Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

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

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Come.
Come see our blue crop
or the setting sun.

Be welcomed and listen for the silence we have;
   it is soothing here
   beyond car noises and
   harried people; the trees still grow.

Birds cluster at your window
but do not sing; they have lost
   their brighter plumage;
the meadow is greener this year.
Winter and snow will quench the silence;
   the dogs will moan for your hand.
We will have spirits for your arrival;
   colored lights will reflect the solitude.
Come,
we need your deeper hues
to complete our paintings.
The children's hair has grown;
soon their knowledge will expand
and you can teach them poetry before prose.
The distance is known,
   through the prairie to the wooded lakes
   and mountains; we are there.
Your life may have changed
but you will fit the patterns
   of the new plants.
We are waiting;
our news of the world is small;
we deal mainly in sunlight
and a new word is welcomed.

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

Putting on an army fatigue hat over his mask, Tuggy secured the tank’s belt and adjusted his flippers. With his hand across his hair-covered chest, Tuggy yelled at Topper. “Topper, will you please be Cuba... ya know, like in the Carribean and all?”

“Why, Tuggy?”

“’Cuz I’m gonna be Fidel Castro... and I’m gonna conquer you.”

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

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

“Yeh... okay, Tug, whatever you say.”

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

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

Tuggy had graduated two months ago with a degree in Cultural Anthropology. He was twenty-two and had no plans for the immediate future. For the time being he was happy with...
refreshing relaxation. He graduated at the top of his class, although he was never very fond of his education. His favorite pastimes were scuba-diving and games, god, how he loved to play games. His all time favorite game was Candyland. He loved moving his locket about of the hammer where he thoughtlessly bent a lifter.

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

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

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

Tuggy sat down on a red vinyl stool next to the stained counter. "What'll it be, kid?"

"Coffee, please."

"That it, kid?"

"Yes, ma'am."

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

Tuggy's respect, "I just thought I'd get a cup of coffee."

"Coffee!...ya don't actually think that's what a man going all the time do ya, kid?...By the way, ma name's Sam, Sam Penington, good to meet you, Sam." The joy of meeting a new, real person, Tuggy continued his goodbye out the doors and ran out to the beach house, and put in another nail, Tuggy made his way to the souvenir shop, of which he now seemed a customer. Postcards of no place and Tonka brigades hung about state decals and various other expensive mementos.

"Can I help you, sir?"

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

Tuggy was about to leave the bathroom, a large, tattooed, deep-voiced man, combing his receding black hair behind his ears, spoke. "What're you doin' here this early, kid?...or what ya doin' here at all, kid?"

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

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

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

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

"Where ya from, Tug, round here?"

"Tug?"

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

"Yeah...thanks, kid."

"Bye."

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

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Tuggy thought to himself as he shook dry his manhood and placed it back in its secure boredom. As Tuggy was about to leave the bathroom, a large, tattooed, deep-voiced man, combing his receding black hair behind his ears, spoke. "What're you doin' here this early, kid?...or what ya doin' here at all, kid?"

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"Where ya from, Tug, round here?"

"Tug?"
"How come I gotta go to school?"
"So someday you'll, well-"
"Dad?"
"Yes, Tuggy?"
"Will you buy me a new rubber football? Miss Brendlin says we have to bring our own, and mine is all deflated and everything."

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

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

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

"What'll it be today, Sam?"
"Blue Ribbon, and whatever da kid wants."

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

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

"Thanks a lot."

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

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

"Thanks. Could I have a straw please?"

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

"It's easy!"
"What is?" Sam turned with his mug in hand.
"I enjoy it!"
"Enjoy what, you asshole?"
"Oh, I'm sorry, Sam. I seem to be thinking about something else. . .god, this daiquiri sure is good. . ." Hey, Sam?"

"Yeah, Tug?"

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

"Oh, just a little gambling."

"What kind?"
"Cards, Tuggy, cards."
". . .Oh."

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

"What's really eatin' ya, Tuggy?"
"Well, Sam, if you have to know, it's, it's..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What's the ante?"

"How's two dollars sound?"

The cards were dealt, and the men looked at them to see if they would bring them any money. When it came time for Tuggy to pick his card, he hesitated, then took the top card. Tuggy looked at the card. He was alone now. He cried a little something. Then looked at the card again. The card said "Candyland Card Number 12: Go down the popsicle slide."

Laughing hysterically, Tuggy threw down the card and ran. Once outside, he ran back toward the truck stop. Arriving, he hopped into his car and sped off.

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

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

He turned again, alone again, alone again.

The park playground slide was long. Tuggy's father was at the bottom of the slide reassuring Tuggy's doubt. Screaming loudly, "Don't let me fall, Daddy, please don't let me fall, Daddy, don't let me fall!"

