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BRUSHING





BRUSHING FALL 1984

COVER DESIGN

The cover painting by Olga Viso is acrylic on stretch canvas painted in the style of the late Synthetic Cubists of the 1920's. "The Color of Being" is a study of the life-giving force of emotions in the human body. Man's body is lifeless, rigid, and almost mechanical without the existence of feelings (thus the dull, robot-like figure to the lower right.) The presence of a conglomeration of different emotions (represented by a variety of color cubes) surround and permeate the being, giving it life and purpose. The face and its complex features (upper left) are almost like windows through which the soul radiates its spectrum of emotions.

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FOREWORD

The poet Wallace Stevens tells us that reality lies in the imagination.

*Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
A mirror, a lake of reflections in a room,
A glassy ocean lying at the door*

If this is true (as wise word-wielders must believe it to be), then what lies before you is a world or, perhaps more apt, pieces of many worlds — each far more real than the paper on which they're printed, truer than the ink that maps their pikes and pathways. Herein are the realms of tinted verse-sowers, eyeglass enthusiasts, and humming, shadowless loners. They've been carefully eased from their orbits. Introduce yourself. Make them your own.

Noel Levin, editor

THEN

In Eden, south of Buffalo
Grandpa worked a fifteen-acre farm
as respite from his city job
with the Grain Exchange, and
Granny kept more cats than she could count
swarming about the dark and fecund barn.
Inside, a new-born batch, still blind
squirmed in a bushel basket.
A carborundum sharpening wheel hunched
near blades of scythes, a rusty harrow
and a leather harness
though the only horse was then
a rug in Granny's sewing room.
Up in the loft corn dried in sheaves
to shuck and pop in winter.
Grandpa's dusty fields sloped
back behind the barn
while by the road, beside the house
Granny's flowers blazed the summer long.
On one side stood her formal garden
sprucely lined with pointed evergreens
its flagstone walkways skirted with roses
hemmed by boxwood trees.
On the other side a wilder field of peonies
and dahlias, flowers to cut
shattered the sunlight into radiance
in Eden
south of Buffalo.

ALAN NORDSTROM

BLACKS/BLUES

“Quit writing blacks and blues! Write pinks and
vivid yellows!” he said.
and I listened
and I tried.

In my garden
pinks and vivid yellows occasionally poke through
the flowers,
and I always pull them up — damned weeds —
choking
the beautiful black
of the flowers.

BEVERLY HORANIC

SPECS

Why don't you wear your specs no more?
You used to quite a lot.
Poppy! They were you, they were,
but now I guess they're not.
Seems a bloody shame, it does
that art like that must change.
I'll try to understand —
but won't —
your need to rearrange.
I wish I knew the reason why,
but I know I never will.
Just know I really loved your specs —
Blimey!
I love them still.

ANONYMOUS



WILLIAM LOVING



DAGMARA L. ZEIDENBERGS

OBITUARY

I am a death
in the family —
a cement-filled
womb,
a white-trash drug dealer
trapped in concrete
and a rotten river-bottom;
Every pore, crack
filled with sludge.
 (In the murk,
 the catfish need no eyes.)
I remember
lying on my dusty carpet,
 staring
at the close walls
scarred with cracks and fingerprints.
And I remember
sitting
in plastic chairs,
begging
in the school clinic.
 (Afraid to inhale
 because my chest felt broken.)
Now,
the black catfish
float, solemn,
disapproving.
Bits of metal and glass
shine
in the water
like a golden haze.
Slowly,
the glittering dust
settles
on my concrete coffin.

KARA PROVOST

MOVING MEMORIES

Allied Van Lines “move families, not just furniture;”
they fit everything into
a truck
like a Chinese puzzle —
then simply move a dozen years
down the driveway.
(they’ll even **unpack** for you and
place the Kleenex box by your bed.)

But how can they insure
the glow of a forest of Christmas trees,
or wrap the squeals of a 5-year-old angler
hooking a 6-lb bass —
Will these fit in a corner of the truck?
Can they pack the oak trees
that steadied baby steps,
held a swing,
a tree-house that became
a frigate, a fort, a castle?
And where do birthday parties go?
In with the ice cream plates —
or nestled between
dolltalk and make-believe?
Is there a box big enough for
the first solo drive on
a 16th birthday?
Tire prints —
Heartprints.

The swish of a first formal,
the blush of a first date
cling to the wallpaper along the stairs
and will not go through the door!
Echoes of baseball boasts —
football cheers
catch in backyard branches and
excite the ghost of a puppy
named Lady.

Memories resist lampshade crates —
like helium balloons
they waft down the hallway;
bump the chandelier;
elude the soft-gloved movers,
and refuse to leave
the empty house
on Windsong.

NANCY HOFFMAN



DAVID MITCHELL

AN ALSATIAN FARMER SPEAKS TO FRENCH SOLDIERS—1871

Bastards!
Idiots!
Why do you lie so still?
These fields — which you defend
Are not yours.
Don't you know that there is a war on?
(A noble struggle, for France
to which my own son
has committed his life.)
Infidels —
This is not the Sabbath day.
Get up, you!
Are you so numb from drink
That you do not feel
The flies swarming
Above your mouth?
Up, I say!

Oh, I see.
You have not eaten.
The maggots make you look
So thin.
Come now, comrades,
Please move.
If I do not plow and sow,
I can not reap.
And our army will go hungry.
I must bring life to this land.
I must!
Don't you understand?
Food is life —
And life —
Victory.
Victory! Victory! Victory!

DAVID SARNEY

PORTRAIT

John Upswich

by others made real

used to paint
yes America
with not so perfect
He's and She's

and pull from our air

that fragileness

to feather the inside

of his pockets

while sculpting Janets and Harrys
floating through neighborhood afternoons
feeling small

he's forever filling himself with what

sees

unmentioned

Mister Erotica

TARYN WALTKE

There is a house you love that we'll become;
without imaginings meant for one
but cellars to be laden
and attics ever papering-bound.
Shadows only slants will be
to rib the sunlit yellow floors
and on those walls whose hues are sown
through slowly paling, gentle years.

There is a dream we keep that yet we are;
though far from autumn's cellar door
or gabled, sure retreat,
is ours a dawn's walk's earthen damp,
is ours that gingham's backward slant.

If we are goosedown, wanting sleep,
and brass, on entering in,
we are the cedar for our swing
that's staid on porchfront days
drinking frost and fading sun
'til sightless woodrot comes our way.

NOEL LEVIN

ESSAY AT SUMMER'S END

The house is very quiet, self-contained, and sadly still. It hugs the left-over warmth of the dinner oven, the odors curling tightly inside the safely curtained spaces of its being. A single edge of yellow light seeps from the bedroom window. The delicate French furniture settles for the night; the green rug clasps tighter to the ancient floorboards, and the drapes hug each other erratically as the evening wind searches through every room.

I, too, am restless, and the house is suddenly close, airless. The screen door slams behind me, cracking the night in two. For only a breathless space do the crickets stop their agitated rubbings. For one small second, the cicadas pause in their papery soundings of the darkness. The noise grows and fills me, an insidious ear-ringing sound that no amount of shaking or tapping can dislodge. A single mosquito adds its whirl, dive-bombing onto my wrist, leaving its mark, and screaming off into a night of targets.

