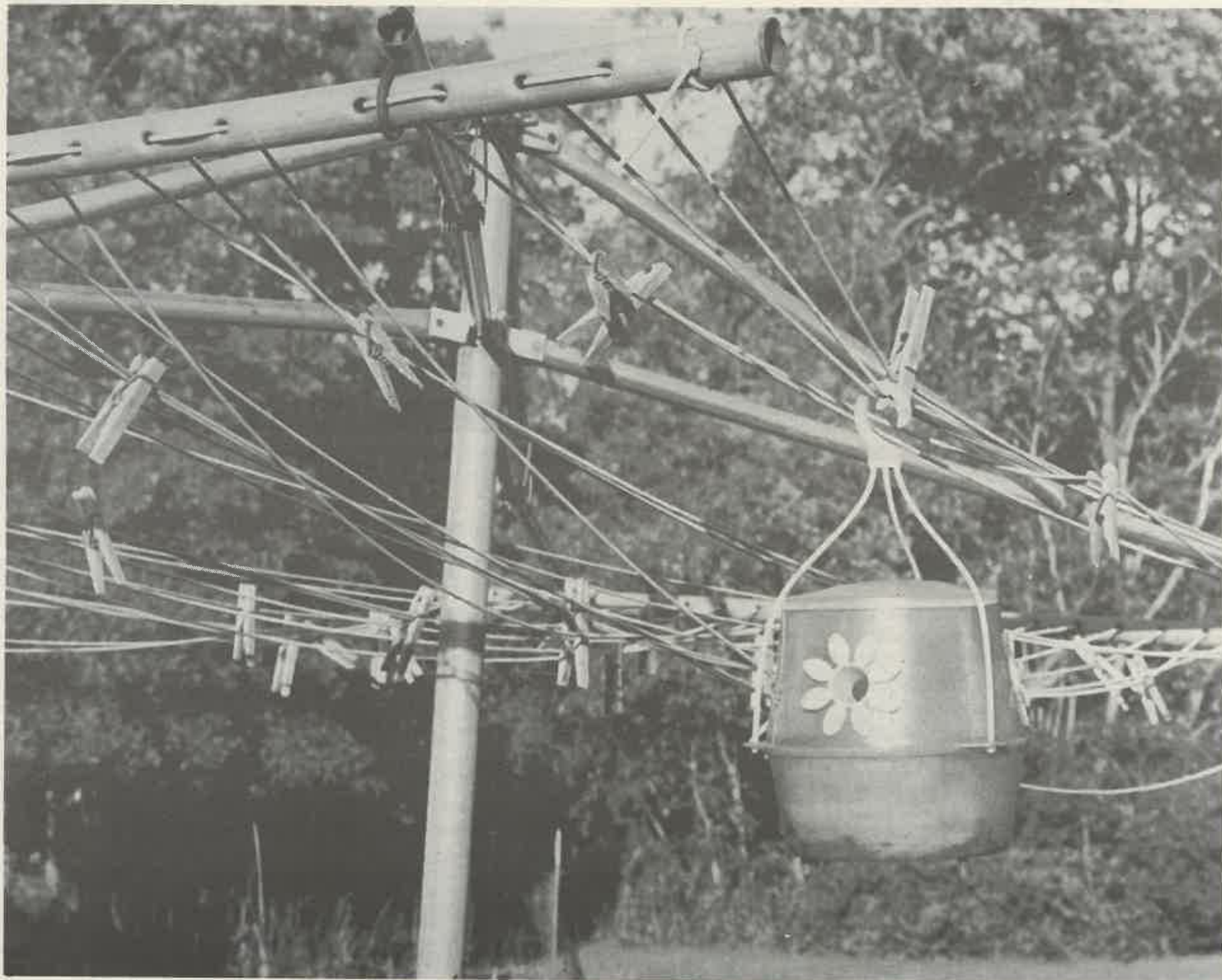


Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Mary McNealy
Somerville, NJ

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Introduction

Welcome to the thirteenth issue of **The Apprentice Writer**, which annually showcases the best writing and illustrations 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 3,400 schools in the eleven states from which we receive submissions.

It has been my pleasure to discover thousands of outstanding student writers through their submissions to **The Apprentice Writer** and the nine 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, which is responsible for providing classes, programs, support, and opportunities for students interested in writing.

The **Visiting Writers Series** brings artists such as



Joanna Wegielnik
Huntington, NY

Tobias Wolff, Sharon Olds, Lucille Clifton, Madison Smartt Bell, Gerald Stern, Joy Harjo, and Judith Ortiz Cofer to campus. **The Susquehanna Review**, a literary magazine, is written, edited, and produced entirely by students. Some of those students enroll in graduate creative writing programs, and others have published in national magazines while still enrolled at Susquehanna.

Advanced workshops are offered in fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Independent writing projects and a variety of internships are over seen by faculty who have published six books in the past four years and regularly publish in national magazines.

We welcome inquiries from students and teachers about **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, 1996.



Laura Glazer

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The Alchemists

She sat at the cafe table by the window, legs crossed as she watches the passersby and toys with her eclair. She'll only pretend to eat it. One bite past her lips and she knows she won't be able to stop. The diners clank their glasses, fiddle with pink napkins, talk in hushed voices. She's the only teenager in the room. But she's more than that. She's something special, a Rosecrucian; Sylvia told her so.

She gets up, shoves away the plate. Shrugging into her coat, shivering at the thought of going out into the cold, she takes one last glance outside. Save for the earlobes studded with diamonds, the women are androgynous, their hair cropped as they power-walk in amber-colored leather jackets. Debased figures through the glass, that's all they are.

#

Going out into the street, she's surprised by how much energy she has. There used to be a time when she could barely do a block, but she would try anyway, forcing herself, liking the weak crunch of her feet on the sidewalk, the taxed whine of her breath.

Just around the corner is Sylvia's shop. *The Alchemist's Studio*, it reads. Excitement stabs her as she heaves the door open. Sylvia sits at a worktable, fingers pinching strands of silver, bright shards melded into some rich woman's jewelry. Ancient silks seem to drape themselves on walls, a furious fusion of color. Sterling bracelets and amethyst rings, lapis lazuli and topaz amulets beckon in cases. The room burns with the acrid scent of incense. An African anthem of Soweto plays on the stereo.

"Nora." Sylvia stands and comes over, takes both her hands. She glows, clinks, tribal as a gypsy. Her dark curly hair is tied up in a vivid claret scarf, and she wears a black sweater and rayon peasant skirt, platform shoes and red lipstick, clunky hoops and ankh necklaces.

"Come on up," she says. "I'm almost done here. Let's get some tea."

She leads Nora back through a rice curtain. Nora shivers as Sylvia leads her over the heavily-carpeted stairs, the dirty frosted windows encasing her away from the world.

#

"How's it going for you?" Sylvia asks, silencing the banshee kettle.

"I'm all right," she says. "No, I'm not all right; I'm terrible. I can't stand going back to school. All those preppie girls . . . never giving a damn about me before . . . now they rush up and shriek, 'Oh, you look so much better!'"

"You are getting better."

"Yes," she says, tension making the lines of her forehead crumple, "I know. But I don't like what I am. I'm fatter and it makes me feel like I'm losing myself. When I was thin I had power." She takes the cup Sylvia hands her, pushes back a pillow on the paisley couch, and sits down. "I know this may sound funny to you, but starvation . . . it was a beautiful thing."

#

She aches to tell Sylvia about the colors, how clear and sharp everything used to be, each sense heightened when she was an ectomorph. The world was a star and she jumped between the points.

Saturday nights at the mall: shivering even in summer in jeans and a long-sleeved blouse, eyes squinted in the neon light, dodging shopping bags and the food court full of frozen yogurt and roast beef sandwiches, brushing off the big-assed Gap girls: No, I don't want socks or a charge card. Feeling delicate and regal. By the fall she'd lost all sense of taste.

Gym class: listlessly swerving at the bobbing volleyball, smashing a random sphere that to her blurred vision looked like a UFO or the bland face of a demon who came down with a hard thwack on her cachexic forearms.

In school: tapping one foot, burning calories and displacing molecules as the French teacher tossed at her declensions and adverbs along with the overwhelming scent of floral perfume. Garbled burbles through a whirlpool, a wringer, a tunnel.

The final nothing: that week before Thanksgiving when in biology she fainted, lips stuck together and throat parched as her chin dropped and she slid from her chair. Her head snapped and she came to with a violent crash of bone and metal and an ammonia spasm, people fighting to clear tables as she heard the distant wail of an ambulance siren. "Oh, Nora, don't be so histrionic," Mitzi Callahan rolled her eyes and said. Just like that, there was an end of it. Her world of furious tremble and delicate skeleton was gone.

#

"They held me down and stuck tubes into me," she says now. "It was like a rape. I didn't understand why they wanted to punish me. What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing," Sylvia says. "You were human. You coped the only way you could."

Nora runs her hand over one knee. Fat, all of it.

"Where do I go from here?" she asks.

"You go where you feel. You're like an alchemist, looking for that magic potion that will give you *anima mundi*, 'the soul of the world.' But you've got to realize something."

"What?"

Sylvia leans over and puts her hands on Nora's shoulder. "That the food and the numbers are only a fragment," she says. "The food and the numbers are not you."

Nora shakes her head. How to tell her—all the things she never said to the psychiatrists—about how food was so precariously wound up in her life—the scent of the casseroles and cakes people brought when she stayed motionless in bed for a week after her father died—she and her mother, after her stepfather Ryan left, stuffing themselves, the chocolate and tears, eating and crying for hours.

"It's hard," she says. "I-I don't think I can."

"You will," Sylvia says. "It took me decades to give up my tricks and portents and become real again, but I did."

#

She goes home and finds her mother sitting at the kitchen table, curly blonde hair a haggard mass, backside spilling over the chair, skin pockmarked. She watches *Oprah* on a portable black-and-white TV and eats potato chips. "You're out of breath," she says. "Don't push yourself; you're still frail."

Nora knows what her mother's really saying: *Have you been hanging out with that weird Sylvia woman*

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again? As she goes upstairs she hears her call, "I'm cooking all your favorites for supper."

Maybe when she sits down to eat she'll tell her mother about the alchemists, about the voices coming through the wringer and the colors in the shop; maybe she'll stay in her room and not eat at all until midnight, leaving her mother to wail on the other side of the wall. Either way she will be free. She reaches the last step, runs impulsively to the end of the hall and its icy window. With one finger she traces a five-point star. "*Anima mundi*," she whispers, and her voice is no one else's. Just hers.

Jenn Crowell
Jacobus, PA
Dallastown Area High School
Anne Kostas/Sandra Moyer

Pulse

I took a dead man's pulse today. I counted his respirations. Then, I stood by him and waited. I waited for the paramedics to arrive and pronounce him dead. The paramedics paged in and said they would be delayed. I learned a lot while I waited. In an effort to identify the patient, I glanced around his house. I learned where he liked to shop, where he went to college. I found he liked mysteries and kept up with current events. I discovered he was a war veteran, a religious Jew, a father and a grandfather.

I learned about time today. Time has always seemed so constant, so continual. I have, on occasion, even found the passing of time and the gentle ticking of my clock to be soothing. Today, I learned that time stops for no one. As I stood in this man's room, I thought time was cruel. I took a dead man's pulse today. As I placed my two fingers on his wrist, I turned to my watch. Tick. Tick. Tick. My second hand was still moving, but his heart was not. I placed my fingers on his carotid pulse and checked my watch again. Tick. Tick. Tick. My own heart began to race, pounding in my ears as if to compensate for his. Where were the paramedics? What should I do now? I had to remember the basics of my training, the ABC's. A, airway! Is he breathing? I'm supposed to count the patient's respirations for thirty seconds. I glanced at my watch. I gave it thirty seconds. I stared at the man's chest and asked, "Is it rising? I thought I saw it rise!"

"No," my partner says, "it didn't."

The crowd is cheering. "Michigan scored another touchdown, right before half-time?" He died watching a football game. The football game wasn't over yet. I leave the remote control in the man's hand and unplug the tv. His room is silent now. What am I supposed to do? Should I start CPR? Should I get the defibrillator?

My partner broke the silence and my chain of thought. "He's dead," he asserted. "Rigor has already set in." Then he left to wait outside. I stayed. I checked the man's wrists for a medic alert tag. He had none. He wore instead, a watch on his right wrist. The watch on his wrist was still ticking, but he had no pulse. Finally, the paramedics arrived and pronounced him dead. His time of death? Unknown.

My experience as an Emergency Medical Technician has been one of constant discovery. I've learned not only about traumas, childbirth, psychiatric

emergencies and drugs, but I've also learned about people, lifestyles and ideas. The experience has taught me about myself and how I view the world. It has taught me to trust. It has taught me to keep trying. It has taught me to accept the inevitable. Riding in the back of an ambulance has given me a unique perspective on life. Today, I discovered something about time. From my position, I cannot see where I am going. I can only trust that I will end up in the right place and in good time. Time is often the most important factor when handling medical emergencies. From where I sit, I see only the patient, the problem, and the clock. The clock in the back of the ambulance is dead. It stopped ticking long ago. Time ceases to matter. It does not exist in the back of the ambulance. We, the crew, have learned to do the best we can in the minutes and seconds we are given, regardless of the clock.

A man's heart stopped beating today. His watch went on ticking. Michigan went on playing. Time was no slave to him. Maybe what I learned today is to be no slave of time.

Kristin Murphy
Roselle, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Today I Bleached My Eyes

today i bleached my eyes,
held them closed and sucked out the color,
now it's hard to see.

my lids feel raw and rough,
they're dying.
the lashes, singed, fell hours ago.
my mother says i look sickly,
dad hasn't noticed the change.

in a mirror i look
like a mad woman—
dead grass hair,
scabbed and bleeding lips,
albino rabbit eyes.

i did this for attention
so you would think i am blind or sick
or crazy.
but i don't think you know about me being bleach-eyed,
you haven't visited the hospital
and when i ask, you haven't called.

the white sheets wrap around my legs,
irritate my pink flesh
as i pull and tug at them,
the girl next to me asks where i'm from
and i mutter,
suburban baltimore, a dead end end street.

Beach Carey
Baltimore, MD
Towson H.S.
William Jones

In the Green Room

Aunt Alison's pale face and dark brown hair
 once rested on this yellow pillow—
 in this small bed with the old green quilt.
 Now I must take my naps here,
 but I won't sleep.
 I resent having the green room;
 I want the orange room
 or even the blue room,
 which is my favorite.
 Only special guests sleep in there—
 or Mimi, when she and Pop-pop fight.
 In here, the olive shag rug has become
 dark through the years from feet
 creeping from bed to door so many times.
 The rules are I can lie awake,
 quietly, from 2 to 3,
 rather than sleeping—
 as long as my head touches the pillow.
 The oil lamps in these window sills are rusted,
 deep umber, not working anymore.
 From my pillow, ear pressed against matted feathers,
 I watch the light, muddy streaks of gray
 struggling to work their way
 past the azalea bushes outside.
 I listen in the room for something, anything.
 The house creaks, the water-heater starts,
 grumbling like an upset stomach.
 I know my brothers do not need a rule—
 they sleep in the orange room
 next door to mine,
 whispering their dreams to each other.
 I know the blue room is empty.
 The bed is clean and cold in there.
 The blue room's pillow is new.

Ellie Nall
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson H.S.
 William Jones

Triestina

You are named for a city, so old,
 Deep, you are this country; dialect and mountains, hard,
 proud.
 But you live in the South. Virginia.
 Play golf. Needlepoint. Have candy dishes and chintz.

In a chintz parlor, you are old.
 Remember yourself age six, on a boat.
 And a new world, promised green.

On green, you hit little white balls.
 Smile when they go in. This is important.

What was important was Papa's knee, his hair,
 those strong arms, tanned from railroad afternoons.

Railroad afternoons, you dress in black,
 cry dab your eyes, watch cities loom, new, in distance.

From a distance, back in Brooklyn,
 you cry now as we bury you Mama,

see her face in mine.

I look nothing like a dead woman, I think, and tell you.

I tell you, Triestina, you have forgotten this.
 In Italian, your tongue mumbles, is thick and odd.
 Triestina, what would Papa
 think of you now? Blue eyes so cold, so far.

So far, we have nothing to talk about,
 you this lost aunt of mine.
 I've never seen you before, but I've heard things about
 you.

Things about you made Papa mad: your skirts short,
 your sass, your hips. No longer his beautiful city, you ran
 to join
 this new country's army where they hated Mussolini and
 Italy.

And Italy has not touched you
 in twenty-five years. The Calabrian piazza
 that saw your birth is ruins.
 Mama's good name, forgotten.
 Oh, Triestina, think of this in you hot, southern sun.

Celeste Perri
 Cold Spring Harbor, NY
 Mrs. Maureen Ackerman

The Assassin

I cannot be, cannot see
 for Poetry has killed me.
 from a sixth story window, Poetry stood
 with his mail order rifle three shots in ten seconds, no
 human
 sniper
 my peace corps bits of brain blew out the back of my
 head, but
 no one in a fashionable hat scrambled or
 even saw
 that it was
 Poetry who killed me.

startled, i awoke
 Sunday morning sleep-in interrupted by the cry
 of pacific triple tiger and ignored wah wah
 blips of baby radar i never saw it coming
 caught me by surprise, Poetry did
 and left my carcass to stink and burn and sink and rot

Poetry has killed me
 a cactus with its pencil sharpened needles wraps itself
 around
 my limbs and injects pueblo burrows full of lead
 eraser vultures swarm and swoop
 picking the meat out of eyesocket lines
 as ink oozes into the sand of desert paper.
 and i am left with nothing but
 some cough syrup and a sticky spoon.

Jessica Turner
 Milford, NJ
 Delaware Valley, H.S.
 Mr. Forker

O.T.L.L. (Out to Long Lunch)

It's time when my stomach starts to rumble and it sounds as if a plane is going to take off. I grab my purse and head down to the cafeteria to meet the usual gang. Just me, Roselia and Jeanne, "The Giggle Girls" as some people call us. We're all from different areas of the hospital. Jeanne chose Gynecology because it seems that all of the really good-looking doctors are drawn towards that field.

"I'm drained," I say as I slide into the booth. I had an unusual number of case studies to file and my back is killing me.

"Take a number," Jeanne says. She has a plate of grain in front of her because she signed up to participate in a hospital project on the effects of grain in one's diet. She always partakes in those things because the hospital pays her to be their guinea pig.

"Only forty-eight more hours," Roselia says, "and you can eat like a normal person again." Jeanne nods, looks down at her plate and reluctantly picks up her spoon. I take the foil off my veggie burger and begin to take small bites.

"See that girl over there?" I say, "she never speaks." It's some anonymous girl from radiology.

"You know what that means," Jeanne says, and she and Roselia exchange looks. "I think she was raped," Jeanne whispers. Jeanne always tries to make fun of how, just because I work in psychiatrics, I feel inclined to analyze everything.

Roselia laughs and puts her fork down to fumble in her pocketbook. Roselia always has a new pocketbook, eyeglass case or lipstick. She's a kleptomaniac, I'm sure. I went to her house once and there were so many scarves draped all over the place, that I was positive a voice would come over the loudspeaker and announce, "buy one pair of everything and get two free!" Her desk at work is cluttered with small objects that look as if they came from a thrift shop.

"Look who's here," Jeanne says, but I try to ignore her. Jeanne just likes to talk about sex, especially if she's not the subject or object. Her interest probably stems from the fact that she's been rejected by every man she's ever met. It's Ryan who just walked in. He's in my department and he asked someone for my number the other day.

"Too bad he's so tall," Roselia says, "you'd make a really cute couple."

"I don't know what to do with him," I say. He tries to make small talk over the coffee percolator in our department and hints at wanting to see a movie with me.

"I know plenty you could do," Jeanne says and she laughs, elbowing Roselia.

Ryan seems like a normal guy from a distance, but the moment he opens his mouth, all dreams of a romantic future disappear. He has one major drawback. He yells. Now, don't get me wrong, I yell too, sometimes, but it seems that yelling is Ryan's foremost mechanism to communicate. I once knew someone who yelled because he went to a rock concert and stood too close to the speakers and damaged his hearing, but I think Ryan just feels insecure. He yells because he thinks people won't listen to him if he speaks.

While Jeanne and Roselia talk about my potential lover, my mind wanders. It's the usual twelve o'clock crowd. The ones that are too hungry to wait for one

o'clock and yet had a decent breakfast so did not go at eleven. I admire most of these people because it seems that they've got life under control. They're in the middle of two extremes and believe me, neither of those extremes are pretty. The one o'clockers end up having a late supper and the eleven o'clockers are all messed up because they can't have a big breakfast and they end up snacking at four.

"Snap out of it," Jeanne says as she waves her hand in my face. "So, you thought about it yet?" she asks.

"Life's too short to live in potentials," I say, "I like to live in reality best." They both roll their eyes.

Ryan's a nice guy, and our relationship could definitely become a reality if it wasn't for his yelling. Roselia pulls out a handkerchief. This one has tiny blue butterflies in the corners.

"Like it?" she asks, "it's new." Roselia proceeds to blot her eyes which have a tendency to water in the extreme heat. It's like the Special of the Day, my guess is she has nine other handkerchiefs, each one with a slight variation in style, packed away in her oversized pocketbook.

"He's coming over," Jeanne says, and she starts to fumble with her napkin. We're seated at our usual table by the window. I like to look at the cars driving by, on their way to some destination. Maybe a young man is rushing home from work to be with his pregnant wife. Or an elderly lady is off to visit her grandson for his birthday with a car full of presents, Power Rangers and X-MEN. I may even see the man destined to become my husband.

A man stops on the sidewalk and stares at the glass. He looks as if he's watching me dip a fry in ketchup. On the outside, the window is a mirror and the man probably does not realize that I can see his every move. He takes a comb out of his pocket and proceeds to groom his hair. After creating the perfect center-part, he continues by opening his mouth and picking a left-over particle of food from the crevice in his teeth.

"That's disgusting," I say as I drop my fry. He had me hooked. I could not take my eyes off of him until I was certain that he had succeeded. I wonder if he ate lunch at the Chinese restaurant around the corner? Every time I go there, I end up using a lot of dental floss to get pieces of spare ribs out of my teeth.

"Well, I know you like ketchup, but mayonnaise goes well with fries, just ask the Belgians," Ryan yells and I whip my head around.

"I wasn't talking to you," I say. I point to the man who has left the mirror/window, making his way toward the park, I presume, to look at all of the young runners getting in shape to wear their bathing suits. Or maybe he's on his way to his lover's where he wouldn't want a piece of food stuck in his teeth to ruin a romantic evening.

"Who was that?" Roselia asks. I guess R&J were too busy watching Ryan to notice the man and Ryan was too busy watching me.

"It doesn't matter," I say.

"Sit," Jeanne says to Ryan who has already lowered his tray next to mine.

"Do you want to at least try one with mayonnaise?" he yells.

"She likes mayonnaise," Roselia says, "I've seen her mix it with ketchup to make Russian dressing for her salad." At this moment and at every other moment, I do

not and will not ever try mayonnaise on my fries. Like mustard on hot dogs, it just won't happen.

"Really, I'm fine," I say. The lunchroom is crowded and people wander with trays in hand, waiting for an empty table. I see a bald man with aviator sunglasses blowing a bubble with his gum. He could be a mid-life crisis, the sunglasses are a dead give-away, especially if they're the kind where the shades flip up, leaving the normal glass exposed. There's an anxiety attack holding a tuna fish sandwich. She's the one in the corner tapping her foot in a short, sharp rhythm on the linoleum floor. She's probably prone to biting her nails too. I see an eating disorder at a round table. Eating disorders are the easiest to pick out, especially here in the lunchroom. Their eyes dart from side-to-side, conscious of everyone and everything, worried that someone will try to control their food intake. This one looks like a gerbil nibbling at leaves of lettuce and sipping her water.

"Wake up," Roselia says to me, "like the new mauve crystal look?" I adjust my vision to focus on Roselia's lips. The color is not bright enough for her dark complexion.

"It's great," I say. Jeanne and Ryan are in the middle of a deep conversation.

"And I could be Melanie Griffith, always in search for the perfect man. Maybe we could throw in an affair with Brad Pitt, a med. student," Jeanne says.

Ryan turns toward me and yells, "Do you think Harrison Ford could play my life?" I burst out laughing.

"Are you planning on making a movie?" I ask.

"The movie of my life as a wandering artist/secretary/waiter on the weekend," he yells, "and you could be Jodie Foster, my lover."

"What a thrill," I say. Ryan turns back to Jeanne who's picking at her grain. It's almost one o'clock. The veggie burger was surprisingly tasty today. I decide that I want coffee with my remaining fries. I excuse myself from the table and push my way through the crowd. As I'm filling a cup with amaretto, the flavor of the day, a voice calls out to me and a blue poodle balloon is thrust in my face.

"I'm back, did you miss me?" It's the clown that comes to the lunchroom every Thursday to make balloons for the kids. If it's somebody's birthday, he sings, and if someone is eating all by himself, he'll try to cheer the person up with jokes. Chester's a good clown. He plays with the kids, often making fun of himself in the process.

"Thanks a lot," I say, "I'll put it on my desk." His face is painted and his mouth and eyes are exaggerated with colors. He has a huge red smile and sparkles cover his eyelids. He puts his arm on my shoulder, "How are the kids?" I ask.

"Fine, fine." He seems far away, his eyes drifting over the features on my face. I put a lid on my coffee and start to move toward the check-out line.

"Wait," he says. His hand presses into my shoulder. Maybe his kids aren't fine. Maybe he got fired from his night-time custodial job. Maybe his wife is having an affair.

"What's wrong?" I ask. I place my poodle and coffee on the counter. His hand on my shoulder is close to my face and smells like a mixture of cleaning fluid and rubber.

"Look into my eyes," he says, "what do you see?" He stares at me and the sparkles look like tears. There are bags under his eyes, which are more red than usual. I

see a man that is lonely, that is over-worked, that loves everyone and doesn't get much in return.

"I see you," I say, "all of you." I could picture him eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich alone at night at the school he cleans, in the closet where the mop and bucket are kept. He has no time for his kids, but he loves them and does everything he can to make enough money to send them to a good school. I could see him dressing up as Santa Claus every Christmas, never telling his wife what he bought for her before she opens her present, always something more expensive than he can afford.

"I don't think you do," he says, "I can't live this way forever." I put my arms around his neck and hug him. We are causing a spectacle, for a little boy in a faded blue cap points us out to his mother. The boy is probably wondering why we are hugging. Am I sad? Is the clown trying to cheer me up? Chester tries to put on a smile. The boy hesitates and then comes over to us.

"Have a balloon," I say to the boy. He takes the gift and skips back to his mother to show her the poodle. "Are you okay?" I ask.

"I guess the pressure just got to me," he says, "I'll be fine." I check his eyes to make sure he's telling me the truth. I rub his arm.

"Next week, I'll make *you* something," I say. As I walk to the check-out line, a little girl wanders over to see him.

I make my way back to the table where Ryan is yelling to Jeanne about the danger of nutrasweet.

"We may be bigger than laboratory rats," he yells, "but we're just as stupid."

"I like Diet Coke," Jeanne says, "it's not as if a person has died from OD-ing on artificial sweetener."

"You may as well call it Cancer Coke," he yells, "you could always be the first."

Roselia has on another color lipstick and she is blotting her lips with another handkerchief, this one covered with lady bugs. Ryan lets me into the booth. The coffee is still warm and I pick at some of my fries. Ketchup and coffee don't mix well, so I don't dip the fries.

"I have a question for you guys," I say. I take a sip of my coffee. The almond flavor lingers on my tongue.

"Shoot!" Ryan yells. He is too close to my ear. I almost spit my coffee out.

"Look into my eyes," I say, "what do you see?" I watch as all three concentrate on my brown irises. Jeanne methodically swirls her grain with her finger as she stares at me. Ryan's eyebrows are knit and his arms are folded across his chest. Roselia rubs her lips together.

"Why honey," Roselia says, "you're one of us."

"That's right," Jeanne adds, "a Giggle Girl." My palms feel cool and I trace the lines with my fingernail.

"One of us," I mumble.

"Speak up!" yells Ryan.

"Speak," I say.

"There's something wrong with her," Roselia says as she takes out a third handkerchief and another lipstick.

"Wrong," I say, "right."

"She's going crazy," Jeanne says and she blushes as she looks at Ryan.

"Then she's definitely one of you," Ryan yells and he laughs.

"One of you," I say. But I sincerely hope not.

Laura Snyderman
Wellesley, Massachusetts

Mr. David Smith

Aunt Jemima

Way up there
 on a shelf, quite far
 away from the place she called home,
 she sits
 as still as butter, two aisles down.
 Her frozen glass eyes
 no longer reflect
 any kind of feeling.
 A sugary glaze stares me down when
 she glances past the pancake mix,
 the honey bear
 and the cold cereal.
 Then she
 gives me the all knowing smile
 molded to her face.
 Unmoving lips whisper
 coyly to me saying, "leave me alone".
 But I take her by the hem
 of her skirt,
 and place her in my cart.
 Black-brown maple
 oozing like tears,
 trickles past her eyes
 onto her starched,
 white apron.

Alfreda L. Amah
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 William Jones

The Kangamangus

Trees flash by in fullness of autumn color
 and the road banks a hard right.
 Frost heaves pop out of tar,
 lacing it like the veins in an old lady's hand.
 I ease the truck to the edge and stop.
 Looking down into the valley below I imagine
 how easy it'd be to drive through the flimsy
 steel cables;
 imagine the plummet's smooth downward decent,
 the ground rising up,
 boulders, moss and dirt and ice
 pushing up to the windshield
 wanting to be let in from the cold.

It'd be over with-
 one less bad guy out there
 for the hero of this game to contend with.

I wonder what happens to the bad guys
 when the computer ends their existence.
 Do they exist only in memory,
 waiting to be re-written,
 or do they flow out to Central Maine Power,
 stuck travelling down light years of electrical history
 thinking how much easier it is when you don't fight fate.

Benjamin F. Cleaves
 Norwell, Massachusetts
 Milton Academy
 James Connolly

Your Brother

I dated your brother
 for a long time. I was always
 at your house.
 We were in your room
 often. Did you know?
 While your brother and I
 were in his room
 I thought about you
 in the next room.
 What were you doing?
 I heard you on the phone.....
 probably a girl.
 Which one?
 I always wanted to know.
 I was jealous.
 When I got ready to leave,
 I always walked
 to your room and knocked
 with my little fist.
 You asked me why.
 "Habit, I guess."
 You said not to.
 Was that an invitation?
 I began to picture you
 undressing in front of me.
 On my way home,
 I could have sworn
 you were in my back seat,
 smiling and laughing,
 as if it had never happened.

Eliza Hahn
 Califon, NJ
 Voorhees H.S.
 Lois Harrod

Wiscasset, Maine, 1953

The ships rot under a dying sun
 and children play in dead ragweed
 that grows through railroad tracks.
 The leafless trees bend in the wind
 that brings the year's first storm,
 and leaves down the sides of the street
 rush against the curb's stone.
 Lazy twists of chimney smoke
 curl upward in dance
 and sunflower stalks bend
 under nickel-thick frost.
 The last train leaves for Augusta,
 to cross salty rivers
 that push slabs of ice against the steel girders of the
 bridge.
 The ice thickens on the bleached rocks,
 filling their pores,
 its cracking spiking the air.

Benjamin F. Cleaves
 Norwell, Massachusetts
 Milton Academy
 James Connolly

Untitled

Someone told me once it was better to brush my teeth upside down. They said it had something to do with the gravitational pull of the earth's atmosphere and tarter, neither of which I had known about at seven years old. But I was curious enough to try anything. After school on a Tuesday, while my mom was at work, I crept into the bathroom, hoisted myself into a headstand and began to brush my teeth. It's not a sensation you forget-the feeling of complete and utter helplessness- but it's one that I learned pretty quickly, on my head. I lost balance and fell on my face, nearly choking to death on my toothbrush, as well as breaking my nose in two places. So here I am, the poster child for the latch-key generation: my crooked nose a testimonial of gravity discovered. My mom wanted to get me a full time baby-sitter after that, but we didn't really have the money, and besides, I hated baby-sitters. So it was me again, just me.

My goldfish jumped down the disposal once. Home after school alone as usual, I think I was in third grade. I was cleaning my fishbowl in the sink when Howard flung his little body over the edge of the cup I had temporarily put him in. I watched with horror as he plummeted about five inches to his death. I stuck my hand down into the slime, but Howard had wiggled his body into a tiny crevice where some sort of machinery was making an awful sound. My fish committed suicide. Death by disposal. I really don't like fish that much anymore.

I had a friend down the street who would keep me company after school. Adam used to take me up to the high school to teach me how to play stick ball; I was the best he'd ever seen, he said. He also showed me the place around the back of the school where kids used to crouch in the bushes to smoke cigarettes, and the older ones, joints. He told me that most of our friends had been smoking for a while, so I lit one up and started puffing. I don't remember anything as clearly as I do the choking fit that followed inhaling what I thought was a gallon of toxic fumes; but I was determined to be the best twelve year-old-inhaler he'd ever seen. Puff, gasp, choke, cough. Puff, gasp, choke, cough. Or so it went for the rest of that hour, at least. Behind the school, crouched in the bushes. Just the two of us, like it had always been, and our smoke.

When we were in high school, he used to get me into bars. Not tasteful ones with waitresses or little baskets of pretzels, but ones with greasy truck driving types and floors caked with dirt; ones that sincerely made me wish I was home alone again. I wasn't really worried because Adam would sit close to me and hold my hand while an equally greasy band belted out some old blues tune on stage. That's the only reason we went-he loved the music. He had aspirations to become a famous musician; I used to listen to him all day picking complicated rhythms on his guitar while his deep-throated voice sang about loneliness or lost love. In turn, he taught me how to play slide guitar, like no girl he'd ever seen, he said, in the laundry-room of his basement. just the two of us, in a cramped, moldy-smelling room, playing guitar, while the washing machine kept the beat in the background.

