

Take thought:

I have weathered the storm,

I have beaten out my exile.

-Ezra Pound

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The Exile is edited by Vic Coccimiglio, with cooperation in fiction from Larry Weber, Ellen Claffy, David Moore and Nancy David. Aiding with the selection of poetry are Bonnie Verburg, Elaine O'Donoghue, Mary Mueller, Kim McMullen, Donna Peterson and Martin Cloran. The faculty advisor is John Miller.

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Contents:

	Page
Fiction	
Larry Weber	7
Peggy Gifford	15
Joe Bolster	20
Ellen Claffy	25
Dawn Patnode	31

Photography

Nanny Trippe	4, 22, 24, 28
Geoffery Yeomans	6, 11, 17, 28, 30, 35, 36, 40

Poetry

Martin Cloran	5
Tigger Montague	12, 13
Mary Mueller	14
Kim McMullen	23
Sharon Singleton	18, 19
Dawn Patnode	29
Vic Coccimiglio	37, 38, 39



Come.

Come see our blue crop
or the setting sun.

Be welcomed and listen for the silence we have;

it is soothing here

beyond car noises and

harried people; the trees still grow.

Birds cluster at your window

but do not sing; they have lost

their brighter plumage;

the meadow is greener this year.

Winter and snow will quench the silence;

the dogs will moan for your hand.

We will have spirits for your arrival;

colored lights will reflect the solitude.

Come,

we need your deeper hues

to complete our paintings.

The children's hair has grown;

soon their knowledge will expand

and you can teach them poetry before prose.

The distance is known,

through the prairie to the wooded lakes

and mountains; we are there.

Your life may have changed

but you will fit the patterns

of the new plants.

We are waiting;

our news of the world is small;

we deal mainly in sunlight

and a new word is welcomed.

Martin Cloran



Larry Weber

Lonely Wire Hangers

Amusedly spinning a multicolored beach ball between his index fingers, Spencer dried his water-beaded body with the pool-reflected sun. Slapping the ball at his younger brother, Topper, floating on a rubber raft about the wind rippled surface, Spencer, or Tuggy, as many called him, ran to the beach house. The beach house contained the equipment for one of Tuggy's most satiating hobbies, scuba-diving. Tuggy enjoyed immensely swimming, and sitting under water, especially in his parents' swimming pool.

Putting on an army fatigue hat over his mask, Tuggy secured the tank's belt and adjusted his flippers. With his hand across his hair-covered chest, Tuggy yelled at Topper.

"Topper, will you please be Cuba. . .ya know, like in the Carribean and all?"

"Why, Tuggy?"

"'Cuz I'm gonna be Fidel Castro. . . .and I'm gonna conquer you."

"Now just a. . . .uh, yeah, okay, Tuggy, whatever ya say. . . .But how are you going to attack?"

"Underwater, of course. . .that way I can take you by surprise."

"Yeh.okay, Tug, whatever you say."

Topper returned to his floating thoughts and only heard the joining of Tuggy's used breaths with the outer atmosphere.

The tanning summer rays were coloring Tuggy's slinkily strong body a darker shade, while a mood of conquering contentedness permeated his deep-set grey eyes, Tuggy spread-eagled in a prone position over the rubber raft. Humming a simple melody within his head, he flippered, paddled, and dreamed his way about the pool. As Tuggy's mother was supplying the redwood table with depressing patio refreshments, Tuggy slapped a large floating object on its side. A female scream followed a startled look at Topper's young body floating lifeless and purple below the fiberglass diving board.

Tuggy had graduated two months ago with a degree in Cultural Anthropology. He was twenty-two and had no plans for the immediate future. For the time being he was happy with

refreshing relaxation. He graduated at the top of his class, although he was never very fond of his education. His favorite pastimes were scuba-diving and games, god, how he loved to play games. His all time favorite game was Candyland. He loved moving his locket about the rainbow-colored board, anticipating victory and self-satisfaction. Everybody loved Tuggy, for he always seemed so happy and full of innocent love.

Topper's sheet-lined body was being loaded into the ambulance. A city officer walked toward Tuggy who was busy removing his gear.

"How did it happen, kid, ya see anything?.....Ya was in there, wasn't ya, when it happened, I mean?"

"I told my mother it was my turn to walk Tupelo, but she insisted I let Topper walk him because he was younger. . . .I never understood that."

Noticing Tuggy's bereaved eyes shockingly bouncing about the scene, the officer sat Tuggy down on a cushioned redwood lounge. Walking away, the officer asked a doctor to check Tuggy for shock symptoms. As the doctor approached, Tuggy felt himself back at school, writing his senior project while eating the cream from oreos.

"Look at me, Tuggy, please," the doctor pleaded.

"No doctor, I didn't see anything. . . .I was enjoying the water, and when I heard my mother scream, I noticed Topper for the first time floating dead. . .oh Christ! I loved Topper," as the doctor syringed Tuggy's recollections.

As things were clearing up, Tuggy gazed over at his emotionally-collapsed mother groping at her recently-arrived husband's coat. Tuggy looked around some more and soon found himself swinging out over the field foliage on his favorite rope and board swing. Pumping his legs to memorized fairy tales, he decided to jump, and landed in the first pew of St. Catherine's Church "AMEN, may his soul rest in peace," as an elbow nudged him, and Tuggy followed his feet to an allotted portion of

the casket where he thoughtlessly bent and lifted.

Carrying another burned down barn board to his secret fort, Tuggy yelled for George, his friend, to grab some nails and a hammer from the garage. Pounding in another nail, Tuggy rendered serious thought to the pendulum beat of the hammer.

Lowering Topper's casket into its grave, Tuggy began crying and ran for the freedom of the black limosine.

Awakened by a tear-drenched pillow, Tuggy ran out to the beach house, and put on his scuba gear. Swimming about the pool, he dived deep, with his eyes closed, frequently bumping his head on the aqua blue pool side. Leaving a dripping wet comb on his dresser, Tuggy made his way to the kitchen. He grabbed a Sara Lee french-style donut and walked through the front door and into his car leaving a powder-sugar trail behind him. Making his way from the side street to the main street to the freeway, Tuggy raced up its ramp and down its concrete repetition, passing cars, trees, and exits. About forty-five minutes later, Tuggy pushed up his blinker and headed toward the sign that beamed brightly the words "Truckers - Eat and Sleep Cheap."

Tuggy sat down on a red vinyl stool neatly underlooking the stained counter.

"What'll it be, kid?"

"Coffee, please."

"That it, kid?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The hefty Thursday's-my-bowling-night waitress ignorantly slapped the coffee in front of Tuggy and went back to her crossword puzzles. Interested with the little silver doorknob over the sugar spout, moving out with its contents' weight, Tuggy issued his coffee more sugar than usual. He stirred the liquid swiftly with a simple tin spoon, whirlpooling it one way then obtrusively reversing his stir to create a little excitement within the million lipped cup. His hands seems to enjoy the coffee's warmth more so than he, and soon all that remained was the brown ring about the floor of the cup.

"Three nickels and two pennies ought to do it, ma'am, right?"

"Yeah. . .thanks, kid."

"Bye. . ."

As Tuggy made his way toward the restroom sign, he glanced at the silly make-up of the souvenir shop, of which he now seemed a customer. Postcards of no place and Tonka brigades hung about state decals and various other little expensive mementos.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"No. . .no, no thanks, I'm. . .I'm just headed toward the men's room, ah. . .thanks anyway."

