

Exile



The
EXILE

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Take thought:

I have weathered the storm

I have beaten out my exile.

—Ezra Pound

Contributors

Contributing to this issue of EXILE are seniors, JANET TALLMAN and WILLIAM WEAVER, both of whom plan to continue their interests in writing. Upon graduation, Janet will teach secondary school English in Denver, Colorado. Weaver, whose story "The Chosen One" was awarded the semi-annual EXILE-Denison Bookstore Writing Prize, hopes to teach in the Peace Corps.

A poem by VIRGINIA SCHOTT is the only freshman work published in this issue. The sophomore class is represented by poets ELIZABETH BIGGERT and ROBERT HOYT.

Junior English majors MEREDITH ROSE, BARBARA THIELE, CHRISTINE COOPER, and BARBARA PURDY contribute short stories and poetry. Art majors, ELIZABETH SURBECK and BEVERLEY ERBACHER are members of Alpha Rho Tau art honorary.

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EDITORIAL

A Sense of Finality

Any student of Denison may submit manuscripts of poems, stories and essays to the editors or deposit them in the EXILE box in Doane.

A SENSE OF FINALITY

Most of us respond to a friend or a teacher, some of us to the grace of a walking cat or the color of a fire engine; to the degree that we do respond we learn and open ourselves to future experience, and this increases our awareness of the human condition. But here we are entrapped, for awareness begets both responsibility and impotency; we know that we should and must give ourselves to decision, and yet we are frustrated by our limitations. The conflict becomes painfully sharp and we question whether our existence is more firmly rooted in life or endurance. We begin to understand the awful speculations of a mind like Kafka's, the suspended consciousness of Céline, or the self-conscious love and honesty in the words of Agee. We are frightened, and this is a human thing. An acute awareness of the world and life around us is not enough. It is not enough to be a victim of time and the minds before us, to be environmentalists in this sense, because finally we are alone and this we fear.

Nelson Algren once said that "when man is denied admittance to the world he will create his own." And in a unique way this is what we all do when we create an image of ourselves which permits an individual life. This is the basis for what we call constancy or integrity; it allows us to act, to remain responsible to all contexts yet maintain an identity. How often have we asked ourselves when and how it was that we came to be who we are? In this way we are all egoists, and this is a very human thing. But to keep the vitality of this image, this identity, we need to communicate, and we do, each in his own way.

The artist differs from most of us in that he gives form to the content and feeling that we call life. His art and craft permit us to experience the purity of pain and beauty that he finds in life, and gives us the knowledge that no matter how personal or terrifying these experiences are that they are basically expressible. Thus the artist is, and in this way must be, a humanist.

From this stand point so is the student writer an artist. He may lack the experience, skill, or concentration of the published poet or novelist but he realizes and feels the basic human dignity behind the creative act—the dignity, or call it pride, that will not permit him to accept passively the sense of finality which lurks behind awareness alone. And we see this as a very personal form of courage in the struggle to communicate, perhaps naive and unskillful but creative and honest. This is a very human thing. —W. W.

CHANCE ENCOUNTER

by MEREDITH ROSE

Charlie and I had ridden out to Seattle on his motorcycle. All I remember was that we put so much time on booze and girls that there was hardly time for anything else. It was wild; the fair held a kind of attraction that was hard to ignore. It moved, it was alive, and once I became a part of it, I didn't want to leave. Two or three months in Seattle would have been just enough of a change from the worry and grind of school. But Charlie thought we ought to go back and take our jobs in Madison as we had planned. We had work lined up as tree-cutters for the city, and the money was good.

We pushed hard on the last stretch of the trip, even though, as it turned out, there was no sweat on the time. We hit Madison on Sunday, about dinner-time, the day before Summer-school registration. Langdon Street was filled with college kids turned students come Tuesday morning. They were enjoying the last few days of freedom before the session started, making new friends, unpacking water-skis and beach paraphernalia and all the while looking over the possibilities for summer romance. If I was a little resentful, it was because I was not looking forward to going to work the following morning. I begrudged them their leisure and sort of wished I could be in school for the summer, too.

We turned off Langdon into the Psi U. house where we were going to live for the summer; not exactly the sharpest place to stay in Madison, but one of the cheapest. It was on the lake and had its own pier, which would come in handy for week-ends. A crude diagram on the bulletin board showed which room was ours. It took five minutes to unpack, and we were ready for dinner.

The Brathaus was the nearest and cheapest place to eat. We were both tired of the motorcycle so we set out on foot. We started down Langdon Street. That was when I saw Alex. She was with a boy; probably a blind date. She was at ease; she always was comfortable with people she had just met, since she made the grade better if she thought she was mysterious. She was only honest with people that she was sure loved her. I was the only one she had ever completely opened up to. And now she was walking comfortably down the street in her half-athletic, half-sensual gait, hardly listening to his replies. How well I knew that continual babble of hers; God knows I'd heard it enough, following

her around those parties she used to drag me to. She always said that it was her way of getting to know people. But beneath the talk I knew she was methodically, unromantically, and accurately passing judgment on the guy. She wore shorts and her legs were tanned. She looked thinner, but the same peasantry roundness I had always liked was still there. Her hair was cut; she used to wear it long to please me even though she hated it. I had been pleased; she looked sexy that way. Now it was pushed back behind her ears, somehow showing her strong chin and lovely mouth. I can't say I was surprised to see her, but it did throw me for a minute. I had barely thought about her after Christmas, but that was when we went back to school, 500 miles apart. I hadn't been doing too badly without her, but I didn't want to see how I'd manage if she were around. Not yet, anyway.

I didn't think she saw me, though she was practically in front of Charlie and me. I couldn't help but smile; it was good to see her, but I tried to look as casual as I could.

"Hello, Alex."

She answered evenly. "Hi, Peter, how're things?"

Her reply came too quickly. I hadn't had the advantage of seeing her first after all. She walked a few steps past, then turned around suddenly in sort of a planned double-take.

"What are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same thing." I turned to Charlie, ignoring her. I wanted to speak to her, to tell her how good she looked. There was no way to say it, so I didn't say anything. Her date was there and so was Charlie, who no doubt recalled my many vows over many beers that I'd never see her again.

It was as though she was doing some great act, stopping by to speak and she was taken back at being slighted until she really looked at me.

She knew what was going through my mind: her face reflected a reaction bordering maddeningly on tolerance. She walked away confidently. As she and her date walked away, her voice was light and charming. Her little triumph showed in that walk, in that voice. She knew I still cared. How flattered she was. I hated her.

Then Charlie started in on me. "I thought it was all over. Can't you ever play it cool? How'd she know you were here?"

"She didn't know, or at least not until now."

"Well then, what's her act?"

"I don't know. I don't know why the hell she's here or where she's staying or for how long or anything, for Chrissake. And I'm not about to find out."

"All right. God. Take it easy. I just asked a simple question. Good-looking girl to let go that way. Better looking than that picture."

"She was a senior in high school when that was taken, for Lord's sake, and she never takes good pictures." God. I was defending her. "Not good-looking enough to be the bitch she is. Besides, it wasn't exactly that I let her go."

"Yeah. She's stacked though."

"Yeah. How much money you got for beer?"

