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CANNON



Cannon

Volume 14, Number 2

May, 1984

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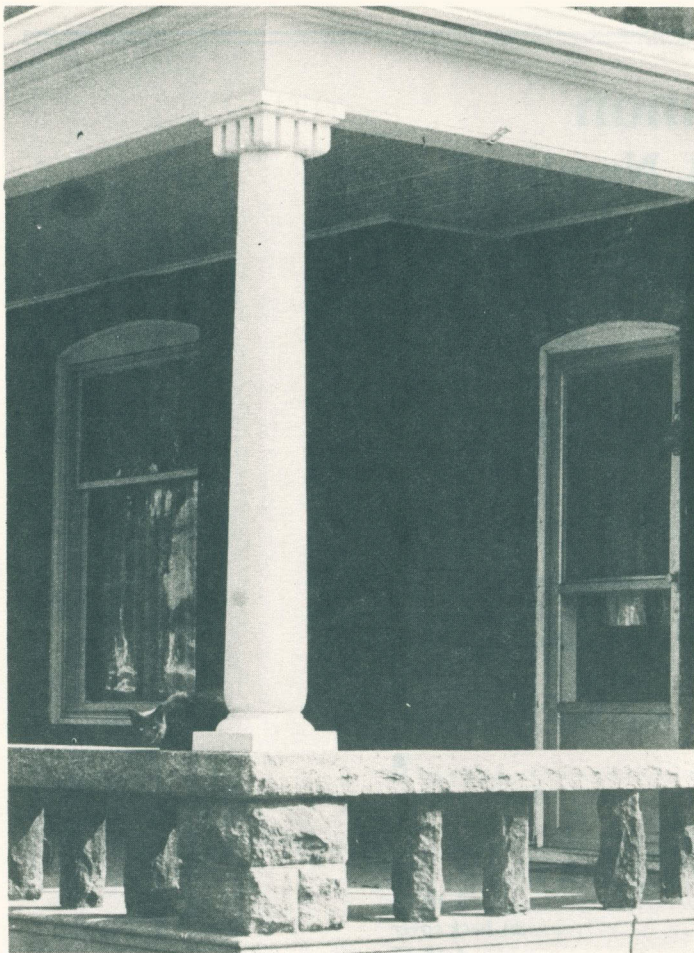
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LeRoy Berentschot
Sr./BuAd, Art

Purple Envelopes

Elma sat in her pink flannel housecoat, fiddling with her curlers and forcing herself to wait until the mailman was down past the third crack in the driveway before opening the door to get the mail. She sat on the very edge of the sofa, counting: four, five, six, seven. On eight she crept toward the door and opened it slowly, making sure the mailman was gone. She snatched up the pile of envelopes and slammed the door with her ample backside. A quick shuffle revealed no purple envelopes addressed to "Elma Bummelhoffer." Her face fell. Although her name was "Brummelhoffer" the person, the fiend, that absolute swine—she felt justified using strong language in such an awful situation—that swine who wrote those terrible letters simply abused her last name, to say nothing of what his silly messages did to her.

Cousin Gertie would be disappointed at the news. She cleared off the breakfast dishes, almost forgetting to save the grapefruit rinds. Gertie had given her an article from the *Herald* that claimed, "For optimum

softness, elbows and heels must be rubbed with grapefruit rinds." Worked quite well, actually.

She dialed and waited. Gertie had to be home, and on the usual fourth ring, someone answered.

"Good listening, KJXB! Hello. . . ? Did. . . Did I win?"

"Gertie—is that you, Gertie?"

"Elma, who else in heaven's name could it be? I live alone. Gracious."

"What am I supposed to think—you answering like you're some kind of radio jockey. Turn down that radio. I can't hear a thing." She could see Gertie in her laundry room, reaching over the beat-up dryer to the old Sears model.

"Don't mock me, Elma. I could win up to \$104.10 just by answering the phone like that: 'Good listening, KJXB'—that's all you have to say. One-O-four-ten!"

As if she needed the money, Elma thought.

"Well, sorry, I'm not KJOC, or whatever. But Gertie, listen"—she lowered her voice—"my mail came this morning—"

"—oh no. Oh no Elma, were any—"

"No," she hissed, her eyes mere slits, "No purple envelopes."

She could hear Gertie's moan of disgust. "Oh Elma, rats, we were wrong. I was so sure, I—"

"Quit moaning, I was too. You know what this means." She began to take out her curlers, grey hair springing precisely into position. "Mr. Ferguson is not sending those letters—"

"I swear, Elma, every Tuesday at noon he mails a letter in the mailbox across from his butcher shop. And with you receiving two letters on Thursdays—"

Gertie babbled on, and Elma could see her leaning on the dryer like always, cigarette in hand, frizzy permed hair a dull orange-grey. How she detested smokers, even more than people who left parsley on their plates. Smoke prickled eyes and rolled up noses—made them twitch. Every time she got an ashtray in the mail she was filled with disgust for anyone who used the things on a daily basis. She allowed herself one cigar a week—after "Hogan's Heroes"—but that was at night, in the bathroom, with the fan on. She began to leaf through the mail.

"Gertie, at least I got a letter from Platte."

"Platte who?"

James had been a good husband, she thought, but he had dense relatives.

"From Star-Lite Motel in Humboldt, Saskatchewan. You know, one of the places James and I stayed during our honeymoon?"

Her husband had begun collecting ashtrays on that trip. He did not smoke of course, but it just so happened that the first motel hadn't given them any monogrammed towels and he had wanted to start some type of collection, "nuptial mementos," he had said. She smiled and put the rest of her curlers beside the toaster. James had always been so thoughtful,

so—well, almost *romantic* that way.

"Yes, I wrote them asking if they could send me an ashtray." She was carefully slitting open the letter with James' old Kirby letter opener, the ones he had given to all his customers, and pulled out a thin paper. She wrote motels and hotels across the west, explaining her desire to continue her husband's dream of updating all the ashtrays in their honeymoon collection. Her high success rate was due, she thought, to her well-written letter: in it she explained how James died of leukemia, how he struggled, how she was now left alone to carry out his dream. Everytime she read her carbon copy, she was touched.

"Well, that's real nice Elma. But I say I'd better get back to cleaning up around here." About time, thought Elma, with that dog hair everywhere. "Josh want his breakfast, oooh, wookit whose here, don't you Josh, oooh, mama's baby needs some munchies..."

Elma could see the big Labrador wagging his mongrel tail everywhere, spreading dog germs, him licking Gertie's hands—a chill zippered down her backbone, and she made a face of prolonged and exaggerated horror in the mirror.

"Listen Gertie—I'll see you in ceramics tomorrow. Remember to bring your senior discount card this time. Keep those eyes open wide though, and phone me if anything happens."

"Okay, and remember, it's KJXB and not that other station you said. Over a hundred dollars!"

Elma sighed. "Forget it. I don't need money THAT bad. See you."

She set down the phone and looked in the mirror again, shook her head, and watched her curls bounce. Thank goodness her hair had turned out such a beautiful silver.

