

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Kieu-Chau Huynh
Silver Spring, MD

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the tenth issue of **THE APPRENTICE WRITER**, which annually showcases the best writing, photography, and artwork we receive from secondary school students.

Each year we send approximately 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper **THE DAILY ITEM** in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to over 3,500 schools in the 10 states from which we receive nearly 5,000 submissions.

It has been my pleasure to discover hundreds

of outstanding student writers through their submissions to **THE APPRENTICE WRITER**, and for the past five years, I have had the opportunity to work with some of those same writers, as well as dozens more, through Susquehanna's weeklong summer writers' workshops.

The summer workshops, which attract students in fiction, poetry, and journalism, are just one part of the growth of the Writing Program at Susquehanna. The Visiting Writers Series has brought artists such as

Robert Creeley, Sharon Olds, Madison Smartt Bell, Tobias Wolff, David Bradley, and June Jordan to campus. Advanced workshops in fiction and poetry are available. A student reading series, an expanded literary magazine, independent writing projects, and writing internships have provided interesting options for student writers. Moreover, this year it's our pleasure to present an eight-page feature, beginning on page 25, which offers work written by contribu-

tors to issues 1-9.

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, essays, photography, and artwork by students in grades 9-12. Send material to Gary Fincke, Writing Program Director, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, (717) 372-4164. The deadline for submitting is March 15, 1993.

We also welcome inquiries from students about the Summer Writers' Workshops in fiction, poetry, and journalism.

THE APPRENTICE WRITER Number 10, 1992

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor: Gary Fincke
Assistant Editor: Tracy Mattingly

POETRY	
Mike Ferguson	3,39
Vanessa Curto	3
Guang-Shing Cheng	3,18
Molly Lyons	3
Alysia Peich	4
Jessica Nepomuceno	6
Clementine Brown	9,33
Andrea Kresge	9,24,36
Lenah Veltzen	9
Remy Holzer	10
Douglas Jennerich	10
Stacy French	10,54
Lidy Jane Chu	14
Carolyn Davis	15
Susannah Voight	16
Debbie Benson	18
Mari Shopsis	20
Jennifer Chang	21
Stephen Bounds	21
Jean Bart	24
Darlene Grzegorski	24
Jill Robin Sisson	24
Cristina Brown	33
Tess Thompson	33
Angi Williams	34
Denise Zalegowski	36
Kimberly Knowles	36
Virginia LeBaron	39
Niklos Hablenko	39
Melissa Leaver	43
Paul Tuchmann	43,54
Ken Rumble	44
Carolyn Davis	44
Erin Gorman	51
Heather Rogers	55
Katherine Bell	55
Elizabeth Fettweis	57
Chris Queenan	59
Adam Huss	59

PROSE	
Curtis Sittenfeld	4,19
Claire Nee	6
Joseph Farrell	7
Eleanor Carter	8
Renee Jaksch	12
Jessica Wolf	15
George Hardy	17
Marta Czekajewski	17
Jennifer Rubenstein	22
Eva Peck	35
Nate Lounsbury	35
Henry Clarke	37
Sarah Landreth	38
Lauren Wysocki	40
Rebecca Hirschfield	42
Laura Siegel	45
Mari Shopsis	48
Guang-Shing Cheng	49
Kate Birney	50
Nina Kuruvilla	51
LeAnn McCoy	52
Asma Gull Hasan	53
Mark Narron	56
Daniel Lipton	57
Amanda Nazario	61
Kara Schenk	62

PHOTOGRAPHY/ARTWORK	
Kieu-Chau Huynh	Cover
Joanna Korman	11,63
Kamila Sych	15,40
Shannon Fincke	21
Cynthia Kerstner	33
Robert Cron	36
Keri Salmieri	44,60
Teresa Horgan	52
Brian Stubbs	55
Gretchen Strouth	55

Paul Tuchmann's poems arrived with no return address.

A DECADE	
Katherine Cottle	25
Greta Hannum	25
Sara Glover	26
Cathy Wagner	26
Joseph Wajszczuk	26
Evan Boyd	27
Susan Brown	27
Vanessa Elder	27
Susan Arnoult	28
Darren Haber	28
Deborah Sobeloff	29
Stephanie Levin	30
Hop Wechsler	30
Susan Gray	30
Ahree Lee	30
Ronald Sala	31
Tina Lee	31
Gia Hansbury	31
Rebecca Latimer	32

LOGO DESIGN
Carolyn Gienieccko

THE APPRENTICE WRITER is published annually by Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, and Ottaway Newspapers through the cooperation of **THE DAILY ITEM**.

These Hands

These hands still
remember a November morning
in a frozen meadow.
These hands still
tense at the memory of the raven,
tangled in a torn net,
the angry beating and the jerking grasses.

It was these hands, parting
withered brush, that stumbled through
a web of string and feathers.
It was these hands, numb
to their own pain,
that ripped at the net.

Remembering the frenzy
of ink-black feathers, remembering
the moment the raven was freed,
these hands unfold like wings.

Remembering the wings which flashed
and fluttered in the bright air,
these hands spread wide
and rise into the wind,
suddenly freed
into the spilling dance
of the raven in the sky.

Mike Ferguson
Richmond, VA
Monacan High School
Judith R. Land

Syncopate

I zoom through the dented night,
Trampolining past clouds and wind chimes.
I gyrate with the puerile moon
And invite twigs to my hair like umber flags.

Parachuting into your kitchen,
My heels catch onto a windowsill.
Splinters jangle onto the floor tiles,
Their shadows yawning like sabers.

I set a pot to boil and slowly
Apricot vapors drag you down the
Stairs of your blitzed abode.
And you smile

At the wild-eyed sage
Performing ant turns on the cabinets.

We settle into the house
With a night creak,
You slump into my arms;

My fingers trickle over your origami skin.
Steam mouths wisdoms, dissolving into the night.
But I still hold you,
Your shoulders creasing my nightshirt,
Linoleum patterns imprinting my thighs.

Vanessa Curto
Potomac, MD
Thomas Sprigg Woolton High School
Steven Swift

Ancient Verse

Grandmother
I watch your wizened face
eyelids reaching for the ground
tottering slowly but steadily
on those broken feet I once saw
naked propped up
two wind-gnarled branches
browned and hardened and peeling
and you still walk ahead
conquering stumps of Chinese relics.

I look down
the milk of a brave new world
nursed me large
But you are taller
a giant ginko
with roots deep in the soil of yellow men
folds of the trunk that flow with sap
and arms of jeweled leaves
encompassing lands past my little realm
for you grew on
the milk of silk fathers

From the breast of three generations
I now suckle your milk
ginseng bitter of misty yangtzes
sour of blood-stained terraces
sweet of mangoes a thousand years back.

Guang-Shing Cheng
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Carol K. Blum

Applecote Inn

Applecote Inn
sits off pebble-strewn Cliff Road
away from the rounded cobblestones.
It stands square-shouldered
clothed in uneven gray shakes.

The steps creak welcome.
Wicker rockers nod their agreement.
The loosely screened door
remains unlatched
awaiting the coming season.

Inside, wide planked floors
swept free of winter-blown sand
caught in the cracks
support painted oilmats, straightened
so their stenciled vessels sail erect.

Ageless bedspreads
rest as smooth as the ironed table linens.
The steamer's whistle echoes.
Soon the steps creak
and the door slams.

Molly Lyons
Mountainside, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Adolescent Boys and Black Caterpillars

I liked playing with
black caterpillars when I was six,
their coarse fur tensing up
as I gently tapped them with my finger.
I could imagine the tiny bodies shivering
as I tickled the very top of the hairs,
upright and sharp,
like hundreds of straight pins.

I watched boys tease the bugs,
putting them on their prickly backs,
throwing them to see if they would burst,
hoping the delicate bodies
were holding something obscene,
blood and intestines or a noxious odor.

They didn't know about
the wings they were breaking,
the protective capsules of fur
crushing folded butterflies.
I wanted to throw those boys,
to see their unwashed adolescent bodies
break into something exotic:
green tropical parrots
or red saltwater fish,
the dirt-stained playclothes
cracking to release shining marbles,
clean and smooth.

Alysia Peich
West Chester, PA
B. Reed Henderson High School
Susan Tieman

The Coin Story

We first heard the coin story when we were very young children. I was seven, and my sister couldn't have been more than five. Our father told it to us driving back from Michigan after Christmas. On the way up, we were so excited we could barely stay in our seats. Everyone we knew would be there for the holiday—cousins, aunts, uncles, and, especially, all the grandparents. Our mother and father had grown up in the same area, and there was nothing Catherine and I loved more than going back with them to see all our relatives. After a week or so of romping around with the cousins, however, we were exhausted. On the long drives back to our house in Delaware, we slept or else we listened to the stories our father told. The coin one became our favorite.

When my father was eighteen, he was invited to a fancy party. A girl he knew had just finished her freshman year in college, and her parents were presenting her to all their friends as a young woman. My father had bought a tuxedo and special cologne. He had brushed his hair back and polished his dressy shoes and practiced dance steps in front of a mirror on the landing of the stairs in the house where his family lived. He was to be the escort of the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. The girl had moved to Michigan recently and knew few people. My father had found out that her name was Jean and that she was very shy. Her new house was on the same street as his, and he had walked his dog past it many times just to watch her.

My father had sat up all of one night and written out the sentences he would say to Jean when he asked her to be his

date. At eight o'clock on a Sunday morning, he had dialed her number and let the telephone ring ten times. Finally, someone had answered. "I want to speak to Jean," my father had said. He had been so nervous that his fingers had trembled.

"She's asleep," the voice had said.

"Please wake her up," my father had cried. "I have to ask her something important."

"She isn't used to young men calling at—" the voice had begun, but my father had interrupted.

"Please," he had said seriously. "Please let me talk to Jean." He would not have been so persistent, but he had stayed up all night, and he had made himself believe that nothing mattered except Jean's agreeing to be his date.

The girl had picked up the phone at last. "This is Tom Fletcher," my father had said breathlessly. "Will you go with me to Sally's party?"

"Of course," Jean had said. She had sounded like she was not yet awake.

My father had been ecstatic. He had gone downstairs and done cartwheels in his front yard. He had counted the days until the party.

When the night finally arrived, my father walked to Jean's house. He rang the doorbell, and Jean answered. When my father saw her, he could hardly speak. Her hair was brushed softly around her shoulders. It was pale brown and gleamed in the fading light of the evening. Her cheeks were rosy. She wore a strand of pearls and a green dress and matching green shoes with little heels. My father had never seen anyone so lovely.

He took Jean's hand, and they started down the sidewalk. As they walked together in the dusk, he could smell Jean's perfume, and he thought this was probably one of the happiest moments he would ever know. People watched them as they entered the tent where the party was being held. A band played next to the wooden planks that had been constructed for a dance floor. My father knew the song, and he sang all the words aloud.

Later in the night, Sally's peers were invited to the indoor pool. My father had swum in it many times, but he was not sure why they were being led there on the night of the party. He and Jean followed the other young couples. When everyone was assembled, Sally's father rapped his knuckles on a glass tabletop, and the people were silent. "This ball is for my daughter," he said lifting a glass of champagne in the air. "But I want her friends to have as much fun as she does. I want to give you this." He reached into a bag that was set on the table. My father and the people standing near him all looked wonderingly at each other. They did not understand what was happening. Then, with one hand, Sally's father extracted coins from the bag and flung them into the air. They dropped in the pool with small splashes and then sank. None of the guests moved. "Go on," Sally's father said eagerly. He kept filling his fists with the coins and tossing them in the water. My father realized that they were silver dollars.

"Hey," one boy shouted. "Hey, why not?"

"Why not?" echoed others.

"That's right. They're all for you." Sally's father beamed.

My father watched as the people around him jumped into the water one by one and then in bunches. They went in tuxedos and dresses, long, silk dresses or pale strapless ones bought especially for the party. In their elegant clothes, my father's friends grabbed at the coins, collecting them as fast as they could, knocking one another in their sudden hurry. All they could think of was the money.

"Is that the whole story?" I asked the first time my father told it. I had thought that it could not be finished, but he had paused and then said nothing more.

"I'm afraid so."

"That's a stupid ending," I said. "Especially after the good parts, like Jean being so pretty."

"Why don't you try taking a nap, Emily," my mother suggested. "I know you're very tired."

continued on page 5

The second time we heard the story was a year or two later. When it was over, I had a question. "Did you go in the pool, Daddy?"

"Not at first. But someone pushed Jean, and I was holding her hand. We both fell in."

"Did you get any of the silver dollars?"

"No."

"I would have," I said confidently. "I'm a great swimmer."

When I was ten, there was a huge snowstorm. We did not arrive in Michigan until Christmas Eve, and all the relatives came out to the driveway to greet us. "Tom," exclaimed one of the uncles. "Tom, is this yours or a rental?" He jabbed his thumb in the direction of our car. We could see his breath spurting out in the cold air.

"Mine," my father said, picking up a suitcase.

"No way. No way." The uncle stared for a moment and then doubled over and began to laugh hysterically. I guessed it was the car that he found so funny, and I agreed that it was strange. A few months before, my father had switched jobs, and we'd traded in our nice station wagon for a rusty, red little car. Standing in our grandparents' shoveled driveway, all the relatives began to giggle and then they were laughing as hard as the first uncle. I was not sure exactly what about our car was so hilarious, but I joined in.

I turned to ask my mother where my mittens were, and I was startled to see that she was not smiling. She even looked angry. I glanced quickly at my father, and he had the same expression on his face. I realized then that his brothers were not sharing a joke with him. Instead they were making fun of my father and our ugly car. "Stop it," I began to shout, but my mother shook her head, telling me to be quiet.

"Are we the poor part of the family?" I asked my father when he came to tuck me in that night.

"What makes you think that?"

"Because of what they said about your car. And Grandmother and Grandfather have this big house, but ours is small. And I don't have lots of fancy dresses like Jane and Pammy."

"We're very lucky compared to some people," my father told me sharply.

"I know," I said hastily, afraid that he would break into one of his dull speeches about the children starving in foreign countries. "But really, are we the poorest?"

"I don't know, Emily." He looked at me sadly. "Why don't you ask all of your aunts and uncles how much money they have and see if it's more than we do."

"Your father isn't serious, sweetheart," my mother said. She had walked into the room, and she came to kiss me on the forehead. "I don't think you need to worry about money."

My little sister rolled over in the bed across from mine. "If Daddy had got the silver coins," she murmured sleepily.

"What?" my mother asked in a puzzled voice.

"If Daddy reached for them in the man's pool at that party," Catherine said, "we would have all the money in the world."

"Not quite." My mother laughed.

"Tell the coin story again," I said, eager to postpone my bedtime in any way possible.

"All right. And then both of you go right to sleep." My father went to sit in a rocking chair across the room, and in the dark, we listened to him tell the story we had loved since we were very young.

When he finished, Catherine was snoring softly. "Daddy," I said, "isn't it rude to say Jean was the prettiest girl you ever saw in front of Mommy?"

My father grinned. "I don't think she minds so much."

"I would. When I get married, my husband will think I'm as beautiful as Cinderella."

"Tomorrow, ask Mommy if she minds," my father suggested, and I decided I would. After he left the room, I lay in my

bed and suddenly I realized it. I leapt up and ran through the hall to my parent's room.

"Mommy," I yelled to them, "it's you. You're Jean, right? Your name is Jean?" For a moment, my parents looked confused. "In the coin story," I added.

"Oh." My mother smiled. "Yes, I am Jean. You're right, Emily. Now go to bed, sweetie. You'll wake your baby cousin."

During the same vacation, all the children were rounded up in the living room. Our grandfather stood beside the Christmas tree. "We will now play," he paused and eyed us, "Family Trivia." He pretended not to hear as we groaned.

"I have to go to the bathroom," announced Jane.

"Stay right where you are, little lady," my grandfather said. "Wait until you see what I've added for this year." He reached into one of the pockets of his corduroy pants and retrieved a thick stack of dollar bills.

"Ooooh," said Johnny. He was four, and everyone knew that he already stole change from the adults' wallets.

"Quiet," our grandfather said, and we obeyed. "Now the first question: What was Grandmother's maiden name?"

"Lewis," shouted my eight year old cousin whose name was Lewis. He stood to collect a dollar and then turned and waved it victoriously at us.

"Show-off," Pammy muttered. The game continued like that, the way we'd always played it except that that year correct answers were rewarded with green bills.

Afterward, my grandfather called to me as I was leaving the living room. "Emily, my dear," he whispered. "I want to give you something." He pushed a bill toward me. It was not a one but a twenty. "Buy a dolly," he said. "I know your parents can't always get one for you."

Although I was surprised, I did not consider refusing. The only part of the incident that was odd was that my grandfather had seemed like he didn't want anyone else to know, but he'd given me the money where all the adults could see us.

On the day we were to leave, my parents found out about the money. They asked where I had gotten a twenty dollar bill, and, with great hesitation, I told them. "I want you to return it right now," my father said. "I'm not angry at you, Emily, but you certainly don't need any more toys." I burst into tears, and after a while, he relented and returned the money by himself. We left for Delaware immediately afterward.

In the car, my father looked fiercely at Catherine and me. "I want to tell you girls a story," he said.

"Are you mad, Daddy?" Catherine asked.

He did not answer her. "When I was eighteen, there was an important party," he began.

"We already know--" Catherine started, but our mother lifted her finger from the steering wheel and wagged it, and we were quiet. My father told the coin story all the way through, even though we'd heard it only a few days before. When he came to the part where everyone was jumping in the pool, he said, "I want you girls to know something. It was disgusting. It was disgusting that the man threw money in and the guests ruined their clothes to get it. The people at that party thought that money counts for more than it does. Remember this, Catherine and Emily: Our family is fortunate to have food and shelter, but money is not important. It can't make you a better person."

Catherine and I were silent. We never talked about what our father told us that day in the car, but I'm sure she remembered it as well as I did. We did not realize for several more years that Sally, the girl whose party it had been, was our Aunt Sally, our father's sister, and that the man who threw the coins was our own grandfather. And when we did know, we never discussed that, either.

Curtis Sittenfeld
Groton, MA
Groton School
Judith Klau

Drinking Milk in the Dark Kitchen

The kitchen is so dark that it could easily be mistaken for someplace else, perhaps a wheat field in Kansas, perhaps a bus stop in Times Square. In the night time, when all things change their shape in the masking darkness, does the milk stay white? What does it become?

The cool fluid passes through the man's lips, and slides slickly down his throat. He wonders what it is he has drunk. It could have been blood, or freshwater rain. Who's to say, he thinks, that it was white? Maybe it was purple, maybe it was green. The man pads through the darkness, past rows of wheat and leering hookers, past Kansans on tractors and New York mar-quees, into the shadows that could be his bedroom. He lies on his bed, which may be a coffin, or a park bench. Closing his eyes, he falls asleep almost instantly. He does not see through the thin blue cotton of his pajamas the outline of a glowing trail of milk flowing into his stomach.

Jessica Nepomuceno
Staten Island, NY
Notre Dame Academy High School
Debra Sundstrom

Socks

I can't remember much about my uncle Joey; he died before I was born. I can only picture a vague, grey photograph of a tall man, in polka dotted shorts with his arm around my mother standing near a bush by the pool. I suppose it was taken the summer he and my father worked for my mother's parents doing odd jobs for money--replanting the grass that grew thick in the back yard, repainting the front of the house, cleaning the pool.... That he was a charming man was all my mother would ever say about him without her dreamy look of past innocence turning into one of unease as she changed the subject. My father later told me Joey was attacked and killed by a gang of homophobic Aryans. He said Joey would have been a writer, would have spread new ideas and influenced people--a really great man. The photograph is buried in an old family album, tucked into a box with furniture kept in the attic because it is too hideous to display in the family room.

The last time I went up there, I was fifteen. Other kids had secret hiding places in their closets or in a tree in the far corner of the yard, places that were private, where we felt safe, where we would take our problems and cry them away, and then everything would be better again. My secret hiding place was always the farthest, darkest corner of the attic, where I had inconspicuously rearranged the old furniture so that I could curl up inside my nest like a turtle retreating into its shell and, with a flashlight large enough only to light up my corner of the den, I would flip through the old photo albums, gazing at the flat, grey images of people (one of them could have been Joey) and wondering what they had done to be immortalized in the Smithson family album. One day, while my older brother, Edward, and I were playing tag, he accidentally knocked over a box I had strategically positioned in front and discovered my hiding place. He made me promise to let him use it and, over the years, added such amenities as a full-sized lamp, a television, a stereo, a mattress and a variety of unsuspecting girls, updating my archive retreat to a sort of high-tech romper room.

I've been having problems in school lately. My guidance counselor says I'm reticent, I write too much in this funny little notebook, and my homework is disturbing. He says I should consider seeing a professional about whatever is bothering me--to help me understand and deal with my problems, but mom doesn't think it will do any good. I guess shrinks are not in this

year. Dad hasn't voiced any opinion, so she's probably right. Even if she wasn't, it wouldn't matter. She says I'm not seeing a shrink. I guess I don't have any problems. It's just a phase right? Everybody goes through something like this...right? I'm fifteen, which might explain it. My mom keeps telling me it's my growing awareness of women that's bothering me, and that I should just give it time and I will gradually feel more comfortable with my manhood, etc. But I really don't think that that's it. I mean, at football games I'd rather watch the players than the cheerleaders, and I can't get excited about the dozens of copies of PLAYBOY my friends keep giving me. They started this thing where every PLAYBOY, PENTHOUSE and HOT BUNS that anyone gets is passed around to every member of the group. It's sort of like our own sophomore frat pledging--you gotta do it. And then we all go out and get really drunk and puke our guts out and I feel better afterwards. Mom says I'm probably just a late bloomer and if I give it time, I'll come around. I'll know when I do, mom says, I'll think about this girl all the time, and I'll walk around in a dreamy daze, and I'll do stupid things to get her attention, she calls it being in first love. My friends call it being pussy whipped. I think I like the idea of first love better.

I wrote a story yesterday about this guy, Joe Byron, I saw last weekend. Me and some guys were in Pizza King on Saturday night when a bunch of guys, older than we were--college I guess--came in and sat at the booth two tables to the left of ours. This one guy had brown hair and hazel eyes and a smile that could enlighten a room, and he seemed really nice and friendly--the universal man--he said hi to me, and I remembered him and wrote this story yesterday because something about him made him different from the rest of the guys he was with. I think it was his socks. He was dressed like everyone else, in a long-sleeved striped oxford and jeans and white bucks, but when he leaned forward or towards me I could see his wild green and yellow polka-dotted socks, and when he said hi to me, I would have traded my mother to be the only other person in the world with green and yellow polka-dotted socks too, and so I just stared at him for a long time. And when he left, I looked down at my own white, Fruit of the Loom sports socks and suddenly I felt really sick. I ran home and leaned over the sterile, pure-white sink and tried to throw up, to get this sickness out of me, but I couldn't. No matter how hard I tried, I kept coming up just short, coughing up dry.

I kept thinking about this man with the hazel eyes and the socks who said hi to me, so I told mom about him and one day absentmindedly asked her where I could find green and yellow polka-dotted socks, and she almost threw a fit, saying that on no condition was I ever to disgrace the family by going out in public with green and yellow polka-dotted socks. Even when I begged, saying I could hide them under my pants, she yelled no; as long as I was living in her house, I would wear either black or white socks like everyone else. My father just looked at me as if he dimly recognized something uncanny in my plea. But my mother said no, and the subject was closed.

I was thinking about the man with the hazel eyes and the socks who said hi to me again the other night, which is why I decided to write the story. I named him Joe Byron after my uncle Joey and Lord Byron, the only other men, both poets, I could ever picture in green and yellow polka-dotted socks. In the story, Joe Byron gives me my most precious gift--my own pair of green and yellow polka-dotted socks, and instantly we are bonded in some way by his poetry, by my writing in the margins, by our knowledge that each of us is not alone.... Together we are stifled at my house, and so we leave, tearing off into the twilight towards Beacon Hill, where we run, shedding our pinstriped oxfords, our Levi jeans, hurtling ourselves, clothed only in green and yellow polka-dotted socks, into my grandfather's pool that my uncle Joey cleaned and prepared for us.

Claire Nee
Rye, NY
Miss Porter's School
Barbara J. Smith

Getting To Know You

What a girl! Katie Kavanaugh was an amalgamation of a guy's best friend, kid sister, and Mother Theresa. As she dropped me off at the Trailways Bus Station, I couldn't think of any other friend who would cheerfully give someone a ride at 8:00 A.M. Saturday morning. Her 1967 sky blue Pontiac, a curse for anyone to be seen in under the age of 58, turned at the light and she was gone.

I was going to have a terrific weekend! I just knew it! Going to visit a gorgeous redhead at St. Charles College was the best thing to happen to me since school began. Besides that, she actually invited me... well, sort of... at least, I consider someone telling you how much they'd like to see you and --well, get to know you, an invitation. I mean, it's not like she had to have it engraved on parchment paper and mailed with a R.S.V.P. --I mean, I think I can tell when some girl's interested and I definitely know Connie is interested.

The only drawback to spending the week end with Connie at St. Charles was having to take the bus to get there. Three hours of Trailways travel was brutal but with a good book, a family size bag of Rollos, and the vision of Connie in my mind, even the Trailways bus can become, "your friendly travel coach."

As I boarded, I scanned my fellow passengers. It looked, as my liberal parents would say, like a slice of the real world. The real world, that is, if you call home Alcatraz. What a diverse group of humanity! I couldn't decide if it was a compliment or a flaw in my character that I fit right in.

Just as I was beginning to bask in my "America is a melting pot" ideology, my eyes spied a definite crack in the pot. In the center aisle was a character worthy of "Figaro." This rotund passenger was arranging his luggage in the space above the seats. My initial thought, "I pity the poor cretin who gets wedged next to him!"

I must say right here and now that I don't believe in Karma. I refuse to acknowledge that it is written somewhere in the firmament that we have no control over our destiny. While I hold strongly to this belief, I also believe that I am a sap, and for every yin there is a yang. My yang was plowing down the aisle and squeezing his ample frame into the seat right next to mine.

My immediate response was to close my eyes, feigning sleep. I would have had to have been knocked unconscious to nod off so rapidly, but I prayed he would fall for my self induced slumber. My eyes, forced shut in imprisonment, began to imagine my reason for enduring the trip. Ah Yes, CONNIE--"Connie," Constance, Constantinople--God, she was beautiful, she was perfect, she was popular, and best of all, she liked me. Ane she must have liked me a lot to invite me to come and see her. It was going to be so great. She's really popular. I mean--everyone takes one look at her and well--need I say more?

She'd be waiting at the terminal. Well, maybe not, she's not the bus station type, maybe she'd send a friend. While in the midst of this day dream, I became aware of an irritating noise. What was he doing? He must be trying to get something from one of those voluminous bags he had placed in front of him. My curiosity won out and I opened one eye just a tad to get a better view.

Although it was difficult to grasp the total picture with my limited vision, I nevertheless endeavored to scan my seat-mate. I have already mentioned his size--generous, his hair--endangered, and his odor--edible. Really, this guy had so many eats in those bags of his, I was ready to order a half-a-dozen cannolis.

"Hi, there!"

God, I was caught! What should I do? Pretend to have a muscle spasm in my eye, close it, and go back to sleep--feign being a deaf-mute--pass out--jump out? What?!

Suddenly, as if emanating from another body I heard myself utter that fatal word "Hi." Without a doubt that small salutation is the most dangerous word in the English language. It was the proverbial finger in the dike--once spoken an entire

flood gate of conversation flowed forth.

As the bus traveled onward and I became immersed in my companion's life history, I began to notice little accoutrements that enhanced his appearance, the least of which was a luminescent set of rosary beads he wore around his neck. His hair, although sparse, was well tended. He must have used a tuning fork to comb it--how else could he have achieved such a perfect spacing between the seventeen hairs spread over his pate? As my eyes remained open but my mouth shut, something amazing happened. I will one day tell my children and my children's children about it. Without any provocation, nay, nary a pitch pipe, my companion, whose name by the way was Antonio, began singing to me. Loud, clear, and I must say with perfect pitch, the musicality of "Getting To Know You" filled the air. That's right, he was sitting next to me, singing a song from some old musical.

"Getting to know you.

Getting to know all about you.

Getting to like you.

Getting to hope you like me..."

My God, this could not be happening to me. I was trapped in a seat, on a bus, with "Antonio the Music Man!"

As the song continued, I became acutely aware of how uncomfortable it is to be sung to face to face. What should you do--smile, hum, whistle, or simply die? How many verses could this lousy song have; it was going on into a musical ad infinitum. Then I had a stinking thought, what will I do when it's over--applaud, laugh, cry, shut my eyes one final time or all of the above? Luckily, as the song neared its closing refrain, one passenger, who I will someday name my first born after, said loud and clear "Encore, Encore!" Thank heavens one lone soul was a devotee of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Up until now, my adolescence has been based on a common principle. Above anything else, no matter what the consequences--DON'T BE CONSPICUOUS. Be one of the crowd, don't stand out, blend into the surroundings. I felt my blood begin to rush, my heart begin to palpitate. What if no one on this lousy bus sings along? What if they all just sit in their seats and stare at Antonio? If being sung to was a mortal embarrassment, what would rejection by the entire load of critics be? I had to encourage the masses. Somehow I had to enlist their vocal support. Is it possible to grow up, to change, to leave the peer pressure of adolescence in one pitiful moment, through one desperate gesture?

My feet became firmly planted in the floor, my upper torso rose and as I faced the melting pot of humanity, I said, "Come on, all together now!"

With one magnanimous gesture, sixty-seven voices rose up in unison. I was caught up in the sheer pleasure of the moment. I suddenly realized that Antonio had a good voice. He transformed a dull, lifeless mob into the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which was quite an accomplishment since we were only now nearing Muncie, Indiana.

Our singing continued along with conversation as well as eating. From Antonio's mouth came heavenly sounds, but from his shopping bag, sinful delicacies of every ethnic origin. We pulled into the bus terminal much too soon. My experience had been remarkable. Would any of my friends believe this? Hey, two weeks from now, would I believe it?

As with every arrival there was the usual confusion and jostling of luggage and coats. I tried to prolong talking to Antonio, but he had become so popular I became lost in the crowd, a spectator, non-conspicuous. I got off the bus and headed toward the waiting room. It's funny, Connie had taken a back seat in my mind, but now I looked for her. Sure, I comforted myself, she's not a bus station groupie; I'll just call St. Charles and let her know I'm here. I'll be real casual, like, "I just happened to be in town and..."

Let me just save face and simply say Connie was busy....OK, OK, she was on a date.....with her fiance. I admit, I may have read her wrong, but let's look on the bright side, Do you know all SIX verses of "Getting To Know You?" Let me

assure you, I do.

My trip back to school was normal, ordinary, boring, nondescript. No singing, no conversation, no food, no Antonio. I considered trying to start a sing-along, but my development into adulthood was not yet complete. I am still lacking the maturity to initiate a public hootenanny.

I arrived back at the station and took a taxi back to school. I saw Katie leaving the cafe. If she was surprised to see me, she didn't show it, and she forever gained my friendship by not asking about my week-end plans. All she said was "How about going out for a pizza?"

We got in her Pontiac and drove to the pizza place. As I drove, I felt I wanted to say something to her, to thank her for being a friend, for being kind, for liking me. Instead, I opened my mouth, and in full voice, with my new born individuality, began to sing "Getting To Know You..."

Joseph R. Farrell
West Redding, CT
Fairfield College Preparatory School
Maureen Diffley

Grey-Green Glass

I am a mother. This has suddenly struck me because I wonder what sort of mother I am and because this is the first summer evening since my father died last winter. I had a marvelous father, not loudly boisterous, but quietly understanding. He used to take me on walks on summer evenings.

The days were long, with no hurry to return, and we would keep walking far past when the street lights were turned on. We didn't need to turn back when we reached the end of the rows of thick brick apartment buildings. During these rambles, my father showed me things, taught me to see things I hadn't seen before. As we walked further from home, the streets became wider, shaded by huge round trees, and we looked up into them. For the first time I saw different shapes of leaves. We'd have contests to see who could count more kinds. He helped me see the tulip beds against the shiny dark grass and moist earth, like dashes of paint smeared here and there by my feet. There was one group of ornate, brightly colored houses that he called Jubilee Row because they reminded him of the elegantly dressed party goers we sometimes peeped at through lattice fences. The houses were deceptively similar, though each one had a different colored and textured low slanting roof.

Often in these neighborhoods there would be children still playing a last forlorn game of tag or hopscotch in the street. But I stayed close to my father. I didn't want to join them. I knew that these children were different from me. They didn't go to the square, stone neighborhood school like I did. Instead, I saw them leaving their homes in orderly groups, sometimes accompanied by their nannies. They wore plaid uniforms and shiny black shoes. The girls had their hair smoothly tied back in satin ribbons. The boys would run ahead and have to be called back. They came reluctantly, scuffing their shoes. I had learned my mother cleaned house for some of these families. Afterwards, she came home tired, cranky. As we walked on, one by one, children would be called in, and they would shut their doors and draw their curtains against us. But there was one house, usually at the end of our stroll, where we decided to turn back, that had a large front window that wasn't covered over. By now the streets were empty, and we were free of curious glances. I had learned at age eleven that I could look in from the deepening dusk into the brightly lit living room without being seen. I had also started to look for a certain kind of symbolism in peoples' actions. I had begun to appreciate having candles lit at dinner. My father would patiently wait for me at the corner while I watched the family, learning their evening routines by heart.

There was a mother, a father, and two little boys who came and went from that room, but most always there was a

young girl with thick, straight, black hair, long enough to touch her waist. The girl was thin and graceful with a pale delicate face and hands. Her mouth was poised between a half-smile and smile when she was intent upon some game or book. I became entranced with this girl and her family.

Once I saw her seated on a flower-printed rug with one of her brothers. They had a picture-puzzle half-finished in front of them. He would choose a piece, and she would point to the place where she thought it went. They were laughing. The next afternoon, I found my little brother playing in the dirt out back. I convinced him to come inside and help me with a puzzle. When he ran whimpering to my mother, she came in to tell me that he was too young to sit still and play with puzzles.

"No, he's not," I snapped, "he's just too dumb!"

My mother told me that if I behaved like that I would have to put the puzzle away. I thought of the girl and her brother. I thought of them laughing. Why was my brother so stupid and why was my mother so dull, so dull and bossy, like the playground monitors who could never just let you play the game the way you wanted but had to organize and direct until there wasn't any fun left at all.

Sometimes when we returned, my mother would question me. She only challenged me, not my father who was not as easily intimidated. The questions started as innocent queries. Did I know how long I had been gone for? She had started to get worried. Then it turned into something probing. Where had we gone? Had we stopped anywhere? I wondered what she was afraid of. Perhaps she thought my father was giving me some illegal treat like a gumball or candybar. I could have told her the names of all the streets we traveled. I knew them as well as my own. But I thought it was safer to act ignorant. I didn't want to give her any opportunity to prohibit me from joining my father on our nightly excursions.

One night I found a ring on the path in front of the house with the open window. It was a plastic ring with metallic blue with little pearl beads glued to it. I bent down and grabbed it, clutching it all the way home, hoping my father wouldn't notice. He didn't. By the time we got home, I had imagined its enormous value. I knew it probably belonged to the girl with the black hair, but despite this, I didn't feel I was stealing. I had no plans to return it. I was just thrilled to have something from her, something that I could hold and look at anytime. By leaving it on the path, it had become an offering to me. But my mother immediately noticed it the first time I wore it. She wanted to know where it had come from. Had my father bought it for me at the drugstore?

"No," I said, "he didn't buy it. I found it." Fortunately, she was satisfied with this version of the truth. I had no explanation planned for her. Her inquiries made me sadly see the drops of glue and peeling paint. Now I wasn't sure if the ring had really belonged to that beautiful girl. It became a ploy, a deception, a bait.

I began to long for the tranquility I saw through the window. When my father and I went out each evening, we left the dinner plates still on the table, unresolved arguments, and my mother chasing my screaming brother to bed. Beyond the glass, I saw the mother reading aloud to the family, the parents embracing the pyjama-clad children, or the mother and father alone together softly talking. Everyone was composed. Everything was undisturbed. I often thought of the week my family once camped by the lake. It was when my father thought all of our troubles were over. We roasted hotdogs and drank hot cocoa every night that week. My mother laughed at my father's attempts to tell ghost stories. She told me about her childhood. That was the only time she told me those things. During the day, someone was constantly splashing in the water, but at night and in the morning, if I woke early enough, the lake would be perfectly flat, gray-green glass, with only the slightest ripple on the shore. This was what I thought of when I saw the mother and father kissing the girl.

The summer drifted away. We took different routes, usually shorter, so we did not always pass by the girl's home, and

continued from page 8

when we did they were not always there. Then suddenly, though I felt summer surely had not ended, school started again. We would go out on Fridays and Saturdays, my father promised, but we never did. I was not really disappointed. I went to a new, bigger middle school. There were more things I could do, school diversions; dances, picnics, sports. It wasn't acceptable to be seen with your parents anymore. I tried dying my hair. I read junk novels. I was no longer satisfied with the subtle excitement of watching someone's life. I rarely thought of the girl now. Her exaltation was being replaced by my new friends. I followed their example. Slowly I forgot her altogether, until this moment.

I would like to know if my father saw what I saw, wanted what I wanted. I will never know. I now know I saw what I was allowed to see, fragments. They showed me what they did not want to protect, discards. Or perhaps I saw only what I had created, illusions. That in my need for idealism, I had imagined the symbolism, importance, meaning in what they did because I was standing in the darkness looking in at the light. And from there, my child's outlook, it was easy to transform her into some mythical elf or sprite. Or perhaps even this ideal family and the lovely girl and me, enviously looking on, did not exist, that who I am now is not who I was, and who I was was transitory. Maybe I was, only that one summer.

