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Exile Vol. XXX

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Denison University

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Authors

Seymour Buffalo, A.T. McMullen, K. Kiefer, Chris Paul, Jay Krieger, Scott Schuster, Gregor MacDonald, Kate Reynolds, Don Wenzel, and Jacqueline Ondy



EXILE

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1984

Vol. 30

Denison University
Granville, Ohio

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Black and White

when I see pictures of
myself as a child sitting on a hearth
in sad hand-me-downs a chubby child
I wonder who is he?
what kind of boy
possessing taut lip and
eyes so round
would I know him if he walked up
to me today
saying not
a word.

Seymour Buffalo

Demosthenes

There's a marble to swallow:
it sits under your tongue.
Spun off a blue veiny thread,
it rolls and clacks on your
picket-fence teeth.

A.T. Mc

Losing Face

Miracle Whip-white bread sandwiches
after school
Halloween is coming in princess costume --
Leaf pile castles
are gathered with the rake
Father bought
and never used.

Mother sighs home
my cheeks hot pomegranates
in the cool grey air,
the Girl Scout cookie orders
undelivered
long division still
unconquered --
another night of Tuna Rice,
a babysitter,
a new man who knows my name.

"Kimberley", he named me
my father -- the weekend man
(hiding all week)
Coaching me with
late movie pizzas,
and Sunday morning bacon
to pick my team.
I am the captain
with no players
and no rules,
Until "60 Minutes"
flickers on
and he pitches me home
during a commercial.

Mondays
the street sweeper
sucks the castle from the curb,
and I lie,
waiting
face up to branches,
letting their colors fall,
to mask my face.

K. Kiefer

Graduations

A cat came tonight
emerging from the dark chill,
Born breathing by blackness,
shadows and rustling leaves.

A message from nowhere
wrapping around my ankles,
With half an ear
and a tattered tail.
An animal stranger
blocking my footsteps,
Speaking of hunger
through glowing green eyes.

With each sweep of the swing John's dusty sneakers chip one, and
number, and another bit of paint off the weathered porch planks. In and out
into the awning's shadow a fly hovers before finally catching the fold of
John's sweaty belly. John lets it stay.
"Got any idea what time it is?" he calls to Andrew. Andrew's gaze is fixed
ward, waiting, as a baseball rises, floats for a while, then drops slap into
his glove. Still skyward, he says "No.", slap.
"Mr. Fadley is getting ready to plant his garden. He says the moon is right.
He offered to till a small plot for us," says John.
"Tossing, Andrew's balanced rock rolls forward to his front foot which
sinks deeper and deeper into the tall grass. He studies the ball's path,
unable to count its rotations. Rocking, a bit deeper into the lawn, he catches
the tosses. The ball's path is like the others.
"Yeah," Andrew says.
"Actually Fadley put it like 'I could roto'till yu a patch a ground. Got
myself a new roto-tiller so it ain't no trouble, 'cept when it starts turning over
the heads. They'll dull yer blades yu know.'" And he says it can't handle
weeds. You've got to pull the weeds first." John says.
"Kind offer." Slap. "They're s'posed to have a good season this year . . ." -
"Slap." "Did you tell him we won't be here?"
"Yeah." Slap.
John looks out across the two lanes of hot black asphalt and across the
parallel striations of tilled earth. He looks out across the infinite striations to
where they merge beneath the thick white sky. And he notes only one small
obvious disruption in the pattern, a grassy mound which Mr. Fadley calls
the Indian burial mound. It's like John's peering out over a big empty table,
and like paper, on to which he and the porch and Andrew and the grassy
mound have been placed. John watches patiently as though for something
Chris Paine to be placed on top of it. He watches and waits and it is still, except for
the baseball's orbits. But like the motion of windshield wipers, or John's own
breaths, heavy with humidity, they become unnoticed.
Nothing changes. It's like he's studying a photograph and depth is an illu-
sion, or not even suggested. He sees a band of green against one of black,
against thinner and thinner bands of textured brown, like an inverted cross-
section of the earth, layer upon layer squeezing each successive layer harder
against the harsh unyielding white. Somewhere in the middle, like a hard
deposit, is that spot of green.
Without thinking John turns his head and attention left. Where the white
sky washes into the brown earth, like that fine area of flesh between the
summer tan and the constant white masked by the watchband, from that
area called the horizon John detects a grain of emerging gray. Though its
emergence is gradual, and uniform, much less noticeable than the chipped
and jagged growth of bald plank beneath John's sneaker, it is enough to be
noticed, more than the growth of the sweaty pool on John's belly. Thinking
that the grain of gray had perhaps always been there, emerging, John
wonders for how long he saw it, before noticing it.

From the unnoticed slap-slap John realizes he hears an expanding hiss. He doesn't know for how long he's heard it but he realizes he does. He decides it's probably the voice of the expanding grey

At some passing instant John realizes the grey hiss has become a car. In that same instant, without much thought, no thought at all really, John anticipates the car passing. And without thought he's aware of the distance the narrowing distance between himself and the car and the distance the car leaves between it and the distant horizon. And without thought John assumes a driver.

It becomes a Buick, he thinks Uncle Bill's Buick, 213 miles to the Mardi Gras. "Mardi Graw, John." Now he sees long hair, fine wind blown whips stinging his face without thinking and thinks it's her. "I hitch it every year." and her bony finger traces the line on the map softly stroking over and over the lines of his moist palm. Out of the hiss he hears a blaring "Ya-ya-ya." Pressed against the sticky vinyl seat his cheek hears the vibrating "Ya-ya-ya" from deep within. From within, a moan emerges moaning. Through a glimpse he sees the hair moaning back and forth over the seat back and the bony fingers stroking his uncle's upright head. With the passing car his head rotates right and he watches her languorous smile recede. Although the car recedes much the way it emerged John watches and thinks of the diminishing car and the increasing distance.

"It must be two," John says.

"Ha?" Andrew replies, tossing.

Noting the baseball, the consistency of its slaps John says "it must be two. She passes every day at two . . . maybe I'll wave to her next time."

"She looks like she's married."

"Oh . . . I wonder what she has to do at two." John pauses. "I've never seen her driving the other way. I had never realized that till now. I've always seen her going that way."

"Maybe she circumnavigates the earth. Actually I've seen her go the other way in the evening." Andrew says. Slap.

John waves the fly from his chest but it hovers back. "What are you going to do?"

"I might go see if the tractors turned up any arrowheads. A baseball game will be on in a while."

"No . . . I mean when summer is over." says John.

Detecting a loose seam in his ascending baseball Andrew can now almost count its rotations. "I don't know . . . s'pose I'll get a new baseball. I'll have to do my laundry too."

Looking at the bald planks John thinks of his sneakers as unfolding an old crumpled map. Peeling away a large piece he uncovers "J.M.'00 etched into the wood.

Cris, in his checkered jacket
 And blood in his mouth
 And teary-steel gray eyes
 And smile that broke
 His hallucinatory stare;
 This Cris of mine
 Sought to
 Reveal a comprehension
 That reduces the shape of trees —
 Threatens the sky
 And wonders
 If it isn't the ground.
 "And perhaps that's why
 They got along so well"
 My sandy-kneed cousin Ben
 used to speculate.
 For once, just once,
 In your box of function and form,
 Shatter the sides and corners
 And make them into
 Water.
 And that's what Cris' eyes said
 While his hand
 Renewed
 The life of Vincent
 Van Gogh.

Anonymous

Sorry We Are Close

Henry Edgar jolted up in his chair and dropped his copy of *Ninja*. He raised his hand to his mouth to moisten the smarting cigarette burn. The cherry blossom fragrance of the Japanese hillside was overcome by the musty stacks of the Little Professor Bookshop. His new Timex with the glow in the dark dial showed seven-fifty-four. November the Twelfth. Thursday. The store was to close at eight. Henry leaned forward to rescue his copy of *Ninja* from the swamp of dust fuzzies and paper scraps. A sinewy hand unsheathing a katana, letters of the title spilled on with a bloodstain. Choice cover. Those guys made Samurais look like Sunday school kids.

Henry rustled through the litter on the counter. He had to find the keys. Yellowed stacks of the Free Press spilled their edges into an oversized ashtray already brimming with butts. A leaking bottle of white out. Copy of *Mandingo* with chewing gum glob. The widows trade-ins, basement mildewed trash. Black dust from the sharpener. *Newsweek*, July, June, May. Magazines. Thursday. Dinner at Dads. Henry found the keys. Eight o'clock. He went to lock the front door. Keep anyone else from coming in, get these people out. Don't forget the mags. Oh no, Mr. Walters encroached upon the closing door.

"I'm sorry Mr. Walters but we're close—"

"Don't be silly Henry." Mr. Walters blazed a mad path to the magazine rack.

"Crap." Henry under his breath. He continued in his attempt to clear out the store. The science fiction kid. No problem. The Town and Country woman. Very polite. The foreigner. He's out. On a roll, on a roll. Could have sworn Norman the Poetry nut was . . . Henry rounded the corner of Sports and Self Help. She was there. In the lit section.

"Miss Carter?"

"I think I'll buy this."

"I was just about to suggest—sure." She leaned back against the stacks, twirled a lock of touseled hair with her finger. Their eyes met. Henry trotted back to the front of the store and briskly assumed his station at the register. She smiled and plopped *Lady Chatterly's Lover* on the clean part of the counter. He looked at his watch. She always wore that tight blue sweater. His eyes rested on what was closest. The animal embroidered on her left breast.

"What's that?"

"D.H. Lawrence"

"Looks like a housecat." She looked down to where his finger wavered.

"It's a lynx." Round eyed and proud." Slazenger."