She wondered if Muffins was ready to come inside. Cats, she thought, especially Siamese, were so much more practical than mongrels. She opened the door and gave their special whistle. How Gertie stood that dog was beyond her. She sighed, and unwillingly admitted that Gertie was always there when she was needed. And always so interested in whatever. Comforting. And with all these letters, she had been such a help. . . .

She had received four so far. All in purple envelopes, all typed on some kind of computer, and all so very mean. Not dangerous mean, but *low* mean. Like the first letter. It made her toes tingle: "YOUR PRECIOUS MUFFINS IS CROSS-EYED." Muffy was a simple creature, never harming anyone. He, like anyone else in this world, had no control over his physical appearance. It was as close to child molesting as was possible.

The second letter had arrived one week later. Gertie had been over, helping clean the house after Christmas. Both had supposed it to be a late Christmas card, probably from George and Beth in B.C. . . .

"Elma, gracious, this card is certainly bright. Look, they spelled your name wrong—"Bummelhoffer" it says." She laughed loudly but was stopped by Elma's frosted glare. "Hmmm, no return address. Probably in case it weighed too much." Gertie flipped the card all around, holding it to the light. "Thick envelope, that's for darn sure." From the kitchen, Elma could see Gertie pressing her nose against the stationary, no doubt leaving a smeary grease mark. "Feels floppy though. Can't be a card."

"Oh give it here." Elma put the melmac salad bowl in the cupboard, and draped the dish towel over the oven handle. A surprise letter made her heart beat a little faster. She sliced open the top and took out the letter. The message was short.

"I KNOW YOU WEAR SUPPORT HOSE."

She read it again, and blood rushed to her head. She nearly fell, but Gertie grabbed her elbow and steered her towards the couch.

"Gertie," she said slowly between clenched false teeth, "This is a violation of the *First Amendment*."

"What's it say?" Gertie whispered.

She thrust over the letter. "Only *had* varicose since I was 39," she said, eyes blazing. "If I didn't wear the things, heaven knows where I could be right now...."

Since that day, three more letters had come. The first of them six days later. She had anxiously awaited the mailman each day, and that Tuesday she had seen with a start that another envelope lay on the door mat. It was rather soggy, but she had managed to pull out the message intact. All it'd said was, "MY, AREN'T WE ON EDGE TODAY."

Since getting the letters, she took extreme caution when leaving the house. She was dressing in the closet again, like she had before James had died.

It was the third message, one week later, that convinced her that she was being watched constantly. She had gone to Anthony's to buy a sale dress. She came home to a letter. The fiend was getting bolder, now hand delivering the letters. She had called Gertie and relayed the messages.

"Gertie, one more—today."

"How can you take this pressure?"

"I'll tell you—if I didn't have you to phone I don't know I could."

"The least I can do for one of my relations, even a married-in one." Why that distinction was so important, Elma had never figured out.

"The message—what was it?"

Elma fanned herself with a folded church bulletin. "Oh, it simply said something really strange about smoking."

"Elma," Gertie said in a warning voice, "What exactly?"

"It's weird." She chewed a corner off the bulletin. "'EVEN WEEKLY SMOKERS GET CANCER.'"

"He's started to use codes. Don't worry, I bought

a decoder book one time at a rummage sale. Twenty-five cents."

"Gertie, I can't take much more of this, I CAN'T. If only James were alive today."

"Yeah, sometimes I miss Herman too," sighed Gertie.

Elma stomped her foot. How anyone could miss Herman at a time like this was beyond her. Herman had died the same year James had. He had not gone past eighth grade, he had munched on raw potatoes and an occasional onion, he had listened to country western music and he had worn a woolen cap pulled down so far he must have run 50 yards and then *dove* into it. But now he was dead.

Neither woman spoke for 30 seconds, remembering. Then Gertie came up with the plan about the butcher. But that had fallen through.

Where in the world was Muffy? Elma stood shivering at the open door, looking across the road at old Sebina Seitz's house. He had better not be in *her* yard or he might not make it back alive. Sebina didn't like cats. She was a prize gardener, and used a slingshot to keep away intruders. They'd been living beside each other for six years and Elma hadn't seen the inside of her house until three months ago when she'd gone over—on a dare from Gertie—to invite Sebina to their ceramics class ("Oh Elma, I dare you! She won't come anyways!"). She remembered the dimness, plants under strange coloured lights. How a bright yellow margarine container, filled with rocks, sat on rusted coffee tray right beside the front door. How an ancient exercise bike took the majority of rug space. Sebina dyed her hair an abnormally dark black and ultra-permed it; in the summer she circled her block and theirs, a futile attempt to jiggle off the pounds that turned her form into a diesel. She never talked except to huff, "Hot," and that was before she got the walkman, so this past summer she had simply nodded.

That an older woman could lower herself to listen to such a juvenile device disgusted her. And the clothes she wore. Black polyester pull-on tops with fluorescent flowers. Black polyester pants and white leather Nikes. It looked like she had randomly chosen a spot to put her macrame belt and had created a waist through sheer force.

She remembered her shock when Sebina had accepted the offer. Although she didn't remember every detail of the house, she did remember the details of that one ceramics class—how Sebina had arrived five minutes late, Gertie's excitement.

Ceramics was at ten, so Elma and Gertie had already seated themselves when Sebina came and sat across from them and two chairs down. Several of the other ladies brought friends too. As they painted, they introduced each other.

After one member introduced her "dear sister recently moved from Aldersyde," it was Elma's turn, and she rose hesitantly.

"Uh yes, well ladies, this is my neighbour Sebina Speitz. She's from—well, where are you from?"

Sebina's glasses sparkled under the fluorescent lights.

"From Brooklyn—"

Gracious, thought Elma, New York.

"—And I plant glads."

Elma sat down and kicked Gertie underneath the table. New York indeed.

"So Gertie, tell the girls what you heard about Linda, that girl who used to come to class."

"You," said Gertie uncomfortably.

"She heard," Elma put down her brush, "That she invites that boyfriend of hers to stay overnight—in front of her little boy."

All the ladies shook their heads in unison and kept painting. All except Sebina. In the silence, she placed down her paint brush, turned to Elma and said in a hoarse, clear voice, "Fault-finding is dreadfully

a hitchhike to Wheeling

*all along the river
steel mills sleep
while
workers keep
a wake
throughout the night
on the water*

Ronald Thomas Nelson
Sr./Theatre Arts

catchy; one dog will set a whole kennel howling."

Everyone stopped painting.

"Gossipers go to hell," she said with politeness. Then she pulled out her walkman and snapped on the headphones.

How Elma had lived through the rest of class that day remained a mystery. No one had said anything and everyone left early. Elma had had to throw away the ashtray she'd been working on; its design was too shaky.