One, two, the loosely hinged john doors open like falling dominoes. The smell of shit, piss, cigars, whiskey and body odor shower steam-covered half the mirrors and had succeeded in peeling off half the explanations for the Tropicana Prophylactic, and basic truck driver needs machines. 'Graffiti is refreshing,' Tuggy thought to himself as he shook dry his manhood and placed it back in its secure boredom.

As Tuggy was about to leave the bathroom, a large, tattooed, deep-voiced man, combing his receding black hair behind his ears, spoke.

"What're you doin' here this early, kid? . . .or what are ya doin' here at all, kid?"

"Well, sir," as the man made eyes at Tuggy's respect, "I just thought I'd get a cup of coffee."

"Coffee!. . .ya don't actually think that's what gets a man going all the time do ya, kid? . . .By the way, ma name's Sam, Sam Fortner, been drivin' trucks near twenty-five years come this spring."

"God, that's older than me, me, me. . .yeah, me, Spencer, or Tuggy, . . .yeah Tuggy, Tuggy Penington, good to meet you, Sam."

The joy of meeting a new, real person, camouflaged the grimace on Tuggy's face, a product of Sam's forceful handshake. Tuggy's recently attained adult naïveté seemed to be very refreshing to Sam, so he decided to "keep the ball rolling" as the old saying drags.

"Where ya from, Tug, round here?" . . .
"Tug?"

"Oh! Yes, yes, about an hour east in Fox Chapel."

"Hey, you is a richie then, ain't ya, Tuggy?"

"No, Sam, my father is."

". . .oh."

A moment of contemplating silence started producing rapid thoughts about Sam's previously stagnant brain.

"See you later, Sam, it's been nice talking to you."

"Yeah. . .Tug, sure."

Tuggy continued his goodbye out the doors while toying with the change in his corduroy pants pocket. With the close of the second swinging door, Tuggy heard a muffled, "Hold it."

So he turned slowly in front of a placid lady revolving a wrought-iron postcard stand. As the lady reached, held, and read the mountain landscape for fifteen cents a card, Sam came through the door and grabbed Tuggy's arm.

"Where ya think ya going, Tug?"

"Oh, ah, I dunno. . . .I thought maybe for another cup of coffee."

"Shit. . .What you need is a good drink. How 'bout it?"

"I don't know, Sam, I don't think I'm up for quite th--"

"Know this great place about half mile up 47 on the corner of Dovron Road. . .well?. . .let's go, kid."

Sam's cab was filled with wrinkled Playboys, empty coffee cups, half-used sugar packs, and gum wrappers. Its smell resembled that of a four-week vacation car with five kids, before being cleaned out. The repeating melody of the semi's engine seemed to hypnotize Tuggy until Sam turned and

"Now, remember Tuggy, don't trade any of your lunch with Jason; your mother wants you to eat everything in your lunchbox, or she wouldn't have packed it."

"Hey, Dad?"

"Yes, Tuggy?"

"How come I gotta go to school?"

"So someday you'll, well--"

"Dad?"

"Yes, Tuggy?"

"Will you buy me a new rubber football? Miss Brendlin says we have to bring our own, and mine is all deflated and everything."

Slamming the door behind him, Tuggy saw the "Enjoy Coca Cola" sign with "D&D Bar and Grill" under it, with an attached little sign that said, "Truckers Always Welcome".

Opening the door to the bar, Sam introduced Tuggy to an established fantasia of vraisemblance. Tuggy sat down at the bar while Sam sat down next to him, nodding at resounding "Hey, Sam"'s.

The plastic Clydesdales rotated around the lit-up "king of beers" sign.

"What'll it be today, Sam?"

"Blue Ribbon, and whatever da kid wants."

". . . Oh. . . please, um, could you make me a frozen banana daiquiri?"

"Well we don't sell too many of those, kid, but I guess I could whip one up for you in a second."

"Thanks a lot."

Monopoly game eyes followed the typical barroom decorations that included two cussing pool players, eight onlookers, one frustrated lover, four ignorant government discussers, three depressed and tired truck drivers, one "illusions of grandeur" bar tender, and two recently acquired friends at the end of the puddled counter. The electric bowling machine was out of order, which left only the pool table to play with. The bar resembled more of a YWCA bullshit session than a town tavern.

"Here's your F.B.D., kid."

"Thanks. Could I have a straw please?"

It was Thursday, and the Little League had just hit the Dairy Swirl scene for an after-the-game treat. Tuggy's banana milkshake was refreshing in his dusty shortstop throat. His father had just asked him how he could drink something that tasted like penicilin.

"It's easy!"

"What is?" Sam turned with his mug in hand.

"I enjoy it!"

"Enjoy what, you asshole?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Sam. I seem to be thinking about something else. . . god, this daiquiri sure is good." . . . "Hey, Sam?"

"Yeah, Tug?"

"What's going on over there, behind the curtain?"

"Oh, just a little gambling."

"What kind?"

"Cards, Tuggy, cards."

". . . Oh."

After about four drinks and two men's room trips later, Tuggy and Sam had run out of shallow conversation.

"What's really eatin' ya, Tuggy?"

"Well, Sam, if you have to know, it's, it's..."

"Go on, Tug, you can tell me."

"Well, Sam, it's how fucky hot I am with this coat on."

"Quit joking with me, will ya T--"

"I'm serious, Sam, this coat. . . it really is making me very uncomfortable."

"Then why in the hell don't you go hang the little bastard up, over there with everyone else's coat?"

"Let's go play some cards, Sam. . . I got some spare cash. . . okay?"

"Jesus Christ! . . I sure wish you'd make some sense, kid. . . fuck, all right we'll play cards, but why don't ya hang up your goddamned coat first?"

"Let's go play cards, Sam, all right?"

The moving back of the curtain caused four round tabled men to look up.

"Got room for two more?" Sam said with his arm stretched over Tuggy's shoulders.

"Sure do," the men said in unison, "have a seat."

The room was dark except for one cone-

shaped light on the end of a long, spotted cord oscillating over the table. It was hard to see anyone's face, and after a couple of hands, Tuggy could only hear indistinct voices say, "Your deal, kid. . . what da ya play?"

"Uh. . . how 'bout some Acey Ducey, guys?"

"What's the ante?"

"How's two dollars sound?"

The cards were dealt, and the men looked at them to see if they would bring them any money. When it came time for Tuggy to pick his card, he hesitated, then took the top card. Tuggy looked at the card. He was alone now. He cried a little something. Then looked at the card again. The card said "Candyland Card Number 12: Go down the popsicle slide". Laughing hysterically, Tuggy threw down the card and ran. Once outside, he ran back toward the truck stop. Arriving, he hopped into his car and sped off.

Laughing more and more until the merry tears turned to depressing sobs, Tuggy arrived at Pine Valley Ravine and jumped out of the car. Crying more and more, he collapsed under a lonely pine as his tear water blinded his vision. Tuggy stared at the rocky cliff in front of him.

Moving his locket four spaces to the card's indication, he slid down the popsicle or lost the game, or threw his candy card at his little brother, Topper.

