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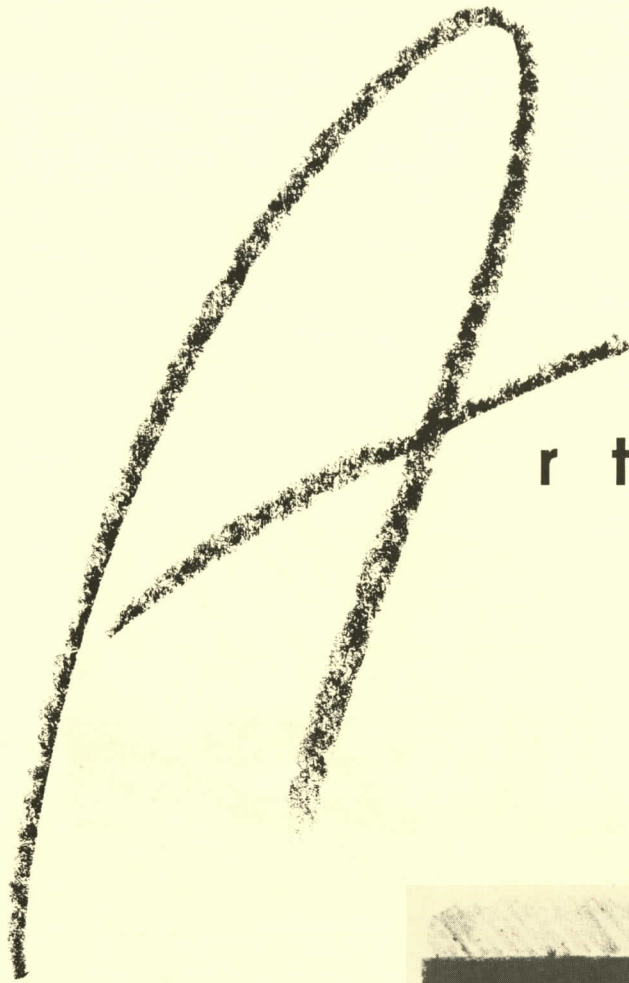
OLLAGE

S P R I N G

1990

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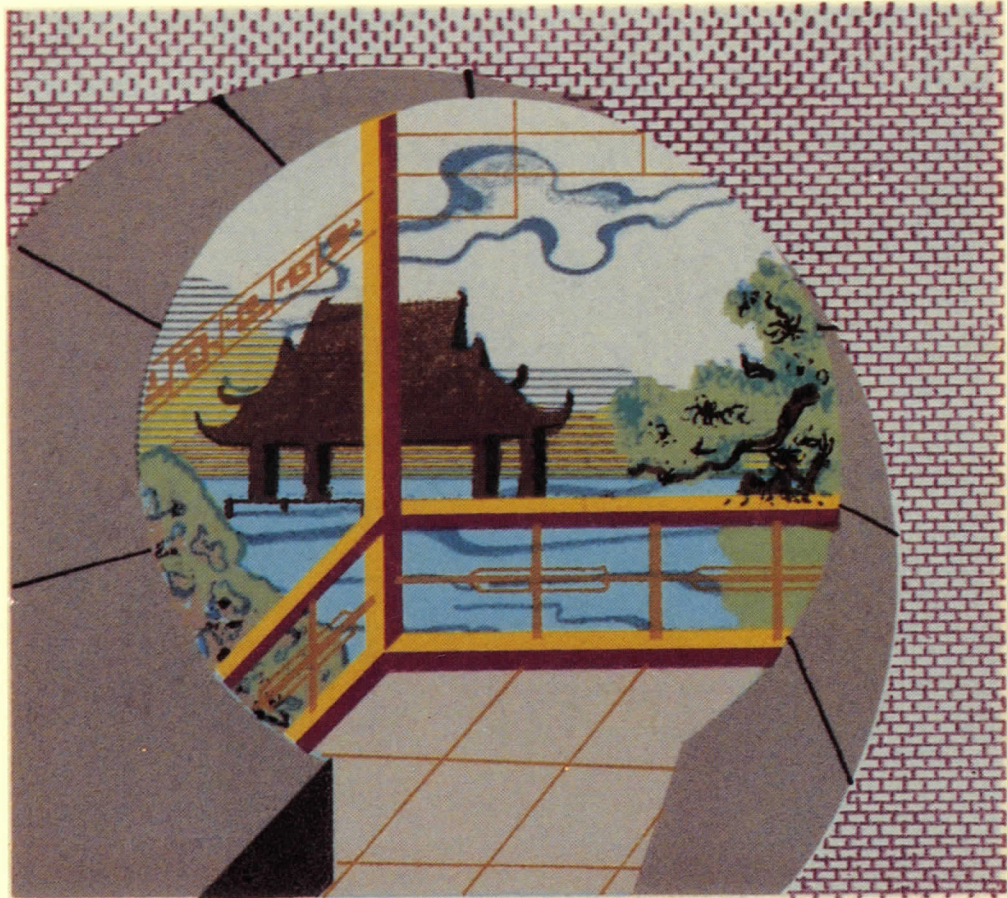
Judges:
Christie Nuell
Charles Jansen



"Birdy"
By Tara Hall



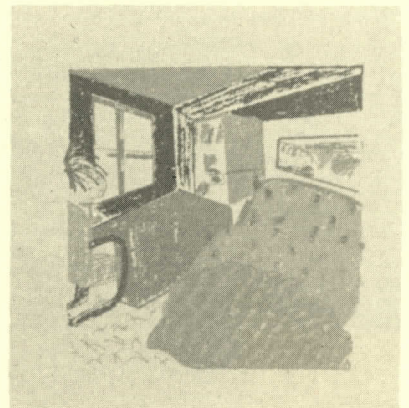
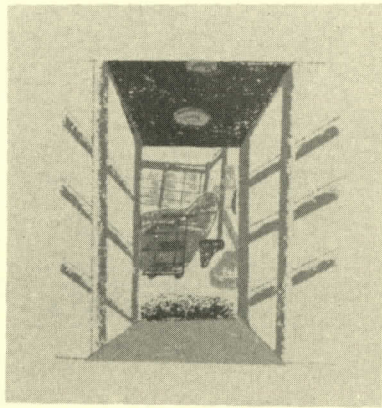
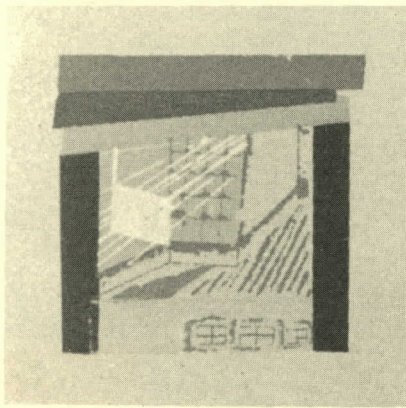
"Below Coming Above"
By Micheal Russell



