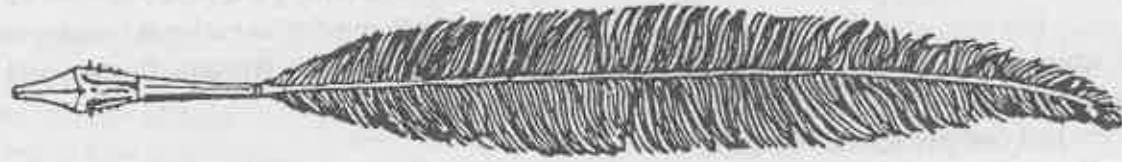


Susquehanna University

# THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Cara Pasarelli

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## Introduction

Welcome to the fourteenth 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 thirteen 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 ten years many of those students and hundreds more have attended the **Susquehanna Summer Writers' Workshops**.

The summer workshops, which attract students to study fiction and poetry writing through classes conducted by nationally-know published writers, 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 Tobias Wolff, Sharon Olds, Lucille Clifton, Madison Smartt Bell,

Gerald Stern, Joy Harjo, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Robert Boswell to campus. **The Susquehanna Review**, a literary magazine, is written, edited, and produced entirely by students. Some of these students enroll in graduate creative writing programs, and others have published in national magazines while still enrolled at Susquehanna.

A writing concentration major has been introduced at Susquehanna, and introductory and advanced workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and playwriting are offered. Independent writing projects, student chapbook publication, a student reading series, and a variety of internships are overseen by faculty who have published eight books in the past five years and regularly publish in national magazines, including **Harpers, Newsday, The Paris Review, Poetry, and The North American Review**.

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, 1997.

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## WyPwa\*

My grandmother  
works her way down 12 steps,  
slowly walks over to the far corner room of the basement,  
where I work on the computer,  
and hands me orange sections bundled up in a paper towel.  
I cup my hands around hers, kiss them.  
She draws her hands away, leaves the oranges  
nestled in my palms.  
I thank her.  
She works her way back, across the basement floor,  
up 12 stairs,  
and I look at the orange sections  
her stiff fingers peeled and picked at  
until they were just wedges of pulp  
anxious to bulge out of thin membrane.  
I bite into each section,  
careful to take in every  
teardrop sack of life  
held within that thin skin.

\* WyPwa - Chinese for maternal grandmother

Helen Lee  
Berkeley Hts, NJ  
Governor Livingston HS  
Mr. Scott Shallcross

## It's a Cruel World with Pink Shoes

It's a cruel world with pink shoes  
that just don't fit right  
and wiry blonde hair that looks nothing like it did in the box  
after constant bouts with a hair stylist  
and her tiny, precise fingers.

Tons of outfits sprawl across the floor.  
I pass over all of them,  
and my eyes land on the one I want,  
the one I used my allowance to buy,  
the one my friend is using,  
the pink mini-skirt.  
"It's mine,"  
"You always get it"  
escalates to  
"I hate you, get out."  
I throw her overnight bag onto my lawn.

Her brown eyes are apologetic.  
She leaves my house and stands by her bag.  
Her voice cracks as she pleads  
"Could I stay, please?"  
She takes two steps towards me  
and reaches for her bag.  
It stares at me and tears well up in her eyes  
as guilt knocks the wind out of me.  
I am an actress though.  
My eyes scream sorrow, but I push it away,  
tying my arms in a double knot.  
A selfish girl still wants the skirt  
to make her Barbie perfect.

L. Claire Page  
Towson, MD  
Towson HS  
William Jones

## My Family Is in Love With Sausage

There is no chance of a full breath.  
The fatty scent storms into my room  
like a pig bursting in, stuffing atoms  
into my lungs, blocking airways.  
I feel asthmatic and out of control  
as it slides under the door.  
Lying in bed, I realize that it's Saturday;  
Mom is slaving in the kitchen while  
Dad is coaching recreation basketball  
for my brother Devin's team.  
They will be home soon  
and Colin will have to stop watching cartoons  
to eat breakfast with the other three.  
They'll all be eating sausage,  
breaking the outside layer  
of tough pig intestine to get  
to the soft spicy insides.  
I just want to sleep.  
I open my window and crawl out  
onto my roof with my blanket.

L. Claire Page  
Towson, MD  
Towson High School  
William Jones

## Last Evening on the Island of Naxos

Tonight the hotel room is an oven  
and the mosquitoes are hungry.

The air weighs like a hand on my body  
and I do not have a clean dress for dancing.

Our pockets and stomachs are empty; our faces red  
and peeling from hours in the sun.

There is no escape from day's heat except water,  
but night will come on like a smothered shout,

so we wait. Soon the breeze will dry  
our salty hair. The lights on the island

will melt into a neon rainbow along the shore  
and we will sit on the docks, watching the people

float by like grains of sand carried away  
in the surf; you and I will lean back

into the darkness and stare up  
at the infinite universe, sipping our bottle

of 400-drachma champagne, the emptiness  
of our stomachs closing to warmth,  
and we will realize how many hours  
stand between us and morning:

when we are tired we will walk home slowly  
and try not to notice the multitude of stars.

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

## Mandel Bread

Once a month we take a trip into another reality. A slower one. Where each knick-knack has become permanently affixed to what will be its final resting spot. Where, for our brief visit, the plastic peaches in the etched porcelain bowl double as juggling balls and decorations. Where my brother Josh grows "at least five inches" in the four weeks that we are away. Where the same embroidered guest towels hang in the tiny powder blue bathroom, forever pressed into perfect rectangles with razor sharp edges. Where the volume is set so high on the television that the entire apartment building hears when we turn it on. But most of all, where my Great Aunt Sarah lies: where the only sign of ugly Father Time is the painfully slow wasting away of her mind and body.

I am in the kitchen washing the dishes after we have eaten dinner. We bring in Boston Chicken during the winter because she can't stand the cold. Aunt Sarah says that food always tastes better picnic-style anyway, when you can use your fingers. I don't know how much she can taste any more; for all I know the tapioca pudding and candied sweet potatoes taste exactly the same. But I don't think that is what really matters to her. She says people don't come to see her much anymore. Except for this young medical student from down the hall (who she doesn't want coming over while I'm there because he's not Jewish) we are her only visitors. She hopes that she lives to see me married to a nice Jewish boy. She says she feels helpless and useless. Her shriveled hands shake and her gait is barely more than a slow trudge. Her memory is not very good, but she gets around this by calling everyone "dear." We have the same conversation every visit, often more than once each time.

So it is as she calls out for the third time to ask if anyone **wants any mandel bread.** It is hard to describe all that mandel bread is. Webster doesn't define it, but I will try. A very small corner in life is reserved for mandel bread, and it is ever shrinking. It isn't really bread at all, it's closer to stone. It looks like biscotti. It tastes like hard almond cookie, the kind that you can break teeth on. It is kept in a tin, usually in layers separated by wax paper. It is essentially an ethnic food. The only mandel bread I have ever come across has been in close proximity to an older Jewish woman. The ritual offering of mandel bread has been an integral part of our visits ever since I can remember. Aunt Sarah loves us. Food is love, and mandel bread seems to be the currency of choice. So, how do you say no to mandel bread if it is essentially the same thing as rejecting love? I try. Have just one piece, dear. No thank you, I'm really not hungry. That works only a few times, until I realize that not being hungry does not justify rejecting mandel bread. Then there's the 'I'll take some home' response. The problem with anything I say is that each time Aunt Sarah asks is the first time to her. So, on the seventeenth offer, I accept. Aunt Sarah's eyes light up, and thought I can feel the impending doom of actually having to eat the mandel bread, I am happy.

Eating the mandel bread is made only slightly more bearable by the multiple cups of steaming tea I drink with it. As soon as I finish one piece, if not sooner. I consent to eating 'just one more piece.' It's like a high; I watch my aunt in delight as she shows her approval. Wow, I think, it doesn't take much to make some people happy. Soon, I can't help myself. We have moved back into the dining room and we all sit around the looming tin of mandel bread.

As I reach for my seventh piece, I notice my hands begin to shake. My steady, sharp-shooting aim is lost, and my hands finds its way to the side of the tin, and instead of picking up a piece, my fingers are jammed into the cold metal. I don't think much of it at the time, I only have one objective—I strive to

consume the mandel bread with my whole being. Munching on that piece, my taste buds conspire to revolt. No sweet, sour or bitter signals reach my brain. The mandel bread has become more than a dessert, more than a food. It affects me in small ways at first, like the trembling in my hands. By the tenth piece, however, the faces across the table blur out of focus. The edges become soft and vaguely remind me of peach fuzz. Musical peals of laughter punctuate the whirl of muffled voices. I lose count of the pieces. . . was that my eleventh or my first? It doesn't really matter anyway. The next thing I realize is that the smooth skin on my arm has now become papery and wrinkled. It dangles down like the skin of a rooster's throat. I get up to look in the mirror, but the flurry of bodies in motion all around me is too much, and I feel like a slowly plodding tyrannosaurus rex, or was that a brontosaurus? Anyway, I decide to sit back down, but I can't help noticing that my feet are clad in off-white velcro sneakers. I'll just have another piece of mandel bread. It's only my second. Uh-oh, I dropped it. It hurts to try to pick it up. Ouch, my back! I can't seem to find the floor. Oh, there it is, in my lap. As I look down, I am somewhat shocked to find that I am wearing navy-blue polyester pants. But not too shocked. I tell Josh that he must have grown, at least five inches, since I saw his last year, or was that last month? I don't really understand what he says. He's going to be tall when he grows up. I only come to his chin, and he's only fourteen. To his chin?! Am I shrinking? Or is her growing?

I offer him a piece of mandel bread. He doesn't take one and I don't quite catch the reason. Come on dear, just have one piece. (It's all I have to give.) What does not being hungry have to do with the question? Dear, you must have grown at least five inches since I saw you last. Or did I say that already? What are you doing, throwing my peaches in the air! Stop it dear, before you break something. He turns on the television, but immediately turns the volume way down. I can't hear anything. He comes and stoops over, practically yelling in my ear. Like I'm deaf or something. I'm not. I offer everyone another piece. At first Josh refuses, but then he takes one. I smile. I am about to offer him just one more piece, but I notice he is eagerly eating the one I just have given him. I am happy.

Rebecca Stein  
Abington Sr. High School  
Rydal, PA  
Mr. Baker.

### Revision

Old cliches are knocking at my window,  
with tweedy carpetbags  
plunked down on the patio,  
to describe my longing for  
understanding,  
for a gentle face and  
no judgment, yet they cannot  
help.  
The shades have long since  
been drawn.  
The lights are off, and my  
imagination is asleep.

Margaret Burke  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

## Falling Back

the first small-hand sweep from one to two  
beats Hallowe'en into bat-tattered fragments  
before we change the clocks  
stir time like leaves  
wipe the slate clean with a low-flying broom

we stayed up just to taste  
that most witching of hours  
where feral dreams can burn  
upon the air

then we fell back, let the renewed hour  
wrap us in a sleep where our hands meshed  
and later, drifted apart again  
as our dreams parted ways for the night

in the fresh-swept, icy morning  
I watch you sleep  
wondering when the rise and fall  
of your sleeping ribs became  
important as the air  
that carries my own nights

the small hand sweeps from two to one  
there are no guarantees  
with each breath  
sleeping hands touch each other  
outside time

Kate Schapirs  
Lakeville, CT  
Russell Coward

## The Sea, the Weight, the Movies

After practice, his father summoned him upstairs. "Come on up to the balcony after you pack up!" he yelled to his son as the boy walked off the stage. His son placed his violin carefully in its case, closed it, and carried it out of the theater and up the stairs, to the balcony.

"How was the dress rehearsal?" his father asked. "You guys sounded good." The son mumbled in agreement. "Put your violin down. I've got something to show you."

He led the way up the aisle to the very back wall. The son rubbed his hand along the old wall paper, feeling the rough texture burn the callused skin of his fingertips. Amazing it had survived this long. He followed his father, who had continued into an open door. Once through the opening, he saw an old, gray hallway that ended in a steep set of metal stairs, overlooking a chasm of trash. His father was ascending them, and indicated that the boy should follow.

It was dusty, and it didn't look like many people had been back here recently. What was this place? Curious, he followed.

"I was wandering around while I was waiting for you, and I found this." The stairs were almost a ladder, and the son felt slightly ill at ease. The father continued as they climbed. "You can find a lot just by looking."

They had reached the top. The son turned a corner, and was met by a flash of light as his father switched on the unfrosted light bulb just above their heads. In this illumination, he saw a pile of machinery, smelling of grease. Just an indiscriminate mass to his eye, old and dusty and forgotten. Gears and tubes and bulbs and rods.

The son looked pointedly puzzled, and in response his father indicated a corner of the room. He followed his finger and gazed into the darkness. Stepping closer, the object became clearer. A table, covered with a thick layer of dust, like everything else in the room, and tilted at an angle. He took another step so he was leaning over the blackness and saw what was on the table. Celluloid.

Again he was baffled, and shot his dad an annoyed look. The father smiled and led his son into another room. As he followed, the comfortable warmth of the theater changed into a stifling heat. He coughed as his father clicked on the light. There, in front of a small glass window sat a row of huge, hulking machines. On the opposite wall was a row of wooden cabinets, cracked and broken with age. The light glinted off small plastic labels set into the wood.

Then it hit him: He was looking at projectors.

"Neat, huh? From back when this theater was a movie theater. You'd hardly know it from looking at those fancy seats, and the wallpaper, and the chandeliers. See these projectors burned these little rods here and... hey! Look at this!" As his father was speaking, he had been moving excitedly around the room, and was now holding a bit of film up to the light. "I remember this! Come over and take a look!"

Reluctantly, the boy came over and peered at the strip his father was holding. "What does it say?"

"Oh... 'Coming Attractions.' They used this as leader to the trailers." *Right*, thought the boy. "And look at this!"

Another prize for the boy's inspection was clutched eagerly in the father's hands. "HIGH-QUALITY USED BOOKS! BOUGHT AND SOLD!" declared the black-and-white ad.

"I haven't seen some of this stuff for fifty years!" said the father.

But the boy was mystified. It was something special for his father--some long-dead memory--but to him, it was just an indistinct scrap of film, interesting only for its age. "Why don't you grab some of it so we can get out of here?" he said. "I'm kind of hungry."

"Uh... OK. Which one should I get?"

"Just grab one, dad. They're all the same."

"Hmm... I'll get the ad," said the father, pocketing the second piece of film he had found. "OK, kid. I'm ready to go."

He was not in the warm-up area, a concrete-laden basement of the old theater that reeked faintly of detergent and moisture. They were about to play the free "senior citizens" performance (he couldn't believe they actually wanted to call themselves that)--kind of the final dress rehearsal.

So now, bored, he sat on the stairs and looked out at the room. He felt kind of out of place. What was that his mother had asked his? "What are these people like?" Hmm. What were these people like? He let himself scan the room.

It was one large group at first. A mass of black fabric, hair, and hormones. Then he saw little patterns. The stragglers, like him, silent at the edges. Some watching, some playing, some thinking. None talking. Teachers moved about the crowd, trying to tune. Then a slow convergence towards the center seemed to appear, little groups to show up--two or three people bunched together, chatting happily, the girls smiling, the boys looking nonchalant. A sense of calm and belonging pervaded throughout.

And so, his mind came to rest on one group of mixed boys and girls. Most were violinists, so he had heard them talk before. But now he just looked. There was Nick, his stand partner, a tall well-built lacrosse player with nice hair. the girl

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continued from p. 5  
 who sat next to him in math class had a crush on him. Then the chubby guy, a little effeminate and sometimes condescending but usually all right. Next to him was the ordinary weird boy with the fish key chain.

Then the girls, mixed in unevenly with the guys. Angela, who had pointedly ignored him when he was wearing his dorky coat but who had given him a little pat when he was wearing his "cool" one. She was talking with her boyfriend, Cory, a jock with spiky hair. Vying for Angela's attentions were Stephanie--the girl he had sat next to for three weeks once but never said a word to, who drank Diet Coke, and who had given him a hug at the end of three weeks--and another girl whose name he had not caught. They were stand partners and giggled cutely in the back of the section.

And how long had he known these people? he asked himself. Three days? Two?

"All right, guys! Time to go on! Break a leg!" said one of the teachers suddenly, breaking him off from his thoughts. He had to move quickly to get out of the way--the problem with sitting on the stairs--and got some dirty looks. Slightly flustered, he took a wrong turn and ended up following the group he had been watching. They had done this before, he saw. They walked through the flaking hallways lightly papered with old movie posters. He saw them as he walked by: *The Projectionist*, *Casablanca*, *Singin' in the Rain*. Now he remembered seeing *The Transformers Movie* in this very same theater when he was seven or eight. No one else knew that. Then it was time to go on.

"It's a sea of old out there," he thought to himself as he fought the lights and looked out at the audience. A whole theater full of old faces.

He wove his way through the seats until he reached his place and sat down. The folder landed on the stand with a dull clank as Nick joined him. Nick was smiling, but did not say anything. Perhaps Nick had seen him watching, and wondered. But no matter--it was time to play.

The first piece came suddenly, without introduction, a fast, short number by Tchaikovsky that was supposed to wake the audience up. Fat chance. He had done this before, if not in this specific theater. The old people would applaud politely at the end, because we are youth and they love us. "It's their chance to get out," a former stand partner had remarked. They wanted to get the most out of it, and it was more the fact that they were there than what was going on.

So when the conductor was making one of his pointless speeches--conductors were required to do that, he thought--he looked out at the sea of old. And that was what he saw. Just white hair and sad faces. Wrinkles, dentures, hearing aids. Old. Indiscriminate.

He did not have any relatives in the audience. All his old relatives were dead. He could only remember one grandparent's funeral, his grandmother's. It was on a picturesque little hilltop, with fresh dirt and perfume in the air. Four big, black ladies had sung "Amazing Grace." He had known his grandmother, and he liked her when she wasn't smoking. He could see something there beneath the old. A history, he guessed. They had talked some, and he had gotten some impressions of a real life, and not just a grandmother.

But not here. Here it was just old. They really were "senior citizens." They weren't even grandmas or -pas. There were no lives there, no personality, just the weight of years. And he felt sorry.

Then the next piece started, and he forgot his remorse for a while, as it was enveloped in a cloud of rosin that was sent up by the first sudden note. But then as it moved on to a slower

theme, his section was just background noise, so he thought. Why was he sorry? He was sorry because he didn't know the people out there. He knew the people in the basement more than he wanted to. But those people out there, they had a whole world in their heads, a world he did not know. He wanted to see their memories. He wanted to sit there and watch their lives play out.

Just like a movie.

Just like all those old movies out there. The ones you had never heard of, with the actors you wouldn't recognize, back from before you were born. These people knew those movies. His dad knew these movies. But he did not. Things like the strip of film his dad had picked up had meaning to his dad and these people, but it was nothing to him. Just like the audience.

But the movies would always be there if he wanted to see them. These people would not. All the old out there was slowly dying, one by one. A movie lost with each passing second that could never be recovered.

He knew the Transformers, and he knew the people in the basement. The old knew *Red Dust*, and they knew each other. And someday no one would understand him, either.

After the concert, his father picked him up and took him to a restaurant for a snack. They had chatted, ordered, and sat, and then he had to go to the bathroom. Returning, he passed an old man and woman talking, and he remembered.

He got back to the table and sat down. "Dad," he said, "tell me about the movies."

Michael Barthel	Clinton HS
Clinton NY	Deborah Hepburn

### In My Grandparents' Guest Room

The room was all shadows  
 all the time, each block  
 of darkness a shade of blue.  
 The sheets were cool water;  
 I hid in them, watching  
 the shadows of trees dance  
 with long blue limbs against the wall  
 until I heard the click  
 of my grandparents' door.  
 Then, through the thick blue  
 darkness, I planned a path  
 down the stairs to the pantry  
 for a second helping of oatmeal raisin cookies.  
 The kitchen smelled of carrot sticks  
 and wax paper and hand lotion.  
 I took three cookies and hurried,  
 my white night dress blue in the light,  
 back to my room. I left a trail  
 of crumbs behind me.

In the morning, stomach heavy,  
 I woke to the glowing sunlight  
 making its way like a child's hands  
 through the blue branches to caress my face  
 and to the cold touch of my grandmother's hand  
 against my shoulder. When we walked  
 to the kitchen for breakfast  
 the whole house was white with sun  
 except for the watery shadows  
 that followed our footsteps down the stairs.

Elizabeth Hazen	Walt Whitman H.S.
Potomac, MD	Dr. Martin Calvin

I've noticed that there is always somebody on an airplane who will strike up a conversation with anyone. I travel a lot because my dad is a businessman and he always takes me with him—he says I'm his favorite travel companion. So far I've been to seven countries and twenty-one states. We always travel first class, because that's where you get the nicest stewardesses; they bring my dad Bloody Marys that they mix up right there in the little cart in the aisle, or real wine glasses full of champagne. Then I press the stewardess button and ask for a Shirly Temple. I love watching the grenadine swirl around in the 7-Up, and they usually come with a cherry. Sometimes you get my own TV, where you get to pick out the movie. We had those last year when we flew to Australia, and I watched six movies each way despite the fact that I kept getting interrupted by the woman sitting next to me.

"Hello, little girl," she said at first, and I took off my headphones to be polite. She looked very old with lines all over her face and bright makeup, blush and lipstick and eye shadow. Her hair was curly and white and she offered me the dessert from her airplane lunch. It was chocolate truffles so I accepted. On airplanes I can eat anything but the meat they give you—God knows how long it's been there. The old lady told me she was going to Australia because her grandson was getting married there. He was a scuba diver in the great barrier reef and he was marrying a lady scuba diver named Helda, whose father owned the biggest glass-bottomed boat company in the country. "Isn't Helda a silly name?" she asked me. I said yes and told her my name was Anjelica. Then I asked my dad if we could go on a glass-bottomed boat ride in Australia, and he said we could.

The lady told me she didn't understand why her grandson had to get married in Australia. The whole family lived in Richmond, Virginia. They were all on the plane, only she was the only one in first class. I told her my dad and I always travel first class because the stewardesses are nice. "And the seats are wider," she said. "I've become a woman of luxury in my old age." She smiled, which crinkled her eyes, and asked me why my mommy wasn't coming to Australia with us.

"She's dead," I said. "Cancer. Too many diet Cokes and Virginia Slims."

The lady looked shocked. "Well!" she said, taking the airplane magazine out of her seat pocket and beginning to leaf through it. I put my headphones back on. I was watching a movie my dad said was good, but it was just people running around trying to shoot each other, and a dumb lady who lost all the money and had sex a lot. It was fairly entertaining. The lady kept glancing over at me and frowning. Finally she tapped me on the shoulder.

"What?" I pulled the headphones down around my neck.

"What is that you're watching? You shouldn't be seeing a movie like that."

"My dad liked it," I said, gesturing to him. He looked up from his TV screen and smiled distractedly.

The old lady looked surprised. "That's your father?"

"Yup." I gave the old lady a big smile like I do when my dad and I have our pictures taken in faraway places. The lady smiled weakly and went back to her magazine. I love to smile. I'm a pretty ordinary-looking twelve-year-old girl, but people tell me I have a really sincere smile. I practice in front of the mirror a lot, and I smile like that every time I meet someone, so they'll like me.

When we got to our hotel in Sydney, my dad got a bellboy to bring our bags up to the room, and I wandered off into the lobby as he approached the front desk. "Hello, Mr.

Cole," I heard the desk lady say when my dad gave her his stuff. "Pleasure to have you here with us." I listened until she told him the room number before I moved out of earshot.

The hotel lobby was large and splendid, with high ceilings, crystal chandeliers and wood paneled walls. I looked over and saw a tall girl sitting on one of the couches that circled the middle of the lobby. She wore a sleeveless sundress and white sandals and kept pushing wet hair behind her ears with French-manicured fingers. I walked over to the girl and sat down on the opposite couch to inspect her. I decided she was a couple of years older than I was.

When she looked up from picking at something on her dress, I smiled at her and she smiled back. Then I got up, walked over to her couch and pulled my knees up to my chest—I have nice skinny legs which I've been waxing since last summer. People like it when you sit like that. It makes them feel more comfortable than if you cross your legs formally or stand up and hover over them. The girl looked at my feet because they were on the sofa and said, "I like your shoes."

I smiled again. "Thanks." I got a lot of compliments on those shoes, polished leather sandals that my dad bought me especially for the trip. They cost a hundred-fifty dollars, which is a lot considering I'm growing like a mushroom in the rain, but he said they looked beautiful and I'm worth it. "Nice manicure," I said.

"Oh thanks. My mother thought getting them together would be a nice mother daughter bonding experience." She made a face and I nodded sympathetically. "I mean give me a break. She's getting married for God's sakes. They've been divorced what, six months now? and she's getting married already. It was bad enough coming all the way to freaking Australia—now I have to deal with my mother in love."

I had been keeping up different variations of my sympathetic nod the whole time she was talking, as if I understood exactly what she was going through, so I decided it was time to introduce myself. "My name's Anjelica," I told her. "I'm on a business trip with my dad." I pointed him out and the girl raised an eyebrow.

"Wow, he looks really young."

"He's thirty-six," I said. He looked younger than he was.

"I'm Sky," the girl said. "Like where planes go? It's not short for anything."

"It's pretty." I flashed my smile. "How long've you been at this hotel?"

"God, don't ask," she groaned, pushing her hair behind her ears. "Oh, I've gotta go." A lady in a red hat and fancy clothes was beckoning her impatiently. Sky rolled her eyes. "Bridal luncheon. See you later, Anjelica."

"Bye." I wondered if her mother was Helda.

We ate dinner at the second most expensive of the hotel restaurants, called "the Reefer," which made my dad laugh. Right after we sat down, the waiter came up to our table and smiled brightly for a few seconds. Then he took a breath and said, "Hello, my name is Rod," in this great Australian-accent. He paused, took another breath and said, "Would you like something to drink?"

"Johnny Walker Black, please," my dad said, and I ordered a Shirly Temple. When they came, we toasted our glasses together, and my dad said "To us," in an imitation-Rod accent. I laughed.

That night I couldn't fall asleep until almost two, even with my regular dose. Ever since I was a young kid, I have been an incredible insomniac. Now I just take pills—my doctor gives

me a special kind that isn't addictive. He told me I am one of the youngest cases he's ever dealt with. When I was little, my mother used to come into my room at around midnight, to kiss me, and when I would say, "I can't sleep," she would tell me to pretend I was in a movie about a beautiful princess, and this was the scene where the princess falls into a long, deep sleep. She would make me close my eyes; then she would drape my hair artistically about the pillow, pull the sheets up to my chin and say, "Perfect. Now just hold that." All the other mothers read up on child rearing as though it were something to be learned, like algebra. My mother used all the tricks her mother used on her. She just didn't have the time.

People always ask me if I miss my mother, as if there's a definite yes-or-no answer to that, and of course they expect you to say yes. Actually, though, I don't even miss her that much. She was always around, and I do miss that, the physical aspects of her. But it's not like we were best friends or something.

The next morning I was up bright and early, sitting on the beach, sipping a Shirley Temple, wearing a brand new turquoise suit and black-rimmed mirror sunglasses and feeling very glamorous. I had rented an eight-dollars-an-hour beach chair and had been lying on it, covered in SPF 15, for almost twenty minutes when Sky walked up and tapped me on the shoulder. "Anjelica!" she said. "God, you look tan."

"Hey," I said and pushed my sunglasses up onto my head. I love doing that. It makes me feel sophisticated. "Thanks." I didn't tell her I looked so tan mainly because of the bathing suit. The lady at the store told me the colors that make you look tannest are turquoise and yellow. Well of course I couldn't get yellow, because it clashes with my hair. I'm not completely blonde anymore, but a yellow suit would make it all the more obvious. Plus, I have blue eyes.

"Oh, did you get that at the bar?" she said, nodding towards my drink.

"Uh-huh."

"God those things are so freaking expensive." Sky made a face and squinted up at the sun. "Oh, what the hey, I'll just charge it to the room. I'll be right back." She started over to the outdoor bar which was located up on the deck, open twenty four hours a day. "Pull me up a chair?" she called, jogging across the sand.

"Sure," I called back.

A few minutes later, she showed up with a lemonade and began arranging herself on the chair. When she finished she looked over at me and said, "I got a letter from my boyfriend today." Then she rolled her eyes and said, "If you could call it that."

I smiled. "What, the letter, or the boyfriend?"

"Well, both, really. God knows what he's been up to since I've been down here. So far I've written him about a trillion letters, and all I've gotten back's this lousy one postcard with about six words on it." She tucked her hair behind her ears and rolled over so she was facing me. "We used to have such a great relationship. On my birthday? This is so sweet--he wrote me this ten page letter, extremely cheezy. When I turned fourteen. Three weeks later, he dumped me for a sophomore named Elise."

"I'm sorry," I said, sipping my Shirley Temple. I love hearing stories like that.

"Yeah, well she eventually moved to Kansas City, so of course he came groveling back. He says he still loves me, but I know he's just using me for sex." She said this all very matter-of-factly.

I nodded and smiled sadly. "I hate that."

Sky looked amused. "Yeah, well, what can you do?"

"What's his name?" I asked, hoping she would continue.

"Mac." She made a face. "Edward MacArthur Godfrey Junior," she said in a regal tone, "if you want to know the truth." Sky picked up her glass of lemonade and sipped the last bit out of the glass. It made a slurping noise that I love to annoy people with on airplanes. She didn't prolong the effect like I do though, just stopped sucking and put the glass to her forehead. "It's scorching out here."