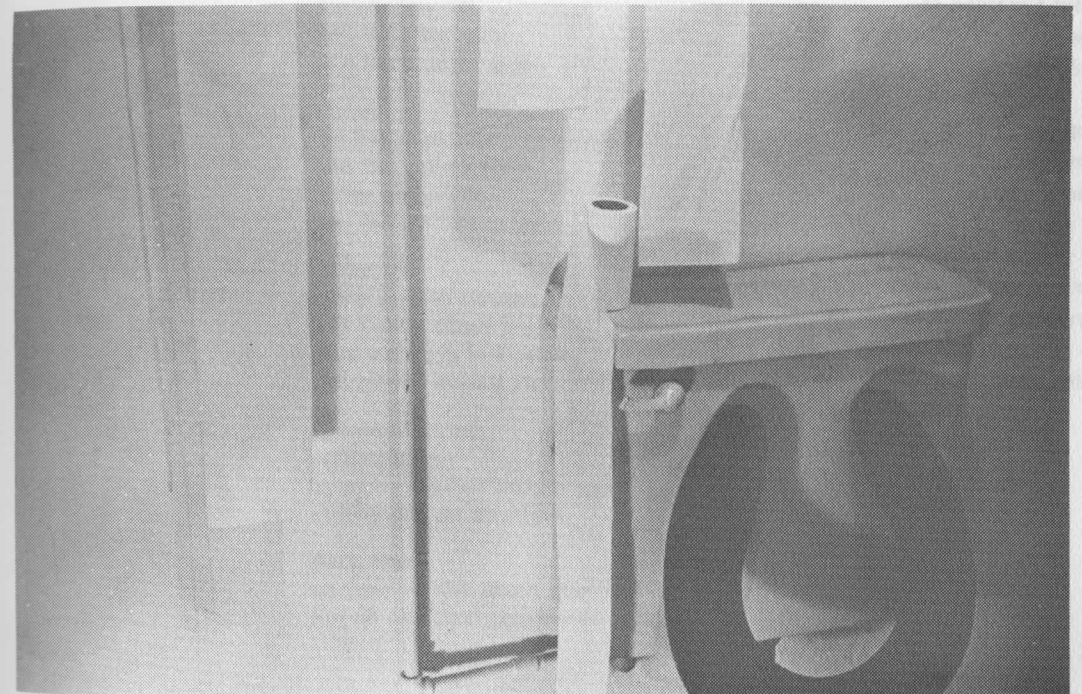
He turned again, alone again, alone again.

The park playground slide was long. Tuggy's father was at the bottom of the slide reassuring Tuggy's doubt. Screaming loudly,

"Don't let me fall, Daddy, please don't let me fall, Daddy, don't let me fall!"

Tuggy let go of the slide's handles, and let out one last joyous scream.

Oh, what great delight, Tuggy had won yet another Candyland game!



Tigger Montague

Mirror, Mirror

When I was
sixteen
I got a rose
from a boy who said
I looked like
 one of the delicate
petals.
He was crazy.
But I wanted to
believe
him.
I held the flower
up to my face in the
mirror
and looked.
I think
I should have
trampled the flower;
instead,
I put my fist through
the glass.

Twenty-Two Year Decay

When they told me
I laughed.

And then pulled the tube
out of my arm.

My mother
sat beside me
on a cold
metal
chair.
Talking about Aunt Dorothy.

I thought about my next shot.

And who was going to be the next president,
and whether Bette Midler dyed her hair,
and the square root of 307
My room number.

My father leaned uncomfortably against
the window sill
admiring the view
of a back parking lot.

I admired
the bandage over my incision
And the yellow stain
of the antiseptic,
that looked like urine.

Betsy
came in with flowers
and talked about the
good old days in Boston,
and all the smoky Harvard parties.

I remember her
getting laid
by some big Dartmouth jock
and having an abortion.

Back then
we used to talk about sterility.
But no one ever considered cancer.

Rice Puddin'

the just married couple stood in vanilla icing
up to their ankles. everyone thought they looked soooooo
happy and soooooo much in love, beaming up on the fifth tier,
holding hands. wedding gifts spread around them
in brilliant array, mixersblendersgratersgrillersgrinders
andcrockpots. the glare shone bright upon their young faces.
the photographer flashed his sylvaniabluedotcubes
in their eyes, caught their happy pose on film so they
wouldn't forget it, chanting, "smile!" even though they were
but couldn't help it. people began circling around them,
laughing optimistically, high on punch. someone shoved
a knife at the bride and said, "Cut it."
so the bride and groom took off all their clothes,
melted into One creamy white vanilla bliss
and were never seen again.

Mary Mueller

My mother lies asleep in her warm white room. On the table next to her, two glasses of water and a bending straw, pink and tired, hangs out of an old coke. Her tray is tiny, and fourteen pills lie scattered upon it. They roll about, occasionally knocking each other, waiting. Waiting for her to wake. All must be consumed today. She sleeps. She doesn't know. Her eyes, all blue and sparkly, covered with veined lids. Her white gown has crept up to her chin, and in her sleep, she readjusts it. Her rings sliding up and down fingers smaller than on her wedding day.

Across the room, I wait. Sitting on my hands, now creased red from the pressure of my thighs. I have been here long enough to see an inch of fluid from the bottle above the bed fill her arm. I am wondering whether her eyes are blue and sparkly even when I cannot see them.

Suddenly she is awake. Her eyes, blue and tired, try to focus upon me framed in the white, white of the room. She reaches for me, extended arms insistently restrained by three feet of rubber tubes.

Her arm no longer white with tape and needles, is soft with cashmere. I, six years, and all chubby legs and cheeks, running to her, waiting with the other mothers. Off the bus and into her arms.

Walking quickly away from the rest, her high heels clatter and click, click and clatter on the sidewalk. We talk about my school day, about my spelling 90, about my new math and my crummy old social studies. We are almost at my piano lesson house, and drawing back instinctively, I cry: "I can't do my scales. Oh Mother, please don't make me go!"

"Of course you can; we did them well earlier. Earlier, you did them perfectly."

"But you were with me. You counted like a person, not like a piano teacher. She won't wait for me!"

"It's all right. I know you'll play them

perfectly. I promise."

"Girl Scout's honor?" I press for the familiar reply.

"Girl Scout's honor."

"And I won't throw up or anything?" I squeeze her long fingers.

"Of course not."

"Girl Scout's?"

"Double Girl Scout's." She salutes as a final affirmation, sealing our ritual of departure. Satisfied, I go.

Peering at me from blue eyes, she drinks deliberately through the bedraggled pink straw. Taking less than I would have, she returns her glass to the table. Her roped radius hampers every movement. I rise to help her. She releases the glass too soon. Sound breaks through all of the white rooms on the ward, bouncing off the polished floors.

Two little girls dashing through the hall.

"If you don't make it to Mom's bed before the next crash, you'll be hit by lightning." Shrieks of nervous terror from us. Excited feet running, running towards mom's room.

She has heard us coming, half asleep and expectant. One long arm reaches for both of our fists, the other rearranges a disgruntled father, making room for us.

"I get Mom, I get right next to Mom!" We leap together into the big bed with all its wondrous pillows. Snuggling both into Mom's warm spot where moments ago she had slept.

Another crash, a nervous shudder, a soft sigh. The unutterable safety of her breath upon us. Her hand reaches over to touch the girl who had to sleep next to Dad.

A thousand pieces of glass lie sparkling on the shiny floor. With a nightmare's frustrating slow, creased, stiff hands, calves screaming surprise at sudden stirring, I move, across the room to her bed. On my knees, picking fragments from the floor to my hand, from the

floor to my hand, floor to hand, floor to hand. A tiny trickle of blood from my palm. I turn from her. She has already seen. She reaches for me. The white form fitted sheets, the attached tubes, lock her prone in position. I move to touch her, palm full of glass and filling with blood, my only offering.