When I was fifteen, I watched soap operas after school. The biggest dilemma in my life was how to make it home after softball practice in time for the opening cred-

its. Then I would pray that the blood-test samples came back negative, disproving the theory that Carry and Austin were related. I was sure that Carry would forgive Austin for leaving her after her discharge from the mental institution, and would run back into the safety of his arms. Then Carry's father would be able to come back home, and their family would be happy again, or at least until the end of the hour. But it never happened like I wanted.

My mom used to call it "mental rape." She would go on for hours about how teenagers were especially susceptible to the negative effects of soap operas, but I was still me, so I didn't really grasp whatever abstract notion she was trying to implant in my head. Anyway, I was fifteen, so I didn't listen.

Sometimes I wish I were in the third grade again. I wish that the days were twice as long as the nights. I have this crazy idea that at a certain age, a person's life is no longer a chronology of events, but sort of a jumbled fusion of specific memories. I don't really remember learning to tie my shoes or to snap my fingers. I can't recall breaking my arm the first time I went skiing: the walk home from school is what I remember. listening to the leaves crunch under my feet while the kids behind me complained about homework or piano lessons. The thought of three hours of anything drowned out their high-pitched whines. I would pick up into a run and watch the oak trees and picket fences whiz by me as my head spun with possibilities. There were always such endless possibilities.

Katherine Landry
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, NH
Douglas Rogers

Letter to a Past Tense Lover

Darling, I wonder if you know about snow blindness & the way moonlight plays tricks on winter ground, the way it doesn't lead the eye, but forces everything to be taken in at once.

You'll never understand that finely powdered night when I sat between him & you in the front seat of his car, on a mission to serenade your latest painted lady. To call up to her bedroom window & watch how your breath formed her name in the cold. There was nothing between us & the cold in that car except the slowly fogging windshield & a well placed ashtray. I don't remember fumbling for lighters or the way streetlights imposed color on snowflakes, momentarily resting on the window. I remember shifting where I sat & being forced against you w/every turn.

Lauren Williford
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville H.S.
Gary Blankenburg

3 Women, Sleeping

after four miscarriages
my mother places her faith only
in God
never again in doctors.

she sleeps tonight
lips parted, forehead clenched,
black hair pressed flat.

i reach for her hand, i
do not want to sleep alone.

II

diabetes,
i am afraid she has diabetes
she asks me to massage her hands, her feet;
they are swollen pink
i rub them until my arms grow sore.

*i'm old, she says,
i used to be beautiful like you.*

*no, you are wrong, i tell her,
explaining that i'm sixteen, lanky, awkward—
no one finds me attractive.*

she's an even 5 feet, much smaller than i.
i could cradle her in my arms.

III

sleeping, i dream of
four brothers all named Joseph
my grandmother, with diabetes of her own,
decaying arrangements of roses,
casseroles,
caskets closed.

Julia Soo Young Kim Towson High School
Towson, MD William Jones

Museum of Art

i hear the triptych
tocking at my door
it is a three piece ensemble
orange on the corners
green where the sections cut
and in between
an indistinguishable gray
it talks to me telling of the intense
wind patterns in museums
like the metropolitan
where a breeze from the corridor
flies around his floor
sweeping low and right at first
then climbing the far wall
and flipping towards him
crashing by monet
chasing elbows of the gallery
fast to hinges
forking at a dovetail niche
falling on white tile
and half a gale whistling
up the center slice
before it expires
into tourist breath

warm and wet
melting his weird color

Emily Troutman
Baltimore MD

Catonsville High School
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

Father Man

Father these things do not happen in your Union house-
of curtains you tried to hand,
of kitchen floors you tried to straighten,
of basement floods you tried to drain.

These things do not happen in the thin books you read,
which end like sitcoms,
which end without feeling.

You say I am a girl out of braces, into college
quickly as you wash your hands.

I do not have any thought or touch,
except the one time you held my hand in the supermarket,
(which made me more of your conquest.)

But Father, do you know how you
bend masculinity toward me like a tamed piece of wild,
how you are pushing away the rest of the crowd with your
sharp elbows
until I am standing alone.

Father do you know the string
you tied to me has broken
how it is around my waist
holding nothing but me in my odd and undefined place.
Father do you know I have let the swans out of the park.

I have swallowed the key.
I have left the autumn apples fall to cider.
I have let the homeless man sleep on my newspaper.
I have pushed the swing of you into the elm.
I have gathered each red and fallen leaf
by hand in waiting
as the city zoo closes,
as the television goes to the elongated beep of sleeping
technicians.

I am letting the crows trickle into my lot-
all eyeing, all trying to touch.
Father I have let myself be
without.

Father do you know of plea bargaining with your children,
do you know of my imploring,
do you know of my turning on the light in the day
to be sure I am alive.

Turned you into an old dish
a trembling star.
and let myself be a drama with complicated sequences,
parts

all of the things you did not chose
to understand.

I have let them in and
tied back your elbows.

I no longer cut myself back
I let the bees in.
I let the teeth grow, the edges gleam.

Since you no longer soften or
discipline, no longer keep me
and I no longer keep you.

Melanie Massey
Pocono Mt. High School
Mrs. Sparrow

I'm munching on a peanut butter sandwich as Tracy approaches, making this funky grin. She slides into the mint green plastic chair across from me. Swallowing a glumpy bite of peanut butter, I ask her, "WHAT?!"

"You know my science partner, Glenn?"

"Yeah. What, have you finally got a crush on him?"

"I already did. Anyway, I didn't realize this, but he hangs out with Ethan like every weekend!"

At the mention of his name my body is gripped by the usual jolt of a thrill mixed with tension. "Yeah? So?"

"Well, Glenn invited me to the movies with them on Friday and I said only if I could bring you!" Tracy is now pounding the white table like a drum roll, although I don't think she realizes it. I am feeling hot and cold all at once.

"What?! What did you say to Glenn, exactly?" I rip a hunk out of my sandwich and chew like a barbarian, my brain focused and waiting for Tracy's response.

"I just said, 'Sure. Can I bring my friend?' So are ya gonna come?" She leans across the table until I am able to see the individual specks of glitter in her magenta lipstick. But soon my eyes glaze over; her lips become a hazy, magenta cloud, and I am no longer looking forward...

"I'm Ethan McWilliams. I decided to take this class because I'm interested in the patterns of society. Someday I want to live in Venice Beach and write music and poetry."

As the rest of the students took their turns describing themselves, I watched him. His cheeks were hollow, accentuated by pronounced cheekbones. His chin was sort of long and thin with a sandy goatee, the same color as his close-cropped hair. I was sitting diagonally behind him, admiring the beaded necklace slithering around his tan neck.

Years of pathetically skillful obsessing were launched on that first day of ninth grade in sociology class, and they're not over yet. Ethan Luke McWilliams, the eighteen-year-old god, has been so out of reach all this time. It is a kick in the shin when I remember that I once shared a class with such perfection for an entire semester without any results—non even a friendship. All I learned from that experience is that celebrity-realm beauty is not restricted to celebrities.

Tracy drops back in her chair after my failure to respond.

"Come on, Natalie! You've gotta do this! It's what you've been waiting for, for like two years! Besides he's graduating this year!" Her forehead creases and her meticulously-plucked eyebrows wrinkle. She doesn't understand.

My obsession with Ethan has been something I've been ashamed of ever since it escalated the way it did. When I first discovered him, I changed my routes in order to see him scuffle down the hall for an instant. And after watching him blend into the crowd, I always had the desire to rush and tell somebody about the way his jeans hung so low on his bony hips and his shoulders jutted up under his black T-shirt.

"Look, Natalie, I can't go out with the two of them by myself. So, if you don't do this for yourself, do it for me. Glenn's really cool," Tracy sighs dramatically and stands up.

I picture Ethan sitting in a dark movie theater, the soft glow from the screen flickering across his chiseled features.

"Fine."

"Oh, thank you so much, Natalie! We'll have the best time!"

I'm afraid Tracy is going to hug me, she is so excited, but she just smiles, shrieks, and jumps a little before spinning around and leaving the cafeteria.

After my seventh period class I am walking toward the door to leave school and I sense Ethan coming down the staircase up ahead. His lean, muscular arms are clutching the black notebook that I've noticed before—his poetry notebook. He turns toward the door and I think, jeeze, I'm going out with him on Friday.

Grabbing a can of coke from the fridge and a bag of Cheetos from the pantry, I head upstairs to my room. It is a warm, bright, and breezy day so I open the windows wide and plop onto the floor with my snack. I'm trying to picture how it will be on Friday night. Tracy will probably have me come over before it's time to go, so I can help make sure she looks perfect. Glenn and Ethan will probably pick us up at her house. Will Ethan drive? Will I actually ride in his cute little yellow Volvo? But as I try to imagine Friday night, it doesn't work. I am able to picture Glenn, Ethan, and Tracy getting into the Volvo in Tracy's driveway and sitting down in the movie theater, but I am never there.

"Natalie, you're such a great friend!" Tracy is thanking me repeatedly on the phone while I struggle to do my math homework. "Actually, you're probably only doing this for yourself, huh? But that's okay, 'cause we'll both be happy!"

"Tracy, I still don't know about this. I mean, at least you know Glenn. I've never had a conversation with Ethan in my life."

"Well, then you should be more excited than I am!"

"No, I should be more nervous than your are."

"Okay, you all are going to need number two pencils for this quiz. It's a scantron," our sociology teacher told us. "And don't bother asking me for one, 'cause giving you all pencils isn't my responsibility."

I leaned down to grab a pencil from my back pack and heard Ethan's deep voice ask Julie Dunnington if she had an extra one. She said no. He was probably gonna ask me soon! My hands scrambled through the bottom of my back pack, finding candy wrappers wads of paper, and quarters, but no more pencils.

"Uh, do you have a pencil I could borrow?" I heard him say it and turned to find that face looking at me.

I swallowed. "Uh..." I clutched my pencil tightly in my sweaty hand. "No, sorry. I really don't." I gave a weak smile, and Ethan turned abruptly to the guy next to me.

"Hey, man, you got a pencil?"

From that day on I carried at least three pens and three pencils in my back pack, but Ethan never needed another one.

I'm brushing my hair before bed and lovingly admiring the pictures in my room: Johnny Depp with a fiberglass rooster, Johnny Depp lighting a cigarette, Johnny Depp riding a bicycle in some great trousers, Johnny Depp sitting on a tire in some more great trousers. But then my eyes scan the small section of wall between my

closet and the corner. This is Ethan's corner. His name is tacked up high, cut out from a magazine article about some actor also named Ethan. Below that are other cutout phrases like "Teen Angel." I've been waiting to get a piece of paper that he's actually written on, preferably one of his poems. But my pride and joy is a collection of actual photos of him. A girl who Tracy has photography with went downtown one day with him and a bunch of people. She had picture after picture of Ethan, and yet she left a pile of them behind in the darkroom, because she'd "messed them up." I cherish them, and Tracy knew I would. She can be great sometimes.

But now that I look at these black and white images—Ethan goofing around in front of a fountain, Ethan smoking a cigarette, Ethan zipping his jacket, and Ethan drinking a Big Gulp—they embarrass me. How can I seriously face him on Friday, when he's pinned on my wall? I plan on acting like I've never even thought about this guy—what's his name? Ethan McWilliams?—but he's on my wall for God's sake!

It's Friday. Walking around school before first period, I see Ethan at his locker. After tonight, maybe I can actually talk to him at times like this. I'll casually walk up and say, "Hey, Ethan." For some reason, though, I cannot imagine saying his name to him. It seems like I've used that word so much that I've abused my privilege, and if I said it to him it would be tainted.

Ethan slams his locker shut, clutching his black notebook and wearing his faded, olive green back pack. He walks past me, and I'm wondering if he knows he's gonna be going out with me tonight. I wonder if he even knows my name.

At lunch Tracy talks endlessly about Glenn. "He's picking us up in his Mustang convertible! Cool, huh?"

Great, no Volvo.

"They'll pick me up first and then we'll come get you. It'll probably be around 8:30. Okay?"

"You don't want me to come over and help you get ready?"

"Nah. That's all right. I'm not really worried about impressing Glenn. He knows me well enough," Tracy sighs. "It's gonna be cool going out with a guy I'm already sorta friends with."

I put down my peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwich and suck down some Evian.

"But you'll probably wanna look absolutely perfect, huh?" Tracy is smiling slyly. "So, if ya want, I'll help you get ready and have Glenn pick us up at your house."

"No, that's okay." I grumble. I'm not used to primping for a guy. I don't feel like it—even if it is Ethan. He probably likes girls who don't try to look good, anyway, so I won't.

At home I open up a Coke, but I can't even finish it. I lie in my room listening to The Doors, a band I happen to know Ethan idolizes...

My cat is on my stomach, kneading me with her paws. Jim Morrison is no longer moaning through the speakers. I open my eyes. The clock says 7:51. I sit up, my cat rolling off my stomach onto my bed, and look around frantically. What time were we leaving? I think it was 8:30. Okay, about forty minutes. I stare into my closet. I don't know. I put on a black T-shirt and a pair of faded Levis. Then I shove on my shoes and stand in front of the mirror. I'm at the mirror for fifteen minutes before I even look at the two lipsticks on my dresser. I choose a

very light pink and barely put any on. Brushing my hair as I wander around my room, I stop at the pictures of Ethan and brush harder. I picture sitting in a car with him. I hear myself saying, "Hey" nonchalantly, but I fear the nervousness in my voice—a squeak or a tremble, igniting a blaze in my face.

I hear the doorbell downstairs and my mother answering the door. She's telling Tracy that I'm upstairs, and my stomach is leaping. "Tracy, I can't go!" I call through the door of my room.

"What?" Tracy sounds confused.

"I'm sorry, but I really can't! Just go ahead without me": Hopefully she won't push me.

"Okay!" Tracy's not upset. Doesn't she mind going out with them by herself? My mom tells her goodbye and the front door shuts. Outside a car door slams. I walk over to my window and see Mustang taillights going down the street.

I'm lying in bed wondering what I've done. I imagine Tracy, Glenn and Ethan in the movie theater. Afterwards they'll probably get some dessert and laugh and joke around. I throw my covers off and stand in front of the four photos of Ethan. "You're not a celebrity!" I yell at the wall. "You're not a god! You're a teenage boy at my own school!" I pull down each picture and all the cutouts and place them in my desk drawer.

Munching Doritos at lunch on Monday, I'm dreading Tracy's arrival and her description of Friday night. She comes toward the table, smiling that stupid "Glenn's so cool" smile, and slides into the chair opposite mine. She doesn't say anything. Great, she wants me to ask about it.

"Okay, how was Friday?"

"Perfect!" She has sprung to life. "It was perfect that you didn't come!" Tracy opens her lunch bag and pulls out a sandwich and a Diet Coke.

"Thanks a lot."

"No, no, Natalie. You see, Ethan didn't come either, so it was just Glenn and me!" She daintily takes a bite of her fleshy roast beef sandwich.

"Why didn't he go?" I ask eagerly.

"I'm not sure. Something came up, but who cares? Everything worked out perfectly!" Tracy is disgustingly giddy. "Oh, but you were sick, weren't you? Are you better?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks for being so concerned."

At the end of the day Ethan comes out of his seventh period class, creative writing, just as I am about to pass by. I slow my pace so I can walk behind him. He crushes a piece of a paper in his fist, then tosses it carelessly at a black trash can. The white ball of paper bounces off the rim of the can and sinks to the floor. I stop. As Ethan turns the corner, a girl rams into my back and curses me. I stay where I am. Students pour through the hall. Some go around me; some shove me rudely and ask what the hell I'm doing. I ignore it all. One kid kicks the ball of paper against the wall, and my stomach tightens. But I stay where I am, following the paper with my eyes and hoping the kid has not noticed my concern. Five minutes later the hall is empty. I walk over to the treasure, grab it, and shove it into my pocket.

In my room I madly unroll the ball of paper and smooth it out on the floor. Ethan McWilliams is printed in the upper right corner of the page. Below his name is a big, red "D." In the center of the page, in sloppy black ink,

is a poem. I crawl over to the desk drawer and pull out the photos and cutouts. Quickly I arrange them all back on Ethan's wall. Then I tack the poem in the center, where it has always belonged.

Sarah Cullen
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School

Untitled

The fire alarm had finally stopped ringing, and the sixth grade class started shuffling into the rear door of the school. She and I lingered. I traced out the answer to her note with my foot. The shadow of my size nine shoe fell onto the chunks of broken pavement surrounding the playground. Her eyes lit up as I ended with the letter "S". As we scurried back inside the school, sweating from the heat of May and young love, she turned to me and asked, "A penny for your thoughts." *I never replied.*

I received the note while surfing through the *World Book Encyclopedia Volume 6*. It read, in bubble letters and adorned with pierced hearts, "Happy Anniversary." We reached the back driveway of her house. My heart started to pump. *How could she end it like this?* The smell of overgrown weeds and chlorinated pools filled the wet air. I did not hear a word she said; I was making the decision. *Should I be the one to do it?* My voice did not make the sounds I commanded it to. We finally reached her back door. Last minute, Jarrod. Do it now! I touched her arm; she turned. *I nearly killed myself for you*, and I, with great stumbling, asked her if I might kiss her. She blushed the color of her mother's geraniums on the sun-deck and nodded her head. *Everybody made fun of me for asking.* I leaned and kissed her. What to say, what to say? I stumbled home.

We were voted "Class Couple" near the end of the year. I attended her dance recital and gave her a silk flower. *I hate fake flowers.* She made the class Chinese fortune cookies and in mine placed the simple note "I love you." We were in love. *I lost my friends for you.* I treated her to a soft ice cream at Jumping Jack's. We shared pixie sticks under a gnarled pine in the cemetery. We rode our bikes together everywhere. I met her at the corner every day. *Where were you today? Where were you? had to ask the crossing-guard if he had seen you.*

The summer came. *I don't remember doing anything with her.* I rode by her house all the time, waiting to get a glimpse of her. *She had a pool.* I was riding down her street with my mother. *We weren't embarrassed to be with our parents then.* I rode up onto the sidewalk and looked into the alley way. *I can still hear my mother's cries.* I looked forward, no sight of her, and watched my front wheel hit the moving car. The hood passed under me, and I slammed into the grass. *She never came out to see if I was okay.* It was ironic because she wasn't even home. My mother thought I would break my neck. *what I get for sticking it out on the line.* I still have the scars. The words "I love her," once written on a dusty mirror, were blown away by impatience: my impatience. *An answering machine?* She came over to the house and had steak with my family. They loved her, my grandfather especially. *Hello, you have reached 370-1565.* I was bored. I could not. *We cannot come to the phone right now, but if you*

will leave your name and number, we will get back to you as soon as possible. I was late for our first date because I was riding all around the neighborhood looking for flowers to pick to give her. *John was always late, it's all right.* Click. Click. Beeeep. *Jarrod, we can't go out anymore.* The weeping was the worst part. It sounded like more than one person, was that her mother? *I stared at the answering machine for days.* I miss her, Mom. Well, maybe you should have thought of that when you kept forgetting to call her. *Did I forget?*

Jarrod Beck
Scotia, NY
Scotia-Glenville High School
Nancy Chant

Cart Boy and Me

the cart boy the freckles i long to connect into arrowed hearts
on his face, powdered fresh, powder room love, secret and
filled with the mandarins he sold, ever the picker, sticky faces bee flowers under the sun the way he smiles at me,
a
sectioned orange grin, the seeds of baby boy teeth showing
on what a wonderful day, cart boy, if only i could tell you

the cart boy lingers after the others have gone. he wears a gray
and green striped shirt, stale peppermint, tucked into jeans and
sneakers. i catch him watching me the whole time, freckle constellations i long to connect into Valentine arrowed heart.
cart boy sees me looking, a sticky mandarin sectioned grin on
his face, baby boy teeth sticky with sweet, does he want me to
know? i am also wearing a striped shirt, but blue with red, not
the other way around, and i look nice, i think.

do young-year-olds have loveers, or does cupid just put cart boy
and you into a heart and shoot you, question marks me to cart
boy, sighing with secret delight? he sells oranges, you know,
and grins as he gives them out, can i have an orange too?

ah hah, says cart boy, seedy eyes taking in the cool boy view.
what do we have here, shaking in the juicy light from the empty
room. shake shake shake shake your booty, yeah. the oranges look
at me, i look at them, then at cart boy. loovers forever.

Dina Cheney

Potomac, MD

Carol Blum



Elena Togashi
New York, NY

Haute Couture

When I was younger, I wanted a pair of bow-tie rhinestone earrings, so I put them in my pocket. When I got home, I looked at those earrings from a proud new owner's point of view; however, I seldom wore them. In this way and for a long time, I practiced petty theft. Gumballs, shoe laces, pens, stationary, fake jewels, hair barrettes, soaps, small perfumes, eye pencils, lipsticks, and other little items, those that would entertain me, I took. My hoard was a comfort in hard times.

I always wanted what I never got. Moving into the city, surrounded by unfamiliar territory, everything about the city seemed so scary. All the things I had mastered in my past, all the stores I knew as kind, would have to be sought out again. I would go in and out of stores waiting for the feeling of reassurance, the feeling that would tell me it was okay to go ahead with my plans. Woolworth's, Hallmark, Love Drug, then onto the more exclusive stores, Tropica, Dot-Zero, Accessory Place, all generous with their gifts. For a while I had a job at The Fragrance Shoppe. I would help stack the soaps and bath oils, pocketing bath beads as I walked around the store. Sometimes the manager would go downstairs long enough for me to slide up my sleeve or into my bag; sponges, bath pillows, soaps, shampoos, powder puffs, scented cedar chips, perfume oils, hair accessories, colored washcloths, perfumed moisturizers, anything compact and to my liking. I was eleven years old and I liked a lot that was for sale at The Fragrance Shoppe.

Four years passed. I don't know what made me stop taking items of desire, or moreover, what made me start again, but I was in FAO Schwartz and decided that I wanted a pen and up my sleeve it went. Funny thing about stealing, it is a lot like riding a bike, you never quite forget how it is done.

Once again I began seeking out each store's security guards, who used cameras, censors, big plastic tags that couldn't be removed from the item of desire. I began a new type of stealing at Patricia Fields. Then over Christmas vacation I put on a black shirt and pulled my sweater over it, shoved the hanger in a hole in the wall and walked out wearing a new present. I waited outside for my friends to leave, the adrenaline pumping through my body, heating the inside while the outside shivered in the icy weather. This trembling, natural high made me happy for the day.

My wardrobe grew with items of desire from Betsy Johnson, Bloomingdales, Saks Fifth Avenue, Mon-Montre,

Henri Bendel's. I had all the designers in my closet folded, hung up, rolled in a ball in the corner of a shelf. Donna Karen, Calvin Klein, Henri Bendel, Anne Klein, Gianni Versace, Ralph Lauren. If I wanted it, I got it. I got it all.

Soon it became more than an occasional occurrence. If I was even remotely attracted to an item, I would take it. I knew every trick in every store. In Bloomingdales they counted the number of items you brought into the room, but I quickly worked around this, bringing back and running out for more, messing up the item count. I would cough as I broke the big plastic hangers in half to fit them in my bag. I would pull the plastic tags off and put them in pockets of other items or push them into the liner under the chair in the room. Never leave an empty hanger in the room was a rule, and fully check your item for any type of security device, act interested in a particular item asking the salesperson for different sizes, but never being quite satisfied. I was the pro. I would walk into a store full of confidence, wearing the items that I had stolen from them a few weeks earlier. I could steal something in twenty minutes or less.

"Always remember, they travel in pairs," laughed the security guard in Bendel's as he walked my friend and me to the inner depths of the store that I never even knew existed. I had forgotten one of my rules. I now stood humiliated. Phone calls were made, papers signed, and I thought it was over when Officer Cisco entered the office, removing his handcuffs from his belt and fastening them around my wrists. Moments later, Officer Umphery entered and clasped the cuffs around my friend's wrists. We walked out the back entrance of Henri Bendel's and were put into a police car.

A familiar song buzzed on the radio and I thought all this couldn't be happening to me. My friend and I sat in that filthy box of a room. I cried; she smiled for her mug shot. I was thinking about the unthinkable, believing the unbelievable. Why did this have to end this way, me staring at the inked walls of the precinct?

"I am fifteen," I told them.

"Bull-shit missy," they retorted hastily, mumbling words of disbelief. They didn't even believe my age, much more my story. Did they read me my rights? What happened to my phone call? They can't arrest someone as young as I am...can they? How long do I have to stay here? Too many questions and no answers for this criminal.

Sitting at the fake wood table they discussed their wives, lunches, breaks. They discussed donut shops, bagelries, bars. These were regular men; when did they suddenly get control of my life? "My social security number, check it, you'll see my age," I said. "563-90-857, you'll see, I'm-"

"Shut-up, we asked your social security number, not your life history," the officer yelled as he left the dirty room. I looked over to see a letter on the wall listing all the stores that would prosecute shoplifters and wondered how I had gotten away with it for so long.

"She's fifteen guys. Call her parents and release her," the officer said.

Tiffany G. Hoffman
New York, NY
The Nightingale-Bamford School
Christine Schutt

Wrapped in Light

Mornings when the house is empty
she spills out of bed,
water from a white dish,
then pulls the wrinkled sheet
from the mattress and wraps
it around her as if it were a gown,

then lets the sheet slip
down onto the wooden floor.
Her naked body catches the sunlight
and holds it in the grooves of flesh
and curves of muscle. She dances
in front of the window

and lets her fingertips trace
the outline of her hips,
then stomach, then neck,
until each part of her body flows
into the next, as if it were
filling a vase.

Mornings when the house is empty
she dances through the halls,
dipping into puddles of light
that drip through the glass.
She tries to catch the light
and wear it on her skin.

Liz Hazen
Potomac, MD
Walt Whitman H.S.
Dr. Martin Galvin

Untitled

"I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg.
There is seven eighths of it underneath for every part that
shows. Anything you know, you can eliminate and it only
strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show."
Hemingway

Like Hemingway,
I will use only the necessary words;
only the very tip of the iceberg will show,
with so much more lying underneath.
I will lie under those words.
I will look for you in the Italian rain
among the ragazzi of the piazza.
I will be the one with the cigarette
dangling from my brown lips,
not like in the seductive Sophia Loren movies,
but plainly,
the ashes dirtying my black coat;
my hair clinging
to my make-up ridden face,
hiding the eyes that will be looking for you
among the beautiful faces of the square.

Vanessa Salazar
White Plains, NY
White Plains H.S.

On Edward Hopper's Automat

There is pandemonium in your silence,
your two tightly crossed
legs jutting out white
under black marble table.
I stare discreet behind
my copy of yesterday's *Newsweek*.

At the slightest flicker
of your wrist I become chrysalis,
caterpillar. I ooze myself
into your soup bowl.
As you wipe the lukewarm
coffee cup rings off with your palm
I become acutely aware
of my rasped breaths.

It occurs to me I don't know
the color of your hair
under a yellow hat
or how your hips frame your dress
under an emerald green
trench coat.

I just know you're here
sitting alone at one am,
your downward face
oblivious to the traffic
beyond the glass.

Caroline Giordano
Bowling Green, OH
Bowling Green H.S.
Theresa Dunn

Daring Me to Believe

christmas is long since past,
along with it the scent of my cookies,
burnt on the stove
and it seems too much for me to ask
why the manger still sits on the television;
my mother put it there two weeks before
the birth of christ,
without my consent,
the last three months it has stood there,
watching me from its perch,
daring me to believe
that mary gave birth to a savior
so, who will save me,
when I fall from grace,
like those dreams where you don't really fall,
just wake in terror,
hanging onto the rails of the daybed;
I've already broken two bars off mine
and I want to stop the dreams,
thoughts of salvation run through my mind,
I walk along with the wise men
staring at the swaddling clothes and
wondering whose face I would see
should I dare to tear at the cloth.

Michelle Gallagher
Baltimore, MD
Towson H.S.
William Jones

"No Cuts, No Buts, No Coconuts"

Allen looked at the clock. It read 10:24. The clock was broken, though, and it always read 10:24. Allen scolded himself for looking at that wacky clock. The girls behind him laughed again and his face tingled and felt hot for a second. He checked his fly for the third time; it was still zipped. The girls were all staring right at him. He knew they were even before he turned around; he could just tell. Kiley was in the middle and she had the biggest smile. Allen kind of wanted to hit her. But he couldn't hit her; she was a girl and even though boys hated girls, boys couldn't hit girls. It was a strange rule and Allen wondered who had thought of it.

The class was supposed to be reading some story about a boy who spends his summer at a farm. Usually Allen was the first in his class to finish reading; he read very quickly for his age and prided himself on this talent. Today, however, those rascally girls had laughed away his concentration. Billy Ford and Sandy Reynolds both had already finished the story; they had their books closed on their desks. Frustrated, Allen read the same line he had read three minutes ago and still could not understand it. It said "Uncle Jim met Bobby at the gate."

After reading the line a few times, Allen glanced over his shoulder with a nonchalant sway of the head. The girls were passing some sort of strange note written on wide-ruled loose leaf paper. He couldn't be sure, but he thought that the note may have had something to do with him. Maybe I've got some weird fly or food on the back of my head, Allen thought. But, after investigation, Allen discovered nothing but hair. Allen's grandfather had some weird food on the top of his head when he last came to visit. It was there for two days!

In the lunch line that day, Allen was standing in front of the class idiot, Oswald Foderman. Zade, Allen's best friend, cut in front of Oswald and Ozzie demonstrated why he was the class idiot.

"No cuts, no butts, no coconuts." What a third grade thing to say, Allen thought as Oswald chuckled at what he thought was a pretty good joke. If they were all in the third grade, Oswald might be a pretty neat-o guy; but they were in the fourth grade and while it took others two whole hands or more, Oswald could count his friends with, amazingly, no fingers at all.

"Shut-up." Zade pushed in front of Oswald without really looking at him. Oswald was also picking his nose once in class and everybody saw him, even the teacher. From then on Oswald Foderman was also known as "Fode the nose toad" for obvious reasons.

It was pizza day. Allen was feeling a bit excited, even though he couldn't show it. It wasn't cool to like school food. Everyone would think you were some kind of nerd if you didn't say it tasted like mud or barf or something. That was why guys would sometimes bounce their hot-dogs, flick chili onto the ceiling with a fork. Allen took his pizza back to the table and talked Married with Children with the other guys. All those crazy fourth graders loved that show and they could talk about it for hours. Those fourth graders loved pretty much anything that was on the FOX network. Even without lunchroom peer pressure, these activities would still probably go on. Playing with food would be pretty entertaining.

Heather Jacobs was the table washer that day, and she was also one of the girls that was laughing at Allen when she was supposed to be reading. She made her

way from the girls' table over to the boys. Allen, sort of, looked away. She started talking, though, and he couldn't ignore her; it wasn't polite.

"Kiley said she wants to talk to you at recess and it's really important. She said to meet next to the slide." Heather was waving her big, yellow sponge around the whole time she talked. She acted like it was some magic sponge she had brought from home for show and tell.

Allen acknowledged Heather, and she resumed her washing. Of course, the other boys had heard the speech and they were thinking about it. The whole table was quiet for a moment; a rare occurrence during elementary school lunch periods. Finally, Austin said "Do you think she likes you or something?"

"I hope not," Allen said.

"Maybe she wants to, you know, do it with you." Everyone howled "gross," even though they didn't fully understand what "it" was; sex-ed started in the fifth grade.

"Well, I'm not gonna do it. I don't care what she says; I'm not gonna do it." But, for some reason, Allen felt like he sort of wanted to do it. This Kiley was making him feel all ooey.

"You can't talk to her," Zade was totally serious. "You have to do something mean, like throw a ball at her head. You can't talk to her."

Allen was standing on the piece of wood separating the play ground from the soccer field. Kiley was sitting on a swing, looking away from him. Allen's friends stood on the soccer field. Most of them were giggling in anticipation of the throw. Allen thought about doing something funny like throwing the ball at the boys or pretending to fall over and die but he didn't do either of those; he just told himself girls were bad and then threw the ball. It hit Kiley in the head but he didn't see it; he had turned away.

The rest of the day, Allen was the coolest guy in the fourth grade. In music class the other guys let him use the metal thunder sheet thing; he shook it in the wrong places and almost everybody laughed. Mrs. Vexorg, the music teacher, got really mad at him, but he didn't care that much; she gets mad every day, Allen thought, but I'm not this cool every day.

In art class Allen did even more cool stuff. They were supposed to be painting an imaginary animal and Allen painted something that looked like a big, cherry lollipop. After explaining that it was a picture of Kiley getting hit with a ball, Allen had the rest of the boys whooping and falling all over the place. The spilled containers and hysterical behavior made it look like the boys were getting drunk off of crayola non-toxic paint. It took a while, but the boys sobered up and realized that the rest of the class was watching them. None of the outsiders could be permitted to look upon the sacred painting.

"Allen, may I see you're painting?" Ms. Henter, the teacher, was petite woman who was a little too nice. Allen just looked at his finger.

"Allen..." Ms. Henter was even less assertive this time. She kind of whined at him. Ms. Henter wasn't good at confrontation.

"I, uh, haven't started it." Allen's hangnail was longer than the day before.

"Oh. Well, who painted this one?" Ms. Henter said, motioning to his art work. She hoped that she hadn't hurt his feelings with her interrogation.

"Um, I don't know," Allen said, picking at some orange paint on his thumb. "I haven't painted anything. I

didn't paint that painting; I don't paint things like that." Ms. Henter looked at the painting; she had no idea what it was.

