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Exile Vol. VII No. 2

Clark Blaise
Denison University

Christine Cooper
Denison University

Janet Tallman
Denison University

Nancy Schieber
Denison University

Linda Chase
Denison University

See next page for additional authors

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Authors
Clark Blaise, Christine Cooper, Janet Tallman, Nancy Schieber, Linda Chase, and Neil Weintraub

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Take thought:
I have weathered the storm
I have beaten out my exile.
—Ezra Pound
Contributors

Two senior English majors have contributed narratives to this issue of Exile. CLARK BLAISE, author of the prize-winning story, "The Littlest Orphan," plans to continue his fiction writing next year as a California resident. NEIL J. WEINTRAUB publishes for the first time in Exile and intends to work intensively on short story writing next year at the State University of Iowa. This issue's third narrative, "The Monkey," is the first printed work of Nancy Schieber, junior English major. CHRISTINE COOPER, freshman poet, and JANET TALLMAN, sophomore Exile editor, also publish here for the first time. Three poems by LINDA CHASE, the new President of Franco-Calliopean society, complete the writing in this issue. The etching and pen and ink draking are the contributions of VIRGINIA PIERSOL, junior art major specializing in graphics. WILFORD BAUMES, who designed the woodcut appearing in Exile, recently finished a senior project in sculpture.

S T A F F

EDITORS: Clark Blaise
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ADVISOR: Dominick P. Consolo

COPY EDITOR: Kathleen McComb

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Cover Design by Jane Erb

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Any student of Denison may submit manuscripts of poems, short stories and essays to the editors or deposit them in the Exile box in Doane Administration Building.
Editorial

Writing is tough, and so are writers. They may be sensitive, nervous, easily depressed, but they’re tough. They keep writing, no matter what until everything has been said. Then they watch for awhile and discover they can start all over again. But they weren’t always that way; there was a time when their words were gems, not tools, when their work was awesome, not tedious, and when they solicited encouragement and criticism was unbearable. At that stage they were probably in college, and the only outlet for their effusions was the college literary magazine.

Now a word about the magazine. Though generally staffed by a group of young writers, or students seriously interested in writing, the magazine has a toughness, and in its way, an honesty, that the individual writer has yet to achieve. In what may seem for the young writer a chaotic world of words and fleeting exciting ideas without forms or absolutes, the magazine stands for order. It is a finished product even if the stories themselves are just beginnings and the poems are more clever than thoughtful. It is the place where musings end, where subjectivity ends, where all vague hopes and fears end. Only in print, in the hands of an intelligent reading public, do the answers begin to flow. And the organ of transmission between the student writer and the student reader is the student magazine with its student editors. In the publishing world, its position is unique. There is no anonymity, no mimeographed rejection slips, no passing the buck. It is the most vulnerable of all publications, for its very concreteness is an anathema to the universal college mentality. Students shudder at the thought of “universals,” and “absolutes,” and generally regard judgments to be little more than prejudices. Although it is vulnerable to criticism, the magazine would not choose to be different, for it is the focus of necessary controversy. Defended or attached, the magazine is a solid, objective reality, honest and unequivocable.

All this brings us to Exile. In its seven years of publication, something of a tradition has grown up with it. And as traditions often do a disservice to any publication, being by nature opinions without written testimony, the time has come for a little clarifying. There have been twenty-five or so editors since 1955, and not one has printed what might be termed a definitive Editorial Credo. Exile has never specifically stated upon what basis it accepts or rejects manuscripts.

It doesn’t intend to now. The reason, obviously, is that it can’t. And the reasons for this are many, the chief one being that Exile is, and always has been, a dynamic publication. If there has been one consistent credo, it has been this: encourage and print the finest writing Denison authors can produce. But we have no set critical formulae and we try to offer constructive criticisms on all works submitted.

Exile has interpreted its role on campus to be one of twin responsibility; to the writers and to the readers. To the writer, Exile recognizes the importance of encouragement, but also recognizes the need to exercise a realistic editorial responsibility. To the readers, Exile has maintained a policy of publishing the finest finished work of their fellow students. We feel that only when a writer is published at his best and read at his best has the magazine lived up to its purpose.

Exile attempts many things; perhaps a valid criticism is that it tries too much. Maybe it takes itself too seriously in trying to be a final step in “amateur” writing, and still publish as great a selection of student writing as possible. Its size and biannual publication impose certain limitations. We operate with deadlines, and the editors are certainly not infallible. Selections and judgments are always relative to material submitted, and, of course, that varies immensely from semester to semester. These are the restrictions under which Exile operates; I have already sketched the responsibilities it tries to assume. For the most part it is able to operate effectively within these bounds.

The literary tastes of the editors do not vary far afield, however, from the tastes of most other interested, and thoughtful students. Though vocabulary may differ, all readers are looking essentially for enjoyment or enlightenment, and if the writing succeeds in one or another of these, we accept it for publication.—C.B.
On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan. —MOBY DICK

The Littlest Orphan

By CLARK BLAISE

Seller's Landing now.

"Foley, you wake up. See, I poled clear up to ol' man Sellerses."

"That's good, Escal," the littler one answered, then closed his eyes and laid his head upon his slim bluish arm. "I done seen it enough anyhow," he said.

"Foley, you wake up good now. I ain't been talking on no account. Stay awake. You promised that afore I'd take you the gar hunt." He lifted the long cypress pole from the muck and flicked it at his brother.

"Quit it, Esc," Foley whined, but still kept his eyes closed. "I been awake the whole time."

"Then act awake. I knowed I shun't of brung you at all. Still a baby, like Ma says."

"That ain't the truth," Foley retorted, and sat upright so quickly he swayed the frogboat, nearly spilling his older brother into the creek.

"Now see what you near done? That right there shows you don't know how to act in a boat. Just set down and shut up."

"Y'all called me a baby," Foley defended. "Ain't no call fer that."

"I said shut up. I don't know which is worst, you sleepin', doin' nothin', or you awake yappin' like a wormy hound."

"I wisht y'all'd fall in, plumb in a gator nest," Foley said. And still sitting upright added, "An' anyways, if I'm a baby, it don't make you much more'n one yerself." Content he had the last word, he nestled his head in his folded arm again and closed his eyes.

Escal wasn't ready to drop the argument. "You wisht I'd fall in? he repeated. "Then what? You'd set right c'here cryin' 'til you got the boat snagged in sawgrass. You try to git out but you couldn't. You'd just set and starve 'til you'd try swimmin' for it, then
some gator or gar’d come along, and snap you like you was nothin’ but a minnie.”

“No I wouldn’t,” cried Foley, his chest heaving; ribs and knobby shoulders looking like they’d pop through the papery skin. “I’d pole right back past Sellerses, down to Davises, then I’d tie up the boat an’ walk home. Y’all ain’t so smart as you think. Y’all was afraid to hunt gar alone, that’s what.”

Escal laughed, a hard laugh that hurt Foley more than all the previous insults. “I jist decided it’s a whole lot better polin’ by myself not listenin’ to a passel of lies from you.”

“They ain’t lies . . .”

“Hush up, Foley. You been lyin’ to me, and it don’t make it no better to say you aint.”

“They ain’t lies,” he screamed again, and then grabbed the tapered end of the cane fishing pole that lay at his side and with a lunge, drove the flat stubby end at his brother’s stomach. “They ain’t,” he cried again, and his throat burned with tears and rage. The pole missed, but Escal caught it as it rushed by, and, tugging, pulled Foley toward him. For an instant he just stared at his little brother.

