

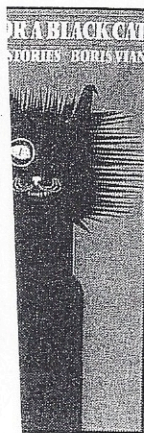
RAIN TAXI

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 3 Fall 2001

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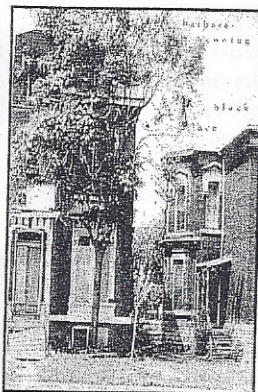
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BLACK LACE
 Barbara Henning
 Spuyten Duyvil (\$12)



Scotch-tinted malaise pervades post-Vietnam Detroit as wandered through by Eileen, the protagonist of Barbara Henning's stark novella *Black Lace*. A desolate America lurks perpetually in the background, embodied by Eileen's war-crazed brother; an American flag on which she commits increasingly uninspired bouts of adultery, and the more subtly depicted pover-

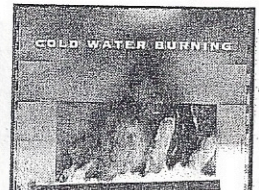
ty and desperation cloaking the people Eileen meets on the street and in the dingy bar she tends.

While her sudden departure from unsympathetic husband Charlie is initially hopeful, Eileen's willing submission to several lovers suggests that solid and self-assured independence remain beyond her reach. Her affair with a man called D, for instance, illustrates both her freedom from wife- and motherhood, and her enslavement to unconquerable desires to be sexually objectified. Eileen can't get enough of D, even though he refuses to make love to her; instead he commands her to perform before him as he mutters philosophic inanities.

Although occasionally *Black Lace's* characters are didactic, Eileen remains complex and heartbreakingly authentic. The third-person narrative regularly shifts to Eileen's diary, in which she contemplates her family's dysfunctional female lineage, her intermittent and co-dependent relationship to her daughter Monica, and her conflicting wishes to perform and to hide. "Secretly," Eileen writes, "I have always wanted to be loved and desired by a crowd . . . But then I desire the opposite, also, to go unnoticed, to watch others, to stare at the back of women's legs, to stare in their faces, to figure out the particulars of desire in solitude." Refreshingly, Henning resists happy endings, and instead focuses on the richer material of Eileen's engagement with her conflicting selves, leaving the outcomes of her trials with identity beyond the last page. ♦ (Thomas Haley)

COLD WATER BURNING

John Straley
 Bantam (\$23.95)



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(at . . . sees). For the most part, this opaqueness in character actually works, and the Alaskan landscape is perfectly analagous in this respect as a place both generous and brutal—Cecil Younger must feel perfectly at home. ♦ (Alan DeNiro)