Eleanor D. Carter
Rochester, NY
The Harley School
Alex DeSantis

Lychee

A scorching June day
Sweating through Chinatown with Lidy
Half pound of lychee nuts in a crinkly brown paper bag
They bang against my leg with every step
We are walking fast and it is hot
I feel my face bursting into furry redness
More angry than the leathery pink shell around the lychee
The inside like a rosy snake skin
We eat a lychee each, holding a soft opal on our tongues
To let the sweet juices purge our insides
The smooth smooth pit
Silky against the roof of my mouth like polished wood
It falls perfectly clean from the fruit
It reminds me of rosary beads and patience
Of biting down on black enameled chopsticks.
Four more blocks until the subway in the sulfurous smell of grey streets
And I hold the pit on my tongue
Looking sideways at the man lying against ceramic tiles
He asks me for change which I haven't got
I consider the gift of a lychee nut
"Take it" I would say, "It's better than money"
I'd peel off the shell to expose the quivering brain
More pure in color than my skin
Fleshy jewel of milkiness
Would he understand
The importance?
I consider the uninterested chinese fruit seller
Who didn't care to talk to me
In the busy hotness of noon
And the smoothness of the pit on my tongue
And Lidy with long delicate chinese fingers
Peeling the spiny pinkness away from the flesh
I consider the dirt on the man's fingertips
If I handed him the nut.

Clementine Brown
Maplewood, NJ
Columbia High School
Mr. Lasko

Black, Foggy Sleepiness

With the lights out
We go under
In a black fog,
Consumed by bedspreads
And flannel sheets.
With the electric blanket on,
We are shocked
In our cozy socks
And the black fog comes
With stars burning
Through the fuzziness.
We curl up like cats
And purr like the motors
Of old pickup trucks
While we dream of mushrooms
In the sunshine.
You get up and slip on
Those black sneakers
And slither down the hall
While I purr in my sheets,
And you drink
From a Dixie cup.
The neighbors are awake
And playing music
With the bass turned way up
And somewhere outside
There's a train
Disturbing the sweet, black fogginess
With a mournful whistle.
I want to get up and run
After being awakened
By the Dixie cup drinker,
The bass and the train.
I'd like to jump on the roof
And slide down chimneys,
But somewhere out the icy window
I think I see dawn
Creeping over the rooftops,
So I decide to go back
To my foggy bedspreads and escape
The beginning of day as I hear you returning
From Dixie cup land
Squeaking in your Black sneakers.

Andrea Kresge
Stroudsburg, PA
Moravian Academy
Johanna Farrell

Squirrel Thieves

I lift the curtain with one finger,
to see my bird-feeder explode
like a pinata.
A squirrel swings on the shattered frame,
showering the ground with sunflower seeds.
Then, like a magician, he pulls live squirrels
out of the frozen branches.
He flicks his tail to greet his instant guests,
their eyes bright as birthday candles.

Lenah Veltzen
Middleburg, VA
Foxcroft School
Paul K. Bergan

The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor W

Inside the still circle of light,
Sterility mingled with prickling sweat.
Blood sticking rubber gloves to skin.
Cold silver gleaming in raw red soup.
Tufts of hair flattened on the surgeon's wrist.
The patient lying, as though dropped from above, on the table.

His wife can no longer bear to touch skin.
Once home, she counts each spoonful of soup,
Her eyes squinting in unwelcome light,
As the spoon rises to her lips. She arches her wrist
Without purpose, tired and alone at the table.
In bed she hears noises and starts to sweat.

In the children's ward, a boy named Angel was flinging soup.
He looked like Rembrandt, sitting up at the table,
Chubby face gleaming as he caught her wrist
To ward off the nurses who stuck needles in his skin.
His father, who came to visit, smelled of sweat.
His pupils were small from sunlight.

Rembrandt, of course, had visited an operating table
Long ago. He had seen the patient, back curved like a wrist,
Helpless. And the ewers of water like some thin, hot soup.
How, from the stiff collars, had risen the stench of sweat.
The pale Dutch faces bathed in yellow light,
Surprised by what they could see: a thigh's skin.

Rembrandt's surprise would spring into sweat
When he saw the tubes around Angel's tender skin,
The swinging steel jaw of his table
Beneath the white ceiling and the cold light.
But the way he leaned his head against the pillow for some soup
Would have pleased the painter with his plump wrist.

When the patient dies, his wife will pinch her wrist
Black and blue. She will turn from the light.
Her urine will smell to her of fear, and sweat.
When she comes from seeing Angel, the Ouija table
Will tell her what she knows: Angel with his pretty skin,
And she herself will soon sink into death's heavy soup.

Amidst the chilly white sweat of a morgue table
Stand his dark skin and his light skin.
Amidst Rembrandt's black soup, a quick flash of wrist.

Remy Holzer
Rye, NY
Rye High School
Ray Peterson

This Linen Afternoon

brushing the air
with feathers in our hair
like Grandma dusting furniture in the Spring
just in time for company,
we are born and born again,
and Grandpa's in the next room
waiting for the guests to arrive.
He's quite tired, lying in his space.

Silent on his stomach, his hands sit, motionless
eyelids--soft as snow
heavy as ice
in his best blue
worn only to church on Sundays.
His shoes sit in his closet never
to be removed.
He's giving his socks to the blue and purple-toed needy.

Grandma makes tea in her sixty year-old
kitchen
and sings their wedding song
that has lasted through the ages
so long, so long.
One by one, or in groups,
the guests arrive
silently, sluggishly,
lethargically.
Grandma greets them all,
with a kiss,
as they stand against the wall
and filter toward Grandpa with great patience
(the younger ones always rue the feel
of Grandpa's waxen forehead on their lips).
sons and daughters,
nieces and nephews
in family reunion.

cider sipped by frog-filled throats.
statued,
Grandpa lies,
eyes fixed upon his kin whose faces slouch
and magnet eyelids draw closer towards one another.
The Nonchalant Life creeps out from beneath
their toes
and stabs them in the ribs
where Grandma's stew still grows.
She flows about the house in floral dress
so happily--
as she should be on this linen afternoon.

Douglas Todd Jennerich
Rutherford, NJ
Paul Buhtanic

Family

Sometimes the phone cries his problems
and you can bet she will sigh and pay his rent.
I stand there for minutes
listening to his voice shiver
through the phone lines-
But mother explains herself, with a shrilling voice,
to my father, "At least he is not robbing a package store..."
(Doing Drugs)
I can hear the silence forming the words,
I hear the money slipping from her wallet
as I dust or mop or sweep or fold-
And I listen later to the phone scream one more forgotten request
sending me across town
to pick up his laundry...

Stacy French
Lanesboro, MA
Mount Greylock Regional High School
Anne Villalon Speyer



Joanna Korman
New York, NY
St. Hilda's & St. Hugh's High School
Susan Cirigliano

hoboken, nj

*we sit down to our meal built for two
mashed potatoes boiled hotdogs microwaved baked beans
grandmother makes me say grace in her
kitchen that smells of old cabbage and cat urine*

i haven't said grace in ten years

*she asks me when was the last time i was to
confession
i want to screamshout
forgive me my grandmother for i have sinned
its been six years since i was catholic*

*but i only stare at the gray fault in the
plaster from 1916 so like the vein in her forehead
the lace curtains trail patterns across
the plate in the suffocating almost/dusk*

*choking isnt dared on the baked beans she forgot
to add brown sugar to but swallowing the
insisted upon milk is okay
she tells me how many rosaries she does for
the pain in her feet*

*ive only done a rosary once when i prayed
that i wasnt pregnant after kissing frankie oconners
on the lips in seventh grade*

*rubbery hot dogs are chewed and deep breaths
taken through open mouth as someone chuckles
going by on a bicycle
she calls me mary-kate, even though its not my name*

Erin O'Hanlon
Mays Landing, NJ
Oakcrest High School
Joseph Barrett

Untitled

*i try a steady voice, i can't
i speak reedy and tremble
to this cold wind, this bitter
phone-receiver, in memory
my tears have cradled this
cold plastic, and your hands
yes, your skin i've touched
in sorrow, a withheld kiss
i would talk or you would talk
sitting in the room you painted
i might have talked to cardinals
we saw before it snowed
or the wind that blew your hair
across your eyes
maybe you thought of me
at night felt the places
i had kissed, or me
rocking to sleep hoping i might
dream of your gentle voice, yes,
i would talk or you would talk
but i might have talked to cardinals
we had lost before it snowed.*

Alex Tocaben
East Hills, NY
Roslyn High School
Daniel Jamieson

Hester Street

*Today I watched you leave,
footsteps alongside your friends trailing
down the long neck of the corridor.
Now I sit glazed black and white
in the haze of the movie in the class,
where the man and woman smile in each others arms,
dancing. They are something more than
approximations or ghosts. I watch
the producer's name credit itself on the folds
of the woman's dress while her hands
are engulfed by those of her partner.
The white letters chameleon themselves into
highlights. Then the scene changes.
The characters speak with accents. "In America
you marry for love." Her eyes gaze back
into his. His wife has followed from Poland
but she can't be American enough for him,
can't make her body move, her mouth
speak the country. He erases her into
a blank page and writes the new words
down himself. The movie continues, but I
can't see the end. Mrs. Haber told the class
if you look closely in one scene you
spy out a boom microphone hanging over
the bodies of the actors and actresses
like the end of a noose. I put my head down
in my hands. Today I watched you cry,
managing to wipe the ribbons of water
from your face with my fingertip. It is over.
Your tears are for yourself.*

Todd Polenberg
Poughkeepsie, NY
Roy C. Ketcham High School
Robert Adam

Sitting down in a rickety chair with my chocolate milk, I glance past the curtains out my window. Children play across the street. A young girl sits in the grass with her doll.

I remember when I was sixteen and babysat. I remember how she shied away from a raised hand or sudden move. She was scared, I guess, like a puppy dog cowering from a newspaper.

One time I went over to her house, I remember hearing her mother yell, "Why did you go outside when I told you not to? Didn't I tell you not to? Didn't I? Answer me! You know what happens when you disobey mommy, don't you?" and then I would interrupt her by ringing the doorbell.

It always took a minute for the mother to answer, but her brisk, clodding walk on their wood floor told me she was coming.

"Yes? Why, Charlotte, come right in, dear," she would say.

"Hi, Mrs. Markle," I responded, and she was a different person from the one I had heard inside: kind, sweet. She reminded me of someone who rides a horse then turns around in the saddle to ride backward. The horse still has the same destination and the same rider, just a different style of getting there.

I don't remember asking Mrs. Markle a question like "Is everything O.K.?" or "What was wrong?" It was not that I didn't want to know but rather that I was afraid to.

I remember the little girl well, her tangled brown curls rolling down her bony spine. Julia ate when I was around, but it must have passed right through her. She was always thin, thin and pale...pale like milk before I poured the chocolate in it. I wish I could have poured chocolate into her.

She loved chocolate milk. I remember her draining the cup, leaving the chocolate film on the bottom. She sipped chocolate milk from a red cup, slurping every couple of seconds to announce how quickly she was downing her drink.

"You never had chocolate milk before or are you just thirsty?" I asked, sinking into the cushion of their worn chair. Its green fabric felt soft like the inside of a baby's wrist.

"Hmm?" She didn't look up.

"I said do you like it?"

"Oh," she said, and I noticed some chocolate on her upper lip. "Yeah...it's good." She smiled, her teeth were white even against her pale face.

"That's good," I said, and got up and turned off the beeping microwave. Grabbing the dish with my hands, I balanced on the outsides of my ankles and switched it off. I placed the dish of chicken next to some spare change on the counter.

"What is it?" a voice asked behind me. A small hand collapsed on some of the change as I turned to see Julia shove it in her pocket.

"Chicken," I said.

"Oh, I couldn't see."

"I know."

We sat across from one another and she began to devour a leg. Suddenly Julia glanced toward the sofa where the empty red cup lay and then looked back at me.

"You want some more?" I inquired.

"Yes, please" she smiled, a piece of chicken wedged between her white teeth.

Getting up and opening the fridge, I pulled out the milk. A deep sound emerged from in back of me. Straightening up, I turned to see a frightened Julia.

"I'm sorry!" she pleaded, "I didn't mean to, it just escaped! I...I'm sorry, it won't happen again I promise!"

"It's O.K. Everybody burps," I said, shrugging my shoulders and stirring in my chocolate.

She gave me a puzzled look saying, "Can I still have the chocolate milk?"

"Yeah...Why?"

She shook her head in slow motion. She reminded me of a cartoon character jumping off a cliff. She was waiting for the impact.

I brought the chocolate milk to her and watched her stare at it. The brightness I saw earlier in her eyes disappeared.

"Help me clean this up, Julia," I asked, pulling open her closet doors and picking up some doll clothes she had strewn around.

"Help me clean this up, Kelly," imitated Julia. Taking a doll by the legs and angling it above one of the other dolls, she used it to order the first one to help clean up.

"No way, ho-zay," Julia had the other doll named Kelly say.

"I said do it," yelled the other doll and raised its body above Kelly in a domineering position.

"I don't want to."

"You will or else!" said the other doll, raising an arm.

"No," screamed the doll Kelly. The dolls exchanged violent blows against one another.

"Julia, you're stalling. Now come on, help clean up before your mother gets home," I said, proud of how easily I had seen through her little ploy.

By then the doll had thrown the other doll across the room and was jumping up and down with Julia screaming, "Victory! Number one! And Kelly gets away!"

"Julia! Come on!" I said, agitated. Do you want me to tell your mother you didn't pick up?"

Julia stopped abruptly and quietly said that she didn't.

"I didn't think so. Now...go get that doll you just threw and put it away." She shuffled over to the doll and picked it up. The eyes of the doll were painted blue on the face's surface and the hair was blond. The nose was small and a white scratch ran down the side of its face where the paint was rubbed off from hitting the wall. Its deep red dress had a belt sewn on the front that tied loosely in the back. Julia tossed the doll in the closet. We picked up the rest of the dolls and shut them up in the closet too.

"You know I wouldn't have told your mom," I tried explaining. "I just wanted you to help, is all. You know, help clean up."

Julia nodded but didn't say another word until we were in the living room where, sitting in front of the television she jabbered about some show. I poured her chocolate milk and agreed with whatever she said about the milk. A car door slammed, and I looked out a window to see who it was.

"Your mom's home," I said and went back into Julia's room to get my purse. I pushed the door open and a draft closed it again. Grabbing my bag, I strode to the open window, pulled it down and locked it. I joined the Markles back in the living room.

"Hi, Mrs. Markle," I said. How are you?"

"Oh, just awful! The McGruders cancelled their contract and..." She turned toward the television and paused for a moment. "What was I saying? Oh never mind. I'm so exhausted...I just can't handle this...trying to support myself and have a kid too." Mrs. Markle walked over to the television and turned the station to the news. "Never have kids, even if you're married, because they'll leave you too and then you'll be stuck." She went to the liquor cabinet and poured herself a burbon. "I'm so stressed out," she explained, lighting the cigarette she had pulled out of her pocket. Picking up the glass of burbon, she walked across the room to her bag. Its top gaped open and the strap curled like a snake around the arm of the chair. The window behind her illuminated the dust circling the air. She was a dark figure in the sunlight streaming into the room.

"Will six be enough?" she asked, peeking into her billfold.

"Yeah, that'll be just fine, Mrs. Markle," I said, and listened to her heavy breathing, watching the dust particles floating in front of her waver as she exhaled. She closed the curtains and turned on the lamp. Stepping forward into the artificial light, she handed me six one dollar bills and smiled.

"Here you go dear. Will it be enough?" I nodded. "You sure?" I nodded again. "Well O.K. then, dear," she said, turning away from me and gliding toward the front door. I followed the

Mrs. Markle was not supposed to be home until late and left a note about leftovers. We set the table, sat down to say grace and ate applesauce, potato salad, and chicken. Everything was cold, even the chicken. Reaching across her plate for her drink, the sleeve of Julia's sweater dipped into the potato salad which stuck in the hairy weaving of the cross-stitch.

"Julia roll up your sleeves. Here..." I said, wiping off the salad with a napkin, "you got it on your sweater and...there. Now roll them up before your whole plate ends up on your sleeve."

Julia laughed, carefully turning it over a few times and finally pushing it up to her elbows. The sweater was red and black and had a few threads intertwined in it. Her wrists were small thin bones with a film of white skin around them.

"Oh, gosh! What happened to you?" I asked. Bruises the size of a finger print blotted the insides of her wrists and a larger bruise of paling green rode on her right forearm. "Did you fall or something?" I nodded slowly.

Julia paused and picked up the movement of my head, imitating me saying, "Uh huh. I fell."

"Where? Off your bike again?"

"Yeah." She nodded once more and looked down at her plate. Taking the spoon, she made it suddenly disappear and then emerge from the applesauce.

The bruises on Julia's wrists and forearm reminded me of the ones on her legs and the few on her back I had noticed while getting her ready for bed one night. I remembered there were two on her left shoulder, three on the right, and a few near the small of her back. Her legs were bruised around the knees.

After practice I stopped to eat lunch at a playground. The children ran around dodging swingsets, slides, tires and each other. A few stayed in one place as the sun rays layered their skin and burned their noses. Mothers jabbered on the sidelines or watched their kids perform acrobatic feats on the gravel stage.

I remembered the playground when I was younger. It was a place to fly through the air on a swing or slide down a slide at super fast speeds. I always loved the playground. My mother said that I spent too much time there but said that I was a better gymnast for it.

Reaching in my paper bag, I pulled out a lopsided apple. It was red with faded splotches of yellow and the stem was broken off. Resting it in my palm, I examined it. There were no worm holes on the apple, but I did notice how black and blue the inside of my forearm was. At first I couldn't recall how it happened, but then I remembered the uneven bars. Misjudging one of my turns, I banged my wrists against the top bar before falling. My bruise was larger than the ones I found on Julia, and I wondered how she hit her wrists by falling off her bike.

"If you can't play nice with your friends then we are going home," said a mother as she grabbed her kid by the arms and began to drag him away.

"No! No Mommy...get off!" screamed the child, trying to wrench free. The mother released the boy with her right hand only to slap him with it.

"That's it. Let's go. If you can't behave..." she scolded, and I looked down at my own arm thinking of Julia's wrists.

"Oh, gosh..." I said, and snatched up my paper bag, leaving the apple to rot in between the rocks.

I paused to catch my breath at our front door before entering. The rooms were bright with sunlight that rolled through the windows. I walked into our kitchen, while the tile floor creaked beneath my weight. I fetched another apple from the fridge.

"Mom?" I called and stumbled up the stairs into her room. "Mom?!!!...Oh there you are."

Looking up from some papers, she asked me what I wanted. I told her about the bruises I had found on Julia and my suspicion of abuse.

"It could be child abuse, but you can't go around accusing people," said my mom, getting up to open her bedroom curtains. "You need to find out if it is and then you have to turn Mrs.

Markle into the authorities. Obviously it's a serious problem, but if you're wrong you could hurt the woman's reputation."

"So what do you think I should do?" I asked. "Cause I'm totally clueless. I don't know. Maybe I'm just over reacting," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"I can't tell you what to do exactly. You need to find out what's going on without getting yourself too involved in their business but...really, I don't know. Maybe ask Julia herself if her mom hits her. Let's see what happens and work it from there, O.K.?" my mother asked. I could tell the idea frustrated her, and she wanted to get back to work.

Julia stood on the kitchen chair in front of the closet, her toes gripping the edge of the seat as she attempted to balance on the balls of her feet. Reaching up her arms, she just missed the top stack of games on the shelf. Julia stepped down and heaved up the chair, balancing it on her chest by leaning back. She set the chair down closer to the closet and clamored up on to it again. This time when she stretched up she succeeded.

She held the game in one hand and, holding its rungs with the other, slid off the chair. Her feet slapped the floor as she hit and she ran to the middle of the room. Plopping down Indian-style, she set up the Parcheesi board.

The game board was square with a playing piece missing. Making up the rules as we went along, Julia decided that I was to be the red while she was the blue.

"Your turn," she said.

"Julia?" I said, and she looked up.

"What?"

"Does your mother ever hit you?"

"Yeah," she said, looking back down and picking up her blue piece.

"Is that where you get your bruises?"

"Yeah,"

"Does she hit you hard?"

"Yeah," and Julia said again, "Your turn!" Much more insistently. I rolled the die and made my red piece stomp across the board three places.

"O.K., go," I said, and handed her the die.

I sat down on one of the swings and pushed myself back and forth with my feet. I didn't know what to do. Julia said her mom hit her but she also said that she acquired bruises from falling. But even the most rambunctious kids don't have that many bruises.

I was pretty sure there was something wrong in that house. I was even pretty sure Julia was abused. But I was not positive. If I confronted the mother, then she would deny her actions and I would never be allowed contact with Julia again. I just didn't know what to do.

"Julia, go put the range on high but be careful, the other burner is already hot," I cautioned. Julia turned the dial to the left. "No, wrong way...here, I'll do it," I said.

"No, I can do it!" Julia insisted, and backed up with one arm reaching behind her for the dial on the range.

"Julia! STOP!" I yelled, foreseeing welts on her fingers and arms. I lunged forward, caught her other arm, and pulled her away from the burners. The force of my pull flung her thin body into the opposite wall.

"I told you to be careful." I turned to say, and my fear found escape through anger. "Doggone it, Julia! You would have been burned! You would have welts all up and down! Did you think I was kidding?" I paused and tears gathered in my lids. My anger washed away with them. "Hey, it's over. It's not that big a deal. You O.K.?" She reached up and the tears came in numbers, rolling down her cheek. "Oh come here honey, I'm sorry. You hit that wall hard, huh? But you will be O.K. because you're tough right?" I said, and she nodded.

The front door opened and sunlight cut through the shadows of the kitchen. "What's going on here?" Ms. Markle asked, standing with her arms crossed across her chest.

I remembered how she fired me so curtly and suddenly.

"Charlotte, I'm afraid you can't work here anymore. I don't want you around Julia. You upset her, and I don't want that to happen anymore," Ms. Markle said as she walked across the kitchen floor. Her feet were pointed slightly forward and she smoked a cigarette. The air filled hotly around my head. Each breath of smoke tickled the back of my throat.

"How did I upset her?" I asked, shoving my hands through the denim in my pockets. The jeans were tight, and I worked to get my hands inside them.

"She has bruises! How do you think she got them?" she said nervously in a high voice. "What? From me? You hurt my little girl!"

"You mean because she was about to burn herself on the range and I pulled her away? I grabbed her so she wouldn't get hurt, for goodness sake!" I shouted.

"You threw her against the wall! Have you seen some of the bruises she got?"

"She would have been burned," I screamed. "I did the first thing that came to mind...get her away from the range! In my excitement I accidentally pulled too hard. I..."

"That's not the point," she interrupted. "Nobody touches my girl. Do you hear me? No one! I don't want you in our house anymore. I've already hired a replacement."

She opened and closed the front door behind me. Pulling away from the accusations, I walked away from the house. The sky, with its dark clouds, was like Julia's bruises. I wished I could go back to when I didn't know anything, to when I had never seen Julia's..."

I kicked a pebble down the driveway. It stopped halfway to the end.

Turning left, I came to a red light. In my rear view mirror a woman pulled lipstick across her bottom lip.

I wondered if Ms. Markle fired me because she suspected I knew about the beatings or because she truly concerned for Julia. She could have thought I was hurting her kid. Julia did have bruises across her back and a bump on her head from when she hit the wall.

The light turned green, and my car accelerated past the people on the right.

I did not know the answers. After all, Julia's mother could have thought I was out of control to fling her child across the room. She could be overprotective and upset, but enough to fire me? No, she must have figured out my suspicions. I pushed down hard on the accelerator.

I ran up Markle's walkway and rang the doorbell. Nobody answered. Ringing again, I turned and spotted the "For Sale" sign in the yard. I went over and ran my hand over the smooth wood.

"They moved last night," called one of the neighbors who had been clipping the hedges.

"Why?" I asked.

"Don't know...just moved," he answered.

A cloud shielded the sun. Flowers bloomed beneath the trees that cushioned the hard angles of the house. The shutters were strapped together, and the windows were closed.

Pulling back the curtains, I peer out the open window. The little girl is still sitting on her lawn and the sun is beating down on her back. She is pudgy with dark hair. Her mother opens the door and stands in the threshold. She is thin like the praying mantis trapped in a bush below my window, outside. The woman calls harshly to her to come inside.

Later as I watch the sun set behind the houses, I notice that the girl has forgotten to take in her doll. It has blond hair and a red dress with a belt attached in the front that loosely ties in the back. It reminds me of the doll Julia once had.

Renee A. Jaksch
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernice Von Zur Muehlen

The Truth

*It takes energy to wear red.
Sometimes she wears it and her head
aches with the heaviness of it all.
Red things are always overpowering--
Drown you.
Red roses, with black hearts,
their red-veined petals like
eyelashes, full of paint,
pulling down your lids.*

*She broke three T.V.'s
And scratched Chester across
his face.
Chester, who ice fishes,
sitting for hours in a cold tent
on long frozen afternoons.*

*Her daughters think she is crazy.
My sister says she is at the height
of menopause.
My mother pretends to laugh,
how she laughs at people who have hurt her;
silently, where they cannot hear.
It is another joke from the crazy family.*

*She told me how she cut a Spanish dress
with yellow rose ruffles
from old American dresses.
How black hair swept her shoulders,
Dark crimson lips.
"I used to be like you"
say her pale geranium lips.*

*When she chased him to Buffalo
and then came home and hid
in her mother's house
We were quiet.*

*I know what she was
looking for
beneath brown skin.
You look for truth
when faces are blank, showing nothing.
And you want pain.
Something you can see.
Hear screams
where everything is ripped away,
sound, face--
there has to be more than
this red behind our eyes.*

Lidy Jane Chu
South Orange, NJ



Kamila Sych
Verona, PA

Cave

*I'm in the heart of a cave.
Someone else is alive,*

*Someone whose breath makes stalactites
tick like clocks*

*and limestone walls
sweat veils of crystal*

*Someone who survives
long nights without love,*

*brushes my hair with stones,
paints what I cannot see.*

*Now, dropping her tools, she pulls me
into the warmth of her animal skin,*

*stirs the fires in the dried
sockets of my skull.*

*My eyes blaze ochre, and I see
an earth-stained bristle*

*in my hand, my hand transforming
every curve on the wall*

*into a horse belly heavy with foal
no ice age or spear can kill.*

Carolyn Davis
New York, NY

Coming of Age

Cassie was sixteen the summer that her mother went crazy. "These things happen," people reassured her. Mrs. Sales, the librarian, would shake her head and squeeze Cassie's shoulder and pull her funny fish mouth down into a frown whenever she saw Cassie after her mother's "episode."

Mrs. Sales knew about episodes. She had come home one hot summer night years and years before, her yellow cotton sundress rumpled and her sandals in her hand. Ronald, her fat husband, had been waiting up for her, hiding behind his tool shed where he kept lawn chairs and the big silver wash basin. He had watched her making her way through the back yard.

"Aha!" he had cried, jumping out at her holding a large shovel. "You were trying to sneak back without me noticing, but I noticed all right."

There were cookie crumbs stuck to Ronald's moustache.

"Ronald, hush," Mrs. Sales had warned. "You'll alarm the neighbors. Go back to bed."

She had anticipated a confrontation when she had started her affair with Archibald, the town mortician. She felt sexually potent, and surely Ronald would some day sense that and wise up.

Ronald swung the shovel at his wife and missed, and then he turned the shovel on himself. Two hits, and he was out.

Cassie stood naked before her full-length mirror on the first day of summer vacation. Julie May had told her that it was important to be in touch with her body. Julie May was older. She wore her long hair such that it tumbled down her shoulders and was wild-looking. She never buttoned her shirts up to the collar. She had French-kissed two boys, which thrilled and repulsed Cassie all at once. The idea of a boy's tongue darting in and out of her mouth sent shivers up and down her spine. It would surely never happen to her. It was too wonderful, too exotic.

Cassie turned to examine the curve of her hips and the roundness of her behind. She sighed, ran her hands slowly over her legs and her stomach and her breasts. It was ok for her to touch herself. Julie May had assured her that in order to truly know yourself you had to be willing to touch yourself. But Cassie stopped her hand when it got to the soft, curly hair at the base of her abdomen. She couldn't bring herself to do that. She wasn't ready. She wasn't like Julie May. Not yet.

"What are you doing?" Cassie's mother gasped, flinging open the door. "Oh, Cassie, what do you think you are doing?"

She ran into the room and grabbed a shirt off the floor.

"Put this on," she insisted frantically, pushing the shirt at her.

Cassie turned to face her mother, her hands on her hips.

"I'm touching myself, Mother," she explained indignantly. "I'm getting in touch with my body and my sexuality."

Cassie stormed out of the room naked and slammed the door behind her, leaving her mother saying, "I gave this child life and all I have now is a shirt."

Donny and his two friends leaned over the hood of Donny's Camaro in the backyard. Their shirts were off, exposing tan, muscular backs bronzed from hours spent leaning over the hoods of cars, endless hours spent checking fan belts and changing transmission fluid and talking about which girls had the biggest tits.

"Hey, Donny, here comes your sister," Rich said. Rich, at nineteen, was the oldest, two years older than Donny and Brad. They worshipped him. He knew everything there was to know about cars and about women.

"Beat it, Cassie," Donny said as Cassie made her way over to the car. "And for God's sake, put some clothes on."

Cassie looked down at her bright pink bathing suit.

continued on page 16

"I'm trying to get a tan," she said. "It's important to have a fresh, healthy glow."

"I think she looks all right, Donny," Rich said. "Leave her alone."

He came and stood protectively by Cassie's side, laying a hand on her bare shoulder.

Cassie's heart did flip-flops and she felt a funny stirring between her legs. Everything Julie May had said was true. One day your sexuality just wakes right up. Just wakes up and takes off without warning.

Rich took her everywhere in his car. To the movies, to the snowball stand where Liza Greene stared enviously and started gossip behind Cassie's back, gossip which no one believed anyway. Liza had the biggest mouth at school and once spread a rumor that the principal was having an affair with the French teacher which was totally stupid because the French teacher was pregnant at the time.

Rich drove her up on top of a big hill overlooking the school on those hot June nights and would park his car and look at her with that look, the look her mother had warned her about.

"But Julie May says that when a boy gives you that look" Cassie had said.

"Stop all this nonsense about Julie May. She is nothing but trouble," her mother had interrupted.

"Well I think it sounds terribly exciting!" And with that Cassie had stomped out of the room. She was always stomping away; she never walked anymore. Or stayed to listen.

And Rich would kiss Cassie hungrily for hours up on that hill in his car, moving his tongue around in her mouth until she squealed with delight. She would come home, cheeks flushed and hot and her mother would sigh miserably, wrapped in her long, cotton bathrobe, "Oh what have I done, what have I done?"

On the day her mother went crazy with the scissors right in front of Mr. Weldon the mailman who had horribly rotten teeth and bad breath and always seemed to smell like cheese, Cassie was dressed in short shorts and a tight top.

Cassie was sitting in the back yard waiting for Rich to drive up in his car when her mother appeared behind her holding a pair of red-handled scissors.

"Cassie, that shirt is too tight and your shorts are too short," her mother said. "What will Rich think of you?"

Cassie groaned and stretched her arms above her head, sticking her chest out as she did.

"He asked me to dress like this," Cassie said. "He will be disappointed in me if I don't."

Cassie had searched for hours through the attic for her old, small clothes. If I dress like this he'll keep on loving me and not that horrible Mary Evans at the diner who waits on our table and never takes her eyes off Rich. He'll love me if I look more mature and more in touch with my body like Julie May says. She had stared at herself in the mirror, and marveled at the way her curves pushed against the tight fabric.

"You go change your clothes right now," her mother said, frantically twisting the fabric of her ankle-length skirt.

She took a step towards her daughter, her baby girl who was dressed like a tramp and who didn't even understand what could happen to girls who dressed like her. Donny, Cassie's older brother, was what happened to girls who dressed like her. Donny, an unwanted, unexpected pregnancy, conceived out of ignorance in the back of a car parked on a hill.

"You look dirty," her mother said. "You go inside the house right now before someone sees you."

"Too late, Mother," Cassie said proudly, waving at Mr. Weldon the mailman and pushing her chest out further.

It's not easy to say what happened next because Mr. Weldon was the only witness and he was prone to an occasional drink or two or three during his mail route. But it seems that Cassie's mother suddenly took her scissors and cut big

swatches out of her own skirt and blouse and threw them over Cassie to cover her up, leaving herself exposed in the process.

"She was wearing pink silk panties," Mr. Weldon was heard to say later. He is still talking about it to this day, to everyone he knows.

Cassie had taken the scissors from her mother's shaking hands.

"You ruined a perfectly good blouse," her mother said. "But the skirt really was ugly, so that's ok."

Jessica Wolf
Baltimore, MD
The Bryn Mawr School
Julie Checkoway

Church Garden

*The candle burns
at the foot of the statue,
someone's prayer
wordless and steady
in the twilight.
Ocean waves are a pulse here,
deep and insistent
beneath the mourning dove's hum,
and my breath steams in the chill air.
The Virgin is serene
marble folds of her veil
and her gown
falling gracefully to her feet.*

*I always come here to walk,
listening to the pines
and sometimes the waves,
if the wind is right.
I am not sure of my belief,
cannot understand the mysteries
of conception by God,
of dying and rising again.
But in the mosaics
along the Stations of the Cross,
the Virgin Mary weeps
for the death of her son.
There is no mystery in that,
in the naked anger that is grief--
I have seen eyes burn with it.
My aunt's, my uncle's, my father's.*

*Is this why the candle burns at her feet,
because she weeps in the mosaic
and the mourning doves weep with her,
and because her statue face
is so calm?
Those who mourn
long for such peace.*

*My beliefs are unsure,
but I close my eyes
for those who lit the candle,
and hope their pleas are answered.
They believe,
so I will add my prayers to theirs.*

Susannah Voigt
Point Lookout, NY
Ms. Pickus

I had never seen him cry before. Not even when his father died. But there he was. He had not turned to his wife or mother. He had turned to me, his seventeen year-old son.

There was a break in the school day for me, and I left the red brick building to go home. I squirmed into a small gap in traffic, delighted to get away. When I arrived at home, I did not go inside, or get something to eat. Instead, I went around to the side of the house, stretched out on the porch and lit up a cigarette. I savored the few minutes that it took me to finish the Marlboro Red and then started another one.

In mid-inhalation our gravel driveway crunched and popped like burning wood. I glanced at my watch: 12:30. There could be no way that it was either of my parents. My mom was in Washington for the day, and my Dad was at the office. So I kicked back and finished filling my lungs with smoke.

As I exhaled, my father appeared on the walk to our house. In one hand he held his leather brief case and in the other a large cardboard box. On his face was a bewildered expression. When he saw me he did not let go of what he held as much as he simply forgot that he was supporting anything in his hands. He did not even blink when the brief case and box smacked to the ground; I am not sure if he even heard them. Papers and books scattered into a patch of our rose bushes. As he stared at me across the yard, he reached up, pulled his glasses off his head, and started to polish them. This was a methodical gesture for him that he had perfected over years of practice. But this time he stopped in mid-scrub and put the glasses back on his head purposefully. He started toward me with an expression that I took for anger.

My Dad quit smoking years ago, and I knew that he would be upset to see me with a cigarette. But I stayed on our porch steps with a Marlboro in my hand. Heel-toe, heel-toe, click-click, his shoes stuffed over the pavement with every step. He was the mirror of myself in thirty years, almost exactly. He stood tall, thin, and controlled. The only difference between us was our attire, the style of glasses we wore, and the cigarette that was in my right hand.

The rhythm of his shoes stopped when he was beside me. He opened and closed his mouth, starting to speak, then stopping, framing his words. Then he closed his mouth one last time and shook his head; he had come to a decision. He reached out and took the Marlboro from me. But instead of putting it out like I expected him to do, he brought the cigarette to his lips and inhaled deeply, breathing in until his lungs overflowed. He was unaccustomed to the smoke and choked a little. Then his cough turned into a chuckle.

He gave the Marlboro back and sat next to me on the cold step. Suddenly, before I could say, ask, or do anything, his laughter turned into sobs, and tears rolled over his false smile. I asked him what was wrong, what had happened. I quickly apologized for smoking. When I said this, it seemed for a moment that the laughter would return, but the tears lingered. He paused and it took him a breath or two to say the words: "I got fired today."

My Dad was vice president of a company. He had been with that company longer than my life. I did not even know exactly what he did, but I knew he was dedicated. Fired! How? I did not understand. But then I realized that my father did not understand either, and probably neither of us ever would.

After a while my Dad's smile returned and he asked me for another cigarette. I never went back to school that day, but that did not matter. Neither one of us knew if what we were saying or what we were doing was exactly right, but we came up with something. In the next two hours we picked up my Dad's spilled briefcase and box. We talked about his life and mine. And we finished my pack of Marlboros.

George Hardy
Baltimore, MD
Gilman School
Julie Checkoway

Hot and stuffy. Physical weakness had overcome me, not because of what I saw, but because my stomach yearned for nourishment. On the stretcher, no bigger than a coffin, rested an emaciated, 63 year-old female. Her vanilla-colored nightgown was cut open with surgical scissors, exposing her skeleton. Paper-thin were her veins, so the paramedic struggled with the IV needle. The scent of morphine, deluding through the air, awakened me to find twelve bodies, excluding the starved one, crowding the square emergency room.

Oh, I need bloody, red meat, like a medium done hamburger, to keep me alive. She needed oxygen. Fluid had filled her lungs as gastric juices had filled my stomach. The priest was praying, three nurses were giving CPR, two paramedics were drawing blue blood from vessels that were once rich in oxygen, and my insides were growling: I could not keep up with all the action. I was just too hungry, so I watched the heart rate monitor.

Minutes later, blue blood still flowed into the syringe. CPR did not work. Pump the stomach? There was nothing to pump. Her lungs nearly exploded with fluid: the nurse and her assistant had to pump her lungs. It was not enough. A shiver ran down my spine. The nurse assistant wheeled in the Crash Cart and turned on the generator that flowed with electricity. Summer cookouts with grilled hamburgers overpowered my sense of smell.