She closed the front door thoughtfully, walked to the bathroom and took out her hairbrush. She stood in front of the three-way mirror and brushed back the stiff curls. Pulling the two side leaves around her head, she looked at herself from all angles. To use makeup was tempting, but she never could respect anyone who painted themselves to look young. Like Sebina. Spiteful Sebina, painted Sebina Speitz. She looked at her profile. Not bad. Sebina could never conceal her ugliness with artificial means. Sebina. The hairbrush clattered into the sink and hundreds of wide eyes stared back at her. It had to be her.

Slamming back the mirrors, she marched to the phone and dialed Gertie, not giving her time to spit out the radio station.

"Gertie, get over here fast."

"Elma—what's happened?"

"Gertie, it's Sebina. We're going to have to prove it."

"I'll be there as fast as I can."

Sometimes it was nice that Gertie didn't have any other friends. She took James' ashtray and warmed it against her cheek.

Gertie must have sped because according to the oven clock she arrived in three and a half minutes. Elma closed her eyes as the rattletrap screeched to a bouncing stop in the driveway.

"What is going on?" she said, barely in the back door.

"Remember THE ceramics class?"

"Elma, she doesn't have enough upstairs to pull off something like this." Gertie wiped her nose on her kerchief.

"She hates me. She's tried to kill Muffins before with that caveman weapon she uses. Remember her face that day? It's her."

Gertie leaned forward. "Then let's get over there and give her what she deserves," she said quietly, intense. "Everything."

"We don't have any proof." Elma jerked closed the drapes. "We've got to get in that house tonight."

"The heck with tonight," she said calmly, "We're going over there right now."

Elma stared. "What do I do—just knock on her door and say, Excuse me, do you mind if I look for purple envelopes?"

"No, just pull out a toy gun and say, 'You witch,

Penance

*There's a lot to be said for hair-shirts
hidden under outer clothing
and a smile.*

*Flagellators lack that dignity
carried out on stretchers
to stomach-pumps and bandages.
Razors and starvation are
obvious carving
half as deep
Yielding life on a whim, less
pain.*

*It's harder to pound
a fist on a brick wall, bruise
the bone, no blood.
Nail polish over mica nails,
curling irons cover split-ends.*

*There's a lot to be said for hair-shirts
hidden under the skin
and a smile.*

Lynn De Young
Sr./T.A., English

you're sending me scary letters.' "

"Don't get strange."

"No, use a real gun." She started to giggle.

"Gertie!" If only James were alive—she couldn't take much more of this.

Gertie blew her nose loudly, laid the dirty kleenex right next to where Elma usually had breakfast. "How's this: we run out of flour, and you run across."

"Even Sebina's not that simple."

"She's bright enough not to believe cream of tartar but flour's perfect. You're in the middle of baking; you need two cups and only have $\frac{3}{4}$?"

"That's good," she said, amazed.

"Well?"

"Let's do it!"

They both sat there.

"We can't."

"Oh yes we can—"

"Well—then we've got to get rid of all my extra flour."

"What?"

"I have to do this with a clear conscience. Let's dump it out." Elma walked straight to the cupboards and lugged out the 20-pound bag. "Help me."

"You crazy? Here," Gertie slid the flour cannister towards herself, yanked off the lid, dumped it into the garbage and announced, "Now you don't have any flour 'in your cannister,' get it? Oh, this is so much fun. I wish Herman could see me now!"

"I'm going," Elma announced as she grabbed her coat and a measuring cup. "Get the binoculars out of the hall closet, third shelf. And watch closely!"

She breathed deeply, whispered a prayer, and slammed the door behind her. On the way she tried to rehearse a short speech but as she pushed the doorbell her mind was blank. It took two additional knocks before the door opened.

"What do you want?" It was Sebina's coarse voice, but she couldn't see anyone.

Holding out the plastic cup, Elma said, "Just in the middle of baking, and what do you suppose happened? Needed 3 cups, and what do you know, I only had 2. Simply thought, no need to worry, just get a little from a friendly neighbor." No answer, nobody. She kept smiling. The *smell*. She breathed through her mouth.

"Get a little what?" the voice muttered.

"Oh! Flour, one cup."

"Wait here."

Elma glanced over her shoulder, then tried to look through the door into the livingroom. Why were all the plant lights off? "Mind if I step inside?" she yelled. "Chilly out here."

No answer, so she slid past the door. Eyes adjusting, she saw the exercise bike's outline, the tin of rocks, and something else—a sewing machine? A little

T.V.?

"Getting warm?"

Elma jerked around.

"Oh, yes!"

"This is all I have." She stirred the flour with her finger, then smiled strangely. "Bye-bye."

Taking the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of flour, Elma shakily walked out the door and back to her house.

"Well, there went nothing," she said throwing the flour in the garbage. "Just getting a good look when she comes back real rude like. 'Getting warm?' she says. Something wild, like a savage creature. Makes me shudder."

"Find any evidence?"

"I barely got in the house, Gertie. I thought I might have seen a computer thing—but it could've been a T.V. She didn't even invite me in."

"The witch!" She looked out the window spitefully. "The wit—Elma. *ELMA*," she screamed, "Look!"

Elma pulled back the curtains. "Holy Heavens."

Sebina was chugging across the street carrying a little cup.

"She's bringing us more flour."

"What for?"

"For our cake, *remember?*" She slammed the mixer into fourth gear. "Help me!"

Elma threw in whatever she could reach from the cupboard while Gertie raced to the fridge and grabbed some eggs. The doorbell rang.

"Shall I answer?" yelled Gertie above the roar of the mixer.

Elma nodded, and Gertie pitched two unshelled eggs towards the metal bowl. One made it. Elma closed her eyes to the mess and noise and cursed every one of James' relations. The cupboards and counters were a mess. Let Gertie talk to Sebina—they were two of a kind, and she shouldn't have to put up with either of them. She wiped out two of the flour-covered ashtrays sitting next to the sink. Why were they talking so loud? Keep busy, pay no attention, Sebina would go away. All of a sudden she felt the floor shake and knew someone was coming up behind her.

"SHUT THAT THING OFF!"

She didn't dare turn around.

"OFF I SAID!"

A fat black arm reached over her shoulder and yanked out the plug. Elma couldn't get the dry scream out of her throat. She turned to look into the greasy face with dirty yellow teeth. Where was Gertie? She looked desperately over the dandruff-covered black shoulder. "Leave me alone," she said through shaking false teeth. "What are you doing in my house?"

"I want to come back to ceramics." Sebina moved closer.

Elma dove under her left arm and ran into the

living room. "Fine. Don't hurt—leave me alone. Go away."

"I want to come again." She moved towards the living room.

"Stop. Stop," she hissed, her hand seizing the ashtray on the T.V. Where was Gertie? "I'll throw this. . . " Sebina kept coming, smiling. "GERTIE!"

The front door slammed and both turned to see Gertie holding a limp Muffins. His tail just hung, and his head was twisted; there was blood on his fur—Elma knew he was dead. She stared. He was dead.

"I don't like cats," wheezed Sebina. "I hate cats."

Every muscle in Elma's body stiffened. She stared into the witch's dark killer eyes, focussing every drop of hatred within her. She raised the ashtray above her head, and with the force of both hands, sent it whizzing towards Sebina's head. It smashed into her greasy forehead. Sebina crashed slow motion into the carpet. The floor shook.