"Well, it's very pretty." Ms. Henter knew that Allen had done something wrong, but she didn't care. She had become disenchanted with teaching just a few years earlier when the same kid vomited on her twice in one year. She just didn't feel the magic from then on. When any of her students had a bad attitude, she just left him alone. Sometimes she wished she had joined the circus; it was a childhood dream that had somehow stayed with her throughout adulthood.

The next day in school, Allen's cool status had dissolved. He was just normal Allen again. He threw a paper airplane in class, and it hit the floor in front of his desk; it didn't move. Nobody laughed. Nobody even noticed. Allen accepted his normalcy relatively quickly; he had expected it. The fourth grade social ladder is a lot more intricate and cutthroat than we give it credit for. Children are just like adults, except smaller with runny noses.

During reading time Allen waited for the laughing. He wanted to be laughed at; he missed it. He had told himself that girls were bad but he knew they really weren't; girls were kind of neat. Focusing on the story was too hard, and so Allen looked back at Kiley. Ever though her eyes were down on her book, he could tell she was sad. He threw a ball of paper at her.

Allen was quiet at lunch, and at recess he walked apart from the other boys. He thought maybe he should talk to Kiley, but he didn't know what to say or even if he should say anything at all. Suddenly, Kiley was right in front of him. All Allen could do was smile. Then she smiled and poured lunch-line chocolate milk on his head.

"Bye," Allen said softly, licking the corner of his mouth.

"Yeah, bye," Kiley said. She punched him in the stomach and, as he was doubled over, gave him a stiff uppercut.

"I love you," Allen choked. She pushed him over and he grinned into the dirt.

David Mongillo
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen



Athena Maikish
New York, NY

Wicked Blues

Eyelids are heavy tonight. I am blinded
by the red haze of sleep, bubbling

freely from the swollen sockets of my eyes.
I am nothing, but another shadow, convulsing

with laughter as I drown myself in drink.
Jazz prepares a coffin, each note pulls

me deeper into its satin bed.
The human saxophone screams its blues,

a drunken whine, wrapping itself around
me, caressing the icy wings of my lungs.

I see my soul mingle with the cigarette clouds,
finding sleep beyond these restless strings

The unity coughs into night, piercing
the audience. This cat, his eyes black glassy,

lays it down low, afraid to dig deep.
Together, we howl, bursting into night.

Die softly, ease into it, he whispers,
loosening his grip.

Tammara Lindsay
Atlantic City, NJ
Peter E. Murphy

my papa's hands

your hands reflect your soul
like a tree,
your hands
branches of life
rise skyward as
you approach God
with hands
joined, pointed toward Heaven.
an entreaty
embodied into the hands
old rough hands
interlaced in prayers.
you went papa
I'm staying
your ascension leaves
no hands to hold in prayer.
I'm waiting for hours of night
When you will bring the silence
through the city
in your hands.
We are only visitors in this world
and the worst scenario
would be to lose
your shadow in the sky.

Ilya Kaminsky
Rochester, NY
Brighton H.S.
Dr. Wiener

Heart Attack

It is seven o'clock and raining. Grandfather is standing in the archway between the living room and the kitchen. Not an arch really, more like a place where there used to be a door and no one ever got around to fixing it. Grandfather leans into the wall, looks old.

"We should get going," you say.

He seems to see you for the first time. He squints his eyes a little, squints them like he's trying to find out who you are.

"We should get going," you say again. "Are you packed, Grandpa?"

He looks at you hard now, frowns a bit. "No," he says.

You slap his shoulder, say, "Come on, I'll help you."

His room is brown. Brown the color of Brooklyn and old peoples' things. When you got the call three nights ago at school, after you had cried for a while, you could only see brown. Brown pants, brown shoes, that babyshit brown car he used to drive, the one you rode low in the back seat of and said the Hail Mary sixteen times between your house and Brooklyn and hoped that all of your friends were inside. My brown grandfather, you told your roommate and laughed because you found it absurd and funny all at once.

Your grandmother was no color really except maybe oatmeal and tan or the color of the plastic covers on her couch. How you hated those covers, how they squeaked when you sat down, how they made you slip and slide all over. She wore orthopedic shoes laced to the top.

Your grandfather goes to his closet. "How long am I gonna be there?"

You look at the floor, curse your father for not telling him the truth. You say, "A while, Grandpa."

"Do I need a jacket?" He is asking, his way, if he will be there for winter. It is June now, and hot.

You say, "Doesn't get very cold in Del Ray Beach."

He nods, nods fast and hard like he can shake this all away.

"A hat, maybe," you say, trying to be helpful. "It rains a lot, you know."

"A hat," he repeats, and pulls one from the top shelf. It is a Brooklyn Dodgers hat, and you think it is pathetic. He puts it on, but only half on so it rests on the crown of his head and makes him look like an old, stupid fool.

You lean over and pull the hat down, the way that is cool now. This way you can't see his eyes. "It's hip," you tell him.

He likes this word. You can tell because he clasps your shoulder and says you make him proud.

At nine, the rain has stopped and you are driving. Grandfather says your car is too small, he can't stretch his legs the way he could in his Buick. You think: babyshit brown Buick, but stay silent.

He asks if your father, the surgeon (and he lingers over this) bought you this car. When you nod, he asks how much it cost. "Enough, Grandpa, enough," you tell him.

Your grandfather manages to make do with the space and leans back in the seat. "Just a quick nap," he tells you. "I'm a tired one."

He's entitled to a nap, you think. After all, he's old and his wife just died.

This morning, you buried your grandmother at Beth Moses cemetery in some town called Pinelawn. Pinelawn is closer to your house than hers, and you wonder why a woman who hadn't left Brooklyn in just about her entire life would choose to spend eternity in Pinelawn. Your grandfather told you later, in the car on the way back to Brooklyn, that Pinelawn, just the name, sounded like some kind of peace to your grandmother.

"Days is cheaper," he tells you at the Holiday Inn.

"Grandpa, my father's paying for it." And with this, you dangle your father's green plastic card in front of him.

"Still," he says, "the young should respect the old, save them some money sometimes."

"Gramps," you say, calling him the name you usually reserve for old people who get in your way, "I'm tired. Let's just go to bed. In the morning, we'll get some breakfast and be on our way."

In the room, your grandfather takes off all of his clothes except his boxer shorts and green knee socks. For some reason, that they are green bothers you more than the fact your grandfather is in his semi-naked splendor. It's like getting to the last part of the puzzle and finding that the piece you have in your hand doesn't fit.

"Been sleeping this way since I was in the navy, boy. Hope it don't bother you much."

You think of Grandma Rose and him in bed that way for some fifty years. You wonder if he kept his socks on when they did it, had sex, made love, whatever. You wonder if they burned your Grandmother's tiny legs, if she kicked her orthopedic shoes off before she got into bed or if he edged them off with the very tip of his old, green socks, later, in the middle, like some kind of climax. This thought is making you more uncomfortable than your grandfather so your roll over, say "No."

You wake to your grandfather leaning in close to the window, his nose pressed hard against the glass. "Red morning, boy," he tells you.

You raise your brows, shake your head a little: this news doesn't bother you. "So?" you say.

"Red in the morning, sailor take warning," he says, not looking at you.

You say, "Grandpa, we're not sailing."

He turns, looks at you finally, taking you all in. "Still," he says, "it's something you ought to know."

Maryland comes and goes. It is only highway, endless ribbons of pavement coming and going under the rhythm of your car. Grandfather decides on an easy listening station, elevator music that gets on your nerves. You decide that he is not so hip after all, even with that hat on.

On the edge of D.C., your grandfather asks you this: "What'd that father of yours give you to drive me all the way down here?"

You squirm in your seat, wish desperately that your grandfather wasn't so smart, wish you could lie to him. You say, "Nothing, really."

He says, "I ain't dumb, boy."

"No," you say.

"So?"

"He said he'd pay my utilities bill next month."

Your grandfather frowns in a tight nod of agreement. "Jacob's getting sensible in his old age, eh?"

You laugh. "Something like that. Why did you ask?"

"So we know where we stand. I like to be sure of my surroundings, boy. Been that way since Midway."

You drive in silence. Barry Manilow and his Coco Cabana make your grandfather smile, mumble something about how your grandmother loved this song.

The capital rises over the wall of cars. In the distance, the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Memorial; Lincoln sits steady and Jefferson stands tall. You have seen it all before: you went there on a class trip, stuck grass down girls' backs and faked pushing your best friend Joey into the reflecting pool.

He says: "I almost died fighting for that. When I was your age, I had Japs up my ass twenty-four hours a day. Just for that. If you believe in something, boy, you die for it. It's that simple."

You try hard to think of something you would die for, but since you can't, you only drive harder, faster, feeling somewhat empty.

You remember one Christmas when your mother invited your grandparents over for dinner. "Don't bother," your father, the Jew in Denial, had said, "they won't come."

But they did, with a present in each hand for you and your sister Anna. Excited, you kissed Grandmother's leather cheek and shook Grandfather's hand in the reserved way you had begun to know. You led him around, showed him the Christmas tree and your new train around the base. You were maybe seven. He got down on his knees and pushed the train along the track, making choo-choo noises and calling out stops like a conductor. His voice boomed and made you laugh. You got up, wrapped your arms around his neck and said, "I love you, Grandpa."

He blushed. And then he squeezed your arm back, whispered, "I love you, Patrick."

That was the last time he called you by your given name. You've kept track.

"Yeah, he's fine," you tell your father from a pay phone in the lobby of a South Carolina Days Inn.

"I know he's difficult," says your father over the screams of your baby half-sister in the background.

"No, he's fine, really."

"Hey, Pat, it's okay. I'll pay the bill even if you don't like him."

This is making you angry for no reason that you can explain. "I like him, we're doing fine."

"How's the car?" he says, switching to something a little safer.

"Runs like a dream." You are careful to not say whose dream exactly.

He chuckles like you are suddenly very funny. "Well, son, I better go."

"No, wait!"

"Son? Is something the matter?"

Something is terribly wrong. You are starting to feel lost on this little journey of yours, like there is nothing to go back to, like you haven't come from anywhere, like no one will miss you if you stay for seventeen years, like you will never feel the passion your grandfather has.

"I just wanted you to say hello to Katie and Monica for me."

Monica is his new wife, his third. She is plastic and perfectly his.

He chuckles again, that deep sound from his throat. "Will do, boy, will do."

Walking back to your room, you can't decide if the fact that he didn't hear the worry in your voice is more bothersome than his calling you "boy."

"You been in love yet, boy?" says Grandfather to the beat of U2. Barry was starting to make you sick.

"I'm not sure."

"That's a no, then. No one's been in love without knowing it."

"There was this girl, back at school. Her name was Sara. I liked the way she laughed in a History class one day, and I asked her out. We dated for awhile; it was fun."

"It wasn't love."

"No?"

"If it were love, you'd get dizzy just thinking about it. You'd shake when you called her on the phone. All day without her, you'd be wanting her, to see her, to hold her hand. I'm not talking about sex, boy, I'm talking *love*. Love is when you sit by her when she's sick, when you ache in her pain, when you know the patterns of her breathing, when you love the way she looks at four in the morning, when she is beautiful at seventy."

"Oh," you say, uncomfortable. "No, Sara wasn't love."

He sits smug in his bucket seat. "Your grandmother was a hell of a woman. I fell in love with her in Brooklyn before the war. Sent her about a thousand letters and she answered each and every one of them. We fit. You know what that's like, boy? To be exactly made for each other?"

"No," you have to admit, you have no idea.

He leans back into his seat, folds his hands in his lap, closes his eyes and smiles. "She was a beautiful woman."

At seventeen, you had towered over your grandmother. You took a walk together down Fourth Avenue three summers ago. She said the neighborhood had gone bad, that she only felt secure with you on her arm. She was so tiny, that little grandmother of yours.

As you walked, her spotted arm in the crook of yours, stories poured from her the way you'd never known. Her voice was rich with her history, with her love of the past. She called your father Jakie, cooed at her memories of his first birthday, cried when she spoke of his graduation, laughed at the idea of his weddings.

You reached the beach. She pointed to Ellis Island, said, "Back when the world had dreams, where we're standing right now was beautiful. I was four when I stood over on that Island, and it was magic." She looked at you. "Have a dream, Patrick, or you'll never do anything."

And you hugged her, tight, so she squeezed back.

"Welcome to the land of flamingos," Grandfather says at the border of Georgia and Florida. "Welcome to golf and the color pink."

"You don't like Florida?" You never thought about an old person not liking Florida. You thought it was some kind of Eden for them: a hard life rewarded, convenience and ease for the rest of their days, however long that may

be.

"Don't like anything fake, boy. I don't got any respect for places with no past. Past makes a people, boy. It gives them a future. Without that, you ain't got crap."

His navy talk. It used to make your mother mad. He gets this way when he's offended. Like the time your father refused to fast on Yom Kippur and your grandfather got red and hot, screamed, "You'll probably piss on my grave, you ass." All you remember wishing about that day was that your grandfather would just give up. After all, you did nothing your father did either.

"I didn't know," you say at an intersection and turn and look at a generation lost. "I really didn't." You are starting to cry. "I'm sorry," you mumble.

"Choke back them tears, Patrick, a man don't cry when the cards are down."

You think of your Aunt Flo and Uncle Murray down in Del Ray playing golf and taking walks with nothing interesting to say. You think of how the seasons never change, how your father won't call, that you won't visit.

You remember Brooklyn, that babyshit brown Buick, their pathetic brownstone and their plastic seat coverings. And suddenly, you believe in something; suddenly, you believe in the burning of your grandfather's heart, in love, all of it.

"I'm taking him back," you scream to your father over a bad connection at some Floridian gas station.

"What?"

"We're coming home."

"What for? Del Ray Beach is perfect for him. We agreed."

"He just wants Brooklyn back, he wants to go home."

"He's seventy-five years old, for crissake, what does he know?"

"More than you."

"This is some whim of yours, Patrick. This is part of your 'revolution,' turning on your father."

"Like you did?"

There is silence. On the phone booth, soft rain starts to fall.

"Anyway," you say, "I'm not asking, I'm just telling. He's going home."

The slam of the phone echoes in the small booth, in your heart. You are proud for reasons that are not your own.

Your grandfather is sleeping in the front seat. He won't wake until the middle of Georgia, to the lights of I-95 shining him home.

Celeste Perri

Cold Springs Harbor, NY

Maureen Ackerman

The Shoe Shine Girl

Approximately ten-thousand steps are needed, by my patent leather clad feet, to take me home. I know because I counted one day when it was raining, although the water soaked through my shoes and ran down my scalp to drip away, like a miniature waterfall, from my chin. I counted, as a million drops struck a thousand puddles, Bouncing in whole form off concrete, car hoods, and the

top of my cluttered skull, they did their best to bludgeon away my thoughts.

But that was a long time ago. Today the earth is thirsty, even though puddles still sit from when it had its last drink. It is a shiny winter's day, a day that shouldn't be. The sun sits high in the sky, edgy and alone. Reflecting off the grey town, it makes everything gleam like steal. Trapped in the hungry gears of this machine. I push through the oak double doors of the school building, only to become the sane traveler in a desert of rusted junk. Even the puddles are two parts oil to each one water and, reflecting back the grimacing sun, confirm my suspicions. There to lubricate my surroundings, keep the system running smoothly. They intend to coat me so that I will go down easy.

I pull my foot from the murky psychedelic darkness of an oil puddle and take step number one. I will walk slow today, maybe take eleven thousand steps, because I do not want to go home. I live there. I have nowhere else to go. But I do not want to walk in my door, climb my creaking stairs, yell, "Hello? Anyone home?" to a tomb. I know mom is at work, because she is always at work, and I know Ally is home because she's always home in the afternoon. Sometimes she goes out at night, all night. I hear her putting down her keys and kicking her shoes across the room, to a dead thud against the wall that borders my room, these nights. This afternoon, though, I will have to knock on Ally's door, because she never answers me, and then she will probably still not answer me. She will most likely be sitting where she always is, in her chair by the window, watching the cars go by. Some days she goes to school, but these are fewer and fewer as she has gotten weaker. She is my older sister, and I love her, but ever since Halloween I've felt, when I look into her eyes, I see nothing at all. A void maybe, or scrubbed stainless steal indentation, where a person once was.

Halloween was the day it rained hard. That morning, while I buckled my newly purchased, thrift shop chic, but still shiny-like-new, patent leather shoes, I heard her in the bathroom. It was the most sickening thing I'd ever heard, because she was throwing up and crying at the same time. It was as though she were retching up not just vomit and bile but her very soul, ripping it away as though she couldn't handle it anymore. My stomach curled in on itself, and I swore I'd help her, give her back whatever it was she was missing. I slunk back to my room and sat, hugging my knees, till I had to leave for school. Ally didn't go that day. She said, "I'm sick can't you see? I have a stomach virus," but she didn't. I knew, because I'd been awake since 5:30, listening to her tear open packages. Ding Dongs, Cape Cod Potato Chips, cookies and Duncan Hines Rich Vanilla Frosting, rip, tear, crunch, swallow. She consumed and consumed, trying to get it all down, as though it was poison, or maybe bitter medicine. Doesn't one feel just the same when taking both of them anyway? I had listened in amazement, frozen with curiosity and terror. I didn't think I understood, but from something, lost in the back of my head, I knew I did. In the morning, all the stuff I used to make my lunches was gone, and Ally had a "stomach virus."

I knew she had become really thin, but I thought that it was normal. I thought she looked glamorous in her now baggy clothes. She moved like a swan, her regal cheekbones making her seem a million years older than me, instead of three. She would sit at the dinner table,

continued from p. 20
pushing her food around her plate with long, color tipped fingers, looking celestial yet brittle- the perfect mix of woman and girl. Sometimes, in the months before I understood, I would close the door to my room and look in the mirror, thinking about why nobody could ever tell we were sisters. I would hold the full flesh from my thighs or upper arms in my hand, willing it not to exist. I would pull my t-shirt around me and wish my waist was small and tight, that my baby fat could be sloughed away. My seventh grade breasts on my ninth grade self did not even deserve an evaluation, so sickened was I by them. I wondered if I would ever look like she did, like the models in her magazines, or if I would remain a different species, whole in my alienation.

And then I heard her that morning in the bathroom, and that afternoon I took out a pair of safety scissors and cut holes in all her magazines, cut the "waifs" into hundreds of pieces. Then I pasted all their bony body parts, in all the wrong places, on a piece of construction paper. What a sick and twisted creature I created, although I wonder if I actually created it, or perhaps just showed what it really was. I wanted to reach out, or at least make her realize that someone loved her, just for who she was. Oh well, she never cared what I thought before, she didn't care now, I thought. But I tried anyway. At first it was hard to talk to her about it. Then, it was easy. Then, it was nagging. Then, yelling. She wouldn't listen, couldn't listen, and Mom just worked, worked, worked. Mom would threaten, take her to psychologists, beg her to eat. But she's never around and can't even look Ally in the face. Me and her never knew our real father. We had a stepfather that I called Dad and Ally called "Rick," but he died when I was ten and she was thirteen. Ally hated him. Mom took us to visit his tombstone once. Ally spit on his grave.

The months since Halloween have gone by slowly. Ally went to three psychologists. They told her she had a problem. Big help. She has a lot of problems. She sits hunched like an old woman in her chair all day. She has little marks on the insides of her arms and stares at me like she can't even see me. I asked a girl in my school what marks like that mean. I drew them with a red pen on my arm to show her. She said, "Heroin, Claire. Keeps you thin...." I felt so sick that day. At dinner Mom frowned when she saw the art on my arm, but bit her lip instead of saying anything.

As I have been thinking, clearing this all through my mind, I have taken many steps, all the while listening to the grinding noise of the gears at work as the machine waits for rain (or is it blood?). My house is just a block from here, but I use baby steps to make it further. I am scared today, more scared than I have been before. This is because as I was leaving today Ally did something very strange.

I yelled dutifully, "Hey, Al, are you coming?" even though I knew she hadn't the strength to go to school even if she wanted to.

She yelled back, "No, of course I'm not coming. I'm sick, Brat, and you just woke me up." She calls me "Brat" just to be spiteful, because she knows it makes me feel small.

"Bye," I yelled back, like I always do, and grabbed my backpack to head out the door.

"Wait, Claire, don't go yet. Come here," she yelled sharply, her voice changing completely. It sounded like

warm socks after walking home in the rain, like bells and candy corns, and I dropped my bag and ran up the stairs to see what she needed.

She sat up in bed, and as she did so, her nightgown slipped down over her bony shoulder. Beneath the thin material I could see her ribs protruding above her sharply concave stomach. I stared and sucked in my breath. I couldn't help it; it had been a while since I had really looked at her. She smiled at me, looking like her old self for a moment. Reaching over, she let her long, skinny fingers tuck a piece of hair behind my ear and gazed at me sadly for a moment. "Goodbye," she said, and then rolled over and closed her eyes. A normal thing to say to someone you won't be seeing for a couple of hours, I thought, but why had it sounded so distant, so final?

I made myself walk out after that, down the stairs and into the street. One foot after the other. Mettle on metal. All day I watched the clock. I thought about the way she'd been acting the past couple of days. How she had seemed so strange, even for her. Peaceful, broken, dead. I thought of how I could not see even the tiniest spark of light in her eyes, where before a wicked fire had burned. And she looked like death when I left her, smelled like it, or at least its happy lover. What would I find waiting for me at home?

I can't make my steps any smaller and my destination approaches. I look up at Ally's window and see the curtains are drawn tight. My heart sinks a little in my chest. I turn the knob and pass through my doorway, calling an edgy, high pitched "Hello! Anyone home?" and cross into the kitchen, picking up a cookie. "Ally- you home?" I yell again, as loud as my lungs will let me. It is inappropriate to yell like that in a silent house, but I could not care less. I start to pray, even though I didn't believe in God. Please let her be ok. I'll do anything if only she's ok, I think. I'll spend everyday just trying to help her.

I start to blubber and shut myself up. I wish Mom was home. I hate her for this, and I hate Ally worse. I get up and start to walk towards the stairs. I count. Eighteen steps to the base of them from the kitchen. I picture razors, needles, vomit, and blood. Sixteen stairs to climb. I picture Ally in her rocker, eyes watching TV, then with eyes glazed - watching nothing. I knock on her door. "Ally? You in there?" I shriek. Nothing. With all the anger I feel at Ally for putting me through this, at Mom for always looking away, and at the world for tearing to shreds everything that's too soft to withstand its triple-edged blades, I kick in the door.

Ally is lying on the bed, not moving, eyes closed. I run over and stare down at her, then call out. I can't see her chest moving up and down, and my own heart feels weak. Then, out of nowhere, a bony hand appears to swipe at me. I grunt and jump back as Ally withdraws her claw.

"Leave me alone, Brat. I'm sleeping," she hisses. I'm so happy to hear her vice I start to cry - big shaking, gulping sobs. She ignores me, then rolls her eyes and pulls the covers up over her head. I walk out of her room and to my own, feeling hot droplets of relief and sadness collect at my chin. One solitary drop makes it far enough to actually fall away and land on the toe of my worn patent leather shoe. Then, the rest dry up, and I pretend that they were never there to begin with.

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Eastchester High School
Mr. Richard Leonard



Angela Kariotis
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The Politics of Tea

I have never celebrated the first arrival of summer with lemonade. I have never stood in the kitchen and milked the last drop of cool juice out of every lemon until their hollowed, concave bodies, looking like thick, yellow egg shells still damp and dripping with golden yolk, littered the kitchen counter. For I have been taught to combat fire and ice.

When the day is hot and the air bubbles out through its own pores, my mother makes tea. She puts the kettle of water on the stove and waits by the burner's blue flame until the kettle whistles steam out between its round, metal lips. From this heat she makes tea. The tea is hot enough to burn water stains off bathroom faucets, hot enough to peel off images from the television screen, hot enough to curl the letters off the pages of books. My mother believes that fire should be combated with even greater fire until everything is so hot and all the molecules are so excited that everything melts into one. Bad luck melts into good luck. The past melts into the present until everything is so blurred that you can only look towards the future.

Today, on the hottest day of the season, the sun stands tall and fat and round at its zenith. The air conditioning is broken, and since everyone in my family has left to go visit Uncle Wu and perhaps sneak a peek at his new computer, I am left alone and in charge of the apartment. I boldly walk through the empty rooms with nothing on but my bra and a pair of cut-off jeans. And since my mother isn't home, I turn on all three of our electric fans and point them all in my direction. And even though I know that I'm

wasting electricity, I stand tall and happy in front of the three whirling blades. Arms held up towards the ceiling, legs pulled opened in a V-shape towards the floor, I image myself to be one of those white sails stretched across Chinese fishing boats like the ones I saw yesterday in my World Cultures textbook. Then, I transform myself into a ninja or a martial arts expert like Mr. Miagi in the *Karate Kid* or Bruce Lee or the various other karate heroes featured in Saturday matinees shown on channel 57. I karate chop the air fighting through the heat with ninja throwing stars and numchucks. Now, I am an exotic, mysterious woman from the pages of the *Joy Luck Club*. I am beautiful with slightly slanted eyes and Western bridged nose. I am beautiful with my body small enough to fit into your hand and my skin white and smooth as silk. Come close enough and I can whisper in your ear, in my soft and slightly accented voice, the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the secret to making Kung Pow Chicken.

The electric fans are spinning at top speed now. And I realize that somehow on such a hot day I have caught a chill. I turn off the fans and I prepare to make tea.

When the Red Guards came to search grandmother's house, when mother was still a little girl crying from the smarting of her lost tooth, grandmother took spring tea leaves, soaked them in cold water, and rubbed mother's gums until she quieted, until the pain left her little red mouth, until the Red Guards left the house. When grandmother packed the children onto that boat that night and sailed off quietly to Taiwan, she told mother how warm it would be in Taiwan, how they didn't need all the clothing they left behind. She told her how in Taiwan the air was warm, the rain was warm, how the soil was so warm that ginseng roots grew so big that they could make five pots of tea from one brown root.

Years later, instead of the heavy sweetness of coffee or the bitter blackness of English tea, my mother taught my brother and I how to drink green tea. She taught us that drinking tea is not like drinking soda or water. First, we must examine the leaves checking for discoloration and throwing those out (for discolored leaves are useless and bittered the taste). Then, we must breath in its vapor letting the steam finger through our body and filtering away bad memories, melting all thoughts into an even stillness. And only then, when all this was completed, could we sip in the tea.

There are so many kinds: spring tea, ginseng tea, green tea. Mother keeps them stored in her cupboards in between jars of dried shitake mushrooms and packages of preserved black beans. They come in tall, tin canisters with green and red landscapes painted on the lids; they come in round containers of copper and plastic; they come in paper boxes with yellow lettering.

I open Lucky Brand tea and peel back the plastic coating and take out a pinch of tea leaves. In China, political prisoner #4170 picked these leaves when they were still young and rich with taste. She took them into her fingers and twisted them off one by one. #36-78 took what she had given him and spread them across the drying beds and pressed the green juice from between their fibers and drained the life out of each cell until they were limp enough to dry. #1650 waited and watched until it was his turn to pick up the pieces and begin his task. He took handfuls of dried leaves, careful not to crush or discolor them, and let them slide between his fingers into a plastic

container and pumped out the air, vacuum drying the tea in.

I examine the tea leaves at the bottom of my mug. They are small and thin. They are small and curled as the spines of women working knee deep in rice patties with their ankles wrinkling, their bones slowly dissolving in the muddy water. They are small and curled as the spines of fetuses might curl in their mothers' womb quietly waiting for the moment to unwrap and break into life. I examine the leaves for discoloration. At the corner of each leaf, I think I see words scribble out by their preparers:

"Tomorrow meet by boiler room, be prepared"
 "They shall never silence me; I will never forget"
 "Mother, I am still alive"

I imagine the tea leaves to be the lost pages of the history of my people. I imagine the tea leaves to be like messages stuffed into glass bottles and thrown out to sea.

I add water. And the boiling liquid swirls the leaves into a whirlpool in my cup. The tea leaves unwrap and break open. Taking in the water, their dried bodies are now fat and alive. I take a sip and let the hot vapors burn down my throat.

Amy Hsin
 North Penn HS
 Dr. K. Walsh

Does God Have a Bedtime?

As I listen to the last lingering words of Mr. Butram, to the closing of leather-backed Bibles, to the shuffling of papers as people flip through their song books looking for #24 in the blue book: "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand," I catch a glimpse of a little girl in thick black pigtails, a blue sailor dress with a red collar and sash, and white socks pulled up to her knees.

Her body is limp with sleep as her father begins to lift her up from his legs, which all little girls use as portable pillows. And for a moment I saw myself being lifted up by my own father, so many years ago in the same exact church, on the same exact pew...

I was a rather obedient child in church in those days; from example I learned that it didn't pay to "cut up." Whenever a child did choose to squiggle too much, or whisper to a neighboring child, or try to drink the Communion grape juice, there was always the infamous bathroom where many a child learned: if they can not sit still in church, then they shall not sit at all. With scorched bottoms they would come walking rigidly out of the bathroom and up the aisle as the preacher would ask, "Can I get an Amen?" And the congregation would chime back in unison "Amen."

And although I only made one trip to the bathroom with my mother, I knew the feeling of having the whole congregation say "Amen" to the fact that you had just got a whoopin'.

Those early Sundays at church, though, are filled with fond memories: singing songs, cutting out paper Jesuses, memorizing memory verses and the books of the Bible in the hope that you would be the one this week to win the little Bible pencil sharpeners, or the pink erasers with "Jesus Loves You" on them, or the little plastic baggies filled with treats; I still remember going to Congregational dinners where all the children would go through the dessert line first, or running to find Mr. Morgan

after the service because he always had a couple of packs of Juicy Fruit in his aging hands for the children of the congregation.

In those days God seemed always a steady friend, a charm that slipped easily into my pocket — a wonderfully graying, bearded man with a jolly smile and inviting arms, who protected me from Satan and his army. I used to pray every night thanking God and asking him to watch over every relative I could remember from my parents to my cousins who lived in Pennsylvania; I used to ask him if I could be the special helper the next day in Mrs. Yartivz's second grade class; I used to ask him every Christmas if I could win the Nickelodeon Toys 'R' Us Sweepstakes and I told him if I won, then my parents wouldn't have to buy me any toys for Christmas.

And do you know what? Relatives died, and I was only special helper twice all year in Mrs. Yartivz's second grade class, and I never won the Nickelodeon Toys 'R' Us Sweepstakes.

For a time I thought I must have been praying too late for God and that he had fallen asleep before my prayers had reached him. I had always thought my bedtime too early, especially for a big girl who could ride a two-wheeler all the way around the block by herself. But, "Man! God's bedtime must be earlier than mine," I thought, and I felt I was in good company among the slumbering.

Ever since then my life seems more confused, more complicated and sometimes I wish I still had that bedtime. There are nights when I'm studying for a test, or slaving over a math problem, or writing a paper and I feel this tug on my soul. Have you ever felt someone slip away, and you tug and pull to try to bring them back, but the harder you pull the faster they drift? Sometimes I think that is God tugging and those are the times that that jolly old protector seems so far away.

When I reach in my pocket, my charm is gone, and when service is over I'm too old to get gum from Mr. Morgan, and when there are Congregational dinners, I have too much homework to do and can't stay. There are no more memory verses, no more prizes, no more paper Jesuses to cut out along the dotted line.

I always wondered why God got a bad rep in society. Now I know: we all grow up and everything else seems more important than that steady friend, and we get too big for those trips to the bathroom, and we go to bed way past eight o'clock still thinking God goes to bed early, and we don't bother to pray because we believe our slumbering Creator won't hear our prayers.

But through this: through growing up, and in the church, and away, I have found perspective — I need God, slumbering or not; I need my protector, my counselor, my redeemer.

Well, God, it is 9:48 p.m. and if you are still awake I ask you to help me find my charm; I promise not to lose it this time; help me find my way back to that jolly smile and those inviting arms.

And, oh, yeah, the Nickelodeon Toys 'R' Us Sweepstakes is coming up soon. How about putting in a good word for me?

Christina Patricia Pepper
 Henrietta, New York
 Rush-Henrietta HS

Resurrection

Once upon a time in the middle of winter, when the flakes of snow were falling like feathers from the sky, a Queen sat at a window sewing, and the frame of the window was made of black ebony. And whilst she was sewing and looking out of the window at the snow, she pricked her finger with the needle, and three drops of blood fell upon the snow. And the red looked so beautiful on the white snow that she thought to herself: "If only I had a child as white as snow..."

My aunt Sis was 15 when she went to the women's hospital in New Jersey to have her first child, a son she did not want. She didn't know how to get pregnant and that's why she did. Her father Papa Joe wanted to take her to New York City for an illegal abortion, but her mother Tina was Catholic and knew a forced marriage to Paul Hooker, a high school senior who worked in a gas station, would bring less embarrassment to the family. Papa Joe sang at her wedding, and Grandma Tina cried. Sis was married in a dress from the cover of *Brides*, the little bride smiling only in pictures from "Our Wedding" photo album hidden in Papa Joe's living room. No one else wants it. The baby was named Robert but called Bunky, and Bunky, Sis's son, named Papa Joe.

"...and as red as blood..."

My mother tells me Paul Hooker was O.K. until he realized what money was. I guess this is why he quit pumping gas and also when the marriage blood stopped pumping. Its heart was the children's child Bunky.

"...and as black as the wood of my window frame."

