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The Road

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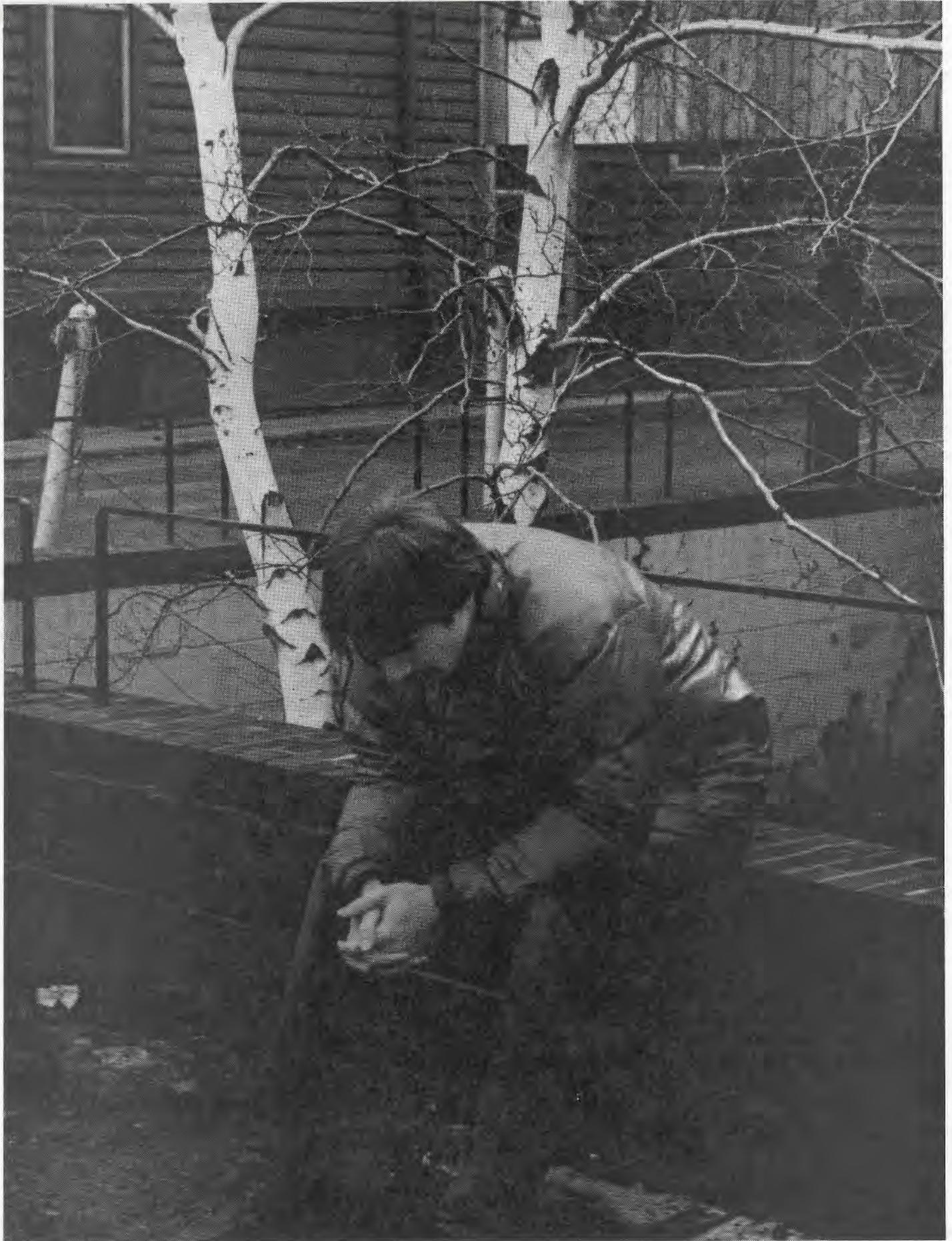
Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"They'd landed at daybreak. The second ship would be coming and there was much to do. Tests were to be made determining whether they could colonize this new world. A new civilization was to start on this planet, using the experience of a world gone mad, hopefully learning from its mistakes."

Cover Page Footnote

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The Road

By Laurie Anne Collins

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Most people had said a third world war would annihilate the human race. They hadn't imagined the half of it. A reign of terror and a famine had followed the war. Madness and destruction had spread across the earth like a raging fire.

A group of scientists had seen what was coming and had tried to stop the destruction sweeping the world. But they had been laughed at, called fools. Despite this, they continued testing and calculating until they discovered a planet that was to pass by Earth. They had twenty-two hours to save what was sacred to them — their civilization, their way of life. They prepared a ship and gathered the few decent humans remaining to send to the planet, their new home — Earth II.

That's why they had arrived and why it was so important to be able to colonize. There was nowhere else for them to go. If they couldn't settle here, it would be the end of the human race. There wouldn't be another chance.

Many things had to be determined. They tested the ground, the air, and the environmental conditions. They calculated times, dates, and the planet's relationship to other planets. And they waited for the second ship, never knowing if it would ever arrive. Hoping and giving up hope again and again.

Having made it to this planet, they determined to take full advantage of it; for themselves, their ancestors, and most of all, for their children. They were thankful for this planet and felt obligated to build something worthwhile. They felt they owed it to the planet's previous inhabitants.

They knew the planet had once been inhabited because they had discovered a road and a road doesn't just pop up out of nowhere. From the moment they discovered the road, they felt an insatiable urge to follow it, to discover where it would lead, but too much else had yet to be done.

The time came, eventually, when they were able to go in search of where the road led. As they followed the road, they were plagued by questions. Where were the inhabitants? Why was there no sign of them? What could have been their reason for leaving, if they had left? The air was pure, the water clear and fresh, and the sun wasn't hidden by black, soot-filled clouds, as had happened on Earth.

The farther they followed the road, the more they compared their new and old homes. Experiencing all the beauty that had disappeared from Earth, the more urgent they became to find the original inhabitants of this planet. The Earth people felt they had to pay homage to these people for keeping from destruction a planet as old as Earth.

The road stretched onward. They traveled constantly and were exhausted when they lay down at night and when they arose to begin a new day of searching. They felt they couldn't stop. They had to find where the road led.

And one day in a shadowy darkness they arose to voices.

"May I please keep them? They're so cute!"

"No, dear, you already have too many pets."

"Oh, all right, I'll get rid of them, but I still think they're so cute!"

When the second ship landed, they found the first ship, but none of its occupants. They searched for the crew and found a single road leading somewhere in the distance. There was no doubt now the planet had been inhabited, for a road doesn't just pop up out of nowhere.