I offer you my body,
I do not want it,
It disgusts me.
The pale white of my skin
reflects death.
My thighs,
a mute explosion of flesh
and loose fat,
fall open to you:
I have abandoned them.

You believe
the knowledge of your fingers
will reveal me,
that when the eyes of my body
close beneath you
I do not see the blood
at the corner of your mouth.

But I watch you:
the dead and the dying.
I judge you.
I condemn you to the golden ropes
of my hair.

Sharon Singleton

I was told of your decision
by the friend
who offered you his hands.
You studied them
until recognized the flesh, the fingers
as your own
and took them from his arms.

He came to me
with the illusion of hands
extending from awkward, empty wrists.
His eyes,
once merely the reflection
of your demands,
were too clearly blue,
too certain of their vision.
I had to look away.
His eyes betrayed the thought:
He cannot allow this dismemberment,
this diminishing of his body
into another ghost
that clouds the distance
between me and you.

And I,
uncertain of their origin,
could not offer my own hands.
I could not tell him
how my heart
shatters the silence of my body,
how the angular knot of my stomach
protrudes through raw flesh,
how my eyes beg to be seen.

Joe Bolster

Anything

This is an anti-story. You may be asking, what is an anti-story? Well, I have a book that's entitled, "Anti-story: an anthology of experimental fiction". Does that help you? It doesn't? Well, to tell you the truth, I don't really know myself. I suppose an anti-story is just the opposite of a regular story, whatever that is. Maybe it means there are no rules, but no rules could be a rule. maybe it means i dont have to punctuate correctly not that i ever do or mabe eye donte haf two spale correctle. Maybe my title can be anything. After all, it does say "experimental fiction." I guess I'll just write along and find out what it is. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines experiment as, "A test made to demonstrate a known truth, examine the validity of a hypothesis, or determine the efficacy of something previously untried." You don't know what efficacy means? Well, go look it up yourself. I'm not going to the put the

whole damn dictionary down on this paper. Besides, this is an anti-story. I will tell you what the dictionary says about fiction. Even anti-story writers can be nice when they want to. Fiction: "Something invented or imagined." Now you see, I could end my anti-story right here because it now fits the definition of experimental fiction. This little thing is previously untried, and I had to invent or imagine everything you have just read. But if I had ended it back there with the word "read", you would have probably said, what the hell kind of story is that, no plot, no characters, no nothing and it's only 248 words long. (Count 'em if you want.) I'd just say, that's an anti-story, baby. Experimental fiction. I can do anything I damn please. Everybody is so accustomed to regular stories, they would be lost and upset if my story were only 248 words long. Well, I'm going to make it longer because I don't like to see people lost. But don't think I'm going to turn it into any regular story. No sir, you're just going to get some more experimental fiction. Let's see, what can I do to entertain you? Hmm, how about some artwork ----- There, now did you ever see that in a story before? Of course not. Would you like some fiction? Is that what's troubling you? You haven't seen enough fiction? I can take care of that. Yesterday I came into my room and found eleven dead armadillos on my desk. What's that, you say? It's fiction. I invented and imagined those armadillos on my desk. Want some more? I know you don't, but you're getting them anyway because I'm running this story. Six of those armadillos, got up and whistled Beethoven's 16th Symphony. If you know anything about music, you just know that's fiction. I mean everybody knows armadillos can't whistle. I'll bet you're starting to squirm just a little bit right now - you don't like my story. Too strange, too foreign, too many dead armadillos. Ha, ha, little joke there. Laugh if you want to. It's your prerogative. You don't like all the power I have. You could stop reading, you know, and you

probably think you have the power to do that. But if you think about it, it's really my power. I can either end the story - that'll make you stop - or I can write something really obnoxious and weird, that'll make you stop, too. On the other hand, maybe you are enjoying my anti-story, in which case you will read on. I've got all the power. Notice how this is all in one paragraph. Do you dislike that, find it hard to read? Tough! I'm sorry, sometimes we anti-story writers can be so cruel. I will be nice now. Hi reader, how are you, great to see you again, you're looking well. Feel better? A few words back, 28 to be incredibly precise, I called myself an anti-story writer. I wonder what the other anti-story writers think of me. You know, the ones who get published in The New Yorker. They would probably say, oh no sir, you have gone too far, you have broken all the rules, you are not a true anti-story writer. Does that bother me? No. You wonder why? Of course you don't; that was just a rhetorical question. It doesn't bother me because if I'm not an anti-story writer or a regular story writer, then I must be something else. I am an anti-anti-story writer, perhaps the first and only. I am unique. There is nobody else like me in the world. Isn't that obnoxious? Don't you just hate me? I'm so. . . what's the word I'm looking for. . . anti. Notice how I put those little . . . in there. They were just for effect. I knew damn well what word I was looking for. Just wanted you to get another glimpse at my power. I also wanted to work the word anti (didn't feel like using "this time) in there, so it would be mysterious, intriguing and thought provoking. But if it isn't any of those things, I don't really care. Are your eyes tired? They are? You see, now I own your body. Well anyway, my hand is tired. I think I'll leave you alone now. Oh yeah, one last thing before I forget. Have you ever heard that saying, the pen is mightier than the sword? You know what I think? I think whoever said that never used a pen in a sword fight. What do you think?



Spilling out into earlymorning July,
dewed grass cuttings
stuck to tennis shoe toes,
we laughed across the yard,
past the hoofsucking barnyard sludge,
onto already sticky macadam,
popping tarbubbles and kicking gravel:
back to the spring maybe--
or the orchard.

Then on the quiet gray road
in a puddle of mapleshade,
the stiff ragged heap
caught and held us
silent.

We nudged it,
sniffed it,
poked it with a stick,
and worried over it
until brave Billy picked it up,
scattering greenflies to other dinners,
flung it hard, like a furred airplane,
into the flower-lined ditch
and we went on.

Kim McMullen



Ellen Claffy

Easter Story

When I was ten, I decided to do something with my pet parakeet. She had been given to me three years before by my grandmother, who used to raise them. Grandmother was the type who would never give or take but the best. My bird was blue and very pretty. I was too young to know what to do with her, so I simply named her Polly and let her keep on being pretty. Now I asked myself, why not teach her to perch and do tricks? And even talk? Too bad Polly never let out so much as a peep. Oh well, that didn't matter. In a few weeks she'd be singing in English.

Poor Polly had never been out of her cylindrical cage before, and now I had her out almost all the time. I had clipped her wings, not too well, but well enough for her not to fly back in. Polly soon figured out a way to get back, though. She'd scramble over to the fuzzy piece of carpeting beneath her cage and attempt to climb one of its legs to the bars and through the open door to freedom. I would try to reach her before the cage, usually stopping her before she got onto the carpet.

One time I left the room for a minute, leaving her perched on top of my chair. When I reentered, I saw the post was vacant and the bird already on the rug. I ran, flopped on my belly, and grabbed her. Polly let out a small screech. Her toes had become caught in the carpet, and the fiber was slicing into them deeper the more I pulled. I let go and untangled her. She was all right. The only thing she cared about was to be back inside her cage.

Polly was all right after that too - until one day I found her at the bottom of her cage. Her plumage was all ruffled; her eyes were closed, and she had difficulty walking. When I picked her up, I saw that her feet were covered with yellowy knobs. I quickly placed her back on the cage floor. Mom noticed her condition later on when, unfortunately, I was in the room. She couldn't see what was wrong with her. The vet was out of town that day, Good Friday, so Mom decided to take Polly to the Main Line Pet Store. They had been in business ever since she had been a little girl, so they'd know what to do.

