

DENALI



LCC's Literary Magazine  SPRING 1988



Denali is a student-managed literary arts publication of Lane Community College.

Denali welcomes submissions of poetry, photography, graphic arts, essays, character sketches, literary narratives, short fiction, etc. Please enclose a SASE for guidelines.

The **Denali** staff would like to thank Dorothy Wearne, Karen Locke, Jack Powell, Mike Rose, and the rest of the LCC staff and faculty for their immeasurable assistance.

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The Arctic Explorer

She and I strolled
Spring night
Quiet river's bank
She kissed me
My lips tasted children

She said
explorers are lonely
like water running over ice

Within me were miles of silent snow
And mine were the only footprints
On that frozen land

Sean McGill



Joyce Kommer The Storyteller

In Spooky's Eyes

There were clouds in Spooky's eyes
There was a little beer in Spooky's glass,
And he told me this;
There were arms and legs lying, leaving fresh green
stumps.
Young stumps in the jungle.
There were voices in the night,
Eerie, oriental English
Like demon chimes they chanted
To the sweating teen-age soldiers.
"Hey G.I., you die tonight G.I.
G.I., fuck you G.I."
The voices were locked forever in Spooky's head.
Death came calling in the night,
With the smell of fear and rage and blood.
Only Spooky heard the voices ten years later,
In the bourbon and the blood he remembered
Those lonely heads with hollow faces.
On small town streets he staggered,
And still he heard the voices.
"Tonight G.I., tonight."
The moon rose, clouds moved,
And there were tears in Spooky's eyes.

*Steve Nasset***Mourning**

The buffalo roamed
And ate grass
And nourished the Earth
And the Indians roaming beside them.
White men slaughtered the buffalo
And the Indians.
Their skulls and bones nourished the Earth.
The years and coyotes
Carried off the remains.
The windy restless spirits
Moaned over the plains.
The Indians are gone.
The buffalo are gone.
Now only the ghosts of the prairie remember the past
And the grass, bowing its head,
Remains.

Steve Nasset

Greener Grass

You push a button and the water belches through
 We wait for coffee
 I am as simple and invisible
 As the percolator as the doorknob
 We talk predictably down
 a well-fingered list: Klee Spitzenbergs
 urban renewal We admire each other's second
 hand jackets agree on interiors agree
 on foreign policy agree on pie crust I'm
 like a twenty year vow
 you're ready to trade in on a whore so
 you figure you'll save yourself the trouble But watch me
 tomorrow
 I'll chop my hair buy white lipstick
 find you in the street
 and tell you it's on the house.

*Ruth Simer***TRUTH IN THIRTY SYLLABLES**

You peer into my cold heart
 and imagine intensities
 that are not there.
 You are seeing
 only yourself
 reflected.

*Brenda Shaw***The Young Man**

He is sitting there again,
 the same man I saw yesteryear.
 I love him.
 I have always loved him.
 I can see what you see,
 the pipe,
 the deep crevices in his skin,
 the weathered, worked hands,
 But I still love him.
 Long are gone, the days of youth.
 I remember.
 The man of games, of running swiftly.
 The rugged play of his, his beautiful body.
 He winked at me, I giggled.
 I fell in love.
 Oh, how he loved children,
 to tease, to tickle, to taunt.
 He made them laugh, as he laughed.
 I remember.
 He was stern, he was soft.
 He guided my life, with a gentle hand.
 I think, I feel, I love.
 Warm sunny days of happiness,
 warm nights of splendor.
 Frolicing a lifetime together.
 I love him.
 I can see what you see.
 I can look deeper.
 And deeper still.
 Into his eyes I could drown.
 I can see what you do not see.
 In his eyes, I can see a young man.

Cristi Gregory

Why can't you agree with me?

Why can't you agree with me?