The Brathaus was crowded. Everyone asked about the cycle and the fair, and I answered automatically. The chance encounter, as I began to call it, kept running through my mind. How in God's name had she ended up here for the summer when I had avoided being home just so I wouldn't run into her all over the place? As I said, I didn't want to try to get along by myself with her around. She had a way of making her presence apparent, and I knew she would purposely make things uncomfortable for me. I remember wondering all semester who she'd date during the summer or if she'd fallen for some guy at school. Sometimes I thought she had just hung on to me until someone else came along. I wondered if anything would come of our chance encounter.

Somehow the evening wore on. We left the Brathaus and went to a coffee house where I picked up an art major, typical New York Jew gone beatnik. That's all I remember about her; I just kept drinking and even after we got to her apartment my mind was still so screwed up that Alex was about all it focused on. When I finally got in, Charlie was already there and asleep. I was just as glad; I didn't feel like talking about it.

The next day we started our jobs. I was glad to be at work; there was something about the physical labor that took my mind off things. Charlie and I were the only college boys on the crew, and at first the others looked down on us. As the weeks passed and I fell into the routine, I got to be a damn good tree-cutter. The work was hard but I was in good shape.

I saw a lot of Alex in the evenings at one bar or another, always with someone who resembled in one way or another that first blind date. She treated them all in her half-friend half-flirt

manner. We exchanged few words, but she made it a point to be friendly. When I saw her, it was always the same. I was rooted to the spot. Although I didn't want to be near her, I couldn't leave. We couldn't talk; she was always with a big group of people. Once, I pretended that I was the nameless face she talked at. I thought maybe I was going a little crazy, but this was the first time I ever had the chance to look at her as other boys did. Her worst faults kept showing up, but she became more and more attractive to me. I kept looking for some way to see her, some way that would just happen. I couldn't just call her up.

One day about half way through the summer I did run into her. It had rained that day, so I didn't have to work, and by late afternoon I had run out of cigarettes and I had to go down to State Street and get some. As I started down Langdon, there was a girl ahead of me, Alex. She was alone. I called her name and she turned around and looked up:

"I wondered when I'd see you again. You only live a few doors down, you know. I was so surprised to see you here that first night. I even tried to call you a couple of times. I got Charlie's old apartment and they told me where you lived. Are you in school?"

"Why did you call?" I was on the defensive.

"I wanted to know if everything's all right and how you were and all."

"What do you mean, all right?"

"Well, you never answered the letter I wrote after Christmas."

"Did it require an answer?"

"Yes, it required an answer. I wanted to make sure you understood."

"Was there anything to understand?"

"Yes, there was." She was getting annoyed. "Obviously after going together all that while there must be something left, and I want to make sure you knew what I meant and that I don't hate you or anything."

She didn't give a damn what I thought. She never does, except that she should figure in favorably. We got to the corner and stopped. She looked terrible. Her hair was dirty and laid flat to her head. She had no make up on, not even lipstick. She had probably been studying all day. She wore a dirty, frayed trench-coat and cut-offs and a Wisconsin sweatshirt underneath.

"Did you buy the sweatshirt for your big summer in Madison?"

"No, a boy at school brought it to me after spring vacation. He lives here."

"Is that why you're here?" I asked quickly.

"No, I don't go with anyone."

I asked her that every time I saw her. By now she knew enough to answer without my asking. I was always relieved when I knew that no one else was close to her and that I was the only one who really knew her. People liked her, and even though I found her social personality sickening, it could impress the hell out of anybody else. But the only time she was really worth anything was with me.

She smiled confidently. "Peter, it's good to see you. I had forgotten how attractive you are."

That was something she'd say, and in her own way she meant it. I was flattered and was sure she still cared. At the same time, I felt a power over her, as though one harsh word would make her kick me in the shins and run away like a scared five-year old. I couldn't do that; she was trusting, and conscious that I loved her.

We still stood on the corner. I asked her where she was going. She had to buy sneakers, having left hers at home, and couldn't get along one more minute without her sneakers. What a lousy wife she'd be. We went down to State Street together. The shoe clerk thought we were married, and I almost wished we were. It was dinnertime by now, and neither of us had eaten. The next thing I knew I was ordering steak sandwiches and Michelob at the Brathaus. The beers loosened us up; she did most of the talking. She's used to that.

"Peter, I hear you have a girl."

"Yes, I've been going out with a girl from Winnetka. She's everything I've ever wanted."

She saw through that immediately. She knew I was lying; I hardly ever say things like that. She did know there was a girl, and it bothered her. She always said she knew all about the kind of love life I had, but nothing could really convince her that I wasn't leading a monastic existence all year in Madison while she played around in Ohio.

"You're still in love with me, aren't you?" I said.

She was. I took her hand. She was very good at looking into people's eyes. I began to think maybe she wasn't so contrived.

We talked, and we got sort of sloppy and sentimental, but I hadn't been so happy in months. I couldn't get over how great it was to see her. I asked her again if she loved me, and she said she'd never be able not to. It was as I had hoped, as I had always thought, really.

It was about 7:00 and I didn't want her to go yet. I got an idea.

"Do you like wine?"

"Sure, what kind?"

She always had to know what kind. "Let's get some wine and go over to Doug's."

Doug was a mutual friend we had known at home since high school. The three of us had been very close. But she couldn't go, had a date. So did I, for that matter, and offered to break mine if she'd do the same. But no.

I couldn't let her start to manipulate things. "I want you to go now, not some other time. I might not ask you again."

This scared her. I had her where I wanted her; she would come with me and things would be as before. She was finally beginning to wake up.

"You're putting me in a bad position, Peter. I can't break a date. I hardly ever break dates."

"Can't or won't?"

"Both I guess."

"Look, there are seven thousand people here in the summer. You'll never see the guy again. You'll get away with it. It's done all the time."

I was testing her. I knew her well enough to know she wasn't turning me down on principle. Who in hell could she have a date with that was so damned important? Why was she hesitating? Always before she had given in to me, but now we seemed to have come to a blind alley.

"Either you come now, or you'll never see me again."

This startled her. "And if I do come, what then?"

"I don't know what then. We'll see."

She laughed. "Come on, Peter, don't you think that's a little ridiculous? How can I make up my mind when you force me to choose? You haven't any right. I'll go with you tomorrow, or Thursday."

"Alex, I do have a right. You said you loved me. I love you. I have the right. Damn right, you choose."

I couldn't stand to watch her stall around. We sat in silence for a long five minutes. How could I make her stay? I had set down the terms and it was too late to take them back. Now I wanted to retaliate.

"You can go home alone. I'm not taking you."

"You didn't exactly bring me down here, so I don't suppose you have to take me home." She shrugged into her trench coat.

She got up and went out the door. I finished the rest of my beer and purposely thought of nothing. Then I followed her. It was an impulsive thing to do, and I'm not usually like that. I had to run a couple of blocks to catch up with her. She was covering ground with enough speed, but she wasn't really hurrying.

"Alex. Wait."

She answered flatly, "What." She kept walking, never breaking stride.

"I'll take you home. I want to see where you live."

"God-damnit, I thought you weren't going to see me ever again and all that crap, so what the hell do you care where I live?"