Foley sensed his brother was going to hit him—he always hurt something after he looked at it long and hard that way. “Don’t hurt me,” Foley pleaded, but it was too late. Escal let go of the cane pole and kicked him, catching him on the chin, snapping his whole upper body backwards like it was on a swivel.

“Don’t never try that again, you hear, or so help me, I’ll stick this pole clean through you,” Escal swore in a voice so tense that it cracked. Foley was too pained and astonished to answer. From his chin a slim line of dull red trickled to the hollow of his shoulders. It looked so bad it hurt, so bad he wished he could look at it and make it better.

Escal said nothing for a few minutes, just looking over his brother’s head, down the creek. Foley still cried.

“Stead of just sittin’ there gulpin’ in flies, why don’t you fetch some bait?”

“In a while,” Foley answered, “We got plenty of time.”

“No, Foley, gotta do it now,” Escal answered, “Else it won’t be dead and smelly when we need it out on the lake.”

Who wants smelly ol’ shiner anyhow?” Foley asked.

“Look, Foley, you ast me if you could come on a gar hunt. I done this afore, an’ I know how to do it. If you don’ do it my way, I’ll pole right back to Sellerses and let you off.” Escal started poling again and the sun disappeared behind the trees.

Haines Creek was four miles long, counting the distance that wasn’t a creek at all but just a widening of the boat-wide aisle between cypress and mangroves, and often the trees were so old and bent that Escal had to stoop beneath the chigger-laden moss. The water was dark green, almost black, and no direct light penetrated the forest floor; hence the effect was one of drifting in a subterranean river. Only when there was a break, a dead or dying cypress that created a small clearing, was the sunlight able to tumble through the shaft and illuminate the water. The effect was theatrical—the intermittent splashes of light gleamed like spotlights on the water.

In the sun the water looked to Foley like the air around the projection beam at the movie house in Leesburg—dirty and dusty with little particles bouncing every whichway except down like they were supposed to.

Escal poled into a patch of light but kept the pole in the muck, holding the boat fast in the brightness. “Sun feels good,” he said, “I was cold back yonder, and my arms was gittin’ stiff.”

Foley didn’t reply, but instead crawled from the front to the back of the tub because the sun felt so warm on his back. Stopping at the shallow poling ledge, at his brother’s feet, he peered into the water at the foreshortened pole, visible for a foot or so until it blended into the deeper, greener shadows of grass and roots. The water dimpled around it, then the dimples drifted downstream and flattened out. Foley reached for the pole and shook it at a shell-cracker that was nudging it, probably sensing it was a stump he could knock a tiny barnacle off. The movement of the pole sent the fish reeling back into the grass. Then Foley crawled back six feet to the front.

“Sun feels real good, Esc’,” he finally said. Then he closed his eyes and let his head loll on the side of the boat. He faced the sunlight and opened his mouth as if to swallow the warmth.

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"I'll stay with y'all," Foley answered. "If y'all say so, I'll fetch us a couple of shiners. If that's what we need to get us a big ol' gar..." his voice trailed off and he watched the water part slowly in front of the boat.

"Then mind me. You need lots of bait, and it's gotta be dead and smelly."

"An' you gotta spread it afront of his mouth an' git him close 'nuff, then y'all club him on the haid, ain't that right?" Foley asked, turning his head to face his brother.

"It ain't all that easy. Gotta be strong."

"But I can hit real hard, honest I can, Escal," Foley said.

"An' you gotta know where to hit, else you break a spear like you was hittin' a tree, and the ol' gar'd just drift off like nothin' more'n a dragonfly lit on him."

Foley thought a few seconds. "They bigger'n that snappin' turtle Doc Ferguson pulled out of Lake Griffith that tuck a leg off'n that Yankee girl las' summer?"

"Plenty bigger. Them's the biggest thing you ever seed, I'll jist bet. Big snapper run only a couple hunnert pound. Big gar go twict that."

"You cain't even knock me off the boat with a cane pole, an' I don't even weigh a hunnert pound. You're a good one fer bait fetchin', an' that's about all."

Foley took a piece of bread from the moist cellophane package that lay under the cane pole. He sprinkled it with a few drips of water, then molded it into doughballs, a half dozen, the size of marbles.

"Find some light, so's I kin see what's down there," he said.

"Quit your fussin', I done seen some up yonder," Escal answered.

As Escal poled, Foley slipped the ball onto the hook, and not bothering to use the pole, looped the line about his wrist and dropped the baited hook into the water. As it touched the warm water, it looked like a ball of frozen milk; a milkish cloud trailed from it and flecks peeled off as if it were an aspirin tablet. Then a firm white ball remained, securely fastened to the hook, so that only a fish could remove it.

They reached another lighted area, and Escal lay down on the floor of the boat. He stretched his legs until they hurt, because his bones didn't come together right. He lifted the pole into the boat, and the boat didn't drift in the shallow currentless water.

"Watch you don't fetch nothin' we cain't use, Fole'," Escal cautioned.

"I'm fixin' to get me a shiner, but a li'l snapper keeps comin' out after the ball," he answered.

"Nigger bait, nigger food, but watch you don't fetch no turtle, else you can dig the hook out."

A few seconds later Foley exclaimed, "I got me a shiner! Watch him run."

"Just haul him in and cut out the sportin'. I ain't got all day to mess with bait," Escal stood ready to begin poling again.

"Jist a second. Man, he's big."

"He's fixin' to get loose, Foley. Listen to me—they ain't hardly got a mouth, they's all the time breakin' way."

Foley started twisting the line about his hand, then suddenly stopped.

"The turtle, Esc, he done come up and tuck the shiner."

Escal bent over and glared at his brother. "Goddamit, Foley, I warned you where your messin' 'round would get us. Gimme that line." He reached for his brother's arm, then looked into the water.

A plume of inky blood surrounded the line and on it, instead of a whole shiner, was just its front part and a baby alligator turtle.

"For God's sake, didn't I tell you what would happen? Why cain't you mind me just once? An' it would be a snapper, too."

Foley poked a finger at the turtle and again it hissed. "His tongue wiggles, Escal, jis' look at that. Looks like a worm in there."

"Dammit, Foley, I don't care what it looks like, jist git that hook out. Anyhow I seen tongues on them big snappers they drug in from the lake last year—them ones that weighed two hunnert and fifty pound—that was thickern' bead snakes."

"How deep you figger he took it?"

"How should I know? They take to shiners like rats take to babies. Prob'ly all the way."

"Think it hurts him?"

"I don't know."

"He don't look like he feels it none."
"He will, less'n you dig that hook out. You gonna feel it too if you don't hurry up."

"Cain't I just cut the line? Leon Sellers says they got somethin' in 'em that soaks up hooks after awhile. Then it don't kill 'em," Foley said.

"You cain't cut the line 'cause we ain't got more hooks," his brother said angrily. "If I knewed you was goin' to fish like you did, I'd a brung a hunnert hooks."

"Then what kin I do? I ain't fixin' to dig in there with a finger just fer a hook, an' I don't care what you do." He examined the turtle more closely. "Took it in the haid, all the way in. I kin see it way back in his gullet, curlin' up."

The turtle, still on its back, was attempting to right itself. It swayed back and forth along the ridge of its back, and its legs pumped a turtlegallop in the air.

"We cain't waste no more time, Fole'," Escal decided, "An' since you ain't about to git that hook out, there's only one thing left to do, an' that use this thing fer bait." He reached over and picked it up, holding it by the shell far down by the tail. Stretching the line taut so the turtle could not double back and bite, Escal gave the line a quick snap. The neck popped and the turtle died with a shudder; gray film flashed across its snaky eyes and the legs twitched in midstride. He tossed the remains at Foley, and fresh spots of blood spattered on his chest. "Now play with this an' git the hook out," Escal ordered.