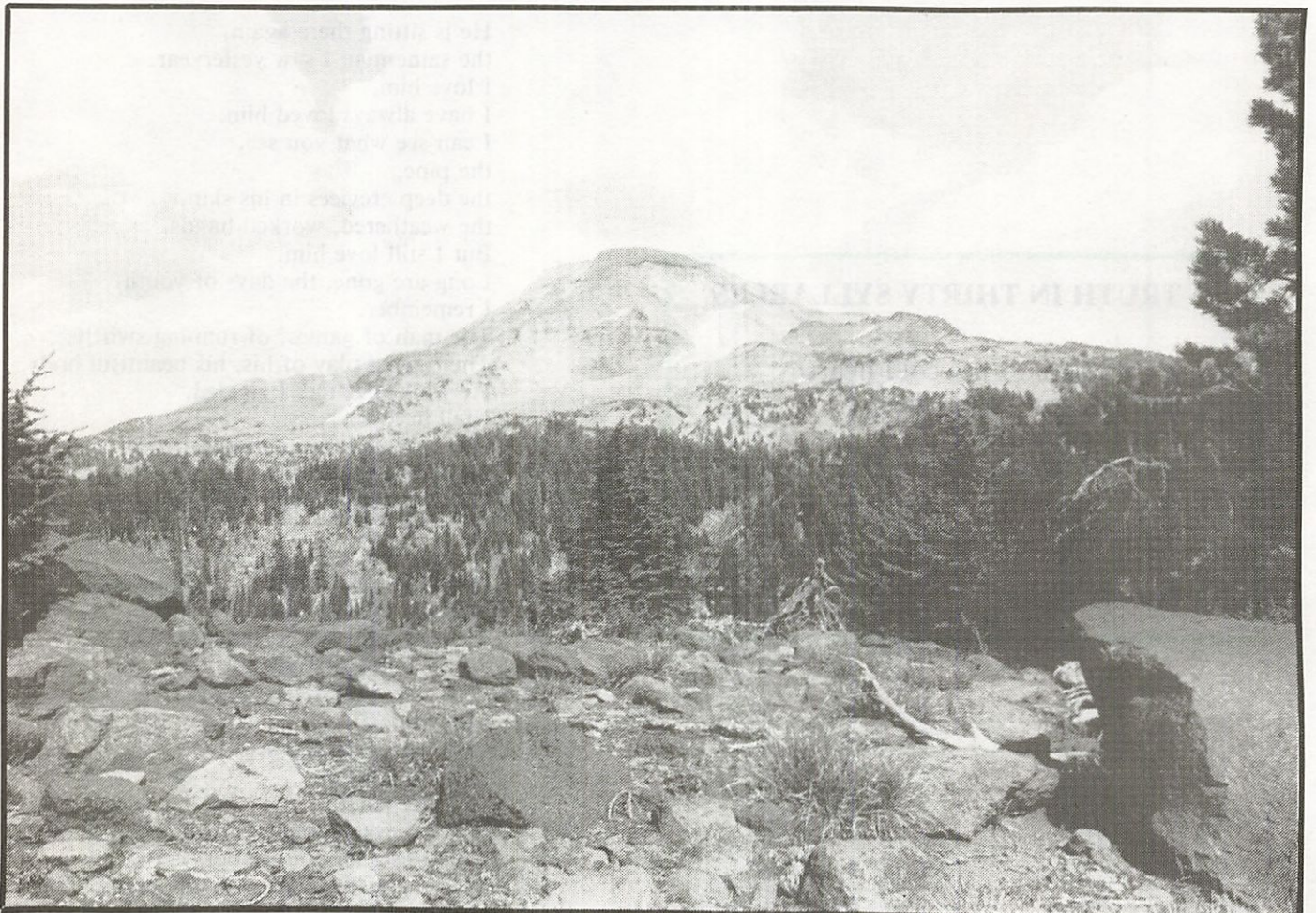
I pick up a blade of grass
and ask what is it you see?

Why, it is a blade of grass--
Small and insignificant.

I see a piece of the world--
Bold and magnificent...

That is why we can't agree.

