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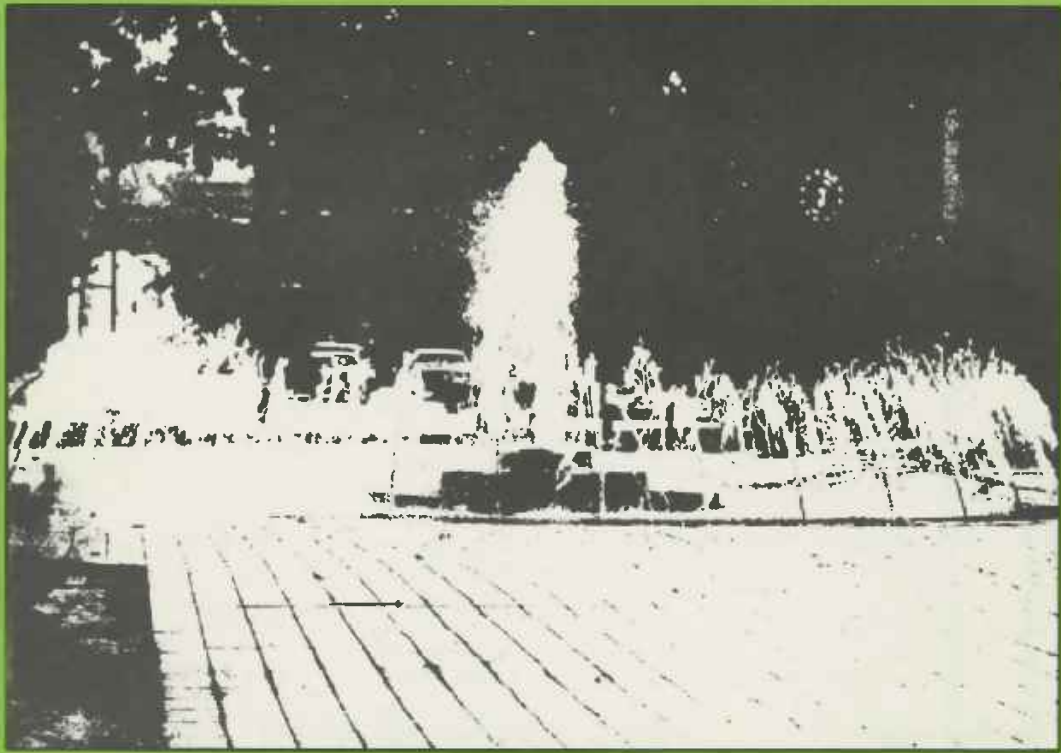
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Instress

WINTER 1988

INSTRESS has been published by the students of College Misericordia since December of 1966. The title, coined by Gerard Manley Hopkins, signifies the moment the reader achieves complete understanding of the written word. The author, through INSTRESS, conveys to and shares with the reader, an emotionally moving experience.

Submit your works to any of the editors or writers of INSTRESS for publication next year. INSTRESS receives campus members' original artwork as well as their original poetry, prose, and photography.

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COLLEGE MISERICORDIA: Founded and Sponsored by the Religious Sisters of Mercy

Bloodletting

This bullet is
 aimed for my skull
 Because bleeding with a pen
 is not bleeding enough
 Because clawing these lines
 and cutting my fingers
 is not bleeding enough
 Because you clean my bloody words
 like you clean the bloody streets
 Because you will not let me bleed
 like I should
 Because you will not let my ink think
 the big blood
 Because if I cannot bleed paper
 I will bleed plaster
 Because I want to write
 a short wall poem
 Full of imagery
 and alliteration
 Because I know I can
 bleed that graffitti
 Because I know you will
 clean the wall so clean and
 clean the poem so clean and
 clean the blood so clean
 and that you will clean I
 so clean like you
 so clean like you.

Rich Aloia

Mock Poem

I can't write a poem
 Because the images and words
 Dance just beyond my reach
 Teasing
 Like chickadees,
 Near, then gone.
 The phrase I pursue
 Might capture the birds
 Circling in my memory.
 Circling from the field, wind-lifted
 Settling.
 Serendipity might describe my discovery:
 Not birds
 But leaves of corn rising from the dead
 Mock wings, borrowed flight,
 Words never caught.

Nancy Comstock

Shattered Dream

Ashley was only thirteen when she fell in love with Drew. Her entire world revolved around him. Too young to understand, too weak to break free, and too scared to let go, Ashley held on. In one night, the grip was shaken loose.

Alone in her parents' beach house on a cool summer night, she received news that Drew was in town. She couldn't wait to see him.

Ashley arrived at the house to find Drew in a state of total intoxication, screaming words and phrases incoherently. When he saw her, accusations soon turned into insults; insults into violence, he began to punch a door, yelling, "I'll kill him." He was wild and uncontrollable, like an untamed beast as she struggled to move out to the street. Crowds of people watched, but no one stopped him. She thought, "How can people be so cold?" Finally, Ashley broke loose and ran. After a mile and certain she was safe, she slowly turned around. There he was, red-eyed and wild. The struggle began again, but this time Drew had turned on a stranger. One hard punch, and the stranger fell down. It had to be someone else's voice she had heard in a scream, for all time and motion had frozen. Drew was pounding the stranger's head into the ground, his fist hitting like a hammer pounding away at a nail. It was in that moment Ashley realized that she had loved this savage man for three years of her life. She felt herself falling to the ground, and everything went black. Three years of sweet memories began flowing through her mind...the first time Drew ever kissed her, the way he used to hold her so gently in his arms, and the first night Drew ever told her that he loved her. In the midst of all the pain, she cried out, "Drew, why are you doing this to us?" When she opened her eyes, she saw red sirens flashing. Then, she saw the innocent stranger, his face covered with blood. The cops drove away, the ambulance drove away. Drew was gone forever. At the last sound of the sirens fading softly off in the night, she knew that she was going to be alone for a long time.