"Elma, Elma," Gertie whispered horrified, "What have you done?"

Elma began to scream. "You shut up, dog lover. SHUT UP, I've had it with you all. She killed Muffins, she killed him—"

"She was my friend, she was my friend," sobbed Gertie, "My only friend."

"Friend?" screeched Elma. "Do you know what she has done to us? She killed my cat! She's made me practically lose my mind by sending obscene letters, she's—"

"I killed your cross-eyed cat," Gertie said, eyes dead. "But not on purpose. I ran over him when I

drove up the driveway. Sebina just told me." She cradled Sebina's head in her lap. "Why don't you hurt me too? I helped her write the letters."

Elma stared at Gertie and then at the dead cat. It seemed to get bigger. . . .

"You and your stupid ashtrays. Too good for us all, weren't you. Thought you did the world a favor by marrying James. Never came to Herman's birthday parties. Bina always came. But you never met her, his beloved cousin from New York—thought you were the only relative that mattered, didn't you. Oh we had fun. And with these letters too." Out of the corner of her eye, Elma could see her stroke Sebina's hair. The floor had stopped shaking.

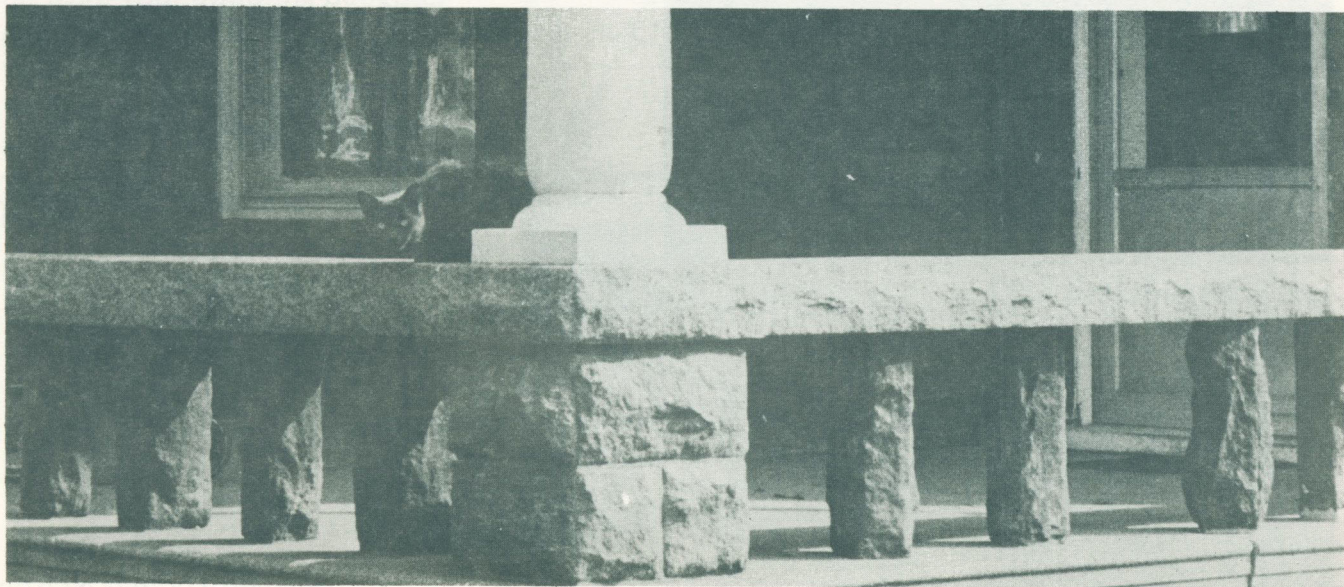
"I told her to come in and give you a good scare. She's quite an actress. Oh Sebina, what has Elma done?"

Elma looked from the cat to Gertie. "You killed my cat?" She saw Gertie's tears dropping onto the black sweater.

Gertie raised her eyes and for a second Elma could have sworn her frazzled hair was smooth and bright red-orange like it had been in their youth. "I'd turn my cheek one more time Lord, but I don't have much of a face left as it is."

Elma's face turned purple. "Fine time to start praying," she shrieked. She put on her coat, marched over to Muffins, gently put him in her arms, and marched out the door.

Twila Konynenbelt
Jr./Elementary Ed.





LeRoy Berentschot
Sr./BuAd, Art

In Ohio

*His pleasure
is treasure,
the chests of the best
buys of that hot
ohio auction day
that july.
the sheds,
leantos leaning on leantos
built of beams and bean poles
crowding the barn yard yawn
like crooked teeth
always hungry for
another haul.*

*the old fridgidaire,
forever defrosted
("good parts")
the as is disc,
a few thrown,
("needs parts")
the washing machine ringer,
rung
("good for something someday")*

*his pleasure
is treasure
and junk,
gyps
that trip to auctions
of hot
july
days in ohio.*

Ronald Thomas Nelson
Sr./Theatre Arts

Seventh Morning

grey green work shirts
from thirty years
with big boilers
were shelved only for Sunday
when you wore white
and I,
in cowboy dropseat flannels,
sat with your grandfather's
leather and scotch tape bound
bigger than two shoe boxes
book.
and I
talked of pictures
of bearded men
in lion's den
and boats
with tigers and bears
and you
played the radio
with songs about mighty forts
and thanksgiving courts
and you
gave cough drops when through.
and through
the door's crack
far from your doubting daughter
and lawless son in law
you
with crust from breakfast
and blood from coffee cup
you (and I)
knew.

Ronald Thomas Nelson
Sr./Theatre Arts



LeRoy Berentschot
Sr./BuAd, Art



Laughter of Children

Becki Stair
Jr./Art

*The laughter of children is contagious:
giggling over a twinkies picnic
stiffling in tall weeds making plans
to destroy the enemy held bridge
cackling while they race down rail-road tracks
singing off-key to the tune of spikes
beaten in monotone time
snickering to truth-or-dare confessions
of a stolen kiss behind the swing-set
or under the blanket in the bedroom*

*Shall we tape them
play-back in the dark hours
of silent morning
then cry
Father, let us be?*

Lynn De Young
Sr./T.A., English

Never

Will I ever
Find another to discover
or
Kiss before age twenty-
one little kiss!
Through child eyes see
a world without ending
a dump truck without costing
a house without cleaning
a meal without making
Take back
a stupid gesture
awkward answer
foolish cocksure
never,
Never,
will I ever.

Lucas Seerveld
Jr./Film, Philosophy

Rebecca

Rebecca, I love your great browns eyes,
your crooked knee and wobbling walk in water.
I want so much for you
to have a home
in your own body.

You grab the rail to crouch,
lowering into the wet
like a tentative believer come to the Baptist.
I fancy a voice calls an affirming
This one's mine.

I drag your trust, forcing
your feet off the bottom, coaxing
a timid flutter kick. Splash
once, you're nineteen now and still
in shallow water.