"Oh." Henry plugged at the register. "Four fifty." Their eyes met. Seconds after he heard an unusually loud throat rumble.

"Henry?"

"Yeah?" He slipped her purchase into a paper bag. Eight twelve.

Thursday. Dad's place closes up tight at nine thirty.

"I said, what ever happened to the fat man that used to own this store? Eugene?" Henry hesitated. She never asked before. Why now? He craned to see Mr. Walters slouching at the magazine rack. She was good looking

"Henry?"

"Yeah? . . . Oh . . . Eugene. Eugene is dead. He choked on a doughnut." He scratched his shortly cropped blond hair and shrugged as if to say "What can you do?" Her jaw went slack.

"How awful. How horribly awful. I'm terribly sorry. He was . . . he was very, he was nice." She cocked her head and squinted. "You know?"

"Sure. You know Miss Carter . . . I've been reading this book . . . *Ninja*, and I thought maybe—"

"Henry!" Mr. Walters bellowed.

"Call me Becky." She swept the bag from the counter and flounced out the door. Kinda fat. No, not fat, just sort of roundish. That's it. Roundish. Nice though.

"Henry! Where the *Popular Damned Science!*"

"Asswipe." Henry muttered as he shuffled to the back of the store. "I think I took the last copy for my Dad." Eight fifteen.

"You think?" Mr. Walters sipped from his hip flask. "Yer supposed to know. Yer the dern little Professor ain't you?"

"It's past closing Mr. Walters, and its time to—" The doddering old man clicked his falsies and pored over *Scientific American*.

"Lookit here." Walters prodded the open page. "As soon as that bum son-in-law of mine fronts me some scratch, cash mind you, I'm gonna get me one of these solarized numbers. I'm gonna pack up my Rambler and get the hell outa this rat-hole. Arizona. That's the spot for me boy. Been gettin postcards from a friend a mine, Earl, says he got hisself one these solarized jobs. Don't hafta waste good green on energy bills, no sirree Bob, not with one a them solar puppies. I figger, with two, maybe three grand say, lookit right here. Why that's the solar panel. Powers the whole damn thing."

Henry heard the toilet flush. Not another one!

"Earl says a feller can run a blender or anything on that sucker if he had a mind to. How bout that. A blender."

Henry ushered Norman the Poetry Nut from the washroom door to the front door. His private reading room. That's what he thinks it is. Poetry nut. Henry saw Mr. Walters waddling out the door with a stack of magazines. Old fart better pay for those later. Finally everyone was gone.

Four quick snaps. He snuffled as the two rows of fluorescent lights flickered out above the congested aisles. The armpit of his sweater snagged the top edge of the plywood that fenced in the display case. Straining, inhaling, fingers shook. He surged. The scratchy collar of his sweater creased his neck. The splinters held fast. A bead of sweat tickled and clung to the tip of his nose. He narrowed his eyes. It plopped onto the green felt. Henry flipped the sign. SORRY WE ARE CLOSE. The sun had evaporated the last letter. He noticed that the display case hadn't been changed in weeks. He was supposed to do it. Who else would?

He was stuck. While he grunted and tried to free himself, he noticed the display case. He writhed, then rested. In the case were best sellers in hard cover editions. Not a bad job. Generous stacks, front and back of the paper

jackets clearly visible. Ken Follett, Stephen King, the new James Beard Cookbook and . . . Best Biker's Tales?. He squirmed. He twitched his nose and sent another bead of sweat to the felt. Nearest and within reach were Helen Gurly Brown and the G-Spot book. Just what exactly is the G-Spot. People seemed to want to know. Becky has one. One copy left propped up with extra Stephen King. Still trapped. Might as well since I'm down here.

He strained just a little bit more, reaching. Sharp, unexpected pain snapped him upright. He howled. A thin strand of sweater led from the splinters. "Crap." He probed the gaping hole. The G-Spot remained a mystery. Henry looked for the stack of magazines. Right there. They were right over . . . there. Nuts.

The string of reindeer bells tinkled, leather strap gently tapping the frosted glass door. Ought to get thermalpane solarized glass. Sun in, cold out. Mr. Walters is a fool. Solar nut. Rock salt. Crush it. Smash it into a fine white powder. The armpit smarted. More rock salt to be demolished. He stomped the crystals. A few tugs from the neck of a puffy down coat produced a scarf. He pulled it to cover his runny nose, then a bit farther up the bridge of the nose. It was his disguise. The wind from the traffic bounced off glass store fronts. He winced. A small cold tear trickled down. Henry saw the street people from the reflection in the glass. They did not know this. He spotted Otis. Otis was not looking. That was good. He shoved the scarf up higher. An elderly black man in a worn and shiny corduroy coat first thumbed up on a pair of baggy trousers, then yanked down on the fuzzy earflaps of a black pilots cap. Henry wanted to skate past. Slip through the trap just this once. The old man spat while massaging the whiskered creases on the back of his neck. He dropped out of vision as Henry passed a section of brick wall. Then from another window, Otis. That feeling came. Gray queasiness, rancid mushroom soup thronging in his gut. Otis left his post. The parking meter in front of Sam's Jams. He's seen me. Henry dropped his head and quickened his pace. The man blocked his path.

"Say. Say man. Mebbe you could lay me on a dollah?" Henry stopped and fumbled for change. Empty.

"Fifty cent, Fifty cent." The reek of cheap wine, body odor. Otis, a pair of bloodshot eyes with drooping lids. The palm and wriggling fingers at eye level. Henry's chin trembled. He tried to step around the bum.

"Don't have no change to-day?" Henry discovered two cigarettes in his shirt pocket. Otis snapped up the smokes. "You alright chuck."

Henry's chest heaved in a relief. He was past. Then the hand on his shoulder. "Wait a minute Chuck." Henry wheeled and locked with the bloodshot eyes, the drooping lids. Otis spread into a mad dog stained smile. Henry bubbled with greasy unease.

"You a righteous dude Chuck. Make Otis feel a little not so bad." Otis popped an Ohio blue tip on a cracked thumbnail. He took a long drag. The smoke bobbed up on his lip. "Go on. Go ahead." Otis held out the wet filter. A peace smoke. Henry flitted from bloodshot eyes to cigarette. Otis tilted his head. "Watsa mattah Chuck?"

"I don't smoke." Henry blurted and spun on his heels. Soon he was out of range. The fear began to ebb. He flushed with humiliation and sank his head turtle like into the folds of the scarf. I don't smoke. Jesus Christ. He didn't bother to look at the reflections. He turned to see Otis gesturing to another passerby. Trying to stiff some other poor fool. He patted his chest. The last two. He started to seethe. Not tomorrow scum. No goddam way. Not tomorrow. He lashed out at a beer can.

On a good day, Otis, who might be concealing a weapon, was the only major problem to avoid. But today was Thursday. Dinner at Dad's place. Henry shuddered. At least there should be no trouble getting in this week. A clump of fur with spindly legs and high cut boots was coaxing a smaller, heavier clump of fur on the end of a leash. Henry crunched past the increasingly desperate urgings.

"Be a good dog. C'mon be a good lil' girl. I'm cold too Muffin . . . Christ Muffin will you find a spot!?"

As he scraped the bumpy layer of ice from the windshield the fur balls tickled past. "Good dog." The woman cooed. "Good lil' doggie." Muffin advanced at heel, nose held high. Henry flashed a scornful sneer, nostril arched in distaste. Thursdays. If my problems were only so . . . he dropped his keys. He shoveled the clutter, cans and paper, onto the passenger side of the Satellite.

It was dark by the time he heard the snow squeaking under his tires upon rolling up to the guardhouse. The uniformed man kept his hands tucked in his armpits. He waddled over to the Satellite.

"Name?"

"Henry Edgar."

"Purpose of visit?" The mans' frozen breath swirled about his head, smoke late from the street lamp.

"Dinner with my father. Merle Edgar is expecting me."

"Just a minute fella." The security man waddled back to the steamy windowed back. Needs thermalpane, Mr. Walters voice echoed. Damn fool solar nut. The man nodded into the telephone. The plywood sign that marked the entrance to PLACID FUTURES loomed above the gate, its blaze orange logo of a sunset radiating serenity.

"I'm sorry Mr. Edgar. I don't have you down in my log book for incoming visitors. Please step out of the car." Henry moaned and clambered out.

"For cryin' out loud." He whined.

"Say something there fella?" Henry shook his head in a positive no. The guard circled the shimmying automobile. He scribbled down a few notes which were whisked out of sight when Henry peeked over his shoulder.

"Carrying any fire-arms or explosive materials. Propane. Butane?"

"Nope."

"Been exposed to any radioactive materials in the last month?"

"No sir."

"Any contagious diseases?"

"What?"

"Disease. Chicken Pox, V.D.?"

"Certainly not. Hey, is this really necessary?" Henry breathed into his cupped hands. "I'm here every week. You must know me. I recognize you."

"Just answer the question fella."

"But look at me. Look. Look at the car! I'm Henry Edgar. You must have some recollection--"

"Hey pal. You're not in the book. If you're not in the book, well . . . you're not in it. No one gets in unless they're--"

"In the book." Henry completed.

"Don't get wise." The guard rumbled around in the trash on the floor of the car. "Ouch. What the--" He pulled his hand from under the seat. From a bloody finger dangled a three treble mooselunk muskybait.

"Sorry. I must have gone fishing." The Satellite began to idle convulsively, the loose hood clanging.

"Listen you, you, listen here fella, first you're not in the book then this. I don't need your brand of aggravation. I got right mind to--" The Satellite barked a backfire that startled them both. The phone rang. The guard stomped over to the shack.

"Okay buster. You got clearance. Park it in G-lot."

"Thanks buster."