Jeanine Donovan

"To H."

To H., older brother, who bore life silently
 Who like a flower plucked too soon will never bloom,
 A billion tears I could cry more, but no. No more.
 Earth, which loved you, yet mourns
 Listen to the wind roar.

To H., my confidant, who piloted my years
 Your mem'ry like a dying strain sustains my spite your dearth
 And leads me to this peak you climbed where last you breath'd a word
 And bids me, "Reach," through wailing wind
 To touch you, in the sky, from earth.

Liz Gush



Sharon Dunn Art '88



In Autumn

In Autumn
I followed the rituals
Peanut butter sandwiches
Parades on the 29th
In flame-proof costumes
The crowded bus rides home
The breaking of tiny wings.

In Autumn
I ate Mom's chili with crackers
Read the same ghost stories
That surprised me every time
Raked piles of leaves
Climbed trees
And went to school.

In Autumn
I colored with the leaves
My brown eyes brightened
My cheeks flushed bright hues
Of crimson and rose
I was effulgent with energy then
Filled with fire,
While everywhere about me,
The world was cooling down to a stop.

Lyz Gush

October Country

I am on my way to the October country.
Crashing through this forest path
like a mad painter carving colors into canvas.
Watching the psychedelic sky celebrate
the offerings and sacrifices of the bare and beaten.
Feeling the fall fill my lungs
like the trunks of autumn trees.
Listening to the genocidal leaves grind their way
among the falling dry and floating dead.
Crusading through this cruel beauty
like squirrels' blood spilling across an acorn-crushed street.
I am on my way to the October country.
To make the leaves soft again,
To make them bend.
I am on my way to the October country.
To make the leaves drink my blood and confess their sins,
To make them conform to the shape
of my frail and fallen body.
I am on my way to the October country.
Carrying my cross and
Praying for salvation from this autumn's crucifixion.

Rich Aloia

A Neighbor

Mrs. Helen Brinska Wycowski is a woman who refuses to reveal her age. "You know, dear," she states as she pets one of her many cats, "I stopped counting birthdays when I came to this country. As a matter of fact, I don't really even remember what I was up to when I stopped. Anyway, age isn't important as long as you've got your health." Helen could be mistaken for a fifty year old woman, her youthful appearance a result of years of excellent health rather than of artificial cosmetics.

As more of her cats creep into the room, she begins to discuss her early years. In the sitting room of her home, dozens of religious statues and pictures from the Ukraine, her place of birth, crowd tables and shelves. "All of my family," she says, "all twelve of us, and the whole town from the elders to the children, everybody went to daily services at the church. Unless of course it was harvest time and the men and older boys were too busy in the fields." For Ukrainians, religion was an integral part of their life; they attended lengthy elaborate Masses, recited prayers three times a day, and followed rituals of food preparation, harvesting, and education for the children.

While Helen explains her family, she searches for a photo album, finally finding it under a sleeping cat. Helen has a surprising number of family portraits. Because photography was expensive, it was usually reserved for special religious occasions. The Brinska family, however, had had several photographs taken throughout the years, a luxury due to the wealth of Mrs. Brinska, a nanny to a noble family before her marriage. Her employers gave her a sum of money and other gifts each year which allowed the Brinska family to achieve a higher social position than many of the village peasants, and thus the children were well educated. Also, the money eventually enabled the Brinska family to flee the Ukraine in 1920. Fear of religious and political persecution by the Bolsheviks forced the family to emigrate to the United States.

Continuing her narrative, Helen explains the various photographs that clutter her room. In one of the carved wooden frames rests a faded picture of Helen with her Confirmation class. The bright eyes and round chin of the girl in the photograph remain part of the woman today. "I know you'll find this hard to believe, dear," she laughs, "but I do dye my hair blonde. My husband tells me its one of the few true American things I do." The future Mr. and Mrs. Wycowski first met in New York City at a church-sponsored school that taught English to immigrants. At the request of his pastor, Mr. Wycowski, the son of Polish immigrants in Scranton, Pennsylvania, traveled to New York to teach. He helped the Brinska family move to Scranton, and ten years later he married their youngest daughter.

As Helen reminisces, more cats enter the room. "My cats are my children now since my boys have grown up and moved off," she sighs. Both of her sons are unmarried businessmen in Texas. She views her cats as her children, grandchildren, and friends. "I guess there are about thirty-five of them now," she says. "I started with four, and look what happened!"