She always got a little profane when she was rattled. Damnit, I knew she still loved me, and why in hell she wouldn't let herself admit it, I didn't know. We walked on at her quick pace, now hurried by the fact that it was almost time for her date. She was worried about some sort of scene at the door with the other boy. I rather hoped it would happen. I wanted to get a look at this guy.

"Here's where I live."

We turned into the driveway and onto the porch of her sorority house. No boy was waiting. She took a deep breath and turned to face me. I reached for her and kissed her. It was still broad daylight and several girls plus the housemother walked right into the middle of the whole thing. I didn't care. I wanted her to come with me, and talking hadn't done any good. She kissed me back and put her hand on my back lightly and then took it away. She still hadn't changed her mind.

"I'm sorry. Peter, I just can't break this date."

She was still on that tack. She said she'd call if she needed me or anything. I said goodbye and left her on the porch. I remembered her excuse. "I just can't break this date. I just can't break this date."

I half-waited for her call, but it never came; it wouldn't have been like her. I didn't see her after that and she passed from my thoughts. The following fall I got a letter which I opened eagerly

and read, all about virtues of chapter meeting and classes and parties and how good she thought it would be if I were to see her again; there were things to talk over. I was warm and happy until I looked at the postmark, November 14. Thanksgiving vacation was less than 2 weeks away. I saved the letter for a few days and then threw it in the wastebasket when I cleaned my desk. I just threw it in; it didn't warrant ripping into small pieces.

TWO POEMS

by BARBARA PURDY

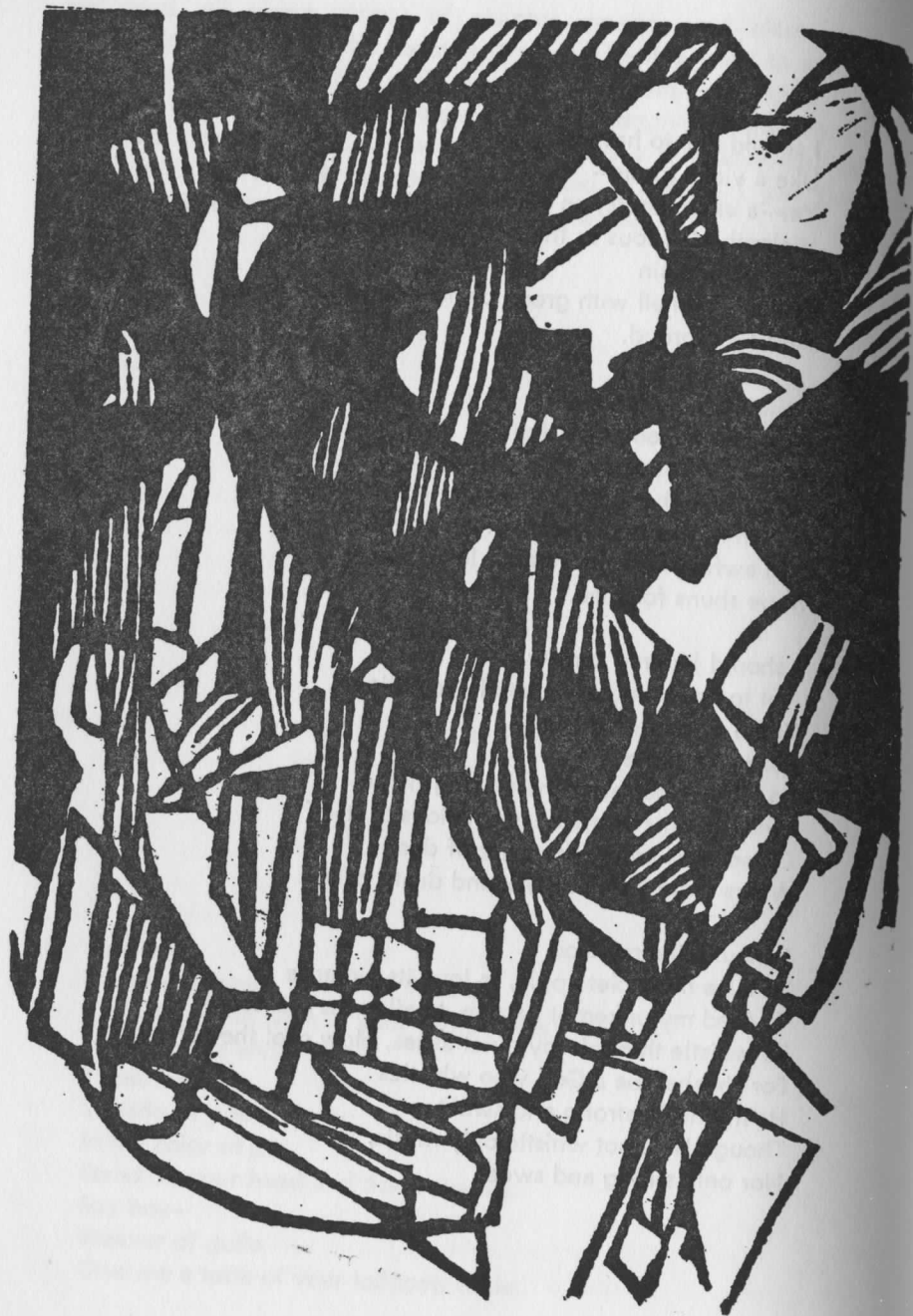
Say boy—
Weaver of lies
Of lies like the wink in your Santa Claus eyes—
Weave me a wink
Think me a lie
Whistle in pink
In the color of pie,
Stand on your head and tickle the sky.
Say boy—
Weaver of guile
Give me a taste of your lollypop smile.

I should like to have an idea
Like a violet apple—
Yes—a violet apple; an extraordinary fruit
Violently delicious as the first forbidden fruit—
To shock, to sin
To say—the hell with green beans and yellow corn,
And I am proud.

I should like my love
To be an unkempt garden
Of wild roses and gentle daisies
Which together grow in a merry confusion
Which mocks the majesty of distant hills
Too awfully like the somber love
Mine shuns for glee.

I should like my sorrow
Not to heave in passionate lamentation
Like a dirge of trumpets,
But to be mute
As quiet ashes after the searing flame—
Which weary of mad exclamations of itself
Of nervous ardor, so aware of death
Wears more a quiet black and dusty pain.

I should like my God
To taste my violet apple, to love its violence
To seed my unkempt garden, to allow its wantonness
To whistle through my quiet ashes, blow cool the sorry heat
For He shall be a God who whistles
He'll whistle strong and sweet
Though He'll not whistle only music,
Nor only strong and sweet.



The Chosen One

by William Weaver

Part I

A soldier is walking—there—on the road, where the dust is light and perhaps two inches deep, ground and shifted by the iron treads of heavy vehicles. Boot prints interlace, half obscuring each other, and many are buried by the vehicle tracks. The land adjacent to the road is dry and dustless, etched with intricate cracks from which appear tufts of dry grass and scrub oak, the leaves small and stiff like green parchment. There is neither a visible sign of anyone except the soldier nor is there anything that might suggest a battle: no scattered equipment, no corpses, nothing, except the road, the vehicle tracks, the boot prints, the dust, and the soldier.