"I know." I sat up in my chair, drew my knees to my chest and ran my hands up my legs from my ankle to my knees. Sunbathing is great. I love the way my skin turns all hot and tan. All that sweating doesn't burn any calories, though--you're just losing water. I know a lot about calorie burning, thanks to my mother, who was obsessed with it. If someone ever invented a game called "Calorie Trivial Pursuit," I would win every time. It would be a good game, because lots of things burn calories that you might not expect. For example cigarettes, Nicotine increases your metabolism, so smokers burn calories much faster than the average joe. That's why my mother smoked so much. She was very thin.

By that afternoon, Sky had started calling me Anj. I figured she shortened all the names of all her friends down to one syllable--she told me extremely detailed stories about her two best friends, referring to them as Case and Tiff. Sky and Case had been best friends forever, even though Case had turned out to be kind of a bore, Sky was a loyal friend and invited her to all the parties. Tiff was a new friend Sky had made at the high school, and she had the longest hair Sky had ever seen. She was definitely a lot of fun, but she had an annoying habit of cheating on her boyfriend. I wondered if Sky would have bothered to mention that to me if she hadn't had Edward MacArthur on the mind--I could tell she was worried he was doing the same thing. Sky and I stayed out there for hours. I drank three Shirley temples and listened to the adventures of Case, Tiff and Sky until I had to get showered up for dinner.

That night I went outside onto the deck and leaned against the wall of the hotel. I stood facing the wind so that my hair blew back from my face, and when teen-aged boys walked by I turned the corners of my mouth up in a wistful smile. Most of them smiled back. I had on a plain white sundress that looked a little like a nightgown because it was so long on me, but in the dark you couldn't tell. It used to be my mother's. She was five foot eight and so far I'm only five-two, but I can already wear some of her clothes. She had extremely good taste.

Loud voices coming from across the boardwalk distracted me from me pose, and I turned around. A man in a white suit and a woman with short hair were screaming at each other. I was too far away to hear what they were saying, but I could tell by the way they looked how mad they were. I shifted positions to watch them, holding the hair away from my face with one fist.

"What's that all about?" asked a voice behind me. It was Sky; she sounded cross.

"Hey," I said, spinning back around. "I don't really know. What are you doing out here?"

"I dunno," she said tiredly, sliding her back down the building until she was sitting on the damp wood of the deck. I followed and pulled my knees up to my chest--the dress was long enough so that I wasn't exposing myself to the world. "The wedding's in two days, and my mother's going psychotic," she went on. "I just couldn't take it anymore. Every little detail sets her off. She was busy having a fit over whether she should change her name for this one, and I just left."

"What is it?" I asked, hoping the deck wasn't staining  
continued on p. 9



my mother's dress.

"What? Oh. Gordon. I just don't see what's the big deal."

"My mother didn't change hers when she got married," I told Sky. "Not that she wanted to feel liberated or anything like that, she just didn't like the way it sounded--Mary Cole, it would have been. She thought it sounded too much like 'miracle.'"

"I don't see what's wrong with that," Sky said. I decided to leave her alone. When I turned back to the fighting couple, they weren't screaming anymore, just sitting together by the bar, holding hands across a glass-topped table. I watched a waiter in a tuxedo approach them; the man waved him away with his free hand. I turned back to face Sky, who stared away from me up at the half-moon. You could see the outline of the full circle, very faint against the black sky. When I looked back at the couple at the table, they were kissing.

The wedding was that Sunday, and I was invited as long as I promised not to eat anything. Sky had on a pink flowery dress that matched the pink flowery dresses of all the other bridesmaids; I think there were about eight of them, sisters and cousins and friends of the bride--Sky told me her mother made everyone a bridesmaid so they would come. There weren't that many people besides the ones who were in the wedding, which I guess is why I was allowed to go at the last minute. I sat in the audience in a sundress, the nicest one I had brought on the trip. My dad was in a business meeting somewhere deep in the bowels of the hotel.

I hadn't talked to Sky all morning; she had been off at the beauty parlor getting her hair all piled up on top of her head and replacing her peeling French Manicure with glossy pink polish that matched her lipstick and the dress. She looked beautiful. I wondered how the beauty parlor got her hair to stay like that. They must have used up a whole bottle of hairspray. It looked great, but I knew she was going to have a hell of a time washing it all out. My uncle from Seattle got married last year to an ice-skating instructor named Aimee, and I was the oldest of four nieces who had to wear babyish high-waisted dresses and throw petals into the aisle. I was allowed to have my hair professionally done, and it took me five shampoos to get out all the gunk.

It was very unlike a movie wedding--the bride and the groom remembered their lines perfectly; the ring bearer didn't forget the rings; and everyone chose to forever hold his or her peace. Sky's mother was very done-up. She wore an overly lacy wedding dress and pastel colored makeup, with her dyed hair in bouncy curls. After the ceremony, a bridesmaid caught the bouquet; then Sky's mother and her new husband got into a white stretch limo and drove off. "It's just for effect," Sky told me. "They'll be back for the reception."

The party was held in the hotel's Grand Ballroom, an enormous, highly decorated room, complete with a bar and lavishly set tables with placecards. Before dinner, caterers approached the guests with plates of fancy hors d'oeuvres, and the adults strolled about in black tie, sipping drinks and congratulating the married couple. Sky's mother wore a red dress and matching shoes, and walked around on her husband's arm, sipping martinis. I wondered what the final decision had been on her name, but there weren't any monogrammed napkins to check. At one point Sky's mother walked over to us and smiled brightly. "Hello, girls," she said. "Are you enjoying yourselves?"

"Can I have a sip of your martini?" Sky asked.

She handed Sky the glass. "Don't spill." Just then, an elderly couple approached us. "Aunt Mimi," Sky's mother

exclaimed. "How was the trip?"

"Oh, fine, just fine. Your Uncle Harold slept the whole way down. You were wonderful today!"

Sky pinched my arm and motioned me away. I followed her out of the room and into the hallway. "What?" I whispered. She held up the martini proudly. We spent the next ten minutes in the hallway forcing down the rest of it. Sky drank more of it than I did.

After the dinner, everyone was herded outside where the band was set up and all the glass-topped tables were cleaned off the deck so people could dance. Sky and I hung around for about fifteen minutes, and I danced with a short cousin with slicked-down hair while Sky watched and made faces at me. After the song was over, Sky whispered "Let's get out of here," and I followed her back inside. The Grand Ballroom hadn't been cleared out yet--all the caterers were outside with the dessert. The tables were covered in half-eaten plates of food and crumpled napkins. Sky made a streamline for the bar, and we ducked down behind it. She grabbed a half-full bottle with a Johnny Walker label and held it up for my approval. "What do you think?" she whispered.

"I've never tried it. My dad drinks it," I whisper back.

Sky nodded and handed me the bottle. "You can hide it under your sweater." We peeked out to make sure no one was in the room before running back out, through an exit door and down the boardwalk steps onto the beach. We ran a long way, until the party was just an array of lights and murmured voices in the distance. Finally we stopped and sat down in the sand. Sky sat cross legged and leaned over to take the bottle. She unscrewed the cap and took a swig. When she put it down, her eyes were watering and her face was all twisted up like after you eat a lemon. "This is disgusting," she said. "Here, try it."

We passed the bottle back and forth for a while; I took tiny sips that I could barely hold down and tried desperately **not** to make a face. I didn't see how my dad could drink that stuff as if it were orange juice or something. I felt like I was drinking turpentine. My throat burned and my mouth tasted terrible. After the first couple, I stopped taking actual sips and just put the bottle to my lips when it was my turn. That was bad enough.

I took my pretend sips and watched her take real ones. Neither one of us said anything. It was as if we were hypnotized into the rhythm of sip, pass, sip, pass. What I didn't want was to get drunk. I had seen movies and my dad, and was afraid of what I would turn into if I took too many sips of that stuff. Usually he's great, but I've seen my dad drunk before and it was scary. He had seemed fine up until my mother's funeral. After she died, he took me home from the hospital and I sat on a stool in the kitchen while he called up all the important numbers in his address book and said stuff like "Well, we're all trying to be strong here."

At the funeral he wore his best suit and stood with his head down and his hands folded; I couldn't tell whether or not he was crying. Then we went home and I took off my black dress and hung it up in the back of my closet. I took a shower and let the soap run in my eyes like in a book I had read about a girl whose mother dies. When I went back downstairs in my p.j.s, my dad was sitting at the kitchen table drinking scotch out of a coffee mug from Miami Beach. The bottle was on the table. "Come here, sweetie," he had said and hugged me so tight I could hardly breathe. I had never seen him that way before. He cried and cried, and finally I ran out of the room, took a double dosage and went to bed feeling something was wrong.

We hadn't drunk very much of it--not even all the way past the label--when Sky stood up and flung the bottle into the ocean. I was glad. She took off her high heels and nylons and

threw them into the water too before she waded in; I put my sandals down on the sand and followed her. "God, it's cold," she said, lifting up her dress so it wouldn't get wet. She said a swear word and laughed hysterically as she tripped over a rock and fell headfirst into the water. "Everything's all wet," she said, sitting up and shaking her head back and forth. Her hair and the dress were completely drenched. I was still standing up to my ankles at the edge, my dress hitched up to my knees. I didn't know what to do.

Sky stood up and splashed her way back up onto the sand. "My dress is all wet!" she screamed. "Anjelica! Help me with the zipper." I did and she peeled off the dress and turned a lopsided cartwheel, falling onto the sand in her pink slip. Her hair was pressed down on her head, with loose strands stuck to her face. "Ohhh, look," she murmured, raising a limp hand towards the sky.

I looked up for a few minutes and then turned my gaze to the party, still going on strong in the distance. I thought I could make out Sky's mother, that red dress dancing and laughing and being happy. Sky was furiously picking at the pink nail polish on one thumb. I cringed; it had been so perfect.

Finally I stood up. "Let's go in," I said. Sky ignored me, closing one eye and then the other as she looked upwards again. Finally I got her to stand up, and I held her arm as we walked back in, leaving the pink dress on the sand. When I got back to my room I didn't check the clock, just brushed my teeth, swallowed my pills and went straight to bed. I didn't even bother to call down for mints. My dad wasn't there yet. I fell asleep right away.

The day before we left I spent at the indoor pool with Sky. She had to get up and go to the bathroom a lot because she had her period. She didn't talk much except to ask me what time it was. When I told her she would mutter something like "Two minus eight, six, good." She told me she had to be very careful not to get TSS, adding with a condescending air that I probably didn't have to worry about that sort of thing just yet.

We dunked in the pool a few times and sat in the Jacuzzi watching the weight room through the glass until our fingers and toes got pruny. A girl sitting near us in the hot tub got asked how old she was by one of the lifeguards, and they made her get out because she wasn't sixteen. Sky and I exchanged glances and grinned.

That night at The Reefer my dad seemed more distracted than usual. "Are you packed up?" he asked me.

"Almost," I said. I watched him sip his drink, checking to see if he was flinching. He wasn't.

Our waitress was named Kellie and wore her hair in braids so long they must have taken forever. I didn't order soup because I was afraid the braids would get dipped if she wasn't careful. Kellie was just as smiley as Rod. I wondered if the restaurant coached its waiters on cheerfulness.

I didn't have anything to do that night. Sky was going to a piano recital with her mother and her mother's husband. She had rolled her eyes and told me her mother was worried and thought spending time together would help. Sky showed me the stretchy black dress she was going to wear and invited me along. I said her mother would probably rather I didn't. "God, Anj, what do you care?" Sky said, and actually I didn't, I just needed an excuse not to go. I hate the piano more than almost anything. My mother used to make me take lessons and practice every single day. It was awful; my teacher smelled like mothballs and yelled at me for not arching my fingers. My mother said that if I kept at it I would thank her later, but I quit as soon as she got

sick and stopped monitoring me.

I looked around the restaurant. It was fairly empty. At the table next to us a good-looking young couple was drinking champagne. I watched the girl place a cigarette between her lips and lean across the table for her boyfriend to light it. My mother told me that I could pretty much bet on smokers being drinkers too; she was the exception to that rule. I stared at the couple in fascination until the woman looked at me questioningly. Then I felt silly, so I looked back at my plate and proceeded to swallow forkfuls off the pile positioned at one side.

The girl reminded me of Sky, or at least of the way she had seemed to me the first time I met her. People always turn out so differently than I expect. I'm an extremely bad judge of character. I always assume everyone else is just as confident as they look, but most people don't turn out that way. Sometimes I almost don't want to get to know people who seem that perfect-- I don't want to destroy my image of them. My mother was one of those people with whom it's impossible to tell whether they're always acting always or never. With me, it's always. My mother told me that I should be careful about letting my guard rail down. "You can never put it back up," she said. But I don't know if I even want to take mine down. I like my Anjelica act.

I looked up again and out the window to the beach. It was almost sunset and the sky was turning a pinkish color. A man in a bathing suit walked by holding a baby awkwardly against his chest. I love watching men with babies. They look so helpless. I picked up my fork again and pushed some stray pieces of rice back towards their pile. Then I moved the meat over closer to the rice because the gravy was starting to run off. All my food was about to fall off the edge of the plate, it was pushed so far apart. Summer squash was the vegetable of the day, and there was no way I was going to let it touch the rest of my food.

Emily Weiss  
Newton MA  
Milton Academy  
Mr. James Connolly



Melanie Greenspan  
So. Orange, NJ  
Columbia HS  
Don Lasko

It's snowing, right here in Ontario, NY, and also across the ocean, back home in Skopje. It's snowing in Belgrade, Ljubljana, Maribor, Maravo, Popova Shapka, Zagreb, Podgorica. It's snowing in SARAJEVO, the town-host of the '84 Winter Olympics Games; the town of our basketball victories; the place where the West met the East, where Christianity held and stepped back for the Muslim religion; a spot where people unified under the patronage of art; today the town where people die on a daily basis, not specifically being killed by weapons, but due to shortages of food, electricity, clean water, heat, a decent place to live in, nothing big nor extravagant, just a place to live in.

It's snowing, and I can't help thinking of Ana, the girl with the golden curls. She used to live in Ilidga, on the east side of town, in the center of Grbavica, the soul of the city, where a person might easily get drunk from the odor of creation going around. Now, that place does not exist on a map; after so many bombings; people forgot about The Beauty that once lived there.

It's snowing, and images of happy children appear in front of my eyes; two girls in their colorful winter coats, snowballing and making a snowman; a mother going after them, with a worried expression on her face, watching them not to get wet; a carrot in place of a nose, an old saucepan with its damaged surface, representing a hat.

It's snowing and I'm writing this feeling-releaser about Ana, and the joyful days of our childhood, only seven years ago, and yet it seems like a millennium has passed and gone to infinity.

It's snowing, the little frozen ballerinas are swinging to the side, with the windy music, giving us their annual dance. Ana used to take ballet lessons, and then she decided to quit on account of basketball. She skied as an Olympic competitor, swam like Franci, played tennis like Seles, dived like a dolphin, lived like an angel, and died unjust, by an ignorant soldier on the "enemy side." Who was her ENEMY? What was her "sin," or her "ethnic mistake?!"

It was snowing then, last December, when I received the news of her death. My grandfather only said that her body was to be buried under our tree, the one we climbed so often on pursuit of apples, juicy apples. Yummy!!! Once.

It's snowing and I've got the blues.  
It's snowing now. It's snowing.

Bela Gligorova  
Ontario, NY  
Wayne Central High School  
Mr. David Scott

June

Baby boy, my boy: it was like gospel, it was a choir; wading through sick moonlight and grass I carried you to the hilltop, we talked about the hot night, limp noses, pockets of posies, circling circling baby boy, little thing. It was like daylight, it was so slow, you pounded my limp leg, and tugged on my ear; bed of clothes, supertime...squeezed lung moonlight, you could not hear Rose's guitar from your biting, and the silent beating of my heart in my temples made me wish for rope. Dull angry eyes, boobytrap question; your little arguing body, muddy feet. All I want to do is sleep, shut the windows, bar the door, quiet the dogs. Circling baby boy, circling my boy...

I reached for my head when the moon broke up in the sky, pockets full, oil-soaked flowers; buttercake stomach lies white on the hill in the heat in the green cheese moonrock rain. Follow me down, boy...down to the hole, where the fireflies won't die when the summer is gone, and they sit and glow on my porch in a mason jar wall, and don't worry, don't worry, Mom be home soon. She's circling for posies and filtering June; come inside to the fan, read me some math. Letterhead follows: The Mud Hotel - flaking and peeling from lightbulbs and gas line, crucifixes and picture frame headlines, which yellow the linen and suck the air from the den. Rosemary, Rosemary, tilling your soil: remember the day that we watched TV till the mystery bled and my fingers turned numb from the phone, and someone spoke to the minister about options and you decided

a midnight picnic was the answer to our problems. Baby boy Lucifer, filling the holes, like a choir, like gospel, and I touched the moonrock, the moonrock riddle. We did a dance on the 4th of July, pillowcase sunset, fallopian fiddle, red checkered picnic cloth covered in blood. Leading us off to the baby boy hilltop, sweaterneck heat, Rosemary, Rosemary, rattle my bones. Find me a mason jar, Rosemary, Rosemary. Find us some time.

Peter Knight  
Harrisburg, PA  
Susquehanna Township HS  
Mrs. Susan O'Brien

Discrimination

One shining sunny day in Portugal, during the winter, I could feel the oranges ripening on the trees. We all prepared breakfast to eat out on the patio in the fresh sunlight. My mother stood slippered, holding a glass jar half-filled with Special-K. In a moment, it slipped to the ground and shattered, shards of light dancing across red tiles, a smash and bits of glass like water drops splayed out in cracks of grout. My mother put her hands to her face and exclaimed out loud: "I didn't try to catch it, I thought it was plastic!" My eyes filled with tears from my mother's embarrassment, but I was more upset: I thought she should have tried to catch it, no matter what it was made of.

Sarah Coombs  
Natick, MA  
Walnut Hill School  
Jessie Schell

**Broken Water**(inspired by *Eric*, a painting by Chuck Close)

And while the boys were on the other side,  
and we were tearing at the mud with our toes,  
waiting for the next whump of wave to hit,  
a ripple screamed out from the lake.  
Something was tearing at it,  
pressing up against its surface.  
We climbed up the bridge to look down at it  
in the center of the lake,  
the knotted center,  
and then the ripple became a sketch of a face,  
a penciled-in figure that grew and spit into colors  
as it rose to meet the glaze of the water,  
becoming more and more defined as it unsunk itself.

There was grain in front of it but we made out eyes, two,  
and bubble lips,  
and we knew this face belonged to a man when  
we saw the lump buried beneath his neck,  
a plant stump,  
and I wanted to kiss it because it was hard  
and fighting to break through the skin,  
to be born.

And all colors in his face were like seeds  
wrapping over his swollen figure.  
And I wanted to count  
each layer of water he ripped apart,  
**and** the lake was screaming at me,  
**into** my wet ear:

**THIS HURTS. GET IT OUT, GET IT OUT.**

**And his** glasses were still in place,  
like he needed them now to read,  
**and his** nose left shadows on his cheeks,  
**because** it, too, was swollen.  
It had become full with all the water in the lake  
so that it was smeared and ruined in shape.  
And behind the glasses were eyes  
that had a slant to them,  
and in their sticky sockets they looked sideways,  
like my eyes do on the street when I try not to stare.

And every jut of his hair was being stretched by the current,  
and there was rhythm in his gray streaks,  
and in his black streaks there were tiny waves.

And I thought about the boys on the other side  
who hung over the rail of this bridge and  
let their skin drop down from their faces.  
And how this man looked like that, but runnier,  
like the water had smoothed his lips into his chin.  
And I thought what the boys on the other side  
would do if they saw this heaping body.  
Would they want to touch it  
but instead sift over it with their eyes,  
like we did,  
or would they try to pull it out of the lake  
with their clenched, wiry muscles,  
all reckless and soaking?  
And would they think the body dead or possibly,  
waiting, breathing for them underneath?  
And I thought about the boys again,  
with their thick-shelled chests,  
and how they beat them against the water

when they swan in this lake.

And I wanted to kiss them too, but not on their faces.

I thought about how the lake had  
muffled their scratch voices  
when they reached its center,  
for their tongues were compressed with the sea.  
And I thought about how the lake had stopped its screaming  
and was now just huffing, barely conscious.  
And then I thought about how some babies are born still,  
or still-born,  
how they don't come out crying,  
and how some one has to cry for them  
or else they won't be remembered.

Piper Sorell Weiss  
New York, NY  
The Chapin School  
Mrs. Rinden

**Blue Chevrolets Driving Down**

When wheels turned round,  
those spokes whistled in the air,  
our eyes adjusting to those August nights  
to make it down the dirt road.  
Under the pine trees to the stars,  
blanketing their green tips,  
we came to an opening,  
and looked up.  
We wondered  
about things that sat high on our minds,  
why we were here?  
why did the moon follow us at night?  
those things that were larger than us.  
Then we pedaled,  
passing those windows filled with mason jars-  
always lit.  
The blue Chevrolet would sit too.  
Always lit.  
Glowing in the starlight like the jars.  
We'd stop again.  
Shiver in our summer sandals.  
Chills ran when we'd think  
about that blue Chevrolet,  
chasing us over holes and pebbles.  
"Pedal faster!" I'd yell.  
And the driverless blue Chevrolet jumped over  
bumps as if they were newly laid tar.  
"Faster, faster."  
And I'd look back and yell for him.  
"Faster, faster."  
I'd look again.  
Only the blue Chevrolet,  
staring me down in those pale dusty lamps  
And I'd pedal.  
But soon that blue Chevrolet would get me too.  
Waking from the daze under stars.  
Staring to the Mason jars and the blue Chevrolet,  
I sighed.  
Even though fear  
was the only track running around my mind,  
I wished someday the blue Chevrolet would come for us.  
Someday.

Blake Gilpin  
Milton, MA  
Milton Academy  
Mr. James Connolly

She came back again. I don't know when or how, but there she was, sitting on the couch, when I got home from babysitting the Donnelly's. She hadn't changed much; I knew Mom was gonna kill her.

At first, I was surprised, and thought that maybe she decided to come back to apologize for all she did, or even to tell us that this time, she was really going to straighten her life out. But when I called her name and she didn't answer, I knew that it was going to be just like last time. Maybe worse. Mom was really going to kill her.

My name is Rain. I live with Mom and my dog Snack on the marshy bayou of the Mississippi River. Our home is on stilts, because of the reoccurring floods we get. I hate the mosquitoes around here that breed in the thick and stinking mud of all the yards. That's right, it stinks around here, excuse the pun. But I guess after living here for fifteen years, you eventually get use to it. The smell, I mean. My home is small and open. Everything is made of wood: all of the furniture, the beds, most of the bathroom, including the sink and part of the toilet, everything. My uncle built the place ten years ago after our last home was destroyed in a hurricane. All he had to use were a few scraps of shingling and a truckload of wood he stole from the lumber yard. Although he didn't think of it as stealing, rather getting even on the American economy since "the prices on things like wood were so goddamn ridiculous to begin with." It seemed like getting revenge on society and the economy was the story of my family. Anyway, I guess our home was as good as any. It was completely screened in, so right after supper the breeze off the water swept the sticky sweat out of the house. I fell asleep to the singing of crickets and the mating calls of the bullfrogs. And the occasional weeping of my tired mother. I used to lie awake tossing and turning trying to block her out, but then I realized that everyone just needs a good cry once in a while. Sometimes I would tiptoe into the living room and lie down on the hard wooden floor next to her room, debating whether or not to go in and try comforting her. But after a while, I realized it probably wouldn't do much good. I looked too much like her.

"Angel? Hey Angie, it's me, Rain. Are you all right? Come on, Angel, snap out of it! Can't you even hear me?" I knew she couldn't, and she'd just sit there looking lost for the next five hours. We did look alike, except she was a lot smaller. She even looked as though she shrank since the last time I saw her. I remembered when she was healthy. Angel was the sweetest person, always smiling or laughing. I loved the way she laughed. It was like a million little bubbles surrounding you, tickling you. I doubted that she even remembered how to laugh. She just sat there looking stupid and helpless. It was almost as if those bubbles had imprisoned her, and I hated them for it. Angel was seventeen then, but she appeared to be about twelve years old. Her tiny body was draped with a pair of soiled jeans and a skimpy halter top that kept slipping off of her shoulders. Her mousy brown hair was tucked half up in a messy bun, and her green eyes were glassy and bloodshot. I sighed and walked into the kitchen. I remember thinking that my mother would be home in an hour, and that I had to figure out what to do with Angel before then.

Back then, my mother rarely shopped. She was the type that believed what you put into your body was what someday you would give back to the environment. You know, the real New Age type. I remember when I was little and had allergies, she'd never give me Benedryl. "Pollutes your temple," she'd say. So, instead, she'd drop me into a tub of scalding water and mix in a few droplets of eucalyptus oil. I wonder if getting third

degree burns and searing the inside of your nostrils would be considered destroying your temple. Maybe that's the reason Angel's bad habit bothered Mom so much. Anyway, I think the real reason why my mother didn't shop was because the local grocer turned her down for a job, so she refused to give them any of her hard earned money she made down the street at a used clothing store. We started to grow and make all of our own food. Plus, it was a whole lot cheaper that way.

I ransacked the kitchen for anything- a scrap of bread, some cranberry chutney that no one ever liked, garbanzo beans, anything. I dug into the very back of the fridge, and retreated with very little - a jar of sour pickles. Dinner.

"So, Angel. How ya been? Pretty crappy? That's nice. So where's the latest dumpster you been stayin at? Or is it some back alley doorway this time....ya know, Mom and I have been living pretty good lately and to tell you the truth, I don't think she's really going to appreciate the fact you decided to randomly come back into her life one day, you ungrateful-" Then I just shut- up. I must have sounded pretty stupid talking like that to her. She couldn't understand me. But ya know, when your mother worked from five a.m. to nine p.m. it got pretty lonely, just you and the dog.

I kicked off my loafers, dampened with sweat, and stretched out my toes. I liked the way the wood floor felt under them, cool and slippery. As I padded across the living room, I thought about how much I used to hate to walk around barefoot. I was always afraid I'd get deer ticks or hookworms or lyme disease or something. But I really didn't give a crap anymore. I found the whole experience of being barefoot kind of liberating. I think my mother was really beginning to convert me. I settled down into the futon couch with my jar of pickles, and continued to study my feet. Some people really hate feet. I didn't mind them much, really. I also heard bizarre stories about how some people have a foot fetish. My friend Jay told me that. I wouldn't go that far, but I decided that I liked my feet. Or maybe just the word, feet. It really has character, a definite syllable. Feet, feet, feet.

Angel began to make soft gurgling noises on the couch. Snack whimpered in the corner, and I tossed him a pickle. But somehow, I knew he wasn't whining because he was hungry. I bent closer to Angie, and realized how horrible she actually looked. There was dirt caked under her jagged fingernails, and her hair was gross and nappy. She had a faint bruise on her left cheek, and cuts and scratches all over her arms. I wanted to reach over and hug her, but at the same time, I couldn't stand her.

I decided that maybe if her appearance was improved, it might be easier on my mother. Our bathroom was small, and the paint was peeling off of the ceiling. There were these really big flakes that just hung there, and sometimes, I would stare at them debating whether or not to reach up and peel them off. I never did, because I thought it would be sacriligious or something. As I ran the water and let it change from warm to hot, I wondered if my mother had any eucalyptus left. However, I could never bring myself to be that cruel. Angie had been through enough already.

"Angel. Angel, come on. You gotta get up. I can't do this by myself, you gotta help me! Come on Angie." I felt like crying. I could have carried her, she really wasn't too heavy. It's just that I needed to see her walk, for my sake, to reassure me. Maybe I was being selfish. As I pulled her to her feet, she started to whisper things. I couldn't really make them out, and she probably wasn't even saying anything sensical. But she was able to move by herself, a little. I felt her complete weight leaning into my shoulder. When I finally got her into the

bathroom, I peeled her from my body. She slowly slid onto the cold tiled floor, like a limp rag doll. I yanked off her jeans, and pulled her shirt over her head. I almost couldn't bear to look at her naked little body. It reminded me of a time when I was young. I had this porcelain china doll when I was six years old. One day, my mother told me I couldn't play with a friend, so I threw it against the wall, hoping it would shatter into a million little pieces. But it didn't. Instead, the doll's delicate face just cracked down the middle. I hated that doll. Angel's body looked like cracked porcelain. Her belly was covered with soft peach fuzz. The doctor told us that Angie tended to grow more hair on her body as a result of malnutrition. Her skin was so yellow and pasty. I began to wonder if she would just disintegrate as I put her into the tub. I soaped her up and washed her hair three times. Then she began to wake up.

"...away...ssstop it! ...where's my roll of tape.... I need you to stay, I need everything...." She was shivering and trembling, so I pulled out of the murky bath water. I wrapped Angel in a towel, and left her shivering on the toilet seat.

She had clothes in her bedroom still, I knew, because when she left, she only brought a knapsack. My mother had turned Angel's bedroom into a small office area. However, she had left Angel's bed. Maybe she really did figure Angel would be back someday. I slid her closet door open, and groaned. There were four things in there: a flower printed baby doll dress my grandmother made before she died, a bright yellow raincoat, a long gypsy skirt, and a ratty, terry cloth bathrobe. I sighed and took the bathrobe off of the hanger.

"Great, Angel. What the hell did you do with all of your clothes?" I stared at her from the bathroom door. She was looking straight ahead at the tiled wall. "Angel? Hey, I know **you can** understand me now. Angie-

"I...sssold them. I ssold them..." She gazed in my direction and yawned. I should have known that. She sold everything to put a few extra bucks in her pocket. She even tried selling the sheets off of her bed once. I never found out if anyone actually bought them.

