

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



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INTRODUCTION

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

Each year we send 11,000 copies--printed as a public service by Ottaway newspaper THE DAILY ITEM in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to 3,400 schools in the 10 states from which we receive over 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 six years, I have had the opportunity to work with some of these same writers, as well as dozens of others, through Susquehanna's 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. Appropriately, at the beginning of the second decade of THE APPRENTICE WRITER, the University has just created THE WRITERS' INSTITUTE, an innovative way to further promote excellence in writing.

THE WRITERS' INSTITUTE, in 1993-94, will oversee

the extended residency of internationally-recognized poet Denise Levertov; the Freshman Writing Seminar Visiting Authors, which insures a campus visit by the author of a class text; and the Visiting Writers Series, which has brought artists such as Tobias Wolff, Sharon Olds, Robert Creeley, Madison Smartt Bell, David Bradley, and Larry Heinemann to campus.

Under the supervision of THE WRITERS' INSTITUTE, advanced workshops in fiction and poetry are available. A "Writing-in-Action Day," which will feature a nationally-recognized author, will host 150 high school students from Pennsylvania and neighboring states on November 9. A student reading series, an expanded literary magazine, independent writing projects, and writing internships provide interesting options for student writers. This year, for instance, the first creative Honors Thesis, a novella, was written under the supervision of the Writers' Institute Director.

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, essays, photography, and artwork by students in grades 9-12. Send material to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17840. The deadline for submitting is March 15, 1994.

We also welcome inquiries from students about THE WRITERS' INSTITUTE and Summer Writers' Workshops in fiction, poetry, and journalism at the above address or (717) 372-4164.

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LOGO DESIGN

Carolyn Gienieccko	
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Artichokes

The outside always reminded me
Of fish scales. My mother
Used to put one of them, whole,
Between me and my sister.
Lisa once told me she loved them,
The first thing she said, and she laughed
And pulled her hands inside her sleeves,
Folded her arms into the bunches of her sweater.
We peeled from the outside in,
Slowly, and I remember
That the outer layers were the toughest,
Like callouses.

They told me she was seventeen,
Born in Beijing, soloed nine times
With the San Francisco Symphony,
A violinist and my first angel.
We would sit there, facing it
With full concentration,
Feeling and pulling,
As we stripped it of its outsides.
And finally, she played.
She held the instrument in her lap
With her hands, then lifted it
Like the arm of a lover.

It became softer, more delicate
As we moved on. The little leaves
Slid off easy. "That's the choke,"
Said my mother, "Just cut it out."
It was as if she could create,
As if she knew.
And I wanted to touch her,
To feel the music on the inside.
But we couldn't. We didn't.
We just left it there,
Cold, as if the end
Could never justify the means.

Evan Hughes
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

The Glass Egg

I once had a picture book about a rabbit whose pastel world was contained in a yellow glass egg. In the story, one could watch him through a decorative window in the egg, but he was always at a distance, absorbed in his self-contained little life.

The apartment is still and dark when I arrive home from school earlier than usual. The muffled noise of the traffic on the avenue below is part of the city silence. From outside, the cars cast moving shadows which unite the white walls with their glossy brown trim. The glass panes in the doors appear warped as the pale sunlight hits them.

I place my bookbag gently on the floor of my room and walk soundlessly down the hall. Through the half-closed doorway of my parents' room, I see my father lying on the bed; he is home early. His perfectly shined shoes rest neatly on the white pile rug, shoe trees inside them. The room is dark except for the sharp light given off by a black clip-on lamp on the headboard, and the weak light from the long French window across the room.

The harsh light picks out my father's serious, sweet face. It

highlights his bald crown, the chrome on the softly jabbering radio against the wall, his hands, which hold the Metropolitan News section of the New York Times above him. His pale blue shirtsleeves are rolled up, and his feet, encased in smooth, ribbed brown socks, fall easily to the side. He leans against a pile of shapeless pillows in brown cases. They match the rough, brown and black checked blanket.

I move down the hall to the doorway of the living room. My mother sits in one of the round living room chairs, her back to the window, reading the International News. Her legs are propped up on the glass-topped wagonwheel table, her long, bony feet turned in towards each other. The chair is hidden beneath an old tablecloth, whose blue and yellow flowers set off the bright turquoise of the old, cheap jogging pants my mother wears. They are coupled with a scratchy-looking synthetic lace shirt - her "around the house" clothes.

Through her clear-framed reading glasses, my mother concentrates intently on the paper, her dark hair loose and a little fuzzy as always, straggling in her face. Her expression is rigid and serious, her dark eyes intensely focused on the page, as if she were trying to burn a hole in it.

I slip across the hall and look into the study. My brother is at the computer, as usual, in the far corner of the room. He slouches in the old wooden swivel chair, almost backed up against my father's heavy desk - glued to the screen, bug-eyed, mouth hanging open slightly. He looks rumpled, from his too thick, sand-textured brown hair to his sloppy socks and neon-trimmed Nikes. Beneath his shoes he unwittingly crushes papers, computer books and pens, which lie scattered around the swivel chair. Among them is the Science Section.

I head back towards the front door, stepping gingerly so as to avoid a single creak of the floorboards. I grab my wallet and black nylon purse from my room. As I slowly open the front door, there is the muffled sound of the rubber siding pressing against the crusty plaster at the edge of the wall.

I come out of the back alley just as a crosstown bus pulls away from the curb with a violent huff. A bunch of yelling preschoolers wheel their plastic motorcycles home from Riverside Park, mothers in tow. A Mack truck follows me up the hill, its engine making threatening noises. The drivers ignore the "\$50 Fine For Honking" signs. A gust of wind fights me as I head for Broadway, blowing two D'Agostino's bags and a discarded Sports Section in my path.

Up at the corner, a familiar gray-looking man with long, matted hair peddles used books and clothes, a cigarette dangling from his hand. The M104 bus leaves the curb with a mechanical shriek. An Hispanic fellow selling flowers from a shopping cart shouts in a heavy accent as I pass him, crossing the boulevard. From the other side a group of black girls wearing doorknocker earrings and shiny black platform shoes shout through me as they go into the subway. "Jamal! Yo, Jamal!"

As I head down the block, there is the distant underground rumbling of a train. A woman on black high heels flies past me into the subway, her jewel-toned scarf bouncing in the air. Another bunch of noisy kids follows her, crunching on Dipsy Doodles.

I go into Eeyore's, a children's bookstore. Painted in the window, Harry Houdini hangs upside-down next to a fascinated kid in thirties garb. The featured book of the month is called "The Houdini Box". Inside, the walls are a soft green, and paper cutout animals hang from the ceiling. Children huddle with their parents around picture books, all animated voices and hands as their parents patiently turn the pages. "The Little Mermaid" soundtrack plays almost imperceptibly in the background.

I head for a bookcase filled with thin hardcover storybooks, and begin to search the bindings. Somewhere in here must be a story about a life in a glass egg.

Rebecca Hirschfield
New York, New York
Hunter College High School
Barbara Miller

Drive

I once saw the head of Halley's Comet:
dim and boring in comparison to the halogen bulbs
that fire past me
only a few feet away--
across
asphalt
coughed up
itchy comfort air
that stings the gauzy stretch of skin
around my wrist

Hating dirt but bearing soot,
I'll endure the dried-out canal of a highway
before some mucousy field.

Octane is not as impressive as the sun,
but it's prettier when it burns,
and it's hotter around my face.
Warmer than the diffused energy
of our closest star.
I don't care if the sun is bigger,
older, stronger, faster
brighter.
This juice fires up
the yellowed dusk.

Maria Teresa Dizzia
Cranford, NJ
Kent Place School
Dr. Jane Cole

Breeding

In a patch of dirt behind the house,
where we met and parted,
I planted seeds. Dug them down
in spring earth, breathing
with morning dew and worms.
Fast into the seeping heat of June,
me growing big and watered down
with lemonade and mint.
Popsicle sticks half in, half out,
label in careful black marker
that spreads through wood and runs
by August, like letters read in rain.
Tulips and irises sprouted into lilies
and grew wild--
I couldn't bend to cut them back.
The baby came in fall when leaves
covered the garden with dry color,
dropping like sighs. Her, burrowed
in pink blankets and sleep.
I could creep
down to the jack oak and quiet
until she cried again. Sneaking
like a secret, a mistress,
my seeds had grown to flowers
and died, strangled
by bantling burdock and mayweed.

Nicole M. LaBrecque
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Chicopee, Massachusetts

Right off the squirming highway
we step into the dark land
of hazy olive yellow motel rooms,
smoke filled air
and a "family style" restaurant
300 yards from Motel 6.

Greasy morsels,
brown vinyl booths and
particle board divide us
from the fat man eating ribs,
the waitresses in white, air
cushioned shoes, and shelves
covered with fried food
waiting under heat lamps.

Back at Motel 6
Chicopee George sits
at the front desk while
tired bones await unfamiliar sheets
stretched over hard mattresses
in rooms with unknown corners
and ash trays
full of someone else's cigarettes.

Night squeezes its lonely air
into the restaurant and under
motel doors pushing
our travelling souls onward
towards another American beauty.

Andrea Kresge
Stroudsburg, PA
Moravian Academy
Johanna Farrell

Untitled

Last night's dreams linger in their minds
like midnight mist winding through the toes of Dawn,
that girl with the fiery hair and eyes the wings of birds.
She speaks to them with honey words,
loosening limbs but emptying stomachs,
sweat beading on the bundled ones.
Colored ribbons band across the sky,
swiftly moving in wind that stirs creatures back into marbled
shells. Frost sent away the dark that brought chill
to those parts of the floor unroofed by the knitted rug.
I stare along a piece of yarn stretched from its corner
across wooden planks.
If I look hard I can see my own unraveled state,
snow falling outside in large flakes.
I imagine the coldness of them in my palms,
melting and dripping, and I,
still watching children as they sleep,
the drops like my eager wishes to hear their Dawn.
I return to shadows of a pine scented hall,
creeping out before they wake, making sure
no trace of this new sun escapes the room
onto the white wash beyond.

Tamika LeNay Hughes
Philadelphia, PA
Julia R. Masterson High School
Mary Ellen Brown

My Mother Smokes

It's 11:30 at night and I'm sitting on my bed watching the blue-blackness of August through my ripped up screen window. The moths that crept into the room are all near the ceiling, flitting around to the noise of the locusts outside in the woods.

The night is turned upside down; everything is different. My parents, who rarely go out, are at a party; my brother Ken, who is almost never home, is asleep in his room next door. It's all different except for me. I'm on my bed smelling the end of summer flow in and out with the moths like I always do this time of year.

So I get up and I'm trying to shake the funny feeling I've got being all alone with the moths and the wet, wet air. The boxed silence of the house and the chorus of the locusts are chewing my ears like wild dogs. I don't want to be here. I hate feeling lonely.

I step over to the other side of the room and sit down in front of this brown wicker basket full of letters and piles of junk that only pack rats like me keep around. I don't quite know why my hands are opening every old envelope, I only know that the letters smell like ink and envelope glue and the guilt you feel after not writing back to people. I'm learning that old letters do nothing for loneliness.

So I'm looking and looking and I don't even know what for but all of a sudden I'm opening up this blank envelope. There's a cigarette in it and I'm wondering, where the hell did this come from? But so far it's the only thing I've touched that feels real, all bent and imperfect and human. It's quickly apparent to me that this is the kind of cigarette my mother smokes. I stole it from her purse and put it away for a time like now. I don't smoke.

I'm leaving the thickness of my room and heading towards the kitchen because that's where the matches are. All the while I'm wondering why. I hate the smoke because it stings my eyes and I hate the taste because it covers my throat with chalky soot. I hate cigarettes because they're probably killing my mother. But I keep walking because all I really want to do is conquer them--to learn how to smoke like a pro and not get addicted--not like my mother.

The house is dark, just like outside, and it's cluttered because I live in a house full of pack rats just like me. The locusts are following me; windows are open all over. The matches are where I expect them, on the counter just above the bread drawer. That's where my mother keeps them and there are plenty.

I know well that no one is home, except snoring Ken and the moths, but still I jam those matches into my pocket, grab the ashtray and smuggle them into my room like a thief, like I did when I stole the cigarette. I'm so nervous that between the beating of my heart and the locusts, I think my ears will explode.

I'm back on the bed now by the window which I've just opened wider. The night is no darker, no bluer, no blacker. It's three minutes after midnight and my parents are still not home. Ken has not stirred which makes me happy now that I'm about to light up. Ken hates the smell of smoke; he's got the nose of a beagle.

The matches smell like rust and the scraping of them against the sandpaper is like nails on a blackboard. I grit my teeth and ready myself for the deed. I'm sitting poised on the bed, wanting to look chic, wanting to beat the cigarette at its own game, wanting to show my mother how it's done. I know well that I do not have an addictive nature--it's my mother who does. She tells me she picked it up the first time she tried it. I am not so slick. I choked my first time.

So I'm lighting up and somewhere at a party my mother probably is too. I am doing all I can to forget that though, and trying to concentrate on learning to inhale the smoke the right way: smooth and cool and completely without effort. I intend to be a pro by the end of the night.

And here I am sucking in and coughing out and I'm stumbling over my own pompous last attempt at beating the demon that is this cigarette. And it all makes me feel so stupid and so alone that I'm sitting here with the moths and locusts and my snoring brother, keeping this unconquerable cigarette company by the window.

I am so disgusted I put out the cigarette and throw the last three quarters of it out the window with the ashes. I've wasted a good cigarette. It's eight minutes after midnight and I've managed

to fill the room with smoke and soak my sheets with the smell of a public bathroom. I want to forget that I failed.

There is no fan in my room and I don't want to go into the hallway to get one. I know the smoke will find its way into my parents' room. It will wait up for them long after I have gone to sleep. And I know that if my mother thinks I have been smoking, it will make her cry. She hates cigarettes even more than I do.

Amanda Gunn
Stamford, CT
Stamford High School
Margaret Ragozzino

Perfectly Clear

My vision became quite poor at a very young age. Though it is fully corrected now, as much as is possible, I remember when it first began to leave me. In the first grade. My teacher was a quiet, aging veteran with huge Coke-bottle glasses. Little chains hung from the sides and draped delicately down to her bony shoulders. I would sit at my desk, chubby and oblivious, and she would peer at me through those vast rims, her eyes watery and magnified.

Please not me, please not me.

I tried to escape her view but her gaze flooded the room. I couldn't escape, I surely would drown.

"Read the sentence for us, Barry." Her lips moved slowly. The words were warm, but I could see that tiny, cold sparkle, like the glint off a knife, lurking in the back of those eyes. She knew damn well I couldn't see anything. I strained my back forward, craning my neck, eyes squinting, adopting a physical counterpart to the mental strain of trying to see the chalkboard.

That blue room spun so fast in my mind that time waited for me; it stood in the corner, arms crossed, beckoning for me to speak. My lips parted in a rubbery grin, but my throat was mute as lead. That old woman stood there crookedly, eyes holding me in chains. The corners of her wrinkled mouth began to glow as a grin started to surface. She knew exactly what was happening. She knew and she wouldn't let me go, wouldn't throw me a life-preserver.

I choked alone beneath those brown waves.

"Barry, is there a glare on the board? Let me go narrow the blinds a bit..."

I was prescribed glasses, "spectacles" as the grey-bearded doctor called them, but would not wear them. Not for my life. Thus the world around me remained a foggy, indecipherable mess. People were faceless from a distance. If someone called out to me in the lunchroom, "Hey Barry!", I wouldn't know how to respond. I would strain to see the child's eyes, to know whether they held mockery or warmth or sheer surprise, but the face was a tiny pink thumbprint on an angry collage of colors and shapes. And I would stifle my small voice, not knowing where to aim my glance or my shout. I was alone in a thick fog, shrieks and giggles and whispers bouncing off the cinder-block walls like soft bullets, grazing my head and disappearing into the mist.

So I turned inward, my mind being the only place where I could clearly see. Inward, to where things were small and close and sharply defined. I withdrew myself from the unknown and began peering at this life through a magnifying glass. I read books often, holding them close to my face and narrowing my eyes to pinpoint each word on the page. Each word became vastly important, a bastion in a sea of ink, to be carefully regarded and scrutinized.

"Gibber." "Nook." "Flenser." These became my compatriots for the time.

This period of inversion didn't last long, looking back on the whole affair, but I developed certain habits during this intense span that burrowed into my psyche and remained there. They were a rare strain of viruses that would lie dormant in my bones, only to reactivate themselves at whim. One of these was a tendency to personal obsession, specifically a vehement fear of contagion.

continued on p.6

As could be expected, some of the brighter students caught sight of my disposition and attempted to take advantage of it. For amusement, of course. One day at recess we were out on the blacktop, playing basketball, and I noticed that one boy--a thin, wheezy runt named Lars--kept stopping to rub his eye. He would rub it fiercely, painfully. Lars noticed me studying him, and approached me when I wasn't looking. Feeling a small prod in the small of my back, I whirled around. Lars's eye looked like a bloody globe in his pallid, buck-toothed face. It glared at me from its socket, all pink and oozing. I shrunk back in horror. Lars dipped his finger into the sick, crusty mess and extended it toward me, like a gift.

"Here, Barry," he chuckled through his thin liver-lips, "have some pink-eye." He began stalking me on pigeon-toed legs, his finger held out in front of him like a torch. I wobbled backwards, tripped on my ankle and fell back against a chain-link fence. That bony finger kept floating toward my face, guided by the bloated, smiling eye.

In a complete blindness, I swung my fist out in front of me like a beast unleashed. It landed smack in Lars's eye with a sick, wet thud, like a rotten pumpkin hitting the pavement. When I realized what had happened, I shrieked. This was mostly drowned out by Lars's bawling, somewhere to my left. Then I looked down at my fist in terror, and for a fleeting second saw it as the scaly, rotting hand of a leper, polluting the rest of my arm like a malignant stump. I fell to my knees, grinding my knuckles against the blacktop, trying to free myself from the diseased skin of my own hand. Like a bear caught in the metal teeth of a trap, gnawing viciously at his own foot to save the rest of his body. Then the swarm of voices, the hoard of sneakers stampeding towards me. I envisioned a lynch mob after me, all torches and teeth and ropes, and turned to the sky, as if for escape. As I stared into the sun, runlets of blood trickled down my arm like hot, salty sweat.

That is when I saw her standing by the fence. Blue sunspots danced around her golden face like angels, flitting about in circles each time I blinked. Her frizzy blond hair framed her head in a huge halo. And at that moment I stared into her eyes and saw that she understood.

She understood!

Those eyes were deep and cool and blue, like a rare lagoon. I felt myself diving into them, plunging deeper and deeper as the crystal water sucked from my skin all the heat and blood and pain and confusion. Just cool, naked splendor. Fresh and clear and free. I could see that she wanted to free me from this place; to escape with me. We held that blue gaze for eternity, as the bawling and anger of the blacktop faded into obsolescence.

She was in my class, too. We had sat across from each other, unaware of each other's presence for months. Now she was a divine statue, a Madonna unveiled. Now we were attached by a secret golden thread, invisible, which allowed us to mutually experience every thought from within our hearts.

And we needn't speak. She knew that as well as I. All our feelings and desires could be communicated just by looking into each other's eyes. It was a spiritual attachment, high above all the dead, garbled conversation of the classroom. Only we knew how to rise over the lowliness. When I looked into those soft depths, everything was clear. Perfectly clear.

Weeks slipped along like this; I was floating on a cloud of new vision. The class would be taking a test--twenty-two heads turned intensely downward, twenty-two pencils scribbling furiously. I'd see her face turned down to her paper, her hair spilling over it like a waterfall of light, hiding her visage. And amidst the silent cacophony of scrawling and snuffles, I could hear her pencil dancing softly over the page. Each smooth curve or soft arc she made stood out to me like a rare orchid trapped in a garden of weeds, holding up sacred petals to protect the precious bud inside. Each mark was like a perfumed whisper in my ear, sending bursts of white electricity through my body, energizing every pore in my skin.

And I basked in the secret knowledge that she was listening to me, too, and experiencing exactly what I was.

After a month and ten days, I decided that I would have to say something to her. I knew I didn't need to, and that she knew

that, but it couldn't hurt. Nothing could harm the bond between us. We were sublime.

At lunch, I approached her. Though I was confident, more confident than I had ever been, I felt a small, hot excitement, as though I was entering an undiscovered room in a house I had lived in all my life. She was sitting at a table, on the end seat. About her sat the other girls, pecking at their lunches like a cheery nest of birds. I walked slowly up to her, looking down at my sneakers which stepped on the tile beneath me. A nervous, giggled hush settled over the table as I approached. I felt unfamiliar eyes fall on me, visually groping and prodding. I tried to avoid them.

Then I was looking down at her, her face turned up to mine. I realized how silly my slight nervousness had been as I plunged into those safe, blue depths, feeling my hair streaming behind me. The connection was there, and the noise of the lunchroom faded into the fog. There was only her and me, alone in the shade of the lagoon. I cleared my throat briskly. It sounded tiny and hoarse, almost choked. I felt my words boiling up inside my chest, pushing me to let them spill freely forth.

My lips parted.

Our gaze was pure sunlight, liquid diamonds.

My lungs rumbled, sending a wave of energy up into my throat; my teeth parted, tongue poised--

"Megan."

The name was a golden butterfly, released straight from my lips into the air. I was showered with the radiance of my spoken word--the word that would weld us for eternity.

"I'm sorry--do I know you?" Her eyes clouded like milk spilled over glass. My tongue lay bloated and tangled in my mouth. My lungs withered like dying ferns. "Hello?"

Suddenly I was miles beneath the water, alone and lost. The depths turned murky and cold. Far above me, bubbly laughter echoed down from a sunny place.

I was drowning beneath the waves.

Now the lunchroom fog swirled about me, dragged back into existence like a corpse from the grave. The giggles and shouts swarmed me, detached from the blur of featureless faces. I stumbled through rows of lunch tables, like endless tombstones.

"Barry, where you going?"

"Hey Barry!"

All faces and hands and nameless tongues. Outside the school, I turned my face upward to the low, overcast sky. Each tear fell from my eyes like a small, clear lens, and shattered silently on the pavement.

Brian Booker
Bethesda, MD
Walt Whitman High School
Dr. Galvin

Flock

From overhead, comes a chattering sound
Like a party muffled by walls.
A stream of black appears,
Like oil spilled on the sky,
Flowing past the corners of the clouds.
Three blinks later, it gets thinner,
Now a spill of pepper,
Blowing past the trees.

Peter Lindberg
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School
Gary Blankenberg

Handled

Too uncomfortable to sit still,
he rubs his palms across his stomach
under his shirt
and across his ribs.
He pokes and fiddles
with this little knobby tumor clot thing
in his breast.
He smooths himself out,
smears and spreads his body
back in place.

Puts his hands on the piano
and pushes the ivory keys--
presses his fidgety energy into the soundingboard
as veins stretch across deliberate octaves.

His hands are so much older than he is:
they're darker than his face and his chest.
They look strong and worn
world-weary
compared to his fair and gentle face.
Even relaxed they are grown-up:
his knuckles shrunken around a delicate bone,
his nails cropped just below the tip.

He drops a tired hand to my knee
thoughtlessly--
merely a rest stop
until he catches another gnawing ripple,
a whispering aggravation,
and he begins to smooth it out
once more.

Maria Teresa Dizzia
Cranford, NJ
Kent Place School
Dr. Jane Cole

Positive Space

my art teacher
asks my to pose.
flattered, i sit for three hours,
staring at the screaming
white, pinhole walls
where days before
my work had hung.
'pick a focal point, stay fixed,'
echo, as my eyes paste
to a thumbsize sticker
across the empty room.
banjo music strums
as the artists take the brush.
still life.
intent on work,
the artists fade to negativity,
amorphous blackness.
while light surrounds me;
the tiny sticker
paints negative space in my mind.

Kristen Sabol
Lattimer, PA
Bishop Hafey High School
Michael Stofko



Natalie Hope McDonald
Lebanon, PA
Lebanon Catholic High School
Kathleen Devitz

Marlboro Man

I gave away
one cigarette
christening white
to my sucking baby brother
whose dishpan eyes begged
for one,
smooth,
in.

In it went
like guava juice
-no like lukewarm coffee
pitched and packed tight
to spelling "o" lips
as it slid,
slowly,
down.

Down, downly dense
filling the flattened sacs
into cherry balloons
to fly away
stringless and unbound....
until the next
just once.

Michele Miller
East Hanover, NJ
Villa Walsh Academy
Olive O'Sullivan

It takes me a few minutes to realize why, except for the rootless men with their brown paper bags, the train station is deserted. It's New Year's Day, and the entire city is shut down. My walk down the darkened streets is that of the paranoid: every third step is a look over my shoulder.

Walking down the streets of this city usually makes me happy; I lose myself, surrounded by a tide of detached people and red bricks. I can look around me and be bombarded by signs of life. I am still separate, still an outsider, but I don't have that gnawing feeling of abandonment that creeps up on you when you're truly isolated.

But there is a different quality to the air tonight. Tonight I am flat out scared. I keep seeing things that are not there; doors slam and windows darken and I think to myself that it's been a long time since I've felt this alone.

I turn down 10th and sit on the steps of what used to be my second home. Stavroula lives across the street, and someone is sitting in her window. For a minute I think it's Greg, and then I remember that Greg has changed, he doesn't look like that anymore. We've all changed. I pass my hands over my swollen eyes. It's been fifteen minutes, and now Stavroula is in the window waving me over.

The smell of Greek food wafts up from the restaurant below, following me up the stairs to her room. I play the bass for a while, my fingers barely touching the strings as I observe Brian's back reflected in the window. I think about kissing him in his car Sunday. I watch his hands float over his guitar and wonder when I will be courageous enough to let someone get close to me, and when there'll be someone who actually wants to. A Rites of Spring song crawls through my tangled thoughts, but the irony is lost in the weariness of the present, of sitting on the floor of a stranger's home because there is a stranger in my own. I move to feel the window's January chill, and I sweat.

Leaving, I still don't know where I'm headed. I sit in Brian's car again; this time there are five of us. I say he doesn't have to drive me to the station, but inside I'm glad. An old man with his fly down stands too close to me at the pay phone. My father answers and I hang up. I wait the half hour for my train while a man who calls me "beautiful" circles like a shark. He doesn't see beauty in my uncombed hair and reddened eyes; he recognizes the familiar hollowness, he is attracted to his prey as if by the smell of blood. Euphemisms drop from his lips for what I read in his eyes: "Victim. Hole. Meat." I try not to feel trapped and wonder what I'll do if he moves closer. I don't know.

The train comes and I shrink into my too-big clothes and head... home? Homeward, at least--tonight I'm not sure where home is. An Israeli man talks happily to the old man behind me about the city. He's been here a day. I wonder how he sees these streets. The Israeli man is nice, he makes me laugh. The old man tells him that everyone is happy today because it is a new year. The old man makes me laugh.

It's colder than I remember when I get off the train. Back in the suburbs, the streets are safer, but they're just as heartless. A dog barks, and although I'm in no hurry to get home, I run the last block.

My mouth tastes like blood. I stand in the kitchen feeling like a stranger and drink a cup of coffee with my jacket on. I hang up the new calendar and go to my room. Sitting in the chair by my window, my mind avoids the thought of the year and eight months left in this house. I try to think of friends and count my blessings, but I come up empty. I put on a record to mask my footsteps and sit on the stairs and unlace my boots. Below me, behind a locked door is a closed off man, a man I don't even know anymore. I feel his blood in my veins, and I wonder what he is thinking. When I look in the mirror, I see his eyes and wonder who I'll be when I leave this house. I see his effect on me already, the way I push everything away that threatens to make me happy. The song returns to me again: "I have learned sometimes a need can run too deep

and we throw away the things we most wanted to keep." Am I going to be my father? The record clicks to a stop, and the silent house has no answer for me. Are you thinking about me, Daddy? Do you miss your little girl? Like father, like daughter; I lock myself in my room like a prison I have built for myself. I lay on my bed and feel very, very small. I remember the old man who said everyone is happy because of the new year, and this time, I can't laugh.

Alexis Amoroso
Meadowbrook, PA
Abington High School
Mr. Baker

Night Terror

My attachments have grown too thick.

I want to go back those horrible nights
when I dreamt my hands huge lobster claws,
and woke, to shuffle around the hall
trying to shake the dream from them.

They tingled and my numb fingers
were a single awkward clasping tool
that wouldn't cover my ears
when my mother cried out in her native language
and my father didn't hear her.

I want to go back to writing poems
under flashlighted-sheets,
to tucking every corner of every blanket
under every elbow and heel
and sleeping in the hot fortress
of my fears.

I want to return to waking on my back
with eyes angled toward the window
waiting for dream faces to disappear,
blanket-less and drenched in a cold sweat,
my T-shirt wrinkled up to my neck.

Under the false protection of a wire screen
I listened to summer animals scream and screech
their ownership of night.
With renewed faith, I whimpered Jesus loves me
to the gray slab of light
that allowed itself to creep to the frame of my doorway.

I want to return to the fantasies of night:
when fathers die in car crashes,
and sisters drown in creeks,
to my own death--
rape, and a gunshot wound in the head.

But with your knees suctioned
to the dangle of my own
I can only force my lids to stay open,
and wait
for the instant you fall asleep
when your arms will loosen and set me free.

Jill Robin Sisson
Finksburg, MD
Westminster High School
Alan Zepp

Untitled

The only thing I remember from that night is the clicking sound of my left turn signal and my mother's cautioning statement concerning my position. "Come on, I've had my permit for over two weeks," I began, and I imagine that's all she heard, what with the screeching of brakes and the crunch of several cars into each other and a concrete barrier. The last thing I saw was some unidentifiable debris sailing towards the windshield, shattering my world into a thousand tiny pieces. I caught a glimpse of my own eyes in the rear view mirror before they closed, and although many images were passing before them at one time, I was able to take one long look straight into my very thoughts.

This look was the cause of my waking up last night, as it has been on several other evenings. I will be having some pleasant dream when suddenly I will see a mirror, and my face will glare back at me with such horror and confusion that I may not sleep again for days. I even avoid looking into reflective surfaces, afraid of what I might see. The nightmare happens very rarely, so I really have no reason to complain. I would imagine worse things can happen to people once they die. Did I mention that? That I died? Yes; all because of some unclear traffic law I was dead for three minutes and twenty-eight seconds. I suppose that is about when the paramedics arrived and pulled me away from my destiny.

So, of course, you are wondering, "What happened while you were dead?" I know this because that is the first thing everyone wonders; that is the first thing my sister Ann asked when she saw me; that is the first thing that the woman sitting in the third row at the Oprah Winfrey taping wanted to know. Well, I didn't see any white light, and my late dog Wilson didn't run out of the darkness. I have tried many times but the best way I can explain it is this: I saw nothing. I heard nothing. I was conscious, but not fully aware of my surroundings. And I remember a distinct sensation, which I can only explain by saying it felt much like I imagined being in a cloud would feel before I learned about water vapor and air pressure.

I might be able to supply a more thorough account, had the emergency team been slightly delayed. This, however, was not my fortune. I'm not sure exactly how, but my life was returned to my body. At least, that is what I have been made to believe. I can't say the possibility hasn't occurred to me that I was never brought back. Perhaps this is heaven, perhaps this is hell, or perhaps this is some vast waiting room where I'm being observed until I throw the balance one way or the other. Most likely, though, this is just some bizarre product of my fantastic imagination, and it's rather unusual that such a scenario would ever cross my mind to begin with.

In addition to my new vivid creative powers, dying has certainly given me a unique perspective on life. I did not rush out and give all my possessions to charity or devote myself to volunteer work. These are principles which I believe have great value to a certain extent, but the insight I gained led me in quite a different direction. It may best be demonstrated in my newfound abhorrence of mathematics. It has been my observation that, in undertaking a mathematics problem, one is searching for a single, concise, logical, reasonable answer. With this in mind, I must conclude that mathematics is completely misplaced in the real world. "Life just isn't like that." The juxtaposition of reality with anything rational or simple is totally ironic. Dying has shown me that very little makes sense, that life will never be reduced to some rudimentary equation, and that man never will have any grasp on what sort of mechanism is at work determining each individual's fate.

I think I enjoy life a lot more now. I think I take advantage of every opportunity and appreciate things I would have overlooked before. Not too many people I come by can accept that tomorrow you just might have a close encounter with a concrete barrier, so perhaps you should make the most of today. I suddenly notice things like rainbows and snowflakes; when I break a glass it doesn't upset me as it used to. I don't live as if each breath is my last, but I also don't take breathing for granted.

I got out of bed and snuggled my feet into Ann's worn pink slippers. When I pulled back the curtains I saw the black night sky, lit with a thousand stars. I placed one of my Dad's old records on my dusty turntable, and the harmony of Simon and Garfunkle drifted through my room. "El Condor Pasa." If I'm ever permitted to complete my life, I thought, maybe I will be a condor. I won't be tied to the ground as I am now; I will soar the skies. I'll feel what it really is like to touch the clouds, to see the world from above.

I laughed at the thought of how crazy I must have sounded and what my old friends would have thought if they could have heard me. Deciding to refresh myself with a splash of cold water, I headed toward my sink. The cool drops trickled down my face as I stood up, but they did not prepare me for what I was about to see. I opened my eyes and, for the first time, I did not glance away from the mirror. I did not turn my head. I did not avert my eyes. I was aware of the image. I believed that what I saw was the truth. Yet I realized that it was not me staring back.

Jennifer Bildersee
Meadowbrook, PA
Abington High School
Mr. Baker

Weeds

Do you remember those nights when
the field grasses hissed in wind,
tan and rusty feathers of the field shivered,
the white sliver of moon cracked
a smile over the crooked land,
my knees peeked out of jeans worn down to threads
and you sat, legs crossed,
with a ladder of smoke climbing
from your fingers to the sky
...a trail of smoke caught by the wind
and pulled across my face...

