



**OUTSIDE NEW LIFE
EVANGELISTIC CENTER
(DOWNTOWN, JANUARY 14)**

Extremely cold night. The streets, barren and gray, look harder than usual, like everything does when the weather's this bitter. Outside Rev. Larry Rice's New Life Evangelistic Center, a man in ragged clothes leans backward over the concrete banister, his face pointing skyward. The position looks uncomfortable and precarious, as does his apparent situation. His breathing is heavy and labored: When he inhales, he nearly tips over backward onto the street below; when he exhales, he slips slightly forward — a human teeter-totter without an anchor. He isn't quite asleep, but he isn't quite awake either. A plume of steam rises from his mouth when he exhales, then gets swept away by the wind.

A young guy leans against the wall near the entrance to the homeless shelter, smoking a cigarette and watching attentively. What's the story with the man on the banister? I ask. He's too far gone, the guy says, too incoherent; he might be dead drunk or high on aerosol. He might be insane. Pathological. Who knows? The young guy doesn't take his eyes off the man. You can tell he's concerned, not sure what to do, but still compelled to keep watch as the man teeter-totter gently back and forth.

For a while we watch him together. Eventually I move closer to the man draped over the banister, poke his shoulder, ask if he's OK. His eyes are closed and he's smiling, apparently unaware of his predicament. He mutters something incomprehensible, then, finally, slides forward completely and remains hunched like a sack of old clothes in front of the shelter while we wonder, this other guy and I, what to do.