Gradually the creek widened and grew deeper. It was midday when they finally reached the open gray expanse of Lake Harris. Overhead, gulls wisped across the misty sky, and from high in a cypress back in the swamps a dead cow circled down; gray film flashed across its snaky eyes and the legs twitched in midstride. He tossed the remains at Foley, and fresh spots of blood spattered on his chest. "Now play with this an' git the hook out," Escal ordered.

By now he had extracted the hook and bent it back into its original shape. Before they reached the lake he caught two shiners, strung them through the gills, and hung them over the side, as Escal directed, barely in the water. The tub had to hug the shore, as the pole was only six feet long, but the poling itself was easier since the lake floor was hard-packed sand and didn't try to swallow the pole like swampmuck.

"Y'all know where to head?" Foley asked.

"To the coves, where it's shady, but near the pads where they's lots of ducks and brim. That's where they hang out, swimmin' 'round all day jist a-waitin' for a duck or frog."

"An' snakes too, them eats cottonmouths, ain't that right, Escal?"

"Sure, everything. They eat everything—eat you iff'n they had a chanct, but there ain't nothin' they like better'n dead shiner. They spots a shiner floatin' with its belly all swole out an' his eyes sort of cloudy blue, an' with his scales not hardly shinin' no more, an' they just watch it. I seen 'em, jist paddlin' 'round like there was nothin' on their minds but how good the water was."

"Then after a while they back up real slow, 'cause they's too big an' heavy to move fast. Then they haid straight fer it—that's when you better not be in the way—an' when they's a foot away they jist open up that mouth real wide—even little ones swallow your leg and have room left over—and chomp down. Then they jist coast on by till they stop."

He started poling again, then added, "Buzzards too. They just like gar, only they go smoother and faster. I could watch a buzzard all day and never get tired.

Ahead lay Buck's Cove, its surface a deep shade of olive, and at the far end where it melted into the shore grew a dense blanket of lily pads. In the middle, spires of a dead cypress shattered the surface like the fingers of a drowning man.

"Plenty o' pads, Esc'," Foley said. "Think maybe one's knockin' 'round over yonder by the cypress?"

"Cain't tell 'til we draw 'em out. He could be anywheres, under them pads, chewin' on worms, or knockin' that stump, or maybe ain't none in here."

"Then what?" Foley asked.

"Then maybe I'd rest up. Prob'ly pole over to Sem'nole Island then maybe we'd go back."

"We kin come out tomorrow can't we? I mean iff'n we don't see none today."

"No we ain't. If we don't see none today, means we don't see
none tomorrow neither. Means the water’s hot and they got plenty of food down below without never comin’ up. Ain’t nobody gonna see one ’cept maybe some Yank trollin’ deep fer bass with a big ol’ half-daid shiner. Then that man gonna lose his whole Yankee rig right down to the bottom of the lake.” Foley laughed at the thought of a tourist latching on to a gar.

“Man, I sure would like to see that,” Escal continued. “Prob’ly ol’ Leon Sellers hisself guidin’ them, an’ all of a sudden there go the Yank’s gear smack out’n his hands straight down so fast he don’t even see it. He says to Leon, ‘What the hell happened? We musta snapped on a knee.’ An’ ol’ Leon looks real serious and say, ‘Why, no sir, I do believe you done latched onto a Lake Harris largemouth like you seen on the signpost. Why, yes indeed. I do believe that’s what done it. A shame ’bout your rig—I should of warned you ’bout it.’” Foley and Escal both laughed.

“Yea, that’s what ol’ Leon’d tell him,” Foley said. “You can tell ’em anything, they’s so dumb.”

Escal poled silently toward the dead cypress. Foley continued talking. “I seen one chuck a mudfish back,’ he said. “An’ I seen one even try to pick up a bead snake . . .”


Foley lifted them from the water. Their eyes were cloudy, and their scales more chalk than silver, but the gills still heaved. “Good,” Escal said, then pushed his finger into the red gill lobes until some thick blood dribbled out. He stood, and threw the dead fish as far as he could in the direction of the pads. They landed like tinfoil, bright and weightless. The boys sat and watched.

“Foley,” Escal whispered, “Y’all fetch some more bait.” He looked into the dark grassy water. “Plenty o’ shiner down there. I don’t think a gar’s fixin’ to be first at them other ones.”

Foley slipped another doughball onto the hook and dropped the line into the water while Escal watched the now-dead shiners. In a couple of minutes Foley had caught two more which he strung and dangled in the water. Then they both sat quietly and watched the floating bait.

After a few minutes Escal said quietly, “I remember onct at Rob Boyd’s they had a big ol’ gar settin’ in a flood ditch that tuck off one o’ Rob’s cow’s legs that crosst over it. Ditch weren’t hardly big ‘nuff fer him to turn around in. He jist been layin’ there in the mud, a-waitin’ on chickens an’ rats an’ snakes an’ maybe Carrie Boyd if she stepped near ‘nuff.”

“Then what ol’ Rob Boyd do, after the cow?” Foley asked.

“Then Rob and Frank tuck a chicken an’ stuck it on a pulley hook that was plenty sharp, an’ tied a heave-rope onto the hook, an’ chunked the whole rig into the ditch. Pretty soon the ol’ gar comes long, chomps on the chicken, an’ takes the hook. Frank and Rob, an’ even Miz Boyd come out an’ heaved that gar out’n the ditch. Then Frank comes out with his axe—plenty sharp you can bet—and goes to work, figgerin’ to chop ’im up, then bury ’im.”

“Did he chop ’im up, Escal?”

“Yea, he chopped him into two pieces, each of them six foot long and threwed away his axe ‘fore he was through,” Escal laughed. “Carrie Boyd says that critter smelt worst than a outhouse in July, so they got some niggers to come out an’ haul it away that night.”

“Escal,” Foley asked, “If an axe don’t chop him up, how y’all spect to do it with nothin’ but a cypress pole?”

“Cause like I done tol’ you, I know where to hit. I done this afore.” He lifted the pole from the water where it had been floating, and showed it to his brother. “See, right here’s a point I whittled myself. Stick it clean through his eye, then up into his haid, an’ that’s all there is to it. That don’t mean it ain’t hard as hell to hit it right—an’ hit it hard enough,” he added.

They sat still a while longer. The sun was hot now, and the mist was clearing. A moccasin eased its way across the cove, with just its ugly spade head above the water. It reached the cypress stump, the halfway point, and braided itself around the knee, coiled in the sun. A kingfisher that had been perched on a higher stump, the halfway point, and braided itself around the knee, coiled in the sun. A kingfisher that had been perched on a higher knee swooped down and pecked it until the snake dropped back into the water and swam away.

The water around the floating shiners swirled slightly. Escal was the first to notice; he stood, and poled a little closer to the bait.

“Somethin’s down there, jist a-waitin’ an’ it ain’t no gar. Bet it’s a bass fixin’ to strike.” He shook the pole under water at the direction of the swirls, and they disappeared. “Bass all right. Gars don’t run,” he said.

They sat and stared at the shiners. They’re pitiful, Foley thought, like the chick Carrie won at the Easter fair that jist got sicker ‘n sicker but she still held it, not lettin’ it go, even though she had a brood hen. Never had he looked at dead fish for so long; he didn’t feel good. At his feet, flies buzzed around the carcass of the turtle that was really beginning to smell. It didn’t float, so Escal hadn’t let him throw it in.