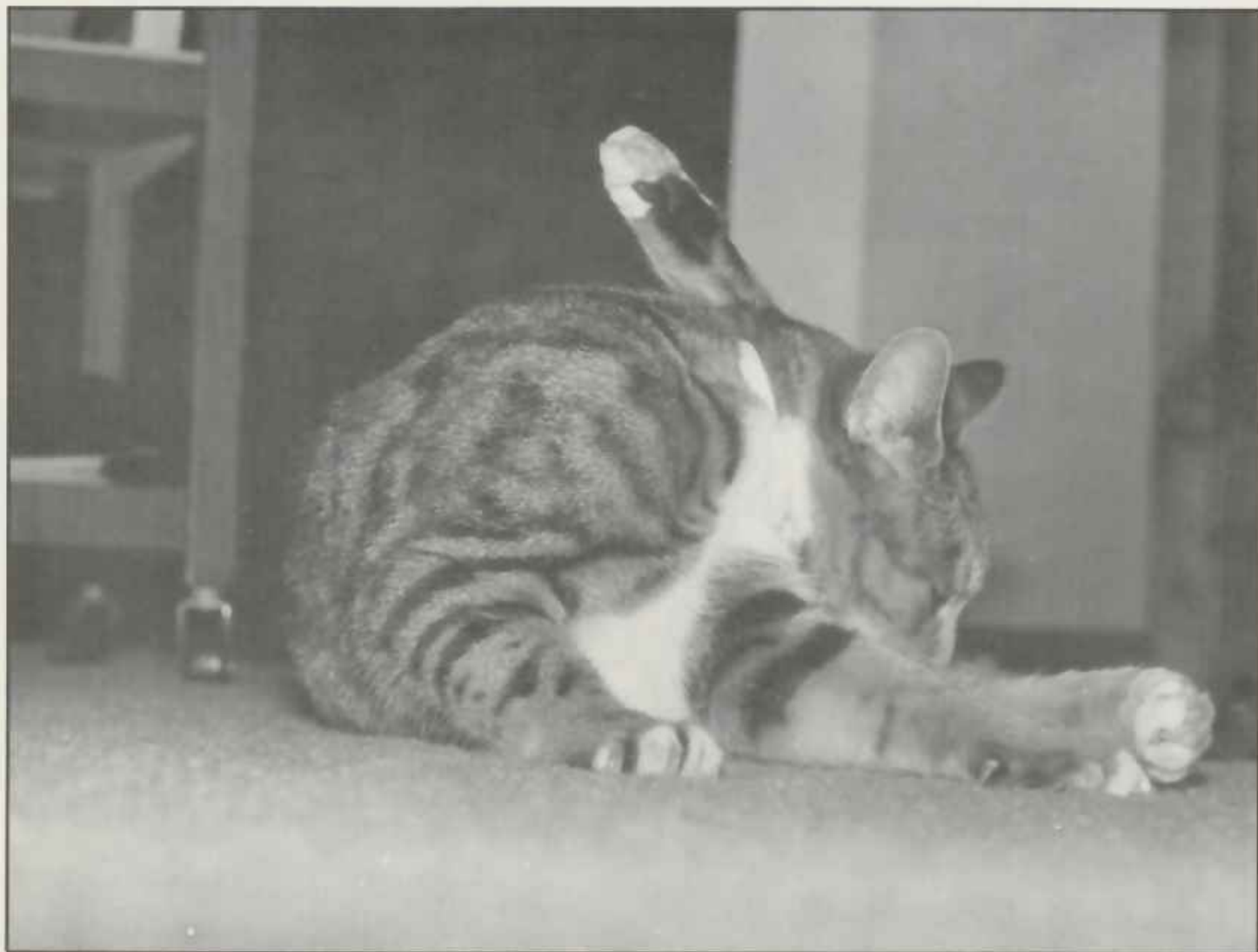
The sound of her voice lures even more cats into the room. Most are grey or orange tabbies, but a few are black. All are fat and pampered. "You know, dear," she whispered, "I'll tell you a little secret. Lots of people think I'm crazy just because

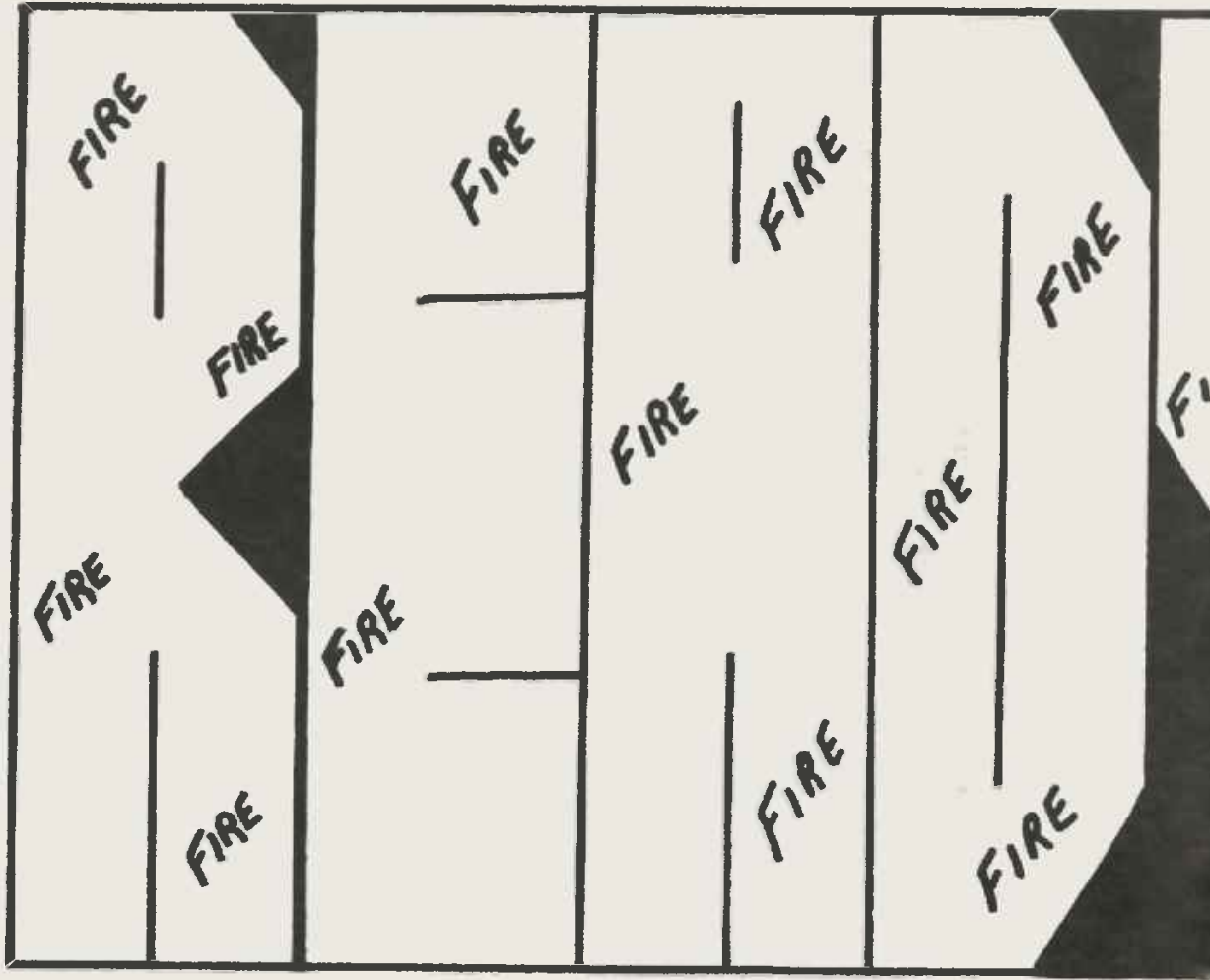
I got all these cats. Believe me I'd rather spend time with all my cats than just one of these noisy women in this neighborhood."