"Too bad." The guard shook his head. "And I was just about to warn you smart ass about the new system in interior procedures."

"Sure. I'll figure it out." Asshole.

A sinister smile crept over the face of the man in the glass enclosed booth. His voice crackled over a loudspeaker, the only fixture in the round room. "Get a pair of goggles from the cabinet Mr. Buster." A drawer like that of drive-thru banks hissed open. Henry strapped them on.

"Stand in the center, on the black dot." Henry shuffled. A panel on the ceiling slid back to expose a bank of spray nozzles. "Our Scanners indicate that you may be the carrier of some sort of vermin. Bugs. I'm very sorry but this is our new standard procedure." Henry's eyes bulged a livid white from behind the goggles. New procedure!

"Hey. Wait a minute." He spotted the black plastic name-tag with the large white letters. "Hey you. Maurice. Wait!" His protest was drowned out by the roar of the antiseptic jets. A blasting from above. Stinging sensation. The hot fluid singed his ears, nose, lips. Choking, gasping godawful fumes. Pain. The hissing, popping spray. A sizzling steak on a hibachi sound. Smell like hospital concentrate. Raid. Kills bugs dead. He reeled and staggered. The Voice, a metallic abstraction slicing through the undertow. PLEASE STAND ON THE BLACK DOT. Silence for a few seconds. Then alien static

the jets dripped. The fluid began to foam, like scrubbing bubbles. Oven cleaner. He gagged and hacked up popping foaming grey stuff. The fumes grew in intensity, scarring nostrils. WILL YOU PLEASE STAND ON THE BLACK DOT. Scarf, cords, and coat were all imbued with gray froth. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SPLENDID COOPERATION." I'm dying you twisted maniac, get me out of this-- PLEASE PROCEED TO THE DRYING SECTION. A curved panel slid open, beckoning. He left a glossy snails path. The lighted sign flashed. PREPARE TO DRY. A loud click followed by a rumbling whir. Oh my. The fans assaulted. Torrents of hot, dry air blasted the foam off of his sodden clothing. It stretched the skin on his face. How long does it last? The fans stopped. Henry wobbled and leaned against the wall. Then the heat. Arid, sweltering. A goddam toaster oven. Blistering waves cascaded from a bank of red lamps. Walls turned pink. Henry Edgar melted onto the floor. The sign flashed. A bell and buzzer clanged and rasped. PRELIMINARY DECONTAMINATION COMPLETE. From his prone position he whined. "This is . . . Oh my God."

Another panel hissed open. Exit now. The corridor curved forever. Video cameras ogled him like ravenous vampires with blinking red eyes. There were not right angles in PLACID FUTURES. Henry slithered onward. Then the swinging doors and another blinker. The Voice had followed him. WELCOME TO BETA EXCHANGE RADIATION PURGATION CENTER. Henry hesitated. This must be new. It can't be as bad as the . . . what the hell. The floor became a moving sidewalk. He was being propelled toward a shimmering steel arch. Not unlike those of airport metal detection units. He looked down to find himself on a black dot. Once under the arch a crackling noise began to slowly emanate from somewhere. Louder staccato bursts ricocheted off the smooth walls. A siren went off. The signs flashed CON-AMINATION. Two men in lead lined suits, faces obscured by black rubber gas masks. "You must come with us." The voices gurgled.

"But I haven't done anything!"

They carried him away. A mask loomed in front of his face. The voice gurgled. "Please disrobe." Henry shrugged out of cords, sweater. "Everything." The gurgle insisted. "The watch too."

Helpless. Nude. Embarrassed. Henry looked at his feet. "Is this really necessary?"

"How about buttoning it and getting on the conveyer belt. Better lie on your stomach." A hand poised at the control lever wiggled anxious fingers.

"Why? What for?" the belt lurched forward, bringing him a foot closer to the dark hole in the wall.

"They're not my balls." The hole was closer. Henry rolled unto his belly. jets of hot water scalding, bursting at him from every conceivable angle.

The steam was thick. He breathed a cloud of water vapor and spluttered. The brushes. A gnashing hog backed set of mechanized bristles. No soap.

They scoured him like a dirty pie tin. Whirling cat o' nine tails. More jets. Blowers, heat lamps. Squeezing through a soft cloud of alcohol drenched

cotton. Then not one, but two, five. Injections automatically stabbed his

rump. The belt delivered a quivering blob of Henry.

A blond woman of heroic proportion wearing a crisp white jumpsuit hovered near the belt. She held a armful of powder blue paper clothing. Name tag-Amelia shook her head. "We found the source of radiation dear. Get up." His body was pink, scratched and puffy. He felt like hamburger. He lay prone on the canvas, squinting up at her through spread fingers. Couldn't she just leave the clothes and get lost. He did not move. "Get up dear." "Bitch . . . Bitch . . . Bitch." The words barely drooled out. He was close to tears. He covered his genitals and reached out for the stiff paper garments with his free hand.

"It ain't nothin' I haven't seen before. I'm a nurse Honey." Henry snorted. He pulled on the pants, his toenail ripping a hole in the seat. "Be careful there. You only get one pair. By the way, you should get rid of that glowing in the dark watch of yours. Those raidum dials sent our equipment haywire. You screwed things pretty good."

Henry wanted to kick Amelia right in the crotch, dear.

The paper garments chafed. He stiff legged down the hall. A draft violated the rip in his seat. He recuperated during the long, tedious, descent to Delta complex. He thumbed the buzzer to apartment seventy four. A fishy eyeball flickered in the circular glass plate. Locks began to whirl and click inside the lead lined door.

Merle shimmered in a sleek white tennis outfit that set off his tan. His hair was perfect. "Henry! What took you boy?" He bellowed with genuine enthusiasm. "You look all tuckered out. What's with the paper duds?" Henry forced a weak smile and slinked in the doorway.

"How's life out there?" Merle's forearm rippled as he locked Henry's flaccid hand in a corporate grip.

"Pretty okay I guess." Henry shrugged. He peeked over his father's shoulders, fearful of some new form of modern treachery installed since last week. "I see you got rid of the jogging treadmill."

"It's gone. Wasn't much fun was it? It's good to see you Henry." Merle surveyed him. "Why don't you go and get into some real clothes?" Henry nodded and moped over to the bedroom. His paper clothes rustled. He came out wearing a pair of red golf course pants and a tight fitting polo shirt that would not tuck in.

"I got cable now." Merle swaggered over to the tube. "It's the latest thing." Henry stretched the puckering shirt and frowned. He paused to look at the mural painted in the "windows" of his fathers burrow. Subtle track lighting played upon a New England moo-cow and barn scene. Merle slipped behind his fully stocked wet bar.

"Hows about a Canada Dry?"

"Sure." Henry was transfixed by the illusionistic depth of the painting. He could almost smell the scene. Sweet grasses, an ammonia-like mustiness riding

a warm breeze. The smoke twisting from the farmhouse tickled his nostrils. "Dial a smell. You like it?" Merle chuckled. The ice cubes clinked in the Currier and Ives highball glasses. "I got it from John Wanamaker's catalog of scent. Check this out." Merle twiddled dials and snapped switches. An electric motor hummed. Cape Cod Seashore displaced New England moo-cow. A heady aroma of surf and sun baked seashells wafted from the smell banks. "Check this." A stiff breeze completed the window illusion. "Wild." Merle flashed his impeccable teeth.

"Wild." Henry mimicked. "Hope you didn't forget the periodicals." Merle chortled over his electronic delights. The Canada Dry crackled on the cubes. Henry looked down at his feet. God help me. The magazines.

"Look at me son." his demeanor changed. "Where are they? I specifically requested *Architectual Digest*. I want *Omni*. I need *Popular Science*. *The New Republic*?" You couldn't have forgotten *Scientific American*." Henry rolled his eyes and scuffed his feet.

"I forgot."

"I asked for *Time*. I asked for *Apartment Life*. What is your problem son? You know I need them Henry. Dammit. You work in a bookstore. I bought you a bookstore. I would think you could find it in your heart to bring poor old dad his *Saturday Evening Post*."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry does not give me what I want. I want *Life*. Give me *Life* Henry, *Life*."

"I can get them--"

"I'd rather not talk about it now. What am I going to do with you?" Merle knocked back his Canada Dry.

Father and son shared silence in the burrow for a half an hour. Merle punched away at the button of his remote control. He settled upon channel 7: Bowling for Dollars. Hookin' Bob Handley delivered a thunder strike, then split. Merle snorted.

"That fool lost everything. Shoulda been happy with the leather rhino footstool."

"I'm sorry about the magazines."

"That's okay son. You'll pull it together for next week. Won't you?"

"Sure." Merle gave Henry's shoulder a friendly squeeze. He smiled. Henry knew that look. He could feel it coming. Merle laughed a fakey laugh. Henry laughed. The treadmill? No that was last week. The garbage disposal is clogged. No. That wasn't it.

The beds were no longer in Merle's guest bedroom. Instead a stainless steel box, an inflated coffin, dominated the room. It sprouted a plethora of tubes and had a small door at one end.

"It's a what?" Henry locked his knees and refused to enter.

"Really nothing to be afraid of son." Merle applied pressure to Henry's back.

"Have you tried it Dad?"

"Why its the latest thing."

"No way."

"Its state of the art."

"I don't care."

"The air is supplied through a regulator type demand valve. Very safe. And what's nice about it, the air is lemon scented."

"But why Dad?"

"I'm very well read on this son. Sensory Deprivation is just the ticket for the tense individual of today's high tech, fast paced world. Its relaxing, pleasurable, and a sure fire way to unlock the powerful imaginative potential dormant in all us. It really quite healthy. The ultimate hassle free environment"

"It's dark in that thing?"

"Of course."