After the divorce, Bunky lived in South Carolina with Hooker, as we began to call him. Sis didn't have any money for a child. Bunky visited our little house in Vienna one Christmas, wearing a full combat suit of camouflage. He and my brother Dylan scaled the ledge of bricks joining the blue tile of kiln-fired and still unsanded, ceramic-textured paneling around the picture window to the three-foot brick base beneath the window, giving not just the window but the house weight. They shuffled sideways, protruding little-boy painless ankle spurs clicking silently together as they crept. I watched through the window and astounded minutes later from the porch as they crept by, clutching first white windowframe and then nothing as hands flattened on the window. They were mimes trapped in invisible boxes, animals caught in a headlight's glare moving slowly back and forth in the window's glassy-eyed reflection. They were guerrilla fighters, Bunky in the right outfit but Dylan in a cowboy suit of jeans and buck-toothed smile and the smell of a little boy's spit. They were New York City window washers on a wide-screen T.V.

They called her Snow White, and when she was born, the Queen died.

I look like Papa Joe's mother. My father remembers being three years old one Sunday dinner and climbing on a chair to drop a washer in a bowl of pudding to see what would happen when Grandma Tina's father ate it. The grandfather broke his tooth and died soon after, though not from the broken tooth or from shock his grandson's cold-blooded science experiment inspired. Grandmother Tina's father was the last grandparent my father knew. He didn't know there was a grandmother still

alive through his childhood and even during his marriage until Sis called in 1978 to say she was dead. Papa Joe and Sis went shopping and bought a flowered sofa dress to bury her in, size small because she was tiny, a loveseat. She lived in a mental hospital for forty years, beloved unknown grandmother, identified as beloved mother of six and simply grandmother of three in the obituary.

A marvelous breakdown, then a doll in a bed and in a flowering dress. From her last glance back to her life and after she was Blanche DuBois on the arm of a kindly doctor. Depending on the kindness of strangers, the children were split up, one lived in Wisconsin with cousins and never seen again until 1958. Boy Joe stayed with neighbors and watched his father come home from work through another house's window. The Great Depression—no money and too many children, floors to scrub on his mother's knees. Her own depression leading to some state we can only imagine; Papa Joe is reticent. It was enough for a state hospital bed for forty years and weekly visits from sad son Joe, except for the year he had cancer. Bleeding from the mouth collapsed on the fake brick linoleum in the front hall at home under 438 Jersey Street stained glass window and the blue Virgin Mary figurine who has been rotting for twenty years from her feet, her encaustic paint covered termite scars. As she was eaten, she looks lighter and ready to be clenched by dove beaks and flown away. My father failed third grade, but Grandma Tina was an English teacher who could pull strings for promotion. That was the year Papa Joe's baby black hair fell out and grew white. When he finally came home from the hospital to march in the 4th of July parade, Sis screamed because he looked different. I think he bought hair dye so his mother wouldn't be scared when he came to see her.

But Snow White was growing up, and grew more and more beautiful; and when she was seven years old she was as beautiful as the day, and more beautiful than the Queen herself.

When Grandma Tina died, President Reagan sent Papa Joe a letter of appreciation for her service in World War II, the document the family of veterans always get. Papa Joe put the letter on his bookshelf next to his favorite pictures. Grandma Tina was a model after high school, but her mother made the photographer burn all the pictures when she found out they were for an underwear advertisement. On the bookshelf, there is a picture of her holding her Marine hat and smiling. She is beautiful and alien. No one looks like her.

And a young boar just then came running by, so the woodsman stabbed it, and he cut out its lung and liver and took them to the Queen as proof that the child was dead. The cook had to salt them, and the wicked Queen ate them, and thought she had eaten the lung and liver of Snow White.

Christopher, the little brother, died at 23 of cirrhosis of the liver. Papa Joe and Grandma Tina came home from Atlantic City and found him on the couch, passed out for days and barely breathing. A year earlier his doctor told Christopher he would die if he didn't stop drinking. Christopher wanted to be like the relative in the family story who chose to live forty years in a chicken coop on someone else's farm. That man did nothing but live,

stretch and simmer with chickens. Existential errands worked for my family's philosophy degrees, but Christopher chose to drink on his couch, vomiting on the red tapestry throw cover. On the other side of the wall, in the front hall, Virgin Mary spread her arms and fingers like treading water. Christopher was separated from Virgin Mary's brick tiles by a wall and from chicken coop dreams by Papa Joe and Grandma Tina, who wanted him to want a job. If not a job, at least a driver's license.

She ran as long as her feet would go until it was almost evening; then she saw a little cottage and went into it to rest herself. Everything in the cottage was small, but neater and cleaner than can be told. There was a table on which was a cover, and seven little plates, and on each plate a little spoon; moreover, there were seven little knives and forks, and seven little mugs. Against the wall stood seven little beds side by side, and covered with snow-white counterpanes.

Grandma Tina was a Marine, ocean blue because her job was office work, typing labels and on the biggest monster typewriters and pleating letters for envelopes until her fingers felt ridged by changing stiff paper topography and burned by friction from the tabletop's plastic. She flunked (high heeled) boot camp because she just couldn't learn how to reassemble a gun after she took it apart, much less give it that final commando shove until it clicks with a switchblade chomp, like closing an umbrella fiercely, Marine-style. Grandma Tina's first task at boot camp was to sweep the floor, shocking the entire corps with her inability to wield a broom. Someone else was always there to sweep and assemble guns. Grandma Tina took care of her mother, who was permanently bedridden after falling off a horse, not into a bed but onto the ground. After her funeral ten years later, Grandma Tina, the enlisted woman, rented the house out, and when she returned with Papa Joe after the war, all the furniture was gone, stolen by renters leaving clean floors.

But when the seventh looked in his bed, he saw Snow White lying there asleep. He called the others, who came running. They cried out in amazement, went to their seven little candles, and held them over Snow White. "Heavens above!" they cried. "Heavens above! What a beautiful child!" They were so delighted they didn't wake her but let her go on sleeping in the little bed. The seventh dwarf slept with his comrades, an hour with each one, and then the night was over.

We are walking in Georgetown on Christmas Eve. Papa Joe shuffles, the right leg seems shorter this year. We pivot through the iron and thin glass Safeway door of a going-out-of-business store selling \$20 prayer candles to la madre Mary for riches or fertility or luck that cost \$2.50 in the Puerto Rican grocery store and Courtney Love clothes, and art cards. Reggae music smoothes the store and makes us circle a few extra times. Papa Joe is convinced we are listening to reggie music, as if Archie's pal Reggie is hitting the drums and singing sandpaper sweet. I am thinking about hopelessly uncool Archie and his gang, their suffocating soda shop and strange Jughead, his Beat black turtleneck and bongo—Jughead Kerouac. Jughead played a trick, a hair shaft, on vain Reggie in one comic book story. Replacing Reggie's shampoo with blond hair dye, Jughead lurked in school halls until Reggie emerged from the locker room, his head

flaming dandelion wine. Jughead's belly laugh infuriated smooth Reggie, and a quick glance into a mirror confirmed Reg was now the fairest one of all. Jughead sprinted, bandy legs evasive, until he reached the swimming pool. Reggie pushed him in but fell too, and when Principal Witherbee appeared, the chlorine had eaten the dye, leached it out, assuaging the situation as easily as dropping Snow White's coffin. Reggie was Jughead's wicked queen, vain enough for four locker mirrors, forming a rectangular prism held by magnets to steel gray lockers. The locker, though institutional Archie, had possibilities. If painted black, easily done while the principal ate lunch in his office, Reggie's mirrors and the locker would be closer to the same color. Black holds all colors together, while a mirror throws them all out, but both know colors intimately and reflect the knowledge, heavy with sadness of knowing. Papa Joe asks me if I like reggie music. He asks me twice, and when I tell him what I think, he repeats the answer three times. It's superb! The woman working there has dull purple lipstick that wrinkles when she hears Papa Joe's stage whispered administration of her blue-gold dye job.

Papa Joe use to own a little novelty store in Harrison called Scarborough Fair. When I cleaned his basement out two years ago, a whole corner of unsold merchandise spilled into my bag. Rolling paper for pot rice paper thin and of colored design, Japanese psychedelic origami paper. Dog clothing waiting for personalization of vinyl letters soldered by a tee-shirt press, ocean gleaming a few colors, without help from Exxon Valdez spills of oil rainbows. The shirts were unmourning sky with white bric-a-brac trim around collar and sleeves that fall almost to paws of the small dogs. He made me some for my stuffed animal, Fluffy. I can't remember what most of the shirts said, but they were all pro-dog. Dawg, they say in New Jersey. "Puppy love" was one, and the most appropriate. On a trip to Boston Fluffy got lost, maybe left in a diner or gas station. My mother called the catalog that was Fluffy's mother or father and ordered a Fluffy. "No!" I shrieked, listening to her ask for a Fluffy. "That's my name for him! The catalog calls him 'Plush Pet.'" Fluffy's brother came in the mail, but didn't belong to me until I gave him lost Fluffy's tee-shirts. Luckily, neither Fluffy looked odd in "Puppy Love" because Plush Pet was actually a dog, (albeit a strange one,) and less androgynous than the name Plush Pet suggested because of his sad eyes. Maybe he was sad because he was named Plush Pet. A vicious circle. Fluffy was Doggus Erectus, meaning he was engineered genetically to stand upright, if he hadn't been born with that unfortunate genetic disorder of having stuffing instead of muscle, bone, and fat. He couldn't possibly be a real dog because his arms were much too short. He had his own coat, though, a parka made of oak-tree brown, polyester, nonflammable plush like the rest of his fur originally was (hence the catalog name.) Fluffy is dog-eared now, his thighs permanently creased from sitting up, leaning against pillows. I pet his coat to remember Fluffy when he was new. Plush Pet didn't mind wearing a coat made of dog fur, but it reminded Fluffy of Nazi skin lampshades so he kept his coat in my sock drawer, breathing in the light of glow-in-the-dark shoelaces.

The dwarfs said: If you will keep house for us, and do the cooking and make the beds and sew and wash, and knit,

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and keep everything neat and clean, you can stay with us and you'll want for nothing.

The papa with snow white hair visits on Christmas, Easter and the 4th of July. The real Snow White scrubs the floor for seven dwarfs, but this season our Snow White has seven little men on his roof, Santa Claus and elves, lit up and flashing light around the green house with rooted Astroturf porch on Jersey Street in Harrison, New Jersey. At home.

So she stayed and kept the house in order, and in the morning they went off to the mountains to look for silver and gold, and in the evening they came home again and dinner had to be ready.

Papa Joe found a job for Christopher after his graduation from Heroin High, the fitting nickname for Harrison High, where he went after Saint Peter's Prep kicked him out, probably the same year the Catholic Church decided Christopher wasn't a saint. The job was in construction, the most destructive experience for tragically fragile Christopher. He quit after the first lunch break, when the other workers made fun of his bag lunch, because Papa Joe packed his lunch and didn't understand manly construction workers don't carry lunches in shining creased Macy's shopping bags.

They lifted her up, and when they saw she was laced too tightly, they cut the lace. She breathed just a little, and then little by little she came to life.

The hospital where Sis works is five blocks across the bridge away from Georgetown, where jeeps designed for wilderness-wreaking and mud spinning slam potholes, where women sufficiently touched by Micholob golden gods drive home drunk and, crying, are chained to mailboxes by police officers. Sis works in public relations.

Joe is gone, has wandered away from me sitting on a couch and reading when my aunt finally comes down to the lobby where we have been waiting. She wants to know where he is and I remember her stories of embarrassment when Papa Joe would get up to sing show tunes at any event with a microphone. P.T.A. meetings I imagine, and Girl Scout cookie distribution night maybe, and weddings. My uncle on the other side is the president of another hospital and when his father, my grandfather on the other side, comes in for cardiac rehab he always wears his oldest clothes, navy blue and grease work pants worn thin at the knees fixing cars for thirty years and flannel shirts with elbow patches and a thick machine-knitted but now muddy orange hat. His clothes could inspire a new line at Urban Outfitters in Georgetown and from the back he looks just like the boys at my suburban school who want to work at gas stations and be in bands. My grandfather tells every hospital worker he meets that he's the president's father. They don't know he's an engineer who went to the Navel Academy and was in charge of a ship in the Cuban Missile Crisis and lived next door to Tennessee Williams in Key West. Tennessee Williams was a big jerk, he tells me, a man who stayed up all night drinkin' booze and smokin' Cuban cigars and typin' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof on a manual typewriter that made a racket every time he started a new line, workin' with the window open and keepin' the baby (my mother) up all night. That jerk went swimmin' all day with hid friends; he didn't have to work like the rest of us. I had to keep Bunky away from Tennessee Williams' crowd, my grandmother adds, I don't

think Bunky knew the man was gay and I wanted to keep him, laughing before she offers me hav'n'havf, Bostonian for half-and-half, for my tea. Anyone can have a heart attack, a retired Navel officer from Mississippi or a retired gas station attendant from Mississippi, as long as they drink plenty of Boston hav'n'havf and down platefuls of double-yolk eggs from Delaware. My uncle gave him a sweat suit, sixty dollars from Lord & Taylor; gray with blue stripes down the sides and matched seams. The pants even had zippers at the ankles, so he could take them off but keep shoes on if he wanted to. They were too long, though, so my grandmother hacked a few inches off with some old probably rusty at the edges steel scissors that don't meet together flush but have a Grand Canyon gap even when squeezed together hard. When my grandfather showed up in cardia rehab the first week of the new year, ready to walk the treadmill with dripping heart monitors and slipping beltless old pants, my uncle was disappointed. The new pants were too short to wear now because my grandmother forgot they'd shrink when dried in a hot desert of Kenya Kenmore dryer and couldn't be returned anyway, with the zippers gone.

When we find Papa Joe he's looking at ties of hollow silver plaiting the tree's bows and weighing branches of a hospital Christmas. Silver is warm White, Blanche DuBois' gingerbread breath. He's impressed with the tree, and the presents underneath. He's hoping some are for his daughter. She's glad he's not bothering patients or singing over the hospital paging system.

And again she made her way over the seven mountains to the house of the seven dwarfs, knocked at the door and said: "Pretty things for sale! For Sale!" Snow White looked out and said: "Go away. I can't let anyone in." "You can look, can't you?" said the old woman, taking out the poisoned comb and holding it up. The child liked it so well that she forgot everything else and opened the door. After they agreed on the price, the old woman said: "Now I'll give your hair a proper combing." Suspecting nothing, poor Snow White stood still for the old woman, but no sooner had the comb touched her hair than the poison took effect and she fell into a dead faint.

Papa Joe, my father's father, has white white hair that was black black, what my grandmother, my mother's mother, called the stove polish black of her maiden aunts, who showed up for Sunday dinner in Boston sixty-five years ago. On that moist fall night, my grandmother waited for them outside alone, kicked fallen leaves into a wide gutter until they settled, sodden, on asphalt. She bent from the shoulder blades, arms dead weight like Cro Magnon man. Her hands were pendulums as they clapped, moving out and falling in so easily in thin air above her feet. She was an owl stretching wings, ready to fly. Her talons brushed the wool of her aunt's winter coats. The three aunts surrounded her, and the gutter pond floated four owls, she the only one without the soft feathers of overfull breasts, faces fog and hair sweet black oil. In the house, my grandmother's hair was brown again, but the aunt's heads were still in the gutter pond, collective black from dead leaves. Each hair shaft candle was dipped and emerged, dripping black wax as hot as the stove. Disney calls it raven, and the brothers Grimm call it ebony, Snow White's black hair. Papa Joe stopped dying about five years ago. He may have shaved his head and been Baby Joe so there wasn't a white/black

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root line, or maybe he went with a punk look, hair bisexual if follicle sexuality is black and white. The miraculous transition from Grecian formula devote to Blanche DuBois white wood was a surprise. He showed up for Easter resurrected that year, all traces of sin dissolved, which is not as easy as combing away the gray in just five minutes with dye that creeps along skin like leeches and smells like gasoline.

Then she went to a secret room that no one else knew about and made a very poisonous apple. It looked so nice outside, white with red cheeks, that anyone who saw it would want it; but anyone who ate even the tiniest bite would die. When the apple was ready, she stained her face and disguised herself as a peasant woman. And again she made her way across the seven mountains to the house of the seven dwarfs. She knocked at the door and Snow White put her head out the window. "I can't let anyone in," she said. "The seven dwarfs won't let me." "It doesn't matter," said the peasant woman. "I only want to get rid of these apples. Here. I'll make you a present of one."

Papa Joe likes to make apple pie, Sarah Lee style. We bought his favorite on Christmas Special. Taking it out of the oven, I didn't know the pie tin was so weak. Holding crimped edges on either side, on points close to opposites, there was no support from underneath. The pie broke along its diameter. It crumbled and spilled its guts out, bleeding apples falling through the crack between the oven door and broiler and even on our eggshell rough kitchen linoleum with the slow beat of sliding tears.

When the dwarfs came home at nightfall, they found Snow White lying on the floor. No breath came out of her mouth and she was really dead. They lifted her up, looked to see if they could find anything poisonous, unlaced her, combed her hair, washed her in water and wine, but nothing helped; the dear child was dead, and dead she remained.

Andrew moved to Athens with Sis studying for her Master's degree, either before they got married or after. Sis missed sorority life by ten years and a baby instead of S.A.T.'s. New Jersey girls don't join sororities anyway, and they hated the South. She says resident undiscovered icons R.E.M. was a band of derelicts; Michael Snipe Tennessee Williams reborn in Georgia. They were married by Grandma Tina's funeral. Bunky was 12 years old and wouldn't take a shower and wouldn't take a shower, until Andrew stripped him and threw him into the steam motel room standup shower. If Bunky had a friend, Hansel or even Gretel, it would have been the witch in the oven, but Bunky was alone and naked. Sent to the showers, Bunky was in the wrong line from the first step off the train into Auschwitz. Andrew likes to talk to people on his Williams College degree, but Bunky only chewed his rat tail, the hairstyle anathema of Cape Cod summer people. Two years after the shower scene, Sis sent Bunky a plane ticket. Hooker's new wife didn't like Bunky around the new baby. Andrew had a system of notebooks and an assignment calendar for Bunky's desk. Bunky networked well. Within a week, he was in a skateboard-stealing ring. Big money; \$60 just for wheels. Sis and Andrew found out he was drinking when the maid's vacuum showed under his bed clinked against a bottle of \$3.79 wine from

Safeway. They thought it was hysterical—the only other aficionado of cheap wine they thought they knew was Papa Joe. Bunky, high from huffing white-out, hot-wired a BMW; it was just luck that the owner drove by him with his second car carphone poised to dial 911. When Sis called Papa Joe a few days later, Bunky was sleeping on Christopher's long-empty couch. Papa Joe wasn't the man who dressed Bunky in army clothes or sent him to live with Andrew, wanting to bathe Bunky 12 years too late.

They laid her on a bier, and all seven sat down beside it and mourned, and they wept for three whole days. Then they were going to bury her, but she still looked fresh and alive, and she still had her beautiful red cheeks. "We can't lower her into the black earth," they said, and they had a coffin made out of glass, so that she could be seen from all sides, and they put her into it and wrote her name in gold letters on the coffin, adding that she was a king's daughter.

Bunky visited us two Christmases ago. He wears glasses over his sad Fluffy eyes, so they are double glass, bulletproof, and attends community college in Florida. He drinks a lot of beer, saying that since he's 21 now drinking's O.K. We try to talk to each other but all we can talk about is CD's. He owns 200. Bunky is nervous around everyone but Papa Joe, who fixes him a Bloody Mary with plenty of vodka. Sis gave us a plaque with the Alcoholics Anonymous mantra printed on it that Christmas. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. My mother hates to be reminded that my father and her children share the genes of addiction, brain cells as open to suggestion of mind-altering substance as obese people's fat cell are open to cake and Ben and Jerry's. We are born with a static amount of fat cells. It's whether you fill them or not that counts.

Then they put the coffin on the hilltop, and one of them always stayed there to guard it. And the birds came and wept for Snow White, first an owl, then a raven, and then a dove.

It took thirty minutes to clean up the spoiled apple pie. I had to wash every shallow pan we keep in the broiler because we don't use it for cooking. There is a canyon between the oven door and the broiler abyss when the oven door is opened like a Murphy bed. The door's beveled angle doesn't meet the angle of the oven's floor—if they did meet when open, the door would be impossible to close. Every edge to this oven is curved with the melted subtlety of an old refrigerator that doesn't work too well anymore, maternally holding warm milk and an empty egg drawer. Kittens like to sleep in front of refrigerators because the electrical humming purr and ironic warmth emanating from the bottom vent is really their mother. You can't tell them different.

I washed the floor last. Using paper towels for broom and dustpan, I picked up the apples by pushing them into a pile with the side of my hand mittened in a paper towel and scraping another towel across the floor, picking them up with a reverse bulldozer. The collected apples had touched oven surface on their journey to the floor, so they were coated in the flaking charcoal of food drips transformed into dried lava. I forked the apples to a

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plate and set them on our deck as the squirrels' Christmas present—only the best for our squirrels, our carbon alar best.

And now the king's son had it carried away by his servants on their shoulders. And it happened that they stumbled over a tree-stump, and with the shock the poisonous piece of apple which Snow White had bitten came out of her throat. And before long she opened her eyes, lifted up the lid of the coffin, sat up, and was once more alive.

Bunky's drug counselor has a theory that Grandma Tina's mother was an addict. A morphine or beautiful beladonna addition would explain her bedridden life; strange one, considering she wasn't paralyzed in the fall from the horse. Grandma Tina never talked about the bed years, but speculations about Jersey Street's opium den will be passed down. Even if there's no truth to it, it would be in keeping with the family's remarkable susceptibility to drug addiction. No one is susceptible to recovery. After everything, though, the truth is only southern families with French names die out. Strong stock from New Jersey survive and rise, the paragon of a good forest fire. We run from flames through the trees; another liver is sacrificed; we are survivors.

Esther James
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen



Angela Kariotis
Irvington, NJ

DAD'S PLACE

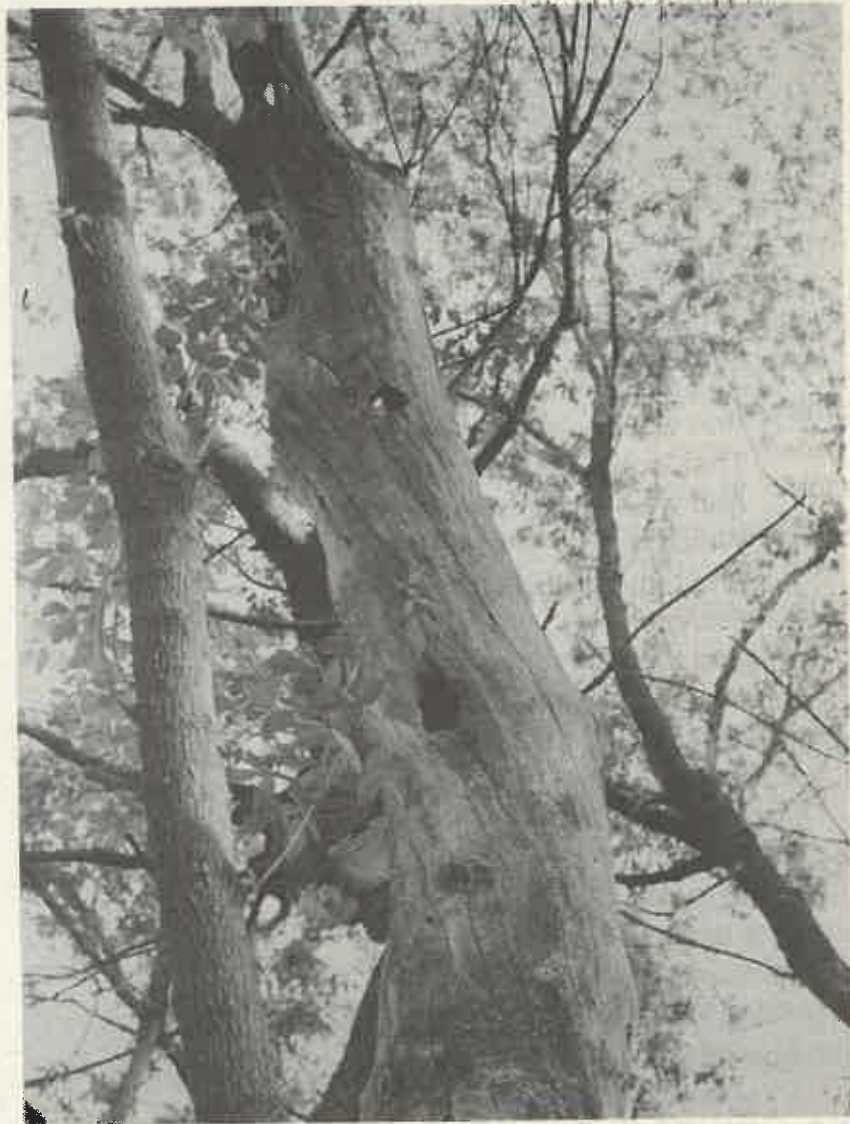
I'm not a big steak eater
Red meat
Cholesterol
But Dad brings me to Brooklyn
To the two story brown building
With sauce as red as blood
And whipped cream
Fluffier than clouds
And waiters with German lisps
And wooden walls with knotholes
That look like beady black eyes
And we order steak for two
Which is really steak for five
And tomatoes and onions
Perfect circles on the white plate
And the starched white linen cloth
Touches the sturdy chairs
And the spoons clang like bells
As they lift the steak to my plate
And fat drops saturate the immaculate cloth
And I cut through the soft red meat
To taste the richness
But it doesn't stop there
They bring pies and schlog
And strawberries cold to the touch
And we sip, and chew, and laugh
Until the waiter with the stained apron
And the sweaty brow
Brings out the chocolates wrapped in gold foil
And places the plastic bag of leftovers next to Mom
And we get up
Our stomachs heavy
And pass the wall of famous faces
Back out to the barren parking lot
And over the bridge back home.

Maggie Murphy
South Orange, NJ
Harriet Marcus

MEDITATION ON TIME

Out with it all
My black box full of trinkets I never got
The triangle I never learned to play.
Like Morgan Street
it's time for reconstruction,
Maybe a fast lane.
No red lights this time around.
When a year changes
everything must go.
It's a liquidation of my life:
All must be sold
by midnight of December 31
and restocked
by the first dawn of January.

Lucilla D'Agostino
Hampton, NJ
Voorhees H.S.
Mrs. Lois Harrod



Mary McNealy
Somerville, NJ

Eyes Still Open

I take my dog out every night before I go to bed, usually around ten o'clock. It's not my favorite thing in the world to do, but it's better than taking her out in the morning when I'm half asleep; that's my mother's job. Gidget is my dog. We got her when I was twelve, and I swore that I'd always be the only one to take care of her. Naturally, that didn't last. Now my mom and I share Gidget's affections, although I tend to think she favors my mom. It often makes me jealous.

My dog is really smart. I know she's smart because she always looks me in the eyes, and I can tell what she's thinking. Not all dogs do that. It makes me feel like we have a link, a connection all our own. That's how I know she has a soul, because I can see it in her eyes.

It was a night like any other night. I turned off the television and walked up the stairs. Gidget doesn't even need me to call her. She hears the rattle of her leash and she comes running. But I called her anyway, softly, like I always do. As usual, she was so excited to go out that she could barely keep still long enough for me to clip her leash on. This just added to my moodiness. I knew it was cold out, and I didn't have any shoes on, and Gidget always seems to take a long time just when I want to go inside and go to bed.

I opened the door and turned on the stoop light. I was right. It was cold, even for early November. Gidget ran out and I stood on the stoop, thankful I had an expandable leash so that I wouldn't have to walk far. The night was clear, with a crisp, biting breeze, which made me even more impatient. Gidget seemed uneasy, picking her head up every once in a while to look around. I thought maybe there was another dog around. My dog

and I have something in common; we're both equally skittish. Gidget is usually afraid of other dogs, and it makes me nervous that she can't defend herself. Once, in a park, we were attacked by two Siberian Huskies whose owner was nowhere to be seen. When he showed up, he said they just wanted to "play." So you can imagine how I felt, cold, tired, nervous, and in a hurry to get inside and go to bed. Gidget took her time.

I was just about ready to go in and tell my mother that Gidget wouldn't go, expecting the usual answer—that I hadn't kept her out long enough. This would be followed by my usual "Well, if you know so much about it, why don't you take her out?" Unless I was feeling really cruel, which I wasn't, this would eventually end up with me taking her out again, and her going right away, of course. Suddenly, Gidget's head sprang up, her eyes freezing in one position. That's usually the signal for me to run inside, dragging her behind me, in fear of the Saint Bernard around the corner, or maybe the stray Golden Retriever up the block, or even Ginger across the street. As I turned my head in that direction, I saw something in the road out of the corner of my eye. Immediately I looked away. I didn't know what this thing was or what it was doing. All I knew was that it was huge, and my heart skipped a beat as I thought, "That's some big dog!" and got ready to charge inside.

But something made me stop, something I couldn't control—my logic. It told me that I was being ridiculous, and anyway if I'd seen something dangerous I had time to look for one second before running. I did, and I didn't run.

It was a buck. I knew when I saw his antlers. As I looked back he lifted his head, and our eyes locked. His eyes were big and black and shining, standing out on his oak-colored face. He stood erect, head held high, on the pavement in the dim glow of the street lamp, and it was one of the most beautiful sights I ever saw. I couldn't move. Even Gidget was held transfixed. My heart was beating fast with a mixture of fear and excitement. A thought came and went that I could stomp my foot just to see him run, but I didn't; I just stood and stared. About seven seconds passed; they seemed like seven hours. Then finally he turned and trotted casually up the street, not as if he were scared, but just as if he had had enough, and I heard his heels clicking on the pavement. My eyes followed him, and I looked after him for a few moments, still in awe. Then came realization, and joy—I had to tell someone.

I ran inside. I didn't have to drag Gidget because she was just as excited as I was. I was up the stairs two at a time as soon as I had clipped off her leash, repeating "Oh my God!" just to set the tone. Upstairs my mother yelled "What?" and I ran into her room. She and my father were in bed.

"You'll never guess what I just saw!" I said, panting hard.

Naturally her answer was "A deer," and she said it with pride, as if she had guessed the answer. But she hadn't, because I knew that what I had seen was better than a plain old deer, better than ten deer. When I told them my story, I knew I was right. My father's face lit up with happiness and shock, and almost envy. My mother was kind enough to note that the house my dad had been working on for hunting in the Catskills with my godfather hadn't invited any deer. Meanwhile here, closer to the

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city, we had the nine does my parents had seen in the yard one morning, and my buck, the best one of all. I was glad, and it overcame the pity I felt for my father.

I come from an Italian family. A few nights later we had polenta with stew. My mother makes her stew with veal, sausage, and, when we're lucky enough to have it, venison. We did have it, leftover in the freezer from my godfather's hunting expeditions of last year. I didn't eat it. The dark pieces of meat were easy to pick out. It wasn't that I couldn't eat it; I just didn't want to. I didn't even leave the stray pieces on my plate and pretend I didn't see them, the way I used to do. And my mother didn't tease me and tell me which pieces were venison. She had heard my story.

A couple of weeks later my dad brought home a deer, a doe. My mother and I drove into the driveway that morning and noticed he was home from his hunting trip. I saw the gate to the back fence was open, and I knew he had been lucky. When I was little he always used to hang his deer from the back porch, and I would go and see it, and squirm and squeal, and we would laugh. We still laugh; I don't mind that he likes to hunt. But I never kill spiders that crawl across the rug unless I'm alone in the house, and even then I sometimes just keep my eyes on them. And so I didn't go down and see the dead deer this year, though I often had the urge to. Somehow I couldn't. I stopped myself because I knew that I would envision that deer alive and healthy, eyes intent. And I knew that her eyes would still be open.

Danielle Pieratti
New City, NY
Clarkstown High School North

TUESDAY NIGHT

We stood with our cold-shocked fingers round the holes in the fence, staring through it like POWs behind barbed wire.

On the other side lay the factory almost demolished, the one with the broken greenish glass and brick splattered with white spray-paint swastikas, the one I dreamed of making an artists' barn, the one my father and I used to jokingly call "ours."

Now we watched it in mid-crumble and shivered, he in jeans and VFW jacket, I in stockings and dress and ratty cardigan. Our hair blew. We stayed silent awhile, listening to the cars honk on the street. Finally my father spoke. There's not much left, he said. I echoed him: no, not much. The arched windows cried out please. The blue-black city sky loomed like a bruise in bloom above our heads.

Jenn Crowell
Jacobus, PA
Dallastown Area H.S.
Mrs. Anne Kostas

Flipsides

Watching you walk
Back, forth rocking
Left, right tipping
Makes me seasick.
Your homey strut
Self-induced limp.
Crackin' your knucks
Threatnin' shadows
Invisible
Adversaries.
Tryin' to speak
Spanish accents
Rolling your R's
Like a parrot.
"Baduy pinoy,"
You wish you were
A chicano
In East L.A.
Color clashin'
Gang bangin' guns.
Flips who know you
See a leper
"Tus muchachos"
Smiling watch you,
A comedy
In progress.

Ronald Ignacio
Colonia, NJ
C.A. Kiyak

A FRECKLE

She reached down towards my face, attempting speech. I saw a freckle on her chin, perhaps a mark, or blemish darkly staining skin. "Your sister..." she stammered trembling words.

I failed to listen, turning sharp my head away, though still I saw the freckle—black and soft, protruding grossly, hugely, yet I couldn't stare, that was so rude, besides, her lips were moving again—"Oh..., poor child..."

Was it a freckle? Was it a disease?
A cancer, yes! attacking deep inside.
Perhaps a battle, cell against lone cell,
and bone beneath skin awaiting defeat.

Now change. A spider, thinly squashed appeared. A murder had occurred, one pleasant day, a blackened mark the consequential scar of evening crawl halted too abrupt. Her voice again disturbed my haunted thoughts. "An end so cruelly..." "No! It wasn't true! I wouldn't listen to the words of death.