"Transcendental Reality"
By Boun Sayaphanh



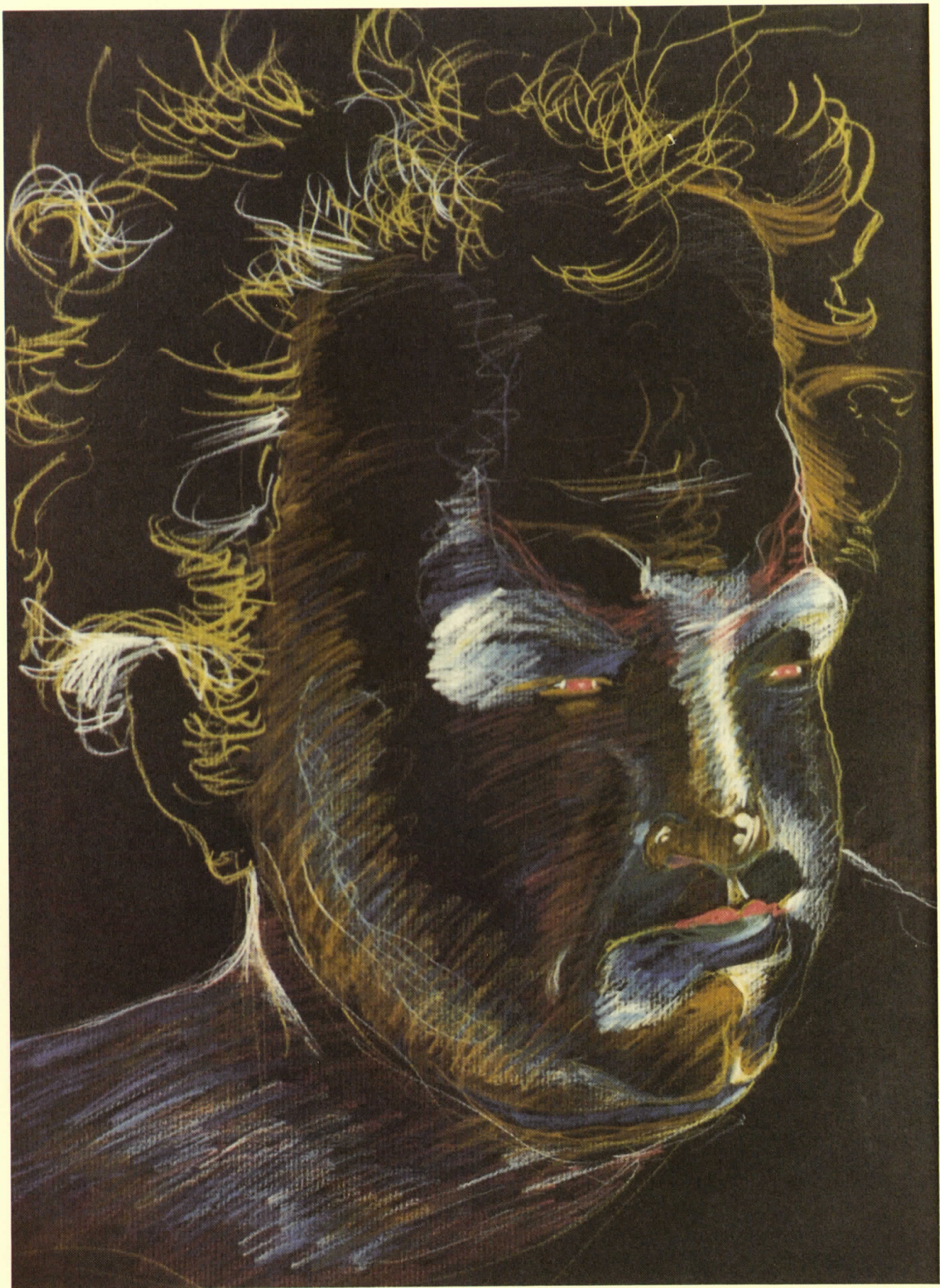
"Open House"
By Tara Hall



"Open Spaces"
By Tara Hall



untitled
By Thomas Davis



"Electric Evil"
By Micheal Russell



i t e r a t u r e

Judges:

Guy Anderson
Robert C. Petersen

Girl in Red Dress Dancing

By William Prather

Janet softly. Janet softly at the door of the room.
"Jan!" Her mother's voice.
"Yes, Mama?" Her arms, like stems of coral, over her breasts.
"Jan, you wash those dishes up, you hear?" From the living room it comes to her, boxed by the hall, the long hall.

"Yes, Mama!" She, toe to heel, toe to heel, off with her flats. "In a minute!"

She, so grown for thirteen.

Tall, slender, breasts nascent, she sheds her worn shirt and jeans.

Quickly, quickly now. Her parents, the tv. Her brother, away. She walks to the closet. Conscious of her breathing.

Excited, she fumbles with the red dress. Her mother's but it fits, almost. She slips it over her head, smooths her hair, snugs the black cord around her waist. It clings. She likes that. Clinging, revealing.

Now, only so loud--she mustn't disturb--with the phonograph.

"Fever." An old song. But flowing like the molasses her mama pours on biscuits. Smooth, slow.

She's dancing. Bare feet on hardwood floor. Pier-mirror. Reflections. Again and again before the mirror she spins, here raising red hem on air, there calf and dress and lacquered floor.

Antique bedposts, her lover, one post. Higher than her head.

"You give me fev-ver," she sings, she whispers, lifting her chin for a kiss, forgetting, momentarily, that bed posts don't bend. Aren't graced with lips.

Over and over, gliding, spinning, the room around.

Spring scent, a vase of narcissi. Bare feet,

nimble on cool planks. Murmured words, caught in shirred curtains. Twists of red dress, reflected: in the mirror, on the floor, on the night-dark windowpanes, on the vase of blooms.

"Jan!" Muffled, but heard.

"In a minute, Mama!"

The song nearly over, the door hooked shut.

Chalkblue eyes, maplewood hair: in red dress dancing.

"Fever all thro-ough the night."

At last in her lover's arms, invisible arms, strong arms, arms to lead her around the room: before the mirror to spin a calculus of red, near the vase to inhale the blossoms' scent, along the papered walls to trust her lover's touch.

Enthralled by thought, thrilling to an invisible touch, forgetting her crafty brother. Not hearing the hook raising, the door opening.

"You give me fee-ver!" Her brother's voice.

Silence, song ending, record revolving, speakers popping, monotonously.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Under the high ceiling a bonewhite, enamel, doorfacing reflects, subtly, the girl in red dress. Frames her brother, and now, behind him, her mother's dark reproach.


"Janet, what on earth are you doing with my dress on? I thought I told you to wash the supper dishes."

Behind the speakers crackling, monotonously. Before her an image liquid, distorted.

Running now, running past her brother, past her mother. Where?

Running down the long hall.

"I love the space between your teeth." A husky whisper. Her lover's.

Dancing past the hearth. 

Boy on a Front Porch in Mid-America

By William Webster

On a front porch
in a Mid-western small town
a little burr-headed boy
draws a gun from his dime-store holster
and fires up into the blue.
He's waiting for the pony-man
who comes round taking pictures
and selling smiles,
whose magic snaps reality
across the vast distance of dream.
The boy yearns to be lifted up, up
into the saddle
where the air
creates a mist inside his brain
and intoxicants
wrought in the buffalo-hide bag
of a middle-class medicine man
make him an angel of the red bandana.
With his gun on his side
and hat pushed back,
he longs desperately
to become real,
to shake off the dry, dull literalness
of the suburban American dream
which for him was never anything but a lie.

The pony-man, however, never came.

So it is evening
and the sun in the west
drops lazily behind
the red-brick row of duplexes
across the street.
The boy, alone,
opens the screen door
to go inside,
pausing
with a momentary vision
of a grandmother
who warned against
playing with fire.

Composing

By Kitty McCord

Poetry is too messy
so I wake to straighten.
Stack, number, throw away.
But your chewed guitar pick, a hidden
remnant of you for the rest of my life,
becomes boys with shaded eyes
who startle me
with the toss of their heads.

I move out to clean,
seek to syphon you from everyone
I pass. Their footsteps away
echo your monster motion.
I plead with backs for a turning,
a smile that leads
to an arm-in-arm saunter,
a leaning.

The bows are tied perfectly
so the blonde boy at the wedding
asks me to whirl.
Potentials will wrap me a moment,
move me in and out of shadows
playfully.
But these are
haphazard seductions of cloistered white moths
who skim and tease the heat
refusing the quiet, reaching tongues.