We got there around quarter to three, glad they were still open. Mom put a nickel in the meter while I waited just outside the door, looking in on a huge aquarium with about twenty multi-colored goldfish swirling slowly around inside. Mom went in first; I followed, carrying a small covered cage to keep Polly safe from drafts and confusion. I was wondering what it was like to be inside on the floor -- all alone and in pain, surrounded by darkness. Though it had only taken three minutes to get here, to Polly it must have seemed like three hours.

The inside of the shop was dark, and every available space was taken up by aquariums, empty and occupied bird cages, and pet supplies along the walls. The place was full of the smell of old bird seed, the fizzle and hum of fish tank filters, and the garbled warblings of birds. The wooden floor creaked at my every step. I saw a musty colored cockroach scuttle past my left shoe and under the counter. He wasn't very big, only about an inch. The smashed one right where Mom was standing

was nearly twice its size.

I looked up the gray wall of the counter and onto the man behind it. I had seen him several times before - a big man who always wore dark T shirts over his blubbery belly. Today he had on a black one. Mr. Henry took Polly out of her cage without even removing the cover. I could hardly see her in his hand. It seemed to swallow her. Then he turned her upside down, revealing her sore feet sticking out between two of his fingers. Mom drew in a sharp breath. Mr. Henry muttered something, then walked into the back room with her.

When he came out again a few seconds later, Polly's feet were bleeding. He explained to us that her feet were infected. My head suddenly tingled and grew hot. I wasn't looking at Polly's feet anymore, or listening to Mr. Henry talk. I don't know what I was looking at. I don't know what I was listening to - except maybe the screamings of a hundred of her kind.

What was he going to do now? The man looked the bird over, half dead in his hand, pointing out her dull, broken feathers and her closed eyes. Mr. Henry was trying to convince me that Polly was too old and sick to live. There was nothing he could do, especially now that she was bleeding so. Her blood was all over her body and his fingers. Now I didn't want Polly anymore. I never wanted to see her again. I never wanted to see another parakeet again as long as I lived. Mom and I turned and walked out, but not before I took one last glance over my shoulder. I saw red-fisted Mr. Henry walking in the direction of the back room.

Riding home in silence, I wondered what he'd do with her. By the car clock it was just three. Polly had to be dead by now.

"Mom," I finally got up enough courage to ask, "do you think he stuck Polly with a needle to put her to sleep?"

"No dear. Mr. Henry smothered her with a rag soaked in cloraform." Mom's voice was calm.

"Really?"

"Most likely. But Polly was in such poor shape, she probably died right there in his hand."

"I bet he killed her," I said.

Mom and I got home, I going upstairs to put the little cage away and she rushing to answer the kitchen phone. When I came back down again, she was still there. She was talking to Grandmother, or rather, Grandmother was talking to her. I could hear her voice on the other end.

"Yes Mother. . .now Mother!. . .YES Mother. . .but Mo- oh, here she is now. . ." Mom cupped her hand over the mouthpiece.

"It's Grandmother," she whispered. "She wishes to speak to you."

I went to the phone, wishing I was going to doorway instead. When I heard that same tone of voice as before, but addressed to me, my face felt hot, my hands cold. Didn't I know how to treat a bird right? Once a bird started to bleed, it never stopped. I was in tears. Mom took the phone, and I felt like hanging myself.

"It's all right," my mother said afterwards, putting her arm around me. "Mother's just terribly upset, that's all." I was relieved. And I thought I was going to have to tell Mom everything.

Saturday, I couldn't believe it - we were going to the pet store again, this time not to go away empty handed.

"Pick one," Mom said. There were so many, and they were all so noisy, I could hardly think straight. Few were as blue as Polly. I wanted Polly. No I didn't. I wanted a goldfish instead. No, I'd get a bird just like her.

The parakeets that were in the left hand cage were scratching and sitting, eyes closed, or huddled in corners. The other cage had younger, fresher birds. I narrowed down my choice to two of these - a blue one and a straw green one. Both were lively. But the green one looked meaner, so I chose the other. Mr. Henry stuck in his hand, and all the birds went screeching for the walls. After five minutes of chasing the wrong bird, he got mine. The bird

was struggling in his hand. As Mr. Henry withdrew it from the cage, I could get a close up glimpse - two tail feathers and a bill hanging over his forefinger, behind a pair of huge black eyes. The beak smiled.

My bird was very still at first. In an hour or so she decided to do some exploring, finding her food and water. She remained extremely quiet though, for she was not used to the silence of her large new quarters. With the help of my mother, the cage had been well scrubbed and sterilized. The rug was still there, which I hoped would be gone by the end of the next week without anyone taking notice. Then the week after that, I could begin training. I'd be more patient this time.

Sunday, when we got back from church, I was told Grandmother was coming for dinner. I grew scared. She did come, an hour late, complete with Easter hat, new suit and rows upon rows of bracelets and rings. Her chauffeur followed behind, depositing two shopping bags brimming with Easter presents at Mom and Dad's feet. Grandmother looked sterner than I had ever seen her. Was it her outfit, or was it because she was telling Mom about the incompetence of her chauffeur? Or was it because of me?

We all sat down in the living room, Mom next to Grandmother on the couch, and Dad to one side. I got the chair opposite the couch. I certainly didn't want to stay, but to be polite, I sat through the whole thing.

An hour and a half later, we were still in the living room. Mom stirred the contents of her drained cocktail with her forefinger. My coke just sat there; it looked fuller from the melted ice. Grandmother was doing most of the talking with Dad, her pebbly voice and perfume filling the room along with the swinkling of ice cubes and the aroma of ham. The discussion was about her summer house in Maine. Had she forgotten?

"And I've got a bird feeder up next to the study window," she said, almost laughing, "where Clipper has his cage." Now she was laughing. Mom and Dad were too.

"Excuse me, I have to go tend to the ham,"

I heard my mother say between laughs. She exited the room, but I saw Mr. Henry exit the rear room of his shop instead. What did they do with dead parakeets? If I had kept Polly, I would have dug her a nice big grave in the garden and put a stone over it so no one would have been able to dig her up. But I didn't have Polly.