The stoop is cool, the cement pleasantly rough. Scratching my bare instep against the largest crack of the step, I edge into the dark, leaving the puddle of light to its own devices. The moon hasn't poked her head above the sycamores yet, and still there is a vague light across the yard. A patch of glittering brightness lays where water has pooled in the drive; a glimmer of white gravel caresses the fence. And there, the soft blanket of grey fog closes across the field, obscuring the corn, the crib, the roadway — rolling, rolling.

I count the stars . . . seven in the Dipper; three there beyond the roof of the ghostly garage. A handful clings like discarded daisies in the shadowy fan of the maple tree. A miller whirls crazily by and dashes itself against the screen, followed by another and another of its senseless clan.

Headlight beams stab their way repeatedly along the macadam, briefly limning my storm-broken locust tree. They, too, disappear, quickly, in the rush of high powered motors, the raucous blare of night-breaking horns disturbing the prettier noises of my eerie world.

My anonymous friend, a raccoon, I think, noses his way warily just beyond my sight. I hear his careful progress and wish mightily that I, too, could wander through the fields, hurry through yards, ravage bins of garbage and trash, uproot petunia beds, and topple cement statues in the lawns of country dwellers.

The night has made me fanciful — and sad. Where is the moon? I long to see it one time more in my summer freedom. Tomorrow another year of school begins, clipping shorter by just one more my life of summertimes.

CONNIE K. RIGGS

THE CHEMISTRY WE SHARE

Old Max is gone beyond,
young Bullis abroad.

White clouds linger,
they do not last —
some go to far places
while others in rain fall.

It is in cherishing
that love
breeds sorrow.

Those whom we lose
in death
are but travelled abroad,

and friends lost —
dead.

'tis only

the valley wind
whispering to
dancing willows
that brings Evapora back

the shared moonlit star
and the almonded squirrel
that remain of
Bennet.

You revive to Gloria Vanderbilt
as Dracula wakes
To new blood.

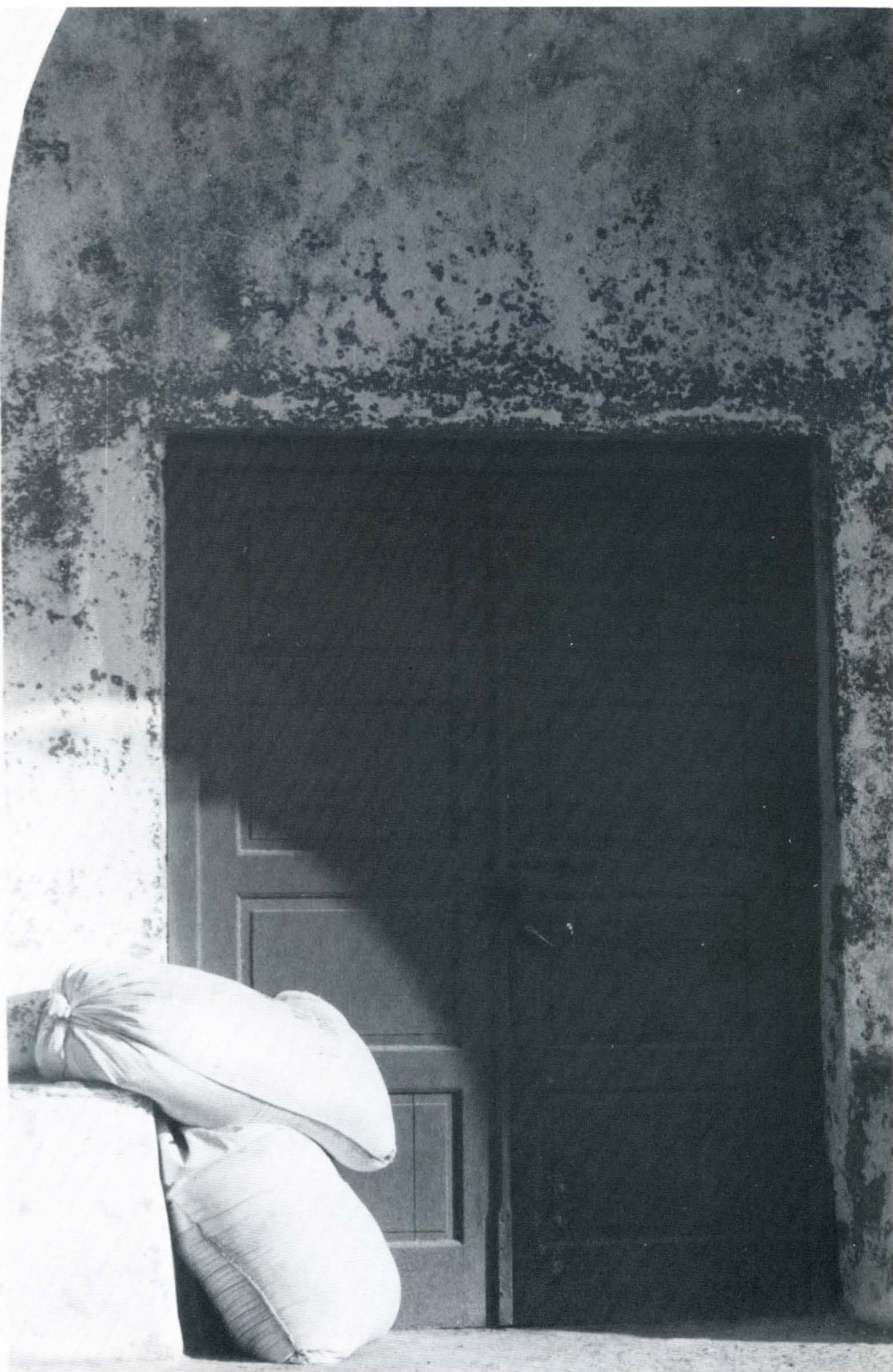
Old Max still rocks
in the empty rocker

and Bullis swings
still in the Spanish moss
he liked so much.

Sohrab,
Sohrab will always
be wherever Huck Finn
and
I
are.

MOHAMED RAWAHY





THE SPOILS OF '45

I recollect him coming home
and bringing me a plastic bayonet
the sort that soldiers practiced with.
The long tan army belt he brought me
slipped behind his back and, snick
like magic, came out short.
He gave me too a netted metal helmet
a combat belt with rows of metal holes
for hooking canvas pouches on
and, best, a German target gun
blue steel, brown stock, and boltless
that went to play with me
in all the trenches, forts
and cockpits of the neighborhood.
And to my Mom and me he brought
nailed in a wooden crate
dates from Algeria
brown, wrinkled, crusty with syrup
filled with small white worms.

ALAN NORDSTROM

JUMPING ROPE

dear old ladies who sit on grocery market benches,

Please smile.