"Well, then I don't know what to tell you. I guess you're just gonna have to wear this." I handed her the bathrobe, and she let it fall to the floor. "Angel, are you okay?" She looked like she was going to fall asleep. I guess she really hadn't snapped out of it yet. I decided to put her to bed, so she could just sleep it off. I brought her into my bedroom, and tucked her under the covers. Just as I shut my door, I heard my mother walk in. She was singing.

"...hmmm..mm...hmmm...Hey Babe, how's it goin?" She leaned over and gave me a kiss on my forehead. "Guess who got a date with her boss today!" Mom grinned and threw her arms up into the air.

"Wow, that's really great, Mom. I told you he'd ask you out."

"Ohh, I know, I know. Whaddya say we go out and celebrate! We can go to the Armadillo, have ourselves a few Margheritas, get our palms read...Come on, honey. Let's go right now!" I was probably one of the few kids whose mother actually got drunk with them. I asked her once if booze polluted our temples. She just threw her head back and laughed. I still don't know the answer. I felt terrible. I wanted to go out to dinner with her, but I knew we couldn't leave Angel alone. I watched my mother drag a comb through her thick brown hair, humming to herself. I hated Angie for coming home. How could she have ruined my mother's night?

"Um, Mom. I dunno if that's such a good idea," I said softly.

"What's that, honey? Oh, come on. Don't be such a

party pooper. It'll be fun!" She just smiled and began to pull me towards the door.

"No, Mom. You don't understand. We... we can't go out." I saw the smile fade on my mother's face. I could feel tears welling up in my eyes. "She's back, Mom."

My mother frowned. "What do you mean, she's back? Rain, where is she?" Her eyes turned cold. I covered my face as my mother pushed by me.

I heard nothing from down the hall. Finally, my mother came back into the kitchen, with her head hung low. She looked like she was going to throw-up.

"How did she get here? Where did you find her, Rain?" My mother leaned her head against the wooden wall, pounding it softly.

"I dunno, Mom. She was there when I got home from babysitting...She couldn't even talk, Mom. I think she's got it bad." My mother gave a cruel laugh.

"She sure does have it bad. Damn near killed herself is what she did. I should just call the cops, that's what I should do. I should have done that a long time ago. She's not going to get better, you know that, don't you? Angel's the type that just keeps on pushing, and pushing, until there's nothing left. You don't change people like her, Rain. You can't. We just gotta let her go. It's one of those impossible things that you just gotta learn to accept." I blocked my ears. I didn't want to believe her. I really thought Angel had come back to us so we could give her help. I thought about how things used to be, how we would sneak out into the dead of the night to go swimming in the marshes with Jay. Sometimes we'd just sit in the soft falling rain and go to sleep in the tall grassy beds on the river banks. I don't ever remember being bothered by the horrible stench until after Angel left.

"No, no...you're wrong. She'll get better. Please, Mom, just...give her one more chance. I swear, I'll look out for her this time. Just...help her, one last time." My mother smirked. I knew I sounded pathetic. It was a useless argument. I never really listened to myself beg before, I never beg at all, but as I listened to myself, I didn't even know what I was asking for anymore. To let Angel stay, so we could watch her fade away right before our eyes? To give her more opportunities to steal things from us? I guess all I wanted was for everything to be back to the way it used to be, when Angel laughed. I knew that could never happen though. I took off out the front door, barefoot. I clutched the five dollars I had made that day and headed for the center of town.

When I reached the Country General Store, the sun had almost gone down. I was lucky I didn't step on any broken glass. Jay was working behind the counter.

"Rain, Rain, go away, come back some other day..." He taunted me.

"Shut-up Jay. Gimme a pack of Marlboros. Oh, and I'll take one of these Slim Jims, too."

"Hey...are you ok? What's up? Why you all upset?" I glared at him and folded my arms across my chest. "Come on, Rain. Cigarettes? You never smoke. What happened to your old philosophy, 'Pollutes the temple'? You sure that's what you want?" I almost started crying.

"She's back, Jay. She came home completely baked, I haven't a clue what she's on, and my mother is so ticked off...I gotta help her, I don't know what to do, Jay."

"Whoa. Are you gonna be all right?" He slid the cigarettes across the counter and handed me my change. "Hey, listen, my cousin has this support group every week, I could help you bring her every day for a coupla weeks or so."

"Yeah, sure Jay, thanks a lot. I really appreciate it." I

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turned to walk out the door.

"I'll come by around noon, okay?"

I walked over to the small harbor across from the store and gazed at the city lights in the distance. I saw planes sailing silently overhead, like lightening bugs. I stared at a butterfly, resting on a weed. I began to think about how butterflies took long journeys over the ocean, all by themselves. I wondered how far they went, and if they ever got tired. Few butterflies probably ever made it through their whole journey. Suicidal butterflies. I opened the pack of cigarettes, and began to smoke them slowly, taking long, dramatic drags. It was a long time before I went home.

The next day, Jay showed up at my house around quarter past twelve. I hadn't really told my mother about our little plan. I woke Angel up, and told her about the meeting. She didn't say much; I didn't expect her to. When we got to the place, there were about fifteen other people there that looked like they were in the same condition as Angel. Some were pacing back and forth, mumbling things, and scratching at their faces, while others were just staring into space. They looked like hungry little children, scared out of their hollow minds, empty, lost. Angel latched on to my shirt and timidly followed behind Jay and me. The group leader looked like a hippie, and at first, I thought she was on something herself. But when she spoke, I realized she knew what she was doing. She thanked us all for being there, and told the members they really took a big step in deciding to join the group. I wondered how many other the people were forced into coming. I found out soon enough. All of the group members with problems were asked to tell how and why they came to know about the support group. A lot of them said they were tired, that they felt trapped and cold. Some of them said they were sick of living a life imprisoned. I guess I never thought of it that way. I never realized these people ever thought, or felt, I just assumed they were in a constant state of oblivion. A few people said they were forced into going to the meeting. When they came to Angel, she didn't say anything, at first. She just glanced at me.

"Listen, if you don't want to talk about it right now, that's fine. Why don't you tell us something about yourself, Angel?" The group leader tilted her head to one side and smiled ever so slightly. "Why are you called Angel?" Angel looked at me again. "Okay, then. Do you want your sister to tell us for you?" I wanted to kill Angel. I knew she could have told them. She was just being impossible. I cleared my throat.

"Angel is seventeen. When my mother had her, it was during a hurricane, and she couldn't make it to the hospital. The house was beginning to flood, and there was no electricity. She knew Angel was going to be born that night, and she didn't think that the baby would make it. But she did. My mother claims that an angel saved them, because our house was the lowest point in the neighborhood, and four families that had also been trapped in their houses during the storm all died. And the most convincing aspect of all is that she didn't cry when she was born. Or so my mother says." I felt really stupid. I felt like I had fifty eyes laughing at me. And then, very quietly, Angel added,

"I just want everything to stick close to me."

"Wow, that's really beautiful. You know, if anyone makes it in this group, its going to be you, Angel. I really think you're going to pull through," the leader said. I thought I saw the corners of Angel's mouth turn up into a little smile.

During those two weeks, Angel slept, a lot. I guess she hadn't really stayed in one place while she was away. No one had dared to ask her where she had been, but I know it was somewhere pretty bad. I had a feeling that she was in trouble, and needed a place to crash. She didn't eat much, but she got

stronger. I, on the other hand, was smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. I felt so anxious. Even Jay began to worry about me.

"Don't you think you're smoking an awful lot, Rain?" Jay asked me one afternoon.

"What's your point, Jay."

"I dunno, I just kind of thought it was a little hypocritical that you're sitting here day after day, watching Angel's every move, and you always have that cruddy cancer stick dangling outta your mouth...."

"Listen, Jay, when I want your opinion about my life, I'll ask for it. But for right now, just get off my case, cuz the last thing I need is for you to come in here and shoot off at the mouth with your boy scout honor crap... It's not a joint, it's a damn cigarette, anyway..." I realized I was being a jerk, Jay was really being so patient through all this, especially with me. I felt bad about how I was treating him, but I didn't really care about anything, as long as Angel was home.

I wondered if my mother had caught on. If she did, she didn't say anything. Jay really did go to every meeting, and he even offered to stay with Angel during the afternoon when I was babysitting. She began to talk a little at the meetings.

One day I came home from the Donnelly's, and I heard Angie laughing. Just like she used to. I didn't think I'd ever hear the sound of her laugh again. I quietly walked into the living room, so I wouldn't surprise them, and saw Angel sprawled out on the couch. Jay was standing with his hands on his hips in the middle of the living room. He had tied a helium balloon to Snack's tail, and the poor thing was trying desperately to knock it down. He'd run half around in a circle and then try to jump on his tail with his front paws, unsuccessfully. He kept landing face down on the wooden floor. I heard myself releasing a giggle. Then, we all burst out laughing. I really thought it couldn't have gotten much better than that. I felt like maybe we had finally gotten through, that maybe we really were chipping away that ugly cocoon that had stolen Angie away from us. And I made the fatal mistake of pretending that everything was just like it was when we were all younger, that all the bad things that happened were suddenly washed away. That night, the three of us snuck out to the marshes. It was a cool night, so we built a small bonfire. We sat talking aimlessly for hours, watching the fingers of the fire climb high into the midnight sky. Jay rolled over onto his stomach and looked over at the two of us.

"What do you want the most in your life? I mean, besides a million dollars, a free trip to anywhere in the world, ya know. I mean, what do you really want?" I groaned and lit up a cigarette.

"I... I want everything to stay how it is right now for the rest of my life... I want to reach up at nothing to get everything I need. I wish that I could fly, like bubbles in a glass of seltzer water, and tingle in someone's mouth, just to make them feel better..." Angel said, glancing pointedly at me. I couldn't tell if she was being serious or not.

The cigarette was teetering on the edge of my mouth. I yawned.

"What do you want, Rain?" Jay asked me. I sighed.

"I don't know. To go to sleep? I never really thought about it. I guess I just want to be a good person. What kind of question is this anyway, Jay?" I was half asleep. But before I actually fell asleep, I heard Angel whisper,

"I wish I could have my tape back."

My mother was so distant during those few weeks. I thought she'd be so happy. I was really getting ticked off at her; I wanted to think she was really proud of Angel's achievements. But every now and then, she would whisper in my ear, "Don't set your hopes too high. I'm telling you, just let her go."

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And one Saturday, I finally learned what she meant by that. My mother was working, and I had to babysit until seven. Jay was supposed to come over and stay with Angel until I got home.

But when I walked through the front door, I knew something was wrong. Snack was whimpering in the corner, and the house was a mess. I walked into the kitchen and saw almost every drawer and cabinet emptied out. I knew she had regressed. It was that same picture that I had had nightmares about over and over again. It was the old ritual, coming out once again to haunt me...

"Angel what's that?"

"Why, it's my ... it's my treat, Rainy. It's kind of like my reward when I do something good." Angel giggled.

"Like candy, Angie?"

"Mmm, kind of like candy, but it makes you feel nice ALL over - not just in your tummy."

"Oh. Can I have some, Angie?"

"No - and I want you to stay in your room until Mummy comes home... ohh, and let's just keep my candy a secret. You know how Mommy gets about sweets and things... Pollutes the temple, right Rain...By the way, have you seen the scotch tape?"

I knew she had regressed because everything was taped together with scotch tape. It looked like a giant spider web, stretching across the floor, the cabinets, the stove, the half open refrigerator door, everything. And then I saw the note:

Dear Angel-  
had an accident at home-  
be over as soon as possible - I'm sorry- Jay

The air felt bitter and harsh in my mouth.

"Angel? Jay? Come on you guys, I know you're here. Angel, Angel, how could you do this to me. We worked so hard for you, you were almost there..." I dragged my heavy feet slowly towards the bathroom. I could already see the whole picture in my mind. She would sit on the bathroom floor, Indian Style, with all of her treasures and tools: a candle, a book of matches, a teaspoon, a bottle of rubbing alcohol, a syringe, her bag of course, and the notorious role of tape. I could see her light the candle, and then hold the match between her bluish little fingertips. I used to gasp in horror as the fire would creep closer and closer to her papery skin, and I was so afraid the flames would just burn her up, hungrily. But the flame always died right before it reached her fingers. I really did believe she had angels with her, blowing those matches out. I could see her staggering around with that role of tape, haphazardly dragging the sticky snake over everything she could.

"Angel, Angel. How could you do this?" There was a trail leading towards the bathroom: the sprinkling of a little white powder, a bloody syringe, a teaspoon covered with wax, and the bottle of alcohol, spilled across the floor. The powerful fumes reached my face, making me gasp and choke. My eyes stung, partly from the alcohol, and partly because I was crying. As I approached the bathroom door, I saw only her feet. It reminded me of Dorothy in The "Wizard of Oz," when she sees that her house had crushed the wicked witch. Only in this case, it was Angel. I couldn't bear to look at the rest of her. I knew she was gone forever. Angel had let go.

Those were the worst days of my life. I don't even remember what happened after that. It was such a blur. I used to hear the group leader's words over and over in my head. I wonder if she said that to all the pathetic souls who were on their way out. I remember holding Jay, as we cried together. He kept on saying how he felt so badly, how it was all his fault. I don't think my mother ever shed a tear. I remember her dressing in black and not even caring how I smoked three packs of cigarettes that night. I don't remember the funeral at all. I was

too busy watching the butterflies. I wished I could have told them to stay on dry land.

I never felt that I really knew Angel. She always seemed so far away, lost in her own world, trying to make everything stick by each other. But then again, I guess you never really get to know angels very well.

Carolyn McIntyre  
Westwood, MA  
Westwood High School  
Mr. Wayne Chatterton

### Nibbling On Roses

Give me a  
Scotch,  
Straight-up,  
Broken on the rocks, and a  
Creole wind, the  
Spicy, hot-blooded kind--  
A pleasant, hungry little  
Headache to be  
Relished with a  
Morning Danish,  
Two cigarettes, a  
Comfortable hat and a  
Million cherries.

Temper it all with  
Your wet joie de vivre and  
Dry, fragrant lips,  
Your parched sense of humor and  
Dime-store experience...  
I'll sit back and watch you,  
With my eyes closed.

All along,  
I **knew** where you were going,  
**Predicted** your destination when you'd  
Smashed the clock face  
Wrapped around your neck.

Every minute of our day,  
I saw it coming,  
Set a place for it in our  
Bistro booth,  
The last-chance reservation.

Now,  
Sit and wait...  
You, with your  
Tapestry tresses and  
Aluminum eyes;  
Me, with my  
Lyrical salves and  
Chinese tea.

Good night,  
Enfant terrible,  
But I'll take my leave;  
Les bourgeois are  
Exhausted of you

And so am I.

Christina Moreno  
Chester, NJ  
Villa Walsh Academy  
Mrs. Olive O'Sullivan





Ella McPherson  
Washington, DC

### Gone

My thumbs get around--  
or at least they get me around  
springing up at the sight of a smooth-riding pick-up  
staying put by my sides  
when The Wrong Kind of People roll by.

My feet know gravel,  
dodging bits of beer bottle glass  
that wear and wear my well worn shoes.  
Bare, they know the soft soil and puddles  
of this kind, earthen palace.

On guard, these feet pick up the dirt of many travelers'  
lives on the floors of dusty sedans,  
the dirt of many who are just trying to get  
there, anywhere, same as me.  
My feet have trudged and tapped in  
New Orleans, as the jazz flies  
thickly through the air  
injecting me with bluesy spirit.

No longer coddled and cuddled  
by my Northeastern cradle, I am free  
to judge the nature of my reactions, of my interactions.  
The people,  
the ones who have known the land,  
know me instantly,  
with intimacy,  
and I let their thick tapestry lives  
layer over my slight experience so that  
I know them too.

When I run away  
I run away,  
the land catches me, dances with me for a while,  
then sends me on my way with  
a flask of gin (for warmth) and a note that says  
"Jimmy, go home,"  
and I go,  
though home can only be a rest stop now;  
I've tasted too much to say,  
to stay.

Lainie Goldwert  
South Orange, NJ

### "School Walk"

I walk out onto the chilly bright street.  
It is eight blocks, eight tales, to my same goal.  
I am sixteen, but might as well be ten.  
The buildings are 'specially tall today,  
But the gutters are 'specially dirty.  
Freshly-painted trash cans filled to the brim  
And newspaper machines mark the corners,  
Like torn flags on islands. I walk two blocks.  
There is the new Catholic School on the right.  
I must be careful not to look or catch  
Any of the big students in the eye.  
Eyes are too good to be looked in. Ahead  
Is the fat kid, my never-speak-to-friend.  
I see him each day; each day he sees me.  
"Hello," my mind says. But my mouth sleeps strong,  
Like the time twenty-four hours ago.  
And I silently wonder, Why is that?  
'Cause this is the only path, he answers.  
I asked my father about that last night.  
"Don't be silly," he says. "Straighter's greater."  
GodKing Sense will never fall from his throne.  
The load of my pack digs into my skin.  
What else can I do but lug the luggage?  
Slush surrounds my boots as I cross the stream  
From block four to five. Some of it gets in,  
Some stays out; some falls down the sewer drain.  
A bright-red car honks and turns to the left.  
A dark-green car honks and turns to the right.  
They both soon slip, but in opposite ways.  
I slowly think back, and I remember  
That that didn't happen yesterday morn.  
Molten metal machines change all the time.  
But their maker doesn't. "Straighter's greater."  
Man ties tighter than nature can dream of,  
Comments my friend, now an island away.  
I think, though, I am gaining a rope burn.  
Maybe, I say. Maybe what? asks father.  
Maybe, I say, another way, some day.

Alexander Dworkowitz  
New York, NY  
The Calhoun School  
Drew Kalter

### Sporadic Reminders

Some mornings at our house, the hum of lying minds  
ceases  
when father's plane takes off  
from the upstairs runway.  
Rattled floorboards sound to  
pealed back luggage stickers,  
while dawn  
resists the shaft beneath our door.  
It all makes mother weary.

"A brittle canopy is not meant to be cradled."  
I hear her say,

like the tissue paper lamp shade my father  
returned to China.

Jessica Marshall  
Newtown Sq., PA  
Marple Newtown HS  
Tom Williams



Marie Malin  
Perkasie, NJ  
Pennridge HS  
Judy Weirbach

### Braids

Pull, twirl, push through, pull. Pull, twirl, push through, pull. As I work on Emily I feel Jenny doing the same thing to me. My scalp moves back as my hair is pulled and twisted into the next braid. It hurts sometimes, and when it does, I want to kick her. But I can't. She's so much bigger than me. And anyway, she's got ahold of my hair. I wouldn't kick no one who has ahold of my hair.

Emily keeps twitching and giggling. I have her hair, pulling it slowly and looping it around the rest. Whenever she moves I pull a little harder. That should show her. I have to have her perfectly still or it won't work. I know this well. I still have bruises. I moved when I wasn't supposed to. Lucy is lucky; she won't have to go through that. Emily would never do that to her little dolly of a sister. And anyway, she's the youngest; mother wouldn't allow it. She didn't allow me to touch Emily until Lucy was born, but I don't remember it when that happened to me. Jenny does. She seems to remember it well, with all the fuss she makes whenever someone does something wrong. No matter who did it, and it usually is that little sweetness playing with her dolly, it is always me who gets in trouble.

"It's not fair," I tell my playthings. "It's not fair," I tell the sky. "It's not fair," I tell my father but all he says is "Life's not fair, honey." Of course life isn't fair, that's not why I cry at night. MY life isn't fair. I am the one with the black hair and dark eyes. The hair I'm now twisting is blond and fine and shiny, so is Lucy's, so is Jenny's. I think I'll pull a little harder; she's mocking me by twitching and giggling, and whining. She thinks whoever finishes first is the winner. She never does the best job and always whines when I take my time. But her hair is so beautiful, I hate it; I have to make it look better. I don't know why. I wish my sisters would treat me like I treat them. My mother says, "quality over quantity," but no one besides me understands her. Emily has bright red cheeks and little dimples, so does Lucy, and when they smile their little lips curl around and form the most perfect bow. Why not me? What have I done to deserve this? I pull, I twist, I push, I pull. This is my life. My sisters do other things, go play with their friends, go shopping with Mother.

They pull and twist and push my hair, but they have no reason to. Just me. I think again and again and again and again what if? what if? WHAT IF? Lucy has started playing with her

toys. They are really my toys, ones Mother thought were too young for me and gave to Emily who gave them to Lucy. But they are really mine. I played with them first. Now Emily wants to play with her dolly. And I still have to finish her hair. Emily, be quiet, I don't have time for you, only your hair. You are so annoying! I didn't even touch your head! Well, fine, go tell Mother, I don't care.

She would have done it anyway. These things we all do together are their little plots to get me in trouble. Always me. Maybe sometime I will do it to them. They would deserve it. Some day. They will be sitting and playing and laughing and then they will be the ones in trouble and then I will sit and play and laugh and my hair will be blond and my eyes will be blue. Sometimes I wish I had the heart to fight back, to show Mother that it wasn't my fault; that I'm not to blame, that it's my beautiful sisters. Not that Mother would believe me. Or Father. "I don't care who started it, I just care who ends it," says Mother. Well, in my family it just isn't true because I "always" start it and I'm always in trouble for it. While I pull and twist their hair into beautiful braids, they pull and twist me into a monster. They braid my feelings into twists and turns and make me miserable while I braid their hair to make their lives wonderful. I wonder, do grown ups have a word for this?

Robert Kahn  
Rockville MD  
Richard Montgomery High School

### Gusevs' Fish

On days when rain  
falls on patios  
like seasickness on Gusev  
there's not much to do.

You wonder for a  
time; just like Gusev,  
about the mystery of  
things--fish as big as mountains  
and the wind tied to rusty chains.  
Then you make lunch,  
cream soup and buttered  
wheat toast.

Outside the stacked waves  
cap and break and nothing  
seems so good  
at all. Just the determined  
drivers of sputtering cars  
which honk their horns  
and spit long shots of water.

The telephone doesn't ring  
although you keep hearing it  
from somewhere--maybe it's coming  
from the basement--or it might even  
be the distant  
rings of neighbors' phones.  
They're a sociable bunch.

On days like this, sick days,  
like Gusev: think of home. Make up stories.  
Listen to the aching wooden hulls and to the others  
tell their stories. Rock back  
and forth in a netted hammock and dream.  
unconscious for days--dream.

Jonathan Queally  
Cape Elizabeth, ME

I don't remember ever not knowing what discrimination was. My mother has driven into my head not to prejudice myself against anyone, and she started doing this, I guess, when I was born. It made sense, because I seemed to be at risk, living in a place with no black people, no Hispanics, no homosexuals that anyone knew of, no Jews, no Muslims, really no one but white Christian people. More than any other group though, my mother tried to teach me about gay people. She seemed to bring discrimination against gays into virtually every conversation. She could fit the subject into any discussion from schools to music.

It was my aunt Elonide who actually had the guts to tell me about four months ago that Mom had been "questioning her identity." We talked about it, and we decided that the thing to do was call Mom and simply ask what she had decided. This Elo did, and then I got the message that my mother was gay.

It sounds like a very strange thing to be told, and I doubt that all that many people have experienced it, but it didn't really bother me all that much. I'd always known that my parents were different. I'd hated it in eighth grade, when my main goal for the year was to get everyone to like me. That plan didn't work very well, mostly because neither my family nor, consequently, I had much in common with the normal Westcliffe people. I should have known even then. My mom didn't go to church because she'd rather sit at home in the peace caused by her family's absence, went walking every day for hours during the moonlight, and had a friend who was so obsessed with the environment that she changed her name to "Terra," meaning earth. My dad was a forester, and this, coupled with my mom's lifestyle, caused countless jeering comments, the worst of which for me was my eighth grade crush and his friend calling them "Mother Earth and Father Sun." I would have given anything to have parents like my friends, always kissing and holding hands.

I had the job of telling my older sister, Claire, that our mother was homosexual. Mom was afraid to tell her because of Claire's possible reaction. While on the phone with Claire, I told her that Mom had been afraid to tell the news (If it can be called news, my mom said that she was gay ten years before.), but not me. Claire said, "Why? Does she think that I'm more conservative than you? That's funny." That is what Mom thought though.

Claire and I were always both very "good." We both did our homework, got good grades, and hung out with the "good" people, not the ones who went out to the lake, sat out above the dam just past the "No Trespassing" sign and drank before driving over to the cemetery to make out. Our group didn't do those things. We were good because we stayed at each other's houses and watched movies on Friday nights, went to basketball games and sold concessions for student council, and most of us (myself being the exception) went to church. But Claire was different in one way. She went to church every Sunday. That placed her on a different list with Mom. Mom sees the church as a huge old institution that is against every thing that she is for.

The fact that my mom and I didn't go to church was one of the biggest things that made my family different from the normal Westcliffe people. There are so many churches there that it's practically an old adage that "There's a church for every ten people." Over half of the faculty at the school went to one church, Valley Bible, and those who didn't were discriminated against in things like how much the administration listened to their requests for budget or student discipline. Every last one of my friends went to Valley Bible. I didn't agree with it (I've hated church forever because I thought it was brainwashing me.), but I needed friends. The church group fit my beliefs and

personality more than did any other of the groups that existed in the school. So we just didn't discuss anything that we didn't agree about.

I actually even tried to go to church there a few times. They said that everybody was welcome, and so I went to Youth Group to try to fit into their happy life. One of the events I went to was the New Year's Eve party. It was quite unlike most New Year's Eve parties, and consisted of a lot of sitting, talking, and being very serious. Right before bed, everyone started crying. My friend Natalie cried because she "had let God into her heart, and felt the feeling of total peace, and it had disappeared." Everyone hugged her and said they understood, but I didn't. I just felt left out because I had never "Had God in my heart." Or maybe the reason I felt left out was that I wanted to cry and be hugged by friends too, just like when I pretended everyone hated me in kindergarten and cried to my mommy. I wanted everyone to care about me too. I made up something about how I was so glad I was there, because in the church I had gone to before my rebellion in sixth grade, no one ever got to share problem in a group like this. That made me feel better, like I had a problem too, but it would have felt a lot better if it had been true.

I never had enough problems. My friend Kristen once told me, in one of our very few pseudo-arguments that I didn't know what it was like to have problems, and that I could not possibly understand how hard life could be. She had lost of problems, like alcoholic and drug using parents and both verbal and physical abuse. Perhaps that's the reason I was so amenable to the idea of having a gay mother. Finally I had a problem too.

Claire reacted much more negatively than I did not because she was more conservative. She was just more attached to the idea of having a happy, "normal" family. Her biggest concerns were Dad and the marriage. I had certainly thought of the marriage and the implications of one spouse's announcement of homosexuality. I guessed it meant divorce, but that was okay by me. It's not that I wanted my parents to get divorced, but it seemed inevitable. I had thought of it happening before; I almost expected it to happen. I had had time to get used to the idea. Claire was the one who made me think of it in the first place, when I was in ninth grade. My parents were never lovey-dovey like my friend Becca's, for instance. I realized that on my own, but I would have just accepted it as a mature relationship, if I had not heard that Claire was worried about a divorce. But it didn't worry me, even after the idea was suggested to me and I got to think about it.

A big difference in my reaction and Claire's was the element of surprise. I guess people don't normally walk around with the suspicion that their mother is gay, but I really wasn't surprised. Mom's continuous allusions to gay discrimination and all the gay friends she had made me think of the possibility before. It wasn't new to me, but Claire said that she never had thought of it. I don't know if Mom actually stressed the issue less with Claire, or if Claire just thought that our family was more normal than it was. Claire had a more rosy view of our family. Claire was upset about the possible breakup, and I just took it in. Once again I felt left out, just like at the Valley Bible Youth Group New Year's Eve party. Claire was having stress while away in college, and here I was, with no problems.

None of us know what to think about it all. Mom wants us to think that it's no big deal, but it really is. It disturbs us because it has to. Everything we accepted has disappeared. For all that we were different from the rest of the town, we were normal to ourselves. They called us weird, but we could take refuge from all that our happy little existence up in the hills. When my friends grew up, they even started to envy my family. Our parents were together, didn't bug us, and let us have parties

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 in our cabins. Most of the other families did not have that. But then that all disappeared. Mom was always depressed before she announced her sexual preference. Now she feels much better for having told us. But she's the only one. Dad refuses to believe that the woman he married and had three kids with is gay. Who would want to believe it? And he feels threatened because it lends mom an excuse to get out of the marriage, which she has wanted to do since she got into it on her wedding day. Dad wants to keep up the picture of happiness. Claire feels that her rosy view of her family, the "only stable thing" in her life is being destroyed. She doesn't want our parents to divorce, but she seems to deal with it. I was the one with the most accepting view of it; it barely bothered me. I was even glad because I finally had a problem. It worries me how very little I care about the issue. I wish I could cry, just like I wanted to cry at the church New Year's Eve Party. But I can't. Everyone around me is sad, but

Angela Lankford  
 Chevy Chase MD  
 The Field School  
 William Layman

### Untitled

Rubbing sleep from my twelve year-old eyes  
 awake since six to make the trip from Manhattan to Jersey City  
 stacks of mammoth paper cartons  
**towering**, dwarfing me  
 as they teeter precariously  
 upon their gray metal shelves  
 counting toy soldiers into a bag  
**one, two, three**  
**frigid silence**  
 only the whirl of a starving paper shredder  
**looking** out through a small window  
 cracked, dust encased, chicken wire round  
 Jersey City  
 no, not a skyline  
 rows of crumbling buildings  
 bodegas with rows of cheap sodas and cigarettes  
 old men debating in rapid fire Spanish  
 one, two, three  
 both inside and out a thick serpentine cloud of smoke  
 crushes my body  
 fills my throat  
 uncomfortably hot, uncomfortably cold  
 one, two, three  
 balding paunchy boss  
 who still plays with his soldiers  
 at each and every lunch break  
 each metal figment of his imagination  
 has a name  
 beside him a warm flat cola  
 greasy ham and cheese on a roll  
 one, two, three  
 early afternoon  
 glistening drops of water condense  
 over our overworked air conditioner  
 bags of alert, stout, green plastic men  
 all uniform in their molded expression  
 ready, attentive now to be shipped  
 late afternoon  
 climb into cramped station wagon  
 driving home to the city

the small row of buildings  
 fade into the horizon, their silhouettes  
 radiating a quiet golden dust of decay  
 until they become no more than  
 dots against the darkening sky

Elana Rosenfeld Berkowitz  
 New York, NY  
 Hunter College HS  
 Ms. Nanette Asher

### Perspective

It was our place in the springtime  
 behind the old auction house.  
 We'd sit on the back steps  
 leading to the French doors  
 and rest ourselves against the wall.  
 Chipped paint, blue-grey with age,  
 broken glass from little boys' games,  
 and the broken gutters hanging uselessly.  
 We used to climb those gutters  
 to watch the tall grass field.  
 The wind made it crawl  
 like a caterpillar going nowhere.  
 Tracks in the distance  
 created a border for the field,  
 but no train would ever  
 disturb the peace in that place.  
 Hours we'd sit  
 amused by the waves of the field  
 that rolled off over the tracks.  
 When we sat too long,  
 a rooster reminded us of our intrusion,  
 but no one else bothered to care.  
 The air was too sweet to leave.

