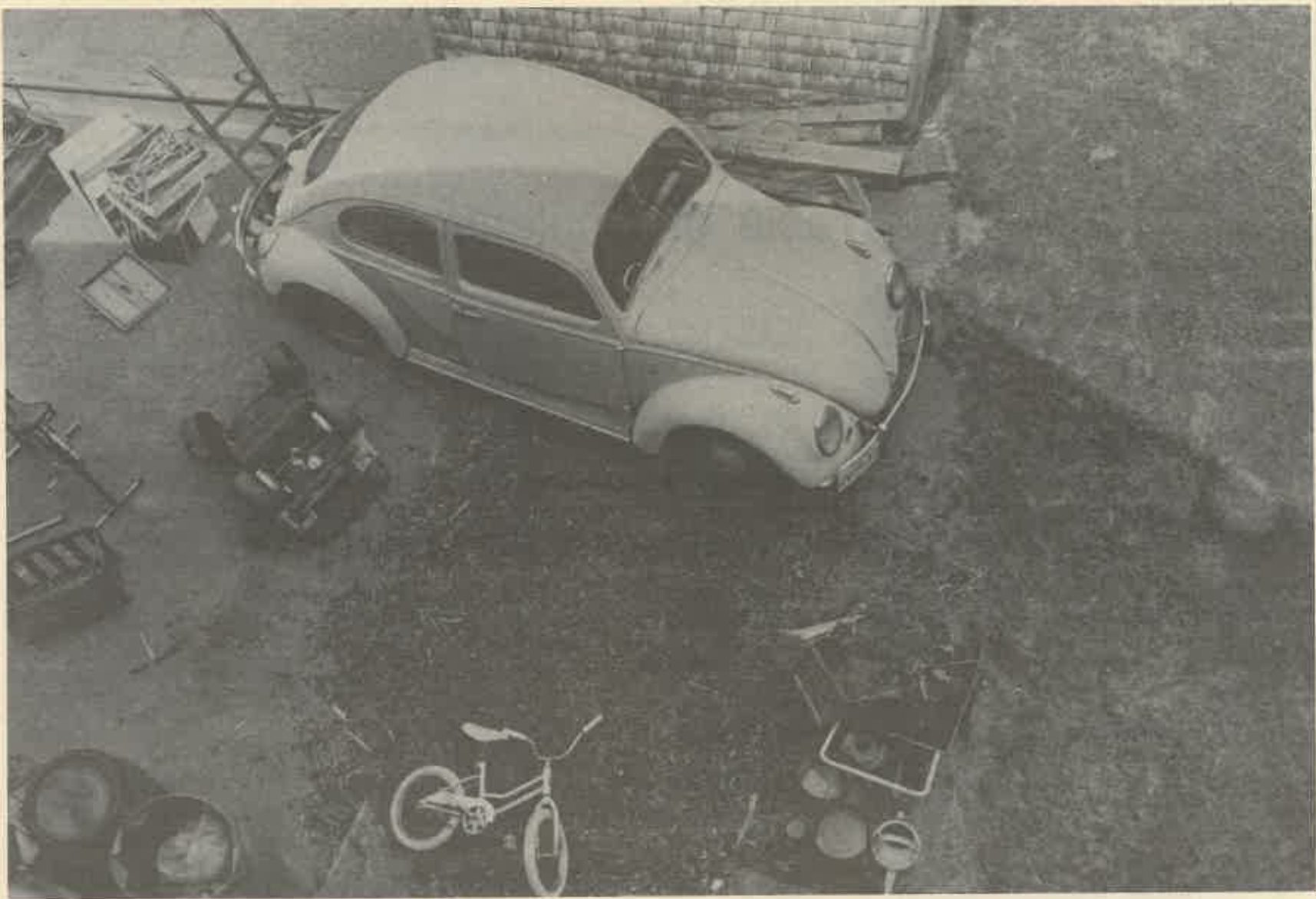


Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Peter Wohlen

VOLUME 12

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INTRODUCTION

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

Each year we send 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper THE DAILY ITEM in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to over 3,500 schols in the ten 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 the eight years many of those students and hundreds more have attended the Susquehanna Summer Writers' Workshops.

The summer workshops, which attract students in fiction, poetry, and magazine writing, are just one part of the Writers' Institute at Susquehanna University. The

Visiting Writers Series has brought artists such as Tobias Wolff, Robert Creeley, Sharon Olds, Lucille Clifton, Robert Boswell, Madison Smartt Bell, and Steven Dunn to campus. Advanced workshops are available in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. A student reading series, a literary magazine, and writing internships have provided interesting options for student writers, some of whom have published in national mag-

azines while still enrolled at Susquehanna.

We welcome inquiries from students and teachers about any of these programs which make up the Writers' Institute. Send material to be considered for THE APPRENTICE WRITER and any other inquiries to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870. The deadline for manuscript submissions is March 15, 1995.

THE APPRENTICE WRITER Number 12, 1994

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Boy on the Tractor (Frederick Folk Festival, 1978)

The sky of my memory is yellow
and filled with sharp needles of sun.
The boy in his wide-brimmed hat
was always away from me, separated
by patches of cut and uncut grass.
He rode his John Deere,
part of an exhibition for the company.
I followed my aunt and her boyfriend,
holding the stuffed cat they bought me,
hoping for a bright red candy apple
which at 3 was too big
for me ever to finish.
For weeks after,
the boy was all my parents heard
come out of my mouth.
I remember how he ate with me,
talked with me, was me
and how I drove my tree out front of my house
the way he drove the green machine.
I was one of the few people watching him that day,
fascinated that someone who was not an adult
could do something that
until now I'd only
seen grown-ups doing.
As we left the festival, I saw him again,
rounding the far corner,
turning the wheel, leaning to the inside
to be sure of what he was cutting.

Ellie Lyons
Towson, MD
Towson High School
William Jones

A Caged Butterfly

A blackbearded man
comes to sit on my momma's porch
wearing a straw hat
frayed to the edges
and adorned with butterflies
from the world over

Blackbeard says he remembers the fire
that crazy man on the hill started
says that he wasn't playing a fiddle
like Nero in Rome
but an old banjo that was a birthday present
from his aunt in Chicago

that fire blazed for days
wiped out all of that man's crops
like God's Great Flood
took one of the prettiest babies

his wife bore
had a 'face like' a shiny marble
cheeks full of giggles

his wife's family told her
to leave that dirty old dog
but she loved him
like he was the last drop of
convenience store perfume
and in her forgiveness
he built a house on the top of the hill
daring all the forces of nature
to defy his manhood

and that woman bore children
til she stopped bein' a child herself
she sat in the house
making things pretty with old soda bottles
singin' ballerina dreams
as she filled vintage brown creme soda bottles
with lilies and sprinkles of rosemary

the bottles rattled with the knocking
of the bedposts against the wall
and with each of his moans
she caught the reflection of the bottles
against the window shades
that would lift with just a tease
of wind

she sat in the house
bein' a woman
for quite some time until all the song
that was left in her
diminished to chirps of yes and no
the flapping shade yielding no temptation
any longer

instead she thought she saw
iron bars against the glass
thought she saw the door
striped with steel...
she withered as each child left
and she floated through the days
swimming on the dreariest of thoughts
until her soul left her eyes
to live a resful laidback life in the clouds

Blackbeard always takes his hat off
when he finishes
swallows my momma's lemonade
without a pause
and descends our steps to the dirt road
to the hill

today
i could have sworn i saw a butterfly
leave the edges of his hat
to tiptoe over the grass
float among the clouds
seeking heaven

Yolanda Wisher
North Wales, PA
North Penn High School
Dr. Kathie Walsh

Gingham

She wears gingham
and knows that sassafrass tea
and almond soap
soothe the soul
that marigolds are for daydreaming
about going to Mexico
loving matadors
with painted faces
roses between their teeth

she wears gingham but
isn't a warrior
or tall
full-lipped
amazon
she doesn't have diana ross
billy dee
lady sings the blues hair either

she can't wear embroidered hot pants
and moth winged collars
or cotton ball afros
cuz she really isn't like that
she was only made to dream

but
just like claudius' harlot*
she keeps covering her face
when the stars fall asleep
she keeps opening the drawer
with the fishnet stockings
sliding the forget me nots
behind her ear

hiding the gingham
under a lavender velvet cape
*from Hamlet

Yolanda Wisher
North Wales, PA
North Pennn High School
Dr. Kathie Walsh

The Angels

These days
my sister sits cutting out
angels
in the near-hallowed darkness
of her bedroom,
angels pasted by girlish fingers
on walls, on books, over the bed,
their feathered wings caressing,
their soft haloes dimmed by newsprint,
who once a night weep when
my sister, the holiest of lovers,
lights a single candle
for her earthly god.

Jennifer Carroll
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School
Dr. Blankenburg

At Cloisters

Outside the rain is pouring down.
It makes you seem almost like a painting
the way the light shines in on your face.
Are you looking for the sun
between the clouds in the sky,
or thinking about how you plan on dying?

Last night I had a dream
you were walking naked
through the museum.
All the statues watched your body
wander up and down the corridors,
hiding in the shadows as the rain
played tricks on the stained glass window
that showed Mary with her child
fast asleep and dreaming.

Christine Edwards
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School
Dr. Blankenburg

I'll Be Waiting for You When the Swimming Pool is Empty

I'll be waiting for you when the swimming pool is empty,
And dry autumn leaves blow across the cracked concrete,
Crackling, whispering like ancient laughter.

Amid moldy towels hanging from the fence, fluttering against
The dark sky, left long ago and forgotten,
I'll be waiting for you.

When the wind pushes a colored ball across the hard cement,
Over clumps of grass growing in the dirt-filled cracks,
Chased by the ghost of a little child,
I'll be waiting for you.

When you stare through the cold chainlinks of the fence,
Around the empty pool,
I'll be waiting there,
Whispering,
Daring you,
To come in and take a final dive.

Daniel Solomon
Bronx, NY
Ms. I. Weiss

A Deck of Cards

The wind was pressing in at the window, jealous of the warmth
trapped in the room. He pressed his big face right up on the pane,
and howled at us for entrance. I knew better. Outside it was cold
and stingy, just as it always is. Inside the heat drifted up and down
the bare, creaking floors of the Dubuque Theological Seminary,

continued on page 5

pushing the dust as a mop would. It did a better job than the janitor who came in every Wednesday night to sweep up. It was the first euchre night of my entire life, a frigid Friday evening that would stay with me past my first date, past my first car, but not quite up to my first tractor. It was a stellar, numbing moment.

Of course, it's always hairy in the winter in Dubuque, Iowa. Dubuquers know how to dress for the weather. All you can see are towering, leaning bundles of clothes, tottering to their destinations through the snow. My brother was born in a four-foot blizzard that nearly kept my dad from seeing the whole thing. In April. If you're wondering where exactly Dubuque is, the most anyone here can tell you is that it's right on the nose of Iowa, right in the dead center of tornado country, and a two minute walk from Toaster, Illinois. It's on your standard Triple-A map, but you'd drive right by it in the night without your spotters on. It's that kind of town. We've got a main street with its own post office, which in my opinion is not much to brag about, but we do anyway. We especially like to lord it over the folks from Elmer's Run, who don't even qualify for hamletship, and who basically just incorporated so they could put up a big sign on Rt. 209 saying, "You are now entering Elmer's Run." Elmer Powell got his name immortalized because he was the owner of the sole phone in the Run.

Anyway, getting back to that frigid Friday, this was the first time I had ever been allowed at the Friday Euchre Club, in the Dubuque Theological Seminary. It's held in the Seminary because McKittrick's barn was blown down in a freak silo accident. Old Frankie was more upset over losing the Euchre Club than the 70 tons of grain that just decided to spontaneously scatter itself over four square acres. The regulars chose the Seminary for a replacement since it already had tables and chairs for Sunday School, which were really poor excuses for the hay bales used for sitting before, but you play with the cards you're dealt.

Euchre (think yoo'-ker) is a close cousin of bridge, but a little quicker and a shade more "yeller." My dad likes to call it "the stinkin' uncle that married into the family and sells fertilizer for a living." He just has that God-given knack for apt expressions. I think of it a different way. You play bridge with lady friends in dresses, over cakes and tea when the afternoon is starting to yawn. You play euchre with stodgy, seasoned locals in dusky overcoats, with an odor of foot powder hanging in the air as the wind beats the walls down. It's just a tangible feeling, and in Dubuque you play euchre a certain way.

At the Club meetings there's always a bunch of grunting, some table-pounding, and occasional whooping on a lively night. I found it funny that first time to see the legends of Dubuque, the same ones who sit in church with the tight-lipped grimace like they were passing stones, getting all heated up and noisy an off-suit first lead. I swear, the whole club gets up like a pack of roosters when there's a close game going. The folks in the neighborhood would think Pastor Williams was up to some of his hooligan antics, but they know better, after 25 years.

The game itself is pretty simple. I wouldn't attempt to bore you with the details, but I'll give the two-bit introduction. Five cards each, jack of trump high, lay down your best, and win all the hands you can.

But that's just the crust of the cake, especially the 17-layer chocolate cake in the bakery on Main. Euchre transcends the mechanical playing of cards, into places my dad calls, "pockets of attitude." He said that on the way to the meeting. I was in the process of inquiring what that meant exactly, when he turned the radio way up, and I knew enough to know that the conversation was over. My dad is an intriguing guy. He has that unknown depth to him, like a sinkhole. You can't tell where the bottom is. Not like Ronnie McElvoy over on Hertford Lane, who still brushes his teeth with the same toothbrush of twenty years ago. People go to Ronnie to get their cars running, and not much else. Yet my dad always has a wise thing to say. He's known for not always saying the sensible thing, but he sounds very intelligent nevertheless. Which is strange, because Dad is also the worst damn euchre player in West Dubu-

que. Most people get a grasp of the fundamentals, and just by playing they get better with time. Dad knows the moves better than anyone, even "euchre emperor" Fred Delaney, but Dad and losing have been buddies too long for any kind of goodbyes. The other members of the Club have a name for him--"The Flying Dutchman." Last time Dad won a game of euchre, Pearl Harbor went down to honor the occasion. Last time he won two games on the same night is prehistoric.

Which is strange, because his regular playing partner is Bill "Ace" O'Reilly, the fastest trump in the Midwest, the Bauer of Power. Second only to the "emperor" in sheer euchre cunning and acumen. And yet, he is also the second-worst damn euchre player in West Dubuque. Why Ace brings himself to keep playing with my dad every Friday is a closely-guarded secret, and the most anybody knows is that it has something to do with an old bet, a greased pig, and Miss Iowa Pork Princess 1935. Investigation only taught me how well people keep secrets in Dubuque. So Ace O'Reilly keeps playing with my dad, and every Friday night the two get a sound pummelling.

Hang around long enough, and you'll notice there are certain sayings that Club members use at designated points in a game. The closest thing resembling them is the liturgy that people chant in church. The pastor says a key phrase, and the multitude moans the appropriate indecipherable words, like they've been listening to Buddie Halek play his accordion a couple hours too long. When a player knows he has the upper hand, he sits back, drapes an arm over the chair-back, and smirks, "Man knowing cards, cards knowing man." Like the cards wormed their way through the deck to be held in this man's blessed hands. I think with Dad, the cards have yet to make his acquaintance.

But that frigid Friday night, when I first entered the gilded doors of the Friday Euchre Club, I could smell something different, though I had never been there ever. This aroma cut through the foot powder and the mildew, filling my nostrils with its strong odor. It was Old Jack Dandy whiskey. This was no faint, wafting smell, though. It boxed you square between the eyes, like a joltin' Joe DiMaggio home run. And yet, not one of the Euchre regulars has his good stuff on the premises. Looking back, I'm more inclined to think I made the whole thing up. But that night, I knew I was smelling Charlie Lester's breath.

Charlie Lester is as close as anybody's gotten to becoming an euchre legend. The story is in the official town register. Allow me a small preface. When you call a suit trump, and you don't win at least three "tricks," you've been euchred. The enemies sit there with that greasy, stinker smile on their faces, and you're left with egg on your face and a side order of gristle to boot. Being euchred is as humiliating as it gets, like discovering your fly's been open during the entire spelling bee. You get that warm, pants-wetting feeling, especially when your opponent, sniggering a bit too much for his own good, grandly states, "Hearts are trump, and euchre's the game!" That particular cliché is his car horn, letting everybody in earshot know that he's got your hide practically strung up for serious tanning.

Anyway, ole' Charlie Lester, one especially biting February evening, gets it into his head to go alone with no right or left bauer in his hand. Going alone means your partner sits out, because you're sure as fire you have enough good cards to win three tricks without help. Calling trump, knowing that the right bauer is in someone else's hand, is always asking for trouble. Going alone without both, now that's just plain moronic. Whatever had gotten into poor Charlie's head that night, Old Jack Dandy or just some loose marbles, sent all his senses down the cat-hole. He uttered the fatal words--"Drop 'em, Herb. I'm goin' alone," and every game in the room stopped at once. Everyone dropped their hands to watch the loner. Loners come as often as the Des Moines circus, which isn't saying much for the circus.

Well, the game gets going, and soon Charlie's tied with the enemy, two tricks apiece. He was swearing and ranting and praying at the same time, shaking his head and spit flying from his mouth.

"Come on, Eddie, lay that bastard down for us to see!" he was yelling.

Poor Eddie, he's a quiet guy, and he was sitting there with this look like he just sucked a lemon, while Charlie gave him his second shower of the day. He laid his last card down, and everyone saw it was a 10 of spades. Trump.

Charlie quit his raving and stared at the card real hard, like he did at every street sign. His face rose, and it was just beaming like a full moon in August. His big toothy grin told all 52 men in the room what card he was holding. Casually he flipped his card on the table. A queen of spades. High enough to win.

So now, Fingers Browning was the only one left holding a card. Charlie flashed the toothy grin in his face, not saying a word, trying to read Fingers' poker face. Now at this point, there are twenty different versions of what happened next, on account of the severe crowd at the table to see the final card itself. But the town register has it this way.

Fingers was fiddling with the card like it was a wipe cloth, and he had a frown on his face. Charlie was whooping around the Seminary, trying to skip but tripping on his heels, when Fingers placed his card face-down on the table. Charlie ran up and grabbed it, his eyes blazing like hot briquettes. And then those hot coals just widened into huge saucers, and the card slipped out of his slack hand.

King of spades.

Somebody at the back broke the huge silence that followed with a cough. Somebody else chuckled. Another snorted. And like a row of corn going in the combine, one after the other, the entire Friday Euchre Club burst out laughing. Poor Charlie Lester, he just slunk out the door amidst the laughter, and never walked in again. In fact, no one ever saw him again, and no one really cared, because that way they could talk about the time Charlie Lester got euchred going alone without offending anyone. Some say he moved away in humiliation, others think he went and killed himself that night, unable to live with the shame.

But I know I smelled Old Jack Dandy whiskey that frigid Friday night, the same alcohol Charlie Lester drank, when my dad, the Flying Dutchman, called a loner. Every head in the house turned like greased axles, and I had horrible thoughts of Charlie striding in that second to see for himself the making of Dubuque's second legend. "Dad," I said, "Don't make things worse. Call it off." Now wasn't the time to be cautious about trampling pride here.

"Son," he said, giving me perhaps the most fatherly look Iowa's ever seen, "I've got a loner sitting in my hands for the first time in my entire life. It feels so good too, if you just trust me."

I was stuck, feeling like I was hog-tied to a runaway mule. Ace O'Reilly only shrugged when I looked at him. The wind blew harder against the windows, and it sounded like a fist pounding. I thought about what it would be like to live a life of total ostracism, and the thoughts almost loosened my bowels, so I sat down and tried my best to keep from wailing.

So Dad began his first loner. He won two tricks and lost two tricks, putting him in exactly the same shoes as Charlie Lester. I thought, funny how this would be my first and last night in the Friday Euchre Club. No more dates with girls, no more scholarship to Iowa State, no more euchre. The wind brought out its sledgehammer and started working on the door.

And Dad sat quiet as a rabbit as Spooner McGillicutty and Rex Conlon played their last cards, with buttery smirks on their slick faces. They knew the famous luck would kick in, and hand them the honor of having performed the second euchre going alone. He watched the cards being played, looked at his, looked back, and clutched his card to his chest. Everyone started walking back to resume their games, talking about how many good men they lose every year, when Dad cracked the biggest smile in his entire life. Carefully, Fingers-fashion, he placed the card face-down on the table, and was preparing to sit back and say, "Man knowing cards, cards knowing man," when someone knocked on the door. "Get the door please, Ace," he said pleasantly, like it was a tea social.

Before Bill was half-way out of his seat, the doors of the Seminary were thrown open. I jumped, half-expecting to see the ghost of Charlie, and nearly lost it for a second. Everyone turned to the door to grunt at the uninvited guest.

No one stood there. Wind shrieked in, scattering 52 decks of cards around the room. They fluttered like chickens, racing around the walls, before every scrap of playing card suddenly flew out the door in a gust of wind.

"Twister!!" yelled a local weatherman, and sooner than you could say "Euchre," the seminary was empty. Iowans are very familiar with the likes of tornados, and to hell with euchre if you're staring up the gullet of a nasty twister.

So that was my first night at the Friday Euchre Club. It was the last night the Club met at the Seminary, considering how the building was gone the next morning. During the town clean-up, the roof was found wedged sideways into an alley on Main, between the bakery and the post office.

No one ever found out what Dad's last card was, and Dad sure isn't telling anyone. I ask him every year on his birthday what the card was, and he gives the same reply every single stinking year. "You wouldn't understand."

But I'm not complaining. The Club had a vote to expand to include three neighboring towns, so up to 300 crumby old men could play euchre. I voted against it. So did all 24 of the original members. It missed passing by three votes. And I'm happy about that. Euchre's a small town game, and people play it a certain way in Dubuque.

Davin Quinn
Annandale, VA
Thomas Jefferson High School
Ms. Stegall

Untitled

I learned how to steal in nursery school. There was a little plush doll that I had my eye on for awhile. Her name was Abbey. She was covered in all sorts of buttons, zippers, and snaps. I'm not sure if I liked the zippers or snaps more. Either way, I stole it. I brought it home in my Care Bear back pack and hid it in my pajama drawer.

I'm not sure if it was at this time I started to notice the stained-glass windows at church. I had first seen them during C.C.D. class while looking at the stations of the cross. While the others were examining the taupe colored figures of the cross, I was focusing on the brilliant windows. There was one window which haunted me. I stared at the window where Jesus held his sheep in his arms. His robe was crimson red, and lay limp except for the wrinkles around his golden belt. His eyes were almonds of chalk with huge brown m&m's placed in the middle. The m&m's were the deep brown kind, the kind which don't taste as good as the others. The eyes followed me as our class slowly circled the church. I tried everything: watching my white kangaroo sneakers, picking off my old magenta nail polish. I knew I couldn't escape those m&m's watching my small back. The worst part was I knew that those eyes could also see Abbey, carefully tucked behind my pink feet-in pajamas. I hated C.C.D.

There were so many rules, and so many ways to offend God. I remember getting thrown out of the church for chewing gum. Sister Julie, with her clay face and stiff gray curls, sat me down and explained that church was God's house. God didn't approve of people chewing gum in his house. I noticed there was a slight curve in the yellow curb I was sitting on. I wondered if it was formed by all the other little children's bodies sitting hunched over on the same spot listening to Sister. I watched her cracked lips open and close slowly to the chime of the church bells. I knew Sister Julie must have been right. I had never seen Sister chew gum in church, or make a talking puppet out of the weekly newsletter as I had last week. God must be able to see everything I did, and even worse, dead people, too.

I can clearly remember lying alone on my bed the night my grandfather died. I placed each hand on one of the dinosaurs on the comforter. They were all sorts of colors, yellow, green, and red. I had a chilling sensation that my grandfather could see me. I envisioned his body floating above me, looking straight into my eyes. That night, when all of our relatives had come to our house, I went into the kitchen. I knew that mom had gone to the grocery store a few days before, and I wanted a piece of the green Carefree chewing gum. I opened the off-white cabinet door and reached in to the silver dish. I placed the sugary pale green stick into my mouth and walked back into the room with my family. There was a thick odor of perfume and Kleenex. The attention turned to me, and the whole group seemed to mouth the words, "Don't worry, Kerry, Papa will see your whole first communion from heaven." I didn't know if they had actually said anything, or if I had just imagined their mouthing the words. When I looked back at the group they were still placing rectangles of cheese on round crackers, so I decided to say nothing and to rest my face on the cold white wall next to me.

While lying on my bed I began to wonder if Grandpa had seen me pick my nose that day. I wondered if he had seen me pee in my bed the night before. Worst of all, I wondered if he saw me when I stood naked in front of my mirror wondering if I looked the same as other girls. I turned over and looked at the wide green numbers on my alarm clock and decided I would be good. Even if I didn't want to be a good girl, I had to. Now God and Papa could see everything I did.

A few years later I decided I would confess to stealing Abbey. Her bold colors were now concealed in a closet by a dusty Chutes and Ladders box. I sat quietly one night at C.C.D. between two of my classmates on the wooden pews in church. I traced my hand along the peeled-away polyurethane on the seat and stared at Sister Julie talking quietly to a kindergartner in front of me. I wiped the perspiration off my upper lip and stood slowly when my name was called. I was wearing my favorite jeans, the ones with the dark blue spot where my back pocket had been ripped off. I looked at the long maroon drape where I was to enter and began to slide my feet along the pale blue carpet. The small oval light above the confessional turned off, and my classmate walked out. I grabbed the right side of the curtain and pulled it to the left. It smelled of stale moth balls and faint body odor inside. I knelt down and slowly looked up at a metal screen in front of me. It looked like the bottom of a colander, only silver. I panicked. Where was the priest? I could hear a dull mumbling through the screen but I couldn't make out any of the words. I had to time my exit so that it wasn't suspiciously early. I counted to twenty, stood up and left. I saw my classmates bowing their heads and praying in the pews, so I followed their lead. I reentered the wooden pew and watched my knees form dents in the leather of the maroon kneeler and whispered the Hail Mary.

That night the odor of chicken which mom had cooked entered my stomach and bounced around rapidly. It left me with a hollow, teary feeling which wouldn't go away. I walked up our wooden steps, the same color as the pews, and sat down silently at our white kitchen table. The rice looked gray, wet, and mushy. My limbs felt bloated, wrinkled- as if I had been sitting in a warm bath for too long. I looked into the blue eyes of my mother and wondered if she knew what had happened at C.C.D. that day. Her wrinkled hands placed a slender glass of milk in front of me. I excused myself and walked to the bathroom. The blue stone foyer felt cold on my bare feet. I walked into the bathroom, avoiding my green eyes in the mirror, and shut the door behind me. I sat on the closed toilet and placed my hands in the position of prayer. I'm sorry, God, I'm sorry.

Last winter there was one day I walked to church alone. It was the day after a snow storm and the streets were covered in gray sleet. I didn't mind walking, though, since I had really thick brown boots on. They left a dark peanut-shaped footprint, where the pavement showed through. Every few steps I looked back to see the twisting line of peanuts along the road. I dug my hands deeper into my pockets and buried my mouth under my scarf. I passed by the snow-covered bushes by the side of the church which said, "Pray

for Peace." I walked up to the glass door and opened it slowly. I felt a warm gush of air on my face. I brushed off my boots and walked down the pale blue steps.

I sat in the same pew as the week before, the night when I was confirmed. There was a small booklet left over from confirmation lying next to me. I slid down the pew and opened the booklet. I read, "Matthew Mark Summers, Caitlin Monica Sullivan, Kerry Elizabeth Schneider..." Small pellets of sweat ran down my side and stopped at the waist of my jeans. I watched the priest, draped with a deep purple robe, enter the church. I stood, sat, and knelt, over and over. The Mass ended and I was left with a warm feeling on my tongue. My heart was beating to the slow clank of the incense chain as I slowly walked out of my pew. I noticed white bird poop smeared all over the stained-glass windows. I approached the back of the church and stopped at the small white dish attached to the wall, next to the maroon drapes. I reached my right hand into the holy water, and made the sign of the cross. It left a thin line along my cheekbone which felt cold during the walk home.

Kerry Schneider
Needham, MA
Mrs. Coon

Eating Olives

Tim was on the phone
and I was eating olives
the bitter green ones
with red pimentos curled up inside
the way I used to curl up in Tim's arms.
He told me that I was a great girl
but he just wanted to be friends.
I choked on olive juice
spewing it over Tim's Princeton sweatshirt.
I yearned to hand up the phone
but my legs would not rise from the floor.
His once familiar voice called my name
as I hurled the receiver into the air.
It bounced off the ceiling
then hurtled down and smashed the olive jar.
All the juice burst out
rushing along the cracks in the kitchen floor
and I had eaten all the olives.

Kate Panepinto
Summit, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

katie's dying

katie's dying comes late on a spring thursday,
when it's almost warm and the new leaves glow

she is a string in her hospital bed, a white string
clinging to white sheets, waiting for some salvation,
for someone to tell her that it's all right, that she's won at last.

but I can't say anything to her, I can't cool the sores
around her mouth, the only color on her face. I can't erase
the shadow that lies on the gulley between her hipbones,

or the way the evening sun creeps over her skin
so thin and translucent, a membrane hardly worth its own
feathery weight, another thing she thinks she needs to get rid of;

the only thing left between her and the blinding light.

Alicia Rabins
Towson, MD
Towson High School
William Jones

Island Prayer

On riny Sunday mornings
the church steeple bends down
from the top of the hill.
It prods the men awake;
they rub dried salt from their skin
and yawn themselves into motion.

They pull on their blazers spattered with fish blood
and walk out the door,
leaving their children's
landlocked dreams of pavement
and shopping malls undisturbed.
They can still hear the warning of the red buoy
that greets them every night like a drunk father, swaying.

Ascending the boardwalk,
their hands match the weathered railings.
Somehow they can't let go,
even when it ends, splintering, and
the white building accosts them.

They collapse into pews,
wait,
let the music wash over them,
bury them in different sands
than those that infest their lives,
fill their shoes,
crunch in their food,
burrow beneath their fingernails,
prove insoluble in their faith.

They don't want to hear about Jesus
and His full nets,
at least not this week,
when the winter winds are beginning
to batter their boats in the harbor.

Their minds are at anchor.

Leslie Eckel
Chestnut Hill, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Cousins

in fright, in flight
when we stole barbie clothes
from the neon National's
near the A&P.

That day we got caught with paper bags full
of tiny high heels
and one package of M&Ms
we flew from the cloudy parking lot
on green bikes
empty rat traps
rattling we went to eat fudge
and marshmallows on the other end of main street
by the big blue theater and the dandelion store
we held hands and sucked back tears
with the thick sweet bars

and now we eat chocolate chip cookies
even though we gave them up for lent .
the house is damp and snow is melting
in the gutter when you have to cross the street
and the rugs seem to lose their worn spots
to be new and stiff again
bristles in the air when I ask about him
a millionth time of the same strength
since last easter when we linked arms
and walked alone up side streets
back to the safe green awning
it was sunny and a breeze
makes me think it's almost a year
since that easter funeral
and you seem quieter
and I seem taller

I know we don't play on the roofs
of yellow painted dollhouses
and we don't pick up seaglass anymore
but I'm still shorter and you still make me cookies
and we still go to the beach
except alone in winter salt no flowered suits
no splinters
no father.

Bess Williamson
Washington, DC
Milton Academy
David Smith

The Crash

All i heard was a crash,
a scrape, glass breaking like bells.
The cars passed quick as razors
and I didn't see anything.
It was over, I guess, then,
but glass sprayed in front of me.
I was still waiting at the intersection
in my car.

In front of me,
a man got out of his crashed car
and began to cry.
Across the street,
another man got out of his crashed car
and began to shout.

The third man
didn't get out of his car.
The wind whistled
where a windshield had been.

I got out of my car
and carefully, even gingerly,
picked up the large pieces of glass
and swept, with my coat sleeve, the little pieces of glass
from the hood of my car.
I took the short steps to the crying man
but there was so much glass.

Blushing,
I gasped the December air.
I got in my car
and drove home,
the shards of one man's window
poking through the knit glove
to my hand.

Anne Estabrooks Oak Knoll School
Cranford, NJ Harriet Marcus

Art Concept

I had nothing to say -
So I kissed you -
when we were drunken and random
and you sat on the bed next to me.
The sheets smelled of cheap red wine and turpentine.
From the easel the faceless nude stared at me
newly formed figure, wet and slick
thick with paint applied roughly
in broad, frenzied slashes.

You kissed the same way. The same urgency
refashioned the shape of my lips,
styled the still life
Convenient Body.
Studiedly posed,
into an imitation of the canvas,
my body with your hands.
Dirty fingernails
defined
me with ridges
of paint;
I couldn't decide if I liked it.
My lipstick smeared
a child colored, outside the lines.

Jessica Schutz
New York, NY
Hunter College High School
Linda Johnson



Joe Rouetto

Untitled

There are high-pitched dog whistles
and murmuring soap stars
coming through closed doors,
and across brown carpeted hallways.
Mother is watching TV,
comatose on flannel bedsheets
with anti-snore pillows
tucked under her head.
She doesn't hear the phone ring,
only my brother
telling her things she wants to hear,
and he and I exchange a glance
as she sighs and rolls over
and talks to us, stoic, about getting old.

Father sits at the kitchen table,
a wooden confluence of strained conversations
and bright yellow yield signs,
with one lightbulb out
in the overhead ceiling fan
and a chipped mug with caffiene stains
quietly set before him.
The microwave sonar song sings
the day old coffee is hot and ready,
and the shuffle of his leather slippers
across careworn tiles that little feet flew over
is comforting and warm,
though it's hard to find comfort
in yellowing undershirts
and the slurp of his beverage
through tight, turned-down lips.

Rebecca Louie
Flushing, NY
Hunter College High School
Kathy Lawrence

Light

I don't like light, it smells bad,
like the corner of an attic
when that little slice of light comes
through the doorway at 9:30 pm
when your trying to sleep but
everything is frozen.
The clock goes backwards
until it's so early you should
be waking up and welcoming
the light.
You dream of warm tea,
hot chocolate, and sleep
only your heads too full.
When you're sleepy and
the sheets are too warm,
your pillow is not fluffy,
and the phone is ringing
light feels like
green glowing ooze
you can't get away from.