You call me child,
what a beautiful child,
you say.
But i can't smile for you
today.
i am too tender to
touch, old ladies.
My bones ache like yours,
my eyes weep like yours
in the bright sun.
Your shifting, puckered mouths
tremble and
do you always carry hand-
kerchiefs?
i do.

Are you going to church now?
i guess
i'll save
your space
on this green bench
and wait for you to
come back to me.
Old ladies
with rhino's skin,

please smile.

KARA PROVOST



BEAUTIFUL BAMBOO

My beautiful bamboo
Tall, straight up thirty feet.
My beautiful, tall bamboo
Someone's cut you down.

Today, I came to watch you play
But you were gone.
A dark man
In a blue suit and hat
Cut out your life
With his faded red saw.

My beautiful bamboo
I miss you.
You were so graceful
Outside the window
As the sunset wrapped
About your trunks.

My beautiful, tall bamboo
I'm going to miss you most
Because your peaceful,
Graceful silence
Will peek at me through
The window no more.

CHRIS HAMPTON

DESERTED HAIKU

In the pale moonlight,
Fresh aroma of spring flowers —
A faint northern breeze.

Clear summer day
Driving to far blue mountains
Bray white castles
on azure canvas.

The willow tree —
Ourselves and all are kin
The fish and the stars.

Green slopes of Mt. Lemon
The saguaro the only companion
Ancient desert footprints.

MOHAMED RAWAHY

LOSING MY GUMBALLS

Disbelief splashed across your face as I scooped raspberry sherbet into the aquarium. Trying to restore the calm to your countenance, I quickly began to explain that even goldfish occasionally enjoy indulging in the delights of sherbet, but my reasoning only succeeded in agitating the waves of incomprehension washing over your mien. So I shut up, not bothering to add that goldfish fancy all flavors equally, and sat down and eyed you sadly.

In one hand you clutched still your stainless steel spoon—nothing odd about that, since you had anticipated finishing dinner with sherbet and coffee and the continuation of our conversation. But now our dessert was floating in the fish tank, melting slowly and blushing the water pink, and I watched as you slowly realized that, instead of raspberry sherbet following the moo goo gai pan, evidence of my insanity was to become the meal's final course.

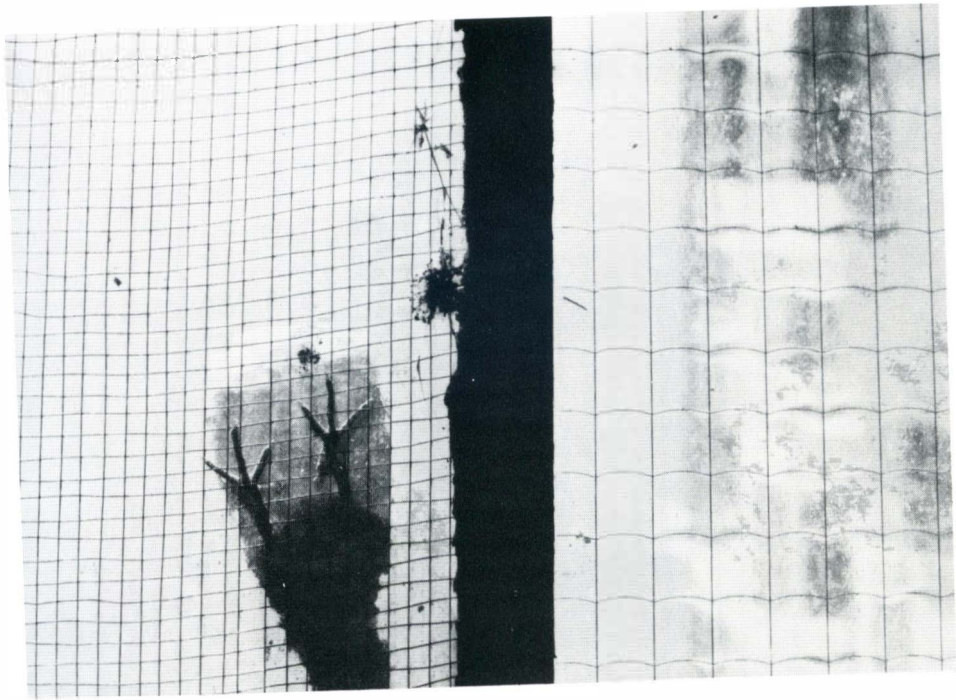
You glanced again at the aquarium, and the spherical scoops of sherbet bobbing at the surface helped you to snatch a cliché from your confusion. Your expression suddenly froze solid with understanding, and I watched as you thought, Poor girl, she's lost her marbles.

I sighed. Lost her marbles—Ooo, how unoriginal! But, then you couldn't have come up with something even slightly less conventional, not you.

If I were labeling myself, I would substitute "gumballs" for "marbles." And in this new idiom, I would become one of those machines, located at the entrance and exit doors of every supermarket, whose release mechanism had jammed, sending multi-colored gumballs bouncing across the sticky green and white dappled linoleum floor. Tiny orange and pink and yellow sugar-shelled spheres of sanity escaping from my glass skull to be pursued by squealing children, to be crushed under bag boys' shoes and the wheels of shopping carts. Losing my gumballs.

See, if you were to pick up one of my gumballs from the floor, wipe off the dirt, put it in your mouth and bite down, then you would experience a burst of tangy flavor. Attempt the same thing with a marble, though, and you would probably crack some teeth.

ROBIN SIMMONS



JOHN CURLEY

When a star explodes
Beacons of brilliance travel
For thousands of years
To tell a lonely sailor where to turn.
Now that you are gone,
Will your special light guide me
From the same place where you were?
Or will I drift, a ship off course
Centerless
On the black indifferent waters
Of the sea?

BETH RAPP



VIRGINIA FREDERICK

EQUUS

It was January
When you fell and somersaulted over me,
Legs clawing powerlessly in the air
Before you came to rest
Against the cemetery fence
And tried to get up
But couldn't,
Front legs willing, but hindquarters
Unable to do the job.
And me —
Sprawled helplessly in the dirt,
Knee twisted the wrong way,
Trying to scream
But nothing coming out of my mouth
But a little blood
From a split lip.
I closed my eyes
And pressed my face against the ground,
And when I looked again
You were standing,
Legs shaky
Nostrils flared in fear
Head lowered to the ground
As If you knew
That the nerve damage was already done.

Now April,
By tractor light tonight,
We take you
And bury you
Beside the river where you used to wade,
Beneath the tree you sought for shade.

MARGARET O'SULLIVAN

SOMETHING I KNOW ABOUT SOMEWHERE I LIVED

There was a time
when the sun did not insist
but was merely somewhere in the sky
above my back yard

I went reluctantly to
where I didn't play alone
the wall twenty feet up and
roughly pink supporting a felt sky

I went there alone and
leaned against the wall,
not casting a shadow,
disinterestedly humming

a song I didn't know well
I knew about the children
who had lived there before
Bricked in

Only one high window and
a small door
gave from my room
to where they played alone.