"No way."

Merle smiled.

Henry floated like a lilly pad in the salt water. It was more than dark. He thought about Mom. What was for dinner. He fell asleep in the spiraling lemon scented void.

"Sorry about that Henry. After our squash game me and a couple of the guys went to see Dr. Strangelove. God I love that movie. Roy has an Australian cable channel I can't get. Gee, you look a little . . . puckered there ole boy." Merle slipped a crisp twenty into Henry's pruny hand. "Get yourself a Burger Chef on the way home. And for god sakes Henry, get yourself some real clothes." Henry poured himself out the door. He went home.

The science fiction kid was cracking a wad of grape gum. Henry saw him through a hole in the stacks. In the constricted passage of aisle three, Sports and Self Help, someone had messed things up royal. What a chore, sort the fallen paperbacks and try and organize. Organization. That's the key. The grape reek drifted from the other side. He could hear Mr. Walters hacking and the whisper of magazine pages. What a chore. Then she came in. Henry adjusted his hair. She tippy toed to pluck a book from the literature section. So like her, a discriminating reader. Never one to buy the pulp. That's my kind of woman, he had once heard someone say in the doughnut shop. Her

blond hair was loose, as if she spent time trying to get the devil-may-care look. Henry ogled the swelling form that threatened to burst from the tight Slazenger sweater. It's a Lynx, not a housecat. She caught him staring. She did not blush. She winked. He snapped back to his task. She was moving closer. Be casual. Glad to see her, but not spastic. A smouldering coolness. Hello Miss Carter. Too formal. Hi Rebecca. Too flat. Good to see you Becky ole gal. Who am I trying to kid? Mr. Walters called her a hefty heifer. What does that old crank know? She's not fat, just very . . . roundish. Nicely rounded, like a model in a Renoir. Not mean and bony like the tweed and leather herd.

She was closer, but not looking. Tretorns, faded jeans, classy sweater. She dressed as if she wasn't roundish, but she was. The Tretorns squeaked. Henry knelt and began tossing books. He mixed Sports with Self Help. She was on top of him now.

"Hello Miss Carter. How was your weekend?" She had leaned back against the foreign language dictionaries. Her sweater was near the breaking point. She looked up from the book.

"Today is Friday Henry." Such a pleasant smile. She wanted to squeeze past. Henry tried to make room by pressing himself into the stacks. He sucked in. She smeared against his back.

"Call me Becky." Her breath tickled his ear. She trailed a finger across the small of his back as she passed. Henry started. Books fell. He tried to catch them, but the flood from the rocking shelf cascaded to the floor. Becky giggled.

"Knock off the damn racket." The voice snapped. Mr. Walters. Becky slipped around the corner into science fiction.

"Fat Hog." The science fiction kid wrinkled his nose at Henry through the hole in the stacks. Henry plugged the hole and continued re-shelving.

The bell rang at the front counter. Becky, not really that fat, was there, slapping a paperback against her thigh. Henry hastened to her. Not too eager . . . keep that smouldering cool.

"Find something you like?" A slight pause. "Becky?"

"Sure did." She held out the book. He looked at the title, the price, popped the gluey keys, looked at the title again. *Delta of Venus. Erotica*. French name. That word. The smut shops that were sprinkled all over the downtown area. That word in big letters, drawing in the slinking men in their overcoats and slouch hats. Henry wasn't sure, but she must know. There she goes winking again. He had no idea that there was a place on his shelves for anything of its kind. Becky of all people. In his store. Sports, Self Help, Literature, and now this.

"Something wrong Henry? You look pale." She wiggled and slipped her purchases into a tight back pocket.

"What? No, Nothing." Becky gave him a sloe-eyed grin and propped her elbows on the counter. Henry twitched into his most personable smile. He eased into the chair, breaking from the eyes. His smouldering cool was now a steaming sewer lid. He looked over, around and again into the eyes. Say something.

"Do you like to party Henry?" He clicked his lighter and shot a thin stream

of smoke to the side.

"Party? Sure. Love to party." Party. The word tumbled around, finding no particular place to rest besides New Years. He never partied.

"Come to my party. Tonight. I'm having some people over and I thought you might like to come. My folks are in Nassau again." She began scribbling down an address. Henry focused on the lynx, which trembled as if to spring. "Some of the guys are going to be old High School friends. They're all right but I get sick of their heavy ego trip thing. Know what I mean?"

Ego trip. Lynx. Party.

"Oh sure. I'm sick of that too." She pressed the note into his hand.

"Tenish is great." She flounced out the door. She was really not that fat at all.

Henry tired of the stealthily creeping black robed warrior from the island of Urumu. He closed his copy of *Ninja*. The blurb on the back read: LYRICAL in its tranquility. REMORSELESS in its violence. HEART STOPPING in its suspense. EXPLODES THROUGH THE FRONTIER OF MODERN FICTION WITH UNPRECEDENTED POWER. Bullshit. Henry stealthily crept over to the frontiers of the remorseless literature section with unprecedented curiosity. He bumped into Mr. Walters.

"That Heifer sure got you in a tizzy there Henry. Now if you ask me—" Walters held a finger up.

"Not now." Henry scanned the titles, looking for the word. That word. He found it and pressed the cover to his chest.

"Whatcha got there boy? One a them racy numbers?"

"Have you seen the recent expose on state of the art solar water heating systems in *Popular Mechanix*?" Henry hustled past Walters. Walters swigged from his flask and padded along behind. He stopped.

"State of the art? No kiddin'" Walters wiped his chin and trotted back to the magazine section.

Henry slouched down low and surveyed his prize. He peeked up over the littered counter. No one. He thumbed open the pages of *Delta of Venus*. No pictures. He checked the back cover. "She did for a wealthy male patron for a dollar a page. He asked her to leave out the poetry, but she could not." He started to read. He had encountered sex scenes in the pulp novels, even in *Ninja*, but nothing quite like this. He read faster. Where he expected transitions the scenes unfolded lush detail, sandalwood fragrances, shameless nakedness, contact, frictions and . . . oh my. He left his cigarette to expire in the ashtray. He double-checked the status of the Sci-Fi kid and Walters.

"Henri, when may I see it?" Rebecca was an exquisite one. The finest of his discoveries. To think that he had found her in the Houses.

"My dear, I must complete the final sketches. Please hold the pose." She was like fruit, tender, pulpy, languid. One must capture the silkiness of the hair, the subtle curves of the neck. Henri was pleased to have this woman offer

the bloom of her succulent flesh to the sun of France. "It is complete." She rose from the blanket in the grasses, swaddling herself in thin silk. She pressed her warmth against his back and murmured praise.

"Henri, how marvelous you are. Your work is the essence of me. To think I've squandered myself for so long among the beasts of the Houses."

"Rebecca, only this, this is nothing. My brushes and oils shall make the canvas vibrate with the celebration of life your form inspires."

They kissed, sinking to the sweet grasses. Oh to savor the delights of tawny flesh. He responded to her fully. The lips explored. He caressed. They cared not that a casual passer-by might witness the fire of their passion.

"It is fortunate that I have freed you from your former life." Henry whispered.

"Former life shit. I need at least two grand if I'm gonna get outa this rat-hole." Mr. Walters clicked out and scrutinized his uppers. "Damn glue ain't worth a plugged nickle." Henry reached for a handful of Becky's silk wrap, wanting to cover her from the view of the old fisherman.

"Whatcha readin' there boy? Must be pretty good judging by that pup tent."

Henry shut the book and covered it with newspaper. Mr. Walters laughed. Henry blushed and lit a cigarette.

"Maybe you ought to light another one for the book there Henry." Thank God lunch hour was close.

The mannequins were locked into gestures that suggested conversation. Henry paused at this window. Items as featured in the sharper image catalog. It was snowing. He bounced the change in his pocket. This is just as good as any other place. A sharper image. Henry entered Male Ego.

Someone had been spritzing the cologne samples. His feet sank into the mauve wall-to-wall. He recognized the Muzak version of a Beatles song. Pants. He sponged over to a circular chrome rack. They didn't have any of those plastic size dividers.

"Hello. I'm Kevin." The salesperson swooped in. Henry nosed up to the price tags in his quest for a thirty four waist. He didn't look up. "I see you're interested in our Spring Lightweights."

"Well . . ." Kevin sported a short collar oxford and a thin tie. He had a pimple on his chin. "Actually I'm interested in—"

"Verry stylish. And fresh in from Italy. We believe in getting the jump on the season here at Male Ego. Now this cotton polyester blend is ideal for your outdoor socializers, or golf if you will. And as you can see, all of these feature velcro zippers."

"Well, I don't think that I—"

"I know what you're thinkin'. A lot of guys think the velcro zippers are faggoty. But look. I've got one, and I'll bet you didn't even notice. Did you? Lemme tell you pal, these things are handy after a few brews. And hey, not

to mention the ladies, Huh?" Kevin gave Henry a confidential elbow nudge. "Corduroy." Henry blurted. "I want corduroy. With a real zipper."

"You're going to feel a bit out of place this summer in corduroy. And for too warm on the golf course." Kevin whisked out several lightweights and draped them over his arm. "Let's take these to the dressing rooms."

"But I want to wear them tonight. To a party." Henry stubbed on the thick carpet. Kevin stopped and looked him fully in the eye.

"You're gonna look a little weird wearing a spring lightweight at a mid-November event." Kevin narrowed his brows.

"You got any corduroys or not?"

They finally agreed upon a pair of sahara tan cords. They had a button fly. "Why don't you just take these, and a fine choice I might add, over to our tailor, Raoul. Raise two fingers if you want cuffs. He'll catch on."