Mairi Beautyman
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
John Ziliak

"..." from Tenafly

"Have you seen the hot air balloon in MacArthur Park yet?" Mrs. Lansing asked me curiously.

"No. But my mother's taking me this afternoon."

"It's enormous. I certainly would never go up in one of those things. I like to think you wouldn't either, Anat," she warned me. I was silent, and after a few seconds she turned her head to look at me for the first time. "Anat? You're not the volunteer they got from the grammar school, are you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lansing."

"And your mother's letting you go up there? I'm shocked, Anat, really shocked. I should have thought your mother could exercise better judgment than that," she offered sharply.

"Well, they said it was safer than a car. And my mother's judgment is fine," I declared gently.

"And now she's corrupting you, too, you poor dear. I knew something like this would happen when she showed up in our building all alone but for a baby. I'll say this for her, she's certainly proud. Never would she accept any of my help in raising you! She wouldn't hear a word of it. And me, lonely in my old apartment! But did she ever send you over to visit me? Not a once!" my neighbor lamented.

"But I always visit you, Mrs. Lansing. I'm visiting you now."

"But did your mother send you?" she demanded.

"Well, no," I admitted.

"There you are!" she shouted triumphantly. I was not surprised. Mrs. Lansing is always right.

I stared out into the sun. Under the tree in the courtyard between the apartment buildings I had once found a whole ring of keys, green with rusty brass. That was the day I had first met Mrs. Lansing. I wasn't a baby at all, with five years of life experience to my name at the time. The first week in the summertime after we moved into the apartment, I was playing outside with a Rubik's cube that had been lying in the downstairs lobby. The keys blended in with the grass, but I spotted them because the Rubik's cube fell down and clattered with them.

I scooped them up and shook the ring, which held at least seven or eight keys. Excitedly I ran inside to my mother and held up the treasure I had discovered.

"Well, look what you have!" she exclaimed. Setting down the dishes she had been unpacking, she held her arms out to me and enveloped me in her embrace. "You know, we should really see whose these are."

"What if we can't find the people?"

"We may have to take them to the lost and found at the police station."

My eyes widened. I had never heard tell of a lost and found before, other than in my kindergarten class. I longed to bring the keys over and see the lost and found. I made a wish that we would not find the owners of the keys.

"Go outside, honey. See if anyone belongs to these." She sent me into the courtyard, and I dragged my feet slowly on the tile stairs from the second floor to the lobby. Once in the garden, the sun beat down on me again. My eyes, accustomed to the darkness, took a moment to focus.

Down in the grass by the slender oak tree were a boy of my age and his old grandmother. The grandmother

was standing against the rough trunk full of caterpillars and gypsy moths, but she did not notice me because her eyes were intent on the shaded crab grass. The boy knelt in the patch of shadow, his fingers deftly sifting through the green blades and clover.

I knew they were searching for the keys, yet I could not bring myself to give them up so soon. Gone was my dream of proudly offering the green and golden ring of charms to the blue-hatted police behind the lost and found desk, disappeared my hope of answering their questions helpfully and happily. I crouched, hidden in the dark doorway from the view of the calm couple under the tree.

Suddenly, the boy sprang up. "Look what I found, grandma! A Rubik's cube!"

"Oh, lovely, darling."

In my haste I had forgotten the rainbow box in the grass. I strode towards them, ready to recover my toy.

"Oh, grandma. The girl has our keys," the boy cried joyously.

"Thank you so much dear," the woman told me. "Come here, come on over. Now however did you come upon those, I wonder? What a clever little girl you are. What's your name, dear?"

"Anat."

"Annette? What a pretty name your parents chose for you," she crowed.

"Anat," I repeated timidly, unsure of whether I should even speak to her, since she was a stranger.

"I see. Well, Anat, then. Go on, Kenny," she said, turning to her grandson, "Open on up the door so we can go inside. Would you care to join us for a snack, Anat?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, then, I'll come over and visit you later. You must be the new family in number 43, aren't you?"

I nodded.

"I'm Mrs. Lansing. I'll certainly be seeing you again later. Kenny and I live just over there," she told me pointing to a ground floor apartment on the southern side of the building, the one with a little garden outside the window where yellow tiger lilies grew.

They walked away waving with the keys and the Rubik's cube. I watched them enter through the tan-colored door and disappear.

Kenny has since moved to live with his father in Claremont. I rarely see him anymore, although we were once good friends. Like so much else that I had great hopes in, he faded from Tenafly too early to take on the character of our town.

"Excuse me, young lady, could you tell me where Mountain Street is?"

I inched away from the car that had pulled up by the sidewalk. "The first right turn at the red fire hydrant," I said.

"Thank you so much. What's your name, now?"

"Anat," I answered, backing up into the enormous pillowy policeman standing watch over the block. Relieved, I turned my head back to look at the man in the shiny brown car.

"Anat? Thank you. I'm going to name my first daughter after you," he promised as he sped away.

I wondered if he would stand by his word. Of course I would never know, nor did I care to be commemorated in appreciation of some simple directions I had given. I turned gratefully back to the police officer who balanced precariously on a broken meter and a patch of

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mud. Ignoring my smile, he muttered, "Little girl like you shouldn't be talking to strangers."

"Oh...I'm sorry," I apologized diffidently.

"Don't be sorry, don't do it," he replied, attempting again to burst the meter open.

I continued my walk home from school in dejection. Although my mother constantly warned me about strangers, I could never quite bring myself to brush them off rudely as my elders suggested; I hated to hurt anyone's feelings without justification.

Upon my arrival at our apartment, the mailman was in the process of jamming several letters and circulars into our mailbox in the lobby.

"Well, Miss Ben-Or, here's a letter for you," he chuckled. Louis the mailman handed me a thick, lumpy envelope.

"Thank you," I said. I received the mail from Louis' outstretched arm and ran up the clay-style stairs to the second floor. Even though I was already eight years old, I was not allowed to ride the elevator by myself.

Once safely inside, I picked up the telephone to call my mother at work at town hall. She was the employment offices administrator, always busy with resident of Tenafly. She picked up her special telephone after four rings.

"Hello, Tenafly employment offices. How may I help you?"

"Hi, Mom"

"Oh, hello, Anat." Her voice changed immediately in quality, as voices do when they are talking to another person. I think that people tend to acquire the flavor of someone else's voice almost right away. The certain pitch of a laugh, an accent on certain words in a sentence, the way of pronouncing consonants with a softer or lisping or harsher tone...these are stored in a memory bank and are taken out selectively to communicate with one person or another. The people who have the most ease talking with others are the people who can most easily take on the speech of someone else, and then quickly discard it.

I never considered my mother one of those people, only because I knew her and could forgive her anything. Whenever I noticed the tendency in myself to speak like a friend or elder, I would quickly alter it. Only around someone unconnected to the person I was copying would I unconsciously take on the aspects of their speech to which I was most attracted.

"Mom?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Can I go to the library and get a book to read?"

"Do you have to go today, Anat? I'd really prefer you to wait until the weekend when I'm home," she told me.

"Oh, but please, Mom? I don't have anything to read and it's starting to rain outside." It was doing nothing of the kind, but I said it all the same just to strengthen my case. "You let me go by myself when you're home. It's only three blocks away. It's closer than school!"

"School's different, Anat. All right, let me think about it."

"Have you thought yet?"

"No, Anat."

"Please?"

"No, No, you may not go, Anat. Go visit one of your friends."

"They're all busy."

"Visit Mrs. Lansing." See, my mother did tell me to

go visit her once.

All the same, after I had hung up from the phone call with my mother, I locked the door and headed out for the library. Although I did not expect my mother home before I returned, I left a note for her on the table just in case she came. She could be angry with me, but at least she would not worry, or so I thought.

I held my library card in one hand and skipped down the stairs. I reached the lobby, then the courtyard, then the sidewalk. I turned left after Hawes Street and headed for the Tenafly Public Library.

It took me seven minutes to get to the library. The weather was pleasant, although decidedly overcast, so I took my time meandering through the neighbors' gardens and past the little fish pond. The library was a white building with wooden shingles and a home-like front porch. Most of the houses in Tenafly's residential neighborhood looked like the library; our own quarter of town held more modern brick apartment buildings, which I preferred.

I entered the library quietly. Although never known to cause a problem for the librarians, I didn't want to take any changes with being disruptive, especially on a day when I wasn't even supposed to be there. The librarian smiled at me when I pushed open the light wooden-frame door. She recognized me, undoubtedly, from the many times I had visited her place of work, but I am not sure of whether she knew my name. I certainly did not know hers, although she had commented on my choice of books every time I checked one out. She knew all sorts of interesting things about books. The librarian was of medium height, a little plump, about the same age as my mother. I know this from thinking back to it, but what I noticed about her when I saw her was quite different. Her striking feature was her hair. It was as black as ebony, like Snow White's hair, and fell all down her back and shoulders in round, haphazard curls. At one point in the day it must have been gathered into a bun at the back of her head, but I never saw it in its original state. There was, to be sure, a large circle tied up with a ribbon, usually fallen to the nape of her neck, and innumerable black bobby pins stuck in at crazy angles. But most of the hair sprang out of its confines and around her face, framing her smooth and ivory skin.

Her eyes were black, also, or nearly so. They were always outlined with black eyeshadow, on the rim of her eyelids, underneath on the fragile lashes, and above on the bold eyebrows. I could never help but stare into her eyes whenever I spoke to her. I think she preferred it that way, though, or else why would she take so much trouble just to have people notice her eyes?

I had not yet told the librarian that her job was the one I aspired to hold some day. I was much too embarrassed. But there was no doubt in my mind that someday I, too, would sit in a house full of books, all different kinds, from floor to ceiling, and have read every one of them and be able to tell everyone which ones were good and which were not of any use to read. This was the most romantic and wonderful job I could possibly think of.

I continued into the library, making my way slowly to the section with children's books. Sitting down on one of the soft couches, I leaned backwards, stretching my feet out and pointing my toes. After a moment of resting in this fashion, I decided to select a book. My card only permitted me to borrow four at a time, so it was always a difficult decision. Finally, I had made my choices. Three

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of my books were fiction, and one a biography of Enrico Fermi which had been rebound in a bright but ugly orange cover. After about thirty minutes, I began to grow nervous about my mother returning home, so I walked to the desk with my books and my library card.

"Good afternoon," the librarian greeted me, without much enthusiasm.

"Hi."

"And what do you have here?"

"Oh, just some things to read."

She held up one of the books I had selected. "Are you reading this one for school?" she asked me.

"Oh! No, just for fun, I guess."

Her face brightened. "Wonderful. This is a great book...used to be one of my favorites, you know," she explained.

"Did you really like it, then?" I could not think of anything to say that might be of interest to her.

"Oh, yes. Be sure you come back and tell me how it was. Here you go." She put my books in a stack with the cardboard card on the top.

"Thank you," I said.

"No problem."

I paused at the door to wave. "Bye," I said.

The librarian looked up from her desk. "Good-bye, now."

Surprisingly, after I had emerged from the well-lit library, the sky was dusky gray. It was only four o'clock in the afternoon, but clouds blocked the yellow sunlight from making its way to Tenafly. I grew nervous. What if my mother had come home early because of the impending storm? Or worse...if she called Mrs. Lansing to go check up on me, and I wasn't there, everyone would be frantic. Mrs. Lansing would never see my note, because she's blind.

I began to walk briskly, then after a moment to run towards my house. I bypassed all the normal routes I liked to take and ran straight through the backyards of my worst enemies at school. When I arrived at the apartment, there was a light on inside. A sense of dread grew inside me. Maybe there were search parties being sent out for me at that very moment—not unfeasible as an order from my very protective mother.

I ran up the stairs frantically, arrived home, and swung open the door with all my strength.

Right there, in the middle of our living room, stood a great big man with my mother's jewelry box in his hands.

Frozen in place, I watched as this man turned slowly towards me and gasped. His grip slipped, and the whole jewelry box crashed to the floor. My mother's necklaces, rings, and bracelets scattered over the rug, and the music box mechanism sprung out and played a few more tinny notes.

I screamed at the top of my lungs and pushed the door back closed, then ran all the way in the pouring rain to the grassy hill where the town hall stood. I bumped straight into my mother's co-worker, a perfume-smelling lady who always wore skirts and jackets that matched with each other exactly.

"Well, Anat, honey, what are you doing here?"

"There's a man in the apartment and he's- where's my mother?"

"Anat, stop mumbling. I can't understand a word you're saying."

"Please! Is my mother in the office?"

"Well, she just stepped out for a moment for the restroom. What's the problem?"

I didn't answer her; just dashed for the ladies room and yelled out my mother's name. "Mom! Where are you, Mom?"

"My heavens! Anat! What are you doing here?"

"Mom, you've got to come quick. There's a man in the apartment," I explained as calmly as I could, since I knew she could become overly excited during emergencies. The fact that I had acted the same way as I feared she would, even the extent of forgetting about the wonderful invention of the telephone, did not occur to me at the time.

The toilet flushed, and my mother came out quickly and washed her hands. Without bothering to dry them, she dragged me out to the police department. "What did he look like, Anat? What was he doing? Did he try to hurt you? Did he say anything?"

"I don't remember. He was tall. He had your jewelry box. He was scared of me."

We reached the police area, and my mother approached the front desk with me. She trapped me between her arms, squeezing me tight. "Hello," she said, calmly, to the police officer. "I'd like to report a break-in to our apartment. A tall man, a half an hour ago. My daughter walked in while he was there then ran over here."

"Address, Ms. Ben-Or?" asked Louisa, the police officer.

"687 Rangoon Plaza, number 43."

"Right. And what did the man look like?" Louisa asked, again, without much enthusiasm. It seemed to me she should have been as terrified as I was.

My mother looked down at me. "Anat? Try to tell Mrs. Clements what the man looked like, now. What color was his hair? What was he wearing?"

"I don't remember. He was just there. He was tall." I was especially short, so this detail did not impress my mother or Louisa at all.

"All right, Anat," said Louisa (I never could think of her as Mrs. Clements; she was far too young to be married, barely twenty years old; but this fact was not my problem with thinking of her as "Mrs."; rather, it was due to the fluorescent yellow bubble gum that she always chewed). She punched in the information, I supposed, on a greenish computer which probably sent a police car straight to our apartment. "Anat, we're going to look at some pictures, now, and you tell us which one looks like the man you saw in your apartment."

She led us into a tiny room with a false-wooden table and four plastic chairs. I sat down with my mother, nervous. I fully understood that my choice could determine the fate of the unlucky portrait's owner. What if I made a mistake?

When Louisa had taken out an enormous blue folder and spread out myriads of black and white and colored photographs over the table, I could not point my finger at any one of them. I recognized scores of faces that could have been the man's, but that almost certainly were not. I could not bring myself to select one of them. Jail was a terrible, almost forbidden word to me, full of awful connotations. I would never be able to send someone in that direction.

After several minutes of searching through the glossy pictures, I admitted to them that our man, as I had

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come to think of him, was not there. In fact, although I did not voice the thought, the robber who had been in my apartment had seemed to be benign, almost kind, so horrified was he at finding me there with him. If he could feel fear, and of a little child, then he must not be so awful.

"I can't choose. None of them looked like him."

"Anat, look some more," my mother urged.

I stood up. "No. He's not there."

"All alright, Ms. Ben-Or," Louisa told my mother, "Let's go over to your apartment and see what we can do for you there."

She led us out front to where a shiny blue police car was stationed. My mother held open the door and shoved me in nervously. Luckily, Louisa wasn't driving. Officer Park brought us instead. It was a short ride to begin with, less than a mile to our apartment, but because we were soaring through, it seemed to me, on wings instead of wheels, the sharp outlines of Tenafly blurred and spread the city sideways, like a circus mirror, and made it go on forever.

Finally, we squeaked to a stop at the sidewalk in front of the apartment, joining two other, much dirtier police cars. My mother threw open the door and yanked me out behind her. She had not said a word to me on the way over to the house.

I began to follow her to the door.

"Anat, don't you dare come up, now. Go straight over to Mrs. Lansing's house." (a second time she'd ordered me to visit her, I should point out).

"But, Mom, I want to see—"

"Forget it, Anat," she told me, and walked off.

I followed her quietly up the stairs. Unfortunately, one of the police officers followed me, and I was unceremoniously expelled from the building.

Back at Mrs. Lansing's apartment, there were periodic flashes of light in the windows from the police cars outside, but she didn't notice them at all of course. She was busy stirring a cauldron of tea over her gas stove.

"It's for those poor dear police officers, Anat. Think how wet they must be getting in that rain."

She didn't notice that I was dripping water from head to toe all over her nice clean kitchen floor myself, but all the same she offered me a glass of apple juice.

"No, thank you," I answered.

"Good Lord, Anat, you have to drink something!" She grabbed my arm just above the elbow in her frozen hand. "Look how thin you're getting! Doesn't your mother feed you anything?"

"Yes."

"Oh Anat," she sighed, "I just don't know what we're going to do with you."

"Oh."

"Well, come on, you may as well help me with this tea, since you're just sitting there doing nothing." She motioned to a cabinet above the sink. "Why don't you reach up there for me and get some mugs."

I stood and climbed up on the counter to open the door of the cabinet. The inside was dark and cavernous, and I could not see a thing because the light was not on in the kitchen.

"I can't see," I told her.

"Just reach in and pull out whatever you get." Mrs. Lansing never put light bulbs in her lamps at home, since she was the only one who lived there for any amount of time at all.

I stuck my hand boldly toward the back of the closet and emerged clutching a plastic leftovers container.

"Hand it over," Mrs. Lansing ordered.

"Not yet," I called down from my towering height. I searched again and this time came out with a cracked porcelain mug. There was nothing else in the cabinet. "That's all," I told her.

"What do you mean, Anat? I have hundreds more mugs in there, six at least," she protested.

I tried once again, but there were no more mugs.

"No, none else."

"Well! I always say, why keep superfluous mugs. Go ahead, Anat, get some from your apartment."

"I can't go there. My mother made me stay here." I shivered as the rain continued to pour down outside. I hated Mrs. Lansing's apartment when it was raining. It was too uninviting, and there was nothing soft to sit on, like a rug or a sofa, only her bed upstairs in the rarely-entered brown bedroom. The whole place was temporary-feeling, not like a home at all.

Suddenly, someone knocked on the door. "Go get it, Anat, will you?" Mrs. Lansing called out in my direction. I obeyed her and admitted my mother to the apartment.

"Anat, come home at once," she ordered.

"Mariam, how is everything up there?" Mrs. Lansing asked my mother.

"To tell you the truth, Lillian, it'll be all right. Thank you so much for taking care of Anat all this time." My mother seemed in a big hurry to bring me upstairs again.

"Oh, it's no problem, Mariam, no problem at all. She's a joy to have over. You should tell her to come visit me more often."

I followed my mother once again out into the cold rain. She paused a few feet before the entrance to our lobby. "Anat, I have some news for you."

I looked up at her face. Water was streaming off of it. She seemed very serious, so I did not say a word.

"Anat, I have to tell you, that robber you saw as not a real thief. It was someone we both knew a long time ago."

My stomach flew down. I knew who it was; it was my father, I was sure.

"It was your father, honey. He came back to visit us."

"My father?"

"Yes, Anat."

"Why did he come here and rob our house?"

"I don't know quite yet, honey. He's in the jail right now. They found him still in the apartment, hiding behind the couch. We're going to go see him in a few minutes."

I looked at my mother's eyes to see whether or not she was very upset. She was. I began to cry.

Immediately my mother lifted me into her arms and told me, "Don't cry Anat, everything's going to be fine." She carried me into the apartment building, all the way up the stairs, and set me down on the couch. She sat next to me, ignoring the mud and jewelry mixed on the stringy carpet.

We sat there on the couch for an hour, maybe. My mother didn't attempt to talk to me, even, nor I to her. I think you're supposed to talk to someone who's sad, but neither of us did. Finally, she spoke: "Let's go over to town hall to see your father."

Outside, one would never have known it was night.

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time because of all the light radiating from the recently-installed streetlights. Their yellow beams were obscured by the rain and suffused outwards to our shadowed faces. Walking in the semi-darkness was not nearly so bad as it might have been without those lanterns.

The town hall housed Tenafly's jail. Through the rain, the ivy-covered building looked like a vampire's mansion. The only lights visible from the street were in the West Wing, as the jail was euphemized. My mother led me straight up to the sunset side of the hall, and we stepped over the threshold into prison. It was terrifying for me. I had never before entered the underworld housed in the West Wing of Tenafly's capitol.

I gripped my mother's hand tightly. Officer Park was seated at the desk. He peered down at us. "Well, hello, Ms. Ben-Or, Anat. Come on in."

We followed at his command. The hallway brought us to a small bank of cells, not really proper prison quarters with bars or bunks. They were just rooms with cinderblock-walls and little wooden benches. In the third room on the left sat the same man I had seen earlier.

He stood as we approached. He lifted himself imperceptibly, his head straining upwards. He was visible through the open doorway. I shrank back to my mother, burrowing myself in her body. She gripped my arms tightly.

"Miriam," he said. I could already sense their awkwardness. My father looked down at me. He spoke in my direction, but his words seemed out of place. "It was for Anat that I came. I was looking for a picture of her, or something."

My mother shut her eyes gently. "I see."

"I didn't know her, you understand. You never wrote. It took years to find you."

"But that's the way we decided it." My mother's eyes were still closed and her eyelids were strange half moons, like dusky golden seashells.

"Well, it's good to change your mind once in a while."

"That was no way to do it, you know. You sure made a mess of things."

"Mariam, I realize that. How was I supposed to know Anat was going to walk in at that exact moment?" By then his face had drifted up to meet my mother's eyes. He glanced down at me again. I could never forget his face, pleading and despairing. He found no hope in my mother's primly folded eyes, and I don't know what he saw in mine.

My mother intoned my name. "Anat." She plucked my hand from my dirty pocket and tugged me away. I dragged my feet, craning my neck backwards to see my father.

"Good-bye, Anat. Take care, now." That was the only thing he said to me at all. I had wanted to leave that place so badly, but now I longed to stay. I can't explain why, but I felt like I had things to say to my father. Even if he wasn't related to my mother anymore, he was still related to me.

During the moment I was pulled out of town hall, I recognized the first time my mother and I were separated. We used to share everything. Now there was something else, not common to us both. I felt immeasurably sad.

We closed the door once again and went out. It had nearly stopped raining, and Tenafly was draped with strings of pearls that were really long lines of raindrops

arranged on the large leaves on the trees. It was unfathomable to imagine them sliding slowly off the sheets of green, almost as lethargically as a flower which is opening its blossom in the morning, taking as much time to drop as it would take for them to evaporate completely. No, it would still be forever until I met my father for real, an eternity trapped in a moment. It would be another century before I became a librarian, years until my mother would bring me to the town hall again to visit her.

On the other hand, inside a mind, anything can happen in a moment. I made Mrs. Lansing see me up in the hot air balloon, and she didn't have to wait a second for that vision to penetrate her blindness. I looked down on all of Tenafly. It was a big colorful pattern, like the kind I made with my magic markers, but the design I saw was far too intricate to internalize, and too confusing to pick out Mrs. Lansing or my mother. When I saw it again after I had grown up some more, I always wondered whether it was the big picture from the air that was more important, or all the little bits and pieces you could see from the ground. Somehow, the things I saw when I was on earth were the ones I always remembered.

Liana Tuller
Wellesley, MA
Mrs. R. Frick

Twenty Shades of Blue

When my mother died, my father and I peeled her baskets from the walls, took the paperweight of pressed goldenrod from her desk, watered her plants and gave them away. Her last June breath hung over us like a peasant's wool shawl, in suspended exhale, throughout July and August. In my sleep I heard her shudder. I entered third grade that fall and sat like a stone, tears wending down my cheeks for hours. I cried through language arts and math and social studies and science, and one time I even cried through Films, which is any eight year-old's favorite subject next to recess. I sat there in the dark watching the reproductive habits of frogs being shown to me in full color, bawling softly as everyone else howled laughing. Afterwards my young-teacher-who-dressed-old, Miss Martin, marched me into the bathroom and put her hands on my shoulders, mouth set and each short, dark curl in place as she shoved a tissue into my fist, whole chest heaving beneath her ice-pink blouse, as if she felt sorry for me and wanted to let me cry except for some unspoken educator's code holding her back. She shook me a little. "Julia," she said, "you've got to stop this."

But I couldn't stop. I lost weight because I cried into my ham and cheese sandwich at lunch and couldn't eat it. They had just called the school psychologist when my father and I made up our minds to become survivors rather than mourners, turn our grief into happiness, and set out in a blue Volkswagen bus. We left in the middle of October; we packed flannel shirts, a road map, a cooler, a spirit of freedom. I took my reading textbooks with me, just to make the teachers mad because they were always so worried about getting them back with the proper ID number stamped inside and at least in fair condition when anybody left school, and on the long nights I'd read Dad the discussion questions at the end of the chapters and have him answer them, just to hear the funny answers

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he'd reply. "Too many salty pretzels," he said as to why the girl in the story argued so much. I never thought I could feel so much good pain in the pit of my stomach from laughing.

Other times we'd do interviews, taking turns being the guest and host. He played a male makeup artist; I played a female garbage collector—"Thank you for sharing your trash with us," he chortled just before our commercial break. The best times, though, were when it got cold and he'd let me put on the big olive jacket he wore when he was an aircrewman, and he'd tell me stories of the places he'd been in the Philippines, places where the street signs said "Beware of Monkeys" and you could get thrown in jail for spitting gum on the sidewalk. He'd teach me exotic, beautiful words in other languages: *amiru*, *ikebana*, *matushka*. The first meant sweet dependency, the second, flower-arranging, and the last was the best. That one meant mother in Russian.

"It's funny," he said one night, "how in songs they're always talking about being blue as if it's a bad thing. But there are more than twenty shades of blue, did you know that, Julia? Twenty different shades of grief and pain."

"Really?" I said.

"Really." His jaw tightened.

"Those stupid teachers of yours," he said. "I could kill them. Calling you a 'class disruption.'" He turned onto a new exit.

"Do we know where we're going, Daddy?" I asked.

"No," he said, and wiped his eyes roughly with the back of his hand. I leaned against the door of the bus and rubbed his nylon insignia's patches between my thumb and forefinger, realizing that I hadn't cried in weeks, wondering how close the sky was to heaven.

#

We stayed in countless motels. I loved them, loved bouncing on the starchy beds and playing with the remote control on the nightstand that swiveled, loved trying on the shower caps and trying to guess what people looked like from their names in the phone book. I kept track of our route by the labeled soaps and postcards I dropped into a plastic bag, trinkets from each town: Hanover, Salisbury, Petersburg.

Much as I adored the motels, it was impossible for me to get to sleep in them. The sheets were too hot. Doors banged. Funny noises burbled down the hall and mingled with the heater's only-tepid breath. Shoulders shaking, body curled, my father wept as I lay in my twin bed and watched the dingy curtains billow, wanting to do something to help him. What was it he had said that day when I came home with my face red and bloated, carrying the psychologist's note? What was it he told me after he tore the paper into a million tiny pieces and threw it in the trash, after he set me up on one of the kitchen's bar stools and wiped my cheeks? "You can cry all you want, my little banshee." Just knowing that I was allowed to cry had made me feel better, but banshees were women and my dad wasn't little, so I couldn't say that to him.

Sometimes when he didn't think I was awake he'd get out of bed, and pace, and stand by the window in his boxers and pull the shade back, stare at the parking lot down below. Thinking of the blue spark, the one he'd sometimes long for, he'd put a finger to his temple. Then he'd glance over at me and my open eyes, and his features would melt; he'd square himself and tighten, put on a jovial grin and saunter over to me at two a.m., brush

back a stray lock of my hair and whisper, *Let's go raid the candy machine*, and we would be hopeful and giggling again.

Jenn Crowell
Jacobus, PA
Dallastown Area High School
Anne Kostas/Sandra Moyer

Iris of Horiki

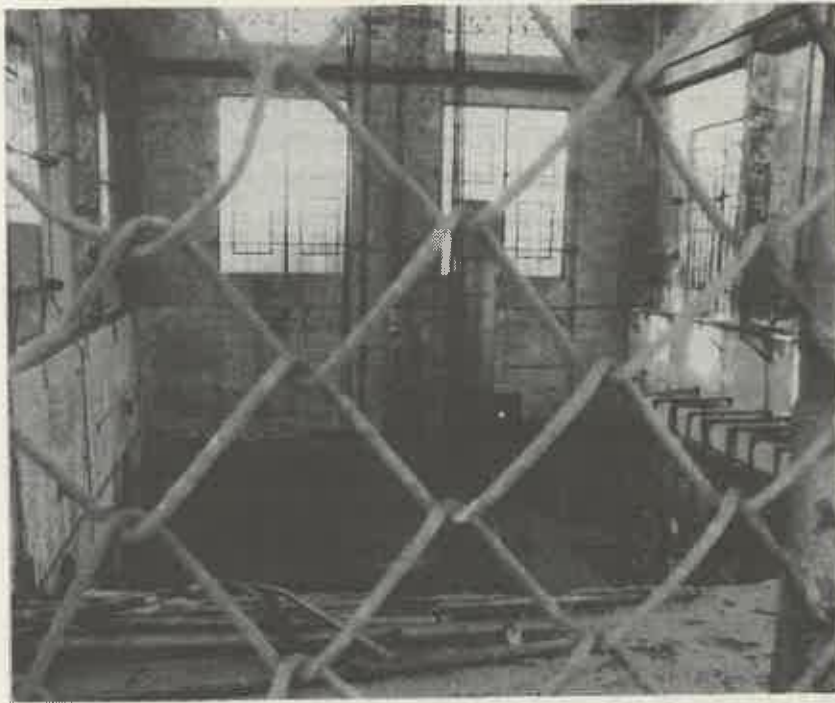
Today the iris
with its damp existence
shimmered among green life,
copper sunsets and gray clouds,
a religious fire in the sky.
The boys choir sang
words in my empty pond,
delicate droplets of warmth
sticking to my lips.
It was yesterday's honey,
the day when I ran
and he watched me tumble
among the acres of gold.
It was you, father
wondering if god was divine
if he could see me,
the nymph of this summer
pleading to my Asian flower,
feed me in you soil.

Lucilla D'Agostino
Hampton, NJ
Voorhees H.S.
Mrs. Lois Harrod

it

at 9:58 I stand outside
frozen mud crystallizing
packed hard under my boots
as I
pound the ground
clumps of earth fly
this dope falls dreaming
this smile smushed on
forgive my lips, they had it coming
eyes shut I'm gone smoldering
feeling toasty floating in circles
mumbling to a field of foreign daisies
something tipped
maybe my foot
and gravity it wakes me up
to see
my dog has left the oak and
the house far down the yard
tonight
you took me past the birdhouse
and right past the woods.

Lisa Manasar
Wappingers Falls, NY
Roy C. Ketcham H.S.
Mr. Conholly



Jennifer Jarnecke
Falmouth, VA

The Old Brown Chair

Mom was slouched across the old, beat-up brown chair, smoking a Virginia Slim. It wasn't a special day—just another Oprah-and-Soaps-and slippers day. I had just gotten home from school and grabbed a cookie from the porcelain cookie jar when I heard my mother say in her normal, sullen voice, "Kathleen, that you?"

"Yeah, Ma, I'm home."

"Good, now you can go clean your rat-infested, pig-pen of a room. It looks like a hurricane hit, ya know." This was our normal after school conversation, but my room still was not clean and probably never would be. It was my mother's greatest obsession: everything needed to be immaculate. I glanced around the kitchen and attached sunroom and saw nothing of interest. There was only designed furniture and the most expensive figurines littering the tables and countertops. Modern art was thrown all over the walls, floors and tables in different shapes and sizes. With all the colors blurring together, it made me want to scream. No one was permitted to sit anywhere in Mom's designer rooms except on special occasions and at parties. I don't think anyone wanted to sit in them though; they were all too scared they would mess up the room's refined elegance with a few wrinkles.

Except for the brown chair. The brown chair was the one place where a person could relax (when it wasn't occupied by my mother). It was placed in the far corner of the den, in the dark shadows of bright colors, modern art, and leather sofas. The chair was from 1972, the year my parents married. It was the first thing they ever bought together. I don't think that it will ever be moved; it's really the only thing that unites my whole family.

I began to walk up the back stairs to my room when I heard Mom call again, "Kathleen, I mean it this time! Sarah will not clean that—it's all I ask you to do." Her voice drowned out into a puff of smoke as I continued up to my third floor bedroom. Sarah was our maid. She cooked, cleaned, and vacuumed right around my Mom on the chair, but there was no way she would open her eyes near the terrors of my room.

I was just footsteps away from safety and privacy when Janine, my little sister, came bounding up behind me. "Kath, come play hopscotch with me."

"No, Neen, I don't feel like it today." I could see the

anger in her face almost before I finished the words. I told her that every day, but she never stopped asking.

"Fine," she said in a childish, haughty voice. "I'll play by myself and Borny will watch me." Borny was the name of her doll that came in a box saying *New Born Baby*. Janine was your average six year-old, I guess.

She stormed away, and I ran up to my room to be alone with my diary. It had been with me since I was nine, recording my crushes, my frustrations, and my secrets. My diary was where I escaped to every day after school to remember my thoughts forever. Today I had something of real interest other than the usual nothings of a blase day of gossip and tests to reveal to my book of confidentialities. Today I was going to unveil my deepest feelings about Jack, who had asked me out for Friday night. I had been waiting for that moment for months now, and all day I could think of nothing else. I was peacefully dreaming of his lovely, sculpted body when the phone rang. It was a loud and obnoxious ring to which I had no desire to respond. This blast of noise, someone else's chit-chat, was interrupting my glorious thoughts of Jack. "GET THAT!" I screamed. It rang again. And again. "SOME-BODY GET THAAAT!" It stopped ringing.