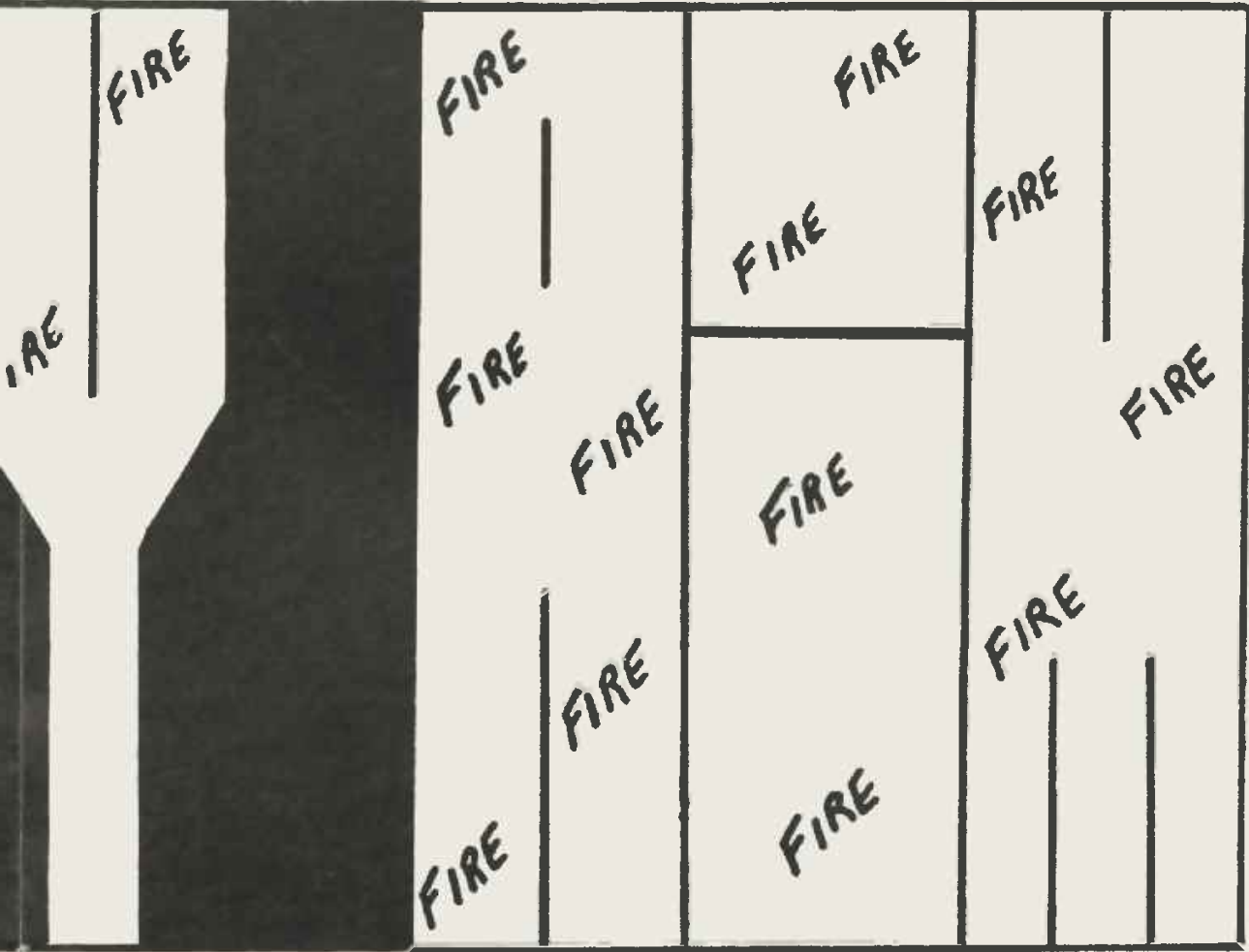
Helen is not concerned about the immediate future of the cats. "Sure, there will be more and more, but the older ones will be dying off and I keep the vet happy anyway," she chuckles. "I'm always bringing a few down with some problem or other." She is even less concerned about her own future. "I've learned to just enjoy the peace and calm of these days," she explains. "Maybe I appreciate it more because of the traumas of my childhood with the revolution and all. But when it happened, you know, when we were fleeing the country, we just coped. We didn't know we were 'making history,' as you say."