Henry cautiously edged into the back room. Raoul was on the phone, angrily spouting his native language and gesturing emphatically with his free hand. His dark eyes bored into Henry from beneath a shaggy brow. Henry pointed down to the pants. Raoul terminated his conversation with a grunt and slammed down the receiver. Henry held up two fingers.

"A-hehn." Raoul grumbled. He looked down at the excess fabric pooling around Henry's stocking feet. "Ahh-hehhnn." He gestured toward the alteration platform. Raoul took charge, spinning him around, yanking up on the waist, down on the cuff, pinning and grunting all the while. Henry felt the hands. The swarthy foreigner was leering at him. He didn't mean to do that. He didn't. He did. Henry ran out of the back room bristling pins, tags fluttering.

"Hey, where are you going?" Kevin was leaning on the cologne bar.

"I'm gonna finish the alterations at home thanks." Henry grabbed his jacket and left Male Ego in a hurry.

Henry flossed, making sharp clicking noises in the dank washroom with the rust stained sink. He stretched his upper lip down over his teeth and clipped a tuft of nose hair. The store was empty. SORRY WE ARE CLOSE. He left and began walking. He probed the shadows of doorways and alleys with wide eyes. In the dark anyone could be Otis. He jingled the quarters. That scum. Never could find a decent parking place. Cabs honked. A bus lumbered along the curb, grazing, filling its windows with tired expressions that yawned and stupidly stared down, foreheads thunking the glass. A pack of teenagers took turns pushing each other and grappling for a bottle in a paper sack. One had one of those radios. Looks more like a suitcase. They didn't notice. That was good.

In the muted light from the glove compartment Henry checked the address dress. So like her. 1051 Devonshire, Grosse Pointe Park. The nice part of town. The Satellite coughed into life, rattling and clanging. The tail pipe wagged as he turned down Jefferson. He sniffed and made a sour face. Familiar, yet strange. Like an old sweatsock. Like a crusty old sweatsock on a

radiator. Foul. He rolled down the window.

"Yo Chuck! Roll that up. It's cold back here!"

"Yaaa!" Henry braked, the Satellite tracked on a patch of ice, no control. He flailed at the wheel, hand over hand. Nothing. Then the angled wheels gripped dry pavement. The car lurched to the left violently and bounced to a stop.

"Say! Whatyouspodabedoin! You gonna snuff us!" The hand clamped down on his shoulder. Henry swivelled to face the bloodshot eyes. Otis.

"Where we goin ole dude?" Otis bubbled up a bottle of Mohawk sloe gin.

"What. What do you want Otis? Change? I got some change. Cigarettes? Have a whole pack. Why? What are you doing in my car?" Henry feared the possibility of a weapon.

"How about a Pistons game?"

"What?"

"Hoops. I want to see Bob Lanier."

"No. Wait. No. I mean I've got to . . . a Pistons game? Are you out of your . . . five bucks. Take it. Please get out of my car." Otis did not move.

"Where you goin Chuck?" Otis picked his nose.

"Ten bucks. Take it. It's all I have. I'm going to a party. I can't be- I can't be late. Henry fluttered the bill in front of the bloodshot eyes. Otis snapped it up.

"Tha'd be jus' fine Chuck. Is this a dance party?"

"No. No way." The traffic zipped past casting moving shadows on the two. Otis tipped his bottle and belched. The idling Satellite wagged its tailpipe with a steady thunk, thunk, thunk.

"Look. There's no way you could get in the party even if I . . . You're dressed like a . . . Otis, will you just take the money and go easy on the both of us?"

Henry waited until Otis was done. Chunk of sewage. Anyone else would have thrown the trash out, given him a swift one and sent him off. Otis yanked up on his zipper and emerged from the steaming bushes. The two crunched up the brick steps and stopped at a large, ornately carved wooden door. It had a heavy lion's head knocker. Henry smoothed the creases in his new pants and faced the door with a smile. Otis coughed up a hocker and tried to figure out what the cast iron dachshund on the front porch was for.

"You're not going to get in. And don't sleep in my car either." The door groaned and a face poked into view above the security chain. It was not Becky.

"Yes?" A neatly groomed and starched young man drily questioned, then painfully clamped one eye shut as he saw Otis grinning in his threadbare corduroy coat and fuzzy pilots cap. While Henry fished for the crumpled address, Otis pushed forward.

"It's me baby. And I am raring to party and have a good time!"

"Who may I ask is 'Me Baby'?"

"I'm not with him. I'm Henry Edgar and-" Henry waved the piece of paper, an invitation of sorts.

"It's me! Otis Allison! King of the Blues. I just split from my gig down at the Soup Kitchen Saloon. I been jammin' with Muddy."

"Muddy Waters?" The security chain dropped.

"The Man himself!"

"I'm Henry Edgar, Rebecca told me-"

"No kidding. I love that stuff. Hey c'mon in. How did you find out about our-"

"Some dude at the bar."

"Excuse me-" Henry peered over Otis's shoulder.

"Hey, who's this turkey with you Otis?"

"I'm Henry Edgar and-"

"He ain't with me." Otis shook hands with the man and smirked at Henry. The door slammed. He looked down at the dirty piece of paper clenched in his fist. He rapped the lions head. No answer. He warmed his hands in his pockets. If only Becky had answered. The King of the Blues. Who is he trying to kid. He sulked down the steps. The muffled laughter, music . . . and her voice. He spun around. 1051 Devonshire mocked him. Dammit. He trudged through the snow. A back door. He tripped past the bay windows. Around the corner. This place is huge. A dog barked. He forged ahead, past the bluish lights of the conservatory. Over a low brick wall and he was at the kitchen door. He pushed his nose up to the glass. In the light from the open fridge, she was there. He tapped on the glass. She was feasting on a piece of chicken while scanning the contents of the fridge. He rapped a little harder. She tucked the gnawed chicken back into the fridge and came to the door with a Lite beer. The door jolted and was braked by the security chain.

"Henry!" The round face beamed.

"Becky!"

"C'mon in. You're all snowy. Henry! Guess who's here! B.B. King!" Henry dusted the snow from his cuffs.

"The guy at the front-"

"B.B. is such a wonderful man." She led him down the long hall toward the clamour of the party. "He has some of the most colorful stories about the music business."

As he shrugged out of his coat he spied Otis stalking the hors d'oeuvre table.

"There he is!" Becky squealed.

"No, that's not-" Becky drifted into the crowd of blazers and argyle sweaters milling about the family room.

Otis was entertaining a smoke shrouded clique by demonstrating how many deviled eggs he could fit into his mouth. He was slurping beer from a crystal vase. Henry sneered. Becky was giggling and fawning over every disgusting gesture Otis made. Conversation swarmed Henry as he elbowed his way to the booze table. "Roy! Good to see! Angie! Hey Jeff."

"May I have a gin and tonic please?" Ignored.

"I heard Ralph never graduated. Where did Norman go? Bill's plastered again. Three sheets to the wind. Look at that. My Dad got these free ties from work. Check that out. Did George really bring his Uncle?"

"Can I have a beer?"

"Sure pal. Hey, is that really John Lee Hooker? He's hot."

Henry smirked. He let the babblings bounce around him. He hung out by the pool table and sipped. Bruce racked up. The stiffly dressed guy from the door was chalking up his cue. He lifted his nose up and away from Henry. You too pal.

The warm hands came from behind and covered his eyes. She pressed into his back and blew a soft "Guess who?" in his ear.

"Just hanging out Henry?" She picked a piece of lint from his sweater.

"This is a real nice place. You know I'm reading this book right now that has a house sort of like . . . It's called *Ninja* . . . and-" Two women in plaid skirts tittered and looked away.

"You're dribbling a bit there." He brushed the droplets of beer of the front of his sweater. "I'm so glad you could make it. Have you two met?" Otis leered from over her shoulder. "B.B., I'd like you to meet Henry."

"Say Chuck. Wassup." Otis extended his hand. Henry soggily shook. "Then you two know each other. You move in a lot of different circles, don't you Henry?" Becky adoringly touched Otis on the shoulder. She twirled a lock of hair.

"Becky this isn't who you think-"

"Say darlin'. You remind me of a gig we played down in Memphis. O'course Elvis be dere, and we had us a righteous time." Otis puffed his chest with the flourish of a master Bluesman.

"He was never in Memphis. You don't believe this?" Becky squinted.

"Don't be rude Henry. Please B.B., tell me about Elvis. It's so exciting!"

"Well, you dig, it was a hot show. Den lateron, we got together at Elvis's place with some o' them fine lady friends of his. A party to be sure."

"I'm originally from South Carolina!"

"Becky. This guy is, he's a, a b-"

"Just what is it you're trying to say?"

"Doan be mindin him. He be drunk. Anyhows, we was jus hangin' out with the Man when he says, 'B.B., would you like yourself a Cadillac?' Well, B.B. already had himself one or two back then, so I says-"

"A bum. He's a bum. A bum off the street."

"That's not very funny. Don't insult B.B. with your crass jokes. Why don't you go talk to George's Uncle or someone. Please go on B.B."

Henry fumed over to the bar. He leaned up against a windowsill and stared at the ensuing pool game. He caught glimpses of him thrilling her with his Cadillac and three Elvis's. That scum. He takes my money, my cigarettes. Becky. I'm not giving him a ride. He can hoof it for all I care. His sweater stuck to the frosted windowpane. He tugged, but it had frozen fast.

"Now if they had heads out, they'd gotten some a them theremalpane glass windahs."

"I'm stuck." He recognized the voice. He had to look.

"Still tryin to put the squeeze on that heifer Henry?" Yes. It was Mr. Walters.

"What are you doing here?" Henry peeled an inch of sleeve from the glass.

