

by BRIAN WIPRUD

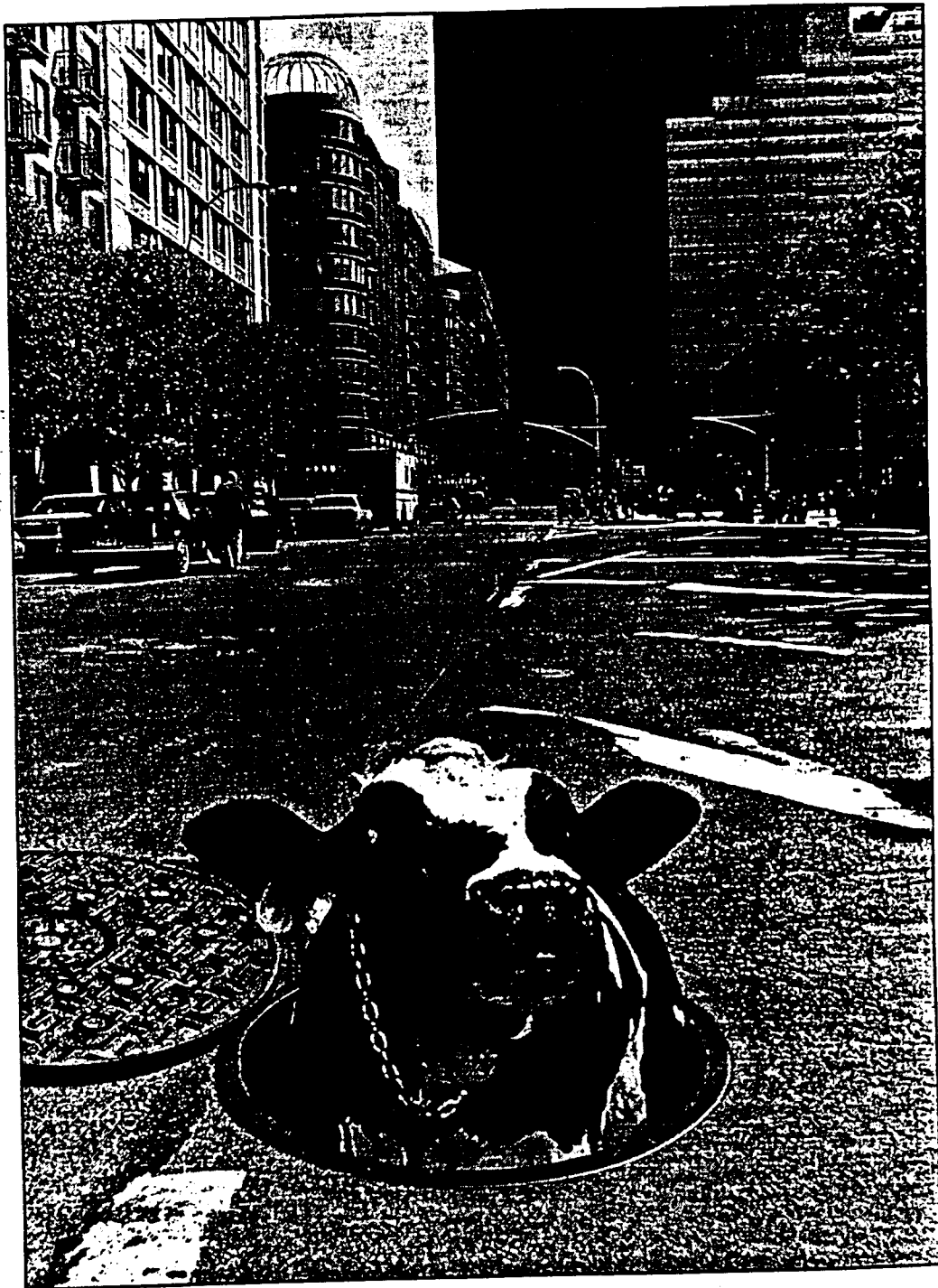
Illustration by LUIS MORALES

Once upon a time, I was taken in by the story of the woman who smuggled a big ol' water rat back from Puerto Vallarta thinking it a Mexican hairless. Likewise, I was duped by the tale of the American tourist down under who, in the midst of a goofy photo-op with what he thought was a dead kangaroo, watched in dismay as the critter hopped off into the bush wearing his Armani jacket and carrying his traveler's checks and passport. A friend looks you in the eye and says it happened to a third party; he isn't exactly lying, just simplifying his source. I mean, there's no two ways about it: saying it happened to your sister's friend's mom's hypnotherapist is a tad convoluted. But there's enough timbre of truth to the story's human foibles that makes you want it to be true.

My yarn is true because it was told to me by a Con Ed inspector named Fred. The way this story goes, he was watching a crew install a drainage basin on Greenwich Street when they came upon a wall of wood about ten feet down. Thinking it was just some old trench sheeting, they tore a hole in the wall and found a void. A laborer went into the hole with a torch and came out saying it was an oak-vaulted tunnel ten feet wide by eight feet high that trailed off an undetermined distance in either direction. It was then that an old man from the neighborhood stepped up to the trench and said, "Why, I see you found the cattle tunnel."

In days of yore, he explained, New York City forbade the herding of cattle through the streets, and so it came to pass that a tunnel was constructed for the purpose of moving cows from Manhattan's East Docks to the West Docks. You know, cattle ferried from Long Island to a Greenwich Village slaughterhouse. Or was it Jersey cattle bound for Brooklyn stew pots?

Anyway, it's a heck of a story, one that



*In days of yore, it was forbidden to herd cattle along city byways.
So they constructed a cow tunnel right beneath Greenwich Street.
Or so the story goes.*

BUM STEER