The clouds are a dull tawny yellow and heavy in the skies and the sun is still bright in the west throwing a long shadow in front of the soldier. His eyes are fixed only a few inches in front of his moving feet where little clouds of dust escape from beneath the pressure of each boot-sole, mechanically, like puffs of steam from a calliope. Dust rises then settles in the boot prints behind, and on the heavy leather boots, and the green muslin trouser legs of his uniform, stained with sweat where they have been tucked into the boot tops and damp along the inside of each calf where the dust has turned to a scabbing mud. The jacket is of the same military green as the pants and is fully buttoned, the collar turned up on the left side. There is no indication of rank or company and regiment which would normally be found on the shoulders and collar flaps. The soldier's head is bare, his hair a whitish blonde, damp and matted, and were it not for the short stubble beard he might be said to have the face of a girl. Clear pale green eyes stare blankly at the dust and striding shadow in front. In his right hand he is carrying a rifle, the barrel worn shiny in patches reflecting dully through the dust, pointed at the ground as he walks, his slender fingers cradling the magazine just ahead of the trigger guard.

He is walking in the track made by a heavy vehicle, as if on a tread mill for the road continues out of sight in either direction. There are no mountains, only occasional gray boulders and scrub oak. His face is without expression and streaked with a flaking mud which hangs in the short beard. As the sun turns lower the legs of his shadow lengthen and return to meet his boots at every step. The light brown color of the dust, the ochre fields, the boulders, and green of the sparse brush is all turning to varying shades of gray, as if reduced to truer proportions in the half-light where shadow gains substance from object. The heavy clouds have turned from a sick yellow to a brownish red, the separation between having turned a bright watery red as if a razor had been quickly drawn over a suntanned belly.

The soldier stops, his face down and lost in shadow; he stands resting, then turns fully around. The sun has become an oblong disc and is at the half way point on the horizon, red without dimension, flat against the sky. His right pants leg has become untucked and his shoulders are dark with sweat that diminishes to a streak down the center of his back. The dust is not as thick in the tracks but his boot prints are visible for almost thirty yards; they are not straight but wander from one side to the other. He knows he is tired. Perhaps it would make as good sense to walk back over the same tracks? There seems nothing either behind or ahead. The only feeling is the subtle fright of standing still where your boot prints have left you. The sun is now down and the ground and sky change like a chameleon from day to night. He turns and walks off the road, the rifle cradled in his arms.

A hundred yards ahead he can make out the shadow of low rocks and brush, gray against the lighter shadowed gray of the earth. The rocks and brush are not large enough to offer shelter other than a shadow but the night is dry and there is no lightning in the clouds that now darkly stretch and cover the earth as scar tissue covers a wound. As he walks he can feel the occasional grass give under his boots and the brush bend and slide against his legs. Approaching the rocks he walks slower looking for a place to rest, then leans his rifle against a bush and sits with his back against the largest of the rocks. His forehead is sweating and there is a slight movement in his lips. His eyes are lost in shadow and stare, straining to separate the land and sky, then out to the

road now dark and indiscernable, then to his feet stretched in front. Turning he slides away from the uncomfot of the rock and lies on one side wiping the sweat from his face. The night air is cool and moves slowly across the hard ground. The brush is still. He rolls to his back moving a hand caressingly up to the jacket pockets, but they are empty; then to the ground and runs a fingernail along the edge of a crack. Drawing to his knees, he feels for something in the rear pockets and finding them empty reaches out to the rough texture of the stone where his fingers search the cracks but find nothing except bits of dirt, dry moss, and flaked stone. He pauses, then lowers himself again and fumbles with the thick leather laces of the boots until they are off. He now lays one on the ground beside him, then the other in an opposite manner so that the two boot tops cross, forming a pillow. Adjusting his head on the pillow he tucks his hands tight between his thighs and closes his eyes struggling for sleep. But the damp smell of the leather is close now and pungent, and the closed eyes can offer no protection from the darkness of the sky; it is all the same. Pressing the eyelids tighter brings dim streaks of light that come and go across the vision like distant rockets in a dark fog or smoke where dull bursts of red, green, yellow, and burnt orange form inarticulate patterns.

They are behind him now, both men and shadows, sounds and colors moving in a complex of war. Shouts and commands demand the reality of action, feeding on its own immediacy, moving the men along the beach like insects swarming. He is moving with them, feet running, stabbing, sliding in the sand, falling and waiting as the shelling continues overhead, a polite exchange between shore batteries and ships which leaves the soldier suspended in a net of air fire, anxious, afraid, not yet part of the action except in imagination, emotion, and memory of the many days spent in training, the learning and rehearsing of a duty to be done in a different time and different place. They are moving again. The shelling slacks. Voices shout and mix with the scrambling of boots on the sand and the soft clatter of rifles as they are shifted from hand to hand and nick against the cartridge belts, canteens, and field packs. A long line of soldiers is moving more slowly now, some running half stooped, some crawling, up the beach toward the dunes just before the brush line marked by the shattered trees of previous shelling. Every hundred and fifty yards a tank

is breaking way, the heavy armored turret and distended glass eyes searching. The men are settling a little now and sounds of weak joking blanket the thoughts of those burrowed behind dunes and looking quickly up and down the beach, avoiding each other's glance. "Hey, Joe." "Yes, dear?" "Don't forget the chickie I left under my pillow for Bordenaroe."

The soldier is lying on his stomach, his rifle at his side, the barrel cold and just grazing his cheek; faces protruding from the anonymity of gray steel helmets are somehow familiar, beside him in the same position or huddling behind low bushes, tree trunks, or rocks, waiting. Behind, the foamy wakes of landing barges extend themselves back toward the mother ships, absurdly peaceful now that the shelling has stopped. The acrid crack of rifle fire starts farther down the beach, then the mortar shelling, sporadic, still out of sight. The men crouch lower, tightening, bracing their best against the loose sand. He is up now and moving in a stooping jerky run, concentration drawn to the few visible yards in front. The first nausea of sulphur, just a whiff, but painful to the nose. The earth, broken and routed deceives him and he falls but quickly recovers in a lunging, crawling motion. A fire has been started off to the left, the brush burning with nepalm. He crawls closer to the ground now, his face perhaps six inches from the boot soles in front that scrape methodically at the loose dirt like a heavy turtle. His elbows move in the same manner, stiffly, a clumsy clawing motion, the rifle cradled in his arms. The helmet pulls at his chin, digging into the back of the neck, cutting out any sight except the straight ahead dirt which one can feel with the end of his nose, re-echoing sounds in a metallic resonance. He is watching only the boots ahead move but can feel others beside him; the rifle barrel clanks as it brushes another, and when he turns his head to see, elbows, boots, rifles, and helmets like his own are all moving alike. Shots are fired near him, but he cannot tell at what. A dull, sweet, fluttering sound grows out of the sky, then turns to a grating scream and explodes twenty yards away. He can feel the earth jolt and sees a body snap into the air as if it had been attached to a puppet wire which was yanked. The sound clatters through his head leaving it dizzy and sick, and a light rain of dirt falls with the stinging smell of sulphur. Another lands further ahead, then another off to the right. He crawls, quickly, scrambling under a fallen branch

