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OUTWEEK

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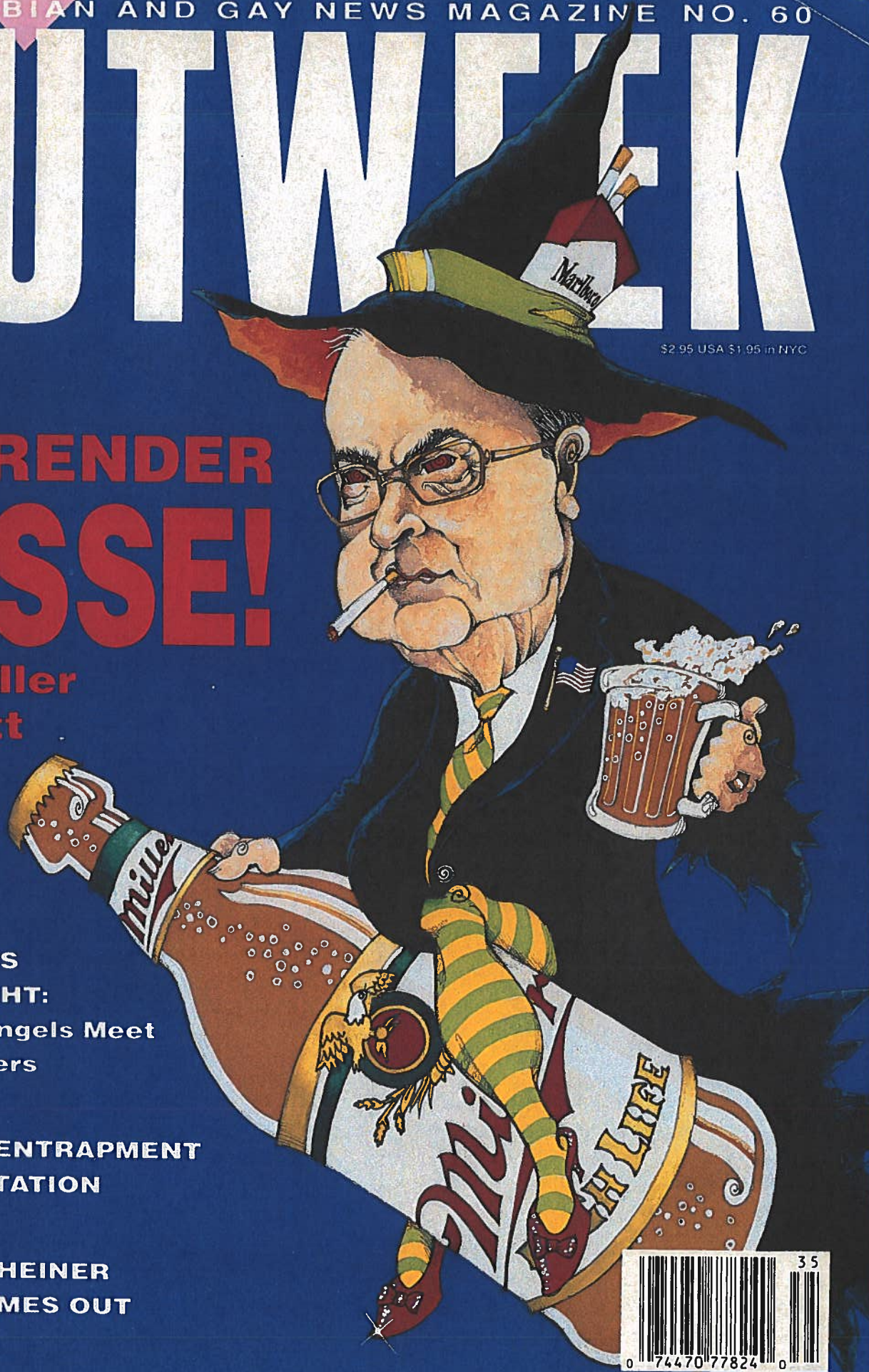
SURRENDER JESSE!