Last week I tried again
to make you float.
You sink. I am a life vest, a buoy
around your waist. Trust
yourself, and float.

I want so much for you.
Next week let's jump in and splash.
You may get water in your eyes.
I'll hold your hand.
at first

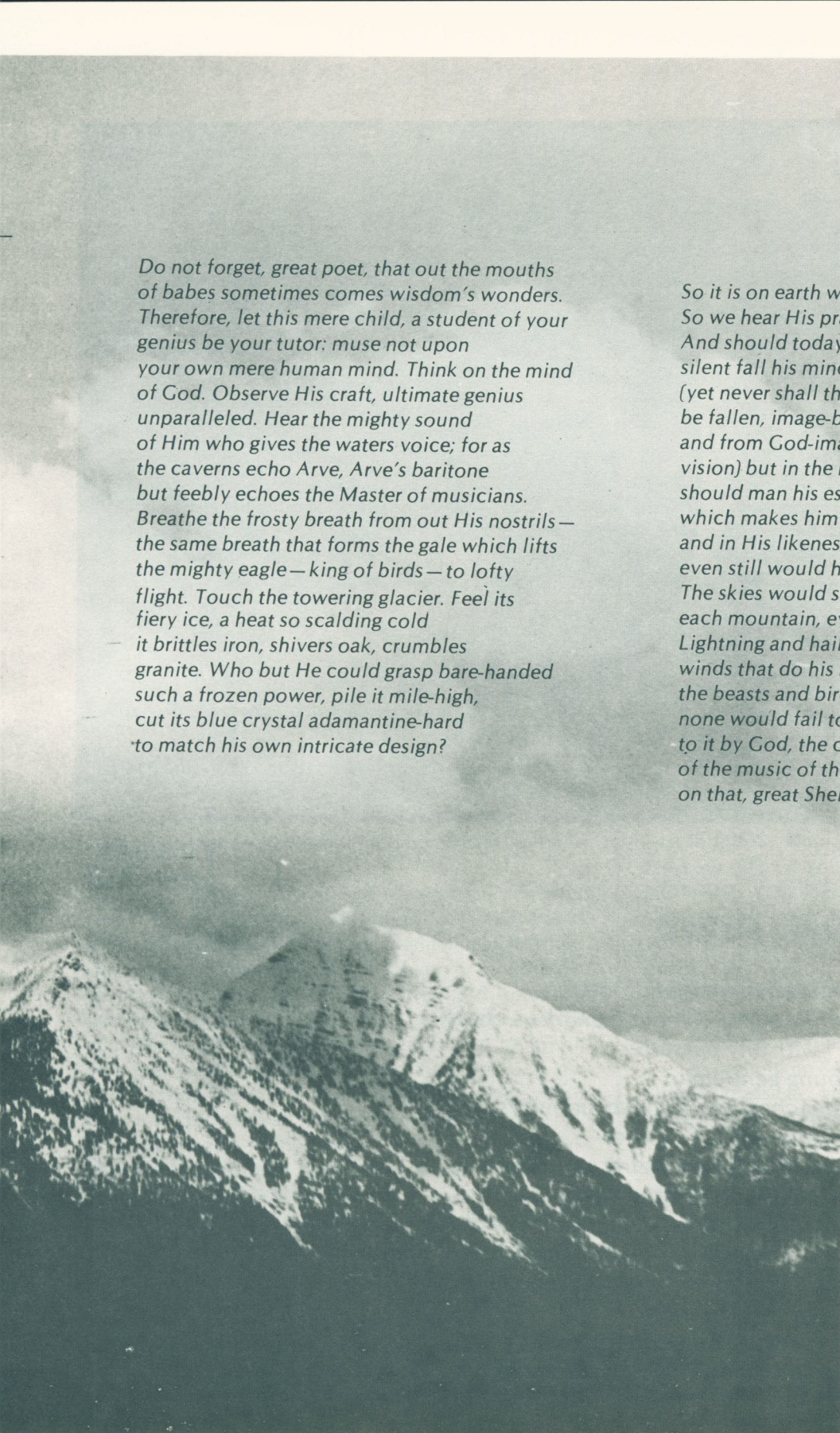
Lynn De Young
Sr./T.A., English

Lines composed upon reading Shelley's Mont Blanc

*Shelley, you dolt! Of course the wilderness
can speak in tongues mysterious. Its voice
shouts loud and full; proud as high Mount Blanc,
older than the ancient, tall and stately
pines that form his beard — wise, bristled sages,
yet mere suckling babes in comparison.
Its voice rings with more purity and constance
than the mountain's hoary crown whose icy
masses — crystal empires — grow and then
recede again with seasons' change. Have you
ears? Then hear — hear the Arve's great tumult
flood its great gorge with song of waters
blending with the breeze that plays the bows
of fir trees like harp strings. Have you eyes?
then see — look down from dizzying heights, look down
the Arve's ravine. Then lift your eyes and gaze
again to Blanc's vertiginous pinnacle.
Observe again, and with more care, the veiling
waterfall. Pierce its ethereal folds
with new vision. See? it hides an image
never chiselled by mere human hands,
yet intricately sculptured by an artist
greater far than any Michelangelo.*

*Whence comes this power in nature — would you know
this awful splendour, serene solemnity?
Who gave this wilderness its fearsome tongue
that shouts through silence? What composer breathe
this the vital song of every broiling river,
every mighty ocean wave, each bold
tempestuous mountain shower timpanied
with thunder? What deft-handed architect
designed each cragged and fissure-fraught glacier,
raised the Alps in turrets to himself,
majestic Blanc his temple's highest horn?
What goldsmith could conceive this mighty earth
form her mold, then pour creation brimful —
no, o'erflowing with glittering power?
Listen now if you would truly know.*





*Do not forget, great poet, that out the mouths
of babes sometimes comes wisdom's wonders.
Therefore, let this mere child, a student of your
genius be your tutor: muse not upon
your own mere human mind. Think on the mind
of God. Observe His craft, ultimate genius
unparalleled. Hear the mighty sound
of Him who gives the waters voice; for as
the caverns echo Arve, Arve's baritone
but feebly echoes the Master of musicians.
Breathe the frosty breath from out His nostrils —
the same breath that forms the gale which lifts
the mighty eagle — king of birds — to lofty
flight. Touch the towering glacier. Feel its
fiery ice, a heat so scalding cold
it brittles iron, shivers oak, crumbles
granite. Who but He could grasp bare-handed
such a frozen power, pile it mile-high,
cut its blue crystal adamant-hard
to match his own intricate design?*

*So it is on earth we see God's grandeur.
So we hear His praise, feel his power.
And should today man's intellect be stunted,
silent fall his mind's imaginative voice
(yet never shall this happen, for though mankind
be fallen, image-bearer he remains;
and from God-imaging springs man's creative
vision) but in the name of argument,
should man his essence lose, cease being that
which makes him man, a creature God-conceived,
and in His likeness empowered to conceive;
even still would heaven declare His glory.
The skies would still proclaim His handiwork;
each mountain, every hill shout forth his praise.
Lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy
winds that do his bidding, tree and bush,
the beasts and birds of ocean, field and forest,
none would fail to sing the part assigned
to it by God, the conductor and composer
of the music of the spheres. Think
on that, great Shelley, and tremble.*

Jeff Alons
Jr./T.A., English



Val Broek
Jr./Elem. Educ.

yonge street

teeming avenues talk footsteps
 while a grouchy old man plays chess
 with any passerby.
 a young gentleman
 bleached hair flopped sideways
 blows painful notes
 into his oxidizing saxophone.
 while his open hand case
 rests firmly on the pitted cobblestone
 and exposes his collected bits of metal.
 shuffling steps carry sets of searching eyes
 from shop to shop
 and moving bodies drain down
 around lust mingled with death.