Baymont Cutchler



Mike Primrose Untitled

The Hidden Feast

Seaducks float above encrusted rocks,
now buried, where I knelt at dawn
to pry in the closed world
of a mussel bed.
Gray waves rear and gallop white toward shore.
Harlequins drift sidewise
and backwards down glassy slopes,
through archipelagos of foam,
and always know when
to dip, as if pulled by a string,
and pop out behind the brawl.
Down where they swim and feed,
sunflower stars rush in with the tide,
dissolving spines from sea urchins,
pushing billowing folds of stomach
in their spineless cousins' mouths.
Nudibranchs munch poison sponge,
claiming the poison for their own.
And a haze of tentacles and waving plumes
filter the soup of waste and decay.
Bodies cement to bodies, holdfast.
Plants in animals, plant-like animals
perfecting their niche,
their slight advantage.
Waves roll over and through
the dim-lit frenzy of feeding
or being food.
Scoters ride the steep walls
and gulls wheel screeching down the troughs
hunting for scraps.

John Hicks

The carbonate-silicate geochemical cycle

Snail and clam shells
litter the coast
and the ocean floor where it goes
under a line of advancing volcanoes.

These shells slip down
the continental slide,
melt in magma
into carbon dioxide.

That gas escapes volcanic vents
and fumes into the atmosphere.
Clouds form in cold, ocean air
and sail before the wind to land

where mountains catch their keels.
These vapor shipwrecks spill
rain on silicate rocks.
Ions wash off and stream downhill,

slow at the coast, sink in the sea:
calcium ions and HCO_3 .
These ions sprinkle charged snow
on the continental shelf below.

There, clams and snails
are born as naked cells
that build these ions into
calcium carbonate shells.

Peter Jensen

FOR EMILY DICKINSON

Look, how the Amherst roofs
rhyme across town and
trees in summer foliage
burn like heavenly clouds!
Through this raised window
smell the night coming on
as it touches grass stalks
and hollyhocks and closes up
damp morning glory trumpets.

We love New England's outwardness
pregnant at this hour. One need
only overlook a yard or garden
or glance across town to feel
the community of one's self
with its own lamps coming on
and streetsigns with coordinate names.

We stand on the edge of aphorisms,
poems: language everywhere we look,
anything we know. This is our summer.
Our window brings immediate sky.

Remember the storm
that ripped leaves insideout
until their tongues wagged
rushed into speaking?

Then one blue-white streak froze them,
caught up our breath as we turned away
blind from the glass,
our doom upon us.

Prophet thunder rolled,
shook our lungs.

Again dark and the leaves
stopping drops of rain,
turning rightsideout, tasting
rain that scares no one.

We still laugh. Universe,
austere and high, comes and visits us
tapping the window, familiar,
our uncle old-whatever-his-name-is
with watch and jack knife in his pockets
and all implements to smoke his big crooked pipe,
a chunk of root from Spain!

God's home again -- his matchflame
tames the dark. Whatever he smokes
smells like earth, like compost smoldering.

Tonight as we stand gazing,
our hands reach to the elements.
We contribute fear and wonder
shot through with the forking flashes of words,
lighting us in a weird light,
leafcrown and roofpeak, reinventing
Amherst right before our eyes.

Erik Muller

WRITER'S BLOCK

This barren field
lies fallow, fallow,
fallow.
No green word sends its shoot
through still earth.
No flaming birds starts up in the wild bush,
and the sea beyond waits
in deathless hush.
Will time permit a burgeoning
in this black soil?
Or will the bird still sing
fallow, fallow,
fallow?

Brenda Shaw

WAKING ALONE

Waking alone,
her side of the bed
still sunny,
I found
under her pillow
the moonlight
she collects
to use
during the dark hours
of her day.

Wendell Anderson

I KNOW YOU

"I know you,"
They all say;
Though they've never heard the prairie wind
Or sat with me 'til morning.

Wendell Anderson



A SUMMER'S WINDOW

I remember Harold, and the summer I was twelve years old. I remember too, his old red International pickup, rusted and dented and covered with desert dust, and, in all probability, held together with bailing wire. Hardly a day went by that Harold didn't drive that old pickup into town, and then he would sit, along with his cronies, in front of Meribell's grocery store drinking orange soda pop.