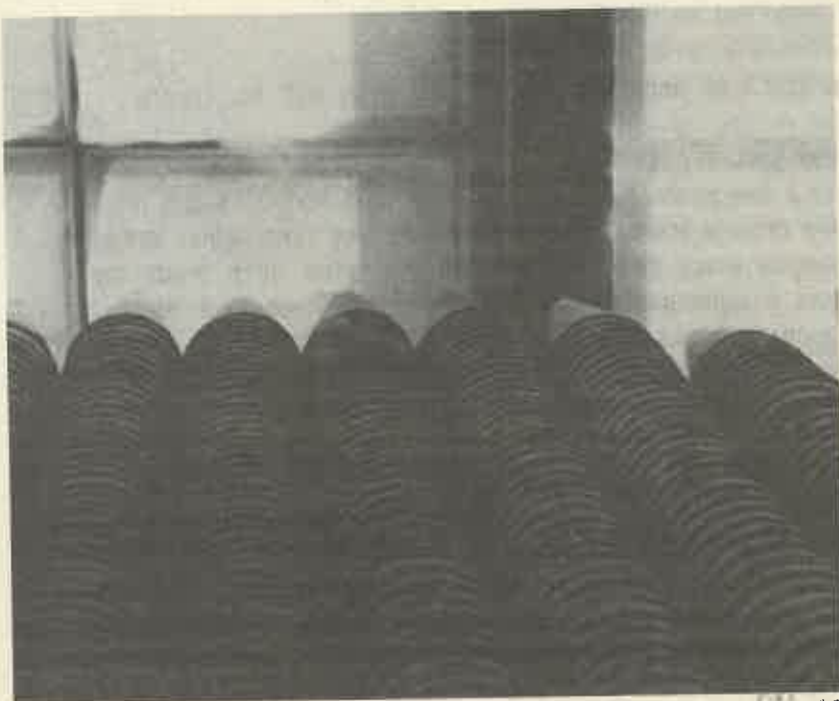
Amy Schaible
High Bridge, NJ
Voorhees High School
Lois Harrod

Mother's Instinct

The last day of my childhood
I threw raspberries
at the girl I found
in the woods with my brother.
I remember the stains left
on her white shirt,
watching her shield
her eyes to cry,
and the way she blindly pushed
through the brambles, through
my brother's laughter
to get away.
But our mother knew.
Somehow she could see
blood as tiny as the seeds,
juice flowing from our lips.
She called us inside
holding my father's belt.

It's a mother's instinct
to know
her children's sins.
I remember years later,
the last day of summer,
my first kiss-
sticky-
fingers slipping like feet,
lying on the grass among the brambles,
and crushing the berries with our bodies
until darkness.
Then finding my mother
the next morning
scrubbing away
the dirt on my clothes,
never admitting
she couldn't quite get out
all the stains.

Bonnie Minick
Glen Gardner, NJ
Voorhees High School
Lois Harrod



Victoria Yoffie

The Caldwell Careless

It's an ordinary building project, so ordinary that when you pass it you barely even look at it. It's mundane. Its brick facade is inoffensive. Its calm, two-story structure is set back from the road by a parking lot. This place is carefully maintained at all times as if determined not to offend the world around it. The lawn and trees are perfectly manicured and there is nothing, no running children, no plastic yard animals, nothing, to contrast the smoothly rolling green. It's a private place, very withdrawn. There is nothing to say that this is anything more than a neutral building complex. Every now and then a figure can be seen in one of the windows, gazing placidly out at the world on the other side of the glass, but there are no other hints of personality. Everything about this place works hard to create and hold harmony with the outside world. If you don't bother it, it won't bother you.

But maybe you will bother it. Maybe someday you'll have reason to venture beyond the shiny, sliding glass doors, and you will notice the passive ambiance begin to change.

The difference is slight at first. Beyond the modernized entrance lies the lobby, carefully decorated to leave a pleasant impression on visitors and benefactors. The mauve walls match the carpet and classic-looking furniture, polished to a waxy shine. All of the pictures in the room are as comfortable as the rest of the decorating, full of scenes of quiet forests and lush meadows. You won't realize right away what anachronisms those scenes are in this building. There's a reception desk in a corner of the lobby where an underpaid nurse will supply you with a pen and show you where to sign the register. Every now and then she jumps and runs to the aid of one of the building's residents who has wandered into the lobby. Lost and confused, the wanderer will amble around the room until the nurse directs him/her back through the waiting room doors and into the halls beyond. Keep this in mind when you pass through the waiting room doors and be careful not to let any of the patients through. Like a petting zoo or a drive through safari, the inhabitants here have to be carefully corralled.

Now you have entered the reality of the Caldwell Care Center, the nursing home nobody thinks about. Look, feel, hear, and smell. Walk around a little. You still have all of these faculties, so use them. You're one of the few people in the building who can.

The first floor hallway stretches about the equivalent of a city block: tiled, mauve, and uniform. Added to the effect of the pepto-bismol walls, the yellow lighting makes everything appear a little off-color, giving the building interior a foreign, institutional feel. But that's what it is, an institution, and there's no call to forget it. If you close your eyes the smell of ammonia and something else, medicine or age, perhaps, bombards your nostrils. Ignore the scent and you will become hyper conscious of the echoing impersonal halls. There's no escape from the presence of this place.

The passageway is littered with wheelchairs as far as one cares to look, all of them inhabited and none of them moving. Each wheelchair is an identical shade slightly darker than the pink-tinted walls. Each is occupied, but there is something startling about the people in these chairs. There's something almost alien about them that the contour of the building doesn't account for. Beyond the identical chairs, the impersonal wristbands, the shrunken hands, feeble bodies, and time-weathered faces, beyond the informal way in which they are scattered around the corridor, there is something unsettling here.

A woman seated just outside her doorway is mumbling something, some gibberish to a nonexistent companion. Over there a man is waving his arms in the air, moving his toothless mouth but no sound is coming out. He's wearing green pants that don't fit and yellow slippers, and he can't stand up. A passerby is shooting obscenities at the nurse piloting his chair and the woman at the left is speaking Spanish to whoever will listen, but nobody's interested. Somewhere down the hall someone is screaming; long disembodied wails that come echoing through the passage; someone in pain or

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remembering pain, emotional or physical, and no one is listening. The majority are just staring, just sitting and staring, and waiting. A woman in the doorway of her disinfected 'bedroom' is gazing at a television set tuned into Pat Sajak. The Wheel of Fortune is spinning, a contestant just won \$2000, and tears are slipping silently and unnoticed down the woman's cheeks.

There's a feeling here. It lingers in the halls, the bedrooms, and the dining rooms. Bingo games and chemical disinfectants won't purge it. You can see it in the eyes of the woman watching Wheel of Fortune, and you can hear it in the body-less voice wailing in the hall. It's hopelessness. It's the aimless hopelessness of someone's grandparents, someone's parents or brothers or sisters or aunts or uncles who have been left here because there's no longer any place for them in the world outside. Their lives are behind them. Now that they are old no one has enough money or time or space for them, so they have been left here. Here in this new, modernized, impersonal Nursing Home they can receive 'proper treatment.' With their pasts pared down to a couple of photos and some knick-knacks, whatever they can fit in a cupboard and a bedside table, most will be here until they die. And they are aware of it. They're waiting.

At the end of the hall you can either take the elevator to the second level or turn around and exit the building. No one will blame you for leaving. If you were thinking of volunteering here you'll probably start to reconsider. Perhaps a hospital would be a better choice. Most patients who go into hospitals come out. People who enter the Caldwell Care Center have little hope of ever going outside again.

Walking down the hall you can feel the muscles in your legs working, and you can feel the tile beneath your feet. You can hear a woman talking about the cat she used to have that lived in the garden she used to grow. You can see the man whose hands are clasped in his lap as he dozes in his chair. You can smell Lysol and ammonia and the vegetables being boiled for lunch. As you pass through the lobby you can once again glance at the tranquil pictures on the wall: inoffensive scenes of places the patients here will probably never again see first hand. The glass doors slide away in front of you and the world is at your disposal. You're once again standing in the reality of trees and sky and fresh air. There is life here. There is hope here. You can feel it fill your lungs when you inhale, and it feels good.

You are not confined to the Caldwell Care Center. The lucky visitor, you still have your life to live and you probably have plenty more things to do than idle on this perfectly manicured lawn. You can walk away, drive away, and leave the Care Center once again as in inoffensive building set away from the street. You can forget it for now. Go back to what you were doing. If you don't bother it, it won't bother you. Old age won't bother you. As you leave it behind, the Care Center is serene, passive, and immobile, absorbed by the life of the town, and waiting.

Megan Wolff
West Caldwell, NJ
James Caldwell High School
Nicholas Brown

Brown-Eyed Girl

This morning the trees combed the clouds with their tinsel branches. The petals of my brave begonia in the window box were polished as colored glass. Somebody had floured and frozen the world white, leaving the crystal bushes to salute stiffly to the wind. I leaned on my bare heels to view this picture framed by my bedroom window. I shut my eyes quickly so that I would not forget, attempting to commit each detail of this scene to my memory.

Three months ago, I was studying at my desk when I realized that I could no longer read the print of my textbook. During classes I pressed my palms against the violent twitching of my eyes. My familiar neighborhood was transformed into a labyrinth of incoherent streetsigns and landmarks. Several weeks later, I stood up to receive a phone call, only to notice that my oak furniture was melting into the floor and the shadowy walls spun faster around me. As my temples throbbed to the shifting colors, my knees gave way.

You have a lesion on the intersection of your optic nerves, the optic chiasma. This condition is caused by the pressure of a tumor on your pituitary gland. Attempts at removing this tumor may cause brain damage or immediate blindness. Without surgery, however, you have between three to five years before you are legally blind. You may notice significant deterioration...

My eyes have become cameras that record each day like a favorite movie. I like to study the wintery mornings, my tropical print bedsheets, the wrinkles at the corners of my father's sleeping mouth. In my room, I navigate between the growing islands of books - Tolstoy, Poe, Faulkner, Garcia Marquez, Shakespeare, Salinger. I am now in the habit of memorizing passages from these books that I anxiously devour.

There is no longer time to complain of a lack of time. Terminally ill patients cling to their last months, making peace with their estranged family and friends. I clutch these next years before blindness because losing my vision is a death. I dread that morning when I awake to a supreme darkness; even the night has the light of a round moon. And I will think that I am dead and perhaps even wish it.

Will my friends think that I can not sense the uncomfortable change in their voices as they gaze at my blind eyes? Will people befriend Me or my blindness? I will shout my name until they acknowledge Me and they will think that I am crazy. And I will boldly believe that I am the same person even without my sight. But when I am alone, I feverishly question how I can remain Me if I can not share in this shaped and colored world with them. Perhaps I will have new friends, who never knew the seeing Me and only the blind Me. They will never know about my passion for Van Gogh's "Starry Night" or my love of painting. Nor will they understand why the blind girl weeps when she feels the beams of a yellow sun that she can not see.

And I will know that I have entered a narrow place, when Robert looks into my eyes with sympathy, not Love. I do not think he will call me his Brown-Eyed Girl anymore. In fact, Rob will tiptoe around me as if I am very, very sick. And finally, Robert will just tiptoe away.

I avoid asking God why; my mother does that for me. When Mother thinks that I am sleeping, she creeps beside my bed to cry into my hair and gingerly touch my shut eyes with her rosary.

I will probably not be the Doctor or Lawyer of the family anymore. In a few years, I will request large print textbooks and relinquish my driver's license. In the meantime, my prescription lenses are changed every three months and my father often reads my homework assignments to me. Before I go to sleep each night, I flip through art books - Picasso, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh. And as I admire Monet's luminous haystacks, my thoughts wander to a dream vacation - a tour of the great museums of Europe. I suddenly understand, however, that I may never witness the peeling grandeur of the famous Mona Lisa. And for the first time since my diagnosis, my cheeks are wet.

Marian Lee
Winston Churchill High School
Potomac, MD
Carol Blum

Ceremonies

"Damn, I'm cold." I pulled my coat tighter, wishing I had a warmer one. I was squinting so much from the freezing wind that the pavement was a blur. My sister was way ahead of us, rushing home to pee, unable to hold it anymore after the hour long subway ride. Shivering, worn-out from battling winter, and unfed despite the festivities, I stepped cautiously on the icy sidewalk, not quite heavy enough to remain on the ground without the threat of being blown away any minute. My ears were on fire.

In the midst of the biting hail appeared two dark figures coming our way. Stopping a few feet in front of us. "Chin, chong, chong, chong, pin, pong, chong, hey, chinita, chinita." Normally I would have just walked on, ignoring this show. After eleven long years, I've become numb. My anesthesia usually works. Not now.

Mom, looking beautiful, still feeling the effects of the celebration, walked on, not seeing the two stumbling idiots bowing to her and snickering. She usually doesn't see these things. She lives by the rule that what she doesn't know won't hurt her.

However, I couldn't contain myself. Possibly because I had had such a miserable night, I was enraged, ready to burst out and shoot them with an AK-47. Unfortunately, I didn't have one with me. Gritting my chattering teeth, I walked past the two dark figures, poised like a good little empress. "Screw off," I said, looking straight ahead. Never make eye contact.

My reaction seemed to please them, and they carried on even more, slapping each other and laughing. Now I was really pissed off. I turned around and, with all my weariness and impatience, spat "ASSHOLE" at them, battling the wind. I screamed and screamed, feeling my tonsils about to burst. Then I jetted home, feeling enough adrenaline to fly. A perfect end to a perfect night, I thought, resentful of my mother for being blind to what just happened and for forcing me to go to a stupid wedding banquet.

The evening began well with the three of us getting ready, pushing each other to get to the only full-length mirror in the house. We looked fabulous, all adorned in our new outfits; my sister in a long back velvet dress and me in big, black dress pants and a dark, green vest. Mom had on the dress we got her for Christmas, a light olive dress that resembled a traditional gi-bao.

"You girls should wear something different. Something red. Black is so inappropriate. You know the groom's mother is very superstitious," my mom said, applying her lipstick like a novice. (I'll have to teach her how to do it someday.)

My sister rolled her eyes and left the room, leaving me to plead our case. "We look horrible in red, Mom. We have nothing red. Anyway, we don't want to upstage the bride."

"You can at least wear this red necklace. Out of courtesy."

"Mom, this is America. None of that superstitious mumbo-jumbo please. Colors don't mean anything here. Besides, this is an evening affair. What we're wearing is appropriate."

"This is America. This is America. But we're going to a Chinese wedding banquet. You should follow Chinese rules. Just wear this necklace."

"Mom, it clashes. Besides, my lipstick will be red," I smirked, and left the room, my typical method for ending an argument.

When we entered the restaurant, our boots covered in slush, I noticed that, besides the bride, only one old lady wore red in a crowd of about two hundred. So much for your Chinese rules, Mom. In the bathroom changing our shoes, I saw my mom counting some bills and putting them into the traditional red envelope.

Ever since I could remember, red envelopes have always meant holidays, celebrations, and lots of money. That was the only reason I liked the color red.

"Mom, why are you giving them so much money? You don't even know them that well and you hate them."

"Aaaiiya, you're so naive. It would be impolite to give any less." This is an important day for Chinese people; the uniting of the phoenix and the dragon. We wouldn't want them to think that the Chen

clan can't afford it...And I do not hate them!"

"Yes, you do," I answered silently. Who cares about what they might think about the Chen clan. They don't deserve the money. But there is no arguing with rules.

"Now girls. Be social. Look happy."

"It takes too much energy to be happy," I replied.

My sister was silent as usual. She got away with not being social just by being mute. Smart plan. That left me to represent the Chen clan.

I hated these functions. Everyone eyeing everyone else, talking about each other, looking at what everyone else is wearing, comparing who has the worst life, the worst children. Parents modestly putting their children down, bragging about them and showing them off. Me smiling my plastic I'm-a-nice-demure-girl-smile. It works every time. My jaw hurt just thinking about what was ahead. I guess boring functions are horrible in any culture.

And so I agonized through the banquet, smiling, nodding, being polite, not understanding half of what was said. And then the inevitable happened. I was being compared to the groom's sister. Since I was seven I had been compared to her because we were the same age. She always won. She was taller. She was prettier. She was smarter. She cleaned her room. Her Chinese was better. She respected her parents more. And on, and on.

Tonight was no different. Everyone at my table began to admire her while she was singing on the karaoke machine.

"She has a beautiful voice," they said. Her dress is ugly, I thought.

"She's already in college, one year early." Who cares. Big deal.

"She's such a good young lady." She's probably a slut.

"She's so mature. What a delight." What a fright.

I wasn't insecure about myself. Not at all. I just knew that she didn't deserve all this praise. I knew about her.

The most disappointing moments of the night were when my mother, the typical Chinese parent, persisted in highlighting my bad points.

"You must be so proud of your daughter," an old friend said to mom.

"Proud of what? You don't know. She's such a child. She never listens to me, always talking back. And her Chinese is horrible. She can't speak Mandarin, only our country-side dialect. She has no interest in Chinese culture. She's only a little better than the little one. She's so antisocial. Doesn't know how to deal with people. I don't know what she's going to do in college....so lazy...."

And on, and on, and on. The more her friends disagreed with her, the more fuel they provided. I sat silently, smiling stupidly like I was supposed to, trying to reassure myself that my mother really didn't feel that way, that she was only fulfilling Chinese etiquette by saying those harsh words. Social law dictated that she trash me. Small comfort.

And so the night continued in that fashion. I ate the cold, bland, restaurant Chinese food, feeling so completely American, so completely alienated from my surroundings. I envied the Chinese girls whose English wasn't as good as mine but whose Chinese was so much better. I admired their eloquent conversations. I sat, dumb, slowly digging my nails into my palms, leaving four distinct marks.

And, screaming at the racist pigs in my neighborhood, I screamed up all of my fury at my mother, my culture, myself, and my world so that when I entered the apartment behind my oblivious parent, I hung up my coat calmly and blithely lied, "Of course," when she asked, "Did you enjoy the ceremony?" Lying in bed later that night waiting for sleep to come, I wondered which college in America would accept me, the short, stupid, lazy applicant, and I ran my right index finger over the tiny indentations on my left palm.

Tsyzu Chen

New York, NY

The Chapin School

Ann V. Klotz

A Gift

"A gift?" No, that didn't sound good. Sarah chewed at the side of her mouth. "A wedding gift." Her lips crinkled into a smile. Better. Then, she thought, she would wink. But, she couldn't do that now. She would save her strength until they came. They would kiss her, and sit down. "Curt and Nancy?" No, "Nancy and Curt?" No. "My beautiful granddaughter Nancy and her funny doctor husband Curt?" Better. Oh, she wasn't supposed to know they were getting married. Oops, "My beautiful granddaughter Nancy and her funny doctor friend Curt?" No. What the hell, she would say it, "husband?" She didn't know why her son had told her it was a secret. She was old, she could say whatever she wanted. Only if she could wink afterwards, though. She remembered the old milk woman at home when she and Issac were courting: The woman used to wink at the young couple as they walked by. "How did she know?" Issac and Sarah had wondered. She just knew.

It would be a while before they would come, Nancy and Curt. She had to wait.

Lunch, Sarah thought, had been applesauce, then something like ground up hamburger meat with small red spices in it that steamed on the tray. Of course, there was her orange juice in the clear container with the pull-away top. But, there was one more item: it was on the top left in the small sectioned tray area for vegetables. She had to stab at it, no, at them, with her fork to get them, and then in her mouth they were slimy and hardly had to be chewed. She thought they were peas, but green didn't look right in her image of the lunch tray-too many colors. Peas must have been yesterday.

Sarah had been convinced that a good Jewish boy could still be raised after the Holocaust. She used to keep kosher in the house—all meals kosher. Sarah was a terrible cook, though: cakes cooked with water instead of flour; chicken, lots of chicken, well done, cooked until she was sure it was dead. Sarah's kosher cooking almost killed her good Jewish boy. He used to spend hours in pain, farting uncontrollably when neighbors came over, and running to the bathroom at all hours of the night. Sarah used to stay awake, alone in bed, dreading the sound of tired, little feet stomping across the cold wood floor of their apartment. "If only his daddy was here." Sarah used to think. "Isaac, he would have known what to do."

But there was no point mourning what had happened eight years ago in the old country—a different time, a different place. To the doctor! The doctor prescribed a diet of fudge-icles and bacon—not a Jewish doctor, Sarah didn't know any Jewish doctors. Well, so much for kosher. There was nothing scientific about fudge-icles and bacon, but it worked well, pretty well at least. No more bathroom runs in the middle of the night. Sara felt like Isaac's spirit was watching her every time she had a yearning to feel the hot spatting, sizzling bacon in her mouth. But, then she thought of the runs to the bathroom. Isaac would have understood, wouldn't he? Bacon and fudge-icles to cure their son. She wished everything were that easy.

Were they peas on her lunch tray? Peas? She couldn't remember. It didn't matter so much, she was having visitors today. Nancy and Curt. Did they know that she had poisoned her son? That he still had stomach problems because of her? No, how could they know all that? They would come to see her; she would give them her blessing; she would wink; they would marry; they would always live near her. And Nancy and Curt would live together, and in this country, too. Curt was a doctor he would know what to do. Yes, today would be a good day.

The room was still empty, though. Sarah's silver-handled brush winked at her from under her bedside lamp. She chewed at the side of her mouth, and scrunched up her face into a thousand wrinkles. How much longer until Nancy and Curt came? She turned around to face the mirror.

The plastic covering on the orange chair cushion squeaked, and the metal chair legs complained.

When she had first gotten to this country, the minute she got off the boat—her son bundled in her arms—a man had taken her picture. He had said something like: "You there! Stop?" She hadn't understood him. She didn't know English. But, she got that he didn't want her to move. She stopped, and got a better hold on her son.

She watched the man disappear underneath a black sheet at the back of what she'd assumed to be a camera. She had never had her picture taken before.

Sarah stared at herself in the mirror. She remembered how scared she had been, unable to rid herself of the feeling that she had somehow taken the wrong boat and could never get to where she was going or back to where she came from. Her walnut brown eyes stared back at her in the mirror. She wondered if the man would take her picture now. She should have talked to him. She didn't. She never got the actual picture. The thought of someone she didn't know having a picture of her on the wall in their house scared her a little. It was wrong. People should have pictures of their own families in their houses.

Her room was empty. She chewed at the side of her mouth, and scrunched her face into a thousand wrinkles. Mr. Morris was talking to himself in the next room, and somewhere down the hall, the cheery blond Wednesday nurse was announcing BINGO time. She hoped someone would come clean her room before Nancy and Curt came; she knew it smelled like urine.

The plastic covering on the orange chair cushion squeaked, and the metal chair legs complained.

She couldn't stay still. She shook like a wind up toy that just kept going on and on. At lunch today, she hadn't been able to open the lid of her orange juice container without help. When she had gotten to the nursing home ten years ago, she had held a certain sense of pride, because she was one of the only people who could eat her meals all by herself. She used to eat in the public dining room, gracefully lifting her fork high in the air before sending it diving into the plate again. Now, they just brought her meals to her room, where a nurse served her.

She had no control and she had a feeling that's why she was there. No, she knew that's why she was there.

She had heard her son—the good Jewish boy, now a doctor—talking with another doctor in the hall once. "Some kind of arthritis," the other doctor had said to her son; "We can't isolate the source in her nervous system. All we can do is wait and see what happens."

Sarah had taught herself to read and write English from the front page of the "Boston Globe?" She wondered if he knew that, Mr. 'all we can do is wait.'

The plastic covering on the orange chair cushion squeaked; the metal chair legs complained. A door slammed down the hall.

She couldn't look at herself anymore. She wanted to see that picture the man had taken when she got off the boat with her son. She couldn't remember what she had looked like then. In the mirror, her face looked nothing like it must have looked in that picture. But she wasn't sure exactly what was different. She couldn't remember her face without wrinkles and purpley veins. She turned away from the mirror.

"Are you going to take it?" a voice whispered from behind her.

"What?" Sara asked. She could feel her body shaking more than usual.

"It's for you," the voice gently prodded, "a gift."

"A gift?" Sara whispered, half to herself, half to the voice coming from behind her. "Isaac?"

"Yes," he laughed, "from me to you, a gift fit for the wife of the Tzar of all of Russia?" His Yiddish slid like candied syrup into her ears. There was sunlight behind her. She giggled.

"And where did you get money for such a gift. Fit for a Tzar of all Russia. Pahl You, funny Isaac, the farmer?" She giggled again, swinging herself around into the light.

Isaac faced her. His deep brown laughing eyes searched carefully into her own. His sun-reddened cheeks glowed so intensely, that his face shone like the late afternoon sun. She was always struck by the way he smelled. His smell was so distinctive, so wonderful, so him. To anyone else he probably smelled like horse manure, sweat, and left-over luncheon beef. To her, he smelled like man, and work, sex and love-everything, all tender and rough.

Sarah pressed her nose to Isaac's chest. She looked up into his laughing brown eyes, and kissed him. Her tongue tingled against

the roof of his mouth, and she ran her hands through his hair, blond like the color of applesauce.

"It's not been so long," Isaac teased, gently patting her round stomach.

"Mmmm," Sarah responded. She thought she felt a kick inside her.

"Have you forgotten my gift?"

"Fit for the wife of the Tzar," she remembered, opening her eyes to dizziness.

He held out two closed fists, always the amateur magician: "Choose!" he said. Sarah looked at his two giant hands-fleshy pink, and hairy. She pointed to one, then changed her mind and pointed to the other. Her own hands shook. They were both so beautiful, his hands, she couldn't choose.

But, before she could grab both of his fists, press them to her breast, and tell him never to let her go, that she wanted to go to America with him where their baby would find love, where they could have grandchildren and great-grandchildren, he opened both of his hands at once. In his right hand a piece of glass twinkled. No longer sharp and pointy, the glass was dull at the edges. Old and worn, small and innocent, preserved and shaped by nature. Blue, like a baby's toy. Blue. The thought of such a big man stopping somewhere, probably on the dirt road back from Mr. Maritz's farm, to stoop and pick up a blue piece of glass, seemed to Sarah absurd and amazing at the same time.

They stared at the twinkling blue glass in Isaac's hand. Sarah didn't know how long they had been staring when the glass began to tremble. At first, she thought it was Isaac who was making it tremble, but she realized that he too was watching. The blue glass trembled and shook in Isaac's hand. The couple's eyes met. Neither had an explanation or an answer for the other. They stared reluctantly back at the glass in Isaac's hand.

Soon, they realized that it wasn't the glass at all that was shaking, but the whole world around it. The blue glass was steady at the center of the universe; the universe was in chaos around it. Somewhere outside of their four wooden walls, a woman screamed. Something about the piercing, shrillness of the scream told Sarah that the woman's baby had been taken away. Sarah couldn't help screaming herself. She felt her baby kick hard inside, like it was trying to get out.

The glass fell to the floor. Isaac and Sarah looked, shattered. Isaac bent to pick it up. He could not, too small, fragmented. There was a gunshot, a piercing scream, then another shot. The couple looked at each other. There was the sound of rifle butts smashing glass. Isaac kissed his wife, took her hand, and led her to the clothes chest. Glass smashing. Gunshots. He opened the chest, empty but for a tattered blanket, and lifted her inside. Sarah's mind felt numb. She remembered Isaac dressed all in black at their wedding, under the chuppah with her parents, and grandparents, his parents and grandparents holding it up. Sarah thought she heard fire crackling outside. Isaac closed the lid to the chest. It was warm in the chest. She tried not to breathe, but her body started convulsing without her permission.

"Out Jews, out!"

She thought she heard her baby crying. She thought she heard boots on the hard dirt floor. Isaac seemed to say something in Hebrew, and then there was a gun shot and a deep, satisfied sardonic laugh. Boots clamored away.

Sarah had barely the strength to raise her arm to push open the lid to the chest.

Isaac lay on the floor, still looking out the door, his hands over his heart. Sarah was hungry, like she had spent hours in famine, but the thought of eating made her want to throw up.

"Isaac, Isaac, Isaac."

"Sarah."

"Down the hall, last door on the right, number 613," the nurse said.

'Number 613,' Sarah thought, '613, why that's my room!'

Sarah looked to her husband, and saw only her own walnut brown eyes. Mr. Morris next-door was mumbling to himself, and

Sarah could hear the pretty blond Wednesday volunteer sing-singing. A polite knock at the door. Sarah turned away from the mirror, and braced herself for their entrance.

The chair cushion squeaked and the metal chair legs complained.

Nancy and Curt appeared all smiles and colorful clothes. Nancy had something in her hands-a gift.

"Hi Grandmal" Nancy said, planting a kiss on her cheek. "We brought you something?" She produced the gift-wrapped with blue tissue paper. Sarah took it, and held it in her lap. Sarah stroked the tissue paper; it was soft, but she was careful not to stroke too hard, she knew it was fragile, and could tear.

The chair squeaked and complained.

Curt gave her a kiss, a little hesitantly. The scent of Old Spice Deodorant filled Sarah's nostrils. She patted Curt's head, and said, "Funny Curt, the doctor?" Curt smiled.

Nancy began to talk about her new job at Filene's Department Store and Curt going, in the fall, to Harvard Medical School. Curt disappeared into the hall and returned with two gray folding chairs. Sarah hoped he didn't notice the stains on the carpet in the hall. The couple sat down.

When Curt and Nancy started to hint about their getting married, Sarah got impatient. She blurted out, "I let the blue glass fall. I should have held on to it, I shouldn't have let it fall."

Nancy and Curt looked confused. They should know, she thought, but there was no time to explain. It was dark outside, and she didn't want them to leave before she got to bless them. If she blessed them, maybe it wouldn't matter that they didn't understand.

Her chair squeaked and complained.

She was ready to bless the couple, but she didn't know any blessings. They sat in front of her, it seemed not knowing what to say. She put a shaky hand on Curt's right knee, the other on Nancy's left. Then, she muttered the word wedding three times carefully in Yiddish: "Chasseneh, chasseneh, chasseneh."

She didn't know what else to say. Nancy and Curt looked at her. She had to wink, she thought. She had almost forgotten, she had to wink. She was shaking. She tried to force her eye to wink. She couldn't. She focused all her energy on her left eye muscle, and tried to push it to wink. She could not wink. She shook harder. One more time, she thought. But before she could try again, Nancy and Curt had risen to embrace her. She stretched her arms around them. It was warm and dark in the huge embrace. It smelled like Old Spice and perfume, and urine-like family and life. Nancy was crying softly. Sarah wished this embrace could last forever, warm and secure, an end to the rhythm of her shaking.

Marcus Vaughan Civin
Baltimore, MD
Gilman School of Baltimore
Julie Checkoway

note

there is a letter from a woman
(two days dead)
in my post office box

it bears no return address
and the name of the town
in which I reside
is misspelled

and after two days now
my memory remains
sharp and fully intact

but in my mind
in my mind
she is still living

Stew Armstrong
Oil City, PA
Oil City Area High School
Melodee Titus



Mia Sherman

Star Wars

The day you swallowed the moon
 was when I finally walked out the door.
 The sky crumbled like a plaster ceiling
 as I rippled down the pavement into
 the corner store to buy a horoscope.
 Lucky I went inside,
 because the next thing I knew
 tremors shook the street,
 earthquakes shot from an invisible sniper,
 a wind howled from the blackening horizon
 and leaves fled along the sidewalk
 to hide in shadows of awnings.
 My stomach crashed into the middle of the earth
 I stepped onto the threshold
 and ran back home.
 You looked up from your crossword puzzle
 long enough to ask about the weather,
 then sat me down to a light luncheon
 of stars and planets.
 I sipped sweet philosophy,
 crunched on cosmic rocks,
 and smiled over the curving
 edge of the bowl. You smiled back
 and I screamed with silent laughter
 while far away
 my meteor trained its cackling path
 for the head of your bed.

Rebecca Brown
 Milton, MA
 Milton Academy
 David Smith

A Second Glance

page 15

Centipedes--
 the branches of November trees
 look like sprawling centipedes,
 armor plated insects
 blindly clawing the sky.
 With the wind they are a metallic sound
 "click, click, clack"
 against one another like a woman's heel
 on the twilight, deserted sidewalk
 "click, click"
 like they're crawling, crawling on top of each other-
 moving up a mountain of tireless, dumb legs,
 reaching for the impenetrable gray sky
 in some vain hope of escaping this awful New England cold.

Laura V. Fielden
 Bethel, CT
 Bethel High School
 Ms. Chapman

Untitled

When you are four or so, you have been a kid your whole life, so you don't think you ever will be anything but a kid. Your parents have been grown-ups as long as you've known them, and they always will be. Your house has stood there forever, a hundred years Mom said, just like the big beech tree in the front yard that you can hide under when the leaves are there. And the stone wall behind the house -- that will be there forever, too.

When I was four or so and I stood in our backyard, the wall seemed only a little bit taller than I was. But it extended a long way down on the other side to the floor of the woods. It kept the dirt from pouring into the woods from under our grassy back yard, our driveway, and even the very house in which our family lived. The walls held up almost everything I knew.

Soon I could see over the wall to the floor of the woods, even without lifting my heels from the grass. I could help my brother, Brook, climb up to sit on the wall with me and watch our cat chase away the chickadees, cardinals, and blue jays. When he dared me to walk along the wall, I looked straight ahead and walked in slow motion with my arms outstretched like they did in the circus, but after a few steps I would suddenly become aware of the big drop to my left and quickly sit back down on the wall, grabbing onto the stones that would always be there.

The beech tree in our yard would always be there, too. It was huge, with a trunk fatter than Uncle Marc, who, on holidays, would lie on his back and let me and my cousins use his stomach as a trampoline. The beech tree had branches so thick that they did not bend when Brook and I swung on them like monkeys. The leaves made a tent around us, and we hid inside from Mom in the mornings before school. But then she would drive out of the driveway without us and we would chase the car, our colorful school bags bouncing on our backs, until she stopped and said, "I almost forgot about you two!" with her cheeks coming up high in a smile. We played Hide and Seek and filled the tent of leaves with whispers and giggles.

In the winter, though, the tree was not filled with anything. But it was not really empty, either, because there was no in or out without leaves. It was just a skeleton, and the sharp, naked branches formed ghost-like faces that peered through my window at night as

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I lay in bed. It was not the tree in which Brook and I played among the streaks of light that peeked through the leaves. It was a different tree in the winter, an unfriendly tree. I always hoped that the leaves would stay, but nothing could stop gravity from pulling them down.

One summer day, Mom gave Brook and me some pieces of chalk, so big that Brook could barely grab them. We colored Chalk City on our driveway, complete with pink stop signs, yellow school buildings, and a light purple police station. We raced through the powdery blue streets on Big Wheels, giving each other invisible speeding tickets and giggling at the thrill of driving like grown-ups. I thought Chalk City would be there forever until I felt a drop of water on my ear, and then more came. When I realized that the rain drops were sliding down the driveway, taking with them our building and signs, I jumped up and danced in the rain, desperately singing "Hee Hunyegah, Hee Hunyegah," the prayer to the sun god I had learned at day camp. But the rain soaked my hair and wet my eyes as I watched Chalk City disappear.