"I ain't stuck to no cheap windah. Huh! My nephew George brought me over. Lives down the street. Now if that boy had some gumption he'd invest in some a these new solar water heating systems. Shoot. These things save money, yessir. Course' they're much more worth yer while if ya live somewhere besides this rat-hole. Arizona, that's the place for me boy. Soon as that bum son-in-law-" Henry yanked. The better part of his sleeve remained pasted to the glass. But he was free. He retreated to the bathroom.

"Batter my heart three-personed God-"

"Get out of the-, will you get lost?" Norman hitched up his pants, grabbed his poetry, and left. Goddamn Poetry Nut. Henry wrestled the buttons of his new pants. The door smashed open. Otis, bloodshot eyes with his hand clamped over his mouth, reeled forward. Henry tried to move out of the way. It was too late. Otis erupted.

"Sorry Chuck." Otis spat into the sink and left.

"No. God no." He mourned over his sahara tan cords. An oasis of sloe gin peppered with deviled egg dripped from his knee. He used a monogrammed towel. The floor was swamped. He even hit the mirror. Fucking Otis.

"Oh my God. Oh GROSS!" He looked up from the crescent shaped stain. One of the plaid skirts had discovered him. He dropped the towel and pleadingly chased after her.

"Him. He's disgusting. He did it." Becky stared in horror. A bandaged set of fingers grabbed his wrist.

"Hey fella. You get around. I think we should strike him from the guest list Miss. Get a move on Buster. I'll keep an eye on the door in case he tries to worm his way back in here.

"Wait a minute! Becky please. It was him!" He pointed his free hand at Otis.

"I tole you he be drunk." Otis cradled her ample waist.

"Go home Henry." Otis steered Becky back into the party.

"Let's dance mama. Fo'get about that trash."

"Becky!"

"See you Thursday buster." The door slammed. The red lit windows of 1051 Devonshire heckled him.

He slowed down to read the digital sign. Twenty nine degrees fahrenheit. A negative seven celsius. November the fourteenth. Saturday. One thirty-four. A.M. The only place open was FOOD CITY.

The automatic door beckoned. He saw no one in FOOD CITY. The plunky shopping music eight track rumbled and switched tracks. Henry squinted

under the buzzing fluorescence. Frozen . . . pizza. Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement. Then it was gone. Could it be the stealthily creeping black robed warrior from the island of Urumu? Henry padded along through produce. Frozen . . . sushi.

Yo! Mr. Briggs!" The stock boy yelled from frozen foods. "There's a guy over here flipping out!"

Henry calmly strode up to the black robed warrior, planted his feet in a wide spread stance. Arms folded. Fear was alien to him. He was a master of Kenjetsu, the ancient art of blade combat. The revered katana, only to be unsheathed in mortal combat, flashed in the waning sunlight. He wielded the weapon in the two handed vertical position.

Ralph Atkinson prepared to defend himself with his price stamper.

"Mister Briggs!" Ralph's thin arms quaked, top heavy from the stainless steel pricer." Call the cops!" Ralph Atkinson turned heels and ran.

Oldest trick in the book. Make me come to him. Henry strided along, ears pricked to detect the whisper of a dart.

Briggs and Ralph poked their heads around the corner of canned goods. "I think we can handle this . . ."

"Call the cops . . ." Ralph whispered.

"He only has a penknife Ralph."

"Yeah, but call 'em anyway. I didn't even hear him, then he's standin' there holding that blade with both hands. I almost bought it." Ralph's adam's apple bobbed.

Henry picked up a few frozen pizzas and headed for the register. What do you have to do to get some service in this place. There was no one in the express lane. He waited.

Briggs kept his distance. The phone was on the other side of Henry. "Hey!" Henry called out to the wide eyed night manager. "How about it pal. You gonna let me pay for this stuff?" Briggs cowered back into produce.

"They're yours. Just get out of my store. Please."
What a wierdo. Henry ambled out of the store. He clicked on his car radio. Some gentle music drifted out, then the voice.

Thursday. November the nineteenth. Eight-twenty-four, he read from his digital Seiko. The guard came out of the shack wielding his clipboard. "Name?"

"Henry Edgar."

"Purpose of visit?" The Satellite clunked its tailpipe in a steady rhythm.

"Dinner. With my Dad. And I don't care for any of your bloody hassle."

"Well . . . I'll see what I can do . . . Buster." The guard grinned. Henry patted his copy of *Day of the Jackal* and grinned back. The blond haired Englishman was not a man to be underestimated.

Scott S. Schuster

The Roommates

Confronting the dust
Is a task we split
Evenly like bars of
Chocolate, fifths of
Scotch, batches of macaroni
And cheese

On your birthday
I was broke and didn't get you anything.
This was o.k.

And when you went to New York
I finally let that cat up the stairs only
It did a bad thing under your desk.
But I cleaned up and this was
Also o.k.

Yesterday morning
After we went running in the rain you
Were taking a shower, and I
Was making eggs trying to
Locate the source of the whole deal -

Is it the knowledge that you'll be doing
The dishes after breakfast?

Or that we will both close the door
Quietly should the phone ring
For the other.

Gregor Macdonald

Perfectly Good Words

There is something inadequate
about a noun such as
artichoke. It is rare
to even see it in print —

and what about confetti
or frontispiece - what about
dulcimer? (I suspect their all in serious trouble)
and what can that mean for their objects?

There was someone who actually
made dulcimers. He lived at the base
of the appalachians
and he'd go up there on saturdays

along some muddy road
to where an old man taught him how.
This is fitting
as the dulcimer is a mountain

instrument. And also once he
played a dulcimer in a talent show.
I was with him and we sang
a song called 'I am a rock'. We

would have got third place
if there hadn't been a drummer.
Drummers always seem to win
talent shows. But Mathew

(that was his name) Mathew
never went around saying the word
dulcimer. He just made the thing
well. Very impressive the way

in which he bent the wood, pounded the silver,
the way in which he could fashion tiny birds
out of ivory or mother-of-pearl
and then place those birds into the fretboard.

What were they? I don't know, some kind of
what, canadian geese?
Artichoke, confetti
Frontispiece.

Gregor Macdonald

Trees fall without me, would you?

You are glued
to the toilet
with pitchy darkness.
You pull off your hands
and throw them at me.
You say you are clogged with the night
your father locked the door above the garage
and stuck
his knuckles into you.

You timber onto my bed
in the hollow of the night
and ooze
apologies
all over me.

You dredge my arm
from sleep
to answer phonecalls
made in pool halls.
Your throat is jammed
with whiskey.
I can hear the smoke
clasping your face
like a gas mask.

When it rains on the snow in the city,
You upholster your flat
with me. I am
in your kitchen
sink.
You plug coffee
and jazz into me
and hover . . . your hand
shatters when it hits my face.

Trees fall without me, would you?

You timber onto my bed
in the hollow of the night
and ooze
apologies
all over me.

I stir warm milk;
my head is a bobber
into the morning.
I weave yellow
sweaters with jeans
in my suitcase.

You outstrip my response
with your moans down the stairs
and return.
You paste
your face
on mine.

Kate Reynolds

She comes to tell me
Tales
Of elves
And their far away dreams.
Kisses me lightly
And goes

To unfold her
Gypsy stories
To another
Waiting
In the lulling evening light

Anonymous

Here at the House

I've asked Bo to move several times. I've asked him to move so many times I'm sick of asking. He likes this place and besides the rent is nice, very nice, he tells me. This is a great house — there's this beautiful mahogany paneling in the den and sauna off the master bedroom even. Really. We have enough room for eight or nine people at least, and his mother had all the rooms, including closets, recarpeted just before they left. It's beautiful thick carpet that sucks your feet and doesn't like to let go. Bo says to relax and enjoy it here, enjoy. But I hate it. I'm afraid to move anything around or buy even the most stupid little thing for this place. Take for example, this soap dish and these matching guest towels I saw the other day. They were this great royal blue. A wonderful warm color that reminded me of a baby's nursery or a kindergarten classroom. But I knew Bo would say they were nice but that his mother really wouldn't like them and that he really couldn't see them in any of the bathrooms anyways, so I didn't get them. His parents let us use this house because they decided to move to Georgia. Bo's dad is a golfer. His mom tries, but she's lousy — she thinks it sounds good to say you golf though, so she does. I find little golf tees all over the house still. There are shoes and clubs all over the basement. Once I even found a set of totally wooden clubs in the attic here. Antiques. They would have looked great if I refinished them and hung them over the fireplace or something. But I didn't suggest it to Bo because I didn't want him to think I was snooping around his parent's house.

This is a strange, strange neighborhood. Bizarre. Everyone is so damn picky about their yards and anything out of, what they consider, the ordinary. Bo's mother told me once that she had this brass wind chime over her patio. And that she was down the street talking to Mrs. Bellwether (a bore) and that she could hear her windchime all the way down there. Maybe three houses at the most. "I took that thing down immediately, Margaret," she told me with this expression on her face like it was a Playgirl centerfold she had pasted out over her patio, not a stupid little wind chime. "I was thoroughly embarrassed," she told me, plowing her thick gray hair with her fingers. Bo has her thick hair. I like wind chimes, but Bo won't let me hang any. No, nothing out of the ordinary. He doesn't mind plants that much though. I work a lot with my plants. Almost every morning I come out here and just try to loose myself in them. Kind of like camoflauge I guess. I've always wondered what it would be like to be a plant. Every now and then I'll smoke a joint out here with my plants and really try to wonder and really try to relax, but it's just too goddamn hard sometimes. And besides, Bo's parents would absolutely die if they knew I smoked pot. God, it makes me sick to even think about them finding out. I really don't do it that often though.