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

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

When I was sixteen
I got a rose
from a boy who said
I looked like
one of the delicate petals.

He was crazy.
But I wanted to believe him.

I held the flower up to my face in the mirror and looked.

I think I should have trampled the flower; instead, I put my fist through the glass.

---

Tigger Montague

---

Twenty-Two Year Decay

When they told me
I laughed.

And then pulled the tube out of my arm.

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

I thought about my next shot.

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

My room number.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary Mueller

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Girl Scout's honor."

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

"Of course not."

"Girl Scout's?"

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

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

Two little girls dashing through the hall.

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

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

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

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

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

A tiny trickle of blood from my palm, I run from her. She has already seen. She reaches for me. The white form fitted sheets, the attached tubes, lock her prone in position. I move to touch her, palm full of glass and filling with blood, my only offering.
I offer you my body,
I do not want it,
It disgusts me.
The pale white of my skin
reflects death.
My thighs,
a mute explosion of flesh
and loose fat,
fall open to you:
I have abandoned them.

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

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

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

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

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

Anything

This is an anti-story. You may be asking what is an anti-story? Well, I have a book that's entitled, "Anti-story: an anthology of experimental fiction". Does that help you? It doesn't? Well, to tell you the truth, I don't really know myself. I suppose an anti-story is just the opposite of a regular story, whatever that is. Maybe it means there are no rules, no characters, no characters, no nothing and it's only 248 words long. (Count 'em if you want.) I'd just say, that's an anti-story, baby. Experimental fiction. I can do anything I damn please. Everybody is so accustomed to regular stories, they would be lost and upset if my story were only 248 words long. Well, I'm going to make it longer because I don't like to see people lost. But don't think I'm going to turn it into any regular story. No sir, you're just going to get some more experimental fiction. Let's see, what can I do to entertain you? Hmmm, how about some artwork -

There, now did you ever see that in a story before? Of course not. Would you like some fiction? Is that what's troubling you? You haven't seen enough fiction? I can take care of that. Yesterday I came into my room and found eleven dead armadillos on my desk. What's that, you say? It's fiction. I invented and imagined those armadillos on my desk. Want some more? I know you don't, but you're getting them anyway because I'm running this story. Six of those armadillos, got up and whistled Beethoven's 16th Symphony. If you know anything about music, you just know that's fiction. I mean everybody knows armadillos can't whistle. I'll bet you're starting to squirm just a little bit right now - you don't like my story. Too strange, too foreign, too many dead armadillos. Ha, ha, little joke there. Laugh if you want to. It's your prerogative. You don't like all the power I have. You could stop reading, you know, and you probably think you have the power to do that. But if you think about it, it's really my power. I can either end the story - that'll make you stop - or I can write something really obnoxious and weird, that'll make you stop, too. On the other hand, maybe you are enjoying my anti-story, in which case you will read on. I've got all the power. Notice how this is all in one paragraph. Do you dislike that; find it hard to read? Tough! I'm sorry, sometimes we anti-story writers can be so cruel. I will be nice now. Hi reader, how are you, great to see you again, you're looking well. Feel better? A few words back, 28 to be incredibly precise, I called myself an anti-story writer. I wonder what the other anti-story writers think of me. You know, the ones who get published in The New Yorker. They would probably say, oh no sir, you have gone too far, you have broken all the rules, you are not a true anti-story writer. Does that bother me? No. You wonder why? Of course you don't: that was just a rhetorical question. It doesn't bother me because if I'm not an anti-story writer or a regular story writer, then I must be something else. I am an anti-anti-story writer, perhaps the first and only. I am unique. There is nobody else like me in the world. Isn't that obnoxious? Don't you just hate me? I'm so... what's the word I'm looking for... anti. Notice how I put those little... in there. They were just for effect. I knew damn well what word I was looking for. Just wanted you to get another glimpse at my power. I also wanted to work the word anti (didn't feel like using "this time") in there, so it can either end the story that'll make you stop. I'm looking for... anti. Notice how I put those little... in there. They were just for effect. I knew damn well what word I was looking for. Just wanted you to get another glimpse at my power. I also wanted to work the word anti (didn't feel like using "this time") in there, so it would be mysterious, intriguing and thought provoking. But if it isn't any of those things, I don't really care. Are your eyes tired? They are? You see, now I own your body. Well anyway, my hand is tired. I think I'll leave you alone now. Oh yeah, one last thing before I forget. Have you ever heard that saying, the pen is mightier than the sword? You know what I think? I think whoever said that never used a pen in a sword fight. What do you think?
Spilling out into early morning July,
dewed grass cuttings
stuck to tennis shoe toes,
we laughed across the yard,
past the hoofsucking barnyard sludge,
one already sticky macadam,
popping tar bubbles and kicking gravel:
back to the spring maybe--
or the orchard.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The inside of the shop was dark, and every available space was taken up by aquariums, empty and occupied bird cages, and pet supplies along the walls. The place was full of the smell of old bird seed, the fizzle and hum of fish tank filters, and the garbled warblings of birds. The wooden floor creaked at my every step. I saw a musty colored cockroach scuttle past my left shoe and under the counter. He wasn’t very big, only about an inch. The smashed one right where Mom was standing...
I heard my mother say between laughs. She exited the room, but I saw Mr. Henry exit the rear room of his shop instead. What did they do with dead parakeets? If I had kept Polly, I would have dug her a nice big grave in the garden and put a stone over it so no one would have been able to dig her up. But I didn’t have Polly.