But you are
the best dancer, wedge of love.
I cannot throw you away.
Resolved, I trace your instrument for song
into a poem.

As If We Did Not

By Lola White

We walk on bones.
They shift beneath our weight.
Some of them, brittle,
crack,
splinter.
The earth settles;
it is simple.

The earth compacts,
hardens,
presses centuries
of bones to dust,
preserves a precious few
like petals in a book,
one day to be un-
earthed; looked upon
by such as us
as if we did not
daily
walk on bones.

Cat's-Paws Northing

By William Prather

Encased in hoarfrost sheaths,
Junipers and naked barks
Mix themselves haphazardly
On the flanks of tented earth;
Crystal water seethes
Beneath brazen radiation,
Beneath the seemly energy
Of an adolescent star;
And cat's-paws northing,
In solitary flight
With the poetry of purring,
Dust the rafters of the woods.

For So Long Now

By William Webster

For so long now
the elevated has stood here
iron columned, fastened with bolts
sometimes the size of a man's arm,
hovering between the hungry buildings
that close their eyes to the terror
of trains passing.

For so long now
the limping man
has pulled his cardboard box
by a frayed rope
in front of the train station,
cleaning the sidewalk,
heedless of the herds
of angry men and women
coming and going
among the truth of their refuse.

For so long now
the same faces
stare out the diner window at the street,
waiting for the intoxicated evening,
and streetcorner astrologists
count the universe for lottery numbers,
leaning out the grocer's door
to test the wind.

For so long now
I have passed through this same temple
paying homage to Buddha
who sits in a cage
ringing the bell of the everlasting
eyeing the scripture of economic nirvana
the Bhagavad Gita of desire and dauntless power.

Yes, for so long
I have stood at this same spot
on this patient platform,
meditating on the mantra of our waiting,
hearing it grow and grow
into the language of my life.

Vision of Summer Past

By Vicki Kindred

Today, I listened—
I heard the birds sing,
the song that was so long,
so sweet and new, found me
watching you mow the heavy,
tired grass, the grasshoppers
all buzzzzing, scattering in the
air only to again land in your path.
God, the air was so moist and heavy
I could barely breathe, but the heat did
not bother me; I did not mind the heat. I
could see how your skin would just glimmer,
shine, how your hair became wet and the smell
of the freshly-cut grass filled me with the vision
of summer past—how you always cut the grass, and
I, I flitted in my sundress, bronzed and bleached with care,
without a care. When do those summer days disappear? "Would
you care to sit with me—sit in the cool shade where the sun has not
been given a chance to dry the morning dew upon the grass which you have
not yet cut."

"Yes."

Flutter-by

By Victoria Clausi

Flutter-by butterfly, caterpillar heaven.
Dream a wish, a sister's kiss
On eyelids softly laden
With stars and moons and innocence.
I want you to know clearly
That you, my precious, gentle one,
I love much more than dearly.

Melena

By William Prather

While skulking moon lends nimbus to the clouds
That crowd aloft, motionless, becalmed,
Like ghostly sails offended by the night,
Melena dreams and empties of repose
And, thin-ankled,
Her cheek lifted toward the stars
(The shrill secreted by her eyes,
A silent song of glory undershot),
She combs her tresses, long and graying blonde
And dampened by the fierce cascading dew;
She dreams in love of love of him she knew,
Whose strength a scar of seasons strove to sap,
Whose youth a jealousy of space entrapped
And murmurs words that tremble in the air,
Then seep into the crevice of the night.

Edges

By Kitty McCord

It was the lukewarm wind
bathing the ache,
the unshaven man
in the Divinity Library
who poured his choice to lead me,
over me,
the musty books, my mothers,
that made me write one more line
for a tomorrow of cotton.
It was the waiting plane ticket,
the decision
to let the February wind kiss me
goodbye that coaxed the last pudgy child
over her edge
into the brown arms of self-seduction.
It was this night-sail that rounded
the wave of cutting peace,
this wink of bruise that made me forget,
in one surge that clefted tomorrow and yesterday
from now,
as I drove the last silence to home,
not you, the one propelled by grief's stained shroud,
but the fear of watching
forever. You go.

untitled

By Lori Gann

Clever boys in groping glee gather
for fun, frottage and clinging ceremonies.
Under guise of intellectual banter
ask and answer yes I will.
Clutching in darkened room a desperate stab for
touch
a wondering, wakeful question.
Confusion of the names, but bodies never fade
in mind--
a diverse lot, they attend again the ritual
and each will spin and grab
another for the night.

A Design of Sacrifice

By Vicki Kindred

What desire in a budding tree--
one that breathes green with life renewed.
Yet, the tender leaves will host fatality
soon after their young veins protrude.
For in crooks and crevices lies destiny
in silken wombs of hungry brood.

But is it the work of ruin device,
or simply a design of sacrifice?

Windows II

By William Webster

By the heavy light of a full winter moon
mother sits at the windowsill,
inscribing in the frosted glass.
Her will wholly given over
to changes in temperature,
rising and falling
in the flux of revision.
A fine powder falls in her lap,
melting into the wet security
of a made thing.
Here she forms the name of a child
by a persistent scraping
in the ice,
heart pounding as
she works faster and faster,
a murmur escaping her lips,
humming and again humming
an urgent solitary note.

None know the dimensions
by which she sees and
no one dares disturb her
till daylight, though
*nothing wears the human soul
like waiting.*

Next to the name
now carved in impermanence
is the barely discernible trace
of the words she has become:
"Oh God, let me last till morning and the sun."

Black Rainbow

By Lola White

for my father

1921 they struck black gold in El Dorado.
You were ten when Grandpa, boom-chasing,
packed the family down from Illinois.

Mud sucked like quicksand in the streets;
horses sank in, and no man or chain of men
could haul them out. They were shot
and left to sink.

Now asphalt sits astride the bones
that were their backs.

The gushers shot up all around.
Normal folks went out to stand in the black spray
till they were slick with it. Hotels ran out
of rooms; the barbers leased their chairs
for beds.

Everyone was there, or came:
gamblers, floozies, millionaires
and bums, and right behind them
the evangelists, the Klan, all of them drunk
on bootleg gin, morphine, religion or oil.

Grandpa stayed sober. He had a chance
to buy the whole north section of the county
at fifty cents an acre, and he turned it
down. He went to work for the refinery,
steady pay for steady work.

He stayed with the refinery till it exploded,
killing him
and catapulting you and Uncle Lincoln
into the rival refinery: roughnecks,
working the cat-cracker,
the graveyard shift.

And that poor fifty-cent an acre land
was sitting on the richest field of all;
the Rainbow Field, they called it.

How old were you by then, thirteen?

Thirteen, and Grandpa,
who could've bought the rainbow,
dead.

Evening Breath

By Victoria Clausi

The bay is calm, but always a ripple:
The pop of a cork-bobber, the
Dive of a tern, the bow of a boat, or
First drops from a slow-brewing squall.
A source is needed only to remind
Of the endless supply of motion in the universe.
What stands out with clarity are the ripples.
Perfect rings spread across the water, reflecting a
Quivery dissonance: A gull flying again
And again through the eternal tides, deeply
Feathered clouds behind the watery lines. Now
Swallows dive into the dance, dart through the
Ripply Sky-world, droplets of water, more
Ripples, a pulsing, hydrosol world.

Dinosaurs

By Reita Gorman

Dinosaurs!

He called us dinosaurs
Extinct in our own time!
Suffocating in our own conflict,
Struggling with antique ideals.
Credit cards and time-paid cars,
Hell-bent to change the world.
"Ask not," he said. "Yeah, Yeah," they sang,
Peace Corps and Vietnam,
Heal the sick and feed the poor,
Teach the dumb to read
Blend black and white until it's pure
Wear knee-length hair, sing protest songs, free love and buddha beads.