The house seemed suddenly quiet without the ringing. If it's too peaceful, my thoughts get lost, smeared together in the blur of ideas all coming together. I turned on my favorite radio station and listened to the sweet sound of The Greatful Dead. I thought of Jack and how jealous all of my friends said they were. "Sugar Magnolia" drifted through my room, and I saw Jack singing it to me, by a lake, with the trees swaying softly in the breeze. My naked feet were enveloped in the shaggy carpet, sliding back and forth while my hands slipped up and down the side of the diary. My mind was wandering, and my thoughts were flashing pictures of Jack and me at the movies, Jack in my living room, Jack in my bedroom. Without warning, a strained yell came from the den. "Kathleen, come down here!"

What Mom could want was beyond even my vivid imagination. She generally left me alone until dinner, and even then she only called me if it was one of those rare nights when Dad came home. I knew it couldn't be that. Dad was in New York again, and besides, it was only three-thirty.

I mustered up all of my energy to stand and succumb to the beckoning of my ever-nagging mother. I meandered downstairs and nearly tripped over Janine's game of Monopoly lying in the middle of the kitchen floor. "Janine! Move your stuff!" I could see my mother, still sitting in the old brown chair, with her eyes fixed on something outside the window. "What, Mom?" She sat there and didn't look at me. "What, Mom?" I whined. She whipped her head around, and I saw for the first time the harsh contrast between the pallor of her face and the fire engine red color of her dyed hair.

She looked at my shoulder as she spoke. "Grandma Kath died."

There was a period of silence, one of those silences when no one knows what to say because no one knows how to feel. Grandma was a woman of mystery in my life. I had never really known her; she lived so far away. The only time that I remember meeting her was when I was seven. I was a timid little girl meeting this woman for the first time; she was a woman who was supposed to have a great influence in my life. She came, she

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saw, she went, and that was the last that I ever saw of Grandma. She called on my birthday and sent ten dollars for my Christmas; she called on her birthday and sent pictures of her Christmas. Other than that, I knew virtually nothing of the woman who gave birth to the woman who gave birth to me. We shared a name, but nothing else. We never were a very close family, and our distance showed in how I reacted to the news.

"That's such a shame, Mom," I said without much heart. "I didn't even know that she was sick." My Mom looked away and again focused her eyes on the maple outside the baywindow. That was my cue to leave, and I followed accordingly. I thought my Mom would like to be alone to figure out how she should feel.

I now had something to think about, something else of interest to write in my diary regarding the day. Before I did that, I thought maybe I would go back in the woods to find Janine and tell her. I was walking out the back door when Mom called in a soft voice, "Kathleen, don't stay out too long, honey. I think I'll have Sarah make your favorite, lemon chicken. We can have a nice little dinner. Okay?"

I didn't bother to think. "Yeah, Ma, sounds good." I walked out the back door and saw Janine contentedly playing hopscotch on the driveway with Borny faithfully in her arms. I let her play, unwilling to enter her innocent world. I walked behind the fence surrounding our yard and escaped to the forest. It smelled of musty, dead leaves. The spring smells were almost in the air, but gray, luminous clouds still hung tightly to the sky. It was a perfect day to think about a grandmother I would never know. How could she just leave like that? Didn't she know that I really needed that ten dollars for Christmas? For a woman who didn't even know me, she had a lot of nerve to just die like that without warning. Just one little phone call, and my Mom's attitude was changed, my thoughts were shifted, and my household was thrown into an abnormal state of caring. She never disturbed us when she was alive; what business did she have to disturb the normal runnings of my house now that she was dead? I couldn't think of anything else to feel about Grandma. She meant nothing else to me. I wouldn't be back for the lemon chicken. Grandma wasn't going to have that much influence on me now. Jack was my love, and my thoughts turned to his gorgeous blue eyes as I dug deeper into the forest.

Lauren Rinaldi
Blue Bell, PA

Wissahickon High School
Barbara Speece



Jennifer Jarnecke
Falmouth, VA

Another Storm in Texas

The man in the suit on television tells us it is coming. He is calm; announces it as if he were a game-show host. But mom tapes the windows as she always does. "Why does she do that?" I ask my older brother. In all his wisdom, he has to know, I think. Zach is five. "Mom is scared," he says.

Three children trail behind her like ducklings, her voice trying to steady itself as she points towards our bathroom. "Please get in the tub again. Yes again, now go." Even at bath-time I do not like the tub. Zach has told me if I pull the plug before I get out, I might get sucked down to the place beneath the porcelain, lost in pipes forever. But now, again, the family sits together, listening to the crackling and boxing outside. Little Danny cries, Zach holds his ears, and I stare at mom, who's pale-faced, distracted, eyebrows scrunched together. She never stares back; instead she brushes her fingers through Danny's yellow hair.

Ellie Nall
Baltimore, MD
Towson H.S.
William Jones

MINING DREAMS

i have long-nap-hangover-
headaches when
i wake-up in the beginning
of long winter nights.
like a narcoleptic
hibernation
after eating Fluffy warm
rice.
spanish-yellow.
like mami's
yellow skin that's
smooth and crinkles
around her smile.

Dana Elbirt
Washington Int. School
Washington, DC
Catharine Bell

Things

Sitting in bed eating a plateful of meaningless things
6:02 fever brands my forehead.
Half an hour ago it started
during the car ride home
meaningless things fogged up the windows
and thickened the air into mushy mist
so many things to say,
nothing would come out
of such unwilling lips.
So I sit, unmoving again
meaningless things rummaging around in my head
I take a sip
the water tastes metallic in my mouth.

Anna Huh
Timonium, MD
Dulaney H.S.
Mrs. Elizabeth Fanto

Alex

There is a room in Westfield that is a certain shade of pale blue that overwhelms you with a cooling feeling of comfort. It is an enforced pacification, drilled into you with thousands of paintbrushes instead of one shot of Valium. The chairs are leather, in the same periwinkle shade that there is far too much of in this room. The nurse at the desk says this room is for waiting, and that my friends and I should take a seat. I take off my coat and sit in the chair closest to the corner. There are stacks of pamphlets and old magazines to my right, all again telling me to wait. I flip through to find a Cosmo, the September issue with the half naked blonde on the front, and I begin to browse the table of contents.

We are here for my friend Kate. She wants to go on the pill because she's screwing with her boyfriend like crazy, and he's not the most responsible person in the world. He, her boyfriend Alex, is with us. He grabs a handful of condoms at the desk before he sits down. There is no place or reason for modesty here. Everyone in this entire room is here for the exact same purpose, and once you enter through those doors, there's no need for pretenses. Kate is going in to see the doctor now, and Alex smiles at her as she goes. He really loves her, and when he had his little accident on the slopes two months ago, it became clear she was eternally devoted to him as well. They won't break up, not for the rest of high school, certainly.

I am here for a variety of reasons, none of which I am particularly proud of. I am the one who got these two crazy lovebirds together in the first place, chasing Alex's ex-girlfriend away with a stick on the band trip last year. I was the one who helped Alex stay clear of the drugs, if not the alcohol, which was messing up his life. I made Kate acceptable to my group of friends. And I'm the one who came along as a chaperon to get birth control so Kate won't find herself pregnant. I promised to drive Alex's car back, too, so they can talk in hushed tones in the backseat. Third wheel, second fiddle and still counting.

Alex is on the verge of whistling, you can tell by his wandering eyes and searching expression, as if a song were transcribed somewhere on the walls, and he was looking for it. The people in the room pay little to no attention; four are reading old Us News and World Reports or something equally boring, three smile nervously as they realize I am scoping out the row. One clutches her bag tightly. Alex takes this brief interlude of glancing upward as an excuse to start a discussion. Of course, it is about Kate.

"Did she like her Valentine's Day present?"

Of course she did Alex. You spent a small fortune on a gold band that is doubling as an engagement ring. Even without her natural affinity for sparkling metals, she was impressed. You haven't worked in a month because of that skiing injury, so you are deeply in debt to your parents for it as well. She called me up hysterically happy over it. I'm her best friend these days, so it's amazing I didn't know about the gift before you did.

"Kind of, yeah. She really loves you."

"I know."

Alex and Kate are both fairly insecure people. They constantly remind each other of their relationship and love, and sometimes I mention it when Alex seems desperate for affirmation. The whole school is aware of it, like a neon sign in the distance, shining for all to see, but only annoying those, like myself, who are forced to stare at it for hours on end. He's been sleeping with her for six months now, and the school knows that as well, but the gossip channels are used to Alex collecting people's virginites. He has seven in this strangest of all possible hobbies, and he's 'loved every last one of them.' Sure, maybe Kate and Danielle, but the others...I don't know. Maybe.

He's gone to picking lint off his jacket. He leans over my article on dealing with sexual harassment by same gender bosses and whispers "murder is red rum spelled backwards." I laugh a little, just because this place is so dreary. "Dooht nerap den nalp is planned parenthood in reverse." That does not deserve a response. He begins to tell me about Kate's beautiful personality and terrific sense of humor. I mention her best friend's keen sense of patience to stay here this long for her. He giggles or mumbles; I'm not sure which. I pretend to pay attention, but primarily read about the fall fashions. I catch snippets of conversation as a bonus.

"...she really cares about me...where I'd be without her...even my ferret likes her...can live at my house until after college...bloody china patterns or something...absolutely gorgeous...did you see Seinfeld last night?"

I look up. "Huh?"

"Just making sure you were paying attention." He went on about Kate. My horoscope says I should be open and honest on even numbered days. I look to the desk looming over on the right hand side of the room. Damn, it's the twentieth, and while he's mid sentence, I look to him and I almost tell him everything that I have inside of me. I stare into his blue eyes, slightly shaded gray, and into his confused expression. Everything from cheating at poker with him to the fact that I've been in love with him since Thanksgiving weekend Sophomore year is on the tip of my tongue. All the years waiting for him to break up with Danielle, then using Kate, whom I didn't like at that point, as his rebound relationship, and the pain of unrequited love are throttling me. The days spent in moody contemplation, the nights on the phone with him, or with my friends talking about him, art class drawing him, hours of the morning dreaming about him are all culminating into this moment. For an instant I think he understands, so he pulls back. I give a quick hug and say that I value his friendship as much as I do my R.E.M. CDs. He's impressed.

When Kate comes out, very shortly afterwards, she smiles and slides under Alex's arm. They spend the ride home practicing foreplay in the backseat. They are not wearing their seatbelts, but they don't seem to notice my horrendous driving or the tears on the back of my hand.

Siobain Duffy
South Orange, NJ
Columbia H.S.
Mr. Lasko

X is incredibly brilliant. My dad used to listen to them when I was about three or four. They were L.A.'s best punk band. He was punk too. He shopped at thrift stores and used to take me to 7-11 at all hours. He had two matching tiny European cars, one in white and one in raspberry pink. He bought them both for about five hundred dollars.

He had lots of girlfriends who wore cheap jewelry and had dyed hair. These girls, who blurred into one, used to go out drinking with my father, and kiss him and argue with him.

He was 22 when I was born, and skinny. He wore shirts from the fifties on his tall frame, when everyone else was still getting out of the seventies.

When I was four, bordering on five, he, his girlfriend Robyn, and I got into his old yellow Volvo and headed toward the Mexican border. I remember when the air had become hot that we stopped for radishes and salt at a shack stand.

We drove on and slept in the car that night. The next day my thin legs still had the small leather sandals on them. Daddy went to a convenience store, or the Mexican equivalent of one, and bought me a glider airplane made of fragile balsa wood. We tried to make the plane fly, but it dropped from the sky and broke. He bought me three others before the day was done.

He used to throw me into the air much higher I'm sure than other daddies could. The neighbors used to cringe when they'd see me blasting into the sky and laughing.

He was a thrillseeker who raced brakeless speedway motorcycles. He used to be one of the top three racers in the world, with number 22 on his back. Another one of the racers was named Bruce Penhall. Bruce was the 1980's sunshine cover boy. He guest starred on ChiPs a bunch of times and even guest starred twice on Love Boat. Bruce and my dad were the golden boys. Daddy would bring in a lot of cash on the nights after he'd won a race. The money somehow managed to leave his pockets before he could make it home by daylight.

We didn't need much money to have fun. We used to go to the park together, and we'd swing and spin on the jungle gym. Once he was spinning me on one of those non-mechanical merry-go-rounds too fast. I hit the sandy ground with a force strong enough to embed the little beige pieces in my face. I remember looking at myself in the mirror and wondering if they were going to stay there forever.

He's still in his thirties. I used to watch Thirtysomething when it was still on prime time and not yet syndicated. I used to wonder why my father was not like the characters on that show. They all had careers and wives and homes that were well on the way to being paid for. That's not Daddy.

Selina Becker
Cambridge, MA

Buckingham, Browne, and Nichols
Abigail Faux

Ace of Hearts

People are trading cards and examining their hands, all laughing and making jokes. You have effectively removed yourself from the situation, curled up in some armchair. You've already lost your shoes and vest. Your friend's already down to her bikini's, but that's just like her. The guys all have their shirts off. Another girl, sitting across from you, gives you a nervous smile. You return the smile and hope you don't look as worried as you feel... (Why didn't you wear more layers?)

"Two pair," he says, as he looks at you *hopefully*. You put your hand down, knowing you have something, but since you don't exactly know how to play poker, you're not quite sure what.

From his face, you can tell you're safe for another round. It's not that you won't do it, but it would be best if you could wait a few rounds, until the majority of the girls have, so you won't have to feel self-conscious.

But two rounds later, everyone's looking at you, and you want to kick yourself for exchanging three cards.

You slowly unbutton your shirt, but halfway down, you decide to get it over with and slip it over your head.

Everyone whistles, this one totally immature guy is staring at you, and you feel your face turn bright red. You want to cover yourself up, but you know this will appear as prudish or childish, (which is ironic considering how childish this guy is), so you don't. You make some sarcastic comment (you seem to do that a lot when you're uncomfortable), and everyone laughs.

You're relieved it's blown over. But one laugh stands out above the others. This guy, who you've been noticing all night, catches your eye and gives you a smile.

And the game goes on, the cards being reshuffled and redealt. But you're not really paying attention. You're still thinking about his laugh and his smile. He's different than other guys. You're flattered by his attention. You look at him, and he's looking at you, and you smile.

And everyone's cheering again, and another shirt comes off, but you notice that he didn't look, he's still looking at you... (it must be love.)

It wasn't so bad. Minutes later, no one even cares anymore. And now you're thinking, even though you think it may be wrong, *I wonder what he'll think of the rest of me?* And you smile at your bluntness, and he mouths "What?" And you mouth back "Nothing" and he mouths back "I'll talk to you later," and you nod.

Tomorrow you're going to have your friend teach you how to play poker and maybe pool. It's about time you learned. Maybe he plays pool, he looks like he does.

Not like you would learn to do something just because a guy did, but...

Well, maybe he could teach you how to play. Is there such a thing as strip pool? You hope not, or maybe you hope so.

Deborah E. Lintz
Westfield NJ
Westfield H.S.
Mrs. Karin Ninesling

Tobacco Dreams on a Summer Evening

The boy sat in bed listening to the old man tell stories about the old days on the farm when he was growing up. The room smelled like Mail Pouch tobacco and Matty, the old black lab, who always slept with the boy's grandfather.

"Grandson," the old man said, "I wrecked my first car when I was a young turd like you."

The boy smiled and leaned back, resting his head on the old man's belly covered by a dirty, ribbed cotton undershirt. He'd heard the story a million times before.

"Horses were more reliable than cars then," the old man said, leaning over the bed to spit a chew of tobacco into the spittoon beside the bed-stand. "And that model A was the first car my family ever owned. My pappy took me out to the garage to show me the car and put me behind the wheel to let me see what it was like. He said he would teach me how to drive it."

There was a scratch at the door.

"Get up and open the door," the old man said, "Matty will be wantin' in for the night."

The boy rolled out of bed, careful not to step in the spittoon, especially since he had socks on. It wasn't so bad if he stepped in the spittoon in bare feet, because then he could just wash the tobacco juice off in the tub without having to touch it, but if he stepped in it with socks on, the juice and little bits of tobacco would stick to the fabric, and he'd have to pull the soiled socks off and get grandpa's spit all over his hands.

The boy walked across the high-piled red carpet, all gritty with dirt and tobacco, because grandpa didn't vacuum much since grandma died two months ago. He opened the door just a crack, and the black lab stuck her snout in the door, forcing the door open the rest of the way and almost knocking the boy over.

The dog, slightly arthritic, waddled over to the boy. Her tail wagging, she spun around, licking the boy and whipping him across the forehead with her tail as he knelt down to pet her. She rolled over, he rubbed her belly, and he scratched behind her ears, because that was her second favorite spot to be petted. She liked to be petted best on that spot on her belly that made her leg go when you rubbed it.

"C'mere Matty," the old man said, slapping his hand on the side of the bed. The dog heard the old man, tail spinning in tight circles as she tried to roll up from her back onto her feet again. The boy gave the dog an extra push, and she stood up, waddling over to the bed, and placed her two front paws on the mattress. It was a routine the old man and the dog knew well.

The old man had been run over by tractors twice and by an angry heifer once. The first time he was run over, his leg got caught in the back wheel of the tractor, and it ran over him again and again until the tractor hit a fencepost and tipped over—he wasn't expected to live. The boy's father had found the old man a few hours later, lying beneath the tractor on moist red earth, cursing because he'd been so thoughtless in letting himself get run over by a tractor. The old man lost consciousness on the way to the hospital as the upholstery in the back seat was stained with blood, but after reconstructive hip surgery, two artificial knees, and a few months, he was out plowing the same field, on the same tractor.

The old man couldn't walk very well without his cane, a shepherd's staff from Scotland where the boy's

great-grandfather was born. Grandpap had outlived the artificial knees, and the doctors didn't think he should try surgery again at his age. But the old man's arms were still very strong. Years of farm work, throwing bales, milking cows, and driving fenceposts had made his fingers thick as a garden hose and his arms thicker than both the boy's legs put together. Matty whined, and the old man, still lying down, grabbed the dog's front legs with his immense hands, lined with old scars and age, and pulled the dog onto the bed like an old blanket.

Matty licked him once across the face, and the old man patted the dog on the head. The dog lay down next to the old man and curled up against his left side. The boy crawled back into bed, lay down, and rested his head on his grandpap's belly again. The dog liked to hunt, and had either spent the day digging up a ground hog or rolling in a dead animal she'd found on the side of the road, because she smelled like carrion. The window above the bed was open, and a cool night breeze blew in, fresh and sharp. It mingled with the old man smell of tobacco and the dog smell of rotten meat.

"My pap showed me how to start the car," the old man continued, "and then my ma yelled for him from the kitchen of the farmhouse; she needed him to go and get a load of wood for the stove."

The old man shifted positions because his feet had gone numb, and the boy and the dog shifted to accommodate him.

"My pap left me in the car because it wasn't in gear, and he didn't think there was any way I could put it in gear, young as I was and never having driven before. But when he went into the kitchen, he and ma got to arguing and forgot that I was in the car. My pap had told me not to touch anything, but after he was gone for a while, I started to fiddle with the steering wheel and the pedals. The gear shift was a pedal on the floor of the car back then, not a stick like it is now, and somehow I got the car in gear, and when I pushed the other pedal, the gas pedal, cause that's how my pap said you make a car go, I drove straight through the back wall of the garage. That garage was only made of thin boards and scrap wood left over from when the old barn was torn down, and as the car kept driving, I turned around to look out the back of the car. As I watched the garage collapse behind me, like a big boot had stomped on it, I ran into a tree before I could turn back around to see what I'd hit. The car stopped, and I went flying, and bumped my head a little bit. When my pap and ma heard the noise and came running up from the house, I knew I was in trouble. I thought I was going to get my hide tanned, but when my pap and ma saw me in one piece they were so happy I didn't even get scolded. My pap, though, he was in the doghouse, and after ma was done hollering at him, I think he went to bed without supper."

The old man finished his story and looked down at the dog, who was breathing quickly, whining, as her legs twitched almost like she was running somewhere. "Matty must be having bad dreams," the old man said, rubbing the dog's belly and patting her gently on the head to wake her up. "Hey girl," he said, "what's wrong? Shhh. It's all right, puppy, go back to sleep." The dog's tail thumped on the bed as she looked over at the old man with her big brown eyes. Sometimes, the boy thought, it looked like a dog was crying, but grandpap said they look that way, because they're always begging for food or attention.

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"Grandpap," the boy spoke for the first time that evening, "how do you know dogs dream?"

The old man looked over at the dog and stretched his arms, resting them behind his head. "Because dogs are just like people," he said. "They have different personalities and different feelings, just like people. And if a dog didn't have any feelings, do you think Matty would be so happy to see you come over to visit, or do you think she would get so excited when you throw her a stick to fetch?"

"What do dogs dream about, grandpap?" the boy asked.

The old man spit into the spittoon and smiled. "Same things as we do, I believe, except with other dogs instead of people."

"Does Matty dream about us?"

"I'm sure she does."

"Then it's not all other dogs in her dreams," the boy said, rolling over to look his grandpap in the eyes. Propping his elbows on the old man's chest, he rested his head in his hands.

The old man grimaced. "Boy, you have sharp elbows, just like your father."

The boy put his elbows down and rested his head on the old man's chest, listening to his heart beat. It wasn't the same beat as his dad's heart; it wasn't a steady rhythm. Sometimes it didn't beat, and sometimes it beat twice when it should have only beat once. The boy couldn't tell when each beat was coming like he could with his father. "Grandpap," he asked, "why do dogs have bad dreams?"

"I don't know," the old man said, running his fingers through the boy's hair, "maybe because scary things happen to them, just like scary things happen to you and me."

"But grandpap," the boy protested, "you're not afraid of anything."

The old man sighed, "Matty has lots to be scared of, think about it. She cries and cries and cries when we leave her in the house alone."

"But that's just because she's a silly old baby," the boy said, giving the dog a little shove with his fist. "Besides, she has to know that we'll always come back."

"Maybe she doesn't," the old man said, leaning over to spit into the spittoon. He reached over to the bed-stand to get another chew, but the pouch of tobacco was empty. "Grandson, get up and fetch me another poke of tobacco. It's on your grandma's dresser, next to her old hair brush."

The boy got up and walked over to the dresser. The old man still hadn't emptied his wife's dresser, and everything was exactly how she had left it on the night before she died. The boy always felt strange touching his grandma's dresser; it didn't seem right. He was especially afraid of touching her brush. It was made of ivory and had bone bristles; her name, Beth, was inscribed on the back of it. The boy's father had traded his brush pants for it when he was in the Belgian Congo, in the service. Her hair was still tangled in the bristles of the brush, and the boy was very uncomfortable touching it, because she was dead. He had watched her buried, but her hair was still here, like she was still here. His older cousin told him how dead peoples' hair and fingernails keep growing after they're dead, and how they're all bones and bugs and bits of decayed flesh. He tried to forget what his cousin had told him, but grandma's hair always made him remember, and he didn't like to think of grandma anymore, especially

in that way, especially since she was dead, especially since grandma used to brush his hair with that brush on Sunday mornings when he visited, before he and his grandparents went to church. He could still hear her singing as she brushed his short, blond, curly hair, telling him what wild and lovely hair he had, hair just like his father's and his grandfather's.

"Grandpap," the boy said, not paying attention as he grabbed at the spot where he thought the pouch of tobacco would be, "how come Matty doesn't know that we will always come home when we leave?"

The old man closed his eyes and rubbed his eyelids. "Dogs don't think the exact same way people do. Matty might not be able to remember that every time we leave we come back; maybe she thinks that every time we leave we will never come back. Hand me that poke of tobacco, will you?"

The old man opened his eyes and looked at the boy. "What did you bring me that for?" he demanded.

"Because you . . ." the boy trailed off. He'd been thinking about Matty, and dreams, and Grandma, and hadn't been paying attention to what he was holding. He looked at his grandpap, staring him in the eyes, and looked down at his right hand extended to the old man.

He was holding the ivory brush. Surprised, he dropped it on the bed next to the old man. "I'm, I'm sorry," he said, crossing quickly over to the dresser again and picking up the pouch of tobacco. "I didn't mean to, I really didn't mean to."

He brought the pouch of tobacco back over to the old man, and as he was about to set it on the bed-stand, the old man grabbed the tobacco from him and backhanded the boy across the face.

"Who told you to bring me that brush?" he yelled.

The boy fell over, more from shock than from the force of the blow. He reached back to catch himself, but his hand hit the edge of the spittoon and spilled tobacco juice all over his pajamas, all over the floor, all over his face and in his hair.

"Christ, now look what you've done," the old man yelled. "You know who's going to have to clean that up, and it's not going to be me!"

The dog woke up and jumped off the bed, barking at the old man. The boy sat up, tobacco juice dripping off his chin. "Sorry, grandpap, I'm sorry. I'll clean it up in a second."

The old man struggled to sit up in bed. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and opened them again. "No, don't worry about cleaning it up," he said, his voice calm and even again. "I'll get it in the morning. Just go to the bathroom and clean yourself off, and take that damned dog with you; we're all going to sleep."

The boy turned the spittoon right-side-up, walked over to the door, and called the dog. "C'mere, Matty." The dog followed him, and he opened the door to leave.

"Turn the lights off before you go," the old man said softly as he lay down on his back again. "Goodnight, Boy," the old man said. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to holler at you; it wasn't your fault."

The boy walked into the bathroom across from his grandpap's room, rinsed off his hands and feet in the sink, and took his pajamas off. The ends of the vinyl floor were peeling up, and the bath mat was moldy and smelled bad. The old man's false teeth sat at the end of the sink, brown from tobacco, and brown because he didn't wash them.

The boy had rinsed all the tobacco off his body and didn't feel like washing the rest out of his hair. In his underwear, the boy hung his pajamas on one of the squeaky towel racks that was pulling out of the crumbling dry-wall, turned off the lights in the bathroom, and felt his way down the dark hall to the living room couch, where he slept when he visited his grandparents, or now, just his grandpap.

The boy crawled under the sheets, gritty because the dog slept on the couch a lot, and because his grandpap didn't change them. It wasn't a good idea to sleep in just underwear the boy thought, because his legs would probably be all bit up by fleas in the morning. The dog jumped up on the couch with the boy; there was hardly enough room for both of them. At least Matty was warm, the boy thought, and he was too tired to care about flea bites. The boy drifted off to sleep listening to the dog's breathing.

The boy woke up late that night; he had to go to the bathroom. Squirring out from under the dog, he felt his way back down the hall to the bathroom and didn't bother to turn on the lights. He just had to pee, and he'd used this toilet plenty of times, so he didn't need any light. He decided not to flush the toilet until morning so he wouldn't wake his grandpap up, and he walked across the hall to peek into his grandpap's room to see what time it said on the digital clock on the bed-stand.

The boy looked in the room, over toward the clock, where a beam of moonlight shone down on the bed where his grandfather was sleeping, breathing heavily, with a pillow under his arm. The clock read 3:36 in bright red dashes. The wind blew the sheer curtains across the moonlight, and tiny squares of light swayed over the sleeping old man. His heavy breathing stopped. The boy stood in the doorway and watched the old man, wondering if something was wrong.

The old man sprung up in bed, faster than the boy had ever seen him move, faster than the boy thought possible to move. The old man sat on the mattress, sheets around his waist, and looked into the empty space before him.

"Beth," he said in a gentle voice, "Beth, is that you?"

The boy was scared; his grandfather was talking to himself. He didn't want to watch any more of this, but he could not bring himself to leave. The boy slid into the shadows of the doorway so that the old man could not see him.

"Beth," he spoke again, reaching his hand out to nothing the boy could see, "please don't go away. Please, Beth, stay. I love you, stay."

The wind slowed and the curtains fluttered to rest. The shadows of the patterns on the curtain disappeared from the bed, and a single beam of moonlight shone off the old man's head.

"No, Beth, no, you can't go," he pleaded. "No, don't go, not again, please, not again."

The wind died, and the old man slouched forward. He moaned a deep, long moan, then cried softly, burying his head in his arms. He leaned to his left, then toppled over onto his side, lying curled over on the bed, crying, as the boy watched his chest rise and fall with each breath. A bird, probably an owl, flew across the window, and the shadow crossed over the bed, across the old man.

The boy turned away from the old man and slipped quietly to the door. It was not good to see such things.

His grandpap would not want him to see him like this. Some things were better left unsaid and forgotten. The boy crept out of the room. He would not say a word about this to anyone, then maybe he would forget about it, too.

Mike Cowden Sewickley Academy
Sewickley, PA

Going Home

Home is the seawall that crumbles at a sneeze,
the wrinkled men
tangled in fish nets
who pray to it like a god.
The water crashing,
spitting at the air
above,
the salt that coats your throat
and burns your eyes.
The whirlpools
whipping in
and out of rocks
where rough winds
and nights
are drowned.

This is the place
before home,
my beginning.
Here,
where clouds hover
and the sky changes from gray
to tray.

You ask what I remember
and I say
everything.

When the rain falls
the questions drop like tears,
slash
and sting.

Going home is feeling
bruises and bandages
the moving truck couldn't take away.

The ocean lies flat
and if you stare
you can see the water breathe.

The sky is still dark
and darker
and so I'm waiting...

You always
said the tides would change.

Johanna Greenberg
Colonia, NJ
Carol Kiyak



Elena Togashi New York, NY

Fragile Alpine Zone

Entering Fragile Alpine Zone,
the sign says
in the irregular yellow letters
that someone in the 1970s
thought would look charming and authentic
if carved into varnished boards
and used to mark trails in national parks.
The ground here is mostly exposed bedrock—
schist, my teacher tells us—
and the trees are stunted by the harsh climate.
The growing season is short,
my teacher says,
and in winter
ice forms on their new growth
and it breaks off.
That's why they lie low,
and extend their branches outward,
pressed against the cold ground.
What the sign means
is to be careful
that these trees
have a hell of a time
even surviving up here,
and we don't want to make it
any harder for them.

Riding a Greyhound bus,
I pass an old woman
standing on the front steps of a mobile home.
I wonder what she thinks
when she looks at the trailer park
Home sweet home?
Or does she remember
herself in a white veil
and a husband
just home from the Pacific
and a future
of white clapboard and suburbs
that never materialized.
And does she wonder
with bitterness perhaps,
or regret,
or a sort of vague surprise,
why it never came.

Home from school for the weekend,
my mother corners me
in the kitchen
and tells me that my friend's father
died last week,
and standing in the church
I know that I am not exempt,
that no one ever promised anyone
that life would last,
and no one ever promised me
immunity from any of it.

Later,
I stand in a hospital
beside the woman
who helped raise me.
She looks so small in the bed,
with her head tilted back
and an oxygen tube across her nostrils,

but she knows me,
and holds my hand tightly.
The next night
they call and tell us she's died.
My mother pats my hair
and tells me Vee wouldn't have wanted
a lingering death,
and I know that
while I want to spend
as long as I can
living,
I'd also prefer
to take my time in dying.

I sit in bed
with a notebook in my lap
and a tissue in my hand.
I am crying now
for the woman who held me on her lap
and taught me to sing
about the good ship Lollypop.
The rock beneath me
is crossed
with deep grooves and cracks,
and the trees that surround me
are hunched and gnarled..
Living here takes all their effort,
my teacher says.
There's no sign,
but it's different down below.

Nancy Carlynn Houghton
New York, NY
The Chapin School
Jane L. Rinden

While Taking My Baby Brother At 7:00 A.M.

There is something holy about rain
Early on Tuesdays and Wednesdays
The pavement mirroring the sky
That dresses the earth for morning
A shade lighter than night.

In the car
Water drops dancing playfully
The beat of the windshield wipers clicking in rhythm
As the pregnant sky breaks water
Flooding between the thighs of naked trees
And the open palms of dead leaves
shuddering on the ground.

The stream of cars, a yawning worm
Bending to fit the highways curves
Each car two bright moons
Reflected by two tall owners shining
As they race by
Neon words and blinking traffic lights shine too,
Reflected by the wet road
Their brightness pries open sleep-filled eyes
The world, a gray dome
Each light stands alone
Straining to illuminate the faces.

Maureen Gallagher
Chambersburg, PA
Anne Branham

Night Swimming

with the pink shower curtain pulled across
I am secluded in my bath
in the company of pink and steam
I hold my corner
through the loneliest hour of night
I find a place in silence;
water swims between my legs as i tumble and twist
these hips between the sheets of water
in the song i hear the halt of time

these thighs of mine feel smooth and tan in here
as i start to dream in this warm translucent lake
it swallows me to the neck with heat
my knees bend up through the water
like little rock island we saw near the shore
i remember our bodies after dark
in that summer lake
still radiating heat
the sun kissed us
lift imprints of pink glow
on our cheeks and shoulders;
the water baptized us
as we turned into fish
and dove through the dark.

Mai Hariu
Williamsville, NY
Williamsville East High
Mary Richert

Halley's

I felt it all day,
felt you coming back to me
like a hot comet
a burst of paper.

Your letter lay on the bed like a promise,
the many foreign postmarks like
drunken footprints,
teeth before braces.

You breathed into me again like summer,
like car trips,
mutual cigarettes and favorite diners.
This letter, flash of your life,
drove me past an overpass with your
name painted on it
left like a jewel or a sigh.

You and I dreamed through each other,
swallowed each others pasts,
presents, and saved our futures for dessert.

Rolling down our past, I tasted you-
in a tear fat with the sweetness
of yesterdays.

I stretch you out
and toss you up to serve as
sky, hair sighing across that expanse,
trembling fingers setting stars
like quiet diamonds.