While I thought of summer barbecues, two plastic pads were placed above her nipples. Generator, charged and ready to flow, buzzed mechanically. One of the countless nurses held two electrically charged pads by the handles. "Clear the bed," was the order given by the doctor. A moment of silence followed. All remained dead still except for the heart monitor which made gentle ripples, ones like my gastral muscles made searching for morsels to churn. Not slipping my eyes from the monitor, my olfactory senses picked up a smell, not of barbecued beef, but that of burning hair caught in a blow-dryer, sizzling and crackling like wood chips in a fire. Fire that would cook my food.

Electricity, fire and heat ran through her body three times. You get lucky on your third try is the saying. The emergency staff could not. I observed the monitor, waiting for the zigzag to straighten and go on infinitely. Having no strength to fight, I could not let her die no matter how hungry I was.

Numb. I could not feel my insides. She would open her eyes, starved for life... No. I did not comprehend. The paramedics, nurses, nurses' assistant, even the priest had no hope: they all walked out. The nurse who tried to shock life back into the lifeless skeleton cleaned the room and turned the lights out. Taking my arm, she asked if I was all right. My eyes were gazing, through the darkness of the room, at the monitor which had been turned off, waiting for the line to calm itself.

"Honey, when the line reads negative..." she paused.
"I'm starved: may I go grab something to eat?"

Not until I ate the last bite of the hospital hamburger did I say to myself, "You know, I saw a woman die, today."

I was no longer in the dark of the room when I returned, fifteen minutes later. The door to the room was open. From across the hallway, through the crack in the door, I saw, above the coffin-thin hospital bed, the operating light, the one that does not throw shadows. Four white lightbulbs were lit horizontally and four were lit vertically. The lamp itself was lit vertically. The white lights melted together: I saw a cross. I was hungry no more.

Marta Czekajewski
Bristol, CT
Miss Porter's School
Gary Fountain

Brotherhood

I.

We learned in history
the civil war was a war of attrition
literally brother against brother
holding the reunion on the fields
hallowed over the cause of disunion.

Imagine, after aiming the weapon
at the hearts of the enemy mass, the aftermath of battle:
each side withdrawing to encampment
behind walls of wood as
a hermit crab withdraws into its shell,
to find a humming in the night
not sharpened by shells but laughter over tea,
to meet in the opposite camp a welcome comrade
brother again as in youth
at the same supper, astride the same parents
having shed the countenance of adversaries,
a poreless skin peeled and stuffed
into the back pocket along with the dagger,
now under the parenthood of the smokeless sky.
Then to return to daybreak,
to harden the eye, incapacitate the heart
in aiming the bayonet at a grey-suited head
fifteen, seventeen year dinner companion
invalidating the invalidation shared brandy proved;
to halt, to kill
to mete out last breaths of a brother
whose veins ought to be parallel, uncuttable
but as shot, a death
for the greater shapeless cause.

II.

When I asked my mother
why she seldom speaks to her
sisters, brothers
Too many she said.
And now the family scattered
strewn, borne by dashing winds
to divergent coasts.
The middle name they share,
of the seven only my mother kept this
tie to the hub of her ancestors.
Five out of seven at the Cali reunion proved
jovial for a night, new year's, and enough
before the week was over.
Bi-yearly phone calls construct a motley web of sorts;
collect from taipei, ohio
the big-eared uncle, guardian in mother's will
los angeles and big sister, the one who
captured boyfriends in belgium.
my aunt, little sister
for a while packages of barbie dolls and legos
now an i love you in march,
over the phone and nothing else,
the shortest distance between two points is as good
as the optic fibers that let me hear those words
and mother to bang down the phone.

III.

In my sixteenth year
I became the shortest one
in the family.
The reign ended and communism
instated itself in my brother's barks,
facial afflictions requiring my medicines,
the audacity to pinch my cheeks back

for his subjugation
let on only by elongated fingers,
those cheeks baby powder enough to bite
I squeezed until ten, my living doll, that mommy-baby game,
Relieved of the nights I got up to vomit
heads hot with fever, sleeping habits,
he comes, he leaves
lives in the next room as a tenant.

Now his nose in the cereal bowl, mine in a book
he honors me with a grunt
as he scuttles off
where I am curious but dare not know,
hoping the threads of our middle name to snap back
the physics of his blood, as a boomerang
to come to face again, direct smile
hoping that
my children and his children, cousins
will be more than distant shells
on the wide expanse of a map.

Guang-Shing Cheng
Potomac MD
Winston Churchill High School
Carol K. Blum

Nightmare

Reality is strangling you at 11 P.M. as you sit on your bed and
want nothing more than to run outside or, better yet, climb out the
bedroom window just because you never have before, but you take
off your shoes first so you can feel the cool of the grass hugging your
toes and kissing your ankles, and your eyes close and you breathe
your deepest breath with your head tilted back, and you suddenly
find yourself running--no, dancing--into the street and further, spin-
ning and twirling and flailing your arms with your eyes still closed
and the air filling your lungs and finally your entire body with the
solution to everything, and you finally fall down laughing and dizzy
in the grass across the street and you open your eyes

And sitting on your bed, you want nothing more than to scream
and throw up and rip out your hair, because you can't go outside
and be nothing but happy, because you're afraid of the world and
you want to kill everyone, because you love everyone and lie to
everyone and kidnap their kids and molest their kids and poison their
kids with ignorance, and you don't know why, but you never want
another boyfriend, because everyone who touches you is suddenly a
stranger and everyone who touches you is suddenly one of them, one
of them, him, or the other one whose name you can't remember,
because you were only three and then you realize he's thirty-four
now and probably a businessman who still molests kids and who
maybe molests his own kids now and who may be the guy you passed
on the street yesterday, the one you smiled at--because you're
friendly--and you don't remember his name because you were only
three

And sitting on your bed, you feel your face begin to burn and
your skin begin to moisten, and your muscles are tight and sore, and
you might be too angry, and you squeeze your eyes shut, because
you can't see anyway and you can't feel or hear of taste of smell
either, because the pain and the anger and the fear blind you and
deafen you and deaden your nerves

Debbie Benson
Richmond, VA
Monacan High School
Judith R. Land

Elsie's Fourth of July

More than twenty of them weave across the field. The adults carry old blankets or grasp the hands of their children. Half a mile away and hidden behind a grove of pine trees, a Mormon choir is belting out patriotic songs. Elsie's group finds enough space for all of them, and they smooth the blankets on top of the grass. A little boy immediately leaps on to his family's yellow sheet and rolls himself like a mummy. His father yanks his arm and drags him off a few feet to scold him. Elsie turns away. She doesn't know the names of the father or son.

The sky is grayish-blue, but on the ground it is almost dark. Hundreds of bendable, glowing sticks shine across the field, probably held by little kids. A group of college kids sit thirty feet away from Elsie. Their smoke blows in her face whenever a breeze rises. At the end of each song, they shout "No More" to the choir.

"I agree," says Uncle Tim. He is lying behind Elsie. "They're giving me a headache."

"Oh, Tim, come on." Elsie's aunt nudges him. "Did you try the Jesus thing?" The adults are passing around a mimeographed piece of paper with a picture of Jesus on it. If you stare at the picture for thirty seconds then look up in the sky, He will supposedly appear to you.

"Isn't that sacreligious or something?" Elsie asks.

"Of course not. Kim gave it to us." Kim is the husband of one of the women and he is a minister. Right now, he is on some kind of business trip, but Elsie is beginning to feel like she knows him quite well. His name is mentioned in almost every conversation.

"Pass that over here," calls a man with a moustache, another person whose name Elsie doesn't know. What Elsie does know is that she wants to stay as far away from him as possible. The Fourth of July is also Marika Thompson's first birthday, and back at the house, while the kids waited in a line for cake, Elsie heard the moustached man say to Mr. Nelson, "Libby is getting quite a—" With his hands, he cut the air in the shape of an hour glass, or a teenage girl, with emphasis on her chest. Elsie listened in disbelief as he and Mrs. Nelson discussed Libby's apparently recent development. His own wife was short and thin, wearing hightop sneakers. Elsie feels sorry for her. In her mind, she has already started to call the man a pervert.

"When are the fireworks gonna start?" asks Justine, Elsie's younger cousin. Small bubbles of sweat line her upper lip. The kids have been playing tag.

"Soon, I imagine," Mrs. Lamin says. "Bobby, do you need a tissue?" She holds out a yellow wad to her son, but he refuses it. Mosquitoes are beginning to fly at the group.

"Did you bring any spray, Rhonda?" asks Elsie's uncle.

"No. I didn't even think of it." Elsie's aunt bites her lip then shrugs. The baby is crawling toward her, and she bends her head to smile. "Hi, Marika. Hi pretty girl. Do you want to sit on Rhonda's lap?"

"Did you come here last year for the Fourth of July?" Elsie asks.

"Yeah, we did." Kim's wife is the one who answers. "Or was that two years ago? Norie, was it last year or two years ago that we were here for the fireworks?"

"Last year. No, actually, you might be right. No, it was last year because we called from the pay phone in the parking lot to see if Marika had been born."

"Last year," Kim's wife confirms, but now Elsie is barely listening.

"You've been a fantastic audience, folks," a far away, microphoned voice tells them. "We thank you all for listening to our songs—"

"Thank God," uncle Tim mutters.

"—And we just have a few more before the show."

Uncle Tim covers his face with his hands as the first strains of "Yankee Doodle" become audible.

"Why was your childhood so bad?" Elsie suddenly asks her

uncle. The only reason the question is not entirely inappropriate is because he mentioned this in an earlier conversation. Because Elsie has nothing better to do, she has this summer developed the habit of asking as many questions as she can think of to virtually everyone she encounters. She imagines that she is fairly irritating to most people and perhaps especially so to her uncle whom she does not know that well.

"Because we lived in emotional poverty and financial poverty." He sits up and wraps his arms around his knees.

For a moment, Elsie is silent, and then she says, "What does it mean to be emotionally poor?"

"It means his mom never held him on her lap or said 'I love you,'" Aunt Rhonda offers. "But now he has me to hug him all the time." She puts an arm around him and squeezes a shoulder. Uncle Tim grunts and shrugs her off.

"Oh," Elsie says.

"And if you said to his mom 'Do you want to go to a movie or take out the trash' she would just say 'I don't care.'"

"Oh," Elsie says again.

"Do you know what financial poverty is?" asks Elsie's uncle, and he grins. Even in the dark, she can see the gap between his front teeth.

"Yes," Elsie says quickly, but he has already started speaking again.

"It's eating pancakes five nights in a row."

"You made pancakes on Saturday," Elsie points out.

"Yeah, but now I have the choice. Do you know what my nightmare is?" Elsie shakes her head. "To be assistant manager at I-HOP."

"What's I—HOP?"

"International House of Pancakes," Uncle Tim and Aunt Rhonda answer together.

"Oh. Are they the ones with the yellow signs?"

"That's Denny's," says her aunt.

"No, I mean on the highway."

"I don't think so." She shakes her head.

"My worst nightmare," Elsie says, "is to be an air conditioner installer."

"I wouldn't want to be a stewardess," says Aunt Rhonda.

"I was a stewardess after college," says the thin wife of the pervert man. She apparently has begun listening to Elsie's and her aunt's conversation. "It wasn't so bad. Cute guys." She raises her eyebrows.

"No kidding." Aunt Rhonda looks interested. "I never knew you were a stewardess. I just get the willies when the plane takes off. Ugh." She shivers.

Mrs. Thompson leans toward them. "Marika loves planes. When we flew to Pittsburgh to see Jim's brother, she didn't cry during the entire flight. Not at all, did you honey?" She rubs the baby's cheek.

"Kim once sat next to—" begins Kim's wife, but the first firecracker has gone off.

"Finally," mumbles Uncle Tim. The children race to find seats on their parents' blankets.

The first ones are good, sparkly whites and reds and then a blue star shape. "Yay," shouts Aunt Rhonda. Everyone looks at Marika to see if she is afraid. She isn't at all. Instead, she seems transfixed by the explosions. Less than five minutes have passed when the duds start. They go off near the ground, shapeless blobs of white so loud they hurt Elsie's ears.

"Oh no," says Uncle Tim.

"Are those on purpose?" asks Mrs. Thompson.

"I think so. I think it's a ground show," says one of the pair of husbands sitting next to Mrs. Lamin.

"It sucks," mutters Elsie.

"Tell me," Aunt Rhonda agrees. "Give us some more," she yells.

"Hey, Rhonda, keep it down, will you?" Uncle Tim smiles the same way he did when he asked Elsie if she knew what financial poverty was.

"You know you love it, Tim," says Mrs. Thompson.

"Oh, he does. Right, baby?" Aunt Rhonda laughs. The fire-

continued from page 19

works start breaking in the air again, and she and Mrs. Thompson cheer.

The rain doesn't begin for a few minutes more. At first it is light, and everyone groans but not very seriously.

"Oh, Jesus," Uncle Tim moans. He is lying sideways on the blanket and attempts to roll himself in it.

There are more firecrackers on the ground. "Booo," calls Kim's wife.

"Just wait," says Mrs. Thompson, as if she knows what's coming next. The duds continue. Elsie pulls her sweatshirt over her knees. It is already damp.

"Who brought the umbrellas?" calls out the pervert man.

"Not Rhonda," Uncle Tim says grumpily.

"Yeah. Right. How about you?" Aunt Rhonda jabs her husband. "Am I the household help or something?"

"No, that's what Elsie's family has." He looks at her niece to check her reaction.

"Good one," Elsie says sarcastically. "How funny." She changes her tone. "I was actually wondering why you guys don't have some maids. You don't expect me to make my own bed, do you?"

"Yeah!" Aunt Rhonda cries enthusiastically. "Dish it back to him." The good firecrackers start up again, and the people on the blankets are quiet, watching them through the rain.

By the time they realize they are soaked, the show is almost over. "Cover me, Rho," says Uncle Tim. She is sitting Indian style, and he rests his head on one of her thighs.

"Can I lie on you, too?" Elsie asks.

"Of course." Rhonda pulls Elsie's head toward the other leg. Elsie's whole body, jammed inside the sweatshirt, rocks over. They can hear the college students cursing.

Groups of people stand, rolling their blankets. "Should we go?" asks someone.

"No way," replies someone else. Elsie thinks it is Mrs. Thompson, but she is stuck on her aunt's lap and can't turn around. Even craning her neck, she barely sees the fireworks. The rain is getting heavier on them. She can hear different people screaming and can smell the lotion her aunt must use on her legs.

"I'm freezing," yells Justine.

"Me, too," echo the other kids.

"This is it, guys," an adult tells them. "Just enjoy the finale."

"Push me up," Elsie says to her aunt.

"Are you a fetus?" asks Uncle Tim, but Elsie doesn't answer him. She uncurls her legs and stands. Her sweatshirt is stretched hugely. The last fireworks are going off, one after the other, green and blue and comma-shaped white ones that scurry down the sky sounding like snakes. Suddenly, a flag illuminates the field. The crowd cheers, even though most people are already walking toward their cars.

"It ain't over till the fat lady sings," says the pervert man.

"Go ahead, Rho," says Uncle Tim. By now, all of them are standing. He nudges his wife. For one slow instant, Elsie makes eye contact with him. Even while she scowls, she thinks he probably wishes he hadn't said it.

"Hey, hey," the pervert man says jovially, "I set up that one. I just set it up." It is pouring as they follow the crowd to the parking lot.

Curtis Sittenfeld

Cincinnati, OH

Groton School

Judith Clau

From the Teapot, an Accident

From the teapot:

steam speaks droves

moves in slopes

Catherine burns incense

an infusion of vanilla and sandalwood

patchouli, roses

Our confusion--

that we wear the monkey light on our faces

in the darkened room

that there is pinching and tickling

accusation: pushing the glass

but

Catherine bids us hush:

We are calling the dead.

We are calling your spirit.

We are calling you back

from the brutally gashed tree

in which the rearview mirror, curious,

said the Times, was embedded;

from the cracked and unidentifiably twisted

curves, of fiberglass and steel, of

your slender arm embracing the wheel like a snake

on top of which

floated your bright face

like the rainbows that glide over an oil spill.

an accident

an accident

that you were there

that it was you

dancing out of the moonroof

giddy with night, with

the curve of the hill as it

slithered past the sharp iron pikes

of the cemetery fence

maybe, with a little beer

but always a good girl

a good girl and

and Catherine bids us hush

as the glass slides over the board

as if it were oiled.

Maybe you're speaking Russian now.

We don't know Russian

and can't recognize the half-born

almost ghosts of words

that appear.

Just give us these ghosts of words

and the ghost of you,

make them

as solid as the mirror

as the tree

make them

as sharp as the pikes of Woodlawn

where there is a new headstone

that even Catherine's incense cannot reach.

Just let us have you

as sharp, as real

as the sliver of windshield that cut your throat,

as

an accident.

Mari Shopsis

Hunter College High School

Bronx, NY

Mr. Zegers

An Orange Leaf

you've
just
said
good-
bye
to me.
the sun is
low, the sky
almost
not blue.
i watch you
pedal off
slowly,
carelessly
sinuous
with
an
orange
leaf
stuck to
your
chain.
you look back
at
me,
sitting alone
on the curb,
your
shy-boy smile.
"Thank you! Thank you!"
you cry out,
the
orange leaf
falling behind
and me
blushing.

Jennifer Chang
Lawrenceville, NJ
West Windsor Plainsboro
High School
Lucy Boyd



The Last Chance
Shannon Fincke
Selinsgrove, PA

Nine After Six

Frogs with brown spots live in Easter basket
grass inside a plastic People's bag.
They try to climb out when the bag
slouches in the back seat, but
I can't let them get loose in the car.
Mommy will be mad.

Boy Scouts stand in front of the
log cabin Abraham Lincoln was born in.
They push bed sheets up the flagpole. Down the
road, at the corner of the practice football field,
half a block from the white
house we used to live in, a
German Shepherd is chained to a post.
He eats lettuce from the garden of the
house next door with a silver painted archway
gate. A woman with paper-colored hair wears blue and purple
flowers and talks at us.
She says Pet the doggie, you would like? She is a

witch. We say Thank
you, no. At my aunt's house the
refrigerator is in the living room next to
Gramma who is Estelle Getty on TV.
She has a cane with a
bear claw on the bottom next to her yellow
chair. The refrigerator is yellow too. When
I talk to Gramma the yellow
door opens and bowls of salad fall out.

Dad is building a windmill out of the dead
tree in the backyard. That's why
he is not here at Aunt's
house now. He is standing in the
garden, looking at the tree. The
car is on and Mommy will not wait.

If she had, I could have let the frogs go.

Stephen Bounds
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

Forcing Bulbs

I first knew that there was something wrong when my parents talked in the living room after dinner for three days in a row. The living room was reserved solely for my father's business company and for my parents' significant conversations. I took my time clearing the table and tried to hear what they were saying. My mother spoke in her "very serious" voice, pausing between sentences to inhale deeply on her cigarette. I caught brief phrases like "what if she doesn't want to" and "how long will it be" and "we'll have to get a new bedspread." I asked my Dad if we were going to move.

"No Bec, why would we do that? We only moved here three years ago."

"I dunno. I just thought maybe we were."

"Well, we're not. Your mother and I love it here."

My parents called me into the living room after dinner the next week. I smiled at them knowingly, sure that I had figured out their little secret. "So?" I said, dropping onto the couch opposite them.

"Rebecca, your father and I have something very important to discuss with you."

"When's it coming?" I asked. My parents looked at each other strangely.

"Oh, uh, we had no idea you knew. Probably next week sometime. I know it's very sudden." I stared at my mother's stomach.

"What?"

"We'll move her things in Tuesday or Wednesday, and she'll take the train down Thursday or Friday."

"You're not pregnant!" I jumped off the couch and yelled at both of them. My mother stifled a smile.

"No, sweetheart, Grandma Ruth is going to move in with us."

My Grandma Ruth was eighty-seven. She smelled like liquid soap and perm solution. During the day, she wore polyester house dresses and fed her plants homemade plant food. In the evening, she wore slacks and rayon print blouses and discussed 20/20 vehemently with anyone who would listen. She had never worn makeup until six years ago, when my Uncle Ned and Aunt Carol gave her a makeover for Christmas. After that, whenever I saw her, the first thing she'd do was brand me on the cheek with Plumberry Passion.

I ran to my room and slammed the door as hard as I could. Lying on my bed, I hugged my old stuffed cat to my chest. Not fair not fair not fair. A little while later I heard my mother's slow footsteps on the stairs. I ignored her knock, but she came in anyway. "Listen honey, I'm sorry you misunderstood, but this isn't the time for you to be selfish." I didn't look at her. "It's the best thing for Grandma, especially after her decision."

I looked out the window over my bed. The maple tree in our side yard had lost most of its leaves. The lone brown survivors tossed and turned in the slight breeze. One by one they lost their hold on the branches, and slid through the air to the ground. "Don't lie," I said. "She's not coming here to live, she's coming here to die. It's not fair."

"Please Rebecca," my mother said, the heaviness in her voice surprised me. Turning around, I saw that her nose was red, and she was rubbing her eyes with one hand. "I know it's difficult. Your father and I have talked and talked about this. It really is the best thing for Grandma. We need your cooperation to make it work." I didn't say anything, so she left, closing the door quietly behind her.

As soon as I got home from school on Friday, I could tell that she was there. Her moth-eaten woolen plaid coat was in the closet where I usually put mine. I had to pull a hanger from the tangle on the side.

When I went into the kitchen, I saw my mother loading the refrigerator with melon, plain yogurt, and tomato juice. "This will be nice, Rebecca," she said, pulling a can of stewed prunes out of a grocery bag. "It's a chance for all of us to begin eating healthier." I grabbed an ice cream sandwich from the freezer

and walked out of the kitchen. My mother's voice trailed behind me as I slammed the door. "Go say hello to your grandmother!"

I opened the door to the guest room slowly. "Hi, Gramma." "Hello darling, how are you?" She was sitting in bed, reading.

"Pretty good, how bout you?" I regretted saying it immediately. I knew how she was, and I didn't want to remind either one of us about it.

"I'm very happy. I'm so glad that we'll have the opportunity to talk a lot. It was so hard when I was living in New York."

"The last opportunity to talk a lot before you die." I finished her sentence in my mind.

She was staring intently into the open closet. "Would you do me a favor? I'm not sure where your mother put them, maybe in there."

"What?" I said, moving along the wall from the door of the room to the closet.

"My bulbs. There should be a brown paper bag in there that says Waldbaum's, although maybe you won't be able to see the letters because the top is folded over." I switched the closet light on and immediately saw the bag. I leaned over and picked it up. It was heavier than I expected. "Bring it here." She put her book down and patted the bed. Unfolding the top of the bag carefully, she reached inside and pulled out a small, brownish lump, the size of a plum.

"Oh. I thought you meant...."

"Light bulbs?" My grandmother smiled. "I tell you, forcing bulbs is a lost art. Do you garden?"

"No."

"Well come here and look at this beauty." She held it up to the light. "See how hard it is, and how even the sides are."

It didn't look like anything more than a lump to me, but I agreed. "It's really nice, Gram."

"Well, don't worry. Come January you'll learn to appreciate it." She examined each bulb separately, and set them down one by one in a line by her leg. A little brown soil dropped from each bulb onto her lap. After she had looked at them all, she placed them carefully back in the bag and folded over the top. "Go put these in the refrigerator, won't you?"

"Hi Gramma."

"Rebecca. What's wrong?"

"No offense Gram, but your son-in-law is a real jerk."

"What happened?"

"Oh, he only went into my parent-teacher conference yesterday and told Madame Beauvais that I hated French, and if he was paying all this money for me to attend a private school shouldn't I like French, and his daughter usually has a pretty good attitude so something must be going on, and he suggested maybe we should watch a few more films!" I was breathless and almost in tears.

"Oh." My Grandmother looked confused.

"And when I told him I didn't like French, I said don't say anything, but now I know he did 'cuz stupid Madame Beauvais showed us a film today and told the whole class that we could thank Rebecca's father for his suggestion, and she glared at me with her disgusting black eyeliner eyes and said, 'I hope you find this interesting.'"

"Now I understand." Grandma nodded. "You talk very fast."

"And when I told my Dad he said he was very sorry but he thought it was important and he couldn't believe she would do that and he'd call her if I wanted which made me even madder." I stopped, out of breath.

"Do you remember your Grandfather?" my Grandmother asked suddenly.

"A little." I lied.

"Well, if I tell you a story do you promise not to tell anyone, even your mother?" I nodded. "Especially your mother."

"Yes," I said.

"After your mom and Ned moved out, and we moved to the other apartment in Queens...were you ever there?"

"I don't think so," I said.

"Well, the kids were gone, and things became strained between your grandfather and me. I don't know what triggered it, but that's a strange time, just past middle age. It's hard to tell where you are. Anyway, your Grandfather started to work late, spend more and more time at the office. That went on for a while, and other things too, until finally I found out that he was having an affair.

"Now, a marriage makes the most profound kind of trust there is between two people. Your grandfather betrayed it, and I had three choices. I could have pretended I didn't know, I could have told him I knew and forgiven him, or I could have left him. Hardly anyone got divorced then, but don't think I didn't think about it long and hard. Do you know what I decided to do?"

"You stayed with him."

"Yes, I did. But I sat him down and had one of the most difficult conversations I've ever had in my life."

"What did you say?"

"Lots of things, none very important now. What was important was that your grandfather was sorry, and he apologized. He gave his reasons, and told me the affair had ended a few weeks before, which I already knew. When you're married to someone for thirty years, an apology isn't so easy. I knew that your grandfather was sincerely sorry, and he'd never do it again, so I forgave him."

I was so shocked I could only stare. Thinking of my parents having sex made me cringe; my dead grandfather having an affair was beyond me. "I don't think I would have forgiven him."

"Well," my grandmother looked at me intently. "I think I would have said the same thing when I was your age too. And maybe you're right. But we're all imperfect, and however badly we screw up, that's how much we have to forgive. It's one of the hardest things in the world to do. It's different than forgetting, and it's different than being taken advantage of. No one is as simple as all good or all bad. Don't deny yourself a person by letting the bad become all of them."

"What about Hitler?"

"People you love, I'm talking about people you love," she said. "You find your own answers to the rest.... Now, think about that if you want to, but I'm tired, and I'm going to take a nap. Hand me those pills and the glass of water on the bureau before you leave."

"Hi Gram, here's your medicine."

"Rebecca, hello. Thank you, set it on the table next to my bed." She whispered in a low, raspy voice, because her throat hurt too much to speak normally. She lay on her back, looking at the poster my parents had given her for Christmas. My father put it on the ceiling so she could look at it while she was resting. It was a photograph of an oak tree in a bed of tulips. "What day is it today, dear?"

"Saturday."

"What number?"

"Uh, the ninth of January."

"Good, it's time. Listen closely." Her voice was hoarse and quiet. I stood by the bed, watching her careful effort to make her chapped lips form the words. As she spoke, her skin moved like a papery sheet over her features. "Go get the bulbs out of the refrigerator. They're in a Waldbaum's bag. Bring them up here. Also get my pots and the soil. Ask your mother where all of it is." Her breathing was shallow and fast. She didn't look at me when she spoke.

When I came back she was sitting up in bed. The light struck her face differently, and made her features look pinker, less pinched.

"All right, now take a bulb out of the bag and hand it to

me." She held it far away from her eyes and examined it in the window light. "Perfect," she said. "Now take one of the pots...the top one, that's good. Fill it up one third with the soil." I ripped a hole in the bag of topsoil and clumsily dumped some into the pot. "Here, give it to me." She placed the bulb firmly in the pot, and packed the dirt smoothly around it. "Now, fill it up the rest of the way to this line." She pointed to a groove near the top.

We repeated the process for the other six bulbs. Each time she would examine the bulb carefully, and center it in the pot before I filled it the rest of the way with soil. By the time we were finished, the bedspread and carpet were covered with dirt. "Your mother is going to have a fit," my Grandmother said. I laughed. "Move the desk under the window and put the bulbs on it." The desk was heavy, but I did as she said. "Thank you, Rebecca. For helping me. Come, sit here." She patted the bed beside her. "Listen to me carefully." I wiped my dirty hands on my jeans and moved next to her. Her legs hardly made a bulge under the blanket.

"It's difficult for me to get out of bed now, so I want you to water the tulips every day, just enough to keep the soil moist." I nodded. "If you do, the shoots will grow fat and the flowers will bloom healthfully...." Her voice trailed off but she found it again. "When the flowers die, cut them off. It's the best thing you can do for a plant. But when the leaves start to die, let them be. The plant needs them when it's lying dormant...."

"Grandma, I'm not going to remember all this. Just tell me when the time comes and I'll do it." I stood to leave.

"No, Rebecca," she whispered. "Just let me finish, and try to remember. Plant the bulbs in the ground this summer. They won't bloom but it will keep them alive...."

"Grandma," I laughed uneasily, "you're being ridiculous. Just tell me when you want me to do it, and I'll do it. We can do it together, like this."

"No...please," she tried to grab my arm like a desperate child. "Listen, and try to remember."

I understood her finally. I wanted to slap her. I meant to talk normally, but my voice got louder and louder until I was screaming. "No! You're the one who's not trying! If people are so great, and life is so worth it--if these stupid tulips are so great--then why didn't you even give the chemo a chance." I was yelling at her and crying hysterically. Everyone talks about your 'decision' like it was some noble sacrifice or something, but you're not going to help anyone by being dead. You preach about love and forgiveness, but it's all shit Grandma, shit because you don't believe it anymore than anyone else does."

The silence was like stone between us. She lay down in bed again with her back to me, and pulled the blanket up around her shoulders. I left, shaking and crying.

"Gramma?" she was lying on her back, staring at her poster.

"What."

"I'm sorry." I prayed that she would smile at me and say she understood; that what I said was ok because it was all a big joke, and she really didn't need the chemo after all. But she just lay there silently, without moving. I swallowed and tried to speak, but my voice felt like it didn't belong to me. Finally the quiet was too much. "But you were wrong, Grandma." Her eyes wavered for an instant. "I love you. That's why I can't forgive you." I could tell that she was surprised. The words hung fragile, like glass between us.

"Forgive me for what?" Her voice was clear and hard. She was so still it was hard to tell that she had spoken.

"Dying, Gram. I can't forgive you for dying."

"Well," she said. She sounded relieved. "You just take care of those bulbs. When the time comes, things will be clear."

Jennifer Rubenstein
Pittsford, NY
The Marley School
Alexander DeSantis

Familiarities

Did you ever stoop
in the old playground
in a grey tweed skirt
mid-heeled pumps from Italy
and support hose
to look at the sun
speared by monkey bars
remembering how the world looked
when you were young?

to catch a smell
of lilacs
like those in your dead grandma's yard
because you're afraid
that memories
will fly away forever?

to taste again
stale coffee
with too much sugar
when he looked at you
for the first and last time
with eyes the polluted blue
of a New Jersey Beach?

to sit down and
pull out sour-sweet guts
through your belly button
and make them conform
to the corners
of a white
piece of paper?

Jean M. Bart
Wilkes Barre, PA
Wyoming Seminary
Peter A. Stinson

A Daydream in Wind Gap

There's a light on in the upstairs window.
It shines through years of residue
Produced by grimy fingertips.
Someone is peering out and sees
The grey November rain
And the gas station across the street.
That person may be wondering
Where the next place will be,
An apartment in some far off city perhaps?
The greasy diner next door is buzzing
With fat men plodding in and out,
Eating heaps of bacon, sausage and scrapple.
The person in the upstairs window
Clicks off the light and turns away.
Maybe they've given up on diners and gas stations.
Maybe a new destination is calling them away,
Or maybe it's just time for them to go
To work in a factory somewhere.

Andrea Kresge
Stroudsburg, PA
Moravian Academy
Johanna Farrell

Chruslanki

I almost had a picture of the poppy fields,
spotted with wild red
sharing the land with tall grass that no one cuts
because crows eat it.
Red cows,
good, fat cows restrained by ten foot chains,
chew out a perfect circle with a ten foot radius,
exposing raw ground
and sleepy field mice that scramble in confusion away from
the sun.

My grandmother is walking down the path with gloves on.
She pulls up the iron stakes and gently slaps the cows'
flanks--

lazily, they follow their lowered noses until
sheer green blades brush their nostrils.
She stabs the stakes into the ground
and kicks them hard.

Closing the lens cover,
I decide to raid the strawberry patches
before my cousins wake up.

Darlene Grzegorski
Union Beach, NJ
Red Bank Regional High School
Karen Haefelein

Grave Visitors

There's an image of you and me
lying before the altar
wrapped in each other's breath
and pulse
beating

the rhythm
of fate
and

contemplating sin,
this is the only place I can use.

Grave visitors,
we enter the church to play the piano.

The fantasy comes so easily
guiltily
but easily--
whispered screams and sighs collide
and rest on the silent piano keys.

We're beating out the Ten Commandments
on the floor
collapsing on top
for all to see
early Sunday morning.

There's an image of you

and me
in the faithful drone of the minister

with the taste of your apple juice lips
still on my mouth.

Jill Robin Sisson
Finksburg, MD
Westminster High School
Alan P. Zepp

A DECADE

Ten years, for periodicals like THE APPRENTICE WRITER, is a long life. Literary magazines, which rely on the support of individuals and institutions, tend to measure their years in dog-time. Therefore, it's a pleasure to be able to produce a supplement for this tenth issue, a sort of retrospective and assessment, which features recent work by some of our past contributors.

Last March I contacted several writers from each of our first nine issues (except #1, for which the addresses were lost). What have you done since the year we printed your work? I asked. What are you doing now? I received about 35 answers; another half dozen were returned

by the post office; not a bad return.

At least for the writers who answered, things have gone well. They've attended, for the most part, first-rate colleges and universities: Harvard, Yale, Virginia, Princeton, NYU, and Bryn Mawr, to name a half dozen.

Their majors have varied from Biology to Engineering to Creative Writing to Architecture to Physics.

Their post-graduate activities have varied as well: the Iowa Writer's Workshop, Ph.D. programs, medical school, entry-level jobs.

All of this is well and good, but what effect did THE APPRENTICE WRITER have on these students and did any of them still write? These are the questions the editor of a

student publication wants answered, and, for those who continued to write, their credentials were glowing. They've published in national magazines like Kansas Quarterly, Maryland Poetry Review, and New York Quarterly. They've won prestigious awards like the Ruth Lilly National Poetry Fellowship and the Elias Lieberman Award from the Poetry Society of America.

And, happily, I had two APPRENTICE WRITER contributors in class at Susquehanna this year, and, better yet, they are outstanding students and excellent writers, first-hand evidence that all of those letters weren't somehow deceiving.

So, congratulations to the soon-to-be doctors, physicists, teachers, and

writers. I think the link of clear thinking, imagination, and verbal skill to all types of success is unmistakable, and I'm pleased that these contributors have proved an endorsement for that perception. If THE APPRENTICE WRITER is being published 10 years from now, I trust that another survey like I've just conducted will reproduce itself for writers from this issue and the subsequent nine. As for the writers who are represented here, those who responded without samples, and those with whom I've missed contact because of address changes, I expect that another decade will produce achievement in all of the fields I've mentioned as well as dozens of others. I look forward to hearing from all of them again.

Nike Missile Site: Summer 1983

Scraping our stomachs,
Shelby and I wormed under the wire fence
and ran barefoot to the abandoned base.
It waited for us, empty,
like someone had exhaled
and forgotten to breathe again.
The silverware was still in the sink,
dirty from when the platoon left.
We climbed up the rusty ladder
and shooed the pigeons out of the way
so we could sunbathe
on the helicopter landing.
We saw the whole base from there,
quiet and dry, the ground baking
below our eleven year-old bodies.
Our mouths watered and we talked
of 6th grade and gymnastic tryouts.
When the sky clouded up,
we went to the lieutenant's office
and talked to the red haired woman
in the picture on his desk.
It was his secret lover, Alicia,
and rubbed the dust off her face.
We marched back home, silent, that summer.
Our muscles didn't hurt
and we could only hear ourselves
breathing in the dust.

Katherine Cottle
Issue Number 9, 1991
Dulaney High School
Mary Washington College

Daily Bread

When the front door gives
its thud-greeting
we know it is not over.

There is no forehead flush
to backdrop your bloodshot eyes.

We are not trying to steady our fingers
as we align the forks
with the placemat flowers.

(You have given Jenna her due
reprimand for a B in art and you have
accessed my private computer files)

but the dog has not been kicked
and no plates have been flung.

There is no clink-jingle of glasses
as the cupboard door slams home.

We have not been told we can't cook worth shit.

We have not tried to disappear
to the upstairs bathroom where the
lock doesn't work.

But as I pass you on my way to the dishwasher
I smell anger on your breath.
You have not said hello.

Greta Hannum
North Penn High School
Issue 9, 1991
Susquehanna University

This Is My Religion

When all I can hear
is the refrigerator
cooling milk and yogurt and eggs
and the occasional extended exhale
of the heater
through its barred mouth
I stretch out
with no thought to how my clothing falls
and feel each muscle that presses
against the status quo
and watch my skin-strung hips
rise and fall with breath
and think about God.
I think about Him
past the dance music
from the house next door
and over past the whirring arias of trains
whistling through my western town
and I feel myself
breathing and thinking in the universe,
feel my Pride
pressing against the limits of the universe
like hands on a balloon's insides,
poking and stretching and soft.
My mouth is sealed shut
like elderly lips
glued with saliva and lack of use
so I do not speak to Him,
but listen for Him through the black
feel the eye of God on my hair
and on my careless fallen sweater
and my stretching neck and legs
this is my religion.

Sara V. Glover
Issue Number 8, 1990
Dulaney High School
Brigham Young University

What to Look At

Why not the vacuum in the corner,
and what it's failed to suck

from the lank carpet, and my hair probably
wrapped in its fan. It doesn't sound

like a sinful thing to watch and it's not;
I noticed it in a domestic mood,

I cooked something today and it was good.
Let me tell you, I'm young, but quite

domestic--my dogs, even, the leaper
and the masturbator, now ripping up

my Adidas,, used to live together on a farm,
they're a Labrador and a something.