Do you remember the cars that roared
over the empty road, disturbing the silver-blue
silence of the night

or the way dry grass picked and scratched
through jeans as we sat
in our circle of weeds

Do you remember how you stood
and twisted under the sky
with chestnut hair hanging over your eyes,
the smoke still rising from your fingertips
or how I felt so young and wild

Do you remember how the forks squeaked
across delicate plates in the warm light of the house
and how the silhouettes of hungry people
were outlined in large windows

Do you remember how our skin puckered
as a breeze slid slowly across our arms
or how faces seemed to glow
in the light of the flame lit with white hands

Do you remember the sounds of deer in bushes,
of squirrels and rabbits scurrying away from the fire
or the sound of my breath as I exhaled...

Tell me you remember how I loved you
when the night was fierce
and your face grinned

as you brought your smoking fingers
slowly to your soft pink mouth.

Andrea Kresge
Stroudsburg, PA
Moravian Academy
Johanna Farrell

Loneliness

for Rachael and Gary

I made my own birthday cake
an epiphany waiting to happen
stirring in the cloves
to numb the ache in my arm
from the beating

the pictures all focus
on the butter and chocolate
streaked across my face
and my sister's white blouse
stolen for the occasion

staying up late
lavish with vanilla
flown in from Jamaica
and ground that night
in the gray back room of the metropolitan airport

I put the candles in myself
one by one
a hundred of them
my lungs could still take them
even after I had sung my own song
screeching and warbling and dancing
all around the living room of the borrowed house

I made my own birthday cake
and I made my own wish
which has not come true despite
the burn marks on my elbows
the stains and the stomach ache

waiting to happen
latent baked in
crack me open
I am the fortunate one
bursting with epiphany

Sarah Althea Braun
Beacon, NY
Oakwood School
Kate Hymes

Flowers in the Sink at Four

We sit around the wooden table
dented with moving
and petrified with childhood.
Laughing out loud
over the melon
cut in balls seeping with nectar,
I tip my chair back
and touch my sister's feet
through the hole in my sock.

As the envelope of acceptance sleeps,
tired on the counter,
we drain its contents

into our mouths,
the sweetness
of my mom's happiness
running down my chin.
We picture her paintings,
her life
sorrow
excitement
us, hanging on a white wall
with green neon lights
that mean go.

We sing loud
about license plates shooting by
and songs that have something to do
with love.
In the gray car
on puckered seats
we sing until New York.

We sing in her art.
In "Rachel's Garden"
"Amanda's Garden"
"Dad's Garden"
of ragged color,
torn and sewed.
And she wonders why
she cares
that people squint at
her paintings,
why it's not a job
that she leaves
when her palette runs down the drain
at four.
But I know
as I watch the flowers
catch in the sink
and rot.

That she has created
a labyrinth
and lost
the map.

Rachel Slaughter
East Amherst, NY

Air Venice

The leaf drifts down,
spiraling slowly, riding
the currents of the wind,
an aging gondala
on the clear canals of air.

Sometimes I wonder
who rides in that boat
who peers over the sides
who listens to the steersmans song
who steals a kiss
from his love
on the clear canals of air.

Jason Pottorff
Devon, PA
Conestoga High School
Louise Jones

My grandmother stole in on hot nights
 When Granddaddy visited Stockholm and Paris,
 On trade trips to sales centers.
 She slipped her keys into the locks,
 Slipped her locks behind her ears,
 And paused for moments to let the smell of sweat
 Dissipate and run off into the street.
 She bathed on the doorstep in the orange light
 Of streetlamps and yawning stars.
 Behind her, a few streets down,
 Beyond the public library,
 He breathed her kisses and the taste
 Of her breasts onto his pillow.
 My grandmother slid down the long hall
 To the kitchen and cooked vegetable soup
 On the gas stove. The steam
 From the carrots and potatoes rose up
 Through the ceiling plaster and floorboards
 And made my mother toss
 In uneasy sleep. The sticky heat
 Plastered her hair to her forehead.
 Her fingers traced endless circles
 On her stomach.

Katherine Brown
 Potomac, MD
 Carol Bleen



Klm Kindelsperger
Hagerstown, MD
Smithsburg High School
Ragan Rogers

It's dark. I strike a match and light the cigarette dangling from my mouth. There.

I'm stressed out. The millions of questions in my life are all tumbling on top of me like the ocean waves I never got to see this summer. My senior year of high school begins tomorrow and I can't wait to get it over with. I like smoking during times like this. Sitting at my windowsill, with the sound of crickets washing over me, I can see billions of tiny stars through the clear August night. It makes me feel very small and I can finally begin to shuffle my problems and neatly pile them on my consciousness to be dealt with.

I'm sick of silence in my relationships. It seems to hover over my life and choke me just when I need to speak. It's like I'm moving my mouth but no words are coming out.

My friend Sara and I got in a fight tonight. We fought about fighting. I said that fighting has done a lot of good for this world. It's saved relationships, it's saved lives. Sometimes silence is the worst thing for a person. She told me fighting hurts people and that it's never right to hurt someone. But I think it's better to hurt someone you love than to continue suffering without them knowing. Arguments are the only time when words of brutal honesty really come out of my moving mouth. That sticky silence is finally cleaned out of the corners of conversation.

So we fought and where do we end up? Silent again. But things will change. Time will heal the wounds the argument made and our relationship will grow because of it. Without the fight though, silence would have prolonged our growth.

Then there's my father. With him the silence is different. It's like that quiet stillness that clogs the air on Sunday afternoons. We just don't talk. Cordial words of hello and goodbye and how's life are all that seem to fall from our heavy mouths. I'm from a big, Irish Catholic, meat-and-potatoes family. There's a sort of expectation for all the boys in my family to be beer-drinking turbo jocks who go to a big state university then become successful businessmen. And what am I? A writer.

My dad was always at work when I was growing up, and I was raised by my mother and siblings. I remember when I was very young, when words were meaningless and affection was something shown, not spoken. Every night I'd spend hours playing and laughing with my dad after work. But in the morning he'd be gone.

Before long I grew too heavy for his lap and too old to spend time with my parents. The happy buzz of our meaningless conversation was swatted like an insect of my past that I needed to get rid of. I wanted words.

All those days while I was growing up, my dad was locked in some skyscraper toiling to support our family and not once did he ask for anything in return. That was his way of saying, "I love you." I understand and appreciate this. Maybe I'm greedy but just to hear the words, "Thank-you," "I'm proud of you," "I care," would be the sweetest music to my ears.

Now our days are clogged with that heavy Sunday silence and neither of us will break it. Instead we use it as a shield. We dodge our feelings by hiding behind it. I blame him. He blames me.

My parents think I'm on drugs because I lock myself in my room and listen to Bob Dylan. And I write. That's where my words come from. I can escape from my quiet world by building stories filled with commotion. But those words don't fill the air with sound. They lie flat on dead pages waiting for curious eyes to pick them up. Those words don't say, "Thank-you," "I'm proud of you," "I care."

Rest assured I'm not a junkie. The truth is that my parents are looking for a reason why this gap of silence separates us and an excuse why they let it grow. Sometimes I wish we would argue. I wish that brutal honesty would fly out of our mouths in the heat of a passionate fight. But it doesn't. It builds up in our hellos and good-byes but is kept safely locked in our heavy mouths.

Before long I will be in college and those words will be even

more impossible to say. I fear I'll be spending my life moving my mouth with no sound ever coming out. I'll just wander through life tripping over sentences I'd wished I said.

My cigarette is almost halfway done. Smoke is like sound. It occupies that emptiness in the air that would otherwise force me to look inward. The song playing on my stereo has been a sort of anthem for me this summer. It says, "There's more than one answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line. And the less I seek my source for some definitive, the closer I am to fine." The music soothes me. It fills that emptiness in the air so I won't acknowledge that emptiness in my soul.

It reminds me that I think too much. I analyze life so much that I never stop and live it. I'm so busy choking on words that I can't just breathe the air and feel my heart pump life throughout my body. Sometimes I wish I didn't think so much. I wish I could just be oblivious to the problems in our world and in my own world. But I can't. I get passionate about things. I get in arguments. I care.

This summer I feel that emptiness in my soul has grown so big that I am now forced to acknowledge it. It's now bigger than any music or sacred cigarette can fill. I feel this longing for my life to change and for my problems to lay themselves out and suddenly be solved. But nothing has changed. All I do is retreat into my words and my cigarettes.

I feel this summer has been wasted. Every day I would lock myself up in the mall and toil to support my college education. I didn't go to the ocean, I didn't sunbathe, I didn't even swim. My friends said I was so pale that I looked like a ghost. I was a ghost this summer. I'd disappear from my surroundings and retreat into solitude. Then I would haunt my own consciousness and demand an answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line. But my repeated pleas only seemed to echo off my empty soul and come out of my moving mouth in silence.

Still, I have this song and I have this cigarette. Music speaks when I can not. It becomes the words I wish would come out of my mouth. And the smoke just relaxes me. When I can't speak all I can do is breathe. I'm good at that. With a cigarette in hand, I can watch my breath come out and pretend my problems are hidden somewhere in that cloud of smoke leaving my body.

So the summer is gone. A woman I work with named Mary Beth doesn't even like summer. She says it's too hot and sweaty and deep. But autumn, oh boy. If there's anything I love most about this world it is the fall. Things change in the fall--weather, leaves, lives. Mary Beth is a fall person, too. She's old enough to be my mother and yet I can talk with her like she's my own age. The words come out when I'm with her. Late night conversations with her became my chance to release those heavy words locked up in my mouth.

If there's one word that fits Mary Beth it is freedom. I don't know why. Maybe it's because she doesn't trip over sentences she wished she'd said. Instead she argues. She's honest. She cares. That is freedom.

My friend Sara is repressed. She allows herself to be tied down by those around her for a fear of hurting them. Her mother has this image she wants Sara to fit. Sara, the real Sara, is not this person. But she allows herself to be buried by her own love for her mother. She remains silent because she cares. But she doesn't care enough to be honest. She doesn't care enough to hurt her.

I fall somewhere between my two friends. I seem to be brutally honest to all those around me and yet I become choked by silence when it comes to my own flesh and blood. I want to be free like Mary Beth to say those brutally honest words. But like Sara, I'm afraid of the truth. The truth hurts...not only the people I love, but also myself.

So I'm still standing on this isolated plateau with miles of silence between my parents and me. But I have the fall to look forward to--when the wind is always whistling and the air is always perfumed with smoke. My cigarette has long been finished and my song is now reeling to a stop. That overwhelming silence surrounds my thoughts and I look to the stars. The crickets don't even seem to be making noise. The only sound I hear is my soft breath, singing

to me in the darkness and a beating heart, pulsating to my song of life.

Brian Jansen
New Fairfield, CT
New Fairfield High School
Joseph Gambini

Believing in Plants

I
It was so certainly not love
that I wanted
to cry. he was talking
about his dead philodendron
that once had tried
to crawl out his cracked kitchen window
on its spinning vines
how he felt
bad for not letting it
go when it could.

II
he told me about a neighbor's garden
that was dead
but she kissed
the earth with her
energy, her need for a garden
brought the dead to life
with bright marigolds
and sunflowers shining through
any hesitation.
he didn't think flowers would work
for him.

III
I told him about my grandmother's yard,
bleeding roses on splintered fences
she gave me a rose with a white star
in the middle
and taught me to eat
it. she always said
she missed my grandfather
would never not love him
would always eat roses
keeping him
in her old stomach.

IV
he believed
if he watered the plant
with tears it would live.
something spiritual, he said.
magic, I said.
he squeezed his eyes
for tears
but none came
he said he didn't believe in tears
wanted me to try
and I did.
nothing.
As I was leaving,
I felt a hunger.
went searching for roses.

Sarah McCann
Metuchen, NJ
Ina Schlein

Madre Superior

for Felicia

You, with three grown children
who have forgotten the touch of your lips
and now come home blood-shot and red-necked.
I'm just a tongue-tied stranger here,
whirling in throaty conversations,
catcalls, and martinis.
These three have baptized themselves
and attend other Sunday services,
devout teenagers
in a city where there are no rules,
no children.

They have clouded the stars you wished on
with the grey breath of Marlboros, curses,
and their own prayers.
You see them saying goodbye to their lovers
in the marble arch of your building
when you have forgotten
and refuse such sin.
With their chins raised to drink the world
and yours bent low to your breast
in panicked misunderstanding,
this foursome has crumbled
like the ruins of Las Plazas.

When I fly back to my life
I will smell tortilla on my palms,
count pesetas instead of pennies,
remember cheap tequila
and dancing until noon.
And I have watched you,
huddled with your book in hand,
cross dangling
towards the ridges of your memory,
and I have seen the mother
I never want to be.

Nicole LaBrecque
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Coffee

Boys are strange creatures, though I try not to think about it too much. At two a.m. Sunday morning, they will all lie piled up on the couch like a litter of puppies, and one other girl and I will sit in between them, all of us watching a movie through sleepy eyes. It is too late for sex, and these boys are too innocent anyway. I can talk to them when we go on walks where they smell like laundry detergent and sweat, though they often only respond with grunts and yaps. Now we are tired, so we watch silently, and we keep our hands to ourselves. We ignore Mike's dog scratching at the back door.

I'm breakfasting on college catalogs in the kitchen. Dylan stands at the door in his bare feet and boxers, trying to impress me. I tell him I'm going to Jack's. "I was planning on paging him later," he says offhandedly, though he knows I don't care. I look at the latest college applicant sheet on which I'm working. I have no steady phone number, so I leave that part blank. There are four different spaces for my address: "Mother's address. Father's

address. Current mailing address. Where are you living now?" I fill in all four lines with different addresses and turn the page to the essay: "Where do you picture yourself in ten years, and how does your current situation reflect these goals?" I close the application quickly and leave for Jack's.

As I walk toward Jack's, I wish I was wearing something heavier than the old sweater I have slung around my shoulders. I check parked cars to see if I can report any friends' license plates to Dylan. I pick up a Pepsi can and plan to recycle it. A lone spandexed jogger with a golden retriever runs by. "Hi, Friendly," I say to his shivering dog, because I think all dogs are secretly named Friendly. I pat Friendly's head as he runs by, and I give a quick smile to his owner. I soon reach Jack's front door, so cold that my skin has formed goosebumps. I press the squeaky button on Jack's doorbell and I am answered on the third ring.

"Hey, Alison," Jack says, expecting me, and I walk into his warm kitchen, glad to be inside. Jack sits down at the large pine table in the center, and curls his legs under him. He begins to concentrate on last Friday's stock market pages, circling the technology stocks with a red pen. The house seems remarkably peaceful this morning; perhaps Jack's parents have gone out with his younger brothers--my future boyfriends, I always tell them.

"Hung over?" Jack says, looking up from the paper. He loves to ask this question, I think, for its deviant value.

I shake my head. "How about you?"

"I didn't drink anything last night."

"Oh," I say. Jack lies well, but I never take him up on it. When he's older, he'll be dealing in junk bonds or real estate fraud, though I always try hard to imagine an honest future for him.

"Have you eaten yet?" he asks me, and I realize I haven't.

"Why don't we go to Peet's?" I say, and though I know he prefers greasy food over coffee, Jack thinks that this is a good idea.

We drive over to Peet's in Jack's parents' Volvo; "the tan," we call it. Jack insists on driving everywhere, even two blocks just to get coffee, and he is upset that he might have to walk more than a hundred yards from his parking place. "Parking is going to be a hassle around here," I say, and for once I am glad I don't drive.

"Yeah, but we have the placard," Jack says, and I remember.

"Jack, what if someone really has to use one of those places?"

"There are plenty of them. Don't worry." He waves my concern away and we roll into a handicapped parking space. Jack puts out his mom's blue placard which she has been granted because of a minor operation. "Okay, now just limp a little," he says.

We walk over to the bank first, which Jack likes not only because they have an ATM that is open all night, but because it will deliver not just twenties, but tens and fives. Jack punches in his code and then carefully pulls out his twenty-five dollar withdrawal. He slides the bills lovingly into his wallet next to his numerous credit cards and club memberships.

"I just got a page," Jack says, with urgency. He pulls a Motorola pager out of his pocket and glances at the number. "It's Dylan. Let me call him from this payphone." Jack puts two dimes in a nearby payphone and dials. Being friends with Jack is like ordering pizza for instant delivery. "Dylan, what's up? No, I haven't. Yeah, I'm here with Alison. In front of Peet's. Yeah, sure. Do you want to do something later? Okay, just page me." He hangs up. "He's really a class A individual. Now shall we go in and get some coffee?" I nod. This morning I will let Jack do the talking.

Jack orders a black coffee and I order some tea. We sit down for a moment, but Jack begins to fidget. "I really need a smoke. Do you want one?" Jack says. I don't smoke, but Jack thinks he's being polite. I look around to see if I know anyone, though Jack's smoking is no secret.

"No. Jack, couldn't you just wait?"

"I don't want to wait," he says. "I'll do it outside, though, since you don't like it. Besides, I'm getting the patch soon. I'll be right back." He shuffles outside and lights his cigarette. I sit down alone at the window counter and drink from my black mug. The smell of dog is still on my hand from one solitary pat, though I don't mind it. As Jack sucks on his Camel filtered he makes faces at me

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through the window. I laugh, and wonder how I ever got to know someone like Jack. Before I find an answer, he is finished and has stomped out his cigarette.

"Did you miss me?" he asks as he comes back in and sits down beside me. His coat smells pungently of smoke, though I know it isn't just from this morning.

"Terribly," I say with a smile, because this is what he wants to hear. "You know, Jack, I'm going to visit you at school when I look at colleges."

Jack nods, then looks outside, ignoring me. "There's a plate you can ID--FYJ948," he says, reading the license plate on a newly parked car.

"The Stevens."

"Right." Jack borrowed the license game from Dylan and me last year, and now it is his. Mrs. Stevens walks by with a large shopping bag and I wave at her from the window.

"I got bad news this morning. My mom wants me to start thinking about colleges. I don't know if I have a chance."

"Jack, you know you'll always come out on top--by some means." I remember the time last year when Jack was stuck in the elevator at a hotel downtown for four hours. He ended up making friends with the hotel staff and earned a free room for several nights, although he never used it. Free rooms were always waiting for Jack. People always commented on how he had transformed himself from a strange, offbeat kid into the life of the party. Lately he seemed more like a strange offbeat kid again, wearing his battered oldbucks, green army jacket and jeans.

Jack pulls his pager out of his jeans pocket again. "I just got three more pages--let's see, Mike, Monica, Dylan again. Maybe we should just stop by to make them happy."

"Okay." We are both done with our cups, so we leave the drafty coffee house, hop into the leathery Volvo, and drive the three blocks to Mike's.

We ring the doorbell at Mike's house and I can hear him quieting the dog before he lets us in. It's cold as hell outside and I wish he would hurry up.

"Hey, dude," Jack says, trying to be cool as Mike opens the door. Jack and I saunter into the kitchen with Mike. Jack immediately grabs the phone and makes a call. Mike looks at me stupidly, as if to say, "Well, that's just Jack."

"So, what's up?" Mike asks me and Jack's other ear.

"Not too much, really," I say. I begin to pick at some grapes. The food around Mike's is pretty good even though his parents have gone crazy on the whole organic trip.

"So you want to do something tonight?" Jack asks Mike in a phone whisper.

"Sure," Mike says back. "What's going on tonight?"

"I don't know. Probably not too much, but we can find something." Jack has made his connection. Mike looks at the number on the readout. It's probably Dylan.

"Dylan, dude, what's up?" Jack says. Mike wants Dylan on speaker. Jack punches the speaker button and Dylan's voice comes through loudly.

"Is Alison there?" Dylan asks. He says my dad called. I'm glad I wasn't home; I don't feel like dealing with him today.

Mike walks over to where I'm sitting in the breakfast area as I leaf through the Sunday entertainment section. His dog, Austin, wanders into the room and I pat his furry head, looking back and forth between him and Mike.

"What'd you all do after you left last night?" he asks me.

I have to explain my whole life to Mike, to entertain him for a bit, which actually isn't bad since he hangs on every word I say. When I'm done, he says, "Listen, about the whole business of where you're staying. My mom says you're always welcome, if you need anything..." I smile at him, and in an awkward moment, we both look across the kitchen to the phone cord pulled between two sliding doors. Austin licks my hands.

When Jack is finished with his phone call, he walks over to where we are sitting and leans up against the marble counter. "Do you guys want to smoke tonight?" he says, flicking his lighter play-

fully.

"No, we don't--" I say. This is becoming a bad joke between us. "Jack, we really should get going. If we're going to do something tonight, I need to get in some work on my applications now."

We all say goodbye--Mike gets a "dude, page me later," from Jack--and Jack and I leave.

Dylan and I eat leftovers in the kitchen and are ready to go by eight-thirty. Mike honks for us at about that time and we go down to meet him. "Hi, you guys," I say, as I climb into the back seat and Dylan follows me.

"The doors open at nine-thirty," Jack says. We decide to drive over now to the club anyway, because we are supposed to meet some friends there. Jack needs to get more money from the ATM first, and I doubt this is only the second time today.

Once we get to the parking lot, Dylan realizes he has forgotten his own money. Jack leaves us in the car and walks over to some old friends who are crowded around a small plastic bag. The three of us watch as Jack joins in. We warm up in the car for a few moments while we stare at the flickering lighter in the center of Jack's group. "I'm so glad they're just roasting in public," I say, though it hardly surprises me.

Eventually I walk over to talk with the drug kids while Dylan and Mike stay in the car. I greet Jack, and he and all the other boys crowd around me. "Do you want to smoke now?" Jack asks me with widened eyes.

"No, that's okay," I say, laughing at Jack and his group, mostly younger than he. One of them is an ex-boyfriend of mine and we look at each other warily across the group. Groups of burnt-out adults are approaching the club now, and I wonder if I really want to go. It is cold, so I walk back to the car, leaving Jack and my ex behind.

I knock on the window and Mike opens the door for me. He and Dylan have decided that they'd rather get something to eat instead of going to the club. Mike says he is worried because he forgot to feed Austin. After we sit for a moment with the heat on, Jack comes up to the window. His eyes are red and he has a newly lit cigarette in one hand, his illuminated pager in the other. "Are you sure you don't want to come smoke with us?" he asks Mike and Dylan.

I answer for all of us. "Jack, we're sure. How much longer are you going to be?"

"Ten more minutes. I promise. Let me just make a few calls." Jack stomps out his half-finished cigarette with his rubber sole and jumps into the seat next to Mike, forcing me into the back. Jack makes a few calls on the carphone, trying to find something to do at each number. Each call ends with a quick "page me later, dude" but nothing good comes up. When Jack finishes his calls, he goes outside and lights another cigarette. "I'll only be a few more minutes, and then we can all get coffee. I'll pay." The three of us know it will be an hour, and Jack won't pay. I stare out through my bullet-proof window into the reality of the parking lot. I am suddenly glad that I am safe in the car with two boys that I like, instead of cold in the parking lot with dozens that I don't.

We listen to the radio for a while and watch the scene developing outside. Jack's group remains clustered, so we drive closer. Jack now seems to be making some kind of final arrangement.

At last the groups begin to break up. "Come on Jack, we've got to go," I call out my window. Jack reluctantly walks over to the car and gets in the front seat. He looks longingly at the kids in the other cars as they wave goodbye.

"Now we can get coffee, right?" Mike says.

Jack gives Mike no answer, but as the other cars speed out of the parking lot, Jack rolls down his window and yells into the night, "Page meeeeeeeeeee!" Mike looks at me hopelessly, and I have nothing to say. I can only think of his dog, restless and punchy in his cage because his friend forgot to feed him.

Tom Dolby
San Francisco, CA
The Hotchkiss School
Patricia Jones

Summer Guest

The single best thing about sleeping over at Olivia's, Julie thought, was the ocean breeze in the curtains, early in the morning. She knew Olivia was already down in the blue-panelled kitchen, probably munching on Cocoa Puffs and watching Scooby Doo, but as soon as Julie had gotten up she had gone over and leaned out one of the open windows over the driveway into the summer sun. The scent of the woven hemp rug beneath her bare feet filled the warming room, and the gauze flapped excitedly in her face in syncopation with the muffled roar of the distant beach. Her watch, a dinky little Casio which had miraculously proven waterproof, read ten-thirty, but she wasn't going down just yet.

A rush of breeze which rattled the branches and inflated her cotton nightgown finally blew her inside. She put on one of her nicest pair of shorts and one of her favorite t-shirts, carefully chosen at home the day before. The denim shorts and red-and-white striped tank top Olivia had worn yesterday were jumbled on the wicker chair by her bed. Julie furtively checked the labels, trying not to disturb the clothes. Just as she had suspected: Calvin Klein.

She shuffled in her flip-flops along the faded floral carpet in the long, softly dim hallway, and down the steep blue service stairs. "Ju-lee!" Olivia greeted her in her usual overly ecstatic way, her accent vaguely French despite the fact that she said she despised living in Paris during the school year. "I wondered when you would get up. Have some cereal."

Julie got a bowl from one of the cabinets, admiring the uneven glass panes in the blue doors. "Did you sleep well?" Olivia asked, eyes half-fixed on a Bugs Bunny cartoon.

"Oh, oh yeah." Julie smiled sleepily. "I love your beds. And your curtains."

Olivia smiled back quizzically. "Hey, Julie, want to go swimming after breakfast?"

"Sure," Julie said, thinking of her current bathing suit, a blue one-piece with complicated spaghetti straps that her mother had bought her on sale because she needed one, despite the fact that Julie hadn't been there to try it on. It had a small brassiere built in, something Olivia didn't need yet.

"And later, we can bike to the library and get a movie, okay?" Olivia said, balancing her pointed chin on slender thumbs. Once last summer, when they were sitting on a bench in the Caldor Shopping Plaza, a woman had told Olivia that she ought to be a hand model.

After breakfast they scampered upstairs, feet thudding on the old, warped floorboards, Olivia speeding ahead and giggling. In the bathroom they pulled their neglected-looking bathing suits down from the curtain rod in Olivia's claw-footed tub. Julie struggled to get her suit on quickly, but the straps, which were supposed to cross in the back and hook at the sides, were a pain.

"Here, let me do it," Olivia offered, already sheathed in her shiny, pink neon piped black tank. She giggled again, and Julie caught her slender, tanned, grinning face in the mirror on the medicine cabinet. "Wow, Julie, you really have a chest!"

Julie looked down at the rainbow beach towel they were standing on. "Yeah, well, whatever," she muttered.

In the pool they dived for yellow plastic eggs with flexible green alligators inside. Julie hated the enormous filter cover over the drain, and she hated the way the dark pool light loomed in the wall above her. She always had the feeling that the mechanical purifying machine, a box on wheels scaling the walls, was following her. And she hated having to concentrate on holding her breath to keep pressure on her ears so they would be less likely to hold water when she got out--she was prone to infections. In fact, she wasn't supposed to be diving at all.

Olivia shot over next to her in a garland of little bubbles, leering through a diving mask. Her arms were full of eggs, and as she rose to the surface she mouthed what Julie made out to be the words "fart face," nudging her with her long legs and tickling her with her slender toes. Julie laughed, trying hard to keep her nostrils shut and ignore the creeping machine as it started towards her across the bottom of the pool while she tugged at Olivia's straps. She came

up for air and shoved a wall of water at Olivia, who squealed and clambered easily onto a transparent yellow raft. "Hey, Julie," Olivia teased, paddling deftly with both hands. "Want a ride?"

As Julie lunged for the raft, she suddenly felt both of her straps pop out of their hooks, and the front of her bathing suit fell promptly down. Olivia, unaware, was kicking water in her face from her vantage point on the raft. "Hey, Olivia, cut it out! Damn, this stupid suit is always doing this!" Julie fumbled with the left strap, hugging the front of her suit awkwardly to her chest. Meanwhile, Olivia reclined elegantly on her folded arms, her body long and flat, displaying to Julie her still smooth armpits.

Later, still dripping, they played ping-pong in the garage next to the pool. A silver chain with a little delft-patterned Dutch shoe hanging from it glistened against Olivia's walnut-colored skin. She had put on lavender sunglasses and a green hat with a plush seagull growing out of it.

Like always, they were about even at first, although Julie found herself sprawling across the table to make returns. Soon Olivia's serves became sharper, her slender hand slicing the wooden paddle upwards, her laughter gleeful. Julie spent most of the rest of the game retrieving the ball from behind old, dusty furniture. "Wow, you are so much better than last year--not to say that I was ever good," she said as they started the third game.

"Ever good? You always sucked!" Olivia teased, gracefully sending the ball over the net with a quick flip of her paddle. "I practiced with my dad last week."

"Oh, when's he coming back from the city?"

Olivia shrugged. "Je ne sais pas."

Julie swiped angrily at a high ball, which fell spitefully into her side of the net. "Hey, Fourth of July is next week--do you know what you're doing?" she asked. Her friend shrugged. "You know, we've been friends for like three years now, but we never went to see fireworks or anything," Julie continued.

Olivia frowned politely. "Well...see...Judy and Roger are coming, and some other people I think..." Judy and Roger were Olivia's mother's stepchildren from her first marriage; she also had a son and a daughter, the former living in Rio, the latter in San Francisco. Guests were always coming and going at the big house which Olivia's parents rented each summer.

Suddenly, Olivia's face broadened into a huge, secretive grin. "That's what I wanted to tell you," she broke off excitedly.

"What?" Julie paused and threw the ping-pong ball at her friend. "That you lost your brain?"

Olivia leaned all the way across the table, her straight, dark blonde hair hanging in her face. "I'll tell you tonight--if you can sleep over again," she whispered dramatically, grabbing Julie's hand and pulling her towards the gate in the tall hedge which separated the pool from the house. "Come on, I'm starved!" she sang.

When they reached the back of the house, Trudie, Olivia's housekeeper, was standing in the open screen door. "I was just about to call you," she said plaintively in her heavy British accent. Trudie was a squat, ugly woman, with boyish hair dyed dark red, a big, thick-nosed face, and a penchant for red and purple costume jewelry. She loved horses, had awards and posters all over her small room, but Olivia, with a somewhat affected expression of sadness, had once told Julie that Trudie had suffered minor brain damage in a bad fall ten years ago, and that she had become a housekeeper because her well-to-do family had rejected her.

"Well, obviously you didn't have to," Olivia shot out, and marched past Trudie into the kitchen. Julie made a point of smiling. "How are you, Trudie?"

"Oh, fine, thanks. Did you girls go for a swim this morning?"

"No, of course not," Olivia sang from the refrigerator. "That's why we're all wet." She brought out two Cokes. "Do you want an egg McMuffin?" she asked Julie, who nodded. "Trudie, would you make us two egg McMuffins, please?"

Trudie scowled at her, then smiled and berated her in French. "You must give me the eggs first, Olivia," she whined. Her speech was punctuated with hisses. "Your mother has gone to town to buy some things for our guests."

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Olivia squealed, then ran over to Trudie and put a hand over her mouth. "Shhh, don't say anything." She grimaced at Julie, who sat down and leaned back in her chair, feigning innocence. "What?" she said. "Oh, don't look at me. I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything." She felt a pleasant, warm sense of excitement, and turned her chair slightly towards the screen to enjoy the warm light. Olivia came over and tousled her hair from behind. "Thank you," Julie whispered almost imperceptibly. Olivia didn't respond.

That night was charged with giggles. Julie sat serenely against the brass headboard, starkly awake, listening to Olivia's lilting voice in the dark.

"He's my cousin, he comes from Amsterdam," she was saying. "I think his name is Michael."

"Have you ever met him?" Julie asked blurrily, musing. The gauzy curtains blew languidly into the room.

"Yeah, three years ago we went to Amsterdam. I don't remember too well." Olivia paused. "His parents are my mother's cousins."

"Oh, so he's more like your mom's cousin," Julie corrected, a little too loudly.

"Well, yeah, I guess so. But he's mine too." The slight defensiveness in Olivia's voice made Julie cringe. She remembered her mother on the phone this afternoon. "Two more nights. Are you sure Olivia invited you?" she had said, her tone harsh, finally giving her reluctant permission after Olivia's mother had told her, in a rather confused voice, that the girls wanted it very much.

"Look, Julie? I'm going to sleep. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Good night, sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite," Olivia said, yawning. It was her regular way of signing off, but now it just thickened the excited worry around Julie's heart. In a few minutes Julie could hear Olivia's somnolent breathing. She slid down into her bed, nowhere near sleep, various incarnations of Michael filling her mind.

"They're back from the airport, girls!" Trudie shouted. Olivia careened out of the bedroom and down the plush stairs. Julie followed, fluffing out her blue-and-pink striped polo shirt and wishing she too owned a crisp yellow sundress with a lace inset in front.

When they ran out the front door a middle-aged woman with straight, orangeish hair kissed Olivia's cheeks, and she and the balding man in white next to her introduced themselves as Yaan and Elsa. Olivia's parents and a young man were getting bags out of the Lincoln's trunk.

"You remember Michael, don't you, Olivia?" Elsa said in a lightly accented voice as he approached. The young man put down the two suitcases he was carrying, and Olivia gave Julie a soft nudge. He was tall and broad-chested, with rather spiky hair, wheat blond with dark roots. His full cheeks and rounded nose were vaguely clownish, endearing, almost puppy-like. Dark blue lines fanned out around his commanding blue irises, and there was a genial grin on his pale, tanned lips. He wore a warm-looking, colorful rugby sweatshirt and khakis.

"You are Olivia," Michael said, taking her hand. "You I remember." His voice was friendly and inviting.

"I remember you too!" Olivia squealed, and all of a sudden jumped up and clung to him with her arms and legs. The adults laughed and Michael grinned, a little stunned. Julie stood in the doorway next to Trudie, wearing a smile.

Michael and Olivia turned upside down as Julie bent completely over and hurled a football across the lawn between her legs. "Sorry," she shouted to Olivia, who was giggling and tickling Michael, now in a white polo shirt and bathing trunks, as the brown ball hurtled past them. Julie ran over to them and started half-heartedly tickling Olivia, who screamed gleefully and pummelled Michael's chest. "Stop it, bitch!" she yelled at Julie, laughing hysterically.

Michael put on a look of mock surprise and stared at Julie. "Your little friend uses such terrible language," he teased, then lifted Olivia, lithe and flailing, and jogged towards the pool gate. Julie

attempted a laugh and a run, but her body felt attached to the grass, her bare feet heavy. She watched Michael and Olivia disappear to the other side of the hedge. As she walked slowly to the pool she tested her straps, snapping them through her shirt. She took her time, listening to Olivia's squeals and the sound of adult laughter and splashes.