and off to the right. The boots ahead are now gone. He turns to the side and moves further but there are no helmets or rifles; no-one can be seen and he is surrounded only by the sound of guns and the stench of burning wood. He looks about again, then pulling himself to his knees, crawls rapidly forward. The unexpected closeness of an automatic rifle burst sends him to the ground again where he crawls back, head turned blindly sideways, the helmet edge digging a small furrow in the loose earth. He waits, ears straining for the sound of a command, eyes blinded by the smoke, dirt and low brush. He starts to move again when the right foot and knee drop; he turns and rolls into a crater, falling below the level of the smoke, then sees the nervously quick uniform of the enemy roll away and bring a rifle up to the hip. He drops into a crouching position, the rifle leveled with the enemy's belly; he waits without movement, fright, or thought, unable. A shot blasts over his shoulder and the enemy, as if transfixed by a needle, slumps and hangs on the opposite side of the crater. Dirt and small stones clatter like light rain on his helmet and shoulders as the soldier who fired the shot slips over the edge and into the crater. "The damn thing jammed on me! For Christ sake, it jammed!" But he does not look up and feels only the pressure of a hand on his shoulder which then lifts and raps sharply on his helmet. He turns with a pained and frightened look in his eyes, "Honest. The rifle jammed, I swear it did. I swear . . . !" But already the other soldier is crawling out of the crater, perhaps not even hearing him. There are again gray helmets and shuffling feet near him but now they are distant in his mind; he does not look to the side but only ahead at the absurd patterns. Perhaps he is laughing but his face is empty, and his face is empty with the gaunt benediction of one who has died by default.

The night is heavily clouded and there is no sound of birds or animals, nothing but the talking of soldiers and distant sounds of shooting. By order no-one is to light a cigarette or remove a helmet. The soldier is sitting on the ground alone, moving his foot back and forth in the dirt with the childish resolution of preoccupied thought or determination. He stands and begins to walk away from the sounds, through the light brush that has turned to shadow in the half-light. He is walking with slow heavy

steps, cold, without feeling, yet moving one after the other. He carries the rifle in both hands, his thin fingers twined about the stock. His clothing is damp with sweat and the night's chill is felt as his thigh brushes against a low branch. He is walking, but only the shadows are ahead, dim and illusive. The loose dirt squinches out from under the boots as they move one after the other, and the feet are cold, numbed to the feel of walking. Ahead he can see the empty shadow of a shell crater; it is too large for a fox hole and of a different shape, a perimeter of ragged earth perhaps eight feet across and filled with shadow, like dark water without reflection or visible depth. On the far edge is the outline of a helmet, shoulders, and arms. He lowers slowly to his knees then belly, silent and still. From the lower angle of vision the figure is larger. He can't tell by the shape of the helmet if it is the enemy or not. The darkly silhouetted form is still against the dim light. He waits, about ten feet away. Why hasn't the enemy heard him approach? Is it the enemy? Perhaps he is asleep; the soldier cannot tell for the figure refuses to move. He crawls forward and silently rests the barrel of his rifle on the crater edge. Still the enemy does not move. He aims carefully at the center of the helmet, holds the sights from wobbling and fires. The head snaps forward and rocks back. The rifle lurching with recoil then falls back in place once again centered on the helmet. He fires again and the helmet flies off, then again and again. The head continues to snap with each shot in a simple mechanical manner until the magazine is empty. The soldier waits for the last of the shots to stop ringing in his ears then crawls over the edge of the crater and slides on his elbows to the bottom, then turns and regains his balance. The dead figure is large above him, dark and still. Epaulets arch from the shoulders which have not changed position; the dead soldier must have been an officer. He reaches out and, gripping an arm of the corpse, turns it around till it faces him and slides partially down the crater wall. The soldier is a Negro, his dark young face unscarred by the bullets which have splintered the skull and left through the forehead. He raises his hand to the soldier's face then down along his body until he feels mute slivered flesh at the hips. The enemy has been dead, perhaps from the shell that made the crater. The soldier buries his face in his hands, fingers cold as he touches them to his cheeks, mouth and eyes.

Impersonal hands are now holding him by the arms and helping him out of the crater, and he is lifted and placed on a stretcher. The talk is low and he makes little effort to understand it, aware only of the gliding swaying motion of being carried and that he mustn't become sick. His face is sweating. Someone takes a handkerchief to wipe it dry, but this lasts only a moment for he can soon feel a bead of sweat trickle past his lips. He tries to concentrate on this in order not to become sick but his mind wanders blankly from the sweat to the soldiers to his left hand which he had not noticed was off the stretcher. He tries to feel something or anything but the hand is too far from the ground and it would be too much of an effort to turn it over. Then one of the soldiers replaces his hand, crossing it over his chest and wipes the sweat again from his forehead. Now the nausea is becoming dull and impersonal as if it is no longer himself that is sick but his stomach, and he is lightly comfortable. His eyes are blankly open but the sight is blurred by the sweat and lack of light; the forms of those who carry him are not distinguishable under the helmets. And the stretcher continues to move lightly as if on the tips of waves.

The motion stops and again he feels hands grasping him under the arms then help him up and guide his arms over their shoulders. He stumbles between them as they move into a tent, brushing the flaps aside, then past three occupied cots to the fourth which is empty. "Medic—hey, Medic. He cracked up. Better not tell him. He may not like it here even if he does know where he is." "Yes, sir, sir— but what the hell are we supposed to . . ." He sits on the end of the cot, then is helped down. There is a gas light almost directly in front of the cot and the brightness blinds him; all he can see are figures that pass as shadows before him, blocking the light, then blurring to the side. A hand helps him as he struggles to sit up, then holds him braced while another unbuckles the heavy webbed cartridge belt, then the jacket. He is helped out of the jacket which is damp and cold and into another cleaned and dry of the same type except it is lacking any rank or marking, probably belonging to a soldier killed in a previous battle and has since been used for hospital issue. The hands help him down again until he is comfortable, and then draw a blanket over him. He closes his eyes and is aware of nothing except that he wants the people to go, he wants to sleep.

No-one speaks to him nor is he aware of anyone talking about him. Footsteps diminish on the dirt floor. Silence. No, light breathing. Someone turns over. He reaches and pulls the blanket closer to his chin; he is still sweating but he knows that in a moment he will be cold and knows he must try to keep warm. Sleep is impossible; he is not tired but numb. Eyes open—all black—only the light hanging dimly from a wire, perhaps eight inches down from the ridge pole—a little higher than a man standing—it is hard to tell—the canvas slants from the ridge to a point just above his head where it falls straight like a curtain to the ground—gray, or dark green, he can't tell. He looks to the side—three cots—all sleeping, or at least still—perhaps dead—can't tell. Other side—one cot—empty—blanket folded neatly at the foot—waiting. Five altogether, about two feet between—tent must be about twenty five feet long and about sixteen wide. No cots on the other side—a table obscured with small packages—two chairs—a stretcher along the side—no rifles. The light is lower now—things are fading. They turned it off and it has taken a moment to die. For a moment his ribs crawl in panic—watches the dim white mantel grow yellow and darken—burnt orange—ashen—black. He closes his eyes, opens them, closes them again—they offer no protection from the blackness—nothingness. He presses tighter—lids ache—the trench—he struggles but the sides are loose—slips—helpless—below the level of smoke.

