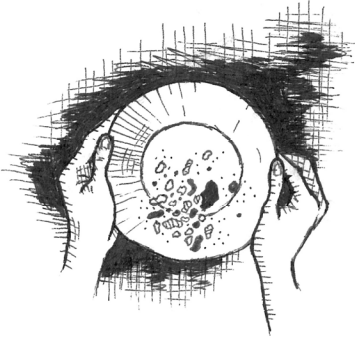


Agatha Atavist

By Graham Helfrick



Agatha A., of Mrs. Grayflat's third grade
Was first in line when came the day
In two tall boots, with homemade tray
Always one to keep an appointment made.

The bus would bring them to Hiddenite Mines
They'd been learning, of course, of fire and lime
Of sediment, obsidian, granite and grain.

Agatha knew every number and name
Accordion file with nine discrete lanes.

On the journey over, with clarion call
Grayflat gathers attention and holds them all
Politely in thrall as she asks "who knows
The hardness of calcite on the scale by Mohs?"

"It's three," thought Agatha, bitterly.
"But this question's one more thing between the creek and me."
"And numbers aren't enough, that much I know."
"I'll need to be tough, more like topaz. Although..."
"Really diamond is better,"
"My boots should be wetter!"
Alright then, here goes:

Agatha the atavist
Sifted that day an amethyst
Flash in the pan of purple quartz
Culled from kings' myrrh-scented courts.

She holds it tight inside her hand
Rabbit foot and cattle brand.
From perfumed places out of time
To the hand-bezeled creek bed at Hiddenite Mines.
"You can take it away for \$3.99."

She fits the gem inside her eye
A caustic act; it burns like lye
Blood drips along the water line
Making room like stone that's mined.

And through the purple stone, sees agatha:
A golden egg, a phoenix nest
Crawfish crawl past a treasure chest
A fruit bat with a child's face
The silver spire of Our Lady of Grace.

She sees the undersides of leaves
'All ancient rooms are full of bees.'



Her amethyst eye, from the river bed
Now starlings roost inside her head
In the socket where an iris bloomed
Smothered, secret, now entombed
The amethyst won't be rolled back
cat can stretch upon the rack
Won't tear won't crack.



She's taller too: her purple eyes
Blow back the dust, dissolve disguise
She sees the ancient picture there
That long and dark descending stair.

At night she sleeps
Stone eyes don't close
They seek, refract; remains, the fact:
They've felt the flame which no one knows.