We never had any conversation, Harold and I, until my twelfth summer. Without preamble he walked up to me one day and asked if I would like to meet Myrtle. I looked over my shoulder to Mom who, from behind the grocery store glass, waved to me to go on. She knew about this I guess. He was safe enough apparently.

"Okay," I said.

We climbed into that International, and rattled down main street onto the highway. Harold drove west past Miller's corner, past the Tamarish tree, then turned off onto two dirt tracks aiming through dry grass and sage brush.

The truck meandered through the sage, past cactus and Joshua trees. No one spoke. Harold's hands gripped the steering wheel; mine gripped the door handle.

We drove up to a cabin where Harold stopped the truck, and turned off the ignition.

"Close your eyes," he said.

This was getting more bizarre by the minute, but I closed my eyes. I sat there wondering if my mother was as demented as this old man. Furthermore I wondered about my self sitting there in the desert heat with my eyes closed. I heard Harold's cowboy boots crunch across the coarse sand. A fly buzzed.

"You can open now."

I opened my eyes staring straight into the muzzle of a furry faced honey eyed burro.

"This is Myrtle."

I gently pushed back her nose, and squeezed out the truck.

She was dainty as a ballerina, charcoal gray with black striping around her eyes, down her back, across her withers. She nosed my pockets.

"She's looking for treats," Harold said slipping a sugar cube into my hand.

I offered it on open palm, and her delicate lip whisked it away. I was acutely aware of the old man standing beside me. I rubbed Myrtle's neck. She nosed my hands, my pockets.

"Would you like the job of riding her?"

I patted Myrtle. My heart was pounding.

"She needs exercise."

I turned to the old man, and noticed for the first time that his eyes were the same color as the sky. "I would love to exercise Myrtle," I said.

Thus began my summer. I rode Myrtle every day. I began early in the morning before the sun was high, riding my bike to the cabin. And, every day I carried a treat in my pocket -- an apple, a carrot, or a sugar cube.

I remember the hill overlooking the Joshua trees. Myrtle would stand transfixed. I listened to the sound of the gen-

tle wind, and I could hear the rushing of the blood through my own ears. Occasionally the screech of a hawk, like a primordial scream, would pierce the stillness. We on the ground could feel the intensity of his cry, and then we would watch him float effortlessly on the air, punctuating his flight with an echoing screech, gliding, surveying his kingdom. The wind, as though stirring us back to reality, would ruffle Myrtle's thatch and mine telling us it was time to return. With full hearts we would pull ourselves away and traipse, in a daze, back to the cabin.

When it was too hot to ride I sometimes brushed Myrtle. Sometimes Harold and I sat chewing on grass stems. He spoke of life and the universe, and matter being neither made nor destroyed. He liked talking of things otherworldly.

One blistering day Harold and I sat at his table. He downed half an orange Nehi in one gulp. I held mine to my forehead.

"It's time for me to put my life in order," he said.

"Order?" A hot poker pierced my chest. Death was the only subject that brought such a firm affirmation. I didn't know what to say.

I stammered, "Wh-what's happening, Harold?"

"You can have Myrtle if you want, or she could go free. The decision is yours."

"Have Myrtle?" I spun around. "Why...why would you give away Myrtle? Myrtle is your best friend. Why would you want her wild? You wouldn't give away Myrtle unless you were going to die. Are you going to die Harold?"

"Yes," he said softly.

"How do you know?" My voice reached a high pitch, "Are you sick?"

"No, I'm not sick. I just know."

"But how? Nobody knows when they're going to die."

"I do."

"Harold, no!" I slammed the orange soda down on the table and ran to him. No time for formalities, I threw my arms around his leathery neck. I laid my head against his chest and I could smell his body sweat and his body sweat and his vanilla tobacco.

"It's not a bad thing, Honey...you know I don't really believe in death. I know my spirit lives forever -- like the timeless desert. I'm timeless too. Only, Sharon, I haven't found a way to stay in this body forever...I haven't found the answer yet."

"Do you need to see a doctor Harold?" I raised my head to look into his eyes. "Maybe they can fix you."

