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INSTRESS



SPRING '94

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FRONT COVER: WITHIN TIME, JENN GARCEAU

INSTRESS has been published by the students of College Misericordia since December 1966. The title, coined by Gerard Manley Hopkins, signifies the moment the reader achieves complete understanding of the written word.

Literary Editor: Jennifer Garceau; Editorial Staff: Nancy Lewis, Olivia Sinclair, Lisa Brutko, Kevin Curcio; Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Johnson.



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UNTITLED
PAUL SOLLIDAY

I stood, watching over the world.
This was my own private place.
The place I could go to and forget about life and responsibility.

It is this place I treasure as deeply as my own existence.
When I think about sharing this place with someone I cringe,
the inclination alone would make me a traitor to my own cause.

Yet here we stand together . . .
My arm around her.
As we had neared the top, I could hear her gasp in response to
the sudden view below her, as if her gaze might betray her stability . . .

It was like sharing the secrets of the universe with God.
We watched from our peak as life goes on below us.

Time no longer exists.
Our presence has made it stop and sit quietly on the side,
realizing it must relinquish its existence to our control.

Speech is forbidden, as vision and imagination wander gracefully
over the valley below us.
The twinkling lights . . .
The sky, lightly tinted by blues . . . reds . . . and yellows . . .

The bond that is formed between us is its own form of lovemaking.
It takes us to the brink of ecstasy . . . and carrying us over . . .
over into our own personal heaven . . .
A heaven where the fibers of one's heart can be touched.
We have formed a closeness I never would have expected.
A speechless bond which we know is not misread or misunderstood.

I have taken that moment and placed it close to my soul.
There is a place in everyone's heart, I believe, that is meant to
be shared with only one other.
I have been lucky enough to find that blessed person early in my life.

REMEMBRANCE
COLLEEN YANORA

Here I am standing on that same corner I stood on several nights ago. I can't understand what force keeps pulling me back here. It may be the need to know more about that little girl I keep seeing through the window. The force taunts my mind, until I give in and return to the corner.

Where the hell is everybody? I stand alone. I feel nothing, hear nothing, and begin to wonder if my senses have failed me. A light shines in front of me, and I see that big white house. I know that little girl is inside. I begin to walk away, but that force in my mind places me at the window of the house. I am terrified.

Peeking through the window, as if I know I should be afraid of something inside, I notice bodies slumped over laying in each corner as if each were waiting to be disposed of like a bag of trash. There is a sense of death surrounding the entire house. Looking around I notice this is the only house, and I am the only person. I keep telling myself to run, to get away. I am still in front of that window.

I can feel anger from within the house. As I peek through the window again, my entire body becomes warm. I begin to perspire. The window is hot and the glass seems as if it is going to melt. I move back, fearing that my skin may burn. I return hesitantly.

Fire engulfs the middle of the floor and runs straight toward the ceiling as if it were being pulled by a piece of string. The bright colors begin to burn my eyes. I keep wondering where that little girl is. The flames widen, and they enter the room, each person moving slowly around the fire. They seem to be connected by the same string which pulled the fire toward the ceiling. I can't see their faces. Who are these people? They grasp each other's hands and move around the fire as if they are doing a dance practiced over and over. No one notices me. No one ever looks up. They just keep moving.

I feel a chill going through my body, and I am sure it is time to leave. As I turn away, I can hear a child yelling for me. I turn back to the window so quickly, my body smacks against it. The glass doesn't break. Now I see the little girl. They hold both her hands and continue to move around the fire. She begins pulling away and they begin to laugh. Their faces begin to form and I realize I know each one of them. As they dance around, the circle becomes smaller, each person closer to the fire than before. I want to walk away. I can't. Her cries get louder. I want to reach through the window and save her, but I can't.

I need to get away but how can I leave this little girl. My mind begins to fight with my thoughts. If I stay will I be able to handle visions that burn my eyes? I am afraid.