Old dinosaurs? I guess we are.
Prosperity our new-found god.
Pay Sears, the bank and buy Reeboks,
Take trips to soothe the odds.
"Can't be too thin or rich," she said.
Diet pills, valium, cigarettes and booze
Ulcers, migraines, and perfect plastic boobs.
Babies in day-care, latch-key adolescents,
Guilt-eaten women, working three jobs
Half-assedly, acidly.
Impotent men, not fitting in,
Right clubs, right cars, Pierre Cardin.

"HEY JUDE," "SHE LOVES ME YEAH, YEAH, YEAH"
Microwaved food and dryer-ironed shirts
Multi-vitamins and dirty coffee cups
Perfect velcro teeth and bottle-fed hair color
"SOMETHING IN THE WAY SHE MOVES"
Guiltless infidelity under rented sheets
Real or imagined passions' heat.
Oh dinosaurs, ye dinosaurs
Your time has come and passed.
Fossil-fied in cold instinctual ambition,
You think and dream and hum old songs
And haunt a hurting world
Alone...

Something

By Lola White

There is something in
the way an old woman
handles eggs,
placing each one
with infinite tenderness
in its little cardboard nest,
carefully wiping each
with a damp white cloth
before receiving in her
knotted fingers
the quarters that you
offer her,
something in the way
she handles eggs,
even in the way
she closes up the box,
hands it to you.

A Thousand Lucky Days

By David Katz

I found another penny today,
amidst the bits of broken glass and pebbles strewn
along the pavement.

It seemed, as sunlight gleamed
across its face,
to wink at me.

And as I bent to retrieve it,
I recalled many times when
upon such a find my mind
would fill with wishes and
dreams I hoped my luck would bring.

But as I pocketed the coin,
a proposition you once made
sprang suddenly to mind.
I must reiterate--
Even if I do find a thousand
in this lifetime,
the fact remains that
you owe me ten bucks.

Flight Five Forty-Eight

By William Prather

She was blonde,
Baroquely bespangled
And of a certain age.

Her husband
Came behind
With pipe
And bespectacled.

With her eyes
She looked ahead,
But her hands in her hair
Looked everywhere.

And after she had passed
Into second class,
A stewardess said,
"I remember her commercial."

A Wish

By Victoria Clausi

When you spread one of those ear-to-ears
Across your face, it's so easy to catch your
Laughter and skip up a spring path to the
Lightest dreams of childhood. And when
You flush red with anger, I want to hug away
every
Scary lie that's ever dimmed your laughing eyes.
And when you lie awake tossing the lariat
From one missed dream to another, I wish
Moonlight from your mirror would lift and shower
On you those shimmery, delicate pearls.

Al's Anger

By William Webster

Ten years and I still have the same orange laundry basket, cracked around the top ridge which forces me to be very careful when I pile it full of clothes and carry it to the laundromat. Left handle broke off a moment ago, and the right is about to do the same. The basket, bought at K-Mart as one can see from the price tag I've never bothered to remove, sits there on the floor, limp and upsidedown, my clothes strewn over the floor. Some fell on the bed where my wife lies in a fetal position, motionless, with a dirty tube sock covering the left side of her forehead and an eye. I make no attempt to retrieve the sock. What's the use given the fix I'm in? She looks like a wounded soldier whose bandage has come loose in the night from tossing and turning, dreaming of exploding shells. The black morning gathers close around the house. The Doppler sound of a train whistle slices through the silence. I think perhaps I've lost my mind, a synapse has misfired, a screw's loose. I'm not all here, there, somewhere. With all that's happened, I'm sitting here worried over my laundry basket, scribbling in a notebook.

I must make a confession. I cannot control my anger. Learned to curse working construction for my father who owns a building company in Ohio and who put me to work the minute I was old enough to swing a hammer and slap a paintbrush. On the construction site I learned the workman's method for contending with the demons of mishap, for wrestling with uncooperative elements, learned the anguish of the first primitive, half-naked savage who made a tool and was proud of himself for two weeks and then regretted it and cursed God for the rest of his life thereafter. Others who share my love for language and literature are able to divert their anger through clever verbal constructions. I have no such gift. I tear language

and innocent objects to pieces and then wander off feeling guilty and stupid.

Or maybe it's a result of my poor relationship with my mother. She talked and talked and talked to me while I felt myself growing smaller and smaller and smaller until "fuck off" became my *cri de coeur*. All I could see was her Max Factor red mouth opening and closing. It was like watching a TV evangelist with the sound turned down. If I'd screamed, I would have sounded like a flying buzzing. Fuck or motherfucker or any other linguistic construction are my words of choice. I wish she had hated "defecating cretin" or "neo-Neanderthalic moron."

As I said it's been ten years, during which time I've gone from job to job, made money, had affairs behind my wife's back, repented, suffered her affairs and repentance, been self-righteous, vainglorious in my successes, faced failure with despair, and still I own the same orange laundry basket, a little tattered now after so much use. I could buy another but I'm afraid of change. Change frightens me.

Four years ago my wife and I lived in an old, gray-blue Victorian house which had been converted into two apartments. One of the most attractive features was the color. In the fall leaves fell from the large oak trees creating a gold ocean around the house which thrilled my wife and me every time we came home. I had been given a Cannon 35mm for my birthday, and I took pictures of my wife among the leaves as she stood against the blue background of the house. I was happy, I think.

But something happened. The landlord's father, a round, wheezing, thick-spectacled, gray-haired old man along with his young helper worked outside the house one entire summer, painting it

with glossy, beige oil enamel. When they were finished, the house looked like a dirty thumb print. My joy in the Fall disappeared. I became depressed, exasperated, felt helpless. My wife thought I was going crazy, and maybe she's right. Maybe I have.

I try to have conversations with my wife. I have to admit that deep in my heart I believe her to be amiable and, most times, perfectly willing to try to understand what I'm talking about. I sit alone in my study full of books and read myself into an acute state of anxiety until it seems as if I'm going to explode. I run to her to unburden myself. She sits there blinking her round eyes at me patiently, pushing her long, brown hair back from her face, drinking coffee with cream and no sugar. After awhile I get the idea that she wishes she were somewhere else, so I start talking louder. Suddenly I realize I'm shouting at the top of my voice and pounding fist and table for emphasis. When I reach this point, I hurl some accusation, and before I know it I'm thinking about hitting her, thinking how satisfied that would make me feel. I have to leave the room. I wonder what she thinks of me when I do? I'm afraid I don't know my wife very well. I'm not sure I know her at all.

My wife is athletic. She has gorgeous sinewy legs. Her flat stomach, smooth skin, and long hair makes lying next to her in bed more than I can bear. When I met her she was still a teenager, and from my perspective it's as if she doesn't age. I feel like a child molester when we make love. I tell her I love her, and when I'm away from her I believe I do because I miss her and have all sorts of warm sentiments about the character that I'm convinced is her. And in the throes of sexual ecstasy my voice assures her of my affection, but sometimes, and recently much too frequently, I have to imagine she's someone else, or worse, that I am someone else, and this scares me. I know that other men desire her because she is athletic and charming and laughs at jokes; and I wonder whether I'm not wishing I were someone else or that she would run off with another man. It's as if I want to get rid of her so that I can love the person I think she is when she's not around. I read magazine and newspaper articles on relationships, but no one ever addresses this problem. And I'm afraid if they did, they'd make me angry by saying not to worry about it or

that I don't know my wife for who she really is. I do worry and I don't know her and the problem persists without resolution.

"Al, baby," she says the other morning, as she pads into my study around six AM, rolling up the bottoms of her stretch nylon shorts and pushing her socks down around her Nikes, "I'll be back in about an hour. I'm going to take a run around campus."