Nathan Fellman  
 Kent School  
 Mrs. Stout

### Education

In the battered dirtpits  
 of junkyards and granite  
 quarries, sober, hard men  
 grab hold of chains  
 that are caked with mud  
 and they sing songs that  
 only hard sober men can  
 sing.

These aren't college boys, not  
 most of them.

At sunset, though, when the  
 orange sun sits back for  
 the final time and turns  
 the discarded refrigerators  
 and the muddied chains into  
 deep shadows, they seem  
 educated. As if there wasn't  
 one thing they didn't know  
 about. Not one mystery or  
 ignorance. As if tattered  
 leather gloves were diplomas  
 and denim jackets were gowns.

Jonathan Queally  
 Cape Elizabeth, ME

My daddy always said I had a head on my shoulders for nothing but storytelling. He said that a featherhead like me was bound to end up in some sort of trouble. Needless to say, Daddy was right. It turned out that Daddy was right in everything. Well, everything important, that is. But some people say that the one mistake Daddy did make was the important one. I think they're wrong. Dead wrong. They'll never understand Daddy. But then, Daddy always said that life wasn't written for the small minded. And I suppose he was right in that too.

My story begins on a fine September evening in the middle of an Indian summer. The trees and the fields were all rust colored, and the heat rose up from the sidewalks like steam. Well, where there were sidewalks. Our little town of Norfolk, Georgia wasn't known for its sidewalks. My mamma and daddy lived miles away from their nearest neighbor, and it was an odd occurrence to see two buildings close together. Now Norfolk is a booming little tourist town, but I kinda miss the old days. The only real cement in the whole town of Norfolk then was in the town square, built by the last mayor who, when he heard a Congressional delegation was coming to visit our little Norfolk, decided that we should appear more urban. So in the middle of woods and water and trees and birds and with no real population to speak of, Norfolk Proper, the town square was built. There wasn't time to erect many buildings or to begin much business. There was just Old Colonel Harvey's General Store and Miss Hattie's Meat Potato Business. But it wasn't known as Miss Hattie's then; it was an old-looking saloon called Black Jack's Bar. The owner, Mr. Stanley Amhearst, is the oldest citizen of Norfolk, Georgia, and the oddest man who I have ever met. But then, that's another story all together.

The Congressional delegation never did come to Norfolk, and the mayor wasn't reelected next term. But on that hot September evening in the foothills of Georgia, the steam rose odd that one square of cement, and a shriek had been heard clear across Georgia. I had been born.

My mother named me after my great-grandmother, Marie. She was French. Marie LeBelle. Or so my mother says. Somehow, though, it came down through the years as Maybelle, and that's what stuck. Though my birth certificate proudly proclaims my French heritage, my mother's futile attempt at introducing culture into the wilderness was thwarted by the Southern mispronunciation of my name: Maybelle. And ever since then, I have been known as Maybelle Parker, whether for good or for evil I'll never know. Daddy always said that Mama doomed me to a life of frivolity when she named me that "frippery" French name. And I suppose he was right. I've never been very good at concentrating. Joe Baker says I'm sillier than a haycat, whatever that means. Joe Baker likes trying to confuse me, and he succeeds most of the time. I've known Joe since I was born. His mamma was visiting my mamma when the labor started, and he heard my scream as soon as I popped out. Mamma said that I was cute as a button when I was born, and I believe her, too. I have always been beautiful. Even Joe admits that I am beautiful. But he says that I looked as scrawny as a plucked chicken and just about as ugly when my mammy, Jezzie, brought me out of that bedroom room. Jezzie never said so, though, and she should have known.

Jezzie was the one who knew me best out of anyone besides my daddy, and I s'pose she always will be, may God bless her soul. Jezzie was a good woman with big, warm hands and a bright smile. She was a mamma to me from that first September evening, for my own mamma was too busy to be just a mother. "There are things to be done, and people to be seen," Mamma used to always say when she'd come home in the

evening after visiting the houses of all of the poor or sick or otherwise afflicted people of Norfolk. My mamma was a good woman, and that was enough for me, but she never was much of a mother, if the truth be known. I always admired my mamma, that bustling woman with her constant smile. Daddy said that Mamma was a light in the wilderness, and he was right, too. Everyone said so. Except for Mamma.

Now it was Jezzie who had to raise me and make me seem respectable. Daddy wasn't respectable enough himself to do that, and Mamma didn't have enough time to impart some of her graces to her scalawag daughter. As soon as I turned two years old and Daddy'd earned enough from the farm, he sold the house, the Parker plantation, to developers and moved onto Norfolk Proper, right next to Black Jack's Bar. Jezzie used to pray all the time in that house next to the saloon; she said that we was so close to sin, that she could just about taste it and that she wouldn't be surprised if Lucifer came walking right through that door. I spent most of my early childhood waiting for that bloody-eyed specter to walk in the room, say "Howdy!" and set himself down to dinner, but Lucifer never did come to call, and before we knew it, we had already moved again. Into the mayor's mansion.

My daddy was elected mayor when he bought up all the property around Norfolk Proper and sold it to developers. My daddy basically made the shopping mall industry in Georgia, and whether he should be blessed or cursed for that is for the Georgian, and the reader to decide. I never really understood how my fun loving daddy could be so devoted to business. It just wasn't in his nature to be a cutthroat or to move quickly. Daddy would sit for hours on the back porch of the mayor's mansion, staring out at the glittering landscape until the bright shine of the sun turned to the dull sheen of a starry night, all the while trying to convince himself to walk into the kitchen and eat supper. The Parkers were always slow-moving people, and I suppose that's what killed daddy in the end.

When I turned eleven years old, my daddy had what he called his "Year of the Blue Streak." (My daddy always did like having fancy titles for everything: made him feel like things were more important.) He said he called it that cause that's the year all the developers came to call, trying to get their hands on Daddy's property, and those developers, well, they never seemed to want to stop talking. Daddy had had plenty of dealings with those folks before, but never in the numbers that he had that year. You see, my daddy had bought himself an oil farm, or at least that's what he called it, up in Alaska or some such place, with all the money he got from the Parker plantation. Jezzie said that it was the Devil's luck that Daddy bought that property, but then Jezzie thinks that everything's full of demons and curses. Daddy said, though, that he was going to make himself a "wildlife refuge" (everyone in Norfolk just thought that was a dandy-fied way of calling it a hunting range, but me and Mamma knew better), and that he wasn't going to sell that property in Alaska, even if it was an oil farm.

Now, developers came from near and far to see Daddy the Mayor, and folks in Norfolk, well, they got real excited when they heard the news. Mrs. Cramer baked one hundred and sixty pecan pies that year, all for the developers and their families. (And boy, do I know it! Joe and I spent hours shelling those Pecans.) I just thought it was loads of fun. It seemed like every day, someone new was coming to Norfolk. My daddy called it progress, but Old Stanley said that he took it for a bad omen. Why, he got so man when those developers came to drink at Black Jack's Bar, that he went and closed it down! That was the first time we Norfolkers started thinkin' there was something important going on with those developers.

Something even me and Joe Baker couldn't afford to miss.

In the summer of my eleventh year, a Yankee developer came to stay with us at the Mayor's mansion for a month, trying to convince Daddy to sell him the oil farm. Well, Daddy was real genteel about it. He worked his hardest on his charm, but Mamma and me, well we just knew when that particular twinkle came into Daddy's eye that that developer didn't have a chance. But Mr. Silas Avery kept on trying with that slicked back hair of his and his Yankee smile. Joe and me took to calling him "Mr. Slimy Unsavory," but that was before Jezzie found out and gave us both a whippin'. It was a long time before Joe and I could sit down without hurting something awful, and it was an even longer time before we poked fun at Mr. Silas Avery again.

We still listened in though. Me and Joe and Bill Harper and Jack Benson and Lucille Thorpe and Cindy Meyer, well, we all formed a club that summer when we heard about Black Jack's bar closing, and Joe made us sign a blood oath that we would "protect the oil farm from nasty developers" and "pry the hands of the Yankees off our precious town." We called ourselves "The Union of the Confederacy" and we felt pretty proud of it too, 'cause we'd never had a proper-sounding title before. We were just Joe's Gang. We didn't much know the point of Joe's new club, but Joe seemed awful intent on it, so we all went along. Joe's daddy and brother belonged to the Sons of the Confederacy, and Joe said that it would be "dishonorable" for us to stand by while "the heathen foe takes over this Christian land." Whatever that meant. All I knew was Jezzie was worried, and I was sick of shelling pecans for developers. So we listened in.

Joe crept up on the roof, and then came Billy and then Billy helped Cindy up, and Lucille stood on Jack's shoulders and screamed at him for looking up her skirts. Jack looked white as a ghost when her crawled up there; probably still in shock from Lucille's scolding. Lucille always did have a tongue on her like a branding iron, or so Jezzie always said. Then when everyone else had crawled up, it was my turn. And I was scared as a rabbit.

I'll tell you now, I've never been one for heights, and I can stand most anything, or so Daddy used to say. I don't mind snakes or rats or the bleeding rashes Joe used to try to scare me with when he came to school with poison ivy, but I get mighty scared when I'm up in the air. I need solid ground under my feet, even if my head is always up in the clouds. Ever since I was four years old and Billy Harper pushed me off Miss McGumry's chicken coop, I have never felt safe anywhere but with me feet flat on the ground, and that's never changed for me. So climbing up on the roof seemed a miserable idea for me.

"Why do we have to go up there?" I asked Joe, suddenly annoyed with this plan of action. Joe shot me a superior look.

"We're saving the confederacy, you fool!" he said, hanging over the side of the roof and staring into the upstairs window. I stamped my foot impatiently.

"Joseph Theodore Baker, you'll let them see you!" I snapped, happy with my new power. His plan was stupid, and not only wasn't I going to climb up on the roof, I was also going to be a good Daughter of the Confederacy. I was going to prove that Joe Baker was acting dumb as a bear, a noble cause for any Confederate lady. I stomped confidently towards the front door of the house, opened it wide, and was about to slam it behind me when I heard Joe Baker's voice call from above.

"And just what are you going to do about it, Chicken Legs?" Well, that just about did it. I marched back around the house, and with "that hellfire look" in me eye (as Jezzie always says), I glared up at Joe Baker's freckled face until he flushed

the deepest red I ever did see, and I told him that I would pry those Yankee hands even better that he could and that I bet his Granddaddy was a turncoat during the Civil War. Well, as if that wasn't enough to turn a man purple, especially a man with as much family pride as my dear friend Joe, I called him a "yeller-bellied hypocrite" for good measure. Now so far I was doing fine, and my head was swelling up good about the whole deal, but then Lucille Thorpe had to open that big pink mouth of hers (Jack Benson and "Hiccup" McGumry always swore that they saw her swipe that shiny pink lip gloss from Old Colonel Harvey's General Store, but I never did believe them, even though her lips did look awful shiny sometimes) and ask me:

"Well, just what *do* you intend to do to get rid of the Yankee?" Just like that. Just as sweet as pie. If you ask me, I think old Lucille Thorpe had her eyes on Joe Baker even then, but that's another story. All I knew then was that Lucille Thorpe was as crooked as a Yankee and a tattle-tale to boot. And I had to think up a plan to save face, or else the gang would never forgive me. I sent Lucille a superior stare.

"Why Lucille," I began, slow as molasses and just about as sugary. "I would've thought you'd *know* without askin'. Why the plan's just about as *obvious* as can be!" Skinny old Jack Benson began scratching at his mosquito bites. Jezzie always said that the Bensons were a no-good crop of folks, but when Jack's daddy built the first hotel in Norfolk, well, they were just as rich as can be. Mamma said we had to be nice to them; they were "society" folks now, and the mayor couldn't just snub society folks. He'd look mighty ornery if he did, or so Mamma said, and no one likes an ornery politician. So we continued as always, with Jack Benson still considered one of the gang, 'cause no one had the heart to kick him out. Besides, he always could catch frogs a sight better than the rest of us. And carrot-headed Jack always belonged to tow-headed Cindy, even then, so it was also for her sake that we kept him in the group.

"Why I don't see why we jist don't kill 'im!" Jack remarked, still staring at the oozing bite. Lucille blanched.

"Jack Benson, if you don't stop scratching that bite this instant, I'll just scream until I die!" Lucille screamed, frightening poor Jack until her was like to fall out of his skin. Fall out of his skin, he didn't, but fall straight off that roof, he did. No one could even catch him, it was so quick. I was like he just up and jumped off that building at the sound of her voice. And to tell you the truth, I wouldn't blame him one mite if that was true. But as it was, all of us stood there and stared at the sprawled figure of Jack on the ground. He seemed awful pale in the summer sun, and his eyes were firm shut.

"Why don't y'all do something!" Lucille shrieked, piercing the silence with that hellwhistle of a voice of hers. Cindy turned on her angrily.

"Stop hollering like a cat with its tail chopped off! You're the one who made Jack fall!" As I said, Cindy and Jack were made for each other, even back then, we could tell. tears streamed down Cindy's cheeks as she crawled back down off of the roof and ran towards Jack's side. That seemed to break the silence for all of us, and quick as a bat, everyone was down off of the roof and standing around Jack, staring at those closed eyes.

"He's dead," Billy whispered in awe. What a thing for a man to say! Especially while Cindy was right there! I elbowed Billy. Hard. I admit, it wasn't a particularly ladylike thing to do, but hard times call for hard measures. Billy yelped.

"Ow! What're you doing, Maybelle!" Billy glared at me, his face as beet-red as Jack's hair. I smiled sweetly.

"I'm sorry Billy, were you saying something?" Well,

continued from p. 22. Billy looked madder than a bear, but before he could say anything, Daddy and that Yankee gentleman, Mr. Silas, were outside next to us and staring down at poor old Jack.

"What happened to this Boy!" Daddy asked, his eyebrows low over his eyes. I could see that Daddy was angry. Daddy didn't get angry much, only when people or animals got hurt or something like that. I must say that my daddy was the lovinest man that ever lived, but right then, I wanted to be just about anywhere besides next to my angry daddy. Mr. Silas smiled.

"Were you children playing?" He asked with that odd, cold voice that all Yankees have. Joe stared up at his contemptuously. I could see by the flush in his cheeks that he was as angry at the sight of that Yankee as a hunting dog that spies a hound. All of the sudden, I wished Joe's daddy wasn't a Son of the Confederacy.

"Of course we were playing," Joe said his jaws clenched tight. "What did you think we was doing?" Mr. Silas didn't seem to notice Joe's anger. He just went on smiling like a porcupine in July. Yankees sure were stupid, I thought. I was surprised Joe didn't just spit on him, and Mr. Silas was being nice as can be. How dumb.

"He fell off the roof!" Lucille piped up, ever the honest one. I almost groaned out loud. What had dumb Lucille got into this time? Before I had time to think up a juicy lie, she came out with the truth! I began to wonder if Lucille was a Yankee in disguise. Daddy glared darkly down at us.

"What was that child doing on the--" But before Daddy could finish, Mr. Silas reached into his jacket and pulled out a bag of colorful jelly beans, like the kind you could get in the General Store for a quarter, and held it out to the sobbing Cindy. She looked up at him, her face all streaked with tears, and paused before reaching up for a nice shiny yellow one. I was shocked. Cindy! Accepting gifts from a Yankee on Jack's deathbed? What would Jack have said! But I could see that my anger was increased a million times over in Joe Baker's heart, and I knew there was going to be trouble.

Right before Cindy popped that big shiny jelly bean into her mouth, Joe interrupted with:

"Stop! They could be poisoned!" Upon which Mr. Silas to all our amazement, held out a big red jellybean for Joe. I was stunned. Surely Yankees had some brains in their heads! How could he. . . But before I knew it Joe had popped that big red jellybean into his mouth, staring guiltily at the group. My heart just about stopped. Sure, cinnamon was Joe's favorite color, and those jellybeans were awful good, but Joe--taking candy from a Yankee! It was then that we knew that our leader had betrayed us. The Union of the Confederacy never met again. We were just Joe's gain once again.

"What happened to 'prying Yankee hands off our virgin soil?'" I cried, suddenly very angry at Joe's betrayal. What right did her have to ruin our title for the rest of us? Joe shrugged ashamedly, but before I could tell him off straight, Mr. Silas was holding the bag out to me. . . and those orange jellybeans looked just so luscious. . .

"Maybelle!" Lucille gasped as I popped a big round jellybean into my mouth. I glowered at her. Who was she to be righteous? She'd caused the whole thing to begin with! But then, when Mr. Silas held out that bag to her, Lucille gave in quick as the rest of us. She always a sucker for the pink ones.

"What about me?" Billy complained before grabbing a big green one from Mr. Silas's bag. My daddy shook his head and chuckled.

"You sure know how to buy the affection of children." He said, the anger gone out of his sparkling blue eyes. Mr. Silas

included Daddy in his wide slick smile.

"I hope I know how to buy other things too, Mortimer," Mr. Silas said as he began to stuff the bag back into his pocket. "Things more important that children." My daddy smiled, the "hellfire" look in his eye, just like mine. I sure was lucky to have such a daddy.

"That's what you've got to learn, Silas," Answered Daddy as he walked away, back towards the house. "There's nothing more important that children." Silas's smile stiffened with disappointment. But before that Yankee developer could follow Daddy back inside and try to milk out some more promises from this stubborn old Southern gentleman, little Jack Benson leapt to his feet, just as lively as you and me, and cried out:

"Can I have one? Can I have one?" Call me a liar if Cindy Meyer didn't give Jack the silent treatment for a whole month after that, until it seemed like those two would never be talking again. Of course, they did, and soon Joe's gang was back to Joe's gang, and the year of the Blue Streak was finally over. Mr. Silas went home, bringing his contracts and jellybeans with him, and I never again saw a slick smile to match his. We finally did lose the oil farm in Alaska, and well, soon we lost that mayor's mansion too. But that belongs in another story. And as my Daddy used to say, two tales in a day, is one tale too many, ask any beast in the forest. Before I end this story, though, I just have one more thing to say. If you ever come down Norfolk way and you stop off at the Benson Hotel in Norfolk Proper, be sure to look for the jellybean jar on the front desk. And be sure to say "Howdy!" to Cynthia Benson.

Catherine Keyser  
Sea Girt, NJ  
Mrs. Judy Mangan



Melanie Greenspan  
So. Orange, NJ  
Columbia HS  
Don Lasko

## Embarrassed to Tip

I felt like a cliché as I walked up to the cashier the coffee shop. I was dressed in black, looking as if I was about to perform beat poetry, and my eyes were glazed from the fatigue and the protein droplets on my amber lenses. The eerie dryness of Tom Waits slithered into my ears; I recognized the song from a cover I'd heard performed by some Canadian artist. I ordered a vanilla ice coffee.

"We're brewing it right now," said the cashier. He looked like an actor--like Steve Buscemi as Mr. Pink, only much more scruffy and worn by late night studying or too much pot.

"How much longer until it's cold?" I asked.

"Three hours," he said.

I mused a bit, as one must do in a coffee shop, contemplated what type of brew would suit my tongue. My taste buds broadcasted an SOS to my brain, an urgent call for vanilla. Steve Buscemi was fluent in tongue telepathy.

"I can put some syrup in this other type of ice coffee. Maybe it will taste the same." His voice fit his situation as a coffee shop cashier. The sentences he spoke were huskily fluid; sound struggled past his callused throat to dribble down his lips and soil his brown, unevenly shorn goatee. He leaned against the register as if his hips were dissolving and he needed support. His profile hardened to a determined scrunch, his half closed eyes fixed on the iced coffee cooler that his skinny fingers were manipulating; The cooler resembled the one I saw on a Gatorade ad--the type which would occupy a \$50,000 spot in the Super Bowl.

"Your vanilla coffee."

"How much?"

"Do you want milk? I can level it off for you." His speech was relaxed, dripping through an almost-shut faucet into an illusory washbasin.

I almost forgot that he hadn't been listening to me.

"How much? No. . . I mean, I want milk."

"\$3.20, with the bran muffin," Steve said, acknowledging the muffing that I fondled like a Chinese stress ball.

I fished in my right coat pocket with my left hand. Steve Buscemi folded his actor forearms over the register counter. His eyes were unflappable, fixated on my nervous, fishing fingertips or my quivering legs which endeavored to keep my from collapsing. I gave him the money; two worn ones--perhaps survivors of someone's washer--and many quarters. I took my muffin and my artificially vanillaed brew and sat at a window-side table, as is a coffee shop patron custom.

My train was coming soon. Steve Buscemi had left the coffee shop, allowing the side door to bang as he went through it. I stared through the window at the back pockets of his Levi's as he bent over a green Toyota two door. He had gotten a ticket. I felt bad for him; actors aren't supposed to get tickets. I took my dishes into the kitchen for him, hoping he wouldn't see me--I would have been embarrassed.

I sat back down. As I absently watched Steve Buscemi kick a nearby fire hydrant, I listened a bit to a foreign couple sitting two tables away. . . I think they spoke Portuguese. I wanted to wonder what they were saying, but I imagined they could be talking about a murder plot or a diamond heist, and I didn't want to hear anything that was supposed to be a secret. *Secrets deserve to be kept*, I thought. *It's none of my business what they are doing*. So I focused fully on the actor.

This time he returned my stare with his languid glance. He walked towards the coffee shop door. I got up and stood against the table, which wobbled under my unsteady frame, and watched him walk that Actor Walk.

I decided that I wanted another coffee.

I would have felt stupid asking the actor twice for an ice coffee, although I wasn't sure why. So I asked him for a hot one. He placed the steaming paper cup next to the jar of tips.

I fished.

He grinned.

I laid five precarious glances on the jar of tips.

I laughed.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked.

"I'm embarrassed to tip."

"Why?"

"Just a neurosis, I guess."

"You have good energy. Hold on to it." He puzzled me, but I smiled as I'd been taught. I threw seventy-five cents into the jar. My face was red. I pointed my heeled shoes toward the door.

I almost forgot my coffee.

Cheyenne Picardo

Pottersville NJ

Kent Place School

Dr. Cole

## Savannah Moon

After dusk in Savannah  
the moon is heavy and humid.

It appears to be alpine white chocolate.  
I want to eat it.

It sits on my Oma's shoulder,  
cuddling in the space between her forearm and collar bone

as she washes her thinning hair,  
the shampoo suds making paths

through her wrinkles--  
the line on her upper forehead,

her low frowning breasts,  
the skin collecting around her ankles.

Pretension becomes her,  
her song takes years off her face.

I am not so content.  
The moon reflects off my bare, sunned skin,

claws of Spanish moss reaching down toward me,  
laughing at my nakedness.

There isn't enough warm water for both of us,  
so I stand shivering, gazing

around the wooden fence for  
the grasshoppers and other insects.

Maybe when I am older,  
my skin will form wrinkles to house

the wisdom of my years and  
I will have the courage to stroll along the

lagoons of Georgia  
with only the moon as my cover.

Rebecca Foster

Baltimore, MD

Towson HS

William Jones



Silk. Comfort to me has always meant a feeling of security, a lack of things to poke and harm. I've always found contentment in the soft puddle of a cat in my lap, so soft, so boneless and at ease. Silken smoothness has always meant security from pain as a Persian rug is security from rocks and sticks. Much of my life has been a search for that comfort, be it mental or physical.

I still recall the comfort of my father's arms. As an infant and toddler, I would fall asleep as my father read to me. I'd sit on his lap, my head against his chest, and I would listen as much to him as to his story. His warm voice would surround me, reaching my ears through the air and through the slow rise and fall of his chest as he breathed. Slowly my will would weaken, my eyes grow heavy, and I would fall asleep.

As I grew older, and I began to set out on my own, I lost the security of an infant. The world became a swirling landscape of unforgiving surfaces: pavement to play hockey on with my friends, worn out grass and hard packed dirt for soccer, and the cold hard tile and concrete of the school. Our Elementary School was a veritable badlands of dangerous places. Half of our play area at recess was "the blacktop." Stretched between a curve of our h-shaped school, the blacktop lay rough and cracked between the canyon walls of our classrooms. I never enjoyed playing there because it was too easy to fall or to be pushed, and you were certain to scrape something. At one end of the building was "the pit," a sloping driveway into the basement. It was littered with stones and bits of asphalt as the pit grew, slowly swallowing the blacktop. Throughout the elementary school these things reached at me, but didn't hurt me mentally.

Soon I was stumbling about, trying to cope with arms and legs unfamiliar to me. The world I thought I'd mastered became confusing from a taller view. Even the ski slopes I'd known since I was three loomed strange as I tried to learn longer skis.

Whenever I despaired, though, memories of more comfortable times would come to me. In particular I recall a scene from before school days. The picture surprises me with its clarity, and I can see myself running out the back door of our house. The doors are all open to let the breezes through, and I charge out the back door with a small plastic kool-aid dispense in my hand. It's full of the red flavor I still like best. Later I am running through the grass, a warm, thick carpet to a little boy. I zoom under our clothesline amid bright orange sheets, smelling the clean detergent smell, and then flash back out into the sunlight again. Memories like that keep me warm in the winter.

By the time I regained control of my extremities, the world had changed again. No longer did corners reach at me, eager to hit. The floors of the middle school were carpets. This time, the turmoil was inside. Inner security as "friends" switched sides, deciding they were too cool to associated with someone who read, like to hike, and got along with his family. Middle school brought as many dangers to my emotions as elementary had to my body. Throughout middle school I searched for my inner-silk, that mental half of the calm security I'd felt before in my father's lap.

One evening, remembering the comfort of that summer scene running outside, I walked out my front porch. I closed the door behind me on my sister, now in middle school and arguing with my parents. I looked at the moon, tired, and asked it why, as I had passed from middle school to high school nothing had changed. I stepped off my concrete porch, arms spread like wings to catch the cool night wind as I had caught the summer breeze before. I sat in the dew-damp grass and laid down. The

night closed around me like a blanket of silk, the grass beneath my head the pillow.

That night inspired me to look elsewhere for comfort.

The night is a comfort to me, the moon is someone to talk to. I see solace in the softness of the grass, and the gentle buffeting of the wind is a friendly challenge. With some of this new self-confidence, that comfort was everywhere I looked. I found my friends.

Darkness fills the auditorium as several classmates and I walk across the cavernous space to a couch at the end of the stage. There we flop down to have dinner before play rehearsal begins. We finish, setting the food aside, and lean back in the soft silence, staring at the ceiling.

"God, I'm tired," the girl next to me says. "Mind if I use you as a pillow?"

"A what?" I ask.

"A pillow." She repeats a smirk playing with the edge of her mouth. I'm not sure I like the idea.

"That's all men are good for, you know. Pillows." She declares and lies down, her head in my lap. Her eyes closed, and I laid my hand on her head. we are good friends, and she looks tired. Her smile faded as she relaxed, grateful for the peace. Her smooth hair flowed off her head onto the couch, soft as silk. As she fell asleep I continued admiring her hair, smoothing it.

*This must be comfort*, I realized. Falling asleep by someone is the ultimate form of trust. She's trusted her safety to me, one of the greatest compliments I've ever been given. I realized that she'd fallen asleep on me as I had fallen asleep in my father's lap.

And I've found comfort.

Scott Price  
Clinton NY  
Clinton High School  
Deborah Hepburn

**Young Woman Braiding Her Hair**

Oh, Auguste,

you made me so fine  
why do you paint me with this  
long red hair?

I have to braid it in the mirror  
can't you see it's chilly in here?  
you give me round shoulders with

creamy white skin  
and make me wear lacy clothes  
Oh, Renoir,

you paint my face so plain  
do you paint all your young  
women that way?

look close at my eyes

and at my puckered lips

Oh, Auguste! I think I see

an earring!

the mirror shows me

pondering a bit

Oh, Renoir,

qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

J'ai envie de couper mes cheveux:

I will give it to Pissarro's peasant girl:

Now she will not need wear a straw hat.