A cool pressure on his bare head, his eyes open, gaunt and blank. "Relax. You're okay. Just stay put and rest." And the cool pressure moves over his bare head but his lips are cold, helpless things. His eyes close and the hurricane of sensations numbs and dies in sparkling eddies of light and dark, gently on his body and mind.

Part II

The morning sun is hot and the shadow of the rock is long behind him. He wakes sweating and uncomfortable, tired and stiff. The soldier sits up and looks at his rifle, then back to his feet as he struggles to pull the boots on, tucks the pants cuffs into tops, then pulls tight the laces.

He starts back toward the road, then turning continues in the same direction as the day before. His head is bowed, looking only a few feet ahead. On the road the dust is light and deeper where it has been shifted by the treads of heavy vehicles. The fields on either side are dry and laced with jagged cracks from which appear tufts of dried grass an amber yellow. The sun is yet below the clouds, smoky and dull, but fully above the horizon. His eyes are empty and watch just ahead of the boots where clouds of dust rise and cake on the green pant legs damp with the morning dew. The dust has also dried and cracked his lips which are now the color of the ground, warm in the morning sun. He seems to have aged, to have subtly changed dimension, but it is impossible to tell. He walks, one foot in front of the other.

There is a sound. He stops and lifts his head. Something is approaching from behind. He turns and sees a low trail of dust rising off the road perhaps half a mile away, and begins to walk back. He walks about fifty yards and still the vehicle is a good distance off, but the sound is louder now. A small vehicle. It is a motorcycle. He waits. The bratting of the engine is like that of a model airplane and changes to a deeper burping resonance as it slows to a stop beside him. The rider's face is lost in the shade of a helmet; he motions for the soldier to mount the motorcycle behind him. The soldier loosens the sling and slipping the rifle over his shoulder, obeys. The soldier remains clumsily seated until the driver reaches back for his hands, and, drawing them around his own waist, indicates that this will be the only way for the soldier to hold his balance. The motorcycle moves off down the road, shifting quickly through the gears until it is lost in the long trail of dust rising behind.

There is nothing in sight, nor is there anything that might suggest a battle; no scattered equipment, no corpses, nothing, except the road, the vehicle tracks, the boot prints, and the dust.

Awarded the EXILE—Denison Bookstore Writing Prize.

by CHRISTINE COOPER

MYSELF

I

I see the world
of great brick buildings,
bleeding ivy from their windows
wherein the learned men
spill knowledge
on my countless notebooks.
What will I remember?

II

My family is far from me now.
They say I have
my father's eyes
but mine see different things.
Dogwood still is unexpected,
When I see a falling star,
I gasp and wish,
I hardly dare to touch
a baby's newborn flesh.

III

Memories are very strange.
I recall the time
When I believed that
if one only held a negro's hand,
and ran with him,
laughing in the meadow,
that others too might see
and things could change;
the times when,
kneeling in a child's night,
eyes squinting closed,
I could pray,
decide my dream
and believe that He would answer.

IV

I see the wrinkled world
of old men, lurching in their chairs
too weary now to read
what they can no longer live.
They do not raise their heads.

V

Some people are so close to me
that if I saw only their hands
I would know them.
I have sat
among the private trees,
watching for an answer in their eyes
When we saw
a great pine tree
pushed deep into a hill
and climbing in the clouds,
or the stiff veins of a fallen leaf.
Among the trees I wonder
how much a father is in me.
Will I forget to breathe the Dogwood?



THE KANGAROO

by Virginia Schott

My child, beware the kangaroo,
The creature of your dreams.
Remember that the kangaroo
Is more than what he seems,

A beast that neither stands nor stoops
Nor rises to the call,
But thinks the thoughts that are his own;
And though his head is small,
The thoughts in it are large enough
For all the harm they do.
Beware the thunder, o my child,
And fear the kangaroo.

UPON REMEMBERING THE ONCE-NOVELTY OF ICICLES

by BARBARA PURDY

Ten years have passed since
Crouching under a bench
Munching icicles
With a vagabond playmate
Was well worth soapsuds on the tongue
And a low browed mother.
But yet how well I remember
That day of snow and tomato soup
Much more than today's
Rain and orange juice.
Maybe the difference
Is that I've lost my taste for icicles—
They're old hat now.

COMING AWAKE

By JANET TALLMAN

How simple it was to let the moon pass angle-wise
Across the space of open door and lie naked
In the crocus light, allowing aloneness,
Scarring not deep enough to suggest an ache,
Almost a dream, placid: *Noli me tangere*, I said,
Remembering a line somewhere. If only for a turn,
I could almost be a ghost and wander through the momentary night
Till now. There was a thing I was not to forget today.
Outside the rain sighs and a pair of muffled footsteps
Full of malady measures down the road.
The day in shadowed patterns on the wall
Waits to sip us up again.
You are not here, I remember now.
If only you could have been the snowy forehead
Of this dream pressed on my dawn-warm arm.
Sooner the moon, a dream or touch
Will pass before the darkness shrouds us thoroughly
Or that man can really follow down the day.
If only we could be less lonely.

POEM
by Christine Cooper

I hate your picture
When I move, you don't.
I do the things you won't.
You are you
And I am me.
When you don't move,
There is no we.

It is only one of you
And you are many
If I can only have you one
Then I don't want you any.

THE ORB WEAVER

by Elizabeth Biggert

Suspended together
Only I with awe
And he with skill
So maneuvered to make
This lace-like filigree
Sparkling here.
He hangs as a tassal
Adorning the tracery.
Delicate chiffon
So treacherously spun!

"NO FUSS, NO MUSS . . ."

by BARBARA THIELE

Lindemann's Drugs is about the best place to hang around after school if you don't have anything better to do. Especially in fall. It seems like more people are in town in fall. And especially in the drug store. I mean if you're in town you always stop in the drug store. If you're old you always need some medicine, or if you're a woman, some powder or perfume or something, and kids are always getting some candy or a coke or reading the dirty magazines. Besides, you can sit down there. I mean it's no fun for a guy like me to hang around if he can't sit down and watch what's going on. So anyhow, I always hang around Lindemann's, get a rainbow cone or read the funny cards or just sit around and watch what's going on.