JOHN CURLEY

FOOTNOTE #1 TO NEW WORLD METAPHYSICS: TULIP EROTICA

They stand as lovers, even,
at the window,
steeped,
shoulder deep
in French rose:

Unaware
I see them so:
Pressed at the hip,
their petaled heads
above, awry,
in softly
soulless
blackened
rapture;
happy, drowsy
leaning
leaving
only as
the other.

Shall we dance alone tonight,
My Love,
or die embraced,
as one?

KIM MCDOWELL

MILLIE PEARL

Millie was a marvel — one of a kind — a quietly enduring lass of no particular beauty or apparent talent. It was perhaps her very unnoticeability which made Millie what she was. It was singularly fitting that her middle name was Pearl.

At 16, she was “put out to work.” God-fearing, soft-spoken and biddable, she was a prize to the Lanhams. “Worth her weight in gold,” was the comment often made, but never, of course, to Millie herself. It was an understatement at that. Sandwiched between her rising at five a.m. to build the fires and dragging herself to her bed at night beneath the eaves, was the cooking for 17 field hands, the churning, and the care of multitudes of chickens which swarmed across the farm. She washed clothes, scrubbed linoleums, patched overalls and work shirts. She darned and mended, even kept the bare, dusty kitchen yard swept. At the Lanhams’, Millie learned the ultimate meaning of the word “clean.”

“Clean,” pronounced Mrs. Lanham in her pursed-mouth way, her hands clasped tightly beneath her coverall apron, “means clean.” Clean meant that once a week every dish in every cupboard was brought down and washed and dried to pristine purity. Clean meant scouring every pot and polishing each piece of silver to spotlessness. Clean meant boiling the clothes in the steaming iron cauldron, turning carpets every two weeks to “even” the wear, and reversing collars on worn shirts to lengthen their useful life. “Cleaning” included rotating window blinds from room to room so that the sunlight which poured onto the living room shades was balanced in alternate weeks by the total lack of rays in the “back bedrooms.”

Oh, yes, Millie learned about “clean.”

Living as well as working with the Lanham family, a sadly unlettered lot, it shouldn’t have bothered Millie perhaps, that she had left school during the sixth grade for her “working out.” But it did. Some soft, warm, hungry part of her longed to learn, to know, to speak. It wasn’t mathematics or history that concerned Millie; she knew little of the world and the lack was scarcely noticed. She never dreamed she would need to count beyond her pitiful wages, and a world beyond the County Line was unfathomable.

What it was . . . was beauty. Millie longed for beauty, for words as gentle as the

spring beauties filling the small valley nest she had discovered beyond the west forty. She ached to have on her tongue the names of colors to describe the sunset; she yearned — in a quiet agony of suspense — to possess “learning” about delights she discovered in the pages of the “Wish Book.” Pouring over the Sears & Roebuck catalogue by lamplight, she feasted on pictures of cretonne drapes, colorful sofas, rose-patterned carpets, dishes abloom with myriad blossoms.

“Some day,” she promised herself every night as she closed the book, “someday, I’m going to have all that. Some day I’m going to have a house and furniture of my own. I’m going to have a separate dining room with 8 chairs and a sideboard. And then, when everything is nice, I’m going to have a picture. I am. A real, honest-to-goodness oil painting. One with trees and a little creek, with big globs of paint sticking right out of the picture so everyone will know it’s real.”

Millie married eventually — not well, but happily. She left the Lanhams, secure in the knowledge that she knew how to run a house with cleanliness and thrift. She still scrimped and saved and cleaned and cleaned and cleaned. But the house, now, was her house. She reveled in keeping her floors free of the least speck of dirt. No dust mice curled beneath her beds even momentarily, and the motes that whirled in every shaft of sunlight elsewhere were magically absent from Millie’s rooms.

She had learned her lessons well; she had become a solid partner in marriage.

It was, however, the time of the Great Depression before they owned their house — *her* house, and the living was lean. Money was not only scarce but honored as the household god; pennies meant scraps of meat and soup bones, the long bus trip to work for her husband. Well-taught, Millie joined the millions who studied long before spending even the smallest coin. “I’m a pinch-penny,” she laughed, pleased with her thrifty ways.

And yet, when the young man — sallow-faced and threadbare-elbowed — pecked apologetically at her screen door, Millie forsook her hard-learned lessons with scarcely a second’s hesitation.

“I’m an artist,” he announced through the screen, his face anxious, his voice tentative. “I don’t suppose you’d like to buy a picture? For your wall? I mean, it’s a real painting. It’s oil. I painted it myself. You can feel the paint right there. “Course, I’ve never been to that valley, but I looked at the pictures in the library, and it’s a real

valley. In Missouri. It's a real creek and everything. All of it. Real." His voice died slowly away. He stared at Millie, taking in the glazed look, the swift pain that crossed her face, the hands that worked the moprag she held.

"Wait," she croaked. "Don't go." Turning, she kicked the bucket of grey water, sloshing grey suds onto her clean linoleum. "Wait," she called over her shoulder, dropping the moprag, casting barely a glance at the spreading pool of water.

In less than a heartbeat Millie's sugar bowl was emptied — emptied of grocery money, of Louis's new winter coat, bereft of urgently-needed carfare and the flour for next week's biscuits. Necessity bowed to a resurrected dream.

Millie was still sitting there in the middle of the dining room when Louis closed the front door behind him. She was rocking placidly, contentedly, hands folded in her lap, her eyes fastened on the oil painting propped against the wall above the ancient buffet.

The supper beans burned stickily on the kitchen stove, but Millie was oblivious, her whole being concentrated on the blue, blue valley and the mist rising over the fallen tree, the silver thread of the tiny creek, and the patch of yellow flowers high on the hill.

"It's real," she murmured as he set the smoking pot of beans on the back stoop. "It's a real oil painting. Just feel it."

And Louis, with that enduring patience of Depression and do-without, with no understanding at all of Millie Pearl's yearning, obediently touched the gilded frame, the gentle wash of blue and silver. Hiding his own bewilderment, he echoed his wife's lifetime of desire. "It's real, all right Millie Pearl. A real oil painting."

"Feel it," she commanded again, her gnarled hands clutching themselves in ecstasy. "Feel it. It's real, isn't it?"

And Louis, seeing the emptied sugar bowl, the burning pot, the eyes bright with wonder and unshed tears, said quietly, "It's the realest thing we've got, Millie Pearl. It truly is."

And she was content.

CONNIE K. RIGGS



MELINDA BLANKENBERG

THE END OF IS

I wonder if
at the end of is
I'll move to a condo down where it's warm
(of course, it'll have to have northeast exposure
'cause that's the light my violets like),
to wait for thank-you notes
my daughter made her children write
and social security
the third of the month
to save for weekly Wednesday trips
to keep my permanent curls set straight
the way old ladies are wont to do
before their Thursday bridge group meets
that monthly hops
from
Stella's
to
Irma's
to
Emma's
and
back
quicker than I can
cross the street these days.

I guess I'll do my laundry Mondays
shopping Tuesdays
dusting Fridays
(Wednesday and Thursdays, remember, were made
for hair and cards).
On Saturdays maybe I'll sit and read
do crossword puzzles or watch TV.