She is pushed into the flames. They laugh even louder than before. I feel my heart as it sinks down into my stomach. The force that pulls me toward this house runs through my entire body. I scream so loud the window shatters. They never look up. They keep laughing. I turn to run and feel that chill again. The faster I run the colder I become. Someone grabs me from behind. I begin to shake. I pull away with the same force the little girl used when trying to escape. I hear her screams again. My entire body jolts.

I open my eyes and realize my nightmare is over. My skin is hot and sweat is pouring from my body as if I had been standing next to that same fire I dreamed of. I remember the little girl as she was pushed into the flames. I want to forget, but I keep recalling it. I look around the room, as if I were trying to remember the flames that engulfed the room in my mind. I wonder what happened to those people who clung to each other's hands and laughed as if the flames had amused them in some way.

I now feel that same force I had in my nightmare. The force pulls my vision toward the door in my room. She stands in the doorway, and I realize this is the same little girl who had engulfed my entire mind. I begin to cry as my daughter walks away.

VISIONS NANCY COMSTOCK

I know this road,
but not its nuances.
The haze obscures blue curves and
profound valleys alike.
I am misguided
by intuition.
In variegated dreams
Among veiled company,
It looks like the road to Heaven.
Visions sometimes do.

JUST BEFORE DAWN
JOE DOMBROSKI

Shades of night fall upon my eyes
fading out those crucial stars up in the sky.
In my dreams your face is still all I see
dreams are not reality.
Castor and Pollux reveal answers to you
but the universe never will stand still.

Two stars clashed some time ago
since then the skies above did flow.
No trace or sight of Gemini tonight
unity could only make the sky more bright.

It wasn't very long ago
that you and I believed in the same things
but now it seems you put love behind you
blister-covered words are broken thin.

I see you still but that's just fantasy.
I hear you call to someone else.
Gazing at your distant cool reflection
pelting silver tears I cry for you
trying to keep this hope alive.

Deep inside I'm dying
all for things I never knew.
Don't you know I'm trying hard
to take this love from you.
 Now the skies are falling
 and the seas are drying.
 Can't you see
 the world stopped turning on me.

TO EDGAR
MARY BETH O' KONSKI

Shadowy figure, gliding across the graveyard
Like a stormy cloud on the date of your demise
Bearing gifts of wine and flowers
Lovingly placed on an ancient grave
Disappearing into the night
To the echoing sounds of nevermore.

SUNDAY DINNER
LISA MURPHY

We sit in a tribal group of eight.
My father at the head, mother at his side.
All are half finished with the meal.
Mother suggests saying grace,
so we stop chewing.
I even put down my fork.
Father quickly in monotone, recites the prayer,
". . . Name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Amen."
I seem to have finished my plate between
"Thy bounty" and "Amen."
I look up.
The baby is decorating his potatoes with corn kernels.
Mother is anxiously trying to snag someone's eyes.
She is eager to discuss this morning's sermon.
I excuse myself.

I THOUGHT I KNEW MY 'ENGLISH'
OLIVIA SINCLAIR

When I first came to America from England, one problem I did not foresee was language. I thought that since English was spoken in both countries, how could I go wrong. I learned very fast that some words have entirely different meanings depending on which language you are speaking. I remember sitting in class during my first week in an American school when I learned my lesson. My teacher, Mr. Tsalvis, had told the class to write an essay about our spring vacation. I had written about half my assignment when I realized I had made a mistake. I raised my hand, and said "Excuse me Sir, do you have a rubber I could borrow?"; suddenly there were giggles from my classmates, and the teacher just looked to the ground and blushed. I sat at my desk completely baffled why everyone had reacted to such a "normal" question. The girl behind me passed a note to explain, in her own words, the definition of a rubber. I was horrified, I sat in class wishing I could disappear into the closet like the children in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. Even today I have a tendency to muddle my words; fortunately, I have learned the meaning of both American and English terms.

THE POTHOLE SHUFFLE
MARIE BLIZZARD

Swerve to the left

Veer to the right

Craters in the street

cause urban blight.