By the time she passed through the wooden gate, Michael was already swimming laps. The adults were gathered around the pool in deck chairs. Olivia, dripping, was talking to Elsa. She beckoned Julie over excitedly.

"So, you girls are having fun with Michael?" Elsa said, her crinkly, pale face beaming under a broad-brimmed sun hat. Olivia shot Julie a grin, then nodded politely.

"Michael is going to the University of Amsterdam next year," Elsa was saying. She turned to Julie. "How old are you?"

"Oh, I'm twelve."

Elsa laughed in surprise. "You seem so much older, my goodness. I would have thought you were perhaps fourteen." She looked at Olivia, who was hopping up and down on one foot. "Well, girls, don't let me spoil your day," she said warmly.

They ran off to the poolhouse and collapsed into giggles. "So, what do you think?" Olivia asked, bright-eyed. Julie looked out the uneven window at Michael traversing the pool. "I think he is so cute," she said, with a nervous laugh.

"I told you he was," Olivia replied, sitting on the ping-pong table. She tossed her blonde hair. "Hey, Julie, let's do an apple bed tonight, okay?"

"That is so mean!" Julie said. Olivia and Trudie had done it to her once: folded the sheets down in a triangle and covered them over with the blanket. "We should do it right before dinner."

"Yeah, and Julie - my parents and Yaan and Elsa are going out to dinner - so guess what? You and me and Michael are having dinner together!" They both shrieked, and Olivia threw a ping pong ball at Julie.

They spent most of the afternoon in the pool. Michael beat the girls by a long shot at collecting pool eggs, Olivia trying over and over to dislodge them from his arm, grabbing him around the waist or clinging to one of his muscular legs and weighing him down. Julie dogpaddled and dove around, applauding and cheering, occasionally checking her bathing suit hooks. She perched herself precariously on the edge of the raft and watched as Michael grabbed a poised Olivia securely about the waist, her arms arched above her head. His fingers met at her navel. "Aaah, please don't kill me!" Olivia screamed. She stuck her tongue out at Julie. "Julie, make him prom-" she began, collapsing into laughter. Michael smiled and whispered something in her left ear, and Olivia screamed as he catapulted her towards the raft. Julie winced at the cold, heavy spray.

When she came up to the surface Olivia sprang over to Michael, who was hanging from the diving board, and whispered something to him. "Hey, Julie," he shouted, laughing. "Shall I throw you in?"

Julie slid choppily off the raft, glancing for approval at Olivia, who fluidly usurped her place. "Have a good time," Olivia cooed, and Julie's heart bounded as she positioned herself awkwardly in front of Michael, feet paddling spasmodically to keep her afloat. She kept her eyes on the water, watching his big, coffee-colored arms curl around her from either side. Her shoulders and neck tensed and her upraised arms trembled a little as he gripped her firmly and mortifyingly just below her ribcage, and she shut her eyes. She felt him lifting her, aware of the secure pressure on her abdomen and of the kind of fear she had felt at the highest point on a roller coaster track, a fear of the steep rush of nothing awaiting her on the other side. As Michael vaulted her forward, she opened her eyes to a grinning Olivia, who shoved a wall of spray towards her by way of welcome.

"Shhh!" Olivia whispered, tugging at Julie's wet t-shirt. They stole into the bathroom which connected Michael's room to another and peered in. "Okay, coast clear," Olivia said. The girls went to either side of the bed and yanked the sheets down, tucking quickly

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and nervously.

"Want to know something?" Olivia said mysteriously, as they replaced the blanket.

"What?" Julie asked, half-listening, trying to be casual as she walked over to an open, rumpled suitcase and fingered the rugby sweatshirt thrown hastily on top. There was a light, sweet smell of musk around it.

"Julie, come on, don't touch his stuff," Olivia chided suddenly, taking her arm. "Come on."

They showered together in Olivia's tub, but Julie kept her bathing suit on, soaping inside it. "Take it off, Julie!" Olivia teased. Julie eyed the stark tan line on her thigh enviously. "Olivia, what were you going to tell me, anyway?"

"Oh - that," Olivia mused, stalling. "Weeelll...in the pool?"

"Yeah? What?"

"I was going to pull his bathing suit off!" she shrieked, and bounded out of the tub, grabbing a towel. Julie stood there for a little while, with the warm scent of Ivory conditioner rising in the water.

They brushed their hair out in front of the bureau, which was strewn with candy and hair ornaments and potpourri. Julie loved the way she always felt so clean after swimming all day and showering at Olivia's. She watched the comb glide through Olivia's straight, wet hair. "You were kidding, right?" she said, groping tentatively.

"Uh-uh."

Julie gave a false laugh. "You wouldn't dare, though. Come on, Olivia. Admit it."

Olivia slipped the yellow dress over her head. "Who says?" she challenged, grinning devilishly. She fell back on the bed, legs splayed open in the air, then sat up quickly and grabbed Julie around the shoulders, pulling her clumsily back from the mirror onto the bed. "Hey, come on," Julie said, trying to remove Olivia's entangling arms from around her chest. "That hurts."

"It hurts?" Olivia said, then burst out laughing. "Tickle attack!" she shouted. Julie sprang across her and tumbled over the bed to her feet. She returned to the bureau. The mirror reflected Olivia, scowling, sprawled across the bed, her flower-sprigged underwear displayed prominently. Julie felt something hit the back of her neck - a red gumball which landed on the dresser. Olivia jumped to her feet and thudded to the floor. "Hey, I'm going downstairs, okay? Come down soon!" Olivia said. Julie didn't respond; she tried to concentrate on attacking a chunk of fragrant tangle.

When she got downstairs, Trudie was standing by the huge iron stove, convulsed with laughter. Michael sat at the head of the table, wearing his rugby shirt; Olivia was running her hands through his damp hair, making it stand on end. "Olivia!" Trudie shouted. "Don't be fresh!"

Julie looked at the table, at the blue checked cloth and the earthenware plates. There was a huge green salad and a basket of peasant bread. "Julie, why don't you sit at the end, there," Trudie said, taking a roast chicken from the oven. Olivia planted herself at Michael's left, and Trudie sat between her and Julie.

"So, you are twelve?" Michael said suddenly, taking a leg. He was directly at the other end of the table from Julie, his hair rumpled, silvery in the shadows, his eyes sharp and brilliant. Before Julie realized he was talking to her, Olivia butted in, laughing when Michael slapped her hand as she grabbed the other chicken leg. "That's what she says, but she acts like she's two!"

"Forgive Olivia, she's highly retarded," Julie said, trying to sound cool as she looked Michael squarely in the eyes.

"Oh, I know that already," he replied, and Olivia squirmed, seizing the salad tongs and shoving a grabful of lettuce towards his face. "You are the mature one then, no?" he said to Julie, fending Olivia off and laughing too.

Suddenly Julie got up, grabbing the tall wooden pepper mill in front of her plate. She ran behind Michael's chair and positioned it above his hair, which smelled deliciously of balsam. "Not necessarily," she said. "Do you dare me, Olivia? I mean, it won't make a difference - he's got pepper and salt anyway!"

Olivia shrugged, a disinterested look on her face. "Comme tu

veux," she replied. Then she smiled at Michael. "Tu te fches?" she asked sweetly, blonde hair falling forward as she leaned in towards his face.

He turned in his chair, a politely bemused expression on his face, and put up his hand. Julie let him take the pepper mill, then walked with calculated dignity back to her chair. Olivia began talking exclusively in French, and soon the other three were laughing hysterically. Julie picked up bits and pieces, making a few simple jabs with what little French she knew. She had a feeling that most of what they said to each other was insults.

After a while, she got up and walked behind Olivia's chair, then gave her hair a firm yank. Olivia turned to her with an embellished "Yow!"

"I'm going to bed," Julie announced in a monotone, avoiding Michael's laugh-crimsoned face and detached gaze.

Olivia smiled sleepily. "Tu es certaine?" she asked, not looking for an answer. "Alors, c'est dommage. Sweet dreams!" They all waved. Julie did not look back as she mounted the blue stairs.

In Olivia's gray-dark room, she lingered between the cool curtains for a long time, wishing she would cry.

"Julie, wake up!" Olivia hissed, shaking her. The room was still fairly dark when Julie opened her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Six a.m." Olivia giggled. "Let's go spy on Michael!" she said excitedly.

Julie made herself snuggle down again, face in the pillow. "After last night, why are you asking?" she said in a deliberate mumble.

"What? Come on, before he wakes up."

"No, really, Olivia - it's not a good idea. You go."

"Why don't you want to?" Olivia pulled on Julie's hands. "You're the one who thinks he's so cute, anyway. Look, we can go for a swim afterwards - maybe all three of us."

Julie sat up abruptly. "Hey, you said that first, Liv. You asked me if I liked him."

Olivia rolled her eyes. "So maybe I did - but you're the lovesick one!" She put her purple sunglasses on and grimaced. "Julie, maybe he sleeps without a shirt!" she whispered.

Julie pulled the cozy covers over her head. She wondered what his reaction to the apple-pie bed had been. She wondered what he would do if they raided his bedroom. She wondered what he looked like freshly awake. She wondered...

"Leave me alone," she drawled, then lay perfectly still and silent for several minutes. She could hear Olivia shifting her weight from one foot to another on the hemp rug. Finally, she heard her leave and run up the stairs to the third floor.

Julie's mother came in the old green Honda at ten o'clock, wearing a shabby brown and black bathing suit and white jogging shorts dirty from gardening. She and Olivia's mother chatted while Julie, who had slept well into the morning, went out to the pool to say goodbye. She was surprised to find Olivia alone, in snorkel mask and fins. "I wondered when you'd get up!" she called gaily from the deep end. "Come on in - or is your mother here already?"

"Yeah, definitely," Julie said, and forced a smile. "Call me."

"I will." Olivia waved. "Don't let the bed bugs bite!" she yelled.

As her mother pulled the car out of the driveway, they passed Michael in Olivia's parents' other car, a silver BMW convertible, driving in. He smiled politely at Julie. She smirked back.

"Who was that good-looking boy?" Julie's mother asked as they turned into the lane.

Julie looked up at the gauze curtains sailing out of the bedroom window. "Oh, just another summer guest," she replied.

Rebecca Hirschfield
New York, New York
Hunter College High School
Barbara Miller



Seth Davis
Fredericksburg, VA

Stafford Senior High School
Terry Valente

The Hanukkah Bush

Unshakeable faith has never been one of my strong suits. Despite this, my identity as a Jew, until recently, was unshakeable. Perhaps this was because my religious identity had never been directly challenged; I'd never been confronted by the violent anti-semitism described in the newspapers, and all the jokes circulating through my Christian neighborhood were told politely out of my hearing range. My identification as a Jew was not fortified by adversity, and it was not based on blind acceptance of doctrine. In fact, I found and still find much to disagree with in Jewish tradition. The view of women as unclean leading to their exclusion from active participation in services and the segregation of the sexes in orthodox shuls angers and upsets me. At the same time there are many elements of the Jewish tradition that appeal to me. The observance of Yom Kippur, and its emphasis on community is one such appealing element. "Forgive us, pardon us our sins," is a refrain heard on that day. "Us" and "our" are an acceptance of communal responsibility for transgressions. The existence of a Jewish community allows members to take solace in the fact that they are never alone. That somewhere in the world another Jew is lighting the Shabbat candles or attending services or saying a blessing over bread and wine. The very survival of the Jewish community after nearly six thousand years and nearly as many years of persecution, is solace in itself. The emphasis on tradition and the strength that could be garnered from belonging to something larger than myself were my reasons for identifying as a Jew. What I didn't realize was how powerful the corrosive forces were that I was subjected to, namely, the slow erosion of assimilation, and that I was the one being worn away.

In New York, a city where "Jewishness" is so integrated into popular culture that anyone who can work "schmuck" into regular conversation and eat a "bagel with a shmear" for breakfast can lay claim to a piece of Jewish heritage, one would think it would be easy to maintain cultural integrity. Unfortunately that's not the case. This past holiday season made that abundantly clear to me.

My father, tired of the dried eucalyptus leaves that normally

adorned the house, brought home a sheath of fresh pine branches and put them in a vase in our living room. The next step was logical, my mother and I, continuing the aesthetic, laughingly decorated the branches with bows and ribbons stripped from presents and hung it with Austrian chocolates, delicately wrapped in gold foil and decorated with portraits of Mozart, that were meant to serve as ornaments. The branches were then jokingly renamed the "Hanukkah Bush." At the time it didn't bother me, but then I attended a Christmas Eve party at the home of my parents' friends who were Jews. The focal point and crowning touch to their living room was a glittering tree, decorated with all the trappings, in red, green and tinsel. Beneath the tree were conciliatory presents, wrapped in blue paper with small, white menorahs, waiting to be opened bright and early Christmas morn.

I went home that night sickened, and stared at my Hanukkah Bush for awhile, watching its branches droop under the weight of the baroque ornaments. I realized then that the Hanukkah candles had only been lit two of the six days that had passed and that the menorah was sitting in a dark corner of the kitchen, dejected, pathetic and unlit. The understanding that I was passively giving up the heritage my ancestors had fought and died for disgusted me. I dismantled the Hanukkah Bush, throwing out the fragrant branches. Later that night when my mother saw what I had done she said to me, "I didn't realize it would bother you so much. It was just so attractive." I contemplated momentarily. Had I totally lost my sense of humor and sense of aesthetics? I realized I was reacting to something much deeper than a joke made in poor taste or a seasonal foliage arrangement. I was forced to question my identity as a Jew. What kind of Jew was I? What entitled me to bear that title, besides birth to a Jewish mother? The answers did not come to me that night, only the shape of questions that I knew would haunt me in the glow of candles yet unlit.

Jessica Schutz
Douglas Manor, NY
Hunter College High School
Patricia Matthews

Body

I will baby myself
in old age
with creams and oils and slices
of orange, egg whites,
and olives,
grapefruit steam.

I will bathe for hours,
twice daily,
in water squeezed
from the petals
of African violets,
three times
on Saturday evenings.

I will teach my children to bathe.
I will teach them to stand
in front of full-length mirrors,
and rectangle mirrors and small,
circular, hand-held mirrors naked
to view their chins, collarbones,
thighs, knees.

I will refrain from swishing a towel
across a hot, showered body.
I will no longer lay out
clothes on the toilet seat,
but walk from room to room
letting air
separate
to cool me.

I will sleep on new silk sheets
each night, fill drawers
with underwear, and paint
the walls of my room white,
open windows for breezes
and I will breathe--breathe--
breathe.

Jill Robin Sisson
Finksburg, MD
Westminster High School
Alan Zepp

Liberty

The house we live in was brought in from the country in the '40s, Mamma told me. That's why the pipes run underneath the house instead of inside the walls. That's why Ralphy comes up through the hole that was cut in the floor for the kitchen sink pipe. The men cut the hole too big and had to put pink fiberglass insulation around it for a seal. It doesn't work though, 'cause Ralphy burrowed up through it. Looks like he ate a hole right plum through that insulation. Ralphy lives under the house, or maybe out in the garage. He's a mouse and Mamma can't stand him. She throws mothballs under the house and makes Mr. Snibels, our neighbor, go under there lookin' for Ralphy to kill 'im. Every time Mr. Snibels comes out with a dead mouse, but it's not Ralphy, 'cause Ralphy is a soft brown and these mice were all brown-gray.

I set up a trap to catch Ralphy once, so I could have him as a pet. But Mamma found out and sent me to my room. It didn't bother me though, 'cause the next day Mamma and Aunt Bird brought home a turtle that they didn't want to run over on the road.

I think Ralphy may've died. I haven't seen him in a while, and Mamma hasn't screamed about mice either. If Ralphy is dead, he died of old age. It's not 'cause Mamma or Mr. Snibels killed him either, 'cause everybody knows that wouldn't be Christian--the third Commandment says, "Thou Shalt Not Kill."

Gracie, from down the street, baby-sat me when I's in elementary school. She lives in the brown house that has a black wrought-iron fence around half of her front yard that holds in all of the flowerin' bushes. The fenced half is on the side by the day-care center. The unfenced half goes from her front walk to the parkin' lot of the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank. There's a sea of tiger lilies on the side by the bank. Gracie waters the flowerin' bushes every day, but not the tiger lilies. Since summers in Oklahoma tend to be real hot, the lilies die and turn into brown stalks that talk to me when the wind passes by.

They first talked to me when I's in the front yard practicin' my twirlin' routine for recital. If I completed my double-turn thumb flips, the dead stalks murmured in appreciation of my talent. If I dropped the double-turn thumb flips, they grumbled because I hadn't practiced more.

On Saturdays, when I's little, Mamma let me walk to the post office to mail the bills. She always gave me 50 cents to buy an lc-ee at the Easy Stop. Since I always walked the long way home, down the Main Street, some of my lc-ee would melt. Before the tiger lilies died I'd give 'em drinks from my lc-ees.

Mrs. McCarty works at the grocery. She's been baggin' our groceries since I was five. The only time I ever see her not bagging groceries is when she puts up the cottage cheese in the dairy aisle. She's never in the regular aisles, only that refrigerated one. She wears short sleeves, and when she sets down big boxes of cottage cheese, her arms jiggle and the little white hairs on her upper arms and around her elbows stand straight up. She was my Sunday school teacher and taught me in Vacation Bible School, too. When Mamma was sick last winter with the flu, Mrs. McCarty brought us groceries on her way home and put them up with me.

She always calls me her Sugarbaby. She says it's because I'm a sweetie and she's known me since I's a baby. But I think it's because in second grade I stole a handful of Sugarbabies from the grocery. When Mamma found out, she said I was goin' to go to hell in a hand basket. She called me the devil's own. That scared me so bad, I ran all the way back to the grocery. When I went runnin' through the door, Mrs. McCarty grabbed me by my arm. I told her what I'd done and why I was cryin', but she just said, "My, my goodness, you're sure a devil." That made me cry more. In Sunday school that week she told me I wasn't really a devil, she was just kidding.

After the games during softball season, the coaches always take us to Don's Drugstore for a pop. If I get to the machine last, all the strawberry and the grape are gone, and I have to have a regular or orange one.

We crowd four into each side of the booth. We all fit 'cause we don't have a shortstop. Sometimes, when I'm sick, I don't like goin' there 'cause the team's all hot and dirty and being skwunched together makes me feel nauseous. Mainly 'cause we always win, 'cause we're County Champs, and the team's always excited, elbow-win', kickin' and doin' high fives over the table. If I'm sick, I end up climbin' out over the top of the booth and goin' home early. It's a pretty fun time, except for Charlotta Wilson's laugh. She laughs like it sounds when you blow bubbles in your milk. It's loud. Goodness! We always know when a bad batter comes up to the plate 'cause we hear Charlotta's laugh get louder as she moves closer infield.

I like being the first one in the booth, 'cause then I feel the cool orange vinyl and the rips and where they were taped up at, on my bare legs. I feel more comfortable bein' able to have the booth all mine, at least for a moment before the other three girls slide in.

Sometimes we harass Craig, who owns Don's Drugstore, about

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puttin' in a soda fountain like all the real drugstores have, not just a pop bottle machine, so we could eat here and wouldn't have to call the City Cafefor order-out when we are hungry. He just says, "Go to Dead Don. He's the one who took it out in the first place."

On occasion, when we come in, there's people in our booth. So we mill 'round awhile, makin' our way over to the pop bottle machine, an' one of us says, "Hey, ya wanta pop?" hopin' they'll leave. But they never seem ta. So we's all take 'em out the side door and sit on the curb and watch people drag Main.

The Trans Am Man owns Bob Wheedle's Chevrolet dealership, but everybody knows he's not Bob Wheedle 'cause Bob Wheedle is dead. No one knows the Trans Am Man, not really, 'cause he doesn't lives in Liberty. He lives in Mullhallon, which is a good two towns away.

He stopped to talk to me once, just after Bob Wheedle died. I was walking home from the swimming pool and this shiny, black Trans Am with a big gold eagle painted on the hood and gold curly Q's painted on the side pulled up next to me. The man asked how to get to Main Street. I said drive straight on 'til he reached the stop light. He winked and smiled at me like people smile on the Pearl Drops commercials, then drove off.

The Trans Am Man only works on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. On those days he comes into town about the time I'm walkin' to school. At first I waved and smiled big when he drove by and honked. But people started teasin' me and callin' me Bobby Jo. Mamma heard about it and forbade me to act like that. She said I was actin' like a tramp. I told her I barely knew him, but she didn't care. She said that she didn't know him and Mullhallon was full of heathens. They have two bars ond only four churches, ya know. After that I didn't wave anymore. I had a secret crush on him, but I never told no one because I didn't want my mamma to find out.

On Friday nights he always leaves early and he always changes his clothes from the ones he was wearin' in the mornin'. He changes from his light blue sports jacket to a black shirt with big orange and red petally flowers all over it. On Fridays he drives off the opposite way from Mullhallon. I know, because on Friday nights I sit out on the bench in front of the Domino Parlor with Kelly and Sally, the twins that live behind the school.

Kelly and Sally are best-friend twin sisters. When two boy twins moved into town freshman year, Kelly and Sally dated them. But the boys moved away. In class, when the substitute calls roll, Sally's name turns into Selly because it's right after Kelly. Only adults seem to do that, though.

They live behind the playground of the elementary school in a house made of big, brown and reddish-brown stones in cement. There's two houses like that on Cole Street. You can tell the twins' though, 'cause they have a rusting pick'em-up truck on cinder blocks in their front yard. Their dad was going to overhaul the engine and paint it, but that's before he stole away to Rooney with Melinda Frickey, who worked at the bank and just got out of manicure school. That was about four years ago, though, when we's in seventh and eighth grade.

At my ninth birthday party, they both wore blue jeans and red-ruffle blouses. I was hoping that they got me one for my birthday, but they got me an orange and pink slinky, instead. I wanted a red-ruffle blouse like theirs. They didn't know that, though.

All my life I've been kinda jealous over Kelly and Sally, but I don't let on to nobody. Even though their daddy left 'em and mine didn't, I still envy 'em. Their mamma always made their lunches in elementary school, when I had to eat in the cafeteria or make my own lunch. I always wanted my mamma to make me a lunch, but she said if I wanted it I had to make it. I wanted her to make it so she could put in tin cans of pudding, home-made chocolate cookies, peanut butter and syrup sandwiches, and apples with the skin cut away. But she never did.

The twins were the first ones in all of Liberty to get glow-in-the-dark shoelaces. I wanted a pair like theirs, but Mamma said they were frivolous. For the first week after they got them, everybody went

inside the hollow tree trunk on the playground to watch 'em glow. But one day they didn't glow anymore. It's because Kelly and Sally's mamma washed them.

Both twins have long, straight blond hair with fluffy bangs. I have long, tight, red curls that frizz when I brush 'em out. The twins say my hair is pretty, but I know it's not. It doesn't shine and bounce when we play softball. It just slouches, so I stuff it under my hat.

On the Liberty softball team, Kelly pitches and Sally plays first base. I play right field, and everyone knows right field's where you put the worst player. I envy 'em because people throw the ball to them. The only time I get to throw one is after climbing the fence to get homerun balls.

I hang out with the twins because they were in Brownies with me, and Mamma lets me go places with them because she knows their Mamma. That's why we sit in front of the Domino Parlor on Friday nights. Our mammas know each other.

The bench outside the Domino Parlor was painted a pea green, like the front facade of the parlor, but it cracked and all peeled off from the sun and rain. This bench is ours Friday nights, and Bobby Jo has taken it over on Saturday nights. She uses it as a home base when she goes trollin' for boys. But the twins and me go to church and want to be in the Miss Harvest Queen contest. The judges don't like naughty, boy-chasin' girls. We know because the judges usually spend the evenings in the Domino Parlor. They are all old, grandfatherly, and wear straw hats and walk slow. When it gets real hot, 'cause there's no evening breeze, then they sometimes invite us in to sit by the window fan and drink a tin cup of lemonade.

The lights and ceilin' fans in the parlor hang down low from the high ceiling. The fans are always goin' so slow I can see all four fan blades as they turn 'round. I asked a man once why they don't put them on a higher speed. He said 'cause they weren't fast speed fans, they were slow. I didn't quite understand, so I just drank my lemonade. Me and Sally and Kelly all try to make polite conversation, and the men always tell us that we'd make good Harvest Queens.

When we're out on the bench, we watch the boys drag Main. Sometimes they stop and ask us if we want to go down to the Dairy Queen and have a cherry limeade with 'em. We tell 'em yes and meet them down there after five minutes. We never go with Chad Booth, though, 'cause he's not a God-fearin' boy. People say he drives reckless and chews. They don't know that most of the boys chew. We tell the boys we'll meet them, because we don't want the men inside the Domino Parlor to know we're trollin' for boys. But not like Bobby Jo. We do it Christian-like. We wave good-bye to the men in the parlor, walk down to the Dairy Queen, get our own booth and order our own limeades. The boys just pay for them.

Bobby Jo came to our school from Texas. It wasn't a big change up to Oklahoma, but she went from a city with four high schools to a town that has kindergartners on the same bus with seniors.

She wears tight jeans that look like they are vacuum sucked to her legs. Here in Liberty we wear our jeans loose and saggy, like potato chip bags, because we're good Christians. On the first hot day, she wore shorts to school. All the boys were lookin' at her legs and talkin' about them. They didn't act like Christians at all. So, the principal called her out of science class and told her the way a proper Christian young lady dresses. "No shorts, and skirts must touch the knee when sitting. No low cut blouses or flashy clothes. School policy," he said. She didn't say nothin', but her parents called the school. She got to have a whole parent-teacher-student meetin'. She got out of class even, and we all knew that that wasn't fair.

Once, her parents took her out of school three days before Easter break for a family ski trip. She didn't even have to take finals when she came back like anyone else would've, either. In Liberty, we believe education is very important and that one should be penalized for deliberately missing any part of school. Our policy says, if one misses a single day of school at any time for any reason, upon

one's arrival, one must take all mid-term exams. Well, Bobby Jo Bobby Jo said she didn't have to do no such thing, when she got back from Colorada. She said it right to the teacher, too. The teacher sent her down to the principal's office, and she got another parent-teacher-student meetin'.

Needless to say, her family has been blackballed in Liberty for not bein' good Christians.

In Liberty, 'round Christmas time, there's Santa Clauses everywhere on the weekends. A Santa Claus is outside the front of the Easy Stop, the Quick Stop and the Buy n' Bye for the Salvation Army. There's a Santa that sits near the front window of the Chickpea County Newspaper buildin', takin' pictures with kids. About mid-December Santa's elves come out to hang Christmas decorations on the streetlights. That's Quintus and Cicero Jones' job. Larry Buford helps sometimes. They all wear red shirts and green stocking caps with bells on the end. I forget about one of the Santa's 'cause he only comes out once a year. That's the one outside the fire station who stands in the back of a fire and rescue truck, handing out lunch bags full of hard candy and oranges that smell like a mixture of marmalade, grape cough syrup, and honey.

Quintus and Cicero are brothers, 'bout seven years apart, but they're old. Old enough that their faces and hands have turned brown cracked leather from hard work in the fields. Their great-great-great-grandfather owned the initial parcel of land in the whereabouts of Chickpea, the County Seat. Mamma says that the grandfather's name was Cicero, too. That's why this is Chickpea County.

Quintus used to be the town drunk. On Sunday mornin's you'd find him propped up in the telephone booth at the corner of the flower shop, across the street from Katie's Hair Boutique. Ellen cleaned him up, though. Ellen's a waitress at the Longhorn. Quintus was always hittin' on her. So, one day, when he first came in, Ellen said: "Quintus Jones, I'm not ever gonna be able to marry you if you're never sober enough to ask me." From that day on, Quintus was sober, and him and Ellen got married and honeymooned up on Eagle Creek. Quintus even leads group Bible prayer every third Sunday at the Christian church, now.

Cicero works down at the Co-op. He drops dog food off at my uncle's house on Thursdays, and aired up my bike tires when I was little and rode it to the library. I've only seen him out of his blue cover-alls once--when his mamma died. At his mamma's funeral he wore a brown suit and a yella tie. You could tell it hadn't been worn recently, or else he would've known the sleeves were a bit short.

I like Cicero better than Quintus. Quintus always seems to be preachin'. When I sees him on the street, he says, "Bless you. And remember that God is watchin' over us all." His tone of voice depends on what I'm doin'. Cicero nods his head, smiles, and calls me ma'am. He's called me ma'am ever since he was airin' up my tires. If we're both in the City Cafe, he'll buy me a piece of coconut cream pie. He's just nicer. Probably 'cause he has a county named after him and is kind of a celebrity.

After church on Sundays, Darlene Fitzpatrick and me walk down to the Easy Stop, get Ic-ees, and go back and sit on the cement steps made for the trailers on the corner of the lumberyard across from the church. We talk gossip and slurp until her brother picks her up after Boy's Youth Church. The sun's always shinin' on the corner of the lumberyard on Sundays, no matter. So as soon as Darlene and me get too hot, we move to another side of the steps. The cement is smooth and cool, and doesn't hurt our hands or scrape at the cloth of our dresses if we slide off, like concrete does. Concrete makes our hands hurt 'cause the little rocks press into them with heat from the sun. The cement makes our hands feel soft and fleshy.

We used to sit on the bricks until Darlene complained that they made her butt hurt. That's why we sit on the cement steps. After Darlene's brother picks her up, I stay by myself a while. I take off my shoes and walk between the rows of bricks and steps letting the sand into my panty hose under my toes, then walk home. Mam-

ma got mad though, said, "We ain't no Loretta Swift. We don't own a grocery store. We can't just arbitrarily go and pick up a new pair for free." I stopped walking home with my shoes off then.

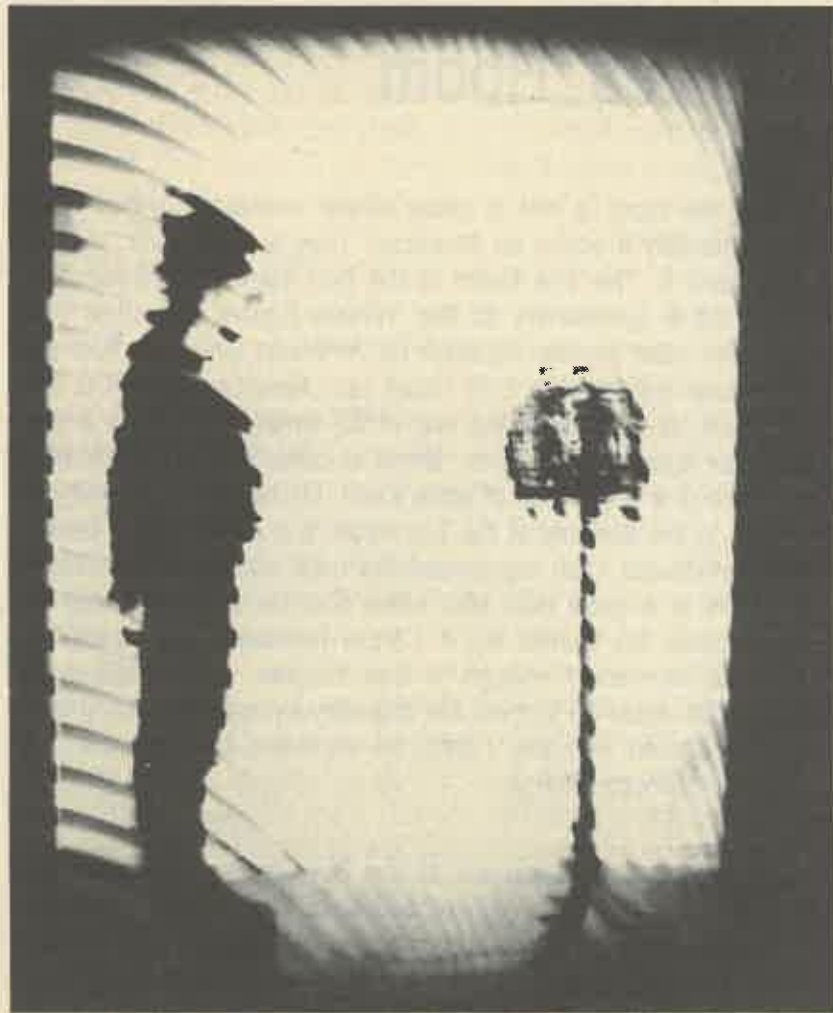
Sometimes I want to be alone and it's not a Sunday. If so, I go down to the lumberyard, 'cause it's just two blocks from the house and right across from the Nazarene Church, where we go every Sunday. I remember throwin' handfuls of gravel from the road at the steps when I was little, so I'd have to brush them off and climb over them before Sunday school started. Now I walk through the rows, letting my left hand run over the bricks and my right over the top of each cement step. Hal owns the lumberyard and Hal's Hardware, which is right across the street. Hal knows me from the City Cafe and leaves me alone.

Eventually, I go sit on a set of steps in the back of the yard by Percy's Air Conditioning and Washing Machine Repair. Sometimes I bring my homework, sometimes a sex-trash book from the library or sometimes just myself. Sometimes the sun is so bright it hurts my eyes and makes me dizzy, the way it reflects off white paper and the white cement. When I feel that way I lie my head down on one of the cement steps, close my eyes, and let the cool of the cement soak into my cheek until I'm not dizzy.

It's kinda nice to be there alone and read. People don't bother me there, even though it's just a block off Main. I guess people think I'm lookin' to buy some bricks--at least that's what I'd like to think, even though I know they know I'm not. But they still leave me alone. Even the pastor's wife doesn't say "Hey" when she goes to church to practice hymns every day at 3:30.

When I sit there and it's gettin' dark, I dig my feet in the sand and scrunch it between my toes. It's a scratchy damp feeling that makes me want to scream, but I can't 'cause there's Missionary Service at the church every night, and Mamma would hang my out to dry if I interrupted the singin'.