Her legs, of course, look so, tan, and sinewy as usual, and I feel something pull inside my stomach, something pleasantly uncomfortable. But when she leaves the room, I start missing her, wanting her, needing her to put her arms around me. I feel lonely. Why? I think: She runs every morning. It's part of her routine. I grow suspicious, but despise myself for my suspiciousness. I try to go back to my coffee, cigarettes, and books, but can't get my mind to focus. Everything blurs. I go on like this for a good twenty minutes, thinking about my wife's legs, feeling lonely and suspicious, eschewing my suspicions, sipping coffee, and smoking one cigarette after another. Finally, I can stand it no longer. I go to the bedroom and hurriedly put on a pair of Khaki shorts, snap them around my belly, throw on a T-shirt and go out to the car. I'll go to Kroger for Diet Pepsi.

I pull onto Kedzee, then O'Rorke, and turn right on Main. Just as I negotiate the corner, pumping swiftly away from me are a smooth and muscular pair of tan legs in orange nylon shorts. At the top of the thighs appear that most delicious dip of female flesh just before the legs reach the buttocks, and for a moment I have the distinct feeling I'm looking at a stranger. I have no choice. I have to drive by her, and I debate for a moment whether to honk and wave or drive on as if I haven't noticed her. I try the latter, hoping she won't notice our banged up Dodge in the work traffic. But I have strong doubts. I think I'm embarrassed, not at what she might think, but at what I was thinking: a curious mixture of strangerlust and the infernal jealousy. Of course I have an excuse for my being there. I know that. But, also, rolling around like ball bearings in the pit of my stomach and becoming an ache in my inner pelvic tendons is the realization that people, other men--married and single, young and old--are gaping at my wife like I have been momentarily. I wonder if

she knows it, and if she knows it, likes it. I don't want to find out. I wish I'd stayed home, but now I'm obligated to Kroger and Diet Pepsi. One spends a lot of money and energy to create an artificial life to keep from being found out. I'm afraid that my wife doesn't know me.

My wife disgusts and embarrasses me, and I know she knows this but is afraid to say because this would mean confrontation, and my wife wants to avoid confrontation at all costs. In the evening she comes home, takes a Budweiser from the refrigerator, and sits down on the sofa next to me while I'm watching television. She unlaces her shoes and pulls them off like a young boy, ungraceful and awkward. Her socks invariably have holes in them out of which protrude two or three of her rounded, flat toes. I sigh and roll my eyes, moving ever so slightly away. In the beginning this was cute, I thought. She was unlike any other girl I had known, unpretentious, seemingly possessing not the smallest particle of vanity in her body. I was wrong. She was vain in other ways. In fact, she is vain in her lack of female vanity. To be disgusting, I think, humors her, and she seems to practice the art fervently, the more fervently I become repulsed by it. I know this sounds cruel, but I hate my wife and wish she would spend some money (money that we don't have) to make herself pretty. Yet she is pretty, so I don't know for sure what I want. I have one her laundry before and even her underwear have holes. I wonder what our friends would think if they knew this about her.

One day my wife decided to get her hair cut, which made me nervous. I was agitated to think how this alteration of her appearance might change our lives forever. "I'm tired of my hair," she said, gulping her coffee and cooling it in her puffed out cheeks before swallowing. Her hair separated down the middle of her head in an uneven part and hung from her ears over her cup. Morning Edition played on the radio, and I half listened to an interview with a "brilliant" new playwright whose play had won a literary award and was being produced off-Broadway. Her play was applauded for its portrayal of the urban female predicament.

"Why don't you get it cut."

"Should I spend the money?"

"Spend the damn money! I don't care." I

was trying to listen to the program on the radio. I wondered what it would be like to win an award and be interviewed by someone from PBS. I never listen to the news for its own sake. I use it rather as a narcotic to ease the pain of my own anonymity.

"You don't listen to me," my wife iterates from time to time. I'm always shocked at this observation of my behavior, for I've considered myself one of the world's great ears. That day at school, however, I spent anxious, unable to concentrate on lectures, my mind drifting to the image of my wife planted on the sofa, bending over her cup of coffee. Stopping off at the liquor store on the way home, I bought a pint of Peppermint Schnapps and took swigs from it as I speeded down the interstate, being careful to watch out for the Highway Patrol. 100 proof Schnapps cures my sense of boredom and makes me feel at one with myself and, all too infrequently, with mankind. It is the poet's nectar, surely, a Keatsian potion, my bottle, that "cool vessel of transparent juice." Unlike Pope, I have often been satisfied with the "Shallow draughts" which "intoxicate the brain."

Anyway, my wife was not at home when I got there, and I'll admit I had forgotten why. I fixed a sparse meal of hamburger and cottage cheese and retired to my chambers to sleep it off. It was not unusual for me to go to bed early, for I enjoy seeing the fiery red horizon of morning. It must have been merely a couple of hours, for when I awoke to the glaring ceiling light, my head was still swishing around in the fury of the fermented nectar. There stood my wife with her hair cropped above her ears. I screamed and sucked light. The next morning I apologized, trying desperately to make amends.


"But I do like it." Sunlight seeped through the valance covering the front bay window, turning my wife's face to shadow and highlighting her hair. My wife was now to me only a hairdo. The well-being of our marriage hinged on my next moves. "I was having a bad dream, honey. That's all. I dreamed I was at the gay commune, and they began a mass orgy. I was being chased through the woods by a fat middle-aged hairdresser who was just about to catch me when you turned on the light." I had to think fast. It worked. She laughed. I spent the next week with the peculiar feeling that I lived with a stranger.

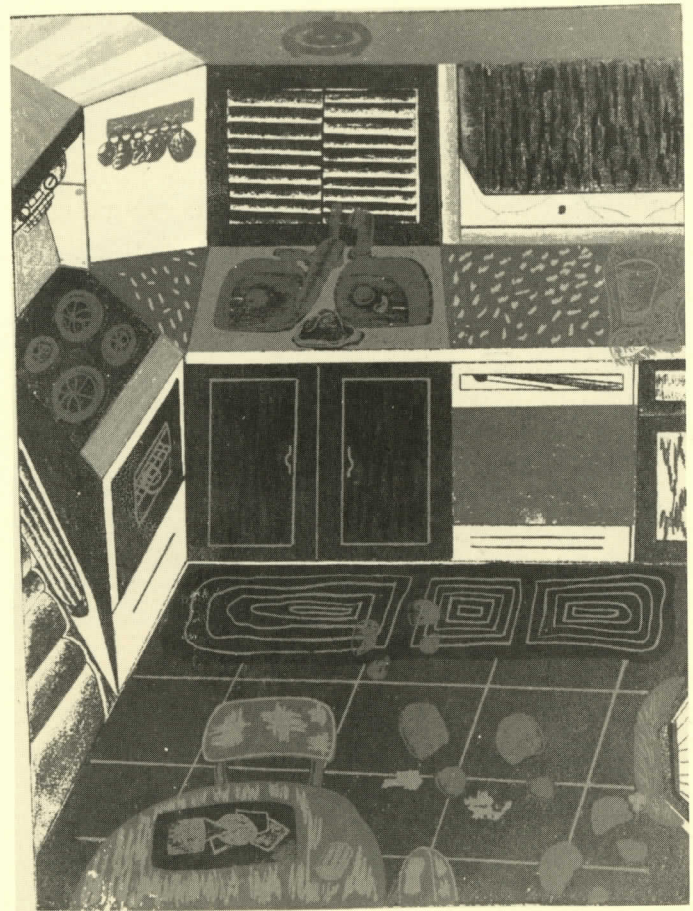
My wife hears all about my dreams. Usually they consist of my finding her with another man. Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night and before I can stop myself, I've slapped her on the butt. I hate it when this happens because I spend the entire next day wondering about the prophetic power of dreams. I tell her the dream while she lays there rubbing a big red spot. Seems all I do these days is apologize to my wife.