As an increasing number of cats climbed onto the sofa, Helen leaned back and smiled. "I've got some good years left, and I'm just going to relax with my cats and my husband and enjoy them. Nothing really upsets me anymore," she firmly states. "I've seen it all in my time. I just hope somebody can take care of the cats when we go."

CherylAnn Manganello







"The Black Box"

I found a black box beneath the
floor boards of my attic,
cold as a meat cooler.

A cloud of black dust escaped;
I was no longer in my world:

Cries of beaten children,
Changing chains,
Faded figures flying
through darkness...

I was trapped.

Lisa Blaum

Joy Well

I know why some people live longer than others.
I've studied them and watched them
And thought long over it.
I've eliminated the chronically ill,
The disabled, the handicapped.
They have special problems.
I've studied only the well, the able, the few
Who have only to deal with
The normal stress of life.
If such a thing exists-I'm not quite sure,
But it may. Anyway,
I've formed an idea
Of why some people manage to make it
Despite all the pitfalls,
All the crummy odds.
It is because they are happy, alive
All the days that they live.
Some measure of joy
Wells up inside of them and spills over
Their life, like a soothing balm,
A potion that heals the cut,
The drawing, binding scars,
And leaves them well again. The joy comes from
The deepest wells of the soul.
It is a God-gift.
Not given to all, but given to all
Who seek it and take it
Once it is finally found.

Georgetta Potoski

Confusion

Confusion
 Whirlwind thoughts
 Answerless questions
 yes; no
 right; wrong
 cluttered mind
 wayward directions
 up; down
 left; right
 endless paths
 hazed perceptions
 truth; lies
 beginning; end
 Confusion.

JALEH MOHALLATEE



As the others collapsed into chairs and couches, he sat down, not so much in the sofa as on; a person perched for a moment on the surface, but at the same time a body evenly and completely relaxed. Perhaps relaxed is misleading, for the total effect was one of a deliberately created pose. Legs casually crossed, arms folded and hands draped over his lap with long white fingers splayed across his black coat, he sat. His erect carriage led the eye up the dark wool to his pale face, a face devoid of emotion. Heavy brooding eyes regarded both the immediate scene and the greater drama playing out in his mind. However, that which occupied his brain was undoubtedly a negative force, for although his separate parts failed to reveal it, his entire outer form could not conceal the inner conflict. By merely sitting, he betrayed himself.

CherylAnn Manganella

From Now On

I left today to expand beyond my walls.
No good-byes could be said while tears drizzled
 down over the contours of my face.
I'm beginning to slip out of the past's grasp.
As I gave the attendant the ticket I didn't look back.
The walkway that seemed so long when I arrived -
 now only lasted a few short seconds.
I look out the window replaying thoughts in my mind -
But none took me back to your arms.
Surrounded by anxious passengers, I imagined how
 their lives must be,
None looked the way I felt.
The lump in my throat that made it impossible to swallow,
 kept growing until finally I couldn't contain any more
 tears in my eyes.
My body chilled at the thought of leaving my
 whole life to start a new one.
Why couldn't you leave the past - to start a new
 future with me?
Why am I falling and there's no one left to
 catch me?

Kristina Pearson

A Cold Winter

As I look out the window, my vision is blurred by an early frost
 on the pane
Decorated in a pattern of snow-flaked crystals.