"Can you see me in a hospital? No, I'll die at home, in the desert."

"Don't give up. I don't want you to die -- you say you don't believe in death -- don't die then."

He reached to comfort me.

"No!" I pulled away rushing to the window.

Outside the sun beat down. How could it? It just went on and on oblivious to our suffering, oblivious to two souls in some cabin on some God-forsaken desert, grappling with life and with death. The sun just shone, not blink-

ing, not hiding its face for one moment in reverence or awe or sorrow.

"Why are you doing this?" I spun around facing him, "You talk about living forever -- about matter being neither made nor destroyed, about being one with the source -- then you say you're going to die." I screamed, "And you're not even sick!"

"Why must I get sick? I'll just slip out of my body and move on."

"How do you know this? You don't know this!"

"I do know it -- I've done it before -- I remember."

"Then why do it again -- why not make this life it? Why go through the whole entire mess again? Can you imagine being born again? I can't! I don't want to -- it's either this life or forget it."

"You might change your mind someday. My body isn't strong anymore. These past few months I have felt my body and soul separate. Sometimes I see my body, only I'm hovering above it, slightly to the right and attached by a thin clothesline -- I know one of these days the line will break and I'll be off."

"There comes a time, when you'll want to be a part of all there is. I've lived in the desert for forty years. I've watched the hawk and the rattlesnake. I've seen a mother mouse rush out to carry her baby back to the nest by the scruff of its neck. Every fiery sunrise has been seared into my soul. Every sunset purple and cool has helped me to know what being alive is."

"The animals know their time -- when to prepare for winter, when to bask in the sun. I know my time too. Some say you can take your body when you leave, maybe, I don't know. Mine's pretty worn out anyway, and I don't see that it makes all that much difference. I'll just be a part of it all. I'll be the dust stirred by a herd of wild burros."

I was quiet.

Finally I said, "I'll love you always, Harold."

Harold dropped his head. I saw tears fill his eyes, but I pretended I didn't see. "Let's take care of Myrtle," I said.

There was no choice really. I loved Myrtle with all my heart, but she'd always been free. I didn't want to pen her. Her spirit belonged with the desert wind. I'm sure she thought every leaf rustled for her benefit. She chose to be with Harold because of friendship and food, not fences. I couldn't see her in my backyard, standing around the way I see some horses, standing, standing.

"You mentioned a wild herd last week, Harold," I said, "let's go find it."

We spent our days in the pickup scouring the countryside. We kept our attention on Myrtle's forthcoming new life and freedom. I watched Harold a lot, his Stetson pulled down to shield his eyes. I noticed that his blue eyes got paler blue until they almost faded away.

"I miss Myrtle," he told me one day.

"She's back at the cabin, Harold."

"I mean my wife -- Myrtle's named after her."

"Oh," I looked at this gentle man beside me maneuvering the truck around cactus, over shrubs. One day he stopped and waited for a rattlesnake to crawl out of our path. "Are you afraid to die, Harold?" I asked.

"No."

"Most people are."

"I know."

"How come you're not?"

"I know I'll live forever -- why would I be afraid of that?"

"But it's an unknown. It means leaving this life, the life we know."

"For a better one."

"Heaven?" I asked.

"Not the way it's normally thought -- like heaven or hell. There's no hell, there's no heaven."

"How do you know these things?"

"I didn't live to be eighty for nothing."

"You're eighty?"

Harold laughed, "I tried to stop counting years ago, maybe I'm older."

"Honey," Harold added, "the body is just a house for the wonderful creative spark of life that is really us. Afraid to die? No, I'm not. It's just changing clothes."

"What about pain?"

"I've felt pain. There may be a little when the nerves kick out. The moment of death is glorious. It's just changing clothes."

"What about pain?"

"I've felt pain. There may be a little when the nerves kick out. The moment of death is glorious. It's just moving toward the light, the light of an all-loving presence. It's our god-self. Never be afraid, Honey. Love what you are."

I learned a lot that summer I was twelve.