When I pretend I'm curled in a basket
like a pup, like wet little Moses,

I can eye my decline. In the damp basket
everything telescopes into a redheaded

evil urchin who pokes me with sticks
from the docks and puts flags

on my basket for races. Here
you don't notice me, don't deny it.

I think that on a farm, on a river,
anyplace pastoral, you'd see, you'd worry:

I have knotted arteries at my knees
and other joints, I have bruises

and some dreadful other marks.
But they're not symptoms of evil,

I tell you. They're a flushing out
of the devil, who will soon leave

my blood like a martyr
rising. He'll perhaps find you

this fall with the newspaper
that blows along the sidewalk

and slaps you in the leg, the fall
that will seem to fresh, but is red

all over, you haven't been watching.
Now I'll bring the vacuum back in,

but not as a myth in my life,
believe me, I'm pushing it

in here to make enough noise
so I can't hear myself and mostly

so the dogs will run away.
Look, if you've noticed me talking

from several spots, if I seem to make no sense,
I don't want to hear it, I'm hiding

from the devil, I mean,
I don't really want you to find me.

Cathy Wagner
Issues Number 4, 1986 and Number 5, 1987
Catonsville High School
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Crayola Knieval

I made my first major life decision during a show where middle Americans volunteered to mutilate themselves for three minutes of air time. One particular daredevil brought backyard masochism to the professional level and became my second-grade idol: Evel Knieval, America's Stuntman.

Evel Knieval had the best toys: motorcycles, speed boats, rocket cars (with emergency parachutes), and a costume that would not lose him in any crowd. Evel never had to say anything. His white-sequined and stringed outfit did all his screaming for him. "I am Evel Knieval," it said. "I am America. Watch me snatch a Hershey bar from death."

I can't recall if it was the night Evel jumped Snake Canyon in his rocket dragster or leapt the pool of man-eating sharks with his jet-bike when my dad poked his head out of The Star Ledger and said to my mother, "You know, Rose, that guy is a suicide artist."

continued on page 27

Before that, I didn't have a word to describe what Evel did. I had searched for "Shark Jumper" in the classifieds and concluded that all the choice careers were filled from the inside. Now I knew his official job title and could begin my own career.

The next day at school I convinced my lunch table to throw out their aspirations toward law and medicine and to become professional suicide artists. Stunt class began the instant Mrs. Finelli, our lunch mother, dismissed us, checking first to see that we hadn't left too many crumbs on the gym floor.

Training would be hard. Fortunately we had an entire hour recess and a set of the most death-defying jungle gyms to work with. Our first class was entitled, "Screaming, Flailing and Falling from High Objects." We'd climb to the top of the jungle gym, then one of us would plummet into the bottomless chasm, flailing for four or five feet before getting a jacketful of cedar chips.

I had memorized my own introduction, complete with its own echo. "Ladies and gentlemen . . . men. Presenting, live, the stunt of the century . . . ry. Evel Knievel, Jr. will now swing from this monkey bar to that with his eyes closed." We recited our credo in chorus, "Please do not try this at home. We're professionals."

Of course I missed. That was half the fun.

Mrs. Ruskowski—it was her turn to smoke on the playground instead of in the teacher's lounge—managed to catch my climactic "Ball-o-flame" fall at "The Ant Pit Show." My friends assured me that it was a good fall, but the ants just weren't man-eating enough for me. I was spitting out cedar grit as Mrs. Ruskowski asked me what I was doing.

"I'm a suicide artist," I replied.

"A what?"

I told her again.

Mrs. Ruskowski hoisted me the hundred yards from the playground to my classroom by my ear. She dropped me into my desk, handed me a sheet of "U-can-write" paper and instructed me to write "I am not a suicide artist" twenty times. I couldn't spell the last two words. She had to write them on the board for me to copy.

I couldn't forgive Evel for deserting me on the playground. I prayed for him to wipe out on the jumpp over the Grand Canyon and felt guilty the instant he missed the ramp.

Joseph F. Wajszczuk, Jr.
Issue Number 5, 1987
Madison High School
The College of William and Mary

Drowning

1.

Tonight I'm looking out onto
the Potomac, its murky water
surrounding a thick branch I imagine
to be my mother's arm, hand grasping
the air. It wasn't here,
but a river in Florida
that almost swallowed her,
unable to swim after tipping
the canoe that held them both.
My father saved her
as I watched from another boat;
all he lost was one black boot
and a pair of old sunglasses
that sunk to the bottom.

He died six years later.
That morning I knelt beside him,
helpless and immobile, watching
him slip from my still hands.

2.

Sometimes I wonder if I could have
kept him from sinking.

Other times I wonder
who he would have saved first
if I'd been with them
in the boat that day.
In my mind he usually rescues
us both, but sometimes
his hands come up
with only tufts of reeds and grass.

3.

It's years later now, all of this
comes back after watching
a television talk show on near-death.
And now I'm calling home to hear
my mother's voice, muffled as if
she's saying my name from underwater.
What's it like to almost drown?
I am holding fast to the phone,
like a life I won't let go.

Susan E. Brown
Issue Number 6, 1988
West Potomac High School
University of Virginia

untitled revelation

these pimples across my back
warn me never to have sex
again

and i agree with them

i can feel her two hands
at my sides, those fingers urgent
and smooth with sweat, inching up
and across a back spotted
with acne

with the room so dark
she might as well be reading braille
along my spine

and any moans in my left ear
become hazy and imagined
tomorrow in the cafeteria
under the heavy fan of whispers
among friends

going, There he is...the one
I was telling you about....

Evan Boyd
Issue Number 9, 1991
Monacan High School
Susquehanna University/

My Little Trickster

I think I can see you
crouching in the doorway,
your black-and-white dots
throwing my eyes
to tripping places--
And you, I'm sure,
can see me plain as day--
bug-eyed, blinded, stupid,
saying "Is that you, cat,
or isn't it?"

Vanessa Elder
Issue Number 2, 1984
Friends Academy
Princeton University

10010 Brookmoor Drive

They called yesterday and asked us to please take the trainset out of the basement because they wanted to renovate. Otherwise they would have to throw it away. It has been six years since I set foot on Brookmoor Drive. Haunting to think I lived here for sixteen years and it doesn't seem like home. The lady answers the door, inviting my sister Becky and me inside. We got the job by default since Mom wants nothing to do with it and Dad is somewhere in the Orient or Europe. Becky makes the necessary small talk.

The living room hasn't changed much. It's missing Mom's Williamsburg touch; no brass candlesticks or colorful books on the built-in shelves; no olive and burgandy Oriental carpet surrounded by polished hard wood floors; no high-gloss cherry hutch or coffee table; no sea green davenport or velour wing-back chair; and no hand painted Royal Doulton figurines perched on intricate German-carved endtables. It's dark here; the soft, yellowish lights of Mom's dinner parties snuffed out by heavy, garish maroon curtains closed on the windows. The lady removes the child from the doorway, sweeping a shock of black hair from her face, smearing the oil paint on her fingers in a black streak across her forehead. Becky rattles on about her art lessons and portfolio. The kitchen, several shades drabber now, is the same. Except they've replaced the roll-out dishwasher with a built-in wall model and the trays on the wall by the phone are empty of spices. 593-0578. They didn't change the phone number.

Becky shoots me her look that informs me of my socially unacceptable stare. Descending the steps to the basement where Dad's trainset is, I note they carpeted the stairs. Not a bad idea since the old linoleum was very slippery for socked children and dachshunds. The woman flicks on the light in the playroom. The two bare bulbs protruding from the ceiling trusses and pipes illuminate her artistic struggles. She leaves Becky and me in the doorway and disappears to find tools. I can barely picture Becky here, or even Mom and Dad; they're lumped into an entity apart from myself, disjointed and uninvolved.

A red rocking horse that Dad made for us, with a yellow straw mane and a real pony saddle he had when he was a kid, used to stand by the wall adjacent to the door. A pile of soiled rags occupy that spot now. Crayon smudges the grey concrete floor in carnation-pink, periwinkle, midnight-blue and burnt orange splotches in the corner diagonal from the door. They always got lost under the pink fuzzy carpet and one of us would step on them, grinding color permanently into the floor. We never really noticed until we moved.

The lady's easel, with a horrific black, grey, red and orange painting of grief and a soul's destruction, mars the wall under the two little windowwells. I much prefer the World Magazine posters Becky and I chose for that wall: The Muppets, the African Savannah, Chinese Panda Bears, Alaskan Caribou Herds and Walt Disney's trash-can-like robots from the movie, The Black Hole. Becky looks around too, probably critiquing the lady's artwork on the cinder block walls.

I step farther into the room, on the pretext of checking out the fasteners Dad used to support the trainset from the ceiling. Over to the left of the chimney, we used to have our house. A three-foot high house made out of wall paneling, just big enough for two sisters a year apart to fit in with their red and white metal kitchen set (stove, oven and sink), 2 stuffed pandas, enough baby clothes for one day's adventure, panda-sized rocking chairs, a supply of PB&J sandwiches cut into triangles and a couple of boxes of Sunmaid raisins for dessert. Dad installed a night-light inside the little house so Becky and I could simulate day and night to accommodate our imaginary life.

Next to the house was the antique desk like the kind Laura Ingalls had in the one-roomed school house. The gouged wooden top lifted, screeching from time's delubrication. A waxy, crayon-smell mixed with dampness and dried apples wafted out each time the desk was opened. The desk housed the black and red

cookie tin of Crayola crayons, a doodle pad, the Etch-a-Sketch, a ruler, several pairs of blunt scissors, a school box of Itty-Bitty animal erasers and an assortment of favorite books like The Lost Puppy, Green Eggs and Ham and Red Shoes.

The lady has her art supplies unceremoniously piled along the whole wall by the chimney, the floor stained from spillage, the walls splattered too.

I reach up to jostle one of the supporting pulleys on the train set, checking to see how the bolts are connected and where the chain is anchored. Becky walks to the easel to study the grimness. Footsteps sound above. The toilet seat bangs against the tank and someone sits down. Becky and I exchange amused glances knowing we would have gone to the second floor bathroom. A tinkling sound breaks the silence.

Under the toilet stands the white and gold chest of drawers we left that was relegated to the playroom once remodeling began and the new master bedroom added. Also added was a den, the first floor bathroom and our playroom below in the basement. I wonder if the candycorns are still in the foundation; Becky and I used to sit and watch the dirty men construct and share our lunch with them. One day they let us embed candy-corn into the newly poured cement walls for posterity.

The toilet flushes and the lady's footsteps come down the hall to the kitchen. Momentarily, she appears, the child drooling down her smock wrapped around her waist and shoulder. She hands me the instruments she's chosen to extract the malignancy from her house; a Phillips head screwdriver and a socket wrench.

Susan Kaufman Arnoult
Issue Number 3, 1985
Northwood High School
University of Maryland

From: Diary of A Disturbed Man

"What are you doing here?" The first thing I asked him.

He was standing just outside the doorway, in his long camel coat, his tan leather suitcase by his feet. He turned and signalled the cab to leave. It drove away, its fender lights swallowed in darkness.

"I tried to call you," he said, "but your machine didn't seem to be on."

"Oh," I said, "I've . . . had some phone trouble." I can't believe he is standing in front of me. "Why are you here, though? I thought you were going to stay at a hotel."

He paused. He gave me a rather stern look, as though I were breaking a code by speaking to him like this. The cheap-skate.

"I was thinking," he said, which is always the first sign of trouble, "that it would be ridiculous for me to stay in a hotel when you've got room here."

"But I don't. . . I don't have room, I told you."

He glimpsed hopefully at the front door. "It'll be fine." And then: "What are you doing with that suitcase?"

"The place is a mess," I said tersely. "You should've called and now I have an errand to run. This," I said, gesturing at it, "is my friend's. I borrowed it on an overnight trip. And I was going to get it back to him tonight."

"Well, perhaps . . . look it's freezing out here, let's go in, ok?"

Since the fool had dismissed his cab, we had no choice.

"You look like hell," he said to me as I unlocked the door. It was like a hot light, his gaze. I felt the pressure returning. How terrible it was, to have had him standing there. He is taller than me, this man, and gruffer. I have inherited the worst from him—all of my positive attributes come from my mother, who was wise to divorce him. (An idea: visit her and her new husband in

continued on page 29

Tucson.)

He seemed tired, by the look of him. "Long train ride?" I asked.

"Oh, well . . . not too bad. But yes, I'm tired. Might have a nap. What's with your foot?"

"Nothing."

With hesitation, I crossed the threshold, glumly reentering the rat hole. I flicked on the light. He was startled. And then he rolled his head back. "What is that stink? You have a dead animal in the closet?" He quickly surveyed the first of two rooms--one enters the kitchen, with a tiny bedroom to the right, a small hallway and the bathroom to the left.

He looked like a captured soldier, evaluating his enemy's hideout. He was positively gawking. "When's the last time you cleaned this place? You must need a maid. Or a wife." He laughed at his little joke, and strolled to the kitchen table. He seated himself, glancing around all the while.

I sit across from him, on a padded chair that needs patching; the vinyl is giving way to spotty eruptions of sponge. We stare at each other, two strangers. Or rather, he is the stranger. He cannot begin to fathom what has happened, what will happen. The first day he has known me.

"Tell me," he says, yawning, "what's wrong with you?"

If I had left 5 minutes earlier!

"Nothing. It's just . . ." A smile from my lips, the first perhaps in days. "You know, nerves. Insomnia." How ironic, that this part is actually true.

"Insomnia? How long has that been going on?"

Since I realized who I was.

"Not long."

He gives me a quizzical look.

"They say New York is going to hell," he says after an unbearable pause. "Is that true?"

"Well, you'll be able to find out for yourself."

"I guess I will." He's looking me over now. This is what I have been dreading. "How's work?"

"Ok."

"Sounds pretty boring, the way you describe it."

"It's not so bad."

"And the writing?"

"Are we going to start the inquisition already?" I say. He is surprised at my tone. Now I feign tiredness. Soon he will ask me to suggest a restaurant.

I am planning my escape.

"Well, I'm just curious," he says in a gentle tone.

A sickening pause. I close my eyes. The knife is bulging up against my leg now; in my jeans for the time being; it has wormed its way into the far corner of my pocket, making it uncomfortable for me to sit. Finally I cough out a sentence:

"I've been trying."

"Trying isn't gonna sell," he says.

"It's just . . . I haven't been all that prepared to--"

"What? Speak up. I can't hear you when you mumble."

I cannot help but glare at him briefly. I wonder how much money he has on him, and how I'll get access to it. Perhaps, when he takes his nap--

"I hope you're more articulate in your writing than you are in person," he says. "Because you're not making any sense."

"In there," I say, gesturing toward the living room, "I have a few pages for you to read." Yes, those few pages, saved before the burning. My petty introduction--a man standing outside of a movie theater, contemplating suicide. They lie on my broken down couch (rescued from the streets with the help of R., as I recall), scattered, slightly burnt, alongside a few empty Chinese take-out cartons.

"Oh?" He smiles, yawns a second time. "Let's see them."

"Ok."

Like Igor, I go scurrying off at his request. I return. I toss the pages at him and go into the bathroom. I hear him opening the fridge. The fizzy crack of a soda or beer can being opened. He sits in the wobbly chair. A pause. Is he reading?

I listen closely as I begin to walk out of the bathroom (it's

just a few quick steps to the kitchen.) This is the true reason I purchased the knife.

He is not quite in view. I can hear his labored breathing. For a moment, I am standing in the kitchen--not this kitchen, but the kitchen of uneasy memories . . . That is, flowery curtains in the window that catches sunlight--and grease from the frying pan, when he whips up one of the few dishes he is capable of: sausage and eggs. Curtains that he makes the maid (who visits once a week) take down and clean. Or else the moon is visible in the far corner of the sky, through the speckled glass. How long I would stand there, gazing up at it, wondering about my future. And in the next room, a man is hovering over a slip of paper that contains the proof of my creative worthlessness. I peep out at him. What is he doing? Reading carefully, though he keeps rubbing his eyes. But then he goes back to the words, laying the pages on the table. He moves closer to it, resting on his elbows, his back to me--he is squarely a target. I enter the kitchen sweating, the knife pointing at his back. I am ready to cry out.

He lays down, closing his eyes. His head rests on his arms. The trip exhausted him, and my writing was the final sedation. Now he is slumped over. He is napping on my fiction. His snores are audible....

Darren Haber

Issue Number 3, 1985

Taylor-Allerdice High School

New York University

A Palette of Properties

When my grandfather was two, the farmhouse flamed.

His mother burned

alive. She threw him out the window,

trusted him into the snowbank.

She had promised him,

"I'll hold you against me

until you're old enough to choose."

She held him tight as water.

As far as I'm concerned her baby's still falling.

I can't really think

of my grandfather as an infant,

but somehow I was born in that rift,

in the vacancy before he landed.

I guess she never knew if her boy survived.

Maybe this is why I kaleidoscope,

make my dwelling on the edge of omission.

The stinging snow is a friend.

My hands burn in the pause

when I return inside. My decision

to take this job was no matter.

I hadn't noticed I had moved

until on the drive home from work

I realized I didn't know where to buy eggs.

When I was six I could be president,

a waitress at McDonald's, a lifeguard.

I mourn those possibilities.

Thursday, while etching in

circles for hours, I saw a skater.

She knew the grace of limit.

She gathered in her limbs

and was wild with spin.

Deborah Sobeloff

Issue Number 3, 1985

Walt Whitman High School

University of Michigan

Untitled

With his fat thumb, my father reaches
from his Senior Vacation Hotels of Florida
up the East Coast shoving beta-carotene, Ester C,
vitamins A, B, D, E into my mouth in Maryland
like he did when I was five, kneeling on linoleum
beside me, pressing pills to the back of my tongue.

My mother used to crush them for me,
mashing dark green tablets with the back of a spoon,
smell of seaweed and soggy sandals plaguing
the air as pills split and crumbled on the counter top,
crushed to powder until they could be caked as eye shadow.

My father wanted me to swallow whole.
I'd stand for hours in the middle of the kitchen,
eyes watering, stomach chest throat regurgitating air,
the same cup of water getting warm in my hands,
ice long gone. With his wrist in my mouth,
his voice warned, "Stephanie. Now Stephanie..."
his pitch lowering with his eyes. He downed nearly
a dozen, saying, "See how easy it is?"
See how easy it is?" before letting me go,
always with a "Next time you're gonna do it"
with one eyebrow raised, the tip of his index
finger pointed at my nose, loaded.

Stephanie Levin
Issue Number 9, 1991
Dulaney High School
University of Maryland Baltimore County

Deep Blue Night

And we are children
We need to find ourselves
Heartland days we passed in rage
Desperate and alone.
And we are beatniks
Soul inspired
To the twisted mountain roads,
fog and foam.
Let the tides wash
Let the road go.
We will meet it.
We will know.
And we are children
And you have borne us.
You made us hungry
You made us run.
Something happened.
Now you're tired
and we're tired.
What have we done?
So let the road go
When the wind blows
I'll come running.
I'll come slow.
And we are children.
We are wanting
always wanting
what we have.
Although we have it
we still want it.
We still need it.
We are mad.
And though we can hardly stand ourselves
Someday there will be a place
where the flowers fresh with youth
often clumsy, find a face.
See the towers dwarf the city

See the towers
Let them stand.
In the city
In the mystery
we are driven
ships unmanned.
And we are builders
forced in flight
outlaws on a deep blue night.
So let the oil burn in the tavern
Light the markers on the path.
Only children play forever
And we are children, until our death.

Hop Wechsler
Issue Number 9, 1991
Lower Merion High School
University of California Los Angeles

Grandfather Knowledge

That he created children was a miracle to me.
The sagging bed that held his sunken body,
the anger and the bland paste of oatmeal at breakfast,
all convinced me that the children must have accumulated
in the corners like dust, particle by particle, to one day
slowly rise and accept their lot, their inheritance of
stuffed cabbage floating in jars like green brains in
the refrigerator, the plastic slipcovers gleaming like
dull shells on the furniture. I never suspected,
until at eight years old I startled him
with one leg into his pajamas, that my grandfather
could possess such a dark fact as pubic hair, could
have such a limp trick as his sex to lay before
my grandmother like a gift. I never saw my
grandfather with any trappings of youth until
I saw the pictures of him at twenty-two, standing
with his bride at the gate to their house, his broad
immigrant's fingers gripping her shoulder, his palm
crushing her suit as she squinted into the wind
and he looked out from under his hooded scholar's
eyelids like a man who knew what there was
to give and be given.

Susan Gray
Issue Number 7, 1989
Solomon Schechter Day School
Harvard University

Untitled

It's seven-thirty. The frank morning light
cuts deep into your shoulder like a bite
of acid. Even when you breathe, alone
in sleep, it pinions you, a glance that's grown
firm with the waxing hours of day. Good morning.
The rigid air is cut by light, a warning
of daytime's perils. I recall last night
in darknesses, as if it were a fight
for air underwater, as if I'd known
the deepest weight of water and my own
dependence. Even now, in light of morning,
the rigid air is cut with signs of warning--
the darkest crossing of two lives, the sleight
of hand, the twist of motions pulled in tight.

Ahree Lee
Issue Number 7, 1989
The Baldwin School
Yale University

Nereid

The waterdark--
her element.
The first night
and last,
far from the midnight revel.

And to think
how those mariners,
forgetting the fight
versus waves and fates,
obscured
as we
in mist,
with the Nereids,
the honeymouthed
seanymphs in the tale,
how ablebodied men
sank with a kiss,
forgiving all.

We still hear
their canticle
in the cool air.
Your hair
is the softest seagrass.
The same moon
keeps time above.

And we press
the water from between us
for a time.

Ronald Wayne Sala
Issue Number 6, 1988
Boyertown Area High School
Eastern Mennonite College

My Vanity

There are better Japanese restaurants than this one, I'm sure
but we finally sit down in Hatsune
to some badly brewed tea.
From her 108 pound disposition,
my mother inquires how my dieting is going,
and then asks how I am.
Looking down at my belly,
I conclude that I will never digest the moon
that I seem to have swallowed,
and I will never be
as slender as my mother.
I ask my mother if she finds me beautiful anyway,
but it is that slight hesitation before her 'yes,'
that makes me doubt her answer.
but it no longer hurts me
--those days are far behind me
when my mother would kindly suggest
cosmetic surgery to change
my moon face into a more acceptable pretty.
She's now turned her obsessive ways to different projects:
--my father's smoking and
our suburban lawn that apparently
died from her tender care
this spring.
It's been some time since I was eight years old
--a client of my mother's vigorous
self-improvement plans and the miracle-workings

of beauticians.

Did that awful perm make me look so much better?
I never took down the hood of my windbreaker in 5th grade.

No, I don't want you to feel guilty
not that you would
because I'm doing just fine now--with
my okay grades and my potential.

I didn't tell my mother that
I found myself a little--surprised?
--embarrassed?
when I needed to choke back a few tears
over good tea
explaining my history to my poetry teacher
who asked what were
my passions
my obsessions
I had wanted to mention my frustration as a writer
as a new student
to talk about my rough poems
but instead
I asked her if I was beautiful.

Tina Y. Lee
Issue Number 8, 1990
River Dell Regional High School
Yale University

electric city blues

the city under a net
of electric cables
straining
between lamp posts
and the sides of buildings
zinging like the strings of a heart
long left in San Francisco

last night I climbed the steps
of the steepest street
breathing hard beneath a sky
fat with fog
and it was good
at the top
to lean against a stop sign
and spit down at the sidewalk

the whole thing spread open before me
in pink and gray wetness
the buildings and the bridges
connecting
in miniature holiday lights

the criss-crossing of cable lines
a cargo net to climb
a spider
a tight-rope walker
I could toss myself from this height
I thought
I could toss myself and be caught
in the city's web

those wires would make me warm
and I might glow
like a city light

continued on page 32

continued from page 31

in blue

because blue is the sound I wake to
 morning wailing through the window
 on a saxophone
 and what other color would this city be
 but blue Pacific cool
 the fog dragging the blues from the ocean
 to the streets
 and the streets crackling
 electric blue

I climbed the steps of the steepest street
 and felt like I was falling

August 1991

Gia Hansbury
 Issue Number 7, 1989
 Fontbonne Academy
 Bryn Mawr College

From: License

Pascal looked at Colby's. It was a little brick building on the corner. It was painted white and its windows reflected the street and sidewalk around the store. Pascal saw his reflection in the windows. He thought he looked older, wearing his father's parka and his Redskins hat. He almost looked like his father. There were a few signs up in the windows about shoplifting and sales on cornflakes and pork chops. A red and blue neon sign that said "Colby's" jutted out from the roof.

Pascal crossed 17th Street and walked to Colby's entrance. He was nervous. He opened the door. The bells on the door jingled. They always embarrassed him, especially today. A girl at the check-out stand turned to smile at him. She greeted him with "Good Morning" even though it was past noon. Pascal had never seen her before. She was pretty, with clean blonde hair that swept around her shoulders. Pascal was glad he did not have to ask her any questions.

He headed for the back of the store by way of the candy aisle. He always watched for sales on treats for the kids at the day care center. An older man was standing in the middle of the aisle with candy corn in one hand and chocolate-covered peanuts in the other. "Hi," Pascal said.

"Oh, hello," the man said. "Say, you wouldn't by chance know which type of candy's popular with kids these days?"

Pascal tried not to smile. "Oh, I think all kids like M&M's-- the plain kind."

"Oh yeah?" the man said.

"Yeah, all kids like those unless they're allergic."

"Well, thanks. You've been a big help. My two granddaughters are here for the weekend, and I'm trying to show them a good time."

"You're welcome. I hope you have a good time."

Pascal walked past the dairy section to the back corner of the store where they kept the beer. They had a lot of different kinds. Pascal had a hard time deciding. He was pretty sure he wanted light beer. He thought it was healthier, and Tony was watching his weight. He didn't want Miller. That was the kind his father got. Pascal didn't trust his father's taste. He liked Budweiser commercials and he'd read that it was the most popular beer in the U.S.

He picked up a pack of Budweiser. He was already nervous that his hands would shake when he handed the girl his money. He took a deep breath, thrust out his chest, and headed for the front of the store. On his way, he stopped and read the label on the beer again.

At the check-out stand, the pretty girl was talking about the lottery with the woman ahead of him. When she smiled, little

dimples dented the corners of her lips. Pascal thought he might buy a lottery ticket with his change. He put the six-pack on the end of the counter. He reached in his coat pocket where he kept his Special Olympics medal. He ran his fingers along the medal's smooth edges and over the raised design on its face. It was his only medal. He'd won it in a track competition for the long jump. He usually kept the medal with him. It had become a sort of good luck charm.

The man he'd talked to in the candy aisle stood behind him in line. When the woman ahead of them left, Pascal slid his six-pack along the counter to the girl's hand. He reached into his back pocket for his wallet.

The girl put her hand up to her forehead. "Umm, do you have an I.D.?"

"Yes."

"Can I see it?"

"Sure."

"I mean, it's required by law and all. It's not that--"

"Here," Pascal said. He handed her his social security card. He'd also brought his birth certificate.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I can't accept these. Do you have any picture I.D.?"

Pascal didn't understand.

"Like a driver's license?"

"I don't drive. But I'm twenty-one."

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "You gotta have a picture I.D."

The man behind Pascal pulled out his wallet. "Would it be all right if I helped ya out?" he asked. "It's really no problem."

Pascal looked down at the six-pack. He had not expected this. He wanted time to think, but he didn't want to seem slow.

"Uhh, I guess that'd be alright."

"Okay," the man said, "I'll just pay for it with my things, and we'll work out the money afterward."

"Cash or check?" the girl asked.

"Cash."

The girl rang up Pascal's beer and the man's M&M's. Pascal stared at his shoes while the man sorted his money.

"That'll be \$7.93."

The man handed the girl a twenty dollar bill.

"Out of twenty?" the girl recited. She punched in the numbers, the drawer shot out, and she flipped through for change. "That's ninety-five, eight, nine, ten and ten, that's twenty. Thank you." All the numbers confused Pascal.

The girl turned to Pascal. "Bye. Sorry about the hassle."

"It's okay," Pascal responded. He followed the man out the door.

"Well," the man said. "I guess you owe me 'bout five dollars."

Pascal opened his wallet. He felt guilty, as if he was doing something illegal. There were only three new dollars in his wallet. All the other bills were dirty and wrinkled. He had to give the man two of the wrinkled dollars along with the three crisp ones. "Is that okay?" he asked.

"That's fine."

"Thank you."

"No problem."

Pascal walked to the phone booth around the corner of the store. He dialed Tony at work.

Tony answered, "Hello."

"Hey Tony, it's Cal."

"Oh, hey Cal, happy birthday. Dude, how's it feel bein' twenty-one? Did ya get the beer?"

Rebecca Latimer
 Issue Number 6, 1988
 James Madison High School
 Brigham Young University



Cynthia Lynn Kerstner
 Vernon, NJ
 Vernon Township High School
 Brian Paul

Untitled

Occasionally they would try to be nice to each other, but never at
 the same Time
 Baffling to a ten year old
 And I remember the long winding road and our little insect car in red
 and white
 The sky was shimmering like a sheet of water
 And we all felt very small against the flat field and the orchard on
 the hill
 Unrecognizable at our distance-
 Just rows of greens, like lettuces or carrots
 We stopped on a sloping wet road at a little stall
 To buy fresh raspberries and a jar of pickles
 And a bunch of flowers from a wrinkled old lady's garden
 In the car I rearranged the flowers
 Ate the squashed raspberries
 Made sure to hold the jar upright
 My father and I hoped mom would like them even
 Stopped to buy some peas--still in the pod
 They were in a basket on someone's doorstep
 A cardboard sign said
 "For every bunch taken please put fifty pence in the mail slot"
 And we sped home past stony little houses with green courtyards
 Hidden down overgrown driveways
 I know my mom liked the flowers
 But she put them in a jar on a sink, not on the kitchen table
 The pickles she did not pretend to like
 The peas were sweet
 But there were not enough
 Before we knew it they were swallowed and gone.

Clementine Brown
 Maplewood, NJ
 Columbia High School
 Mr. Lasko

Regard

river-bottom catfish, five pathetic
 fish or some such number beached
 on slick blue plastic; distended
 bellies soundlessly yield to circumstance,
 whiskers drip, diluted, and
 gill-flaps flutter-heave
 under the unaccustomed horizontal
 weight of market-air squatting
 at the rim of the crate
 beside which children and bending women with watches
 briefly peer, exclaiming disgust; underfoot
 again the children, riveted by novelty,
 squirm near familiar fixed
 ankles and dress-hems that hang undisturbed
 beside the fish, concerned only with surviving
 nobly out of element, bravery indelible
 where squares of fishing nets waffled skin
 pinned struggling under the weight of combination
 and high above, the blinding sun thickens
 glass-eyes and staggered the bodies seem
 set temporarily in diamonds.

Cristina Brown
 Potomac, MD
 Winston Churchill High School
 Carol Blum

Drive

She chews on the straw
 and rattles the ice cubes,
 slurps watery remains
 of her Coke.
 Raindrops shatter
 against the windshield;
 the wipers brush them away in
 sweeping arcs, squeaking slightly
 as the station wagon wishes
 down the interstate.
 Inside, her parents arguing
 about something, their words
 stale, lingering in the air
 with the smell of hamburgers
 eaten an hour ago.
 Her head throbs
 as she looks out the splattered
 window into greyness
 that smothers tired yellow
 headlights of other cars,
 running her finger along
 the ridged plastic upholstery
 of her seat.
 She rolls down the window,
 lets in whooshing wind
 that blows hair in her eyes
 and pellet-like rain
 that sticks to her face
 like artificial tears.

Tess Thompson
 Boalsburg, PA
 State College Area High School
 Callie Kingsbury

Untitled

regardless of the scriptures
--i think everyone has a ghost--

the dog in the yard screams
soulful and misgiving
as i walk into the hall

--for what else could be
and what about the voices? . . .

even though it is dark
i feel the blood on the walls
smiling and soft
and red
like the color of your fingernails (rubies)
and i pass it with my fingers in,
trailing the sweetness into the next room
and laugh.
with you

mother
i steal your earrings
surely you don't mind
silver statues hanging
from my ears in horrid columns
like teardrops
remind me--
of blondbrownish hairs that
were straying
in the rain
of pale green eyes
big thumbnails
and gardens of pain

my fingers slide
across the mirror
wet with rubies
trailing over glass
the slickness and the smoothness of you
trailing over time
the resilience

my mind
is crazy with secrets
and with these minutes like years
i should miss you.
. . . oh the carpet moves with clarity
and my feet being sinking anemone
holding some forsakeness
i cannot for the life of me
figure how you haunt me

mother
the dog is quiet
but the man he
sits
old and worrisome going
out of
his wits
he prays
these days for the strangest of things
and he talks of broken ties
and i watch his
eyes like ribbons
uncurling unfurling pulling out the life and times of you
or else i
am alone

standing with your trinket box
in front of a mirror
wet with jewels
and ribbons

--i am much older now
and age is like a heroine
and time is a healer
and the obituary hangs
in shattered plasticine
somewhere
in the kitchen
boldly written memorabilia
fading quietly unpersuasive
(screaming out the death of you)
not quite brightly as rubies
which drip
in waxy bright-colored rain
--and my face is much clearer
as i look into the pool it leaves
and existence much dearer
even in the dark
my fingers still bloody
but my nails are small
it doesn't really matter . . .
now

really it couldn't be the dreams
few and phantasmic
and colorful and
out of focus
it couldn't be the lights
or the evenings
spent sluggish rapings of
time and tide
the yard being barren of
flowers in the winter
and the cold
and the picture frames
the household is mad
the furniture weary
of fumings
the survivors leave
the occupants
of a morbid stead
of an absence

and the mirror doesn't lie
even in candle light
my mind
is crazy with sorrow
and with these days gone rampant
i should miss you.
for more than a second
fleeting on a movement of
the eye
the door is open
and a cool wind comes in
waking me only momentarily
with a transient finger on
my lips
leaving out the ghost of you.

Angi Williams
Richmond, VA
Ms. Anderson

Teenage Riot

Another best day of my life is gone. I'm tired, all sorts of tired, but at least I got an extra hour added onto my life because of the time change. I want to save this part of my life like an orchid after the prom, safe in its little plastic case above the crisper in the refrigerator.

Courtney and I took the Long Island Railroad to New York City yesterday. We feel asleep with our Walkmen on so we didn't have to listen to the annoying women from Syosset sitting behind us. I'll have to remind myself not to be one when I grow up.

We got off that train at Penn Station, skipped down Broadway, and caught another train to 8th Street. It smelled like steam and urine on 8th Street yesterday. Wet, gritty sludge lay in the gutter, and coffee cups and newspapers seemed to be glued to the sidewalk, like a collage.

On St. Mark's Place yesterday there were a lot of black Moslem guys selling aromatic body oils. The incense they twirled smelled like breakfast treats as it burned. I was twirling inside myself.

Courtney and I walked into Venus Records, and it felt so close and warm it made me dizzy, like a fuzzy new coat at Christmas. It's a tiny store, but about eight people were working there. I brought the two CD's I wanted to buy up to the counter, and one of the guys rang them up and a girl put them in a bag. The guy gave me a couple of cashews as a present. "We're all squirrels in here," he said. The other guys chuckled from their confident, cross-armed group, and gave me slight nods of approval. I took too long getting money out of my wallet as I looked up at those boys. The cashews made my tongue taste bad.

By chance, we met some kids Courtney knows on Bleeker Street. They all wore the same shoes and some just pretended to like the band we were going to see that night. They huddled into a tight pack and made the cool fall air seem colder. I didn't care at all, I just walked behind them. Our teenage clan paraded down the sidewalk, and I heard a woman at the side of the street tell her friend that she liked my tights. I was blushing inside, and my head began to swirl like the stripes on a peppermint, so I caught up to Courtney and walked with her in the translucent dusk.

Yesterday night was the last time that the sky would still be light at 6 PM. New York's hazy, pale gray sky through all the buildings--would the time have changed if we hadn't changed it?

We all ate dinner at McDonald's, looking out at the darkening raquetball courts across the street, the balls making sounds like a hand slapping against a chest. I was psyched for Sonic Youth. I put an off-kilter bun in my hair and painted my lips red using the reflection from the window as a mirror. When I saw my image in the glass I looked the oldest I'd ever seen myself. I turned away as fast as I could. It was time to go.

Kicking, screaming, teenage angst, smashed to fragments and burning out forever inside thirty year old bodies, Sonic Youth knew what we wanted to hear because they'd been here before. They fed us, all of us squeezed together, like hungry little chicks in a box. The dancing let everything out. Hair stuck to my face, and my shirt was damp with other people's sweat. When it was over, the masses oozed out through the doors and onto the street, and ears ringing, people separated into small, slack bunches. The warmth melted like rainbow sherbet left outside at an August birthday party, and my sweat turned cold. Without moving, I looked over the whole block for Courtney and her other friends. I twisted my sore shoulders and fixed my shirt. I felt all dreamy and happy, and I laughed, but my eyes got watery as I smiled. I never wanted that day to end.

"Hey Kat!" Courtney yelled when she found me waiting. "Is it one or two?" I glanced at my watch. It was one, new time. We'd saved an hour. I lifted myself up, fixed my eyes, looked back into that night again, and then started walking towards the

train station, laughing with my teenage friend.

Eva Peck
Mystic, CT
The Williams School
Dawn Haines

Trends

He wrote down his thoughts . . . too bad he had no thoughts to write about. She thought about his thoughts, but her thoughts were about nothing, as were his. He got up from the uncomfortable chair he had been sitting in for the last hour and moved to the kitchen to fetch a snack. The refrigerator was empty like his head; his stomach growled for food, as did his head for thoughts.

His wife went to the kitchen with her husband, and saw the same things he did in the refrigerator: nothing. Apparently she had no reason to perform every move synchronized with his.

He went back to his thoughts and writing, and his wife went back to wondering what he was thinking. He picked up a pencil hoping and thinking maybe this was his big moment, but was disappointed to find it was just a false alarm, and he really had no thoughts. His wife was disappointed as well.