Mark-Philip Venema
 So./Communications, Philosophy

Long, Same Rice That's Ready in—Five Minutes

My granddad had sixteen brothers and sisters. I hold no malice towards my great-grandparents, but the resulting permutations of relatives occasionally leaves me depressed—especially in this age when one is expected to give greeting cards for New Year's, Old Year's, and every nuance of occasion between. I've reached the point of despair. It's not even so much the outrageous prices that get me down—it's the horrible selection. Thinking one can find a card that is unique, worthwhile, and somehow personal reveals a mindset that still hopes for the runless nylon. As someone who studies English and is a Christian, I am especially irritated by one group of cards: the "Inspirational" section, usually located beneath a huge plastic sign graced with a praying hands design.

The queen of Inspirational poetry is Helen Steiner Rice. The blurb on her cards laud her as the "Inspirational Poet Laureate of America, known throughout the world for writings that bring hope, comfort, and cheer to people in all walks of life." I guess that's where the problem begins. I fail to be inspired.

But apparently that's just my opinion. Statistics reveal the woman has sold millions of cards, books, plaques, and posters mostly to evangelical Christians. Her "poetry" consist of writing rhymed "goodthink" verses about God, the Christian life, hard times and optimism. Cards for births, birthdays, deaths, marriages, and anniversaries reveal her to be an all-occasion specialist. Such a wide audience and pervasive influence must mean Helen Steiner Rice's work must have elements of worth and appeal. Surely.

I fail to find such appeal in the style of her work. The verses keep time better than a metronome. Tap your foot to the beat of this one: "There are always two sides, the Good and the Bad, / The Dark and the Light, and Sad and the Glad—" Such a tight forms leads to forced rhyme. Examine this excerpt from "For Girls Only": "... For regardless of society and the morals they disparage / Nothing in the world can take the place of love and marriage." The product is cranked out, wornout, cliché-packed prose, size 20 concepts squeezed and manipulated to fit a size 3 form.

Rice's poetry is dangerous as it advocates a view of Christianity easily accepted: the world is a place of

suffering but "Burdens are Things God Turns into Wings" and besides, "This World is Just a Resting Place." In her poem, "What is Life?" she gives this advice: "We know we are born to die and arise / For beyond this world in beauty lies / The purpose of living, the ultimate goal / God gives at birth to each seeking soul..."

Marx would have loved her. He despised Christians and viewed Christianity as a crutch for 90-pound weaklings who couldn't handle reality; for him, God was nothing more than a false comfort in suffering. Mrs. Rice seems to advocate such ideas as her poetry promotes a world-flight mentality and passive Christianity. Her poems contain no fight, no spirit of adversity against secular culture. Everything is mushy, religious goop that advocates tolerance and waiting for God's miraculous deliverance. One card whispers this prayer: "And as I sit here writing this a thought passed through my mind— / Why dwell on PAST or FUTURE or WHAT'S AHEAD or GONE BEHIND?" / Just follow GOD unquestioningly because YOU LOVE HIM SO, / For if you trust HIS JUDGMENT THERE is NOTHING YOU NEED KNOW!" The action she does take hardly taxes her: "I am perplexed and often vexed, and sometimes I cry and sadly sigh. . . ." She encourages feelings but not action; she fails to give insights and does not challenge. Monotone verses work like a drug.

But I can hear it already.

"You hold on—her cards and books have a basic, simple message very appreciated by those who receive them. Life is a struggle, but does that mean that one always has to be talking about it? At least her stuff is Christian, and that's more than you can say for most material these days."

All right, a concession—she is a Christian woman who has broken into a highly competitive market. She is presenting an alternative to secular greeting cards, and sometimes simple, optimistic verses are appreciated. But overuse has resulted in her verses becoming representational of "Christian poetry." Here's the resulting question: does her poetry present a true view of Christianity? I say her prose is too narrow, too sweet. And since her Christian cards (sacred poetry) must always mention God—guess what term gets applied to those that don't?

To those who think her poetry has depth and does justice to the concepts of which she writes, listen to an excerpt from her autobiography:

Once a woman in Massachusetts made a claim that she was the champion verse writer with over 100,000 verses composed in 24 years. Some of my co-workers took umbrage, knowing my output far exceeds that. In fact, some people who like to engage in such statistics one figured that in my heyday I was averaging over 250 verses a day, which comes to 75,000 plus a year. Consider I've been in the business for 40 years—my total probably reaches more than 2 million. (p. 75).

I'm not really surprised that many of her poems are embarrassingly similar. She's got quite a few favorite rhyme pairs, one of which is sunshine and rain.

"For LIGHTS and SHADOWS, SUN and RAIN, / SADNESS and GLADNESS, JOY and PAIN, combine to make our lives complete / And give us VICTORY over DEFEAT . . ." says a poem called "Love Divine, All Love Excelling." And another, "It Takes the Bitter and the Sweet to Make a Life Full and Complete," agrees: "Life is a mixture of sunshine and rain, / Laughter and teardrops, pleasure and pain, Low tides and high tides, mountains and plains, / Triumphs, defeats, and loses and gains. . ."

My, life seems full of such paradoxes! Although the poem "What is Marriage?" doesn't mention rain and sunshine, it mentions "pleasure and pain," another favorite: "Both pleasure and pain, the glad and the sad, / Teardrops and laughter, the good and the bad" combine to make marriage the undefineable thing it is. "Look on the Sunny Side" absolutizes these paradoxes: "There are always two sides, the Good and the Bad, the Dark and the Light, and Sad and the Glad. . ."

But finding poems that sound alike hurts less than finding two that seem to contradict. While discussing happiness, Mrs. Rice advocates that "Everybody everywhere seeks happiness, it's true, / But finding it and keeping it seems difficult to do—." In a later poem she claims "Happiness is something we create in our mind, / It's not something you search for and so seldom find." Now I'm not sure if she advocates searching or not! And things get more muddled after looking at "How to Find Happiness": "Happiness is something that is never far away, / It's as close as the things we do and say—." Here happiness is equated with doing good deeds. Although in totality the poems come to similar conclusions, contradictions exist along the way.