After the first big snow one winter, Brook and I ran out into the front yard in multicolored hats and jackets and snow pants. We lay down to mold perfect snow angels, we rolled up the bottoms, middles, and heads of snowmen and -women, and we built a tall, sturdy fort to protect us from anyone who wanted to take over our shiney kingdom. But the fort could not protect our angels and snow-people from the mighty sun. The snow began to turn into slush, which seeped into the angels. The snowmen slid into the colorless, shapless mush. Through the window, I could see that even the fort itself had greyed and sunk. I marched outside without a hat or a jacket or snowpants and kicked the slushy mound again and again until the icy water soaked through my shoes and socks.

As Brook and I grew, Hide and Seek and Chalk City became One-on-One and long bike rides around the reservoir. But we still sat on the stone wall, and, by now, the woods did not look quite so scary; we felt comfortable letting our legs dangle down on the woods side, for we were held up by the sturdy wall that would always be there. We now could walk along the top of the wall like they did in the circus without suddenly clutching the stones.

Once, we even decided to venture around the wall and into the woods. We put on long pants and thick socks so the poison ivy would not creep up and make our ankles itch. We grabbed tools from the cluttered garage and went to work pulling up roots and weeds to make a clean, straight trail, like the powdery blue streets of Chalk City, through the wilderness. Just like the day we had set out to build snowmen and a fort, I felt, that day in the woods, that we could mold nature into whatever we wanted. We tamed the woods, I thought when we finished. Nothing could destroy a trail so neat and perfect as ours.

Soon after we made the trail, I cheerfully stuffed the car with trunks and suitcases and put my bike on top. As the car cruised out of the driveway, bound for Exeter, I glanced for a moment at the full, friendly beech tree. I knew it would be the same when I returned, as would the stone wall, the house, Mom, Dad, Brook, and everything else at home. Nothing had changed when I had gone to summer camp, and the only difference now was that the car was packed fuller.

But when the car cruised down the driveway the other way, at the beginning of Christmas vacation, the beech tree jutted sharp, naked branches out at me. It was not like coming home from summer camp because when you come home from summer camp, you still live at home. You should know you really don't live at home anymore when you step out of the car and your cat walks right past you, throwing you a suspicious glance. You should know you don't live at home anymore when your mom gives you one of those kisses that aunts give you when you just touch cheeks in the air. And when you have to stare at the kitchen table for a few minutes, trying to remember which seat you used to sit in and your mom calls over from the stove, "Yours is the one by the window, remember?" but you don't remember and you sit down and the chair seems a little too high or too low, because something has changed.

You should know you don't live at home anymore when your

mom offers you salad, but you've never eaten salad in your life because you hate lettuce and you always gave yours to your dad when you went to restaurants. You should know you don't live at home anymore when your brother is becoming an old friend, whom you want to talk to in long, fast sentences like you once did when only you could understand each other through giggles and Mom told you to calm down and stop saying like every other word. But now you can't because there is nothing to say anymore. Then you should know you don't live at home anymore, but I didn't know it then. It would take me three more years to know.

My senior year, Brook would come to Exeter, too. I looked forward to the long, fast sentences returning; surely we would hang out together under the trees in the quad and ride our bikes to the beach. But when I asked him to go out to dinner, he had just gotten back from McDonald's with Scott, and when I came over to talk, it was his turn to play TechnoBowl, or some other video game. When we did go out to dinner, he said yes, his classes were fine and yes, all his friends were fine, and there was nothing to say anymore.

There was nothing to say when we sat next to each other in a stuffy airplane two days before Thanksgiving. We were on our way to a hotel in Orlando, where Dad's side of the family was gathering for my grandmother Maggie's eightieth birthday. The night of the party, the hotel's banquet room overflowed with flowers, food, distant relatives, and shared memories of the old days. Wearing a bright red dress, I stuck out as the youngest among my female cousins. Now old enough to wear black or navy instead of red or pink, they kissed the air by my cheek like their mothers did. And we were all too old to jump on Uncle Marc now, who leaned back, looking tired in his chair. He did not even let his grandchildren do it; so they ran around the tables with the other little kids, chasing each other between the legs of men in sport coats and women in lipstick and black dresses, who were talking about the old days.

After a while, the grown-ups picked up the kids and plopped them onto the floor and told them to settle down. Everyone turned their chairs and their eyes to a big white screen, where we would see a slide show of Maggie's life. In the first picture stood a little girl with a skirt that flared out. As the slide projector turned, she grew taller and her skirts lost their flare. Then her hair greyed and her face wrinkled. But the changes did not seem to come gradually; with each click of the projector, with each flash of light, came a different person. The woman on the screen differed from the old woman who sat, hunched over, at the next table, differed as much as the Hide and Seek tree did from the sharp tree that formed scary faces on winter nights.

Afterwards, I continued to talk with my cousins, who showed off diamond rings and discussed baby names and apartment buildings. When you hear your cousins talking about moving to their own homes, you are shocked. And then, sitting there among them in a bright red but simple dress without a flare in the skirt, suddenly you do know that you don't live at home anymore. You remember the glance of your cat and your mom's kiss that never touched your cheek, and you suddenly realize that, like the women around you in dark dresses, you do not live at home anymore and probably never will. Your childhood is ending, and you panic.

It is like when you're scuba diving, taking your time, looking at fish and making waves with your rubber flippers, and you think you've got another hour or two before you have to go back to the surface. Then you look casually at your watch and after staring at the hands for a moment, you realize you are out of Oxygen so you rush to the surface as fast as you can, in a panic, pushing the flippers hard against the water, and you gasp for air at the surface. Then later you think back and you're really not sure you enjoyed your time swimming because you had thought you had so much more time to enjoy it. And you panic because you'll never be able to go down again.

So as I complimented the stones on my cousins' fingers and suggested baby names, I was really gasping for air inside, because I knew then what I had not known three years before, that I didn't live at home anymore. The panic continued when I returned to school. As I struggled to reach onto something, to resist the current

pulling me away from my childhood, memories started to pop into my head constantly during the day and at night, like a slide show of my life. I remember watching a TV movie with Brook while we held mugs of hot chocolate, imitating the way Mom and Dad sipped black coffee. I remembered swinging my legs up to the bar on the swing set and hanging there upside down, playing Horse on the driveway, selling lemonade on the sidewalk, cruising down a hill on a bright blue sled, gliding across our yard on the yellow "Slip and Slide." But now the swing set had been taken down; the basketball hoop had cracked and fallen into the snow; the nickels Brook and I had made from sugar and lemons were in somebody else's piggy bank. Several dulling years in the attic had covered the blue sled with dust and stolen the brightness from the "Slip and Slide." That December, while I was in Exeter, I knew that the beech tree, too, had lost its color.

Just as the summer beech tree was not the winter beech tree and just as the Maggie in the pictures was not the Maggie I knew, it seemed like the girl in the memories was not me. I moped around Exeter wishing I could go back. I really could not remember whether I had enjoyed being the little girl or not because I had thought I had so much more time.

It was like when you are playing in the ocean, riding the waves into the shore on a boogie board and you're having a great time. You're playing with your brother and saying, "Oh, here comes a big one. I'm takin' it! I'm takin' it!" And you take it and you fly up on top the crest and then slide onto the sand, feeling a rush of warm, summer-vacation air. Then you look around for your brother, but he is riding the waves with some other kids. So you look up to wave at Mom and Dad and to say "Watch me!" but they are not there and you suddenly realize you drifted so far away from them that now they are just two little spots under a distant blue umbrella that once shaded you but does no more, for you are alone and approaching the rocky part of the beach, where the waves can suck you under and you can't swim back.

But I frantically spun my arms and tried to swim back. I came home as many weekends as I could, but my parents were going to that new Italian restaurant with Steve and Debbie or to Foothills Theater with Alan and Diane or to a cocktail party at the Art Museum. So I usually ended up in a quiet house, with a cat to whom I was now a stranger. I could not have gone out, even if I had wanted to, because I was still putting off getting a driver's license; driving like a grown-up did not seem as fun as it had from the seat of a Big Wheel. Home alone, I would watch TV and sip hot chocolate like Brook and I used to, although, by now, I really craved black coffee.

In the hall one of these nights, on the way to the TV room with a full mug of hot chocolate, I stopped in front of a picture of the family. Daddy, with dark hair, sat on the stone wall, holding a baby boy. Mommy had a smooth face and high cheeks. Between them stood a little girl hardly as tall as the stone wall behind her. She wore a bright red top and a skirt that flared out, which she could lift up against gravity when she spun around. But it was not me; it was not the seventeen-year-old girl in the straight, simple dress, and it certainly was not the teenager who stood there in a grey sweat suit and slippers, now unconsciously sipping like a grown-up.

The next morning, Mom and Dad and I drove back up to Exeter. Dad said that the landscaper had come the week before and mentioned that the stone wall was leaning towards the woods. The same sturdy structure that had always been there to grab onto when the woods scared me, the thing that held up my home and my family, almost everything I knew, seemed to be crumbling. I looked at Dad and suddenly he was not the same dark-haired man who sat on the wall, holding a baby. I looked at Mom and saw that her cheeks were not so high. And then I knew that all the spinning a little girl could do would never really defy the strength of gravity.

When I came home for Christmas vacation, I walked around the wall, down to the woods. I wanted to look at the wall from the woods side, to see if it really was leaning. But when I got to the

edge of the woods, where Brook's and my path had begun, I could see no path at all. The plants of the woods had crept back in, refilling our neat, straight trail with untamed weeds and roots.

This time, I did not feel the frustration I had had when the leaves had fallen from the beech tree, when the rain had destroyed Chalk City, and when the sun had melted our snowmen. Because whatever it was that made all these things happen, whatever made Mom's face sag and Maggie hunch over and the wall lean into the woods, was the same thing that let me hang upside-down on the swing set, get a ball through the hoop, sled down the hill. It let me ride the crest of a wave and slide onto the sand, even though it did make me drift away from the distant blue umbrella.

Brit Katzen
Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Douglas Rogers

Consumption

At midsummer, they brought you home to die.
in the bedroom upstairs, you stumbled to the window,
clothes sagging like the skin under eyes,
to watch the tree in the backyard tremble
under the strain of your children's swinging.

This November
we can see the curves of your back on the sheet,
the ashes in the closet with skirts, a parka, an odd shoe.
In the picture on the dresser,
darkness creeps into your face from the inside out
as if you are still being burnt, slowly,
and stored in a frame, under glass,
the perfect tragedy.

Leslie Eckel
Chestnut Hill, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

To My Mother

You left
when he was out of town,
on a night so shadowy
I was afraid to look out the windows.
You thought I was asleep
when the garage door shuddered open
but I turned on the lamp
to make sure it was real.
Now I'm alone
in a house
full of your pictures,
and old pee stains
from my dog
who always loved you
more than she loved me,
and an old man who still cries at night.
But I don't cry.
Your swallowed name
burns black in my throat,
and the rest of me left with you.

Amanda Burr
Natick, MA
Walnut Hill School
Jessie Schell

My feet echo on the slate stairs leading to the basement of the Holocaust Museum. The guide who directs me to the Children's Wall of Remembrance has bouncy curls and sympathetic eyes.

"It's very draining, isn't it?" she asks.

I smile weakly in response. The two hours I have just spent gaping at pictures as I walked aimlessly through the museum seem unreal. Following her directions, I stumble over the stubby, rust-colored carpet that softens the white walls of the museum's basement.

A few rays of sunlight sift through the skylights from the open lobby above. Entering the memorial room, I recall the articles and reviews I have read about the museum and even the origins of this particular exhibit. When the idea of the Holocaust Museum originated six or seven years ago, children from across the country were asked to compose and illustrate a message for visitors. They painted these pictures and words on five inch square ceramic tiles. Inscribed in heavy silver letters above the thousands of tiles are the words: "The first to perish were the children... from these a new dawn might have risen."

One long wall is covered by the drawings, each section a mosaic of bright, Crayola colors and screaming words. Images of terror, hell, and nightmare assault me. I wonder if children are as innocent as society often perceives them to be. Intense words like hate, terror, and death suggest that this innocence has long vanished. My eyes are drawn to the brightest tile, a white square, dominated by a fuschia heart, intertwined with tiny thorns. Next to it, a tile painted with a brilliant rainbow, surrounded by clouds and sunshine, states: "Let the sun shine through." Six million Jews died in the Holocaust. The children of America have seen this figure, have heard the stories of permanently scarred survivors. Yet this one child thinks of sunshine and searches for hope.

The tile room, unlike the rooms above, where visitors are cramped into an airless space, is nearly deserted. I hesitate, struggling to remember the location of my best friend Jen's tile. As my eyes wander over the second grouping, her tile, white with a navy blue trim, leaps out from the jumble. In the center is a yellow star of David, criss-crossed with gnarled barbed wire. I blink rapidly, barely aware of the tears escaping down my cheeks. Painted in heavy black ink are her words, "Never forget."

Jen was in a car accident in May of 1993. She was returning from a weekend in D.C. with a Jewish youth organization. She died on June third. The day before her accident, she had visited the museum with the group. I imagine the light on her face when she saw the tile. She had stood on the same nubby carpet. She had felt a rush of importance, knowing her words would be read by thousands of visitors. From the moment I stepped into the museum, my senses had been wrenched by images of the Holocaust. Now, standing in a stale basement room, I must face the worst of them: not a grainy photograph of walking skeletons or tapes of animal-like wails, but a single square tile.

Jennifer Blalock is printed in a twelve-year-old's block letters. I touch the smooth, cold surface, feeling the meticulously applied paint, and imagine Jen touching the same spot. I inhale deeply in an attempt at self-control.

The woman from the hall wanders into the room towards me. Her eyes follow mine, and she reads aloud: "Jennifer Blalock, age twelve. Never forget." Bright-voiced, she turns to me.

"Is that you?"

I shake my head, letting my hand fall to my side. My fingertips are white from pressing so hard on the tile.

"Jen died," I blurt out.

The pleasant expression on the woman's face dissolves. I clear my throat, rubbing my fist across wet cheeks. As I step towards the narrow opening to the hall, the guide calls out, "Wait!"

"Yes?" I ask, my voice breaking. I am suffocating, even in this crisply air-conditioned room. I want to escape from these reminders of childhood and pain.

"You can't leave feeling sad." She reaches out and places a

slender hand on my trembling arm. "That isn't the intention of this exhibit."

When I don't respond, the woman removes her hand, and I feel an emptiness from the lack of physical contact. Whatever the intention of these drawings, I cannot erase from my mind the memory of Jen laughing. She had joyously explained to me he honor she felt at being part of this museum; I cannot forget her vivacious eyes, her springy brown hair. Jen rarely expressed her most private emotions, and I guard the memory of each confidence as precious. Our friendship, stretching through junior high and high school, was one of the few constants in my life. Jen provided a calm voice and often gave me the energy to stay focused. As I stand in this empty hall, listening to the murmurs of tourists above me, our friendship seems removed and somehow bitter.

I feel vaguely guilty as I wander into the spacious hallway, where the speckled sunlight floating in the air seems hollow. I watch my white Keds step carefully on each stair, my feet seeming detached from the rest of my body. I leave behind what I now sense I can never forget.

Marjorie Adamson
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

Class Rank Ranks Out

"Don't worry about someone else's work - worry about your own." "All that matters is that you do your very best." "This is not a competition." "I do not want to hear you asking someone what they got. Only what you got is important." "Everyone is different. No one is better than anyone else."

Sound familiar? These comments have been repeated so often they are nearly cliches, proverbs. These are teachings about learning - they tell us the most important thing about life. Though the lesson is more nebulous and ongoing than, say, how to average a set of numbers, it is more concrete - don't compare yourself to others, compare yourself to you. Don't think you are superior or inferior to anyone else, think you are better, bigger, more beautiful than you were before, and can only continue to rise to become more of yourself.

That's what they teach us in school, especially in first grade when they start returning the first spelling tests and the kids look at the scrawled red pen percentages, and then realize there are twenty-two more to see. They crane their necks and even shout across the room, bragging and brandishing the grainy yellow paper, or hiding it, hiding the word "heard" mistakenly spelled "heared." When we realized that the numbers were supposed to mean something to us, when we realized that everyone else's meant even more, the teachers sent in the antidote signal - don't compare, don't compare. Do your Personal Best.

Now, even for freshmen, for whom college is a dim reality and spelling tests a recent memory, we see that the original message, the one they sought to conceal, is the truth. Somewhere between then and now, the personal stuff, the non-judgmental stuff, became moot. What matters again is the Number.

The Number, of course, is the average, the mean, the final number crunch. All the words spoken, all the facts memorized, concepts learned, essays written, reams of paper, pounds of books wrapped, zipped and carried from locked metal boxes in the wall and back again, all are reduced to the Number we know as G.P.A., we roll of our tongues flippantly, "geepeeay." What's yours?

A lot of people, even green little freshmen, have a moment of truth and sit down to figure it out, before someone else does. Punch some rubberized buttons and bingo! It's that simple, a math class of work, a biology topic: reduction-division. Reducing the work of a quarter, a semester, a year, three, four years to numbers and letters, averaging them to get grades, dividing them to get the G.P.A. It is between zero and 5.5, both of which take a tremendous effort

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to conjure up on the calculator. All could stop there and we'd know how hard we've tried, how hard the classes had been. But in order for the Number to be Important (and it is, now that the Numbers we aren't supposed to compare Count for the future), you know there has to be something more.

The Number is Important because it will go into a computer, sometime in the distant future. This computer had never laid eyes on us or our work, or ears on our words and our thoughts, or the fingers it doesn't have on the pulse that makes us living, breathing people, not machines. Yet it will be fed, offered our reduced, divided numbers. The computer will do a final, double-check crunch, and spit out a Number, just like we can at home. But the computer will know something we don't: the Numbers of everyone else in the grade. To be efficient, the computer will put the numbers in order.

That's the story of the second abbreviation, as it appears on the transcript copies handed out in some guidance groups: R.I.C. Rank in Class - you and everyone else, everyone whose spelling tests were not your concern, your Personal Best assigned a place among the rest. To be exact, there are three hundred transcripts with a waiting space, waiting for two more years to go by and be calculated into "geeppees" and given a place in the ritual of the Rank. Exactly three spaces will have numbers that represent medal-winning finishes in international athletic competitions. Exactly one space will have the number that heads off them all, the leader, the homonym to the all-important word "won," the number one. It looks like this: 1. One "one," one "won" one person whose Personal Best is now, publicly, the Best.

Different cliches might apply here - "less is more," maybe. What is clear is that the don't compare - everyone is different - it doesn't matter what s/he gets is moot. This is to show "how you compare to the others in your grade." This is necessary so, believe it or not, someday a college can look at "how yoy compare," in other words, who is better. Euphemisms and arguments aside, this is how I, one of the hundreds to be ranked, to fall like a cadet, anonymously, into the paint-by-numbers of my grade, see this system I have yet to take part in.

I see this as an attempt to quantify intelligence, in essence a person's social worth, which is subjective and unique and personal. I see this as something that makes people burst into tears when they learn that they have earned a ninety-nine, and someone else a hundred. I see this as the ultimate self-worth destroyer, the brutal truth behind the love-yourself facade. This is the cruel part of a bait-and-switch - work hard and feel good, but surprise! someone, or lots of someones, are harder workers, are smarter people. This system of Rank does what Eleanor Roosevelt said was impossible - it makes people inferior without their consent. How can it do anything but?

Rank in Class is the ultimate first-grade rudeness, but this time the people who discouraged comparison are egging it on. I got better than you got better than him did better than her is better than her beat him... It seems so ludicrous, to give us these orders, so ridiculous that they are really labeling a best and worst, top and bottom.

I'm not saying competition is always bad. There is the kind that is exhilarating, the kind that makes us whole. There is competition against ourselves, against our past frustrations, against our doubts. The class rank gives us more doubts, gives us competition against the others, who are completely unlike us, who don't share our personal lights of strength and buried shadows of self-doubt. The rank in class feeds the people within our soul who think they aren't good enough. It makes us know we aren't good enough.

The class rank encourages isolation, obsessive behavior, total concentration on the sliver of life that is grades and numbers. The question on my mind when I get my report card and look at the reflection of my efforts will not be "did I do my best and have fun because I am still a kid?" but "is this good enough?" The answer is inevitable: only perfect is good enough, and there is always someone more perfect than you.

I regard this institution warily, waiting for it to cast its impersonal, indelible stamp on my self-esteem. While I watch it make its mur-

ky, snaking approach, I see something crystal clear, and simple.

Why not keep the two little spaces on the transcript, one for G.P.A. and another next to it. But instead of "R.I.C.," the second one is "highest possible personal G.P.A.," including a clear representation of the person's courseload, including honors credit. How you did compared to yourself.

Stop putting us in order - let us be independent, let us grow to be more of ourselves, less our defeats in the eyes of others. Treat us like first graders, tell us not to compare. Treat us like adults, let our work stand alone. To someone looking at the future stretching right in front of her fresh nose, Rank In Class is rank.

Emily Weinstein
Paul D. Schreiber High School
Port Washington, NY
G. Blain Bocarde

Travelogue

My hands don't remember you
the maps they traced on your face
the pathways they traveled
along the veins in your neck.
Pens books spoons toothbrushes
have replaced your wrists and shoulderblades.
Fists filling pockets
can't recall some foreign mottled pigment
some face in a foggy windshield
that burrowed into the pumping highways
behind my eyes
swelled tossed turned
under closed lids.
A miscarried dream
that spilled out of my mouth
and split against the tattooed walls
of one of the traffic-stained telephone booths
that line this street
like confessionals.

Bring back your hands.
I won't ask where they've been,
what charts and legends they have drawn
since then.

I've gone soft and shapeless.
My blood runs slow and
thick when I don't sleep in
your palm,
between your working fingers
while I walk through plot lines
that litter my head when my
eyes aren't looking.

Bring back your hands.
I will wake and write down
every photograph,
pen in a hand recalling
every color
every blueveined roadmap
every bracing press
of familiar fingertips.

Jessica Winter
East Amherst, NY
Williamsville East High School
Ms. Richert

The Piano

Puddles of deep light
Spill onto the piano--
Pooling onto sleek keys.

Low notes escape,
Echoing
Across smooth reflections

Of themselves to
Chalky shadows
Where small blue fire-tips--

Bright flashes of song--
Lick at the dashing fingers
Dancing away

Before the air
Absorbs the fragments
Of melody,

But the open window
Whirls the droplets of sound
Out into the emptiness.
Only the curtain
Blooms
In magic flame.

Audra Sherman
Oakton, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

Wait

The clock strikes one hundred years
and the apple on the table
has begun to go bad, its taut red skin
and mealy flesh to rot.
A spot no bigger than my thumbprint
spreads, a smooth dark sea
upon a glistening globe.
A hundred years is a long time to wait--
the ticking of the clock has meshed its pattern
firmly into my mind. It thunders, now,
demure clacking having swelled
into a cruel steady crash of noise.
So steady, so maddeningly steady
and with nothing but the apple to occupy
my vision I wait and listen
to the clock on the wall.

I miss the sunsets
and our happy Norman Rockwell days.
And I ache to leave the apple
to its fruitflies and the clock to its
indifferent ticking, but you,
O fierce and melancholy guest,
have yet to arrive.
Why do you take so long?
Do your wild and lovely stallions
drag their hooves upon the cobblestones?

Jessica Barr
Sunshine, MD
Montgomery High School
Mrs. D. Wilchek

Taillights

The wooden slats of the bed frames creaked as she gently sat down beside my motionless form. She ran the back of her hand quickly under her sore, wet eyes and looked at me from far away. She shook my shoulder gently and I slowly felt myself rising, as if buoyed by warm murky water, into a hazy consciousness. Drawing myself up on my elbows, I examined her face in the half-light which seeped in from the hallway, permeating the viscous blackness.

"Rob," she breathed, "Rob...your grandmother died."

The syllables fade into silent weeping, her body shaking slightly. I rested motionless on the bed, the tired, disinterested expression on my face barely changing. She stared at me.

"I'm sorry...I'm sorry," she added quietly, "My mother died, I lost my mother...she's dead."

I felt hollow and tired, but no surge of emotions rushed to my chest. I experienced a vague sadness for my mother as she began sobbing, hunched over the side of the bed, her hair strung between her fingers in lifeless tendrils. Above that slight discomfort, thoughts rushed steadily through my mind. I knew at once that this moment would be branded forever in the delicate scar tissue of my memory. I remember thinking with an odd, misplaced sense of scholarly dissection how soap-opera dramatic the moment seemed, as if I had seen it too many times on T.V. for it to affect me in reality. I was so hollow and calculating that I was scared, scared at my own inanimate coolness. And that selfish expression of fear: eyebrows drawn down and together, forehead creased, nostrils flared, eyes deep and pointed, must have been what my mother took for surprised sadness, for she grabbed for my shoulders, pulling my unfeeling body towards her in a tight embrace.

"I'm so sorry, Rob," she whispered in my ear, "She was such a good grandmother, such a good, good person...she loved you so much."

I held her tightly, partially out of sadness for her, partially out of my own unease and discomfort, and partially out of not wanting her to stare into my eyes. "We're going to drive up to Maine to see the body in the hospital before it's cremated," she explained between hitching breaths, "I've already told Beth; Carolyn's going to her father's; get ready and we'll leave in about fifteen minutes...I love you."

She squeezed me tighter and cried with steady, pulsing force. From far away I thought how childish she seemed, how fragile and vulnerable. She held me and wept for several minutes, and I maintained a steady grasp on her, my eyes focused blankly on a spot deep within the far wall of my room. When she released her grasp, she sat up, offering me a strained smile: "Okay?"

I nodded yes quickly.

"I'm not going," my mouth betrayed before I could form the thought in my mind.

"What...why?" my mother demanded painfully.

"I'm tired...it's early, I'm going back to sleep."

I rolled away from her onto my stomach, pulled the blue blanket up to my neck, shut my eyes solidly and tried to fall asleep. I felt my mother's gaze on the back of my head until, after a long time, she rose soundlessly from the side of my bed and walked out of the half-light into the blinding, aching brightness of the hallway. I did not hear them leave.

I slept until one. I spent the afternoon alone, except for the occasional telephone call, which forced me to confront the situation for brief moments.

"How are you," they said.

"Fine."

"I'm so sorry."

"Yeah...thanks."

"Are you doing okay?"

"Uh-huh."

"Tell your mother I'll call back later."

"Yeah...sure."

This scene replayed itself throughout the afternoon and into

the bleak evening like a nicked record. I spent the lonely, in-between silences in somber anticipation of the next ring. Each time I answered the phone, I couldn't help but think that I was only acting a role, trying to play a part in an old Broadway show. The audience had seen it before and expected me to play the role as it had always been played, yet even with acting comes an emotional intensity, a focused, self-awareness. I was more like a section of the scenery; I inconspicuously added to the general effect of the drama which unfolded for the audience below. When the audience had left, I was wheeled into a dark backroom to sit away from the lights and gather dust and rot. I ate and sat and lay down and ate and watched the night steadily overtake the house with grey shadows.

My mother returned that night with my grandfather and Beth. Beth immediately ran crying to her room. My grandfather wandered around the kitchen, touching items on the countertops, moving them, straying back and forth aimlessly. He went to take off his coat three or four times, the deep navy blue jacket sliding off his shoulders and trapping his arms at his sides.

"Hello, Robert," he offered painfully.

"Hi," I said. I did not know what to say.

My Grandfather moved towards me and hugged me with his arms still trapped down at his sides. I held him for a full minute, then he let go, turned from me and walked away. I let him go.

I climbed the steep stairs to my mother's room, moving on all fours with my hands pressed into the rough burgundy carpeting, as I had done when I was a child. She was hunched over the side of her bed, motionless.

"Hi, Mom," I whispered.

She looked up at me, her face raw in sore, red strips from the tears. I treaded the distance between us, awkwardly bent over her and pressed against her.

"I wish you had come today, to see your Grandmother for the last time," she said clearly.

"I was tired," I said, immediately regretting my words.

She pulled away from me and held me by the shoulders.

"She was your Grandmother..." she said. The accusation hung sharply. "When are you going to cry?"

I reached for her abruptly and pulled myself to her, crying hard, because I knew I was supposed to and because I wanted to need to. It wasn't the shock that made me so cold. The distance frightened me. The reserved separation frightened me. I was numb, deadened, emotionless. I felt so alone and disconnected from my family, so uncaring, so detached. I watched the drama from behind a two-way mirror. All was silent, dark and separate. I wanted to be deeply saddened and depressed. I wanted to validate my love for my Grandmother. I was so infuriated with myself, so filled with self-loathing at my indifference. I grasped her body tighter and tighter.

At her funeral I cried. I sat in the front pew below the white, high vaulted ceilings of the tastefully elegant church in Darien, Connecticut. I sat between my mother and sister, my eyes focused alternately on her large, old photograph, mounted on styrofoam board, and the dully shining brass urn resting on the thick swath of white cloth which shaped the outline of a long, oaken mantle. I knew that I loved her then and I was truly sad, but I still harbored an odd sense of detachment. I recognized, for perhaps the first time, the distance between myself and the people I love. I realized my tendency to draw in, to close up. Partially, this gradual estrangement was the result of two years at boarding school. Mostly, it was the result of my selfish approach to life. I had always approached relationships from the perspective that I should only contribute to a relationship when I needed something out of it. I was never there for anyone else when it inconvenienced me. I was wrong. I know that.

On the way home from my grandmother's funeral, as we plummeted down the interstate, my two sisters asleep in the back seat, I tried to tell my mother how I felt. I told her that I wanted to be more empathetic and more attentive. I wanted to replace that two-way mirror with a window. She sat quietly as I spoke, her eyes focused into the rear view mirror, watching the curving, broken, yellow

low fine illuminated in the car's taillights. I could tell that she had been hurt by my seeming indifference. I apologized to her and told her how much I had loved my Grandmother. For several miles, we remembered her together. Tragedies, mistakes and pain overlap and obscure one another, and after a period of time they pass out of the range of the dim taillights and into the darkness. Then we can concentrate on the road ahead.

Robert Levin
Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Douglas Rogers

My Father Is

My father is Michelangelo

I say

to my friends who stand around
and watch

with their mouths

agape

as my father dips

his nylon bristled brush

in his beige ceramic jug

that I bought

last year for Christmas

filled with Mohawk's Fast-Acting Strip Paint

that takes two days

[years]m

to dry not in the Sistine Chapel

but out in the sun

beats

as my father begins

where the chair's leg tapers off

he glides the bristles

down the Mahogany piece

he stops

rubs a little harder

backs up

and goes forward again

until he reaches the bottom

he is economical

and dips his brush

in the milky residue

wanting to wrest the remainder

from the thick brown film

only after he this accomplishes

does he stop

hands me

a brush

and dumps a pile of fresh sawdust

into the mottled gray residue pan

only to take the brush

out of my hands

and into his

again this man

my father

is Michelangelo

everyone

but me

believes

my father is

the almighty

Michelangelo.

Josephine Alemanno

Summit, NJ

Oak Knoll School

Harriet Marcus

Pennywhistle

The subway smells sharply of metallic grime. I shove my underground pass back into my jeans pocket and head towards the escalator. Down, down, deeper into London, the motorized stairs carry me down. Long fluorescent tubes glare off the yellow tiles of the walls, a grotesque imitation of sunlight, illuminating graffitied suggestions. "GO HOME" the thick black marker scrawl at the corner of a toothpaste advertisement urges me. "I don't want to," I tell it silently as I slink past. "This city is mine. I belong here." But still the escalator continues down towards departure.

The last step pushes me onto still ground, and I set off at city pace down the long rectangular corridor. Step step step fast enough to remain invisible, I walk among the army of underground travelers. We sound like water rushing through loose pipes as we shift past and around each other to the trains. In front of me our legion has veered away from the wall, forming a narrow gap in our stream, our mob of human particles. As I near the beginning of the gap, I hear a wavering tin melody gliding thinly through the unused space of the passageway. I peer around the heads in front of me to see the form of a person crouching against the jaundiced tiles of the wall.

Man or woman, child or adult, I can tell neither from the hunched skinny body, nor the shoulder length tendrils of grease hanging thin and dirty in front of the pale downcast face. Pale as the bones that press against the weary skin, pale as the ghost it will someday be. Clothed in army reject tatters, this androgynous urchin holds a pennywhistle, glinting heavenly bright in the dull passage. Wasted and filthy fingers skip from note to note in airy cadence as the music glides from unfed lips. The melody floats like a hymn, writing itself onto the crowded space of the tunnel. Strains past starvation issue from the thin tin tube, from the meager breath of this ragged slip of flesh and bone, seeming to dissolve heavenward.

I slow my pace, unable to help myself. The tune draws me towards the gap. I can see how the eyes close with concentration, the body trembles trying to force the air of the city back into tired lungs, the hands steady on the wavering music. The crowd bumps past me in its rush, its gurgling cascades towards the platform. I cannot keep up with the stream; the current pushes me nearer the empty pocket, the empty court of this semi-conscious piper. The song, the prayer, twines around me, welcoming me.

Suddenly above, around, beneath the melody a dark rumbling begins, attacking the notes. The huge sound shakes them from my ears and I remember that I had come here to leave the sweet decay of the city. I am not meant to stay, to lose perspective, to find music. I will join back in, pack myself tight into a fast moving capsule of humanity, finally to reemerge into surface daylight. I am meant to be of use, of definite form and function, to think clearly, breathe clean, die among the ones who love me. My footsteps regain their original cadence, blending easily back into the pace, the current. The train has arrived.

I quickly fish into my pocket, drawing out a coin to drop into the penny sprinkled cardboard box at the feet of the fading dream of music. As it clinks to stillness I have already walked past, wondering if ten pence can carry me closer to grace.

Johanna Lewis
Portsmouth, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Douglas Rogers

Untitled

It was the quietest part of the entire house. That's why Lara chose it as her refuge. Whenever she could retreat there, to the basement laundry room, with a blanket to wrap around her knobby knees and the cordless phone to warm her ear. She sat down there whenever she could, in the little room Dad had built, among the mismatched socks, and the soapflakes, and the "I'm With Stupid" T-shirt Mom saved for cleaning the house in, and the cartoon sign her older brother had stolen from the old laundromat on Poughkeepsie Ave. with which to christen their then new laundry room. "Don't Be A Machine Hog!" it said in letters made of soap bubbles that flowed from the mouth of a cartoon machine with a snout and piglet ears.

It had always kind of scared Lara as a kid but Joff had been so inflated and beaming-like when he brought it home rolled up under his arm just like Dad used to roll up his racing papers that Lara hadn't said anything. Joff had hung it up himself, in a frame he had found in the unfinished part of the basement. Lara hadn't seen him hanging it. She had heard him do it through her floor. Her room was right above the laundry nook so she often woke to the machine's grunts of indigestion as it churned Joff's athletic socks in its enormous belly.