After an hour more of no thoughts, his hair had been half way torn from disappointment and frustration. He went towards the door with his wife trailing behind, but forgot his coat, and decided to go back for it. His wife was trailing behind, every one of her steps performed simultaneously with his, to the point they almost were stuck in the closet together.

As the front door to their house closed behind them, a million other front doors to houses were shut at the same time. Walking down the steps was the husband and wife and a million other husbands and wives, some with children.

The man saw them all following, and began to flee, but they began to flee with him. Elderly dropped dead from exhaustion; kids fell on their butts and died on the spot because they could not keep up the synchronized movements of the man.

When he hopped, they hopped; when he went to the bathroom, they went to the bathroom. But those humans whose bodies were not built for the task of hopping and going to the bathroom died like fleas.

He had to get back inside of his house before they all ran over each other and died. He walked slowly, careful to make sure everyone could keep up. As he walked up the front porch stairs leading to the front of his house, he looked and saw all the others trying to do the same thing. Some fell on their faces and died; others did not fall, but they did not have any steps to go up, and still they kept on trying to climb.

He was soon safely inside his house with his mindless wife. He walked inside his house, taking the risk that others might die because of him. The desk he had been writing on before was only a few feet away, and he tried to get to it before any more people died.

He pulled the chair out from under his desk, and sat down comfortably. The wife did not have any place to sit and fell down. She sat still, awaiting her husband's next commands. Her husband noticed her fallen, and went immediately to her aid. As he walked towards her, he realized she did not obey him like she should have, because of her fallen position. Suddenly he noticed her first move not caused by him. Her head hit the floor with a thump, and her eyes closed. He was sure the same fate had befallen all the others outside.

Nate Lounsbury
Broad Run, VA
Fauquier High School
Peg McDonnell-Culley



A Print of the Artist as a Young Man
Robert Cron
Dingmans Ferry, PA

Prize Catch

Strung up with a rope by the antlers,
my uncle's moose hung from the basement rafters.
Eyes like shiny black marbles stared blankly
at the ceiling above where my uncle
sat in his living room celebrating his hunt.

The brown and white fur was matted
like the fur of a child's teddy bear
that is going on its fourth year.
It could have been a large stuffed animal
except for the dry blood around the neck.

Its stiff legs extended outward
and were bent slightly at the joints.
The black hooves were encrusted with dirt
like my uncle's boots after a long hunt.

As I looked at it, I imagined the body skinned
and hanging in a meat locker somewhere
and its head above the small fireplace
in my uncle's den, glaring down at him.

My uncle never once felt the horns
that are tied tightly to the rafters,
yet he smiled and laughed
while celebrating his hunt.

Denise Zalegowski
Pennsauken, NJ
Haddonfield Memorial High School
Marilyn Lee-Mauger

The Church

Light filtering through
The stained glass windows
Dimly lights the huge, open room
Where I can smell
The ancient dust
Of hymnals
And half-burnt candles.
Altar robes hang
Like ghosts
In the closet
And the statue
Of Jesus
Watches
As I take the images in.
I wonder why
These people
Put a statue of Jesus
On a crucifix,
Bleeding
And looking sad
In their place of worship.
Wouldn't they like
To remember him laughing?
What an image
To prevail
Over this cavernous room.
I drop my cross,
Making a thousand clinks
As it hits the floor
And reverberates
Through the church,
And I think
Of my laughing Jesus
In this empty place.

Andrea Kresge
Stroudsburg, PA
Moravian Academy
Johanna Farrell

Time

I looked into my eye
and I saw a clock radio.
Its hands were both on twelve
and even though it was dark
and the cicadas were calling,
it proclaimed high noon
over snowy valleys
where snow lilies wane-

the woods are a closet;
fig leaves, lady's slippers
and foxglove are all we ever needed
but need a poppy red baseball cap
or maybe a straw hat
with pink geraniums.
If you find it for me,
hang on to it so it bangs
on my bedroom door.

Kimberly Knowles
Lebanon, NJ
Voorhees High School
Lois Harrod

The red lanterns of dusk backlit the mountains at the far end of Kennebago Lake. A gnarled tree climbed above the others on the Fontanallis Point, and the waters of Wilbur Brook spilled into the big waters. My dog Sable lay on the front seat of my small tin boat and would only move her head to bite at mayflies, or look at loons. When a loon swam close to her, she would tense and strain at the side of the boat, wanting badly to leap in after the bird, but not wanting to make the jump from safety. The loons would go underwater, perhaps just when Sable had decided to go in after the boat. A salmon broke the surface to eat a bug, and the small rings reflected the sun's reddening figure.

Sable floundered over the seat and put her head on my knee. I put down my fishing rod and watched the sun drop below the mountains. The water was pleasantly cool; the water felt good on my fingers. Turning around I could see the light on the porch of my small cabin. It sat close to the edge of the lake; it was waiting up for me.

I didn't want to turn back and start the motor, so I didn't. I thought back on all sorts of things that were not nearly as pretty as the mountains, not nearly as warm as Sable's ears, and not nearly as tranquil as Kennebago Lake at nine PM.

At seven thirty-three AM a loud horn blared behind the kitchen of my house. I tossed down one last creamcheese-laden bite of an onion bagel and grabbed my red backpack and my hockey bag. I hit the power button on the TV remote control and "The Bugs Bunny and Road Runner" show came, with a hiss and click, to an abrupt halt. I leapt over Sable and blasted through the back door, my hockey bag slamming against either side of the frame. Tripping into the bus, I said good morning to whoever sat in the front seat and I settled in for another twenty minutes of sleep. I was aroused by a girl shouting obscenities into my face. I said something nasty to her and she laughed. She had said so much worse to me that speaking hardly seemed worth the effort.

The bus arrived at school unusually early and I tossed my bags out the door. Grabbing hold of the top of the bus door, I swung out over the top of my books and landed on top of my hockey bag. I crammed it into my gym locker and returned for my books. I trotted into homeroom and plopped down next to a hockey player named Baxter.

Ms. Brown walked into the room and sat down at her desk, a sign that we were about to be lectured at.

"We all know what happened yesterday at the Berwick contests. I have been instructed to send you all to the gym to talk to Mr. Bird about that fight. You are all big enough to understand that fighting with the other school is ridiculous and out of order. I can't believe that some of my students will be known as fighters at other schools." I had not heard of this altercation and I was interested.

A boy called Mo Hacking answered sarcastically, "One of them started it Ms. Brown!"

My teacher, whom I until that moment respected, grew furious. Mo, I don't care who started the goddamned thing. I heard you jumped in first, little shit!"

"But they beat us in lacrosse!"

"Go see the dean now!"

As Mo stood up, he turned back over his shoulder and said, as if to strengthen his opinion, "My father said he would have beat those bastards up too!" A number of other boys encouraged Mo as he left the room.

Mr. Bird was the forty-year-old principal of my middle school. He was a happy man whom I had befriended early on in the year. He was a baseball fan, but told me he had started playing golf when he turned thirty-five. His office had pictures of Jack Nicklaus, the Minnesota Twins, and my favorite, an autographed picture of Chi Chi Rodriguez, sinking some famous putt

and leaping in the air.

Mr. Bird now stood under the basketball hoop and paced the edge of the key. He did not look friendly without his pictures behind him, and I was scared what he might say in these unfamiliar surroundings. We were lectured about the brawl, and Mr. Bird connected it to our personalities and values.

He was right. I looked around and there were a lot of people present that I didn't like. The people I didn't like were hard to get along with. They were rich; their parents were powerful; they knew it.

A girl in homeroom had told me about her maid who couldn't start her Honda and couldn't get to school in time for first period. The girl had complained for five minutes, and then I ended the conversation as rudely as I could, "My bus was twenty-five minutes late two days ago. I sat next to a girl who hadn't taken a shower in three days, and who threatened my life a week ago. She wouldn't close the window, even though it was raining. Because of the traffic, I was fifty minutes late for school, and the nurse called my mother to make sure I wasn't making up an excuse. I wish I had your Honda."

Mr. Bird was droning a little. He was going over the same topics he had gone over five minutes ago. I understood already that fighting was not good; that was very basic to me. But to many of the people around me, the fight was nothing more than fun or fear or something they saw as harmless. I didn't think that this talk would influence them.

We had been given a few other talks like this, good talks about stealing equipment from the gym and writing on the walls of the new theater. These talks had short-term effects. Nothing was stolen for a few weeks, no obscenities had been written on the building for a while, but then it started again. I didn't think that these people would ever think anything they did was wrong.

Hannah Goldstein looked up at Mr. Bird, but I could tell that she was still listening to the girl next to her. She wouldn't understand that fighting or stealing or writing on the walls was wrong; she could never see that her actions affected other people.

Hannah stood up as Mr. Bird finished. She shuffled out of the gym and into the cafeteria to pass her free period with her friends. They would not talk about the meeting; they would only talk about where they were going and with whom they were going on Saturday night. I hoped to stay at home and sleep, or maybe go to the ball park and watch the Yankees.

I enjoy the ball park for a lot of reasons. I enjoy the people at the ball park. Some people come in suits straight from work. They sit stiffly for the first few innings and then loosen up their belts and drink beer. Around the seventh inning mustard stains become visible on their ties and shirts. The voices that ordered shares of IBM all day now shout out in anger or laughter at the umpires and players. These people are fun to sit with. They joke and shell peanuts with their teeth, they help lost kids to an usher, and they cheer when their friends catch foul balls.

I sat behind two hair dressers once, too. Young and flirtatious, they made the ushers sit on their laps; they talked about teasing combs and "Da great new pair a' cizaz Rhonda got!" They coaxed a ball from a bat boy and gave it to me when they left; they said I was cute.

I often saw kids at my school at the park with their girl or boy friends, but I never sat with them. They spewed obscenities at the umpires and made out in the grandstand. They wore \$150 sneakers and fancy jackets with logos of other teams, they wore brand new caps of the team on the jacket, and they were never satisfied with the home side. They were unpleasant to be with because they were cynical. They could not enjoy the game unless someone hit a home run every five minutes, and they were never satisfied with four hot dogs and a cotton candy; they always brought pasta or some other fancy salad from home. They never kept score and never took their hats off for the national anthem.

These were the people I went to school with, and as I looked around I found that they made up the majority of people

in my life. I had a few friends that I went to the ball park with, but they were by far the minority. I realized all of this very quickly. I saw some things in myself that I had never seen before, things very similar to those I saw in the kids around me, and I made the decision to leave.

Sable lay at my feet. It took me a long time to think through and remember all of this, but she did not grow restless. She was content lying in the boat and watching the stars encircle the night. Orion was huge in the sky, and the big dipper was bright. The fishing gear was neat in the corner of my boat, and the thermos that had been heavy with tea was now empty and light. The lake was calm and the air was still and warm. I stood up in the boat and looked at the mist that hovered over the water. I took off my shirt and pants. My bare feet gripped the wooden boat seats, and I dove into the lake. The water was cool and clean. I drank my fill and then paddled to the side of the boat where Sable strained against the invisible barrier of the hull. I patted her ears and splashed a few drops of water on her nose. She snuffled and shook them off.

I would not go back to that school. If those people were not going to be changed, they were not going to change me. I could look around and see things I disagree with, I'll be able to do that wherever I go, but as I thought about my decision to move myself. I wanted to be with the people who could enjoy a star-encircled night on a lake.

My motor disturbed the night, and my boat left a smooth wake wriggling across the water. As I neared the cluster of cabins at the end of the lake, I slowed down and quieted the motor, so I wouldn't wake the people in the camp.

Henry Clarke
Dobbs Ferry, NY
Phillips Exeter Academy
David Weber

King Kong, Fay Wray, And Me

On Halloween I passed Henry VIII twice, a young vampire in a red cummerbund with blood dripping down his neck, and a little skeleton with a bouncy ponytail whose glowing shinbones showed under a fancy velvet coat. I also passed the same homeless man I always pass on Eighty-ninth Street, but he was wearing a shiny mask like an iridescent butterfly, and as I approached him I couldn't stop looking at him. In the dark he didn't seem human, hunched over in the shadow shaking his paper cup at me, with this beautiful insect stuck to his face, shimmering in the light from the street lamp. I gave him a quarter as I walked by.

Halloween's weird. A lot of people talk about how they feel completely different about themselves on Halloween, and I think that's true. I think the reason for this is that Halloween's the only day in the year that most people can dress exactly as they like and nobody cares. And then they can act out the costume, in a way. There's a kind of freedom in that, acting completely abnormal and everyone accepting it. This Halloween I had a mission, and I was dressed to give myself the confidence to accomplish it, in a tee-shirt with a photograph of the Weimaraner dog Fay Wray on it, and with this little stuffed gorilla in my backpack. I headed for the Empire State Building.

I had never thought about spending the night on top of the Empire State Building before that day. But Halloween morning I read in the paper that it was opening at six the next day, and I thought, Wow, I could go and watch the sun rise over the East River and still get to school on time tomorrow! How cool! And then I got to school and everyone started to ask me what I was doing for Halloween, and I had to say, Well, nothing in particular, and they all began to talk about parties and fishnet stockings under Dracula capes and cute guys at whose houses they

were planning to trick-or-treat. I don't know how many people asked me that question. Even Marina, my best friend, who knew that I had not been allowed to go trick-or-treating since I was seven, and that I wasn't going to any of those parties or wearing any kind of stockings under a Dracula cape, asked me. I got a little mad at her, although she didn't notice. She was going to be spending a quiet evening in front of the TV with Stan, her extraordinarily good-looking Slovenian boyfriend. I asked, in a fairly cold tone, how he was supposed to enjoy American TV when he didn't speak any English; she batted her eyelashes. This made me feel worse than ever.

God, I hate Halloween!

The notion of spending the night on the observation deck occurred to me when I was trying to figure out a particularly pointless, and hard, chemistry question. I could do this really strange, totally out of character, not quite stupid thing, avoiding the whole Marina-jealousy problem. I would sleep under the stars, see the dawn, hail the first taxi I saw, and get home and showered without my parents knowing anything about it. The more I thought about it, and the less I considered it, the better it sounded. After doing all my homework and having a huge dinner, I called Marina and told her to meet me on top of the Empire State Building at six-fifteen the next morning, put on practically all the clothes I own, fished my baby King Kong out of the closet, grabbed the family sleeping bag, and snuck out of the house around eleven. The Empire State Building closes at midnight. I felt sort of possessed: My whole body was in the clutches of this idea.

My stomach was filled with little moths as I went in the door, feeling silly and at the same time excited about my adventure. I bought a ticket in the soaring lobby. One half of it had a little picture on it and read, "A souvenir from your visit to the Empire State Building." I put that part in my pocket after the ticket taker ripped the other half away. The observation deck, when I finally got there, was freezing and deserted. In honor of Halloween, the tower was lit up orange and black. As I looked out around me, all I could see were little lights and the spaces between them. Cars were tiny, twitching fireflies, impossibly far away; the bridges were just strings of pearls suspended over the rivers.

"That's incredible, isn't it?" asked a voice to my left.

"Yeah," I said, startled. I had thought I was alone.

"Makes you stop hating the city for a second. Looking out there, I feel like mankind is really superior to the apes. A lot of the time I don't think so. Anyway, hi, I'm Dave."

"Hi." I shook the hand he extended. "I'm Paige."

"My parents' house is out there somewhere, and if I looked hard I could probably find my dorm at Columbia. But I haven't got a quarter for the binoculars, so I'll have to forgo that pleasure." He smiled. "Oh, well."

"Oh, well." I agreed.

But you know, if you go over to the south side, you can see the light from the parade in the Village. You can hear the noise. Come and look."

"Um...okay?" I said, thinking, what is going on here?

We crossed to the other side. I could see brighter, stronger light coming up from a mile down Sixth Avenue, and motion, and even sound.

"I went to that last year," Dave told me. "It was fun, and I got to see Moses rollerblading, but tonight I didn't really think that crowds were what I wanted, you know?"

"Yeah, I know." I squeezed my head between two of the bars of the fence. "It feels like, if only the fence wasn't here, you could get close up."

"It is here because a lot of people tried to get close to the scenery," Dave said, gazing up at the tall, wicked, curved-in spears that the bars became. "Now, if you want to jump off, you have to stab yourself on the fence, and then fall eighty stories." He turned and looked at me. "Bummer," he said.

"Yeah." I smiled, and tilted my head back to see the sky. Dead grey clouds, tinted orange from the lights, scudded aimlessly, occasionally revealing a glimpse of the moon.

"You know, originally," Dave said, squinting as he looked up as well, regarding the tower, "the spire was supposed to be a mooring place for zeppelins."

"Zeppelins?"

"Yeah. They were going to tie zeppelins to it."

"God, can you imagine that? Huge floating things tied to the tops of buildings? That's really weird to think about. New York would be so different if that happened." I looked up again and tried to picture it, and laughed. "That's really funny. It would have been awful."

"Yeah, thank God for Hindenburg."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far." I put my elbows on the railing and looked south over the city. I thought I could see the Statue of Liberty, but I wasn't sure. I walked around to the other side and tried to find my building, which I couldn't do in the dark. I was getting really cold.

A security person popped out of the gift shop in the middle of the observation deck. "Twelve o'clock, people," he said, "We're closing up."

"Well, Paige," said Dave, appearing again on my left, "It was nice to meet you."

"Yeah," I said, "good to meet you, too." I meant that. He was nice.

Dave vanished through the gift shop to the elevator; I stayed a minute longer before I followed. I guess my whole plan was based on the idea of being alone, and in the company of someone else I considered it a little more rationally than I did before. It was a dumb idea, I decided, and I was hideously cold and growing sleepier. Definitely a night to spend in my own bed. I caught the first cab I saw when I got down to the lobby and snuck back into my house.

I had to wake up abominably early, at about five o'clock in the morning, because of what I had told Marina. I arrived back where I had been not long before, on top of the city looking down, but this time I was watching the East River. The sun rose in front of me, washing all the buildings with new light, and seeing that, all the reflections, and even the asphalt looking beautiful, I knew for sure that, as a species, we'd come a long way since the days of the apes.

Sarah Landreth
New York, NY
The Chapin School
Jane L. Riden

Red

*Yesterday, I ran down the slick-tiled hall
late, again, to tennis practice.*

*My bloated, red duffle bag
bumping and bruising my knees
in rhythm to my awkward gait.*

*And from behind
someone happened to call me
Red!*

Just like you did

*When you wanted my attention and I nodded you away
as I figured $a^2 + b^2$ and pondered Spenser.*

I stopped, whirled and waited --

*Waited for you to blast through the heavy, double doors
and run your calloused hands and guitar-nubbed
fingers through my tangled, wild hair*

*And ask me if I definitely didn't have time
to catch a movie after school.*

Virginia LeBaron
Malvern, PA
Great Valley High School
Mary Magargee

The Corncob Pipe

*On a coal-black night in West Virginia,
I light the charred corncob pipe,
gaze into the bonfire, leaping
and grasping at the stars.
I stretch. Wet grass licks
My arms; the fire wraps
its warmth around me; the stained,
sepia moon hovers over me.*

*I cling to this frame of my life.
I want to bury myself in these dewy
grasses. I want to feel forever
my face blush at the fire's glow.*

*I inhale. Smoke curls
from the corncob pipe.
I am lost in the coal-black night,
a dancer who twirls and reels,
a dancer in a dizzy world, spinning past
in a blur of light.*

*I exhale. The smoke floats
from my mouth. The ragged mountains
sag, and the luminous moon
chokes on the stifling coal dust.
I am forced to surrender
to the hard ground and the soggy weeds,*

*because my arms
are not wide enough
to embrace any one moment of living
forever.*

*I turn away from the bonfire;
finally the tobacco burns through
the corncob pipe, collapses it.
I savor the lingering*

*taste of tobacco as the final
traces of smoke dissolve into
darkness.*

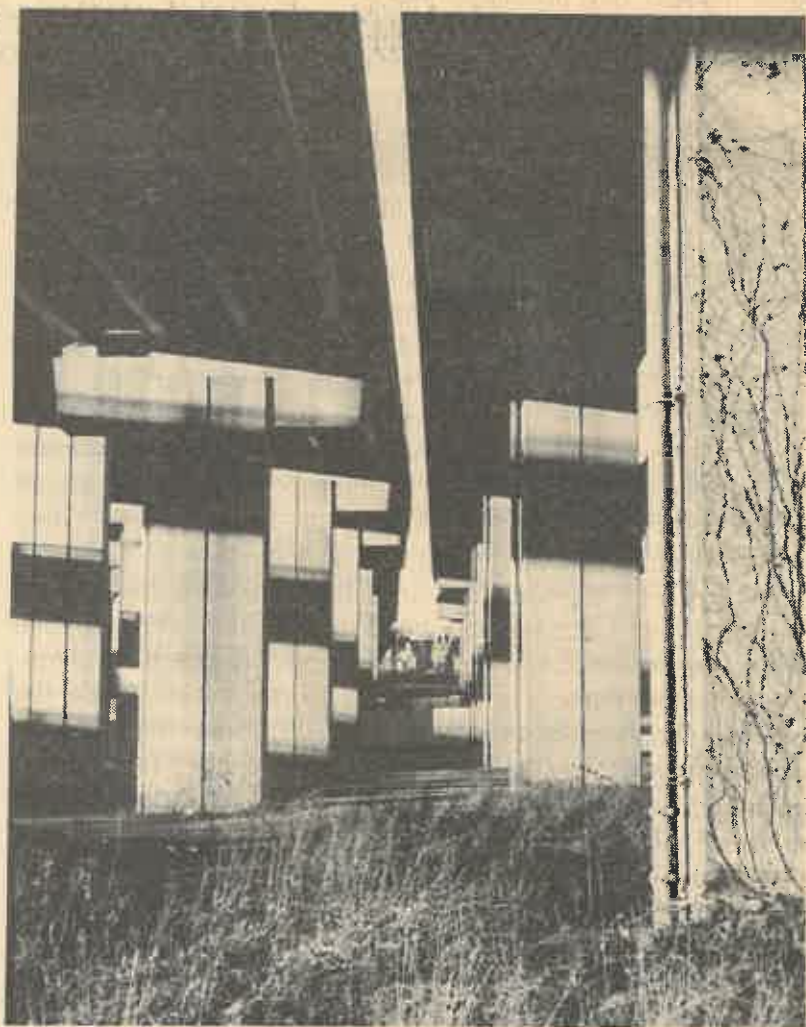
Mike Ferguson
Richmond, VA
Monacan High School
Judith R. Land

Untitled Flowers

*in the night, in the wind, at the edge of rain,
i find five irises, and call them lovely.
as if a woman, once, lay by them awhile,
then woke, rose, went; the memory of hair
lingers on their sweet tongues.*

*i'd like to tear these petals with my teeth.
i'd like to search these hairy sleeves,
their beauty and indifference. they hold
their breaths all their lives
and open, open.*

Niklos Hablenko
Burke, VA
Mr. Greiner



Kamila Sych
Verona, PA

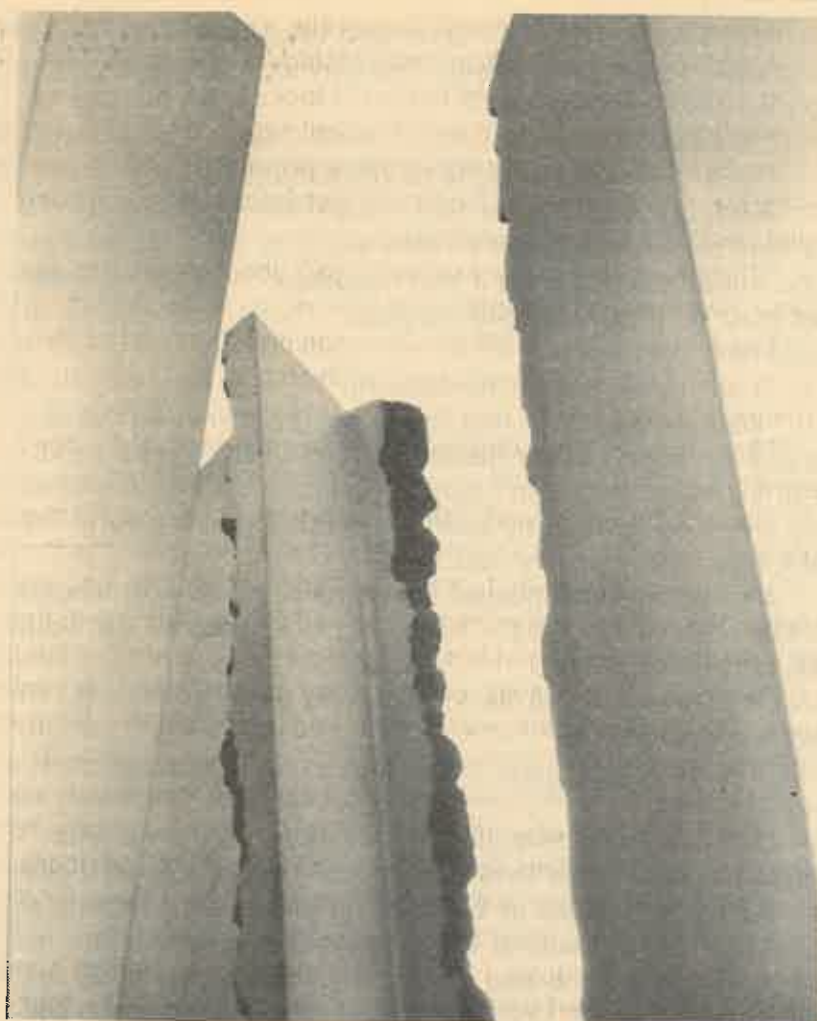
Old Boots

Scratching those few whiskers on my chin, I approached the base of the mountain. It seemed so old to me, compared to the first time I came with dad. Now, the rock faces of Mount Trevor, with protruding ledges, looked like wrinkles on an old man's face. Standing there, I couldn't help but remember my father's words spoken so long ago. He said, "Listen to the mountain and it tells you everything." And as I finished the thermos of coffee my sister Jenna had prepared for me and rubbed the cold from my numb fingers to begin my climb, I wondered if what I heard was the mountain snickering.

I worked hard and methodically that morning, each goal taking me a little closer. Soon, the peak was within twenty feet of me. I tried to make my heavy breathing drown out the sound of cynical laughter I seemed to hear. Then my Nova came to mind. A 1979 ice-blue Chevy Nova--it was built of steel and powered like a son of a gun. There was a time when that car was like a good woman, the sole instrument of my pleasure. With that, my shoulders sagged and I lost that crevice I was gripping and fell.

I hung in limbo, caught by the rope wrapped around my waist, completely short of breath. I felt as suffocated as I had the night of the accident when the walls of that Nova crunched so close around us. Above the din of the chirping crickets, sirens wailed in the dark humid summer air. The approaching red and blue lights reflected in the mirrors of my car. Beside me, I looked to Jacob. His profile, a young and naive version of mine, seemed completely undisturbed by the impact. He was still clutching those old climbing boots of mine. "Just like the night of the accident." I stuttered those words aloud a second time, caught up in the memory, as I hung by the rope in mid-air. I looked around, as if a criminal, for my bearings. From where I hung, the peak was obscured by the clouds. It was all over for that day.

I was an hour and a half early when I walked into the parking lot after that climb. But I knew it didn't matter though. Sure enough there she was waiting, and I was mad. I got into the car and slammed the door to let her know, too. "Dad needed the truck," she explained, but not why she was so damn early as usual to pick me up from climbing. We drove home in silence. I



Kamila Sych
Verona, PA

waited for her to ask, in her mocking tone, if I had "heard" anything. She didn't say anything, for a change. She didn't even ask if I made it. Mom already knew the answer; it was as if that was why she was always there an hour and a half early and that is why, I suppose, I was usually so angry with her.

When we got back, I stood in the driveway at Mom's and watched the mailman pull away from the box. Retrieving the mail, I scanned it, not really expecting anything, especially not that. In neon letters, the postcard shrieked of the sale on junior climbing equipment from the "largest climbing retail outlet in the county." I gripped it, thankful that my sister Jenna had not found it. It was for Jacob. My brother had been waiting for this. Often, he and I used to go there just so he could finger the new equipment and gather free brochures to read over and over and over again at home. He would stand by while I chatted with the salesman, hanging on to their every word, only to use the knowledge later on to impress Jenna.

Sometimes at dinner, I would quiz him on the equipment and tell him stories of rock faces as steep as the side of the house. His eyes grew wide, while Jenna scowled across the table with that disapproving look of hers. There were days when I drove in from football practice, amused to see him trying to maneuver up the decrepit, slanted side of the barn behind our house in my old equipment, just like he would a rock face.

"You'll kill yourself, Jacob!" Jenna hollered at him one afternoon. I watched his knees shake and his hands slip down the rope until he landed in a heap.

"It's your overprotection that will hurt the boy most," I barked. We bickered like old married people. She collected him off the lawn and drew him to her bosom as if he were her child and not our brother. He sat still for a moment in her embrace then squirmed away, charging toward the house, his eyes glued to the ground.

"Just wait 'til he starts hearing the mountain voice, too. Then, we're in trouble," Mom called out, laughing, as she sauntered out the front door with her date.

Jenna waited during our final gear check for his first climb on Mount Trevor.

"Why is Jacob wearing your old boots?" she demanded. "They must be quite small." Her voice trailed off expectantly, as

continued on page 41

if that alone was reason enough to halt the trip.

Jacob replied that he didn't mind using my old boots.

With all the pride I could muster, I looked to him and said, "They will fit today." I heard her skeptical sigh.

Then watching her sternly, I calmly promised, "We'll go to the factory soon and buy Jacob not just boots but everything brand new." At that he smiled weakly.

"They'll get me where I want to go," Jacob reassured her quietly, and pointed upwards.

I took him aside just before we began and told him to listen, just as dad had made me listen. He twitched his head, as if straining to hear.

"But, Robbie," he whispered to me, near tears, "I don't hear anything!"

I was a bit concerned. "Don't worry. It comes with time. Let's get going."

He smiled, relieved that he was still allowed to go. We reached the real summit as the sun dipped ever so slightly in the sky. I remember looking at him on that last climb of ours so long ago, watching those eyes of his. They had a shine, a real glowing shine of brilliant amethyst nestled in snow that sent my heart racing.

Standing in the driveway now, I looked up. There was no sun. The gray sky was thick and furrowed, as if ready to unleash a furious storm upon me. I crinkled up that postcard, aimed for the trash can and missed. The sound of distant thunder bounced on the asphalt driveway.

Inside Mom's house, I found my sister busy weighing herself. Her eyes shifted with the scale's pendulum, as she muttered something about my week with dad. He was living two streets away, but she still referred to him as "your father," as she kicked the scale into the corner. I hadn't spoken to her in a week since last I stayed at Mom's. After the accident, we no longer shared lunch or talked between classes. Now, she was always alone, and whether she liked it that way or not, I couldn't say. We never talked long enough for her to tell me anything. I'd watched her spending her free time in the nurse's office, using that ancient rickety scale. I supposed weight was all that was important to her anymore.

Even after school, I no longer bothered to slow the car to offer her a ride. Her response was always the same—almost robotic, "The walk is better for me," she'd say. There were times when she didn't return home from that walk for five days at a time. When she did return, I always had to look her over. There seemed to be a little less of Jenna each time she came back. "Mom's been wondering where you have been," I had to say when she returned. She'd look at me with red, swollen eyes as if we were sharing a joke. I knew she knew that Mom didn't really enter into this at all and that made her smile weakly. "I got held up somewhere," was her response. I came to accept it.

While Jenna exercised now, I stood in the kitchen plowing through bills that littered the desk in the corner. Large red letters demanded payment for expenses up to four months old. I threw them down, knowing that whoever Mom's latest was, he would surely fork out whatever was necessary. As if on cue, she breezed in with the latest following her. "This is Carmine," she said. That was it—our introduction to the man who we'd be eating breakfast with for the next three to five months. I figured him to be about ten years older than I, but not much more than that. I looked him over. He wore neon yellow shorts and a matching tank top with four gold chains underneath a full length leather coat. Tennis, Mom explained.

When I had had enough of Carmine, I went out again, yanking the kitchen door shut behind me, and took to walking down the street. I found myself at the junkyard, weaving among mangled cars, trucks, and appliances. It took time but I had learned exactly where to walk without facing a dead end of metal junk. I looked over the ice-blue chrome of the car, still dull and wrinkled. Once a full-sized machine, my Nova was now smaller than more recent compact models. Through the passenger window, broken by paramedics after the accident, I fingered his blood still caked on the upholstery and my old climbing boots. I

rubbed the rust that discolored the edges around the "sunroof" created by the medics. I winced then at the force of the memory and shut my eyes.

I remembered how I cautiously turned the head of my sleeping brother, resting against the window. Men pounded once, twice, thrice, until the glass holding his head crumbled away. That face, that head, much like mine but younger, fell forward, his eyes wide, unfocused, stunned. My fingertips slid around the tender skin of Jacob's neck only to be torn away by anxious paramedics. The overwhelming buzz of a saw was so chillingly close above us. I wailed, and continued to wail while they yanked his body out the "sunroof" of the car. My head swirled in pain; my thoughts were uncontrollable. We had done too much on his first climb. Jenna could have driven us home. I was tired, driving too fast. Those damn boots were too small! The boots dropped from his hands on the way out. They smacked me on the head. I stopped wailing.

I opened my eyes and scanned that junkyard, looking for something useful. Resting my head against the car, I listened again to the sound of approaching thunder. I grabbed his climbing boots from the car and dropped to my knees beside the wreck. My bare hands tore at the cold dirt. Soon the loosened earth mixed with the sticky blood from my ravaged fingertips. I couldn't stuff the boots into the hole; they were just too big. The sky opened in a crack of thunder. In an instant, a deluge of water saturated my body. I began to laugh shamelessly, recalling how Jenna thought the boots were too small. My chest heaved with sobs. She was right; she knew everything.

I trudged home, soaking wet, knees covered with mud, fingers messy with blood carrying those old boots. I walked into the kitchen and found Mom in her bathrobe at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"What the hell are you traipsin' through my house like a creature from the black lagoon for?" she demanded. I placed the boots in the middle of the counter, as if a centerpiece.

"Get the grimy clothes off, young man! Don't make a mess! I'm having company over later on. Would you mind taking your sister out tonight?" she asked in one breath. "What the hell are those things anyways?" grabbing for the boots.

"You know damn well what"

"NO! NO!! I won't have them in my house!" She yanked open the window and reached for the blood-stained boots. I grabbed her arm with all the force in my body.

We struggled. "I don't want to see this disgusting blood anymore. I just don't want to have it here anymore. Let me go, Robbie! You're just like your damn father. If you hadn't been obsessed with this climbing business, he would have never started any of it!" She imitated a man's voice. "Listen to the mountain"

I gripped her harder, forcing her back into the window sill. She whimpered. She shrieked, "Do you hear me? Let me go, Robert. I am speaking to you. I am your MOTHER!"

I released her, shoving her against the wall. I slammed the door behind me on my way out.

Jenna rushed out behind me. "I'm leaving to walk to the library."

I looked at the load in her back pack—enough for a year's journey.

"It's a six-mile walk to the library," I said, swallowing tears. I offered to drive her.

"No, but, but, uh, you can, uh, come with me if you'd like." Her voice died on the last few words. Her sunken, watery eyes, that same amethyst color as Jacob's, begged me to come along.

"Give me five minutes. I'll get my things."

Lauren M. Wysocki
Brookfield, CT
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Mrs. Lieberman

Mrs. Lieberman is watering her geraniums. Her bony fingers clutch the watering can with one hand, while her other hand supports her against the bureau. She concentrates on her task. Mrs. L cares for her plants with love and affection. They are her only responsibility. Much of her time is spent under someone else's care.

I visit Mrs. Lieberman on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When I started my visits, they were a mere chore, time spent fulfilling a school service requirement. I began to value these visits because I saw how much Mrs. L enjoyed them. Today, while I ran around doing other things, I knew that Mrs. Lieberman was waiting patiently until four o'clock, listening for the sound of the key in the lock. All day she sits in her frayed lounge by the window, reading the large print novels she gets from the library at the home, sipping tea with lemon from a glass. She checks the kitchen clock more frequently after three o'clock. And then, I am there.

She greets me with a happy kiss at the door. "Nora, my sweet, you must give me your coat, it is so wet. Let me hang it." She drapes it lovingly over the back of a chair, stooping slightly from her arthritis. Sometimes she stops moving for a moment and winces in pain, and I wince too.

"You will have some tea, Nora, yes?" she asks. It is not a question. Mrs. Lieberman connects love with nourishment.

"Of course, Mrs. L."

"Nora, Nora. You and I, we are like old friends now. Lily. Say Lily." Lily is Mrs. L's first name. She is like a lily, fragile and pale. I smile.

"All right, Lily."

"So, that's better." She nods. "And how was school today, Nora? You were not so bored as before, this time, eh?" She carefully sets the teakettle on the burner.

"Well, you know, school is school, Lily. Not the most fascinating place in the world. But we started reading *Great Expectations* in English."

She frowns and looks at the ceiling. "This is a book by that Dickens, but I can not remember if I read it. It is not about a war in France, is it?"

"No, that's *A Tale of Two Cities*," I explain, "*Great Expectations* is about a poor boy who wants to be a gentleman. Then this secret benefactor starts sending him money."

"The person who sends the money, this is a criminal, yes?" I nod, and Mrs. L smiles. "Sometimes my mind is not so dull as you think, Nora."

"You, Lily?" I tease. "You are as sharp as a pin."

"Like a pin I am not. But not so dull as the lady down the hall—that Mrs. Fleischman." Mrs. Fleischman has Alzheimer's disease, I think. Whenever she meets Mrs. L walking in the garden, her nurse has to remind her who Mrs. L is.

Mrs. Lieberman motions towards the chair next to her lounge. "Sit down, Nora, sit down. You had said last time something about the school paper. How is that?"

"I'm writing an article for it. It's about the new teachers they hired this year. Pretty interesting article. Keeps me busy, though."