Krysha H. Szymczyk  
Erie, PA  
Mereyhurst Preparatory  
Mr. Terrence Healey



Melanie Greenspan  
So. Orange, NJ  
Columbia HS  
Don Lasko

### Kupala Night

*The blue eyes of lakes, reflecting the sky, the boundless green forests, the marshes of my Belarus lie near western Russia near Poland. Here Slavic traditions and legends live in forgotten small villages, not affected by centuries.*

On Kupala Night we went out  
into the murky darkness of July.  
When the red flames of sunset had died away,  
we burned the darkness with fires.  
We gathered around them and started  
Belarussian songs, our souls filled  
with those melodic sounds that make the heart  
laugh and cry at the same time.  
We sang and jumped over fires,  
holding our hands together. High above,  
still cold stars observed the Earth,  
not knowing why we were dancing.

We went into the forests, for the legend said  
there blossomed the magic flower of the fern  
every year on Kupala night.

We did not find it,  
and calm and lyric songs  
echoed above the water, lost in woods.  
Girls wove wreaths of the evening flowers  
and threw them into the river,  
wondering if somebody would catch them,  
for the legend says that wreath will float  
into the hands of one's true love  
on Kupala night.

We sat there, listening to the sad  
whispers of river and woods,  
watching the dark colors of night fade,

the fires extinguished by the rising sun,  
as Kupala night was slipping away.  
In the dim light of the dawn, I saw him;  
and in his hands, there was my wreath.  
And now, thousands of miles away,  
this is how I see his eyes: in the sunrise,  
the shine of river streaming down his hair,  
the blue flowers of my wreath in his shivering hands.

(for Dimka)

Kristina Polyakova  
Baltimore, MD  
Towson HS  
William Jones

### Open Season

i walk again,  
in dampness where every face  
with dark hair,

muddy eyes, supported  
by paper shoulder blades  
is you.

i fake. these days in  
paris alone, i  
hate knowing street names

instead of landmarks,  
wire statues up against walls,  
and hills where we thumbed

through stolen journals  
until our feet went white  
or blue. i try

to read russian novels,  
but roll over in bed to  
read news magazines

with surveys, race and executions  
in america. i eat lunch in a park  
filled with women in fresh blouses.

i eat egg salad as if i need the  
protein. three times a day i type you  
a letter, empty out my pockets and

fill a small jar  
with change  
for train fare,  
a baby,  
clean linen,  
a good luck charm.

i walk on wet streets,  
where hand mirrors on the ground reflect faces.  
these walks could be a one act play,  
waiting for you in this open season.

Madeline Beach Carey  
Baltimore, MD  
Towson High School  
William Jones

## Spoonbread

We tiptoe about the house, my brother and I. Spoonbread does not rise if you are too loud, or so we were told ages ago when we were more prone to roughhousing. Now we are 17 and 21 and have mellowed out considerably in our old age, but we still whisper to each other as we pass in our socks in the kitchen. Dad stands at the sink and washes shimmering silver mixing bowls, his contribution to the effort, while Mom, the grand chef, kicks back and reads the newspaper. The heater hisses like so many snakes, keeping us toasty while snow falls silently outside. It doesn't want to disturb the spoonbread either.

Mom is still in curlers, Dad in his bathrobe, I in my pig slippers and Sean in his boxer shorts at nine o'clock on this Monday morning, but the snow has made sure that we have nowhere to go today. I am secretly grateful, although my parents may grumble about the snow day, because it is only on days like today when we are all together that we have spoonbread. We all sit in the kitchen and wait for the spoonbread, not just because we have nothing else to do, but because it is spoonbread, and it must be eaten by all four of us together.

After an eternity of longing, the stove buzzer rings; it is time. Mom opens the oven and is greeted by a cloud of steam large enough to set the fire alarm into hysterics. Moisture clings to her brow like perspiration as she pulls her baby from its watery womb and sets it down on the dining room table. Mom is modest as always, saying, "I should have left it in a little longer," but we know better. Just like every time, this is the best spoonbread ever.

We join hands around the table for grace and smile at each other as we realize that for once we make a complete perfect circle. Grace is German, a subtle homage to not only God but also the language that gave birth to my family when my parents met as graduate students in Princeton's German program. It is a bond of understanding among the four of us when we have visitors for dinner. They sit quietly, often looking a little overwhelmed, until the four of us explain that it is simply a child's grace asking Jesus to be our guest and bless that which He has given us.

Mom raises her spoon carefully and cuts the spoonbread first in half and then cuts one half into fourths. We always save half for seconds, partially in hopes that someone will be full and not want any, leaving more for the rest of us (this never happens), but mostly because it gives us more time together. I am always served first because I am the baby of the family. Sean comes next, and we eye each other's plates suspiciously, making sure that they are even down to the last spoonful. Mom serves herself last, and now we can eat. Mom asks me to pass her the apple butter, but I reach for the syrup and drown my plate in gold. My spoon mashes the yellow mound about until it is a desert island surrounded on all sides by the green sea at the edges of my plate. I taste it, but it is not quite right; I never add enough syrup the first time around. Gold pours onto my plate a second time and makes a river running down my beach. I give it all a good swirl until it looks like what I always thought porridge must be like when I read about the three bears in nursery school. Now it is ready to eat.

We all eat in our own ways. Mom, careful and precise, takes very precise forkfuls and washes each one down thoroughly with her coffee. Sean, a notoriously slow eater, savors each bite to the fullest, making sure he has gotten every last bite off his plate before setting down his fork. Dad does not bother to mix in the syrup first but digs in as soon as it is placed on his plate. I am like my dad as Sean is like my mother. Lacking any self control, I take huge bites too big for my mouth,

revel briefly in the glorious sweetness, and then take another spoonful before the last is even down my throat. (I am the only one in my family who uses a spoon to eat my spoonbread.) In my eagerness I always get syrup in my hair and spoonbread in my shirt and end up feeling a little unsatisfied and dirty when it's all over. But I can't help but indulge myself in the present, and before I know it, my first helping is gone, and I am sitting watching Sean dawdle and yearning for seconds.

Spoonbread is a southern delicacy that my father's mother brought with her from North Carolina where she grew up. It's a cornbread soufflé that has no taste of its own, but is a good excuse to use lots of syrup and applebutter. I think it must run in the blood, because I have never found another soul on earth who even likes the stuff, while my family would kill for it. (It's a running joke among my father and his two brothers that there was once a fourth Barney brother who was killed off after taking the last of the spoonbread.) It is a commonality among even my extended family that a prerequisite of being a Barney is a love of spoonbread.

Seconds are handed out the same way as firsts and devoured just as quickly. Thoughts turn to after breakfast when everyone will head their separate ways; Dad will shovel the driveway, Sean will drive through even a raging blizzard to visit his girlfriend, Mom will retire to the kitchen to grade papers, and I will head to my room to work on homework. We all turn anxiously toward the empty pan, but there is no more spoonbread left. There could never be enough.

Heather Barney  
Chatham, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

## Maroon

It was 6:28 p.m. when you woke me; 6:23 actually, since my clock's always five minutes fast. I stubbed my toe on the desk stumbling for the phone, eyes half closed and sealed at the edges with that stuff that comes from crying too much. Two am, you asked, and I said sure, so sleepy not knowing the difference; and when your girlfriend picked up and entered the conversation I greeted her like I'd known her all my life, like my best friend, like she was you really. You know the truth though, don't you, that we've only spoken once, over the phone, wide awake, and our conversation was drier than white meat. They say most Asians prefer dark meat, and though it applies to me, I wonder if it is true for you.

I rolled out of bed, rubbed my puffy eyes, and realized the problems with picking you up at two am, chugging as many mugs of latte I could handle without shaking uncontrollably. My mother left to golf or shop or do some other impulsive thing following an outburst. When she returns, it will be like nothing ever happened which is why I will leave before she can.

I reread the letter you wrote me, marked the decrease over the years, like a pyramid effect, which was okay because we both were so busy, and I wouldn't have loved them as much. I remember the beginning though, how I was the Princeton babe (though you swore you never called me a "babe," you apologized anyway--you couldn't help it if I was one) and we were dead positive you were Johnson's Rasselas, prince of Abissinia reincarnated. Thanks, you'd write, for listening to me blab about this girl (whichever girl it was at the time). Sure, I'd answer, no problem, because I knew you didn't love her, and I wasn't really listening anyway. You never really told me about this one.

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continued from p. 27

I call Elaine, my partner in crime, and since her family is so damn hospitable, and although she hadn't heard from you in a year, I invited myself--and you--over for the night. We talked about stuff, how it used to be, how my boyfriend was a loser, how her boyfriend was so needy, how two summers ago you recited the "take me not as king" proposal from *Henry V* to that girl you thought you were so in love with. So we waited, Elaine and I, drifting in and out of sleep sprawled on her fluffy comforter, seriously considering leaving you at the station. But we came as you know.

You came out of the wrong gate. You were supposed to arrive at Gate E where I waited anxiously, not the one behind me. If I hadn't turned, I wouldn't have seen you lope up the stairs, look bewildered in the middle of the night, expecting me to be late since you know me so well. But I was there, as you know.

"Hello," I smiled and wrapped my arms around your neck--you had to stoop, you've grown so much--and placed a well mapped out kiss on your cheek.

"Hey," you drawled with my face still tucked in your shoulder, and for an instant, as I passed by the base of your neck, you smelled like my cousin, like family.

It was weird to touch you. You know, since we really became friends through letters and phone calls. Those letters, written on stationary from the homeland, poorly translated phrases like 'I love world like dreaming of you' scrawled across the borders, tape sealing the glueless envelopes--finding them snug in between bills and junk mail.

Elaine, patiently waiting in the sidelines, began to spew with conversation, happy to see you as well, yelling because of your lack of correspondence (I felt arrogant, because you called me and not her), and I saw you, your shoulders relaxing, enjoying the comfort of how it used to be, remembering her chirpy voice, her small full mouth never closing, her long black hair literally whooshing down her shoulders. It felt good, I know.

We both didn't say much, just interjections in the steady flow of her voice, driving to the only twenty-four hour place I could think of at two a.m. and almost getting in an accident for not checking my blind spot. I never do. I'm a truster of mirrors, I guess.

At Denny's we became vocal. "Pancakes with bacon," I told our thin, greasy waiter. The fluorescent lights made everyone in the room a shade uglier.

"Veggie soup," you ordered.

"Nothing for me," stated Elaine, looking in part awe, part disgust, at these obese biker types enjoying their slimy food with beer. "Look at those people," she prodded, though we both didn't want to. After all, she wasn't eating, but we were.

We decided Elaine was in love, and that she had a fetish for plump men. She cringed, but laughed, which is why we love her.

"Stop stooping, Jay," she cried. "Your posture is terrible!"

"Yes ma'am," you replied, feigning mock offense, and sat like a cock at his post, back arched, chest thrust forward, crowing at some sun yet to come. Wow, I thought, you don't look so skinny anymore. I found your hiding place, like Elaine's tongue and my blind spots.

"Elaine slept in the car, her energy run out, and I drove, you sitting next to me. The quiet descended like a vulture on a carcass, and I stared at you peripherally, wordless and waiting, or maybe just on the fringes of comfortable silence; I can't tell as I've never been reticent around you, with minutes ticking by that didn't cost us twenty cents after eight p.m. Maybe you were

tired, already knowing we don't have many conversations left, not what we want out of life or who we want to spend it with, not passion or integrity; we've settled them in letters postmarked summers ago.

I wondered if you were thinking of the time we met in New York City, and your third girlfriend dumped you in the Asian Arts section of the Met while I was wandering and wondering. Or maybe the time I told you you were the first boy who told me I didn't need a guy.

At Elaine's you slip away and, passing by, I overhear the beeps of the phone and for three hours I waited for you to sleep and all I could think was that it used to be me on the other end of the line. I slept when I heard you breathing.

Waking you this morning, bare in your maroon boxers, tangled in your sheets, your hair puffed in that 80's Morrissey style from a night of tossing, I smiled. Sometimes, I wish you were my twin brother. I could be satisfied with that; I know when it's you before I pick up the phone; I can forge your signature. We could laugh again then, hyenas on the moon, the silence making no difference. I wanted for you to dress, thinking of our friendship, thinking of something to say besides "it's hot outside," and "how did you sleep."

You enter in your white, striped shirt, looking timid (of what I didn't know), hugging me a good morning, greeting Elaine, busy in the kitchen. You sit down and look around, to your left and right, but manage to avoid me, skillfully I might add. I am looking at you. I am staring at you. I am thinking of you, the silence, and the goddamn weather. Sometimes, I think I love you, feeling my emotions change from the enduring pink of our friendship to the deep red, the maroon of your boxers even. I wouldn't know thought, about love that is. Then again, neither would you.

Una Kim  
Phoenix MD  
Dulaney HS  
Ms. Elizabeth Fanto

#### Etude

Aunt Georgette squirts a wound of ketchup from the almost-empty bottle that farts disruptively.

On top of her pile of tasteless, now bloody, rice, boulders of hush puppies threaten to roll onto the tablecloth.

My sister is a contortionist, her elbows in my face as she digs in.

Mr. Fetterman dropped his hearing aid into the jello when he made it, but either forgot or was too embarrassed to say anything. We noticed that he misheard everything we said. When Mom eats her jello we hear a loud, plastic-crunching sound (she wonders why the piece of pear was so hard).

After dinner, we play scrabble. Timmy insists that t-e-e-d-u is a word. Dad runs to get the Dictionary, his legs moving like an enraged pendulum on a grandfather clock. No, Timmy, t-e-e-d-u is not a word. Look harder.

Greg de St. Maurice  
Latrobe, PA  
Greensburg Central Catholic  
Mrs. Patricia Fenny

The Saturday that our town discovered that Russell Rivers was returning was one of those days that never ends. From the moment he stepped off that smoky old train and into our town he became not only the substance of conversation, but the man who changed the life of almost every person in the community in some small way.

I first saw Mr. Rivers standing on the station platform after just stepping off the train. He was standing perfectly still in a not-quite white suit and a pale green and blue checkered tie. He wore a mustache and no beard and had blazing red hair which I could see clearly because he held his not-quite white hat in one hand. In his other hand he carried one of those old fashioned suitcases. I wasn't close enough to see the color of his eyes, but I could tell even from a considerable distance that his eyes were darting back and forth, giving him a jumpy nervous air.

Truthfully, he looked like nobody important--not anyone famous, certainly, and hardly even worthy of notice. The way he just kept standing there glancing around made him look like a worn-out lost dog, and nothing more.

So, personally, I couldn't see what the big deal was, all the commotion, people not-so subtly glancing in his direction as they walked past him. I didn't understand. But my view meant nothing. If the rest of the neighborhood wanted to obsess over the arrival of a seemingly normal man, then there was nothing I could do to stop them. And not that I even wanted to stop them. After all, it was a Saturday morning in the middle of summer. I would make do with any adventure that came up--even if I didn't fully understand it.

\* \* \* \*

I had first heard Mr. Russell Rivers' name on a night in June about two years earlier--or at least that's the first time I paid attention to his name. I had just gotten out of the bath and was going back to the room I shared with my big brother, Jake, when I saw through the narrow crack of the nearly closed kitchen door my father pacing back and forth. He was screaming into the telephone, "Are you sure it's him? The Russ Rivers? This isn't something to joke about, you know, because if Russ Rivers is coming back here, we're all going to need to know about it. . ."

My father would have gone on, I'm sure, if he had not seen me standing there. But he did see me and I was yelled at for standing around in a wet towel dripping water onto the floor, and I was sent to my room.

Jake was there. Since he was four years older than I, I considered him to be much more knowledgeable about almost everything. So when I walked into the room, the first thing I said to my big brother was, "What do you know about that guy, Russ Rivers? Dad's out there screaming about him and I thought maybe you'd. . ."

I trailed off when I saw the look on Jake's face. Old, knowledgeable Jake stared straight at me through his annoying squinty eyes before he opened his mouth wide and began to laugh.

"What do you mean, 'Who's Russ Rivers?' Everyone knows that!" And Jake left.

I was left in my room, alone and frustrated. It wasn't really because I was curious about who Russ Rivers was. If everyone truly knew who he was, then it wouldn't be too hard to figure it out later. I only felt confused because of the way my family had acted in the presence of his name. Jake--well, Jake I could expect anything from. My father's reaction mystified me, though. He had never before cared if I had dripped water all over the floor. He had only truly yelled at me a few times

before, and I had never been sent to my room. No, my father was not a man who became worked up over small issues, and so I was worried. And there was nothing I could do to help because I didn't even know who Russ Rivers was.

And two years later, the day he arrived at our train station, I still didn't know who he was. I must state that I had not spent the whole two years trying to figure it out. After the first time I had heard his name mentioned I had planned to ask my best friend Teddy, who knew almost as much as Jake. But Teddy had been away visiting his grandparents until the end of summer, and by the time the end of summer came around, I had nearly forgotten about the night in June where I had heard my father on the phone. From that night until the day he arrived at our train station over two years later, I had heard the name Russell Rivers only a few times. Each time I heard it mentioned my ears would perk up and I would remind myself to ask Teddy who Russell Rivers was. But I always forgot to ask.

So here it was another summer and Teddy was at his grandparents' until August again and Jake had a job in a neighboring town for the summer and Russell Rivers had come to our town and I still did not know who he was.

It may seem as if it would be simple to find out something that everyone in you life knows about except you. It was, as I found, not simple. Although many knew the significance behind Mr. Rivers' arrival, few revealed anything obvious. And so I was forced to piece together all of the gossip I heard in order to feel as if I lived in my own neighborhood.

\* \* \* \*

I found out just how big a deal the return of Mr. Russell Rivers was about an hour after I went to the train station where he arrived.

I was out riding my bike that morning when I decided to check on the Kleins. They were two elderly residents of a smallish house a couple of blocks from my own house. I had known them since I was about six years old when I had fallen off my bike and landed, screaming, on the pavement in front of their house with a scraped elbow and a minor injury to my ankle. Arnold Klein had helped me to his door and Jeanie Klein had met there to mend my elbow and ice my ankle. I knew this aid was of considerable significance because the Kleins were not generally involved much in providing neighborly aid. They were a secluded household which associated little with the rest of the neighborhood. But my screams had brought at least one of them out the door, which seemed to be quite an achievement. Since then I had kept in touch with them, and usually stopped by when I was riding by their house.

Mr. Arnold Klein answered the bell and let me in their house. Mr. Klein was really a gentle old man who unfortunately had some unflattering traits. Apart from the fact that his social skills were lacking, he had eyes which bulged out quite a bit from his scarlet face, which always gave the impression of an oblong red balloon blown up a bit too much. But he was generally a kind elderly being who had never married. He lived with his mother, Miss Jeanie, who was the oldest living person I'd ever seen. She never left the house. The Klein's, I suspect, were nearly desperate for company, and so was I, so we were compatible.

On that particular day, when Mr. Klein answered my ring on the doorbell, he was acting more distant than usual. He never fully greeted me when I walked in the door, but today he didn't even make eye contact.

Jeanie (as she liked me to call her) was sitting up straight in her rocking chair mesmerized by the local newspaper open in front of her. As soon as I stepped into the room she came out of her momentary trance and impulsively began to fold the rustling

pages of the paper together. I remember catching a glimpse of the name Russell Rivers, part of the front page headline, seconds before the paper was put away.

"Would you like some tea?" I was asked by Jeanie, who fumbled for the teapot, attempting to be slightly more hospitable than her son.

"No thanks, Jeanie. I don't drink tea, remember?"

"Oh. . . yes, then what would you like?"

"Nothing really, I just wanted to stop by and see how you were doing." I had learned by the age of seven that although the Kleins were friendly people, it was not worth it to take their food.

"Well, we're fine, really, just fine. Aren't we Arnold?" He grunted. "Yes, yes, stop by again later, we're fine for the time being."

And so I left.

On the street on my bike in front of the Klein's house, I paused to consider my options. Russell Rivers was obviously of great importance to others besides my family. And not just other like Old Mrs. Prauss who lived in the center of town and made it her business to know everybody else's business. Russell Rivers was significant to people whom gossip meant virtually nothing, when speaking in terms of normal circumstances. This proved that a figure like Russell Rivers was abnormal and unprecedented in our town.

What to do, I wondered. To try and learn more about Russell Rivers through the Kleins would be a waste of time and abuse of their friendship. They had made it clear that the affair with Mr. Rivers was nothing they were ready to discuss. This led me to believe that I had no business even trying to figure out who he was. But who's place was it to know? This thought led me back to Mrs. Prauss, instead of leading me to another subject to ponder. I forgot about feeling guilty for my curiosity, and began to sympathize instead with the temptation which Mrs. Prauss must perpetually endure.

So I rode my bike to the downtown area and parked my bike in right in front of Mrs. Prauss' house. I had no particular plan of attack. But as it turned out, I had little time to contrive one because she was right outside sweeping her porch as I rode up.

"Hello, Mrs. Prauss. How are things going today?" I greeted, purposely asking a very open ended question of her.

She pursed her lips into a thin line and responded, "Never you mind." This shocked me because usually she carried out the practice of telling everything she heard to almost anyone--and she made sure she heard almost everything. Through all this, Mrs. Prauss may have been nosy, but she was not stupid. She had no excuse for constantly questioning others to find out information and she knew it, so she usually donated her information to anyone who else who was curious, and was told many different things in return.

But apparently there was something different today because she refused to tell me anything.

The temptation must have almost overcome her, though, because after she told me it was none of my business she took a deep breath and liked her lips. "You just go home and tell your father to telephone me right away. Or better yet, tell him to head immediately to the downtown train station--there's someone there I think he'd like to see."

With that my decision was made. I told Mrs. Prauss that I'd tell him and raced off on my bike. The truth was that my father always worked on Saturday mornings so I would not be able to tell him. My father was one of the farthest things from my mind at that moment, though. As I peddled down the streets I had only one thing on my mind--Russell Rivers. I was headed

down for the train station.

And when I arrived there it was not difficult to find what I was looking for since there was a mob of people--obviously most of which were not passengers--taking up half of the entire platform.

For the first time in my life I blessed my usually inconvenient size. I could quickly dodge bodies and squeeze between tight places until I was finally at the head of the mass of people. And that was where I saw Russell Rivers for the first time.

I cannot say I was disappointed by his physical characteristics, previously described. I wasn't shocked by his insignificant features because I had not known what to expect. I had not the time or the motivation to form a hypothesis about what this man looked like--only what he had done that made his so important to everybody else. And I couldn't yet tell that.

The crowds surrounding me were too loud to allow me to decipher more than choppy phrases. Needless to say, I was in a position where almost all that sunk in of their words was the name: Russell Rivers. Every time it was screamed it was all I could hear for a few seconds.

And suddenly Mr. Rivers (who had been standing perfectly still, except for his darting eyes, on the platform) began to move. I saw his mouth open slightly and his chest heave slowly out and back in again as he took a deep breath that seemed to drain all the life out of him. I watched his hand with the hat on it slowly inch to the top of his head and I watched the hat drop onto his head, casting a shadow over his eyes. The crowd had hushed to a deathly silence. And the bell on the train he had just stepped off sounded the call for its departure. I think we all expected to watch it move out of the scene leaving only its passenger. But instead, the moment the bell sounded, Russell Rivers turned around and took two steps back up the stairs of the train and disappeared once again. The crowd stood motionless at the foot of the train until its engine became so loud that many had to step away from the platform. The entire station was in shock and all of the fervor and excitement had left the moment Russell Rivers had turned around.

I vaguely recall hearing one shrieking voice during the next few minutes. It was old Mrs. Prauss who had just walked onto the platform and was screaming, "What do you mean he just left? He just got here!"

I found myself wondering how Miss Jeanie and Mr. Klein would find out what happened to Mr. Rivers that afternoon, and whether my father knew and how he would react.

So the train had departed, and with it had gone Russell Rivers. I still didn't know who he was or why every seemed so intrigued by him. But now that he was gone I felt disappointed. Even if I did someday find out who Russell Rivers was, the excitement was over now because he obviously wasn't coming back anytime soon. His arrival had already completed the mystery.

Caitlin Eicher  
Hamden CT  
Bill Hunter

**18 December 1995.**

Wife.  
This word  
is expelled from my mouth  
in one  
grand breath,  
but it ruptures at the peak

continued from p. 30

of its fullness,  
and remains  
lingering  
on my lips,  
like bubble gum  
from a burst bubble.

I was lying on my bed tonight  
feeling more lonely than usual,  
staring at my ugly plastic phone,  
wishing I had a heart to call,  
when I realized,

ironically almost,  
that six years ago today  
I was taking a spelling test  
while my father killed himself.  
And it no longer makes me shudder  
when I reach this point in the year,  
this exactly-one-week-before-Christmas,  
this anniversary of his death,

which is what I'm forced to call it,  
since nobody's been tactful enough  
to coin the word "deathday"

And I no longer consciously move my arms  
when I'm falling asleep at night,  
and I find them resting  
in the same position  
his were  
in his casket.

and it is strange  
that it should be something for me  
to *realize*

because we just went to see you  
yesterday,  
and I, again,  
was faced  
with the glass facade  
of marble cubby holes -  
one of them - a little above head level -  
belonging to you.

and perfectly centered within  
stands your urn  
though it's not really standing  
it could be sitting. squatting. crouching.  
kneeling.  
it's all the same.

I recall being introduced to cubby  
holes in Kindergarten  
We placed two things of flowers on the  
overcrowded glass table,  
one from us,  
the other from my sister  
who lives on the other side of the country.

I took my position  
behind the glass table  
and looked at all the cubby holes  
and all the crude details  
nobody should verbally admit to noticing:  
how those red dots on the corners  
mean they're reserved,  
how some are sealed,  
and others have partners to yet to join  
them,  
how some choose ones  
way up by the ceiling,  
perhaps thinking

that six feet  
will make a difference  
in how close they are  
to whoever it is they worship.  
But then again, we are all  
far better off  
than those  
six feet below us.

or so we think.

I look at the flowers  
and I know,  
just as we pushed a thing of flowers to the  
side

to make room for ours,  
tomorrow, the family of his neighbor  
will push ours aside,  
But I am not too hurt

because you can't  
see it, smell it  
or taste it,  
like that time you ate that purple flower  
on our dinner table  
and made me laugh.

Then I look over to my peculiar, peculiar  
mother,  
who leans against the other glass facade of  
marble cubby holes,  
her expensive leather jacket squeaking  
with each uncomfortable move she makes.

I look at her face  
and wish  
I could rip off  
those forced wrinkles and furrowed  
eyebrows,  
as if, emitted from his urn  
is a light,  
so bright,  
she must squint,  
while the truth of the matter is  
her eyes  
are fully dilated,  
desperately searching and reaching -  
trying to pull in  
any light they can  
from the situation.

Helen Lee  
Berkeley Hts, NJ

Governor Livingston HS  
Mr. Scott Shallcross

### Morning

Buzzing sounds  
like hymns and madrigals  
from grandma's square phonograph,  
and the milk on toasted oatmeal  
feeling it soak  
in all its honey gold cream  
as outside powder coats,  
glazing the bushes  
with sugared ice,  
and I prepare to retire  
in my brown cotton robe  
like all the nests of spring.

Sherry Zeger  
Marion, PA  
Anne Branham

## Navy Blue

The water is as blue  
as the moon it reflects,  
when the blue-throated loon  
stretches out its long neck  
and calls out from the depths  
of the grueling squall,  
so cold that each wave crest  
freezes before it falls.

The river's two shores,  
with their ice mounds and grooves,  
are covered with scores  
of frozen snow-dunes.  
The cobalt sky,  
with its sapphires sparkling,  
drowns out the loon's cry  
from the watery darkening.

The cold mood is sliced  
by the tall schooner's bow.  
It slides through the ice  
and gloom like a plow,  
then disappears  
through the maritime mist  
that has loomed for years  
over the rolling abyss.

Alone again, one last  
monotone tune  
erupts in a gasp  
from the voice of the loon.  
Then, just silence and doubt  
from the crier's blue nape.  
The loon's rueful mouth  
has frozen agape.

Robert Russo  
Chester, PA  
Lloyd C. Bird HS  
Mrs. Clark

## Grandmother and the Gift

Grandmother flew in last night all the way from her country.  
She brought with her a nuclear missile.  
She gave us the nuclear missile while we were all out to dinner  
at a French restaurant. She had gift-wrapped it and  
carried it to dinner in her handbag.  
Would you like some coffee? asked the waiter.  
No, said my dad, just the check please.  
Like most kids I could tell that Grandmother had something for  
us in her handbag because it (the handbag) bulged ever so  
slightly.  
Look what I have for the kids, she said. We stood on our toes.  
She took the nuclear missile out of her handbag.  
You didn't need to do that, said my mom.  
Nonsense, said Grandmother.  
Wow, my sister and I said as we unwrapped, a nuclear missile!  
What do we say? asked my mom.  
Thank you Grandmother, we said. Then we turned our attention  
back to the nuclear missile.  
The waiter came back with the check. My dad took out his

wallet.

Let me get the check, said Grandmother.

No, it's okay, said my dad. You got the kids a nuclear missile.  
We'll pay for dinner.

I insist, said Grandmother,

How about you each pay half, I suggested. I didn't like to see  
fighting in our family. Then I turned my attention back to  
the nuclear missile.

Gimme that! I yelled at my sister. She was already playing with  
it. It's not just yours, I said. Grandmother brought it for  
both of us.

But I'm playing with it now, she said. You can have it next.

But I wanted to play with it first, I said.

Oh dear, said Grandmother, I knew I should have brought two.

Kids, behave, my dad said. Then he turned his attention back to  
fighting with Grandmother.

Let me get the check, he said.

Kids, don't you have something for Grandmother? my mom  
asked us. We took out pictures of her being bashed with a  
chair that we had colored for her.

Why how thoughtful, she said. Come here and give me a big  
hug. We hugged her at the same time.

Stay on your half of Grandmother, I yelled at my sister.

I am on my half, she said. Stay on yours.

Now kids, said my mom.