I ran your poetry round my
room, placed it on the floor
in a faerie ring and
breathed you in like incense
(you are a holy part of me)

You flounder in Brazil like a
drowning child, mouth full
of salt water, and I can only
send you words like a message
in a bottle or a life vest
and pray you stay afloat.

I hear your tears and want to bring you home.

I'll feel it these months
feel you slowly coming back to me
until one day your bright eyes,
dancer's legs come flying home
like a hot comet streaming your hair behind.

Amanda Matras
Tannersville, PA
Pocono Mountain HS
Mrs. Sparrow

Time Is Ticking

There was a clock in the corner
of my grandfather's house.
A grandfather clock.
It rang out time at every quarter hour.
I used to stand beside its cedar case,
hypnotized by the pendulum,
waiting,
for hands to click into brass numbers,
and press my body down against the wooden floor,
feeling the echo of time.
Aging me like the cedar
that encompassed the gears
that propelled the ticking.
It was always after dinner
when we marked my height down
upon the cellar door.
And those afternoons with the clock
shook inches straight into my spine.
I never told you how I cheated,
stealing seconds while you weren't watching.

The grandfather clock still stands
in the corner,
of our house now.
Grandma caught me dazing over dinner,
Still hypnotized by the pendulum.
She says, "Yes. It is a great grandfather clock."
and smiles,
with a look of expectations,
like the last mark on the cellar door.
And I shudder to think
of the time
I'll need to steal.

Johanna Greenberg
Colonia, NJ
Carol Kiyak

A Morning Coffee At The Mill

Wild as the weather
on that Saturday morning at 9:00,
he appeared, bracing against
our filmy tile counter
staring.

I knew not to ask.

The dry eyes as vacant
as empty mugs and
the weeds of gray hair
on his chin were answers enough.

Large, black, to the rim,

he ordered then paid
with sticky coins.

He slipped to the side counter,
the one with the tired stools

that nearly collapse,

and centered the cup

so the steam masked

his creased forehead.

Heavy shoulders rounded

as he hugged the cup

with chapped hands

and glared at the liquid.

Maybe he was hoping

to defrost his winded skin.

Maybe he was thinking

about the coffee's color,

brown, black,

brown on black.

Maybe he was yearning

for the floating grinds

to become a little Jesus,

to glide across the surface,

to rush him to salvation,

to pour right down his throat.

Lesley Finn

Baltimore, MD

Towson High School

William Jones

From Your Doll

February wasn't a kind month to you.
five hundred miles and 65 years
separated us, but I thought of you
when the window was muddled with fog
from my breath.

But airplane windows do not frost.
It was fog in my eyes.

I heard the midnight phone call but
rolling over, my head sought refuge
in protective quilts.

...just a dream..

Daybreak and packed bags escorted
one family member out the door
as another watched pensively
from behind a curtain.

One father in search of another's life.

The last time I saw you,
the room echoed with labored breathing

Body fading, your mind recognized me
and you smiled with your eyes,
lucid and untarnished blue gems.

"Am I dead yet?"

I want to hear your voice say anything but that.

Call me sweetie,

call me your doll

like you did when my nose reached

no higher than your knee

But don't remind me why you lie

motionless between gasps.

"Sweetie."

The cars jostles my reverie.

The window is hidden in fog,

five hundred miles have dwindled
to one.

The blue gems are gone,

the wheezing is gone.

Everywhere is black,

vestments of darkness choke me.

Weeping flowers invade

my guarded shell.

The steeple casts a watchful chill,

and I wonder if they loved you as much as I did.

Elizabeth Sander

Silver Springs, MD

Springbrook High School

Mrs. Nancy Abeshouse.

Under the Table

there's a trail leading to a naked lady sitting on the
linoleum across from me. light bulbs all burnt,
the trashcan in the left corner is bloated full of
tissues.

knife in hand, her breasts hang loose, a
little uneven, quiet.

i know this woman, we go to

the same church. her name is maureen. i call her
mo.

she wears one green sweater, khaki pants every
sunday, sometimes a navy coat that looks three
years too old.

two birthdays ago,

a sunday before the first week of Lent, she gave me

a spare key, five dollars to water her plants

every tuesday, feed her cat george.

she never

was home when i went, left an envelope with my name
on it — taped to the refrigerator.

last month george ran away.

she had stopped noticing him,

having only time to smoke cigarettes,

lie in bed.

i want to call for

help, but the phone is near her right foot, i'm afraid

that she might move, do anything

other than just sit.

Julia Soo Young Kim

Towson, MD

Towson HS

William Jones

Profound Thoughts On Childhood

I
 i find that i write like when i was eight years old
 and all I could think of was the seagulls not really being
 W's in
 life and how I could rule the world if I were a superhero.
 And I'd run around the house naked
 because I knew I could fly.
 And I put on lipstick that matched my tongue after eating a
 blowpop.
 (reminisces: the gum was always a little bit too
 stale and a
 little bit too sweet)
 But I would forget about that.

II
 one day i accidentally ate a tootsie pop
 which was what happened to a blowpop you left
 out too long
 the gum got brown, and the wrapper got changed
 and all of a sudden it said tootsie pop instead.
 And boy was I surprised
 but now I got older.

III
 I can paint you an image
 of a cliff and a sunset
 and me in fight
 hurling myself off into the
 swirling backdrop

IV
 of cherry lollipop.

 And I don't need crayons
 on the wall
 or a lemon-scented soap to wash the dishes with
 when I
 assumed my new Mickey Mouse watch was water-resis-
 tant
 and it wasn't

V
 And the time Pengy was lost and I cried forever
 and two months later when I'd forgotten its existence,
 somehow
 appeared, beak shmushed under my mattress

 only I didn't love it anymore.

Jennifer L. Rosen
 New York, NY
 Hunter College High School
 Ms. Barbara Miller

Rockports

That afternoon
 some time after your memorial service,
 we went back to Summer Hill,
 Mom and Cathy and Sammy and Eleanor and I,
 and while sitting on your sidewalk,
 they ate Happy Meals and Big Macs,
 while I slurped at my sundae.
 You know I never was the fast food type.
 we were taking a break from
 cleaning out your townhome.
 When I had licked my spoon clean

and she had finished her fries,
 Sammy held my hand, and,
 with a bag of sliced white bread,
 the two of us walked down to the pond
 to feed the overfed ducks.

But I know they weren't really your closets,
 the ones we emptied that day.
 They were much too new.
 Yours were the ones that smelled of mothballs
 and cigarette smoke.
 And it wasn't your kitchen we cleaned.
 Those counters where formica, not cracked plastic,
 like yours. Besides,
 your refrigerator was yellow,
 and an old black & white on top.

and she wasn't you.
 the woman who lived in that place.
 She never laughed or smoked
 or ate chocolate kisses.
 No, you never saw that place,
 never lay beneath those starched white sheets,
 took pills from the overpaid nurse.
 It wasn't you they burned, not you in that box.

You left long ago, on one of your walks,
 swinging your arms, swaying your hips,
 wearing away the soles of your Rockports.

No, wait, I wore your Rockports that day,
 when I walked to the duck pond with Sammy.
 You must be wearing sneakers.

Jennifer Harris
 Towson, MD
 Towson High School
 William Jones

Sisyphus: A Pantoum

A yo-yo boomerangs back to the eye,
 Ever the taut cord, unsevered,
 Fluid as a swimmer's body, stroking and turning
 (Soon, you will see this line again).

Ever the taut cord, unsevered
 As I stare at the telephone, fingering your letter
 (You have seen this line before)
 A single droplet lost in the watershed.

Staring at the telephone, fingering your letter
 (This line, too appears familiar).
 A single droplet lost in the watershed,
 Heavy as the rock and the unmoved mountain.

(Why does this line sound so familiar?)
 Fluid as a swimmer's body, stroking and turning,
 Heavy as the rock and the unmoved mountain,
 A yo-yo boomerangs back to the eye.

Kalee Geiderman Magnani
 Rockville, MD
 Richard Montgomery H.S.
 Deborah Wilchek

Tuesdays

Something about Al Wrecklin made Michael's stomach turn. Maybe it was his seedy toupee, or the way his breath always smelled like coffee and cigars, or how his skin glistened under the sallow florescent lights at the office. He hated the way the man always talked as if he were pushing his voice back into his stomach so as not to belch while he spoke. It had been one of those days, and Wrecklin standing in the doorway to his office ended it appropriately unpleasantly. He detested how Wrecklin called him "son" though he doubted he was even ten years younger than his boss.

"Franklin—" he began, "it's about persuasion, it's about doing and saying just the right things. It's about wanting it, going after it, and getting it." Michael Franklin swallowed and stepped as gently as he could manage past his boss and into his office.

"Yes sir, I've heard these are your principles..." *What the hell was a good answer to a comment like that.* He looked in distaste at his desk which was overflowing with folders, and files, and messages. Of course Wrecklin would stop by today. Coffee was what he needed to brave this unexpected visit. But he noticed as he left the elevator and walked towards his office, that Michelle was out, and there was a temp in his secretary's chair. She looked frazzled staring at the various flashing buttons on the phone as it rang and rang, and he couldn't bother with requesting a beverage.

"What does all this mean—you're wondering, why the visit, and the principles—you're thinking to yourself" Wrecklin started again, now pushing his voice down. Franklin stared at the ground and tried to think of something to do to avoid having to stare at Wrecklin while he spoke. He crossed the room and sat down stiffly at his desk. Smiling awkwardly and clasping his hands together, he looked bravely up at his boss.

"OK, you got me—what's up?"

"Franklin, you're a fine worker, an instrumental employee in fact, fair to say?" Franklin shrugged.

"You've been with the company, what, seven, eight years?"

"Nine in March."

"Nine in March See, I've been here one year this month. Time flies, does it not?" Franklin nodded obediently.

"You have children right?"

"A daughter," he said coldly. It seemed inappropriate to talk about something as pleasant as Alyssa with this man.

"How old is she?" he asked, an irritating smile plastered on his face.

"Nine, she's in the fourth grade."

"I have a daughter too. She's nineteen, she just started her freshman year at Cornell. Business, one of the best programs in the country. I told her, 'you never know Lisa, you could be working at my side in this company someday' See her picture?" He extended a maroon leather wallet with a glossy mini portrait of his daughter. His daughter with a hard square jaw like his. Long wavy mousy brown hair, and the same sneaky tight lipped smile. Franklin nodded and tried to show an appropriate amount of interest. But his office was hot and he was starting to sweat from the stress of having to deal with all of this nonsense.

"She's got a good mind for business, Lisa does. I guess it runs in the family." He chuckled heartily. "How

about your little girl? Can you see her working at your side?"

"Probably not," Franklin choked out, "she's more of an artist." Wrecklin nodded, "It doesn't run in all families" he said softly.

"Well maybe not business, but other things do, like this art thing. She's very talented."

Franklin closed his eyes briefly to compose himself. *Why was he justifying her to this man. Like Lisa Wrecklin from Cornell was really a threat to his daughter's worthiness.*

"So, who's the artist, you or your wife?" Franklin laughed dryly.

"Not me, my ex-wife. In fact I think she's showing her work at a gallery on Newbury Street right now, Ellen Franklin, or maybe she says Ellen Parker now, who knows?" Wrecklin nodded.

"Well, anyway, I guess that's enough small talk, I guess I might as well get to the point, what do you think?" He agreed half-heartedly.

"Like I said a moment ago, you've always showed this company what a great amount you are capable of. Frankly, I'm concerned because it seems that your performance is just mediocre now, comparatively of course. I haven't really been here long enough to judge, but the others have told me that you were once phenomenal. Tell me your honest opinion son, has your performance decreased at all in the last...say, year and a half? Are you still phenomenal?" Michael swallowed.

"Uh, that's kind of a complicated question to answer, business fluctuates, that's the way the world works. Maybe I haven't closed as many accounts—" *stupid bastard.*

Wrecklin nodded with false patience, and slowly paced the room.

"Alright, well let's call my visit here today a gentle admonition. How's that? We're a team here and I'm the first one to say that there's no "I" in team, so don't think it's me against you, you're my team mate, and I'm here to just help the game go smoothly." Michael gritted his teeth and nodded cautiously. Wrecklin walked towards the door but then turned around to look at him, amidst a dramatic pause.

"I have faith in you, that's why I'm telling you all this. I know the leaders when I see them." It almost could have been a compliment, but Michael was right in assuming he had meant something different. Wrecklin continued. "And I trust these leaders when they fear that some one's slipping up.....Have a good day."

Michael cringed and resisted the urge to kick his door in. Instead he crossed the room to his window, and sat down on the ledge. He stared at the city moving below him and thought about getting his things together and leaving to get Alyssa a little bit early tonight. Maybe surprise her and pick her up from after school before six instead of her having to wait at her friend's house for him to rush in at seven thirty or eight. It was always the same routine. Tuesday nights, because Ellen worked late at the studio Tuesdays, he picked his daughter up for her night at his house. He was tired as a dog by the time he finally crossed into Cambridge from Boston to pick her up, but he realized it probably had been a taxing day for her as well. Hell, she got up an hour earlier than he. Her mother got her up at quarter to seven to shove her limp limbs into mismatched clothes and yank a brush through her tangles of tawny hair as her half closed eyes stared blankly into

the mirror. Ellen used to drive her to school, but last time he saw her, when he had brought back Alyssa, she had mentioned something about taking "The T" into Boston with her art work because it was easier than parking. So she walked to school all bundled up, for it was cold this winter, colder than usual. After a full day of fifth grade level curriculum, he imagined her being whisked down to after school and patiently sitting through story book readings, and diligently sprinkling glitter onto construction paper dripping with glue. At night when Michael drew her bath, he noticed there was almost always rubbery clumps of dried glue and filth stuck to her finger tips, and tiny flecks of pink glitter on her face. He always grinned and asked her the same thing, why she always had glue on her fingers. She would roll her eyes in that impatient ten-year-old-way, and say: "DAAAA-DY, I told you, Tuesday is arts and crafts at after school. We always use glue on Tuesdays."

"That's right, I forgot," he'd always say. Of course he hadn't but it was just so funny hearing her incredulous response each time he asked.

So, one would be tired enough after a full day, arts-and crafts and all. But Alyssa still waited patiently for her father. It was Corey's house she went to next. Corey and Alyssa had met at age four at ballet lessons in the musty basement of an old church. Corey ate the resin the dancers put on their slippers, Alyssa caught her and told the teachers, and the friendship was sealed. As a guilty father would, Michael worried that his daughter felt abandoned being shipped from her dad's house to her mom's house, to school, to afterschool, to her friend's house, and then all over again. But like a champ, she lived this life as the only one she'd ever known and complained scarcely at all.

By the time he had battled traffic, picked up take-out chicken, and bought yogurt for Alyssa's lunch the next day, it was usually near eight o'clock. She looked tired when he got there, but she always smiled and gave him a big hug. *Daddy how was your week?* He said thank you and good-bye to Corey's parents who always seemed to have every situation under control. There house was cozily dim and quiet, with the barely audible, settling sounds of a laugh track coming from the TV. From the street, as he left with his daughter's little hand tucked in his, Michael could look up at their windows and see the strange, eerie flashes of the light of the TV jumping from wall to wall. He smiled wistfully imagining Corey's mom and dad relenting to let her watch the end of the TV program, reading to her in bed, and then watching her from the doorway standing in light cast from the hallway as she slept.

It was once like that for him. He could remember standing with his arm rubbing up against Ellen's smooth skin. How as they watched their baby sleep in the crib, the only thing he could hear was his daughter's rhythmic breathing and faintly...his wife's gentle heartbeat—calm as ever.

Of course Ellen was a mystery, and so was her daughter. Alyssa looked like her father they told him. A little Michael running around. With his full oval face, and defined brow, and full soft lips. And he could see himself when she frowned. But sometimes, when she smiled, his heart ached. It ached like she made it swell with love and pride. It ached because he realized how little he knew this little girl. How she looked so much like her mother. It

ached like he wished he were married to his wife again. Maybe if Ellen didn't hate him, like he knew she did, maybe if she loved him like he knew she didn't, he would feel that his daughter was within reach. *It's nearly impossible to be a father one day a week.*

Yes, that's what he would do. Pick her up from after school, so she wouldn't have to go to Corey's. He'd even get the take out and the yogurt after he picked her up, so he would arrive earlier. Being late January, the sun had already sunk deep into the sky by the time Michael was ready to leave, and it was barely five thirty. He would have to hurry to make it there before six, because the afterschool closed down, and Corey's dad would pick the girls up and bring them back to their heady fox-hole like apartment. He left the office quickly, not bothering the temp for his messages.

He blew into his cupped hands as he waited for the car to warm up. He shivered and smiled wryly at the thick white clouds that drifted through the air as he exhaled. He silently prayed that the traffic would be gracious that night, for it suddenly seemed imperative to Michael that he reach the after-school before Corey's dad. It was light traffic for some reason, and he crossed The Mystic Tobin Bridge with ease. The traffic backed up all the way from the toll booths sometimes, but the world seemed placid tonight, and the few people that were out there moving—crawled along, and kept to themselves.

Her school was this beautiful old building in the middle of an appealing friendly neighborhood in Cambridge. He parked right in front of it and stopped for a moment to stare at the huge naked trees casting winter shadows across the small front lawn of the school. It wasn't a lawn really, there was no grass, but they pretended there was, and there were even little benches out front, so it was as if you were sitting in the park. The air smelled like winter, and Michael thought to himself how when he hugged her as he tucked her into her bed, her skin felt cool like the air outside had permanently made it that way, and her hair smelled just as winter did. Woodsmoke, wind, fatigue, and loneliness.

It didn't even register in her mind that this man could be her father at first. After doing a double take, that was so typically Alyssa that it made him laugh, she ran to him and threw herself into his massive embrace. She sometimes wondered why he looked so...bewildered when he saw her. And he wondered that himself. It was as if he couldn't believe she was his.

"Hi Daddy!" she shrieked. "What are you doing here." He felt like cringing, she had expected just as Corey had, that it would be Corey's dad who would come.

"I got off work early to come and get you." She grinned one of her famous ones. Her eyes lit up, and her dimple appeared, and she brushed a lock of hair from her eyes.

"Come see Patrick." She took his hand, and dragged him into the arts and crafts room. Patrick was an art student at Mass Art who was working at after school to help make ends meet. He was also a struggling musician who worked in winestore/deli to help make ends meet. Michael first met him at the afterschool, introduced to him by Alyssa whom he was sure was in love with the man, and then he saw him and chatted a little bit with him at the deli whenever he went to get a sandwich or bottle of wine.

"Patrick! Show my dad what I made today in arts and crafts." Patrick smiled shyly.

"You show him. You made it." She pranced over to the drying shelf, and carefully retrieved the glittering masterpiece. Patrick's six and a half foot frame towered behind her looking down at her work as she showed her father.

"It's beautiful Alyssa," he said fondly. The two artists in the room stared at it critically, but then smiled in modest satisfaction at the product. In bold glittering letters, in gold, magenta, and green, the sign read 'Alyssa's Room'. As Alyssa gathered her things from her cubby, Michael and Patrick engaged in polite conversation. Michael called him a kid, and Alyssa couldn't understand this.

"Daddy!" she'd say, "he's bigger than you. And he has a pony tail."

"Oh, he's not even much older than you Alyssa."

"Good—" she whispered, "Then maybe someday I can marry him." She thought her father hadn't heard, but he did. Anyway, he pretended that he hadn't, even to himself.

Patrick loved the kids, maybe even Alyssa a little bit more than the rest, but he worked spaced out, like he didn't even know where he was. "So, wow, I hardly ever see you pick up Alyssa..."

"I know, I got off early today."

"That's cool." Michael smiled. That was Patrick's answer to everything.

"I'm ready daddy," she sang. She threw her arms roughly around Patrick's waist or as close to it as she could reach, and grabbed her fathers hand.

"See you tomorrow afternoon, Patrick," she said. "Cool."

She slept the whole way home, after a few brief sentences about her day. She was lucky to be sleeping, for she would have been mad to stop at the grocery store, and then there was an accident on Storrow drive. Michael smiled weakly to himself as the traffic crept along and the flashing lights from the police cars swayed back and forth. It was Alyssa's favorite part of the trip, and he was tempted to wake her up. It was bill board, strategically placed next to the traffic-jam prone road, with a huge fancy gray apartment building looming behind it. The sign read: *If you lived here, you'd be home by now.*

It's a good point—" she had said. "It makes me want to live there."

"Either that or good advertising." He felt her watching him from the corner of his eye.

"Why do you always have to do that?" She whispered when he finally looked at her. He laughed.

"Do what?"

"You just don't agree with me. It's never enough." But he just laughed again. He never answered her questions, she knew she had made him uncomfortable. He just squeezed her leg and smiled fondly at her. It was his way of saying I love you. And for awhile, that was enough.

As he drew her bath that night, she talked more about her day. He listened to her talk about Corey, and Patrick, and how Ms. Teegan, her favorite gym teacher, had gone to the hospital to have her baby that day. She even talked about her mother. She did that a lot around him, and she was conscious of it. She wondered if she did it around her mom about her dad. She didn't think so. She sat in the tub and swirled the wash cloth through the water pretending it was a sneaky shark. He noticed the

glitter pieces on her face, but let her keep talking. He asked her about how Ellen's show was going and whether she liked her mom's new art. Alyssa didn't shrug like other kids might. She always answered his questions, she wanted him to understand.

"Did you get your night gown on?" Michael called from the kitchen.

"Yes, I did." She walked into the kitchen holding the glitter sign. "Daddy? Where should I put this to finish drying?"

"Why don't you just hang it right on your door. It will dry up there and then you won't even have to move it."

"What do you mean. I have to bring it to mom's tomorrow dad." She said with false patience.

"Oh, I thought you were leaving it here. Don't you want hang it here?"

"Daaa-dy, it says Alyssa's room on it. My room is at my mom's house."

"Oh." He felt small. He felt like saying 'that's cool', as if talking like Patrick would make him big like Patrick.

"Bed time, baby," She crawled into her bed, and waited five minutes for him to come in and kiss her good night. She could hear him washing dishes in the kitchen.

"Good night Alyssa," he whispered.

"Good night Daddy" she whispered back. He left the room and sunk into the couch and stared at the New York Times for a few minutes. It felt right having her here. He felt a happy little presence, just down the hall. This was the way it should be. It hurt not having her when he needed her, but he comforted himself with the thought that she really seemed happy to be there. She must miss it too.

"Daddy?" she called from the bedroom.

"Yes, pumpkin?"

"I miss mommy." His heart sunk though he tried to ignore it.

"You'll see her tomorrow babe."

"Oh, I know I will," she said complacently.

Claire Wieman
Troy NY
Doane Stuart School
Ellen Loughney

Crows at Rush Hour

They screech like tires branding pavement.

Belted across the vermilion sky,
crows crowd the telephone wire,
chattering while the sun falls.

But when black falls after it, they dive
away dive
away,
tightly wound springs uncoiling with a pop.

The naked wire blares like a fire alarm.

Sean Kennedy
Herndon, VA
Thomas Jefferson H.S.
Roger Green

The outside air was shivery cold as Doreen walked home from Mara's house. It was snowing lightly, and her boots melted footprints into the thin layer of snow that covered the sidewalk. Doreen liked the snow. Last week she made a snowgirl on her front lawn, and Mara made a snow whale and a snow bear. Mara liked making snow angels in the snow and so did Doreen, but Doreen's mother didn't like her getting her clothes wet because it was too much of a bother to wait for them to dry. Her mother also made her keep her gloves clipped onto her sleeves because she lost one of them at school last winter, and when it finally turned up it was spring, and it was ripped and dirty from being trampled on in the school yard.

Doreen let herself in the back door of her house, and the warm kitchen air made her cheeks feel cold.

"No, don't come in here like that. Step on the mat, Doreen, bang your shoes off."

Doreen placed her boots on a wet newspaper and clumps of snow skated down their sides. Her mother took her coat and hat from her and brought it to the basement to hang on the laundry line to dry. Doreen rubbed her hands together and blew into them, but they were still damp and cold so she let her hands hover over the steam rising from beneath the crooked lid of the soup pot, and that felt warm and nice like stepping out of a hot shower where the mirrors and the tiles were wet and steamy.

"Doreen, honey, please don't do that," her mother said, reentering the kitchen. She took Doreen by the arm and led her away from the stove. "Don't you remember the time when you knocked the frying pan over and nearly burned your brother? We don't want anybody getting burned here, okay?"

Doreen nodded, and her mother kissed her cheek.

"Were you a good girl at Mara's house?"

"Yes."

"Did you thank Mara's mother for letting you come over and play?"

"Yes."

"And you were careful not to break any of Mara's toys?"

"Yes."

"That's good, sweetie." Her mother smiled. "Here, come with me to the bathroom for a minute, I have to brush your hair. It's a mess of static from that hat of yours."

Doreen's mother led her into the bathroom and stood her in front of the sink and ran a scratchy wet brush across her scalp and through her tangles and her mother knocked her over the head with the spiny brush and told her to stop whimpering. But Doreen was braver now, and she didn't cry when her mother brushed her hair.

Doreen looked down into the sink where her mother dropped her excess hairs. The hairs started out feathery and fluffy and dry, and then the beaded water on the sides of the sink made them wet and swirly. Doreen thought of swirling them around her fingers and making designs, and the designs would look like things just like clouds looked like things. Once, she saw a cloud that looked just like her old dog, Shaggy. They called him Shaggy because his fur was shaggy, and he would leave fluffy clumps of fur on the rug and couch. He didn't do it on purpose, though, but her mother didn't like cleaning it up, so they had to bring him back to the pound. Doreen missed Shaggy because Shaggy loved her. But her math-

er said that the pet store people had to kill him because no one wanted him. Doreen cried when she heard this, but her mother told her not to cry because a dog was a foolish thing to cry about. Her mother didn't mind when she cried when her grandpa died though. Her grandpa loved her just like Shaggy did. She knew her grandpa loved her because he told her so, and he meant it. He said she was his favorite grandchild, and it was the first time she was ever told that she was anybody's favorite anything. Doreen was also Shaggy's favorite friend, and they would fetch with his squeaky toys, and he'd always rub his head against her leg and lay down by her feet. Shaggy would bark a lot around her mother and her brother though.

"See that, Doreen, doesn't that look nicer?" her mother asked when Doreen's hair was slick and smooth. "Sweetie, why aren't you looking in the mirror? Doreen, sweetie?"

Doreen left the bathroom and got her math books from the hall closet. Her mother would have suggested that she start her homework soon anyway. Doreen hated math, because math made no sense. She opened her notebook to the addition and subtraction problems that her teacher wrote on the board and stared blankly at the confusing mass of numbers. There were numbers that added up to bigger numbers, and numbers when subtracted made smaller numbers, but the numbers she was supposed to find came from nowhere. Numbers made no sense. Numbers were stupid. But Doreen was stupid, and she didn't understand them. That didn't make sense either.

"All right, now," her mother began. "What's two plus three?"

"Twenty three?"

"No, let's try again. Now what if I had two apples and you gave me three apples, how many would I have?"

"I don't know."

"Come on, Doreen. Think, now, two plus three. What is it?"

Doreen counted on her fingers, but kept them under the table so her mom wouldn't see her chewed down nails and make her dip her fingers in alcohol so they'd taste bad. "Five?"

"That's right, but no fingers the next time. You just have to know it. Two plus three is five. Say it."

"Two plus three is five."

"Good, see that. Now all you have to do is learn a couple of addition facts each day and you won't need your fingers."

Doreen nodded. Every problem was an addition fact. How could a person know so many facts? How come her mother and her brother and Mara knew them and she didn't? That was a stupid question. It was because she was a slow learner. That's what her mom always said because it was nicer than saying she was dumb. But the kids at school said she was dumb when she said something dumb in class. They'd chant "Doreen, Doreen, the dumbest girl I've ever seen." Once Billy Kimball had to stay inside at recess and wash the board and bang out the erasers because he said that to her in class. Doreen was happy that he got in trouble, but the next day at lunchtime, he sat near her and said that chant over and over, and, sometimes, he'd even change it to "Doreen, Doreen, the ugliest girl I've ever seen." The lunch lady walked by and heard him once, but she didn't

continued from p. 51
get him in trouble.

"That's right," her mother went on. "Five and five is ten. But no fingers, Doreen. If you use your fingers, how are you going to learn? Now what's three plus five?"

"Six?"

"Aren't you even trying?"

Doreen nodded, and a tear skated down her cheek like a snowflake sliding and melting on her rubber boot.

"Then why can't you learn your facts, sweetie?"

Doreen knew facts. She knew Shaggy and grandpa loved her in heaven. She knew Mara and her brother and her mother were smart. She knew that she was a slow learner, and she was dumb and ugly. She knew she liked making snow angels. Those were the facts, weren't they? But she didn't get tested on those facts. No one thought she was smart because she knew those facts. Well, that was a lie. Claudia thought she was smart, because Claudia was dumber than she was. But she didn't make fun of Claudia, and they got along famously. Claudia was imaginary, but Doreen made her out of snow last week. Once her mother caught her talking to Claudia, and she yelled at her for doing foolish things like talking to imaginary friends. Doreen also told Mara last week that her snowgirl was her imaginary friend, and Mara laughed at her because Mara also thought pretending was foolish.

"Mom?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Am I good at anything?"

Her mother walked over to the stove and lifted the water-beaded lid off of the soup pot and dumped a few potatoes into it.

"Mom?"

"What, sweetie?"

"Aren't I good at anything?" Doreen asked, her voice trembling and her heart beating quickly.

"You're a nice kid," her mother replied evenly.

"But I'm good for nothing."

Her mother turned up the flame under the soup pot then placed the lid back on. She walked over to the refrigerator and wouldn't look at Doreen.

"Mom?" Tears raced down Doreen's cheeks. She felt stupid for asking such a stupid question.

Her mother adjusted the magnets that supported her brother's A-plus-gold-star test. "You're just a slow learner, sweetie."

Jennifer Jablonski
Franklin Sq., NY
H. Frank Carey High School
Mrs. Joanne Bergbom

Losing Touch

"Sometimes my feet fall asleep when I drive,"
my grandfather says
and grips and turns
the hot wheel
as he sinks
into the synthetic leather seat.
I can only stare
at his limp feet
in their worn gray boatshoes.
I pray for stop lights and red signs.

He halts
in the smooth lot,
a prairie of asphalt.
Waiting for him
to release the safety belt,
still, I sit
on the seat
thick with heat
and all I see
is sloshed yellow mustard
lingering on the flannel,
staining the dignity,
of my father's father,
my Pop.

I turn
to my grandfather bent at the wheel
and wonder about the sensation
he feels
when he loses touch with the earth.
I know I would feel
betrayed,
my body refusing to retain its youth.
I would be scared
of the empty numbness
spreading to my eyes.

Lesley Finn
Baltimore, MD
Towson High School
William Jones

La Meva Germana (My Sister) : Catalunya, Espanya 1994

La Nit

Montse began to talk. As I put on my pajamas, I watched her sit up, and lean forward as if reaching for something. The wooden venetian blinds behind her, partially open to let in the Mediterranean breeze, created a black paper silhouette of her, a portrait, complemented by the smell of spring rain. She pursed her lips, then said:

"Un bes?" (A kiss? in Catalan, as though she might die of sadness if Pierre did not kiss her)

A brief pause...(myself watching in awe)

"Un bes?" (A kiss? her voice nearly frantic that this boy in her dreams, Pierre, the French prince, was leaving...forever...her virgin lips might never be kissed)

Another brief pause...

"Un bes?" (A kiss? Please Sir, one last kiss,...a plea for Pierre.)

A few seconds later I heard the distant sound of Montse kissing the air, the sound of lips parting, her nose pointed upwards, eyes closed, the corners of her mouth curved in apparent delight. Then oddly enough, she lay herself down without my usual tucking her in.

Bon Records

"Bon Anit," I whisper to Montse, pausing briefly to

look at my wrist watch, hoping that it's almost eleven, so that I can hear the violinist two floors up in 413 practice his Bach. Montse looks up from her Catalan novel about some French prince in Rome, and smiles, not wanting to leave Pierre, the prince, alone for another eight hours.

Reaching my left arm upwards, I turn off the halogen lamp resting on the bookshelves above, while Montse slides the novel under her bed. She sighs, and then turns towards the wall, making a slight sucking noise as she attempts to stop the saliva from running out of her mouth. Her retainer is thick, and occasionally chokes her at night, awakening me to the sound of ruffling sheets as she rises in a dazed sleep to cough. That was when I first noticed that late at night she talks to herself, mumbling complete twenty minute monologues in Catalan, and I've begun to wonder who she's talking to, or if I am in her frantic dreams.

Within the past month, I have come to notice that Montse has yet another odd nocturnal habit. She grabs me now late at night. In fact, the first time she grabbed me, I awoke in a state of total paranoia, thinking that the Basque Terrorist Group, ETA, had just bombed Tarragona, the distant throbbing of the emergency evacuation siren reverberating against our bedroom walls, or maybe it was just my alarm clock that went off too early. Lately ETA's bombings in Catalonia have been worrying me, giving me nightmares since I found out that they blew up the Petro Chemical Plant ten miles away in Reus just a few years ago, causing a seven day inferno, and the evacuation of Tarragona as the heat melted plastic flower pots on balconies, sending a shower of ashes raining onto the city, a nuclear meltdown perhaps. In any case, the bombings were too close to home, and having Montse awake me from the little sleep that I did get, didn't help my situation any. But it wasn't Montse that grabbed me though. It was her other self, the one that only I see at night, which I have begun to call Alejandra by her middle name. Only her mother calls her Montserrat Alejandra Angles Vasquez at those tense adolescent rebellion moments, so I have resorted to using the same tactic when she awakes opening her eyes in a dazed stare, her thoughts far away in some subconscious reality, and rises to walk.