Stephanie Bounds
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Ms. Bernis von zur Muehlen



Zoe Crosher
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Carol Blum



Seth Davis
Fredericksburg, VA
Stafford Senior High School
Terry Valente

The Tea Room

The tea room is not a place where everybody knows your name. Especially if you're an American. They are, however, usually glad to learn it. The Tea Room is the best place in Jerusalem. If you can find it. Somewhere off Ben Yehuda Square is a street that leads to the most popular nightclub for American girls. It is thus the most popular nightclub for both Israeli and American guys. On that same street, all the way at the end of the street, right inside a little alley, is an open wooden door. Wood is uncommon in a city built everywhere of a single kind of white stone. Usually wood is reserved for doors. In the doorway of the Tea Room is a man keeping books, a small antiquated cash register and the main control for the stereo system. He is a good man who hates Cat Stevens, but plays his music because the tourists like it. I know because I was upset that in a nation concerned enough to ban Wagner, and equally anti-Semitic artist would be played. He was very sympathetic to my concern, and agreed with me. I think he continues to make the Tea House goers happy though.

Sometimes they seat you at the Tea Room, sometimes you just pass the man at the register and walk down a few steps into the underground room. It is lit by candles and lamps quite brightly for such a room. Around the walls are cushions to sit or lie on. The tables are waist high--after one takes his seat. The waitress is care-free and tolerant. She lets you order when you please, pay when you please and leave when you please. Better, she lets you sit how you please and do what you please if you are with a special friend.

The Tea Room is a place for tea drinkers. The Tea Room is a place for privileged foreigners: the ones who can find it and who are wise enough to know its value. The patrons are foreign students, British, Hungarian, French who talk politics in native tongues over strawberry tea and are friendly to all. There is no hate in the Tea House. The flower lady comes, sometimes, selling bouquets. She knows that in that small cavern, she will find a few lovers every day, ready to show their amour with such an ancient symbol. Didn't I myself buy flowers one day long ago?

Cigarettes are communal in the Tea Room. They unify the cultures. Americans and Israelis exchange brands. Sometimes an Englander might give away a Silk Cut. Even when you have a lighter, it is friendlier to ask the street artist at the next table. Perhaps, along with the flame, you might receive a story or a joke.

Jasmine tea is my delight at the Tea Room. I soon learned to order "yasmine" rather than my own harsh pronunciation. That ancient spice, yasmine, is return. I traveled to Spain, then Poland, Lithuania, Russia and finally the United States. The story of a people. Two thousand years I have been away from my home, without incense, without yasmine. At the Tea House, my birthright is returned to me. Yasmine. Return. So I sit on my cushion at the Tea House, with my communal cigarettes, and my special somebody with whom the waitress leaves me alone, listening to the murmur of many tongues and I know return.

Michael Horwitz
Williamsville East High School
East Amherst, NY

In Late Summer

in late summer
those moments were succinct

candy flavored imprints upon our minds
like heat sensitive rainbows

instead of shifting gears
when the light turned green

we were sparklers dying slowly
in the sweet Virginia rain

lightning bugs left to smoulder
in a sealed jar

David Sherwin
Annadale, VA
Thomas Jefferson High School
Carol Lange

Tourist to the Roots - Washington, D.C. on Five Dollars a Day

I went back to my hometown as an observer
stood in the shuffling line of a million others
that stretched around the Tidal Basin
at the cherry blossom festival.
Camera dangling from my neck,
took the requisite pictures of the pink-and-white flowers
along with outsiders from Manitoba to Japan.
Walked the long walk of the Washington Mall
from the Vietnam Memorial to the Jefferson,
hitting the Washington and the Lincoln in between,
then back down the Mall
along the museums and office buildings to the Capitol.
Trying to walk with a purposeful step
to show the assembled, sampled world
I wasn't just another outsider.
Got a ticket to watch the Senate from my Senator's office
and sat in the gallery watching a debate
over federal subsidies of bee-farmers.
Fell asleep in the comfortable chairs
until a guard asked me to leave.

When my father worked here
for a high-seniority representative
he flashed his security pass
and took us deep into the heart of the Capitol
where the linoleum and marble are covered by wine carpets,
in the empty hallways of power
which echoed with the news spit out of the wire service
huge sitting rooms with oriental rugs
overstuffed armchairs where no one sat
old paintings of obscure statesmen.
A guard let us onto the floor of the House
and we walked among the
miked hardwood tables
leather chairs
quietly in awe, but we were insiders
friends and members of the majority in Washington -

the analysts, advisers and bureaucrats
locked into the Beltway fast-track.

Now I go back there rootless,
without a safehouse to go home to after a day's exploring,
only a sofa bed in my uncle's new condo,
or a sleeping bag on a friend's floor.
So I shuffle around the dust-rimmed grass squares
that make up the Mall.
I go into museum after museum,
glancing at artwork I've seen before,
the giant stuffed elephant at the entrance to
the Natural History Museum
(where they keep a tame hissing cockroach, a tarantula,
and a piece of a giant squid's tentacle
gemstones, animal skeletons, etc.)
as big now as when I left.
Friends and friends of family ask,
"So, what you been up to lately?"
(and I shoot back
"Not much." Maybe a token something here "You?")
Secure in a government job
in the know
in a little secretive world
cubicked into gray steel desks and chairs
security clearance from the FBI
and a corridor of belonging.

Joshua Malbin
Delmar, NY
Bethlehem Central High School
Robin Rapaport

Gum

When I was little,
I never ate
glue or crayons;
I never fell asleep
during nap time
lying on mats of
primary colors.
At recess when the kids
asked if I
wanted to play tag,
I never did.
Instead, I sat alone on a swing
wondering if my skirt was
flying up in the back
because my mother
had told me to be careful of that.
A boy put a wad of gum in my
long brown hair once;
I started to cry
and the teacher sent me home.
I never told who did it,
so the boy didn't have to go to
the principal's office.
The next day,
I came to school
with short hair
and the boy laughed at me.

Anjy Lavezzo
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Ms. von zur Muehlen

Claresford, West Virginia:

April

each spring when they wind the clocks
and the cuckoos call
the old floors creak, eaves trickle, wainscots rustle
and the whole house ticks with its waking up.
the warm nights are laden with promise,
the scent of primroses and moss
on the stones of the old dark well.
the old woman on the porch drinks it in;
her rocking chair creaks
with the steady rhythm of seconds draining away.
each breath draws a little from the old frame,
leaves her a little more shrunken, frail, shoulders withered.
the pale skin on her hands glows translucent in the dusk,
and she smiles.
the old chair creaks forward and back on the sagging porch.
spring forward, fall back, they set their clocks
but hers only winds down, gears meshing more slowly
till one more spring will push her
gently,
forward,
over the edge
while the cuckoos call in the woods.

Heather Lindsay
Montgomery Blair High School
Carole Tomayko

Images

Did you ever think that you might just close your eyes once,
to find that all the cherry trees
had been chopped down,
all but one?
And when you pull the dollar bill out of your pocket,
trying to take the axe away,
you find that it has crossed the Delaware,
now realizing that the more it looks like it,
the more that X doesn't really mark the spot?
Then, you close your eyes tighter to find
all the crayons have acquired rounded tips,
all except for burnt-sienna because after all
the "b" in roy-g-biv doesn't stand for "burnt"
And as you feel the top of your head,
finding it's not really round the way a head should be,
rather sharp and new,
a sudden tear turns you a shade of sienna
and you wish that everyone would stop drawing
to conclusions,
so you could finally be someone's primary fancy
Tighter still, and you realize
that the sugar plums aren't dancing for you any more
rather they've all gone inside,
leaving a sign on the door that reads
"Plum Tuckered Out"
And as you wonder why they went bye-bye,
you wish that you could find Horner's corner
so that with a push and a pull
of your adept little thumb,
you could make the plums come out to play again
Tightest yet, and the swirling yellow outlines
a small pencil, frantically penciling

the single word "happy"
on a ghostly white sheet which lay before,
And as you focus in, you discover
on the eraser someone has scratched
the words "your life",
also that no matter what
the little piece of wood would do
it spelled the word
wrong, wasting precious eraser
to start over
Your eyes close tighter than ever before,
so tight that all is none,
watches stop ticking, hair stops growing . . . until
there is nothing, nothing but
a little boy hovering before you
And as you watch him pull, on his bow,
an arrow parts the cold.
Confusion bows to enlightenment as
the dart draws ever closer, until
all at once you feel it
oddly warm your flesh
And through a tear of joy,
you open your eyes,
for seemingly the first time.

Michael Martin
Ballston Lake, NY
Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake Sr. High School
James Schultz

Inertia

Twilight hangs stale over us.
We sit on the pocked concrete,
Watching the headlights of the passing cars
Whose vacant light scrapes dryly along the road.
Between us are walls of bitter air.

Laughter sounds hollow in the chill,
As empty as thin music
From a distant car radio.

The wind picks at our hair,
Twisting the ends halfheartedly.
Only on rare nights does it swing up at our clothes,
Does it beat our ears and sting our eyes with the urgent passion
of a 50's ragtop,
Top down, the fluid road falling away from us, the wind speeding
tight overhead.
Tonight it fumbles deadly at our fingers.

A street lamp flickers, burns out with a dry pop.
Dissonant music floats ghostlike in the red sky
Until the traffic light changes,
And it fades away, its last tiny strains lingering like afterimages.

The street grows darker;
Its rough shadows disappear in the flat night.
At the edge of evening
We are strung along the curb like beads on a cheap chain,
All of us plastic-gold.

Erica Weitzman
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

Without the Imagination

"Within me sadness had given way to hopelessness, when faith has evaporated and the imagination is dead, when life seems to have come finally and irrevocably to a standstill." (Stop-Time, page 170)

Orphaned at birth, I'd grown up in the Missoula Home for Boys. I was born there, but never left with my mother. I doubt she ever saw me. I was never breast fed; they say I accepted a bottle on the first try; I didn't even have the instincts of a regular boy.

We were not allowed to watch television at the Home (Home always emphasized by the attendants), and I'm glad. The typical television family might have overwhelmed me. I couldn't have watched Dennis Mitchell play with Mr. Wilson in suburbia while I sat unwanted, wedged in the armpit of Montana.

So my years at the Home were spent squirming in school (I completed grade twelve) and tending the small animals kept out behind the central building. I loved the dogs and goats and sheep that lolled in the back. The parents of the new born would protect them from the wild animals and from foul weather, and once I became familiar to the animals, they would protect me also. After dark, I'd sit on the ground patting the dogs, and they would gather around and lie near me. Once, when we heard a coyote, they all got up and circled around me, their hackles raised in my defense.

When I finally left the Home at eighteen (I was the oldest resident in the Home's history), they gave me Lady, my favorite black lab. I'd trained her from her birth when I was eleven; she was my best friend. The people at the home said she had very fancy parents, but the owners couldn't cope with all the puppies, so they gave one to the home. When they gave me her pedigree (not the kind of thing often found at an orphanage), I read her full name: Repentant Lady. I threw out the slip of paper and renamed her Mary.

I drove through Montana, making money wherever I could. I cut grass in Brockway, scrubbed dishes in Vandalia, and sold T.V.'s at a Radio Shack in Polson on the edge of Flathead Lake. As I drove from job to job, Mary would lie quietly on the seat of my truck, and I'd rub her soft ears as I drove. My independence made me feel adult and mature. It also made me think of what it would be like to have a family, of how wonderful it would be to be driving home for Christmas.

Sometimes I'd see myself in the mirrors as I looked around at Montana, and I'd fantasize about what my mother looked like. I was sure she was pretty, but not beautiful. I didn't have the dainty features that a feminine mother dictates in her offspring. She was probably of average height, since I was just under six feet. I also knew she would be young, because orphans are usually left by young mothers. I'd look at every woman I saw and compare them to myself, hoping someday to find a match.

I liked to think of my mother as a glamorous woman, but I did not see her in Great Falls or at a ski resort. I saw her once, in a town later identified to me as "the one between Cohagen and Jordan." I had a road atlas, but there was no marked town in that stretch of Montana. The ability of the human to live on hope is incredible. Long, cold, rainy nights were made palpable by the thought of my mother. As a grade school student can get through math class by thinking about stickball at recess, so could I get through huge spells of loneliness by imagining my mother; she, too, must have been searching.

Mary was sitting on the seat beside me when I pulled into the small diner on the side of route 59. She was pregnant, due any day. I'd bred her to a stud in Great Falls; I needed the money the pups would bring. I'd never had a family, so I wondered what to do when Mary's family appeared. Her stomach bulged under her, seeming to sweep the ground, and when she ran her overflowing teats flapped and slapped against each other like a screen door against its frame. In the later part of her pregnancy Mary had become very protective of me; she wouldn't let strangers advance on me without barking and raising the fur on the back of her neck.

She worried, too. She'd trudge my circles on the seat of the truck, sniffing and exploring the same two feet of synthetic leather again and again; then she'd flop wearily down in the middle of her circle. I would just look over at her and wait for the puppies to arrive, right there in the Ford. She would lie very close to me and put her head in my lap.

The diner was disheveled. An overflowing dumpster squatted off to one side, and a decrepit row of cabins stood behind the restaurant. The curtains were orange and brown, dusty and ripped, and the tablecloths on the booths and counter stools inside were vinyl; bits of cushioning jutted out from the seats.

I usually looked for my mother in public places: movie theaters or restaurants. Some people showed traits that I exhibited, the same jaw bone, the same rhythm of breathing, but never more than one or two parts of me would match anyone else. I knew that someday I'd find my mother, and she would just know me and we'd love each other and take care of each other.

I entered the diner through the ripped screen door, sat down at the counter, and ordered a cup of coffee and a huckleberry muffin. The lady running the place was grotesque: huge bags hanging below her eyes, and girdled blobs of fat pushing out around her cinched apron. Canadian bacon popped on the long griddle behind her, coating the splatter guard with grease and warmfat. A 45 spun in an old jukebox that was pushed back into the corner, its lights flickering as the bulbs wore down. The coffee was good, but the muffin was stale. It was dried out, and the berries were dispersed in an empty pattern. I filled Mary's water dish from a sink in the grungy little bathroom of the diner and plodded out to the dirt parking area in front.

As I settled the water container in the dust, a little red jeep swerved into the lot, throwing dust over its outside wheels. A tall woman stepped out, her cowboy boots settling in the dirt. She was in fashionable dress: her gripping jeans tucked into the boots, and a denim shirt tied at the bottom, exposing her navel. Her flat chest and straight hips were barely feminine, but her face was attractive, blue eyes like my own dominating her other features. I guessed she was about thirty-five. She looked more wealthy than anyone else in that part of Montana. The jeep was clean and in good condition. She dressed in the current style.

I followed her back into the diner. Her features were similar to my own, and I imagined that her picture in my fictional living room would not look out of place.

She sat at the counter but ordered nothing. The fat woman passed her a good morning and set a cup of black coffee beside her. Her hips expanded over the small round stool as she rolled to one side to reach the cup. She picked her boots up from the foot rest under the counter and crossed her legs. She sat elegantly, but her dusty face defeated her clothes in their attempt at an image that was greater than she could support. She wasn't royalty, but she held herself as if she were. Her chin paralleled the counter, pointing her eyes at the wall over the skillet. Her ears twitched a little when she blinked.

Her body fit the picture of my mother that I had constructed over my lifetime. Her features were very similar to mine, and any father could make up for the differences. I stared at her for a long time. She sat as I did, and when she spoke to the cook, her sweet voice had the same tone as mine.

She could have raised me in a little ranch house, riding horses and living together for years. She could have loved me all my life, never regretting her decision to keep me. Instead I had been discarded at birth. But that could be forgiven. I could forget all that and take her now with any past we chose. She was a perfect match. All her features matched my own, her hair, her cheeks, her eyes.

It is amazing that I was still letting my mind race into fantasies of a family and of a mother. After almost twenty years of being an orphan, I should have hardened myself against the hope of ever finding her. I knew she would never simply announce herself at The Missoula Home for Boys and whisk me away. I knew as well as I knew my times tables that she would not drive up and take me to a farm and raise me in the corn belt. But a human body does

continued on p.26

not allow its user to abandon hope. Hope fuels the body, a hope that better times and a better life are on the way, maybe just a day away.

I knew this woman was my mother after a few moments of studying her, but then she did something that convinced me so much I was ready to go introduce myself.

My mother looked deliberately at me and said, flat in tone, with no emotion, "It's so nice that the sun's out today."

I said nothing. I could say nothing. She knew I was her son. I had found my mother after agonizing years of hope and grievance. She wanted me back. She hadn't wanted to give me up, and wonderful fate had brought us to the same point on this day of our separate quests.

A Volkswagen sputtered into the lot, and my mother looked away from me and stood up stiffly. She walked past me to the door. She greeted the man that got out of the car with a kiss on the cheek. He was disgusting; his skin was pail and ruddy, and his business suit was grimy and of an unpleasant cut. He was very thin, and his thick beard made his head appear too heavy for the rest of him. His inflated head made me wonder if he ever had to prop it up to keep it from tumbling off and rolling down his horrid suit.

The two walked to one of the dilapidated cabins in the back of the diner and quickly went in. They drew the blinds hurriedly and locked the door. I watched intently for half an hour, then saw them come back out. The man had forgotten to put his tie back on, and the woman's hair hung down out of its style. Her shirt was untied, and not buttoned far enough up to hide her tiny breasts. The man lunged at her breasts with his face, and she pushed them towards him. He gave her a wad of bills and walked to the front of the diner. He opened the door to his shabby compact and plopped in. The car popped away down route 59.

She entered the back of the diner through a small plywood door and tiny hall that led her behind the counter. I looked into the building through the ripped curtains and saw my mother give some of the bills to the old woman behind the counter. They laughed as my mother tied her hair back out of her face.

I stared at the small cabin where my mother had offended me so many times. I was starting for the truck when I heard Mary yelp from somewhere in the bushes. She had been loose in the lot since my mother drove up and had wandered off behind the dumpster. I called to her, but she only barked back from the same place. I crashed into the bushes and found her beneath a berry bush, kindly licking clean her pups. There were four, all black. Their fur was slicked back like a teenager's in the fifties; their eyes were closed like frightened children's in a spookhouse. Mary stood up to greet me and revealed one dead pup, crushed by the weight of its mother.

I gathered the living puppies up and put the dead one in the dumpster. I thought that Mary might get upset, so I let her watch me, but she didn't care about the dead one; it was no longer her responsibility. I put them in my coat on the seat of the truck. Mary wallowed into the truck, the pain and effort of delivery still with her. She licked them all again, and then allowed them all to feed from her abundant supply of breast-milk.

Pulling out of the diner, I let my mind go black. I stared at the white line on the side of the road, not seeing anything of Montana as it rushed by me. I put a horse blanket over Mary and her pups and tried desperately to keep them within its warmth, but they always squirmed their way out.

Every time I saw myself in the mirror I became enraged. I'd pound on the wheel of the truck, scaring Mary and her puppies. Sometimes I would thrash myself into tears, then collapse, drooping over the wheel and cursing my taunting reflection as it looked at me from the windshield. I could see my mother everywhere.

I ran deeper into the state, my eyes fixed on the broken white line, my gas meter slowly winding down. I ran out of gas climbing a huge deserted mountain, my foot clenched on the accelerator. I gripped the wheel of the truck for hours, just staring at the white line and concentrating on the road ahead of me, hoping the truck would travel on its own or that I would be rescued.

The puppies were asleep, the engine had long since died out

for lack of fuel, and I was the only one on the stationary road. Stillness settled over me. I clenched the wheel and mashed the gas pedal into the floor, anticipating a sudden surge of power that would bring me to a town.

Slowly I eased out of my position in the cockpit and put my back against the seat. My fingers were cramped from the hours of strangling the steering wheel, and my right leg was tingling numb. Lying down on the seat, I put my head on the edge of the blanket. I curled up against Mary and sobbed.

Henry Clarke
Dobbs Ferry, NY
Phillips Exeter Academy
David Greer

Pressed Flowers

Mama
is the kind of woman
to follow Halley's comet
for three weeks
in Mexico alone

and to think at forty
of getting a butterfly tattoo
on her hip
except Papa would think
she's crazy.

If I die, she said,
bury me under a dogwood tree,
beneath the soft grasses,
and let the petals cover me.

If Papa dies, she said,
get me a motor home
and I'll send you postcards as I roam.

She says
we all leave our old selves behind.
Papa
is the kind of man
to wonder why
everything is the way it is
and why he can't change it

and to think at random
of saving the world
except Mama would laugh
and joke about saving them
from growing old.

When I die, he said,
bury me in a barren field
and plant a few flowers
that shine in the sun.

If Mama dies, he said,
get me a small shack
in the middle of nowhere,
and never forget.

He says
it's all going to end soon anyway.

Melissa Back
Park Ridge, NJ
Park Ridge High School
Patricia Fegan

Ninette

I touched her ruffled pink dress.

The crackle from her plastic stuffed body
made my head and eyes roll
like hers did when the Holy Ghost took them.
Lying in the smoky parlor
my mother's old skin
turns into brown dust on my fingers.
I don't remember
how I was breathing,
if my heart was throbbing.
You would have thought I had again
been invited to sit in smoke rings.

She wanted cremation.

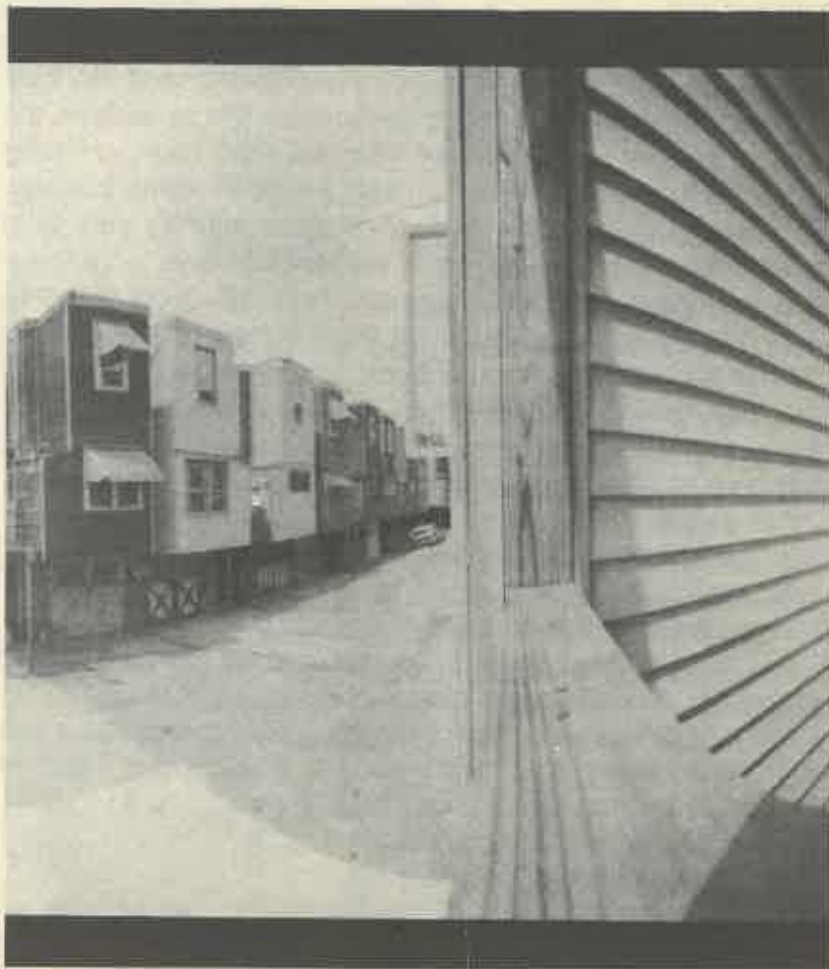
Tapping her cigarette bud,
letting the gray ash from the Salem
drop
into plant pots.
It helps the plants grow.

She was a lady and ladies are scared of insects.

After it rains
why do all the worms come out?
I asked centuries ago when I knew nothing
and she knew everything.
Who knows? I would never want to be in a hole
with them.

We buried her in pink-cream tiles,
too good to be plant food.

Janiece Kirton
Swarthmore, PA
Strath Haven High School
Mrs. Farrel



Mark Stehle
Philadelphia, PA
Chestnut Hill Academy

Best of Both Worlds

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Somewhere in the bottom drawer of the oak dresser in my room lies a photo album that is yellowing with every day and every year. It is a special album filled with rare pictures of my mother when she was a little girl growing up in Taipei, Taiwan, and close to the end there is a picture taken where I am sitting in my mother's lap in front of Chiang Kai-Shek's memorial garden. I actually remember that day that is now more than a decade ago. I had asked my mother if I was Chinese or American. "Both," my mother said, "but Chinese first." Only recently did my mother tell me over a cup of tea that her dream from the day I was born was to have me grow up with the best of two worlds in my blood, her dream...her wish.

Over the years a lot of what I have become is a result of the square lawned, predominantly white society that I have grown up in. I always carry along those still very vivid memories of days not so long ago when I was a little girl and my mother would call me in from the yard, forcing me into her bedroom where she would flash Chinese words and sayings before me. "Now what this say, what that say?" she would ask even before I had a chance to absorb all of this information. Those were the days when my mother feared that I would lose all the Chinese within me to a society that was still foreign to her. She had a mission when I was a little girl, to keep me as Chinese as possible. She would dress me up in little Chinese dresses and silky pants when I was little, and she would grin ear to ear when white mothers would point at me and cry, "Look how adorable that little Chinese girl is!" My mother told me even at that age that it would be my yellow skin, slanted eyes, and my name that would make me special. Yet there came a time when I no longer wanted to be so, "special," to stand out like a rose in the midst of dandelions. American society swallowed me up even before my mother could attempt to stop it. Once I became a little older I was suddenly tired of being singled out because of my looks and my name. "Ask Amy this, ask Amy that!" classmates would cry. It reminded me too much of my mother's old quizzes and tests. There came a day when I woke up, looked in the mirror, started to cry. There were many days after that when I tried to envision myself as an adorable little girl with blonde hair and blue eyes that would tap dance across a stage and sing the alphabet backwards. My mother's eyes grew sadder and sadder when she realized what society had done to my thoughts. She could see even before I could, that in a neighborhood where most people went to ten o'clock mass on Sunday and had outdoor barbecues and later blasted rock music, that people who were, "different," were not easily accepted. I didn't find out until later that my mother knew all the names that little children called me, how they made fun of, "The Chinese woman," that also happened to me my mom. "Show them that you are better, that you are different," she hissed at me one evening, after I had helped her wipe the formica table clean. "I'm not different," I insisted, "just like them, just like them," I cried loudly. My mother shook her head and then took my hand. "How can you say that you are not different, only look in the mirror. You can not get rid of the Chinese within you, it is running in your blood," she said with a sigh.

All of those years my mother struggled with this society that we lived in as well. She was not invited to those infamous PTA meetings, and when she came the white mothers would speak in such difficult vocabulary that she could not keep up. These women always looked at my mother with a curious eye. One time one woman even whispered to the other, "See, I told you that's how Japanese women are...they don't say anything, as quiet as mice." When I told my mother about this much later, she laughed so hard that tears fell from her eyes. "Japanese, wah! This ignorant!" and she laughed even harder until I realized that these were real tears that she was shedding. Only many years later did my mother tell me about all the difficulty she had when she first emigrated to this place of freedom called America when she was only eighteen or nineteen. She told me about the day she landed in Tallahassee, Florida, and had forgotten how to ask, "Can I have directions?" in English. She had walked around in a circle for two or three hours until a black man

continued on p.28

asked her if she needed help. She didn't even know what he was saying so she ran away, scared, frightened with only two hundred dollars in her pocket. My mother told me how difficult it was to find a job in a place where some people had never seen an Asian person before. When she applied for a job at a local supermarket, the man, a World War Two vet, grew so scared that he chased her out of the store with a broom. "Damn Japanese, damn Japanese!" he kept on shouting. My mother was too scared to explain to anyone that although she was born with a high bridged nose and ivory colored skin, she was certainly not Japanese, not even one drop of Japanese blood.

My mother told me about her days waitressing where one time a group of white college boys called her, "Sally Wong," and snapped their fingers at her, ordering more and more until her arms were limp, and of course they left her only a fifty cent tip. My mother told me that those were the days when she would cry every night and dream about the world where she grew up. Sometimes these dreams would be so strong that she could taste her mother's dumplings in her mouth and smell the fried noodles under her nose. The first time my mother told me about her first days in America she asked her why she always remembered the bad things. "It is not so bad," my mother answered, "it is truth and makes my story different."

There was a time, however, when I waved my mother's stories away, when I wore Hopalong Cassidy boots and pretended to be more interested in Saturday morning cartoons than how to write Chinese characters and write my own name. After a while my mother stopped begging me to give her, "respect." She would just sigh and watch me from a distance, her eyes so lonely, not a word from her mouth. I couldn't even bring myself to tell my mother about my confusion, and my frustration those days. When she asked how things were at school I would nod quickly, up and down, up and down and say, "Good, good, everything is so good." My mother later told me that she knew about this confusion and frustration all along because ever since she came to America she lives with it everyday, every hour, every minute. I didn't think my mother meant it when she told me this. How she still sees things in America as if they are not just right, little imperfections and blemishes here and there. She still tells me how in America everything is too big, too loud, too gossipy. "But Ma, everywhere things are like that," I say. "Not true, not true," my mother insists, "here things are even bigger, louder and more gossipy." This is when my mother and I began to clash over even the smallest issues of society, which color is better, what fabric lasts longer, what bank is more reliable, what car is more chic. My mother, as I now realize, will always have a different vision than mine when it comes to certain topics.

She scowled at the television screen when a few days ago a group of women appeared screaming, "Women's Rights, more rights for us!" She snapped off the television screen and cried, "How foolish...too many rights. Sooner or later no difference between man and woman." I argued with my mother for hours after, trying to tell her that being a feminist was not an evil, that it was being into a cause. "Cause this, cause that, only cause trouble," my mother said with a frown. Two days later she laughed when I told her that I was reading the "Feminine Mystique." "You should be so lucky that you were not a woman when your grandmother was young," she said. "In those days women had their feet bound, so weak, so tiny. Women had many children, sat home day after day knitting and ordering servants around." I began to understand a little more after that, why my mother sees some things totally opposite than what I see. It was the world she grew up in, the world where she blossomed.

My mother often criticizes the society that I am growing up in and many times she cannot understand or see why I like or dislike certain things. "Music too loud, movie so dirty!" she cries. "This magazine can not be meant for a seventeen year old!" "Wah, this room is a place for pigs!" "Young women cannot eat that bad food, it will make you ugly!" Many times it seems that my mother says too much while I don't hear enough.

My mother and I face a lot of the same challenges however. Problems that come when two worlds are mixed or attempt to be mixed. Sometimes my mother will come home and order me to

speaking only English to her. "Need to practice my English, need to learn more vocabulary," she will say and other days she will go down to Chinatown for the whole day and come back singing Chinese opera. Over the past few years I think my mother has faced her most difficult battles. She never got the chance to finish college because she had me, so these days when everyone is crying and complaining about this, "damn economy," she cannot even find a single job because her mother had always taught her as a girl that, "a woman's role in society was to stay home, not get job after job." These days the best job my mother can get is a part-time hourly job at the local library.

My mother regrets not having finished her education and sometimes I even think she regrets being born in the baby boom generation. "If I was born now I think I would be different person," she told me recently. She struggles with her identity just like I struggle with my own. I often ask myself "Who Am I?" and other times I avoid looking in the mirror because I don't want to look at the round-faced girl with yellow skin and slanted eyes.

It is hard to keep an identity when you live in a predominantly white society where at times you can feel like part of the crowd until suddenly you pass by a mirror and see your own reflection. It is hard understanding what your role as a female can possibly be when your mother was born into a world where women were regarded as second class citizens. The society I live in is one where there is an unwritten code of what to expect from Asians. All too often I find myself fighting off ignorant questions like, "Are you Buddhist?" or "I heard that Chinese people eat cats." My mother started crying when I told her about these questions some time ago. She had no words and instead she turned her head away and began to hum a song she learned so long ago from her mother. I think the lyrics went something like, "Golden Butterfly please don't go, please stay with me in the winter's snow."

I don't know what to believe at times. One day I wake up feeling Chinese, the other day I wake up feeling white. My mother says "American," however, as if she is talking about some racial group. "Too American, too Wai-Gua!" she often complains, "here everything do this and that!" I asked my mother recently what she liked about America. "Here, a little more free, back home a little too many barriers." My mother's dream of gaining the best of both cultures, however, still continues. She tries to balance out her life just like me, speaking a language called Chinglish, half Chinese and half English. It is because of our differences and similarities, most a result of generations and different worlds that I truly feel that my mother and I are unique. This specialness goes beyond the layer of our skin, because skin can be peeled away just as easily as the layer on an onion. My mother and I both have two forces swimming within our souls, one pulling this way, the other pulling that way. Sometimes it is like a battle, trying to regain one's history while trying to keep a culture. The patterns of our world have woven into our skin, making a pattern that is sometimes seen through our eyes only.