That particular day she's been eight. That particular day she'd lain on the floor of her room to hear him clink the tools he was using to put a nail in Dad's wall. Stomach to the ground, ear to the thin carpet that was more like a floor-painting after so many years' wear on such cheap material, she listened for Joff's clattering. It reminded her of her father's. Of the clattering in the basement those four months it had taken him to install the laundry room. Of the not nearly stifled curses that followed the sound of a dropped hammer or the splattering sound of nails hitting the cement floor, like the clinking of marbles that had accompanied the games she'd play at Gram's house when Gram's back was turned, sending marbles to their demise under the sink and cabinets and refrigerator, to the dark recesses from which they never returned.

It was a clattering she missed now, like when you go to sleep with the tip tap of rain on your roof and awaken to a silence not half as comfortable as the noise you'd gotten used to. Like with the rain, Lara didn't really know how much she liked the noise until it was gone. In fact, at the time she didn't think she liked it at all.

But the house was so quiet these days. So quiet in fact that she had to go to the remotest nook, to squat on the washing machine's smooth, white lid beneath the floorboards so that her late-night telephone whispers wouldn't carry to where her mother slept. She sat down there often, forming a little ball of noise around her, a little ball of buzzing whispers she had to contain, buzzing with stifled laughter, like a cocooned caterpillar she was always violently afraid would burst out and light on her mother's nervous ears.

It was so quiet now that her mother's ears had become super-sensitive, almost. Suddenly, one day, the clattering had stopped, quick as the abrupt clicking off of a radio. There was no more noise in the basement for Lara to listen to except her mother's muffled sobs over the laundry machine's churning and the ticking of the big yellow smiley-face clock in the kitchen.

Joff had bought that clock for Lara's mother when he was twenty and Lara thirteen. He bought it just before he moved in with Dee-Dee, the nice girl with the capped teeth and ebony skin darker than Joff's German father allowed his to be. She had good taste in clothes, bad taste in music, and didn't quite know what to say to Lara. But Lara liked her in spite of that fact. And in spite of the fact that Joff got kind of different around her.

Lara liked a lot of people she didn't think she could. Her father, for example. She liked him just as much after he left as before, maybe even more. She liked his yelling, and his chubby, pale face, and the fact that he cursed at nails and pleaded with floorboards when they stubbornly refused his architecture. She didn't think she'd still like him after he left, but she did. She even, in a way, though perhaps she didn't know it, liked him for being gone, because now he was perfect. He had no faults because she hadn't known him long

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enough to find any. And she was beginning to despair at her ability to find faults.

Alan often told her in his matter of fact way that she was too picky, that she expected too much from people, that it would lead to a lot of let-downs. He'd made these personality assessments as if he'd known about her as long as he'd known her, and as if he'd known her all her life.

That was what Lara hated about him.

"I am not!" she's respond in an excited whisper. "I'd rather expect too much than expect nothing like you do," and her words wouldn't come out right at all as she tried to defend herself. And she'd get off the phone wishing she'd been more angry and more forceful. And she'd go to sleep thinking he was right.

Alan was another one of those people Lara didn't think she could like but did. He came into her life when she was thirteen, and he just never left. She wasn't sure why or how but they began a conversation one winter night when her tiny boots were giving her blisters and the cold and the noise of a police siren down the street were making her nuts. It was still going on four years later. Sometimes she felt like it was more like a four-year-long debate. In which case, she was never sure who was winning.

He had this way of never letting her, or anyone else, win in an argument. He bent and twisted logic like a ball of Play-Doh, and when he was through, as much as it pained her to do so, Lara had to admit he had a point. And if he hadn't had one, he had made one.

That was another thing Lara hated about him. With him she was no longer sure why she was doing anything. And if she had been sure at the beginning of the conversation, he'd turn it around and make her feel foolish for thinking she knew why or how or whom or whatever secure little fact she'd been basing her actions on. With Alan, all Lara's logic floated away from her like a released balloon. Life was no longer a Baltimore Catechism of questions and answers, but one big question that led to another, and so on. Lara would've compared a conversation with him to an exercise in the Socratic Method if she'd even known who Socrates was. Instead, she got off the phone with him most nights wondering why she'd called him at all, yet knowing she'd do it again the next day.

Lara was surprised by her friendship with Alan, with this tall, skinny boy who promised to fix her basketball hoop more times than she could remember. She was surprised because she hated more than anything the one thing he invariably gave her - uncertainty.

When Lara was a little girl, Gram would read her fairy-tales from the little paperback Golden Books hand-me-downs she'd kept since Joff's childhood. Gram's voice was enthusiastic and her eyes wide as they sat at the kitchen table, recounting tales of valor and talking squirrels, of golden nutmeg and ancient sorcerers, of true love and Smurfs.

"...and that nasty old witch with the warts on her decrepid hands said to Sleeping Beauty..." Gram's voice was hoarse and Lara loved to hear it. Whenever she read that line Lara would look at her own hands and at Gram's to check for warts and was always relieved when she found none. She had this queer six-year-old notion that if she grew a wart she'd become evil like the witch and that you could tell if a person was good or bad by the way their hands looked. She had no idea what "decrepid" meant, thankfully, for if she had she would've hid in fear of Gram, or else it would've blown her theory to bits. Gram's hands were worn, with the skin pulled taut over veins and finger bones and nails that were always a little dirty under their white edges.

Lara liked that in the book you could always tell who everybody was. You didn't have to think much to get it, or even listen to the story. All you had to do was look at the pictures. The bad guys always had warts and black horses and clouds around them and the good guys had long blond hair and bluebirds on their fingers and big bright smiles. The good guys danced. The bad guys cackled. The good guys fell in love. The bad guys tried to stop them. The good guys lived happily ever after. The bad guys died.

It was easy. Lara would sit stiffly on Gram's lap and look at

the pictures, and her mind would wander, and she'd think of a million things to say and not say them because she knew Gram would shush her with a bony finger and narrow black eyes. So she'd just listen to the birds outside at Gram's windowfeeder and think how good Gram must be to have attracted them all and look at Gram's snow white hair and think she must've been too good to even be blond.

Lara always wished she looked like the princesses in the books Gram read, especially the Snow White's and Sleeping Beauty's, the girls who didn't know or didn't tell anyone they were princesses until the happiness part at the end. Lara knew she didn't live in a castle with a king and queen and horses. She lived in a little two-bedroom house with peeling wallpaper and parents who slept on a sofa-bed that they folded up in the morning before they left for work, and before Dee Dee bewitched him, she lived with a brother who ate Coke on his cornflakes at breakfast (which was, of course, the coolest thing about him to Lara).

The queen waited tables. Still, Lara hoped for a happy ending. After all, there was nobility in work.

The princess wore Joff's hand-me-down sweatsuit that bore the names of colleges he could've never hoped to go to. Snow White wore rage too.

The king...the king died. The king stopped working one day in the basement, came upstairs, and went away. He stopped yelling, stopped clattering, stopped shaking hands with people when he made a deal, stopped making deals, stopped making noise.

Lara didn't get why the house was so quiet. No one even seemed to speak for days. She started to scream so at least she could hear herself but Mom sent her to Gram's because she had a headache, and Gram shushed her more than she ever had before and made her macaroni and cheese and Shirley Temples for dinner that night without Lara even having to ask for it. She even let Lara play with the marbles and didn't seem to care when they went under the heating grate.

Lara slept that night in Gram's other bedroom feeling nauseous and dreaming that her father was playing "Red Light Green Light 1-2-3" with her, only he wouldn't stop running when she turned around, until Gram came and told her to get into bed with her.

The next day Gram took her home to get nice shoes and a dress, but her mother and brother weren't there, and Gram sat down on the edge of the open sofa-bed and zipped up her dress in the empty living room.

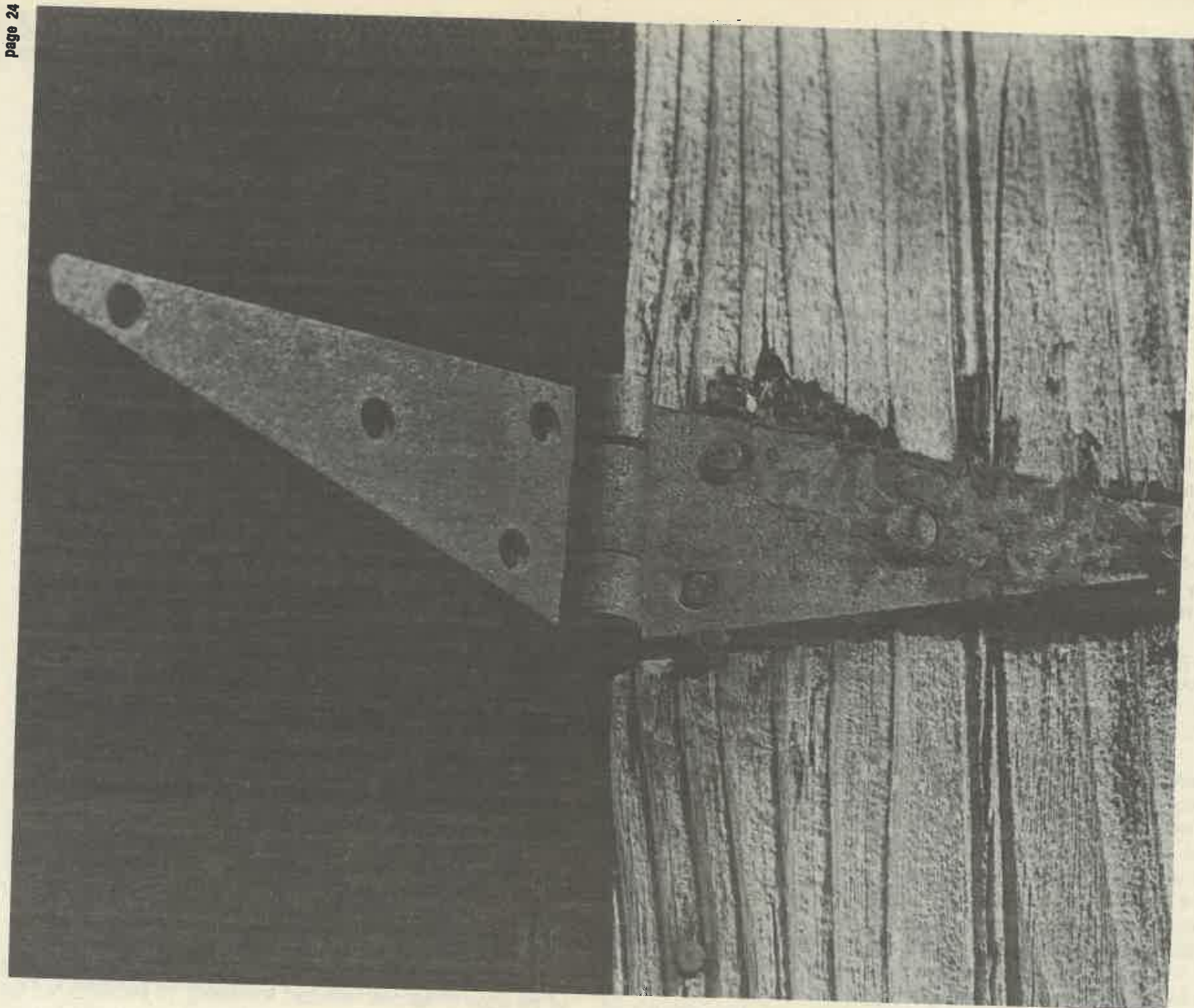
Then Gram took Lara to a big room with a man in a box at the front who didn't look like her father but was. And Lara was mad 'cause she thought maybe Dad went away because he was a bad guy and that he just wasn't talking to be mean. And Lara didn't want to go near him and nobody made her, so she sat in the corner and played with a little boy she'd never met before that someone said was her cousin.

And, little by little, the room got empty, and it was time to go, and the little boy left, and Mom was taking her home again now.

But before she left she walked up to the box by herself because she was just a little bit curious and because Mom said she really should "say goodbye." But she didn't say "goodbye." She didn't say anything. She just looked at his hands. His hands were big and beautiful and warm, if she remembered right. She'd never noticed before, so she had to make sure now. They were huge and beautiful...and they had no warts. Of course he was good; he was Dad. Lara looked at his hands and she was relieved. She wanted to lift them up off his chest to examine the other sides, but bad guys never had warts on their palms anyway and besides, Mom was watching so she figured she shouldn't. But she smiled because there was no reason for her father to have to go away. And she cried for the same reason.

Lara was nauseous in the car as she rode home with Mom and Joff. But she listened to the quiet, and it put her to sleep.

Alexis E. Sottile
Staten Island, NY
Notre Dame Academy
Debra Sundstrom



Rachel Lears

Lessons

When my father plays his cello, the world quivers and all that is solid is his hand urging the bow across the translucent glowing strings. Afterwards, when he holds my hand on the way home, his palm is warm and dry and as we cross Broadway he grips me tightly like I'm a bow too. He has his own studio where he teaches other people how to play, and I like to sit on the wooden bench and watch them try to sound like him. Sometimes Mom brings over a thermos of juice and we drink it in the waiting room and she tells me about music and instruments and then we all go out to dinner. But I like it best when it's just me and Dad and his cello, when everything else floats away.

Today I'm in his studio after school because Mom had to work late. His only student today is Kate, who has red fluffy hair and a gold music note that she wears around her neck on a thick chain. She goes to Columbia, which is right near our house, and sometimes she baby-sits me, even though Mom says that soon I'll be too old for a baby-sitter. But not yet. At our house Kate likes to look at all the old classic music records that Dad has been collecting since high school, and she tells me stories about them, just like Dad.

Usually Kate lets me sit in the room and watch during her lessons, but today Dad says that she really needs to concentrate, so I should wait outside. In the waiting room I can still hear the music, but it's kind of muffled. But I can't see him, swaying and pushing, leaning forward on the stool, pressing his body against the instrument like it was a door he had to open a little bit more. When Kate

plays the cello, she's stiffer, her back taut like a ballerina and her chin raised so you can see her neck muscles tighten. I like watching them play because you can hear their motion in the music they produce. Like just now in the piece she was playing, the notes didn't glide together. But now she's stopped playing, and I can hear them talking, sounds but not words, her high eager soprano and his lower intense murmur. The floor creaks with movement, and I can see him in my mind, pacing and illustrating with his hands. Then the voices stop and the studio is silent as a church, and I stop my impatient wriggling so I can listen, awed by the immense quaking silence. The absence of music in this studio is not something I'm used to, and my stomach begins to churn with worry. I tip-toe to the door and edge it open, peering slowly through the crack. The instrument lies on the floor, and I see my father's hands on Kate's back, holding her like a cello. I close the door and sit back down, pressing my dry lips together and trying to understand. It seems like forever before they come out of the studio. Kate looks at the floor when she says goodbye, and when she bends down to kiss me on the forehead, her gold chain looms in my face as if it is laughing at me.

Later, on the way home, when Dad holds my hand his palm is cold and clammy, as if it had been out in the cold too long, and I can't stop shaking.

Deborah Stein
Douglastown, NY
Hunter College High School
Mr. Zegers

Spivak's Seed

a ring of thirteen year old eyes looked up with fascination as mrs spivak circled the room with her 12 x 17 book of colored pictures of the greek gods. she paused and sighed at a copper sculpture of poseidon: naked, rusted green, and holding that ridiculous pitchfork. "i wish my husband looked like that!" she exclaimed, "michael's stomach is all flabby and his penis isn't half as big as poseidon's." i glanced at sonata and grimaced. it was then that i was first introduced to sex.

mrs spivak told numerous anecdotes about a time when she'd worked at a co-ed school and had gotten her period in class. it had dribbled all the way down her leg without her noticing until one little boy said "mrs spivak, i think you've got a cut..." but there were no little boys here; she could freely divulge her secrets. she told us how she'd eloped with her husband to las vegas the week after she'd met him. she told us all about her daughters' boyfriends and her old flings and her fantasies. she gave us vocabulary words like "hedonist," "fornicate," and "concupiscence," and essay topics like "my first sexual experience." needless to say, we all loved her, but in very different ways.

my initial reaction was shock. i am a new yorker. i am used to cold weather and facts. i am used to people who don't tell you about themselves unless you ask. this was california, land of open arms and closed ears and big blue-contact-lenses eyes. mrs spivak told all. she was so open, so frank, so deceptive.

confidences lead to return-confidences. to listen to someone's secrets is to covertly agree to tell them yours. perhaps not right away, but sooner or later. from my experience, this is always how it works out. at the time, i did not understand this principle. i did not understand privacy. i did not understand boundaries. mi casa es su casa; my secrets are your secrets. there are no secrets! everyone has the right to know everything about everyone else. it's more democratic that way. it's the American Way. see what a good citizen mrs spivak is?

"Don't tell your parents this, but..." mrs spivak was our fellow conspirator as well as our severest critic. we had no choice in the matter: 50 minutes a day she told us about herself. sure, we read the required books. we read romeo and juliet, the Bible, the Greek myths (as written by edith hamilton), pygmalion, a separate peace, the catcher in the rye, and a member of the wedding, which was my favorite, but each of these works was somehow just a filter for her eccentric musings. don't get me wrong. mrs spivak gave us historical information about biblical times and the elizabethan era; she taught us grammar and vocabulary from long lists, and everyone in her two classes excelled far ahead of the rest of the grade. but what we remember is not how to scan a sentence for dangling participles and misplaced modifiers. we remember mrs spivak for her stories...and for her looks.

rumor had it that in her youth mrs spivak had won a beauty contest. from her looks the last time i saw her, no one would ever have known. mrs spivak stood about 5'10" tall with a sturdy bust, stomach, and thighs. she was one to eat heartily and bemoan the fact that she was not born in the time of rubens. mrs spivak's taste in clothing was bourgeois. she shopped at bargain houses like loehmans, stores with big communal dressing rooms and lots of sweaty women in close quarters. mrs spivak wore big belts, patterned button-down shirts buttoned just one button below the limits of propriety, and mid-calf-length skirts...and makeup: lipstick and rouge, but mostly eye makeup: lots of eye-shadow in bizarre colors: forest green, royal purple, and especially gold. whenever i picture mrs spivak, her hair is hairsprayed and highlighted with blonde-ish dye. she's wearing false gold, and her mouth is open. she's wondering if she put on enough deodorant.

for some reason, there is something extremely seductive about blatantly vulgar women. in my life i have met few people so charismatic as mrs spivak, though she is probably one of the bluntest, most unrefined women i know. what is the allure of this unabashed-

ness, this willingness to tell absolutely anything about herself? it is as if she is undressing in front of us and we, shocked at the impropriety of it all, are speechless, our eyes riveted on the sight of her naked body in our respectable living rooms. there is something wonderful and childish about vulgar women. they have, in a sense, freed themselves from societal taboos. they say "stare at me nude, if you dare!" they say "talk about me behind my back, if you dare! i've got nothing to hide. i'm not ashamed. i'm not embarrassed. this is what/how/who i am!"

about sex, i have always been squeamish and unsure. it confuses me, so i generally ignore it...or intellectualize it. i'm the youngest one in my family. i'm physically little. i'm not terribly pretty, so i use all these as excuses. i'm too young. i'm too small. i hide. generally i present the face of a person who just doesn't think about sex, someone for whom sex holds no interest. it's easier that way. i know that this technique will not last forever, but it is a crutch that i will eventually outgrow. it bothered mrs spivak, though. after i'd moved away, i'd call her sometimes. her first question was always: "are you a slut yet?"

when we read the myth of demeter and persephone, to explain what the pomegranate meant. we would have all been willing to accept the twisted fairy tale logic that says "if a maiden eats while she is in the company of an evil lord then she must remain with him forever." nobody asked "why a pomegranate?" but we all found out anyway. mrs spivak even brought in a big green tupperware bowl filled to the brim with pomegranate slices. she made us take her seed...especially me. she presented the bowl at the end of class and invited us to take a slice as we walked out. i had never seen a pomegranate before. i didn't like the looks of it...all red and drippy. she made me take two slices, as if to be extra sure.

yes, mrs spivak succeeded in planting her seeds. i started coming to her office during lunch hour and sitting on the floor beside her. i listened with eagerness to her lurid stories, and soon she started asking me questions, very personal questions. well, she talked openly about her personal life, why couldn't i? it felt good at first to say things aloud, but soon i started feeling torn. promises with other people started giving way. i had promised not to tell my friends' secrets, my family's secrets, but what did it matter? it's better to let things out, not keep them all inside you, right? so i leaked information daily to mrs spivak over sandwiches. i couldn't say "i don't want to talk about it." i couldn't say "i don't think that's an appropriate question for you to be asking," so i answered. truthfully. and i felt like a spy...very vulnerable, very duplicitous. clearly she had no need of all this information. she used it only to amuse herself. i suppose she was curious.

sitting on the floor in her office, i looked up at her and studied her. i became familiar with her motions, her gestures, her smell, the way she pronounced her words. i was fiercely loyal to mrs spivak. when my friends and i spoke, her name often came up in conversation. we all had her, some G block and some H block, but all of us had her, and we always got A's. we were her select Brodie set, and i was the selected of the select. the other girls would sometimes criticize her for her excessive eye makeup and for her gaudy taste, but i had nothing but praise for mrs spivak. somehow when they talked about her it seemed mean and catty, but when she told me in the confines of her office what she thought of them, it just seemed honest and right.

the end of the year came with all its ceremonies and good-byes. my friends had a surprise going-away party for me and invited mrs spivak to drop in. the last time i saw her, she was signing my yearbook. she wrote some fairy tale story about briar rose awakening at the kiss of her prince. she wrote that in my life i would kiss my prince and awaken him. it was hard to read on account of her slanty handwriting. at the end it said i should write to her, that we should keep in touch. presently, she had gone, and i was back to my same old room and my same old house in suburban new york. i wrote. i preempted her questions, answering them before she had even asked them. i wrote and wrote, and waited for a response.

months later i visited my friends in california and decided to give mrs spivak a call. perhaps she had been too busy to answer

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my letter. my friends told me she was no longer teaching at their school. maybe she was looking for a job, or maybe she had found one that involved a great deal of time. maybe things were going badly in her family. there must be some reason why she had not responded. i called up and heard her voice. she sounded delighted to hear from me. she had gotten and enjoyed all my letters. no, nothing was wrong in her family. yeah, she was sorry she hadn't responded, but just keep on writing. was i a slut yet? she was taking classes to become a stenographer because stenographers make more money than teachers do, yeah, and she'd been teaching for so many years and was sick of it. would i please tell her all the gossip on my friends? she must have read my letters carefully. she remembered all the details and asked for elaborations. she told me about her daughters' boyfriends. the conversation ended and i hung up with renewed faith in our friendship, but the cycle repeated itself.

return to new york. write reams of letters. get no responses.

one night i called mrs spivak from new york. she was cooking dinner and was, as always, delighted to hear from me. was i a slut yet? she was sorry she hadn't responded to my letters, but she'd gotten them and was interested in further details and in hearing the gossip about my friends, but she realized that it was a long distance call and would hate to have me pay. could i give her my number? she'd call me right back.

"(914)-834-5684"

we hung up and i waited by the phone for an hour.

yes, mrs. spivak succeeded in planting her seeds. she may have thought she was planting annuals, and in most cases she was. the other girls have been able to deftly move out of her sphere of influence. the seeds she planted in them grew and flowered, wilted and died within a year. the seed she planted in me, however, is a perennial. at regular intervals it sprouts and flowers fully before becoming dormant again.

four years have now passed, and i am still waiting for her call.

Rivi Handler-Spitz
New York, NY
Horace Mann School
Geraldine Woods

A Treatise on Symbiosis

I got much more than a dollar or two
out of that errand you asked me to run
to the library to return your overdue books

Since you gave me so many
coins and bills without counting
the kids you were going to the restaurant with
were calling you to hurry
you said I could keep the change
left from the five

I went to a discount shop
and bought cheap slippers
my old ones were too
flat to wear

So now those slippers are old
the threads are fraying
and the outsole is worn
and sweat stains mar the inside
they fell apart twice or thrice
I fixed them with Crazy Glue
I haven't thrown them out yet

Slippers used can't use back

Akino Yamashita
New York, NY
Hunter College High School
Nell Scharff

communion

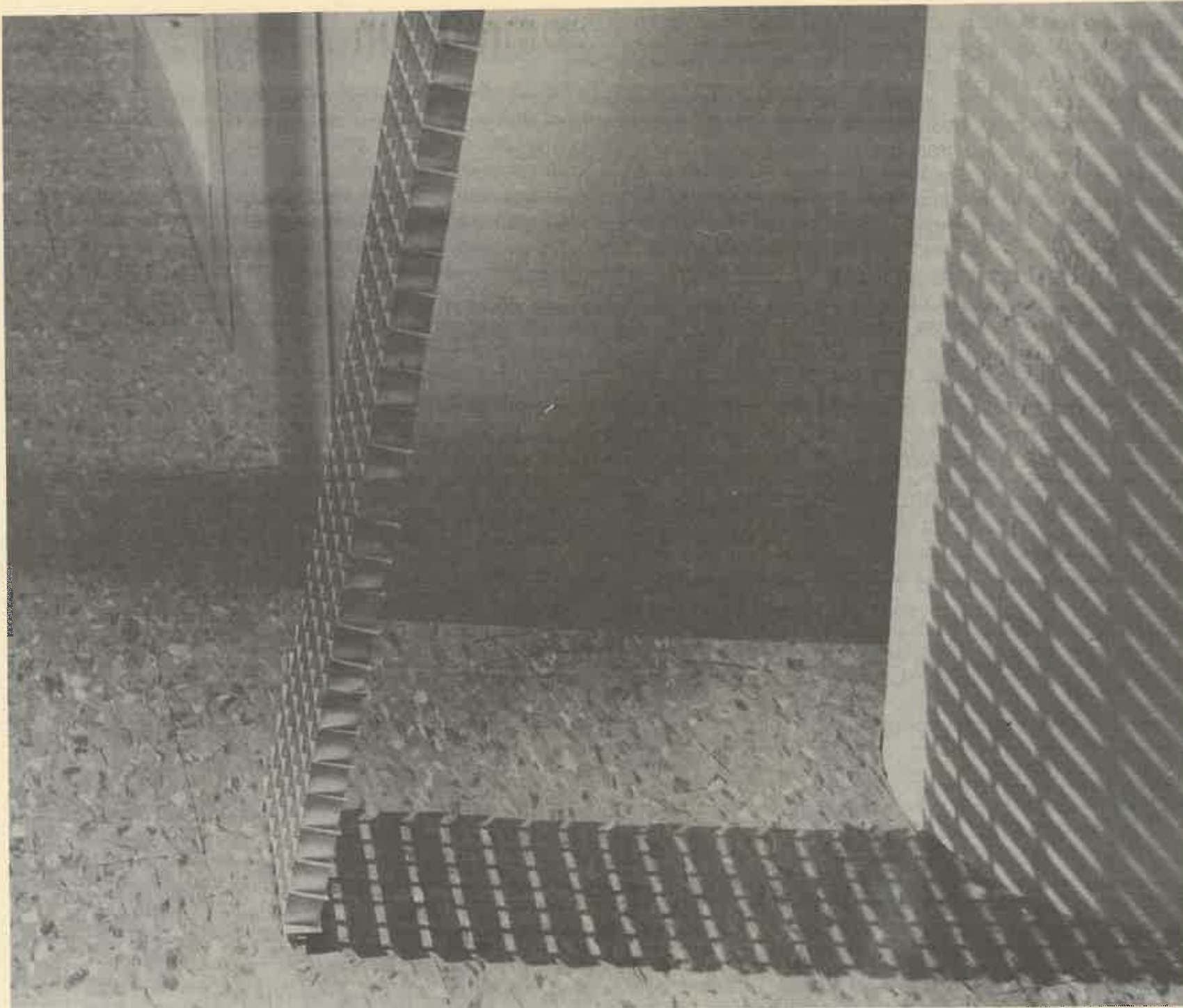
my god,
the taste:
bland
as blood,
permanent
as a promise.
the bread
taken together,
the wine apart,
in its small
Puritan cups.
a bare taste
to a covenant.
do we
remember
without
the magic of flesh,
the hot cannibalism
that was
this beginning?

Marion Ghani
Baltimore, MD
Roland Park Country School
Anne Heusler

the bus-ride

i lie sweltering in sticky blackness
my hot feet slide against the cool
bumpy plaster
the alarm clock drones a mechanical
lullaby
ceaseless and pacifying, pressed against my ear
comforting,
like the Greyhound heating vent,
buzzing steadily,
beneath a window that offered only
my odd reflection
against the dark vacuum of alien landscape.
the lulling buzz,
erasing the strange man staring through me,
silencing the crumpled woman's hacking coughs
that, in my muzzled paranoia,
jolt me, like the awakening from a dream of plummeting,
a second before i shatter against concrete
humming, humming
until i fade from the scene
like a yellow chalk drawing
blown off, blurred
and forgotten

Azure Marlowe
West Chester, PA
Henderson High School
Martha Hansen



Mary McNealey

Contact

7:45 A.M. I'm waiting for the train, even though to get to school on time I should've been on it half an hour ago. Oh well. A cold draft blows in from somewhere and I pull my jacket tighter around me.

Where is the goddamned train?

My hair is practically dripping wet from the shower I took just a few minutes ago. The water is beginning to freeze my hair into cold, stiff clumps. I reach into my bag for a barrette, twist my hair up and pin it against the back of my head. Otherwise by the time I get to school it'll be all rough and frizzy.

The train finally pulls into the station, and as the doors open everyone pushes themselves in to get a seat, and I get lost somewhere in between. I have been riding the same train to the same school for years. By now I should be able to claim that little space of gray metal for myself. But it's too much trouble and I can't bother with it.

So I'm stuck swaying back and forth with the train's motion. I try to concentrate on my English reading assignment-100 pages of Homer's *The Odyssey*. But at the next stop this really hot guy gets on and stands just a few feet away from me. He's tall, maybe a little on the skinny side, with kind of floppy black hair. I'm tempted to brush out my hair, put on some lipstick. Explain to him that I don't always look like shit, that it's just kind of hard to look decent after getting four hours of sleep and waking up forty-five minutes late.

I try to picture it happening.

"Um...excuse me? Uh, I just wanted to tell you that, you know, I don't usually look like this. I mean, I can look a lot better when

I try. Actually, here-here's a picture of me. That's what I really look like. See? I'm not as ugly as you thought, right? Anyway, would you like my phone number?"

I start giggling out loud before I remember that I am on the subway surrounded by strangers. A few people give me weird looks and I glare at them. But the cute guy doesn't seem to notice anything.

The train jerks to a stop and I lose my balance and I step on some fat old woman's left foot.

"Sorry," I say.

She gives a snotty little sigh and says, "You should just be more careful."

What is her problem? "Bitch," I say.

She looks a little nervous and tries to move away from me, but then the doors open and a mob of people shove and squeeze their way into the subway car even though there was barely enough breathing room to begin with. The fat woman is now pressed against my side. There are two stocky Hispanic men who just got on the train. They're friends, I think. One of them is standing almost face to face with me, while the other is pressed to my back.

The train begins to move again, and I am sandwiched between the men. It reminds me of a story one of my guy college friends once told me about three of his friends, two guys and a girl, who all had sex together at the same time in pretty much the same position I am in now. Except horizontally, I guess.

I'm starting to feel sick. I'm wearing a T shirt and a thin jacket in 50-degree weather but I am now burning hot and itchy and sweaty and horribly uncomfortable. There is the smell of some cheap

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cologne hanging thick and heavy in the air, and for some reason it is worse than the strongest body odor.

And then I feel the movement. Actually, it's been going on for some time and I just haven't gotten it through to my brain. The guy behind me has his hand on my butt, and I'm so mixed-up I can't even tell what the guy facing me is doing. And suddenly I have the insane urge to giggle. It is not funny. It is extremely, terribly, not funny. But I am using all my willpower to stop my laughter from bursting out.

It feels kind of like how I felt once, maybe a couple of months ago, when one of my guy friends tricked me into bending over to pick up something while he stood behind me so he could-well, you know. He thought it was such a good joke, and I was really pissed but I couldn't help laughing too. Except this is so much worse.

I think that the men see my mouth twitch or something and they exchange a smile. The front guy moves in closer and I can feel his breath, hot and unpleasant, on my face. Then I feel this pressure against the backs of my knees. The guy is trying to get his leg between mine. I bring my knees closer together, trying to push his leg away, but he just starts pressing in so hard that he almost gets his knee right between my thighs.

The laughter has vanished. I'm hot. I'm confused. I'm sick to my stomach. I want to scream. I don't want to make a fool of myself. I want to kick the assholes in the balls.

And what the hell are the other people on the train doing? Can't they see that something's wrong? Something is wrong when a high school girl is being felt up on the subway by two strange men. What about the fat old lady? What about the cute guy? Doesn't anybody care? And maybe it's my imagination. I mean, the train is packed. There's plenty of body contact. Maybe I wanted it to happen. Why the hell would I have wanted to laugh otherwise?

And there's still the horrible cologne in the air. It's making me want to throw up.

I feel something hard pushing up against my butt. It is still and throbbing. I try shifting over to my right and both men follow me. I am going to explode.

The train stops and the doors open. I twist free from them and elbow my way through the mob. It is not my stop. Who gives a shit?

On the platform, I sit down on a bench. Why didn't I scream? Why didn't I humiliate them? What a stupid idiot I was. What a fool. I let them get away with it. I was just another stupid, scared-shitless girl.

After a few minutes, another train pulls up and I step on.
"Judy!"

"Oh, hi. Why are you getting on here?"

"I'll tell you later," I say. I feel safe. Free. Comfortable.

"Did your train go out of service or something?"

"Um, something like that. I don't know, don't worry about it. Hey, aren't you late for math?"

"Yeah. Screw it, she never takes attendance anyway."

"I know. I guess I'll cut today, too."

"You didn't finish your reading, did you?"

"Nope. Did you?"

"Well, I think I got past the second paragraph."

I laugh and glance out the train car windows. "Hurry up, this is our stop. The doors are about to close."

We get off the train and start walking towards school.

"Oh my gosh, my bag is so damn heavy."

"I know, mine too. That huge science textbook and everything."

The air smells good. Even the carbon monoxide bus emissions smell good after that train ride. I take slow, deep breaths. Suddenly this man in a business suit walks by and his cologne wafts up my nose. It's awful cologne, it's cheap cologne, and my stomach turns.

Deanna Fei
Flushing, NY
Hunter College High School
Kathleen Lawrence

I Crave the Heroic

I'm your average American girl
--If such a thing exists--
Who often ceases her purl-knit-purl
(In the repetition, a certain bliss)
To sigh, and hope life's sweet brevity,
So graciously hard to resist,
Will save her from the Modern Depravity
Leeching to mankind like a cyst.