"This is an older community Maggot," Bo tells me. "Certain neighborhood etiquette is expected." Well, I don't know what he considers proper etiquette around here. So many damned inconsistencies. Major traumas happen once every six months or so. I've just come to expect and accept them. I have to for my sanity's sake. It's like you have to pay your car insurance twice every year. You don't like to, but you learn to live with it. Things will be going along smoothly around here. Smooth as the underside of Ralph and then,

out of no where, she'll freak out or he'll freak out.

Ralph is their cat. It's a retarded cat, to be perfectly honest. You can always tell when Ralph is out. The birds will start screeching and swooping down on him and he will just sit there in the backyard like a ceramic cat (he will not move) until Ilene, Mrs. Baxter, comes out and screams at the birds. She screams things like, "Leave my damned cat alone!" or "Get the hell out of my yard you filthy animals!" I don't even consider that a freak out anymore. That's mild. Nothing compared to what happened last night.

I swear I am paranoid to stay alone in this house sometimes. I never used to feel that way anywhere else I've lived. And I think I have had some really shitty, crowded places to live in. I even made it through four years in those lousy cardboard shoebox dorms. I've never felt uneasy about living anywhere. But here I do. Bo likes to go out a lot. I don't. So I am here alone a lot and I do not like it.

Last night, alone, I was watching the news, smoking a cigarette and trying to relax. I had just got back here after going to this gourmet cooking class that Mrs. Simpson (another bore) has every Tuesday. Bo asked me to take it so I'll get to know some more of the women around here. I did not really want to do it, but I did. It's a real stress scene. So last night I'm trying to relax after suffering through that thing and all of a sudden I hear this terrible, horrendous, LOUD screaming outside. It was like nothing I've heard around here before. I really did not know what was going on. I went into the living room and turned out the lights so they wouldn't see me and I looked out the window and Mrs. Baxter is trying to run Mr. Baxter over with her car. No lie. I couldn't believe it. She's driving all over her lawn and he's running around trying to get her with the pruning shears. I had never seen anything like it. This elegant, distinguished man running around in a monogrammed bathrobe oblivious to anything around him. And this woman driving this wonderful little Alfa Romeo after him. The windshield's broken and they're screaming things like, "You'd better not do this," and no one is out in their yards watching or trying to stop them or anything. No one's doing anything. I was getting sick just watching it.

Weird. After fifteen minutes I just couldn't take it anymore so I called the police. That really made Bo angry. He came home last night and saw the police car in their driveway and asked me if I knew why they were there. So I just told him I called them because I was sick of it. I didn't want to go into details or anything. He said, "Goddamnit Maggot, learn to mind your own business." He was truly upset that I had called the police. "Your mouth looks like it's on fire," he told me. He doesn't like me to smoke because his mother doesn't like me to smoke. She hates it. Once we were eating dinner at the club and before we had even ordered or anything she looked over her menu and said, "Margaret, why do you smoke?" like I was some junkie sitting there with this syringe getting ready to shoot up on the spot. And then she went into this long story about how horrible smoking is if you're pregnant (I'm not and don't plan on it either) and how whenever she sees me smoking she sees this beautiful little baby just sitting there holding this cigarette between

two hands and the smoke's just coming out of its mouth and it's smiling all that crap. I mean she went into this long story at the club before we even ordered or anything. Do you think I had an appetite after that? Bo knows it makes me furious when he mentions my smoking, I'm so goddamn self-conscious about it anyways. So I said something right back to make him mad. I said, "Bo, do you remember when we went to that golf tournament with your parents? And I was bored so I left you guys to follow Ben Maxwell?"

"Oh God, Maggot, don't start," he said and walked over and picked up the paper, which I was not finished with by the way. So I got up and lit another cigarette and said, "And I met you and your parents and the Bartons at the bend by number seven and I was all excited because Maxwell had walked past me on the fairway after his last shot. Remember?"

"Damnit, Maggot," he said and he took the cigarette out of my hand and put it out in the ashtray. "It's senseless for you to bring that simple-minded story up all the time. What do you want me to say this time? That it was right for you to go on and on about what a "nice ass" that man had? God, Maggot, we were with the Bartons. We were guests," he said.

"Well he does," I said and I smacked my lips together for emphasis.

"My mother could have killed you, Maggot. She had so many reservations to begin with," he told me and started up the stairs. Always settle it in the bedroom, in the sauna, on the golf course.

"You mother's great Bo, I love the woman."

"Maxwell sucks," he said from the top of the stairs.

"He's on the tour," I said and lit another cigarette.

"Not for long."

This morning I took Bo across the street to show him what happened. "That," I said and then I pointed to the parallel cuts, little trenches really, in the Baxter's yard, "is where she tried to run him over with her car," I said. All he said was, "She turfed her own goddamn precious lawn." That was all he said. Nothing like, "We really should find another place to stay," or anything. Just, "She turfed her own goddamn precious lawn," like it as a sad normal thing people do. Well, I'm sorry, but I don't think it's a normal thing to do. And I don't like living here and I don't like Bo golfing every morning and I don't like going to those goddamn gourmet cooking classes.

"Bo, that woman is a crazy, lunatic bitch," I said. "I don't like living here."

"They have problems Maggot," was what he said. "C'est la vie," he said. "C'est la fucking vie."

He really does think they are okay. They have money. They are attractive. His parents absolutely adore them. They used to play bridge together before they moved to Georgia.

"Bo, I really don't like it here," I said and I started to cry then. I didn't want to, but I did. So he hugged me and all that stuff and whispered, "cellar door, cellar door," to me about fifty times. He read somewhere that cellar door is one of the most soothing words in the English language. Whenever I get upset or cry or complain about cramps or anything, he says it over and

over. Well, that's bullshit about the word. I hate it. It makes me sick. Whenever I hear it I think of my grandmother and this story she used to always tell me about hearing this knock coming from her cellar door and checking out her cellar and of course no one was there because she lived way out in the country. The very next day after she heard that knock my grandfather got pinned underneath a tractor tire and died. "It was the knock of death on that door, Maggie," she'd always tell me. "It was a sign for me to make things right," she'd say sitting in this chair by the stove in her kitchen and playing with my hair and crying.

"Well, of course thinking about that made me cry even harder. So Bo said, "Just meet me for lunch, okay Maggot? Just meet me for lunch." And I nodded my head and he put his golf clubs in the car and left. I don't really know if I feel like meeting him or not. I've been trying to make a list of what I'm supposed to bring to the next cooking class, but I can't remember a damned thing Mrs. Simpson asked for. Instead, I've been scribbling little things like, Why I think I love Baskerville Osborne, and making little hearts and playing myself in tic tac toe and things. I walked out to get the mail a little while ago and Mr. Baxter was limping around his yard trying to gather glass from the windshield into a grocery sack. It was sad. He was walking around like some little kid on an Easter egg hunt, like nothing at all had happened.

Joan DeWitt

An Eleven-year-old Mother in Stanton, Tennessee

Her cornstalk ankles
are not anointed, but wooed
by the drip
of her hem.
Hands climb that trail
into a quarry, unshrouded,
pink as a shell's secret;
they rub her gooseflesh
into breasts.
Her hips are driven
into the ground.
She is a tent.

Her spine is a fiddle-head fern,
uncoiling,
supporting a boulder
that bursts
down her legs.
Her mother follows
the stream,
plucks the vegetable,
cuts the roots,
dunks it into her daughter's arms.

Kate Reynolds

On Saturday I called the man from the Geauga County Department of Natural Resources to come out. The deal used to be that the county would stock your pond free of charge if the county representative approved of the location and the drainage of the pond. Well, when this guy came out to look at the pond, he came to the front door. I greeted him and said, "It's this way come on back and follow me."

When I showed him the pond, he shook his head and said,

"What? Are you nuts? I can't stock this thing for you. You've flipped your lid man."

"Wait," I begged, trailing after him, "please allow me to explain."

"Explain! I'm getting the hell outta' here before you get any more wild ideas."

"Please sir," I continued, pleading. "Please, stop."

"No chance pal. Later." And he drove off in this county van.

So, I spent the rest of the day by the water's edge, observing the landscape. Sitting, relaxing, wondering, thinking; it was so peaceful. That's why I love it here, because the natural beauty of my surroundings carries me far from lessons and kids and problems and meetings. Now that the shore has sand, I can sit by the pond and smile at the ripples which die one by one on the shore. Last weekend, I planted six trees around the pond; three maples (they will be beautiful next fall), two elms and an apple. I'm happy to report they are all doing well.

First thing Monday morning I was on the phone with some guy from the county extension of the Department of Natural Resources. I got nowhere with him. He said that if the man had already come out to survey the land and had found it unsatisfactory, there was nothing that could be changed by sending him out again. "That's the rule," he said.

"Well," I replied, "this is an entirely different situation. Your guy didn't give me a fair shake. Listen, please let me just talk to him. That's all, just let me talk."

"Sorry bud," the voice said. "Tom Cassell is being paid on our timeclock not yours." And he hung up.

I tried calling six other times throughout the day, disguising my voice as someone different every time, hoping that I would hit a familiar voice and get to at least speak with the man. But, no luck.

Tuesday, however, was my lucky day. When I called three times in the morning, I was told each time that he was out on a call. Then I got tricky. I by-passed this county rep, and called up the state extension.

"Good morning," I said. "Could I please speak with someone about one of your Geauga County branch employees. It seems that every time I call him and leave a message, he never returns my call. As a faithful taxpayer, I deserve as much right to the governmental services as the next guy." And I continued on and on, until I finally convinced these state big-wigs to put some pressure on my friend Mr. Cassell, and have him return my call.

Well, it must have worked. About three o'clock that afternoon, I got buzzed at my office. My secretary said it was a Mr. Cassell returning my call.