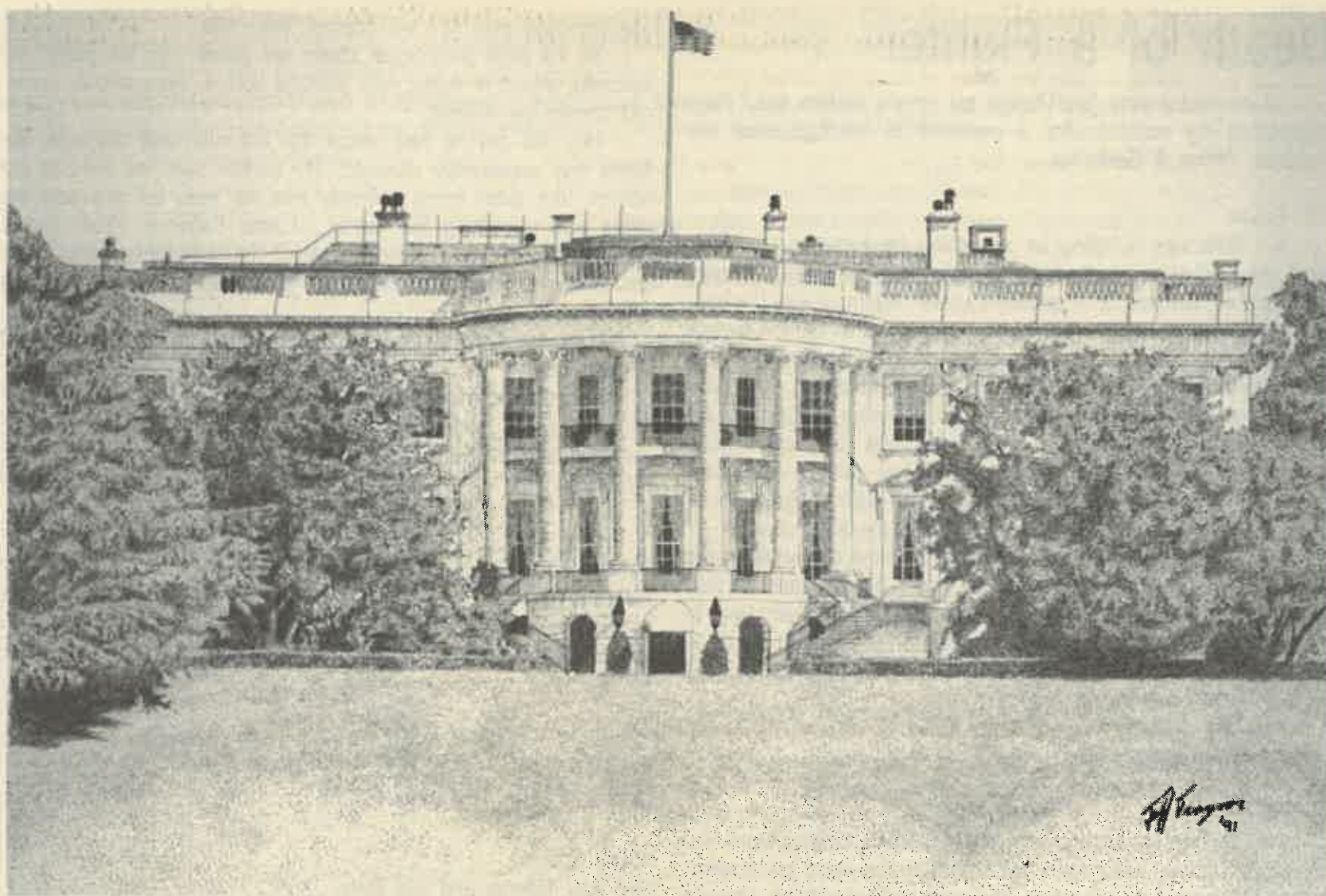
Recently my mother invited me down to New York's Chinatown to have dim sum with her. We talked and argued about the usual stuff that mothers and daughters talk and argue about, clothes, make-up, and the latest styles. I suddenly thought of something that had been haunting my mind for a long time now. "Ma?" I asked, "when people ask me what I am, should I say Chinese or American?" My mother looked at me, leaned back and smiled. "This is your decision," she said softly, "I can not answer this for you...but always remember both of these worlds run in your blood."

I thought about what my mother said for quite some time afterwards. This time when I came home I walked straight to the hallway mirror and looked at my reflection. Staring back at me was a girl with dancing eyes, bright skin and a wide smile. This time I liked this girl, this time I smiled back at her...

"Best of two worlds," the girl whispered.

"Best of two worlds," I replied.

Amy Wu
Thornwood, NY
Westlake High School
Lana Hiller



Jeff Traynor
Burke, VA

The Question of Tradition

At Easter
our Irish family sits
around my Grandmother Broderick's dining room table.
The table is not large,
but the family is,
and we are crowded.

At Easter
we eat the spring lamb with rosemary
with Great-Grandmother Murphy's linen table cloth.
We eat the fruit with cream and the breads with cream
and everyone drinks the Irish whiskey,
even my German father.
But I drink Coke,
and am American.

At Easter
everyone eats cabbage and potatoes
but I eat French fries,
and I cannot swallow the pale cabbage.
Nothing is said of this.
I am not heard,
and often wonder if I am seen.

At Easter
I cry.
I am the only one who remembers.
At Easter
my grandparents,
born in Irish tradition and want,
unpack the Irish linen and silver

and perform the ancient rituals
but forget.

Three generations in America
and Ireland is forgotten.
In comfort and acceptance
they unpack tradition once a year,
admiring the cut of the crystal
and embroidered linens.
Linen and crystal and silver
are all that remain of the roots of our family.

Linen, crystal, silver,
which someday will be mine.
All that they can give me,
these children of immigrants,
besides my Irish name,
because they have forgotten.

At Easter
I get my claddagh ring,
like my mother's and grandmother's,
but different,
because my hands reach for my real home,
and there is a tiny emerald in the crown
that my great-great-grandmother has placed
on my brown Irish curls,
over my pale skin
and Broderick eyes.

Anne Estabrooks
Cranford, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Death of a Fighter

...I am just a poor boy/Though my story's seldom told,/I have squandered my resistance/for a pocketful of mumbles,/such are promises...Simon & Garfunkel

Fifth Grade

Mr. Matthews is telling us everything he knows or imagines about the Civil War. He is standing in front of the class, swinging a rifle around, dressed in an authentic Union uniform. Every few seconds, he gives his sparse mustache a tug, as if to remind himself of the present. The class is emitting a silence seldom heard. In the seat across the aisle, Luther Callahan has his hands on either side of his face. He leans his elbows forward, lowering his face to the wooden desk. Luther squints his eyes and scrubs his cropped, dust-colored hair. He wears his usual faded yellow t-shirt and Rustler jeans. At the moment, he reminds me of a half-grown bulldog. I look at the long weapon Mr. Matthews places on the front desk.

Luther knows just about everything to know of the American Revolution, the Civil War and Vietnam. During history class, he tells us all about his father's military service along with the answers to Mr. Matthews' questions. He keeps a string of dog tags in his desk. These are mixed in with a slew of papers, old candy wrappers and G.I. plastic figurines.

I lift my eyes as Mr. Matthews takes off his uniform jacket. Luther turns to me, smiling.

Seventh Grade

I'm sitting in the second seat of Mr. Varna's College Prep History Class, with my head down, eyes fixed on the notes taken within the last half-hour. I do not move. The room is filled with Mr. Varna's sarcasm. It is biting and painful. I cannot help but feel it in my rumbling stomach, even though I did not spur its explosion.

Mr. Varna walks to our lined desks; his shoes press the carpet deep down. He stops behind me. I can hear Luther Callahan set his jaw. I can see it. Mr. Varna stands beside him. I imagine the eruption of air as he pulls his hand back and knocks Luther to the floor.

Mr. Varna does not strike Luther. But I inhale tension. In a moment, Luther slams the brown, wooden door, rattling the pictures of Thomas Paine and Eli Whitney hanging above the blackboard. One of them swings free, sliding down into the garbage can. Mr. Varna strides to the front of the room. He deposits Luther's history book with a thump on a bookshelf. Turning to face us, he starts to recount the stages leading to the outbreak of the American Revolution. We scrawl with renewed determination.

Eighth Grade

It is snowing as I leave the building. I pull on my gloves, then close the toggles of my woolen coat. The floor of the bus is coated with dirt and slush. It makes patterns on the hem of my long skirt as I make my way back to the last seat.

The bus sits in the parking lot for several minutes, waiting for students to climb up into its vinyl seats. I glance out the back window, taking in the small crowd congregating. They are dressed in jean jackets and paper thin t-shirts. I watch as they pass around a cigarette. Each grasps the communal stub with a thumb and forefinger and presses it to pursing lips.

One of them lifts his head, his hand hovering close to his mouth. Smoke shadows the dusty hair that looks like dirty woolens stretched to fit. His face is pockmarked with traces of teenage acne. I take in the small, bloodshot eyes and think of old wars. Luther Callahan flicks the cigarette to the ground, smashes it beneath his leather work boot, and gives me the finger. I touch the wall between us as the bus pulls away.

Twelfth Grade

Friday Night--The air is light. Graduation is one week away. I'm sitting on a lounge chair, with a piece of vanilla cake in my lap. I look up as Rachel, a close friend, sits down next to me. We talk about the future. She tells me about the scholarship she received,

and the meal plan she will choose. We smile.

As the night progresses, chairs are pulled onto the patio. The concrete ground is dotted with youthful bodies, eyes wistful. Someone breaks our reverie.

Hey, did anyone hear about that kid over near the lake. No. Some guy supposedly drowned. My mother said he went to our school. She didn't know definitely who he was, but she said the name was something like Luther... Luther Callahan. Yeah, Luther Callahan. Do you guys remember him? He had that real short haircut. Someone yells, Hey, let's have a moment of silence for good ol' Luther.

I rub my fingers against the cuff of my shorts, and stare at the concrete.

Saturday morning

The paper is spread out on the table. I am grounded, floored, slammed against the wall. Hard. We started out the same. Really, we did.

Barbara Ellen Campbell
Lehman, PA
Lake-Lehman High School
Maureen Purcell

strong women

strong women
take their failures and fold them
into origami
birds . . .
put them inside--with strong hands into

their strong hearts

turning to face the
winds (which are usually harsh and strong)

until there are many paper
birds, and the birds become

strong and take
flight, and these strong women rise

above rocks
and other hard things, lifting high above them.

i am not strong.

i have no birds

and when i try my hand at the
ancient art of paper folding
i end up with cuts
and crumpled mounds that
resemble chickens.

i am like a chicken, with little legs and i sip my

weak drinks and feebly peck at my
failures as if to eat them

so as to never forget.

Angi Williams
Richmond, VA
Ms. Anderson

Demise

"The dinosaurs, a subgroup of reptiles, are an example of a group that appeared, flourished briefly, and died out completely." Allyn and Bacon's "A Study of the Changing Planet"

There is a derelict swamp
hidden in the whispering sigh of slush
grazing the gelid floor.

The quiet is so loud,
you can hear the cracking
of water freezing
in puddled footprints.

It's the cold brush of wind
that teases among
the weathered wood bones
and suffocates eggs
silenced before their time;
before leathery green
could crack open
beneath the milky white.

And alone in silence,
grass, brown from heavy walks,
finally perishes under
the weight of charcoal skies
immune to the stroke of rays
from the copper sphere.

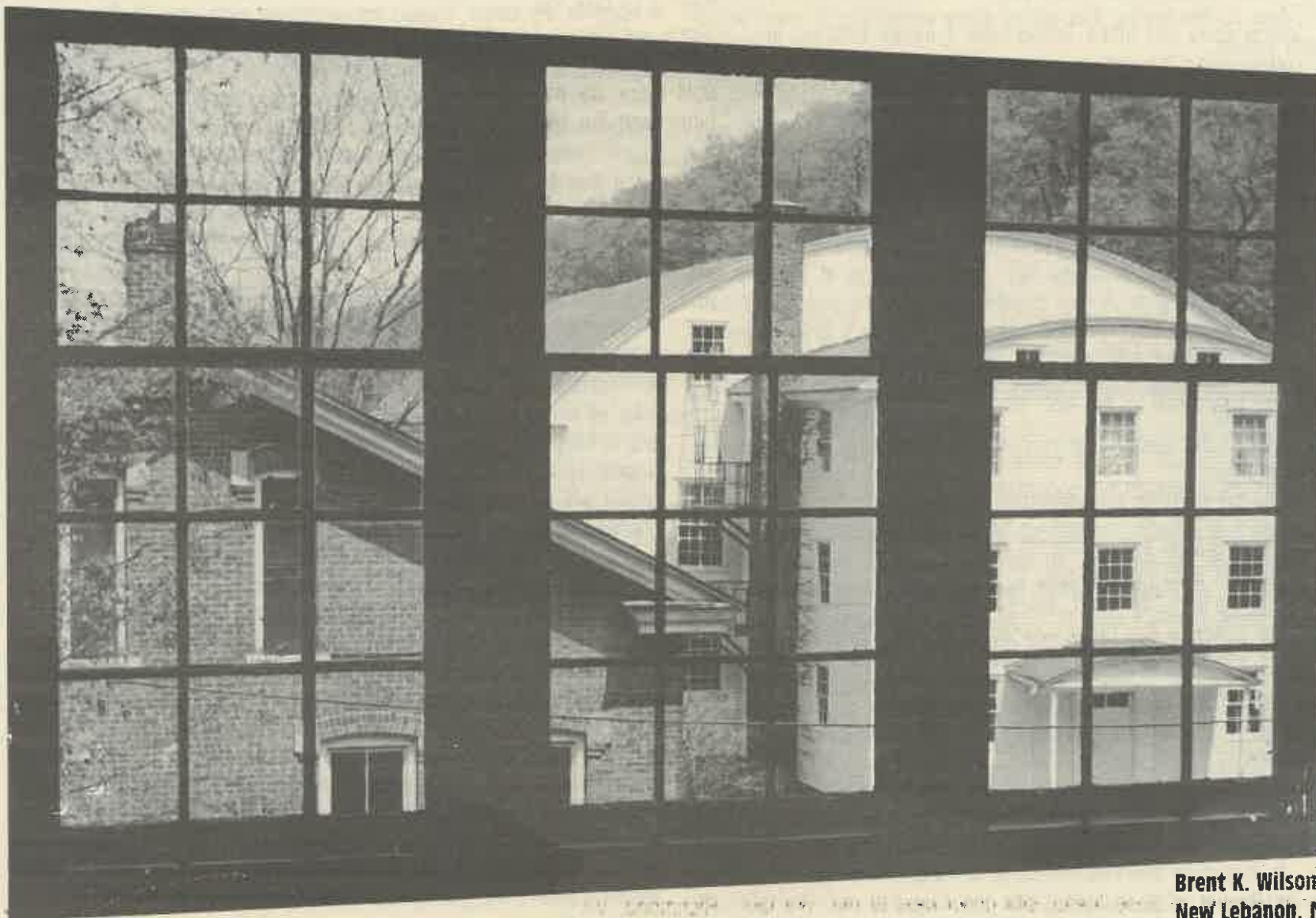
Kim Friedman
Lido Beach, NY
Mrs. Pickus

The Day Before Thanksgiving

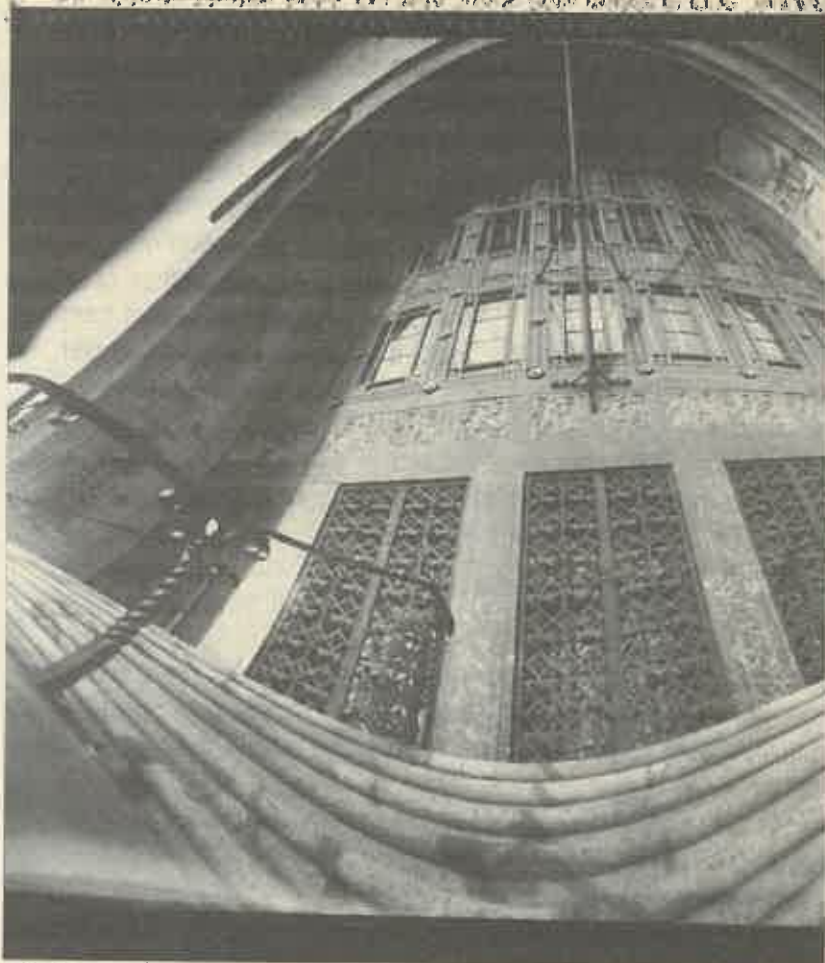
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After you stole a breeze of a kiss
in the corner of the French room
I blushed and was bewildered
looked for an answer sheet on the orange-brown
carpet
Warm blood ran up to my eyebrows
I swallowed hard and we walked to my house
You thought I was a sophomore and what could I say?
We strolled down the driveway and
inadvertently
crushed all the dead leaves
The sky was flat,
grey and cold. I placed my arms within
your flannel shirt to warm them there
You laughed because my hands were ice
It was
worth it to see you smile and your mouth was warm
when our lips touched and I kept thinking
carefreegumcarefreegumcarefreegum
Your voice was high but
I didn't mind the awkward sensual whisper
of your lips right next to my throbbing ear
"I'll walk home" and you skipped off,
your back facing your destination
and I quietly tucked in my shirt,
as the forecasted snow began to fall.

Laura Wheeler
Silver Spring, MD
The Field School
R. Michael Peterson



Brent K. Wilson
New Lebanon, NY



Mark Stehle
Philadelphia, PA

Chestnut Hill Academy
Robert Fles

Deja Vu

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

I'm walking down the street. I'm walking home from school. This is the way I walk home every day.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

Walking home from school one day, the way I do every day, I'm thinking about things I should be thinking of, homework, singing a song in my head, feeling the chill of the air, noticing winter's approach.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One bright sunny day, I'm walking home from school, taking the same path as I do every day. I'm looking up at the sky and thinking how blue it is. A bird streaks past, the last one of the season, and I realize that winter is coming. There is a chill in the air. I stop at a red light, then continue. In my head I hear the last verse of my favorite song. I think about my homework and shudder the thought away.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One bright Thursday afternoon, I'm walking home from school, taking my usual path. Looking up at the sky, I realize that it is the exact color of my sweater, an endless, icy blue. Winter is quickly approaching. A seagull divides the sky and vanishes above the clouds, flying south. I stop at a red light, then continue across the street. In my mind, I can hear the steady beat of my favorite spiritual, and the strong, powerful words that work with it. Homework invades my thoughts and I drown it out with my song.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One bright Thursday afternoon, at three, I'm walking home from school the regular way. I look up at the sky and realize that it is the exact color of the button-down sweater that I'm carrying, a cool blue. It occurs to me that winter is coming. I keep looking at the sky and see a white seagull divide the blue sky. It is flying south. I stop at a red light, then walk across the street. Through my

thoughts beats my favorite spiritual from choir, the beautiful words lifting my voice to the clouds. I think momentarily of homework and let the thought fade away.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One sunny Thursday afternoon at three, after my choir rehearsal, I'm walking home from school, taking the usual path. I walk alone. I glance upwards and am drawn to the color; it is the exact color of the sweater that my mother gave me this morning to keep me warm in the winter air, but I am not wearing it. The color is frigid blue. I remember that winter is coming; soon I will have to wear it. Still looking at the sky, I see an off-white seagull fly above me, lifting its wings and rising out of my sight, into the clouds. It is going south for the winter. I stop at a red light. While I am waiting for it to change, I find myself looking at the color. It is a strange color, not exactly red, but a little orange. I continue across the street. In my mind, I hear the steady rhythm of my favorite new spiritual from choir. We've just spent an hour singing it, and now it rings in my mind. I open my mouth to sing and let the breeze carry my voice to the sky. I think about my homework for tomorrow, and a paper due next week, and my mind scrambles to lock the thought away from my shelter in the strong music of the spiritual. I round the corner.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One sunny Thursday afternoon at three, after my choir rehearsal, after a long, exhausting day, I'm walking home from school as usual. I walk by myself. I glance at the sky and am attracted to the color; it is the exact color of the sweater that mother gave me this morning when I left home to keep me warm in the chilly air, but I am not wearing it. The color is pale blue, almost white. Winter is coming and soon I will have to wear it. Still looking at the sky, I see a white seagull with orange feet fly above me. It lifts its wings and rises out of sight. It is going south for the season. I stop at a red light. Waiting for it to turn, I look at the light. It is red in a strange, orangy way. The light turns and I cross the street. In my thoughts, I hear the strong rhythm of my favorite new spiritual from voice class. We've just spent an hour singing it in choir, and now it rings in my mind. I open my mouth to sing and let the cool air carry my voice up to the cotton-ball clouds. I realize, though I try not to, that I have homework for tomorrow, and a paper due next week, and my mind scrambles to lock the thoughts away from my shelter in the strong spiritual music. I round the corner, as I do every day. I glance in front of me before I cross the street, then cross, looking at the cars. I plan to cut through the park between this street and my house.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One sunny Thursday afternoon at three, after my choir rehearsal, after a long, exhausting day, and two tests, I'm walking home from school the way I do every day. I walk alone, but I am not lonely. I glance at the sky and am thrown by the color; it is the exact color of the sweater that my mom gave me this morning when I left, to keep me warm in the chilly air. I am not wearing it. The color is pale blue, almost clear, almost colorless. Winter is coming and soon I will have to wear the sweater. Still looking at the sky, I see a white seagull with orange feet and grayish blue wings flying above me. It lifts its wings and rises away from me. It is going south for the winter season. I stop at a red light. While I wait, I look at the light. It is red, no, not exactly, closer to orange, not exactly, maybe more like red. I close my eyes and see nothing but a color red. All I can see is red. Then I open my eyes and the color is gone. I cross the street. In my thoughts, I hear the strong tempo of my favorite new spiritual from chorus. We've just spent an hour singing it, and now it chimes in my mind. I open my mouth to sing and let the fresh air carry my song up to the big, white, cotton-ball clouds. I realize, though I try not to think about it, that I have homework for tomorrow, and a paper due next week, and my mind rushes to lock the thoughts out of my shelter in the music. I round the corner as I always do, gazing ahead at the street. I cross it after looking

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carefully left and right, and then ahead at the park between this street and my house. It is green and grassy, shaded from the rest of the world, almost as if it doesn't belong in my neighborhood at all, but far away. I cross it every day and wonder every day why it is here, instead of somewhere in South America, where it would fit. Across the street, I don't bother going to the regular park entrance, but instead cut through the row of trees closest to my house.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One sunny Thursday afternoon at three, after my choir rehearsal, after a long, exhausting day, and two tests and a quiz, I'm walking home from school the way normally do. I walk alone, but I am filled with thoughts. I glance up at the sky and am shocked by the color; it is the precise color of the sweater that my mother gave me this morning when I left my house, to keep me warm in the cool air. I am not wearing it today. The color is almost white, almost clear, almost colorless, and yet somehow still blue. Winter is coming. Soon I will have to wear my mother's sweater. While I am looking up at the sky, I see a white seagull with orange feet, gray wings, and red eyes flying above me. It lifts its wings and rises above me. It is going south for the cool season. I stop at a red light. While I am waiting, I take a deep breath of the cool air and look at the color of the light. It is not red at all, really, but almost orange in a strange, forbidding way. I close my eyes for an instant. With my eyes closed, I suddenly see fire, a raging inferno, burning everywhere, burning in front of my eyes. I open my eyes and the vision is gone. I see that the light has changed and I cross the street. In my thoughts, I hear the strong, powerful tempo of my favorite new spiritual from our school choral group. We've just spent an hour singing it, and now it chimes in my thoughts. I open my mouth to sing and let the fresh breezy air carry my thoughtful song up to the big, white clouds. I realize, though I try not to remember, that I have homework for tomorrow, and a paper due soon, and my mind rushes to lock the thoughts out of my fragile shelter in music. I round the corner as I always do, touching the tree, gazing ahead at the street. I cross it after looking carefully to the left and right, and then ahead at the park between this street and my house. It is green and grassy, set apart from the rest of my world, almost as if it doesn't belong in the neighborhood at all, but far, far away from here. I cross it every day and wonder all the time why it is here, instead of somewhere where it would fit. Across the street, I don't bother going to the regular park entrance, but instead cut through the row of trees closest to my house. Inside the park, it is darker and even cooler, and I hesitate to put on my blue sweater, so light it is almost colorless, and then continue through the park.

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

One sunny Thursday afternoon at three, after my choir rehearsal, after a long, tiring day, and three tests, I take the same route home as usual. I walk alone, but I am filled with thoughts. I glance up at the sky and am surprised by the color; it is exactly the color of the sweater that my mother gave me this morning when I left my house, to keep me warm in the frigid air. I am not wearing it today. The color is almost white, almost colorless, and yet somehow still blue. Winter is approaching. Soon I will have to wear my mother's icy sweater. While I am watching the sky, I see a white seagull with orange feet, gray wings, a pink beak, and red eyes flying above me. It lifts its wings and rises high above, and then away. It is going south for now, but it will be back. I stop at a red light and look at the color. The color is not really red at all, but orange. I close my eyes and see, in front of me, burning, fire, burning, fire, a raging fire in front of me, fire so hot and intense that it is out of my control. Then I open my eyes and am back in this world. The vision is gone. The light has changed. I cross the street. In my thoughts, I hear the strong, emotional tempo of my favorite new spiritual from our school choral group. We've just spent an hour and ten minutes singing it, and now it plays over and over in my thoughts. I open my mouth to sing and let the fresh, breezy air carry my thoughtful song up to the big, white clouds. I realize, though I try not to, that I have

homework, and a paper due soon, and my mind rushes to lock the burning thoughts out of my fragile tower of music. I round the corner as I always do, touching the tree, gazing ahead to the street. I cross it after looking carefully to the left and right, and then ahead at the park between this street and my house. It is green and grassy, set apart from the rest of my world, almost as if it doesn't belong in the neighborhood at all, but far, far away from here and now I cross it every day and wonder all the time why it is here, instead of somewhere where it might fit. Across the street, I do not bother going to the regular park entrance, but instead cut through the row of trees closest to my house. Inside the park, it is darker and even cooler, and I hesitate to put on my blue sweater, so light it is almost colorless, and then continue through the park.

Far ahead I see a figure dressed in black. I continue on my path, curious and afraid, until the figure is close in front of me and I am close to my house. I look at it more curious than afraid, and take a few steps closer to get a better look. I close my eyes and see red. Then I open them. I am only a few feet away when I see that it is a person in a black cape with a large hood, too big for the person's head. The person is facing the other way. I cannot move. The sky above is as pale as an ice cube as the person turns around and stretches long fingers toward my neck. I cannot move. I cannot run. The person says, "I am taking you to hell..."

deja vu the feeling that you've done something or been somewhere before

I'm walking down the street. I'm walking home from school. This is the way I walk home....

Evonne Smitt
Philadelphia, PA
George Washington High School
Barbara Spizzirri

Untitled

Just a second and one look can blind the corners of a room
And the teacher can talk on,
An incense stick speech
Falling off into a dizzy gasp of dust.
Murmur--the heaters are very warm
And they make the only noise of combat I can find
Legs stretched between desks and growing numb,
And growing numb I rest
Waiting for a moment to pass
Head between bars.
Some things move forward that cannot be stopped
Like a fall.
The chalk
Is a white blur;
Her mouth is a violent salmon;
She is trapped in a door of sunlight from the window.
I can't catch the air anymore.
It is a gift;
She is so broken
And she glows with fire.
She reminds me of someone who is buried already.
He gave me one look.
It was not a gift.
It was a scratch across desks.
I do not know why.
There is a scent of a railroad,
A charge,
A blank wall.

K. Grossman
Medford, NJ
St. Mary's Hall

The rain spattered my face as the drops came through the rusty screen windows. Everything at camp was rusty or dirty or old: I remember that I couldn't get the wooden window cover down because the latch was rusted shut. Meryl was outside, her long, permed black hair sticking wetly to her head as she screamed at Jessica. I wanted to walk away, or tell Meryl to stop, but I stood still, watching.

"Just go away!" she yelled.

"I said I was sorry--I, I didn't know," Jessica cried, pushing her wet hair out of her eyes.

"Shut up! Get out of my sight! I can't stand your ugly face a minute longer!"

I wished she wouldn't do that. I had told Meryl that Jessica didn't mean to upset me. It was probably my fault anyway--I was the one who had asked Jessica to hypnotize me in the first place. She was good at that. One time Jessica had hypnotized a girl at the swimming pool, even with all the noise. That girl said that she had been Jackie Gleason in a past life.

Jessica never got homesick. When the rest of the bunk did, we would push our beds together, and she would sit on the top bunk and tell us a story. Sometimes they were Greek myths, sometimes fairy tales, and sometimes things she just made up. If the story was good enough, she would write it down in her little notebook after we were all asleep, scribbling in darkness except for a tiny flickering flashlight that now and then lit up her face with a pale glow.

She wrote poetry, too. Everyone else graffitied the cabin with "Allison was here," or "M.L. & S.B. 4ever," but she wrote poems on the walls with a purple felt-tip marker. The bottom of the back wall was a nearly solid purple streak. The poems seemed to appear without her ever writing one down. It was as if she thought about them one night, and the next morning there they were.

A certain mystic quality swirled about Jessica, though it fell away when she did regular camp things like eating pizza and playing soccer. Meryl once spread a rumor that Jessica was a witch, but the counselors found out and no one believed it anyway. Usually, though, Meryl was nice: she would always share her care packages, even the Pepperidge Farm cookies, and she told the funniest jokes. She had a huge plastic box full of makeup, and every once in a while, during rest period, she would grab someone and give her a makeover. She could make anyone look good. Jessica, though, wouldn't let Meryl put makeup on her. "Please?" Meryl asked one time. "You'd look great with some green eye shadow. It would really bring out your eyes."

"Makeup makes my face itch," said Jessica, staring at the web of rafters.

"Just lipstick, then? I have a really cool pink shade."

"It really isn't good for my face. My skin gets all red."

Meryl looked around in frustration. "Fine, but will you let me do your makeup for the formal dinner, at least?"

"I told you..." Jessica's tone was annoyed, but her face had the same calm expression it always had. It would look artificial, I decided, with makeup. A pale mask with absurd smears of color.

"I know what you told me," Meryl said, going over each word slowly and sharply, "but everyone is wearing makeup to the formal dinner."

"Even the boys?"

Meryl giggled. "Yeah, but they're just wearing blush."

"Well, I'm not. If you really want to, you can do my hair."

"Never mind. If you want to look dumb, fine with me." Then Meryl sat me down on the floor next to her cosmetics box and brandished an eye shadow wand at me. Jessica sat down on her bed and found her place in the book she was reading.

When Jessica hypnotized Meryl, Meryl said that in a past life she had been a Russian princess. Meryl didn't really want to be hypnotized, though. We had to promise her the first shower for two days. When I was hypnotized we used Jessica's bed. It was the

top bunk, and it swayed like a thin tree as Jessica rubbed my temples. "Sixty-six, sixty-five, sixty-four..." she murmured in a low voice, half humming, half hissing. That was the last thing I remember. When she snapped me awake she told me what I had said: in a past life I had been a little girl whose father had cancer. I started to cry when I heard that, and jumped off the bed and ran outside, slamming the brittle door.

Meryl screeched at Jessica: "You idiot! You stupid jerk! Didn't you know that Kelly's father died of cancer when she was seven?" Then Meryl ran outside to me, her New York accent smothering me with honeyed consolations. She directed a stream of profanities at Jessica, then hugged me, burying my head into her crunchy hairsprayed hair that smelled like apples and vinegar.

Jessica sobbed from inside the bunk. "Shut up!" Meryl snapped, flicking her head in the direction of the dirty white cabin. Then to me: "God, I hate her. Come with me to the head counselor's so we can get her kicked out of our bunk. She'll get stuck in bunk five with big fat Lisa."

"Come on, Meryl, don't," I said fearfully. "It wasn't really her fault. She didn't--"

"Fine," she said, crisp as her hair. "I'll just for it myself if you're such good friends with that brat."

She flounced down the path, smoothing her red sweatshirt with her smug hands. It had started to drizzle. I went back into the cabin and told Jessica that she shouldn't be upset, that it was okay.

"But it's not okay," Jessica said, looking at me with red-rimmed eyes. "I shouldn't have told you. I could have made something up." She covered her contorted face with her hands and shook her head slowly.

"How could you have known? It's really not your fault. Besides, I'm pretty messed up if I can't deal with my dad's death after five years, right?"

"Well, everyone already knew you were messed up, Kelly," she joked weakly. We walked out into the rain to go to lunch, but Meryl was standing in front of the cabin.

"Guess what, Jessica," she said through her freckled nose. "I just talked to the head counselor, and she said that if enough people want you out of the bunk, you're out. You might as well pack your ugly clothes now, because everyone is going to agree with me."

"Meryl," I pleaded, but her pink nails pushed me back.

"Stay out of this, Kelly. Go wait inside and I'll walk with you to lunch in a minute." She smiled lightly at me. I shuffled inside through the rain, closed the rickety door behind me, and watched through the screen window.

"You are the most horrible little brat I've ever seen! I'm so glad you're being kicked out of the bunk. I almost got you kicked out of the entire camp! No one likes you, you know. You make everybody sick!" As Meryl's voice rose, I could no longer make out her words. I could see her motions, though: the forward slant of her body, the jabbing of her index finger. Jessica was getting wet, too, and she appeared to shrink slightly as her waterlogged clothes and hair clung to her body.

My counselor came over from the back room of the cabin and forced free the rusty latch of the window cover. It slammed down like a falling table.

"Why are you standing by the window?" she asked as her busy tan hands undid another crusty orange latch. "You're getting wet."

"No reason, I guess," I said softly.

My counselor opened her mouth to say something to me, but just then she saw Jessica and Merle through the window.

"Hey, what are those two doing out in the rain? Guys!" She gestured to them through the wire mesh. "Come inside! It's pouring out!" Meryl smiled sweetly and gave her a "one-minute" sign.

"Meryl is such a loud girl," my counselor said, letting the wooden cover down on the window she had spoken through. "But I suppose it's just part of her outgoing personality. It's good that she's not shy, like Jessica."

"Yeah," I said. "It's good."