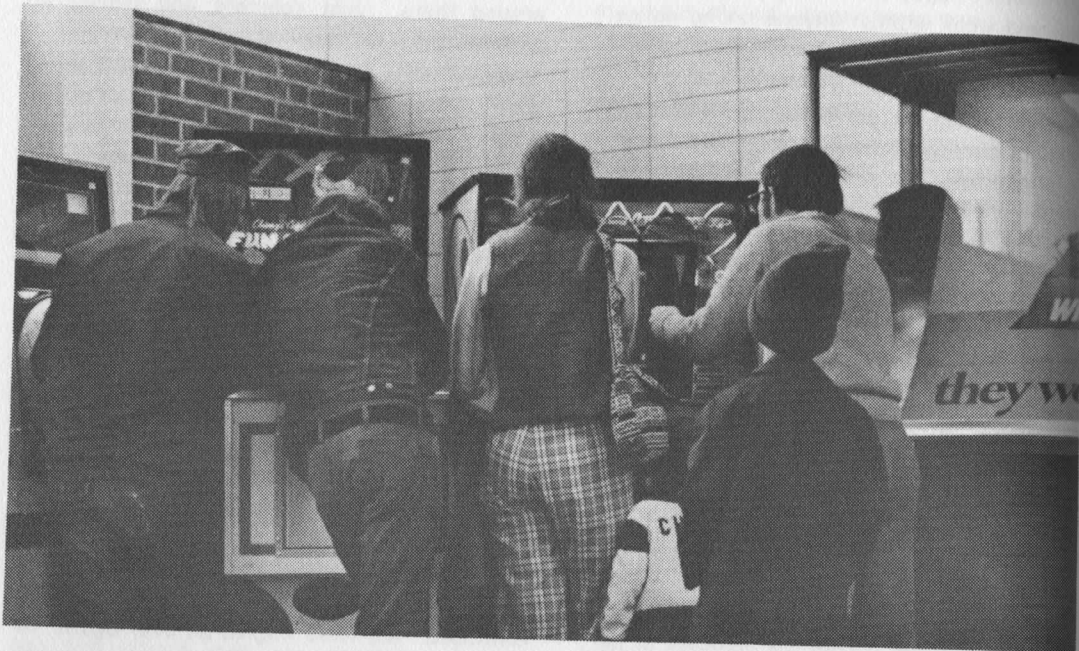
Grandmother was still talking, this time about Bay Harbor. They had ruined it, she said, looking straight at me. I turned my eyes away. Was there an animal graveyard in back of the pet store? No, there wasn't any dirt around there. Just concrete and dented in garbage cans, cartons and broken glass.

There must have been a ton of trash there now. Friday was trash day, but because of the holiday weekend, the garbage men hadn't come. They wouldn't come until Tuesday. I could see stacks of boxes, cartons, and a few beer bottles next to a couple of overflowing garbage cans. Mr. Henry came out the back door and propped one of the strewn lids up against the wall with his left hand. He had something else in his other hand - something small and reddish which he threw on top of the pile before reentering the store. The newest piece of trash slid a little to the side, almost falling off, but something caught it, so only the neck drooped over the side of the can.

Grandmother paused briefly in her conversation, trying to remember the name of a town near the Harbor. When she started up again, I heard another sound along with her voice. It continued. My head tingled all over again. A hasty, store-bought replacement was unforgivable. So I waited for silence and a glower but received neither.

"That new bird has one of the clearest, purest songs I've ever heard," she remarked with an unhard face, then resumed talking about Maine.

"Dinner is served!" Mom called from the dining room. Grandmother rose up and began heading in that direction. I let her go before me. She and the others were saying how good the food was going to be. And it was going to be.



Audience

You bump your teeth to a candied apple
glaring sideways and ciphered at me;
cornucopian competition

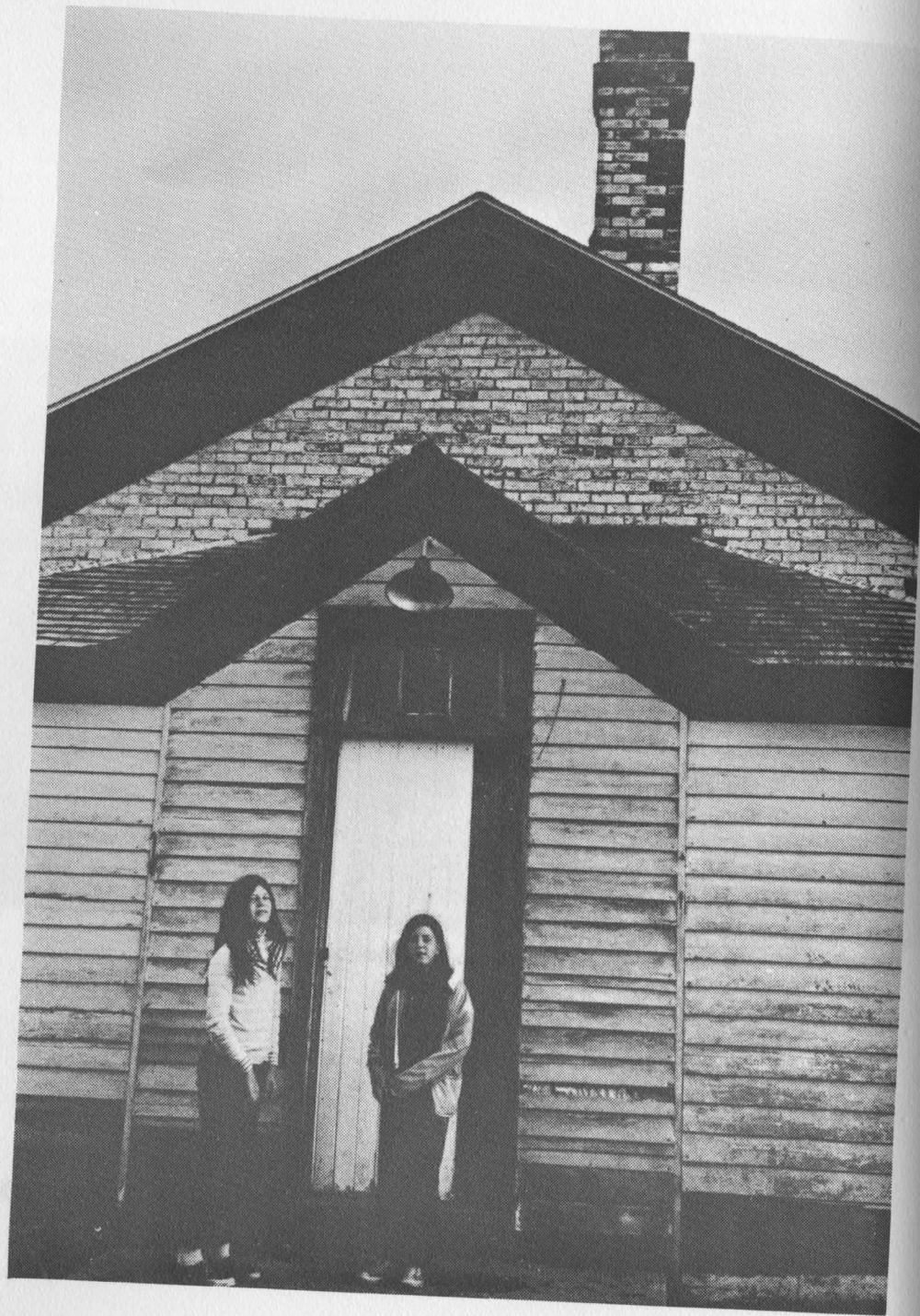
in spitting seeds
at each other's feet.

With heel-dug pretension
you rustle up dust,
hiking your cowhand ass away.
And Indians howl, not worshipping you
while deaf ears are missing
the soundtracks of lovers

backseating at Drive-Ins
and headlighting turf
as clumsy as High School's;
our bellies are white
under red-skinned pride
that never was proud.

You bite my tongue.
And the muted script gets lost
inside the clacking of your cowboy boots.

Dawn Patnode



Melanie

The door to the apartment building was heavy and almost solid on its hinges. I lugged it open and crossed the threshold, noticing the extreme transition from crisp wind to stale radiator air. My nostrils still tingled with an autumn chill. I rustled to the top of the hollow stairway, balancing the brown paper bag in the crook of my arm.

I stopped at the inner door. The key was in my right pants pocket. I reached in and pulled it out against ridges of corduroy. Stabbing blindly at the lock and sweeping my hair back from my forehead, I tried to see more clearly. But the hallway was without light from any windows, and the electric lamps on the walls were dim as small candle flames. Finally, the key scratched into place. And the rusty door-knob turned with a sandy grinding sound.

