

Entire Unto Himself

Michael R. Collings

Already cold and stiff by the time I arrived,
It was a shallow shadow, gray against black;
A collar of blood fringed its matted coat.

I picked it up, carefully, and placed it
Between plastic-shrouded seats, and then drove home.
A block away, light glowed through undraped windows.

The telephone sat silently. It had rung once that night;
A stranger's voice described the dog—where
To find it, what had happened . . . that it was dead.

That voice had sent me to the street. Now,
There was no voice, no echo, no sounds in the house—
No cadenced *clicks* of nails against linoleum.

I sagged into a chair. The family would return
Within the hour. The children would not notice,
Perhaps . . . but she would. She would know the loss.

I sat. Phantom weight pressed against
My feet where he had lain—that one place
Where he had not been wanted but that he chose.

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Phantom breathing bled through stiff silences.
Finally, headlights pierced the windowpanes.
Her car pulled up the curving drive, and stopped.

I met her at the door, instead of him.
I whispered . . . something . . . words that held no sense.
And held her as she wept.