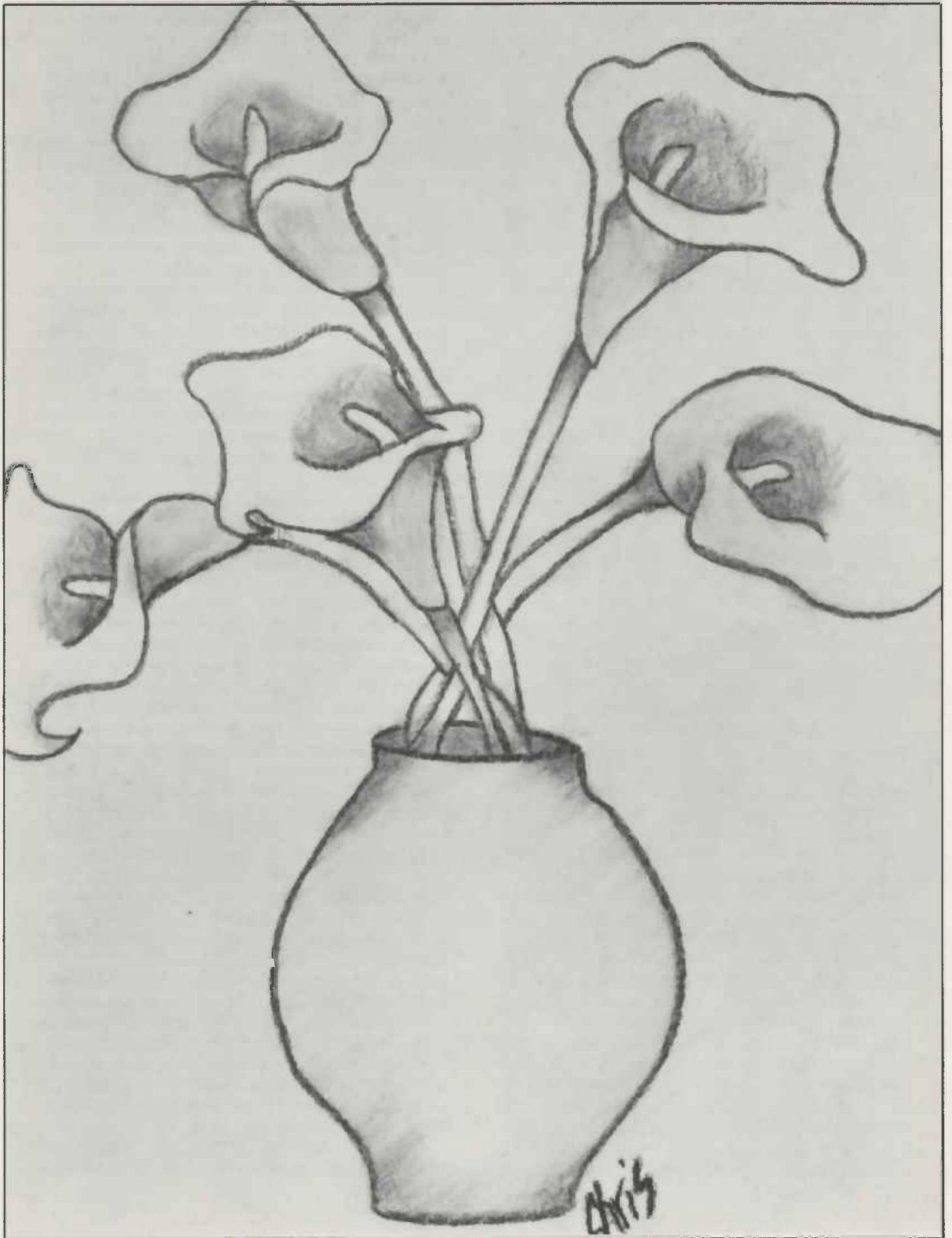
I gently rub a spot clear and peer through this miniature peephole
To witness God's fertile ground covered in a light snow.

I proceed to open the window and I am instantly hit by a stream
 of rushing cold air.
I take in a breath of nature's changing seasons.

Leaves in multi-colors lay peacefully in their resting places
Until a strong wind blows hard and sets the spectrum of leaves
 into a twirling, tornado motion.

Then there is God's creation of man.
Men that fight together in their clans and their hearts are as
 cold as winter.

Karen Springer



Liberty Street

I've been trying to remember why I ever married Dario. I can't. Maybe it was like buying an encyclopedia from a door-to-door salesman; you are convinced that the books are attractive and useful, and that the nice man needs you to say yes, and so you do. Later, the bill comes.

I do remember the benign flirtation we began in the kitchen of Boston's restaurant, although it seems a thousand years ago. At the time I was harboring the feeling that my mother had abandoned me, which wasn't true, and that my friends were drifting away to sunny beaches and part-time jobs and vacations with their families, which was.

But I had chosen to remain in New Jersey when Mother moved to Florida, and to rely on my friends to love me and sustain me. I also assumed, with the confidence of my eighteen years, that I could find work worthy of my potential, but after two weeks my savings were gone and I hadn't found a job.

I drove out to Boston's, the restaurant just outside the biggest shopping mall. I was hired on the spot and given a uniform, a free meal and the opportunity to make instant cash by working the patrons for good tips. It pleased me that things had fallen into place, but a week later I was lonely, and annoyed that I had to work every evening, every weekend, and every holiday, while my friends carried on with their teenaged lives.

At least there was someone to talk to at the restaurant. In and out the swinging kitchen doors, heavy trays balanced between palm and shoulder, we managed to make jokes and small talk with each other as we worked. When it was slow, we sat in the kitchen and smoked, the older waitresses complaining about their aching feet and swapping stories of drunken husbands and the agony of childbirth, and patting my arm, saying, "Enjoy it while you can, honey," as though I didn't have a care in the world. It soon wore thin, like the threadbare spots in the carpeting

of the dining room, which had looked so elegant the first week I was there.

One afternoon I was sitting in the kitchen smoking and staring at my shoes. Dario left the lettuce he was chopping and came over to the table. "Nina," he said, "you shouldn't smoke. It looks bad and it's no good for you." I looked up at him and he was smiling, like I could take it as a joke if I wanted to. I put the cigarette out. It was the first time in a month that anyone had cared what I did.

We got married in Spanish, with Dario's brother and sister as witnesses. It didn't seem quite real to me, I caught only a few of the words, and Dario told me what to say. There was no white dress, and no flowers, and only the small cake we bought off the shelf in the bakery.

For the first three months he was everything I expected him to be. We went out together, and to work together, and home together, and to bed together. I wasn't lonely, except for Mondays, when we went into the city to visit his family.

They all met in one apartment, brothers, sisters, wives, and children. They seemed friendly, but nothing could be done about my inability to understand their rapid Spanish. We nodded and smiled, but sooner or later Dario went away and I was left forgotten in a chair, like an invalid, to be stared at by the children.

It wasn't until Dario's mother became ill back in Santo Domingo that I realized the full significance of his family's place in our lives. A few months after our daughter Amanda was born, Dario came home from work with the news. He had already met with his brothers, and they had decided to send Pablo, the oldest brother, home to take care of Mama and the younger children. We would move into the city apartment with Rico and his wife and children, and the two younger sisters, Elena and Andrea. We would take Pablo's room, so that they could afford the rent and send money home each week to help pay Mama's medical expenses.