STEER THAT CAR WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT

Doing the pothole shuffle.

My entire body's E L N
 R E I G

OW!!! My head just hit the ceiling--

There should be a pill for the way I'm feeling.

Doing the pothole shuffle.

Those G A P I N G holes

survive barrage.

Now my car's in the garage--

I could really use a massage!

Doing the pothole shuffle.

DEATH BY A THORN
LAURA ANN FUREY

Alone, I stand in the stillness of my room. My eyes consume my surroundings, finally focusing on the end table next to my bed. There a white, porcelain vase holds a single, red rose. My attention rests not upon the fullness and beauty of the flower (as most would expect), but upon the thorns, which, through my eyes, seem to define the gift of nature: with love there is pain, as there are thorns with a rose.

My eyes never abandon the thorns; I can never escape the pain. Pain and hurt, pain and hurt, pain and hurt. That is all I seem to know. Even now, when he can no longer harm me, I feel the pain. The memories are so gravely alive: hands fly, fists swing, blood spills, tears fall, cruel words are spoken. His angry voice penetrates the silence like a rose-thorn pierces its awaited flesh. The thorn draws blood from the finger as he steals life from my soul. He continually, and fervently, stole, forcing me to forget the beauty of the rose, only to remember the ugliness of the thorn. With his ugliness came tremendous hurt. I always return to the hurt, both heart and mind cannot forsake the hurt.

When my mind drifts, uncontrollably, to the past, I remember all the hurt that tortured my soul in stabs of violence from his rage. The unavoidable violence of the past is still alive, not with tears and blood but with fear and anger. I remember the pain, anguish, torment, guilt (which he always managed to make me feel), grief, misery, distress, agony. I loathe to be here now and remember those feelings, touching me like a dagger to the flesh, and relive all those undeserved, tortuous moments I was chosen to endure, absorbing his anger and his resentment, his hatred and his jealousy, receiving his powerful blows, accepting the words lashed from his tongue, cringing in disgust from the pleasure he stole from me. They have taken hold of my mind, these unrelenting feelings of mine, feeding my hurt, and adding to the destruction of my soul. Every remembrance projects the ugly, harsh reality of my past.

These thoughts I can never escape; they linger and torment, finally seizing absolute control of my mind. I long to be free of these thoughts, free of his endless persecution--the physical wounds have healed, but the mental scars remain. His bitter words are lead weights, dragging me further into an abyss of darkness. I am the Titanic, sinking into an ocean of hurt, with no one to save me.

This internal struggle--fighting the past, while attempting to grab hold of the present--consumes my very being. I am frantic. I turn this way and that. Yet, I do not move. There is no where to go. I have to find that place--the place without voices and memories. I do not know where it is, but I am driven to find it. I begin to search.

I find myself in the bathroom. I look in the mirror, only to see a ghost--the person I have become. My skin appears paler than death itself. My cheeks are too thin, leaving my face pitifully drawn. My eyes no longer contain any gleam or light; they no longer radiate the magic and mystery of life as they once did. My lips form only a line, never revealing a smile. My dimples have disappeared. My hair has lost its shine and bounce; it just hangs, limp and lifeless, against my shoulders. I see clearly. I am beaten. I no longer possess any strength, or will, to fight this struggle.

I open the medicine cabinet. My hand is drawn to the razor, like a finger to the thorn. Without hesitation, my hand envelopes it. I close the cabinet. Looking into the mirror, I search my eyes--my soul--for the answer. I have it, in my hands.

The need for escape pushes me over the edge, blocking out any shred of sanity that may exist. This need is my only driving force; I cling to it. It will lead me to my salvation. The internal debate is over. I know what I must do. (I cannot erase the memories of the past, but I can end my mortal life. Then I will no longer see his face, hear his voice or feel his touch. I will finally free myself of him.)