One week before school started, we saw a cloud of dust off in the distance. It arose from beneath the feet of a small herd of burros moving west.

Rushing back, we loaded Myrtle into the truck and drove out to meet them.

There were eight burros, three jennys with foals, a single young burro, and an old jack. One ear stood straight, the other flopped. The way he stood, protective, defiant, between his little herd and us, I knew nothing could harm Myrtle without first dealing with him. A little foal peered at us from beneath its mother's belly.

"Could Myrtle have a foal?" I asked Harold.

"Of course she could. And I bet she'd have one every bit as scrappy as that old master over there."

We lowered the ramp from the back of the truck, and Myrtle daintily stepped down.

The old master ran to her braying that horrible sound, but when they nudged each other, I knew they had connected in what the animal kingdom would call love.

Harold died six weeks later. Dad said he walked into the desert one day with a bottle of Jack Daniels.

I know he didn't drink much, but I imagine him toasting that day, toasting himself, toasting the universe, and Myrtle, and me.

We found a note in the cabin, and three thousand dollars, "For Sharon's college education," it said.

I'm grown now with a little girl of my own. Tomorrow we're visiting my hometown, and in my pocket I'm carrying an apple, a carrot, and a sugar cube -- you never know what old friend I might run into.

A Common Egret

A common egret extends delicate architecture
like incantations unfolding from its shoulders
and leaves the river rippling circles
around its sudden loss.

Shell-white hands flare across the evening,
pooling its vaporous blue
in the feathered symmetries of their palms,
and arch the gaunt body through time.

The clasp of form and function descends
by hollow bone, stiff quills, barbs,
interlocking barbules, carbon chains, and
down out of sight;

this is my Christ walking on the waters:

each life exquisitely equipped by death
for the particulars of its existence,
a complexity foreshadowed in the order of a star.

John Hicks



Michael Saker Grace in its Place

Swiss Swans (1291-1991)

Swans take over both banks of the Rhein
as the river slowly floods,
and I wonder when swans
will apply for hotel rooms

along the river at Stein am Rhein.
A room for six with a view
of the water and a diving board
stuck out the window.

We will eat dinner all day, when we please,
so crumble your croissants and rolls
and tell each waitress: dress
in her black skirt, yellow blouse,

and white apron to hand feed us crumbs.
No, we don't require wine, but you may need
lots of local bottles of white wine to go
with fish swimming in your restaurants!

It's been twenty years, since we and our river
took over this post-card town. We're tired of tourists
who take our pictures and hiss at us.
It's time for swans to have some real fun!

Who'll pay for all this? You Swiss
are so clever at financial arrangements.
We're sure you'll find a way to pay
for swans in hotels, swans in the streets,

and swans in townhall councils as we meet
to balance all swan party interests,
so our swan government will last (like yours)
another seven hundred years!

We will declare in four official swan tongues
and learn to manage bank accounts,
to store the skimmings of the world
in numbered, secret files,

while we charge clients seventeen percent
to hoard loot from sacked foreign aid,
gambling, arms and drug deals far away
from near-sighted accountants and taxmen.

O yes, we swans are very Swiss!
We've learned so much from seven centuries
of paddling up and down the Rhein.
We know how to raise our wings and hiss

like soldiers with cantonal flags and beaks
to drive all enemies back where they belong.
We don't mind looking elegant and rich
when we're enjoying peace, so we will order

many fine swan sculptures for each park:
of swans wearing helmets, swans with Leda in the dark,
swans telling tales to cygnets of ugly apes
who grew up to be movie stars,

and swans discovering white quarks with long necks.
Our only problem is: how long will this flood last?
Can Swiss clocks tell if there is time? Can we
install and defend a strong, swan democracy?

Peter Jensen



Michael Saker Just Passing Through

THE SOURCE

I woke at four
and thought about the
letters to write
the people to see
the plans to make
the hours booked full
no time, no time
and the words began to form
as they do, from nowhere
out came a poem
and another
and another
they kept coming
a shining dozen
and when I'd spun them all
I understood my childhood.