The Miller
Boycott
Takes
Off

STRANGERS
IN THE NIGHT:
Guardian Angels Meet
Pink Panthers

TEAROOM ENTRAPMENT
AT PENN STATION

DIRECTOR HEINER
CAROW COMES OUT



NEWS • SEXUAL POLITICS • HEALTH • THE ARTS

Books

Dye Hard

A Body to Dye For by Grant Michaels. St. Martin's Press. \$17.95 cl. 241 pp.

by Max Cavitch

When I lived in Boston, I got my hair done at a foofy Back Bay clip-joint not too far from the salon where Stan Kraychik cuts heads in Grant Michael's new mystery, *A Body to Dye For*. That part of Newbury Street is a sort of Madison Avenue *manqué*: chockablock with tiny boutiques, sprawling cafés and 18-karat attitude. My man Keith operated out of a shop in one of the less genteel blocks. My pretension is cheap, and Keith was sheer genius. These days, I'm shorn by a hip suburban dyke in northern New Jersey. She's terrific, considering what I give her to work with, but if Stan Kraychik had been my *barbiers de Boston*, I never would have left town.

Stan, known as Vannos in the salon world, is a stylist with style. He loves his work, and why not? He fondles some of the city's most gorgeous heads and gets credit for making them even more gorgeous. The head he's working on as the book opens belongs to Calvin Redding, a rich Cambridge architect and, in Stan's own words, "flawless as a fag-rag photo." But Calvin is a jerk, and Stan takes malicious pleasure in making him squirm, demicoiffed and disheveled in his chair, as they wait for Calvin's latest trick to show up. "I can't be seen like this," Calvin shrieks, "in the middle of a dye job!" "Take a Stresstab, baby," says Stan. "Art cannot be hurried."

But it's Stan who needs a Stresstab when hunky Roger Fayerbrock strolls into the shop. When he's not vacationing in Boston, Roger is a park ranger at Yosemite and every inch the star of Stan's cowboy fantasies. Instantly, Stan is plotting the Last Roundup. Whoa, boy! What about Calvin? Not to worry. Ranger Roger seems much more interested in Stan the Man than in the blow-dried fashion plate from last night. After arranging to meet Stan later that evening, Roger goes back to Calvin's apartment for some highly unnecessary beauty sleep.

Unfortunately for Stan—not to mention for the ranger himself—Roger never wakes up. He's found strangled in Calvin's bed, with bow ties around his neck and...well, let's just say that it must have been a formal affair. Stan is convinced that Calvin is the murderer. The police think otherwise, and Stan has to come up with some evidence fast in order to prove Calvin's guilt and his own innocence. In order to get Calvin by the short hairs, Stan combs the country for clues, from Cambridge

to California. But after some close shaves with Calvin's S/M neighbor, a masturbating rock-climber named Wacky Jacky and a couple of gay-bashing cops, Roger's murder starts to look less like a bald crime of passion and more like a tangled conspiracy.

Meanwhile, back at the salon, Stan's boss and confidante, Nikki Albright, is down to her last special-order gold-tipped cigarette and plenty worried. Stan has become so obsessed with finding Roger's killer that he's neglecting his clients and putting himself in real danger of losing his life along with his job. Over at Station E, Lieutenant Branco's worried too, since he's the one who made Stan his unofficial queer deputy, hoping that the horny hairdresser would be able to find out things that a hypermasculine het cop couldn't. In fact, Stan finds out too much for his own good, and it's thanks only to a

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cool head (and good grooming) that he escapes the killer's hair trigger.

After the hair-raising events are over, Stan straightens out the kinks with Roger's Balinese houseboy, Yudi, who has followed Stan back from California. I don't mean to grudge Stan a well-earned happy ending in the arms of his pantalooned pet, but lighthearted racism is racism nonetheless. This West-beds-East tableau probably wouldn't offend so much if it weren't for the fact that Yudi has three counterparts in the book: Ramon, the back-stabbing shampoo-boy at Stan's salon; Eduardo, the Costa Rican gold digger; and Dario, the olive-skinned chef of Calvin's employer. None of these swarthy nubles has a home-grown, English-as-a-first-language peer in their servant's world; none of them seems even to have a last name. The menial status of the four characters most identifiably *other* is an insensitive gaff in an otherwise riotous and rollicking ride along the razor's edge. ▼