I closed my eyes and tried to imagine this new life. A breathless

feeling was welling up in my chest; I already knew that any objections of mine would be weightless against the ballast of his family's authority. I was being thrust into the middle of a clan of chattering strangers, and for the first time since my marriage, I missed my mother.

I tried to make myself useful around the apartment, washing dishes and sweeping the floor, and patching the torn knees of the little boys' blue jeans. But by the second week it was obvious that my sister-in-law Rosa resented my being there. She flashed her eyes at me when I went into the kitchen, and scolded her children when I played games with them. The children would cry and my baby would cry, and I would have to retreat into the bedroom.

Dario was not completely insensitive to my situation. On Mondays he took the baby and me out into the air where we could smile and eat American food and play under a tree in the park. He let me choose a tiny puppy from a box marked "FREE" out in front of the grocery store. We bought him a red collar and leash, and took him back to the apartment. I named him Shorty.

I was the only one home the afternoon Mrs. Diaz knocked on the door. I wouldn't have answered, but the knocking was persistent and the puppy was barking furiously. A voice called, "Dario wife! Dario wife!" in a heavy accent. I looked out the peek hole and there was a great hippo of a woman holding a teenaged boy by the arm and talking into his face.

When I opened the door, she smiled and poked the boy with her elbow. "You Dario wife?" he asked. I said I was, and the woman gave him a nod and smiled at me again. "My name is Alfredo Diaz," said the boy, pausing between words, "and my mama want you teach me good English." I was taken aback by their frank approach, and by the very prospect of pretending to be a teacher. I picked up the pup, which was growling at Alfredo's feet, and invited them in. I started to say something about how impossibly noisy the apartment usually was, but the boy misread my hesitation. "We pay, we pay!" he said, the mother

pulling out a damp ten-dollar bill. Whatever I said, they nodded and smiled as though I had agreed, and by the time they left I had become Alfredo's teacher.

Summer came to the city. The heat was intense and motionless. Dario was little more than a sweaty, sticky body in the darkness, becoming real for a few hours on Monday, then evaporating again. It was more difficult for me to hide in my room, because Amanda needed to move around more, and closing the door on Rosa confined us in the cluttered, stuffy cell. Through the open window came no air, but a whole new assortment of noises: Police sirens, the elevated train clattering a block away, and, in the evening, the half-human wails of prowling cats.

I tried to read in the afternoons while Amanda slept. I kept the radio on to drown out the street noises, but often was distracted from my book by the local news reports. At half-hour intervals the announcer would report the bad news of the day: fires, strikes, murders. After the third repetition of a story about a two-year-old child being killed in crossfire between drug dealers right over on Liberty Street, I unplugged the radio and shoved it under the bed.

Most days I headed down to the Diaz apartment when Rosa began to make the children's dinner. Venturing down the polluted hallways seemed tame compared to crossing Rosa's path in the kitchen, where she would hiss and call me *niña*, "girl".

I generally read to Alfredo from elementary school books I got from the library, then had him read back to me. I hoped it would help his pronunciation, which ranged from passable to bizarre. Every little improvement encouraged me.

During one lesson I began to read about colonial heroes and their roles in settling the country. When I read about the founding of Pennsylvania, Alfredo jumped up from his chair. He ran off into the bedroom, repeating his own rendition of the word, and brought back a worn tourism pamphlet, tape clinging to the corners where it had

been stuck to the wall. A picture of endless green mountains covered the page, over which was printed in white, "Come to Beautiful Pennsylvania." "See?" said Alfredo, waving the folder, "that's where I be going one day."

I turned the pamphlet over. On the other side were more pictures: sparkling lakes with sailboats on them, Amish children cradling a sleeping kitten, and tourists admiring the Liberty Bell. I told Alfredo that my brother lived there, in Pennsylvania. I had almost forgotten there was such a place. I borrowed the pamphlet and stuck it on my own wall when I got home.

When the temperature in the bedroom reached one hundred and two degrees, I took down the thermometer and shoved it under the bed with the radio. I slept most afternoons then, the only escape from the heat and noise, and woke with a start when Amanda cried to be picked up. I no longer went out without Dario, not even to walk the dog everyone called Pequeño, my dog. I left it to Dario or the girls to take care of him.

Elena and Andrea were acting especially boisterous the day poor Pequeño was snatched. They were teasing Rosa's children and throwing a ball around the living room for the dog to chase. He yapped and they shouted until finally Rosa's voice shrilled above the racket, and they were all sent outside.

The girls were back in ten minutes, crying and stammering out a story of how Pequeño was taken by bad boys on the street. It was hours before Dario and Rico came home from work and told us the ending: they had found Pequeño in the back lot, his throat cut. Dario came into the bedroom and laid the red collar and leash on the dresser. I grabbed them and flung them across the floor and out of sight, under the bed.

I did not sleep well at night, often being frightened awake by my own dreams. I tried hard to think of Pennsylvania, squinting at Alfredo's pamphlet on the wall, but drifted back into the spell. I felt myself running,

down the hall, down the wet stairs and out onto the street. I was on Liberty Street. I heard a scream and jolted awake, and fell across the small space to Amanda's crib. She was sleeping peacefully. The scream came again, but it was not human. It was the cats in the alley below.