“Throw another in,” Escal ordered, and Foley did. It was not yet dead, but could not right itself. Foley wished it could, now that
it was free. "Another one," and the fourth, less lively than the third was tossed in. Only its tailfin moved. They waited and soon all the shiners were dead.

Foley laid his head upon the side of the boat and looked out upon the water. Escal watched the bait and there was total silence. The kingfisher flew over the shiners but showed no interest. Skimming the surface, he dived upon a bream instead, clamped it in his bill, then flew back to the cypress stump.

Half an hour passed; the bass returned, but now the fish were too dead to hold any interest, and it passed by. The kingfisher turned to a diet of dragonflies and was hopping from one lily pad to another. Foley was thinking how to suggest turning back without sounding like a complainer when he saw the gar, not more than ten feet away, behind the boat. He shook violently at the sight, and immediately Escal asked, "Where?"

"Behind," Foley answered in a half whisper he could barely contain.

"Yea, I see. Lord, he's big. He's seen them shiners, you can bet."

About two inches of its back and head rose above the surface of the water, and small ripples washed upon its sides like a long thin floating island of branches and logs. How big, Foley thought, how big and ugly can any one thing get? Longee that the boat; maybe twice as long and big around as the two of us hugging together. His brother stood, and Foley saw the goosebumps on his shoulders and saw his muscles twitch. He was breathing hard and fast. Foley was frozen; he dared not move or say a word. Slowly the huge fish drifted towards the bait, the water parted noiselessly in front. It moved silently and effortlessly, like a monstrous error that had grown and multiplied for millions of years till it, and others like it, the gators and even the ridiculous little turtle in the boat at Foley's feet, were the only things that lived and never died. Escal was standing, clutching the pole, his right hand cupped on the blunt end, and his left grasping it mid-way from the point.

Still the gar drifted toward the fish, and now even Foley could see it plainly—the long snout like an alligator, and the eyes that peered out from small holes cut in the bony armor. It would pass behind the boat on the way to the bait; it had to be then, the down-plunge of the spear, as it passed. And only once, if his brother were to kill it.

Escal waited nervously for his only chance. It would come any second; the gar showed no sign of avoiding the boat, though it could not help but see it. A little faster now, it was starting its run; now the fins flipped in threshing circles and the water flashed white.

Escal began the thrust of his spear and screamed "Aiyeh," at the top of his lungs.

Foley could bear no more; he closed his eyes and held his head in his hands, between his legs. He felt the convulsion of the boat as the spear hit the armor plating of the gar, and he heard the sharp crack of the pole as it splintered. And the sound of Escal's feet slipping on the poling ledge; he heard that just before the short muffled scream and splash.

Like you was a minnie; gar come 'long and snap you like you was a minnie, Escal had said, and his voice stuck in Foley's brain. He straightened up and looked out upon the water. Deep swirls at the back of the boat, and two pieces of the shattered pole; that's all he saw. The shiners still floated, belly upwards, now a little closer to the boat. He picked up the body of the turtle and dropped it gently into the water. The kingfisher was perched again, silently staring, on the uppermost spire of the cypress. Soon the boat would drift over to the fish. He would pick them up and put them in the boat with him, and wait till someone came along.

Awarded the semi-annual Exile-Denison Bookstore Writing Prize

Dead Tree
By CHRISTINE COOPER

A spring ago she greened the skies.
Artery roots, gripping hard in the
Melting muds, breathed and sang
Alive! Alive! Alive!
To the red and white celled mystery
Of existence.

Sharp fingers stab into the sky's
Blue belly,
Spill grotesque webs into the
Rainbow puddles,
Wrench and twist and groan indifferently
In the breathing life winds.

17
Beside a February river
I stood in shadows
Of marble words that hung
And shone like blossoms
High on a bush.
I bent to reach
A violet meaning
And mine were skeleton hands.
But the river
Carrying the first faint scent
Of spring upon her lips
Whispered
Round and down
And lifted,
In a vacuum movement,
A yet uncharted curve,
Imagination
Over tops of trees
In songs of memories.

The sullen air wraps cooler
now
Around the days.
Sunlight didn’t always shatter
Through the windowpane—
And wasn’t rain a thread
silver
slipping
slowly
Down my cheek
As I looked up at clouds proclaiming
Other skies?
dreams of windblown dust
that shrouded purple night
seem hidden in a shell of memory
There was a golden line of land
now broken by a tree
That stretched with aimless haste
To meet the water’s edge.
since then a thousand suns
have ceased to be
and I cannot forget.
A small, dark-eyed child stood with her nose and moist fingers pressed against the cold window of a pet shop. Her breath clouded the glass and she rubbed the mist away impatiently. Nothing must come between her and the object of her adoration—the little brown monkey. Without taking her eyes off the small, furry oval of its face, she said to her mother standing tall beside her:

"Why can't I have him?"

There was no answer so she finally turned around and began to whine a little.

"Please let me have him, please."

Her mother stared in the window for another moment without answering and then turned her head away quickly as the monkey looked up at her. Why did she do that? She was annoyed with herself for giving in to her vague feeling of uneasiness. She started to move on, but Rachel would not budge from the window, and she kept up that perpetual whine. The mother knew what the whine meant. It had been the same thing everyday now for a week and a half. After picking Rachel up at school, they always walked this way to catch the bus. It was impossible to avoid the pet shop, and yet she dreaded this time every day. It would take five or sometimes ten minutes to pry Rachel away from the window. Each time Rachel became more insistent, and in that week and a half, she had tried all her little ways of persuasion. She cried and threatened to kill herself, and, of course, she would hate her mother forever. But, for once, her mother stood firm against the mutiny. She had gently repeated her reason each time and she did so again:

"You know why you can't have the monkey. I've told you before. We cannot have both a cat and a monkey. Sammy wouldn't get along with a monkey at all. You know how he hates other animals."

"But Sammy's old and no fun at all to play with."
“Now don’t be unreasonable, Rachel. Come along.” She took hold of Rachel’s hand. “I have to buy some things for dinner before we go home.”

Later, on the bus, surrounded by weary shoppers, the mother tried to get her mind off the monkey. She half thought that Rachel had already done so, since she did not mention it again. This was unusual. She usually harped on it all the way home. But now she was sitting so quietly, so good, with her hands in her lap staring out the window.

The mother felt a little guilty, as she always did when she disappointed Rachel in anything. It wasn’t quite true about the cat, she thought uncomfortably. Sammy wouldn’t like it, of course, but he would put up with anything. He was a philosophical cat. But there was something about that monkey and its queer, yellowish eyes. They frightened her. She had seen other monkeys in zoos, but she could not remember their having such peculiar, opaque eyes. She pictured it in their house, twining its long tail around Rachel’s neck and always staring at her.

She didn’t think it acted like a monkey either. The way it sat hunched and old looking, always in the same corner of the cage. No wonder the child had such an obsession about the little beast. It seemed to recognize her when she came each day, and waited for her, biting at its nails in a nervous way, but never moving, and never taking its eyes off Rachel’s face.

She looked at Rachel again. She was still staring out the window. Her mother hated seeing her unhappy, and she began to plan a dozen little ways to make it up to her. They would stay up late tonight and watch T.V. like Rachel always begged to do, and plan a dozen little ways to make it up to her. They would stay up late tonight and watch T.V. like Rachel always begged to do, and tomorrow, since it was Saturday, she might take a day off from work and have a little party for Rachel. No, that wasn’t such a good idea. Rachel didn’t have many friends. She didn’t seem to get along with other children. Maybe she could invite all the little girls in her third grade class—but what would be the use—Rachel would only lock herself in her room and not come out until she had gone, like she had done once before. Instead, she decided, they would go to see a movie in the afternoon. “Bambi” was being re-run in one of the downtown theatres.