Okay, fine, my sister said. I get to play with the nuclear missile.  
She ran to it.

No fair, I screamed, pushing Grandmother onto the floor. I want  
to play with it.

How about you wait until we get home to play with it, said my  
mom.

My dad picked up the check and the waiter left to get our  
change.

Say, is that a nuclear missile? the waiter asked us kids.

Yeah, we said, grabbing onto it like he was going to steal it.

Wow, he said, you two are lucky kids. I always wanted one  
when I was little. Of course, only the rich kids had nuclear  
missiles then. You must have a nice Grandmother.

Yeah, we said. He went away.

Oh look, said my mom, there's a nice card that goes with it. My  
mom read the card out loud while Grandmother listened  
to her own words and my sister and I went back to playing  
with the nuclear missile.

Thank you, said the waiter to my dad as he handed him some  
money. Then he leaned down to us kids on the  
floor. You have a nice day, he said.

I can't, I told him. Day is over and it's night now.

Everyone laughed. I was really clever.

Yeah, it's night now, said my sister. But everyone had already  
laughed at me and they had nothing left for her. So she  
stabbed me with a butter knife. I grabbed the nuclear  
missile from her.

We can't take you kids anywhere, said my dad.

She started it, I said.

It's okay, let them fight, said Grandmother. It's healthy.

Hey Grandmother, I said, watch this. I tossed the nuclear  
missile up in the air and caught it.

Oh yeah, watch this, my sister said, and she tossed the nuclear  
missile to Grandmother.

Adam Ruben

Wilmington, DE

Concord HS

Mr. Bill McLaughlin



## Starless Night

The bell reverberates throughout Kingswood Junior High, signaling the end of second period. Our class springs from our seats, rushing madly into the hall and drowning out our geography teacher, who tries feebly to assign homework. The flow sweeps through the labyrinth of halls, its size fluctuating as students stop at lockers or pour out of classes. I'm almost to my locker, when I hear a shout. Rounding the corner, I discover that a ring has formed in the hall,

"Get him, Chris!" and "C'mon, Chris!" I hear shouted out of the knot of people.

I work my way through the crowd to get a better view. Peering in, I see two people rolling around on the carpeted floor punching and kicking each other. As an experienced onlooker of many fights such as this, I quickly determine that one is Shilo from his wild flailing. I know the other is Chris from the shouts of the crowd. Both are "greasy" kids from the poor part of town.

As always, the crowd is against Shilo; Chris thereby receives our support. Shilo is a big, awkward kid, already six feet tall in the eighth grade. His size does nothing, however, to deflect the jeers of the students. He gets picked on constantly; in elementary school kids quickly recognized his resemblance to a pig, resulting from his flaring nostrils that were about the size of quarters. Always the last one picked in recess games, he never understood the concept of kickball. His brown hair is washed about as often as he brushes his yellow-brown teeth. He is in all the classes for students with special needs. Shilo is what I hate most, weak and feeble, and what I most fear to be: an outsider.

"All right, Chris!" I shout as he lands a punch in Shilo's midsection.

As I look on I see the crowd on the opposite side start to part. Mr. Aron, a hulking computer teacher, emerges. He grabs Chris and Shilo by their collars and drags them off towards the principal's office.

At lunch I look up from my smoked-turkey sandwich and see Shilo alone at a table at the very edge of the cafeteria. He slowly eats his school-prepared lunch off the bright red tray with his head down, focusing intently on his eating. From somewhere in the midst of the ravenous students a spoonful of applesauce flies out and splatters across his chest. He jumps up and shouts something, to no one in particular, having no idea from where the applesauce came, and knocks his tray off the table in the process. Food, tray, and silverware crash to the floor. Our math teacher, a rotund woman of about fifty, gets up from her seat and walks over to him.

"Shilo, how many times are you going to ruin my lunch?" She accuses. "Get to the principal's office!"

"But somebody threw this at me!" he stammers. "I didn't..."

"Now, Shilo."

"But..."

I watch as he trudges out of the cafeteria, shoulders slouched.

I turn back to enjoy lunch with my friends.

\*\*\*

The smell of winter is fresh and pure, yet the cold October air freezes my lungs and makes me swallow. I look around at my fellow trick-or-treaters, but see only the dark, indistinguishable outlines of their bodies. There are no bright orange vests to keep us from being hit, nor are our parents holding our hands as we march through the dark streets of Melvin Village. The old New England houses are spread far apart. The average age of a Villager is sixty-five, and most of the town is now asleep. Those that are awake and giving our candy have their front lights on, yet these provide little visibility

and the roads are dark. I remember the bag of candy in my hand and look down, noticing how full it is. The allotted hours for trick-or-treating are about to end, but we're trying to get the last few pieces of candy. Sometimes, if you hit a house late enough, the owner will give you all that remains.

I march ahead blindly, following the people in front of me. We don't talk much, the cold has sealed our lips. As eighth-graders, we are too old to be trick-or-treating, but here we are. It is an excuse to get together with friends. It is a large group; everyone in the "in crowd" is here. As we walk I remember the enormous amounts of candy I've reaped over my twelve years in Melvin. This year is different, though. Tonight we have given people something in return for their candy. Those who have provided us the best treats, such as candied apples, have been spared. The rest have received payment in the form of eggs and toilet paper.

A hundred yards in the distance I spot the lights of a house. It is on the fringes of town and the stretch of road out there is pitch black.

"All right, one more house, then let's go back to Al's," I hear someone from up front call.

"I say we just turn around now," another huddled mass states from behind me, "It's only Shilo's house. He probably won't have anything good."

"Yeah, we'll probably get mushy apples like last year. Why bother?"

"Oh, c'mon, I got shafted at that last house," another yells from the back. "Let's stop at Shilo's house, then we'll go. I want some more candy before we end the night."

We trudge on; our momentum carries us onwards more than any resolution that may have been reached. Guided by the front lights we are soon at his driveway. The frozen gravel crackles under my feet. The front of the small house is lit by the porch lights as well as several jack-o-lanterns that lead up the steps. One has a crooked smile and eyes that are far too large and spread too far apart. Slowly twisting from the bough of a nearby oak is a large scarecrow stuffed full of straw. Although the outside is lit, no lights are on in the house, and I wonder if anyone is home.

We slowly walk up the steps to the front door. Someone at the front knocks on the peeling blue paint of the wood door. After waiting a minute and knocking again, we turn around and start down the steps. No sooner have I reached the driveway than I hear a voice call. Turning around I see a young girl of perhaps ten outlined in the dim light seeping out of the doorway. Her face is dark and she looks like nothing more than the silhouette of a girl. She holds a small, orange pumpkin basket carefully between both hands.

"Do you want some candy?" she asks us timidly.

Once again we walk up the old steps and hold our bags out to be filled. Neither Shilo or his parents are anywhere to be seen. Those who have gotten candy start back down the driveway. I hear the door shut behind me and then an angry shout.

"Goddamn it, I always get screwed! This pisses me off. Everyone else gets Snickers and I'm left with Neccos." I turn around just in time to see him kick one of the pumpkins off the steps. I watch it fall and splatter hollowly all over the gravel driveway.

"Yeah, this sucks!" The guy next to him says and kicks another off. Forward progress stops. Turning, I see someone grab a stick from the lawn and begin beating the hell out of the scarecrow. The straw flies out of the makeshift piñata. Everyone scatters looking for stuff to wreck. Grabbing a stick, I run at the hanging man. I swing hard and strike it in the

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stomach. The waist separates and teeters, barely held to the torso, before falling flatly to the ground.

We run around for several minutes destroying everything we can before pausing to catch our breath. I survey the damage; the air is like ice chips in my lungs as I grasp for breath. Pumpkin carnage and straw litter the ground. Egg drips off the house in a dozen places. My thoughts turn to Shilo. The image of his sister holding the plastic basket in her hands. I look down and see the remains of the crooked smile from the pumpkin I spotted as I walked up the steps. It lies there empty and dead, its light cast away.

We are silent once again on the walk back. the sky is cloudy and reveals no trace of any stars. The group walks on and I follow. My bag of candy feels heavier than ever.

\*\*\*

I'm walking down the hall the next day when shouts erupt ahead of me. At the end of the hall people start to gather. I hurry forward but as I approach I slow, then stop. I look at the crowd and hear their shouts. Slowly, I turn around and head for class. I enter and shut the door behind me, drowning out the noise.

Stephen Huff  
Exeter, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
David Weber

### Balding Harvest

There's a lesson to be learned from this I'm told  
by a wrinkly face with a grey moustache  
looking waxed and Salvador Dali rolled.  
In shadowed times his manner bears dispatch  
as he leans back, face washed in wispy smoke  
currents pouring through the leather wrinkles  
hair crimped and stitched as if he just awoke  
greeting routine, staving off the gleaming sickle.  
Grandpa was a farmer not too long ago  
with a farmer's wife and a farmer's tan  
his evidence long silky corn stalk rows.  
He'd look down at dark grainy callused hands  
and know there were more days in the mist ahead  
than lay in his black reflection behind  
but now low in the sky his sun burns red  
and his shadow spills across a field of time.  
Some say time is the fire in which we burn  
and Grandpa's getting hot and waits his turn.

Ben Hickernell  
Balto, MD  
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

### Tepee

With help from our fathers,  
Taylor and my brother  
Mark built a clubhouse  
in the Pancakes' backyard.  
I was jealous  
of the shiny lock.  
It was real,  
not like the plastic ones  
that we found in cereal boxes  
with faded prints of Garfield.

It spoke to us with arrogance,  
and only Taylor knew the numbers  
which could open it.

Two young girls shunned,  
Trinity and I continued to play  
without our own refuge  
until her mother  
Jan began collecting  
branches from the woods,  
balancing them against each other,  
draping a blanket around them,  
locking the door with clothespins.  
She clipped feathers in our braids  
and pointed in the direction  
of the hunt.

Not knowing what to expect,  
when to attack,  
we tiptoed past  
the clubhouse into  
talking leaves  
and cinderblock foundations  
of houses not yet built  
in search of the sleeping buffalo,  
women on the warpath.

Rebecca Foster      Towson HS  
Baltimore, MD      William Jones

### Reuse

I have been the witch tricked into the oven--  
smiling into starving stomachs.  
I have been Rapunzel--reduced for golden ropes.  
Made useful and recovered.  
My body is now smooth, composed, with scars long concealed  
by new skins,  
and my voice is cleverly absent as I  
move away from their heads which are  
bobbing heartily like tiny purple flowers  
in the unsympathetic wind--  
my legs are moving away like scissors  
cutting the crowd, the air  
(They have come for an execution but their villain falls away.)  
No Constitution binds me into use.  
Oh what anarchy.  
What a design to defy so simply.

Silence, a colorless, odorless lizard creeps tentatively  
up my belly, moving lethargically, its back forever broken.  
Silence is the speckled cement beast under my barefeet.  
No tongues click at me.  
And I have no use for answers now.

I am slow upon the ground, using up time.  
I am your finger tracing the interstate on the map.  
I am the pace of the yellow lines through the black ribbon.  
I am a calligrapher's careful curve, only inching:  
I have turned off my nerves!  
I have thwarted some great opponent  
me a big slow beast, far from adroit with the sword.

I will not place myself quietly outside someone's front door,  
a bottle of milk  
left by some stolid morning man.  
I am not ready to be reused.

Melanie Massey      East Stroudsburg HS  
East Stroudsburg, PA      Mr. O'Brien



Lisa Chalk  
Vienna, VA  
James Madison HS  
Carol Fay

### the bottom layer

That was the summer  
trash pick up time  
moved to four in the morning.  
A notice came,  
shockingly yellow,  
to remind me that an  
infernal garbage truck would  
wake me an hour earlier.  
I had to leave small Post-Its  
all over the house,  
reminding me to put the trash out  
the night before.

I sat patiently  
in a garage, twice a week,  
automatically sorting my trash  
into the various recyclables:  
a bottle of Red Door, emptied;  
an old salmon's spine  
(picked so clean I could see each vertebra)  
a clear toothbrush, bristleless;  
and, of course,  
at the very bottom of my last pile,  
another bottle of Red Door, still full.

My friends would come,  
drink beer and stand around  
to watch me sort through  
all the steaming piles of waste around me.

As if it really made any difference at all  
what order I put my trash in.  
As if I had nothing better to do  
than sort through each layer of my past,  
recklessly immersing myself in memory.  
As if I somehow got off  
climbing down in a trash can to smell my memories rot.  
As if the only thing worth living for  
were my remains.  
As if the pulse of my future now beats  
in a smelly garbage truck.

Elizabeth Edmonds  
Hagerstown, MD  
Mercersburg Academy,  
Joel Chace

### Zumba, Zumba, Zumba, Za!

My alarm suddenly bites me in the ear.  
It drags me out of bed, hurting my ear in the meantime.  
Thick musty spiders are nesting away.  
The hot air makes my lips stick and my mouth dry.  
Wooden splinters prick my nose like toothpicks in my mouth.  
The shower taste like drops of poison like the way the snake bit  
me on the arm.  
Silas Crews at Halifax, Pennsylvania, Camp Hebron, swimming  
pool threw me  
the pool materials for my lifeguarding that day during the  
summer of 1995.  
I wasn't really a lifeguard.  
Children of all ages came and went while counselors went  
running to read their  
mail, though all of us could play games.  
We all played a big game of twister  
because our legs and arms were so long.  
Zumba, Zumba, Zumba, Za; Zumba, Zumba, Zumba Za --  
Everyone sang it.  
The craziness of camp of life went thundering through our  
minds.  
We were about as sad as comedians.  
We stood in campfires and threw sparks in the sky.  
LC was there to singe her bangs through it all  
so that the future would hold black bangs among the blondish-  
brown curls  
and gold stones would be found in creeks until the black was  
gone.  
I'll have to dye them blonde so they will not turn orange.  
Aucht van the musica, deuchsh van aladen. Acht can spelen.  
Even as the water speaks goodnight from the lake or as the  
cabins and shelters  
gulp the children,  
even as the alarm clock bites my ear off to awaken me to it all.

Lori Carper  
McClure, PA  
West Snyder  
Sonja Mellot

### Ode To a Dragonfly

Ode to the dragonfly  
that lands  
upon the rose  
hugged by frost.  
The snow  
tickled by the silver light  
that hangs from Mt. Nerapi  
plays games on your wings.  
It leaves small shadows  
the size of pebbles  
and the color of blood  
Birds  
shaken from the ice covered trees  
swoop down to you  
and take you  
to baste  
in their oven.

Erin McCrone  
Califon, NJ  
Voorhees High School  
Lois Harrod



Ellen Brosius  
Brewster, NY  
Brewster HS  
Anne Benjamin

## Europe

Dad was home early that day. I was sitting at my desk, eating a peanut butter sandwich, when he came into my room, without knocking, of course. He looked around like he was surprised to see what my room looked like. He was obviously nervous. "What are you reading?" he asked.

"Book about economic systems. It's basically just anti-oligarchical propaganda."

"Are you learning about that in school?"

"We learn about oligarchies."

"Now, see, that's good. You should try to read about things that your learning about in school. It'll help your grades out. You're smart enough to get good grades, you just need to spend some time on your school work." The joke was completely lost on him. "Do you have plans this weekend?"

"Yes."

He sat on the edge of my bed. I used to have two twin beds in my room, but the other bed was just so pathetic and unused that I took it apart and put it under my real bed. "Well, I have a conference in the city this weekend. We were thinking that you and Candace could come and go shopping and we could go out for a nice dinner afterwards. you can bring Sarah if you want."

"No thanks."

He looked around awkwardly. He's a very awkward man. "We'll have to get you some more bookshelves." I have these boards sort of stacked with boxes to hold all of my extra books. I have a lot of books. He cleared his throat. "Are you liking school more?"

"More than what?"

"Well, more than you used to."

"I've always like school."

"That's good!" He looked around. Didn't he have some papers to correct or something? "You're not having any problems?"

"Problems with what?"

"Well, with any of the people at school. Or with drugs." He looked down quickly. "We don't want to accuse to of anything. We just want to help you, if you have any problems." He kept saying "we," even though Candace was away at a dentist appointment. She had put him up to it, I was sure. She had one of those are you on drugs what's wrong conversations with me every month at least. They're both convinced I'm on drugs.

He waited. His awkwardness turned to vague irritation,

as it often does. "Amn, you've got to say something."

"What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to tell me what's wrong."

"Nothing's wrong."

He sighed. He has these annoying melodramatic sighs that he does all the time. He stood up and started to the door. "There's nothing you want to talk about."

"No." But then I got to thinking that it might be the last time in months I'd be able to talk to him without Candace. "Actually dad, the thing is, I was sort of thinking of going to Europe." The words tumbled out of my mouth in irregular spurts. "This summer, I was thinking of going to Europe. Because I know French pretty well and I'm teaching myself German and, well, Mom's going." I could see his thoughts flickering across his face: Candace isn't going to Europe--oh, Mom--your mother.

He tried to look at me but his eyes just stared in my general direction. "That might be a good idea. Maybe it would be good for you to get away. And if you want to go with someone, that might be nice."

"I know it's expensive."

"We'll take care of it. We'd be glad to."

Ever since I was little, I've imagined Mom coming home. I don't really remember her, but she sends me pictures, so I know what she looks like. At first I imagined that she'd come and just sort of replace Candace. Then I realized that Candace was here to stay, and I realized that Mom would have to come when Candace and Dad were gone. She'd take me to the park and push me on the merry-go-round, super fast. In Junior High I imagined she'd come up to my room and I'd be reading and she'd look around and she'd see which books were mine and which ones were really Candace's and she'd get the joke. Now I just want to talk to her, more than anything. I imagine how I'll explain my life to her: little kids tell adults what they want to hear. The parent asks, "Did you take that cookie?" and the kid says, "No." And everyone does that for the rest of their lives, only they get better at guessing what other people want to hear and they know that the other person doesn't know that they took the cookie.

There was this Scholastic Olympics team at school. I was thinking of signing up because I felt really guilty about the Europe thing and I wanted to make it up to Dad and Candace. I had more than the usual amount of things to make up to them, among them the fact that I was failing English. We were reading The Great Gatsby. There was this chapter where he just named all of the people that came to some party, so I stopped reading it. Brilliant satire of society. Yeah right. We had a test halfway through the book and I wrote my essay about how so many authors like to use initials and thought that made them intelligent. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald and O. Henry and H.G. Wells and J.D. Salinger. You hear "Frank Fitzgerald," and you're like, "Does he go to this school?" But if you hear F. Scott Fitzgerald, even if you didn't know he was an author, well, that sounds distinguished. I didn't get any credit for that essay. My English teacher was threatening a parent conference, which had been inevitable since the beginning of the year.

The day was after the "conversation" with Dad, and I was sort of deciding I wouldn't sign up for the Scholastic Olympics because it's pointless. But I was in newspaper, which is pointless too, but Candace somehow got me to join and there's this kid James in it that I always eavesdrop on. He's not just this kid, he's a senior, and the editor, and he's perfect. He is the only truly happy person on earth, I think. I wish I could find out his secret, but he doesn't talk to me much. I don't talk to

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him much. I have this problem talking to people. My problem is I talk to myself so much. I mean I have genuine conversations with myself. Sometimes hours go by. I'll go through my morning classes and I'll take notes and sometimes I'll even take tests and just not remember any of it. It's like highway hypnosis which I don't understand, because I don't drive. But I guess on the interstate you can go for mile sand not remember passing stuff. That's what happens to me, only with my life.

So the real reason I have to admit that I signed up for the Scholastic Olympics was James. I found out that he was joining and it was sort of inevitable that I would.

I have all of these delusions about James, that he will somehow recognize my inner beauty and love me. Of course he has his girlfriend, who has definite outward beauty and she's a junior. James gets this grin on his face whenever he sees her. It's wonderful. The point is that he would never give her up for me and I don't blame him.

Dad and Candace were thrilled both because of the Moron Olympics and because I was Volunteer of the Month at the public library. Last month I stole two volumes of criticisms on William Faulkner. I'm an expert on William Faulkner. If Candace knew I was a Faulkner expert she would be all excited. "Oh, I took a course on him in college!" so I don't tell anyone I'm a Faulkner expert. I special-order books about him from the book store under assumed names. At first I made names up, but then I realized how stupid the clerks there are so I started using author's names. I told the guy I was Kate Chopin and he said "How do you spell that?" I stole a couple of books from the school library too, but it's not like anyone notices they're gone. No one will until a few years down the road when someone does their sophomore author project on him. No one ever does. Everyone does Steinbeck or Hemingway or God forbid Fitzgerald. I'll probably do good old William Saroyan. He was always good for nothing. Wrote those homey little stories but I think he was a wife-beater or an alcoholic. Maybe he married Marilyn Monroe.

That weekend was the family fun weekend. Yeah. At least Sarah wasn't going. Sarah is pretty dumb. She's an expert at stealing cookies and making people think she didn't. She gets better grades than me but she doesn't know anything except what she learns in school. She wouldn't talk to me except her mom is friends with Candace. Dad and Candace love her.

So we dropped Dad off at his conference and went to a huge mall. Candace bought me a pair of shoes that were sort of expensive and that I didn't even want but she said I needed them. My other shoes did have a hole in them.

We went into this department store and decided to get make-overs. She acted like it was all spontaneous and fun. There was this lady with an incredible grating voice and tons of bad make-up and she got into this big conversation with Candace about whether I was cool or warm. It was so stupid. Candace said that I didn't wear much make-up so I just put on this powdery stuff that covered up my zits so nicely! And stopped the shine on my nose. Oh, good. And lip gloss, too. I acted like it was real nice. It's like I don't have acne! It's like my lips have tear ducts! Then I went to the bathroom. I hate department store bathrooms, public restrooms in general, but I had to pee. I just know there are hidden cameras in public bathroom for the perverts who run department stores. You'd have to be a pervert to work at a department store, or at a mall in general. Malls suck out your soul and don't give it back.

Candace took me to the bookstore next, I guess to relieve the shock of wearing make-up. It would be easier if Candace

were really stupid and shallow and a typical stepmother but she's so nice and even sort of smart. I'd probably like her if she wasn't always trying to make me happy. I picked out a young adult novel with this heroine who just had the worst life. She kept fighting with her mom and her quarterback boyfriend was acting aloof. There were lots of lines like "I know I'm lucky. There are children staring in China. But honestly, they never had to deal with my mother!" I asked the clerk if they had the book Ten Easy Steps to Being a Muslim. I almost laughed out loud. What section do you think it would be in? Science fiction, I said.

I met up with Candace to buy our books. I had picked up a book called Biology in Your Life. Dad the Earth Science teacher says Biology is not so much a science as an exercise in memorization. Dad says I'm too smart for my own good.

Candace looked at my young adult book and said she read books like that in Junior High. She showed me her books. Having Candace pick out books ruins them. She always picks out good books and in a way I enjoy them but they're hers, not mine.

We were waiting in line and Candace gave me this little bag and it was the make-up. She acted like I actually wanted it. I said, "Candace, I don't wear make-up." She said it was okay, I didn't have to, but she seemed pretty sad about it. It was expensive make-up.

Then I felt horrible about everything, about being so obnoxious to Candace, who was being so nice and didn't even have a biological obligation to be nice to me. We ended up at the Gap. I figured I'd appease her with a few sale-price items, but she picked out this little skirt and sweater and tights. It fit, but it was expensive. Candace talked about how the sweater was a classic style and I could wear it for years. It would go with my new shoes. I don't really understand classic styles and why all shoes don't go with everything. We bought the outfit, tights and all.

It was time to go pick Dad up. We were going out to eat at a nice restaurant. Dad noticed right away that I had make-up on. It depressed me and I saw myself in the mirror compared to Candace and Dad and I wanted to take my hair out of my braid and have a nice sweater on. I wanted Dad to figure things out and to stop worrying about me.

Supper lived up to everyone's expectations. We were talking and I started thinking that it really didn't have to be so difficult. Maybe I could be happy if I'd just let myself enjoy life with Candace and Dad. Maybe I could tell Dad and Candace what they wanted to hear, as long as I didn't believe it. Candace brought up the Europe thing which just stopped me and Dad. I guess that's what separates Candace from us, that she can mention Mom in normal conversation.

I read The Great Gatsby on Sunday. I wore my new outfit Monday and the make-up. I didn't go to the library during lunch, for the first time all year.

In Scholastic Olympics they gave us a test to see if we'd get in or not. There were fifty questions but there were a couple I didn't know. We had to wait around for the tests to be scored, and I talked to some people in my grade. About The Great Gatsby, ironically. Maybe it wasn't so ironic, considering the state of mind I was in. Maybe William Faulkner doesn't mean any of the things I think he means in his books. Maybe I just love him because I read into his books too much.

After all that I went to the front doors to wait for Candace. And James was down there and started talking to me.

"Hey. What are you reading?"

I was reading a biography of William Faulkner and I showed it to him.

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"Oh. I tried to read Absalom, Absalom! once. And Light in August. But I didn't finish them in the two weeks, and I guess I didn't renew them."

"They're really good books."

"Yeah. I'll have to read them. Well, congratulations on your triumph in Scholastic Olympics. I don't think I've ever seen a sophomore make the actual team. They hardly ever get picked as alternates."

"Well I studied hard." That was a total lie. What a picture I was in my Gap outfit talking to a boy and lying. I thought about my counselor and how happy this would make her. They make me go to this special guidance counselor twice a month, and she's convinced that if I'd just get good grades and smile a lot I'd be happy. Anyway it occurred to me that if I kept this up, I wouldn't have to go to her anymore.

"I'm glad that this will give me an excuse not to ride the bus."

"I always rode my bike to school, because I couldn't stand the bus. The people on my bus were proud of the fact that they'd never read a book outside of school." We were both so full of crap. Like either of us cared. James was sounding like a dork, and he's really not but everyone sounds like a dork when they're shooting the bull.

"These snuff-chewers on my bus make fun of this girl from Mexico. She can hardly speak English but she's was more intelligent than them. All they ever do is swear."

"I noticed how you talk to her a lot. That's really nice of you."

I ignored the fact that he had complimented me. That he had noticed what I did and had thought about it. "I'd like to see anyone at this school move to Mexico and try to get by."

I was a liar. No one can make another person happy, and all that unhappiness comes from trying to do that and there I was. I realized that I lie about Mom all the time. I lie to myself. I used to pretend that she was coming home and then one day I realized that mom wasn't coming home, and that's when I thought up the Europe thing. And I started to cry, and I hardly ever cry so it's a big sloppy ordeal because I'm not good at it like some people are.

James didn't know what to do. "What's wrong?"

"Everyone hates me," I said. And everyone did. I was finally being honest with myself.

He started shuffling his feet endearingly. "No one hates you."

"You know they do." I was trying not to cry, but I was crying all right.

"Why would they hate you?"

"Because I'm so much smarter than them." He stood there rooting through his backpack probably for a tissue or something like that would've helped. "They're animals. They want to kill everything that's bigger than them."

Poor James. I did love him. I don't really hate anyone, not even Dad or my English teacher. They try. Probably a whole minute went by. "I'm sorry," I said. "I'm just tired from studying so much and not sleeping." I looked out the window and there was Candace. "Oh, there's my mom." Dear Lord. What was I saying?

"I understand. Are you sure you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry about this."

"Don't be sorry. Get some rest. Take it easy." James was only an alternate. There were five actual team members and if one member dropped out he was in line to replace them. It wouldn't hurt James if I spent so much time resting that I would drop out of Scholastic Olympics and he'd be on the actual team with his girlfriend.

I went out to the car. I wished it was raining or snowing

so Candace would have to look at the road more, instead of at me. I wanted to get in an accident. I wanted Mom to visit me in the hospital. I wanted at least to get a card from her, something more than the perfunctory monthly one page letter.

"Are you doing OK?" Candace asked.

"It's just PMS," I said. "I'll get over it."

She let me say that and pretend I had fooled her.

"I'm not going to Europe." It was a redundant thing to say. She already knew.

Christina Hayes  
Luthersburg, PA  
DuBois Area High School  
Susan Wertz

### Rainy Day Ophelia

My head's been wet all day.

I had to be Ophelia - look miserable and drown.

The world's been raining all day.

I woke up in the mid-evening

to damp warm hair from sleeping on it while moist,  
and put on a thick flannel.

I sat in my smooth leather chair

and watched it rain. The only light was

my neighbor's floodlight, making their wet grass shine,  
and the road reflect into my room.

So I wrote to Sunshine - in that light, in the dark.

I couldn't see what I wrote, but I could tell there was paper in front of me.

I wished I could spend the rest of the night in that lit darkness,  
writing what I was seeing

and not seeing what I was writing.

Helen Lee  
Berkeley Hts, NJ  
Governor Livingston HS  
Mr. Scott Shallcross

### The Poetry

It is nothing like what you think

When the snow falls in your dream

And the morning is so close.

Nothing like a volcano of Autumn's touch

And the relentless Mona Lisa's smile,

And the rain path of the viscous cold light.

Or like what Orpheus saw

When he stopped singing

To gyrate his head.

Music does not just stop

But plunges, away,

Swimming slowly on its back.

It is nothing like the charisma of white night.

Playing the piano of silence,

Or like the water covered under the dainty skin of ice.

Nothing like the summer cabin

In the midst of Dantean Florence

With the tiny twisted cherry tree upon its roof.

Nothing like... No, nothing

Just an emptiness there, just a milky dale

Left after the period,

Where everything is before.