Leigh Jenco
Elizabeth, PA
Elizabeth Forward High School
M. Hamilton

The Laundromat

I'm sitting on top of a Maytag
on spin-cycle
chewing on a #2 pencil.
Spinning, sloshing, grinding...
Friday night at Herb's Toss and Fluff
I'm sitting on a machine that's jerking back
and forth, swaying side to side--but it's warm
So warm and violent.
A little longer...
I open my eyes,
lifting them up to see a fat
woman in a bath robe
and little pink curlers
(like rows of salt-water taffy)
staring
Piggy eyes glaring
And flaring, as if she's jealous or perhaps
that's a smile--that slit almost a papercut
for a mouth, curving slowly upwards
What does she see?
Running my achy fingers through my tousled hair,
I lean back and close my eyes once more
Chewing a pencil to a pulp,
Hearing Jimi Hendrix whisper in my ear,
And not wanting the washer to stop because I fear
That if I'm really awake, I'm not still dreaming,
The fat woman will be standing over me
Breathing hard and fast
Talking rapidly and reaching out a thick, knotty,
gnarled piggy hand for my neck,
I hold onto the ends of the box as it kicks and churns some
more,
I look over and hear too much,
Too many people are talking
About sex, money, their laundry and such.
But the fat one still stares
Is something on my face?
I'm just having a little fun
Laughing and giggling at all the losers
Especially YOU
As the Maytag grinds on...

Lauren Gaffney
Mercersburg, PA
The Mercersburg Academy
Mr. Chace

All Hail: The Skies

Hail
starts out
small and quiet
pittering on the pavement
chattering like soft bird song
bouncing everywhere, tiny ping-pong balls,
and it gets louder and larger and
rounder and sharper and quicker, and when I
go outside I feel pebbles tingling my head
and back, and rat-tat-tatting on the canopies above
and the hail falls so heavily that umbrellas creak and break
and all the people drift into buildings while puddles quiver
with frozen drops of rain, little buckshot from Heaven.
And there is water on the glass doors
and the view outside is very blurry
and the sky is pasty white
and the hail falls slowly
until the little pebbles
bounce and roll
into the
gutter.

Amy Prosen
New York, NY

Natalie's Mother

We stand in the glow of her electric candles, watching the car pull in the driveway, our breaths fogging up the windowpane, eyes agape in wonder at the circle of golden shadow made by the porch light that illuminates fake cobblestones, the face down below, a basketball hoop. We are thirteen years old.

Let's go downstairs, Natalie whispers, and look at my mother. This is a great idea. We like the sound of it, breathe out the words, push them around in her room and the dark, a dank prickly secret. We are twin cherubs, faces reflected in the glass, lit-up and wily, all bright yellow foreheads and eyebrows and chins.

In the ambiguous black we make our way out, careful not to bang our shins on the bedframe or her white dresser, stumbling and tersely giggling. The second-floor loft gleams like an ivory carpeted cul-de-sac, the doors to rooms closed and sinister; too-new door-knobs glitter. This house was built purely to make Natalie's mother happy. Down below, the foyer with its polished floor is as hushed and glowing as a cathedral, punctured by the one hanging chandelier. I tremble. I feel like I am a psychic about to meet God, or a freakish holy ghost.

And, like an intruder rather than a guest in the house, I follow Natalie downstairs.

Natalie's father has just come in. She kisses him on the cheek. He's a stocky, portly man, with brown hair and a pathologically kind face, his mannerisms cloying and stiff. "Don't wake your mama," he says. He's making popcorn.

We creep around the creamy kitchen, its anal-retentive gadgets and brilliant lights. I am always amazed by its many digital clocks. Natalie puts a finger to her lips. The family room adjoining sings its paradoxes, dingy carpet and built-in TV cabinet, freshly-painted walls and old plaid sofas, scents of newness offset by vaguely 1960's lamps.

Natalie's mother lies asleep on the couch. This is the moment we've waited for. We crowd in, teenage voyeurs, staring at the spectacle of a once-cancerous woman. Her hair, soft brunette and not quite grown back in yet, spreads in tufts on her throw pillow. Her face has grown chubby from all the medication, her chest rising and falling, shoulders rounded. She sleeps with her hands laced. We cannot see the spiderwebs of marks from needles, but we know that

on her veins and forearms they are there. She snores, and we watch the quiver of one nostril. I imagine her a corpse. We step away, and my hand rises to my mouth in a silent shriek.

We go mutilate ourselves in front of Natalie's bedroom mirror, twisting our hair into chignons and French braids till our temples throb and the roots hurt, smearing rouge on our cheeks and plastering lip gloss, crimping her mother's stolen mascara onto our eyelashes. We chatter and rifle through makeup boxes, deprecating and weak with laughter, but when I look into the slick glass I feel paralyzed and know something is missing. I'm not me. We're trapped in this floral-bordered ceramic hellhole with its smooth sinktop. Purple and bright lights surround me, sick as death. "What's wrong?" Natalie asks, and I can't say anything, only feel evil. Snaking the Kohl pencil round the delicate skin at the corners of my eyelids, again and again.

I remember how she always used to talk to me. I talk about her as if she's dead.

She needed a friend. I think she sought me out. Whenever she had the chance, whenever Natalie wasn't around, she'd try to probe me and get me to talk. Sometimes, when she and I waited in the car for Natalie to drop off library books or something, I'd sit and watch the tiny hairs on the back of her neck and count them while she talked like the perfect mother in her patronizing English-teacher New York accent, rationalizing all the cruel things she did to Natalie and why she wouldn't let her do all the normal things girls did. "You know, I told her she's too good to go to a dance with just anybody..." "Oh, she would have been miserable doing that, really..."

I would burn, burn with that agony, knowing she was a bitch and that we were powerless, because parents were supposed to know everything, and we were the blessed meek. Then Natalie would come back, and for some stupid reason her mother would pound and howl at her, because maybe she used the wrong library card or came out the wrong door or something. I would sit in the backseat, like half a friend, with a gnawing roar in my stomach as I listened to the hum of the radio or a Christmas tape, her mother praying, Natalie weeping.

I crawl into the spare sleeping bag, shivering even in my night-shirt and socks. We'll turn out the light and talk about boys, who we hate in our English class, religion. I've slept here many times before, but the room is too cold and prickly for a sense of familiarity.

One time last year, Natalie woke up in the middle of the night screaming. I know. It was right when Mrs. Kovac got sick. She sat up, skinny shoulders hunched and wrapped in her yellow floral sheets, blond hair unkempt and lips shaking. Her eyes were wild. "I dreamt my mother was dead!" she cried out. "I dreamt she was dead!"

I put an arm around her shoulder, said, "Hey, Natalie, no way, it's just a dream, she won't die."

"But I -- I wanted her to!" She spluttered. "I wanted it to happen!"

We couldn't get back to sleep after that.

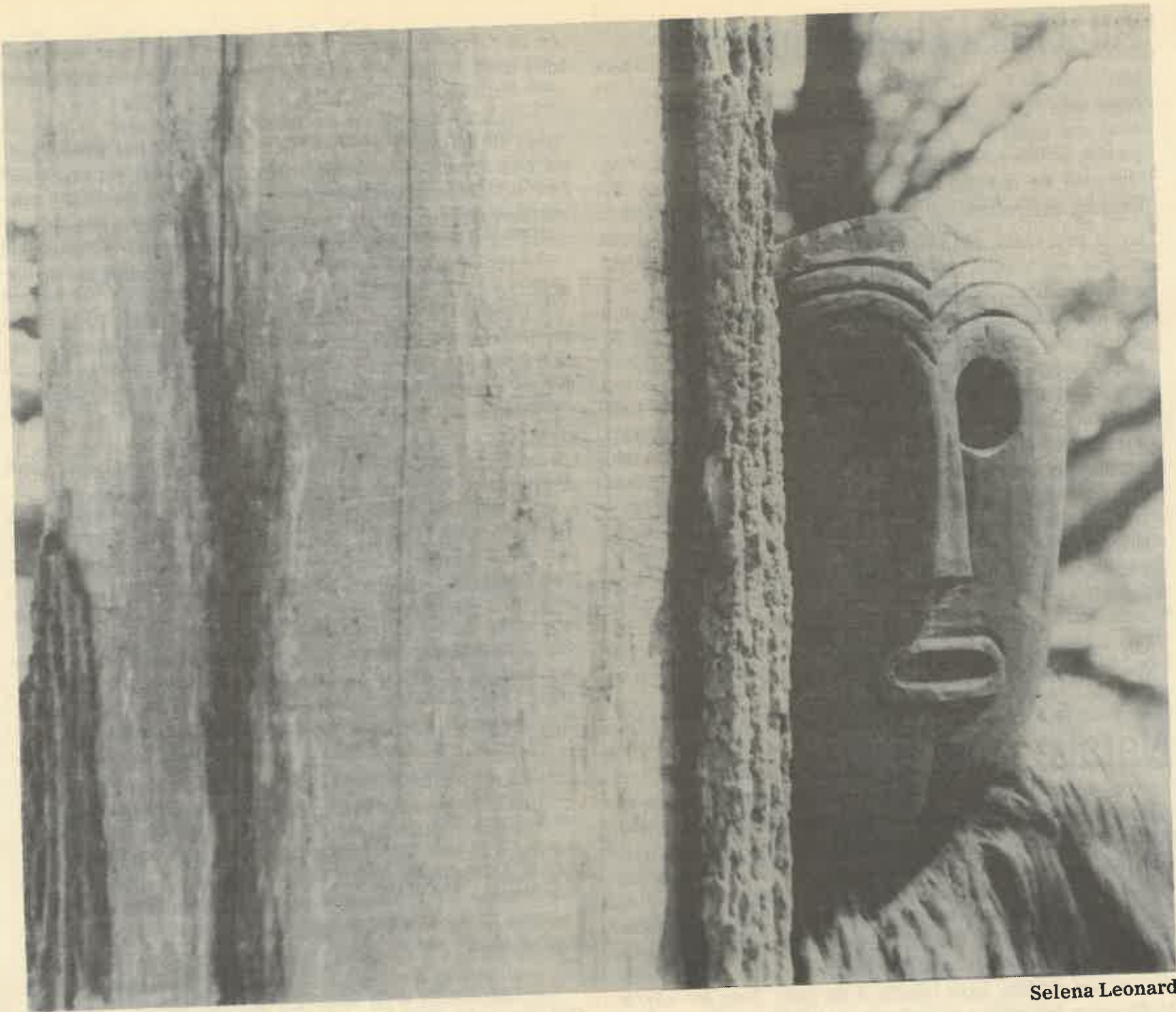
Now the room is dark again, and the heat controller blinks its red eye, and the passings of cars make silver patterns on the walls.

"White trashy," my mother used to say. "That all there is to that neighborhood. Just a bunch of proletarians trying to look rich."

"They cut the tumor out of her brain," Natalie murmurs. "It was like a sponge, they said ... or an apple ..."

I press the pillow to my cheek. I'm not listening; we won't talk tonight. I'm too young and invincible to question death, but I know what its aura feels like. Death feels like an inhaled breath, smoke, a woman's skin, the string of a balloon. I'm lost in my own body, am not even here. I'm pretending I'm Natalie's mother.

Jenn Crowell
Jacobus, PA
Dallastown Area High School
Anne Kostas



Selena Leonard

Yellow Trousers

It struck me that our usual waiter was not wearing the cap that in the early days of our adventure had caught my eye after passing the scene again and again. But as if nothing had changed, the street performer claimed his spot tucked between the staircase leading down into the metro and the 'kiosk' where the local Spaniards often bought their cigarettes or packet of sunflower seeds. His music was not heard, and his hat remained empty, but his persistent grin never disappeared from his face, and time and again I was startled by his intense glares. I did not envy this man's life, yet I was curious as to who existed underneath such a blank stare; what gave him the power and the will to face the world in such a hopeless state each morning. I sipped my coffee, and turned my attention to the rest of the world that was passing by my eyes. I did not take such notice in anyone else. The day was beginning to be overcome by the deep glow that possesses the Barcelona night skies. I knew that shortly I was to head down that staircase leading to the metro, and that eventually led me to my home. I would pass the violinist. I would leave Cafe Zurich, and all the familiar faces until tomorrow; I would leave the desolate countenance until I was again struck by his glare.

"What makes you burn?"

My attention shifted from the musician's torn clothes, to the brilliance of Sam's eyes. He had a mysterious way about him, and as I had always wondered when he would chop his blond shaggy hair, I wondered what had prompted him to ask such a question. I didn't realize then what Sam meant by 'burning,' but was instead amused

by his dreamy way of exhaling as though each cloud were a story he would tell us someday. To any local, our group of four Americans must have appeared bizarre. Sam wearing his black and white checkered wool coat as he did daily, me wearing my white Nike sneakers, almost unheard of for any Spaniard, all four of us with our Jansport backpacks underneath us. We were spotted without doubt, immediately.

I was alarmed by the strong hand that I felt on my shoulder. The last bit of daylight had disappeared, and many people were on their way home, as we were. I turned my head quickly. I tried to focus my attention on the two officers who stood by my side and immediately began to drill me with questions. I struggled to understand their words to me, and their faces were filled with disbelief. Something had happened. I struggled to explain to the officer why I was in Spain and where I was living. The words didn't come, and horrified, I glanced at Sam's passionate blue eyes studying the scene, and then down at his lanky hand that rested on my thigh. I couldn't fully understand what the official was telling me, but he assured me I was all right; his calm tone, and fast, mumbled words penetrated me slowly. The officer pointed in the direction of the street musician, but rather than focusing on the violinist's intricate face, my eyes fell upon a young boy trapped inside a set of hand cuffs and locked between the bodies of two officers. His face was dreary, and he appeared unclean; this boy was miserable. In his hand he carried a small blue bag, but other than that he was alone, and inside I knew he possessed nothing but an empty darkness. I had no idea of his background, and tried not to jump to any con-

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clusions, but I imagined that he was attempting to steal my backpack as a natural desire to survive, and that this child was living on the streets, without a home, without a family, and without food.

"Ha intentado robarle la mochila," the officer tried explaining to me. The young child had attempted to steal my backpack. But I didn't listen, and I didn't respond to Sam's aggressive attempts to get my attention; I was focused on this little boy; his yellow trowsers were torn, and underneath I imagined his young frail and hairless legs.

I signed papers that night consenting that I would testify in a Spanish courtroom two months from that day, and I would give my honest side of the story and of what I had seen of the boy.

For days I passed the street musician on my way to school and replayed the scene to myself, imagining the same table at Cafe Zurich and Sam's face glowing in the late-afternoon light. I couldn't imagine myself testifying in front of a judge, nevermind in Spanish, but most of all I feared the danger I might possibly put this thirteen year old boy in. I pictured vivid imaginings of what dread the boy's life might resemble down the road. I feared him placed in jail, or accused of stealing. This would only harm his dwindling amount of hope, and I didn't want to do this to him. This illegal Arab from Africa was fighting the natural law of survival which forced him to attempt to steal, and the law of Spain which prohibits theft. I wanted to know his past. I wanted to know if his parents were dead or alive, or if they had been murdered. Did this child have any family left at all; did he have anyone to go home to in Africa? The trial was going to be held on a Thursday afternoon, and quite easily I could just go to school like any other normal Thursday, but as I would pass the violinist and make contact with his struggling eyes, I would be reminded of the fight for survival of so many; I would be reminded of the Arabian child and his torn yellow trowsers, and I would wonder what had happened to such a young life.

The hall began to fill with a white cloud of smoke that turned the misery of it all into a dream. I sat, my hands clenched tightly to the legal documents I was told to bring, and watched as people filed in and out of the court room as their names were called. I felt innocent and helpless, unaware of what I might come across when the woman called my name; unaware of what might be inside that room, and if the Arab boy would be present while I testified. It was the first time I realized I was looked upon with scornful eyes. I concentrated on the woman's face as her lips mumbled the names. She wore a dress that reminded me of Flamenco dancers in Andalucia, but it was wrinkled and musty looking. She had the striking appearance of so many Spaniards; an intricate face and deep and defined features that blended with her dark complexion. And each time she found me in the sequence of people that bordered the hall, her eyes darkened and her countenance became fierce. I was an American. Unlike most of the people in that hall, I was well dressed and well presented, and I greeted people as I entered which maybe wasn't right; was I looked at as an 'Ugly American?'

As my eyes scanned the smoky hall, I created stories of what might have happened to all these destitute people, many of whom seemed like gypsies to me. Across from me sat a young couple, and between their bodies a baby was thrown. This mother couldn't even hold his head up, and every time he peeped, she'd force a pacifier into the baby's mouth and hit him. The baby had no life to it, and it reminded me of the homeless bonnet woman and her daughter I'd sometimes pass in the Chinese neighborhood. As hard as I tried not to stare, I was disturbed by the heartless indifference they gave their child that day. The father sat, cigarette in hand, and said nothing except a few nasty remarks to what I assumed was his wife. His words went along with snippy expressions, and his face became fierce. The hall smelled not only of cigarette and cigar smoke, but of stale thirsty air. Thirsty for sunshine and for love; thirsty for less pain and more pleasure. The hours passed, but I was too absorbed in this miserable dream to notice. I wondered what had brought each and every person there. I wondered what their lives consisted of outside of this desolate hall. I would never know,

just as I might know what would become of the young Arab boy, but I could imagine and wish for glimmers of hope to spark their saddened eyes.

The lady standing by the door called my name. And as I lifted myself off the wiggly bench, I realized, just as I had feared, that the couple that sat on the bench opposite me was not caring for their child, but instead glaring at me. Those stern eyes could see inside my life, and into my future. And I realized that they were well aware that I would crawl inside a warmed bed that night, and that I would never face the cold and bare cobbled walks of the city at night.

I testified. I prayed my words would protect him. I never felt any pressure to claim I saw him attempt to steal my backpack; I hadn't. My intent was to defend this helpless Arabian boy, and stress that he was only fighting for survival.

Nothing really made sense to me, and even as I sat, interpreter at my side, trying to explain my story using my broken Spanish, I still wondered why I was there. I wondered where the boy was, and why he wasn't there with me. But it was over in a matter of fifteen minutes, and as I left I felt feeble and unaware. All I could remember was the large firm hand I studied as the man quoted every word I said, but I couldn't imagine where these documents would end up once this trial was completed, or if my name would appear in the documents of Spanish Law.

The apartment of my family was still as I entered. I tried hard to not think about the Arab boy; I would never know any more. But as my eyes followed the marble floors and the blue velvet walls, I was saddened by all that I had, and all that he didn't have. I would always guard my backpack at Cafe Zurich from now on, but I would also be aware of the children who hide behind lifeless young eyes; those who don't have a change of clothes or a nickel to buy a candy.

The vision of the Arab boy hasn't left me. I see his yellow trowsers as clearly now as I did then, and behind I see the determined grin of the violinist.

Alexandra Leetsairis Greer
Portsmouth, NH
Portsmouth High School
Paula Bruno

Charms

I haven't seen a charm like the one around the boy's neck in two years. He's about five, maybe younger, all bundled up against winter's bite in his bright red down coat, sitting in the back of the crosstown bus next to his mother. I can hear her nagging him over the music pouring into my ears, and right before I turn away to stare out the window, the dull metal catches my eye.

It's hanging around his neck, one of those cheap charms that you'd buy at an amusement park: you pay a dollar, tick off the letters you want, pull the lever as hard as you can, and out pops your message, printed on a cheap metal coin, forever yours. I look up at the kid but he's still fighting with his mother, so I turn up my music, turn away, stare into nothing and remember my charm.

Amanda sits cross-legged on a bench by the water, licking an ice cream cone and watching the tourists go by. I cross the street and weave my way to her. I crouch down, taking off my hat to reveal a short string of beads in the front of my hair. She holds the string, not much wider than the strands of hair themselves, in the soft lines of her palm, so as not to destroy it.

"What do you think?" I look up at her, like an angel with the sun floating behind her. She smiles, and I can tell it's real - her cheeks turn a pale red, like she's keeping a secret for both of us.

"They're so beautiful and small."

"The lady at that booth over there did it for a dollar. It was cheap 'cause my hair's so short." She caresses the beads one last time and then swings her legs out from under her, getting to her

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feet.

We leave the wharf and walk down the main strip. As we drift, I notice all the tourists around us and start insulting them in my head. These people seem like fakes. For the past month we've been living in the back of Amanda's station wagon, or under the sky when it was too hot or too beautiful not to. These people frustrate me, rushing in and out of stores, barely able to carry all the bags they've got. I scream at them silently for a while, and Amanda asks me what's on my mind.

"It's these goddamn tourists, people like them that screw up every city. I mean New York, it's one big shopping mall, and it's these greedy bastards that did it."

"To each his own," she says soothingly, like a tiny lullaby. This is what she always says, but she doesn't understand what I mean. She grew up in Virginia, and I grew up in New York. Maybe I don't understand.

I found her ad in a cheap throwaway newspaper that I picked up on a street corner. "Virginian woman, 19 years old, moving to Alaska, seeks driving partner to Northern California." I needed to get to the west coast for college in the fall, so I called the number curiously. I drifted in her voice for half an hour, and three days later I was lying outside of Richmond Airport, looking up at the sky and watching people disappear in planes, hearing their prayers for better times fall to the ground.

Amanda leaves early tomorrow morning. She'll get on the plane to Alaska, where I've been told the sun comes out once a year. I know I couldn't live like that. It's too extreme. She doesn't talk much about where she's going, but she seems to love it. "Just imagine," she said to me once. "It's almost like your whole life is one day, and it never ends. Life moves so preciously." This sounds beautiful, but I feel like an old man when I think about it.

She grabs me by the wrist and pulls me into some store. "Jesus," she gasps, "I haven't seen one of these since I was a little kid." She leans over the machine, looking into the glass window. "Charms," the sign says. "Yours forever." I hunch over the window with her, seeing her beautiful smile reflected over the old gears of the machine. "I used to get these all the time. Let's get one? It'll be fun."

"Sure," I say. When she gets so happy like this, it reminds me of how I used to be as a kid. Giggling, she makes me turn around and wait, listening to the machine whir and buzz as she creates her message. Before I know it, she taps me gently on the shoulder. "Your turn," she sings, and turns around to the machine. I print my name first, then I have to stop and lean against the cool metal, wondering what to say next. I can't think of anything better, so I put "New York," followed by three dots. After that there isn't much else to say. It's my life so far, and I don't know what's next.

Amanda is curled up beside me in the grass, but I can't sleep. I keep thinking, maybe if I stay awake long enough, this time won't end. I won't have to see what life will be next. I lie on my back, my eyes lost in the stars. Amanda's rule was that every night, you had to see a shooting star before you could go to sleep. Not a plane, or a satellite - you can tell they're fake because they move so rigidly and never disappear - but a real, honest-to-God shooting star. You'd be surprised, they're all over the place. But they're hard to see at first. As soon as you catch them, out of the corner of your eye, you see them so briefly. I see every shooting star there is that night, it seems like thousands. By the time I'm too tired to keep my eyes open, sunlight is beginning to seep into view, and shooting stars become weaker and weaker.

We stand on the wharf again, and she kisses me for the first time in the three weeks that we've known each other. Holding onto her, I feel like dead weight, like I could drop and fall apart at any moment without her there. She smiles at me. "Listen. If you're ever up north in nowhere, look me up. I'm probably down the block." I don't remember saying goodbye, and I probably never did. As her car pulls away, I remember something she told me once. Sometimes you see things clearer through tears than you ever could through dry eyes.

Sitting on a suitcase of dirty clothes, I turn my pockets inside out, looking at what I have left in the world. I find her charm next to mine on my key chain. "Love always, Amanda." I hold it in my fingers for a long time, running my thumb over the words until I can swear they begin to rub away. The metal is so light I can barely feel it in my hands. Finally I bury my head in my hands, and when I look up after a long time, I feel a tugging, tearing pain in my head. It's gone in an instant, but it takes me a while to look down on the pavement and realize that I've torn the beads from my hair. I pick them up and put them in my hand with Amanda's charm, and I sit on the street corner for a long time, trying to block out the passing traffic, listening for Amanda's prayers falling to the ground.

I think I lost the charm about a year ago. I used to keep it in my desk in my dorm room, and when I left, I think I forgot to take it with me. I probably wanted to leave it there.

The bus comes to my stop before I know it. Staring back at the kid, I pick up my bag and head for the door. I can't see what his charm says, but I don't have to look closer. I step off into the cold air, fumbling instinctively in my pockets the way I always do.

Paul Benzon
New York, NY

Trinity School
Patricia Robbins

A Letter

I know
you two will have Thai food for dinner.
She will smile, impressed
by your exotic tastes
by how gracefully the foreign words:
Jab Chae, Bul Goki
emerge from your mouth.

Tucking a wisp of hair behind her ear,
eyes downcast,
she will let you
pay for her ticket, leaving
the conscience battles for later,
in her bedroom,
when you are not there.
Focusing on the screen,
she will accommodate the weight
of your sweater-covered arm around her body.
You will critique the mis en scene,
the deconstructionist impulse of the film.
She will nod, and sometimes disagree,
her eyes darkening if yours words press too far.

You will brush the snow from the windshield
with the back of your hand until
it's pink and numb,
as she warms your car.
Her fingertips will move across
your unshaven face. You probe her eyes,
push forward,
the pressure of your shoulders
on her.
Metal doorhandle hard against her back,
her hair on edge, she will pull away,
smile, whisper goodnight,
straightening her skirt as she strides to the house.
You will sit clutching the wheel
as the vent blows heat.

I know
this is the way
it is with you
and all of them.

Julie L. Barnes
Plympton, MA

Milton Academy
James Connolly

After Renoir: Dance at Bougival

For the moment, eyes down,
she watches the violet go round and round
on the dirt floor.
She can almost smell the light scent,
feel the soft velvet in her hand.
Its dark petals call to her,
whispering in a language of purple fields
where the wind slips among blossoms,
dancing lightly under a midnight sky.
But even as she leans towards the flower,
she feels the restraint of hand on waist,
the leading leg in front of hers.
His calloused palm sweats in her own
and she pretends to feel
only the caress of the violet against her skin.
His straw colored hat nags at her bonnet,
and as his face comes closer,
her dreams scatter about her skirts.
The violet whirls out of sight,
the dance falling further behind the music,
and she knows she is trapped within his faded arms,
locked in the grey life of this faltering waltz.

Erica Silverstein
Canton, MA
Milton Academy
James Connolly

Untitled

It could have been so simple-
had the world stopped turning.
The salt shaker on the table had become my best friend.
I spilled it once.
I felt sad.
Like the time that Nikki fell in the mud puddle and I left her.
But unlike the salt--
She picked herself up, got herself together...
And unlike me--she walked away.
Leaden arms do not move.
The clock continues to tick, tick, tick...
I visualize a timebomb under the milk carton.
The refrigerator continues to hummm...like life.
But the phone does not ring.
I imagine the base of the plastic phone--
the ringer button switched to off.
So I get up.
Mini salt granules deteriorate between the dark linoleum and
Timberland soles as I make my way to the wall...the phone.
And it rings...I think.
But no one was there. Buzzzzzzzz..
Or maybe I never answered it.
I swept the salt up from the linoleum.
It could have been so simple-
had the world stopped turning.
The pepper shaker on the table has become my best friend.
I spilled it once.
But it blended in with the linoleum.
So I left it.

Cortney Bailey
Towanda, PA
Towanda High School
Frank Hoffman

Emissions Testing

I'm tired. I'm tired a lot these days. Standing on my feet, sometimes I feel like I'm just gonna fall apart--fall apart and end up a puddle of mud, shapeless on the floor. I don't mind the idea of oozing into warm mud, but I know it isn't really gonna happen. I can live with being tired; I guess I just have to put up with my feet always being achy. My brother, Isaac, spent six weeks flat on his back his junior year in high school. Dr. Ringer didn't know exactly what was wrong with him. My diagnosis: he was tired and tense; it's rough editing the yearbook, swimming, being a good student, and trying to maintain a social life. For Isaac, it's his back that gets the tension surplus; for me, it's my feet.

My friend Sam, probably sick of hearing me complain about my feet, told me once that for relaxation, he sometimes grips tennis balls with his feet. Sam and I have been good friends since playtime on the first day of kindergarten when I told him I thought that firemen should wear their hats with the bill toward the front like baseball players. Sam and I wore red firemen's hats backwards every day at playtime for the rest of kindergarten. I've always been under the impression that a good friend's someone whose advice you respect no matter how ridiculous it is. I found a can of three tennis balls under old Nikes in my closet. I took two from the container. My feet couldn't grip the tennis balls enough to hold onto them when I was sitting down. So, I stood up, put the balls down on my bedroom floor, and watched them wobble to stillness. Then, I tried to stand on top of the fuzzy, round yellow balls. I slipped and fell over.

II.

My campers at Johns Hopkins this summer always made "vrooming" noises when they were running around. Once I asked Patrick why he made the noise.

"It's a car noise," he said; "it's fun." The, he demonstrated. After the demo, a little out of breath, he concluded, "Vroom. It just sounds good." People would look at me funny if I ran to class making car accelerating noises. Patrick was right, though. It would be sort of fun. My car made the real "vrooming" noises that morning, that Saturday morning I had to wake up at 7:15.

"Miss the lines," my dad had said. "They advise, 'Miss the lines.' Get there early."

I had wondered who "they" were. Who runs Vehicle Emissions Testing? And does my Dad talk to them? I didn't say anything though. My Dad gets angry when I take carrot chunks from the salad with my fingers or when I eat a cookie in the kitchen without a plate. Plus, I knew he was right about missing the lines. My Dad's pretty cool; he just gets a little tense sometimes.

It was misty that morning, and I wasn't sure if the mist was my perception as sleep wore off, or nature's intermission as the dew rose. I got into my car, a gray 1988 Jeep, and headed out to the Emissions Testing place. It was in the part of town where people cross the street right in the middle of or in front of 30 mile-per-hour traffic, where there is a Sunny Surplus and two Good Will stores all in one block; and where there are two McDonalds, a Roy Rogers, and a Burger King all in one mile. People always point out how there are so many liquor stores and gun shops in our city's bad neighborhoods. Those damn McDonalds and Burger Kings should be blamed for a share of the problems. Fish fillet, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, onions, and peppers on a sesame seed bun can really suck the financial life blood out of a community.

Ever since I first drove with my driving instructor on I-95--I've never been passed or honked at so many times--I've tensed my lower body, my thighs, my feet, when I am in a tough driving situation. I guess that at first I didn't want the driving instructor to see that I was nervous; my lower body was hidden, so I sent my tension there.

"Right onto Fayerweather Street, then left at blue 'Emissions Test' sign." The secretary--or whoever the woman had been on the phone--repeated the directions a couple of times, just, I think, to make me feel stupid. Older people have a tendency to repeat things

a couple of times to make you think that they know more than you do. Really they don't know any more than you do, they're just repeating the same thing you already know over and over again. Maybe she'd been the one who told my Dad to get there early.

Right onto Fayerweather, left at the blue sign.

Surprise, a line: Half a dozen boxy American cars, a convertible Corvette in need of a paint job, someone's fancy Lexus (probably with climate control), one of those hideous mini-vans with "Aranson Animal Care" written across the top of the back window. I got in line behind the mini-van, wondering first what kind of moron designed such an ugly car, and second if there were any animals caged up in the back of the van.

Not early enough, Dad. That's ok. I'll wait. Turn off car, and wait. No radio--that wastes the battery. Just sit, and wait. Turn on car and move a little after a car way in front leaves. Turn off car. Wait. Sit. On, move, off, sit. On, move, off, sit. Ready.

My car moved into a cement corridor and onto a track. A woman sat in something like a toll booth on the left side of the track. Emissions testing. I gave the woman the nine dollars. Nine dollars? Why couldn't they make it an even number? Who ever has exactly nine dollars in their wallet? Maybe the Emissions people liked giving change. It made the line longer.

The woman came down out of her booth. She hooked up my car to a little R2D2-like machine next to the booth; she shoved a yellow hose into my exhaust pipe, and turned to watch the face of the machine. The machine functioned like the cash registers at McDonalds. All the options are there for you, no room for cheating or human error.

The woman told me to press on the accelerator. She watched me while the car "vroomed." Her face was shaped like a pear--sort of skinny at the top with soft, saggy cheeks at the bottom. I wondered what she would think about me if I made a little "vrooming" noise to accompany my car. She'd probably laugh. She probably sees weirdos all day, every day. But, try as I might, I couldn't muster up a vroom. I thought about the day my brother had gone off to college. Before he left, I knew what I wanted to say--that he didn't have to please anyone, that I loved him no matter what--but I just couldn't say it. My feet were tense.

The pear-faced woman sauntered back over to her machine. She pressed a bunch of buttons. There was some kind of buzzing noise, a green light went on in the corner of the machine, then a computer print out, and she smiled. It looks good, I thought, she's smiling. Smiling's good. Green is good too. Green is go. Green is good. Red, I thought, would have been bad.

The pear-faced woman walked to my window. She spoke. She said, "You're failing in one area. You gotta go to the office on the right. Prob'ly needs a tune up. Have a nice day."

I hate pears. Pears are something to eat when there aren't any apples in the house.

"Damn it," my father said when I called him from the phone in the office.

"A lot of money," I thought, that's what he meant by "damn it."

III.

Two weeks later, I parked my car at Belvedere Square Mini Mall. Walking toward the Blockbuster, I felt good. I had just passed the re-test that morning. It felt good knowing that I wasn't giving off any more noxious gases into the atmosphere.

I had to park far away, though, because it was 5:00--crunch time for last minute shopping at Belvedere Square Mini Mall. Husbands picking up asparagus at Belvedere Market for tonight's dinner party with the new couple down the street; teenage guys venturing to Record Masters to buy the new Janet Jackson CD, the one with the almost naked picture of Janet on the cover; grandparents eating a beat-the-crowd, get-to-bed early dinner at Chili's; me going to the Blockbuster to get a movie for U.S. Since '45, The Best Years of Our Lives, the fictional story of what happens to three World War II veterans when they return home. If we watched the movie and wrote a two page double spaced paper in response, we would get

extra credit on our next test.

The Blockbuster smelled like popcorn. They're trying to make the video rental places so much like movie theaters now. Pretty soon, I'll have to invite dates over to sit on my living room sofa, not just because I want to screw around with them, but because there won't be anywhere else to watch a movie. Movie theaters will be obsolete.

There were lines at the counter.

Speakers piped music into the store: "Blockbuster Video! Wow, what a difference!"

I can never remember the rest of the words. It just sounds like the same thing repeated over and over again. "Blockbuster Video! Wow, what a difference!"

Interspersed were announcements like the fact that this weekend, and this weekend only, John Wayne movies were 30% off. If you played the "Wow, Blockbuster" tape backwards, you'd probably hear: "John is dead. Buy more popcorn. John is dead. Blockbuster customers are sexy."

Smashing one speaker, I thought, would be useless. There were probably hundreds of them. I'd be kicked out of the store before I could get all of them.