That night, the first of her plans came to nothing. Rachel didn’t want to watch T.V. but insisted on going to bed at her usual time. Her mother was a little bewildered at this strange behavior, but she listened to Rachel’s prayers, tucked the blanket around her, and went into the living room to do some sewing on a summer play suit for Rachel. Sammy sat beside her in the crinkly tissue paper patterns, and purred. She put him on her lap and stroked his soft black and white fur, and his purring grew louder and louder. He was getting fat and weighed heavily on her lap, almost putting her knee to sleep. He was eight years old, almost as old as Rachel. She remembered how tiny he had been as a kitten, and how her husband had brought him home in his pocket and dropped him suddenly on the back of her neck. She hadn’t liked cats then. It was the last thing he had given her.

Sammy was walking round and round in her lap, getting ready to settle himself permanently. He was a little provoked when she picked him up and placed him on the floor, but she had other things to do. She finished the play suit and then read the last few chapters in the mystery she had begun the night before. If she had only known how each second she sat reading, her daughter twisted about under the covers in a paroxysm of impatience. Finally she turned out all the lights and went to bed.

Rachel waited at least five minutes after she heard the creak of the bed in the next room and then got up and carefully put on her bathrobe and then her shoes. She stood by the dimly lit oblong of the window for a few seconds and then picked up the small wooden hammer that had come with her peg set.

The hours of waiting had resulted in a definite plan. She had made one mistake already, and she couldn’t afford to make more. She had thought, somehow, that if she went to bed early, her mother would follow her example, but she had been wrong.

Cautiously she inched her way toward the kitchen. Then she discovered that if she tiptoed fast, she made less noise than if she went slowly, or at least seemed to make less noise.

When she reached the kitchen and, after a moment’s thought, shut the door behind her, she pulled out the kitchen drawer with a faint jingle. It wasn’t there. She inched open the next drawer, and the next. Here it was, cold and sharp, in its neat little cardboard sleeve to protect it from rust. Remembering a pirate film she had seen recently, Rachel slipped it down through her belt. It impeded her a little but felt good, cold and smooth at her side.

In front of the heater, in an old box full of rags, Sammy snuffled gently in his sleep. He usually spent the night alternating between sleeping and prowling around the dark house. She touched him and he woke instantly, in the universal way of cats, and began to meow pettishly. He started to get up, but Rachel knew her prey and stroked him until his sleepy ego was glutted, then with one swift movement of the hammer she silenced him. But now, she realized, it must only be the hammer. She had already considered the possibility of blood. The alley in back of the house was to be the fatal spot and this was where she carried him, staggering a
little under his warm, furry weight, the long knife scraping against her bathrobe.

Once again the dreary scenery of shuffling people and traffic moved past the bus window. Rachel and her mother sat side by side, but this time it was the mother who sat so silently, hardly hearing Rachel's unaccustomed chattering. She was saying how she would teach the monkey all sorts of little tricks and at night he could sleep in Sammy's box by the heater, couldn't he. Her mother started at this. She was vaguely repulsed by the idea. She thought—it was only two days ago that they had found Sammy in the gutter along the street. He had apparently slipped out, through the little flap door she had cut for him at the bottom of the kitchen door, and been run over. Funny, Rachel had cried, but she really didn't seem sorry. Children are so quick to accept the inevitable.

She held Rachel's hand when they got off the bus, while Rachel ran and skipped, tugging her along. Then she wrenched her hand free and ran over to the pet shop window. She stopped so suddenly that she rocked back and forth a little, then put her face to the glass. Her mother hurried to her side and stared in the window. For an instant she thought that the cage was empty because the monkey was not in its usual corner. It was now hunched at the opposite end of the cage, immovable as usual, except for the incessant nail-biting, but she suddenly noticed that it was not looking at Rachel, but beyond her. Its strange yellow eyes were fixed on the street behind them. It seemed to be waiting for someone else.

**To Kandinsky**

*(now composed in his grave)*

**By LINDA CHASE**

Your composition now,
(though controlled by Another's hand)
recalls an image that was you.
The pallet boys today,
Tip their brushes in respect
of you and the happy music shapes
that are dancing on your grave.
Their fresh paint builds monuments
(on improvised canvas stones)
which honor, mark your grave, and read:
A MAN:
**HIS COMPOSITION UNDER, BUT BEYOND THE WORLD.**
Visions of Peanut Chocolates

By LINDA CHASE

How old we’ve come from those days
When the nearly was really, and here
and there were Golden books
which were purple or green
and candy-coated chocolate
had peanuts on the outside.

Toys were three-wheeled love
that never toppled over,
And you were my mother, brother and dog
in one house-game afternoon.

If I closed my eyes to hide from you
(when you were a two-headed dragon,
and dragons know what can’t be seen)
you never even looked for me.

My circus-eyes then fell asleep
And slumbered into wisdom and age of reason
where chocolate always covers nuts
and vision is only to be seen.

The Second Day of Summer

By NEIL J. WEINTRAUB

The boy finished dressing himself, folded his pajamas neatly
putting them inside his drawer, and left his room shutting the door
quietly behind him. He went over to his mother’s door and, bending
down, put his eye next to the keyhole; there was no one in sight;
but his father’s shoes, which were always placed under that chair
for the next day, were gone. He listened, holding his breath, and
thought he could hear his mother’s stuffy, rhythmic inhaling. It
was a soundproof door, but he saw what he wanted through the
keyhole.

He ran to the stairs and peeked cautiously around the corner
of the hallway and called down, “Ellen.” He could hear her making
breakfast in the kitchen—it smelled like pancakes. “Ellen!” She
came into sight and stood below him at the foot of the circular
staircase.

“Who’s down there, Ellen? Is daddy gone yet? I think mother’s
still asleep,”

“Your father’s just now getting into the car, Mark, and your
mother ain’t down yet; it’s much too early, ’specially with them
coming back so late last night.” Ellen paused. “Well, come on. You
ain’t scared today, are you?”

Mark smiled at her and threw his leg over the banister. “You
ready?” he yelled without looking down.

“Ready.”

He loosened his grasp and slid down and around to the bottom,
his hands making a squeaking sound on the railing. He saw Ellen
getting ready to catch him as she did yesterday, but again he
shouted, “No, don’t!” and halted himself just before the bump at
the end.

She laughed deep in her throat and went back to the kitchen.
“I’ll have your pancakes ready in a jiffy,” she said to him.

“I want to go outside first and see what it’s like. I’ll be back in a minute.”

He went outside and stood on the front porch. His father had just pulled the car out of the garage and was driving away. Mark ran down the front walk waving his hand vigorously at the receding car, but it was already down the block. George was standing in his line of vision waving back at him.

“Morning, Mark. Goin’ to give me some more help today?”

“Hi, George,” the boy shouted over the noise of the power mower. “Sure, maybe later.” He stood watching the gardener move across the huge front lawn, pushing the mower in front of him. On the other side of the street Mark noticed two boys playing on a slide. As they glanced over at him he started to call to them, but realized he didn’t even know their names. They played out there almost every afternoon. Yesterday he was going to go over but he forgot in all the excitement. Maybe this afternoon. No, he couldn’t unless his mother went away again. If only she’d let him have a sliding board. During recess he watched all the kids slide, but his mother gave strict orders to the teacher not to let Mark slide. That’s the quickest way to get both you and your clothes dirty, she told him.