But most don't take the time to examine Rice's poetry. They send an Inspirational card out of desperation, wanting something that mentions God and has moral standards. This is understandable, but what arises from this mash of reasonings is a challenge to create poetry for greeting cards and books that does justice to our Creator God. In advocating that Helen Steiner Rice's poetry receive a quick retirement, we must be prepared to fill the vacuum. That difficult challenge for quality work presents itself to all Christians presently buying Helen's poetry with quasi-commitment. Accomplishing this will take time. But I'm disillusioned enough with five-minute Rice to wait and work.

Twila Konynenbelt
Jr./Elementary Ed.

Click

we,
three of the finest
salvation army orphans
overdressed in our olive blue jean drab
that we sift
from the thrift—
secondhand-pay-what-you-can
shops of Vancouver, Kent, Boston, Toronto
Rotterdam and Beaver Falls.
AWOL-ing
from cornfield front tears
and
a-lulling
while classroom mushroom clouds clear,
the Kodak cossacks
pose
forever froze within a thirty-five millimeter frame.

they are
shell shocked
but hell hocked
but still hurt
and hope
for another R and R and you
when we toast our fair maids
and toast and marmalade

again.

Ronald Thomas Nelson
Sr./Theatre Arts

A black and white photograph of a carnation flower in a glass jar. The flower is dark and has a long stem with a single leaf. It is placed in a clear glass jar that is partially filled with water. The jar has some faint, illegible markings on it. The background is a textured, mottled grey.

a Sally's in Wheeling

The old man
racks
to porcelain privy
to spill
witness.

he
hacks
red carnations
blooming an
untushed
unflushed
eulogy

Ronald Thomas Nelson
Sr./Theatre Arts

Brian Dykhuizen
Jr./Elem. Educ.



Brian Dykhuizen
Jr./Elem. Educ.

Dancing in the Dark

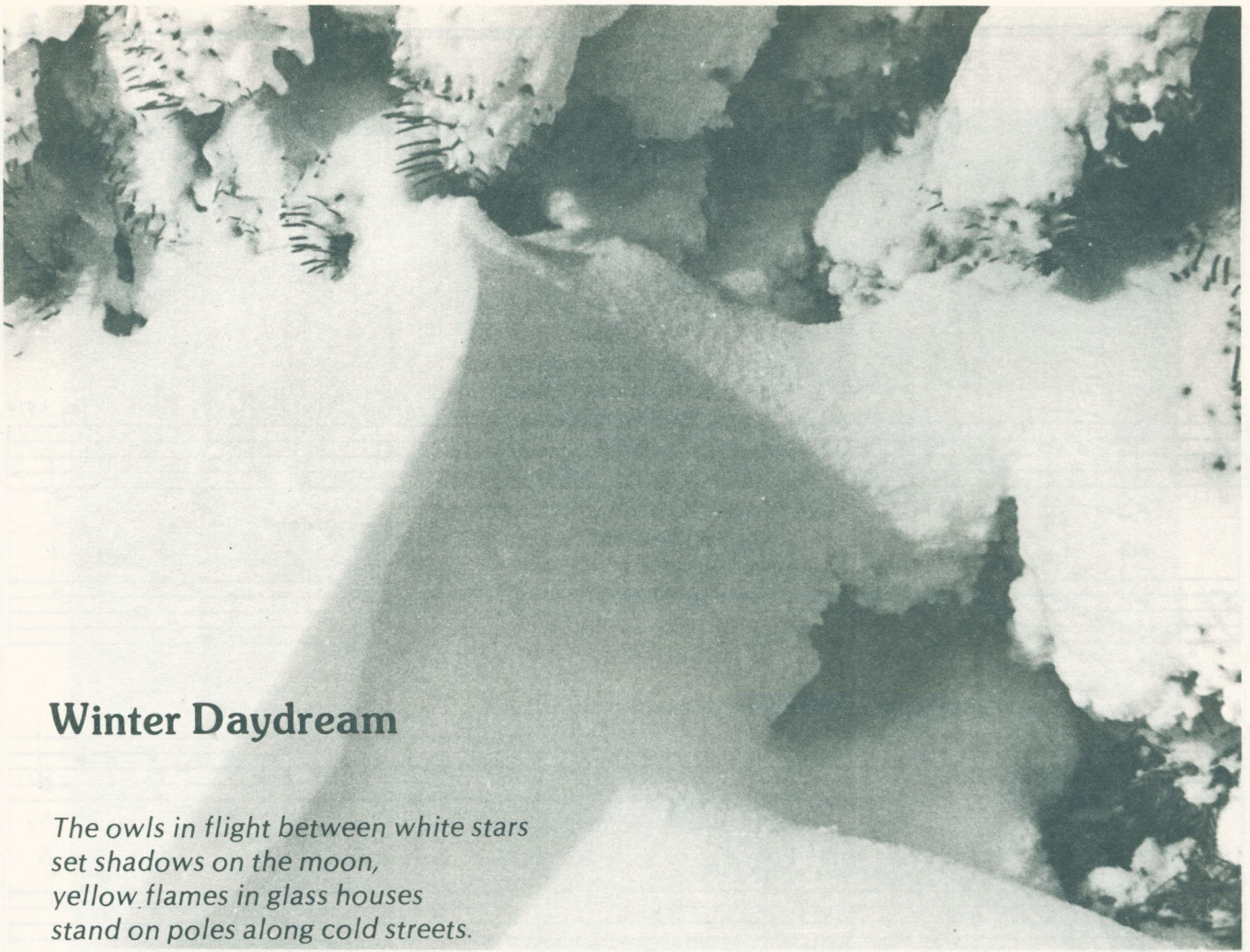
Lyndon Gritters & Randy Vander Mey 1984

Far from the end of my life I feel all my love glowing like a
mp

coal
 My love flies far from this hidden place over the tree tops the
mf

mountains the clouds are carpets where I walk where I find you you are my Pleiades dancing in the dark.
mp

Lyndon Gritters
 Sr./Pre-Med.



Winter Daydream

*The owls in flight between white stars
set shadows on the moon,
yellow flames in glass houses
stand on poles along cold streets.*

*He walks city trails
beneath leafless trees
and a smoky dark sky.*

*With slow cold fingers
he brushes past wild green pines
the smell of thick sap, sticks, broken needles.*

*A silent breath freezes in the windless night,
while Christmas chimes sing and stutter
among neon storefronts and a hundred St. Nicks.*

*The owls in flight between white stars
set shadows on the moon,
yellow flames in glass houses
stand on poles along cold streets.*

Brian Westra
Jr./Biology

Brian Dykhuizen
Jr./Elem. Educ.