I began wandering through the store looking for the Drama videos section. It took me a while to find it, but wasting a little time was better than admitting defeat and asking one of the attendants for help. The New Releases were all along the perimeter of the store. The Horror section was in the center of the store, and the rest of the sections branched out from that: Comedy, then Music Video, then Documentary, and Drama--Drama being right near the checkout lines.

I was trying to figure out where The Best Years of Our Lives would be in the Drama section, when I saw a familiar figure coming through the glass doors. "Sam," I called.

I think because he wasn't expecting to see me, Sam didn't recognize me at first; but then he laughed, and smiled.

"What's up?" I asked.

Sam has this favorite Bowdoin sweatshirt that he wears all the time. I think his Mom tried to burn it once, but Sam just salvaged it from the flames and put it back on.

"I need to see The Terminator," he said. "If I don't get out some aggression, I'll have to go up to a bell tower and shoot someone."

"Did you have the college meeting with your advisor?"

"Yeah," he said, tugging at his tuft of hair. "It was terrible. He was like, 'Sam, your application was a mess,' and I was like 'yeah?' And he was like, 'I'm glad we're on the same level, get to work.' Sam laughed nervously, looking at his feet. "What are ya doin' tonight?"

"Prob'ly watchin' this movie. The parental units are away for the weekend, visiting my bro at college. So, you can come over and hang out if you want."

"No, I need sleep. I had that history essay to do last night. I couldn't force myself to work for a while." His voice squeaked. "I had trouble motivating myself. I'm having trouble motivating myself. I was up 'till three."

Sam looked at his feet. I stared at the wall; there was a poster for a movie that had a picture of a vast African plain filled with wild animals.

"Blockbuster Video. Wow, what a difference!"

Sam and I wandered around the store for a while, pointing out various movies. "That sucked. That was really good. Too violent. Good sex scenes in that one."

"Blockbuster Video. Wow, what a difference!"

Sam said maybe he'd take a year off before college. "All I'm gonna do is study too hard for four years. I want to take a rest, maybe work in a bakery or something."

My feet hurt, and I wondered if I'd be able to make them work on the Jeep pedals, I said I had to go. I didn't really. My parents weren't home. So, it really didn't matter where I was. But, my feet hurt and I didn't want to be so tired that I got into another car accident. The last one, careening into a ditch near the Jones Falls River,

had been while my parents were away.

I wasn't sure I wanted to leave Sam all alone in the video store with the popcorn smell and "Wow, what a difference," tugging at his hair and looking at his feet. I did, though. I gave him a "see ya" handshake, found *The Best Years of Our Lives*, and went through checkout counter number 2. "Due Tuesday by midnight, sir." I waved to Sam again and left through the glass doors.

My car "vroomed" home. No accidents. I hoped Sam didn't rent *The Terminator*. My father showed me an article once that said 95% of people tested hit a metal sensor harder after watching violent entertainment than they did before they started watching. I shouldn't have left Sam there.

IV.

The tea pot we have at home doesn't whistle like normal tea pots do. In fact, it doesn't whistle at all; you're just supposed to know when the water is finished boiling. I never get it right; I always pour the water into my favorite glass tea cup right before it finishes boiling. After I dip the Earl Twinings tea bag in and out a couple of times and add three tablespoons of sugar, a white film forms on top of the tea. Walking upstairs to my room last night, steadying the tea cup on the flowered saucer with my hands, carefully choosing every step with my feet, the white film separated into white strands. With each shake, titter, or clank of the tea cup on the saucer, the white strands moved. Like the changing parts of a kaleidoscope, the white strands formed different pictures with each movement.

First, I saw a zebra's pulsing stripes, then there was a cloud scene, then a zebra, a flock of sheep, a swimmer, then a display of white streaming fireworks, an exploding bomb, car exhaust, tire tracks, a strong Roman statue, a cloud scene, a door frame, and another cloud scene. It was a wonder that, walking up the stairs, staring into my tea cup, I didn't fall on my face.

Marcus Vaughan Civin
Baltimore, MD

Gilman School of Baltimore
Julie Checkoway

"Barbie as Philosopher"

and Barbie said to Ken
"To be or not to be"
and Ken stood with his
comatose smile
as was his tradition
when Barbie went off
on her psycho-babble fits
and her eyes sparkled
a deeper shade of blue
until her bendable
plastic hand slapped
Ken's clean shaven face
and left a mark as red as
Barbie's lips
and Barbie knew
her mind was no joke
she gave a loose
sigh and slipped her
arched feet
right out of those
flashy red heels
and chucked them
at Ken
knocking the smile
right off his face
his plastic hair
looking slightly out of place.

Elaine Fick
Baltimore, MD

Catonsville High School
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

Open Casket

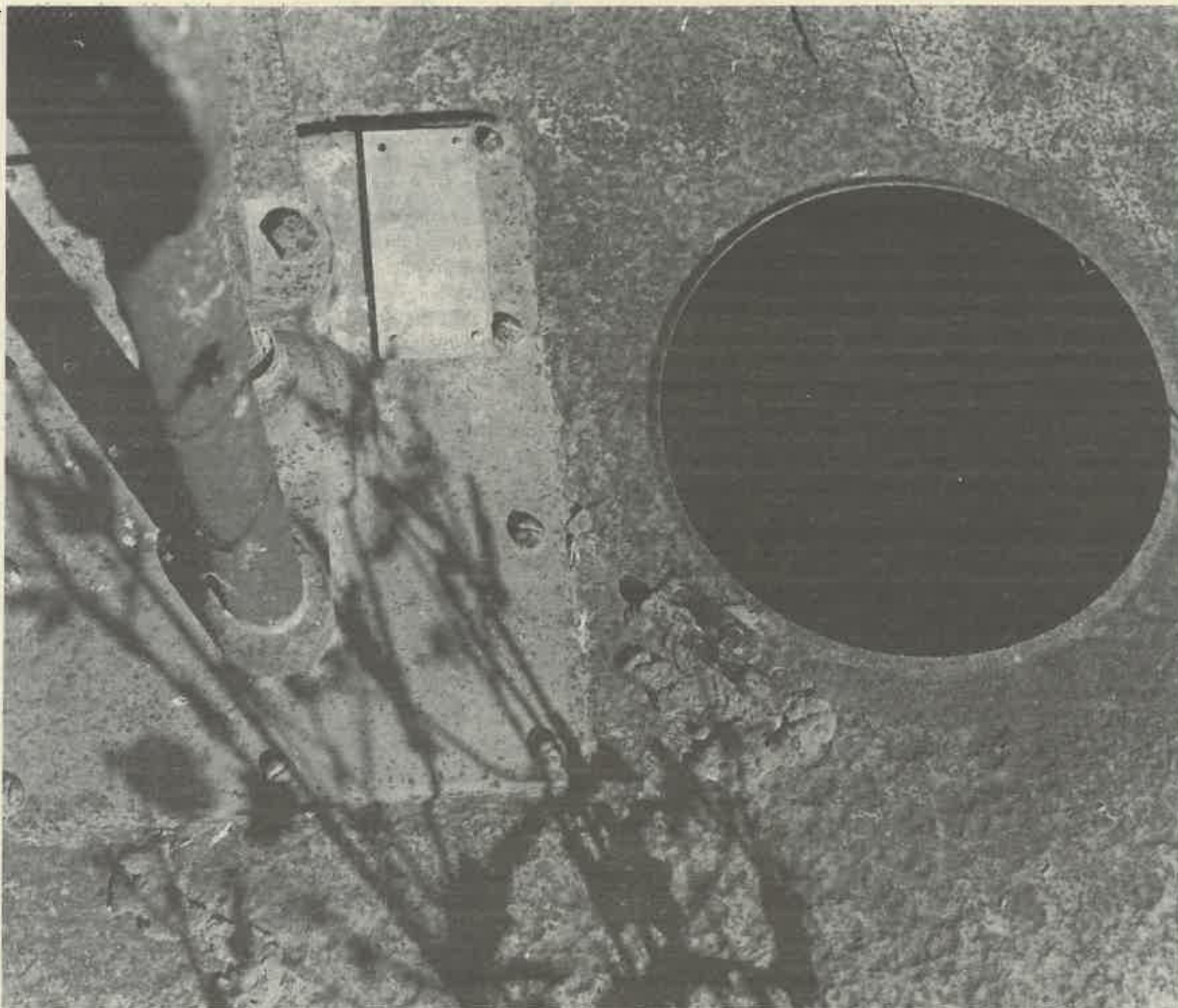
I kneel beside a bird
Could be a hawk,
Perhaps a crow,
Regardless--
It is dead.
Farther on, lies another.
I wonder--
Was it suicide?
Two birds
Refusing to be separated,
One moved by despair,
The other by a Volvo's nose?
Or was it pure coincidence?
Are cars here--
This an ill-used road
To birds
As meteors to us?
Or did they think
They were immortal?
I scuff my suede shoes.
It strikes me
What unholy ground
This is
To die on.
Littered with the ends
Of a million tubes of smoke,
Their former 3 inch selves
Used by those who see
Their fate is like these birds',
And by those who
Don't see,
But hope that what they imitate
Is full of meaning.

Elizabeth Doran
Wappingers Falls, NY
Roy Ketcham High School
Mr. Connolly

Roadside

The tulips, brighter than scarlet,
Seemed all to know when to break
Their pursed silence.
To the day, to the one,
They all opened a Wednesday ago:
Shouts to the wind,
Straight up and loud as daybreak.
But somehow once they began
They didn't know when to stop,
Or when they tried, later,
How to stop. They go on shouting,
Only some screaming now.
What was life is scabbing darker,
Down the sides.
Their arms are dead on the ground.
Some of the mouths blacken
At the edges, like kindling.

Katherine M. Brown
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Carol Blum



Rachel Lears

Too Heavy for Gabriel to Carry

When she wasn't scratching at her knuckles and fingers, she contemplated getting out of bed and running her hands under water. Several times, she let the electricity of the notion fill her body; she'd be ready to toss aside the covers and leap from the bed. Somehow, though, the electricity always managed to retreat into her bones and quiver just enough to keep her awake.

"It doesn't matter," she said to herself. "Washing them would make it worse, anyhow." Last week, her hands had horrified her piano teacher. "It's just eczema," she'd told him. "I wash them too much, so now they're dry." To console him, she'd played octaves, pretending that it didn't hurt, that the skin didn't crack at the fingers.

She blinked in the dark, and rubbed her fingers together; they felt on fire. She looked at the bedside clock. It was a little after midnight. Holding her hands out before her, she could see they were covered with little red moons.

"Het," someone said at the doorway. Her little brother was standing at the foot of her bed, his silhouette burning against the hall light. She squinted.

"Are you awake?" he said.

"Yeah. What is it?"

"I can't fall asleep," he said.

She rubbed her hands together, back and forth. "What's the matter?" she said. "Hey, come here." He walked to her bedside; she sat up. He smelled like shampoo. "Did you take a shower?"

she said.

"This evening," he said. His face was gray in the dim light; he looked older than twelve years; he looked like an old man.

"Sit down," she said; he did. His body shifted the weight of the mattress.

"I can't sleep, and we have school tomorrow," he said. "I have to sleep, but I can't."

She scratched her hands together. They felt as if they might burst into flames. "Why can't you sleep?" she said. "Did you have a bad dream or something?"

"No, I can't fall asleep at all."

The idea of her little brother's having been awake all the time that she had been asleep, stung her somewhere inside her chest. She looked down at her hands. "Well," she said softly.

"I just keep thinking," he said.

"About what?"

"I don't know," he said.

There was a silence. The smell of his hair and skin filled her nostrils. "What shampoo did you use?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I just--No, I don't."

"What?" she said.

"Promise you won't tell Mommy and Daddy?"

"Yes."

"Whatever I tell you," he said.

"I know," she said.

He didn't say anything, only picked up the bedside clock and pushed the radio button, on and off, on and off.

"Hey," she said. "Stop it."

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He turned the radio off and put it back on the bedside table.

"Okay," he said. "Okay, so there's this boy in my class."

"Yeah," she said.

"Well," he said, and hesitated. "I want to beat him up," he said in a small voice.

She looked at him and didn't say anything.

"So bad," he said. "I want to beat him up so bad."

She scratched her hands together hurriedly, harder and harder. Her nostrils were thick with the smell of his shampoo. "Well," she said. "Oh. Well, do other kids in seventh grade beat other people?"

"Yeah," he said.

"I didn't know that," she said, and scratched her hands together.

There was a silence. She hadn't realized how heavy and sweaty the smell of shampoo could be. It seemed to gently crush her lungs; she felt sick.

"What's his name?" she said.

Her brother formed a fist with his hand. "Gabriel," he said.

"What a stupid name."

She didn't say anything, only scratched her hands harder.

"He has red cheeks," he said. "It's because he plays tuba.

And he has skinny legs shaped like an X."

In the dark air, she could see a little boy with a fragile face and fragile body, carrying in his arms a tremendous brass tuba. "Skinny legs shaped like an X, huh," she said. "Why do you want to beat him up?"

"He's just so stupid," he said.

"So that's why?" she said. Her brother nodded. In her mind, the tuba was too heavy for Gabriel to carry, but he played it beautifully. Red cheeks, skinny legs shaped like an X. She wondered what his voice was like. Or whether his cheeks were smooth. She scratched her hands together; the red moons were no doubt spreading. They stung.

"I just want to beat him up," her brother said. "I wish he could die."

Something in his voice made her look at his face. It looked as though the blood had rushed to his eyes and crushed the brown of his pupils with red. Impulsively, she opened her mouth and laughed; but it was a quick laugh, a laugh that squeezed from her chest and cluttered her throat.

"What!" said her brother.

"I'm sorry," she said, laughing.

"What!" he said. "I'll beat you," he said, raising his fist and blinking hard.

She cringed. "Stop," she laughed. "You'll wake Mommy and Daddy up." There was a buzzing sound in her head; she felt giddy. Her hands throbbed in the air. She scratched them, stopped, then scratched them again.

Her brother put down his fist and blinked. "Stupid," he said. "Stupid Gabriel. I want to beat him up."

She didn't respond, only curled up against the wall and scratched her hands, listening to the buzzing sound subside from her head and drain down her neck. Her arms were weak. She sniffed twice and closed her eyes. The smell of her brother's shampoo was strong and thick. She covered her face with her blanket and imagined an enormous brass tuba too heavy for Gabriel to carry.

"I just want to beat him up," her little brother said from outside the blanket; the words seemed to clamor at her ears and hurt her head. She breathed heavily, her face getting warm from the blanket. She thought of the sound of a tuba. Her hands itched. Skinny legs, red cheeks. Smooth cheeks, fragile bones. He probably sat in corners and read poetry.

Her brother was silent. Underneath the blanket, she ran her hands on top of one another; the skin was ragged and worn. She could scarcely breathe. She pulled the blanket from her face; the air was cold; "Hey," she exclaimed.

He was crying, her little brother was crying--"Hey," she said again. "How come you're crying?"

He was sitting cross legged on the bed with his hands in his lap. The tears were wetting his collar.

She thought wildly. "Hey," she said again.

He coughed. "Stupid," he said, and coughed again. "I just want to beat him up."

She didn't say anything.

"He's stupid and mean," said her little brother.

In the dark air, she saw a heavy brass tuba. "Gabriel's mean?" she said.

Her brother nodded.

She wanted to touch his neck or his hair; but he was twelve years old; she didn't know what to do. She thought wildly, scratching her hands together. "What did he do to you?" she asked.

Her brother shrugged and swallowed. "Just mean," he said. "When he's with his friends, he laughs at me. But other times, he's nice."

For a moment, she could only think about the triteness of the situation; she could only smell her brother's tears mingled with shampoo; she could only look down at her hands and stare. Suddenly, though, the air began crushing on top of her, weighting her down, hurting her somewhere inside her chest. She felt empty. She wanted to touch her brother's cheek and hold him and trace her finger through the pattern of his ear, to calm him.

"Hey," she said; but he stood up clumsily and left the room.

"Hey," she said again, stupidly; but she made no attempt to go after him.

In the darkness, her eyes groped for the red cheeks and skinny legs and heavy brass tuba, but the image was spreading like water, fading color, vanishing. She heard her brother shut his bedroom door. All she could see was the image of her little brother standing at the foot of her bed, his silhouette burning against the hall light. The remnant of the scent of his shampoo in the bedsheets stung her nose and spread over her tongue.

She could feel some vague commotion inside her head; she lay down and held her body closely to itself. Underneath the blanket, her hands were curling uncontrollably into fists, tight,

Tighter, so tight that the skin at her knuckles might break. In her mind, she was beating herself, over and over again. It could never hurt. Her hands itched incessantly. She was beating herself, over and over again.

Jennie Chu

McLean, VA

National Cathedral School

Rhoda Trooboff

The Other Side of the Voices

I can hear the sound of the nearby church bell striking eight o'clock as I lie on my bed, listening to my sister and my mom quarrel downstairs. I guess no one can imagine what their fights or our family fights in general are like, because every one of us acts like different people outside of the house. My dad is the president of two companies, my mom is a dean at a college, my sister is a biochemistry major at an Ivy League School, and I'm her kid sister acing through high school and winning all the piano competitions in this New England area. I don't know what my mom's students think of her, but I know at least that my sister is considered to be the quiet, polite, and serious person of the class. But there the two very decent members of my family are, screaming and yelling like animals.

"She just goes around sleeping over at peoples' houses like a dog!" My mom is saying in her usual bitter, too loud voice, not directly addressing my sister Mayu. Mom is washing dishes, making herself extremely busy working hard as always.

"A dog!? What's wrong with visiting friends in Los Angeles? You're just suspicious about everything, aren't you? You just have to stick your nose into everything I do!" My sister, who must be sitting right in front of my mom, cuts into the complaining. Her whiny,

high-pitched voice distracts me.

It was kind of funny - before I came upstairs into my room, I didn't even realize that they were actually having a real fight because I was practicing the piano. Since learning in classic music that music is indispensable for the educated members of the society, and since we are a perfect family after all, both my sister and I had to start piano by the age four. By now, the screams and yells from fighting and classical music have dominated our everyday household. Until about five minutes ago, I was in the process of screening each piece for any left out details for the competition in New York City next weekend. I couldn't get a good, strong "fffz" on the last note with the tip of my pinkie, so I had changed to using the side of my palm there. All the time I heard some loud talk coming from the kitchen, but all I thought about was getting that low C right. But then, I turned my hand and saw that the skin was wearing off and that blood was faintly smearing where I hit repeatedly. I got a little scared. I decided to quit playing, and that was when I realized what all the shouting was for.

I used to try to stop these fights or at least cry silently in my room. I stopped doing anything like that when I was about nine. Most of the fights back then involving physical violence were between my mom and dad. By the time I was eight or nine, I had seen my dad hit my mom, turning her face all bloody. I don't know if it was only her nose bleeding, but whenever I remember about that fight, I feel like somebody had splashed red paint all over the inside wall of my skull. I remember her sobbing too, and it didn't seem possible that the sound of her sobbing could possibly come from a human being. I remember Dad grabbing my mom's neck on another occasion. But actually, the most "suspenseful" moment came right before that, when Mom or Dad - I forget which - touched the kitchen knife. That was different from all the other times. It was going to be cold murder, like the ones in the thriller movies. The knife was perfect, too, the kind that you use for cutting bread, with those fascinating small arches on the edge, shining coldly. It even had a white, plastic handle shaped for a good grip. But, of course, no one was killed. Now that I've thought about it, I think that whichever of them that touched the knife was pushing it back so that nobody would get "hurt" - as if no real hurting hadn't already occurred. How stupid of me to have cried over the incident.

Now, whenever my family goes into a fight, I just ignore it and go about my own business. That's exactly what I did today, when I discovered that a fight was building up between Mom and my sister. I just came straight upstairs to start my homework - except that I'm very lazy as usual and am now lying on the bed, being unproductive. Staring at the blank ceiling and yawning a little bit, I wonder if I have some kind of an emotional deficiency. Then, I remember about my homework and stretch my hand and my entire upper body from the bed to reach my bookbag. It's too cold to get out of the bed. I think it's snowing some outside.

I see my report card crumpled at the bottom of my book bag. I guess I should show those straight A's to my parents, but not now. Actually, I bet they won't notice for another half a year if I don't give it to them. I don't know why I even try to do well at school. I should know by now that trying to do well is just silly because good grades don't even make life better. They make my life worse most of the time because my parents will think all the more that they don't have to bother about me, and I do have to waste time doing homework, only to throw them out as trash at the end of each semester. Even feeling a little better about myself is bad because I seem to start acting arrogantly. At least, some people think I do. They think that I'm laughing at them or something. All I wanted was to be good, perhaps because despite my continuous attempts, I've never succeeded completely in shattering my vain hope of pleasing my parents, or of pleasing just anyone. After all, people have planted in my mind the idea that "good kids" are supposed to get good grades. That idea has rooted itself so firmly by now that being so messed up with my life, I don't know what else to rely on. Maybe I do think everyone else is stupid and get good grades to feel superior to them, and maybe I do laugh at them like they say. However, what they don't know is how many times I've tortured myself thinking

whether becoming a "good kid" was worth the effort or the results if someone else had to give up his or her hope for becoming one. I guess my thoughts don't matter though, because I couldn't do anything but choose myself and my vain hope.

I'm changing into my pajamas - I have on my dotted pink pajama top with the pants of my striped blue pajamas... I know they don't match, but then it doesn't matter - and I shut the door tightly and lie down on the bed to do some reading about the Civil War. I can't concentrate on the reading because the ticking sound of all the clocks and watches in the room is so loud. It seems like it's louder even than the fighting going on downstairs. I can identify all four of them ticking at slightly different timings. I guess it wouldn't be any better if they all ticked simultaneously. It would be horrifying, like a constant nagging all coming at once, getting louder and louder. Clocks and watches always irritate me enough anyhow, as they are. They are so unnaturally precise, even with their own distortions.

"You haven't changed a thing about yourself since you entered college! You come home, and you just sleep all day, getting up only to eat! You are a monster! You just think about yourself. You will receive 'bachi' from God someday. He will punish you." My mom's saying her favorite line, in the kitchen. Her saying the phrase is hilarious, because usually, she's semi-Christian and is saying how wonderful forgiving others is. I don't even know which God she's talking about (she most likely doesn't, either). By the way, she's finally addressing Mayu, sort of, but only in words. She's now going back and forth between the kitchen and the dining room, shutting the shelf doors and sorting papers here and there.

"You think that you don't have to do anything but study. Why, you never even study. You're just going over to Los Angeles to see some new guy you like. Tom! That's his name, isn't it? He doesn't even go to your school! I don't know what kind of school he goes to, or even if he goes to one!" My mom's raising her voice. I can just see her eyes turning into two small triangles. She's a lot like a vicious hound dog ready to bite any clothes off its victim.

"Why do you even care? You never care about me! You don't even care how I feel. You don't understand a thing about me. Why do you tell me what to do?" My sister seems to be getting really emotionally involved in this, and it sounds like she's following Mom into the dining room. I hate it when she's angry and mean. She has all these zits, ready to pop, right on her shiny forehead. She looks so ugly that I can't believe she is her, my sister, whom I used to follow around all day when I was a kid.

"You'll see. You'll see that what I'm saying is right and that I'm saying it because no one else will and because I worry about you. You will realize it when I'm dead." There goes her second favorite line in a "I've-given-up-on-you" tone, as she nosily drags her paper-filled bags down the stairs that she had just climbed. I'm so glad I shut my door.

I start biting my nails. I'm also shaking because it's cold. The snow must be accumulating. I wish I could have a cigarette now. I feel all jittery. I wonder how my parents would react if I smoked in front of them. They don't realize at all how little they know about me. It cracks me up when my mom comes home and comments on the nice scent of the incense I've put on after smoking. I do feel guilty at the same time, though. Really, I'm much worse than my sister, who doesn't even drink. She's so innocent in a way. Tom is her first boyfriend, and their love must be platonic or something. So far, they've only held each other's hands, and my sister was telling me how sad and beautiful that moment was. They don't even know how to deceive my parents. She should just tell Mom that he's the president of her club or whatever when he calls. I mean, my mom thinks my boyfriend is the class president, and she never even dreams of a possibility that he might be much more than just "a very good friend," not to mention the fact that he is five years older than me and of course doesn't go or never went to my high school. It's almost unbelievable how easily Mom's suspicion turns into satisfaction and awe with the use of just one magical word. I guess my sister has these crazy fights because she can't be like me, lying to make things convenient - she actually cares, even though not all the time, to face things. She's so desperate to be understood, to

be seen as she is. Really, she should know - and I'm pretty sure she does - that people don't change. My parents will never see us, how we think, how we feel.

I've bitten my nails as deeply as I can without making my fingers bleed. There is a thin bottom layer left on my forefinger. I'm wondering if I should bite it all off. It might start bleeding. I begin to take it off, little by little, carefully. A sharp pain like an electric shock seizes my finger every time I touch it. All the time, I can't close my ears to the ticking of the clocks and watches. The clocks are driving me crazy! And it's so cold that I can't stop shivering. Damn that snow outside, probably looking so soft and warm like falling cotton balls. I grind my teeth on the fragment of the nail I've bitten off, tasting it. I'm going to destroy those stupid clocks someday. I'm also going to scream so loud sometime, that all the glass windows will break and perhaps the whole house will blow up. In my frustration, I rip off the whole film-like layer from my finger, from under the nail.

"Where's Mayu? Where did she go?" I suddenly hear the frantic voice of Mom. I don't know what has happened. I must have tuned the fight out for a while.

"She went outside! She's running away! She's never coming back!" my dad speaks from the stairs. He pretends to be upset, overreacting to appear funny. I wonder if he is trying to become a clown. If he is, he should follow me as an example.

"Mayu! Please come back! It's all my fault. I'm a bad mother," my mom says, grabbing my sister at the entrance. Her face is probably wet with tears and saliva. She must be looking like a jelly fish, with her wide, bent mouth. I guess the fight is ending now. She's going to blame herself in order to get sympathy. It's such a pathetic approach. No one can scream at and blame someone who is already showing guilt. Of course, my mom doesn't realize that she is using a dirty approach. She actually believes that she is sincere. And I guess she is sincere, then. She's going to say: I'm so sorry, Mayu. Mayu will feel guilty and will have to answer: No, Mom, it's my fault, too. They'll cry together and be very sensitive and nice to each other for a while after that. The story of their fight will conclude in the routine style of a happy ending.

The church bell is striking ten o'clock, and I'm freezing to the bones. The snow has probably made a thick layer on the roof by now. I should have concentrated on my homework. Oh well, I wasted my time. I have some blood on my finger, which I guess I'll just lick. I need to get some sleep for the test tomorrow. My sister and Mom can calm themselves down. My sleep is for the moment the priority. Ah, the darkness feels the best. I just need a few blankets to keep everything nice and cozy. Night is my favorite time of the day. Yes, who cares about anything? Good night to me.

Yukiko Sekino
Lexington, MA
Lexington High School
Paul Steele

Versus

Versus. It was such a cold word. She wondered what it meant, where it came from. Versus. It sounded like verses, but had absolutely nothing to do with the warmth and vigor of her poetry. If asked, she would say it was the sound of a white telephone ringing, the perpetual tone which had grated in her ears as she realized for the first time that she was dialing a strange apartment where her father now lived. Every time she heard the lawyers talk about "Johnson versus Johnson," a crazy image got stuck in her mind: a book of poetry torn in two.

Her mother used to tell her to smile more often, saying, "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar." She always wondered why anyone would go to all that trouble just to end up with a house full of bugs. Not that it mattered anymore, because in spite of all her mother's honeyed efforts, all she had left now was an empty,

sticky house. A house not full of much of anything. It was amazing how little space two people took up in a room as compared to three. How the bathroom looked with only two toothbrushes. She found herself constantly aware of the little things, like the striped sofa where her father used to sit, still covered with creases like upside-down smiles. Some days they glared at her like angry frowns, but at times the stripes and the creases would blend together so well she swore she was seeing rainbows.

She liked to close her eyes and try to picture them together - her father and his girlfriend. Although it wasn't really accurate to call them "new." Mathematically, their relationship was just a combination, never a permutation. Order had never mattered. They had been seeing each other for a year before he finally broke the news to her mother. She tried to picture their new apartment, to imagine what color towel sets the girlfriend would keep in her bathroom. For a time, she had become obsessed with those matching towel sets. If she could only find out what color they were, she knew that all her problems would be solved. But she was too afraid to ask her father. Instead, she would flip through old issues of "Good Housekeeping" and "Ladies Home Journal," examining the interior decorating scenes and trying to decide which dining room table she would have chosen for her father's new apartment, which rocking chair, which lamp shades. Somehow, she never found a page showing towel sets the way she wanted.

Versus. Her mother's lawyer asking her which parent she would like to live with. Whenever she heard that word, she found herself strangely unable to concentrate. Verses. The Road Not Taken. She would take the road not taken. "Whose woods these are I think I know./ His house is in the village though;/ He will not see me stopping here/ To watch his woods fill up with snow." Something tells her that this is the wrong poem, that even the road is eluding her now. The lawyer repeats his question, but she still can't hear him. Somehow it has suddenly become extremely important to her to know if it is the road not taken or the road less travelled by. She thinks for a while, and is disappointed to remember that both definitions apply.

She knows she must be going crazy. She knows it because today, she found herself in the shower with a shampoo bottle in her hand unable to remember whether she had just washed her hair or was just about to wash it, so she did wash it, and as she was rinsing out the conditioner she felt a strange sense of *deja vu*, and realized that she had washed her hair twice in a row without even knowing it.

It was just so simple. She couldn't live with her dad. She wondered why she hadn't realized it before. It was Plaid Day, and her flannel was in the wash, so she went to get one of her father's to wear, but there was nothing in his closet but empty hangers like a bunch of geese craning their, ugly skinny necks. It wasn't fair, how all her friends got to wear their father's flannels whenever they felt like it but she couldn't do that. She had to wash her own. She tried to picture her father's girlfriend washing his flannels, but she couldn't do that either. Suddenly, she realized it: the only detergent she ever used was Tide Unscented, and she bet the girlfriend used Downy or Cheer or something. She couldn't ask her to switch detergents or anything like that. So she couldn't live with him. It was fate. It was just so simple.

Versus. The lawyer is angrier this time. He wants her to make up her mind. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall,/ That sends the frozen ground swell under it." She wonders what a frozen ground swell is and why she hasn't seen any of them lately. She can just see herself, walking into McDonald's: "I'd like a frozen ground swell, please." She knows what they would say: "Would you like some fries with that?" She would reply "No, thank you, I'd like some fries versus that." She would say: "Good fences make good neighbors."

Kalee Magnani
Rockville, MD
Richard Montgomery High School
Mrs. Wilchek

When One Person Falls Out of Love

That day on the boardwalk
I followed you
through the rain-
my sandals making the catching up
to you even harder.
It started that morning at breakfast
not the rain but the way
you stopped looking at me and turned
your eyes on the waitress
on the other side of the room.

I should have known it was coming,
when you and your friends
were playing volleyball on the beach
I was watching their girlfriends smoke,
their bodies already tan,
and I was praying for the sun.
The rain came later,
after the argument
when everything-our bathing suits, towels
words hung in the air of our room
to choke us and suddenly you had to leave
and I followed you so I wouldn't be trapped
in that room alone.

On the boardwalk
I lost you in an arcade room.
The last time I saw you, back turned,
you were getting change
from one of those machines,
but when I got there I saw
the "out of order" sign.
When I got back out in the rain,
pouring now, I couldn't see
through the crowd of umbrellas
something we forgot to pack.

That night I borrowed a key
from the lady at the desk
who looked at me like my mother would
if she knew,
and in the air-conditioned room
I found you asleep under the warm
white sheets
and there was no goodnight.
I was as restless and angry
as the waters outside
so I sat on the side of the street
those lamps dried out my eyes
and I hated you because you slept
that night not once turning
to face me.

The other night I pretended
I was one of those girls on the beach
and we were still together.
I held a cigarette between two fingers
and tried to light it-
so hard when the wind is blowing
so hard because you wouldn't see
this light in the darkness
over so many miles.
So sometimes when it rains

I leave the windows open
to block out the sound
of the air-conditioner here
and still the bed seems so big.

Bonnie Minick
Glen Gardner, NJ
Voorhees High School
Lois Harrod

The Rainbow

I go back to July 1970 and
see the pink of neon throwing
highlights to her auburn hair
as she waits on the crowded sidewalk,
this woman who has no idea
she will be my mother.
I watch her reapply a deep mauve to
her lips and adjust the leather sandle
straps to fit just right.
She is beautiful now,
tilting her head to fill the lungs
with New Jersey's salt air,
and I notice the ivory polish,
bold against her tan skin.
A sophistication at twenty-five.
The double doors open and
live music crawls out to the styreet.
But I want to run up to her there,
in the glow of the neon,
and add one more touch of color
to her cheeks or press the wrinkle
from her paisly blouse.
I want her to be perfect now, a goddess,
because only I know that tonight she
will meet my father at The Rainbow.

Katie Duffy
Reistertown, MD
Mercy High School
Amy Gibson

Untitled

Inside, the humid radiator heat keeps
your sour Marlboro pool-hall scent
on the windows and in my hair
hours after I've watched you leave
a psychedelic trail in the glazed
iced and mud-pocked pool of snow.
The snowman waits by the door
ready to entice you with his leafy
carrot nose and marrying-rings
on every finger, one for you
if he doesn't melt at your touch,
a too-late knight on an icy white horse.
So now I stroke your legend-hair
and in the mirror you are glassy-
eyed, two-dimensional, a paper
doll with powder make-up caked
on your thin lip-hairs
where you once smelled of milk.

Deborah Stein
Douglaston, NY
Hunter College High School
Kathleen R. Lawrence

I lived off a rural route when I was young. The road was paved, but it was never given a yellow line. The speed limit was 45 mph, but everyone went at least 50. My house was the last house on the left from a gravel road with a cul de sac. The gravel road was about two miles long when it ran into the rural route. The 10 or so other houses that were built off this gravel stretch made up a little community called "Rolling Run." Since the buses wouldn't travel the long dusty road, the post man certainly wouldn't. Our mailboxes were all heaped together where the gravel kissed the pavement at the end of "Rolling Run Drive." There was a nice little creek there that ran behind the mailboxes along the paved road. However, there were a few times I cursed that creek for running away with a letter or two I had dropped.

Since I had to catch the bus at the end of our road, I used to get the mail in the afternoons. I walked to and from the bus since neither of my parents worked at convenient times for giving me a ride. The walk wasn't that bad in the spring and fall when the weather was nice. It was in the snow that I detested the chore. But I could take a short-cut through the woods to save about 10 minutes. I remember hurrying home to catch the beginning of the three o'clock cartoons.

I often read the mail during the walk home. I had three pen-pals that I wrote to just so that I could have some mail of my very own to read. When they didn't write back right away, I used to look at the sales items in the K-Mart catalogue. One can never have too many sale items. I always thought of it as getting free merchandise since I was saving money on one thing that I would have normally paid full price for. I'd always buy a second item that I would not have been able to buy with the original price of the first item, the sale item.