She smiles and squeezes my arm, gently but firmly "That is what I like to see in you, my Nora—you work hard. You must work very hard, Nora, and do things at school, like the newspaper and the poetry. Then you will learn much more, my Nora, and you will be so happy and proud of the good work you did. It makes me proud, too."

"When the newspaper is published, Lily, I'll bring you a copy so you can read it."

"This I would like, my child. But here the water is boiling, and you will make for us now, yes?" I get up, noticing that she leans back in her chair with painstaking slowness. I pour the hot water into the glasses, and the tea bags slowly turn liquid golden brown. Mrs. L likes hers with sugar and a squeeze of lemon.

"Ah, thank you, my Nora. This is good, not too sweet or

sour my tongue is going crazy. You make a good glass of tea."

Her flattery is embarrassing. "Lily, it's just a glass of tea, nothing special."

"Ah, Nora, there you are wrong." Mrs. L has a knowing look. "Not everyone can make a glass of tea so good. My grandmother, may she rest in peace, she could brew tea so good, it was delicious. But my mother, may she rest in peace, she was always in a hurry. Didn't let the tea mix with the water long enough. My mother made very weak tea." She takes another long sip, savoring it.

It is only from Mrs. Lieberman that learning about how to make good tea seems important. I listen carefully to her advice, because she is old and has seen and heard so much.

We finish our tea in silence. Mrs. Lieberman holds her glass in both hands, eyes closed. Her house dress is a faded floral print. She wears orthopedic shoes and pantyhose with a slight run. Her face is lined and cracked, the skin folded over her like flaps. Her hair is pure white, like cotton. She looks very peaceful resting there. I want to sit and look at her forever.

"Oh, Nora, Nora," she says, awakening with a start. "Just like me, this, to fall asleep with my tea when you are here to visit." She begins to get up. I help her, supporting her with one arm. "Ach, these old bones, my child, they wake up too slow for the rest of me," Mrs. Lieberman says, and laughs. I laugh with her.

It is five o'clock, and the rain has stopped. It is still light enough for a walk in the garden. We go down in the elevator, Mrs. L tying on her scarf, "Just for this rain, which my throat doesn't like so much." I wonder if she could go out when it's so damp, with her arthritis, but she seems so cheery about it that I figure, What's the harm? Anyway, Lily knows best.

The garden path goes in a circle among the bushes and a few scattered trees. We walk slowly, admiring the tiny beads of dampness on the shrubbery. I hold Mrs. L's hand, afraid she might slip on the wet ground. I like to hold her hand, too.

Mrs. Lieberman sniffs the air. "The feeling of the air, I like this more than anything else. It is so new, it is like something is going to happen. When my husband, may he rest in peace, proposed to me, this was just after a shower in the springtime."

I like to hear about Mrs. L's life when she was younger. On our walks she always tells me a story about her youth. "Tell me about when you were first married, Lily," I say.

"Oh, Nora," she says, laughing, even giggling. "This is many years ago, so many. I must think a little. Ah, yes, now I am remembering. We lived in a tiny apartment on East Ninth Street. Oh, was it cold there in the winter, Nora, there was no heat at all in the whole place. My dear husband, Sydney, he was studying to become a doctor. A doctor of children—a pediatrician. In the day he worked in his father's grocery store; in the night he went to city college. The poor man, always so busy, but he was determined to be a doctor. Many years later, after all that hard work, he was, too. And a good doctor." Her face beams with pride.

"What did you do, Lily?"

"Me, Nora, I also worked, to pay the rent. I worked in a florists' shop, making bunches of flowers. Oh, I can remember that wonderful smell, so good and fresh. It was wonderful to be surrounded by all those beautiful flowers." She frowns. "My boss, he was another story. Such a mean man, all he cared was to make money. The work I didn't usually mind so much, but on holidays, when we got so many extra orders, this man, he was too stingy to hire another girl. I had hardly the time to do one bunch, then I had another order shoved in my face. I went home so tired, and Sydney was so tired, and it was always like this, every day."

"Were you happy, Lily?" I ask.

"Oh, very, Nora, very happy. You see, my child, the little time Sydney and I had to spend together, it was very special. We loved each other very much. In the summertime, we often went up on the roof and tried to find some stars. Sometimes, we thought we saw a little pinprick of a star in the sky, and this made us feel that we were hopeful for our future."

Mrs. Lieberman and I are back at the door of our home. I feel happy for Mrs. L, that she has such a beautiful memory to think about. Going up in the elevator, I look at this fragile woman, and hope that when I am elderly I will have memories like hers.

Before I leave, Mrs. L shows me framed pictures of herself and Sydney, taken at their fifth anniversary. Hers is inscribed, 'Love, to my Lily, 1929.' She looks very pretty, wearing a floral print dress. Mr. L is a tall, thin man with glasses and a boyish smile.

I hate to leave her all alone like this. In the lobby I pass so many lonely people with no one to talk to. They look so frail and tiny.

Mrs. L pours the last drop of water into the geranium pot. Her arthritis is worse, and she seems a little weaker every time I come to visit her. I am afraid to even think what that means. I try hard to look cheerful when I see her.

"So, Nora," she says, sipping her tea. "Today, I have not so nice a story to tell you. But this story I think is important that you know."

I have a feeling I know what I am about to hear. Last time she finished by telling me about the vacation she and Sydney took in Florida after he retired.

Mrs. L speaks softly. "Sydney and I, we returned from Florida in September. He had not been feeling so good. Now, he went to see a doctor. He found out the cancer. I could not sleep. I would hear him pacing up and down in the hallway. We had so many plans—to go to the theater, to travel. Now, we wouldn't have the time.

I didn't like to visit him in the hospital, Nora. There was my husband with tubes all over, and so pale—to see this made me sick. You see, Nora, when you are married a long time, it seems like you and your husband are the same person sometimes. Here, in the hospital, it was as if I was dying with him."

I cannot concentrate on the story. I am so worried that Mrs. L is telling me this for a reason.

"When he was gone, Nora, I did very little with my time. Maybe sometimes I saw a friend. But part of me, it was gone too."

After a while Mrs. L gets up. "Now, I have something special to show you, my Nora." She edges over to the dresser and takes a small velvet box out of the top drawer.

"This, my Nora, this is my wedding ring."

It is very simple and beautiful, a delicate golden band with a tiny Lily etched onto it. The inscription reads, 'To my ever-blooming Lily, on our wedding day.' It gleams the way it did sixty-five years ago, but the finger that wears it is wrinkled and pale. "This is the most valuable thing I have, Nora." Her voice is touched with sadness.

When I leave her, Mrs. Lieberman is very distant. I feel uncomfortable, and tell the orderly in the hall. "Sometimes they get that way, honey," she tells me, indifferent. "Nothing to do about it."

Outside, I look up at Mrs. L's window. She is sitting in her chair, staring into space. The ring box is in her hand.

Mrs. Lieberman is dead.

One day I get a call. My mother goes with me to the funeral. She understands; her mother died before I was born. Lying in an open casket, Mrs. L looks like a wax figure. Someone has made her up. Just for the occasion, I think bitterly. With her red cheeks and white face, she looks like a clown.

The rabbi's sermon is short. He says things that could be said at any funeral. To everyone except me, Mrs. L is just a nameless person. I see Mrs. Fleischman, who I am sure doesn't even know the name of the person whose funeral she is at. Afterwards, the orderly I talked to taps me gently on the shoulder. She looks genuinely upset. I forgive her for her indifference. "Come upstairs, honey. She left some things for you."

Mrs. Lieberman's apartment is already being taken apart. All the furniture seems to belong to the home. Mrs. L had no relatives

to claim her few possessions. I am handed a cardboard box. Inside, there is a small photo album with pictures of Lily and Sydney. The anniversary photos are in here too. Sitting at the bottom of the box is Lily's wedding ring. There is a note folded inside.

My Dearest Nora,

You like memories, my child, so here is a box of them for you. I am happy when I write this, because I know there is someone I love who will remember me. She will grow up beautiful and be good at all she does. And I know she will remember me.

Take care of my memories, Nora.

The note is simply signed, 'Lily.'

That is when I start to cry.

Rebecca Hirschfield
New York, NY
Barbara Miller

Guest Room

*It was his house,
a part of me that I wasn't a part of,
weekends spent in the guest room,
pull-out couch
with knobs of texture
that hurt my face when I slept,
if I slept,
murmurs in the other room,
beeps from the answering machine
mom's angry voice, "Don't I matter to you any more?"
dad in there,
boxers on and hairy chest,
listening to the machine drone on,
then silent footsteps, his,
pad past the guest room,
the front door opens,
I can hear kisses hello sent into her mouth,
dad standing on the dark stone floor,
and welcoming her,
to take mom's place, her angry voice,
he whispers goodnight to me through the cracks
in the guest room door,
and closes his door, from me, for the night.*

Melissa Leaver
Pottersville, NJ

Safeway

*Is Kanab, Utah.
Post Office, doctor, Safeway, and men,
men that come from the black, black gravel pits
to spend half the paycheck on feeding a
Mormon family of six, seven, eight.
Carefully reading lists neatly prepared
by five-foot, three-inch wives, ambling
from Produce to Fresh Meat to Dried Goods.
Their skin is flecked with soot-looking rock,
absorbed by a full day's toil in a hole
scraped into the ground sixty years ago.
No Liquor Section here to drink up their pay,
just the relentless sun and crumbling home,
and me, the smiling manager of the Safeway.*

Paul Tuchmann.



Inward Power
Keri S. Salmieri
Westwood, NJ

The Klowns

I was walking down the street looking at everybody and I was happy. Happy, happy, happy. I was happy cause everybody looked like me & acted like me. I felt like I was surrounded by walking mirrors, all like me. BUT, then I saw somebody different, he didn't look like me & act like me. I didn't understand, no I didn't understand at all. So I got afraid. Afraid. Then I got mad. Real mad & I ran. Ran, ran, ran. & I called my best friend who looked just like me & I told him what I saw & he saw it too & he was afraid too. But he didn't say so, he said he was mad too. So we called everybody & everybody was mad & scared, but nobody said they were scared. So we decided to get together,

to gather in a group, to get this guy, cause we didn't know him & he wasn't like us so he couldn't be trusted. No, not at all. So we all covered ourselves in shrouds, so no one would know us & no one would know we were afraid. So we protected ourselves with costumes to hide from our shame. Like a child hiding under the bed after doing something wrong. We got guns & knives & fire & rope & we went to the guy's house & we were mad mad at our fear. So we broke in & grabbed him & beat him up & burned his house & hung him on a tree & he died. We thought we killed him, but we swore if we ever got scared, I mean mad, we'd get him again. We wouldn't let anybody get us. When the police came they said they needed a name for the guy. We asked everybody, but nobody knew.

Ken Rumble
Chevy Chase, MD
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
Peggy Pfeiffer

Speaking Italian

Robert De Niro speaking Italian, vein pulsing green in his forehead--oh man, he's cute and what control! In the movie version of my greatest adventure he plays Carlo and wears black leather overalls

with all the little zippers I love and we put on helmets like Romans and breeze off on his motorcycle--wow--blue sky all around us, nothing to cushion a fall, and I'm hanging on for dear life past fields of sunflowers

bent in rows. Soon, we sit above the ragged coast of Livorno, steep as our most desperate wishes for happiness; Robert as Carlo is teaching me to see: the way he works his jaw, squint of his glittering eyes as he brings the cigarette butt

to his lips for the last grey mouthful of smoke. He nods at the world we both entered alone. "Bello, no?" The red rocks are split open, the sun is a handsome man and I can't believe my good fortune to be in love, to be loved; stealing back this day from anxiety and death.

Carolyn Davis
Newyork, NY
Jane L. Rinden

Saul thought he remembered a time when things had been simpler. When all was good or suddenly swiftly all bad. But the bad faded in his mind as distance grew (sixteen years of miles) and mists enclosed his memories. Almost gone. Sometimes, lying in bed (swinging laughing) he would tighten-up (only only only) and wonder why (me me me) he wanted to cry.

And as suddenly as it had come, the feeling would disappear and be forgotten. He would roll over and shut the upsetting thoughts away where he could not reach them, and sleep.

Groggy, Saul groped for the alarm clock and slammed the snooze button to kill the throbbing beeping. One long leg, independently, swung over the side of the bed. The other decided to follow. The torso rose, the head fell forward. He stood and stumbled to the bathroom. Twenty minutes later, dressed, morning ritual complete, he leaned through the kitchen doorway.

"Hey, Joe."

Jonah looked up from his Rice Krispies, tousled brown bangs shielding freckles and mischievously squinting eyes. He smiled, his eyes crinkling even more. "Guess what!"

"What?"

"I finished my transportation project. I'm handing it in today."

"I left some Rice Krispies for you."

"Thanks." He made his breakfast as Jonah chattered about his project.

Their mother fell into the kitchen. "Too bright!" she groaned, eyes closed, shutting off the light. "Guh mornig." She flopped into a chair, robe flapping. "Too early. Why do they make morning so early?"

Jonah laughed.

"Mom, did I tell you about my Soc. test?" Saul paused in gulping his cereal. "I got a 94."

"Great." She squinted. "Hi, Jone. What are you doing today?"

"I'm handing in my 'future car.'"

"Oh, wonderful! You worked so hard on that. You deserve an A plus. Do you want me to drive you to school?"

The spoon attacked the Rice Krispies, squashing them, splashing milk.

"Saul! Watch how you're eating!" His mother sighed. "Oh, well, clean it up."

"Sorry," he mumbled. "Gotta go."

He escaped, grabbing his bag, out the door.

"Saul!"

"I'll miss the bus," he called, half-lying.

Shut the door.

Opened the door.

"Anyone here?" Saul threw his bag in the corner.

Jonah was reading *The Rats of N.I.M.H.* on the living room couch. "Mom's working late. Dad's having dinner with a client. No, I don't have homework. No, there is no food in the house. It's a conspiracy. Mom and Dad are not allowing us to eat."

"Well I do have homework," Saul said, "but when I'm done, want to go out for pizza or something?"

Jonah raised one eyebrow, a skill he'd been perfecting for three years. "You want to walk two miles into town?"

"No, I'll drive."

"I think you're forgetting something. You don't have a license."

"Well, I've had my permit for months. I can drive."

"I don't think that's legal," Jonah drawled.

"Don't be stupid!" Saul rolled his eyes.

"Fine, I'll go, but it's your driving future on the line. If we're arrested, I thought you were eighteen." Jonah went back to his book.

Saul snorted.

They left just after seven, borrowing the extra set of car keys from their mother's dresser.

"Ray's or Domino's?" Saul asked.

"Is there a difference?"

"Ray's got better pizza, Domino's is closer and cheaper."

"Ray's."

"Figures."

It was already dark, and the roads were nearly empty.

"See, I can drive."

"Good," Jonah squeaked. "Just--could you maybe drive oh-so-very-well just a little slower? There may be no cars to crash into, but there are some very unfriendly-looking trees."

"Scared?" Saul stepped on the gas (show him). He started to swerve, purposely, little curves at first, then zigzagging back and forth across the road. He felt his adrenalin pumping.

"Saul?" Jonah's voice was shaking.

Saul stepped on the gas harder, pushing away his brother's voice. He narrowly avoided an illegally parked car.

"Saul, please stop doing that!"

The world was swerving from side to side, rushing past (brat) in a jagged blur.

"Saul!!!!!"

Saul let up on the gas and drove straight, breathing hard.

"Saul, why did you do that?" Jonah was near tears. "Why wouldn't you stop?"

Why had he done it? They could have crashed, been killed, or at least gotten in serious trouble with their parents. Stupid! What had possessed him?

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

"Don't do it anymore." They drove in silence the rest of the way.

Dinner was awkward and greasy, and they were back in the car before seven-thirty.

"Listen, Jone," Saul finally said. "I'm sorry about before."

"It's okay."

"Well, let's do something fun, okay?"

"What?"

"I don't know. What do you want to do?"

"Ice-skating?"

"The rink closed last week. We could play miniature golf?"

"NO. How about a movie?"

"I don't have enough money. You want to just drive around and see if we think of something?"

Jonah agreed, and they drove back towards their house.

"I know," Saul turned to Jonah.

"WATCH THE ROAD!"

He watched the road. "Do you want to go to the park?"

"It's dark."

"I know it's dark. It'd be fun."

"Let's go wild and crazy!"

The gate of the park was closed and they climbed over the fence.

"I feel so--criminal!" Jonah whispered.

"The evil Balin brothers strike once again!" Saul breathed. "Their target this time--a deserted park. They entered at night and made off with all of the playground equipment. They are armed and dangerous and wanted--dead or alive!" Jonah laughed.

"Let's play on it before we steal it at least!"

"Race ya!"

They ran, Saul's long legs putting him way ahead of his brother. Momentarily, he considered letting Jonah win, but the rush of competition was too much and he reached the dark steel monkey bars long before Jonah did. He clambered up to the top and gloated. Gasping, Jonah climbed up and sat next to him.

"You know, for monkey bars, these are pretty high," he noted.

They looked down at the blacktop through the bars.

continued on page 46

continued from page 45

"Yeah, they should have sand or something in case a little kid slips."

"So," Jonah swung his legs. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Life, love, the meaning of the universe."

"Oh, okay. The answer is forty-nine."

"Huh?"

"Remember that book you gave me? The one by Douglas Adams with the cool cover? It said so. The meaning of the universe is forty-nine. You just have to figure out the question."

"Oh." They sat. "Seven times seven."

The dark became less dark, more grey, slowly fading until only translucent orange eyelids separated him from the light. Saul opened his eyes. Everything was white. Disconcerted, he looked around (heavendead?) and saw metal bars on the side of the bed he lay on, a closed white door, a white curtain at a window, various medical paraphernalia. A hospital. What had happened? Was he seriously hurt? He tried to move his toes. They wiggled. Relief pounded his heart. He couldn't find any pain.

The door opened, and a crisply starched and bleached nurse walked in. She started. "Well, I see we've woken up! I'll be right back!"

She returned a few seconds later behind his parents and a doctor.

His mother rushed to his side, crouched by the bed. His father stood slightly behind her. She was different, he saw at once, but he didn't know if the difference was in her or in him. But when he looked in her eyes, behind the tears and the love he saw distance, emptiness. She was here, but she was far, far away.

"Saul, honey," she whispered. "Oh, God, I'm so sorry."

"What?" Her voice, more than her words, tensed every muscle in his body. "What is it?"

"You don't remember?" She turned to his father. "Oh, God."

His father, so tall, seemed shrunken. His eyes were red and his mouth trembled. He stepped forward, took Saul's hand. "Saul." He swallowed. "There's been--an--accident."

"What do you mean? Am I all right?"

"Yes!" his mother exclaimed. "I mean, physically, the doctors couldn't find anything wrong, you just wouldn't wake up after..." her voice died away.

"What? WHAT HAPPENED?!!!" He squeezed his father's hand.

"Jonah--Saul--" his father stopped, pressed his lips together.

Saul felt his heart clench. "What happened to Jonah?"

His mother began to shake. "Saul, he's--dead." She wouldn't look him in the eye. She stared down at the metal railings, then covered her face with her hands. His father looked at him, his eyes exhausted.

"But--we were sitting there--talking, and then I woke up just now. He can't be dead!"

The doctor came towards him from the doorway where he had been standing. "Selective amnesia is fairly common," he said. "After a trauma, many people block out memories that are too painful for them to remember. Usually their memories return fairly soon. Sometimes they don't."

"But--I can't remember!" Saul cried.

"Honey--" his mother touched his shoulder. "Shhh. It's okay."

"Why won't someone tell me what happened?!!!"

His mother looked at the doctor.

"Tell him. It might help prod his memory."

"Saul, we don't know exactly what happened. Last night you ran into the emergency ward of the hospital, carrying Jonah. The nurses took him from you and you collapsed. Jonah was already--" she broke off, swallowing hard.

His father took over. "He was dead when you arrived. Saul.

His skull was fractured."

"How--"

"We don't know. We assume he must have tripped and hit his head on the floor or a table. Or maybe he fell down the stairs."

"There were bruises that support the fall hypothesis," the doctor interjected. His eyes were compassionate. "Unfortunately, it is a very common cause of death."

"But--" Saul felt his face turning inside out and spinning, dizzily. His body shook.

"Shhh, honey," his mother whispered, smoothing his hair. "It's alright, shhh, sleep." But her voice was automatic, monotone, and she stared over his head into space.

Saul sat on his bed, quiet, self-contained. He was going back to school the next day, the first time since--it was three weeks after it had happened. Three weeks A.J. After Jonah. The way time would be measured from now on.

He spoke little to his parents. They were too tightly inside their own grief to reach out for him in more than a token gesture, and he had no energy to reach for them. Nor interest. He had no interest in anything.

He ate almost nothing. He had spent the days since the funeral sitting, not-crying. Concentrating his energy on keeping his throat from choking, his eyes from tearing. Sitting on his bed, not-crying, and thinking about Jonah. Remembering.

Jonah was born two weeks before Saul's fifth birthday. Until then Saul was an only child, and now he was only half of the Balin children (not anymore). He hadn't wanted them to bring Jonah home from the hospital. He had cried when they told him the baby was coming home. Before then he had been an idea, a bump on his mother's tummy. Now he was coming to take up room and make noise and to take away Saul's parents.

"But don't you want Mommy to come home?" his grandmother had coaxed.

"Yes," he had sobbed. "But I don't want her to bring it with her."

But she had brought it anyway, carried Jonah in a tiny blue blanket proudly in her arms and up the walkway of their house, beside his father. Their father.

"Hi, Saul," she'd said. "Look at your baby brother. Isn't he beautiful?" He had looked, and blue eyes looked up at him, and tiny perfect dimples.

"Now you're a big brother," his father had announced.

A Big Brother (was).

And they brought Jonah inside.

Saul couldn't make noise anymore. The baby was sleeping. Sometimes he couldn't come into his mother's room. The baby was nursing.

He woke up in the middle of the night. The baby was crying.

He ran to his mother to kiss his booboo, or to his father to wrestle. But the baby was burping, or eating, or choking, or breathing fast.

Sometimes they let him hold the baby on his lap. Then his mommy would stand on one side and his daddy would stand on the other side. And they would coo at the baby, and tell him to hold the baby's head up. Then they would take pictures. And his father would say look what a big boy Saul is. And his mother would say look how nicely he holds his brother. And she would kiss his forehead.

He began to ask to hold the baby more often.

His parents were proud of how mature he was. How accepting of the baby. How caring. How paternal. They would tell their friends how well he helped with the baby, Jonah.

Jonah grew. Look how big he's getting, they all said. I'm bigger, said Saul, but no one heard.

Jonah started to walk. His father whipped out the video

continued on page 47

camera and taped each stumbling step. Saul ran back and forth across the living room in front of the camera. See, I can run, he shouted, and I don't fall. Move out of the way, they said. You're blocking the baby.

Jonah talked. Mama, he said. Dada. They applauded, and hugged him, and kissed him. Elephant, said Saul. Dictionary, lamb chop, medicine, dinosaur, giraffe. Shhhh, they said. you'll wake the baby.

Elephant, he told the baby. Elephant elephant elephant! Efin, said Jonah. And their parents came and laughed and taped them and made a movie of the talking Balin brothers.

So Saul taught Jonah more words.

Saul stretched. He yawned. He didn't cry. He had taught Jonah word after word, until Jonah knew as many words as he did. Then Jonah learned more. Saul had taught him how to run, too, but Saul still ran faster. Always would. His heart ached wishing he had let Jonah win that last race. But he couldn't bear to let Jonah win again.

Images flashed through his mind. Jonah being petted by the relatives. Jonah and the little girl next door discussing marriage when they were three. Jonah going to school, making friends with all the kindergartners, coming home and telling their mommy every little thing.

Saul sitting and listening and not mentioning that Roy Thompson had made fun of him again.

Saul and Jonah sitting in their favorite tree that Saul taught Jonah how to climb. Swimming at the beach, laughing splashing each other. Jonah could swim when he was four. Sledding behind their house on snow days. Reading in the kitchen together with their feet on the table until their parents came in.

Jonah reading the same books Saul read. Jonah falling out of the tree and breaking his arm. Saul splashing Jonah until Jonah yelled to stop and splashing him anyway and splashing until their mother came and yelled. Saul pushing Jonah's sled and Jonah shouting too fast as he plowed into a snowdrift.

Jonah was accident-prone, always had been. As his parents proudly admitted, his one fault. A fault that had caused his death.

Why couldn't Saul remember that one accident? He remembered everything else, every freckle that appeared in the summer, every time they shared a Chapstick in the winter.

He squeezed his pillow, concentrating very very hard on not crying.

The teacher droned on, squawking gibberish pi data cosine logarithm six. Saul propped his head on his hand, elbow resting on the tiny formica desk, struggling to keep his eyes open.

Four weeks A.J.

All the kids talked to him gingerly, first apologizing over and over as if they had had something to do with it, until he couldn't take any more I'm sorry's. Some let curiosity take over, "Did you really forget the whole thing?" and he muttered yesses until they left him alone.

His friends were trying to act normal now, but they were having as much trouble as he was.

He felt dizzy. The world was wavy like air over hot pavement. His eyes unfocussed. He heard the teacher: "The square root of x to the y..." Why. He heard it again, again. He closed his eyes, struggling to balance in his chair.

Something twisted in the darkness of his eyelids. A figure. He tried to focus his inner eye. He saw darkness, but a night darkness, not a closed-eye darkness. There were stars. They were watching, glaring.

He was sitting--standing, somewhere...he was moving, jumping, falling, bending, screaming....

"Saul?! Oh my God, somebody call the nurse nine-one-one does anyone know CPR what happened?!"

"The meaning of the universe is forty-nine," said Jonah. "You just have to figure out the question."

"Oh." They sat. "Seven times seven."

"Ha. Ho."

"Fine. It wasn't supposed to be funny, anyway." Saul stood, crouched on the metal bars, hand resting lightly on one in front of him.

"It succeeded." Jonah crouched also, a small black silhouette against the navy sky, studded with stars invisible in the bright lights near their house.

Saul rose, balancing on two fine steel bars, shifting his weight until he stood firmly. "Thanks."

Jonah stood, unsteadily, across from him.

"Be careful," Saul warned.

Jonah growled playfully, cautiously assumed a fighting stance. "De great Jonah 'Meateater' Balin can beat de wimpy Saul 'Tofu' Balin wif both hands and feet tied over his head." He reached for Saul, grabbed his arms.

"Hey," Saul teetered, momentarily unbalanced, leaned forward.

They hung for an infinite second, both pushing, both wobbling on the thread-thin invisible dark steel bars. They pushed against each other to regain balance.

Saul felt his stomach churn, but it calmed with a rush of adrenalin as he shifted his weight. His head lightened and he was not there he was outside himself he did not feel the tension in his arms in his legs the infinitesimally quick rage that burned, flickered, went out in his brain as he balanced yet kept pushing.

He wanted Jonah to tumble, to scratch his arms, knees, to cry and admit that his big brother was stronger superior to get up be humble and quiet and sit in the back of the car.

He let go. Jonah tumbled, backward, hitting his head on the bars as he fell. His short cry cut off, abruptly, and he lay on the ground, a tiny crumpled ball of little baby brother.

Nausea assaulted him. Saul wavered again, wanted to fall, did not want to see his brother. Rewind, hold on sit down and smile. The world did not rewind, stayed as it was. He did not fall. He dropped to the ground, bent over his brother. In a trance he did not think thought nothing not happening not here dreaming he felt for a pulse. He did not know if it was a heartbeat he felt or the wish of a fevered desperate imagination.

A howl, silent, primeval, to listening stars just a whimper, limped from his throat. He picked up his brother, ran, lugged him, gently sat him in the front seat. Buckled him in. He could not prevent his head from lolling down, to the right. A thin line of red drool hung from one pale lip.

Saul ran around, jumped in the car, drove dazed to the hospital. Carried his brother in through the doors. White bright light surrounded him, carried him in, he collapsed as they took Jonah from his arms.

Saul sat at his desk. Two bottles of Tylenol sat on his desk. A small yellow piece of paper lay under his hand. He held a pen. It shook. He had no energy to write. Relief prompted him. Write, it said. The sooner you write, the sooner it will be over. He did not know what to write.

I'm sorry, he wrote, very small.

I love you, he wrote under it, even smaller.

He bit his lip. It bled.

He looked at the Tylenol. He looked at the note.

Very carefully, he folded it in half. He folded it in half again. And again. Again, until it was too small to fold anymore.

He opened his desk drawer, pulled it all the way out. In the far left corner, under papers and pencils and stamps, he placed the note. He closed the drawer.

He picked up the bottles of Tylenol. He stared at them in his hands for a very long time. He stood up and walked to the bathroom. Opened the medicine closet. Put the bottles on the shelf. Closed the door.

He shook. He walked back to his room. He lay on his bed. He curled into himself, wishing himself back into babyhood. He cried.

Laura A. Siegel
Great Neck, NY
Great Neck South Senior High School
Dr. Lorraine Banka

Untitled

I met Bruno at a party. He was sitting in one corner, wearing a heavy black leather jacket like a shield. He had magenta lipstick on.

I asked Caarla if she knew who he was. It was her party, but that didn't really mean anything. "I don't quite know if I know," she said. "Ask me in the morning." When she drifted by me a few minutes later, she asked "Why did you want to know anyway?"

"I like his lipstick," I said. "I wanted to ask him what type it was."

"You don't wear lipstick," Caarla said. "It would look stupid on you."

"I like the color, o.k.?"

"No," she said. "Stay away from him." She tossed me a tipsy smile as she left.

I tried to stroll across the room like I wasn't the only person there wearing patent leather flats and stockings. I went over to where my sister's friend Marlene was pouring drinks out of my father's mahogany bar. I knew it was o.k.--he'd never know he hadn't drunk it all himself. Marlene wriggled her eyebrows at me and said, "Hey, aren't you Caarla's kid sister? Well, kid, welcome to the real world." She threw her arm out like a tour guide and poured some liquid into a glass. "Here you go now kid." She filled another glass carelessly. "Be a doll, will you, and take this over to Bruno there. Tell him it's love and kisses from Marlene. X's and O's, you know?"

I looked over at the guy with the black leather jacket and the hot pink lipstick. Bruno. He was still sitting there and he looked bored. I pictured myself sidling over to him like the girls in Mummy's Hollywood books. "Hi honey, watcha doin' there all by your lonesome"--her sleek curves writhing like a lioness in heat as he whistles under his breath and mutters (in a low husky voice) "Hey sugar, where have you been all my life," and then I saw between me and Bruno the slick stretch of linoleum that Caarla had greased down.

"Why? For the hell of it," she had said earlier as I was helping her set up. "Look, are you sure you don't want to stay at Lizzie's house?"

"No," I said. I didn't want to stay at Lizzie's house. Lizzie's mother would ask where my parents were, and make tsk tsk noises when she found out they were in Hawaii, Jamaica, wherever they were, without us. "Your mother doesn't worry about you two girls in the house by yourselves? Well." And Lizzie always talked about boys a lot, but she kept saying how she thought my sister was a bit of a slut. ("I know I shouldn't say this but if you knew what they said about your sister....") I didn't care what Lizzie or anyone else said about Caarla. Teachers always gave a little twitch of surprise, oh my you wouldn't be related to Charlotte Ganz, now would you? but got over it rather quickly once I started getting A's. Of all Caarla's friends, only Marlene acknowledged that we were sisters.

"Hey," Marlene said, poking me a little in the side. "Bruno. He's over there. Just slide on over, baby." I looked at the linoleum again and thought of me carrying the two drinks, of my patent leather flats that were as slippery as the floor, and of me falling. I could imagine the drinks flying over my shoulders in smooth arcs and the glass smashing (no, they were plastic), and me moving in a counterpoint arc formed through the air and landing smack on the slick floor; sliding with my legs stuck up in the air like uprooted trees towards Bruno. My skirt would fly up, and I would be lying there for all the world to see in my white cotton underwear and the black garter belt I had stolen from Caarla's drawer when she told me about the party. She couldn't complain that I'd stolen it, if she noticed, because then Mum would have to know she owned it and Mum preferred to go to bed early and not know about that sort of thing.

"What is it?" I asked Marlene, pointing at the glass destined for Bruno.

"Sex on the Beach."

"Sex on the Beach?" I could do that with Marlene.

"Vodka, peach schnapps, and a little grapefruit juice," she

said, and smiled at me.

"Mine too?" I asked.

"You're here, aren't you?" she said, looking away.

I took four very cautious small steps over the beige basement rug towards the linoleum. Behind me, on the orange and brown couches Mum had finally succeeded in replacing upstairs, there were couples entwined, their limbs lost in each other. In front of me was the greasy brown linoleum, and in the far corner, slouched in a matching orange and brown chair, was Bruno. At the edge of the linoleum, I gently slipped my feet out of the patent shoes and left them there, admiring my ankles for a minute. I wondered what Bruno would think of my ankles. Mum told me they were my best feature once, but I couldn't understand what made ankles nice ankles, just like I couldn't understand what made legs nice legs. Mum was always telling Caarla that she ought to do something about her legs. What do you do about legs, besides shave them? I tried to imagine Bruno looking up at me, brushing his hair out of his face and saying, "Who are you? You have beautiful ankles." but it didn't work.

I took small sideways duck steps along the edge of the linoleum, leaning against the wall for balance. When I got past the wall, I edged over into the unfinished section of the basement, and put the drinks down on a stool. Standing in the shadow there, out of sight, I smelt something that smelt like when my dad was burning leaves outside, and the rope from the old swing had accidentally caught on fire. I felt dizzy, sort of a slow muddled feeling, as if everything had suddenly been changed to a watercolor painting, and I was the only solid thing in it. I grabbed onto one of the pillars and leaned back against it. I looked at Bruno, still slouched over in his chair with his hair slouched over his face, and his lipstick a slash of color in the darkening room, and I reached over and picked up one of the plastic cups on the stool. I gulped it down very quickly, too quickly to really taste anything, but still I said to myself, as a warmth rose from my stomach and settled on my cheeks, Sex on the Beach. I like Sex on the Beach. I like Sex on the Beach. I unbuttoned the top two buttons on my boat neck dress and folded the fabric underneath so that it looked like a V-neck. Sex on the Beach, I said.

Then I picked up the other cup, and I walked back onto the linoleum and over towards Bruno. It didn't seem as slippery anymore, although I still took very careful steps. I walked as slowly as I could, but I still got to Bruno too quickly. I wanted to have him see me take long languorous steps; I wanted to see him gleaming with anticipation. Instead, I got over to him and sat down next to the low sagging chair, awkwardly folding my knees beneath me. It was like folding a sheet with fitted corners--they never fold perfectly. I reached up and handed him the drink.

"I brought this over for you," I said, thinking of my shoes over on the opposite corner of the linoleum and how far away they were. I didn't say anything about Marlene because she was over on one of the old couches with Carlo Divini.

He took it and took a small sip. "What is this?" he asked. "Do you know?" I blushed a little.

"Sex on the Beach."

"Oh yeah," he said. He put down the drink on the arm of the chair, and then moved it to the floor when it wouldn't stay on the chair. He looked down and brushed a lock of hair out of his face. "Who are you?" he asked. He reached down and brushed my bangs out of my eyes.

"Megan," I said. "Caarla's sister." I had thought of lying to him. I knew he was new to our school, new enough that he wouldn't know who I was, and Caarla had a lot of friends. Not all of them went to Toughlin School either, so I could have been anyone, but something in the way he brushed my bangs back made me want to tell him the truth. Maybe that's not it. Maybe I was just afraid to lie the way Caarla would have. That was probably why.

He looked at me again, biting his lip slightly. "There isn't much resemblance." I shrugged a little.

"I know."

"You're prettier," he said. He brushed his hair away from his eyes again, and I could see them for a second until he looked away.

"You have one green eye and one blue eye," I said.

"In certain kinds of light, yeah." The burnt rope smell was getting stronger, and I leaned my head back against his knee while he rested his hand on top of my head.

"That's cool," I said.

"Thanks," he said. His voice sounded soft and very far-away and the room started to bleed into watercolors again. I closed my eyes for a minute.

"Why did you bring me that drink?" he asked me.

"Marlene asked me to."

"Oh." A sort of lassitude seemed to cover us both.

"Why are you over here all alone?" I asked.

"Because I don't want to be over there." He pointed.

"You don't like them?"

"Not especially. They're the best there is in this place." I waited for a minute and considered him, the jacket, the blue and green eyes, the lipstick.

"Actually," I said, "I didn't just come over here because of Marlene."

"Uhuh?"

"I just wanted to know, what kind of lipstick is that? I like the color."

"It's just this cheap ninety-nine cent shit they sell at the drugstore." He examined me for a minute--looked down at my face, and then said, "You don't want to know why I'm wearing it?"

I looked at him for a long time, at the tilt of his lips and his hair flopping into his face, and the way he pulled his jacket tight around him like a shield from the way Marlene and Caarla looked at him. "No," I said. "That's not important." He reached back and pulled something out of his pocket.

"Here," he said, peering at it in the dim light. "Cherry Bomb, by Your Best Look." He handed it to me, and I took it and wrapped my fingers around it. "For your best look." I suddenly felt like I didn't need to say anything anymore. I eased my head back against his knee again and closed my eyes.

I lay there, curled against his leg, for a long time. I was half awake, conscious of his hand tracing circles in my hair. I woke up briefly when he picked me up in his arms the way you would carry a baby, and began to carry me upstairs.

"No," I protested sleepily. "No one is allowed to go upstairs. Caarla said."

"Ssh," he whispered. "Just tell me where your room is."

"Up there, to the right. That door. Right." He very gently put me down on the bed and undressed me. He put one of my old nighties on me and tucked me in. At first he just sat by my side, humming softly and stroking my cheek, and then a few minutes later, he slid in under the covers with me and wrapped my arms around him so that I held him like a teddy bear.

When I woke up the next morning, the sun was flooding my room. It stripped the room and showed the dust floating through the air, the cracks in the heads of the china dolls on the mantle, and Caarla standing over me. I stretched out a little bit, closed my eyes and pretended she wasn't there. Slowly I became conscious of the empty space next to me--the lack as heavy as a presence. "Where's Bruno?" I asked.

