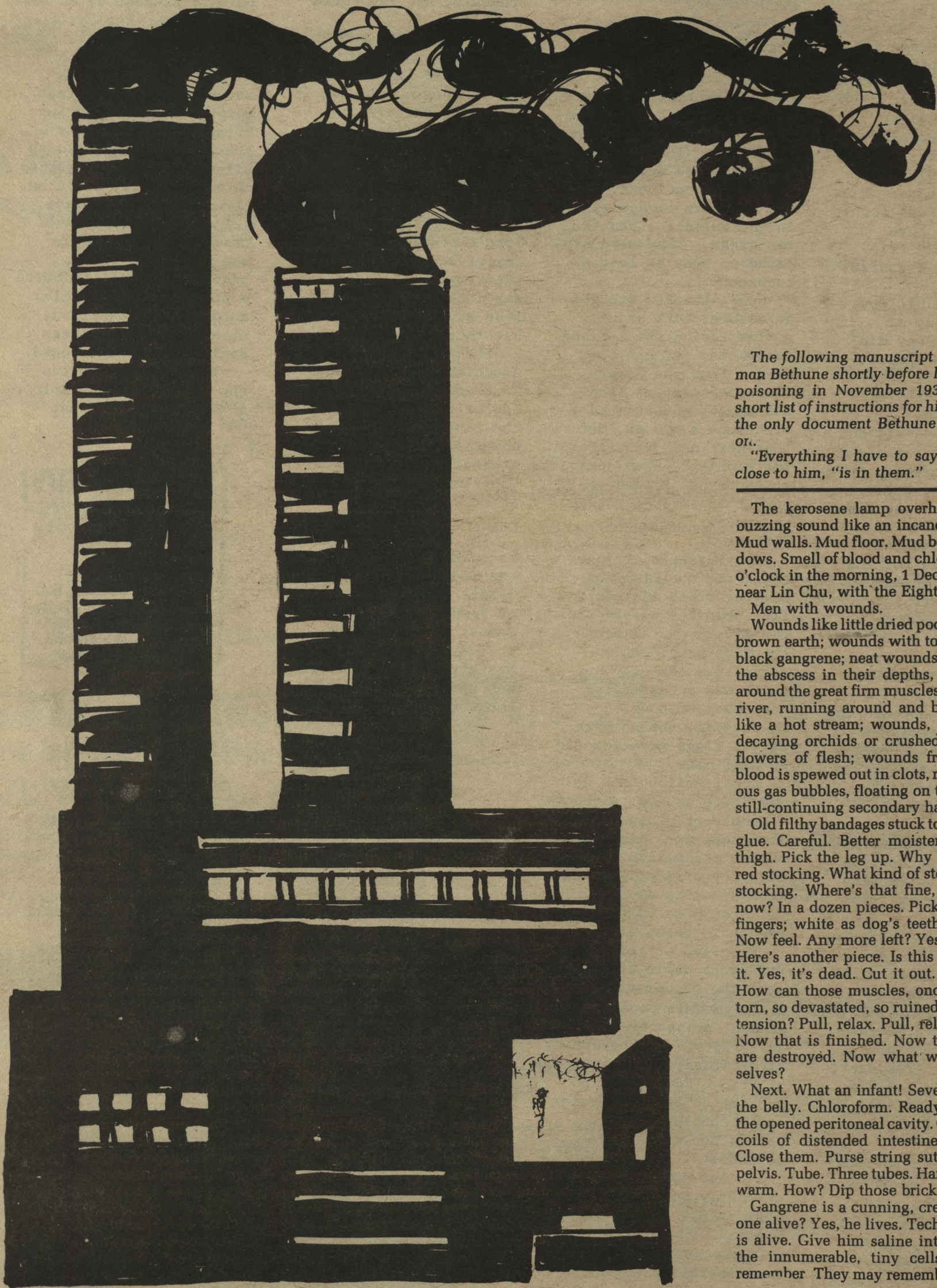


These men m



The following manuscript was written by Norman Bethune shortly before his death from blood poisoning in November 1939. Together with a short list of instructions for his replacement it was the only document Bethune asked to be passed on.

"Everything I have to say," he assured those close to him, "is in them."

The kerosene lamp overhead makes a steady buzzing sound like an incandescent hive of bees. Mud walls. Mud floor. Mud bed. White paper windows. Smell of blood and chloroform. Cold. Three o'clock in the morning, 1 December, North China, near Lin Chu, with the Eighth Route Army.

Men with wounds.

Wounds like little dried pools, caked with black-brown earth; wounds with torn edges frilled with black gangrene; neat wounds, concealing beneath the abscess in their depths, burrowing into and around the great firm muscles like a dammed-back river, running around and between the muscles like a hot stream; wounds, expanding outward, decaying orchids or crushed carnations, terrible flowers of flesh; wounds from which the dark blood is spewed out in clots, mixed with the ominous gas bubbles, floating on the fresh flood of the still-continuing secondary haemorrhage.

Old filthy bandages stuck to the skin with blood-glue. Careful. Better moisten first. Through the thigh. Pick the leg up. Why it's like a big, loose, red stocking. What kind of stocking? A Christmas stocking. Where's that fine, strong rod of bone now? In a dozen pieces. Pick them out with your fingers; white as dog's teeth, sharp and jagged. Now feel. Any more left? Yes, here. Ail? Yes. No. Here's another piece. Is this muscle dead? Pinch it. Yes, it's dead. Cut it out. How can that heal? How can those muscles, once so strong, now so torn, so devastated, so ruined, resume their proud tension? Pull, relax. Pull, relax. What fun it was! Now that is finished. Now that's done. Now we are destroyed. Now what will we do with ourselves?

Next. What an infant! Seventeen. Shot through the belly. Chloroform. Ready? Gas rushes out of the opened peritoneal cavity. Odour of faeces. Pink coils of distended intestine. Four perforations. Close them. Purse string suture. Sponge out the pelvis. Tube. Three tubes. Hard to close. Keep him warm. How? Dip those bricks into hot water.

Gangrene is a cunning, creeping fellow. Is this one alive? Yes, he lives. Technically speaking, he is alive. Give him saline intravenously. Perhaps the innumerable, tiny cells of his body will remember. They may remember the hot, salty sea,