Ilya Kaminsky Brighton, HS  
Rochester, NY Gary Wiener

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## The Suffering Bastard

Inspired by the poem "To a Waterfowl," by Donald Hall

Women with hats like the rear ends of pink ducks  
applauded you, my poems.  
These are the women whose husbands I meet on airplanes,  
who close their briefcases and ask, "What are you in?"  
I look in their eyes, I tell them I am in poetry,

and their eyes fill up with anxiety, and with little tears.  
"Oh yeah?" they say, developing an interest in clouds.  
"My wife, she likes that sort of thing? Hah-hah?"  
I guess maybe I'd better watch my grammar, huh?"  
I leave them in airports, watching their grammar,

and take a limousine to the Women's Goodness Club  
where I drink Harvey's Bristol Cream with their wives,  
and eat chicken salad with capers, and little tomato wedges,  
and I read them "The Erotic Crocodile" and "Eating You."  
Ah, when I have concluded the disbursement of sonorities,

crooning, "High on thy thigh, I cry, Hi!"--and so forth--  
they spank their wide hands, they smile like Jell-O,  
and they say, "Hah-hah? My goodness, Mr. Hall,  
but you certainly have an imagination, huh?"  
"Thank you, indeed," I say, "it brings in the bacon."

But now, my poems, now I have returned to the motel,  
returned to *l'eternel retour* of the Holiday Inn,  
naked, lying on the bed, watching *Godzilla Sucks Mt. Fuji*,  
addressing my poems, feeling superior, and drinking bourbon  
from a flask disguised to look like a transistor radio.

And what about you? You, laughing? You, in the bluejeans,  
laughing at your mother who wears hats, and your father  
who rides in airplanes with a briefcase watching his grammar?  
Will you ever be old and dumb, like your creepy parents?  
Not you, not you, not you, not you, not you, not you.

"Thank goodness it is over," sighs Donald Hall as he  
swiftly walks out, or rather flees the Women's Goodness Club,  
leaving behind him all flushed and delighted and bubbling inept  
sentences a battalion of stupid women who have come to listen  
to the Great Master of the Rhyme, an unmissable event in the  
cultural fabric of that small gossipy town.

Donald kicks angrily at a few garbage cans and plastic  
bags that litter the edge of a straightforward, bleak avenue  
devoid of any vegetation or charm. That bland street however,  
contains one interesting object, and it is toward that that our hero  
is now directing his steps: the Irish Pub. Since he started  
reciting his poetry that afternoon, Donald had felt some sort of  
emptiness around his stomach, the calling from inside for  
something wet, splashy and salutary: yes, a drink, that is all he  
needs. After all, the reception for him had ended so poorly,  
among a fruit punch (he had spilled the content of his cup  
accidentally on a lady's shawl, leaving large pink and red  
flowers on her stupidly white, embroidered collar)--ah, yes, how  
he had felt trapped among the rose scented chignons of these old  
damsels--all of their fat asses, boiled-chicken flesh--nauseabond  
mint tea floating in the late afternoon dust--ah, this Woman's  
Goodness Club, how ridiculously bad it was. And He, the  
Greatly Admired Writer of Rhymes, the super-poet writer of so  
many a Pulitzer Prize, one of the most coveted in anthologies of  
modern literary geniuses, ah, the great poet, what an ordeal to be  
in such a low-IQ'ed company.

But as he enters the pub, feeling his wallet filled with the  
green harvested that day at the Lady's Club, his heart softens: it  
was not really all so bad, after all? Only one hour and twenty  
two minutes, and the rest of my day is mine, and I have this  
money to spend on my favorite occupation: to drink, or drinking,  
again.

He feels even a tiny touch of affection for the fattest of  
the fat ladies, the one with the triple chin followed by a triple  
rank of grayish white pearls. Upon leaving she had carressingly  
flipped another couple of bills in his hand, mingling the dollars  
and a few beads of sweat inside his palm.

Now Donald sits at the end of the long bar at Paddy  
O'Reilly's, contemplating all these gorgeous bottles: any of  
them would render a service to his starving body and soul; any  
one would infect his with this particular joy and lightness that he  
feels when his belly is rolling in vodka, or bourbon, or rum, or  
whatever else. Presently the waiter, a tall and sinuous fellow,  
looking as if he had jumped off Kitaj's latest canvas, asks him  
confidently, "What will your pleasure be, Sir?" Donald's eyes  
are shining with joy and greed: What do you have? he  
insinuates with eroticism in his voice, his bedroom eyes--oh so  
loved by the lovely ladies--half closed in expectation. Specialty  
of the house, answers the waiter causally, is called "The  
Suffering Bastard." The tall waiter's voice is so pompous, and  
at the same time suave, that a group of Harvard T-shirt bearing  
students turn around all at once and explode in laughter so that  
the tiny pub is filled with excited echoes. Donald by now is  
pensive, a hand in his bearded poet chin. Dreaming of  
Cocteau's profile of beautiful male angles, and of an impossible  
love such that of *Tristan und Useulde*, he feels a little uneasy  
about trying the "Suffering Bastard." Suffering, yes, yes, of  
course: all poets do *icibas* is suffer after all. they suffered as the  
Baudelaire's *Albatross* to be exiled on such a lowly earth. They  
suffered plenty at the sottise of fellow humans who cannot help  
but misunderstand the ivory tower Mage who flies above all.  
But "Bastard," hmm, hmm. Donald strokes dreamily at his  
silky goatee, raises his nose and pinches his nostrils, then  
removes his spectacles that reveal huge round half-bind blue  
eyes--no longer the bedroom eyes of before. "Bastard" he  
thinks, hmm, and why not.

"I will have a double bastard on the rocks with two  
olives and . . . a bucket of ice-cream, and a few bits of bacon, to  
toast the arrival of those bastardly. . . How do you call that?  
Bastardly. . ."

When the drink arrives, Donald has retrieved a tiny  
notebook on which he writes his impression of the day: there is  
the soup du jour, and the fly by night, and the one-night stand  
repeated again and again. . . After the fist sip, Donald feels like  
an explosion has occurred in his throat, and then all the lights of  
the bar start to twinkle dimly as in a children's song, such as  
"twinkle, twinkle little bastard. . . little star, little bastard of the  
bar, or the barbars. . ."

Three days later, Donald Hall, who has finally recovered  
his dignity, is accompanied at the train station (and not by his  
limousine this time), flanked by two very lovely damsels of this  
provincial town, and he thinks (but is not entirely sure) that they  
are softly murmuring in rhythmical motion. . . "twinkle, twinkle,  
little bastard, how I wonder where you are," but in fact they  
were only reciting part of his "To a Waterfowl" masterpiece, one  
of the most famous lines being:

"Women with hats like the rear ends of pink ducks  
applauded you, my poems."

Marcelline Block  
New York, NY  
Hunter College HS  
Ms. Nanette Asher



Cara Pasarelli

## The Exchange

I searched frantically through the pile of souvenirs that I had brought to give out to my new Russian friends. Nothing seemed good enough for what Dennis had given me. In the small knit pouch that I kept my money in I found my special matches from Italy that I carried with me all the time. I looked at them for a moment and set them aside, deciding that I couldn't part with them.

I had been shocked when he had given me the gift. I had only met him several minutes before. Alya, my Russian host, hadn't even seen him in years. It was supposed to be an uneventful night. We had just gone out to meet Alya's best friend Anya, to smoke some cigarettes and just hang out. I had met Anya before and don't smoke, so it was no big deal. I brought gum for Alya and we left the apartment as usual, bundled up in coats and mittens against the cold damp air outside.

Through the scattered gray apartment we could hear the horns and motors of the night-time traffic going by on the street a couple of blocks away. We walked in the opposite direction, towards the large fields that the buildings towered over, seven or eight stories high, their lights glittering through windows, making friendly patterns that gave the whole dismal scene a cheery and welcoming look. It was spring time and extremely muddy, so we stayed on the stone walkways, put there for the many pedestrians who commuted to school or work by way of this field. Chuck, Alya's huge Great Dane, took no notice of the mud on his feet, and went his own way, romping around and intimidating the many other dogs that, as usual, were out with their owners on that starry night. Soon Anya showed up, smiling on the front porch of a school a five minute walk away. It was a common meeting ground for a night like any other. We talked for a few minutes, just a couple of girls, laughing and being silly. Our different nationalities made no difference here. Anya and I discovered that we had similar odd capabilities, among them a strange toe maneuver (which was found out by each of us taking our shoes and socks off). We started calling each other sisters, one of the few words she could say in English.

Then someone else showed up. His name was Dennis, although in Russian it sounded a lot more like Denise. He had appeared quietly, out of the dark, and Alya and Anya had yelled hello's, surprised because they hadn't seen him in years. He had been Anya's boyfriend for a while, Alya told me in English, but I suppose that in Russian it wasn't even brought up, because now she was married, another long story.

Dennis was tall with short-cropped light brown hair, the

kind that probably would have been curly if he had let it grow. He had blue eyes that always seemed to be squinting because he laughed so much, and sometimes, even in the dark, I detected a twinkle when he smiled. He was funny. I knew he was funny even though I couldn't understand what he was saying, because every other word out of his mouth brought laughter or a smile from both girls. It was contagious, and I laughed along with them, even when Alya didn't translate. He had a dry, almost sarcastic sense of humor, not stopping at telling of some funny experience he had had, or what a fool; he had made of himself.

Dennis was twenty-two, Alya told me, and a policeman. He had been in the army a couple of years back. It all seemed so strange to me. I felt as if her were my own age, and yet, he had been through so much more than I. As it was Alya and Anya were both nineteen, and yet they didn't seem so much older than I, either, which I guess took some part in bridging the gap between sixteen and twenty-two. Still, it was weird.

We talked for a long time and played with the dog. Dennis began to take things out of the pocket of his jeans jacket. He talked to me little, which was understandable because of the language barrier, but he wanted to show me some of his prized possessions. He took out a paper that looked like a formal document. Its edges were dog-eared and the writing was faded. Alya told me that it was some kind of award for his work in the army. He had been involved in a war. I nodded my head and said "Cool." The language barrier had kept her from explaining to me exactly what the document was, and by the same token, I used a word that I knew she would understand to describe it; a general word that could be used to describe anything. Alya translated in Russian slang and Dennis chuckled almost somberly and, looking down shyly said something under his breath. Alya translated, "Yes, but for this cool he could have lost his life." She wasn't correcting me, I knew, just making note of something, and I understood. Still, after that, I had a new sort of respect for him.

Dennis was feeling his pockets again this time to give me something. "He like you," Alya said in her Russian accent, forgetting the 's,' "he thinks you're cool." I smiled. I knew it was Russian tradition to exchange small gifts. The whole exchange group had come prepared with little trinkets to give their Russian friends. I hadn't brought any of my postcards or maps of New York with me that night, but I thought I'd be able to find something American in one of my pockets for him.

"Ah" Dennis said, nodding his head and moving his hands towards his neck, all the while talking to Alya. "He found something," Alya said after a few moments. She nodded with a knowing look on her face, almost as if she knew that he was giving me was appropriate and that I would like it. It made me excited. I saw him fiddling to take off a necklace that he wore. As soon as I noticed this I knew that I was in trouble. I prepared myself for an argument, but once I saw what it was, I became speechless.

He took from his neck a tattered strip of leather with deep creases where it had been tied in a knot for so long. Dangling from it was a silver bullet. It was about an inch and a half long and heavy, even though it lacked a shell. On one side there was a deep cut, and soldered to the top was a metal loop for the leather to fit through. He handed to me as if giving it up, and I took it gently, almost afraid to touch it. I didn't want it.

"Please," I said. "Tell him I can't accept it. I don't want it. Please," I said over and over. But he was steadfast, and insisted.

"He wants you to have it. It's from his heart." Alya said, patting her chest. My own heart skipped a beat. I knew it



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was something special to him but hadn't wanted to think of the reason.

"It was in his heart?!" I gasped, thinking immediately afterwards how stupid that was. Alya laughed. In between a Russian conversation with Dennis she told me, "This bullet... is a German bullet... 7.62... um..."

"Caliber?"

"Yes. It was... in his leg," I gasped. "... No, not in his leg, but..." She leaned over and made a scraping motion against her own leg with her hand.

I nodded. I was in shock. I kept looking back and forth from Dennis to Alya to the heavy bullet in my open palm, almost not believing that it was there, still not ready to accept it. "After..." Alya continued, "he..." she stopped and made more hand motions, this time a scooping motion at the floor, meanwhile saying, "he took it and..." she pointed at the necklace. "he wear it all the time." She said, finishing the story.

I couldn't take it. I kept trying to give it back to him, but he refused, almost shyly, never looking at me directly, but again making those now-familiar glances at the floor around him. It almost seemed as if it was in fact hard for him to give it up. But naturally he didn't want me to know that.

Now I was in trouble. The only things in my pockets were dirty tissues and a pair of gloves. I was desperate. As a last resort I took off a beaded necklace that one of the other kids in the group had given me. She had brought them for the Russians but had given many of them to the American group. It was one of those handmade necklaces with tiny colorful beads that everyone wears now. I gave it to him.

"It's very American," I had Alya tell him. It wasn't enough. I wanted to give him something that meant more to me. But what? I didn't even have my knitted pouch that I kept all my pictures money and other knickknacks in. Maybe if I had it.

He came home with us. It was only five minutes away. While Alya and I went inside, he stayed in the hall by the elevator to smoke a cigarette. I ran up the stairs two at a time and then into my room. I grabbed the orange pouch and looked through it. There were my pictures of my friends, my money, and a whole bunch of coins, many of them Russian collectors' items that Alya had given me. That was when I saw my matches. I looked away. "Too close." I thought.

Then I looked in the plastic bag with all of my American souvenirs. I asked Alya for help. She picked out a brochure of the Statue of Liberty. We went back downstairs and I presented it to him. I guess he liked it, but how excited can somebody get over a couple of pictures of New York? Suddenly I felt ashamed. the pictures were nothing, not worth anything. I debated the exchange in my head, thinking about how I would feel lying in bed that night, full of remorse. 'If I don't give them to him, tomorrow I'll be sorry.' On impulse I ran back upstairs and into my room. I got the matches out of my pouch, trying not to think too hard about what I was doing. As I gave them to Dennis, I remembered where I had gotten them.

I had always loved those matches. They were "cerini" from Italy, where I spent six years of my life. They were in a small box with a plaid print on it. It was a strange box with a flap that opened onto the matches, not like our American match boxes. I had always wondered about it because it was different. The matches themselves were small and waxy. When you tried to light them they most often broke in half. But nobody else had matches like those. I remembered sitting in my kitchen in my apartment in Italy, the day we moved out, looking around teary-eyes at the now empty rooms filled with so many memories. We were going to leave the matches along with some other kitchen

supplies for the new family, but I stole them.

"It was the last thing I took from my house in Italy," I had Alya tell him. His reaction was similar to mine. He couldn't accept them, but I insisted. "Anyway, they're crappy matches," I said. He and Alya laughed. He left after good-byes and I went to bed feeling very happy and very strong, and a little like a new person.

I met Dennis a couple of times after that. I had told my American friends and they started teasing me about my "bullet boy." He brought me some other gifts: a book about Moscow, a KGB flag that wasn't made anymore, and was probably illegal for me to take out of the country. We exchanged addresses. That was his idea. At times such as these Alya would tell my questioning face, "He like you. You're cool." That was a good feeling. I hadn't even tried. Being American was probably what did it. Still, I like to think it was something more, not cool, but something...

A bond between cultures...

I wear my bullet around my neck every day, taking it off only when it is in danger of getting wet--I don't want the leather to get soft. When I got home from Russia, my parents didn't understand. My father said that it was almost impossible to retrieve a used bullet. My mother said that I looked 'funny' with a bullet hanging around my neck. But I would touch it and feel stronger, really. It made everything better--missing Russia, the friends that I had been with 24-7, the two weeks of careless fun. I would feel its weight around my neck and smile. He had given it to me, just me.

I wear a gold cross around my neck. It lies close to my bullet. It's an odd combination, I know, and at first I wondered whether God would be offended. No, I thought, for it's not a symbol of war, but a symbol of peace. I don't know if Dennis carries around my matches the way I did, or the way I now wear his bullet. Maybe they lie in a coat pocket somewhere, lost and forgotten. It's enough for me to just know he has them. And when I think of that, I feel as if I've contributed in a tiny way to some kind of peaceful coexistence, perhaps minuscule, so small as to not even be noticed, except by me. When I touch the bullet that hangs around my neck, memories of Russia come back to me, that cold night, the lights of the city watching over us. And memories of the Cold War float on the smoke that mingles with our frosty breath in that picture. Like dust, they linger momentarily, then melt, flying upward, and are gone.

Danielle Pieratti     Clarkstown HS North  
Baldwin, CT             Ms. Jones.

**"Family Ties"**

The blue glow of the TV reflects dimly off the buttons on my father's jacket. They sparkle, like blackberries in a summer twilight, and I am tempted to put one in my mouth. I want to touch its smoothness with my tongue, stuff it in my cheek and worry it. His jacket is pungent with the smell of beer, so, I bury my nose against the warm brown corduroy of the armrest and snuggle against his bulk, straining to see, in full color, the comedy emanating from the screen, trying to understand my father's laugh.

Kara Webb             Towson High School  
Baltimore, MD         William Jones



Sandra Lacko  
Wall, NJ  
Wall HS  
Robyn Dyba

### Clarissa

Clarissa. She glides perfectly along the hall, her long dark skirt billowing behind her legs. Her strides, confidently quick, and her arms, brimming with papers, tell me she is as overrun with work as I am, but her wide eyes, her beautifully formed smiling lips inform me that she transcends weariness. This I already know. She is listening intently to a story Susan, whose neat blazer now appears strikingly plain, is telling, and the contours of the listeners face create a myriad of perfect shapes. Her laugh, which comes as she is nearing--so close--to me, must be the enchanting melody by which Sirens lured sailors.

She had lured me, and I wonder where her fatal rocks lie, when I will crash blindly into their unforgiving foundation. Maybe that long neck, with its skin stretched so tautly from collarbone to chin that I can count the tendons which hold that precious head, tells me she is a swan, infinitely serene, but unendingly cruel. Perhaps those narrow hands, with fingers which stretch into elongated pink moons of nails, would spurn a loving embrace. It could be, I suppose, that those divinely radiant eyes hide demonic secrets within the recesses of dark pupils.

But what eyes they are--so dazzlingly blue. Such an open expansive sky which stretches to immeasurable heights could mask no demons, could veil no approaching storm. Such a sky. A sky whose goddess now graciously turns it towards the pathetic patch of mud in my eyes. Mud meets sky for an instant, and the goddess offers a bemused smile of vague recognition. Then she glides onwards, and I am alone with a beautiful back, a cup of coffee, and one moment.

One moment that plagues me, for in the city stench I smell her sweet perfume, in a ringing telephone, I sense the recollection of her laughter, in the smallest patch of smoggy sky I find a peerless mirror of her peerless soul. At work I touch each piece of paper with care, realizing that her glorious hands, her divine eyes, may have graced that page. I am irrevocably diseased, I realize, when my feet carry me not home from work but to Boston Commons. I scarcely know where I am headed when I arrive to see a pair of swans on the famous pond.

Their whiteness gleams against the grayness of the city, their lean bodies glide seamlessly across the pond, their majestic necks stretch splendidly towards the sky. In their every motion I see my Clarissa, and I am lured towards them, I ache to be near them--all the time knowing they would scratch and hiss at my love, cruelly rip it to shreds. I move closer to the edge of the

water, my body oddly magnetized, dragging unwillingly towards those gorgeous beasts.

"I want to pet the swans!" A child's voice screams, and I recognize immediately Clarissa in that voice. My mind, victim to my heart's madness, is useless in persuading my body not to turn and find that voice. I see the child standing, also on the edge of the pond, nearly a hundred feet away from me. Her arms flap up and down and her heels are beginning to rhythmically leave the grass--a prelude, I know, to stomping feet. I find it profoundly bizarre that she has Clarissa's wave to her hair--though the child has an auburn streak--and she had the same distinctively high cheekbones I so admire. I stand, content to gaze at her--the swans are forgotten.

My throat, however, fills with wonder as I watch Clarissa herself glide down the hill to the child. Every recollection of her has added to her beauty, for now I see every loveliness of the city perfected. She extends one long arm to the child and takes the baby hand gently into her own. The goddess kneels--again, so gracious--and runs the backs of her fingers along the child's face. I instinctively touch my own face and can nearly feel the satin blanket of skin soothing my unshaven sandpaper. I bless the slight wind which arises so that I can nearly smell the perfume and nearly hear the melodious whispering of the sweet voice.

So brilliant is the reality of Clarissa, so entranced am I by her image that my body, turned to stone by this odd Medusa, refuses the motion that my heart and mind demand. I stand, absorbed, my fingers bound immobile on my cheek, and I watch in utter amazement as the goddess takes the child's hand and approaches me.

With all the will I can muster, I rip my stubborn fingers from my cheek and force my eyes to the ground to pick up my briefcase. Every imperfection of myself--my shoes, unpolished, my left pant leg, stained, my voice, half an octave too high--screams at me to let Clarissa pass with my head bowed to her greatness. But every desire within me yells in return for me to raise my head, if only to look at her once more. The cacophony is silenced, however, by one quiet, inquiring voice.

"Peter?" It asks. That voice, uttering the syllables of me name, disarms my will, conquers my reason, and I turn to her abruptly. She must sense some bewilderment in my eyes, for she asks tentatively, "From work? Anderson Associates--fourth floor? You're the new guy, right?"

I stammer an impossible greeting, "Oh yes. I--started last month. Sorry, I didn't . . . expect to see you here. You're . . ." The name I hold in so much wonder stands stubbornly in my throat, warning me that my pronunciation would taint its perfection.

"Clarissa," she sings. "I know you have a lot of new faces to learn." And she smiles--a silent recognition, perhaps, that hers can never be merely a face in the crowd.

"Yes--well." I trail off, desperately searching for some bit of wisdom, some minute sacrifice to her divine altar. Failing, I comment blandly, stammering again, "The office--the people, I mean, it's--a nice group, a nice group of people. Very friendly."

"Oh yes." The brilliant eyes cloud as she begins to fade away from me. "I actually came to ask you-- do you know where the swan boats are?"

"Of course," I respond with relish, "I'll take you there." My eyes, which had been so focused on the flawlessness of her face, now turned downward to look at the child. "And what's your name?"

"Joanna. I want to go on the boats. They're swans, but you can pet them. And you can't pet the other swans. They're too mean." Again I hear Clarissa's song in her voice, and I

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smile, as I cannot avoid doing, before a horrible thought crosses my mind.

"This is . . . your daughter?" I ask, fearing the reply.

"Oh, no. My niece," she shakes her head, flirtatious. "I'm not married."

"How funny. Neither am I," I feel arrested blood begin to flow again as we smile together. "The boats are this way." The three of us begin to walk towards the boats; Joanna is to my left and in her left hand she holds Clarissa's right. I avoid trying to convince myself that this is not a dream, for I dread it is, fear I will wake in my apartment with only a cloudy recollection of such lucid magnificence.

"Clarissa, can we do flying baby? Please we have two people now. Mommy and Daddy do it with me."

Clarissa begins to shake her head at Joanna's pleading eyes, "I don't think Peter would like that very much."

"Oh, it's fine. I don't mind." I smile openly at Joanna, then say gravely, "But you'll have to teach me."

"See I knew he'd do it." Joanna addresses me. "What you do is you hold my hand, you say '1,2,3,' and then you lift me in the air and say 'flying baby!' And then I fly in the air. But I'm not really a baby."

I take her right hand, and Clarissa and I count together. As we lift Joanna and she flies in the air, I turn my head to look into Clarissa's eyes and, as she looks into my own, a tiny part of that radiant divinity seems to fade. But as I watch it fade, I watch the most elusive, the most strange of all human emotions enter it. That same strangeness in myself begins to wonder if I have finally found the swan who will not hurt me.

Before that wondering can overtake me, however, Clarissa nods and together we lower Joanna to the ground. Joanna's eyes grow large, her tiny mouth opens in apprehension, then widens into an exhilarated smile as her feet land softly on the grass below her.

"Look Joanna," Clarissa's mouth molds into the same smile as she turns her eyes forward, "The Boats!"

Joanna's smile widens even further, and I feel my cheeks beginning to ache from the contagion of this happiness. Joanna turns her head wildly to find her swans. I kneel and point towards the long white boat just about to dock. As she sees them, those brilliant eyes explode with pleasure, and she runs from me without a moment's hesitation. I turn my eyes to Clarissa, and the two of us, muted by Joanna's wonder, follow the child. As I jog to that dock, I hear the gentle pounding of Clarissa's feet in rhythm with my own. We reach the dock as Joanna does, and she reaches toward the boat greedily, her eyes resplendent with joy. Her hand touches the boat, however, and like an electrical shock, that touch deadens every hope in her face.

She withdraws her hand, shaking her head in utter disbelief, "That's not a swan." She whispers, her voice is filled with rage so complete that it belongs only to a deceived child. "Swans are soft and warm, like baby chickens. They have feathers. Even if they're mean," she pauses, examining the hard metal surface, "at least they're not painted. I should have known." She pouts, kicking a pebble across the dock, "It's not a swan if you can't touch it."

We're out of orange juice again. Cranberry, mango, grapefruit--we have them all, but no orange juice. I settle for the mango and slam the refrigerator door, hoping it will wake her as her snoring awoke me. Of course not. Clarissa lets out only a sleepily satisfied groan before she submerges herself again into slumber. I stumble into the bathroom, pretending to ignore the strewn lipsticks, nail files, and curlers. In my cupboard, which

once was orderly, I search for the aspirin. It must be her cigarettes that give me headaches. I never used to get headaches. I run my eyes across the shelf: Cloraseptic, Chromatrim, Renu, Unisom, Vidal Sassoon, Midol. Maybe I could take that--if it weren't empty. I toss that bottle into the garbage with relish, slam the cupboard door, and listen for sounds from the bedroom. Though I hear nothing, I amble back into the bedroom--6:36, the digital clock flashes.

I sit down noisily on my side of the bed and turn on the light, but Clarissa only nudges her head slightly farther up the pillow. She is facing me, her face drawn tight with sleep. Her nose is a blue triangle, for she wears her weekly face mask. I used to say she was my little puppy dog, because every Saturday night her nose was wet.

I haven't said that in a long time.

I haven't looked at her, either--truly looked at her, examined those features with which I only a year ago fell so in love--in weeks. But in her sleep, she doesn't glow the way she used to; her eyelids hide the gleaming blue sky, the mouth, inconsiderable sealed shut, shines with none of the joy of her smile. Even the wavy hair at which I marveled is straight, for curlers fashion the object of that love. But I wonder if she still glows when she's awake, for the sight of her no longer draws me to her, the sound of her is no longer contained in every passing noise, the smell of her is now tainted by the smoke which gives me headaches.

I turn my eyes to the glass of mango juice which is still nearly full, to the bathroom overflowing with the means of her delusion, to the television which is for once silent. I look back to Clarissa, whose long neck once seemed to be that of a swan, whose radiant eyes once told me that she was a goddess, but who now has no more wonder, no more divinity within her than a swan boat or statue.

Deliberately, I take one more sip of the mango juice, wincing as the taste of it enters me. Putting the glass back on the bedside table, I sigh deeply and rise slowly from the bed. I harden my face, set my jaw, and decide to leave no note. I doubt she would understand.

Ashley Evans  
Greenwich, CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Mrs. Marilyn Ebbitt

### Against Bleached Bones

fish skeleton  
fossilized deep into  
the cracked death of fertility  
it had fought me  
and danced in my skillet  
its jaws gaping for smothered bubbles  
its suffering humored me  
in the parching mud  
But fish never last  
It roasted lazily  
Stagnantly adorning my breath  
that blows the shriveled bodies of flies  
and flakes off fish scales,  
scattering them on my arid bosom  
Powdered on the dirt,  
their pearly surfaces twinkle  
Against bleached bones

Anita Carmichael  
Fallston, Maryland  
Mrs. McCosh

## That was That

Last night I dreamt of blood. Not horror movie blood, the kind that comes in plastic gallons and is thick and red. Not even Red Cross blood, with plastic bags and needles. I dreamt of my blood.

I dreamt that I had sores all over my left arm, and that when I looked down at it, I saw I had a mark of dried blood all the way down.

When I woke up, the dream came back to me, so to avoid forgetting it, I told myself a story: "I dreamt that I had sores all over my left arm, and when I looked down at it, I saw I had a mark of dried blood all the way down." I said it once and then stopped. But when I was in the shower, it came back to be, and I couldn't chase it away. "I dreamt that I had sores all over my left arm, and when I looked down at it, I saw I had a mark of dried blood all the way down." That day, I kept wanting to tell this story to someone, but I never did. It somehow didn't seem right.

I had not seen my own blood in a long time, I realized. I used to see it all the time. When I was a kid, I had some kind of rare disease that made it necessary to have my blood taken every week. It became routine--the rubber tubing on the forearm, the quick pinch of the needle, metal sliding smoothly under flesh, penetrating the layers until it hit a red wellspring, a crimson burst that exploded into the plastic tube. The band-aid afterwards on a sore arm.

I can remember once I had a new nurse, one who wasn't very good at drawing blood, one who couldn't find a vein. She put about three holes in each arm, and I can remember them in the crook of my left, where there was no blood and therefore no band-aid. They were black and gaping, even though crusted over, making my arm look hollow--empty.

Once I got stabbed with a pencil in the hand, right between the knuckles. The lead broke off and just sat there, resting in the middle of two bumps, mountains of bone thinly covered by skin. I pulled the point out. It didn't hurt, not after the first impact. There was no blood. I can remember that very clearly. There was a hole, though, one that I could see into. So I peered into my hand, and saw nothing. I have a very clear picture of looking into that hole and seeing nothing, not muscle fibers or bones, not even--not even blood, not even inside my hand.