I slit the one wrist, and then the other (the razor has fulfilled its duty). I stand, watching my blood spurt out. As the blood pours from my veins, the memories of his cruelty abandon my mind. I feel nothing--he has already made me experience every possible hurt. I submerge my two hands in an already filled sink of water, inviting death to rush. The blood merges with the water, taking it over.

Dizziness consumes me. I stagger to my room, finding sanctuary in my bed. I rest my head on my pillow; my hair spread out as if arranged like an angel. One hand grasps the rosary beads of my first communion, the other clings to the little teddy bear Daddy gave to his little girl on Valentine's Day. I feel almost complacent now; my face calm, brows unfurrowed. A smile touches my lips, lingers, disappears. I sigh--he can never touch me again, not even through memories. I turn my head slightly to take one final look at the rose. This time my attention does not focus on the thorn, but rather, on a rose petal that falls. I close my eyes.

UNTITLED
PAUL SOLLIDAY

Relaxing
a cigarette and a dream . . .
what is my hum of life?
No need for anybody else,
 except for myself,
 my beautiful self!
such a relaxing night. Such a weekend.
I'm getting too comfortable with myself.

I close my eyes . . . try to pick out the hums of life . . .



THREE FEATHERS
FR. MICHAEL BRYANT

It begins with gusto
This dramatic life
Searching for meaning
Caught in its
Embryonic beginning,
It is boldly abrasive
Like the caw-cawing
Of the cantankerous crow.

Run amuck
By the clamoring world
The quest is thwarted.
Left lingering behind
In wimpering silence,
The journey is ceased
And the coo-cooing pigeons
Inhabit cob-webbed towers.

Motioned by midlife
A new awakening begins,
That ruins rationalizations
And reunites reality with truth.
This tumulting and twisting
Clearing horizons
Giving possible peace
Where only doves fly.



TRUE LEARNING
ALAYNE S. FERRARESI

Depth
Where does it come from?

As a child,
My drawings were always two dimensional.
Stick figures
Next to a house frame
A flower or tree
And always the sun and a cloud.

As I grew older,
They tried to teach it.
Art teachers
Showing proportion, shadowing,
Making it look real.
My dad
Teaching me to parallel park,
Judge the distances.
I imitated well,
But never achieved true depth.

In college now,
They are making me well-rounded.
I learn bits and pieces
Of everything.
Never everything about anything.
Activities keep me busy
So busy it is hard to stop
And truly think
To gain depth.

The way we learn,
We spread ourselves thin.
Trivia facts
Are as deep as we get.

Life will continue
On a straight and narrow path.
Will we dare
To dive off the path
Into the knowledge
And depth around us?

SCAVENGER HUNT

MARIE BLIZZARD

Autumn leaves blew brashly in the air, intruding onto neatly trimmed lawns whose prudent owners had already stored away their lawn tractors and hedge clippers. In a small town on a Saturday morning you could always see people doing things--going to the post-office, coming from the grocery store or sitting in their station wagons pulled up to the gas pump being assisted by an attendant who smiled as he wiped the grime from their windshields. Most of all you saw kids--riding bikes, climbing trees, or hiking up in the woods in groups of three or more.

In 1962, a kid in rural America knew there were certain credos to live by: be home by dark, don't talk to strangers and never rat on a friend. Teri, Dani and Billie ascribed to all three. It was nearly one o'clock in the afternoon and the trio had already put five miles on their two-wheelers and consumed six bologna sandwiches and a brown bag full of homemade chocolate chip cookies, washed down with a bottle of Yoohoo, fuel for the 10 year old body charged with electrical energy. Leaving their bikes sprawled on Dani's lawn, they decided it was time for their afternoon walk and tramped up the street, eyes scanning the horizon, ears perked up, looking for an adventure. At the end of the block, they were greeted by Sheri and Sally, who fell in step next to Billie.

They approached a vacant lot upon which the tannery stood comprised of one main building and various outbuildings left empty, dark hulking sentinals, a grim reminder of the changing times and rising unemployment. It was a place where children often gathered to play or to take the short-cut up into the woods beyond the creek. A glint of silver caught Billie's eye as they drew closer to a clump of berry bushes.

