

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 12 *CutBank* 12

Article 28

Spring 1979

The Neighbor

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Recommended Citation

Clark, Kevin (1979) "The Neighbor," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 12 , Article 28.

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THE NEIGHBOR

My uncle is not yet
dead and the last red
bloom of summer has spread
to take the sun
when a neighbor clips it
and places the stem
in the water of her own
crystal vase and offers
the beautiful gift
at the door. She is welcomed
and led up the stairs
to the room where he is
propped on the bed
watching baseball on tv,
and he smiles
and wisecracks the old line
about doors left open.
She laughs and hands
him the flower.
He reaches to take it,
to place on top
of the oxygen machine

and that night at dinner
she is staring at a cut
violet in her centerpiece
when she remembers how
she held the vase a moment
too long, how he almost
had to pull it from her hand,
so surprised was she
at his forearm,
the vessels bulging
blue, and awful the way
the whole thing pulsed

like a lung, and she thought
the word 'nitroglycerin'.
The violet is growing darker,
the sound of cars
arriving in the street,
when she looks up,
surprised now
at the remarkable steadiness
of his hand, his kind eyes,
and finally she lets go her grip.