And Sundays, faithfully,
I'll go to pray —
to pray for all things not:
"O Lord,
I won't I shan't I don't I can't I'm not,
And hopefully neither are they.
Amen."

And will,
when I fall and break my hip,
they make me put a pin in it
and make me buy four new bibbed legs
(as if they think I'll drool on them) —
too heavy to lift
too hard to hold —
and send me on my way
as good as
old?

And after that
will I nightly watch
the nightly news
in a pink quilt robe
with shoes that rest on Grandpa's stool
and tie below my sloppy ankles
remembering what is
no more?

In is,
if all things real are possible
then supposed to be are not:
God knows,
I'd rather be was
than dead.

KIM MCDOWELL

DEUS EX MACHINA

I dropped a dream in a rhyme machine,
A dream with a golden thread.
The mad machine spun my lame dream
As thin as a spider's web.

A tone came up, as from a trumpet's
Breath, and carried us over the sea.
We caught the sail of a clipper ship,
Tilting, pitching, jibing its helm.
Then cracked the tops'ls
And whipped the mast
And swung the careening beams abaft.

We lifted the ship, the clipper ship,
Made it skitter the lapping waves.
Then, soaring high over billowing trees,
To a cloud's halo that hides the sun,
We chased the cloud and rested the ship
On a beam as bright as our song.

I heard faint rhyme.

But the beat
Of time
In the pause
Of the sky
And the pulse
Of the sea
Throbbled aloud
In my blood . . .
Like poetry.

WILLIAM W. HOFFINGER



WHAT THE OLD MAN SEES, LIVING AT THE END OF THE RUNWAY

Polar nights
I can feel the cold around us.
I can feel the quiet
Of polar nights.
Sky blue sea
Cold blue sea

At night she walks proudly
Along Judean mountain tops
Cursing false gods
Believing false prophets.
And then fades away
Just fades away

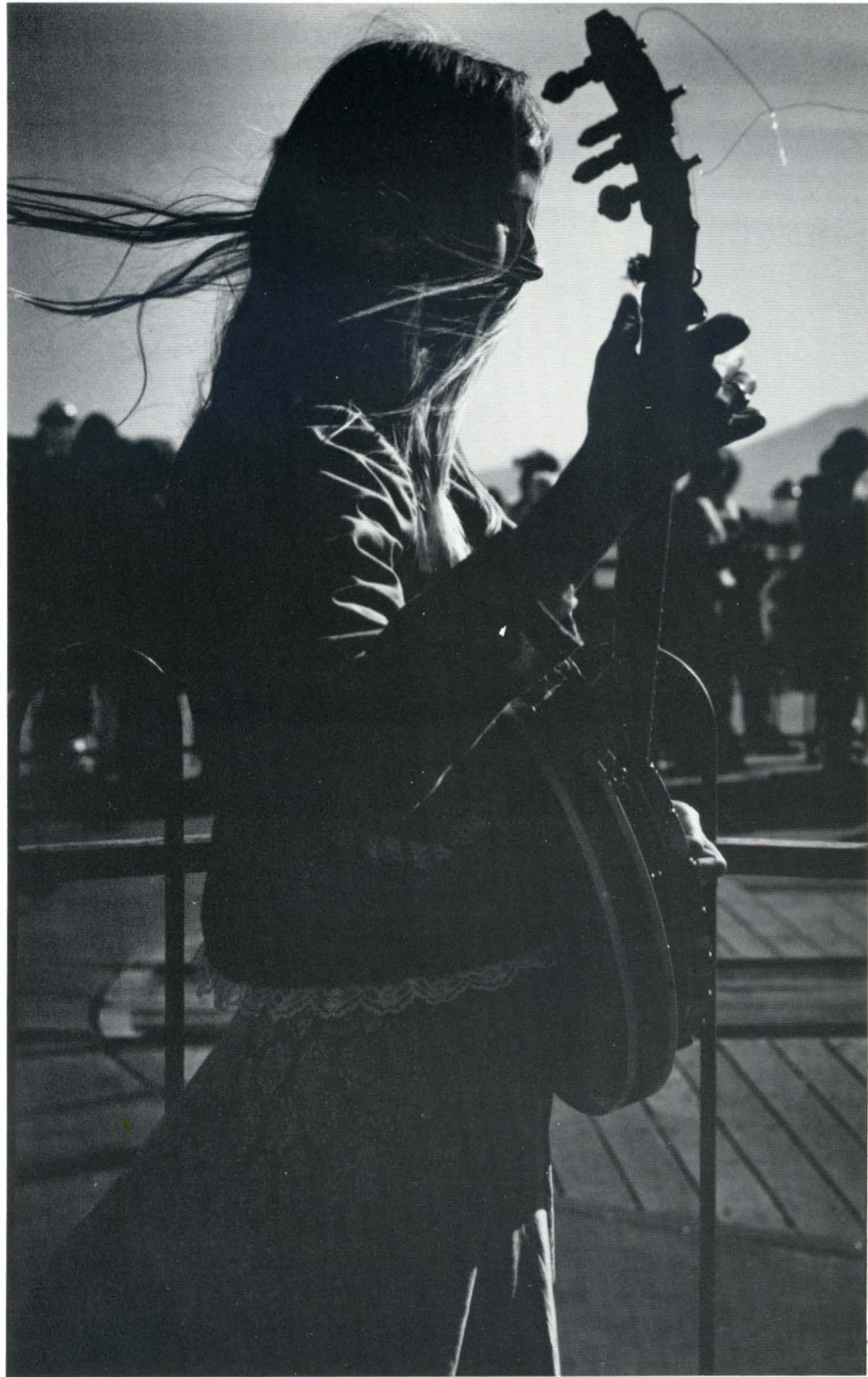
Ninety-nine hunkering monkeys, Screaming
On volcanic rocks of Pacific isles
Burning, Bleeding until
Another is born.
Rage on (native man)
Cool rage (of native man)

Split the beast open.
Let him out (can you see his face?)
Hey, you. Look through my eyes.
Can you see the enemy (and does he look like us?)
I know it
Yea, now you know it too

