supplied a sad looking mom with a chance at wealth is passing by the entrance to the building where her therapy group meets with no intention of attending same when she collides with a delinquent rushing home to tell mom that this evening they are going out to dinner and thirteen will be fed. Apologies ensue and a liquid compensation is offered, but as it begins to rain, minutes turn to hours and the youth does not return home that night to find the burned out remains of the apartment in which he shared a bed with two brothers. Nor to see his mother's body carried out on a stretcher and a crowd of fifty odd people watching in wonder. A little sister eats bread with a short order cook who has watched her progress from a distance and several children crying and making noise sit on the steps of a nearby apartment house until they are chased by the steaming water thrown from a window above by an embittered dying woman. They disperse and lose themselves and their past in crowded city streets, while somewhere in a darkened room a drifter caresses the unreal breasts of his confused girlfriend. With the sun's rising, the mournful notes of a battered tuba are heard telling of scattered dreams and crushed hopes. The player merely trying to recoup his losses, surprises himself. He didn't know he had it in him.