But I do think she's seeing other men. I don't know why I am so sure of this fact, except that I think I am particularly sensitive to guilt. I walk into a room where my wife has been alone for awhile, and she gives me a look as if she's been caught at something. Her eyes water slightly, and the flesh of her cheeks turns red. I ask her what's wrong but don't tell her that I think something's up, for fear that my suspicions are unfounded, which would make me appear paranoid and give her too much power. Jealousy can be terrifying, especially when in its grip you desire the very thing that will destroy your world. What delicious pain it is to imagine your wife with another man.

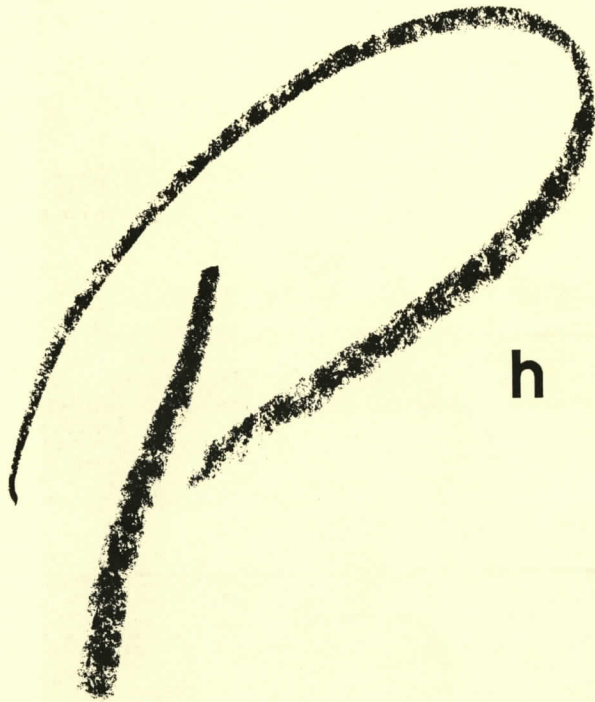
I'd like to think that these suspicions, desires, jealousies, etcetera, are things over which I have no control, but I'm afraid that's just not the case, for what seems to be the truth is that I'm not the kind of person my wife could love. I'm bookish and inactive. I don't particularly like the current health craze and prefer a bottle of Schnapps and a collection of Whitman or Merwin or Kinnell to the pleasures of dinners and cocktails and witty conversations. In fact I'm rather shy and self-conscious. I loath the necessary diplomacy accompanying the public life. At school there is a fellow named Derrick Zimmerman whom everybody likes. A talentless turd as far as I'm concerned, but he is full of adolescent good humor and a big fucking stupid smile. My wife would be better off with a husband like Derrick. He'd be constantly groping her and looking out for her welfare, and I doubt very much whether he would feel suspicious like I do. I have a natural inclination toward contemplating disaster which has made me sour and unhappy.

My wife hugs a pillow and I can see inside the dark cavern of her mouth. If I didn't know better, I'd think her sleeping. Our bedroom is quiet. My clothes lie limp and soiled on the bed

and floor. All I can hear is a single-engine plane passing over the house. The sun is just coming up, and (thank God) it isn't raining. The white drapes begin to glow orange which makes this hangover that much worse. I reach over to pop two Advill in my mouth and drink from the bottle of Wild Turkey sitting on the night stand. My wife doesn't move. Something in me snapped last night. I suppose the thing to do is call the police and take the consequences as they come. If I knew what was wrong with me, perhaps I could find forgiveness. The smoke from my cigarette passes through a narrow beam of sunlight and I'm thinking there's something I need to ask my wife. 