I huffed into the grey-windowed room, dumping my paper bag on what we called, "The Table". It acquired its name because it was the center of activity in the apartment. We walked in the door to see it, and we left by it. Pulling at my sweater sleeves, I returned to reclaim the key from the lock. I wrestled the rough wool over my head and kicked the door closed with a thud. I left my sweater in a bulky lump on The Table with other scattered pieces of outdoor clothing, un-hung art prints, tumbled book piles and old newspapers.

"Hey hullo. . . ." I called to the adjoining room. "Melanie? You around?" There was no answer. I thought, "She must have stayed late at class."

Taking a brief glance at myself in the mirror and brushing my hair away from my eyes, I turned, digging one arm into the paper bag. Speaking softly to the silence of the room, I said, ". . . not too badly dirtied today." I pulled the white waitress uniform its full length up from inside the bag. I draped it over a hanger that was part of the miscellany of the Table.

I padded across the tattered green rug toward the kitchen, hesitated, and looked through the entrance to the adjoining room. I saw Melanie from the back. Her orange hair hung just above the top of a high-backed chair.

The sun was setting through the window, refracting white and yellow around the corners of the room.

"She must be asleep," I thought, half wondering why she hadn't answered me earlier. I approached the back of the chair quietly, "Melanie?" She turned her white face sideways at me and acknowledged my presence only with a flicker of her eyes. "Oh, you're a boy tonight," I said, observing her attire.

"Ya. . . ." She answered me with blue ice eyes gazing off to some distance beyond the window. "I've decided that I feel more secure this way." She ran her fingers over the scarf which she had salvaged and converted into a neck tie. Letting her fingernails slide down, clicking at the buttons of her vest, she rested them on her silver belt buckle. There was a space left empty of words and she looked at me almost imploringly.

While caught in the absence of her eyes, I thought, "Just another mood. . . it'll pass." Then I turned away so as not to have to respond to the uncomfortable atmosphere she was creating. Melanie had raised her outstretched legs and crossed her polished shoes on top of the coffee table. The room was becoming darker with the sunset. The wide window rose behind the television set, and ragged white curtains hung at the window's edges. Yellow, green and red wires spewed from the broken mechanical box. She focused her stare on the blank television.

"Hey, I can handle that thing. I'll take it to the repair shop if you won't." I walked from her to the framed entrance of the kitchen.

Melanie jumped in a sudden quirk of fear, "No!"

I stopped and turned to face her. She glared at me, leaning forward with white fingers tight on the arms of her chair. Then, settling back, and resuming her gaze at the late sun, she said, "Tom might come back."

"Jesus!" I thought, "when will she get serious?" I turned back to the kitchen door, clacking in on linoleum with hard heels.

She continued in a soft low tone, "He had

been toying with the thing. He was right on the verge of fixing it, you know? It was almost back in working condition. If we didn't save the job for him, he'd be mad. You understand that don't you?"

I didn't answer her. She knew that Tom and I hadn't gotten along well. I thought his leaving was the best thing that had happened since they had begun living together. I had moved in with them as a renter. They had an extra room and needed money. Melanie's depression had been getting worse since Tom had left. I kept hoping it would pass, but she was so caught up in only herself that I was beginning to feel like a stranger. I wondered if she had resented me for having fought so much with Tom.

In realizing that I was probably putting useless, or even harmful energy into worrying about what she thought of me, I laughed. "She's a Gemini: two. . . she'll be feeling all right soon: back to one again. . . she's O.K. I'll just be patient."

I washed my filthy waitress hands at the sink, laughing at how absurd it was for anyone to think we could keep the crap out of our fingernails. I imagined my boss, Mrs. Morely, making her gruff voice sound playful, saying, "Just keep your hands in your apron pockets, girls, and everything will be all right when the manager comes around." I turned off the faucet and flicked my hands, splattering the droplets across the lower panes of the window.

Hearing Melanie rustling through a newspaper, I called, "You look for work today?" My voice was louder than it had to be, in order to be heard.

She answered as if she had expected the question, "No."

I had begun to ask her every night, hoping she would get out and find a job. Tom had been taking care of her financial needs while living with her. He had worked with an electrician who lived two blocks over from the apartment, and was making good money. But now Melanie needed to bring in at least a little money for herself if she wanted to continue living the way she had been.

"There's a sign in Cooper's Drug Store down on Burlington Street," I said, "says they need part-time help." With one hand I pulled out a cutting board, scuffing it along the counter top. With the other hand I rummaged carefully through a drawer of knives, feeling for the thick handled one. "Oh ya, that ice cream place down town wants full-time female help. Maybe you could work something out with them." I closed the drawer, and the utensils rattled. "Waitressing's a good thing to have, you know? I mean it always makes good money." I hustled across the kitchen floor, opened the refrigerator and bent down to look for the salad ingredients. Bringing out a bundle of lettuce, I swung the refrigerator door shut. "You didn't go grocery shopping, huh?"

"MMmm - MMmm . . ." The monotonous flipping of newspaper pages from the other room was almost noisy.

I began to feel like a mother trying to talk to a naughty child, not saying the right things. "Guess we'll have just plain lettuce for our salad tonight," I said. And I thought, "Here I am cooking for her, and now she won't go grocery shopping. Where is this going to end? No celery, no carrots, no peppers. . . tomatoes . . ."

I heard a weak response from the other room: "O.K."

I nibbled on pieces of lettuce and remained silent for the remainder of my preparation of dinner. Small house noises grew larger. The oil burner whizzed on and clicked off downstairs. My heels scuffed across the floor, hitting one squeaky spot frequently. I filled a pot of water. It boiled and simmered with different variations of shushing sounds.

Finally, glopping spaghetti on a plate, spooning on sauce, and pouring some milk, I rejoined Melanie. Sitting on a low couch that was across from her, I set my glass of milk on the coffee table. She slid her feet slightly to the side. Leaning back with a mouthful of spaghetti, I suggested she "Grashome while itchstill good n' hot".

She held the newspaper in front of her face, not moving. The absence of televised six

o'clock news left us speechless. An old clock ticked on the mantle. I scooped unsuccessfully at my spaghetti.

"I've got some money for you, Mel; last month's and this month's."

Her, "Thanks" was so compassionate and sad that it almost surprised me. I tried to encourage her to talk by setting my plate down and leaning forward.

"You got your rent for this month?" I asked her. "You're going to have to pay it you know. . . you can't stop everything because he's gone." My voice resounded in the small room. The sun had set and one neon SUNOCO sign flashed faintly red at the corner of the window.

The shadow of the huge chair back fell across Melanie's face, making her chin look longer than it was. She didn't answer me. I couldn't stand the sulking anymore; it seemed almost sick, unhealthy. "Melanie!" I wanted to shake her with my hands. "Will you get off your ass and start living the way you know you can?! Tom was a bastard! But so what? You've got a life to live, too. Can't you --"

"You know what?" She interrupted me as if she hadn't heard a word I had said, speaking playfully and ignoring my presence. I couldn't see her eyes past the shadow of the chair, but I envisioned them, staring hollow, like long, open tunnels.

"I had a dream last night." Her words became slow and precise. "That my father was alive. He lived in a special place. I could visit him every day, but I had to walk up a glass stairway. And. . ." She listened to the quiet for a moment. Then her voice began again. It was low and haunting. "I had to go through this glass maze of walls. So when I went to him, I had to always feel my way along the walls, bumping into other walls. I could see him sitting in the middle of the maze on a stool, thinking. But I never could get to him."