It was even better today. Yesterday he had been a little scared. He still was this time—well, kind-of—especially when he glanced down. Tomorrow he wanted to remember to breathe on his way; he never thought of that while he was sliding. Tomorrow he would go faster, too. Yesterday was such a crazy day. When he got up his parents had already left for New York City, and Mark started to go downstairs when he remembered that he always wanted to slide on the banister. He called Ellen to the stairs and asked her if she’d tell on him, and she promised not to. “All you have is another promise to keep. Maybe George, later; he owes me a promise. That word, niggers. He didn’t know what it was exactly. He thought he heard his mother say something like it to his father once when he was walking into their room, but she stopped suddenly and told him to get out and never barge in again. Then yesterday. It was the first time in the whole year that Ellen hadn’t picked him up after school. He was happy when she asked him if he’d like to come home alone since it would be early in the day, not at three-thirty as usual.

After all the students got out of the auditorium Mark walked slowly towards home, swinging his hands back and forth as he moved. He began to skip as he neared the ball park. Ellen and he passed it everyday, but could never stop to watch because Mark had to be home fifteen minutes after school was out. Now he could stop; Ellen wouldn’t care if he were a little late for lunch. He stood behind the fence which served as a backstop and watched the pitcher throwing the ball in. One pitch sailed over the catcher’s head and straight at Mark. He ducked quickly, wrapping his arms around his head. When he peeked out he saw that everyone was laughing at him. The catcher came back to the fence to get the ball and said, “What’s the matter, falla? Think the ball’s going to hit you?” He shook the fence to show Mark how strong it was. The pitcher shouted to him, “Hey, you want to chase a few balls in the outfield?"
We need someone to run after the balls," Mark shook his head. "No, thank you. I'm not allowed to play. I've got to be clean when I get home." Mark jumped as he heard the catcher's voice boom right next to him. "Aw, come on, kid, you can't stay clean all the time—you gotta have a little fun. What are you, a sissy or something?" A funny look came over his face. "Hey, you guys, guess who this is: the little kid who comes by every day with that stacked nigger?"

A few other boys came over. "Where's the nigger, kid? Where's your nigger-maid that holds your hand? You gettin' much from her, kid?" the catcher looked at the others and they all laughed. "You better stay away from that or you'll get dirty all right, plenty dirty." Mark backed away from the fence. What were they saying? Were they talking about Ellen? They must be. Mark wanted to ask them what they meant, but he grew afraid as he saw their faces staring at him through the fence, so he turned away and ran home.

"Come on, Mark. Hurry up, will you? Your mother'll be downstairs soon and I got the whole house to get clean today."

Mark finished his pancakes and sat toying with his milk glass. Now Ellen was mad because he had taken so long. He didn't like to make her mad. The others he liked to annoy and would drop things on the floor on purpose. They were so dirty anyway. It didn't matter if they had to do some extra work. What a funny word nigger is.

"Sceedadle now so I can finish up here."

Mark gulped his milk down and went out to the front of the house. George wasn't there so he ran around back towards the direction of the loud snapping shears. He was glad George was out back for lots of reasons: the yard was so much bigger, and his mother couldn't see out there from her room, and then, too, Minx might be around. She hardly ever played near the house any more, but when she did come, it was usually to the back. Even when he put her food out Mark would never see the dog. He used to set her dish on the porch step and wait for her to come. Finally he gave up and went inside and watched from a window, "Don't ever go into that lot," she told him. "You can't stand to see that lot. Don't see why. Any vacant lot'll get some rubbish in it. Anyway, you try and remind me."

Mark nodded and went back to the steps waiting for Minx. He hoped he would forget to remind George about getting a bush. He didn't want a new bush put there. That was the only way he could see through. When he first got Minx they both used to run after the animals in the yard. There were all sorts of animals then—rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, cats, other dogs, even a few hogs until mother had them killed. There were all those. He and his dog used to chase them around and around the yard until they would zoom into the lot. Minx would follow but Mark stayed at the bushes, parting them so he could see through and find out if Minx caught the animal. He'd almost go into the lot, but something always stopped him. It was as though his mother were watching him from a window. "Don't ever go into that lot," she told him a hundred times. "It's a garbage dump! You'll get all dirty and hurt yourself."

Then she'd work herself up and call someone important and tell them that a place like that had no place in a neighborhood like this. So Mark would just stand there and watch. Now he didn't see Minx much so he had to chase the animals by himself and that was no fun because he couldn't go through the bushes.

"George, what time it is?" Mark asked just to make the clacking noise stop for a minute.

George looked at his watch. "Ten after eleven," he said and went on trimming.

Only another hour until lunch. He wasn't hungry at all, but sat there gazing at George's black hands move until he became drowsy from concentrating on something so distant. Yesterday's lunch was great. When he got home from school he looked for his parents to tell them what had happened but they remembered they were gone. Ellen called him into the kitchen. She had made an especially big lunch and George was in there sitting down. He didn't ever eat in the kitchen because he always brought his own sandwiches. George, Jr. was there too. He didn't think that was right at first either because he heard his mother tell Ellen that she didn't want him in the house. Then Mark had so much fun he didn't want to think
about it any more. George asked him to promise not to tell his
mother so he promised. They all sat there eating and laughing—
it wasn't at all quiet like its supposed to be at meals. Mark kept
looking at them. They were so black. George, Jr. had washed his
hands before he ate—Mark saw that—but still they were dirty,
all except for the insides which were pinkish. He asked his mother
about George Jr. the first time he came to the house. He was
going to be in the second grade too, but at a different school.
Mark was surprised to see someone his own age so filthy. "How
can he be so dirty, Mother? Doesn't he ever wash at all?" And she
replied, "No, and that's what'll happen to you if you don't stay
spic and span." And then he asked, "But if he did wash then it
would probably come off, wouldn't it, because his dirt hasn't
been on as long as Ellen's or George's?" And she said that was right.
Maybe that's why George Jr.'s palms were pink—but that wasn't
right because so were both his father's and mother's. Mark wondered
whether or not he should tell George, Jr. to take a shower but he
forgot in all the excitement and noise. As he sat there eating he
imagined what it must be like at their home laughing and playing
all the time. They must play a lot of ball together, too, and it
wouldn't even show. No one could ever tell. And then he thought
about how they probably sat around in mud making mud pies.
Finally everyone was through eating and helped clean up. Mark
helped, too. He'd never done that before but Ellen gave him
some dishes to dry. And they even laughed while they were doing
that.

George's hand stopped moving. "Well, I guess it's about time
for some lunch."

"Why do you always eat so early?" Mark asked.

"Cause I get hungry early," George laughed.

Ellen called for Mark to come in but he stood and followed
George with his eyes as he sat under a tree and unwrapped a
sandwich. Then Mark went inside.

"Your mother's up and gone to a luncheon already. She
wondered where you were at."

"I was out back talking to George. Did she say when she'd
be back?"

"Just before I leave, around dinner-time, I guess. She got a
party or something after the luncheon."

"Oh." Now he could help George.

"You very hungry?"

"No, not very."

"Save your appetite for tomorrow's lunch: charcoal broiled
hamburgers outside. What d'you want me to make—a fried or

scrambled egg, and maybe some corn?"

"I'm not that hungry. Maybe just an egg sandwich."

