

WORLD WAR II VETERAN

An old man in his seventies,
shock of white hair and a puckish smile,
walking with an ivory handled cane

strolls in early on a warm Sunday.
“Quiet day on the street,” he says.
“They just raised my prescription \$10

“from 20 to 30 bucks in one month.
These pharmacists don’t know nothin’.
I used to mix drugs in the thirties.

“You just needed a license like barbers.
Morphine and cocaine were legal by script.
There were no pimps either. Older girls

“used to take care of younger girls.
There were yacht parties where
we’d smoke morphine and cocaine.

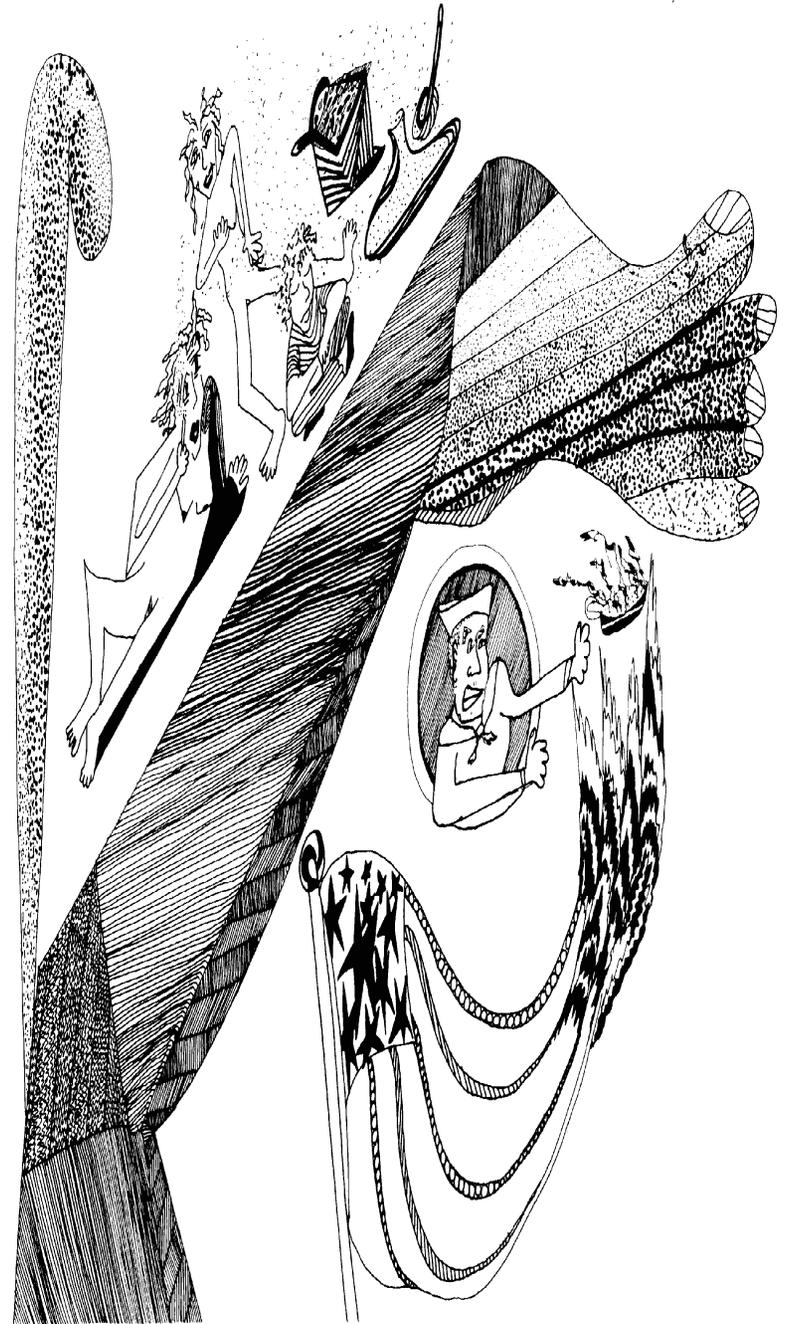
“Yeah, these pharmacists can’t even make aspirin.
If there was a catastrophe
they’d be outta drugs in a minute,

“ ‘cause they can’t mix anything anymore.
You know how much codeine costs to make?
A penny and a half, same with all these drugs.

“Shit! Mechanics are the same way.
I got a complete set of tools
and I carry new breaks and an axle

“when I travel and I can put
them on in an hour.
All mechanics can do is charge a lot of money.

“In the war I could go into
a hot boiler and fix it.
I could pick up a burning frying pan



“and throw it out the porthole.
I used to be 215 pounds
but my stomach collapsed.

“I got a hernia and poisons in my stomach.
They can’t operate ‘cause
the poisons would spread.

“Yeah, Admiral Halsey knew who I was.
I got the tough jobs on New Guinea.
I was wounded and burned.

“I got new knees
and my feet break out all the time.
I won’t let them operate anymore.

“I just go in for a check-up.
See if the plumbing’s working.
Even during the war,

“they couldn’t take care of everyone.
One guy came from Europe to the Pacific
all bandaged up ready to go into it again.

“I went back and I’d do it again, too.
So long! Hot day! Take it easy!”
He limps out onto Grant Avenue.