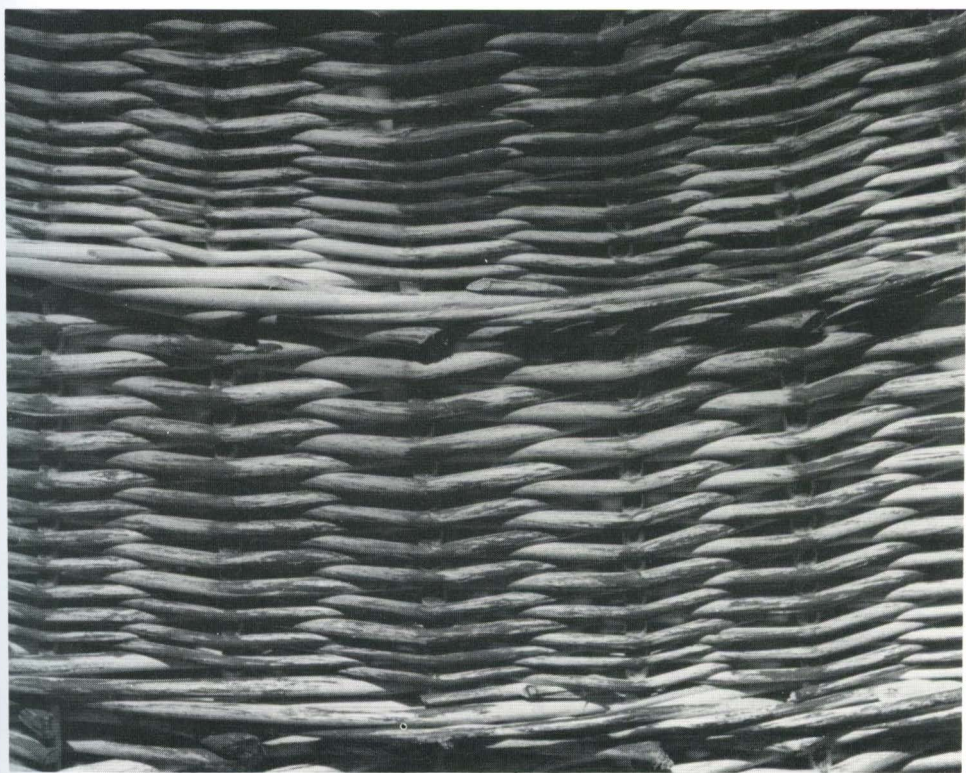
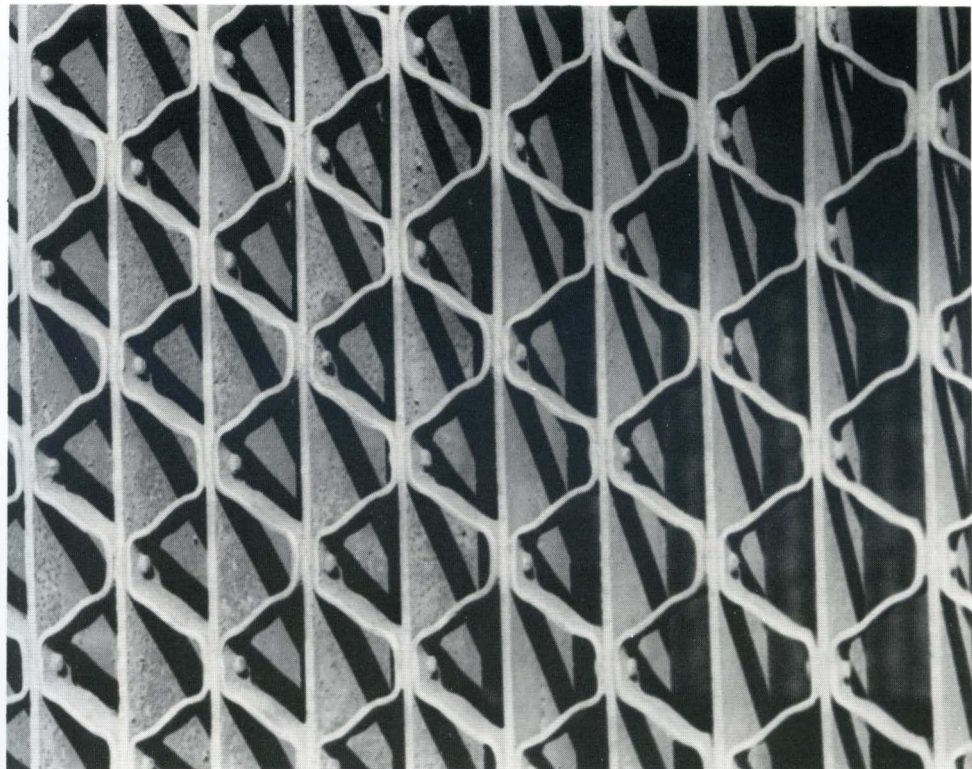
Get on the roof-top and watch him, children.
Storming in on grey-blue wings.
From his belly the truth shall come.
And lightning will rip
East to West (silently rip)
East to West

DAVID SARNEY





WILLIAM LOVING



APPEASE

All the truth
and a sense of calm
lie arms outstretched
under my scalp

hands joined
The worst that could happen
flickers then wanes

Tears on a string
sparkle
and confetti words
blow about

The best greys
spread
and waltz me
into the next room

where diminuendo and a smooth drink
await me
and sleep sleep sleep.

JOHN CURLEY

Still ignorant of Copernican simplicity we live
Each noting every motion of the other
With the dull care of an ancient astronomer
And adjusting our paths accordingly
Never straying too far . . . or too close.
Our lives trace useless cycles and epicycles
On a dull, parchment existence.

How is it I perform these Ptolemaic rituals
When all I want —
All I ever wanted

Was to leave with you for the heavens,
Pull the moonlight under our chins
And fall asleep in the stardust?

BETH RAPP



OMNISCIENCE

I know everything
I know why
 every night
 you pull me to your shoulder
 to sleep
and
I know why you told me
 that night on my birthday
 that you wrote the song just
 for me
and
I know why
 we had that monumental argument
 at five in the morning
I know everything,
I told you.
I even know how brown your eyes are in the dark!
how? Well —
suffice it to say that I just
know everything.
I told you so I told you so I told you so I
told you so I told
you so you
so and so
I told you,
so?

BEVERLY HORANIC

BOW TO YOUR MAKER

I saw you born, through the mirror above,
Emerging pale head and bloody body.
Together we rejoiced in a cry
About the mysterious agony of life.

Children, they told me, were for people
Older than myself, with money and sensibility.
All I had was love and hope,
A passion for life that bewilders even myself.

Today, you totter about, a little urchin
And falling hard now, still falling hard later,
I speak to you about life's lonely sorrows:
Treasure this time of forgetfulness.

GRETCHEN MITCHELL

THREE A.M.

Jolted awake by your whimper,
I reach for my crumpled robe
And stumble
Night-blind across the carpet.

You have a dream that I cannot see
Or hear
Or taste
But your cry has broken
The bones of my heart
And I carry your pain within.

LINDA DOWNING



DEAR MISSY

It's autumn now — the leaves are turning
bright colors

The ferns have all turned brown — the
roadsides have many wild flowers

And there's a lot of goldenrod

The deer move quickly as they feel
the chill

I suspect the bears feel it,
too

I miss all those berries

You used to pick

It seemed then to be too many

Now I wish you'd bring me more

For pies or jam

Temperature here only 52° today

Of course we have a furnace fire

It seems we had almost no summer

Seasons seem to rush by

Grandpa didn't even go in

for his annual summer swim

AMY FIEDLING & BETTY THOMPSON

FROM *ANGINA*, A NOVELLA IN PROGRESS

IX

A knock on the door was always exciting. Mrs. Doordan put her chalk in the tray and said just a minute, class. Sometimes it was another teacher and Mrs. Doordan stood with her foot in the door to hold it ajar while she talked. Usually it was a school messenger who merely shoved packets of papers in Mrs. Doordan's face and when she thanked him, ducked his head and fled. Only on rare occasions was the knock a summons for one of them. If Mrs. Doordan turned on her toes to face the room, the class moved like water gently stirred by sun in a pool. *Sam* . . . she always paused then as though practicing a neutral tone . . . you're wanted in the Office. Then, every child's head turned to the next and the class, all together, breathed: *Principal*.