What scares me though are her eyes. At night they change. They're different. I've told her that they are pink, not blood shot, but the white iris is dark pink. She says that they are always like that at night, but I wonder if she's sick. She has been a bit tired lately. Maybe she has some condition.

This isn't the whole story though. Sensitivity runs in the family, and not only does Montse talk in her sleep but all three of my host sisters do. I think it's the clock. Every night at twelve, the grandfather clock's chiming shakes the frosted glass living room door, starting Montse on another babbling rampage. Juan Antonio, my host father, told me that the grandfather clock in the living room is a family heirloom, so I haven't even thought of suggesting selling the darn thing. My friends at school now ask me why I am always exhausted, and my eyes so blue, so tired. They think that I'm homesick, that I cry a lot, but I've told them it's something else. About two times a week Christina, my nine year old sister, breaks out in a sweat and I hear "Mama Mama!", as she screams from the adjoining bedroom for someone to comfort her, someone to rock her back to sleep. My host family has told me within the past week that I, too, have begun to talk English

at night. I wonder if this condition is contagious, or if we unknowingly have nightly conversations with each other. Maybe that's how she knows so much about the other side of me, what I have told her, even though she is the girl I now call my sister.

With the discovery of Montse's nocturnal habits, I have grown accustomed to awakening myself before midnight, looking at the stars on our bedroom ceiling, as I wait for her to wake up so that I can restrain her from another sleep walking episode by tightly tucking in her bed sheets when she begins to talk. Depending on the mood that I'm in when I tuck her in, occasionally I find myself laughing uncontrollably, as I look at her lying there, mouth open, pink eyes staring straight ahead, reminiscent of the canned sardines we eat for dinner.

Recently I've also started taking precautions to make as little noise as possible to keep Montse from awakening on the nights when I stay up late to study. Whenever I sit at our desk across the room, reading with my back turned towards her, I poise my left hand on the study lamp, holding it close to the desk, ready to turn it off if she begins to move, or mumble a word in Catalan. Turning off the light will usually cause her to go back to sleep. One night around eleven thirty when I started to flip the pages of my book while reading at the desk, Montse was so sensitive to the noise that she sat up in bed, her eyes wide open, as she stared at a poster on the wall of some lifeguard in the TV series Baywatch, her favorite show. I waved my hand a few times over her face, but she didn't seem to acknowledge my presence. Maybe she was looking at something else. Who knows?

That night she would begin telling me her innermost secrets. Of course I never told anybody, but when I'd see her at breakfast, when we'd drink our cocoa with madelenas, and I'd tell her what she'd said. She made me promise not to tell anyone, but at holidays, such as Christmas, when the whole family gathered together, and she told them of my embarrassing moments using the Spanish or Catalan languages, I would reenact some of her less significant conversations with nobody. We'd both make fools of ourselves. Surprisingly, the entire family was aware that Montse talked in her sleep. In fact, it became a controversy because when she shared a bedroom with her grandmother, she spoke in Catalan, but now that I shared the room with her she had resorted to speaking Spanish, God help us!

With the passing of each holiday, Montse would, once again, make me swear that I would never tell any of her radical Catalan friends, that she, the adamantly Catalan girl, had ever mumbled a word in Spanish. Sometimes when Montse and I would get into fights, I'd threaten to tell someone, anyone, of that one particular conversation that she had of kissing princes late one Saturday night around two a.m. in April. Montse said that she didn't remember that one, but I sure did. In fact, I went through my numerous mini-cassette tape recordings of her nightly confessions, of her innermost secrets, and played that night back for her. We both laughed together, and then I thought to myself, looking at her the sheer delight in her facial expression, *Aquest (pausing briefly) sera un bon record de la meva germana Montse...* This will be a good memory of my sister Montse.

Elektra Gorski
Baltimore, MD

Towson High School
William Jones

"Last Christmas"

Last Christmas I lost the magic
 I awoke and knew there was no Santa
 He sleeps with mommy upstairs
 Serving milk to the cat
 Feeding cookies to the dog
 I rose from bed
 My step deflated like a gym-class basketball
 Flopping towards a tree
 That didn't glitter
 Or sparkle
 With Christmas glory

My heart evaporated
 Nostalgia calling for attention
 Trapped in ornaments
 I lost the magic
 I met Santa with a goofy frown
 The boxes lay in an anti-climactic heap of
 "What I asked for-and you bought when I left the store."
 Predictable was the wrapping
 Clear as glass
 Christmas ribboned in bore

Even food tasted
 Like Thanksgiving leftovers
 For, with a table stacked with apple pies
 And powder pastries
 Cheeses ripe with cheddar flair when sliced
 Candy ran over plates like mice
 Gourmet sodas, fruity, fizzy, and fancy,
 I could not taste Anticipation anymore

So I chewed banality
 Stuck in invisible holes in the floor
 I unwrapped
 I thanked
 I gave
 Away a Christmas to maturity
 That rusted the sparkle right
 Off the tinsel

Where was Jesus?
 It was a day like every Monday, 7A.M.
 Santa drank coffee
 Or slouched on a chair
 Magic disappeared

Eric Bovim
 Penibroke, MA
 Phillips Exeter Academy
 Douglas Rogers

Destination

Back east
 I ask about evangelists
 on Sunday morning
 but you are no religion
 bare foot on the gas pedal
 sitting there alone traversing
 the American spaces

your mother left with you
 when her parents hid her wedding album in the basement
 crumbling remnants of a marriage
 she cried only when she saw blame
 in their tired, red, eyes

you must have been behind the open Chevrolet window
 letting the loud space
 slip
 wind blowing through your eyes
 watching home

your mother silent stirring
 coffee with five sugars and four creams
 sloshing on the map

you think now remembering
 it was the moment when she chose your destination;
 the caffeine droplets oozing
 past Austin, Texas

you were in the truck stop bathroom adjusting
 your white dress with the tiny blue flowers wrinkled
 the baby's breath fastened with a pink barrette
 loose behind your ear

it is only in the car
 you are moving

Erica Ehrenberg
 New York, NY
 Hunter College High School
 Mr. Zegers

Endgame

It isn't aging I fear
 but the idea
 that age means we carry
 our ever-bulging experience
 in a basket that steadily unravels.
 And I am told never,
 never to look in the basket.
 Perhaps for fear
 that there might only be sour apples
 that make me heavy,
 as full of trapped rain.
 But every day is full of rain
 that puddles upon pavement
 to reveal gasoline rainbows
 that scatter under busy feet.
 Every day should disintegrate in rain
 like melting wax,
 turn the apples brown
 and the basket strained and frail
 and old.

My basket has soaked up the rain
 and left no evidence.
 But I won't look until I'm ready
 to eat those apples,
 not until they come around,
 soaked and gushing red,
 to another ripening.

Ely Levin
 Margate, NJ
 Atlantic City H.S.
 Peter E. Murphy

French Fries Too Salty

It's August again. I can't wait till I'm really old and have lived too long to be able to remember the little things like what happened two August ago and what I was wearing and what I'd had to drink the night before and I just can't wait till I have to struggle to remember his name, saying "wait, wait, don't help me," and if my arthritis isn't too bad and I can still flip through my old dog-eared yearbooks I'll be able to pass over his picture without stopping to touch his face with my fingertip and I really can't wait for the day I forget that he was wearing that striped shirt I hate so much, the one that clashed with itself, but now I have to remember, and for all the remembering it's a wonder I can't remember what I said that Wednesday but I do remember every word he said, every little blink of his eyes when he stopped for a breath and every nervous crack of his knuckles, but when I replay the conversation on my mind's black and white tv screen it's one sided and I'm just

the cameraman, trying to get the perfect angle to highlight those sweat beads on his forehead, and getting the focus just right so that the tacky paint-by-number landscape on the wall behind him doesn't get distracting but I probably didn't say much anyway, I probably just sat there like a stunned deer stands in the middle of the highway, knowing that the truck's going to hit her but not wanting to believe it until it's too late, knowing what he was hinting around at but waiting for him to just say it and I remember thinking that I should have waited and got him his Christmas present in December like everybody else does, thinking that it didn't do any good to tell myself I'd return that sweater to the store because I just knew I'd keep

it and wear it to torture myself and then he finished his vanilla milk shake all the way down to the bottom and even drank that slimy part that always makes me gag and I

watched him go out the door and I knew he'd put his arm up over his head to keep the rain off and I remember thinking how all that did was just make his arm wetter and I didn't want to finish my french fries, but I knew that I'd save the ones I didn't eat to make me remember that moment so I ate all of them and saved the oily place mat instead. I can't wait till I'm old enough to forget how salty french fries taste when they're soggy.

Anna Johnson
Wading River, NY
Mrs. Audre Allison

"In Betweens"

I'll take you
To the moon
Fall into a crater
separated
you
I

and space
All the Swiss cheese
is milked fantasy
riddled with cosmic dust,
not easy to see you

I'll take you
Thru the galaxy
Give you a ring
As big as Jupiter's
I'll take you
to the fifth dimension
Lose you on the 3rd
left my heart in a square
my mind on a line segment
you love on a pt.
I'll take you
thru infinity
walk on Circumference
Lose you on a tangent
the 90 shove
I'll take you
Anywhere
but I lose you
Somewhere
in the in betweens
on Now
and Eternity.

Isis Misdary
Long Valley, NJ
Villa Walsh Academy
Mrs. Olive O'Sullivan

The House Spoke Out

The walls suddenly went ablaze.
Light tore through doors and windows,
melted the glass,
ripped through the lawn,
grew on the trees
and consumed every inch
of the house on the corner
where no one lived
so they let it burn.
And if you listened close enough,
you would have heard it breathe.
It sucked in years
of empty rooms,
leaking boards, and dust,
and let it all out
in one long moan.
The skeleton slowly collapsed upon itself.

You should have seen the way everyone stood,
frozen,
as if they, too, were soon to combust.
They stared
wondered how high it would climb,
watched it all go up in flames.
Sparks jumped out,
held on to everyone's eyes.
The house said,
"This Is How I Want To Die."
No one remembers how it lived,
no one ever forgot the way it went out.
It lit up the sky
and laughed.

Johanna Greenberg
Colonia, NJ
Carol Kiyak

Homecoming

He came in for Homecoming, like all our graduates who go away, which is not many. Like Andover's a feeder for Harvard, we're a feeder for community college. I had seen him twice over the summer, once jogging and once riding shotgun in Amanda's car. Both times he was sunburned badly, and he didn't notice me.

All the "dignitaries", the graduates with large bellies and legends behind their names, stand on the top two bleachers and watch the game they used to play. I guess Shannon is a dignitary too, now - albeit an unusual one, having ventured into the world of distant higher education. If Shannon saw me on the bleachers, he didn't let on. The few times I watched him out of the corner of my eyes he never looked my way.

We had won, last year, our first Homecoming victory in a decade, and after, everyone ran onto the confetti field and sang the alma mater. When Shannon came out of the locker room, he shook my hand (he's a hand shaker, not a hugger) and my sweater was poking out a little from my coat. I remember the way he took it, folding it back so slowly into my jacket and he asked, "Where's Amanda?"

This year's Homecoming was foggy and the turf's mist reminded me of Scotland, or the way I imagined Scotland to be. I remembered playing hockey on the fake green turf, as a little girl in junior high, and in a plaid skirt I felt Scottish then too.

The Queen's court would be introduced at half-time, but even before the introduction, one could easily pick the attendants out. In their long skirts and corsages, they were our school's glitterati - sparkling like movie stars next to the common folk in jeans.

Shannon was not Amanda's escort, even though he'd be back in town for the occasion. Brothers and boyfriends were the girls' usual choices, but since Amanda had neither, everyone thought Shannon would do. Amanda, in fact, would never pick Shannon for anything. It was her passivity and his preference that had tied the two together. She had neither encouraged Shannon, nor pushed him away.

And the band played a strange song when the Homecoming court came out; it landed somewhere between our alma mater and "My Country 'Tis of Thee". My best friend, next to me, squeezed my elbow when they announced Amanda's name, trying to squelch something, I guess, she supposed I would feel. Amanda's escort was her father, and even from my distance, where my mind's eye had stenciled in her fine features, I couldn't see how this squat man could create our turf's angel.

I knew she'd cry when they would inevitably announce her queen, even though she'd be no less surprised than anyone else. Her tears, though, wouldn't be for the pride of being chosen, because Amanda would never understand why she was worshipped. I don't even think her tears would be an act, because as much as I wanted to believe otherwise, Amanda was not manipulative. She'd cry because of confusion; she wouldn't know what else to do. I'm sure Shannon beamed as the girls stood on the field. This was his realm and in his own unselfish way, he'd love seeing others polish the trophy he could never have.

And some little boy would surely fall in love with

Amanda tonight, and Shannon knew this too. This little boy would stare at her in the halls, his eyes in awe, and Amanda would never know. He would hear of Amanda's indifference toward men that had caused her almost celestial celibacy. Shannon was gone, but there were still many to carry on his favorite sport, theirs also an always fruitless obsession.

Almost a year ago, on a night colder and warmer than this Homecoming, the windows of Danny's Pathfinder were frosted and fogged. I felt hidden from the rest of the world, safe from the outside cold. When Shannon's mouth came near my ear, he whispered "Amanda." He gave me a hundred apologies and I pretended to be mad, of course. I wasn't, though - I was proud.

While my best friend was squeezing my elbow, I knew the dignitaries in the top bleacher were slapping Shannon on the back. In her indifference, she was more his than anyone's. Shannon had taken her to the prom for three springs in a row, yet his mouth never got near her little ear. They never sat closer than two feet apart in the back of Danny's Pathfinder.

For a year I tried to make Shannon forget about his goddess; for a month he tried with me, too. We succeeded for an hour - we were in love for an hour. Last Christmas Eve it snowed - through Danny's windshield it looked like a postcard. I worried about my hair when we got out of the car, and Shannon covered my head with his coat - I turned my face up to the distilled black of Christmas and let the snow freckle me. I don't remember when Shannon took my hand, but now in church, I still look for it there. He rubbed his thumb inside my palm and his warm sweat was as soft as the snowflake on my cheeks. I was wearing the dress he loved and the bracelet he gave me. He whispered the page numbers in my ear because I kept getting lost, and I was as beautiful as the church, more beautiful than her. Nothing moved; in the whole wide world nothing was moving or breathing - only Shannon's thumb and the falling snow....

And Amanda did cry when they crowned her, but she never looked into the stands. The alums started chanting her name, maybe led by Shannon - but Amanda was deaf to the noise. The little girls must have loved her, with her long hair and Cinderella smile. Every face beamed, every fan was proud we could produce such a beautiful queen. Her close friends, she had only two, were on the court also and cried too. Amanda didn't notice them either - I sometimes believed she only had friends because someone told her she should.

Lily squeezed my arm as we stood up to clap, but Lily was wrong. I felt no jealousy as I looked down on the turf where I had once played. Amanda had to lift her head up to be crowned. If she could see faces in the crowd there was no one in particular she'd look for. But she gave us a smile, the same one she'd give to a question or a Christmas tree. My face was wet, but not from tears. As they put the halo on the angel below me, I smiled too. Then I turned my chin up to the snow I shared almost a year ago.

Alia M. Habib
Wilkes Barre, PA
Elmer Meyers H.S.
Mrs. Chamberlain - Grade 11

The Blues Cafe

It was late one night, and I was walking down Main Street. The mist was rising from the pavement from the rain that fell, and I remember that it was not hot nor cold. That night I was wearing my light gray suit which always made me feel good. I neared the corner of Thirtieth and Main and I could make out, just barely, the sound of voices. I turned the corner and stood in the beam of light that tolled out in front of me like a red carpet. The sign above the door of the old wooden building read "The Blues Cafe". I smiled as the fond memories of past adventures whirled through my head.

When you are right in front of the cafe you begin to feel the blues. The blues are not a vice, and they are not an aphrodisiac, but they did something to me every time. The dim light reflected off of the plumes of smoke that rose from the tables before me. None of the people who were at the tables drinking reminded me of anyone I knew, but then I saw Jenkins. Jenkins had been born near a piano, and at fifty-five the musty ivories still called to him. I placed my hand on Jenkin's shoulder and said, "Are you feeling the blues tonight?"

"I'm always feelin' the blues Mistuh Lawrence," Jenkins said.

"I'm feeling the blues tonight too, so play me a real special one, ok?"

"As always Mistuh Lawrence."

As Jenkins created on the ivories my heart began beating in time to the left hand that churned out the chords. Then I looked up at all the others and suddenly realized that I knew who they all were. My mind reached out for a drink, and my soul relaxed in the warmth of it all. My eyes slid down the oblique angle of coolness, for that was how I felt, and I noticed the Vision across the room. I called her the Vision at first because I could see very little through the smoke, but when my eyes could make her out I was sure that her heart was beating to the left hand, too, so I must find out what her name is, because I have not seen her before. My chair took leave of me. I remember rowing out into the abyss. The abyss was a quiet, dark place in which the clock ticked to the rhythm of the left hand, and nature took its course on the smooth sliding right hand. I disembarked from my ship on the shore of reality and sat myself down across from the Vision.

Her skin was shining in the pale light. Her eyes looked at me from miles away, and at that moment I realized that we were both in a world where the right and left hand were playing in perfect accord. Our fingertips touched, then our palms, and finally we were together. The sun was tempted to rise as she smiled softly, and I could almost feel the energy from her soul pulsating throughout the room.

Jenkins slowly brought the blues to a close. When the last hammer struck the final string in the old piano, and the last note permeated the thick smoke of the Blues Cafe, my hand was cold. I could feel the cold sweat on my head. The Vision let go of my hand, and the rhythm between us stopped. Our hearts no longer beat to the left hand that churned out the chords, and I no longer knew anyone there. After a moment I could no longer see the others in the room, and a few moments later, Jenkins and his piano vanished. I was not in my gray suit, and I was not in the Blues Cafe.

I opened my heavy eyes and felt the cold sweat on my forehead. I could feel my heart pulsating in the dead

stillness of the night. My hand held fast to the cold steel bed frame. I threw on a pair of jeans and left my first floor apartment. When I reached Main Street I noticed the mist that was rising from the pavement, and I noticed that it was almost dawn, and that there never had been a Blues Cafe where I lived. As I walked up the first few stairs leading to my building, I heard footsteps on the sidewalk behind me. A soft voice called out through the air, "Goodnight...Mistuh Lawrence."

Neil Tow
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill HS
Carol Blum

New Shoes

He stomped down the hall with the authority of someone wearing new shoes. Every step was a powerful declaration of trendiness, wrapped in blue canvas, with off-white heels and toes, and the sign of capitalism worn proudly on the outside of each foot. God, they felt great! Nothing like new shoes. After the victory had been won and Mom caved in, he wore them out of the store. Carefully feeling each step, he strode down the hallway making the shoes his own. With each step, he envisioned the canvas and rubber stretching, forming to his foot. He felt a little bias to the right foot, because it seemed to be the foot he always started off on, so he added a little extra weight to the left foot. No need to walk unfairly in these shoes, democracy from the very beginning (starting off on the right foot, so to speak). He worked on down the hall, careful only to step on the white linoleum squares, and cruised on the reflection of the long neon light above him. His mission was clear; to walk on the light, only stepping on the white squares, as fast as he could, without being stopped by a hall monitor for goofing off. Dangerous, but if it could be done, he was the man for the job.

No longer in the sterile hallway, he set controls for "super-go" and blasted off. New shoes were the only protection he needed. He flew down the tunnels to the underground fortress of the slave demons. He was ready to open fire when the Master Slave Demon herself opened the door and ordered him inside with the authority of someone who wore stockings and a skirt below the knee. "Super-go" came to a devastating halt, the stomping transformed to a slight wiggling of the toes, and our super hero went inside. After all, he had only said that he needed to use the bathroom.

Well, he wasn't sent to the principal (Bald-Headed Buck), so the mission wasn't a complete loss. The shoes went back to doing what shoes do under desks, wiggling, kicking, thumping their way to the end of the day. Our super hero was picked up by his mother at three as usual in her grocery mobile, as she called it. And he was reminded of his new shoes when he climbed into the front seat. The chair hit his leg just in back of his calf so that his feet stuck out, but he could prop his feet against the glove compartment if he stretched out his toes. A hefty push and his backpack was lofted over the seat to land with a crunch on something. Well, Mom didn't notice because she was doing the Mom thing with the other moms walking by, so he decided he'd just let her figure out what it was later. The stranger Mom-Lady at the win-

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down didn't look as much like a mom as his did. She had really red hair and no make-up, and he didn't like her. Just as he was growing into this thought she leaned across his mom way into the car and wiggled his toe on his left foot. He knew that it was the left foot.

"New shoes, kiddo?" She smiled and looked in his eyes with that see-I'm-talking-to-you-like-an-adult-face.

"Yeah, they're new." It's hard to feel like a super hero when some stranger lady calls you "kiddo."

Well, they got out of the pick-up lot and were plodding on down the road. That was a long day. But Mom was there, and home provided the haven, enriched by cartoons and snack food. It would be even better if they had cool snack food, not all healthy stuff, but that was what made it fun to go over to friends' houses anyway. And Mom always bought cool stuff when he had a friend over, so he knew she loved him. Hey, it'd be good to have a friend over today, because he had new shoes, and they could be spacemen on the swings, and the shoes could be secret weapons like they have somewhere far away, and he could be captain because they were his shoes. But then again, he didn't want to have to go to the creek, because his shoes would get muddy, and anyway they had no cool food, so he didn't ask.

"Look, a plane." Yeah, Mom always pointed out the planes, and she leaned all over the steering wheel to look. But Mom didn't like planes really, she just did it to have something to say. He liked planes, because boys like planes, and he wanted to fly.

"Yeah, cool. A plane." He could imagine walking on the top of the plane, or on the wing in his new shoes, how it'd feel.

"Did everyone like your new shoes?"

Out of the trance, "Yeah! Noo-body has them, and they're really cool already, and even the fifth graders said I was cool, and Mr. Buck liked them. They're awesome! And I was walking . . ."

"Did you get sent to Mr. Buck today?"

"No, I saw him in the hall."

"Oh, good. Ok, kiddo, here we are. Get your bag."

Did she really think that he would forget his bag? Please! He got his bag and went inside, skipping the odd steps up to the door because new shoes made him strong and he didn't need to go slowly. Ahh, inside, bag on the floor. He hurried over, knee up onto the couch, careful not to put his feet on. The couch hit him just on the calf so his new shoes stuck out in front of him. The shoes sat there a couple of shows and then went into the kitchen. They were standing on top of a chair while he watched Mom do dinner things when Dad came home. Dad was introduced to the new shoes, which he took to kindly, and then he disappeared to change from work Dad to home Dad. Home Dad was better because he played on the floor and had softer shirts. Mom was always Mom. Home Dad and Mom were married, but who was married to work Dad? Maybe nobody. He probably worked all the time and didn't need another wife at work. Maybe that's what secretaries are for. They are work wives. Maybe . . . he'll watch TV and see if he can find out.

Dinner was nothing special. Mom and Dad talked about big things, but he liked the fish sticks, and he drank all of his milk so dessert was probable. Dinner would have been more fun if Mom hadn't stopped him from putting his feet on the table to admire and discuss his new

shoes. Well, there was always after dinner. Ice cream was served, and not in mugs like some people; ice cream in this house was a bowl affair. Ice cream was maybe a once a week thing, and everyone was sick at the end of it. Yes, ice cream, new shoes, fish sticks . . . Mom was on a roll. Life was good, and it got better. Mom cleared the table, and Dad was all his. They'd gone to the store. It was crowded. Mom wanted dork shoes, but he knew better. The variety almost killed him, and then he saw them. He HAD to have them, HAD to. HE WOULD ABSOLUTE-
LY DIE IF HE DIDN'T! Luckily, Mom saw the light, and God was pulling for the cool shoes—they were on sale. HALLELUJAH! Yeah, school was fine, too.

Reveling in the glory of the hunter-gatherer who returned victorious, our clan leader was carried to bed. Teeth were brushed and all that jazz, but then problems rose above the horizon. Pajamas were cool, bed was fine, but what about the shoes? Where do they sleep? The magical, powerful, trend-setting stripes and canvas . . . Oh, say can you see! To forsake the shoes, still in their prime, the horror of it all. And to think the velcro straps loosened and alone . . . Through the dawn's early light . . . When he woke up, they'd be like every other shoe, not new, not charged with "super-go." What so proudly we hailed, as feet with new shoes gleaming! Oh, the agony! To grow so enamored only to find that it was the illusion of day, for in the shadow of night, the truth, the love is wiped from the feet, left alone, empty, each a mirror of the other's empty sole. Lost in inarticulate pain, and a stomach ache because of the ice cream.

"Dad, my tummy hurts."

"You ate too much, buddy. What do you need to feel better?"

"Can I wear my shoes to bed?"

"Will it help?"

"Uh-huh."

"Ok, then, climb in bed. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

The world is good, and tomorrow there will be new shoes again. Pajama pants and blue sneakers make for good dreams.

Erin Foster
Olney, MD
St. Andrews Episcopal School
Dona Weingarten

Bar-Mitzvah Blues

Oy, was that an awful meal. The salad was limp and the salmon was too dry. Oh well, what are you going to do? Somehow, I think these shiny balloons are a little much. What's with all this glitz nowadays? In my day a Bar Mitzvah actually meant something. It was a real coming of age; I wanted to make my father proud. Now it's just a chance to collect money and presents. Hah. I don't even know this kid and already I give him fifty dollars. Maybe if he'd taken this event a little more seriously, I would feel more generous. I don't know. Maybe it's just me, but I think anyone who giggles during his Torah portion has a long way to go. And the kids running around in these souvenir t-shirts. This is just an excuse for a party, that's all it is.

I hate this awkwardness just sitting here at the table after dinner. It's just schmoozing, that's all it is. I never was a good schmoozer. But Esther, now there's a talker. It's always the same with us, she drags me out, of course we have to go to the Bar Mitzvah of her cousin's nephew's grandmother's aunt's daughter's stepson. Such a close relative I can do without. Now while she's talking up a storm I'm sitting here evaluating the fish. What is this world coming to? Maybe I should join in the conversation. But somehow I just don't think a discussion of Helen's granddaughter's every move is exactly what I need right now. Oh no, she didn't! I'm not going to drag myself into this. I might have to leave the room, and I don't think Esther would be too thrilled with me then. I'm much better off on my own than dealing with all these happy types with the smiles plastered on their faces. They might call me anti-social, but I think I'm just smarter than the rest. What do I need this craziness for?

What kind of silly music is this those kids are dancing to? If you can call this noise music. The parents must have spent a fortune on the band and all this other schmaltz. You'd think if they spent that much money the least they could have done is get a decent caterer. Honestly, I could have baked a better cake than these no-goodnicks, and believe you me, I'm no gourmet chef. Now the cake at Esther's friend's son's daughter's Bat-Mitzvah last month, that was edible, good even, if I would go so far. I think I've got the whole Bar-Mitzvah system down to a science by now. I know what works and what doesn't, when it's too much and when too little. If only someone would ask for my opinion once in a while. Oy, this music is becoming too much for my poor ears. Now, Esther, there's a dancer. These kids, they have no idea what they're doing out there. Now, when we're dancing together it feels just right. We fit so perfectly, we move, we sway, mmmm. Just thinking about it makes me feel happy. Well, maybe happy is kind of a strong word, but it definitely makes me happier. Happier is good. I want to dance again.

The chatters have moved on to Fran's little grandson now. When will they get tired of this absurdity? There seems to be no limit to the phoniness some people possess. Not that Esther's phony. Looking at her now you might think so, but I know better. I can't relate to her when she's with her schmoozing cronies, but when we're alone it's different. We fit somehow. Hah! There goes the boy up in the chair. Look at him go. Up and down. Up and down. Looks like he's going to fall out. Wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Of all the ways to celebrate is this really the best one? The boy looks meshugana laughing and smiling and bouncing up and down. Up and down. Actually, it doesn't look half bad. He looks practically delirious up there. Such excitement I haven't felt in years. Finally he's down. Ah, now this is a song straight out of my past. Hah! Esther wants to dance with me. Imagine that. Hmm, what a dancer Esther is. Never was there such a dancer. It takes me back.

Emily Silverman
Bethesda, MD
Richard Montgomery High School
Deborah Wilchek

Windshield Wipers and the Clerk

The rain angrily pounded on the windshield and the road disappeared into the blackness which surrounded me. My eyesight is poor and my driving skills are even worse. I was coming home from work at two o'clock on Friday morning. The storm danced violently in the night's breeze and the naked branches of the trees were pushed from side to side. I could barely see the road. The windshield wipers worked in vain to keep the storm away. They cleared the same space over and over again but the rain quickly recovered the windshield. I idly admired the wiper's effort as I drove.

When it occurred to me that I was becoming sentimental over windshield wipers, I realized that my hunger and fatigue must have been beyond normal. I pulled into an all night gas station and wished desperately that I was at home beneath my warm blue blankets. The pleasing smell of gasoline filled my lungs. I stood beneath the red concrete overhang and pumped gas into the car. The wind tossed the cold rain on to my neck and hands. A beat up old Plymouth was parked next to the station. A boy wearing a baseball hat and a t-shirt paced the length of the car furiously.

"What does it say?" he said anxiously. A thin faced girl appeared at the car.

"I just did it. We have to wait five minutes," she replied quickly. I could see her scared eyes through the window. The boy was completely soaked by the rain but he did not seem to notice.

"You said a blue dot is positive. Do you mean positive good or positive bad?" said the boy.

"Positive means positive," said the girl with a hint of anger. I listened unemotionally while the car filled up with gas.

"What am I going to do?" said the boy to the trunk of the car. The girl looked back from the front seat.

"You? God, Billy you're so selfish." The girl turned back to the front. I think she was crying but it was hard to tell in the pouring rain. I put my gas cap back on and returned the gas nozzle to the holder.

"Has it been five minutes yet?" asked Billy. There was no reply from the girl. Billy stared into the passenger side window and sighed deeply. He began to pace again.

I went inside the gas station to pay and get something to eat. I was glad to be out of the rain. The clerk behind the counter had thick glasses and acne covered his thin face. But when he smiled his face was pleasant.

"Pretty nasty out there, uh," said the clerk. His voice was very calm and he spoke slowly.

"Yeah," I replied automatically. "I'm gonna get something to eat and then I'll pay for the gas."

"Sure, take your time. I'm stuck here all night." The clerk smiled again. I did not expect such friendly service at two in the morning. My stomach growled as I stared at all the food.

I heard a car pull up in front of the door. The door swung open and two men entered along with a strong gust of wind.

"So I smashed the guy's face into the wall and then I told him that's what we do to fairies around here," said a tall well built man with an unkept beard. I looked up from the potato chip rack. The man squinted through weathered eyes and laughed wildly. It always annoys me to hear people laugh hysterically at their own jokes. The other man was short and fat. His face looked like a beet.

He smiled stupidly at his friend and nodded several times.

"Hi, guys. How are you tonight?" asked the clerk, cheerfully. The men looked over at him.

"What the hell's all over your face?" asked the tall well built man coldly. The short fat man made weird snorting noises, which I guess were meant to be a laugh. The clerk touched his face and then smiled weakly.

"Oh, I've had this since I was fifteen. My dermatologist says it should go away in about six to eight weeks because of this new cream I got. The stuff works great." The clerk pulled the cream out from behind the counter to show us.

"Gimme a pack of Marlboro Reds," said the tall man with contempt in his voice. While the clerk got the cigarettes the two men made fun of his face and clothes. They looked like little children, trying to convince each other that they possessed authority. The clerk gave them the cigarettes and took the money.

On the way out, the short man knocked over a rack of road maps. He looked back and snorted a few more times. They got in their car and left. The clerk came from behind the counter and kneeled to pick up the maps.

"Sorry about all that. We get a lot of strange customers at night," he said softly.

"No problem. Maybe you should call the police or something," I replied.

"Nah, I'm sure they didn't mean any harm." He walked back behind the counter and wiped off his glasses with a tissue. The clerk began to ring up my potato chips and gas.

"So, what are you doing out so late?" he asked.

"I'm on my way home," I said. I took my chips and started to leave.

"Hey, ah are you in college?"

"No, high school."

"Oh, high school that's great," he said enthusiastically. I forced a smile and then again started toward the door.

"Do you like to read?" the clerk asked.

"Yeah." I was beginning to feel a little strange talking to him but he acted as if we had known each other for years. I quickly slipped through the door and into the rain. The clerk came outside and smiled.

"Sure is nasty out here. Hey, you ever read Kurt Vonnegut novels?" he asked casually while he rubbed his hands together for warmth. I nodded in disbelief as we stood in the pouring rain.

"He's my favorite author," said the clerk.

We stood in the rain for what seemed like a life time but it was probably about ten minutes. I stayed completely still while he told me the plot of every book that Kurt Vonnegut had ever written. The cold wind made my feet and hands numb. The rain crashed into my face until my eyes could no longer focus on the clerk. All I could do was listen to his magnificent voice rumbling over the storm.

At first I could not determine if he was lonely or just some crazed idiot. I was not prepared to encounter sincerity and kindness in a swirling storm of viciousness. I wiped the rain away from my eyes. The clerk took off his glasses and put them in his pocket. Both of us were drenched and my chips were soggy.

"Well, I guess I'll see you later," he said. I nodded. The clerk smiled and then went back inside. In the bottomless pit of night, the clerk's actions of common decency made him seem like a beam of light. But he was only a man stuck in the center of a ugly storm. I looked to the side of the building but the old Plymouth was gone. I wandered aimlessly through the rain to the car. The rain pounded even harder than before. I turned on my windshield wipers and left.

Mark Taneyhill
Newark, Del
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Miss McFann



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