I went to my bed and tried to concentrate on the friendship

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bracelet I was making, but I kept seeing Meryl and Jessica in my mind. Cringing from the memory, I decided what to do--I'd go to the head counselor myself and tell her what really happened. I walked toward the door, but before I could even touch the tarnished knob, it swung open with a dull wooden smack. Meryl came in, rain soaked, and grabbed me by the arm.

"Come on," she ordered. "Let's go to lunch."

"Where's Jessica?" I asked, backing away from her grasp.

"Oh, I don't know," she shrugged. "Off somewhere. Hey, I think it's pizza day."

"I'm not going to lunch," I mumbled.

"What?"

"I'm not going to lunch. I'm going to talk to the head counselor. To tell her what happened with Jessica."

The muscles around Meryl's pale eyes contracted. She stared at me for a minute in seeming anger before her face relaxed. Squeezing my arm, she said sweetly, "Of course you're going to talk to the head counselor. You'll come with all of us later. And don't worry, you'll get to talk. I'm so glad you're on our side. I was afraid that you'd be mad at me."

I looked at the splintering floor. "No, I'm not mad..."

"Good..." she cooed. "Come and sit next to me at the lunch table." I followed her as she trotted down the path, occasionally turning around to smile at me.

When I got back from lunch, Jessica's bed had been stripped and all her things were gone. Without Jessica's blue comforter, the bed was a metal skeleton, casting hard, crisscrossed shadows on the floor. Jessica's things lay in piles on the porch of bunk five. I walked outside, crept up the other cabin's creaking steps, and slowly opened the door. Jessica was alone inside, her back to me. She was writing something in purple on the white and empty bottom of the back wall. I walked out on tiptoe. If she noticed me, she didn't make any sign.

Erica Weitzman
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

I Lived in a Coldness

I lived in a coldness
that made icicles hang
from the roof of my mouth
and grew frozen crystals in my lungs.
Wandering, you
shoveled me out from under
carpet upon carpet
of leaden snow.
In exchange for my clothes
you gave me a blanket
but it had flapped from your back
like a bat's softly beating wings
for twelve shivering twilights
in the midnight air's abandonment.
And beneath it, my hands shook
my fingers, blue crayons
until my blood froze and
could not circulate.
All I could do was
lie down underneath you
and wave my arms, fluttering
to make angel wings in the snow.

Andrea Walker
Chambersburg, PA
Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Anne K. Branham

Mouth

I need something to keep
my mouth busy. I
tried yours, but
like root beer barrels
and peppermint swirls
it only dissolved after awhile,
or I impatiently bit into it,
swallowing its pieces.
My mouth closed and
opened, occupied with
syllables forming words that tried
to join yours over the
telephone. But through the
receiver they sounded slurred
and garbled as if spoken with a mouth full
of gumballs--gibberish muffled
by phone-static. I wanted
to make my hot mouth move
beautifully and shape
words that would poetically drip like
melted hard candy. So I tugged at my lips,
stuttering any senseless thing to fill
our silences, to impress
your mouth into a smile.
But I imagine your mouth
dozed off, dangling dumbly open
as you slept through
my sentences.

Laura Stauffer
Lititz, PA
Warwick High School
Sally Watkins

Miami

I know that it's sunny where you are,
kids are splashing in the shallow end
of a cracked, over-used hotel pool.
You're probably sitting in a white
lawn chair, gone cream over the years,
in your black bathing suit;
cigarette dangling from one hand,
a book from the other.
I can almost hear the television which
is on in the room you're staying in--
you know, the one that opens right
onto the patio. I can hear a talk
show going on. Maybe today its
guests are transvestites or child geniuses.
You can hear it, too, out by the pool.
The voices sound far away,
but you know whichever guests are
on, they could be you or me--
or those kids in the pool.
You take a long drag on your cigarette--
Marlboro Light--and pull your blue
John Lennon sunglasses down over your eyes.
The noonday light is too bright for you.

Leah Zaroni
Middlefield, CT

Prelude to the First Bach Cello Suite, Unaccompanied, in the Fall River Church

I was able to slip inside
And stand by the door, almost silently.
His dress-shoe footsteps
Echoed from the stage as he sat down
In the dark wood, in the shaft
Of colored light and floating dust.
He shifted and sat up,
Put his hands on his knees
For a second, to breathe,
To hear for his heart.
Finally he exhaled,
Slowly and deliberately,
And began to play.
His eyes were closed
And he moved in his chair
So that each string
Would sometimes catch the light.
And the music seemed to pour
Out of the wood and the glass,
To fill the church,
Rolling and building
In an arching line.
Each sound came from the last,
And reached me one frozen instant after
I watched its impulse
in the silky swing of the bow
Or the perfect drop of a finger.
With each pulse of the low line,
My consciousness kept leaving
And in its place
Was something different,
Some kind of sense,
That the music was made for me,
That distance is a fiction,
That everything is just a part of something larger.

Evan Hughes
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Fish Story

He was the first man who ever took her fishing.
They rowed to the center of the lake,
poles lolling in the bottom with the bait
that slipped out of his tackle-box.
He taught her how to press the hook
through the body of the thawed-out shrimp,
and how to cast the line far out
where water vipers could dwell
sliding around in the muddy bottom
like lovers drowning between sweaty sheets.

Kimberly Knowles
Lebanon, NJ
VoorheesHigh School
Lois Harrod

April Road

April Road cuts through wheat like a thin, black incision into a frog's breast. The wheat field stretches across land like Simon Peterson's neatly-dissected frog's rubbery legs flattened on a tray, its organs displayed so that the class can poke and prod. Simon was an expert with a scalpel--he had a habit of twirling it between his fingers like a baton and then unhesitatingly drawing a centered, even cut. I remembered how my jagged incisions clumsily slashed my frog's intestines and heart and how my shaking scalpel mangled it so thoroughly that its wet mass lay twisted beyond recognition in a tin pan. But as I studied April Road from the bank above it, it reminded me more of Simon's frog than his incisions. It was like my frog pinned anesthetized on cork board, requiring a steady hand to dissect it. It was something Simon could effortlessly cut open, inspect, and sew shut without disturbing a vein. But on my attempt at dissection, my fingers would cramp and twitch, my incisions would crisscross and tear. So I looked at the road timidly, afraid that any hurried look or movement would mutilate it, messily gouge out its pancreas and liver, and dismember the flow of pebble and ash, artery and vein, that left April Road untouchable.

I stumbled across the road on an exploration. My father, who is building a house in the middle of Nebraska sky and plain, would bring me to the site to fetch cups of coffee for the crew. I would spend the mornings pouring cream over coffee and drawing pictures on the windows of bulldozers by smearing my finger across glass which I had fogged with my hot breath. In the afternoons I would fall into daydreaming. The field, caked with the stubble of harvested wheat like lumpy butterscotch icing, sprawls endlessly, and I would imagine what lay beyond the blue line where sky meets land. Eventually my head throbbed with curiosity to know. So before the bulldozers yawned and rumbled awake, I began to run blindly, groping for an end in the nothingness of two colors--blue and brown--until I came to a steep break in the land. April Road sizzled twelve feet below under the six o'clock sun.

Balancing on my toes, I squinted to see where April Road ended. But it extended infinitely, wide where I stood and gradually thinning, like a trickle of oil, in the distance. The road didn't curve and wasn't intersected by any other roads. It seemed to start or end where I stood and led to nowhere, camouflaged in the field. I didn't expect April Road to have an end--I imagined that it tunneled through distant, shapeless mountains, sprinted across cities, hurdled evergreens, and splashed into the sea, circling the earth.

The road was peculiar; it did not belong embedded in ordinary farmland, gawked at by sightless eyes and unromantic minds and fondled by sunburned, calloused hands. I superstitiously believed that the road was a mirage that would eventually fade and flutter away in the suspicious heat. I watched the road for a car to prove that it wasn't an illusion, but it remained oddly untraveled. Restless, I somersaulted down the hill and, as if testing cool swimming pool water with my toe, stepped breathlessly onto the road. I expected a shock, like cold water biting a warm toe, and waited for the road to crumble beneath me like tissue paper under lead. Convinced, I crouched to my knees and ran my hand along the road's unbuckled surface. It felt recently paved and the yellow stripe running through its center glistened as if newly painted, yet it seemed as if the road had been constructed decades ago--the land looked built up around it as if the road molded the land in the way that a violent river shapes canyons and moves rock.

For an hour I stretched out on April Road, lazily drowning myself in its warmth, feeling as if I floated on my back on a stream of thick, dark blood. I waited for a car, waited to melt into the road like hot tar. I stared at the clueless sky. A fragile oval of swirling blues, it reminded me of the alabaster egg my mother keeps on her dressing table. Cobalts and turquoises dappled the egg; the same blues blotched the sky, blending with its every shift and fold as the wind swept up. The sky churned uninterrupted until, as if someone had peeled it back at its seams to peek in, a chrome fender hovered over my head.

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"Coming?" a voice called.

The gauge of Dylan's speedometer jiggled at ninety-five, but it felt as if the car sat still and April Road flew by it. Dylan's gold Chevrolet bolted along the road like a blurred, darting streak. We heedlessly tore through the brown and glided under the blue. I found it difficult to wrench my eyes from the road—I didn't want to miss anything—although I wasn't sure of what I expected to see. But something dizzying and thrilling throbbed ahead and lured us onward.

I wondered why it had become so important to find April Road's end. My heart fluttered excitedly, and I felt a curious, pulsating need to understand the road and dissect it, and to place it orderly in front of me so that I could know its purpose and eliminate its mystery. But, in order to understand it perfectly in its entirety, I had to dismember it with the precision I lacked. Each piece of gravel and each drop of tar was irreplaceable. A frog's vein, once it is severed, can never be replaced as it initially grew. The severed vein, even if sewn back together, creates an entirely different frog. The car's tire tracks created an entirely different road. I had to know April Road in a state close to what it was when I found it—pure, original without artificial, mended organs.

I told Dylan I worried that our joyride would ruin April Road. I began to doubt that our trip was worth it. His brow knitting, he drawled, "Well, we already messed it up. As soon as we looked down on it, it wasn't the same. When we walked on it we made it different."

I swung around, "But don't you care about it at all? The road was beautiful and it's getting worse. It's like we're scratching the canvas of a painting with our fingernails."

He closed his eyes impatiently and murmured, "The road is not what we should care about. It's just here to take us somewhere."

Dylan testily shrugged and stomped on the accelerator. We lurched impatiently forward, always passing what we thought might be the end. The gold Chevrolet, like a gunshot aimed to kill, thrust into the falling dusk.

Reaching the end became Dylan's obsession. He drove without sleep. His babbling of what wonders waited for us virulently spread to me. My eyes glazed over with terrific daydreams of the watermelon slices and Sunday picnics and summer street fairs that I imagined would be grinning invitingly at the end.

The sun bent into the car windows, stirring dust motes that circled Dylan's head in glittered halos. Suddenly, a ray shot a rectangle of light across his forehead, revealing a cruel, disfigured face, a face I had thought beautiful in the sun's shadows. Dylan looked like the Devil trying to get away with wearing a tacky reproduction of Christ's crown. I shuddered and jerked my head away.

I felt him turn to look at me. He spoke, the words slipping from his mouth like a slur of wet lies. "I can't make my hands do it. They're locked here." His knuckles turned white from gripping the wheel. "My hands are numb and won't move. I can't go back. I have this dream that I've always had to look to the future for something better. Kinder. I just know that April Road leads to it. The road is so oddly straight and even. Don't you think it's strange—too strange—that it's planted out here in the middle of a field? It's obvious that it'll take me to what I want. It's there—I know it."

"What is?" I asked, fear gurgling in my chest.

He paused, then breathed, "Peace."

Clouds crowded the afternoon sky and threw distorted shadows on April Road. I shifted uneasily in my seat, nervously picking at the dirty, yellow foam that jutted from the slashed vinyl like pus bubbling up around an open blister. Dylan's greed shoved us further. Drool oozed from his panting mouth and collected behind his bitten lips.

Hours fell behind us like flimsy playing cards—the Kings, Queens, and Jokers couldn't keep up. After racing for two days, the gold Chevrolet began to shudder and groan. Dylan let the car coast to a stop and inspected its weary insides under the hood. He fiddled

with the wires and hoses and valves. Suddenly, he wrenched his hand away with a howl. Blood gushed around his knuckles and ran happily down his forearm, coloring in his homemade tattoo of a snake. I shivered as I dabbed at the tattoo. It jumped at me, hissing, as his muscle twitched. My mind flashed back to how I fumbled with my scalpel and gouged my thumb, how I had to hold it to drip over the dissecting pan as Simon Peterson blew on the Bactine.

"She's dead," he said, slamming the hood. The car rattled hollowly like a coffin waiting for its dead. "There's nothing we can do."

Dylan sighed heavily and squinted, disturbed, into the distance. My head rolled around drowsily. Dylan was tired and discontented, unable to accept that this was as far as he would ever see. The dream still dangled in front of him; his tongue curled and stretched to lick it.

Unexpectedly, Dylan said, "What's that?" His bandaged hand waved at a bleak dot wading in a deep, beige field. The snake coiled on his arm, waiting, anticipating. "Is that something? It is!" His eyes grew frenzied and unfocused and he began to sprint.

I followed, clamping my eyes shut running despite of the ache gnawing at my leg muscles, running although my reeling head bludgeoned my skull.

Suddenly, a dilapidated tower of cars, stacked on top of each other like Lincoln Logs, loomed up in front of us. Piled gloomily to the sky, station wagons, sedans and sports cars sighed in an insecticidal buzz. Dylan stood on the edge of the road where it trailed into dust. The chrome of fenders and hubcaps and rear-view mirrors bent the sunlight in countless directions and a film of light fell across Dylan's face like cellophane, melting his eyes, nose and lips together. He blinked at the statue of metal and steel in disbelief. I imagined that the owners of these cars had been driven to own Dylan's disallowed dream and had died here in disillusionment. Dylan slumped into the dust, swaying and sobbing.

Dumbstruck, I turned and faced April Road. I saw the pools of oil and the tread marks of all the cars that defaced the once-flawless road. It had been beautiful, just as it had seemed "right" that a road should be set down here in the middle of this Nebraska field. I saw the gold Chevrolet, rotting in the heat, effacing the road even more, making it ugly and monstrous, rude and ordinary. The butchered frog, strangled in formaldehyde, burned in my mind. It was as if we'd poked and prodded through something once perfect, got bored with ourselves, and pushed it away. We went to any length to pursue what we thought we wanted with the pathetic hope that it might be waiting for us, and disappointed, we destroyed something innocent with our carelessness. I turned my back on April Road feeling an immense sadness for what we had done but too frustrated to cry.

Laura Stauffer
Lititz, PA
Warwick High School
Sally Watkins

A Colorful Love Story

Forest Green was a happy color. He smiled a lot, ate his broccoli, and brushed his teeth three times a day. But something was missing. He didn't know what it was.

One day, when he was having coffee with Blazing Scarlet, she mentioned her husband, Royal Blue, and Forest Green realized that what he was missing was love.

As soon as he realized what it was that he was missing, he began to look for it. On street corners, in donut shops, in pet stores. But no Love was to be found.

Forest Green became Depressed. At the urging of his friends, he went to group counseling meetings. He took up aerobics, then put them back down. He even took out an ad in the personals section of the local paper.

One day, he got an answer to his ad. It was written in a brilliant

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yellow that dazzled him immediately. Lovely Sunshine Yellow wanted to meet him at a cafe the next day at three o'clock. Forest Green resolved to meet this sparkling color.

Forest Green arrived a little early at the cafe, and waited nervously until Sunshine Yellow got there. And suddenly, there she was! For he had no doubt that it was she. She flashed a sunny smile at him from across the room and sauntered over to where he sat.

"What a beautiful shade of green," she thought, looking at Forest. "How deep and pure."

"How sunny she is, how she glides across the room," Forest marvelled. "This is love."

They smiled at each other and each ordered a Super-Thick chocolate malt and pecan pie.

"She is beautiful," thought Forest.

"He is so profound," thought Sunshine.

They finished their pies and malts, gazing at each other. Finally, as he dabbed at his mouth with his napkin, Forest broke the silence. "So," he began. "What are your hobbies?"

Sunshine Yellow smiled, a little puzzled. "Hobbies?"

"Yes, like skiing or stamp collecting....Personally, I collect soap containers."

"Soap containers?" She smiled, nonplussed. Then she brightened. "I have a garden, with many beautiful plants and flowers."

How beautiful she truly is, wondered Forest. "I love broccoli."

Oh, how he smiles, Yellow sighed. "I hate broccoli," she said.

"Do you like to sing?"

"I have an awful voice." How her eyes glimmer, he marvelled.

"Do you like birds?" His glorious way of tilting his head.

"I hate them. They're annoying. I like dogs." How melodious her voice.

"I detest dogs. Do you like daisies?" What a fine shade he is!

"I despise them. Flowers are trivial frivolities. Do you like the banjo?"

"I think banjo music is perfectly hideous. Horror movies are odious, aren't they?"

"Oh I agree?" They beamed at each other.

How much we have in common! they thought.

They left the cafe and strolled down the avenue arm in arm. "What a lovely couple." everyone whispered. "They look so good together!"

As they walked, they continued to talk. But things were becoming tense.

"Soccer?" he inquired.

"No. Volleyball?" she replied tersely.

"Wretched. Autumn?"

"Despicable. Summer's better. Roses?" She grimaced.

"I already told you, flowers are atrocious." He stared at her, amazed at her forgetfulness, her lack of understanding.

"I forgot." How his eyes squinched up when he was peeved. "What about double cheese pizza with olives?"

He winced. "Pizza--"

"--is atrocious." she finished, sighing.

He glared at her. He hated it when people finished his sentences for him. "Parachuting?"

"Never."

How cheap she looked when she pouted. "Checkers?"

"Chess." He really did squint awfully. "Democrat?"

"Republican!" How garish she was, really. She should have known by now that he'd be Republican. After all, they had been together since three o'clock!

This is tiring, she thought.

This is impossibly insipid, he brooded.

"I must go now," she said, not looking him in the eye. "It's been lovely. But I have an appointment."

"Of course, of course," he assured her. "It's been enchanting, really."

They shook hands solemnly. She continued up the avenue, and he turned down the boulevard.

That Forest Green was awfully tiresome, she thought. But some

day I'll find my Lime Green, someone who likes flowers and doesn't squint so.

As she continued, she stopped to admire some geraniums in a window box. A hand carrying a watering can reached out and doused her with water. "Oh!" She cried, and looked up.

Spring Green watched Sunshine Yellow, who was laughing, and smiled back at her.

That Yellow was awfully loud and brash, Forest pondered. But no doubt I'll find my Tasteful Grey or Placid Beige tomorrow. A color who wouldn't dream of pizza with olives, one who is calmer.

He continued down the boulevard. She really was loud, he mused. And then his eye caught on a swatch of Subdued Navy. Now there's a proper color, he thought.

Navy smiled at him. How deep he is, she thought, how spritely green and exciting. I wonder if he has any interesting soap containers.

Rachel J. Galvin

Rochester, NY

Gary Weiner

Rachel's Prism

Suzanna had another nightmare last night. There were four teeth marks in the headboard. I pushed the thin white pillows up to hide the small dents. Last time Suzanna had a bad dream she wet the bed, so the doctors put plastic under the white sheets.

She is improving. Last week she allowed Rachel, her roommate, to hang a prism in the window. Above the bed, black striped shadows from the bars on the window run parallel on the bare wall. Small, straight rainbows used to dance between the stripes.

The woman in front of Suzanna at church was wearing a blue dress with red ladybugs that tried to crawl away when she sat back against the pew. Suzanna tried to pluck one off to free it. The woman must have glued them there. Mom reached over to slap her hand. Suzanna looked at her new, shiny black shoes. Mom had argued with Daddy that he shouldn't have spent so much money on her when she'd outgrow the shoes within a year.

Suzanna liked church. It smelled clean like the bathtub after Mom took a shower. But then Mom put on those knit sweaters that smelled like burning candles. Picking up a Bible, Suzanna listened to the priest. He was reading. She watched his eyes follow the little letters across the page. Then his head would snap his eyes back to the edge of the paper, and he'd have to start all over again.

Suzanna swayed her head back and forth like the priest, but the letters still didn't make sense. She tried rolling her head from side to side, and this time she moved her eyes, too.

A ladybug had jumped!

Suzanna stopped swaying and dropped the Bible. It landed open so the cover faced her, and the bent pages with the letters squished the dirt on the floor. She snatched the ladybug off the woman's ear. The woman screamed. Mom grabbed Suzanna's sleeve, but Suzanna pulled away.

"The lady's hurt!" cried out Suzanna, holding the bloody ladybug. Turning it over she saw a spike coming out of the bug's stomach. She pointed at the woman in blue: "You glued her too tight and now she's dead." She tried to pull Mom's fingers off her arm carefully since she didn't want to ruin Mom's sunset nails. Mom hit her hand away.

"Stop it right now! Apologize to that woman."

"But Mom, she killed the bug."

"You're not going to get away with this again. You've got to stop these tantrums. Is this the way I've taught you to act in God's home? How could you do this, especially on Easter Sunday?"

Suzanna and Mom went home. Suzanna never told the woman

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she was sorry. On Monday, five yellowish-blue marks appeared on her arm.

I found shards of glass beneath the window. Rachel's prism. A silky black ribbon, frayed at the end, lay on the ground, too.

Rachel loves to read about other countries. She reads books about Paris and London that I sneak in to her.

Dad baked a cake and frosted it so it read, "Happy B-day Princess," in big pink letters. There were four neighborhood kids at her eighth birthday party. Holly Rena, who had just returned from France, gave Rachel a small replica of the Eiffel Tower. The Cariz twins gave her two cassette tapes, Carly Simon and Amy Grant. Dad put Sprite in clear plastic cups with cherries on toothpicks that sank to the bottom. Everyone took spoons and chased the cherries in the cup.

The last gift was from Rachel's dad. The wrapping paper had little silver and black flowers with a white background, and an elastic silver ribbon intertwined with a black ribbon. A prism was wrapped in purple and orange tissuepaper. Rachel picked up the prism. Through the center the family room looked normal, but around the edges the picture blurred. Turning she watched Holly spill Sprite onto the pretty wrapping paper. Rachel saw her father clutch the ribbons to his chest, while Mrs. Cariz threw the paper away. It was probably the most expensive wrapping paper Dad had ever bought.

I knelt next to the shards of glass. The black ribbon was shiny and glossy. Suzanna would like it. I was surprised she hadn't convinced Rachel to give it to her. I felt sorry for Suzanna. The only reason she liked black was that she saw so much of it in her life.

People were whispering in the dim room. The dark red carpet and yellow lamp shades were the only colors. Suzanna held Daddy's hand. Mr. Glen came up and grasped Daddy's upper arm. "Hello, Mark," said Mr. Glen, his head bobbing up and down as if on a spring. He glanced at her and smiled. Suzanna didn't like him. He had a rabbit's tail stuck on his chin. She wondered if anyone had told him.

"I heard she had a, ah . . ." He looked back at Daddy and said quietly, ". . . drinking problem. That's tough." Suzanna wondered if the tail would grow back if it was cut off, like a lizard's tail does. It was gray with specks of white. Daddy had stopped talking.

Mr. Glen leaned over. "Do you miss your mommy?" The rabbit's tail quivered. Did it miss its mommy? Suzanna thought. She reached up and tugged on the tail.

"No," Daddy said firmly, pulling her hand away. Mr. Glen left. Another black suit came to talk to Daddy. Suzanna sat on the floor.

One woman wasn't wearing black. Mom wasn't either. Mom was special she got to wear a yellow dress. But Mom was not allowed to get out of the shiny box. The woman, dressed in a dark blue suit, had a gold lollipop wrapped around her wrist. Suzanna wondered what a gold lollipop tasted like. Lemon, or maybe tangerine. She went over to the woman and held her hand. She turned the wrist over and licked the lollipop. It wasn't tangerine. It didn't have a taste at all. Suzanna placed her head against the woman's arm. Tick . . . tick . . . tick. She could hear the lollipop's heartbeat. The lollipop was alive.

She'd have to listen for heartbeats at dinner tonight. What if she ate something that had a family--someone's baby, someone's daddy! The woman was talking to her and holding her shoulder. Daddy hugged her and rubbed her cheeks with a tissue.

"Daddy, do you think it would be okay if I prayed to God for all who have been hurt and died?" Daddy smiled. Getting on her knees, Suzanna clasped her hands together and squeezed her eyes shut. The carpet bit her knees. She wanted to itch the bites away, but she had to show the lollipop how sincere she was. "Dear God," she whispered.

The prism had been pretty. Small blurred images of rainbows floated between the black bars on the wall. Rachel spent the last weekend trying to sketch the scene.

Beneath her bed there are drawings of her family: her dad, her stepmother, and her younger stepbrother. The pictures of her

father usually have the prism in the background or some monument from another country. The background is always black or gray in the pictures of her stepmother and stepbrother.

I found a picture of a child on a swing. The girl is smiling, staring into the sun, oblivious to the piece of prism stuck through her hand.

Rachel loved art. But fourth grade art was just used to keep students busy, Rachel thought. The assignment was to draw your pet or the pet you would like to have. Holly, next to Rachel, was painting a picture of a cat. It had too many angles, Rachel decided. It didn't look like a cat, more like blocks stacked on top of each other. Rachel wanted to draw a sunset. The orange watercolors had dripped into the green grass. Her red sun was too pink. Recess was in ten minutes, so she wouldn't have time to fix it. Rachel crumpled up her piece of paper.

"Holly, I think your picture needs help," Rachel whispered, leaning over the table. "Maybe you should make a dog or something. I don't like your cat." Holly dropped her brush, scattering paint dots across her smock, and ran to the teacher. She left her painting, so Suzanna picked up a pencil and sketched a fatter, rounder cat next to Holly's skinny, choppy one. Holly returned, and Mrs. Kinett was walking with her.

"Here, I helped you." Rachel pointed at their drawings: "See yours compared to mine?"

"Rachel, your cat is very nice. But why did you draw on Holly's paper? That is not a nice thing to do. Where is your own paper?" Mrs. Kinett started to erase the cat.

"It was a nice thing to do!" cried Rachel. She had improved Holly's picture for her; that wasn't a bad thing.

"Where is your paper?" Mrs. Kinett looked on the floor for it. "I threw it away."

"Why did you do that? Now you have no paper to draw on, and you won't be able to complete the assignment."

"I didn't like my picture."

"Why not? Let me see it." Rachel handed the wrinkled paper to her. "It's very nice, but it's not of an animal. Don't you have a pet?"

"No, and I don't want one, either," Rachel said.

"So you drew a sunrise instead?"

"Sunset." Rachel shoved the picture into her desk. "It's stupid anyway."

"No, it isn't. I want you to turn that in as your assignment. I think it's beautiful."

"I could do better." Rachel smeared a blot of black paint across her white smock. It reminded her of the black blobs at the doctor's office. The doctors would ask her what pictures she saw in the blobs. She knew the story for each blob they showed her, but she wouldn't tell them and they'd talk to her stepmother behind the door with the funny glass. The glass always made everyone on the other side move like liquid. She didn't like the glass because it made the picture look different, like watercolors. "I could do a whole lot better if you gave me more time."

"This will do fine." The class went out for recess. Rachel hid in the pine trees near the swings with her sketch book and pencil. Holly was swinging slowly on the swing. Her brown hair shone in the sun. She kept staring at the sun trying to make sunspots on her eyelids--the 'cool' thing to do. The other girls giggled with Holly and talked about how pretty her new sun dress was. But she can't draw, Rachel thought to herself. She can't draw.

I threw away the broken pieces of glass. Rachel would ask me for another one.

Rachel and Suzanna depend on me--it has been that way since preschool. I sneak books in for Rachel and candy for Suzanna.

A nurse walks into the room. "Sara?" a female voice says. "Sara, did you wet the bed again?"

"No, ma'am," I cry. "It was Suzanna this time!"

Lorilee Mizerak

Vienna, VA

James Madison High School

Bernis von zur Muehlen

Sleep

Submerged, where night falls
 on faded shadows
 and sleep is the tide
 washing red and yellow day from us
 to bleach our skin to calm.
 Dream—the word stretches through us
 like a low whistle,
 the tone of our flashing minds.
 We are in a garden
 and in the green thickness of air
 a vibrant hum—
 light sweat on pale foreheads.
 Outside, red lights flash in
 Venetian slants
 over skin relaxing
 from the tight stretch of the sun.
 We spin through our minds
 (the whistle high, shaking in its pitch)
 fall through purple till it
 bleeds to blue.
 A whirlpool of air sucks color
 into a swirling cone
 with you a black dot at its apex.
 And still I fall,
 changing blue to green to yellow.
 Then floating, from below the choking colors
 that swelled my lungs
 Up, through the cloying web of sleep
 (and the whistle trills higher)
 to see red and yellow lights
 flashing the transience of night.
 And in silence,
 the toneless breath beside me
 blanketing air.

Ingrid Nelson
 Vienna, VA
 James Madison High School
 Bernis von zur Muehlen

Way of the Pear

I
 Cool like clean sheets
 still hanging in the
 wind, the pear brushes
 my arms.

II
 In trees I see pears,
 like gourds, only soft,
 and think of fall with
 pumpkins.

III
 My dear friend stops by
 to place in my hand an
 inordinately large pear,
 I say, "Is this your
 heart?"

IV
 In one hand I weigh
 an egg, in the other
 a pear, their surfaces

are exactly the same.

V
 Sucking on a slice, tiny
 pear veins are sticking out
 and little beads of juice
 skid down my throat.

VI
 The skin of this pear
 is scarred like in my legs
 from mosquito bites in
 the summer.

VII
 Not green
 Not yellow
 Not brown
 Only pear.

VIII
 Tiny black seeds
 stick to my ankle
 where I placed them
 earlier. Pears are
 loyal.

IX
 Pears in a box,
 only stems fall
 out between the
 slats.

X
 My grocer says berries.
 My doctor says apples.
 I say pears,
 I too am loyal.

XI
 Angry I dig my
 nails too easily
 into the closely
 human flesh of an
 aging pear.

XII
 Pear speckles like pores
 on an elephant
 breathe in my own breath.

XIII
 Slices are half hearts
 like broken love.
 Oh, disastrous pear!

XIV
 Your navel, lovely pear,
 tiny star on the
 end of you.

XV
 After the pear,
 my mouth is clean.

Jasmine Tanasy
 Englishtown, NJ
 Manalapan High School
 Cheryl Runquist

Julie C.

I have not always gone by the name "Julie." In fact, even after my family settled anew in America when I was four, my nursery school mates knew me by my old Korean given name, "Chi-Hye," pronounced Je-Hye. It is the name that is still used in the most important of my official documents: birth certificate, naturalization papers, passport. But I have not introduced myself by my real name in over twelve years now.

Less than a month after we arrived in New York, my mother enrolled me at a local nursery school. Looking back, I am surprised that I was the only Asian in the school, considering that we lived in a very ethnically diverse part of Queens. Despite my frequent phonetic demonstrations of my name to my schoolmates, the boys and girls, especially the boys, insisted on calling me "Cheeee-Hiiii!" with the second syllable two octaves up, imitating a Kung-Fu master on T.V. breaking a tough piece of wood. Every summon was followed by a squawking laugh. At first, it did not occur to me that they were mocking me, laughing at my Asianness. I, myself, struggling in learning to pronounce the "F" sound that does not exist in Korean, understood and sympathized with those who were learning alien words and sounds.

When my sister came home sobbing that her classmates pointed at her calling her "Chink," and giggling, it struck me. From then on, whenever I heard my name, it sounded more and more like "Hi-yai!" echoing in my head. But there was little I could do. The teachers never seemed to notice the children's mockery. My English vocabulary did not extend beyond "red," "blue," "Barbie," and "I have to go to bathroom." I could not articulate my grievances to them. I grew to dread hearing my name. Sometimes, I would want to cry, feeling the aches creeping in my chest. But I swallowed my saliva repeatedly and blinked vigorously, for I did not want to be the "cry-baby." Cry-babies were always given a good chant. So young as I was, this was my first lesson in true tolerance, of emotional degradation and physical pain. I remained quiet. I even smiled my fake smile; I would feel as if nothing in my face moved but my cheeks that became round and big enough to pull the weight of my heavy lips that refused to follow such a happy gesture. And all I could do was stare at the colorful legos to avoid looking at the children.

In my silence, however, I began to think that my name was ugly; it made me feel ungraceful. There was such a harsh sound in "Chi," such a short syllable. It didn't flow into the next syllable. I envied Donna for her flowing name. "Donnnna," I'd say to myself slowly while Big Bird talked about the number nine on TV.

My admiration for her name grew; I also began to think that Donna's marigold hair was the loveliest I had ever seen. She wore it in pigtails that curled inwards to form little o's like doughnuts. How I wished I had those luscious curls! Once, that year, my mother tried to replicate Donna's curls on me with a curling iron. We never finished the undertaking, because being a fidgety four-year old, I jerked my head once, and the scalding metal rod hit the naked, young skin on the back of my left ear. As she iced my burnt and itching, stinging ear, and rubbed it with Vaseline, I only regretted the straightness of my hair, not the pain I felt in my badly burnt skin. I was not Donna.

The following year, I was generously given the opportunity to change my name. My parents decided to move the family to Youngstown, Ohio. They explained that this was the "shi-goi," the suburbs of a small city. To me, it seemed so alien and so far away that I was ecstatic. I could become "Julie" without confusing anyone who already knew me.

Although the kung-fu jokes were no longer used so closely in relation to my name, they did not stop for good. Kids often asked if I was Chinese or Japanese, slanting their eyes up and down with their fingers as illustrations. I just stared down at my K-Mart shoelaces, hoping that my eyes weren't pointing in either direction. Even last year in New York, a fellow student in my ethnically diverse school for the gifted jokingly asked me if my size 7 feet were bound-the more educated way of making fun.

Last week, I went to get my driver's license application, so I had to sign several official forms. I used my naturalization papers, marked with my original Korean name, as identification; my school I.D. was not official enough. When I signed the smelly carbon papers "Julie Suk," as I always have on my school registration and College Board forms, the woman behind the desk looked annoyed. "You have to sign your full name," she said, shoving my citizenship certificate towards me and handing me a new batch of papers.