"I don't know," Caarla said sullenly. "The last I saw of him last night he was carrying you upstairs after you fell asleep all over him."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "When did he leave?"

Caarla looked at me, a slow measuring look. "You slept with him?" she asked, her voice growing higher and reedier.

I stared back at her for a long empty moment. "Yeah," I said. Looking up at her, I decided that she couldn't possibly understand the truth. "Yeah, I slept with him."

Suddenly I realized that my left hand was clenched around something--had been since I woke up. I opened it slowly, and walked over to the mirror on top of my dresser, still wearing my long floral nightie. In front of my mirror, I opened my hand the

rest of the way and carefully put on a light coat of magenta lipstick. Caarla paused in the door on her way out.

"You really slept with him?"

I nodded.

"Look. Are you o.k.--you know?" I turned to face her and smiled my magenta smile. "I'm fine Carl."

"O.K." She turned around one more time. "You know, that color actually looks kind of good on you."

Mari Shopsis
Hunter College High School
Bronx, NY
Mr. Zegers

Incident

Four o'clock rush hour squeezes onto the subway, smelling of office sweat and tourists' feet. From your vantage point near the door, everything seems normal at first glance: infant-toting women, lawyers in pinstripes, an interesting-looking person here or there. It looks the same as any other packed metro with people armpit to armpit, silent with tiresome waiting, except for the couple by the door.

They both wear backpacks and hold packages. She is fat-tish with glasses; he is large, slightly stooped over and not clean-shaven. They are the only onestalking, babbling like drunk children, giggling incoherencies to one another. You look up from the swaying ground and notice her unfocused eyes, uffish grin, and shrill laughter going from low ha's to high hee's. Grinning back in the same uncoordinated way, he cups her chin in his hand and mutters something that you don't quite catch. She slaps him and laughs again. Couriers, they are, letter-bearers, you think to yourself; they are not normal. All the other commuters are packed together, but a ring of space surrounds them. Just like on TV--these are retarded citizens. But it's good that they are doing something useful--letter carrying. They continue to tease each other, calling each other names and cursing cheerfully like first-graders playing with bad words. Don't stare--you look around and see these people turn their heads to one side, thinking inwards, or are they listening also? He puts his big hand over her mouth and she puffs and puffs, face turning red. She squeals and he lets her go, then goes back to giggling and slapping. You want to turn around, bury your eyes in the neck of the person next to you, but you keep staring, wondering if she was really choking or just pretending. Don't stare--there's nothing appalling about the disabled. They can take care of themselves. Silently, you wish they would stop it. Everyone shifts their feet; some people frown. He gags her again--why we're in public--she squeals. You are not the only one staring now. He has her by the neck, his unfocused eyes unchanged, uffish grin intact. She screams and tries to bite his hand. They topple to the floor.

Cries of "What the hell are you trying to do to her?" enter the slurred dialogue. Suddenly a university student and several others are upon him, prying him away. You step back into the wall. He is not angry, just disoriented. She seems to remember nothing. And soon he is at it again, only fiercer on her face and neck. Her glasses pop off and are lost among feet. Exclamations shock the air. You cannot move. This isn't television. You step off quickly when the metro door opens, even if it isn't your stop. You stand there, on the dank platform, watching blurred figures jostle you out of sight. Her huff-puff screams reach you through the air as you wait, a bystander, finding it easier to wait for the next train.

Guang-Shing Cheng
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Carol K. Blum

"I hate you and I love you. You ask how this is possible? I do not know, but I realize it to be so, and I am tormented."

-Catullus

There is a time in each of our lives; a time in early childhood, when we are disciples of parents. We are their most devoted followers; their most unquestioning believers. And it is in this stage of Mommyism or Daddianity that we first come to know love: blind love, unconditional idolatry. If you've ever watched young children at play, you'll notice they have a certain unique method of glorifying themselves:

"My daddy's bigger than your daddy. He could beat him up."

"Oh yeah, well my daddy is a big truck and he'd just run him over."

Vicious though this bantering can be, it reflects the pride we have in our parents at that age, and the belief that they are both infallible and invincible. And we love them simply because they are our parents.

My father taught me to read and write. He spent countless hours at the kitchen table with me, guiding my chubby hand, making sure I crossed my t's and didn't confuse my b with d. But he never made it seem like a task. He would tantalize me; reading almost all of a story--leaving the princess about to be locked away in a tower forever, or the knight about to be crushed in the jaws of some fearsome beast--he would leave me bursting with anticipation:

"Does he die Daddy? Does it get him?" I'd cry.

"Here, why don't you finish it?" he'd say. "Read it out loud."

And so I learned.

He was also an incredible story teller. The rise and fall of his voice would draw me into another world entirely. Story time, the allotted half-hour before bed time, frequently stretched late into the night, as a result of his eagerness to finish 'just one more chapter' or my incessant pleading "just one more Daddy, just one more!" And when that "just one more" was finished, or more likely, when the entire book had been read, he would swoop me up and tickle me and tuck me in, head still swirling with giggles and goblins.

Most fondly, I remember Christmas. Every year, I received breathtaking letters from Santa Claus. They were at least ten pages long, written on thick parchment in a smooth, flowing hand, and illustrated on the sides; delicate drawings of sleighs, bells, mistletoe--even a dragon once. In these letters, Santa always seemed to know the tiniest details of my escapades. (This was doubtless a way to insure my good behavior over the holiday season.) And in every letter there was a story; some magnificent story about Christmas. One year, the great quartz demons attacked Aurora Shire (Santa's North Pole residence) and were warded off by the brave but tiny elves. Another year, the Ancient Book of Christmas had been stolen by the evil Grif-fins, who sought to destroy all things which brought joy, and had to be recovered by the two youngest gnomes. Even when I began to suspect that there was no Santa Claus, I never let on, for fear the letters would stop.

I have always been grateful that he kept the childish hope alive in me. Although now I always feel somewhat sacreligious when he asks for my help in writing letters for my seven-year-old siblings, Peter and Mollie. He takes such care and pride in these letters, and I know he delights in watching their surprise when they find that they know just how well Santa is doing in school, what high score Peter has obtained in Tetris, and how many people Mollie has kicked lately.

They love him as innocently as I did once, just watch them. My father will walk in the door, and four huge blue eyes glint; little faces flush, and they pounce on him with a war cry of "Daddy," wrapping themselves around legs or waist of any oth-

er available extremity--jubilant, forty-pound tourniquets. I see my past in them so clearly, and I envy their untainted delight in him.

As an adolescent, I fit every behavioral stereotypoe in existence. (I fervently denied it then.) I became infallible and invincible; I took every action of my parents as an affront; a subversive attempt to quash this "new me" I was discovering. My father was overbearing by nature: a perfectionist at best, and a nit picker at worst. I was simply stubborn. As a result sitting down to dinner with my father and me was like picnicking on the West Bank--unpredictable and explosive. But this time was marked by more than typical parent-adolescent fighting. Through the years I was not completely oblivious to what was happening around me. My parents' marriage was rapidly decaying, my older brother withdrew and for the most part, isolated himself, and my father became increasingly violent and irrational.

He had always been hot-tempered; anything could set him off: a messy room, an odd complaint, an A Minus on a paper, even an askew glance across the room. But it was frightening because you could actually see him snap. He was like a puppeteer, instantly changing masks: a certain grimace would carve itself into his face, and you knew all hell would break loose. If he had originally been in a good mood, then he would only yell. But that in itself was enough, that edged electric voice--he is an actor. When that voice, trained to project to the highest balcony seats, knives through you, it reverberates inside until your very skin is shaken loose. However, if he were in a bad mood, anything was possible. He could just as soon hit you as hug you, and you never knew why.

The two years leading up to my parents' divorce were particularly volatile. Most difficult for me, I think, in several ways: I was his first child--my older brother and sister were his from a previous marriage--and so I was the only child who had developed a strong and loving relationship with him. And I was very confused--it was difficult for me to piece together the two sides of this man: his extraordinary tenderness and his sudden, irrational violence. And as my parents fought more and more, I found myself grappling with these mismatched puzzle pieces.

At first I tried to block out as much as possible, hiding under the bed covers, singing softly to myself, as if my frail voice could drown out the maelstrom downstairs. I tried to defend his behavior to myself and to anyone who would listen, in a desperate attempt to somehow protect the honor of this man, who loved me, and who tried to give me all he knew. Even when I was the victim, I defended him. When I was knocked to the floor for leaving the room to get a book for my brother, I convinced myself that it was my fault. I had done something wrong. But even if you clamp your hands over your ears, muffled shouts will still seep through. You cannot help but weep, as I did, at the double staccato crack of a face and a wine glass slipping from your mother's trembling fingers to shatter on the floor. You cannot help but ache, to see your sister black and blue from mid-back to mid-thigh. You cannot but cry out, as I did, when this man half-strangles your brother by the kitchen door. Even when this man has loved you more fiercely than life itself. And I let myself watch what was going on around me, and to me, I made no more excuses for me.

It was then that I knew that I had to get away from him; to escape his oppressive and terrifying presence in my life. I truly hated him. I hated him because I feared him, because I held him solely responsible for the destruction of my family. And I hated him because he was so erratic; he could lash out at you and then act as if nothing happened. I had to get away to a place where I could look at him, myself, my family, more objectively. That's why I'm here. And I believe I've learned to do that. I can separate myself from both my anger and my fear. I no longer hate him.

While I am here, my father and I talk regularly--the weekly phone call of menial details; the exchange of anecdotes. He will invariably share with me Peter's new zeal for a computerized chess game, where each piece is graphically executed, or Mol-

lie's latest poem (I think that butterflies are...neat!). And I tell him about crew or my latest English paper. Not, I think, this one. But there is a different tone to our voices—we speak to each other as adults; as equals. He does not patronize or coddle me, and I am direct and honest with him. At times he will confide in me; tell me things in his childhood that he never told even to my mother. Occasionally we have pointed and angry arguments. Sometimes I come out and ask him why, why, did you do this? Sometimes he denies everything, which is absolutely infuriating, but I understand his need to do this. Sometimes he will answer me, though. Once he even apologized. But in the end my father has become a human being to me. He is no longer the Archangel Dad of my childhood, nor the Lucifer of my adolescence. He is a man who loves fiercely and angers easily. He is a demanding teacher, and a great storyteller. He is my father and I do not forgive him anything. But I love him.

Kate Birney
Exeter, NH
Doug Rogers

The Donut Cafe

The attendant across from me chews on her apron as she awaits my request.

"Mmm, let me see—" My eyes wander over the black board listing the prices above the woman's head, but they keep returning to the woman's mouth to watch her chew on the string.

"Donut?" the woman suggests. "Chocolate honey-dipped are good." She had dropped the rather frayed left string for the right string. I wonder how long it takes her to chew off one inch of material.

"No, I'll take—I'll take the blueberry muffin."

The attendant does not miss a beat of chomping as she briskly slides open the glass door of the casing to remove a muffin. "Sixty cents."

I unclench my right fist and count out sixty cents on my flat palm. "Thank you." My lips automatically utter the words as I accept the bag and wad of napkins.

She gives me a brisk but friendly nod. Suddenly I am at ease. As I turn to the table nearest the entrance, my right hand loosens its tight grip on the napkins.

The table occupies the corner of the cafe where, to my right, one can watch motorists on Rt. 140 through the windowed walls. To my left the sun hangs limply in the sky as if it cannot decide whether to set or not to set. Across the road cars fill the church's parking lot. I sit so that I can see the congregation leave at the end of the service, for at this moment I am supposed to be sitting in their auditorium. Flopping my lab book open to page forty, I begin reading: "Analysis of Group I Cations." My eyes soon abandon the page, however, and wander away from the book to watch the cars on the road. I observe their motion, but the church stares right at me. I switch sides of the table to watch the sun end its equivocation.

Across the cafe six or seven people, sitting at the serving corner, smoke and eat dinner and slander each other. One woman scrutinizes a paper that rests on the counter in front of her.

"What's a word that means someone is below you?"

Inferior, I tell my muffin as I begin to eat it.

"Good God," squawks out a man before adding the appropriate expletives. "How the hell am I supposed to know?"

"Michael!" screams an old woman. She wears pastel pink slippers. "It's Sundee. Can't yeh watch yer mouth on Sundee?"

A man giggles as he bites into a half-eaten croissant. "He even went to church this morning!" He continues to giggle, and I am afraid he will choke on the croissant and die.

"Look." The woman glares at her group as she stabs the counter with her pencil. "All I need is an eight letter word that means somebody's below you."

I swallow a piece of muffin and momentarily wish I had enough money to buy a cup of milk. "It's 'inferior.'"

The man closest to me violently swings around to stare. He wears an old Orioles cap on his hand and a navy blue jacket that bears some company name. I weakly grin at him but am tempted to stare at his fingernails. He has cut them very short.

"Hey!" He stares at me.

I nod my head and count out the number of letters in 'inferior.' "Yeah, it's 'inferior,'" I repeat.

"Hey, Sandy!" The man swings back to his group. "Did yeh hear that little girl over there?"

Now they all turn to stare at me. "'Inferior,'" I say. "Look." I hold up my fingers and again count the number of letters.

"'Inferior,'" giggles the man with the croissant.

"Aw, shut up, Dan," someone says as Sandy fills in the word in her crossword puzzle.

"It's good somebody in here has brains," she says, and they all nod appreciatively for two seconds.

"Very good. Very, very good," the Orioles cap man says solemnly. "Dan, when will you finish that damn croissant?"

"John!" screams the old woman. "It's Sundee!"

"My last day of work's gonna be Thursday," announces the attendant as she pours coffee into someone's mug.

Yes, John, I say to myself as I sit and stare out at a now black sky, it's Sundee. My back stares at the church. The congregation of the righteous across the street is worshipping in Sunday evening service. I think it is a good thing I ate the muffin because I will not be blown away although I am chaff, and then I subside into giggles. Nina, your immaturity attains astounding heights, I tell myself; and I realize that I do not have many weeks of Sunday service left.

Nina Kuruvilla
Luth-Tim, MD
Mr. Gray
Mr. Schneider

Untitled

*going up to God's house and there is snow
because he wanted to see how many of the faithful incarnate
would come to see the matinee performance this sunday
the hat ladies sit in the front, feathers properly erect and
pearls freshly polished (they signed a contract in Pinot Noir turned
to blood for their seats)*

*going up to God's house and there is snow
and i'm giving praise and thanksgiving that the bakery is opened
and my bread will be freshly glazed upon my arrival
and i'm giving gratitude and laud for cherry danish
and coffee made by Marie*

*going up to God's house and there is snow
my brother is thanking the Saints for fat women
who are so devout saying their HailMaryOuFatherGloryAlleluia
that papa can't hear my brother snore through the Sermon on the
Count*

*and how it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle
than
for the rich hat ladies to get into heaven so please make a
generous donation at the door and guarantee a box seat in heaven
amen.*

*going up to God's house and there is snow
jesus does not do matinee performances but there is an
only evening galas with burning bush special effects
understudy who sings slightly off-key
i laugh when he says "This is my body"
as his bulbous body with little bald head, and poor fashion sense
going up to God's house and there is snow*

Erin Gorman
Swarthmore, PA
Cardinal O'Hara High School
Jack Maguire



Teresa Horgan
Pequanock, NJ

No More Chrysanthemums

If the candy store had a name, I never knew it. There was no sign, just a set of crumbling steps leading up to a heavy glass door on a quiet street where lanky houses stood shoulder to shoulder and their roofs touched to form a zigzag pattern in the sky.

Inside it was dark and cool, and the smell of dust and spilled Coca-Cola hung heavy in the air. It was hard to see after coming in out of the sun, and at first you could make out only the two gleaming white display cases, one empty, one filled with candy melting into crooked patterns.

Once we were inside, a hush fell over us as if we were intruders in a church. We kept quiet and counted our change until we heard scurrying on the stairs. It might have been a mouse, or the wind in the trees, it was so faint, but then she'd appear in the doorway which separated our lives from hers. She was about our height, with wispy white hair teased away from her face, and glasses and flowered skirts that touched the top of her sneakers.

"Well, what would you like?" Her voice had the business-like quality of crisp leaves crunching under your feet on a fall day.

"Coke?" one of us would ask.

"I don't have cold Coke, not today. I have Birchola."

"7Up?"

"No, not today. You kids didn't buy much last week. I didn't bother putting any in the fridge. I have cold Birchola."

"O.K."

"O.K. What? Birchola? That'll be thirty cents plus five cents deposit. Who's next? How about you?" she'd ask as if we had a choice, not missing one of us.

Then the door would creak open, and he'd enter in his black suit complete with hat that he wore even in August. His hair was white and soft like a Christmas tree angel's, and it had no intention of staying under his hat. He must have been very tall when he was younger, but years had twisted him to the shape of the cane in his hand.

"Well, hello there, I mean, good afternoon, ma'am, children," he'd say with a tip of his hat toward the woman behind the glass case. "Can't you see she's not open for business?" he'd say to us. "She's dressed up like a package on Christmas. You'd better run along home." Then he'd wink, several times with both eyes, lest we take him seriously, and turn to pull on one of my pigtails. "Where'd you get that long hair, girly?"

"Well, what do you want?" she'd snap, and she'd narrow her pale blue eyes. But I think he did it only so he wouldn't see the spark he caused in them when he walked through the door.

"Me? Well, ma'am, I was just about to get some oatmeal over at the A&P, and I wondered if you might need something?" Then he'd motion at his grocery cart outside the door, as if proving the legitimacy of his presence.

"No, I certainly do not," she'd reply without hesitation, folding her skinny wrinkled arms as she spoke.

He'd flinch, almost imperceptibly, but continue gallantly, "If you're positive, ma'am, then I'll just leave you with these." And from behind his crooked back he'd produce a slightly squashed bouquet of orange and pink chrysanthemums.

I'd smile, knowing he had picked them from her flowerbed next to the steps. She wouldn't smile, but force the corners of her mouth down and answer, "I'll thank you to stay out of my flowerbed. You have no place there. Picking them right and left as you do, I'll be left with no chrysanthemums." Then she'd flush, having said more than she'd intended.

"My apologies, ma'am," he'd reply. "One beautiful thing deserves another."

I'm sure he knew, like I did, that chrysanthemums grow better when they're picked, because they're picking flowers and perennials. But he never corrected her, just tipped his hat eloquently and wished her a "most pleasant afternoon" before hobbling out the door.

Once my friends and I were outside, they'd imitate him with his slouching walk and solitary black suit and say, "Where'd you get that long hair, girly?" in giggling unison. But I never mimicked him because I liked him. I liked what he did to her eyes.

And although she never touched his offering as it lay on the top of the display case, more than once I thought I saw pink and orange chrysanthemums in her window.

I gaze up at her windows now, but they are empty. I was hoping to see chrysanthemums, hoping for a tell-tale sign that she lives here, that there is still a candy store. A lot may have changed in the five years since I moved away.

The store looks dark and empty, but it always did, I reassure myself. I climb the crumbling steps and pull on the door, reluctant to discover things have changed. But as the door opens, my fear disappears, replaced by awe. The store is exactly as I remembered it. I stand motionless for a moment, taking in the familiar smells and sights. The place is so still it seems almost unreal.

"Yes? What do you want? What are you doing here? Do I know you? I was lying down." She startles me. It is the old woman, her hair whiter and wispier than ever.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean...." I say.

"Can't get up as fast as I used to. Doctor says I should rest. 'Close the store,' he says. What does he know? 'Hire help,' he says. Help for what? There's no little children anymore, no, not for awhile. Just big ones. Boys. Play basketball behind the A&P and come here for soda. Still come here for soda. What else do children your age like? I don't know. It's been awhile."

"Well, gum, I guess, and"

"Gum. Yes, gum. Ordered some of that new soft kind. I could sell it cheaper than the A&P, but...." She stops, and her tiny finger picks at hard pink scabs the size of quarters on the shelf beside her. "It melted," she says.

I remember she used to give us candy from the shelves behind the display cases because whatever she put in the cases always melted. I always wondered why since the store was dark and cool.

"Shouldn't you be in school? How old are you?" she asks suddenly.

"I'm fifteen, but it's August." I wait for her to interrupt me, but she is silent for a moment, absorbed with realigning her glasses on her nose.

Finally she asks, "Are you from around here? I used to know all the boys and girls...."

"I used to be. I live on Long Island now," I say, and I try to think of something that will make her remember me, but my trademark elbow-length pigtails have long since been cut.

"I had a sister who lived on Long Island. She died, musta

been twenty years ago. She had cancer. Cancer in her blood," she says.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't concern yourself. Now what would you like? I don't keep much candy now. The man from the company doesn't think he can keep taking my order because it keeps getting smaller. He says I'll have to buy from a store. It's not worth his money to have it delivered here. But that will raise prices, so I don't know what I'm going to do. I told him...."

"Does your friend still come here?" I ask.

She stops and looks at me sharply. "What friend? I have no friends," she says.

"The man. He used to bring you such lovely chrysanthemums."

Her gaze, once so piercing she could see your soul, grows distant and turns toward her beloved, but empty, flowerbed, then somewhere beyond it.

"That was a long time ago," she says, still looking out the window. "A different August."

"He's...?" I try to ask.

"A long time now. He never told me certain flowers you have to pick or else they die. There are no more chrysanthemums."

The air is hanging heavy now, dripping with silence. I try to think of something to say, but my mind is numb.

"I'm sorry," I say finally, but she is oblivious to me. "I'm really sorry, but I have to go," I say, and start to pull myself away.

As I'm part way out the door, she mumbles something, and I turn back, expectantly. She is muttering to herself, "No more chrysanthemums. No more chrysanthemums."

I leave the door close softly behind me.

LeAnn McCoy
Chinchilla, PA
Scranton Prep
Mr. Vanston

My Wedding Day

The long scarf is laid upon my head; it is red with gold stitches that make an abstract design. The head necklace is placed on my head next; it is gold and heavy but does not fall. The large round ornament dangles next to my forehead; it is hard and scratches me. The necklace is very old; it belonged to Ami and Badee Ami before her. Badee Aba made it for Badee Ami on her wedding. He melted the gold, etched in the Arabic verses and filled the etching with emerald himself. He has told me that it would please him greatly if all his daughters wear the headpiece on their weddings. I am making him happy.

The paint lady has put her tools on my lap. She is dabbing my face with a liquid of some sort. It is too awkward for me to look up to the mirror now; I will wait to look. The paint lady now puts something like powder on my eyelids. How strange—who could see anything there? She outlines my eye with a pencil. I wish I knew how to use this paint. I would be more like the Americans. What did Georgina call paint? Was it make-up? She had a pink and white colored bag filled with all sorts of things, all sorts of colors for lips and cheeks. Georgina promised that she would send me my own make-up as soon as she returned to London; she has not sent anything. Now I am married, and I can buy my own, my own soap and hair oil. I will not have to ask my mother for all of these nice smelling things.

Ami comes into my room. She takes me from the paint lady as she is still decorating my cheeks. We move to a small corner room with no air conditioner. I can already feel my make-up coming off in perspiration.

22 eyes no beautiful

"I know that this is late to talk to you about this, but there is something you need to know before you marry. Aba and I expect several grandchildren, especially boys. Your husband will take you to your bedroom tonight and—"

Ami does not know that I have heard all of the stories about lovemaking. My friends have told me, and I do not need to listen. But I will show a look of surprise on my face, so Ami will not become excited and think that I have not saved myself for one man, as all women have.

She is finished, and we both stand. Ami fixes my scarf and smiles at me, sadly. She looks like she may cry. My look must not have fooled her.

"Then his Ami will look for blood on the sheets. Do not be too surprised. You will grow to like being with your husband at night."

Ami is sad when she should be happy. Ami has picked a very successful husband, and her dreams are those of marrying him to me. She must feel old I suppose. I return to my room, and the paint lady fixes the make-up.

The paint lady is done with me. I look at myself in the mirror. I am the same, but I will be different. I will no longer have to listen to my mother and her lectures. I will no longer have to listen to my father's silly rules and restrictions. I am tired of my brothers and sister; I am too old to play with them. I want to play the piano and have a job. I want to talk about the details and intricacies of life with other people and not just with myself. I want to wear black clothes whenever I want and not only when a person dies. I want to be like the European ladies who sneeze on their handkerchiefs and then push them into their sleeves, like Georgina.

"Ah, you will smell nice for your husband. The henna worked beautifully."

"Thank you Auntie Baboo. Zari Mami drew the design. She spent hours on my hands and feet."

"The berath is ready for you. We do not want to forget you." I rise out of my seat like a queen from a throne.

"I am ready."

"You mustn't be talking like this. You do not address anyone except your husband."

My aunts and cousins stand waiting in the doorway of the large room connected to my room. My mother is not here. I am tempted for just a second to run away and disappear, but I would not go very far in my dress, even though I was the winner of the track at metric school. But why would I run away? It would be silly to run away from a clear path.

"Come Chandni, moonlight, your husband awaits your beauty."

"A bride as beautiful as the moon for a husband as rich as all the treasury!"

"That hairy monster does not deserve so glowing a wife," Aba says, his voice coming from the outskirts of the crowd.

"Do not talk like that, Salludin! If Nasreen hears you, she will surely spank you!"

Whoever in the crowd that said that is right. If Ami has heard Aba, she will be chasing him around the house and beating him tonight.

We finally leave the house. I stand in the front of the crowd. My aunts hold a canopy over my head. Auntie Baboo holds the Quaran above my head. I walk slowly so I do not step on the inseam of my skirt. The walk down the aisle between the two seated sections seems to be an eternity. The room is loud, buzzing with gup shup, gossip of the town. There must be a hundred people in this room; I feel desperately alone and can only hear my heartbeat. My little cousins are prancing all around me, and I feel my eyes water. I am crying. I have waited all my life to know why brides cry, and now that I am finally a crying bride I still do not know why I am crying.

I already miss my family. I declare to myself that I will write to each one of them every day. I will lose them if I do not. Now I will become a part of my husband's family. I do not know how they are and what kind of people they are. I hope that they are mannered and not demanding. What will my husband be

continued on page 54

22 eyes no beautiful

like? Will he always be happy with me, even when I am no longer young and pretty, will he still be my husband and I his only wife?

We have reached the center finally. I am still crying, but I am relieved to be near my husband. I am guided to the seat next to him. His upper arm is against mine; I can feel his warmth. I wish he would place his hand over mine, but he does nothing of the sort. I sit still, staring straight at my shoes. Little girls come to admire me saying how beautiful I am, and I wish they would be quiet as Badee Ami says nazeer lagya: when something is too admired it breaks because so many people have looked at the object.

Certain memories appear in my mind. Memories of my history classes and my poetry books warm me. I remember my poems that I have written for class. I hope I can finish my schooling; it is very dear to me. I remember my husband when he was courting me. Every Saturday he would come in his English smoking jacket, his hair brushed off his forehead. He brought fresh sandwiches from the new restaurant for me, my brothers and sister. We feared him more than we were impressed by him. When Adnan was told that I was marrying him, he had an outburst of protective emotion. "I do not want my sister married," he would yell. Such a silly ten year old; he did not know that I was really happy.

My husband won me when he gave me an American book on the General Napoleon Bonaparte. I wonder how he knew that Napoleon was my romantic hero. The book was beautiful. The pages were not sticky; the ink did not run. Words never looked so beautiful to me. I read it hundreds of times. It reminded me of the books at the American Embassy Library. I loved to run my fingers over the smooth pages. The pictures were so nice. The books had a strong cover that was soft to hold. Ami did not like me to go to the library that often. But if I am in America, I can read all the books I want.

My classmates visit me, asking questions that I do not answer. They smile and poke at my jewelry. I can see their minds wondering what my true feelings are. Am I crying of joy or sadness? Am I anxious for tonight? I am thinking in my mind of the times we all sneaked out of school and went to our favorite Chinese restaurant for lunch. We always would feel sick afterwards because we had eaten beyond our fill and would become nervous at the sight of any person who might recognize and report us. I told them that once I was married we could go out whenever we liked; then they would be with a married woman, not a schoolgirl.

The malvee sits at my husband's left. He quietly says prayers to himself. His beard is long and grey and brushed straight. It comes out of his chin like it is floating. He blesses us even though we have been married since the Nikah. I smell food behind me; I am very hungry because I have not eaten all day. I look to my finger for my ring. Even though it was my size, it still hangs between my middle joint and knuckle.

Suddenly crowds come at us, my husband and me. They throw fresh rose petals everywhere, which will be dry before we leave. My uncles and lawyers take us through the excited crowds to my husband's new Mercedes. We sit in the car next to each other. My new Ami sits on my other side. The driver nods to my husband and tries to drive out the gates; the crowds hinder us. I see in the mirror that my brothers and uncles and cousins are pressing their hands against the trunk, pushing us off. All the little children are jumping up and down and waving. My aunts are smiling approvingly. The car reaches the gates. I want desperately to turn around and wave goodbye to my family, but I am squeezed beyond movement by my new Ami and husband.

I cry for most of the ride because I feel guilty about not waving and because I don't know what to do.

"You can stop crying now, daughter. You do not need to show that you are sad anymore."

"Let her cry if she wants to cry. This is ridiculous telling her not to cry when she is already crying." I cannot resist giggling at my situation. For a while I giggle and cry at the same time. I

think to myself that I now should love my husband. I giggle again wondering what all that was supposed to mean anyway.

The car we ride in is black. It is new; it does not have scratches like the other cars. Upon my engagement to my new husband, my new brother-in-law greeted me with smiling eyes.

"You will be rich, richer than all the kings of the Arabian Nights." He laughed with relish and thrill.

"My brother will take you to America and give you all the chocolate you could ever want. He will buy you a big silver car, a German car, American books, and an American life."

We finally arrived at my new home. The servants stand outside, wide-eyed. They all want to see me. I rise from the car with their help. We stare at one another. I decide to smile at them, since I have been crying for most of the evening. They laugh and smile back. A loud clamor of voices come from behind. I turn around to see a servant singing loudly; he has a small sheep on his shoulders. He is followed by four other servants. Space is made around me in which the four servants and the one with the sheep fill. They skip around me in circles, singing and yelling so loudly that my family must be able to hear them from so far away.

The servants break off from the circle; the sheep has been put down. They dance around it. The servant that carried the sheep pulls a knife from somewhere on his waist. The servant, still singing, pulls the knife across the sheep's neck with ease. Blood is everywhere, all over the ground, on the lamb's white fur. I think blood has even come on my wedding dress. The servants rejoice in laughter and yelling. I see my husband and my new Ami laughing in approval. The other servants clap in rhythm with the yells.

Asma Gull Hasan
Pueblo, CO
The Groton School
Jack Smith

The Voice Of The Willows

*Wind, you do tease me whispering
then whooshing.*

Please be still one moment!

My leaves hang softly,

my arms raise and bend slowly-

*What threat am I to you that you should
with your dry pressing*

lick me over?

Won't you pause, sneak about me

on your toes,

and then past me

*throw yourself up and plunge into some
stiff pine?*

Stacy French

Lanesboro, MA

Mount Greylock Regional High School

Anne Villalon Speyer

Girls in White Dresses

Just as year might end, at

Madame LeClare's dancing class,

my brother came, for the first time

upon long rows of girls in white dresses:

he was only twelve. Unable to understand

why, why he was ordered to take

them, dance them, keep them safe.

Too late to choose just one.

He whimpers, and I tell him it's ok. It was

bad luck they liked him. Saw him cute.

He hates their fickleness, the power

they wield. He wanted to do the right thing,

but they wouldn't let him--forced him back

inside the shell they made. The rows

of cotton, satin, lace had tempted him,

and, like me, he wants to know why.

Paul Tuchmann



Brian Stubbs
Spotswood, NJ

I Dangle Each Eyeless Head

*i dangle each
eyeless head
under the water,
arrange them
beside the sink
and then peel them
one by one.
their single vein
makes this possible,
the buried black
string a reminder
that these are*

*far from human,
were barely alive.
i split each along
the belly, wet legs
clinging to my
fingers, their
bodies emerging
peeled and vulnerable.
it is a triumph
of human nature
to swallow these
shrunken pink cells,*

*these limbless
possibilities.
but i do it.
i eat this life
and enjoy it.*

Katherine Bell
Randolph, NJ
Randolph High School
Elizabeth McConnell



Gretchen Strouth
Wappingers Falls, NY

Sunrise

*walk out onto the porch.
"Sun up yet, Pa?"
"Not yet,
but it's fixin' to."
sit in my chair,
porch whines a complaint.
Pa looks tired,
hasn't slept much.
still awful early.
hasn't slept much,
he's not the only one.
Pa pats my hand.*

*today.
no turning back.
in about ten hours,
man and wife.
dress took months,
just one more button.
my love,
he'll look right fine.
he better.
of course he will,
he always does.
will Pa cry?
no, Pa never cries.
will Pa cry?
maybe.*

*my husband,
Mr. and Mrs.
he's buildin' us a home,
perfect little cottage.
just us,
for a while.
maybe some boys,
like their father.
maybe girls,
pretty dresses and ribbons.
both.
perhaps.*

*the sun,
rising.
pink, orange, purple,
so beautiful.
to love and cherish.
I do.
'till death do us part,
Pa jerks awake,
stretches.
"Sun up yet?"
"Not yet, Pa,
but it's fixin' to."
am I smiling?
yes, I'm smiling.*

Heather L. Rogers
Ayer, MA
Ayer High School

My Fairy

I watched Mary E. Burrows on her knees, digging viciously into her dresser drawer for my socks. It was Sunday morning, cool-gray, and moist for mid-December; the few black birds that had not migrated jumped erratically from bare limb to bare limb outside Mary's window. I had been standing above her, in my unwashed body, uncombed hair and bare feet, for no more than a minute, waiting silently for my socks. In her room, the wood floor, like the rest of the house, creaked, the white plaster walls cracked in places and had black and gray blotches all around like soot. On the floor in the corner her school things lay in a pile: the bright colors of her familiar bag, the delicate neatness of her uniform--blue and gold plaid with a gold cross embroidered on her sweater--and her immaculately shiny black shoes, seemed unfit among the girly hearts, ribbons, and animal pictures surrounding me, all of them hung up crookedly with scotch tape.

Mary began to grunt, and as she dug into her drawer she would often briskly brush her hair from her face as if clawing a small animal from her head. After a moment she slammed the drawer shut, stood up, straightened her night shirt decorated with little red hearts, and launched my white socks into the hallway.

"There's your damn socks," she grunted, and she threw herself back into her bed, pulling the covers over her head.

"Sorry I woke you," I said as the chill of the floor stiffened my feet.

"Get out," a muffled voice replied from underneath.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Yes."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because...because you're boring, John," she drew out each word in a long sing-songy way. "You are boring. You never talk to me. You come to my house for your stupid socks that you left here a month ago."

"I'm sorry, Mary," I said, as I noticed the birds outside her window flying away. "I needed some socks."

"I hate you."

"I don't understand, Mary." I never like to leave on bad terms. "The last time I saw you, you said you liked me."

"You're a waste of time."

"You said you liked me a lot, and you asked me if I liked you a lot."

"John," she said, sticking her head out from under, as if she was out of breath. "I said that I liked you but I don't, okay? Goodbye."

I looked out the window again: the little black birds had returned. I looked back at Mary; she was again under the covers, silently, waiting for me to leave. Puzzled, I turned my chilled feet to the door and walked out into the dark hallway, picking up my white socks along the way. As I shut the door behind me, thinking back to pretty Mary giving me winks from down the hallway in the morning, her frizzled shower-wet hair and mother's make-up, seeing in me things that were not, I heard Mary add from under the covers, "Maybe if you took me out, jerk."

10:00 a.m. I sat in front of the TV and flipped from channel to channel, from Reverend Brown to Reverend Smith, then to Reverend Reed, then back again to Reverend Brown. Reverend Brown would often interject "God needs you" every few minutes into his sermon; the crowd would roar "Amen" in response. Reverend Brown always had the loudest parish. He needed it; his poor show had a fuzzy picture and the plants in the background were fake, yet he still had to thank "Emma's Flower Shop, fuh the beautiful plants you see in the reah heah" after every sermon. Reverend Smith, on the other hand, had a handsome smile, thick white hair, friendly glasses, and would talk in a soft voice, in front of a pure white backdrop, with organ gospels accompanying him. Except he interjected the same "God needs you" about every thirty seconds, as if subliminally. Personally, I

found Reverend Reed the most appealing. He wore a loose suit, boots and a greasy haircut; his smiles were not handsome, but sly. And he never said "God needs you," but would say "I need you and your suppoet" instead. He was the honest Sunday morning Reverend.

As I sat watching the T.V. in my basement--brown carpet, brown furniture, even a brownish yellow glow from the brown shaded lamp--my mother walked in from outside with two brown paper bags on each arm.

"John, get off your butt and help me," she said, putting the bags down and holding the back of her neck. "Make sure you get the milk jugs too."

I got up off the sofa into the garage and fit the rest of the groceries under my chin and lifted the milk with my two little fingers. I walked back inside, shut the door behind me with my foot dressed in a white sock, and placed the food on top of the counter all at once. My mother, sighing deeply as she always did after returning home, perusing her groceries with a dissatisfied expression, took off her coat and draped it over the counter. Then, as she did religiously, she greeted Precious, her little parakeet, hanging in its cage next to the refrigerator.

"Hello, Precious; how're you this morning, Precious? Did your brother change your paper today?" She talked to it with a ridiculous grin on her face. "Precious, you're the only one that loves me in this house, aren't you, sweetie? You're the only one that loves your momma?" This was one of her favorite routines. "John, did you change her--" She cut herself short and looked at me with angry disgust. "Oh John, you think I'm so stupid. You don't think I see those looks you give me? I can see those little glances."

"Mom, I didn't do anything.--"

"I saw you give me that look."

"Mom, I didn't do anything." Perhaps I did look at her strangely; I hadn't noticed. But there was no use in admitting it. I didn't want to leave things on bad terms.

"John, if you hate me so much, why don't you just come out and say it."

"I didn't do anything," I repeated, feeling a sting in my chest.

"That's your problem, John," she said, fading away, walking upstairs; "you don't do anything, you don't say anything, you don't give anything...."