After lunch Mark waited until Ellen finished the dishes and
they went upstairs together. He sat in a chair out of the way
while she cleaned his room. He had gotten into the habit of looking
for dark marks on everything light-colored that she touched. When
she made his bed he used to search the sheets for black smears.
But with Ellen there never were any. A long time ago he questioned
his mother about the first one they had. "How come you have such
a black lady cleaning? How can she clean anything if she's so
dirty?" And when she made food he wouldn't eat because he
thought it wouldn't be clean. His mother spanked him for that.
Later she explained that the black lady was there as an example
for him, to remind him to stay clean. And she said that none of the
black stuff came off because it was on so long that it would never
come off. Still he inspected everything around the house, but he
could hardly ever find anything. Once Mark had found a black mark
on a table, and he called his mother to show it to her. It was a cigar-
ette burn, and it made her mad that he had bothered her over
nothing. But he still looked.

"Can I help you do something, Ellen?"

"No, you get on outside now and get some air. It's summer,
remember?" Ellen said.

He went down to the kitchen, put some food in Minx's dish
and set it on the steps. The brightness of the sun filled him with
energy, and he wanted to do something. George was bent over dig-
ning weeds and dandelions in a corner of the yard.

"Are you ready for some help yet, George?" he called.

"Sure am. Get one of those extra trowels in the shed."

"Where's George, Jr. today? Isn't he going to help us like
he did yesterday?"

"He's home getting ready for YMCA camp. I got to leave
early so I can drive him up there."

Mark got a trowel and went to the opposite side of the yard and
began digging, throwing the weeds into another little pile. George
called over to him. "Why don't you work over here and put them
all in one big pile? I ain't about to finish up the whole yard
today so we may as well get this half done. We'll do the rest
tomorrow."

Mark came closer and started digging again. The sun was no
longer at its warmest height, but it was still strong and soon he
felt hot and wet inside his shirt. He remembered seeing the boys
playing ball without any tops, so he asked, "Do you think it would
be okay to take off my shirt?"
"Sure, go ahead."
"Why don't you take yours off, too?"
"Your mother don't like me to. Says someone might see a half-naked man working back here."
"Well, then I'd better not either. She might get mad at me."
"Why would she be sore at you?"
Mark thought. "Well because then someone might see a half of a half-naked man out here."

George laughed and slipped his shirt over his head. "Well she ain't home so we'll be one and a half half-naked men. How's that?"
"Great!" Mark took off his shirt, ran over and put it on the porch, and ran back. As he dug, he watched George's body glistening with perspiration; his skin looked as though it had just been polished. His own body didn't seem that shiny. It was wet and turning brown from yesterday's sun, but it didn't glow at all. Mark recalled what he wanted to ask George.

"George, you owe me a promise." They both stopped.
"What?"
"Yesterday I made you a promise so you owe me one."
"Oh, okay. What do you got for me to do?"
"If I ask you something will you promise not to tell my mother?"
"Sure, shoot. Let's take a break and sit down in that shade. We done a fair amount."
They walked over to the tree where George had eaten lunch. George plopped down.
"I'm not supposed to sit on the ground," Mark said quietly. George leaned forward, took his teeshirt out of his back pocket and spread it on the ground next to him. Mark sat down and could feel the wetness of the shirt through his pants. Sitting close to George he noticed a strong odor not unpleasant, but powerful. It filled his nostrils and he breathed in, purposely, through his nose. It wasn't half as bad as her perfume and powder when she hugged him. "They're so dirty they smell, too, if you get close enough. But don't!" he recalled her saying. He was close enough and didn't mind.

"Well, what you goin' to ask me?"
"George, what's a nigger?"
"What?"
"A nigger! Some boys were talking about the nigger that takes me home every day. I guess they were talking about Ellen."
"Why'd they say that?"
"I don't know. They were mad 'cause I wouldn't play ball with them and then they started talking about niggers. What'd they mean?"
"A nigger is a bad name for what Ellen and me are, what black people are. The right word is Negro. Negro," George repeated.

"Only nasty people say nigger; it's like a swear word."
Mark flushed. His mother told him many times not to swear. He must have been mistaken about what she said that day. "I'm sorry, George. I didn't mean to say anything bad. Really I didn't."

George put his hand on Mark's shoulder. "That's okay, Mark. I know you didn't know. The boys who used the word just ain't too smart, that's all. Now I better finish up. You stay here and rest a bit."

Mark watched George. Soon he stopped digging and began stuffing all the weeds in a big basket. He shouldn't have said anything to George; now he was probably mad at him. And all he wanted to do was to understand what they meant. Those boys got angry when he wouldn't play, his mother would get angry if he did. Now if George was mad... George interrupted his thoughts. "So long, Mark. See you tomorrow."

"Bye George. See you tomorrow." Mark sat there staring into space. He remembered the shirt he was sitting on and jumped up and yelled to George who was putting the tools away in the shed. "Your shirt, George. You forgot it."

"Keep it till tomorrow—I got a clean one in here." He disappeared into the shed.

Mark slung the teeshirt around his neck and stretched. He went inside, stopping to pick up his own shirt, and bumped into Ellen as she was coming out of the back door to shake out her dustmop.

"Heavens, Mark, look at you. Turn around! Your back's all dirty and your pants all sweaty. You mother'll be home soon, too. Go get cleaned off or changed."

He was dirty! How could she say that? He wondered what his mother would have done if she had George, Jr. for a son.

"I think I'll take a shower. She won't be home that soon, will she?"
"No, but hurry on."

He went inside and the coolness made him shiver so he swung his shirt over his shoulders and walked up to his room. He slipped off his clothes and scampered naked to the bathroom. Mark threw all his clothes, plus George's shirt, into the hamper and he turned on the shower and waited for it to get warm. Then he stepped under the water. He looked at the brownness of the upper part of his body and tried to soap it away. Some of it was dirt and some of it was sun. He ran a long brush heavily up and down his back and on his arms and legs until his skin sung.

Mark turned off the shower and dried himself briskly, rubbing so heartily with the towel that his skin shone pink. He returned to his room, dressed in clean white shorts and shirt, and glanced at his image in the mirror. He was still pink from the roughness of the
rubbing. But he still didn't shine like George. Every day he took a shower like this but he was never as shiny as George.

Ellen came in behind him. "Well, that's better. You're a mighty good-lookin' boy, you know that? Clean shirt, clean pants—that's your mama's little boy."

"I'm going to wait outside."

"She'll be home soon, so will your father, so don't you get into any trouble, hear?"

Mark started out the front where he would see their cars drive up, but then decided to go out back. The plate on the steps was empty. Minx must have eaten while he was in the shower. Maybe she was still near-by somewhere. He called to her and then walked around the yard, looking in the shed and behind the fireplace where she used to sleep once; she wasn't allowed in the house anymore. He shouted her name again more loudly. If only she'd come, just so he could play with her awhile, just so he could pet her. He hadn't done that for so long.

Mark walked to the porch and carried a chair out to the grass and sat down. He hadn't dried his head very well, and he could almost feel the sun crackling the water on his hair. Soon the sun would be gone. It was pretty low now. He wondered if those boys were still playing ball. He should have played when they asked him to. She was away then. Maybe he could go over now. No, he couldn't go anywhere. She'd be coming home soon.

He glanced at the sun for a moment and everything flashed different colors before him. The sun was still hot and he felt perspiration rising underneath his shirt. Soon it would be darker and colder. He wanted to do something. If he had played they might have showed him how to catch. Now he'd never learn. He was tired of sitting still all the time and doing nothing. If he hadn't taken that shower he wouldn't have to be so careful.