I used to pinch pennies whenever possible. It wasn't that I needed to, but I just loved to get something for a deal. Perhaps this was when I started to notice that the stamps on the letters I retrieved from the mailbox were often unstamped. To me, this was the neatest thing. To think that I was holding something in my hands that "had gotten through untouched" was enthralling. At first, it was only the big packages that required three or four stamps that had one or two unmarked ones. Slowly though, I noticed that a few letters were even making it past the stamp-marker guard. I had to wonder about this guy. Was there really such a person? And if so, why wasn't he very good at his job? How much skill could it take to mark a stamp. There had to have been such a person, because sometimes the stamps were hand marked.

I noticed when they weren't, though. It became a habit to check each letter for the unmarked stamp. When I saw one, I noted from where the letter had come. Were there certain areas that these unmarked letters came from? Or were they random mishaps? I became obsessed. Instead of turning on the three o'clock cartoons anymore, I headed straight for the desk drawer. With the scissors, I would carefully cut around the edge of the stamp so as not to let any envelope show. Depending on the thickness of the envelope, I would even occasionally steam them off.

My parents started to notice the missing squares from the upper right-hand corners of their mail. I didn't know quite how to explain this when my mother asked me about them one day after work.

I eventually told them that I was starting a stamp collection. They bought it and even bought me a scrap book and some rubber cement. I don't know why I didn't tell them the truth, that I was secretly reusing the stamps on the letters to my pen-pals. I guess I feared that it was illegal. The mail system can be wierd sometimes. I had a friend whose father worked for the mail system. I couldn't believe it when he told me that a person can't leave a friend a note in their mailbox unless it is stamped. I never felt guilty, though. I supposed I figured it was justification or pay in the way that I had to carry the mail from the end of the road to my house since I had to walk home every day.

There were some stamps that were easier to get off than oth-

ers. For instance, there were these sticker stamps that had straight edges. These were much easier cut off than the stamps with the scalloped edges. I was always afraid that the post office would notice the straight edges around a scallop-edged stamp. I could always say that I had decided not to mail a letter that I had already addressed and stamped, that this was that stamp. My favorite stamps were the ones of U.S. flowers and butterflies. I'd hold on to these awhile and use up all the American flags first.

My little trick went on for three-and-a-half years without anyone catching on. I never told anyone, not even my pen-pals. I didn't want the confession in writing, and I thought that they'd stop writing if they knew that I was continuing our letter-relationship through recycled stamps. Besides, I wouldn't have anything to read on the way home, except for the K-Mart catalogue, if they stopped writing.

I became rather careless with my scam. I didn't worry anymore about cutting the perfect edges and using the right amount of glue so that the stamp sat as flat as possible. I didn't even make sure that the stamp was perfectly straight anymore so that it would draw the least bit of attention as possible. It was a given that I never had to buy stamps. Instead, I'd spend the money I was saving on those K-Mart sale items. One could never have too many legal pads, envelopes, or blank tapes. I'd buy a pack of chewing gum or a pack of pencils with the money I saved from the sale. I loved the way K-Mart store always had a wide variety of choices. Sometimes, I stood for 15 minutes, letting people in front of me in the check-out lane, trying to decide between cinnamon or spearmint and No. 2 or soft lead.

All of this was fine until one Christmas. The friend's dad who worked for the mail system got laid off. He said that the postal service just wasn't making enough money. They couldn't afford to keep all their employees over Christmas time with all the extra hours and the extra pounds of red and green envelopes to deliver.

That was a hard Christmas for my friend. She didn't get the bike she wanted so that she could ride around the neighborhood. Her parents only gave each other one small gift in order to save money for their daughter's Christmas. They had to pull the old, fake tinsel tree out of storage instead of their usual fresh-cut, elegant white pine. And they didn't have their annual Christmas party that my family was always invited to. This meant no spiced apple cider or pink and green peanut butter fudge. This year, there would be no daddies catching mommies under the ivy-covered trellis arch that they always hung mistletoe from. This also meant that there would be no gag-gift Christmas present game. Last year, I ended up bringing home some orange goosebump massage balls.

This was the Christmas that I should have gotten coal in my stocking. Instead my parents bought me three different leather-bound books on stamp collecting. The Hunt, the Kill, and Digestion was about finding rare stamps and keeping them in good care. The Art of Arrangement showed different mounts that showed off the stamps. And Know Your Worth was an updated price guide. I felt horrible. I didn't even own any stamps of my very own. I'd mailed them all off, except two butterflies, on K-Mart Caroling Christmas Cards. And I couldn't help feeling somewhat responsible for my friend's dad losing his job. If I'd only paid all those 22¢'s over those past few years, maybe they could have used him still. I just knew I had mailed away his salary to pen-pals and sweepstakes that no longer wrote back and I never won. It was terrible.

I never confessed this guilt to him, but I did buy his daughter the K-Mart Christmas Special Sequin Disco Ball for Christmas. With the sale money saved, I bought a whole roll of stamps. Since that day, I've always put an extra 22¢ on my letters. With these extra 22¢'s and the photo-album of rare and old stamps that I sent my old friend and her father for Christmas last year, I have finally paid off my debt. Instead of sweepstakes, I now mail to charities. And I make a point to never pass the mailman during his "Frequent stops."

Monica McMichael
Broad Run, VA

Farquier High School
Peg Wiley



Michelle Warters

Dissection

Every morning Julia woke at exactly 6:40. There was no snooze button for her. At precisely 7:05, Julia finished her shower and was dressed by 7:15. She brushed her hair carefully, using her hairspray to freeze her bangs in place. When every strand was in place, Julia put on her makeup. She only wore enough makeup to hide any possible blemishes that marred her perfect complexion. When she finished at 7:30, she smiled at herself in the mirror. Her teeth were always gleaming white, as if they were lacquered.

Ellen was always in homeroom before Julia. Ellen said to the other girls, "Well, at least Julia isn't first in everything." Ellen was a loner, like Julia used to be. In 7th grade, Julia sat by herself in the cafeteria, eating skim milk and apples. Skim milk and apples are such solitary foods--not many people like skim milk, especially not in combination with apples. Apples grew by themselves, not in clumps like bananas or cherries or grapes. Her uncle had an orange grove in California. When she used to visit him before...when she used to visit him, there would be fresh squeezed orange juice every morning for breakfast. They never had fresh squeezed orange juice at home anymore.

"Julia, what's happening?" asked Meg O'Brien. "Everyone's so excited about your shindig on Saturday!"

"Oh yeah? Hope so."

"Hey, Miss Prom Queen! What are you doing being antisocial?" called John.

Laughing and joking, Julia and her crowd left homeroom for English.

Mr. Dawson had an unfortunate tendency to repeat himself

each class period. Julia developed an ability to turn off the volume of those around her. She could see Mr. Dawson's lips moving but no words were coming out. Once, she had watched "Gone With the Wind" in its entirety without any volume. The essence of the movie was still there--Scarlett and Rhett still loved each other passionately. Passion defied language. It defied cultural differences--like that movie "Singles," when the girl is fooled by a pseudo-Spanish student. They had passion--maybe not love, but passion.

Julia liked Mrs. Murphy, her algebra teacher, even less than Mr. Dawson. Mrs. Murphy was always saying how everything and everyone in the world was logical. Julia knew better--no one in the world was logical. No one followed the exact same path, not even turtles. In the 4th grade, the boys would catch turtles in the moors and bring them to the schoolyard to race them on a course. One morning, one of the turtles strayed off the lines and crawled across the playground. The boys taunted and teased the turtle until Julia rescued him and took him home. Fred was still alive and was still Julia's best friend.

"Logic governs the world..." Mrs. Murphy droned. Julia scorned logic. She glared at Mrs. Murphy--logic indeed!

Suddenly, Julia was in the cafeteria, being swept up by the crowd that carried her to the lunch line. She separated herself and went to buy her skim milk and apples. No one was sitting down at any of the tables, so Julia sat down and munched an apple. Instantly, it seemed, twenty people descended upon the table at once, all clamoring to sit next to Julia. She just smiled and laughed and continued eating her apples and drinking her skim milk.

At the end of the period, Julia again was carried away by her

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crowd to History with Mrs. Wheeler.

"Ireland under Tudor rule," Mrs. Wheeler began. Julia pitied the poor Irish--imagine not being able to choose your religion or go to school. The Irish were entirely dependent on the whims of the English for everything. Dependency--how Julia despised people who were dependent. She hated people who needed others around them, needed support and love. They reminded her of the puppets in the show at Fairfield so many summers ago. Daddy and Mum took her there to see the carnival. It was the most exciting event she had ever experienced--all the sounds and the people and the colors! Daddy had even given her pink cotton candy that stuck to her lips. He and Mum had laughed when they saw.

"Well, the Irish deserved it. I mean, they rebelled and stuff. Serves them right."

Miriam Manno. She had sleek black hair and a porcelain cream face. Stark contrast. She always was as composed and icy as a doll or a mannequin, like wax figures. Julia had once been to Madame Toussard's Wax Museum. Figures too perfect to be human and lacking any quality or warmth. Utterly passionless. Julia looked up, startled to see that Miriam's eyes were gazing at her, as contemptuous as Julia's had been.

"Julia, I can't handle it. Dissection? Ugh! I'm gonna die!" cried Meg, while everyone agreed.

"What do you think about it, Julia?" someone laughed.

"Oh, it's just another class period. Nothing that different," she responded.

"The dissection of a frog is very useful to understanding human anatomy. By dissecting the frog, you will learn many things about yourself..." droned Miss Okum, the Biology teacher.

Julia groaned with the rest of the class, then went to the refrigerator and collected her frog. He's kinda cute, she decided. Maybe I'll name him Harry.

Collecting her scalpel from the front desk, Julia waited for Miss Okum to give directions.

"First, boys and girls, you must cut two flaps in order to see the inside of your frog. Make one incision in the middle of your frog's stomach. Then, cut two perpendicular lines, one at the top and one at the bottom, resulting in two flaps that open outward. I call these flaps garage doors. Then..."

Julia heard no more. She just sat and looked at Harry. Suddenly and with a vengeance, she took her scalpel and stabbed Harry in the heart. She sobbed, not minding her crowd clustered around her, only thinking of the day five years ago when her father opened the garage doors and drove away from Julia forever.

Gillian Morris Oak Knoll School
Summit, NJ Harriet Marcus

Russian

Tick tick

Grandmother's skin is as tight as it comes,
smoothed with a bun like a wide eye.

She sees the dancers cursing their bones,
and wrapping their bodies around the barres -
like tongues - only misunderstood and mistreated.

The old lady is an albino - a pale, shrivelled star,
and she tells us - Dancers today are weak!

Their blood runs hard under them like secrets rivers,
their eyelashes are curled, lids tinted.
as if they were prostitutes!

Clicks her stick on the floor and her tongue in her mouth
in time with the spasmodic record.

Paint bleeds from the walls -
our grunts of pain shake it down.

When the music jumps back into the heat.

A stage curtain takes them in.

Melanie Massey Pocono Mountain High School
Stroudsburg, PA Sally Sparrow

Untitled

Salt shakers from the sky-
Granulated sugar puffs raining upon the ocean
dissolving as they touch the rolling waves.
But what if the winds turn icy
leaving frosty waves of slush,
and swirling mounds of snow?
Could we then make snow angels on the ocean top?
Would it be an ice island, or freeze and be
another iceberg afloat in the salt?
Would our angels remain or sink to the depths?
Will their holy masses crush the sand and
wave about the ghostly seaweed?
Winter doesn't last forever and neither will these
Ice castles we construct with our hands.
Thorny tufts hover, and land upon the
seawater's glow-
and intricate lace flowers sink until the
blackness overcomes us.

Susan Kegler
Hillsdale, NJ
Pascack Valley High School
Mrs. -Clemen

The Flannel Meeting, Variation on a Theme by Pastan

At the mall you see
as many brands of clothes
as there are grains of sand
among the Arabs,
and the denim lies deep on the shelves,
like leaves. You tell me
of soft cashmere between the jeans,
and I tell you of used flannel as rough
as the emory board
when it rubs its spiny back
on your curved nails.

"You have no fashion sense," you say.
"This flannel crap has overtaken you."
I want to be overtaken by flannel,
to walk on it in bare feet,
to move from the softness of your cashmere
to sink into my rough, shaggy flannel
the way I sink into the green in your eyes
when you speak of buying me
new clothes
before taking yours off,

when the place
where our union begins
is as rough
as flannel.

Julian Cook
Richmond, VA
Monacan High School
Judith Land



The Sketch Artist

I. I fear
the sketch artist.
The power
he cradles
in his eyes
to reduce you
to charcoal smoke trails
scattered on
white paper
gray-burnt shadows
easily smudged.

II. You fear not
the sketch artist.
(You fear little,
anymore.) and
entrusted your
lines and creases
to a black olive
stare and a
hairy brown hand
choking pencil.

III. The snow clings
to and decorates
the stitching of
your trench
coat. We sit
on the porch
you hold the
paper and ask
well what do you think
and it chills
me like this
wind that
the sketch artist
made you look
just like pencil
dust.

IV. I painted you
inside my eyelids
long ago
before you began
to leave me
before the clouds
began to station
in front of
your vision line
before you had
to cock your
ear to
hear the stars come
out.

V. Sometimes the
paint leaks out
sticks to my
eyelashes and
I blink patterns
under my eyes.
You wipe the
stains away with
fingers like
ballerina's legs,
and kiss me.

VI. I'm afraid
all the paint will
leak away.
I'm afraid I'll
lose the
exact color of
your hair
the curves of your hands
the smell of your skin.
I'm afraid
I'll be left
behind with
a scrap of smudged
paper stand-in
for a face
the sketch artist
forgot
when his pencil
left the page.

Jessica Winter
East Amherst, NY
Williamsville East High School
Ms. Richert

Maria

I know Maria's secrets.
She keeps them under bracelets
or long sleeves,
even in the summer.

I saw the wrists last fall.
She wore a pirate blouse
with bell bottom sleeves
that day in the library
reading Sylvia Plath.
When she raked the brown
curls from her eyes,
the sleeves fell and
I saw them:
two white ridges on the right,
and three on the left,
like broken seashells
hammered in there.

Now I see them
whenever I see her.
If she is the center
of fifteen South-mouthed boys,
or alone, playing solitaire
on the stairs
by the magazine room where
she sometimes took her poetry,
the scars look through
her bronze bracelets
like little snow worms
that seem to choke her hands.

Ann Wright
Danville, VA
George Washington High School
Bernard Leigg

While Watching the Pasta Cook

soft and cloudy milk
 warm and comfortable
 steaming into my
 open
 face
 from the gurgling
 pot look! now yellowed
 soft and
 gentle and
 comfortable
 as always
 my gnocci.
 could any too tight
 (submerged in mother's
 heavy arms)
 or watery
 (nervously distanced)
 hug
 compare to
 this
 tender embrace
 between hard
 teeth?

Annie Fischman
 New York, NY
 The Chapin School
 Mrs. Rinden

Last Summer

I can recall sitting all night
 watching the street for your battered old truck
 men calling and calling and getting no answer,
 until 1:30,
 and you said you would've stopped in,
 but my light was not on
 so I'd stare at the glow of the 60 watt bulb,
 night after sultry and humid night,
 but I never heard you bound up the stairs
 or felt your hot breath on my cheek
 and it hurt so bad I used pills to sleep
 else I'd stare at the 60 watt bulb for weeks.
 And sick of the sun and the outside world
 I sat on my bed with my yellowing skin
 and butter-scotch breath and bleeding nails,
 aching to fill the hours and days,
 and all this time waiting,
 playing three kinds of solitaire,
 reading Cummings and Plath and Millay.
 How I climbed out of despair and weakness
 ...I don't know
 Perhaps I got bored--
 The suicide threats too, silly, even for me--
 but I'm happy and shallow again,
 sitting on my bed, biting my nails,
 waiting for my new boyfriend to call.

Maureen Gallagher
 Chambersburg, PA
 Anne K. Branham

Untitled

I washed
 all my clothes
 so that the
 smell
 would dissipate
 into the soap
 and water
 and steam,
 and I lit matches
 so that the
 smell
 would mix with
 the smoke
 and thin,
 as it spread
 throughout the house.

I slept
 all night
 with the smell
 sinking into my skin
 and entwining with my hair.
 In the morning,
 very early,
 I arose
 to wash it off.
 (But it still lingers
 in corners
 around my bed
 and about the house.
 Sometimes,
 when I sweat,
 I think of you.)

Daniel Cobb
 New York, NY
 Hunter College High School
 Ms. Miller

My Own Glacier Morning

It's stuffy in here, though God knows it was my decision to sit down on this glacier floor and pour my heart out. I've never been one for dramatics, yet here I am, a pile of shaking grey bones, crouched in my basement, staring at a journal that smells of mildew and summer rain, about to write about slamming doors and choking voices, crackling driveways and empty hallways. I can't remember the last time I sat down on this calloused floor for more than a minute. When I was younger I was frightened of this place, scared of the trunks spilling over with old clothes and costume jewelry, the broken mirror in the corner, the piles of magazines that decorate the floor like remnants of an ancient village. But God, now that I'm down here, my back against the wall, my feet drinking in cold cinderblock, I finally feel as though I can breathe. I don't care that the air is dense and glittering with my family's generous dust. I don't care that the washing machine is shaking like it's sobbing for a lost love, or that the lone lightbulb flickers precariously with each heavy step from above. I'm alone and I'm shivering, but at least my cold is mine and my fingers tap out rhythms born of my own glacier morning.

Liz Garcia
 Ridgefield, CT

The Breakdown

I smashed the car on my eighteenth birthday.
It was still solid, but twisted up front,
I explained the event to my father.
We talked about liability
insurance and repairs and such.
Then he let it go (small wonder).
Chrissake! It was my birthday.
I found gifts piled on the hearth
and, in the kitchen, the
cake was poised with all
my eighteen candles,
unlit, immobile.
I swung around
saw the sneaking
clock, and I
crumpled and
cried and
God only
knows why
I
broke
down.

Michael Edwards
Fairfax Station, VA
Thomas Jefferson High School
Bettie Stegall

Dinner Time

Every night that he comes home for a late dinner, my father updates me and my mother on the condition of the tale he's been spinning in his head for more than twenty years--what he refers to as his novel. I love watching how excited he gets. He'll wipe his lips with a paper napkin, crumple it in his fist to add to the pile by his plate, and begin to tell us about it again. My mother's mouth moves continuously, but she never says anything; fork and knife are set in her hands.

"It's all up here," he says to us, pointing to his balding head, shining with sweat from the exertion he puts into eating. He dabs at it with another napkin. "My novel," he pauses for a heaping spoonful. I nod and he continues between bites. "It encompasses all the great cities of the world, you know--London, Paris, New York, Rome . . ."

He trails off for a moment to pour the last of the dark imported beer into his glass. He never drinks directly out of a bottle.

"And Rio," he begins again, "my last conference. You see," he motions with large, open hands, "with each new experience, with every new place, my novel gets bigger, rounder. I wrote another eight chapters in Rio."

I look up. "You mean you started writing it down?" I ask.

"No, no." He shakes his head. "Not yet, it's not ready. It's still developing inside my mind." He smiles at me, his hand gently tapping his temple.

I'm not sure of the exact year my father's novel began, something like 1974, the year he graduated from medical school. His mother had convinced him to become a doctor for the money, but he told me that he'd always had an urge inside him to write.

He described his writing process to me as a kind of spider web. Threads spiral from the center until they can anchor and be built upon. In my father's head I can imagine the immensity of the web he's spun over two decades, like the intricately woven net of the spider, a passive hunter until the fly entangles itself. Though I'm not sure exactly what my father is trying to catch.

"What's the novel about?" I ask him sometimes.

"Everything." He hurries through large mouthfuls to answer me. He always takes large mouthfuls; he almost choked once. "All the great themes of the world," he tells me, brown eyes full of the

dining room light, "love, betrayal, revenge, death, regret."

He pauses, looking into my face. "Why are we here, our purposes, desires--"

"But what is it about exactly?" I interrupt. He just shakes his large, bald head.

"I told you, everything." He emphasizes his words with the movements of his hands. "The human mind; this planet, the place of our existence!" He extends his arms to include all the space around him. "The story takes place in a multitude of settings, every place I've visited--the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt, the Ganges River--every place."

I nod. I've seen all these places in the scribbled postcards he sometimes sends my mother and me, the videos he shoots with a brand new mini camcorder, the photographs he takes with his heavy, professional quality camera.

Last night I suggested he start writing parts of his novel down, sections he could attach together later. His eyes widened and he quickly washed down his food with a drink of red wine.

"But I want to catch everything!" he exclaimed. My mother barely looked up. "Encompass all of it, not just parts." He paused. "All of the world," he said, "and everything in it. All its people, all its secrets, all its possessions--everything! Not just parts." His hands hung in the air, waiting for an answer.

"Am I in it?" was all I could think to say. "Am I in your novel?"

His hands dropped to the table slowly and wrinkles appeared on his forehead. He poured himself a little more red wine, something he'd picked up on his last business trip.

"Of course," my father finally answered. He picked up the wine bottle, scanned the label again, set it down. "I said everyone was in it. Everyone in the world is a part of my novel." He lifted his glass and was quiet.

Roya Hamadani
Allentown, PA
Emmaus High School
Ray Oswald

Dizziness

So I'm showering and I get dizzy and I almost fall against the floor while the water's running. I think of how my mother would react if she found me crumpled like a blanket on the wet tiles. Instead I press my shoulder into the wall and close my eyes until I have control.

This happens to me often. Like yesterday in class, the bell rang and I couldn't get out of my chair. My friends tried to help me stand up. I kept on saying "I can't, I can't" because everything was shaking. I looked up at the ceiling where the light was and tried to balance myself against it. You know how lights and colors turn a different shade when you're sick, how everything's a little yellow? It was like that, I was looking up at the thick light falling over me and I kept on saying "I can't" and I was so dizzy. I couldn't move. The teacher had to call the nurse in.

The nurse made everyone leave the room because I wouldn't get up from my chair. I wasn't crying, but I pulled my head over the table as if I were. The nurse had to pull my head up to speak to me when I wouldn't answer her questions. She asked me where my mother was so that she could call her but I didn't know. She asked for my father's work number and I said, "He's dead." She was quiet so I said, "I don't know how." Then I began to feel sick, I needed to throw up, I felt as if I had just cried or hyperventilated, and then I did, then I couldn't breathe.

Even last week I was at a party, and I was kissing, and then all of a sudden it was like, "Oh my God are you on top of me am I on top of you get off of me" because the whole world was shaking, the ceiling was pounding down and everything was spinning and spilling, and I was so scared that I couldn't move. Later I heard that the boy I had been with had had his pants off, had tried to rip my skirt off, but he couldn't. I don't know why. It makes me think, maybe someone is watching over for me.

My mother is worried about my dizziness. She comes into my room and kisses me goodnight now. Her breath is bad, she smells like she drinks beer before she comes to my room or has just woken up. When she kisses me, she leaves her mouth on my face so long that I feel the winged skin of her chapped lips. Then she will pull the sheets over me tightly. The sheets feel like straps, like she is scared that I might leave her while she's sleeping. Sometimes I pretend that I am already asleep so that she won't come into my room.

My mother doesn't seem tangible to me anymore. Most of the people that she's known have died. My mother's closet is full of black clothes. Last week, she was at a funeral and I didn't see her after the funeral or before I went to bed. I didn't want to see her until she changed her clothes, I didn't want the clothes she went to the funeral with to touch me. Sometimes I feel that she's so close to death that it's her skin, her body, her voice that I try not to touch.

I was almost asleep the night of the funeral last week when she came in. The quietness that she used to open the door scared me. She opened it like a person sneaking in to molest a child, even though she only came to talk before she went to sleep. She walked so slowly that by the time she reached my bed, all of the calmness of my room at night had slipped out.

She was crying as she approached. It was so dark that all I could see was her sweaty hair when she leaned over to kiss me goodnight. I knew that her mouth would be hot before it touched my cheek. I could almost taste her mouth through my skin where she kissed me, but I let my mother touch my face. I pretended that I was asleep and that I couldn't feel or hear her.

"I'll get you a doctor," she said. "I'll get you a doctor so that you won't fall anymore," and she was crying. The day before that I had fallen against her in the supermarket, knocking off boxes of cereal from the shelves as I fell. There was the sound of elevator music moving all around me, even against the floor.

I don't know when death began to obsess my mother. Before I was born, she almost died. I don't know how, she doesn't tell me, just like I don't know anything about my father. When my mother goes to sleep, I wonder if she dreams about her own funeral, her own death. Now, when I get dizzy, when I can't walk or move, I think of her death dreams. Every time she dies, I die; it steals moments from my reality and makes me dizzy.

Daniela Vinitzki

Villanova, PA

Harrington High School

Marcy Hackfield and Doris Hourihan

Broken Mirror

Grandma wanted me to pick her Lotto numbers again, and I just lost it. I was shouting and yelling and throwing stuff -- there was potted plant dirt all over the place when it was over -- and poor Grandma had this terrified look on her face, and screamed "Belinda!"

I looked around at what I'd done. The ficus was broken, and the Charles and Diana commemorative plate was lying in pieces by the fireplace, and Grandma was sitting in her big chair next to the window like a queen in a war zone. "Belinda!" she said again. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm sorry," I said. I couldn't take my eyes off Princess Diana's face, the eyes and bangs in one place, the smile in another, and Charles nowhere in sight. Grandma loved that plate. She dusted it every single day. She had gotten it from her subscription to Majesty magazine, and she had an Andrew and Fergie coffee cup too. She took me to England for Fergie and Andrew's wedding. We stood outside Westminster Abbey in this huge crowd for hours and hours, and all we could see were the tops of the carriages, but Grandma just loved every minute of it. She thought the Royals were the best. "I'll clean it up, Grandma," I promised. I was nearly crying, I felt so bad.

"What was that all about?" she demanded.

"I don't know," I said. "I just got mad. I'm really sorry."

"You're going to have a tough life if you fly off the handle like that every time someone asks you for help with the lottery," she said. "Now pick that up."

I knelt down and started to brush the plant soil into little piles with my hands. "Look, Grandma," I said, "I can't help you with the lottery. I don't know the numbers any better than you do."

"Come on, Belinda," she said, "you're the luckiest person I know."

That annoyed me, but I let it go. I had to be sweet to her to make up for what I'd done. "I'll glue the plate up when I finish vacuuming all this dirt, Grandma, okay?" I said, and went to lug the vacuum cleaner out of the hall closet.

"Those two, you couldn't glue them back together if you tried," She said, and we both laughed. "This must be one of those adolescent things. Your mom was the same way."

Later, when we had finished dinner, after I had found a new pot for the ficus and given myself a hump from all the vacuuming, I pulled all the pieces of the plate together and got out a big bottle of Elmer's and set to work. Grandma was right: you couldn't put them back together. Charles's chin was nowhere to be found. I went back to the fireplace -- not there. I looked under the rug right next to the fireplace -- no luck. In case it had flown up onto the mantelpiece when the plate broke, I looked there, and I didn't find it, but I did see a big spidery crack in the corner of the mirror which hadn't been there before.

Seven years of bad luck, I thought. She's going to kill me.

Grandma, being old and everything, is sentimental. This was a mirror which had belonged to her mother, who had brought it over from Scotland wrapped in all the family's blankets so it wouldn't get broken. One of her sons caught pneumonia and died, but the mirror made it safely to America. When she was a singer in the forties, Grandma wrote a song about that -- she turned it into a whole new metaphor for how World War II was wrapping democracy in blankets and some girls' brothers were going to have to sacrifice and die to do it. She sang it at recruitment rallies and USO shows. She said the soldiers ate it up. There's a signed picture of her with General MacArthur in the bathroom, and she looks sort of like Joan Crawford in it. I think that's what she was trying for, at least. She performed in front of King George and the Queen Mother once. She shook the Queen Mother's hand, and she never got over it.

Anyway, Grandma got the mirror as a wedding present when she married my grandfather, who's dead, and then she gave it to my mother when she got married to my father. They're dead too; a plane we were on crashed on the way to Florida when I was four. When that happened Grandma took the mirror back. And I can see why something with that much history would be so important to her, but the fact was that it was really ugly. And also maybe cursed, since everybody connected to it died, except her. But she thought it was beautiful. She loved it. I had to get it fixed before she noticed.

The first step was to put something in front of it. I used the ficus. She liked it, and the new pot was kind of pretty. I put it over towards the side of the mirror, so that the fronds just covered the crack without looking like they had something to hide, and then I hauled out the yellow pages looking for mirror repairmen. There had to be some.

"Belinda!" called Grandma from her room. "Time for you to head for bed!"

Grandma is a firm believer in bedtimes, and mine's eleven. I can sneak around it, though, because hers is ten. "Okay, Grandma," I said, and took the phone book into bed with me. I had a nightlight because I get a lot of bad dreams, and tonight, not wanting to get my grandmother mad at me, I read with just it on. It's the same little lamp I've had since I was a baby: a clown holding a bunch of balloons, and if you wind the knob by the clown's feet he plays "Moon River."

According to the yellow pages, I could get Grandma's mirror resilvered, antiqued, or beveled, whatever that was; I could have mirrors applied to my ceiling, bathroom or wet bar; or I could get a

new mirror while I waited, even a bulletproof one. But there weren't any ads that said, Broke it? No problem!, which was what I was looking for. I slapped the book shut, stuck it under the bed for the night, wound up my lamp, and tried to sleep. It wasn't easy.

The next morning over pancakes, Grandma asked, "Did you move the ficus?" She hadn't gotten dressed yet, but she was already wearing her bushy fake eyelashes, and her eyebrows were pencilled in, Crawfordlike. It was a habit left over from being a singer: never let anyone see you without your face on.

"Yeah," I said. "I thought it would look nice there. I thought once I got the plate fixed we could put it in the middle of the mantelpiece and have a ficus on either side of it." I had thought of that explanation in the middle of the night, when I woke up after a dream.

"Whatever you say. Oh, Belinda," she called after me as I went to get my coat, "before you go, would you pick my Lotto numbers? I want to play early today. I'm going over to the community center for bridge at eleven."

I stopped with my hand on the front doorknob. I was getting mad. "Grandma," I said quietly, just loud enough that she could hear me from the other room, "Pick your own."

"What was that, young lady?" I could hear her scraping her chair back from the table to chase after me.

I opened the door and moved into the elevator hallway, my hand still on the knob, in perfect slamming position. "Look, Grandma," I said, "I am not some Lotto wizard, so don't keep making me do that, all right?"

"So you won't even help your own grandmother. Not one little thing." She turned and talked to the hanging plants. "Who'd have thought Miss Charmed Life here would be so ungrateful? Well, you may think that because you're fourteen and invincible you don't need to do anything for anyone, Belinda, but you're wrong. Have a nice day." And then she was the one who slammed the door, not me.

"Yeah, whatever," I muttered. "You don't die once when you're four years old and you're supposed to act grateful for the rest of your life." I poked the elevator button, hard. "And not dying one time does not make me some kind of luck machine," and then I added, "God damn it!"

I was mad all the way down to the lobby, but by the time I got to school I was scared. It was like a wind change. If she was mad at me, I thought, she would move the ficus. And then she would see the crack. I didn't know what she was going to do to me, lock me out or something. She did that once; I came home too late one night, I think, and I had to sleep at my friend's house. It was really embarrassing. It wasn't even that late. The worst part was that I couldn't figure out how to get her to like me again, and I was kind of afraid I never would. I was more afraid now.

Mostly we have a great time, but Grandma isn't always fun to live with. She laughs off some things I think are important. She gets mad pretty easily, and sometimes she takes a long time to forgive. She'll yell at me in a huge voice left over from USO shows. She'll sulk and she'll guilt me like only a frustrated movie star can, with dramatic declarations and baleful looks and the whole deal. But she is mine. Not much is.

She hasn't had the best life, either. She wasn't pretty enough to make it in movie musicals, so she went back to the drawing board and decided to marry my grandfather. He cheated on her for thirty years. She couldn't leave him because he never let her work, so she didn't have any money, and when he died she still didn't have any money, so she started over again, selling shirts. Things were starting to go right for her -- her three kids were married, she was doing well enough with the shirts to move to Florida with a friend of hers -- when my mother was killed, and suddenly she was presented with me. She's had to put her life back together so many times, and she never gets to finish it the way she wants. She never told me all this, just pieces of it. I could fill in the rest.

I made it through school somehow and took as long coming home as I could. I stood in the hallway outside our apartment for a long time. But when I gathered up the courage to open the front door, the apartment was dark, and empty. There was a message on the answering machine I had just talked Grandma into getting:

"Hello, Belinda, I won't be coming home until about five because after bridge I'm playing poker. Could you take the chicken out of the freezer? Thanks, sweetie."

I check the mirror: the ficus was in place. My stomach went from stone to runny. I was saved. I ran around the house, turning on all the lights, which Grandma disapproved of because it wasted electricity, trying to think of what to do next; I had two hours to get everything right. In the end I just pulled out the phone book again and had my fingers do some walking.

"Crosstown Custom Glass and Shade," said a man who sounded fat and unshaven. "Leo speaking."

"Hi," I said, not knowing how to start.

"Hello."

"Um, I need some help with a mirror," I began.

"What kind of help?"

"What kind? Well, I broke it," I said, and felt like an idiot.

"So you need a new glass," said Leo.

"But I don't want a new glass. I just want the old one fixed. Your ad in the yellow pages says you do sandblasting and things. Couldn't you sandblast it back together?"

"Glass isn't like plastic," Leo said. "You can't melt it back like new. Once it's broken, it's broken. If you bring in the frame I can cut you a new mirror, but that's the best I can do."

"But it's an antique," I said, "it's my grandmother's mother's mirror..."

"We can antique the new glass for you, bevel it, whatever. It'll look just like the old one. And I'll give you the best deal in the city." He stopped. I guess he could hear me crying. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "Thank you very much." I hung up and hugged my knees. There was nothing I could really do except my homework, so I did that.

Grandma came home at five precisely. I sucked cheer into my face and greeted her. "Hi, Grandma!" I said. "Did you win?"

"No," she said contentedly as she unwrapped her coat, "I lost. But without my little rabbit's foot," and she kissed me on the head, "what could I expect?"

I stretched my fake smile at the rabbit's foot remark. "How much did you lose?" I asked.

"Ten dollars. But I'll survive. Like the Talmud says, God gives burdens, also shoulders."

"Grandma," I said, "you're Presbyterian."

"Every grandma is a Jewish grandma." She proceeded into the living room, elegant in stretch pants, and turned on the TV. "Look, Belinda," she said, pointing at the newscast, "isn't that Prince Edward?"

