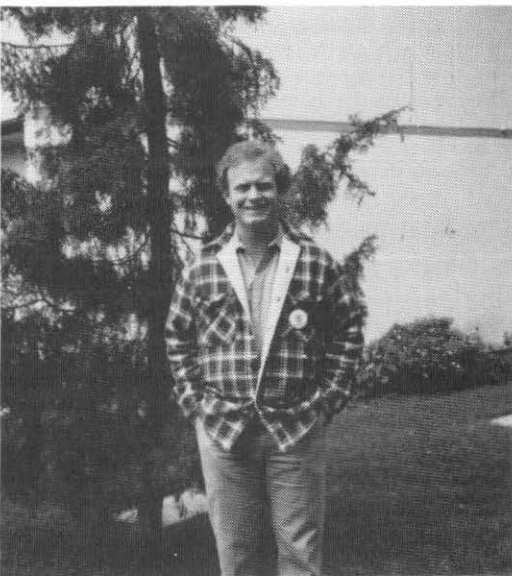


THE PASTURE

(Thomas Merton's Heart)

by **Michael Rukstelis**, C. O.



MICHAEL RUKSTELIS

I walked up to the open pasture tonight,
what they call Merton's Heart.

I had climbed hard to find the trail
and had worried about getting lost:
no matter how often I read it, the road
didn't fit the map in my hand. And then
when I found the road, I saw how it grew
up the darker side of a piney hill.

I followed it among deep greens and quiet ferns;
the only other movement there like mine
was a deer's — disappearing into the bush.

When I got to the place, I was winded,
so I sat down on my ankles and tried
to yield to the fat smell of the earth
on the pasture floor, but wondered instead
who might own this land. It was hard not to see
impatient police puffing hysterical after me.
But only flies came to hover above my heat.

So, I watched the dark cycle of the trees take
the last light of day at their tops.
Later I trod over the doughy clay, clumsy
like some drunk genius, still trying hard to believe.
Then I crossed over from the pasture
and passed through the slight wall of trees
that separated the Heart from the bare shoulder
of grass; here I saw pastures open up from below
like small grateful windows. What I had thought
to see was who had climbed through the valley
years ago — immediately, however,
I felt the surprise of my standing.

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