I was puzzled. I gave her a confused squint when I looked up. "You left out 'Chi-Hye,'" she said. She, too pronounced the second syllable "hi." I barely noticed as I stared at the picture of me on my U.S. citizen's certificate, ten years old and dressed in a trendy 80's pinstriped Izod shirt and purple vest. Suddenly, I remembered how this had replaced the picture on my greencard when I was four with pigtails wearing a shirt with an American name brand that I had so longed to know how to read with such eager eyes on my way to this country. I remembered learning how to read "Lotte," on that Korean-made shirt, then reading "Busy Body," a simple picture book about a lazy little boy. Then I looked at the book I had in my hand, "Greek Political Theory" by Ernest Barker.

"You have to at least include your middle initial, or something," said the clerk. As the people behind me were sighing as they waited their turn, I quickly added a "C" sloppily in my usual script sandwiched between my first and last names.

Julie C. I like it.

Julie Chi-Hye Suk
Flushing, NY
Hunter College High School
Kathleen Lawrence

Skipping Out

I guess that I was about sixteen years old when I learned for the first time that you can know somebody for years and never really know them. I guess that it really shook me up at the time - to think that I really knew someone - and then to just find out one day that maybe I never even knew them at all -and that everything I thought I had with that person was really a lie. I guess I was sixteen.

* * * *

I wake up and try to figure out where I am. It is hard, painfully hard, to think about anything, even something as stupid as where you are, when your mind is in this kind of a condition. My eyes wade through the smoke and haze and the murky darkness and snap me back into the filthy room - the filthy couch, the filthy carpet, the filthy, dingy used-to-be white walls. I try to pull myself up and flop back down onto the couch. It seems to take an eternity for me to pull myself back together enough just to make it to the bathroom. But I get there, shoving my way past all the people standing in line, and I fall into the tiny room and lock the door behind me. The bathroom is filthy too; I suppose that cleaning is not exactly a college student's number one priority. I sink to my knees and clasp hold of the porcelain as the vomit rolls out of my mouth in dark thick waves. It rolls until I can hardly take in air to breathe and then it stops. It stops and I fall back against the wall. I pull myself up to wash my mouth out and shrink back in horror at my reflection. My lipstick is smeared and the powder has worn off and my face is red and splotchy. My eyes burn, sunken back into my head. I stare into myself. I stare at my crumpled clothes - all my birthday gifts. The silver bracelet from my parents and the sweater from my brother and the gorgeous smooth new shoes from my best friend Clara. I stare until seeing all of it makes me sick and forces me to the floor again.

I've been skipping out of everything since I met Clara. We met in second grade, and we'd been best friends ever since. We had

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always been loud and slick and perfect. We walked loud and we dressed loud and we talked loud. And we were slick because we always got away with it. She, with her chopped up hair and flaming lips and torn-up clothing. When I met her, I was quiet. I wore corduroy and Osh-kosh and the same sneakers that every other kid in our class saw at the mall and begged their parents to buy for them. My face was plain. There was nothing special about me - straight brown hair and straight brown eyes and a perfect straight existence. The first thing that Clara and I did was to dye our hair black. Jet black - witch black - Morticia Adams black. Then we got our ears pierced without telling our parents. Clara's older brother Jimmy pierced them for us - with a needle and a popsicle. It hurt like crazy, but I never said a word the whole time. And of course, it got infected and that hurt even worse, but I never said a word. And then my clothes changed and my face changed and all the words I used to talk with changed. Yeah, even in second grade we were skipping out of the lunchtime recess to sneak up to our secret hill and slip away into our fantasy world. And in sixth grade, we snuck out too - snuck over to the high school because it was right next to our middle school - to watch Jimmy and his high school friends try to smoke their cigarettes and act real cool. Ninth grade came and Clara and I finally met our male counterparts. Up until this time it had just been the two of us. We hated all the other girls in our school - all their dresses and Barbie dolls - and the boys who only wanted to play kickball. Ninth grade - I skipped school for the first time with Clara and Steve and Lew. By eleventh grade, we were just as I said - slick and perfect. We skipped out the windows to go to the concerts and the frat parties. We skipped out and we skipped back in - giddy and laughing and all sloshed up. And nobody really knew. Nobody really knew because we walked and talked and dressed so perfect. Clara and Cassie - everybody just thought we were so cute. Somehow, in the midst of all of it, we even managed to get good grades. Clara and Cassandra - we even had perfect matching names. Clara and Cass - we were slick and smooth and cool as ice.

* * * *

I stumble out of the bathroom the same exact way I stumbled in. I am appalled to discover that it is 2 A.M. I can't find Lew or Clara or anybody. I grope my way through the house and find Clara in the basement - sitting with one of the college guitar player boys with stringy brown hair and a pierced eyebrow and a dingy white T-shirt that probably advocates flag-burning or something. I watch Clara laughing - edging her way closer to him - almost in his lap now and smiling her perfect glittery smile. By now she is completely wasted, and I know it and this boy knows it too.

"Come on Clara. It's two o'clock. Can we please get out of here before the police come?"

"Oh for Christ's sake Cass - the police aren't really gonna come. The band's not playing that loud."

"Clara it's 2 A.M. You can hear the noise the whole way out in the parking lot. Besides - I feel really sick. Come on, let's go. I'm going to get Lew."

"Lew left about three hours ago Cass."

"What the - he was our ride home!"

"Yeah, well - he met some girl - they went out to eat somewhere."

"Well that's really great, Clara, but..."

"What's wrong with you, Cass, huh? I don't wanna go...I'm havin' a good time...I met this guy..."

Her words are starting to get all slurry now.

"He's gonna take me down to this better party. It's down by Park Street. Down in the woods somewhere." She giggles. "Come on, just say you'll come...it'll be fun - I promise."

I sigh. I know about the parties down in the woods. I've heard about them. These are the parties that everybody moves on to when they get tired of the frat house. These are the parties where the guys end up throwing punches and the girls end up getting raped. You go to these parties already drunk - you do lines - you do anything - you just get burnt.

And I don't really want to go but Lew has left and I really don't

have anywhere else to go. And so we spill out into the December air. We pile into somebody's car and drive - fast and swerving. We spill out again at the gas station. Clara and I go for a walk so she can throw up, and we lean our backs up against a tight brick wall while the boys pump gas. I watch Clara until she finishes, and then she just stands there. She looks horrible. Well, I mean she's still gorgeous, but I think that seeing even the most gorgeous woman in the world - puking behind some gas station, stinking and shivering, in the middle of the night, in the middle of December - would make her look horrendous.

I stare across the street at the houses with the plastic candles in the windows and the blinking Christmas lights. I haven't bought a single Christmas gift yet - Christmas just seemed to come so fast this year. It has come upon us so suddenly, as we stand there, Clara and I intoxicated, and rushing to keep up with it. I wonder what I'm doing here...I wonder what I'm about to do. I know that I don't want to go to this party. I know that I don't want to do coke. And I stare at Clara now, in the stale neon lights of the gas station, and I realize that she doesn't look so perfect. I stare everywhere - I stare at myself - my sliding walk - my fumbling hands - and I hate what I see. I hate myself because I lied to myself.

We are rushing to keep up. All along I've been thinking that I was controlling it, that if I just drank and smoked pot every once in a while I'd be fine, because that stuff wasn't really all that bad for you. But I always swore to myself that I was never going to end up down by Park Street. Always. Because I was controlling it. But I look at Clara now, and I look at myself, and I realize that I'm not. I'm not controlling anything - I'm letting Clara control me. I turn to her.

"Clara, I really don't wanna go to this party. Let's just go home and go to bed. Why don't you just get this guy's number and call him sometime?"

She turns to me now.

"Damn you Cass. I really like this guy and you wanna screw it all up for me? I thought you'd be the last person who'd ever wimp out on me like this."

I stare at her for a second, and then I leave. I just up and walk away - leaving my slick, perfect best friend puking beside a brick wall at a gas station, 2:30 in the morning. I call a taxi to take me home. The ride seems like it will never end. The houses blur by, and all the beautiful plastic Santas and reindeer blur right along with them. I think about second grade as I'm riding home in that taxi. I think about corduroy and Osh-kosh and playing kickball with the boys at recess. I think about all of this, and I wonder how I'm going to get back there. When I get home, I pause for a second before I get out of my cab. I pause and bend down - undoing the laces. I slip my feet out of the shoes, taking off my socks as well. I pay the driver, and I step out of the cab, leaving my shoes in the car - my birthday present - those shoes - slick and smooth and perfect. Then I walk into the house barefoot, in the middle of December.

Andrea Walker
Chambersburg, PA

Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Anne K. Branham

ex-boyfriend

hours like dandelions
and passion
filling only my rag doll's
teacup,
and i dreamt of you
as i do dream of kidney beans.
i was a human wart
sitting next to you,
i was a broken vase
from the thrift shop.
you were a bad acorn,
i was a squirrel--
i ate you up then spit you out.
they said my face was sour for a whole year.

Jennifer Chang
Lawrenceville, NJ
West-Windsor/Plainsboro HS
Lucy J. Boyd

To Cover the Gloom

We're walking to the Honor Society office. We're going to paint the school once a week starting today. Other groups have painted all week long and last week, too. Today our job is to cover all the graffiti on the stairwell. For doing this once a week, we will get a letter that says Honor Society on it. A Varsity Letter. And next year, we will be assured of sitting with the Honor Society at graduation.

I am walking with my friend Mindy. We're going to meet the other person on our team--Patrick. Today we are going to stay after school for two hours to make it look beautiful. I have the dubious honor of being group leader.

At the office, we change into painting clothes and wait for Patrick to come back with the paint. He tells us we need to take a tray to fill with paint. Mindy goes to get the paint and we fill one tray with stain killer and one with turpentine. We take rollers and paint brushes to the stairwell where we will be painting today. We go to the top of the steps and stand there on the third floor. Patrick, Mindy, and I all stand there staring at our first piece of graffiti. I am looking at it with more horror and shock than I can stand. It is a swastika.

It is written in dark, dark black on the dirty off-white walls. It is horrifying. "I can't believe this," I say. "I never would have thought. In our own school."

Patrick is looking at me in agreement. "It's awful."

"I don't know what you're so surprised about," Mindy says.

"I don't know why you never expected it before."

"Have you ever seen one in here before?" I ask.

"No. But I'm not surprised."

We take rollers and rub stain killer, then paint over the swastika. I want it gone. I want to get rid of it completely. But it is stubborn. I have gone over it three times with the roller, and though I have succeeded in covering my hands and sleeves and the railing and steps with little splotches of white paint, little pieces of the swastika still stick out. Mindy picks up a small brush and covers it completely. I hug her I'm so happy. The swastika is really gone.

There is no more graffiti on the third floor, so we go to the between-floor landing. There are lines on the wall that we paint over. There doesn't seem to be much else.

"We should paint all the walls," I say. "It looks so splotchy this way." The colors do not perfectly blend the way they should. Besides, this covering only the graffiti makes the rest of the wall stand out, dusty, filthy, ugly.

Mindy laughs.

"No, I'm serious. Pat is tall. We should paint up to our heads. Not many people are that much taller than this."

Mindy stops laughing. "I hope you're kidding."

"No, I'm not."

"Jill," she says, "that's ridiculous."

"What's wrong with this school is that it is so gloomy. Maybe if we could cheer it up--"

"No. It would take us two months to do. And then they'd just graffiti right over it again. I don't know about you, but I can't bear that."

"I think we should."

"I'd love to make this school beautiful," Pat says. "We could make the floor marble. And the walls too. The whole school, marble."

"One school used to have that," I say. "It got ruined."

"Not surprised," Mindy says.

"You have to admit it would get ruined, Jill," Pat says, and the moment is over.

A teacher walks down the steps. "It's nice to see this school getting cleaned up finally," she says with a smile. "Are you kids doing this for detention?"

The three of us look at each other in horror. "No," I say, offended. "We're doing it for the Honor Society."

"Oh," she says, surprised. I am not quite sure she believes me. "That's good."

After she is gone, the three of us look at each other. "I can't believe that," Pat says.

"Me either," Mindy and I say at once.

We go back to painting. The walls are covered more with filth than with graffiti. I start painting one whole wall.

"What are you doing?" Mindy asks suspiciously.

"There was a line here," I say, and I'm smiling because she knows what I'm trying to do. She and Pat come over and start painting here too. Then they both realize I'm not ready to stop.

"Let's block it off," they say to each other, and make a big box that we have painted. Then they tell me to stop. I continue painting over the line. "Stop it!" Pat says. He is smiling but Mindy is not.

"What good does painting over the graffiti do?" I ask. "It's the gloom we have to end," I say.

"You're being ridiculous. This school is gloomy. And we can't make any difference on it anyway," Mindy says.

"Why are you so into this?" Pat asks.

"I am an idealist," I say. "I believe we can make the world better."

Mindy snorts.

"The Honor Society must think so," I say. "There are so many of us painting."

Mindy snorts again. "Or maybe three-quarters of the Honor Society aren't painting, and of the ones who are, ninety per cent are interested only in letters and sitting with the Honor Society at graduation."

I finish the block and stop painting.

"Look how messed up the stairs are!" Mindy says. "Go clean them up."

Pat and I go to the spot under where the swastika was and start washing the floor with turpentine. Mindy comes up to help. We move the paint tray together. Underneath are big, thick splotches of paint. We clean them up. There is only one mark we can't get off. "Look," I say. "It looks like the chalk outline of a body, like in a murder." I hope this means that the swastika is dead.

"Are you crazy," Mindy says. "It looks like a rain drop."

I don't answer. "Where are you going?" I ask her.

"Down to paint over the other floors."

"What are you going to paint over?" I ask. We have already surveyed the stairwell and found very little graffiti.

"I don't know," she says. "Dirt?"

When Pat and I have finished cleaning, we go down to see Mindy. She has painted over a lot of little graffiti spots. Splotches of lighter white dot the off-white stairwell. In the basement, a strong fluorescent light shines on the filth. "This school is so gloomy," I say.

"So what," Mindy says.

"There's nothing we can do," Pat says sadly.

Another teacher walks by. "Are you kids working off detentions?" he asks.

"No," we say in unison. "We're from the Honor Society," Mindy says.

"Oh." He leaves.

Mindy goes down to look for cleanser, and Pat and I open the door for fresh air. We can see, across the street, the walls of the parking lot covered with graffiti too. "I'd really like to cover up that," Pat says. "I know," I agree.

I see the custodian standing by the loading dock smoking. When my locker was in the basement, I used to talk to him. I don't think he will recognize me but he does. He smiles and waves. I wave back. Back inside, he comes around to the steps and says hi.

"Hi," I say back.

"So, what are you doing here?" he asks.

"Painting," I say.

"You're not doing this for -- fun, right?" he manages. He does not want to accuse me. I am hurt that he would even think of this.

"We're doing this for Honor Society," I say, now deeply insulted by the continued accusations.

"Oh," he says. I know he believes me, but I am still hurt. "That's great." Then he goes back to the basement.

I turn around and see a big block of white painted on the wall.

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Pat sees it too. "I wonder what that was covering," he says. It occurs to me that it could be someone else being the same idealist that I was, their friends stopping them the same way mine stopped me. For a moment I feel less alone. I feel good. I do not share this with Mindy or Pat.

Mindy comes back and we go upstairs to finish scrubbing the paint-covered floors.

At least the swastika and other graffiti are gone, I find myself thinking when I ask why I'm doing this. I do not truly care about the letter, and I will not be sitting with the Honor Society at graduation anyway. The reason I am really doing this is to save the school.

The next day Mindy and I go to the stairwell to see how our work looks. The swastika is peeking out from under all the layers of paint. We can still see its thick, ugly lines from under the layers of paint. I feel like crying. Mindy doesn't say anything.

But the wall we painted, with a big, thick block of clean white paint, looks shiny and happy. I think it is the brightest point in the whole stairwell. Maybe it will at least turn peoples' eyes from the swastika. Until I paint over it next week. I do not intend to give up.

Evonne Smitt
Philadelphia, PA
Barbara Spizzirri

Untitled

Retching.

Ah violent hacienda-like snow
This room is a cup of coffee
And the coffee is laced
Like a monkey with its velvet mouth and eyes
Almost like it's been cut to softness.
Sweat drips down the crevice of my underarm.
In February there are long lines of cars on the highway.
The pavement is icy it is so cruel,
The chambermaid of yesterday
A disease.
I awake in a light head
The room that is coffee is made from calendar beans.
I sit in the squares of several dates
Keep crawling through the days
Spill the food I've squirreled away up here
Through the months
Which have become so thin for me. . .
I spin my veins
And something has invaded here, here on the carpet
The stroke of a whore her mouth and pool-like eyes
Outlined as the rest of her slips away.
In softness
Which like a TV screen, an old movie
The characters are distorted
They begin to course.
I look away the sun is in the window.
Everything is a touch
The clock downstairs stirs
I hear a retch.
Once more a dog dies in the snow like a wolf
Once more the whore her mouth blooms
And she is lost in a garden of firmaments
Of spike flowers a smart preacher
Killed himself.
Or is it now that stands a bridge
Beneath a human man?
The whore slips

The monkey is her lover
It is her picture's negative in fur
And she can no longer stop what burns in a fireplace
Stop what catches the heel of her shoe
She can no longer stop a door from opening
If like an animal
She will stoop to verify her place.
I stagger the balance of the moment lost
In a grave beauty falls down and frosts
The whore is a cello
I am her strings
The ice melts
On our lips our bodies lift
Preparing.

K. Grossman
Medford, NJ
St. Mary's Hall

Frozen

Every evening, I pass her home. An old, broken down house built in the early 1800's. Each plank of wood has its own direction. They are curved and warped, but I could not imagine them being any other way. The freshly painted, lime green shutters slam against the shaky walls, every time the wind blows, until they fall to the ground in a loud crash.

The glass in the windows is thin with old age. Each wooden pane is carved with marvelous designs. One window, on the east side, is special. The glass lies shattered in its pane. The shape formed by the broken glass resembles a giant cobweb. It is here, in this place, that she sits in a small, wooden chair. Her slim figure peers out at the world between the cracks of the glass. She presses the tips of her fingers against the cold window every now and then, although I don't know why.

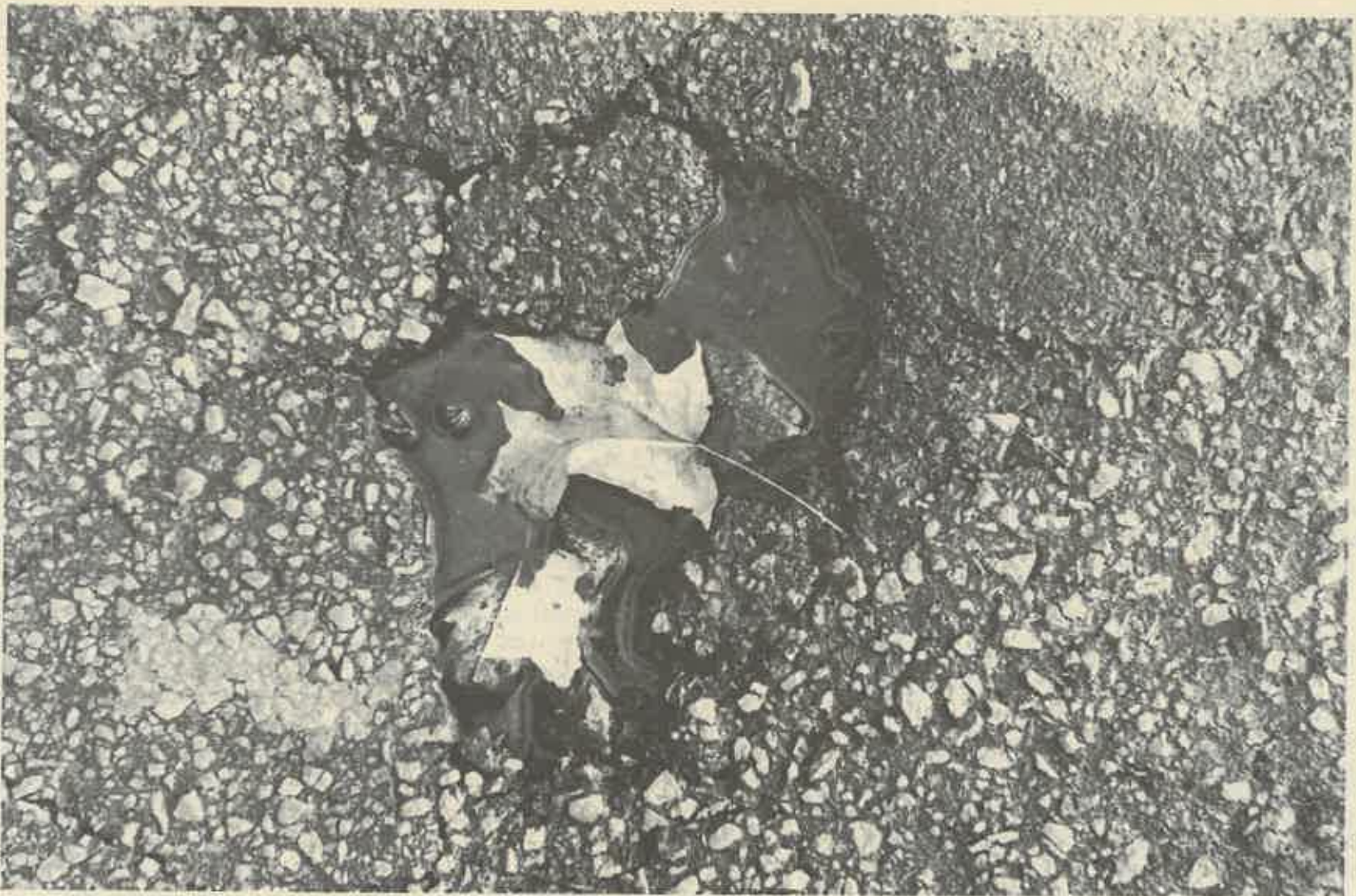
On that cold, September evening, after the leaves had done their falling for the day, I passed the house, but did not see her at the window. I walked by the large garden and felt compelled to enter. I pried open the rusted, iron gate and let it slam behind me. As I tiptoed through knee-high grasses and wild flowers, I watched the house--it was empty.

In the backyard I came upon the gazebo, where I found her sipping lemonade. The cool breeze blew the silver wisps of hair which escaped from her droopy, brown hat, in front of her face. She brushed them away. Her dress, a pale blue, fell over her slim figure, reaching her ankles. Her body seemed lifeless, like a picture, no, like a painting. A rich, beautiful painting that captured her at one moment in her life, and froze her there, forever.

She did not notice me. I stepped lightly towards her. I sat down in the gazebo on the, painted white, metal chair across from her. She turned her head to look at me; her blue eyes were icy, but she did not see me. She stretched her hand to grasp the ceramic pitcher of lemonade on the table between us. Her thin hands were wrinkled, and they shook from the cold and old age. She lifted the pitcher and poured another glass, obviously for me. She glared at me. Her piercing eyes sent a chill down my spine and I began to feel as cold as she was. The wind blew her hat off her head. Her hair fell from a loose bun to brush her wrinkled cheek with glorious silver curls. I drank the lemonade. It felt cold as it slid down my dry throat. The woman leaned over and touched her hand to mine. I felt a tingling sensation in my arm.

A gust of wind startled me and I dropped the glass to the floor. It did not break, but the glass shattered into a cobweb, like in the old window, but kept its shape. I raised it to my chapped lips and drank the lemonade while the wind blew.

Cherilyn Cepriano
Brooklyn, NY
Midwood High School
Sharon Lustbader



Dara Treu **Princeton High School**
Princeton, NJ **Joan Goodman**

Night

I felt cheap. Like a low-class prostitute who lingers at the curb of a trash-covered city corner, hand posed lightly on the pole of a fatigued street light that flickers and emits faint, indistinct noises. An empty condom wrapper, ripped through the gut, left a strong impression of sewer-bound metallic sheen. I shouldn't have felt cheap. I was not the woman on the corner whom the passing cars ignored.

The three of us ducked underneath the metal blockade. It was painted orange. I avoided the puddles as my patent leather heels clicked against the cement; but the sound was not so resonant - the dampness of the night seduced all sounds into muted tones. The fog grew up around us and catapulted my mind into a previously untapped and terrifying world - one of mistrust. The path of cement led us in a circle. We followed it three abreast, not speaking. I did not know what either of them was thinking, and I was afraid. Afraid of the dark, the trees, of him, but mostly, of myself.

I didn't know where we were going to, but was too insecure to ask. The cold bit through my nylons and up my skirt, like the groping hands of immature boys playing at being men. Finally we turned off the circle, and left it to continue its infinite progression. We followed a dirt path to its end. The trees were closer to me now; the moisture on the bark stained like blood.

The gazebo which he led us to was totally unexpected. It was juxtaposed into the bank of the estuary, where the water terminated the line of trees. The already bloody soldiers, clothed in bark, filed in order ready to be sent to battle. The gazebo was painted white. A couple of steps cringed as I walked up them, letting forth the classical noise that fans of horror movies pettishly describe as "eerie." I bit my lip. About ten paces in diameter, the gazebo had a vaulted ceiling which was very, very dark at its uppermost pinnacle. I wrapped my arms about a vertical support, hugging the angular beam to my body in an impassive embrace, and leaned out over the water numbly. A few good stones' throws across, and probably deeper

than I would have liked, I thought.

The other two were talking, laughing, but my heart shivered like the pole of the dying street lamp upon which the prostitute leans. I wondered what was on the other side of the water - safety, love, my intensely felt desire for security? I could not see. But as I stared at the dim horizon, a strange, almost surrealistic noise embedded itself in my consciousness. None of us knew what it was - I cannot remember our various conjectures, but none of them were correct. The noise grew louder, but did not proportionately grow more distinct. A light broke through the fog, far down along the other side of the bank - with it came the source of the noise. The train rumbled grouchy across previously unnoticed tracks, leaving a stale and asthmatic impression in my mind. I would have given anything to be on that train. Another one passed in similar fashion after a time. In the interval, she and I walked down onto the dock protruding out over the water. It seemed solid underfoot, yet he shouted down a warning from his station in the gazebo. We ignored him. He was trying to frighten us. His warning was left as many are: commas or semi-colons, littering the air. They float up to the atmosphere like the smoke rings blown from a cigarette.

It had gotten late. The numbness of fear had left my mind, but settled upon my body in the form of cold. We retraced our steps around the circle. The puddles were still there. The trees were still there. My insecurities were still there, perhaps more intense than ever. I half ran, though my skirt and heels made it difficult. We reached the entrance, where at last there was light. The figure of a man stood between a few landscaped bushes and a patch of cedar chips. The base for the statue was built up about two feet, and he himself, in brightly colored glory, towered over us an additional seven feet. On impulse, I climbed over the chain encircling him, around a bush and up onto the base. The other two stopped and watched. I stood on the base; the figure was cold to touch. But I was colder still.

Kate Zielke
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Robert McConnell

Untitled

As I was going up the stair,
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today,
I wish that man would go away.

The funeral is beautiful and extravagant, just like she would have envisioned it. Huge, expensive bouquets and baskets of flowers adorn the church and grave.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...

The demeanor of the numerous mourners is incredibly solemn; one might think it was someone of great importance who had departed. Somewhere, in the background, in the midst of this scene, an organist begins to play. The music, soft and meaningful, floats throughout and enters the hearts and minds of all those present.

Ding Dong, the witch is dead!
Which old witch?
The wicked witch.
Ding Dong, the wicked witch is dead!

The girl stared. The other girl stared back. She moves one arm. So does the other girl. She moves left. So does she. Up. Up. Down. Down. Stop it! She wants to scream. Just stop it! Leave me alone! The other girl does nothing. She only stares back, dumbly. Of course, what do you expect a reflection to do? I am everything you are. You are a part of me. You can try to deny it, but I am everywhere you are. In everything you do, there is a part of me.

The girl stares at the mirror. The mirror stares back. She wrinkles her rather large nose. Stringy hair, bad complexion. "Oh yeah, and you're short. Or at least that's what Grandma says. And Grandma says. And Grandma's word is law. Or at least that's what Grandma thinks."

Oh why, oh why, can't she just go away, go back home where she belongs. The girl shuts her eyes. Her mouth closes tightly in a frown, maybe thinking her gone will make her disappear. I was fine until she came. Fine! When was the last time I was fine? How long had she been here?

Time no longer had a meaning. It was only a pitiful little distraction. It's only purpose was for counting the hours, too many, until she leaves.

The girl opens her eyes suddenly, too suddenly. She goes temporarily blind from the sunlight pouring in her window. I'll probably go to Hell for thinking these things. But, according to Grandma, I'll probably be going there anyway. Heaven forbid, I'm not perfect like her!

Don't you ever laugh as the hearse goes by,
for you may be the next to die!

I wish she would die, sometimes. Sometimes I wonder how much longer I can put up with this, before I kill her! I can't do anything right. Not in Grandma's eyes. "You're short," she says. Grandma is five nine. That was my greeting when we picked her up. "I can't believe you're still so short."

We should have left her at the airport.

She criticizes everything I do, everything, everything, Everything!

Excuse me if I'm wrong, I must have been living in a fairytale all my life. I always thought grandmothers were supposed to be sweet and kind old ladies. I thought grandmothers baked cookies. I thought they gave their grandchildren birthday presents. I didn't think they were arrogant hypocrites with the notion that they are the closest thing to God, and no one else can do anything!

Maybe, it's just her. Is it her? Maybe, it's really just the vodka talking.

I can't believe you're still so short.

Did you ever think
So immature for your age.
as the hearse goes by
Absolutely no culture
that I might wish for you to die.

The girl opens her eyes, she doesn't even remember closing them. She puts down the pen, all bent out of shape. She doesn't even remember picking it up. You are a part of me. I'm in your every action, your every move, your every thought. Even when I leave you, I'll still be here. The shame of being related to the Wicked Witch of the Midwest.

Somewhere, a voice is calling, it slides in between the cracks of the bedroom door. "Come on down, we're leaving for dinner!"

The girl sighs. Time to go downstairs and face Grandma. Are we all ready? Pull yourself together. Just a couple of hours. What's a couple of hours out of this whole couple of weeks? The evil one is there, waiting, in her blood red mink coat. "Coming!"

The girl opens her door and takes the long, dreary walk down the hallway. It seems to her that her footsteps make an awful echoing sound on the floor. On a carpeted floor? Just your imagination again. Left. Right. Left. Right. Band forward march! Roll your feet! The black cliff of the stairs looms ominously on the right now. She begins the descent. The girl sighs as a smile slowly forms on her tightly drawn lips. The music is back. Someone is playing it, softly, in the background. Songs of the season fill her head.

Grandma got run over by a reindeer...

Tracey Martin
Abington, PA
Abington Senior High School
Charles Baker

Not A Crow

At the cemetery,
everyone held flowers.
We were supposed to throw them
on the coffin.
The drumbeat the carnations made,
as they hit,
sounds forever in my ears.
It made the petals
jump off in fear;
it almost made my knees buckle.

I put my flower
at the mercy of the wind.
It landed safely on an overgrown grave,
with weeds as thick as clouds,
with a withered wreath on it.
As we were leaving,
I heard a strong, clear song
cutting through the bitter cold.
To me it was the song of my flower,
rejoicing.
My father said it was a crow.

I didn't believe him.

Elizabeth Cherry
New City, NY
Clarkstown High School North
Ms. Jones

The Hollow

It was the most enormous tree
I just had to climb it
Kept climbing and climbing
There was a little hole
About the size of my small body
At the top of the tree trunk
I'd yell down the trunk
And hear my voice echo.

I'd brought a rope this time
That I tied to a branch
And I'd slide down the rope
Into the hole
'til I hit bottom.

I wasn't scared
Though now, I think that
I probably should have been
With all the strange things
That could have lived in that
Hollow of a trunk.

Light shone in from the
Hollow in the top, but not much
Just a glow enough to
Faintly tell what it actually
Looked like down there.

I stuck my foot out of
The tiny hole in the bottom
And sang into the limbs
They sang back and talked to me
After my concert, I climbed the rope
And headed home.

Laura Green
Bristow, VA

Distance and Grace

As we went under the brown covered bridge, you told me I had to hold my breath to make a wish come true. I tried to, but my head was swimming from the four hours of driving and even the cracked window couldn't stop the waves of nausea. My feet prickled hot under my suitcase. Your mother's cooing couldn't ease the tension in my back. We're almost there. See--there's the Tamworth Inn and the cemetery. The house is just up that hill. Do you feel alright, hon?

It's a good thing the car couldn't muster enough power to propel itself up that hill. Although pushing it was hard work and my muscles were like knots from sitting so still, I was still relieved for the chance to step outside into the feathery snow. My head cleared and felt empty and hollow.

Your grandfather stood in the doorway of the white motherly-house, stiff as an icicle and twice as cold. Like an ancient guard he opened the door and let the smell of boiled broccoli and pork into the stale night air. He scratched his gray beard as a welcome. His blue eyes looked down from six feet above us but never came to focus on me. In a voice loud enough to be heard through his age dulled ears, you spoke, "I've missed thee, Grandfather. How is thy health?" He enunciated an even answer, but I didn't hear because I was still tripping on the pronoun.

I guess you explained well enough, later in your aunt's old bedroom. You, my very best friend on earth, had neglected to inform

me of your heavenly beliefs. Quakers seemed to me part of a book, not breathing, living people. Yet there you sat, upstairs in your ancestral home, a character with a new dimension. It was a dimension which would never be a part of me, a sort of distance like the difference between my "you" and your "thee." I was out of my element.

Not that you didn't try to include me. You tried to guide me in Quaker grace but more than one hundred years blocked my comprehension. When Papa, as you call him, squeezed my hand, I didn't know to take my turn and squeeze yours. As we sat around the oak table holding hands, I came to realize that I had been the one to break the chain which would have touched everyone there.