"Yeah, I think so," I said. It certainly looked like him -- big teeth and no hair.

"He's getting married!" cried Grandma, and she was right; the news lady was telling the world about Prince Edward's engagement to a girl named Sophie. "She's not as pretty as Diana," Grandma decided, "but then, who is?"

"I thought he was gay," I said, because I knew she would laugh.

"Oh, Belinda, don't tell me these terrible things." She draped an arm around my shoulders. "They're starting to talk about Charles and Diana's divorce. Change the channel."

I clicked the clicker over to CBS, where a serious-looking anchorman said, "...anniversary of the crash of an Orlando-bound jet" and I turned it off immediately.

The outside of my skin was cold, the inside was burning. It was one of those moments when you know absolutely what someone else means, even though you aren't supposed to, and maybe you don't even want to. My brain was clear as ice. That was my plane. I sat on the sofa next to my grandmother in the dimming light, a row of potted plants swinging over my head, completely unimportant in every way except that I was the only survivor. I, Belinda, survivor, lucky, blessed -- all those labels stuck themselves on my forehead, and I almost felt proud before I remembered what I lost when I became remarkable.

"Grandma?" I said. I felt peculiar. I didn't exactly miss them, but all at once I felt not having them, like a hammer in the stomach. My eyes tickled. My throat was swollen shut. "Grandma? Did you know it was today?"

"Of course." She smiled at me, a tight bright smile. "A person doesn't forget a day as important as this."

"I didn't know," I said. My breathing was not working at all.

"You don't have as much to remember," she said. Her hands were locked together in her lap, and she looked at them. She was silent for a very long time.

I couldn't bear the quiet. My grandmother, the belter for the USO, the woman who picked up wreckage every time and launched herself onto the next life, my unbeatable grandmother was suddenly a sad old lady, and I couldn't stand to watch. With her shrunken in a corner of the couch I had nothing to grab at. I knew I should comfort her, but she should have been able to comfort me and I hated that she wasn't. I hated that I saw her being old and fragile when she didn't want me to ever see that. I was paralyzed on the other end of the sofa.

After a while, she lifted her head. "Like it says in the Talmud," she said again, "God gives burdens, also shoulders. My friend Miriam told me that today. It's true."

She was going to tell me I was her shoulders, I just wanted to be away from there. I tensed myself against her.

But she got up from the sofa. "I'll start cooking that chicken now," she said.

"Oh no," I said. "Grandma, I'm sorry, I never took it out of the icebox." Her shoulders deflated and I felt terrible again.

"That's all right. We'll have something else."

"And I broke the mirror," I said. Not to hurt her, but just to confess, to let her know I was sorry. It was easier to say than I thought it would be.

She turned and walked to the mantel. "I know. I saw it this morning." She pushed the leaves out of the way and looked at the crack, then at the pieces of her reflection. Her Joan Crawford eyebrows were smudged, and beneath them her eyes were watery and unimportant.

"I called a mirror place," I offered. "We can get a new glass and we can get it antiqued and -- and beveled and put it in the frame. It'll be just the same."

"No," she said, "it will look just the same."

Sarah Landreth
New York, NY
Mrs. Putnam

South Street

Water ices taste like glucose on the west side and I can't go back to Germantown anymore
sorry, man. sorry.

Crumbling asphalt pierces the ever thinning soles of my dusty and unkept Mac boots as I trip into shop after shop.
it hurts.

Water ice dries sticky around my lips as your little brother confides he's got to leave the house and go somewhere now that you're gone so I tell him about the first time I lost someone as wonderful as you and how I tried to go somewhere else but never really got there but I can tell he can't hear me and I know I can't blame him and we stopped talking.

sorry, man. sorry. I don't feel safe here anymore.

I think about who else I can talk to and I think maybe Amonie but she just had her kid and her boyfriend never really liked us anyway and I think Ethan lives right across the river but he may or may not still be there and god I don't want to leave Phille.

the city of Brotherly Love

i love South Street

even the water ices

and I can't come back

sorry, man. sorry.

Joe Binder

Jackson, NJ

Lois Hirshkowitz

Untitled

I had heard about the cries of someone in absolute torture, but I had never actually heard it myself. Actors try to reproduce the sound, but it is not a sound one can fake. The cries of something in agony are far worse than anything I have heard in my lifetime and are truly like no other sound on Earth.

I was introduced to the sound a while ago on an afternoon after school. It was one of those spring days where the weather can't even be felt. It wasn't warm, but there wasn't a trace of chill. I hooked the dog up to a leash thinking about how much I hated taking him out. He slobbered all over me in excitement, and his huge one hundred and ten pound frame leaped up on my chest, pushing me to the door.

We used to let the dog run, but couldn't anymore because of complaints in neighboring developments. The dog catcher had caught the dog one too many times and informed us that if he caught the dog again he wouldn't return him. So, I knew I couldn't let the dog get away as sometimes happened.

We walked to the back yard where the dog hurried to the property edge with his nose touching the ground scenting something out. We were underneath an old fir tree when he saw what he was looking for. The dog darted wildly from under the tree towards the property line, approximately ten feet away. I was dragged blindly with him, my arm being pulled dangerously from its socket.

The enclosure to the property was made of green wire fencing with two posts every twelve feet and a board running across the top. When the wiring got old, the bottom would turn up leaving room for small animals to crawl through. I had not seen what the dog was so eagerly running after until we reached the fence. Then I saw it, the rabbit, clamoring to get through one of the holes at the bottom.

It appeared that the rabbit would reach safety on the other side. I was pulling with all my might on the leash to give the rabbit time to get through. In the commotion, the rabbit got caught on a small piece of wire that was jutting out of the fence. Going around the piece would be a deadly because the dog's nose loomed farther into the hole every second. The dog seized on the opportunity of having the rabbit in a weak spot. I couldn't hold him back as he heaved forward. His jaws opened and he grabbed the rabbit by the skin on his back.

The piece of wire tore through the rabbit's skin when the dog pulled it from the fence. The dog flipped his head around, which shook the rabbit's body violently. My mouth opened, and I commanded the dog to release the rabbit, but he refused to obey.

No one was home and my shrieks and cries went unheard. I managed to pull the dog back ten feet, but was unsuccessful in having him drop the rabbit. My arms ached and my throat hurt, but I refused to give up. The dog tried to bolt away from me. I moved to the left and ended up two feet behind the fir tree. The dog ran around the tree so the leash formed a "U" around it. The dog and I ended up a foot away from each other, each at either ends of the "U." We were both pulling, but since the leash was wrapped around the tree we reached a stalemate.

I looked beyond the tree where I saw a rabbit ear lying on the ground. Looking at the rabbit I could see the place where the ear had been torn from bleeding profusely. My anguish for the rabbit heightened and I pulled on the leash with tremendous strength. The dog shook his head violently in return and the rabbit thrashed about in the air. As the rabbit swung around it hit me leaving a smear of blood down my calf.

I screamed at the dog pleading with him to release the rabbit. The dog ignored my cries and went about playing with the rabbit. He flipped the rabbit in the air and as it sailed down he gripped it anew. The rabbit slipped as he grabbed it and tried to pull away. In the process one of the rabbit's hind legs was torn jaggedly from its body. The leg fell inches from where my feet were planted in

the grass. At this moment the rabbit began making the noises. At first it made high pitched, piercing squeals.

The dog continued his torture, and the noises the rabbit made became more and more hideous. The dog flipped the rabbit around again, and his teeth sunk into the open wound where the hind leg had been. Tears were streaming from my eyes, and my vision became blurred. I was still screaming at the dog, but the words were all run together and inaudible above my sobs. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to hold on any longer, my arms ached terribly and I had no strength left. But, I couldn't allow myself to let go of the leash because then I would be subjecting the rabbit to the torture it would inevitably receive. I held on for the chance that I could make the dog let go of the rabbit.

As its pain heightened, the rabbit made a new sound, a grotesque type of howl. It was the most awful sound I have ever heard. The howls were low and guttural, their sound giving proof that the rabbit was in agony beyond what I could ever comprehend. The howls were different than the squeals; they were worse, and I couldn't stand to hear them. Each howl sent a chill through my body up to my neck where it stiffened involuntarily.

The howls didn't affect the dog. He didn't release the rabbit, he just continued to make playful growls and sink his teeth even deeper into the rabbit's flesh. Each time the dog bit the rabbit harder it would release some awful noise from the base of its throat. After each howl I would scream and cry because I didn't think I could stand to hear another one. I lifted up one of my feet, pulled it back, and kicked the dog in the stomach as hard as I could. The dog still did not relent. When I thought I could take the situation no longer I let out a scream, a final command to the dog. To my surprise, he reluctantly obeyed and dropped the rabbit.

I ran the dog to the house and locked him inside. I could still hear the rabbit although I was far away in the kitchen. A knot formed in my stomach and I had to grip the edge of the counter and hold on each time I heard the rabbit utter one of those awful howls.

I walked out to the deck and watched the rabbit. It was trying to walk, living its last moments alone and in bitter pain. The rabbit crawled down a small incline, getting slower with every step. After each step came an awful cry because the left hind side had to be dragged along the ground with the raw flesh exposed.

The rabbit took a step, released a wail, and seemed to sink down to the size of nothing. I ran out to the rabbit and stood looking at it. It appeared shapeless, almost like it lacked a skeleton. The blood was still running from the hind section. Dried blood had already caked around one missing ear and the other ear was bent in all sorts of odd ways. The back had blood smeared all over, and teeth marks dotted the skin.

I fell to my knees next to the rabbit. Something urged me to touch it, so I tentatively reached out a hand towards its limp body. I stroked the head of the rabbit saying, "I'm sorry, I tried..."

I never heard my mother's car, but somehow she found me in the back yard by the rabbit. I tried to explain, but nothing could make her understand how awful the sounds of the rabbit before its death were. One has to hear them to fully understand, and once they hear, will never in their life forget.

Keri Martinowich
Fleming, NJ
Mr. Richardson

Ling-Ling, 1969-1992

more terrible in a way
than if the statue of liberty were to totter
and, with a gasp, crumble into fragments:
torch
face
and robe
polluting the water,
which is not so clean even now.

more terrible

because she, too, was an offering of amity
across oceans
but not just that symbol, she
was a life,
which is unquestionably
so much more--
a raindrop in the eye
is wetter
than any conceptual thunderstorm.
more terrible
because of the births--
five,
five deaths also
captive makes for poor breeding but
thriving t-shirt sales
and a curious audience
her furniture was made in seven
thousand wooden hours but
her cubs lived for less.
her mate, Hsing-Hsing
presses his face to fence,
a paw is raised and that
is more terrible
a girl remembers her childish face creased
by the same wire
gaze intruding down on
she and he,
through the green.
more terrible in a way
that he is not lonely,
as the girl wants to think
but solitary: just he
in dripping quiet
the panda comes out of the shade
because he knows
there is sun
and today,
it is warm.

Maro Cassimatis
Kensington, MD
Debbie Wilchek

Silent Films

"Get down!" His arm reaches up and swats the fat golden cat down from the arm of his overstuffed chair. His reflexes are quick and he misses nothing, nothing that he wants to see. Stories of "Luke and Laura," his favorite soap opera stars, stumble from his dry cracked lips as day after day his glassy red eyes envelope their lives. Lost in a blurred world of the "Enquirer," "General Hospital," and Old Smuggler, Pop is becoming an extended part of his arm-chair. Marmie zippers his coat, cuts his ingrown toenails, and finishes his sentences. I wonder where he has gone.

Cold and fragile the bottle sits on the edge of the light cherry table positioned meticulously between the kitchen and dining room, as close to his chair as possible. As I walk to the doorstep of their miniature grey house, decorated picture perfect with sparkling white Christmas lights, I peer through the steamed windows and catch a glimpse of the bottle. It has not moved since the last time I was there. I am not surprised, for it, like the new Pop, has found its place in my life.

I easily pull open the outside door and begin to throw myself against the heavy metal one that always seems to be stuck. Even this heavy metal dam is unable to keep the pulsating heat inside. As I push against it I feel hot stale air seeping through the cracked door frame. Beads of sweat pop out along my brow as a bruise forms on my right shoulder from minutes of pounding. My hands, now red and brittle, struggle with the slippery knob as the bitter

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December wind slaps my body with its powerful gusts. I stand waiting for some response, some reaction from the firey interior yet, at the same time hoping that no one will be there, hoping that I can run. The heavy door gives way beneath my push and I know that my knock has been answered. Our eyes meet, mine and Pop's. "Why didn't you knock, hon?" His stale alcohol breath tickles the reflex in the back of my throat as his free arm, the other, cradles his glass, drapes itself around my shoulders, more to hold himself up than to warm me as I plunge into the picture-perfect blazing inferno.

"Pop," I hear my voice drawn out into an annoying whine, "I just slammed myself into the door for a half hour." An exaggeration, I know, but he never listens.

"Sorry, didn't hear you." As I walked into the room, covered with plush rose wall to wall carpeting that cuddles my frozen feet, the television blares, the volume three-quarters of the way up; I know why he doesn't hear. Shuffling to his chair, remote in hand, Scotch in the other, Pop sits down again. I picture his pale chicken legs that don't allow him to stand as sturdily as they did in the past. Instead they collapse, suddenly propelling him to the chair that waits and cushions his frequent falls.

"You okay, Pop?" There is no answer. I assume he is fine and as I watch his deep seated-eyes, I see him, feel him block out his pain with another swig from the icy glass and focus on the television program. He ignores me. Like a child, he's captured by the visual images while the alcohol dulls his senses. I strip off my winter layers, the down jacket, plaid scarf, woolly hat, thick mittens, knee-high insulated boots, throwing them this way and that, and my face grows red with heat and embarrassment. I feel as though I am interrupting the life of my grandfather. I feel like an intruder in the house of a person I've known my entire life. As I fall onto the flowery sofa across from him I hope to be swallowed up by its plush cushions. The room around me is filled with the hollow voices of television characters and the whir of the electric heater behind me that doesn't really need to be on. Pop and I, we don't talk. Instead we stare intently at the flashing images passing by the busy screen before us. It is as though we are strangers forced together by a common blood line. The show quickly bores me and I begin to wiggle around in my seat like a toddler unable to sit still. His head turns quickly, annoyed with my rustling.

"Want some Gatorade? There's some in the 'fridge." I decline, forcing myself to sit still. I turn away from the program and my tired brown eyes fall on the man before me. Each movement, each twitch, each expression, I see. His face, crinkled and worn often crunches up in pain as aches shoot through him like a bullet striking an unsuspecting deer, making him convulse. Following each grimace his hand lifts the cold, fragile glass to his dry cracked lips and I watch him pour the liquid down his waiting throat. I watch as the alcohol takes its effect. His head begins to droop, his interest in the program falters, he no longer struggles to keep his eyes open. Sometimes I think he wants to die.

My eyes close too. When I open them again, a man stands before me, strong and able. This was Pop, his priceless moments captured on rusted reels of silent film. Hands pounding, head shaking he made his way around the room. As he yelled, his face was soft, free from the pain that he now expresses. The film is Pop, as he was, as he should be. His movement took him to a small corner in the room where a little girl, with two long, tangled braids, played alone. His strong arms gathered her up into the air and for a moment, she flew. Bringing her down, level with his deep blue eyes he drew the tiny figure toward him, whispering in her pink ears, words that the silent camera could not capture.

Unlike the camera my memory does not fail me. "I love you too, Poppy," my voice cracks, as my mind staggers from the annals of its memory. Pushing myself up from the overstuffed flowery couch I walk across the plush carpet and plant a kiss on the bald forehead of my drunk, sleeping grandfather. I climb back into the safe winter layers, preparing to re-enter the icy December air. Clad head to toe in winter wear, I leave Pop, but not before my warm mittened hand slides smoothly over the volume dial on the television, slipping it

back a few notches. Opening the heavy metal door I am taken aback by the strength of the harsh wind, and I wonder if Pop needs a blanket.

Sarah Centanni
Cropseyville, NY
Tamarac High School
Mrs. Schwarz

Untitled

mother
in her newly pressed sunday dress
arched over the cooking pot
like a well disciplined
acrobat

mother
as a coffee table
on all fours
back straightened
balancing hot coffee mugs
ready to spill over

mother
in her faded yellow sun dress
at the corner
selling
her heart-shaped purse
full of
handcrafted gingerbread men
and homespun tapestries
and happily-ever-after stories
and pockets' full of women's lost names
for a penny

Amy Hsin
North Wales, PA
Dr. Walsh

Laiden

Yellow seams meeting
worn pickled hands
washed in brine
Creases flowing over
where the river
ran dry
seeping
only between the lips
where the bucket lies
I only see green.

Isis Misdary
Long Valley, NJ
Olive O'Sullivan

Untitled

I lean against the wall, sucking in my stomach and trying to look attractive to the crowd swarming around me. I arch my back and push my shoulders down to make my chest more prominent. Some guy who I was introduced to earlier, but whose name I can't remember, comes up to me and strikes up a conversation. He's an ugly loser. I see Annie coming over, and I shoot her a "get me away from him" look.

"Hey sweeties!" she says cheerfully. "How's everyone doing?" Annie always acts like she's addressing a large group of little kids, whether it's one person she's talking to, or twenty. "Is everyone getting along alright?"

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"Oh, sure," says the guy, as he is clearly staring at my breasts.

"Well, I hate to interrupt, but I just have to speak with Claudia for a moment," she pulls me away, the sweetness dripping from her.

"Thanks Annie," I say as soon as we walk away, "That guy was such a sleaze."

"He's actually really nice, but too ugly," she replies, "just not your type. I'll introduce you to someone who is!" Now all the charm is gone from her attitude, the real thing showing through, yes, Annie, like myself, is a true bitch at heart.

Tonight, she has dragged me to some bar a lot of her friends hang out at. I just met Annie a couple of weeks ago on a double date. The guys were losers, so we ditched them and went to some party she knew about. Since then we've been hanging out a lot. But, see, she can be kind of intimidating at times: she's nineteen, I'm only fifteen. Although I really look much older, and act more mature, I'm still young inside. But she's so cool, although she is too superficial for me, at times.

I guess she's not a real friend, like, I would never depend on her or trust her with a deep secret. We just share the same interests - guys, partying, shopping, and all that.

Anyway, I love this scene. It's like, a huge bunch of gorgeous people competing for attention. It's totally great, especially when you feel as if you're one of the gorgeous people (not to be conceited or anything.) I mean, of course I have low self-esteem, and I'm insecure like every other girl I know, but because guys are constantly coming up to me and telling me how gorgeous I am, it can go to my head.

I have trouble keeping up with Annie, the place is packed, and trying to push through against a mob of people holding you back isn't the easiest thing to do. But Annie is tall, so I keep my eye on her blond hair swinging back and forth. Every once in a while I see her profile and fake smile as she turns to say hi to people, and air kiss the more important ones.

Yeah, Annie is a definite social-climber. Seriously, she's told me that she has performed oral sex on a guy in order to get "good connections," whatever that means. She also uses people to get ahead. She'll become friends with a girl only because she is popular or pretty. In my case, I don't see how I could be beneficial to her. I guess she sort of sees me as a little sister, or a pet that she can show off. She is molding me, teaching me to be like her.

By the time we get to our destination, a table with a bunch of guys seated around it, I'm about ready for a cigarette. I know it's bad to smoke, but it makes me look older. Annie proceeds to introduce me only to the guy she wants to hook me up with, deliberately leaving out the others. Could she be more subtle! "Claudia, I'd like you to meet Adam, Adam, this is my good friend Claudia. You two don't really have much in common, but you might get along anyway!" She giggles, I blush, Adam sort of rolls his eyes. Annie can be such an airhead.

We murmur our hellos, he seems kind of reserved and quiet. The other guys are real drunk and begin making comments on my body. I'm used to this though, and have learned to expertly ignore it and act as if I don't care.

Adam is sitting in a relaxed position, just smoking a cigarette, but in a very intent manner. Like, he seems real mellow and relaxed, but it's fascinating the way he is concentrating on it. It turns me on. He catches me looking at him, and gives me a knowing smile and I think he winks. I smile back, sort of nervously inside, but I know that it looks seductive; I have this odd ability to just shut off my feelings from the way I act.

"Sit down," he says. His voice is low and sexy. He pulls a chair out from the table, and after a slight hesitation, I sit.

"So, how old are you?" I ask, I can't think of anything else to talk about.

"Twenty-four," he replies, blowing smoke softly through his lips. It moves upwards and swirls around his head briefly as it begins to disperse.

I nod, feeling stupid. I should've just assumed he was twenty-

something. Now he probably thinks I'm young cause I asked. But he doesn't even care to ask how old I am.

There's an awkward silence between us. I pretend to examine the people undulating on the dance floor, but I watch him out of the corner of my eye. His head is slightly bobbing to the rap song blasting over the speakers. He finishes his cigarette, and immediately lights up another one. "Want one?" he asks.

"Sure, thanks," I reply. I have just finished a cigarette, and I don't usually smoke this much, but if I refuse, he'll think I'm scared. He gives me the cigarette he has just lit, and lights another one for himself.

Senseless chatter and laughter is surrounding me, but I block it all out and study Adam fully. He really is stunning, dark, perfectly chiseled features. He resembles a picture on my wall of a Calvin Klein model in some ad that I pulled out of a magazine.

Adam is looking me over also, but I'm not self-conscious, everything he is admiring right now is there for people to admire. I know I look good. My tight lycra spandex dress has a neckline that sets off my cleavage, especially when I lean over Adam to put out my cigarette. I know the soft feeling of my long dark hair as it accidentally brushes his cheek really delights him; the sweet smell of my perfume making him want more. My face is perfectly made up, that half hour of effort disguised in the subtlety; he couldn't possibly guess how much I have on, it looks so natural.

I feel the intense attraction growing between us, this familiar sexual flirtation of few words, little physical contact: it's all in the slight smile on the lips, the stance of the body, the turns of the head, and especially the eyes. Eyes which undress each other, the seduction glimmering in them, the knowing looks.

And a sudden snap back to reality: the spell is broken, the magic gone as Annie calls my name and Adam turns to his whining friend.

"Come outside for a minute," she says. And once more I follow her through the rush of people moving in the opposite direction of where I want to go. They hold me back, and I see a nerdy kid who is bothering some other girl. I shoot her an understanding look and smile. She shakes her head in frustration, and I laugh silently.

We walk down the narrow steps, which are slippery from vomit and the slush of melting snow. I feel a rush of cold air and shiver. My arms are bare, but the cold has a cleansing effect. It wipes away the grime of that bar and clears my nostrils of cigarette smoke and cologne.

"So what'd ya think?" asks Annie excitedly.

"Of what?" I say, but I don't feel like discussing Adam with her. She'll ruin the special feeling I have, however momentary and fleeting the moment is.

"Come on, Claude. He thinks you're really sexy."

"How do you know? I've just met him five minutes ago."

"I've got my connections," Annie giggles. "No, seriously, he said he's seen you before and wanted to be introduced. I guess he's too shy to come up to you by himself."

"Really," I say, feigning interest. I couldn't care less. Sometimes Annie's gossip really irritates me.

"Yeah, and you know, all the girls like him, he's so sexy, but very selective. He doesn't go out with all that many girls. It drives them crazy! It's really special that he's interested in you."

"Oh, so he's gay, or bi?" I ask, slightly curious.

"Don't get the wrong idea, he's straight all right," says Annie knowingly, "just a little . . . strange."

"Whatever," I say. I'd find out for myself; Annie doesn't usually know what she's talking about. She's a bimbo. I don't know why I look up to her so much. She's really slutty. She sleeps with so many guys, I'm sure none of them really like her. And she is probably so stupid, she doesn't even realize. But I figure, her morals and IQ have no relevance, we have fun together, that's what counts.

There's a long silence. "I think you should sleep with him."

"What?" I shout, slightly shocked, but I'm getting used to Annie's random outbursts.

"Well, you've gotta lose your virginity sometime," she says. Annie had sex for the first time when she was thirteen, so did most

of her friends, and she's always telling me the sooner the better. "He's real good," Annie continues, "and gentle. I mean, my first time was awful, the guy totally ripped me apart, I swear I was in pain for a week. What a jerk! But if Adam had been my first."

"You mean, you and Adam. . ." Now I am shocked.

"Yup," she replies. She continues matter-of-factly, "I think you should go for it, Claude."

At this point I kinda just get real quiet and unreachable. Annie calls this "Claude's World." Instead of telling people how I feel, I don't say anything, basically, I just act like a bitch and give attitude, making people I don't know very well think I'm snobby. But that's not the point. I don't like people knowing how I feel. It leaves me too vulnerable.

To be honest, I really don't know how I feel after what Annie tells me. I mean, nothing happened between me and Adam besides extremely intense flirting. Besides, he wasn't a very interesting person. For some reason, it really upsets me that Annie wants me to lose my virginity in this way, to some guy she's already had, someone who I don't really care about, and who couldn't care less about me. I'm not denying the fact that I'm rather casual and nonchalant about sexual encounters, I've done all but have sex with many guys. I've never had a real boyfriend. But my virginity is important to me.

I don't know why. Maybe it's because society engrains in girls that sex is bad. But I don't think there's anything wrong with sex, as long as nothing bad comes out of it. Like, it's bad if the girl gets a disease, or pregnant or something, but I'm not worried about that. I'm not stupid. I'd protect myself. Besides, I doubt Adam has AIDS, he looks fine, and Annie slept with him, she doesn't have it.

Or maybe it's just that I want to be in love with the guy I lose my virginity to. Usually, I use guys. I've never really cared about any of them, but I know some have cared about me...or did they just want to have sex so they showered attention on me? Well, the point is a one-night stand would make me feel used, and I don't want that to happen.

Annie's first time was a one-night thing, and she plays it off like it was no big deal, but I see the hurt in her face. I'm good at reading people. Beneath Annie's superficiality, beneath her bitchy, blonde-bimbo attitude, I see there is a real person, just a person hard to get in touch with. I guess we're all that way. No one shows their true side all of the time.

I realize there has been a long, awkward silence between us, and look up when Annie asks what's wrong.

"Nothing," I smile brightly. "Let's go back in. I want to get another look at Adam."

She laughs, relieved that I'm not upset. Annie doesn't like to deal with other people's problems. She wishes me luck.

We push through the crowd of people again, and as Adam's table comes into sight, I shut all feelings behind a door in my head. But Adam seems to be occupied: some girl is sitting on his lap, brushing her slender, red-painted fingernails through his hair with a big grin on her face. They are talking and laughing, and he is paying attention to her with the same hard intensity that turned me on when he was smoking a cigarette. He doesn't even notice me.

I stand around for a minute or two, make sure he gets a chance to acknowledge me, but he doesn't. I thought there was something special between us; I've never felt that attraction to someone else. But it was nothing to him. I feel so stupid. Am I just used to every guy wanting me, and I'm getting my first rejection? Or did I really like Adam?

But I don't. I mean, he was pretty dumb. And he's the type who knows that he's good looking, so he doesn't have to talk. I hate it when guys are like that, so high on themselves.

I feel so confused. I love Annie; I hate her. I want Adam; I don't want him.

I spend the rest of the night flirting with other guys, acting like I care about them. A couple of guys buy me drinks. I feel tipsy, but in control. I see a really cute guy; he looks like Adam. I want to sleep with him; I want to stop acting like a fool. It's not Adam, and I'm too high and too nervous and too fake.

After a while the buzzed feeling wears off. I feel nauseous and

about ready to leave. I look for Annie and find her in a corner kissing Adam.

"Annie." I don't feel anything; I'm numb to the world. I don't care about it. I actually, truly, don't care. My stomach is turning. It's all the smoke and alcohol.

Annie pulls away reluctantly. They both turn to look at me. Adam flashes a kind of flirty smile, and I think he winks again. What a sleaze!

"What's up, Claude?" Annie asks. Annoyance is obvious in her eyes and tone, yet she has a fake-sweet smile on.

"I'm tired, do you want to go home?"

"It's only one-thirty," she replies. "Go ahead. I'll call you tomorrow."

"Sure," I say. She immediately goes back to whatever she was getting to, and Adam doesn't say a word, not that I've heard him say anything before.

I push back through the crowd to the exit. As I pass people, I barely notice their smiles and hellos. All the girls seem like Annie; all the guys are only after sex. I can't trust anyone. It's nights like this that teach me self-dependence.

I decide to walk home the twenty blocks instead of taking a cab. It's probably dangerous. Maybe I'll get raped, but who cares? Once again, I welcome the freezing cold as a cleansing sensation. I don't feel anything else. I can control myself. Any feelings I did have tonight will go to the back of my mind and remain untouched, unexplored.

Tomorrow Annie will call, tell me what a good lover Adam is, brag about the conquest, and tell me too bad I didn't lose my virginity to him. And I'll silently forgive her. And I'll forget. I won't tell her I was annoyed with her last night. Everything's so predictable. Maybe I'll start hanging out with someone more interesting. Maybe I'll find someone to lose my virginity to. Maybe Annie's right, the sooner the better.

Caroline Meckler New York, NY



Victoria Yoffie



Evrin Artukmal

12 Russians and a Shovel

My grandfather fought in the German army
but for understandable reasons
and most innocently
and without malice
or so I was told
in the marbles and miracles of my childhood
and so I hope today, for the sake of balance
because I am not from his world
and his life is history to me
because I have never lived on my own resources
or run from my home leaving keys
with only a faint hope of returning
or seen a dead body.
My grandfather killed 12 Russians with a shovel
or so I was told.
I don't have much of an opinion on this either.
My history teacher's grandfather broke
his trigger fingers with a hammer
because he wouldn't fight their war.
Tell me, when it all came down,
did they straighten out your clipped wings?
When we were in Latvia, my grandfather showed me
the park where he took girls on "rendezvous"
and I sat with a friend in a bar which looked
upon the tower where my grandfather waited
with a gun on the eve of the invasion.
These streets bleed memories
of hoping,
and praying,
and kissing,
and dying,
and waiting;
and make me remember I am young and foolish.
My grandfather and I hibernate over the ocean
and on the ride home from the airport
I joke with my mom about "rendezvous"
and she tells me he writes beautiful poetry,
love poems, in the tongue of the Old Country.
There are so many things I don't know.
How do I begin to ask?
When did your hair go gray, Grandpa?
Light a cigarette and tell me about the war.
Sit, and tell me a story.

Alexis Amoroso
Meadowbrook, PA
Abington High School
Charles Baker

Tarbaybee

You are so black.
Darker than all
The burnt toast
Piled up in ghetto
Garbage cans.
And you are so fine.
You make me want to jump
Shout
And
Shake
It all night long
Like juke joint jezebell.
On the bus,
In the streets,

As we walk
Hand in hand,
Melted into
One
big
black
sculpture
of love
and culture,
Chunks of ebony
And coal
Fall to the ground
And mark off where we've been.
So everyone knows we were there.
And that we'll be back.
And when your balckness
Confuses and frightens
The white folks
And the black folks who forget they are black,
We make love as the cherry bombs fall around us.
Just remember next to their raw dough flesh you
Shine like a poppy seed.

Jennifer McClune
Manhasset, NY
Dr. Simons

Cats Wearing Armor

Silly man cats,
Neutered felines,
Creep hungrily to the feast
To eat the mayor,
Giant rat,
Gunned down by a mad passerby,
Its warm flesh a delight
To the kitties without balls.

And last Christmas's boy has a misplaced obsession
with water, fish, and nudity.
He undresses minds and bodies to speak boastful words
to himself alone.

Beauty takes her to the beast's chamber,
spreads his green wool across the straw,
strips himself,
and strips her.
In the distance,
stale piano keys tap out six years and seventeen years.
Another sleeps in public places.
He is infatuated with the park bench and the girl.
He paints her.
He paints her into a doorknocker,
into an eagle with golden eyes and silver beak
and emerald heart.
He paints her into battle with guns
and burgundy landscapes reaching out behind her.

The rest will never read the painter's heart.

Morissa Mercaldo
Middleburg, PA
Middleburg High School
Mrs. Barth,

Skating on Streams of Consciousness

I'm snowed in today. Grateful that I don't have to go to school but resentful of the butterflies in my stomach that insisted on leaving their cocoons. After about a week of bumming around my house, I predict I'll begin to believe that I can avoid the inevitable. While I spend my time doing things such as ice skating on my neighbor's driveway, I will forget that I have finals, and I will begin to believe that I will never have to take them. Because everything outside is frozen, it is easy for me to think that time is frozen, too.

That's a dangerous assumption--believing that the material can influence the intangible. Especially when you're watching an episode of "The Wonder Years". Not only will you believe that time has stopped with the water in the pipes, you will also assume that an extra 30 plus years have been added to your life. It's too bad that you have to spend those years with someone as asinine as Kevin Arnold.

Sometimes it seems that, when it comes to school, I'm completely missing the point. Instead of trying to change what I don't like about it by, say, running for student government or circulating petitions, I pretend each evening that I don't have school the next day. Over the past couple of months, I have decided that school is restricting me. I didn't know until today that by slacking off I'm restricting myself even more.

They say that when your consciousness absorbs something, you become it. Take meditation, for example. Sometimes you meditate without even knowing you are, by watching the water lap on an ocean shore or following the clouds with your eyes. After a while, you're not just looking at the water or the clouds anymore. The water and clouds are all you are.

In the same sense, I was becoming my perception of school. And that was something that held me down, that stopped me from achieving my full potential. And I didn't even realize what I was doing, because this perception absorbed my entire consciousness.

Now I know that it isn't school that's making me feel restricted--it's me.

As I look out of my bedroom window, I see a world in which everything is frozen. Icicles are keeping nature's potential untapped. But for her, everything is right on track. Mother Nature needs her so that, by springtime, she can send her budding potential into full bloom.

I am beginning to think that a few snow days are exactly what I need to get me on the right track, to get myself together so that, by exam time, I will be able to live up to a certain potential that I've been neglecting. While nature is frozen in order to give herself time to pull herself together, I can use my own "frozen" time to pull myself together.

I also don't have to become as paralyzed as the frozen landscape. There is time to do schoolwork, and there is also time for other things, like writing. I don't have to be frozen in motion like the icicles outside my window. Instead, I can be poetry in motion...or maybe something that isn't so cliched, since it is my goal to radiate true brilliance. And what could be more inspiring than the view outside my bedroom window? Some people would see it as a barren wasteland of leaveless trees and slush, but not me. I see icicles and snow that are tangible examples of retained energy, and living reminders of the fact that, while nature is on track, I'm probably not.

It would probably be more fun to spend my snow days sledding and making snow angels and doing other things to convince myself that I'm still a kid. However, by staying in school and not doing anything to get myself arrested, I have chosen to be a semi-adult; I have to deal with obnoxious butterflies that choose to leave their cocoon on days when I would otherwise be relaxed. But, as someone once told me, no one ever got an award for sitting in bliss. By studying hard and getting good grades I will most likely be rewarded in magnificent ways. I just hope college isn't overrated.

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