"Look, what's that?" Billie asked pointing in the direction of the object whose blue and gold colors were coming into shape.

The tribe gathered around and stood gaping at a brand new unopened bag of Wise Potato Chips, the large economy size, lying in the open under a wild blackberry bush.

"I don't think we should touch it," Dani said cautiously. "I mean, who would leave a perfectly good bag of potato chips lying around in the dirt?"

"I'll bet it's poisoned," Sheri piped up. "It's probably a trap to catch some poor unsuspecting wild animal or dog that got into someone's garbage." They looked at each other incredulously, unable to comprehend such an heinous act.

At that moment, Jan and Susan, two older, more mature girls of fifteen, came along and the girls shared their find with them.

"Gee, I don't know," Jan offered. "Maybe they fell out of someone's grocery bag."

That seemed to make a modicum of sense, especially coming from the voice of mature reason. Bravely, they opened the bag and one by one gingerly tasted the contents. They looked at each other's expression to observe for a gag, grimace or signs of stomach cramps. Nothing happened. The potato chips smelled and tasted authentic.

"Well," said Billie, "I say if somebody lost them, they're ours now. Possession is 8/10ths of the law."

"Yeah," added Dani. "Finders keepers."

Jan and Susan went on their way and the gang resumed their hike, finishing the bag of chips. Talk of the upcoming sixth-grade dance, what a squirrel Robbie Smith was and how cute Ricky Jones was without his braces blotted out the previous episode. It wasn't until dusk, around 5:00 p. m., when they were walking back toward home that the mystery became unravelled.

A crowd of young children were gathered by the blackberry bush, accompanied by an older woman dressed in dark clothing, her hair pulled back into a knob at the nape of her neck. A teen-aged boy, who seemed to be her assistant, was rummaging around the bush and surrounding areas searching diligently for something. Billie recognized the group to be members of a local charismatic church, whose members were conservative, and whose leader invoked the word of God in a fire and brimstone fashion. She approached the young boy, who was dressed in black dress pants and a white button-down long-sleeved shirt. He peered at Billie over his black horned-rimmed glasses. "For your information, we are having a scavenger hunt for our Church School class and some wild animal or something has absconded with the prize. You and your little heathen friends didn't see anyone around here, did you?"

Billie, whose slight blush went undetected in the fast approaching twilight, murmured, "No, I didn't, sorry."

Mrs. Arnold, the group leader, had already begun to lead her young charges back to the church, explaining that even though they reached their destination and the prize was gone, real rewards were never of the earthly kind; God would provide for their needs of food, clothing and a warm bed and they should be thankful and remember to say so in their prayers at the 7 p. m. service that evening.

Billie reached home and called Dani and Teri.

"Oh, my gosh," wailed Teri. "What are we going to do?"

"Calm down," said Billie. "We're gonna take an oath to keep our mouths shut. Dani and I already agreed."

Billie jumped every time the phone rang and cringed each time the doorbell buzzed, but no irate call ever came. Rumor has it that the Church of God received an anonymous contribution from someone's parents who were glad to see the Church trying to do something for the youth of the town, like having a scavenger hunt.



NO MORE TEARS
ALAYNE S. FERRARESI

Sitting.
On a cold, hard floor.
Clutching.
A big, soft teddy bear.
Crying.

The child has been hurt again.
There are no bruises,
But the scars are deep.

It never should have happened.
Words in rage.
Imbecile! Stupid! Idiot!

The fingerprints have long since vanished.
The memory, though
Is stronger than ever.

Tears
Fall one by one
On the bear's nose.
Rubbing each away,
The child hugs the bear,
Puts it aside neatly,
Walks to the window,
And never stops.

BENEVOLENT WALL
MARY MULLER

There is a gracious wall
that so kindly keeps the world away.
In its gentle patience
it retains the anger deep inside.
Within its solid blockade
emotion maintains a comfortable distance.
In its blind anxiety
it nurtures attraction to isolation.
Within its endless limits
the sweet emotion grows unchecked.