"Color Formica"
By Tara Hall

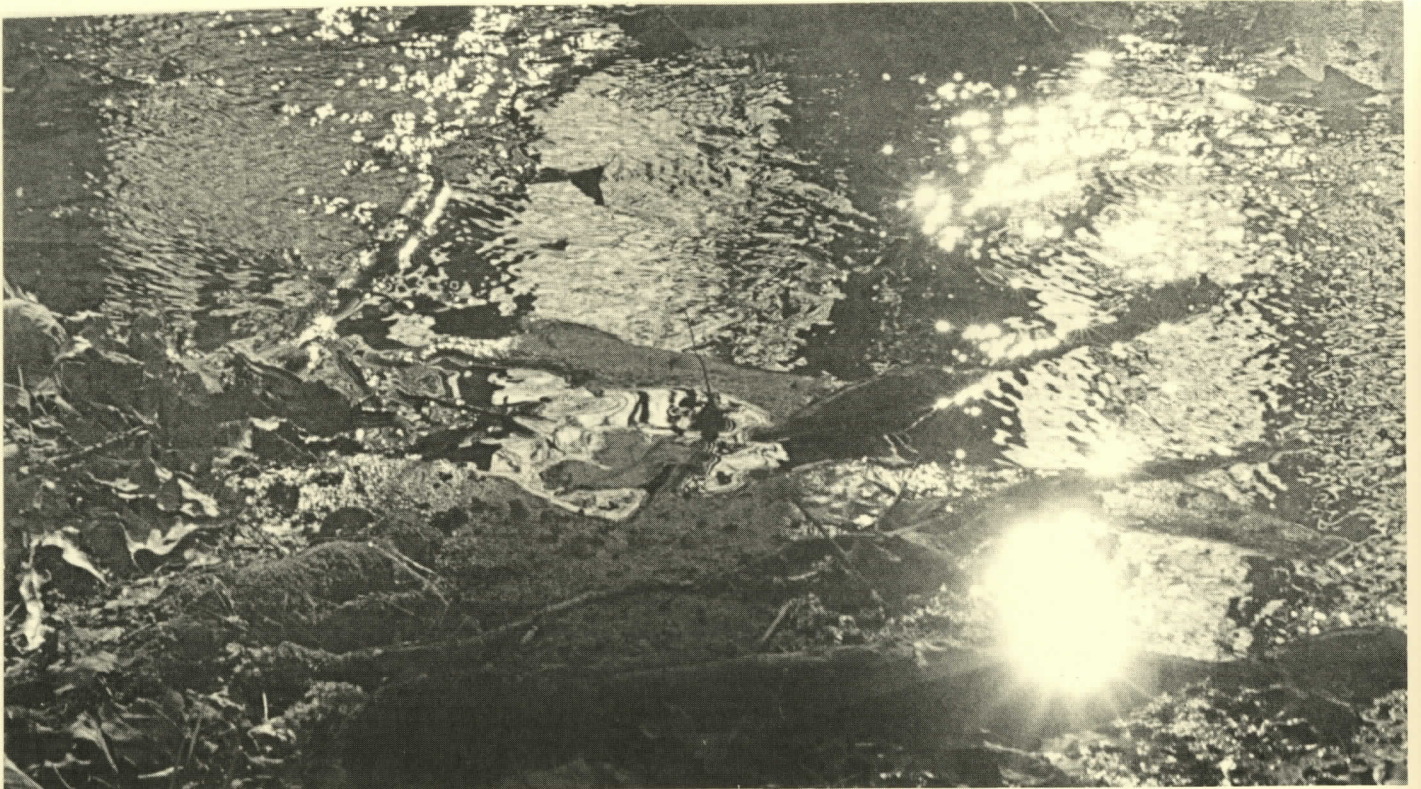


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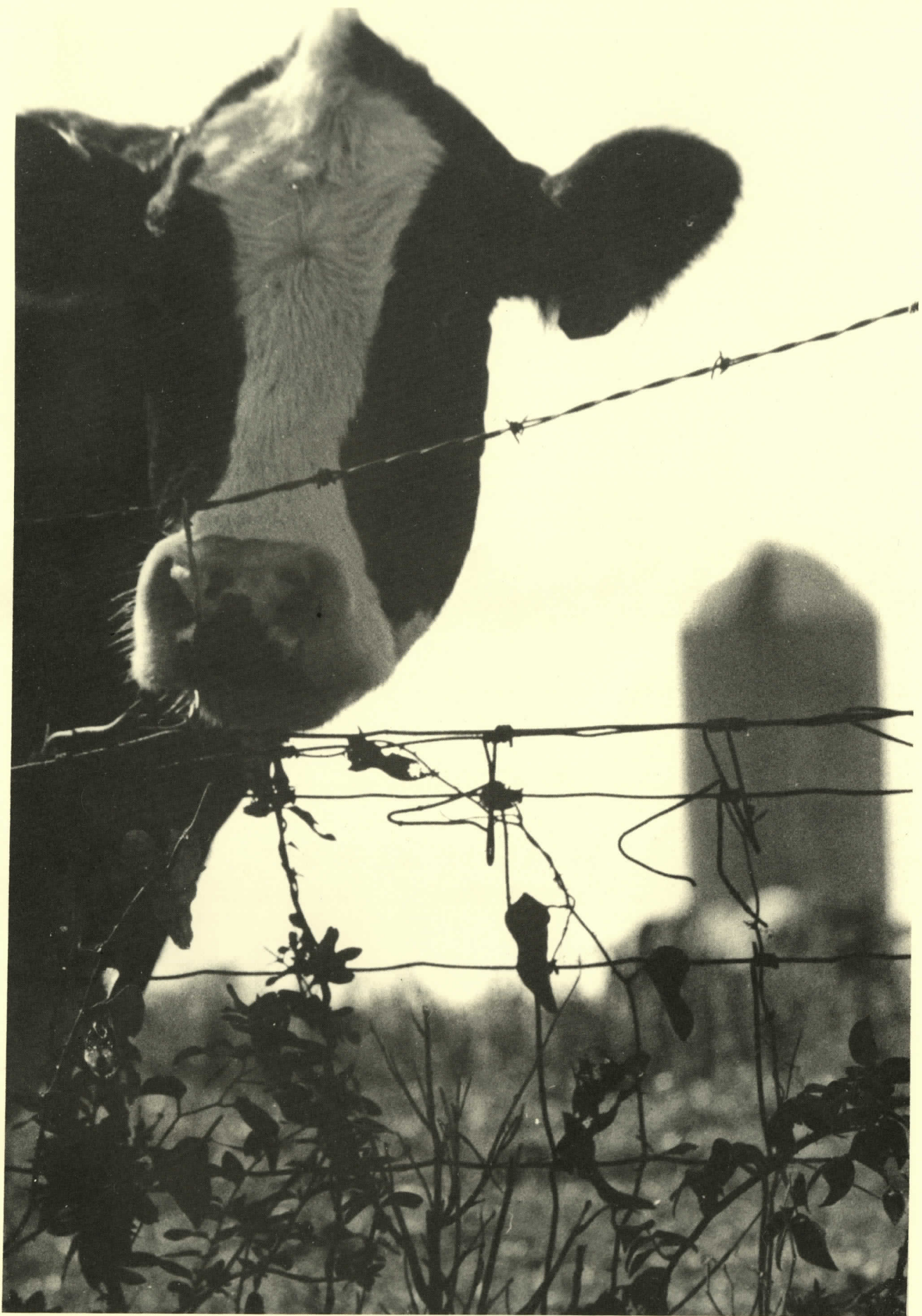


"Swing"