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

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

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

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

"Dinner is served!" Mom called from the dining room. Grandmother rose up and began heading in that direction. I let her go before me. She and the others were saying how good the food was going to be. And it was going to be..."
You bump your teeth to a candied apple
 glaring sideways and ciphered at me;
cornucopian competition in spitting seeds
 at each other's feet.

With heel-dug pretension
 you ruffle up dust,
hiking your cowhand ass away.
And Indians howl, not worshipping you
 while deaf ears are missing
 the soundtracks of lovers
 backseating at Drive-Ins
 and headlighting turf
 as clumsy as High School's;
 our bellies are white
 under red-skinned pride
 that never was proud.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I padded across the tattered green rug toward the kitchen, hesitated, and looked through the entrance to the adjoining room. I saw Melanie from the back. Her orange hair hung just above the top of a high-backed chair.
The sun was setting through the window, reflecting white and yellow around the corners of the room.

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

"Ya..." I answered with blue ice eyes gazing off to some distance beyond the window. "I've decided that I feel more secure this way." She ran her fingers over the scarf which she had salvaged and converted into a neck tie. Letting her fingernails slide down, clicking at the buttons of her vest, she rested her stare on the blank television. "I've decided that I feel more secure with her to the framed entrance of the kitchen. Melanie had raised her outstretched legs and crossed her polished shoes making her gruff voice sound playful, saying, "There's a sign in Cooper's Drug Store down Burlington Street," I said, "sends they need part-time help." With one hand I pulled out a writing board, scuffing it along the counter top. With the other hand I rummaged carefully through a drawer of knives, feeling for the thick handled one. "Oh ya, that ice cream place down town wants full-time female help. Maybe you could work something out with them." I closed the drawer, and the utensils rattled. "Waitressing's a good thing to have, you know? I mean it always makes good money." I hustled across the kitchen floor, opened the refrigerator and bent down to look for the salad ingredients. Bringing out a bundle of lettuce, I swung the refrigerator door shut. "You didn't go grocery shopping, huh?"

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

I began to feel like a mother trying to talk to a naughty child. Not saying the right things. "Guess we'll have just plain lettuce for our dinner. Small house noises grew larger. The oil burner whizzed on and clicked off down town wants full-time female help. Maybe you could work something out with them." I bustled across the kitchen floor, opened the refrigerator and bent down to look for the salad ingredients. "I'm cooking for her, and now she won't go grocery shopping. Where is that going to end? No celery, no carrots, no peppers... tomatoes..."

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

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

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

She held the newspaper in front of her face, not moving. The absence of televised six o'clock news left us speechless. An old clock ticked on the mantle. I scooped unsuccessfully at my spaghetti.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The silver buttons of her vest reflected what little light there was left in the room. I took a slow sip of my milk, not tasting it, feeling the cool glass against my lips. And I set it down with a gentle tap on hard wood.
"I never could get to talk to him, but I always came back the next day to try again. "One time," Melanie continued, "I went in and walked on the icy glass. The ceilings to the glass castle were so high that all I could see was infinite darkness directly above me. I stood at the bottom of the long stairway and looked up. It was made of thin sheets of glass, each a different color: red and purple and orange and green, like clear candies. This time though, at the top of the stairs, I saw my father. His working hat was set back on his head. He was out of the maze and looking at me. I wanted to run and throw my arms around his waist as if I were little again. But I stood still and watched him turn to the pile of glass that was at his side. Slowly, he lifted one clear sheet into the air, high above his head. It shimmered like a silver knife, catching the light at the right angle and refracting it."

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

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

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

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

vic coccimiglio
The Only Way I Knew Her

Rode with her.

in the corner
of my rear-view mirror

wondering if her ass was

as nice as
her smile.

Thought she was tailgating

until I glanced at my speedometer,

but when I did

she passed,

and the last I saw of her

was a white temporary plate.

Touch

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

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

Family

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

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

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