I watched her walk up, blending into brown. I hated her more and more with each step. I walked to the T.V., turned it off with a strong nudge of my fingers, and grunted under my breath, "Yes, mother, I did change the goddamn paper." I clenched my fists and threw my back into the sofa. "I changed the goddamn paper."

I set myself down deep into the sofa, trying to let the tension in my bones and the swelling in my fists die down. I tried thinking of different things, things that might calm me down: Mary E. Burrows? No. Reverend Reed? No. What I needed was a fairy, a little friend, a magical consolation. Was I too old for imaginary friends? They may not be real friends, but is there such a thing? I did once know a fairy, when I was smaller, about ten or eleven, and she, being the older sister of my best friend, was about the age that I am now: Amelia. She was beautiful, and always crying for some reason, always sad, poor Amelia, but always beautiful. I used to wonder about her chronic sadness. She would say, "I don't know, John; I don't know why I'm so sad."

She would smile. "I woke up one day and everything seemed sadder; maybe one day things will be sad for you too." She really was a fairy; my sweet memory of her is hazy and angelic, and her delicate long sun-washed hair and her thin, frail body were those of a fairy. I remember creeping past her room one night when we were left alone; then, not being able to help it, I heard her weep and asked if she was all right. She smiled sadly, wiping her face with the back of her hand, saying that she had a certain problem with a boy, and a certain problem with

her parents, a certain problem with school, and so on. "I have a little bit of a headache," she said to me, and I fetched her a glass of water and an aspirin because she needed me, and my heart was beating faster and faster. When I gave her the glass and the pill, she put them aside on her night-table and hugged me close on her bed. She kissed me on the lips. I tasted a salty tear on her cheek. She gently ran her fingers through my hair as I rested on her chest, and with each stroke of her gentle hand I could hear her soft heartbeat, drifting us deeper and deeper into silence. In her delicate hands I felt the anger. In her soft hair I felt the pain. And together they made a symphony of innocence and warmth.

Years later, when she had moved away to some adult place, some place beyond the fences of our town, she talked to me on the phone. She told me, in a deeper voice than I had known, that she was lonely. And I told her, kidding, that if she wanted, I would marry her. I don't know why or how, but somehow it was an appropriate thing to say. "If only you were a little bit older, John, I would marry you," she said sadly. "One day, when you're my age, you're going to make some girl really happy, John; you really are. All the girls are gon'be after you."

As I sat on my brown sofa thinking of my fairy, the phone next to my elbow began to ring, shaking my loose arm off the table, intruding on my therapy. I wondered who it could be. It kept ringing. I heard my mother's scream from upstairs, "John, will you get the damn phone!" But I let it ring one last time before answering it; I wanted it to be Amelia, I wished it to be Amelia, maybe God, somehow.

"Hello," said a girl's voice, elastic and high-pitched; "Hello, John?"

"Yes."

"John, I was wondering if you could give me the math homework for tomorrow. Did you do it yet?"

"You say you want the math homework." I rubbed my eyes, waking myself up. "You need for me to give you the math homework, math homework, math homework.... Look, people need a lot of things, you know. You need this, I need that." I began to lose the grip on the phone. "But right now you need the math homework, right? Well, I did it, I know I did it, so I'll help you out. Is there anything else you need?" I asked.

"I need the math homework, John. Did you do it yet? John? Are you still mad about this morning in my room? John?"

Mark Narron
Falls Church, VA
Catherine Bell

Trapped on the Ohio Turnpike

*Civilization, where have you gone?
Nothing surrounds me but endless
Flats of browns and greens--
Like a shoe sale at K-Mart.
Even the sun will not condescend
To visit such boring terrain.
My heart aches for my sister cows--
Lonely, stranded, and fat--
With only Farmer Jones for company.
Oh, Wordsworth despises my soul,
But I cannot feign affection
For this barbaric torture--
Trapped on the Ohio Turnpike.*

Elizabeth Fettweis
Randolph, NJ
Randolph High School

How To Be A Poet

So you want to be a poet, huh? Well, in my many years of reading poetry, writing poetry, being the subject of poetry, and observing just what it is that poets do, I have come to one conclusion: writing poetry is an art, and being a poet is a state of mind. And to enter that poetic state of mind, you must know how to channel your feelings into something I like to call....bull.

Now don't get me wrong, I know that many poets have written masterpieces based on their true feelings, their dreams, their nightmares, experiences, and whatnot. But I believe that anyone can write a decent poem by following some simple guidelines. True, the great ones didn't have a handbook to consult when writing their most inspired works, although it could have helped. In fact, many poets' most inspired works could use a little touching up. So let's get started!

Welcome to Poetry 101.

STEP 1. The first step towards a good poem is your outfit. You have two choices: a. all black b. all nude. If you opt for the black outfit, remember that your shirt must be a turtleneck, and your underwear must be bikini briefs. This post modern image is most definitely necessary in order to get those creative juices flowing. If you don't have black clothes, consider your birthday suit. I have found that writing in the nude can help uncage oneself and let the true bull flow. Nevertheless, what you wear (or don't wear) influences what you write, and frankly, I've never seen a poet in GAP denim.

STEP 2. Next, you have to find a good place to write. Past poets have written in the woods, in their jail cells, on boats, at their desks--you can write poems anywhere. I personally prefer writing in a big empty field, because nobody can bother you. Where you decide to situate yourself affects your creative process. Actually, you can get some very good ideas just by sitting in a certain place. Bull can be generated wherever you feel comfortable, so choose a location that best suits you.

STEP 3. Once you decide where you are going to write, create a poetic environment. For example, if you are at your desk, in a dark, dank room, or in the woods at night, you must write by candlelight. And if you're in the mood, burn some incense. If you're writing by day, don't you dare use any other light! Only the sun should light your way.

STEP 4. Now we can start writing. Well, almost. You have to decide if you want it to be about something. Many poems do not have any subject, or purpose for that matter, so if you have a central idea in mind, skip down to STEP 5 now. For those of you still reading, stop thinking now. Clear your mind until there's only one thought left. Whatever that thought may be, sum it up in one word and write it down.

STEP 5. O.K., here's the tricky part. Poetry doesn't have to use proper punctuation or full sentences, so continue writing across the page. And, in contrast to popular belief, poetry doesn't have to rhyme either. Jot down anything, whether it has to do with the first word or not. You see, that's the great part about poetry; if you put in words that have no connection to each other, you can call it symbolism!

STEP 6. After you have written down all the words, ideas, thoughts, or sentences you can, sit back and relax. That wasn't too bad, was it? Now you have to put those words into good poetic form. Oh, and if you were writing in the nude, put your clothes back on. To make life easier for you, I have enumerated

continued on page 58

continued from page 57

three types of good poetic form: verse format, block format, and creative format. Verse format seems to be the most popular form of poetry, and it consists of words in distinct groups. Here is an example of a poem in verse format:

RIDERS by Robert Frost

*The surest thing there is is we are riders,
And though none too successful at it, guiders.
Through everything presented, land and tide
And now the very air, of what we ride.*

*What is this talked-of mystery of birth
But being mounted bareback on the earth?
We can just see the infant up astride,
His small fist buried in the bushy hide.*

*There is our wildest mount--a headless horse
But though it runs unbridled off its course,
And all our blandishments would seem defied,
We have ideas yet that we haven't tried.*

As you can see, the poem is divided into three verses. If you want your poem to take on a formal, organized character like the Frost one above, group your ideas. This format works best when actual sentences are expressed. There are two types of block format: one where the poem goes on continuously, line after line, with no spaces and no definite verse; another where there are spaces but also no distinct verses. Here is an example of continuous block format:

STEVE by David Cope

*the spells became worse-
he'd wake in the morning
his tongue all chopped up,
blood on his pillow.
he wanted a friend to go with him
to the neurologist:
"he just brushes off my questions
and how- and how
can I get a handle on things
when he's like that?
could you come-& talk for me?"*

Such a happy poem. Cope has chosen not to capitalize the first word of each line, but you may capitalize if you choose. The following is an example of spaced block format:

BAGGAGE by Rod McKuen

*The year was only
one long noisy day
that never knew a quiet night.
Your grin
(once strong as any shoulder)
disappearing in so many crowded rooms
each time I thought I'd found your face again
hardly helped at all.*

*I suppose it was a glad adventure
however quickly gone.
Still leave me your address
so I won't have to stand in line
at American Express.*

McKuen has used the power of indentation in this fine example of spaced block format. Many poets inexplicably indent at certain places in their writings, and you can too! My favorite type of poetry is that written in creative format, because there are no rules. I have seen poems that make pictures, poems which capitalize letters randomly (sOmetImes in the MidDIE of a wOrd), poems which switch languages halfway through, even poems which use no spaces (theseenduplookingsomethinglikethis). Here is an example of a poem written in the creative format:

LOVE SONNET by John Updike
In Love's rubber armor I come to you;

```

                b
            o o
                    .b
                , c
                    d
                c :d
            e - f
                e
                . f
            g
                .g
    
```

Get the picture? Poems in this format usually don't make sense at all, but if you do have a rational poem, be my guest and put it in the creative format. If you did understand Updike's poem, please let me know what it means. Now that you have seen the three major types of poetry, decide what you want your poem to look like. Choose wisely!

STEP 7. You should now have a finished poem in front of you. Read over your masterpiece and answer the questions below. If your answers are identical to the ones in the checklist, you have achieved the status of a poet. If more than two of your answers differ, go back and clean it up.

no yes

-x- 1) Does it make sense? ---

--- 2) When you read it, does the word -x- "bull" come to mind?

--- 3) Is it better than the John -x- Updike poem above?

-x- 4) Does it have a central theme? ---
It doesn't have to, but if it does,
that's O.K.

--- 5) Can you write another one as -x-
full of bull as this one?

--- 6) Can you write fifty more as -x-
full of bull as this one?

--- 7) Would your English teacher -x- eat it up?

At this point, you are probably wondering if I, master of poetry, actually practice what I preach. The answer is yes. I have included my poem, entitled "Am I There For Alone?" I wrote my poem following the exact same guide you have just read. Enjoy, and remember that writing poetry is an art, and being a poet is a state of mind.

AM I THERE FOR ALONE? by Dan Lipton

Darkness
is in me
Or is it around me?
and in this cold, stark black I am alone.
Alone with you, or you with alone
because You are there too

Darkness
you feel it between us, like another
which wasn't within before.
Two souls locked in a prison called truth
Look out amongst our stars

We think we will never know that sun
and I know who will never know that sun
but I won't tell him
And
if will never know me
Why?
Has she been here before?

Daniel Lipton
River Edge, NJ
River Dell Regional High School
Marianne Coffey
John Pasarotti

Jackie Robinson

The ball is coming towards him
like the moon revolving around the earth.
He swings the bat with such speed,
if he misses, the stadium will fall over.
He hits the ball;
a gun fires.

He watches the ball,
as it soars over the fence.
Trots around the bases
listening to the crowd cheering
like two trains colliding,
like a bomb going off a few feet ahead
of him.

Running home, Jackie Robinson feels
like he is an eagle flying for the first time.
While he plays, he sees the greenest grass,
the brown dirt flying through the air,
like there is no ground.

Chris Queenan
New City, NY
Clarkstown High School North
Ms. C. Jones.

Breakfast: Valentine's Day

A man waits for his breakfast
At the table facing the window-
What has he seen to make him so silent?
His drawn, puckered cheeks
Are ashen red,
Like dying coals of a lonely fire,
And his chin is baggy as if
His skin is too heavy for his face.
He adjusts his silverware
And stares out the window-
Who is he looking at?
I peer out the same window
And the morning sun
Glinting off the fresh snow
Causes me to squint.

Adam Huss
Fayetteville, PA
Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Anne Branham

Kodomo-no-Hanashi:

It was late and it was the Fourth of July and there were cool explosions punctuating the otherwise monotonous atonal bleatings of the animals penned in the adjoining buildings. My uncles were exploding outside. God only knows if they were actually any relation to me at all much less my real uncles but that day and that week they were more closely related to the thoughts and the actions of this little ten year old than anyone who actually shared any of my chromosomes. They could periodically be heard raising a loud yell as they set off bottle rockets which blazed into the dark Nebraska sky shedding green sparks which slowly incinerated into the black remains that someone would have to clean up in the morning to keep the cows from ingesting them. And I was in the barn. I was with my cousin, I think, a young lady who, in keeping with the quasi-relative theme of the week may or may not have actually been my cousin because I had never met her before, and whose name I can't seem to recollect since I haven't seen her since, and who may well have had no business being on my grandmother's property whatsoever for all I know, since she may have been a complete nonrelation to me and wasn't necessarily related to any of the exploders outside either. It would not have surprised me to discover that none of us were related to each other at all, except for the little boy. I was definitely related to the little boy who was five and whom I liked very much even though I couldn't seem to convince him that pigs were much more exciting, if only in a purely visual sense, than the equestrian creatures on whom he was fixated.

We were sitting in the corner of the barn, looking through the doors out at the bright explosions which, deep down, I would have probably rather have been creating. The little boy was causing trouble in the loft up above and I was talking quietly to the girl who was or wasn't my cousin and every so often a loud whoop came from outside just as a particularly loud or bright or destructive blast precussed the dark sky. My fascination with matches and firecrackers was the only thing that could have possibly have diverted my attention from playing with the little boy. I had been introduced to him the week before, this little son of my great aunt, and whatever tenuous and questionable relationship bound our blood together, it was nothing compared to the tie we shared, the love of the hunt. I would have been horrified if we actually shot at a living animal but the pretend rifles we carried with us as we stalked the imaginary quarry through the vast fields of the farm, arguing all the way about pigs and horses and their relative pros and cons, had hardly any recoil,

continued on page 60

continued from page 59

left no powder to burn, and inflicted no harm despite the fact that we rarely missed our mark. I was charmed by the little hunter, overcoming my aversion toward hunting, I hunted with him every day for hours at a time. I treated my pseudo-relative of the opposite gender with a very different kind of respect; we hardly talked at all until she cornered me on the Fourth and began talking to me. She suggested that we take the little boy to the barn to look at the animals, because he liked animals, horses more than anything, but for some reason he didn't entertain her at all once we got there and, in a spirit of camaraderie which somehow overcame my predilection for playing with the child I sat down with her in the corner to talk.

And sitting there on the Fourth of July with bright green explosions dotting the i's that were created by each upward stroke of the ascending rockets, with a little boy chirping with excitement as he climbed around in a barn filled with pigs and chickens and tigers and rhinos and lions (and horses), with grown men screaming with delight as they made big bangs echo through the largely open farm walls in the summer air, this girl, a year or two older and infinitely more mature than I, began to tell me in her pretty voice about her dog Aarffie.

It was quite a long time ago, she said. She was a younger young lady at the time and, as I suppose is the wont of young children with overactive imaginations and underactive devotions to social interaction, she had spent much of the time she probably should have been spending playing with her second grade friends writing short stories about her dog. Oh, not like you write, she said. Nothing so high-minded or high-quality or high-falutin, certainly not. Just little stories about her dog. I began to mutter something about how I didn't write anything high-falutin or high-anything, how I just wrote little nonfiction stories about me and my life, but I was an inarticulate boy unable to communicate with a very pretty very outgoing girl and when she saw that I wasn't going to say anything that made any sense she continued telling me about her literary leanings. Her dog was a superhero, she said, and that was as plain as day to her. She knew that during the time she spent at school each day little Aarffie, having leapt into a phonebooth for a quick costume change, left her house to save kittens in trees and damsels in distress and he stopped all sorts of bank robberies and stuff. She would tell her aunts and uncles when they came to visit what Aarffiedid in his spare time and they would chuckle and pat her head and she eventually got tired, I suppose, of no one willingly suspending their disbelief. So she began to write.

She began to write, she said, because no one would believe the stories she was telling them about Aarffie and also because she wasn't sure herself that the stories she was telling herself were true. Someone had to tell the world what a wonderful dog he was, since Aarffie was too modest to submit to an interview, even with her, regarding his adventures, the task fell upon her, she said, of documenting each and every day in her dog's life. And the ardor she gave to the task was inspirational to a young man whose attention span was somewhat shorter than the average grasshopper and who seemed at the time unable to ever finish any of the short stories he himself was writing. She saw me smile with a freshly infused enthusiasm she described how she would spend several hours each day writing about SuperAarffie. She apparently finished about thirty stories, each of which was about five pages long. It occurred to me at the time that that was probably more output than I would ever write. Thus far that prophecy has held true.

The most incredible thing, said my cousin, was that she wrote down these adventures of SuperAarffie and as her words took shape on the paper in her primitive secondhand longhand script and as she began to flesh out the world she knew her dog lived in, replete with villains and volcanoes and newspaper reporters (she apparently granted herself in her fantasy world the success in journalism that she dreamed of in the real one), it began to become more real than it had been to her before. If there had been any lingering doubt as to the reality of the adventures of her dog, it was quickly quelled when she saw the words on paper documenting that her stories were factual. Nev-

er mind that they were her own words. Once it had been written, she said, it was real, so Aarffie did save his girlfriend who had been tied to the railroad tracks by Devrick Nastily and he did live in a Doghouse of Solitude and he could fly. Once she had made it real, all she had to do was convince everyone else that it was real, and it would become fact.

It was around this point in her story, with me having said little or nothing for the past five minutes, that we suddenly grew uncomfortable after I rudely interrupted her monologue. Later I would discover that I was allergic to the grain they fed the horses; I sneezed many times that week thanks to that refreshing farm fragrance. Perhaps I have embellished the insignificant memory of my sneezing in the middle of her story that July Fourth in the barn with those green explosions and that boy upstairs, but I sincerely remember sneezing directly in her face. I was so caught up in the fascinating and alluring idea of writing to transform something into reality rather than to record something that was already real, and I was in a naive pre-adolescent way madly and hopelessly in love with this pretty girl with red hair and green eyes and her golden voice, and I guess my anger at my immature self for not being able to speak coherently to her is manifested these years later in my blaming myself instead of my allergies for interrupting a speech which so enraptured me. Gesundheit, she said, standing up.

With her train of thought broken by my unsanitary interruption she offered to go up and get the boy but I insisted, with a sort of noble selfishness, that she shouldn't go to the trouble and that I should do it. And, shaking off a silly affection for a girl I had through the grace of my unmannerly nose managed to offend deeply, I went and I played with the little boy for much longer than was polite to the young lady down below and I sneezed occasionally and aided him in his quest for the dragon or the tiger or whatever big game he was shooting at and then we went back outside talking about horses and pigs and we talked with the grown men who were exploding things for a while and later having exhausted our supply of artificial meteors to send with a boom into the sky we all went to bed.

Later I realized that it was a shame I had not listened more carefully to what she had said. Never again were nonfiction and fiction distinct in my vocabulary. In writing what I remember of that night, however, I find myself embellishing her words with mine until that young lady, cousin or no, becomes the sagest philosopher I have ever encountered and her thoughts ring with mine in a cacophony of illusion and memory. She had said that what was on paper was real and I had naively ignored her and sneezed and shot at imaginary animals with a five year old. And the gunshots, the bullets I discharged from the double barrel of my index finger, the cocking of my thumb signalling each successive round, resound in my memory like the fireworks in the sky outside.

Steve Hanna
Malvern, PA
Great Valley High School
Mary Margargee



preserving the moment
Kerj S. Salmieri
Westwood, NJ

Untitled

She breathes evenly, lets the smooth pillows envelop her, and relaxes upon the worn white chair. Her long feet rest on the glass coffee table, and between her bare knees she gazes upon a small potted plant. A single violet flower stems from the leaves and returns her gaze. Her only other companions are her pen and the glossy red thesaurus on the windowsill. She has not made use of it yet, but she will . . . maybe soon, maybe now. Yet as she reaches for that smooth, hardbound crutch for her creativity, her eyes can't help but recognize the painting that looks like tomato puree on canvas, the painting which must be so large to its roommates and nevertheless appears so minute and insignificant to a young author with so many other things to ponder at this still hour....

Leonard felt an urge to glance at his wristwatch, the diamond-studded Rolex, but he remembered that he had sold it to purchase a wedding gift for Charlie and--what was her name again? Something with a B or an R. It wasn't important. There was a thing Leonard had forgotten to do, what was it? Feed the cat? No, he had fed the cat a while ago. Set out his outfit for tomorrow? Yes, he had forgotten to do that, but then he had thought, what the hell, live dangerously. Now he remembered. He had forgotten to turn off the lights above the painting. It was what he always forgot to do. Sometimes he left the lights on all night. The painting was really all that was still important. It was an original and it was not red. Leonard had always fancied red, that was the main reason he had bought the painting from that fellow--Ralph's friend, what was his name? It would be nice if Leonard could throw another party for people to look at it, but nobody wanted to look at a painting anymore once it was old. Leonard noticed that the plant lady across the street had a box that was blue and another one that was bright red--and he thought of that red pot as he switched off the lights and headed to bed.

"There you go, little rhododendron! You grow nice and big now, don't come to me with the excuse that you haven't had water!"

Of course, Connie loved all the members of her little garden, but the bright rhododendron had always been her favorite. She had to keep a special light on it, but it was worth the spent energy when the buds opened to reveal stunning scarlet blossoms, the same color as the bowl they lived in. Connie's friends all said how great it was that she was so tuned in to nature, even though she inhabited this stark, dingy city. It was nice to have a green thumb, and right now Connie was feeling even more naturalistic than usual. It could have been the planetary influence of Venus, which was currently in alignment with the moon. This had a great impact on Connie, Connie being a Cancer, born July 12th. As she meditated on the moon, Connie crossed the room and sat yoga-style on the large green cushion. She grasped the deck of tarot cards and began to shuffle, her mind trying its best to be central and focused. It did tend to wander, however, to situations other than those at hand. It began to think of jasmine, the beaming little flower-baby, the child who sprouted and flourished too soon, the girl who escaped from this peaceful, spiritual way of life to go--to go and do something. It was so long since she left home, but time means not a thing to the heart of a mother, aging and alone in her age. Connie made a genuinely supreme effort to shield herself from these memories, those nasty particles of thought that were so good at interfering with the here and now. As she slowly re-steadied her emotions and reclaimed her head, Connie found herself concentrating on the east window, the only plantless window in her apartment. Her fierce stare fell upon a tiny ruby-colored prism, hanging in someone else's window. She noted

that it was directly above a sink. A red prism above your sink-- Connie asked herself what its significance was, but she didn't really mean it....

It was George's night to wash the dishes. It seemed to George to be about his fifth consecutive night to wash the dishes, but Anita had told him it was his night, so naturally he had slouched off into the soapy depths of the kitchen, with futile mutters of protest. If Anita said it was his night, that meant it was his night. George had been doing a lot of dishes lately. He had also been doing a lot of cooking. At first, way back when they still remembered the marriage vows, Anita had cooked every other night. She used to be quite a good little cook, too. But now she was always too busy to come home early, too tired to cook a meal after managing the agency. No doubt she was sitting on the futon now, catching the rest of the World News Tonight. George sometimes thought she loved Peter Jennings more than she loved him. A brighter light started glinting across the neon room and began to get on George's nerves. That damn crystal! It was a gift from Anita's mother. They had to hang it somewhere around the apartment or she would have bitched at George for the duration of her visit. There shouldn't be red things in a person's kitchen, George thought. Red things irritate a man when he has to think about cooking and dishes and floor-wax. He halted this train of grumpiness by pausing to scrub at a caked-on film of tartar sauce. On a second thought of George's, he decided he shouldn't think about washing when he was washing, because thinking about washing makes it go slower. So he began to contemplate the sky. It was late; about eleven-thirty or so, and the stars were being shrouded, eclipsed by fog. It was going to pour soon, maybe sooner. He could just see the moon--ever shining despite her translucent curtain. The moon was full--George knew he would have trouble sleeping that night. Everything in the night was gray and heavy--not a single bright color could he observe outside of his own apartment. No, wait, there was a bright color; George had not noticed it before. It was a soft-looking, vermillion-colored cap, resting on the sill of a window. The apartment's lights were sort of yellowish, and now George had to cease his dreaming. The sink had clogged and the dishwasher was currently spilling; splashing and splattering upon the linoleum.

Robert stood up and entered his room. Although he didn't feel tired, he needed the rest on this, the night before the physics exam, in order to pass the physics exam by a reasonable margin, in order to be accepted at Princeton. If he didn't get accepted at Princeton, he would have to go to some other college. Robert really didn't want to go to some other college. At least that was what people always told him. "Princeton--Robert, you should really go there." "Yes, Robby would fit right in at Princeton." "Yeah Rob, didn't your dad graduate from Princeton? Go for it, you're smart enough!" Robert reached for his precious Chicago Bulls hat. It might get wet on the sill, he realized. It had begun to rain.

Robert was actually only in eleventh grade, but anyone would assume he was a senior, both by his serious nature and his appearance. He stood a full six feet two inches, and his muscular presence inspired respect from all the guys he knew. (His muscular presence in conjunction with his sandy blond hair and blue eyes inspired a lot more than respect in most of the girls.) He lifted the hat and put it on backwards. It looked okay, now that he had really started growing his hair. He hadn't grown it for any particular reason except that he was afraid of barbers. Always scared he would lose an ear or something. But now he liked it long. A lot of women liked it long, too.

Robert closed the window. It was really coming down out there. He wiped away some window mist with his hand and watched it rain. He didn't mind rain at all, especially at night. Night rain was a good source of inspiration. Robert sat on the windowsill like little orphan Annie. He didn't like being called

"Rob" or "Robby." Nobody had ever called him Bob, but he was sure he wouldn't like that either. He didn't like being called anything but "Robert." He wished people would respect that. He decided that he would pick one apartment in the building opposite where the people were still awake, and look at it until someone noticed him. There was one, down a little from his tenth floor dwelling, but very close. Their drapes were nice, with sort of brownish and burgundy flowers. On the window seat lay a large, red book. Somebody was sitting in an old white armchair, but only her legs were visible. Robert drew in his knees, hugging them. He pressed his forehead against the cold, damp pane and continued gazing. Screw the physics test, he was staying here a little longer. If he didn't get into Princeton, there was always Cornell.

Nothing seems to be working. She abandons the puffy chair for the less-comfortable, but hopefully more thought-provoking floor. She promised herself not to keep looking out the window, but now she just can't help it. It is now that she notices the person sitting on the sill. His apartment is a floor higher than hers, and they live in different buildings, but he appears to be close, nearer to her than he actually is. Is he looking at her? It certainly seems that way. She accumulates enough courage to return his stare. Then, suddenly, as she peeks up at his face, she smiles. Could he be smiling back? Yes. She picks up her notebook and begins to write.

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Zoey

Part I - Guilty Feelings at Caldor's

Zoey and I were in the toy section of the Caldor's Department Store. I had five dollars and thirty-eight cents in my pocket. I kept my hand mingled in the change and counted again and again, by feel, to make sure it was all there. And Zoey watched that hand in my pocket. I knew she could hear the coins clinking together, so I stopped.

We wandered all through the toy section and each time we passed the bicycles we would honk every horn and ring every little bell until we were sure that the girl at the register would go mad, having to conceal her frustration behind a wall of politeness. I turned and looked at Zoey and she laughed and we both dodged around the corner to the other side of the aisle.

We were drawn back, every few moments, to the sea splash mermaid dolls, plastic bathing beauties that all girls of the third grade, if they truly were with it, would obtain. Over and over again, I shifted through the pile to decide which color I wanted. It was always the blue one with the pelican playmate, four dollars and sixty-seven cents. Zoey said, "I've always wanted a mermaid doll with red hair and a green tail. I've wanted one ever since they came out."

I said, "Oh."

She read to herself "The Story of the Mermaid" from the back of the box and then returned the package to the shelf. She played with the zipper on her coat. She had no money. I felt like I should share and so to assuage my guilt I told her, "I've been saving my allowance for a month for a mermaid doll, you know."

She looked at the floor. "That's good." Then she picked up the doll again. "You know, my mother doesn't give me any allowance. She doesn't want me to have any toys." My conscience began to work on me. I had five dollars and thirty-eight

cents and she had nothing. Perhaps there was some way we could share but I wanted my mermaid doll very badly so I asked her, "Don't you like that pencil case over there? Isn't it neat? I'll buy it for you if you like."

"Oh . . . thanks. I think there's a hole in my coat pocket. Mom says she might be able to buy me a new one. Next year. Maybe."

So I said, "What if I bought two mermaid outfits--one for you and one for me. That would be fair, huh?"

But she stuck her hand in the pocket with the hole and said, "What good's that? Two mermaid dresses and no mermaid doll? No, don't bother to get me anything. Just buy the stupid doll. Maybe I'll get one on my birthday. Next June. When they're not popular anymore. And you've saved up your allowance for five more. Go ahead and buy it."

I bought her the doll. She swore to be my best friend forever and ever. I started saving my allowance again.

Two months later I found out that Zoey's mother took away her allowance for belting the boy next door. And Zoey had given her mermaid doll a haircut. And buried the little catfish playmate out in the yard after she drowned it in the bathtub. But Zoey was always my friend.

Part II - Wishing for Something

Zoey asked me over for dinner one time and I almost said no because I had a feeling that she could not afford it and besides, I didn't like houses where poor people lived. But she made some serious threats concerning our eternal friendship and I felt bound to my investment of four dollars and sixty-seven cents worth of mermaid doll, which had not yet been sheared. I had not yet discovered the fate of Brian, the boy next door, or the consequences of Zoey's action, which had been the basis for her hard-luck scam.

My mother drove me over to Simmons Terrace. The street was tree-lined and pleasant and my mother had to slow the car as a group of children, who were playing in the road, assembled on a grassy lawn and waited, hands on hips, for us to pass. We counted house numbers; my mother on the right and I on the left. My mother found fifty-six and I was about to say she must be wrong because Zoey was that poor girl I had told her about, but the gold letters were hanging over the garage. A bicycle and a scooter blocked the driveway so we had to park by the side of the road. The fence posts made long, long shadows across the street. We climbed a set of stairs and rang the doorbell. Zoey opened the door with a small bounce. She was missing her top two incisors and was wearing jeans and an old sweater and sneakers that were way out of style. "Come on in!" She grabbed my arm to pull me through the front door and waved at my mother as if to wave her away. I told my mother goodbye and tried to smile but Zoey closed the door between us.

"This is my mother. She's making dinner but she's not done yet. Come up to my room and play. She was dragging me along and as I whipped through the house and around the sharp corners Zoey was making I saw paintings on the walls and dining room chairs that matched and rugs without any stains. We went up to her room--up two flights, in fact--and I was to discover that Zoey's room was the third floor.

The walls were covered with kitten posters. She had shelves full of china dolls and books and games and all the plastic characters from all the latest movies. She had a canopy bed with a lace canopy and little pieces of crystal hung from the ceiling by her windows. Her room was huge, gloriously carpeted, magical. I wanted that room and I wanted to never have to leave it. I could smell the spaghetti cooking from downstairs in the kitchen and the sun was setting outside and Zoey's kitten, long-haired and soft, was rubbing against my leg. Zoey's closet, open, was bursting with dresses of every color--princess dresses. There were shoes to match every dress. Little glass

continued on page 63

boxes were grouped on her dresser near a silver brush, comb and mirror set. I walked around that room, forgetting Zoey and touching everything. And then I saw the plastic sea splash mermaid doll.

"I thought you said you didn't get an allowance."

"I don't--until Friday. Mom took it away for a month because I walloped the kid next door for riding my scooter without permission. I tell you, though, it was worth every minute just to see that kid get what he deserved."

"You're such a liar! You told me you were poor."

"When did I say that?"

"You said you didn't get allowance and you had a hole in your coat."

"Yeah, so that's true. But it doesn't mean I'm poor or a liar. Mom's not going to get me another coat because I have two other ones in the closet. So I'm not a liar."

It enraged me that I had saved my allowance to buy the girl who had everything a sea splash mermaid doll. But I couldn't get past the fact that she hadn't lied. And her room was like fairyland to me. It seemed I could forgive one mermaid doll if I could have all this for one evening. It was so plush and perfect and . . .

"Let's carve things out of soap."

"What?" And tear me away from her room? But she didn't wait for me to answer and was dragging me downstairs to the second floor bathroom. She took out two bars of soap and then ran downstairs for some knives.

"We're making animals. What kind are you going to make?"

"A kitten, I guess." I was thinking of her room.

"I'm going to make a horse." She began. "The last place I lived in, the apartment, I used to do this all the time and Mom used to yell at me when she caught me for wasting soap. Now she doesn't care except that she keeps buying me toys and she wants me to play with them."

I carved the kitten half-heartedly. I wanted to go back to the princess room. The soap still looked like soap when I was done but Zoey had carved what I felt was sure to be a classic in the field of equine art.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I think it's good."

"Is it really good or just sorta good?"

"Really good."

"Are you just saying that or are you for real?"

"For real."

"How good is it really?"

"I said, it's really good. It's the best soap carving I've ever seen in my entire life."

"Really?"

"Really."

She smiled. "Yours is good too. Let's go down and see if dinner's ready." And again she dragged me down two flights of stairs to the kitchen, where her mother was getting out silverware. Her mother was fat and red and wore an apron with mushrooms on it. "Is this what you wore to school today? I buy you closets full of pretty things that match and look nice on you and you wear that? Don't you want to look like a nice girl from a nice family?"

"I don't care."

"Well you should."

"I can't play kickball in a stupid dress and I don't come from a nice family."

"You're fresh and you ought to get a spanking. If your friend weren't here . . ." she began to talk into the sauce "I ought to send her to her room, send her friend home . . ." Zoey led me to my chair in the dining room. I wasn't hungry. I wanted to play in Zoey's room. I had bought it for four sixty-seven. "I'm going to take all those toys back," we heard her mother say from the kitchen.

"Yeah, right, Ma," and Zoey took the soap horse out of her pocket and set it by her glass of water. She would pick it up and put it down and seemed to have forgotten all about me, who had forgotten all about her and was dreaming about sleeping in that canopy bed and wearing those color-coordinated shoes.

Zoey's mother dished out spaghetti. "What is this thing? Are you carving my soap again? You have over a million toys. Don't carve my soap again."

"Do you like it?"

"It's ugly."

"It is not!"

"It is when it's my soap. Lea, I'm sure you're not like this. You look like a good girl. Not like Zoey. Put that away--and you're going to wash with it till you've used it up."

Zoey scowled and asked, if I wasn't going to eat that piece of garlic bread, could she have it? They fell to eating. I asked if Zoey's father was coming to dinner. "Working late again," said Zoey's mother and took a long drink of her soda.

When we had finished dinner, we went up to Zoey's room. I rolled on her rug a long time and Zoey admired her soap figure. She told me she was going to keep it. She wanted to know if she could cut my hair, but I told her no. I asked her if I could please bounce on her canopy bed because I had never bounced on one before. She said she didn't care. I asked if I could play with her dolls and look at her books and she asked me whether I had come to play with her stuff or to play with her. I said her. She told me I could have one of her china dolls if I liked since I had bought her a mermaid doll. I chose one with long black curly hair. She looked like my cousin. She was the most beautiful thing I owned for a long time.

We could think of nothing more to say to one another; I, soaking in the richness of the room and looking deeply into the eyes of my doll and Zoey enraptured in her soap creation. Zoey nudged the light switch and held her sculpture up to the window to catch the moon's light. The crystals danced and we were the quietest third grade girls in Southeastern New England.

Mom came and picked me up. My brother, Zachariah, eight, was in the back seat. He was looking out the car window into the woods. There were one or maybe two of my younger brothers and sisters in carseats back with him. Zachariah did not say hello when I got into the car and I did not say hello to anyone. I dressed and undressed my doll all the way home. I slept with her. I dreamt about Zoey's room.

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Thief's Hands

I knew daddy wasn't perfect. I knew he wasn't--really--meant to be called daddy but I loved him. Daddy had this rich, dark voice, and this easy accent that made everything he said sound like it was coming straight from his heart; made everything sound true.

But you have to understand: my father was a free spirit. Society was cruel to him all his life. No one cared for my father; no one tried to help him. No one understood that you can't just lock up a man's body and expect his spirit to go with it--especially a man to whom law and order were like a bridle and carriage to a wild, galloping horse. Like tight red ribbons painfully fastened around his senses.

If you have ever watched a Clydesdale in the shadow of a skyscraper, attached to a massive cart; the strain in its muscles as the leather straps forcibly embrace its barrel, and the tired glaze in its eyes at the staggering glare of the street lamps--if you have ever seen that, you'll understand what it was like for my father to settle down in an apartment in the city.

Daddy could steal anything. He could steal your life-savings, your car, the shirt off your back, the grin off your face...daddy could even steal the time to have a daughter. Daddy could steal anything. And when he was around, he taught me that I could too. One day he handed me a mirror. Examine the face you see before you. The power in your face, the expression you choose to decorate your features with, can enable you to own other people. Bat the eyelashes. Soften the lips. Keep your jaw locked and your head straight, and never--never look down. Daddy was wonderful.

The last time I saw him, it was about 9 o'clock in the evening, and I had been sleeping; I was buried under this soft, black knitted blanket, with holes between the stitches large enough to see through. I had been sleeping, and all of a sudden I heard this--kind of--peaceful sigh. I opened my eyes, and looked out of the holes in the blanket, to see my father standing there, smiling at me. He must have thought I was still asleep, because he didn't say anything. I remember my hair was spread across my face in these webbed masses, and as I looked through it, the blurred color gave this sort of yellow glow to everything around me. To my father, and his skin, and his eyes, and his hands...the hands of a thief. I sat up and cooled my face with the back of my hand.

"Hi, daddy."

He smiled again and told me he was going out to get some groceries, and some flowers for my mother, and that he would be back for dinner. That was sixteen years ago. I do not know where he went, or what made him leave, or if something happened, or--or if he is still alive...but I believe he is. Because the next day, I walked home alone down the hill and around the block...and on the street, with no one else around, I found a bag of groceries. I pulled aside the handles, and lifted a mass of patterned paper away from what smelled like roses. And roses they were. The flowers he got for my mother? I do not know.

But now, as I handle them, dried and frail after these years gone by, I see my hands...so like my father's hands...thief's hands....

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