It was the moment between the knock and Mrs. Doordan's posture at the door that was pivotal. Knock-knock! The second grade waited. *Jen Willin*. Like shots. Mrs. Doordan's voice prepared itself . . . you're wanted on the telephone. The class was disappointed. Pencils were dropped, sashes yanked to make up for lack of interest. Mrs. Doordan ignored Jen's exit and rapped her ruler for order. The class kept its place in light and safety behind her. Her heart lurched in attachment for it, because she knew the hall had no end; the hall was Night; only she and the junior high boy bobbed along in it, like buoys in a dark sea. There was not even light enough in her mind for pictures in the Book, only the force of her body moving, only the cold knob on the office door, the sudden black and white shock, the receiver, Mrs. Frye's tablet, her own faraway voice. Hello??

Life, in the moments that followed, was lifted up by the absence of what was the worst expected (*it* had not happened.) When her consciousness let fear fall, she seemed to float in the space it had held. All the way home on the bus people and things wore bright colors and were dazzled out of their places. A boy, a lunch box, a cow in the field stood out like the filled in figures of old coloring books; too red, or too black, or the wrong shade of green, she would think looking at them later. She got off the bus nearly dizzy; too sunny. She squinted, beginning to run up the lane where the clover grew out in bunches toward the gravel, and it was purple. Purple; she kept passing it, running, not knowing the word (transfigured) but knowing something — the brief bright difference. And there at the top of the lane, in front of the hedges, rearend already wriggling, sat Skipper.

X

Summer opened her head a little; she felt as if she'd had a bad cold but was better. Skipper rolled over and over in the grass and flew off from her in wild imaginary assaults, tearing back, when she called, no feet on the ground. School was out, she was home every day and not haunted so much by what might *happen* in her absence. So, for as long as it took to find Skipper and then to find the rat that last night had raided the broilers, sending them up from dark clouds of feather to smother in heaps; for as long as it took to flood such a rat from his hole, for Skipper to snap the drenched villain's neck in his teeth and then shake him to the death he deserved; for this long she conquered the persistent present. Good dog, good dog, her father said, praising them both.

But a Delaware summer was perhaps most poignantly revealed of an evening. Farmers rode on their tractors as long as light let them tell furrow from ditchbank. The canning factory worked all night long and trucks loaded with tomatoes, asparagus or beans lined up along the side of the road into town. Riding home with her father, Jen's nose caught the sharp vine smells from juice-stained floors boards, from the roads, where fruit spilled and festered. It was still there tickling in her nostrils when they turned off route 404 into their own place, her father, pausing in the car to gaze at the wheat. The car windows were rolled down, her father's white-shirted arm (cuffs rolled back above the wrists) lay along the window; the gravel crunched as the wheels gradually inched up the lane to the house, every visible progress recorded.

Also close observers of the countryside were those who drove from Baltimore and Washington, frazzled out of mind, toward the beaches. Upon these couples the country broke like an anthem. Wasn't this endless, they thought: orchard was joined to field and field to woods and the buildings sat back neatly. Their eyes went over the view uninterruptedly. They stared from their windows silently, nursing a wish, a regret. Then one of them laughed (it had carried like something lost, from open window to open window) and Jen heard it as she rode with her father. In the wake of the laugh, travellers agreed that the road to Rehoboth Beach was paved with fresh peaches. Some couples, silent for months, talked to each other again and thought of leaving the city for good.

Her mother was winding the clock; it had run down, so now the hands were gently pulled around the clock face striking off

imaginary hours until positioned by the tip of her mother's fingers, at just the right minute. Jen flopped down against the fat den sofa pillows; sometimes she liked the sound of the clock. Tonight the successive dongs reminded her of the woman's laughter that had carried across from the highway, dusting her father's wheatfield with its foreign properties; these sounds, struck off as they were, out of real time had changed the mood of the evening.

But how? She played with the velveteen tassels on the pillow. And *who*, asked her mother, did you *see*? Jay Kleinman, her father said from the kitchen. Jen scooped up the remembrance of Jay Kleinman gratefully. He fit with the pieces her mind had been assembling in its search of distinctions. (She heard her mother sink to the kitchen sofa with a sigh.) Jay Kleinman carried Jen's picture in his wallet. What do you think I've got in here, he joked with a laugh, throwing the wallet open, and she smiled back at her first grade image. Jay Kleinman was funny; even when he talked, the words bounced out on gusts of laughter. Sometimes, her father was funny; she burrowed her back into the pillow. Now, he was talking to her mother. She heard him scrape the knife over the tablecloth in search of a crumb.

It was time to hook the screen doors; the cars on route 404 whispered to the road and with their lights, illuminated the cars ahead. All through the night they would pass in convoy, their passengers dreaming of the ocean, the great equalizer. Upstairs, across the varnished landing, her grandmother was breathing in and out in her sleep. Then, as a magnetic sphere suddenly lifts up in an embrace, its fillings, it came to her, this result of her thinking. Her *mother* couldn't die while her *grandmother* was still living.

JEAN WEST

PHIL STANTON



STARDUST MEMORIES

Catalina was different. Young Miss Keery tried to account for this by placing her in the “Gifted and Talented” program, (at seven, the child had an obvious knack for writing), but even then it occasionally stuck out. Once, the gray-eyed girl had read her a story about a dark young man. In her piping child’s voice, she read, “His eyes do not sparkle. They do not shine. They are deep ponds without fish.”

Miss Keery had felt cold, strange. “Why do you write such a sad story?” She had asked, but Catalina shrugged, “I don’t know. I just did.”

It was when Catalina was ten, her last year at Eastbrook School, that Miss Keery became frightened. Serious, narrow, and quiet, it was easy to overlook the girl if Miss Keery really tried, and yet it always popped up again, usually in her stories. The last one the teacher read was called “The Dream.”

“But when the lonely Nun died, only the Violets cried.” Miss Keery read the last sentence with tears in her eyes — it touched the incredible, soul-searing loneliness that lay deep within her. She could not speak to Catalina the next day, but watched her hypnotically, trying to see past the thick plastic-lensed glasses . . . Finally, though, she returned the story and had to ask, “Why,” she cleared her throat, “why did you call it ‘The Dream’?”

“Because I dreamt it,” Catalina answered and smiled.

In sixth grade, when Catalina was twelve, she wrote many stories. She wrote about the color black, about pits and paths and tangled jungle vines. Sometimes she cried, great dry-heaving unchildlike sobs, and her mother wondered. But, it passed, and she began to wait. She knew she was waiting — it showed in her writing, it showed in her face, it showed in her sighing acceptance of what was. But she did not know what she was waiting for — the night-pictures of dreams had not yet shown her that.