By Wesley Howlett Motley III

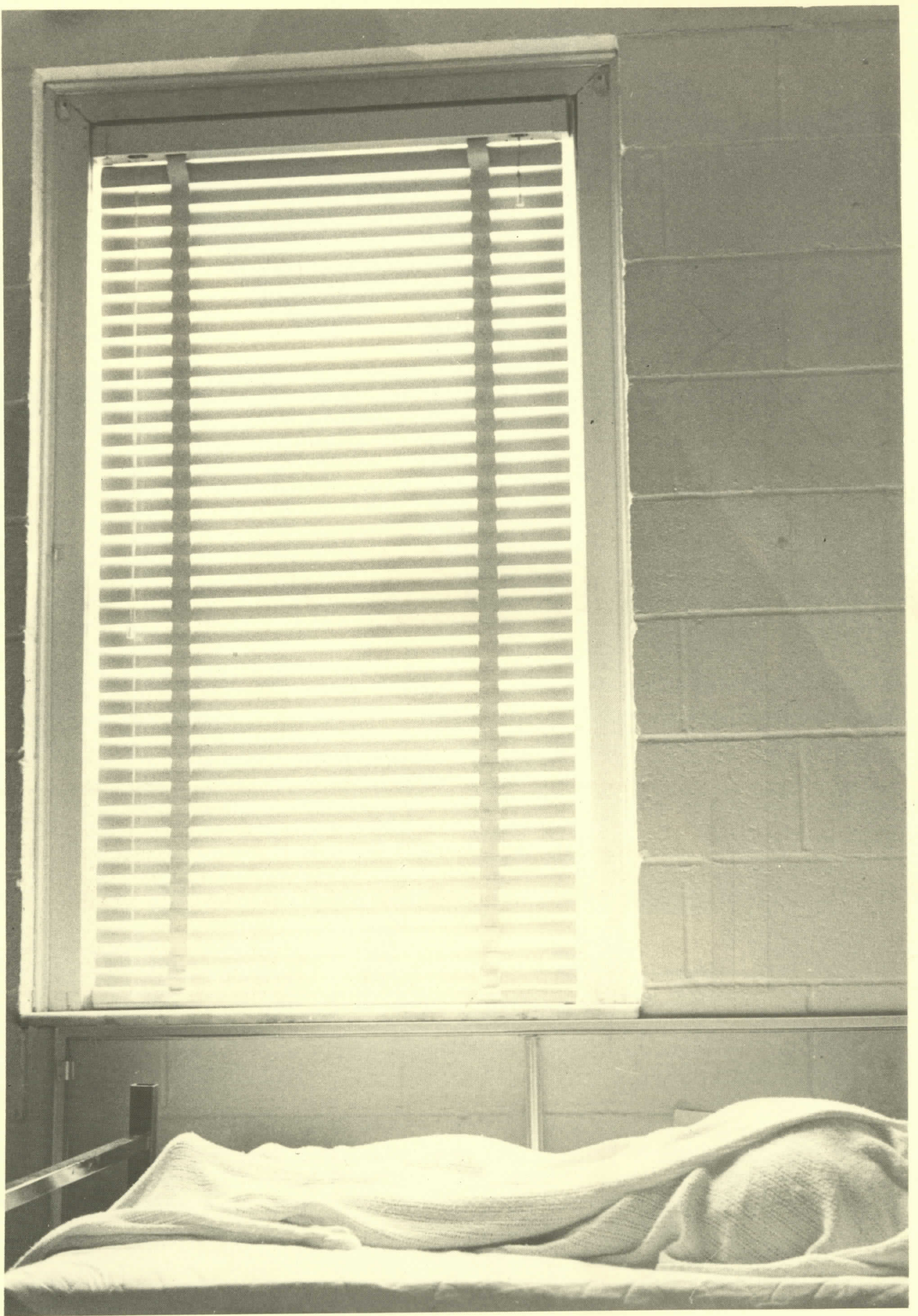


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By Lee D. Wilds



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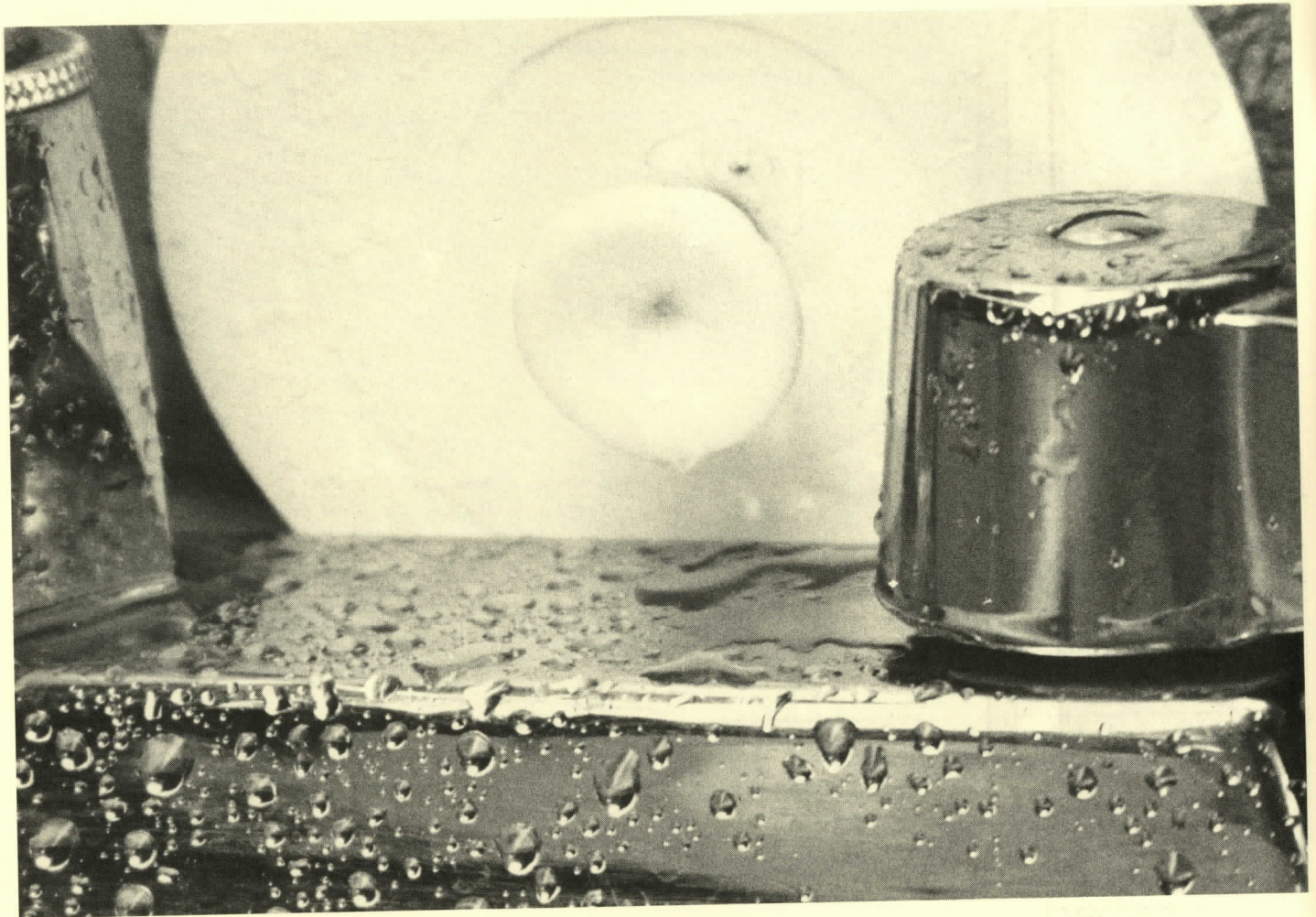
"American Family Farms"
By Mary Penuel



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By Tim Nave



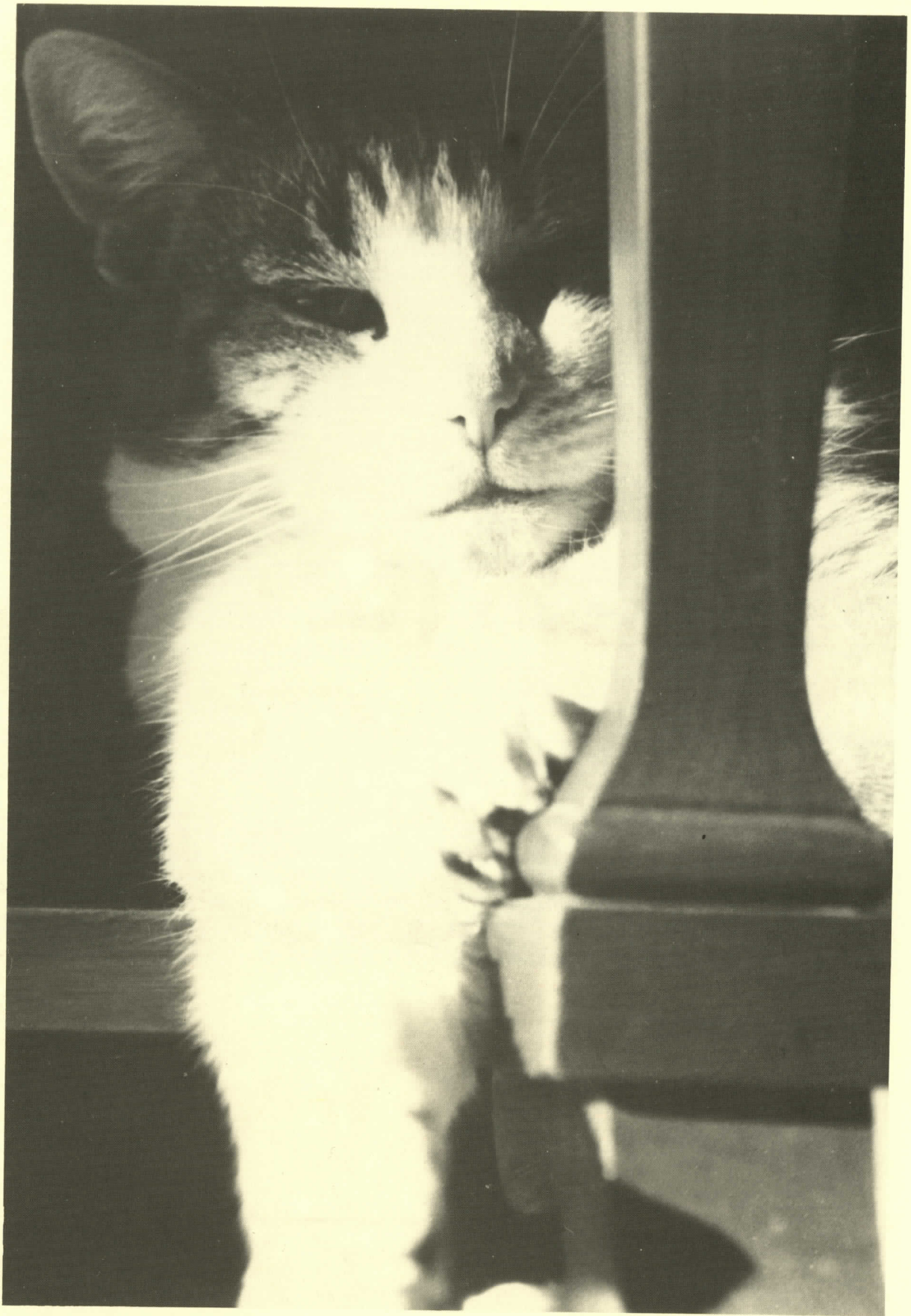
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By Clayton Cooper



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By Thomas C. Davis



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By Dena Mash



"Queen MeMe"
By Mary Penuel



"Katherine"

By Giselle K. Taylor

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