Like this one day in October I was in there just sitting and chewing gum and thinking how I was exactly thirteen years and six months old to the day. Well, while I was thinking I hear Mr. Lindemann talking to this old guy. He was in there buying pills for his wife's arthritis and while the guy in the white jacket was working on the pills in the back room the old guy was talking to Mr. Lindemann. They talked about the wife's arthritis for a while and then Mr. Lindemann asked him how his pumpkin stand was coming along. And he says fine, fine. It was getting near Halloween and I remembered seeing a pumpkin stand out on 42a about a mile past the Sinclair station. I figured this must belong to the old man cause it was the only one I had seen around. I didn't think he ever sold any cause it was so easy for people to just pick one up at the grocery store. I mean who's particular about a pumpkin just so it's orange and round. Well anyhow, I was sure that that was the stand they were talking about. I started feeling sorry for the guy cause even though he said fine, fine when Mr. Lindemann asked how his pumpkin stand was coming, I knew darn well he wasn't going to sell any. Or at least not a lot. I mean he was an old guy, at least seventy, and what did he know about what people want to buy and how to make money? He wasn't bald but his hair was real grey.

practically white, and he was wrinkly and walked real slow. But he smiled. I think that's pretty good when you're that old. I mean, here he is with a lousy pumpkin stand, and he'd die before long and his wife was sick and all. And all those people were coming in that drug store—like it was magic or something—every day spending money, and probably none of them even thought about him out there on 42a hoping to sell some pumpkins. But you can bet that if those pumpkins saved them any pain or time they'd all flock out there to buy them.

If only there was some reason to buy his pumpkins, like if they were already carved or something. Well, I sat there just thinking and the more I thought about it the smarter it seemed. Why couldn't he sell the pumpkins already carved? All people would have to do is drive out and pick them up. Pre-carved pumpkins. I could go out there and talk him into letting me do the carving. He probably wouldn't want to and he probably couldn't think of lots of different faces or anything and his hands would probably shake when he carved so it might be dangerous for him. I mean I wasn't being a martyr about it or anything. Sure I wanted to help the old man; I really felt sorry for him. But I could make some money too, and besides, I really liked carving pumpkins. That's the real fun of a pumpkin.

Well, by this time the old guy had left and I didn't know his name and I hadn't talked to him. But it was about ten days before Halloween then, so I still had plenty of time. I decided to wait until the next day to go out there and talk to him about it. By that time I could plan just what to say to be nice and not hurt the guy's feelings and get all the details worked out and everything. There wasn't much going on in the store now—so I figured I'd go home. But I decided to ask Mr. Lindemann what the old guy's name was. So I asked him and he said it was Granby and I left.

Well, the next day I hitch-hiked out to Mr. Granby's stand. I could have walked I suppose, but it's about two miles out of town and I figured I'd be so tired when I got there I'd lose my whole train of thought. Well, when I got out there and looked at the house I was sure glad I came. I mean it was a real rat trap. Not that it was dirty or anything. But it was about the size of a garage and there were no trees around it. Just fields, so I guess the old guy was a farmer. And there was a barn in back with a bunch of chickens and some tools. The place didn't smell like manure or anything—I mean it wasn't dirty, it was just ugly. God, and to think how that guy smiled in Lindemann's. I think

he must have been smiling to get away from the place. Then I started thinking about his wife. What if I should have to talk to her and she was real pitiful or something? It sounds like I was standing around a long time but I really wasn't, cause right away I decided not to go to the door but just stay out at the stand. There was a sign hung up on it—Ring bell for service. So I rang and just stood around and waited. Well anyhow, pretty soon I saw Mr. Granby coming out the door, real wrinkled and slow. I was really glad to see him and not his wife. It took him about a half hour to get out to the stand but when he was almost there he started smiling. I mean it was that smile that killed me.

So finally he gets there and says, "Hello there, young man. What can I do for you this afternoon?"

"Well Mr. Granby, you don't know me but I know you. I was sitting in Lindemann's yesterday when you were in there getting some pills for your wife. And I couldn't help thinking about your pumpkin stand. You've certainly got some nice pumpkins there."

"Well thank you son, thank you very much. I guess they're as good as the next bunch of pumpkins. Pretty big this year, lots of rain."

"Yeh, I guess so. Well anyway, Mr. Granby, when I saw you in the drug store I got this idea of how I can help you with your pumpkins. Not that I'm intruding or anything—I just think I can help you."

"Oh really? Now how's that?" He was still smiling that smile.

"Well I was thinking about how probably you don't sell many pumpkins way out here and that's probably because it doesn't seem like it's worth while to people to come all the way out here for their pumpkins. Just like you said, one bunch is as good as the next."

"We get along all right. We sell some of them and there're only so many people that want pumpkins."

"Yes, but did you ever think of how many people really want pumpkins but just don't have the time to carve them and everything? Or maybe don't want to mess up the kitchen with the seeds or something? What you need to do is make it worth people's while to buy one of your pumpkins."

"Well, maybe so. But I guess that if a person wants a pumpkin for Halloween or a pie, he'll come out and buy one. How is it you think you can help me?"

"Well, I got to thinking and everything and I decided that if your pumpkins were all carved and ready when people come out to buy them they'd probably buy lots more. I mean you know how people will buy anything that saves time. Look at all the stuff that Mr. Lindemann sells that nobody really wants. Here's what I thought. I'd carve all the pumpkins for you. I wouldn't mind. Besides, when you get right down to it, I really enjoy carving pumpkins. And then you charge about a quarter extra for them. You could give me the quarter and keep the money for the pumpkins yourself."

"I see. Well, it's an idea. But I don't think people want a pumpkin much if they don't have time to carve it themselves. It was nice of you to come out, but I don't think I'd sell many pumpkins that were all carved."

Well, this really made me feel bad for the old guy. I mean, it's one thing not to think of a good idea, but it's really too bad when you don't even know a good idea when you hear one. Well, anyhow, this went back and forth for awhile, me telling him all the good reasons for my idea and him just smiling and sort of hinting for me to go home.

"Well, thank you for coming out anyway." That's what he kept saying.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Granby. I'll make you a deal. If you let me carve some of your pumpkins for you, I won't even take any money for it. Just let me do about ten of them. Free of charge. I mean I really want to do it. Then we can see how many more people will buy them carved than plain." But he didn't even answer me right away. I mean he just stands there smiling and letting his head wobble and then finally he looks at me. And right away I could tell he was going to let me do it.

"All right, son, all right. I'll give you ten pumpkins to carve. You do a good job with them and we'll put them on the stand with the rest. But only on one condition. You have to come out here and watch the stand after school. That way you can see for yourself how many people buy them. There's no point in putting them out this soon, though. Halloween's not until a week from Friday. You come out on Wednesday and carve them up and then watch the stand on Thursday and Friday. How's that sound to you?"

"That sounds great, Mr. Granby. I sure am glad you finally see the point, though. I mean it would really be too bad to miss the opportunity and all." I really pretty much meant it, too. Sure, it would have been better for him to do it my way to begin with, but there's not much point in trying to tell an old guy like that what's best for him.

Well, anyhow, it was a week before I could do anything about the carving and it was just sort of a normal week. I mean you can think about something for awhile but you don't think about it all the time for a solid week. But I did sort of plan what I could do with the different pumpkins. I mean you don't just carve them all alike when you've got lots of different people to please. Some might like them smiling, but you've got to have different kinds, too. I finally decided to make a list of all the different faces so that when I went out there to carve I wouldn't forget any. I decided on three smiling, three frowning, two unusual, and two like dogs.

During study hall on Monday I decided to make some advertisement. I figured that if I put one in the window of Lindemann's, people would probably be in the mood to read it. So I printed one up in real big letters—"No fuss, no muss, get your pre-carved pumpkin. Granby's pumpkin stand, one mile past the Sinclair station on 42a." The last part I wrote pretty small, but the no fuss, no muss part was all in capitals.