I slept in the bed by the smeary window in your aunt's room, covered in scratchy wool blankets that tore the tears from my eyes and made me sneeze. Your grandfather insisted that allergies were "all in the head." At night when I couldn't stand the burning throat and hives, I'd carefully drop all the covers to the floor very quietly so the wooden floors wouldn't scream as they customarily did with any movement. My toes suffered the chill and I often awoke rigid and shivering.

You told me I had the best bed. You said I'd be able to look out the crisp pane in the early breath of every morning to see a hazy blue Mount Washington in the distance. Every day I'd look out into mist or snow. It was hard to picture a view when my distant company was hiding from me.

One afternoon we went rummaging through the musty, fading barn. The snow shoes were usable, however dusty. You graciously took the older pair as I stood on the new. Mine fell off over the creek and I crashed through the ice like thunder. I laughed, you laughed and the hemlocks laughed as they tried to shake the new snow off their frail limbs. My pants froze to my legs on the way home but my feet felt strangely hot.

Your grandfather didn't laugh when he saw the torn strips of rawhide on his snow shoes. My feet still burned, even by the wood stove, and I longed to run outside and extinguish them in the snow drifts. I felt I could distance myself from the distance I felt inside the house which had seemed so humble and motherly at first. I could leave the cold inside for that cool outside. My footprints would be found beside the moose tracks beyond the "No trespassing" signs.

I never did venture out alone. Instead I hunted down an old toboggan in the still older barn with you. We hauled it out and set it up at the top of the hill, ready to fly. Halfway down I tumbled off, bouncing then sinking down, as you sped away. I didn't want another ride because the first one hurt too much.

I found a book of poetry on one of the shelves in your grandfather's study. I saw his name on the cover and it felt like the remnants of a February wind stirred in that room. But inside that book, crisp pages flowed, one word dancing on another as I read on. Just as I reached the conclusion of the second poem, my feet grew hot and I knew he was there with me. As I turned and surrendered the book to his open, expectant hand, I happened to glance at his melty eyes. A tinge of vulnerability hid behind the milkiness. "These are really good," I said, but I was not sure his hearing aid picked up the response. He handed the book back and left the room.

I awoke the next day to Mount Washington's blue graceful figure rising in the distance. The snow and mist had cleared and revealed a presence I could have pictured only in dreams. That form had been watching me the entire time, though I could not see his eyes on me.

We joined hands for grace that night and the flames licked the soles of my feet again. Your father's press on my hand led the heat upward and through to my other hand, and then to yours as I squeezed it. The ripple traveled the distance around the table, finally reaching its origin, your grandfather. The warmth wrapped around the table, and though I was not a Quaker, I was shaking.

Kristen Stoll
Amsterdam, NY
Galway Central School
Arlene Rhodes

mermaid posture

i stood in
mermaid stance
at the front of our
zipped firecracker boat,

to the beat of
the lake ripples and wakes,

and crawled up
past the front seat
to the tip
of the sea craft,
hanging on to the bars,

with my back arched
kneeling on top
of the boat
as if in prayer,

my hair still sticky
from a morning swim
blown off my face,
it gave me
a perfect view of the
blue blue rich blue sky

as we sped around
in circles
i almost believed
that if i let go
i'd be carried away
by the lake wind

never sinking
to the soupy bottom,
never floating back
to the dry shore.

Mora Stephens
New York, NY
Hunter College High School
Ms. Matthews

Untitled

In a traditional sense, honey would be affiliated first with the word sweet. Yes I'm quite sure that if one conducted a Word Association test on a diverse group of human beings, the predominant response to the word honey would be sweet. Or perhaps bee, which is good, for the creator should always be acknowledged. But back to sweet - the overwhelming evidence suggests that honey's purpose in the world is to be sweet. Why would honey be a name of affection if it were not just an alternate way of saying sweetie? Yes hello you good lovely person I much admire, you remind me of a thick runny brown syrup which can be, in a tight spot, used as a replacement for glue. Yep, that is the first word that comes to mind when I think of you.

When honey gets hot, it breaks down, it gives up its firm stand, its attempt to stay put, and just runs. I run, doing what I'm wanted to do, fall back, arms open, leaving my stomach in all vulnerability - lick me, just do it. But when cold, shrinking away, evasive, introverted, my elements run back into me, melting back, becoming one whole body again, a bubble the only evidence of exploitation. When

frigid, I am stiff, even crunchy on the outside, just trying to protect myself from the spoon, from the warm spoon. I just want to stay whole.

Not all honey is the same or even similar for that matter, apart from its general label. Sioux bee is dark and murky with a sickening taste which burns the throat and with a texture that leaves its mark. I look very clear and easy, so why am I so tainted, so colored. Perhaps I was born clear, but so many bees have wiped their feet upon me in contributing to my development, that I have taken on a tinted image, and a difficult nature. I'm quite sure that they figure that I am of them and therefore I do not feel the pinch of their needles or the sting of their poison. I have bubbles to show. I will not ever be clear and will forever be manipulated, stirred, baked, large portions of me sliding down the throats of others.

Oh but how I love myself, how I love to wallow in myself, move my body slowly, enticingly, like a belly dancer. I dive into myself and mush around shifting as if in ecstasy to be so unctuous smooth so runny off the spoon thick on the fingers and swimmy in myself no up no down no end so I can hide and none know where to find me but they know they need and I know I am needed but I give none what they want not ever for I am luscious more than they can taste me so I am unbounded and they are fast restricted and know but won't ever be able to overcome it their passion for my venom their passion for control of me they pour me from jar to jar try to rush me but my man-handle is syruped elusive uninfluence . . . unless of course unless I am hot, hot and becoming . . .

yielding the heat melts my facade turning my seep to a flow my poison to malmsey wanton I accept the spoon becoming fervent I satiate my potent sweetness no longer burns the throat but runs down and down I lose myself becoming no longer my own but of the violator consuming me winsome losing more becoming an undulating layer on my heated intruder lost become but a sticky residue on a short wispy hair.

Alexis Perkins
Bedford, NY
Rye Country Day School
Jonathan Rosenshine

Reminders

My mom tells me to tie
ribbons on my fingers
because I have
last week's ink on my hand
still
left from a reminder, I forgot.
It blends with my veins
at a glance
and it's so hard to wash around!
When I try
the soap always urges
it to swim down my slippery hand.
So off slides my message
in fat blue tears
down the drain
and I have an extra vein
and a mark of the future
I forgot
creased into my hand.

Rachel Slaughter
East Amherst, NY

Moishe Kapoir

you turn your head
so as not to see me
my wounded Liebchen*
How you used to love me

tears pool in my soul
for the love you once gave freely
now
I see guarded eyes
you're lost to me...
and it cuts like a knife
After 30 years of holding you
to cradle memories
is seeping salt on a wound.

I remember when your eyes first
kissed mine
hesitant little innocent eyes
peeking from a gamine face
I loved your eyes!
They spoke to me the way you
couldn't
Mein Schatzchen
I read your eyes
so I waited ten years for you.

Forgive my lies, I loved you.

To feel your shoulders in my
arms
your heart beating above mine
to kiss your gentle fawn-like
neck...to love you
I had to lie.
And every time my lips moved
with every breath I engulfed
I thought of you.
It killed me softly
to live these lies
but for you Lieblich
all of it, I would do again.
For you
I kept my secret sealed in my
breast
the sins of my father...
in the name of HITLER...
My father
raised his hands
smiting the cheek
of
over six million Jews
under the tuition
of Lucifer
he ripped Mother from
child
severed the ties
of husband and wife
with hardened heart
he conditioned his feet
in the dance of war
accustomed his hands
to the weight of his gun

apprenticed his lips to the
Nazi Doctrine,
submerged his mind
in the "Aryan Truth."
My father
this man
who read bedtime stories with
ease
laughing, cajoling, admonishing
me
This man
My father
herded Jews in concentration
camps
guided lambs
to a merciless slaughter.

My gentle Klara
I always knew this day
would come
when my secret,
my Private shame
would unfold
before
your trusting eyes,
Mein Schatzchen,
my gentle Klara.
But
to see you
lifeless on the ground
blood leaking from
your wound
to know you sacrificed
this precious spirit
denied innocent lungs
the breath of life.
My gentle Klara
my trusting wife
I remember...
finding your note,
My Klara
gentle no longer,
your words of hate swimming for
lines
your punishing anger...
then the BLESSED words
"Moishe Kapoir"
that let me know
Mein Schatzchen
that even in your anger
your gentle heart
forgave me.

*Liebchen/Lieblich/Mein Schatz-
chen--German endearments.
Moishe Kapoir--Yiddish alias,
"believe the opposite of
what I wrote."

Leesa Falashadeh Samuels
Jamaica Queens, NY
Mrs. Piranio

Exercise in Futility

"I like you," he was saying. "You think about things." He stretched out on the blanket. "You're different from all these silly New York girls."

"I am a silly New York girl." The phrase brought to mind some Bruce Springsteen song I'd heard, but I couldn't place it. I lay on my stomach, feeling the bends and sags of the blanket on the beach beneath me and filtered cool, coarse grains of sands through my sunburnt fingers. "Sometimes I think too much."

"The ocean is so beautiful at night, when you can barely make out where the black of the water meets the black of the sky." He was so pretentious it was funny. Melissa probably thought he was deep and poetic. He probably recited Neruda while they screwed. What a joke.

"I'm cold." It was almost September and the Pennsylvania nights were getting chilly, as my mother would say. Soon my family and Melissa's family would be packing up the summer house and going home. I couldn't tell which option was least appetizing.

"I'll keep you warm," he said, and put his arm around my shoulders.

"You really shouldn't come on to me. I think about things, remember?" I stood up and grabbed my sandals. "And Melissa will be back soon. You do want to get laid tonight, don't you?" I walked towards the dunes, letting my feet sink in the sand and swinging my hips casually, so as not to betray to him how shaken I was inside. I don't like guys. I don't like what they've done to me, and I don't like how they've turned Melissa into a bumbling idiot. When we were little she was so cool, building massive sand castles and defending them from the older kids who tried to kick them down or dissolve them with buckets of salty water. She never took any shit from anybody. Now she's turned to mush, wobbling at the knees and turning all glassy-eyed from any form of male attention. That summer she'd given all of them stories to tell when football season stared. And I had to lie on our towel and pretend not to see her play with their hair and giggle and rub against them in her bikini with her baby oil skin.

I sat in the patchy grass at the foot of the first dune and lay back against its cold grainy hardness. The wind blew in salt gusts, levitating a layer of sand and sending seaweed rolling into the stormy ocean. My hair whipped at my face, and I raised my arms above me, stretching and letting out a weak, unsatisfying sigh. The beach was deserted this time of night, and I decided that when I grew up I would be a hermit, emerging from my reed hut only when the shore was this quiet and beautiful and sad like me.

"Hey, lady, you better not sit there when the tide comes in." A loud obnoxious prepubescent voice shouted at me. "You might wash away and get eaten by a shark." I looked around for another person, but all I saw for miles around was the beach and the ocean and the spinning lights of the Ferris wheel at the boardwalk.

"I'm up here," the voice taunted. I looked above me and saw the silhouette of a young boy standing on the dune. But before I could crane my neck to get a better look at him, he jumped down, landing with a soft thud behind me on the sand. "Scared ya, didn't I?"

I let out the breath I had been holding in. "What did you do that for? You could've hurt yourself."

He shrugged. "Nah. I do that all the time."

"Well, you could've hurt me."

"But I didn't, did I?" In the moonlight I could make out his red, candied apple cheeks and glittering white blonde hair. I stood up and brushed myself off. "What are you doing here, anyway? Isn't it past your bed time?"

He picked up a few broken sea shells and tossed them, one by one, into the water. "What are you, my mother?" A smooth white shell flew into the air with a flick of his wrist, skimming the water with a long series of bounces before it was swallowed by the violent, lapping waves. I chose a shell from the thick muddy beach by the water and flung it. It sank into the shallow part unceremoniously.

"Wait," he said, rubbing his runny nose with a pudgy red finger, "That's not how you do it. Let me show you." He bent over in solemn concentration, searching for another smooth, little, aerodynamic shell. He knelt in the shallow pool and crawled further in, soaking the edges of his denim shorts. I turned and began my own search. This is fun, I thought. I could have spent all summer learning how to skim shells on the surface of the water. And this kid isn't so bad, either. He's kind of cute, in a little boy sort of way. He's uncorrupted by the evil forces of testosterone.

Suddenly I was lying on my stomach, eating and breathing water. A large, strong wave rolled over me, pinning me to the ground. Then it receded, dragging sand and seaweed and rocks and me into the ocean with it. I dug my nails and toes into the sand with all my strength, not letting my body get pulled along with all the other muck. When it was over I lay there for a moment, drained of my energy and ability to move. The water was silent again, calm and amiable and solid. Gradually I sat up, looking next to me to make sure the boy was all right. He was nowhere to be seen. There were no footprints in the flattened sand, no one swimming back to shore.

"Hello?" I screamed, spinning around, frantically surveying the beach. "Where are you?" I sank to my knees and let my sand-soaked hair fall in my face. I looked out at the horizon, where the black of the water met the black of the sky. Where had I heard that before? I raised my hand to my cheek, but there were no tears. I wanted desperately to cry, to mourn the little boy and his lost innocence. But I guess I knew it was already lost.

Deborah Stein
Douglaston, NY
Hunter College High School
Nell Scharff

Places Where You Fit

You fit
on Scotch
bottle
labels
like
"Johnny Walker"
with
red
rider
jacket
top
hat
khaki trousers
(pleated)
and boots
and cane
maybe
how you
would have
looked
then.

You fit
on papers
stuck
to new
car windows
you blend
with the smell
of polo
cologne
and barb
equed
steak
as you

jangle
with the sound
of pocket
change
falling
between
couch
cushions.

You
fit
neatly
inside
gold watches
and pens
leaving
the four of us
four years
ago
to fit
without seatbelts
in an
old
black
broken
caprice
wagon
with
no
brakes.

Anne Frederick
Williamsville, NY
Williamsville East High School
Mary Richert



Christine Brown
Wading River, NY
Shoreham-Wading River High
School
Karen Peterson

Archeology

We come to the desert
With tools and books, hoping
To find a body buried in the sand,
Looking for cause of death.
The wind whirls around us,
Weather was never good here.
With the flat landscape
Before us, it seems the whole world
Is a desert.

We begin digging,
And find bottles and cans,
No more than ten years old.
No use to us until they reach
a million. The cans will stay,
Maybe outlive us, unless we find

Our dinosaurs, preserved in death.
Perhaps they will tell us something.

Night spreads over the desert
And we have found nothing.
Tomorrow we dig in another place,
Where they would go in the days
When this place was not a desert,
Where they still remain,
Without knowing why, or how,
Or what could have saved them
And us.

Michael Berger
New York, NY
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Indigo's Blues

I know someone who says he will leave his wife for me. Why? Because he likes my personality, my sense of humor. You see, that all comes with the age. We have a sort of unspoken deal. He makes me feel young and when he comes over, he don't have to worry about not eatin or gettin enough sleep. He can relax, drink a beer, and learn to make love. You know, that old kind of lovin. The kind your grandmother and grandfather used to make in the middle of the night. Yes, me and that young boy be creatin some of that ole sweat. I know his wife. She's one those women whose beauty goes down everyday with the sun. Everyday I look out my window, and see her pushin a stroller across the street and carryin a bag of groceries from the corner store. Her hair pulled back off her face in a soft, loose plait with a child's yellow barrette at the end is tar brown from too much dye. She looks like one of those suburb mothers. This city is no place for a girl like that. But then again every girl in the city starts out like her and then somebody comes along the way and runs off with all of their stuff.

God, I remember how that used to be. To get pregnant at seventeen and have to drop out of school. I remember workin at the convenience store sellin boxes of maxi pads and condoms to the guys and girls at school. Where did all those condoms go? They sure as hell didn't go on those guys to stop young girls from gettin pregnant. I remember havin so many problems gettin started and not knowin what to do I was too proud to go on welfare so I worked till my feet got calloused and hard. When you're livin like that (livin for basically nothin) you get used to havin nothin. I swear I wore the same blue dress everyday just so I could give my babies some new clothes.

Indigo remembers feelin blue. So blue she could have taught Bessie Smith how to sing. She couldn't go to sleep without cryin first. Like the time baby Carl got put in jail for hittin this white man up the street. The police officer said Carl assaulted the man when the man only said a few racist words to him. Minor stuff, they said. But if it was so minor why did her boy slam the white man's head on the counter? She always tole her children "Don't let nobody ever put you down," and she thought Carl was thinkin about that when he did what he did.

Well, I tried to get him out on bail but the police officer at the station said they couldn't let him go yet and that I had to get the bail money anyhow. That boy had the nerve to get pissed off at me cause I couldn't get him out right away. And I worked day and night tryin to get the money. I almost debated sellin myself in the evenins. I mean, I even had my daughter workin down at the five and dime on 4th and Leonard. Now, I have loved Carl since he was a little baby, but I never saw his hair look as nappy as it did when he got out. He said he was becomin natural and gettin back to his roots. But the worst thing was he tole me that he couldn't eat pork anymre. Said that pork was the white man's way of killing the black man while he sat up in his castle eatin prime rib. Didn't that boy know chittlins and scrapple were the only things on sale at the food market! He kept goin on about some man named Muhammed Elijah, bean pies, and As-A-Mama-Lay-Combs (at least that's what it sounded like to me). The boy could get up and pray at four o'clock in the mornin when even God isn't awake but couldn't make it for church on Sunday. I guess he got fed up with us common black folk cause one day I woke up and he was packin all of his stuff in his Pinto. Ran off with one of his Muslim friends. Right now he's livin on Albright Avenue. He don't never call or anything but that's alright. I been hearin he's sellin crack and sleepin with a bunch of stank ho's. But that's how kids do you.

Cecil's Indigo's youngest. That girl does everything to drive her mama crazy. She started gettin uppity around the time tha Carl was in jail. Cecil knew that Indigo worked hard but she started complainin. She didn't want to bring her boyfriends home because the house looked like a mess. All Indigo heard was "But Mama, I'm

seventeen", "Mama, I need new clothes", "Mama, I can't do the dishes, I got a date real soon". Her baby face cracked suddenly and fell to pieces amidst the womanly beauty hidden behind it.

I kept askin why she needed to bring her boyfriends home. All you did on a date was go to the movies, get somethin to eat and bring your ass home before twelve o'clock. God, that girl was fresh. I remembesr times I took her to the supermarket, and forty-year old men would have their noses wide open when she walked by. I'm talkin about men old enough to be her granddaddy. I know she didn't get all that freshness from me. It musta been from her daddy's side of the family. Yeah, she moved out not too long after Carl, sayin she didn't have enough room to breathe around the house.

So now Indigo spends her days with this young boy and lives off her social security check. His wife is real nice. The quiet type. He keeps sayin how he's going to leave her so he can grow old with Indigo. Indigo thinks his leaving her will make things easier. At least then she could get on welfare. She sees it in her eyes. Even when she's walkin from the corner store with her belly full of child. It's hope. Hope that things will get better. That her kids will at least grow up half decent. Indigo remembers how hard it was to live with children who hurt you and leave that hurt behind for memories. Indigo wonders if tha hurt is what gives people the blues. And she believes his wife will have to deal with it.

Yolanda Wisher
North Wales, PA
North Penn High School
Kathy Walsh

Untitled

She has lost God
they hush in tones not to but about,
listening from inside the hallway closet,
lacing JCPenney Men's hi-tops and green-heathered socks.
She looked so beautiful
in the itchy Communion dress damp with urine,
leaning a gap-tooth smile at Grandmother's
sweaty, machine-driven bedside.
Five years of Catholic
sermons grasped through second-hand wincing
as Sister Mary Mathias rapped a best friend's small, chalky
knuckles with a #2 ruler, silent, for no good person
likes a girl whose best friend is a boy.
All dressed in her plaid jumper
with green wool knee socks rolled down Olive Oil-style
in the June heat, writing notes on the 10 Commandment page of
a Catechism notebook, winning an hour's free
recess time when Christiane's braided, ribboned pigtails
threw up during the Apostle's Creed, learning the preamble
to the Bible at age four to be recited at kindergarten graduation.
Crying with Alyson for sandbox fighting--
Stephen started it -- but good little girls
shouldn't argue with bad little boys.
She was such a good girl
and now a bitch for refusing to bow
to their blue-lit shrines of Mary
and Saint So-and-So, mumbling something once
learned, locking the front door behind.
In the beginning there was nothing here but darkness.

Kellie Walsh
Lansdale, PA
North Penn High School
Dr. Kathie Walsh

The Kidnapper

I am the one who sees them off to school
With enticing candy corn and sticky lollipops.
I will never be loved,
But I have ways of making love with them.
I am warning you to keep them close.

I will offer them a game
And create a carnival in my basement.
And, if they were to see me on the street,
They would never tell you
Because I have recorded a voice inside of them
As vicious as the monster in their closet,
And it comes out to kill you
Every time they mention me.

Cassie Gutman
Washington, NJ
Voorhees High School
Lois Harrod

Angelcoats

Someone told me once
Angels in their quilted coats
Battered feet
Bloodied noses
Tattered wings
Still fly high
Bring my prayers
With tongues of cream
To the God
Who had a face
When I was young
An angel in a puffy coat
Scraped knee
A flattened bicycle-nose
Flew to God in borrowed wings.

Elizabeth Boykewich
Rutherford, NJ
Rutherford High School
Paul Buhtanic

Grandmother's Hands

From far away, old women look human.
But up close you focus on their hands:
the skin, glossy, plated, like molten Velveeta,
the stains of watery brown marking them as dying ones.

Sometimes, holding a grandmother's decrepit hand,
you notice the vacuum of dry surface against your palm,
the cool soft leatheriness. You are almost reminded
of the sticky, moist warmth of a child's hand
so far removed is it from the parched skin:
faint and flaccid, barely there.

Alicia Rabins
Towson, MD
Towson High School
William Jones

Inhale, Exhale

Two and a half weeks of missions work--it all seemed so appealing at first. Now, however, as I sit on a crowded bus at 6:00 A.M. traveling toward Philadelphia Airport, my trip has taken on an entirely new light. It's not the thought of foreign culture that scares me--I can even handle the food--it's just the...well...the flight that makes the tips of my toenails tremble with terror.

"There's nothing to it, Jess," claims the blond eighteen-year-old behind me. I toss him an appreciative smile. My smile means, "Shut up, talking scares me," but he must not have read it that way because he continues his monologue.

"Actually," he says as he takes off his leather flight jacket, "air travel is the safest travel around." I doubt it. Somehow the idea of hanging at thirty thousand feet above the earth, suspended on nothing but a bunch of forces and fervent prayer, appeals to me as much as listening to the rest of my "aviator-wannabe" friend's speech.

Two hours and four million air travel statistics later, we arrive in Philly. We have an hour until our flight leaves so I take advantage of the time, watching the planes coming in and out and reminding myself that six hours on a plane can't be that bad. I wander into the gift shop, followed by my "angel of good news" and his flight facts. I continue to tune him out and turn my attention instead to the row of pills on the opposite wall of "Flying High Gifts." Pills for motion sickness, pills for nausea, pills for congestion--how can flying be safe if it requires so much medicine?

Realizing that watching airport life only scares me more, I report back to my group leader. "Fifteen minutes 'till flight, Jess," he says smiling. I'm glad he's excited. My initial anticipation has faded, and now I am completely terrified. Lonely, lost, and confused, I quickly seek out my information bank.

He smiles and puts an arm around me, as he hands me a folded piece of paper. "Read this on the plane," he says. I look up at him waiting for an encouraging report. By this time, however, the computer in a flight jacket has traded his golden harp for a fiery pitchfork. "To be honest, Jess," the edges of his eyes crinkle with intensity, "American Airlines has had three crashes this year." His blue eyes sparkle with amusement as my lips move from and attempted brave smile to a worried frown and my eyes widen with fear.

"But don't worry, I'm sure your plane won't crash." The laughter in his eyes begins to annoy me, and I turn my head just as the screechy voice on the intercom pierces the silence with, "Flight 223 for Jacksonville, Florida, boarding at gate five."

I turn and run for the gate followed by my constasnt companion showering me with apologies. I give my mom, dad, and sister hugs and kisses, and I turn to my group leader to receive my ticket. At least, I assume, on a trip of fourteen teenagers and six adults, I'm bound to sit beside at least one person my age.

I grab my duffel bag and head through the gray tunnel on my left. I see only darkness ahead of me and I soon realize that I am walking into certain death: I am entering the airplane.

"Keep going, Jess," I say to myself: I breathe deeply--inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale...."Millions of people fly every day." Somehow that thought doesn't help.

Once inside the plane, I quickly find my row--each row contains three seats--and realize that I'm sitting in the middle seat. A gentleman from my group is already sitting in the aisle seat of my row. I smile briefly at him and sit down. He begins a one-sided conversation that will continue for the next three hours. "Jess, what do you feel is the biggest problem facing youth today?" he asks. I open my mouth to answer, but he has already begun his response. He continues for some time and I tune him out concerning myself, rather, with watching his third chin bounce up and down as he speaks. After what seems like hours, my observation of the movement of body fat is interrupted by the presence of a tall, stately man in the aisle beside our row. His dark hair and glasses are set off by his

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dark suit, and he smiles as he squeezes past me into the window seat. The tall man on the left, my assistant pastor, and the short man on my right, a Sunday school teacher, continue their discussion on the problems facing American youth.

They are interrupted, however, by a voice over the intercom. "Hello!" This is your pilot. Please observe the stewardess in the aisle demonstrating the safety devices on this plane. Have a good flight."

Safety devices? What? I thought "air travel was the safest travel around." I watch the blond, size-five woman in front of me as she demonstrates an oxygen mask and a flotation device. My eyes glue to her every move because I know that these two objects are my only chance for survival. She finishes her demonstration much too quickly, and I clutch the arm rests on my seat tightly as the floor shakes with the starting of the motor. My knuckles turn white from pressure and I remember the note that my walking encyclopedia had pressed into my hand before I left. I buckle my safety belt as instructed and turn my attention to the crumpled piece of paper in my sweaty palm.

"Jess,

Good luck. You'll do fine. I'll miss you while you're away.

Love--

Bryan"

I swallow hard to avoid tears and chew my gum like mad as the plane begins to speed down the runway. I fall back into my seat as I feel the ground beneath me lift up at a high angle. I close my eyes tightly and brace myself for the explosion. It never happens. The theologians on either side of me continue expounding on the Scriptures, as I begin to relax. Glancing back toward the airport, I swear I see a leather flight jacket in the distance, and I know I see its owner remove his pilot sunglasses. My fear disappears, and I begin to enjoy the beauty of the clouds as I see his blue eyes sparkle with amusement and his countenance break into his gorgeous smile.

"Maybe he's right," I think while we soar through a circle of white, puffy clouds. "Maybe flying isn't that bad after all."

Jessica Fausnacht
Lititz, PA
Warwick High School
Sally Watkins

Harlequin

The arrangements have been made
as she waits upstairs,
a brown-face wrapped in a sari,
as the rose color walls
and porcelain harlequin dolls
begin to tremble
like expensive china plates
left out on the table in an earthquake.

And she gears the clasping of hands:
her father and a stranger
she now belongs to.
Spoons clatter downstairs,
feet shuffle and every voice
binds her hands tighter
and forces her fingers together.

Refreshments are being served
as silver spoons and chipped tea cups jingle
in sync
and they're calling her down.

She's rehearsed this before:
head down, not too quickly,
stare at the floor, don't be too eager,
and be careful only your feet
peep from underneath
your blood red sari
with gold dripping edges.

It tightens around her,
tying her fingers to each other,
weaving through empty spaces in her body
until finally reaching an eye
then gouging through one to the other.
They melt together and spill down her cracked, stained
harlequin face
as clear sticky liquid.
And the red silk steals her blood,
woven from her own hands.

No, they must stand at least five feet apart
and she mustn't ask questions
though her mind will wonder,
what he eats and what he sings in the shower
and when the beggars follow him
along a winding street
does he speed up or slow down
and turn around and
does his tie match his socks
and does he laugh out loud or
silently inside himself
in a distant place where I am not allowed
and will he know my name and
will he know my name?

But it doesn't really matter at all.

The days will drift to answer
these unspoken questions
and white walls will fulfill her
and harlequins
will hang steadily on the wall
and she'll forget her face

but for now she must
descend the
stairs one by one
and land silently with a crash.

Reena Shah
South Windsor, CT
South Windsor High School
Stephen Foley & Patricia Davidson

Trouble in River City

The waves. The waves were everywhere.

I had the hot sun beating down on my body, and I was in a deep trance brought on by the waves passing through the ocean. I looked out as far as I could and all I could see were the waves coming in towards my feet. I saw where the sky and the ocean met, a line with a dark blue on one side, a lighter blue on the other. On the light blue side there were white clouds, on the dark blue side there were white-capped waves. It was as if the two were mirror

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But the waves were everywhere.

"Come on Johnny, the tide will be coming in soon! Let's go on out before it gets too deep!" My mother said, running daintily down the sandy beach beside my father. The tide was coming in, and at an alarming rate, yet I still followed after them as fast as my ten year old legs would take me.

Our family would always come to the beach every single year. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and family members I'd never seen before would come to our little beach spot for about a week or so and sit in the sun and swim in the ocean. Never once did we miss a year, since it was considered a family reunion of sorts. Every single year the whole family would come and have fun, especially out in the ocean. I loved the ocean.

I loved the waves.

My father, mother, and I all stepped out into the ocean hand in hand, getting that first rush of cold water that would shoot up your legs and onto the rest of your body. The waves would blast against your tummy causing you to jump back two or three steps, as you tried to push yourself out into the ocean. The three of us never lost our grip, holding onto each other as tightly as we could, laughing and skipping through the water.

We got up to where the water was at my stomach, and at that was when I began to have trouble with the waves. I held on tightly to my mom and dad, laughing as we went on, even though sometimes I would swallow some salt water from the waves. The waves began to get bigger, and that was when I would hear some of my most favorite words...

"Uh-oh Johnny, trouble in river city!" My dad would say just when a wave was about to push me up through the ocean. He would laugh, and so would mom and I, as the wave would come and splash us right in the face. We would all sink back down to the ocean floor and laugh again, for we all loved the water.

And I loved the waves most of all.

We stayed out in the water for a long time, letting the waves have their way with us, pushing and shooting us throughout the ocean. The three of us would shout out the words "Trouble in river city!" in unison, laughing as we did. I was up to my chest with salt water having one of the greatest times, thinking that it wouldn't get any better until dad said, "Hey Johnny, let's all go out farther!"

We all smiled with glee as the three of us waltzed out into the ocean. It was at this point that I couldn't touch the bottom floor. No longer could I feel the blunt sea shells that lay at the bottom of the ocean. If I was to stay above water, I would have to start treading like I was taught to in swimming lessons. It was here, where I couldn't touch the bottom any longer, that the waves were enormous. You would only find a few surfers or swimmers out this far, because this was where the waves would turn white and flow through you like if you were in a storm. This was where I loved to be the most. For this was River City.

"Uh-oh Johnny, you see them? You see the waves coming? Look at how big they are Johnny? They're coming to get you!" My dad would joke, tickling my sides under the water, acting as if he was a fish. I would laugh with him, and so would mom, for we did this every year. And every time we came out here, it got even better.

"Johnny, look out, trouble in river city!" Dad would shout as loud as he could, as the first big waves flew over us. We all went under the wave, holding our breath as we went. I couldn't see anything below except a foggy shade of blue, and the feeling of both mom and dad's grip around my hands. But something was wrong, I could feel dad's grip loosening. I couldn't say anything because we were still under water. All I could do was hold on as tight as I could, but dad was no longer holding on.

The wave finally passed by, and both mom and I shot up to

the surface, but there was no sight of dad.

"Jim? Jim, where are you?" Mom said, looking around her in all directions. She began to get worried, and held on to my hand tighter and tighter until it began to actually hurt. At this point she was shouting out dad's name, but was greeted with no reply. She tried to look under water, but all she could see was murky blue. She was now crying, and I soon began to get scared.

I looked over my shoulder, and saw something that almost frightened me. I called out to my mom, but now she was in hysterics. I kept on calling her until she finally acknowledged me with a frightened "What?!" I looked at her solemnly and said...

"Trouble in river city." It was the only thing that came to mind, mainly because a wave was toppling right over us. It hit right after I finished my sentence, not leaving any time for mom to scream but under water. I slowly felt her grip loosen, until I was all alone under the water.

The wave quickly passed and I shot back up to the surface. I screamed out for both my mom and my dad, but neither of them were in sight. I began to cry as I realized I was all alone, and way far out from the sandy beach. The only thing I could do was swim towards the beach and hope for mom and dad to be there already.

I was a good swimmer, at least a good ten year old swimmer, for my grandparents had made me take swimming lessons during the summer. But that was in a pool, this was out in the ocean, with all the waves.

I looked behind me, to see a white capped wave just about to topple over me. It was breathtaking, clear blue and foamy white, moving by some unknown force, right on top of me. I closed my eyes in fear and waited for it to come. The only thing I could think of was what dad used to always tell me when we were out in the ocean together with mommy.

"Uh-oh Johnny, trouble in river city!"

The wave hit me like no wave had ever before. I opened my eyes to see the bottom of the ocean. It wasn't murky or anything, just clear blue water. The ocean floor was covered in beautiful sea shells, with a couple of crabs scurrying over the bottom. And there were mom and dad, floating at the bottom with their hands outstretched towards me with large smiles on their faces. An air bubble or two would slip out of their mouths and up to the surface, and they looked blue like the ocean too. I could see fish and under water flowers throughout the ocean, but I couldn't see where the sky and the sea met anymore, but I didn't care. I grabbed onto mom and dad's hand and we began to swim again, this time under the waves. The three of us swam laughing together through River City.

Clay Chapman
Richmond, VA
Midlothian High School
Pete Raimist

12:23 A.M.

She sits alone
eating greasy handfuls
of microwave popcorn--
MTV flickers
in the corner--
Venetian blinds rattle
in the wind.
She thinks of the unfocused
blue

of his eyes without glasses,
the way his voice wavered
saying goodbye.

She wipes her fingers
on flowered cotton pajamas.
Darkness presses
against the windowpane.

Tess Thompson
Boalsburg, PA
State College Area High School

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