*Leaves, glued to dark pavement,
Stems raised in mute appeal,
Naked, lean-fleshed,
Grasping for snow's mask.*

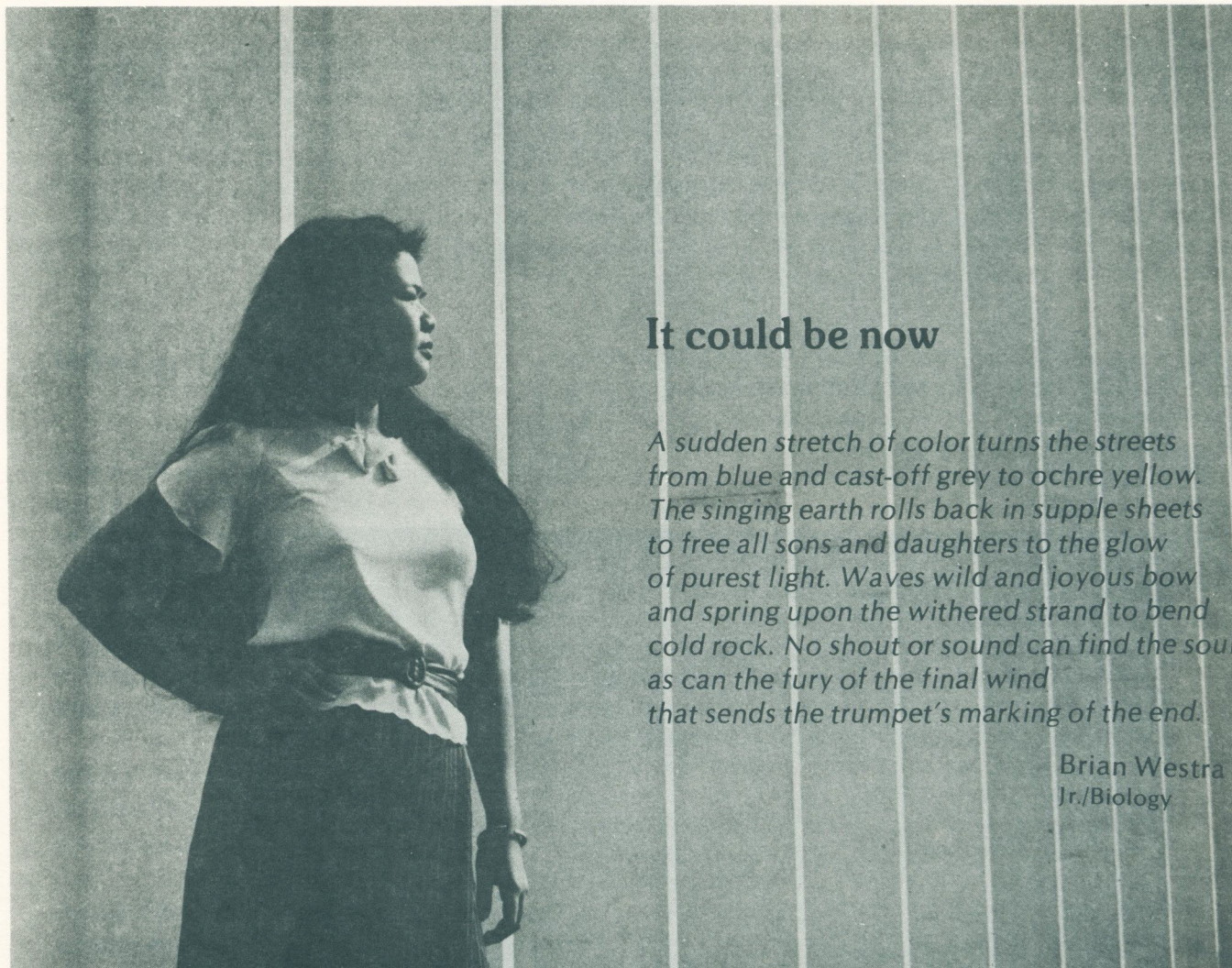
On the Night of the First Snow

*You were born in the month
of your father, grandfather and great-grandfather
on the night of the first snow.
As outside, whiteness covered
stained, scarred fields,
in you the fourth generation met life
with newly opened eyes.
Ten fingers and ten toes
(your mother counted)
soon wrapped in fleeced white
you seemed the soft breath of perfection.
Your mother held you, wept,
unfolded your clenched fist,
watched snowflakes melt against
the dark window.*

Laura Apol Obbink
Jr./English



LeRoy Berentschot
Sr./BuAd, Art

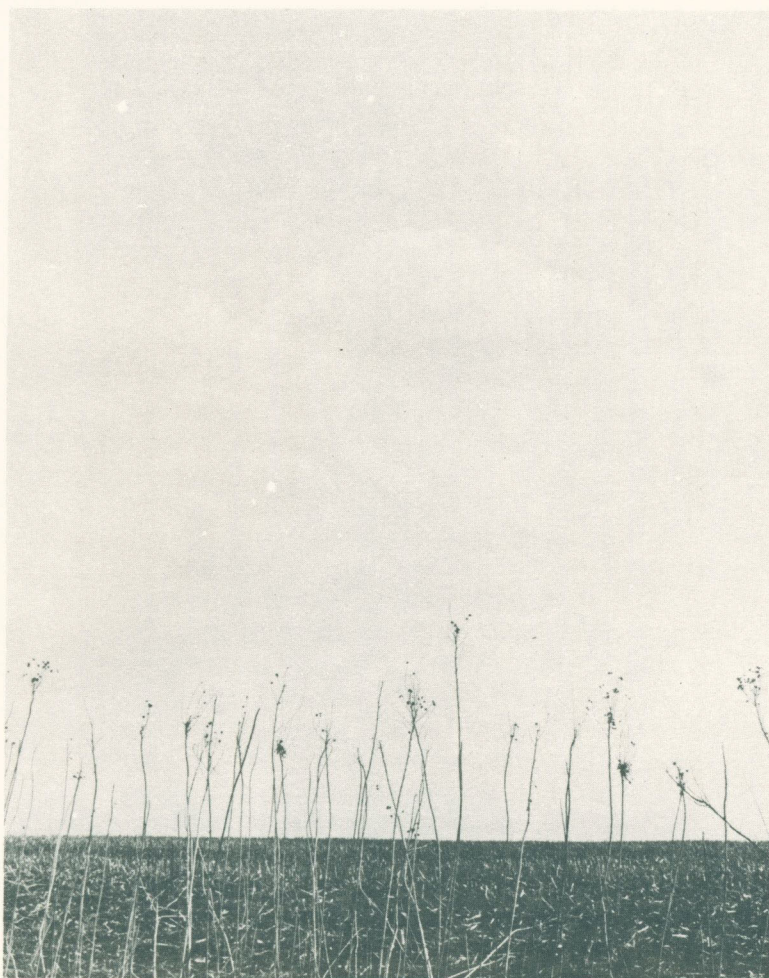


It could be now

*A sudden stretch of color turns the streets
from blue and cast-off grey to ochre yellow.
The singing earth rolls back in supple sheets
to free all sons and daughters to the glow
of purest light. Waves wild and joyous bow
and spring upon the withered strand to bend
cold rock. No shout or sound can find the soul
as can the fury of the final wind
that sends the trumpet's marking of the end.*

Brian Westra
Jr./Biology

Tonja Veltman
So./Art



*"Will you come visit me,
In the silence after a poem,
In eternity?"*

Wendy Dykstra
Sr./English Ed.