Suddenly there was a swirling in the grass near the tree. Mark leaped up and watched; it was a chipmunk. Then in a blur of black he saw Minx flash from around a corner of the house after it. The dog chased the striped animal around the yard while Mark stood transfixed. The chipmunk, with Minx closely behind, raced into the lot. Mark started running, but half way across the lot he tripped on a brick and sprawled flat out in the debris.

He started to cry but realized no one was with him. Instead he stood and peered around: even his dog had disappeared. His shorts and shirt were all covered with dirt and ashes. He threw his hands in front of his face as though he expected his mother to slap him, but everything was quiet. Mark started as he noticed bits of glass and ragged-edged cans spread all over the ground. A drop of blood from a cut dribbled down his leg and his knees were scraped. He watched the blood travel zig-zaggedly and then spit some saliva on his hand to wipe it away. This left a dark smear on his calf.

Mark stared at the blackness which seemed to stare back at him. He bent and rubbed ashes from his knee downward as though he were trying to wipe the mark away. Then he noticed some broken black lumps of something stuck to his palm. That's what caused it. They looked like the bits of the coals left in the grill. He began searching the ground for a dark object. Finding a brickette among the ashes he picked it up and squeezed it. He opened his hand. The charcoal fell out and he plopped down on a rock staring at his hand. It had been dirty before but never like this. He'd have to get it clean. Mark rubbed his hands rapidly against his shirt, but the color, instead of disappearing became shinier. He couldn't go home like this; he couldn't go anywhere.

Mark stood and whistled loudly for the dog. He wanted to see Minx now more than ever before. But everything remained quiet. She must still be chasing that chipmunk. She'll probably never come back.

He dropped to his knees, grabbed the charcoal, and cut heavy hurting lines in crisscross across his face. He ran the brickette all over his neck, on his arms and hands, and into the top of his head. His whole face was burning. Now he wanted to see what he looked like. There had to be something among all this stuff that he could see himself in. Kicking away some of the papers and ashes that were spread all over he found a tin can which wasn't too rusted. He picked it up and looked for himself in the end of the can, galping a deep breath and sighing it out as he saw the creases on his face. Quickly he took off his shirt and blackened his stomach, shoulders, and as much of his back as he could and, dropping the coal, he rubbed until his skin glowed hotly from the friction. He stared into the tin again. There were no more lines, just a blend of blackness. He was like Ellen and George!

Mark smiled into the metal and his teeth flashed so brightly he thought they would fly out of his mouth. He winked one eye...
and saw it disappear into his face, making him laugh and again
his teeth blinded him. He even looked like their son!

“T’ll have to show Ellen,” he decided. “She’ll be happy to
know I have fun too.” He jumped up but noticed that he hadn’t
darkened his legs. He grabbed the charcoal and blackened them,
spreading the color evenly with his hands. As he did this he became
aware of his hands for the first time; they felt so smooth and soft
and warm. The nails were still pink and yes, the palms were, too—
only a little darker. He smiled.

As he ran towards home he checked to make sure that he
couldn’t see any white. He noticed that it was getting dark rapidly.
When he came to the bushes he heard Minx bark behind him but
then she ran off, so he crossed into the yard. As he opened the back
door he remembered his mother. What if she’s home? And his father
—he’s probably back too. Maybe they’re upstairs—sometimes they
have a drink in their rooms or change clothes or something before
dinner. Oh, if they’re downstairs . . .

He tiptoed into the hallway. The light hadn’t been turned on yet
and he seemed to become part of the darkness. Ellen wasn’t around.
She was most likely in the living room so he headed in that
direction, still moving quietly. He heard a low murmur coming
from upstairs.

Suddenly light filled the room and Mark jumped. Ellen was
coming out of the kitchen with her coat and had started for the
front door. “Ellen,” he whispered, “Ellen!”

“Who’s that? What you doing here? Who is that?” Ellen dropped
her coat in the middle of the room and stood there gaping a second
before walking slowly over to him. “Mark! For God’s sake child,
what are you doin’? What do you have on you? What are you
doin’?” she repeated excitedly, shaking his shoulders.

“Look, Ellen, I’m like you now.”

“What?” she said.

“I wanted to be dirty like you ‘cause you have fun, and like
your son and George—”

“You making fun of us, boy? You trying to say we’re dirty.
What d’you —?” Her voice trailed off and she dropped her hands
to her sides.

Mark thought for a minute that she was going to cry. “Ellen,
I didn’t mean anything. I just wanted to be like you, that’s all.”

Her face softened and she opened her mouth to say something.
Instead she knelt down and grabbed Mark and held him to her
for a moment, then pushed him to arm’s length. There was a
black spot on her dress from his forehead. “You better go wash
yourself now, Mark, ‘fore your mother comes down.”

“Why do I have to wash, Ellen. I don’t want to wash.”

“Just go on, like I ask, please.” She pressed both of his hands
in hers. “Please. You mother’s plenty mad at me now.”

“Mad at you? Why’s she mad at you? She doesn’t have any
right to be mad at you.”

“Well, she is. She’s upstairs right now screaming to your father
’bout me. She found out ’bout yesterday and then a neighbor told
her that you and George was out in the yard without shirts on.”

“All we did was have fun yesterday. I’ll talk to her, Ellen;
I won’t let her do anything to you.”

“Hush up. You’re just gonna get me in deeper,” Ellen said.

“Hurry on now. Go get cleaned up.”

Mark’s eyes started to tear. “No, I don’t want to get cleaned
up. I want to go with you. If you go, I’ll go with you. Then I
won’t have to get clean anymore.”

“Stop being so silly, Mark. You know you can’t do that. And I
got one son to take care of already.” She turned him around and
spanked him lightly to move him up the stairs. “Go on. Don’t get
me in any more trouble.”

Mark started mechanically up the steps and stopped. “George,
Jr., went to camp, didn’t he? Let me go with you just for while he’s
away.”

“I ain’t going nowhere, Mark. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Promise?”

“Promise!”

“Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow then.” He stood on the steps and
watched her go out. She was gone.

Mark ran upstairs and turned the knob of his parents door, to
go in and stick up for Ellen. The door was locked. He knelt down
and looked into the keyhole; he could see his mother’s skirt pacing
back and forth, but he wasn’t able to understand what she was
yelling. Mark stood and noticed the white spots where Ellen had
rubbed the dirt off. Then he went into his room and shut the
door just as his mother opened hers. She was still shouting as
she came into the hall.

“I don’t care,” he heard her say as he leaned against his door,
“I’m calling those niggers right now and firing them.”

He listened to his mother going downstairs. He felt completely
exhausted as he walked to his bed and threw himself down on the
white sheets. He wanted to sleep now. Tomorrow he’d like to
slide down the bannister—breathing all the way and with no hands.
And this time he’d let Ellen catch him.

As he shut his eyes, he heard the dog barking outside.
Great Exploitations

(poem in gratitude to André Breton who hailed "the exploitation of the chance meeting on a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities.")

By LINDA CHASE

I met you there, though I don't know why you came,
And I certainly didn't come to meet you.
That was when I was a squatty pumpkin
And you were an eighty-foot square-rigged schooner.
I was looking for Peter on the fourth tier,
So he could eat me, and therefore love his wife again,
And you were studying engineering
In order to safely fire the first mate.
But since I couldn't find Peter,
And the engineering books were out,
You carved a smile in me, just to pass the time,
And my cheeks hurt something terrible.
Quite unexpectedly the clock struck twelve
And since the mice were eating cheese below deck
And Cinderella had already found her slipper,
We casted off and went to sea.