Brenda Shaw

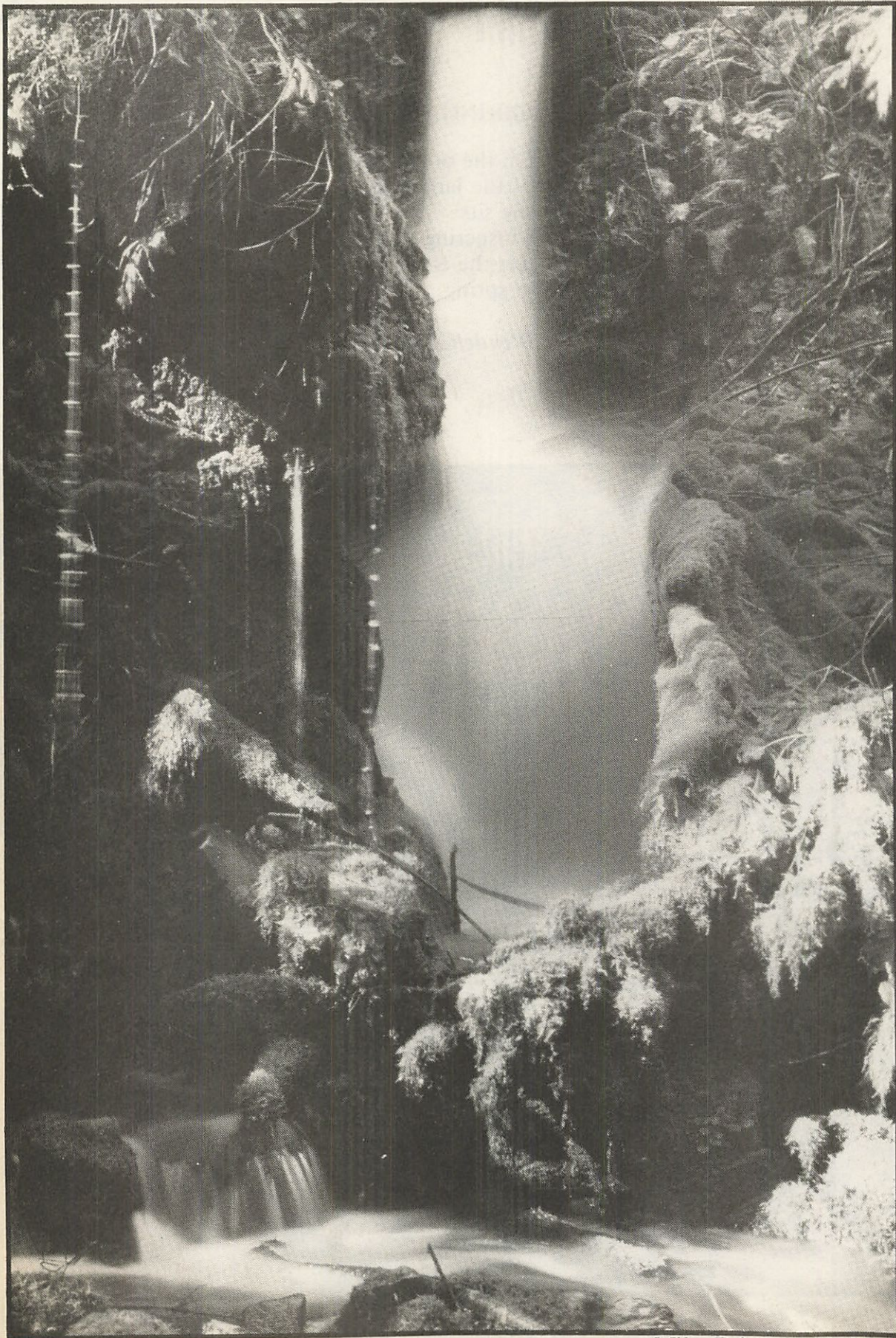
SPRING SISTER

On the other side
of the jade wall
she sits
whispering
like the earth
in spring.

Wendell Anderson



Darlene Cooper **Untitled**



Mike Primrose Untitled