Well, anyway, on Wednesday I went right out to Granby's after school. When I got there, the old guy was waiting for me. At least he was right behind the counter. He let me pick out the pumpkins and then he went inside. I checked off on the list every time I finished one. That way I could see my progress and be sure I hadn't done the wrong kind or anything.

I finished the three smiling and three frowning right away. But when it came to the two unusual and two like dogs, I had to take more time. I guess my Doberman Pinscher one was about the best. I got a couple of leaves that were all stiff off the ground and stuck them in slits where the ears were and made a real mean looking mouth. I put teeth on him, too—regular fangs (I didn't use a round pumpkin for him but one of those tall, skinny ones. They usually aren't as nice as the round ones, but it made a perfect Doberman.) It was practically dark by the time I finished them all, and my hands were real cold and stiff.

Well, by the time I got out there Thursday, I was really in the mood to sell a few of those pumpkins. I thought everyone would start coming out right away, but they didn't. I mean maybe the day before Halloween's a busy day because it's right before a holiday and all. But I couldn't figure it out. About ten cars passed the first fifteen minutes and none of them even slowed down. Someone went by in a blue Cadillac, and I figured if anyone were going to stop, he would. I mean he's the type that has plenty of money but doesn't want to get himself dirty carving a pumpkin. But no, he didn't even give me a look, just went roaring by. Finally, about five or five-thirty, someone stopped, a real fat lady in sort of a flimsy-looking dress with flowers on it. Anyway, she wasn't much good because when I suggested a carved pumpkin to her, she said she just wanted it to cook with. I guess it wasn't her fault. Finally, Mr. Granby came out about six o'clock and said I could go home. I didn't even wait until he got all the way out there. I went up to him this time. I mean it really bothers me the way it takes him half an hour to walk out to the stand.

I handed him the thirty-five cents he made and I was starting to walk away when he says, "How did it go this afternoon?"

So I said, "Fine." I mean it really irritated me to have him asking me how it went when all he had to do was look. I bet he had been watching from the window all afternoon and wouldn't even admit it.

Well, when I got there the next afternoon, I was sure at least one would have been sold. I mean it was the last day. Well, I got out there and sure enough, one of the smiling ones was gone. My mood was really picking up now, and I figured that I'd probably get rid of them all. I hated to sell the Doberman, in a way. I mean he was really a damn good pumpkin and probably anyone that bought him wouldn't appreciate him. So anyhow I was just sort of pacing back and forth, waiting for customers and thinking about the good points of the pumpkins when I happened to look back at the Granby's shack. And right in the window, big as life, was the smiling pumpkin. Well, by this time it was about four-thirty or five and no customers had come, so when I looked back, and found out that I hadn't even sold that one, it really made me mad. I mean he even picked the smiling one. It didn't look that good in his window, either.

Well, that made me so mad I didn't even care about the rest of the afternoon. Three people stopped but they were all jerks. One was a real ugly sort of lady with glasses and she wouldn't even look at the carved ones. All she cared about was that it was cheap. Another lady came with her kid and tried to tell me it was a tradition in their family to carve their own. Finally about a quarter to six, a man drove up in a Buick, but he was in a hurry and just grabbed a pumpkin and threw a dollar bill at me. I didn't much care what happened by that time.

Well, pretty soon Mr. Granby comes out the door of his house and smiles at me. This time I waited until he got all the way out there. I mean I was mad at the guy and all, but while I was watching him coming out, I started feeling bad for him again. It wasn't really his fault that people were so dumb.

Well, finally he says, "I guess I owe you a quarter for the pumpkin in the window. It sure brightens up the place, doesn't it?"

And I said, "Yeh, it looks real nice. Thanks for the quarter."

"Well, I'm sorry you didn't sell more of your pumpkins. Why don't you take one of the carved ones home? And take some home to your mother. She can bake a couple of pies for your family."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Granby. I'm real sorry for you that more people didn't buy them. But I don't care for myself. I mean I like carving pumpkins."

"You remember that, boy, you remember that. That's what really counts, you know. Thanks for coming out."

"Yeh. Goodby, Mr. Granby."

So he turned around and started back to the house real slow. It was dark now, and I wanted to get home. I decided to take the Doberman with me. I mean no point in wasting a perfectly good pumpkin like that. But I didn't take the others. It was too much to carry. Besides, I don't know what we'd do with them after Halloween. I mean, we buy all our pies at the bakery.

III Haiku

BY ROBERT HOYT, JR.

Still night pond, a black mirror.
A wind's caress cracks the moon,
A child cries.

Who knows better the thoughts of
Starfish, than the oysters
He has eaten.



Black time between
Solitary firefly flashes.
There! I'm not alone

EASTER SUNDAY

by CHRISTINE COOPER

Her impish face was flushed as she held tightly to her brother's hand and followed her family into the lily-filled church. It was her first time; the steps to the balcony were large and tiring and she knew by the way the others walked that she must keep her feet quiet even though she loved the clicking of her shiny new shoes. They found a pew and solemnly sat down, the parents and their children, three boys and the little girl, all dressed in Easter egg colors.

Leaning forward in her seat she looked down into the big hole filled with hatted ladies and bald men, quiet in their good clothes. Then, coming from the back of the church, she saw that man who always looked into her Sunday School class to smile at her. He was wearing a black bathrobe. She waved at him but her mother grabbed her hand and held it sternly for a moment. The little girl turned to her brother. He giggled and winked at her so she waved again when her mother wasn't looking. Suddenly everyone was standing. At first she thought it was time to go home, but a lady started to play a big piano and everyone was singing. Her brother bent down and told her to sing too. She looked at the book and sang "Mary Had A Little Lamb." Her brother was giggling again.

When they sat down, she opened her straw purse with the pink flowers and put her white gloves inside. She took out a jelly bean and licked it until the bright red was gone and there was only sticky jelly left. She put it back in her purse. Her brother was drawing funny people on the paper with the picture of the church. He gave it to her and she drew a big sun in the corner and some flowers by the door. Then she drew a house for the man with the black bathrobe to live in.

It was time to sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" again, so she stood and this time helped her brother hold the heavy book the way her mother helped Daddy. Her hand got very tired, but she waited until she finished to let go. When they sat down again, some men came upstairs with big brown dishes. Her father put a little letter in the dish and her brother whispered to her to put her pennies in. She put them in and wanted to hold the heavy dish for awhile and count the pennies, but her brother took it and passed it on down to some other people. When everyone had seen the dishes, the men took them downstairs to the man in the bathrobe. He just stood up and started talking when he saw all the letters and money. He made her tired and she rested her head on her mother's lap, being careful that her slip didn't show. She closed her eyes and slept while her mother tickled her curly hair and neck and her brother gently jabbed her leg with his pencil. When her mother woke her up she said it was almost time to go home and have turkey but first it was time for a prayer. She folded her five year old hands and looked down the way her brother did. She tried to find her face in her shiny shoes.

The lady started to play the piano and they all stood to sing. She had heard the man in the bathrobe talking about the Lord Jesus and so this time she sang, "Away in a Manger." When the music stopped, her brother was giggling again. She laughed too and followed him out of the church, listening to everyone's shoes clicking.