

R.M. LAWRENCE

The Skinner's Shed

In the hard light of
The skinner's shed, I waited.
My eyes, cornered rats, scurried
Desperately around the room
To avoid the naked carcasses heaped
Yellow on the darkened floor.
Frantic, they leapt to the rafters,
Only to be reproached by racks and rows of
Hides curing overhead:
Russet foxes and a single deer, suspended
Among the oily mink — also waiting
To curl about the throats
Of wealthy women.

The stench from old oil drums,
Brimfull with the week's offal,
Burrowed into my nostrils.
I breathed through my mouth
And death crawled in.

The fur-buyer, appraising my afternoon
Offering of a wood-stiff raccoon,
Rolled his good eye towards the ceiling
And spat, "Twenny-six dollar."
Something brushed my leg and growled.
The skinner saw me start and roared
As two red-bone puppies, tussling
Over a muskrat tail,
Rolled away from my feet
Across the sticky boards.
I took my check and fled,
But the disembodied laughter
Trailed me in the dying light.