The silver buttons of her vest reflected what little light there was left in the room. I took a slow sip of my milk, not tasting it, feeling the cool glass against my lips. And I set it down with a gentle tap on hard wood.

"I never could get to talk to him, but I always came back the next day to try again. "One time," Melanie continued, "I went in and walked on the icy glass. The ceilings to the glass castle were so high that all I could see was infinite darkness directly above me. I stood at the bottom of the long stairway and looked up. It was made of thin sheets of glass, each a different color; red and purple and orange and green, like clear candies. This time though, at the top of the stairs, I saw my father. His working hat was set back on his head. He was out of the maze and looking at me. I wanted to run and throw my arms around his waist as if I were little again. But I stood still and watched him turn to the pile of glass that was at his side. Slowly, he lifted one clear sheet into the air, high above his head. It shimmered like a silver knife, catching the light at the right angle and refracting it."

Melanie jumped to her feet. Her glazed eyes were fixed on the red flashing neon sign outside. Her fists were clenched. Her voice rose as she continued to talk, "He tightened his lips and closed his eyes. His shoulders and arms quivered under the weight of the glass. He arched his back with all his might and hurled the long sheet forward. It flashed through the air like a spear with a million arrowheads while the first one crashed on top of me. I held up my hands to break the force of the huge translucent panes. They came down in torrents. My fingers and wrists were dripping with blood. Splinters of glass fell into my eyes, and he laughed so loudly, the sheets began to shatter before they hit me.

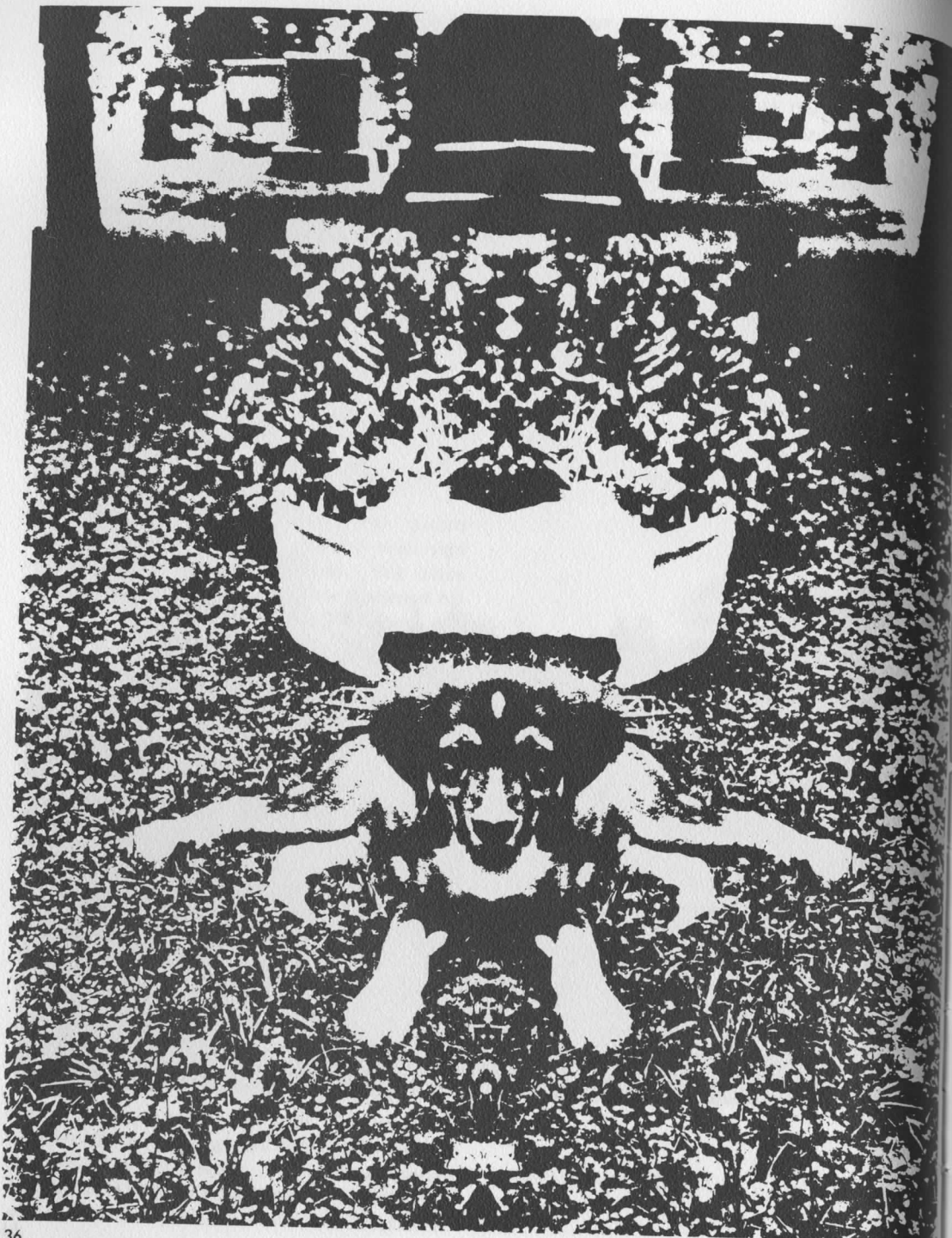
"I called to him, Daddy! Oh stop it, please, Daddy!" And screaming, "Please stop it, please, Daddy; please make him stop this! Stop it Tom, make him stop Tom, stop it Tom. Stop it please, Tom-tom, Tom-tom. . . stop leaving me here all alone. . . all alone. . ."

My focus switched when I heard a pounding from upstairs; a slow heart beat. The cracked plaster of the ceiling fell off in flakes. I thought, "Too much noise. . . ." I remembered the old man who lived upstairs; he complained of his sickness, his sleep and his neighbors.

With our sudden silence, he stopped pounding. The room was full of echoes.

With my right hand, I fingered my vest buttons, sliding up to feel the silk scarf, and underneath it, the smooth skin of my neck. I was half startled to find myself standing by the window with my left hand pressed cool and flat against it. The neon SUNOCO sign flashed pink at the corner of my eyes. I hung my head to look at my clothes. As I turned with the movement of looking down, a shadow crept across my shoulder. "Oh Melanie. . ." softly, I said, "you're a boy tonight. . . ."





Extinction

If a man
in green kakhi pants
with a safari hat
was to question me
from a distance
through the scope
of his elephant rifle,
and ask if I liked
the smell of fresh flesh
I would tell him
the scent would
only be appealing
if his gun backfired.

Vic Coccimiglio

The Only Way I Knew Her

Rode with her.
 in the corner
of my rear-view mirror

wondering if her ass was
 as nice as
 her smile.

Thought she was tailgating
until I glanced at my speedometer,
but when I did
 she passed,

and the last I saw of her
 was a white temporary plate.

Touch

The slowest
I have ever walked
has been
between these two walls,
listening for your voice
behind closed doors.

Someday,
when you are not near
I will think of you
as a bare canvas
when the morning sun
shines through the trees.

Family

My mother, careful
to dust the holes
in our screen doors
so the neighbors
may get a square view,
disapproves of my father
smashing flies
against the empty spaces.

Attempting to keep peace
I open doors
for flies,
yet my parents complain
because I go
to the door
wearing no clothes.

I gave up trying
to explain
why I only come
out of my room
to eat,
go to the bathroom,
mail a letter,
or leave.