FRIENDSHIP?
OLIVIA SINCLAIR

I enjoyed the tranquil park,
the gorgeous sunset,
the starry, starry night,
Thanks to a treasured friendship.

I felt so cheerful,
so full of trust,
so confident,
Thanks to a treasured friendship.

Our talk was of past childhoods,
of daily inspirations,
of future dreams,
Thanks to a treasured friendship.

I hoped for more enjoyment,
more uplifting feelings,
more endless conversations,
But what happened?

THE COED BATHROOM

MELISSA J. WILLIAMS

It was Friday the Thirteenth, December 13, 1985, to be exact and although I don't consider myself to be a superstitious person, I found the date aptly fit the events that were to transpire on that momentous day. For me, the day was significant as I was to endure a thorough physical examination in order to be accepted into the United States Marine Corps. The first requirement on the agenda was a urinalysis which didn't appear to be a difficult task--so I thought. I was instructed to proceed to a desk where I provided my name to an overweight Corpsman. Handing me a plastic, sterile cup, pointing down the hall and telling me to go to Room Number Two, the Corpsman, who seemed to need another cup of coffee to put him in a more cordial disposition, dismissed me from his presence. I began to navigate down the unfamiliar corridor searching among the room number signs hanging above me as one desperately looks for the correct exit on a busy, unknown highway. Upon reaching the designated room, I opened the door, stepped inside and came face to face with--my first introduction to a "Man's World"--a wall of urinals lined up side by side in military fashion, of course. Shocked and unnerved at having walked into the wrong facility (I was glad that no one was in there at the time), I hurriedly exited and searched for the door to the facility I needed to utilize. Finding no other door, I made my way back to the unfriendly Corpsman. His mood had not undergone any change since I had left, and he impolitely repeated his former instructions with intonations implying that I was just another lost, ignorant person being herded through this building. Returning to Room Number Two, thinking this man had lost his mind or was playing a practical joke on me--although he did not seem to possess any sense of humor at all--I looked around at the pearly white urinals, wondering how in the world I was going to accomplish this feat. I considered my alternatives, such as trying to straddle them or trying to sit on them, but those ideas were far from plausible. Suddenly, I spotted a stall in the corner of the room and breathed a sigh of relief at seeing the familiar, enclosed object. My desire to finally complete the urinalysis overrode common sense which would have told me to lock Room Number Two's door. As I proceeded to unwrap the plastic enclosing my trusty cup within the closed walls of my personal stall, my heart skipped a beat, and I stood completely still, mesmerized by the footsteps--male footsteps--entering the room. I was at a loss. My mind raced. What should I do? Should I cough, clear my throat, make some kind of noise to let him know he wasn't alone or just remain still and hope he wouldn't see my legs that were partially visible from under the stall door? I remained motionless like a hunter afraid of flinching a muscle lest he alert his prey of his presence,

daring only shallow breaths. Never once suspecting he was not the only occupant of the facility, the unannounced introduer completed his urinalysis and left the room. I quickly rushed to lock the door and then proceeded to utilize, finally, the plastic cup. In my embarrassment at having witnessed someone of the opposite sex--around whom I was extremely shy and awkward--relieve himself, and in my hurry to get out of Room Number Two, I opened the door and ran right into a man with my full, plastic cup of urine. Lucky for him I had securely fastened the cap. With a redface, made a hasty retreat as far from Room Number Two as possible. Never before had a common bodily function and plastic cup been so exasperating.

UNTITLED
PEGGY CHARNICK

Foolish spendthrift I,
Wasting a lifetime
Searching for meaning in celestial cycles
Learned by rote:

Passionate bleeding sunsets doomed
to be delivered up
to perforated velvet nights which must,
in turn,
submit to
Wan and sterile dawns

Time misspent or hoarded
in silly pursuit
Until,

An act of simple grace
my resurrection revealed
The face of God
before me
In your eyes.