The dreams became more complex as she reached fourteen. She could do more things in them; they were more real and beautiful. The loneliness still ebbed and flooded though, and sometimes she felt she would drown . . . Yet, there was the stillness of knowledge, heavy and quiet within.

One day, she went to sit silent by the pond as the sun spread electricity on the water. Sparks flew against the smooth, living blue and Catalina closed her eyes.

As the sun set and the earth relinquished its last warmth, like a living thing, she entered a dream.

A person, with shimmering hair like a prism reflected in a sprinkler, spoke. “As you know,” the voice flowed, “stars constantly regenerate. They burn out in quiet flashes only to regroup and glow again.”

The person turned to Catalina with gray eyes lit from behind and filled with crystalline sparkling. “Your eyes, like mine, contain stardust. It is in your bones and in your hair, precious silver stardust. You have lived out your earth-lives very well, battling the loneliness with light. Your light has come very near the surface these last years and now it shall be free.”

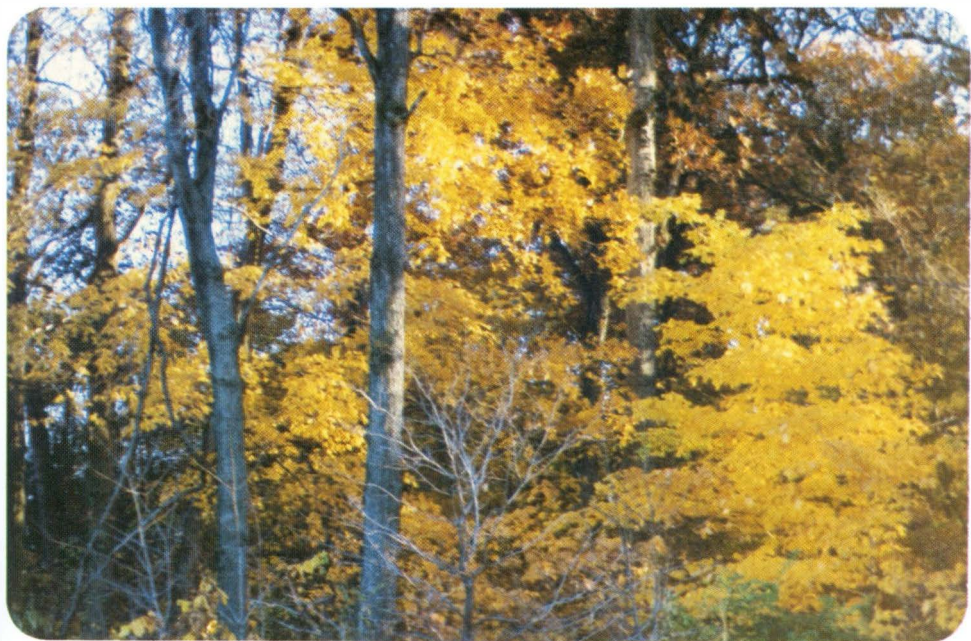
Catalina joined the star-persons’s reality, leaving her dream of earth behind. “Join,” the voice sang in a thousand harmonies simultaneously, “join, stardust children. Burn brilliant and true — light this darkness!”

All night vanished in pure white as the star was born.





HOPE
READ



SPRINGFIELD DOGWOOD

While the violet breath of lilac
softly threads the bedroom window,
and stretches in to stir your silvered temple,
tell me not,
as you smoothly press the satin-bound percale,
of Shawnee hopes and tomahawks,
of lightning bugs, nor northern lights,
but your madness for the white-barked bough.

I know those pink limbs lamed him, too —
there, in the shadow of the oaken grove
that hemmed his appled acre.

For now, as tear-stained leaves, they lie —
father's Mother,
mother's Dad —
stilled, by dogwood's spell.

KIM MCDOWELL

I sat up all night with you
once
and you explained to me
how you had given up
everything you had
to get where you are now.
How, at forty,
you have no one but your laurels
to bed down with at night
and how lonely that can be.
The out-stretched hand was there,
you know,
it was just too much cognac
and my lap too soft
and the night too far gone
into morning
for us to go to the islands —
I locked your door when
I left.

BEVERLY HORANIC

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

DENIS BOURGUIGNON — A picture is only as good as an observer wants it to be. When you think you've seen it all . . . look again.

LINDA DOWNING — I live in a Longwood house with two cats, my husband and a one-year-old daughter who is a poem all by herself.

AMY FIEDLING — "After 20 years, I've finally been published!"

CHRIS HAMPTON — I find I say most when my mouth is shut, rather than when it's open and my foot is in it.

WILLIAM W. HOFFINGER — The world is a centrifuge, but invariably, as you can see, I am drawn to The Center.

NANCY HOFFMAN is in her ninth year as English Department secretary. She occasionally teaches English courses and plans to spend two months next summer in England at Oxford University pursuing British Studies.

BEVERLY HORANIC loves small gifts, or flowers.

DAVID LEE — "... Once in a while you can get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right ..." — Robert Hunter

NOEL LEVIN — Peafowl, moons, and tulips have brought me from words to poetry, will be's to is's in the shortest of whitewashed years.

WILLIAM LOVING — Born in Kentucky. Came to Rollins in 1970. Has studied with Ansel Adams, Andre Kertesz and Ernst Haas. Works in color as well as black and white but personally prefers his work in the latter.

KIM MCDOWELL — Misses her selves.

DAVID MITCHELL — *Otium Cum Dignitatem*

GRETCHEN MITCHELL — “Old man! ’tis not so difficult to die.” — *Manfred*

ALAN NORDSTROM is altogether too sane to be a modern poet, but he cuts a little caper now and then, then goes back to grading papers.

MARGARET O’SULLIVAN — “I do and do and do for you kids, and this is the thanks I get?”

KARA PROVOST — People sometimes ask me why I don’t write more cheerful poetry. The truth is that writing morbid poems actually cheers me up!

BETH RAPP is glad she was coerced into submitting her poetry instead of throwing it away.

MOHAMED RAWAHY — endeavoring to rationalize the elusive fumes of literal illusions.

CONNIE RIGGS is proud to appear in *Brushing*, but stands forewarned by a famous Hoosier’s wry remark: “It’s a fine thing to be pleased with yourself — as long as you don’t walk like it!”

DAVID SARNEY — “A poet makes himself a visionary through a long, boundless, and systematized *disorganization of all the senses*.” — A. Rimbaud

ROBIN SIMMONS — The other day I melted two slices of American cheese over my baked potato in the microwave; so, naturally, you can imagine why I never give snapdragons to anyone for Halloween.

OLGA VISO — a fragile piece of a glass menagerie . . . searching for rainbows.

JEAN WEST — Professor of English; Regarding *Angina*: “And an only daughter is the needle of the heart.” From an Old Irish story.

DAGMARA L. ZEIDENBERGS — A native New Englander who loves music, photography, travel and planes.

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VOLUME 14, no. 1

Brushing is published in the fall and spring by the Student Association of Rollins College. Manuscripts and artwork may be submitted for consideration to Rollins College, *Brushing* editor, Winter Park, FL 32789.