"Tom," I picked up the phone and said. "So glad you returned my call"

"Look," he said, "I'm going to make this short. I don't know that you've been telling the state guys about me, but I don't like it. I came out to your place and did my job, now leave me alone."

"Now Tom," I replied, "don't get upset. I sure wouldn't like it if I had to call my state friends back."

"What is it you want from me?" he wanted to know.

"Just to talk Cassell. That's all. Just talk."

"Then go ahead. Talk. Talk all you want to." And I did. After a half-hour of such instructive talking, he began to see that I had a point, and that indeed he sympathized with me.

"Great," I said. "Then I'll meet you out at my place on Saturday morning," and hung up the phone.

Saturday came, and so did Tom Cassell. "Morning Tom," I greeted him, and ushered him on back. When we walked to the pond I told him to sit down. He placed himself on a large boulder by the shore. "Let me explain," I

"Please do."

So I told him; I told him everything. I told him about seeing pup-tabs from cans and cans themselves and bottles thrown everywhere, and con-

tinuums on once virgin lakes with speedboats dragging people behind for what they call fun. I told him about weedwackers and bug lights and fry-

addys and go-carts, and how they really don't do anything. I told him about space heaters and popcorn poppers and electric toothbrushes, and how I could brush my own teeth thank you.

"Harry," he told me, "you're right. I'm going to do you a favor. I really shouldn't do this, but for you I am anyway."

"Great." I was anxious. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to give you your stock."

I was overjoyed. "Oh Tom. What kind?"

"Sorry pal, but its going to have to be half catfish and half carp."

"Catfish? Carp? This is a pond, not a lake." And I continued on in discourse for sometime.

"That's the deal." He stood firm. "That's all I can do. Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it." This was a victory for me even at catfish and carp; a great triumph.

After he left, I went back to the pond, and took in all the surrounding beauty. The new trees all looked as though they survived the transplant,

even the apple, which should help to provide food for both the animals and myself. The most satisfying thing about these trees though, which I didn't

realize until after I planted them, is how they blend so well with the wallpaper. I'm amazed at what they can do with wallpaper these days. The

effect is so real that last weekend Emily ran into the wall thinking it was a continuation of the room. Now I have some ivy growing on the walls. Not for

Emily's sake, mind you, though I told her so. It simply looks more natural this way.

I've hung lights around the room and then bought grow bulbs from

K-Mart. There are five in all, I think that will be enough to keep the trees alive. At first, it didn't seem right to have those buzzing lights hanging from the ceiling, so I splotch painted them green and brown. Then, I hung vines from them, so now they don't look too conspicuous.

A few days past, Emily bought me a watering can, but I don't think it was meant in a kind way. She knew the problem I was having watering my new trees. "Harry," she said, "I bought you something." And she handed me the watering can. "I hope they grow. Just don't spill any water on the carpet."

Well, the carpet is gone now, and I am having indoor/outdoor turf delivered sometime next week. Now if I spill, I won't have to worry about mold or mildew.

Emily doesn't know about the solar panels and skylights I plan to install on the roof. These should provide the right kind of light for the room and allow for shadows, just like outdoors, so I can let my imagination play. They will also give me a sense of time passing. My morning glories won't be shrouded in confusion anymore.

Emily does know, however, about the two large picture windows I had installed. She had just stepped out of the shower when the man arrived to put the glass in. "Glass man," he screamed when she opened the door. With this new addition, I'll have the pleasure of sunrises and sunsets, and the brilliance of color that accompanies them. The glass does, however, create a permanent blockage between the outside world and my natural inner world. We've sometimes birds have a difficult time knowing a window is a permanent blockage between the outside world and my natural inner world. We've even experienced a few casualties as a result. I buried the dead birds around the room to allow for a natural decomposition. These birds should be a good source of natural fertilizer for the plants and will provide that key link in the cycle of life and death, naturally.

"Harry," my wife greeted me after work one day, "you must do something. I got scared 'outta my skin today. A grackle tried to fly through your damn picture window. Do something, and do it NOW before you murder any pretty birds."

Well I think all birds are, as she says, pretty. So, I headed out to Brothers for a plant. I chose a creeping eynamus, and planted it just below the window. Now, I must do something for natural decomposition since I won't have any more dead birds.

In my long term plans, I have hopes of bringing animals and insects in. Emily would ever allow in her house was a kitten, so I think I best not tell her of this idea. When the kids from the neighborhood come door to door trying to get people to home their newborn pups, they want people to say, "It's so cute," and then, "Sure, I'll take one." But Emily always said, "No thank you. I don't need any animals in my house."

Poor Emily sure has a surprise coming when I bring in mice. Imagine that most people want to rid their homes of mice, and here I'm bringing them in. Squirrels and racoons are in my not too distant plans, and that is exciting. My livingroom would be nice. My livingroom would be nice.

And I think some bugs like grasshoppers and butterflies would be nice. I can't forget dragonflies to dance from cattail to cattail in the shallows of my

pond. If I have ladybugs, chinchbugs, spiders and crickets, I need tall grass, meadow grass, for them to play in. That could be a problem. But, I've thought of building wooden boxes with little legs that stand about a foot off the ground. These boxes would be shallow, about eight inches deep, and quite large, perhaps four feet square. Then I could fill them in with fertile dirt and plant all the meadow grass and wildflowers I want: Queen Anne's Lace, ragweed, goldenrod, maybe even dandelions. Emily, with her hayfever, won't be pleased. But, for real progress you must be willing to make sacrifices somewhere along the line. Also, I will add worms and shelled beetles and grubs to the soil.

Oh, and something for night time, an owl or a bat would be nice. If I had a beaver I would need a dam. I would love a deer, but it's too large, and extending the room would really be testing Emily's patience. A snake, however, would be divine, and something to liven up the place. If ambition carries me far, I think more birds would be great. Two of those bright red cardinals that stand so proud, and a robin to puff its red breast in the spring. I can even add a dogwood or a crabapple for the robin to rest in.

Come to think of it, it doesn't seem like carp and catfish are right for this setting. I was too easy on Cassell. So, once again, first thing Monday morning I called the county extension office. This time the receptionist didn't play games with me, telling me that he was out. I had clout now.

"Tom," I said when he picked up the phone. "About those fish, it just doesn't seem right."

"Morgan," he said, and I think he was upset, "you're one hell of a guy, one hell of a guy with one hell of a nerve."

"But Tom," I interrupted, "I'm not asking for that much. All I want is your understanding in this."

"Understanding? I gave you my understanding. You got your lousy carp and catfish didn't you? What do you want anyhow?"

"Just listen to me; that's all I ask." And when I had his sympathetic ear, I went on and told him more. I told him about cordless telephones and microwaves and computers. Then I hit him hard with landfills and highways and highrises and dumps, and how I didn't want a silent spring. I told him all I could say.

"I just don't know Harry. I'll have to see," was what he said before he hung up.

Well, he did see fairly clearly, because today the guys came to do the actual stocking of the pond, and while they poured in the fingerlings, I noticed they were sunfish and bluegill and bass. He understood after all.

When the men left, I went over to the shore and started thinking. I thought about what Cassell first said about the room. I'm sure people must think I'm a bit loose upstairs, but I wonder if they really believe it. I looked around the room, and I wondered. Then I started to wonder about aging, and decided I needed some decaying trees laying around so that everything wouldn't look so young and new, so planned. And I realized that the logs in my livingroom were hardly any different than the wealthy placing driftwood

in their houses for decoration and effect. It's the same principle, the natural effect, only mine is a little more bold. Then I thought, houseplants are no different either, they operate under the same premise. I simply like to do things on a larger scale. Trees are, after all, just large houseplants. And look at furniture, it's all that simulated woodgrain stuff. They all want their room to look so natural, but mine really does! The same is true with the pond and the fish, they are naturally alive. "Don't people have fish bowls in their houses?" I asked Emily one day.

"Not that they can swim in, or drown in," she replied. I felt like breaking off a twig and throwing it at her, but decided that would do no good; it would only stunt the growth of my tree. So I didn't.

Sure, Emily wasn't too hot on the idea at first, you know how wives always have to disagree with you, just like your mother used to do. "But Emily," I said, "I built you your sewingroom, and fair is fair."

She slapped me playfully on the butt with love and said, "The world is too much with itself to be fair." I didn't know what to say to that because she sounded so real. The room must have done her good. And I said all I could say.

"Who else can rake leaves inside their livingroom in the autumn?"

Don Wenzel

Minimata

your mother
is sick from the factory
upriver.
and so now it is she
 who needs
someone to bathe her.

 a wet sponge
orange drips
 along the line
 of her back

to the outstretched hand
 that contorted

a crab
from the ocean.

Seymour Buffalo

Innocent Intentions

The can of Underwood Deviled ham
Sits on the shelf,
Clouded by a veil of dust.
It's always been stacked under
The artichoke hearts, not
Expiring until 2012.
The white wrapper has yellowed,
But the devil still smiles.
She came over one night, no
Not Her, the other one.
We got drunk,
The next morning the can was
empty — even the gelatin was gone.

Funkmahn

Bird to Brittany

Dazzle me please and
beneath a spellbinding impotence
I will cast long shadows
until an unblinking sun strikes
a snake-tongued flame
searing, into quivering snow.
One tiny gasp escapes
like a hiss, a sizzle:
quickly cut off.

A.T. McMullen

Fall Parents Weekend

I know why my father looks the way he does,
I know why he is not fat and grumpy.
Those plaid pants,
Would only make him look thinner. He is many shades darker
Than my rudy skin.
November and August have sculpted him,
Down like a mountain that has been all but worn away.
His eyes are pale blue as if he cried all the color out of them.

I know why I am here and he is not.

Jacqueline Ondy