In the morning I wrote a letter to my brother Neil. I told him about the heat in the city, and about my baby Amanda, and about Alfredo's dream. I wasn't sure he'd answer; I hadn't seen him in three years. But four days later a fat envelope came for me. Neil had invited us for a visit and enclosed snapshots of his children playing in green grass and floating on tire tubes in a clear creek. He sent more tourist pamphlets for Alfredo. Now I had proof that Pennsylvania existed, and that I existed.

I decided to leave on Monday, so that Dario could drive the baby and me to the bus station. I said my good-byes to the family, which caused little sensation, and went out to the usual commotion of children and nearby dogs. Dario carried both the suitcase and the baby, leaving me empty-handed for the moment.

The bus station was air-conditioned. I took the baby, and we sat inside waiting for the bus, looking as much like a family as we ever had. The departure was announced, and Dario walked us to the platform and kissed us both. The only thing I could think of to say was, hasta la vista, Dario.

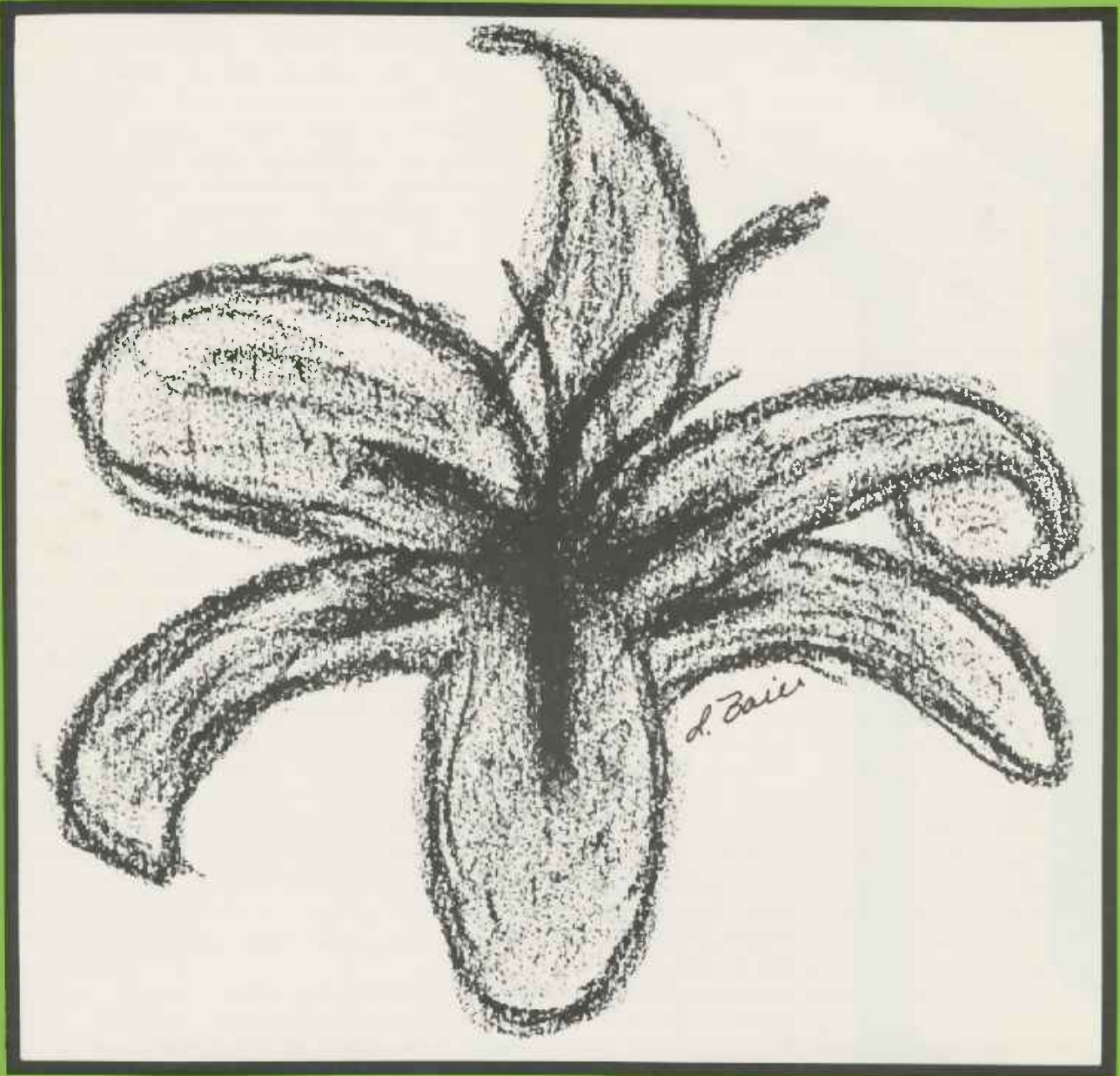
Nancy Comstock



Slipping Away With Laura
(on some dark highway in
south Jersey a few days ago)

Shove hoses through the doors
and into my nostrils
Siphon me out of this death vessel
Pump in your holy compressed hope
Surround my soul with iron echos
Ask me questions
Keep me interested
Keep me alive
Let me feel your mechanical teeth
tear through this twisted coffin
Blast your way toward my battered body
-Flashing lights
-Wailing sirens
-Crying parents
-Screaming tires
I am slipping
My skull
a balloon
filled with wet cool air
crawling beyond seventeen years of waiting
I am slipping
Steadily
Beating away like a ticking clock
Winding down for the quarter-hour
Thinking of ancient grandparents riding horses.

RICHARD ALOIA



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