I have a scar in the lower part of my right arm from where I sliced it open. Just a broken dish I was picking up that happened to skim my flesh. Nothing violent, nothing brutal. I watched as the skin peeled back to show me my insides. I felt nothing outside of a mild curiosity--so that's what I look like! Just some rectangular pieces of flesh held together. That's what it was--onionskin beneath my skin. And no blood. Nothing red. Just yellow. Why was there no blood? Where was my blood?

Last night I watched a rat die. I did not kill it. My friend did. We caught it in the garage and he went to get his BB gun. He shot it once, but nothing happened. the rat kept running around. My friend shot it again, and this time I saw it clearly. He shot it in the belly. The rat jumped and squeaked, but kept moving, kept running around. My friend said that he hadn't pumped the gun enough, that the pellets were just bouncing off--or maybe he had missed.

We finally cornered it by the old golf bag on the far side of the garage. My friend gave the gun a few good pumps. He lowered the gun, aimed, and shot the rat through the head.

It writhed. That's the only word for it. It writhed in its own blood as it died, and as it writhed we could see the two other bleeding holes in the rat's side from the two other pellets my friend had sot at it. It only had half a head, pieces of its skull

and its brain lying in a pile at the edge of the pool of blood.

I don't think it made any noise. It just twitched, coating its fur in blood. Coating its fur in its own blood.

It died after a while. It stopped moving altogether, and I stepped back. And something happened to me. I'm not really sure what. As I watched it die, I felt something flowing into me. I shivered. My friend made a joke and I chuckled. He never cleaned up the pool of blood on the floor, just threw the rat's body into a garbage can.

Today I was lying in bed at night. Just listening to music, just listening to PJ Harvey. Nothing different, nothing I hadn't done before. I was lying there in bed and not thinking about much and staring at my wall and listening to music. I was not ready for what I saw.

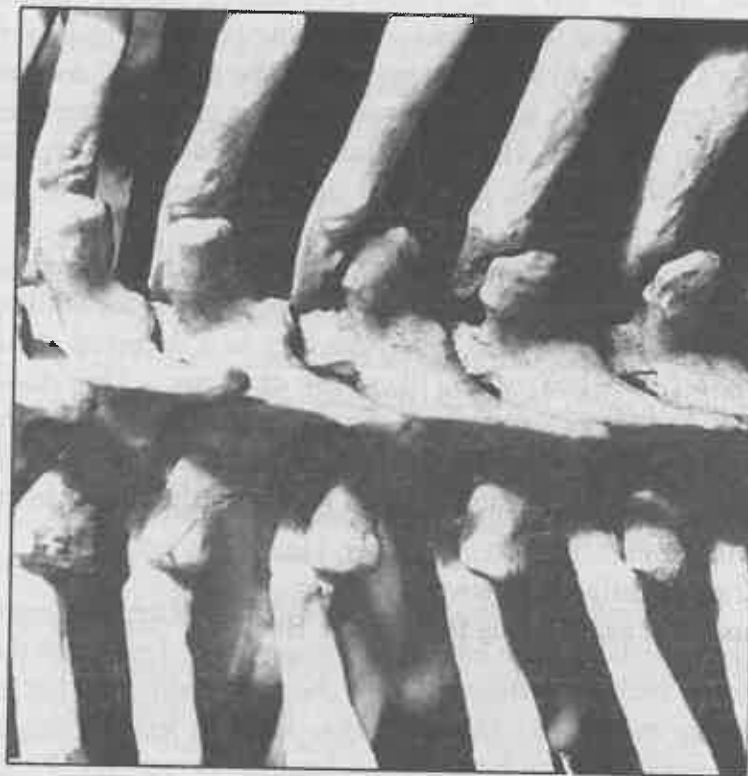
I looked down at my arm and saw a mark, a cut, a sore had peeled away and started bleeding. I looked at the puddle of blood forming in the crook of my left arm and thought, "I dreamt that I had sores all over my left arm, and when I looked down at it, I saw I had a mark of dried blood all the way down."

No panic, nothing brutal or violent. Fear maybe, but nothing external. I wiped it away with my fingers, kept wiping, wiping, wiping, staining them red. Calmly pressed my right arm against the wound, constant pressure, constant pressure. I removed it and I was still bleeding. There was a stain just below my scar.

I just let it flow. There was blood inside of me that had to get out. It flowed over my arm and onto my sheets. They were white, but I didn't care. Something in me had to get out. So I let it flow.

When it stopped, I went to sleep. In the morning, I took a shower and washed the dried blood off my arm, I washed the sheet, too, but the blood would never come out. In the end, I had to throw it out. As I stuffed it into the trash can, I thought of the rat and shivered. Then I went back inside and listened to some music.

Michael Barthel  
Clinton NY  
Clinton HS  
Deborah Hepburn



Ella McPherson  
Washington, DC

### Cafe (after Thomas Lux)

There is a world, white and delicious: the king  
of cappuccino at work, he refills and makes  
the coffee,  
grinds the beans from the bag,  
the glorious smell of French Vanilla  
fills the air.  
Plastic and wood stirrers, a little milk  
lie on the counter  
odd arrangement, mysterious,  
a maze. Put two and two together.  
Now the table, a new cloth,  
red, flowered. The vase,  
dead daises brown,  
the end, or near the end  
dreaming of,  
a calm snowy night,  
and you keep drooling  
for a peanut butter brownie  
day after day, 24 hours, 7 days a week,  
forever, a millennium of years.  
Not a snow flake falls,  
as you sit at the cafe stool.

Not a white covering on the ground.  
Not a single frost, not a  
single snow ball to throw.  
It is no longer a dream.  
It is winter,  
which is white, the snow  
is a path  
to the sweet  
aroma that leads  
to the cafe.

Jeanna Mari  
High Bridge, NJ  
Voorhees High School  
Lois Harrod

### Liquid Soap (after Gary Miranda)

I almost drowned when I was little. That stupid  
bottle always sat on our sink in the bathroom.  
My dad wasn't watching me. I ended up  
drifting halfway down the beach. Whenever I got  
punished, my mother put that horrible liquid on  
my tongue. Some lady saved me and walked me back  
to my dad. He didn't even notice I was gone.

I used to take a tissue and rub that stuff off  
of my tongue. My mom couldn't believe my dad  
was so irresponsible. I could still taste it though.  
It sort of lingered in my mouth. I coughed a lot,  
but that didn't help. That saltwater remained there  
for a few hours in my throat. I always hoped  
someone would save me from that white Jergens lather.  
I was rescued from that wicked seawater. I guess  
there isn't much difference between choking  
from punishment and choking from death. But,  
I survived both.

Dawn Calvert  
Califon, NJ  
Voorhees HS  
Lois Harrod

### domestic life

an empty fridge,  
a whole world  
for me to fill.  
what shall i use  
to clog up it's  
cool spaces,  
populate my kingdom  
of shelves and drawers  
and crooks and crannies?  
shall i use apples and oranges  
or kiwis and plums?  
or perhaps hot dogs and bologna?  
i certainly will not  
mix all these together,  
not in these times.  
the bologna would want  
absolute power  
over the others,  
and as i'm sure you know  
hot dogs are  
belligerent little things  
and this just would not do.  
oh dear,  
what a problem i have.  
i do not want to segregate  
or discriminate  
or insult anyone  
but food fights are  
just no fun at all.  
so help me rule  
my frosty realm.  
be my advisor,  
my right hand lady.  
give me somewhere  
to lay the blame  
won't you?

Kate Burgdorfer  
Oil City, PA  
Oil City Area HS  
Mrs. Melody Titus

### Untitled

I stand in the middle  
of my room, listening to the walls shake,  
watching the red anger  
on your face.  
The spit from your fumbling lips  
hits my cheek,  
and I close my eyes  
pretending I am alone  
on a high cliff by the sea  
watching a single tear  
fall from my face.  
And I want to be that tear,  
cutting through the cold air,  
touching the water.  
Becoming nothing more  
than your memory.

Samantha Isasi  
Levittown, NY  
BOCES Cultural Arts Center  
Phil Asaph

## Acid

"I think I'll become a rabbit," she says, tearing off a piece of lettuce. She chews it very slowly and swallows, pursing her lips. Tearing off the next leaf, I chew it slowly, my mind convinced that I am swallowing some horrible green acid. I gag, take a huge gulp of water and suggest we go running.

"Nah, I'm too tired," Tiffanie says. We are standing in the dark of my kitchen after school. The refrigerator hums and the knives in the sink are a charcoal drawing. Leaning on the counter in my running shoes and sweats, I flip through a magazine without actually seeing any of the pages. It's a nervous habit I picked up from my mother.

"All I ate today was a strawberry pop tart this morning and the lettuce this afternoon," Tiff speaks softly, but her voice echoes down the hall. It rained all day today; the air is misty, but cold. A shiver like lightning shoots up my spine, and I agree that our diet is going well.

"Yeah, I had an apple after biology today. That's it, besides the lettuce."

Tiffanie looks disappointed in herself. She's probably calculating the calories in each bite of Pop-tart. I look at my watch and suggest we jog around at the track.

The clock on the stark white walls announces the time in big block letters. Eleven thirty nine. I am sitting in geometry class, watching a fly ricochet from wall to wall. The second hand jerks forward in small spasms. The fly lands on Charles' head, but no one notices, or cares. Ms. Devon drones on and on about congruent triangles. It is lunchtime, and everyone's eyes are on the clock. I turn and stare outside.

Kacie throws me a dirty piece of paper that screams in capital letters if I'm going to the Homecoming dance this weekend. I think of Matt Howell, my date, and sneer at Kacie who was so jealous when she'd found out he'd asked me. I turn to whisper back to her, but Ms. Devon growls at me and asks me to define *linear pairs*. I sit up, trying to squeeze another pointless vocab word from my memory.

Then Charles asks Ms. Devon if he can go to the bathroom, but she says *no, sit down and behave yourself. Screw you*, he says and gives her the finger. Ms. Devon grabs his by the collar of his shirt, ripping him from his chair. She pulls him from the classroom to march him to the principal. Kacie starts to laugh, the fly buzzing around her frizzy blonde head.

I sit quietly, the silence heavy in my mouth like a stone. I try to swallow it, but my throat is too small. Kacie's laugh is ringing in my ears. I wish that damn fly would soar into her open mouth and finally just shut her up.

Eleven-forty-two. Figuring that class is over, I stand and walk out.

Tiffanie and I are sitting on the grass in front of the school. The sun is out and the ground is moist from the rain the day before. No one else is outside because it is lunchtime and they are all in the cafeteria.

"You should have seen Ms. Devon's face in geometry, Tiff," I say. "She was so pissed at Charles."

"She might grow a sense of humor someday," Tiff said. "But then again she might not. But anyway. . ." Tiff scowls. "I wish Kacie wasn't so damn thin. She's almost scrawny."

"I remember last year she got a lecture from Mr. Drury, the health teacher, about that," I said. "I waited for her after class. He kept saying anorexia was a slow suicide."

"You only die if you're stupid," Tiffanie replied. "Slow suicide. Huh."

I lay on my back in the grass and stare at the clouds

floating by. I am sure the sun is making my hair gleam as if it were gold, but then I frown, remembering my thighs. "I wonder if my parents would still be mad at me for not eating dinner if I became a Buddhist and had to fast. We're reading a book like that for English class. It's kind of interesting." Tiff gives me a blank look. I close my eyes and run my fingers over the tips of the blades of grass.

"I haven't eaten anything yet today," Tiff says. "I want my stomach to be small for the dance this weekend."

"Me neither," I reply, thanking God that my dress is long to my ankles and dark as the night.

As I pull my blankets up to my neck that night, my stomach growls. I ignore it. I'd die if Tiffanie was thinner than me. Rolling over on my side, I close my eyes and see myself in my homecoming dress. Shivering in disgust, I clench my teeth. I see Kacie and Tiffanie wearing their dresses, thin and beautiful, as I drift into sleep.

Then Kacie is scrawny, her arms wrapped in a twisted pose above her head, cheeks sunken in, eyes hollow cavities. Her bones wrap before me in a blur of malted color, deep raspberry red and caramel brown. Tiffanie's fragile features melt like marshmallows, dripping into collected puddles at my feet, her red lips running into rivulets of blood. Suddenly I can't see them at all. I look down at the puddles of wax at my feet, then at myself and I see an empty dress hanging in space. Then my dress evaporates into the darkness.

Biology class, third block of the day. *Tiffanie isn't in school today*, Kacie tells me. She opens her mouth to exaggerate Tiff's illness, but I smile because I know she isn't sick. Sometimes she just doesn't feel like coming to school.

We are looking at x-rays of fractured arms and legs that Mr. Johnson brought in. We are studying the skeletal system in biology class, and he wants to make it as realistic as possible. We all stand around Mr. Johnson in a circle, listening to him tell us about how he broke his arm last winter. He had fallen on the ice going outside to get the mail.

Blood began to pound hard inside my brain. The air begins to thicken, muffling every sound. I grab the windowsill, trying to steady myself. Everything becomes hazy, a thin black veil covers my eyes. I order myself to stand up straight, breathe deeper. I will not faint. I will *not* faint. Then I feel my eyes roll back towards my eyebrows and everything fades to black.

Darkness coats me like an oil slick. Noise is pounding in from every direction. Every whisper, every shuffle of paper throbs in my ears. I try to sit up, but something holds me down. My eyelids flutter, and my first thought is that I've had a heart attack. Slowly I see feet surrounding me. I can hear my classmates breathing. Hair covers my face, but I can see their expressions. Cold marble faces. They are scared.

*Are you all right?* Mr. Johnson asks. I try again to sit up. My head is so heavy, my feet are cold, and so is my arm. The cold tile in the biology lab is a block of ice. I look around at the class; motionless, their eyes are muted in dark shaded tones. I am looking through a black and white photograph. The nurse comes and helps me up, as my classmates shatter the quiet and ask me if I am okay. Matt helps me to my feet and comes downstairs to the nurses' office with me in case I fall over. I sit on the bare mattress while the nurse asks me nonsense questions.

She leaves to find my records and I stretch my arms. I watch as she glances into the mirror to check her hair and makeup before she gracefully glides over to the file cabinet for my papers. She has dancers' arms, long and thin. Surprisingly,

I don't feel sick anymore. I am tired, but my head doesn't even hurt now that I'm off the floor. I want to leave, but the nurse won't let me. I have to wait in her cold, dark room.

I stand up and shakily walk towards the door. The nurse thinks that I am anemic, but I know that I did not fall into darkness because of my blood. I walk into the hallway and she calls me to come back and lie down, but Matt's waiting for me outside so I walk down the hallway with him. *You gotta eat, Laura*, he whispers into my ear. *Can I buy you a brownie in the cafeteria?* He wraps his arms around my waist, his warm body holding me up. *I'm so hungry*, I say, smiling at him, *I could eat three.*

Jasmine Wagner  
Exeter NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Mr. Douglas Rogers

### Breakfast at the Diner

"It's a beautiful day, don't you think?"

"Yeah sure," he says, directing his response towards the inside of his coffee cup.

It's Sunday, Sunday morning at the diner. The hungry people of Stamford pull up in their Cadillacs and their Grand-Ams, they put their children into strollers, they lock their car, they pat their coat pockets where their wallets lie sleeping, somewhat fattened by the meager pay check from the day before.

"What can I get you guys?"

"Bacon, toast, scrambled eggs. . . hash browns. More coffee. Maybe an ice-tea."

"And for you, miss?"

"Nothing. Nothing for me--I'm leaving. I can't stay."

She takes away our menus, glancing disdainfully at the twisted patterns I'd made out of the little gold tassel that separates the menu pages. With a haughty sigh, she turned away, the squeak of her rubber soled sneakers echoing what pursed lips didn't mention. *There's a minimum, you know.* Tell me about it. There's always a minimum. You're always buying something.

"So. . . what are you thinking about?"

He raises his eyebrows. "What?" he says.

"I just mean, how are things going? How's life?"

"Life is fine. Things are going fine." Again his words float down into his muddy coffee, mingle with the sugar, and dissolve into silence. I play with my napkin, I play with my fork. *Remember when you used to love me? Remember when we smiled?* I drink my water and wonder why we never seem to mention what we really want to say.

Driving home, I wonder what it might be like to truly be without him. To wake up on these sunny Sunday mornings and feel free to go on sleeping. Would I miss our corner table by the "smoking section" sign? The bus boy with his greasy hair, his small golden cross and his bright trying eyes which make you remember what it feels like to be trapped? The milkshakes and the bagels, the toothpicks at the register and the salt which clumps together when it rains? And his, my forever boyfriend with his latent smile, and lazy ways. He always orders the same thing. Bacon, eggs, toast, and coffee. I used to eat his hash browns till the day he finally tried them and decided they were good. Now he eats them all himself, and there's not enough to share.

"So when's the next application due?"

"I dunno, March, March something. . . in a week or two, I don't know."

"Did you get all your slides done?"

"Look I don't know. I don't really want to talk about it."

Back to playing with my napkin. The sunlight forces itself through the gray shades the management pulled down trying to condemn it, and I move to the left to fall in its rays. Like a best friend's smile, it is warm and intoxicating, and for a moment, I am happy. When it's warm, I can forget.

*Remember the first time you said you loved me?* I cried and didn't doubt that I loved you back. Remember the late night phone calls, the weekends in the park, the kisses in the sand? I loved you like a brother--I gave you everything I had. I showed you parts of me I hated, parts I never knew I had, I smiled for you like I smiled for no other. I loved you like a brother. You made up my whole life.

Perhaps we pushed it too far. Two years, almost three now. My high school friends don't remember who I am when I'm not with you. I haven't been myself, I haven't been Courtney for years now. I'm "Scott's girlfriend." When I go out, it's "where's Scott?", or "Who are you with?", and "When's he coming?" As if I can't be real without you. As if my life is divided, and you stole away a half.

"Another cup of coffee?"

"No, no thanks. We're set, just the check." He pushed his coffee towards her and she took it to the kitchen. He gathered up his cigarettes and stuffed them in his coat.

"You ready?" I nod that I am.

"Good." He grabbed his keys, which were lying near the ketchup bottle. For a moment I understood what it must feel like to be a prostitute; to be an object, a living possession, if only for an hour. He watches me thinking.

"What's wrong with you?" He said.

"Nothing." I reply, kicking at my napkin which had fallen to the floor.

The waitress returns with the check, and watches over Scott's shoulder as he signs it with her pencil. She glances at me when he hands it back, and her orange lips lie pursed against each other, accusing and hostile; *I thought you were leaving*, they somehow seemed to say. I thought I was too, I answer in my mind. I think sometimes of leaving, I answer those lips. I think sometimes of leaving, but I've forgotten where to go.

Courtney Maum  
Greenwich CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Mr. Jeffery Schwartz



Cara Passarelli

## Lucifer and the Wok of Hell

The chef sat in a swivel chair, viciously guzzling an Ice Draft beer, her loafer-clad feet propped up on a seventies-style coffee table. Her mind was foggy, rendered vaporous by an overabundance of estrogen and two and a half codeine tablets. Her patchwork apron hung off center over her frock--the uniform for her PBS television show. The premiere was about to be broadcast.

The chef was not known for her pleasant disposition. When employed at a college cafeteria, she terrified co-workers with her ruthless, even sadistic methods of food preparation. Frequent clashes with the dean ensued; they culminated in her dismissal from the university after she ripped forty-four glazed danishes to shreds with a butter knife and flung them at her employer. When she was working as a caterer, rumor had it that she ordered her meat delivered alive so that while fashioning her famed chateaubriand, she might satisfy herself with a bovine squeal or two. As for the chef's actual culinary skill, she pleased everyone she served--the diner, of course, was ignorant of the horrific acts taking place behind the swinging door. But the chef tired of restricting her sadism to the kitchen; she wanted the diner to share in a bit of good-natured pain. As the bitterness of poison failed to complement most cuisine, she resolved to shock sensitive American palates with the pungency of Creole and Thai cooking. In order to uphold her reputation of gastronomical genius, however, she occasionally prepared milder dishes.

Somehow the chef was hired as a cooking show host, the only job in which no one was required to consume her wares. So for the first time the sedated chef sat in her swivel-chair, like a spider guarding a web of Kitchen-Aid appliances, within the linoleum pseudo-kitchen. In one half hour spot, she would engage a home audience in the preparation of a spicy turkey dish, a yeast bread, a Chinese stir fry, and a boiled lobster. Hal, the cameraman, who was standing at his usual post, stuffed the remains of a doughnut in his mouth and waddled over to the chef. He attempted to nudge her from her stupor. She opened a puffy eye, spat at the stout, middle-aged man before her, grinned and let her eye close again. A disgusted Hal returned to his camera and contorted himself into "ready position." The chef, with three minutes to air time, magically rose from her half-sleep (after reeling from a nasty head-rush) and crept to her position on the studio set. Hal gave the signal and the sadistic chef was on-the-air, live.

The chef removed a heavy-duty mixer and bowl from below the counter on which she was leaning and equipped it with a wire whisk. "I'm making the sauce now," she grunted. She removed a jar of horseradish from the refrigerator and spooned its contents into the shining silver bowl. The bowl reminded her of the gleaming metallic caps in Mother's teeth. Mother's cooking was inedible in comparison to the chef's and this made for much tension between parent and child. *Mother couldn't handle the competition, the lazy wimp*, the chef sneered in silence. She heaped a half cup of peanut butter into the bowl and blended it with the horseradish at a ferocious speed. The grating of metal on metal made the chef's arthritic fingers quiver.

She removed the bowl containing the spicy concoction and replace it with a new one, substituting a dough hook for the whisk. "Now the bread," she said. Hal held up a cue card ordering more description, but the chef ignored it. A pre-made mixture of lukewarm water and yeast was poured into the bowl. She added a large quantity of flour and set the mixer to "stir." Her glazed pupils focused on the dough as it stretched and relaxed. It reminded the chef of the movie *The Blob*--her first,

rather prudish boyfriend (who coincidentally resembled our dear friend the cameraman) took her to see it at the Fairview Drive-in. She recalled how he resisted her come-ons, shuddering when she'd rest her ample legs on his lap, his incessant "buts" and "ums" when she commanded him to put out. She giggled and fantasized the dough's rising out of the bowl and engulfing Hal. She was becoming unaware that she was being videotaped at all.

Once it was springy to touch, the chef set the dough aside to rise. The chef ducked beneath camera range--Hal snuffed a bit--and emerged with a massive, seasoned steel wok which she set on the stove. She poured two cups of peanut oil into the wok before setting the stove-flame to a level slightly higher than is considered safe. Then she spotted a vial of Tabasco on a high shelf above the stove. She seized it in a chubby hand and dumped the bottles contents onto the rising dough. The chef imagined she saw dozens of tiny, dancing taste buds shriveling in white agony as waves of level forty-two red pepper juice crashed over them. She added miscellaneous meats and vegetables to the hot oil. It began to sputter. She turned her back on the wok to retrieve a half-cooked turkey from the refrigerator. The chef froze when she heard the sound of a thin walled, glass bottle of Ice Draft beer rolling swiftly towards the edge of the high shelf above the stove, a bottle she had clumsily toppled in her mad leap for Tobasco. The chef dived for the bottle--as well as a sixty year old woman chock full of depressants is able--but was too slow. The bottle smashed into the fiery wok. Geysers of hot oil gushed into the air; one flew at her and stung her cheek. She yelped and fell back hitting her head against the broccoli and the bamboo shoots-- "Tastes great" vs. "less filling." She delighted in the conflict between the veggies, stumbled back to the high shelf and poured another bottle of beer into the oil, perpetuating the frenzy in the "wok of hell."

Remembering the still refrigerated turkey, she one again turned to retrieve it. She set the fowl on the counter by the stove. She stared at the greasy flesh while rubbing her belly as the dull ache common to her monthly affliction began to set in. The pain worsened her already hot temper. The turkey sat defenseless on the counter. She took out a large meat thermometer and, as Hal was out of reach, plunged it instead into the turkey's slimy breast. With great effort she lifted the enormous bird into the waiting oven and slammed the door shut.

Hal the Cameraman was shuddering behind his camera. He gave the signal for the break and left the chef alone in her lair, fearful of what she might do to him. (he had heard tales of unimaginable gruesome and painful uses she had found for a deli-slicer. . or was that a garlic press?) Weary from all the excitement and depressants, she collapsed back into the chair by the coffee table, took a few more pills from one of many prescription bottles in an apron pocket, and daydreamed of the turkey suddenly springing to life, bursting out of the oven with a box of stove top in wing, and proceeding to stuff itself. Hal the Cameraman arrived just as she had recovered from this garish thought.

"I think you should get yourself back on the set now, ma'am," said the cameraman.

"Ah, blow it out your ass," said the chef. But she staggered back to the chef, twice turning her head to sneer at Hal.

The show resumed. The chef muttered unintelligibly the procedure for cooking a lobster and went to the sink where she filled a speckled pot with water. She set it on the burner and, as it began to simmer, took a brown paper bag from the cabinet below. She opened the bag, and peered hungrily at an



uncommonly large wriggling Maine lobster. After naming the lobster Lucifer (the chef felt it necessary to somewhat domesticate an animal before she slew it) and rubber-banding its claws, she set it on the counter, which was still cold from the chilled flesh of the turkey. Lucifer nervously waved its antennae. The chef stifled a cackle.

Hal the cameraman watched the chef in bewilderment but dared not interrupt her antics. His feet tapped nervously on a boom-box, now holding a tape of Bizet's "Carmen" (Hal was an opera buff), next to his stool. Hal's countenance fell when he felt his big toe depress the "play" button. Instantly "Toreador" blasted out of its tiny speakers. The chef's eyebrows raised, not in fear but in thought, as she heard the music. She had gotten an idea, a vicious, ghastly idea.

The chef grabbed Lucifer, unbanded its claws and placed it on the set's hardwood floor. Using her apron as a matador uses a cape, the chef waved it at the poor lobster. Lucifer did not respond by moving toward the flapping fabric, but instead was terrified by it and attempted to escape the chef. Angered by Lucifer's negative attitude, she resorted to chasing the crustacean around the floor on hands and knees. But Lucifer was too spry for her crooked body; he sought asylum by sticking his abdomen beneath the stove. The chef stood up slowly and painfully went to a drawer and withdrew an ice pick. She looked over her shoulder. Lucifer had his "back" to the chef thinking simple, innocent lobster thoughts. That water had reached a rolling boil. Slowly, lethargically she crept up on the lobster whose tail and lower thorax remained exposed. The drool oozing from her pointed teeth reflected light like a prism. She leapt upon Lucifer and flung him into the air. Lucifer's short, lobster life flashed before his eyes as he sailed toward the pot. He plunged into the scalding liquid with a splash that sent water flying all over the set, shorting out much of the electrical equipment, including Hal's precious camera. This was the last straw for the rotund cameraman, and he marched out of the studio and headed towards the producer's office.

The chef glared into the pot, and, to her horror, found that Lucifer was somehow swimming, almost happily, in the boiling water. Convinced she was being mocked, the chef stabbed Lucifer with the ice pick.

The producer, informed by Hal the Cameraman that his cooking show host was a raving lunatic, flung open the door to the studio and marched toward the set, his nostrils flaring. The chef, ice pick still in hand, stood braced for attack. The buggy eyes of the producer met the sunken ones of the chef in one prolonged fateful gaze.

Producer and chef had fallen madly, blindly in love.

The couple embraced. The chef seated her beloved in the warped swivel-chair and bade him a sample of her cuisine: a slice of freshly baked turkey with a pungent sauce, a spoonful of stir fry, a glass of old Bordeaux. He ate passionately, his eyes wide with contentment. (Hal sat by his broken camera, watching them, cursing.) The producer lit a Dunhill cigarette and puffed it slowly as she whispered sweet nothings into his ear. He flicked the butt, still afire, over his shoulder--the chef gasped as she saw it fly towards the still simmering "wok of hell." As the swells of Latin orchestral scores flourished in crescendo, the studio was consumed in flames. Lovers and loveless perished in the inferno.

Lucifer's antennae waved victorious.

Cheyenne Picardo  
Pottersville NJ  
Kent Place School  
Dr. Cole

## Horizons

*There are always, always worlds within worlds.*

Bernard Cooper

They floated in a delicate cloud of rainbow light, blowing about for an instant before the waves swallowed them with a forgetful sigh. The man watched until each one was gone, and then he lifted the plastic ring to his lips and blew another stream of swirling bubbles. And another.

"You'll have to blow faster than that," said his son. The small figure was kneeling on the sand, his hair tousled into an auburn frenzy by the wind.

Obligingly the man quickened his pace, dipping the wand in the soapy liquid with less caution and huffing and puffing as fast as he could. Gradually a halo of shining spheres thickened to surround the two of them; with a sudden bound the boy jumped up and began racing about clapping his hands furiously upon the silver curves until the air was alive with a mad swarm of movement and sound.

"Faster!" the boy cried out gleefully.

"Faster?"

"Faster! I'm the giant squashing all the airplanes!"

The man blew furiously for another minute and then he collapsed on the bleached sand and fanned his crimson face, listening to the sound of the boy's claps growing fainter as he raced the sun down the beach.

Presently, the boy returned and sat down by his father. "I couldn't get all of them," he said. "The airplanes. They went that way." And he pointed in the direction of the city.

The man sat up and looked down the Los Angeles coastline, at the thin band of white that suddenly snapped where steel and glass had erupted from the earth. He imagined the bubbles sailing soundlessly in the streets, exploding on the pavement.

"That's all right, Chris. A few airplanes is all right," he said, a little doubtfully. "You missed some last weekend, too, remember? You'll have another chance. Next Saturday." But already the boy's voice had filled the universe.

The man had wanted to be a pilot, back when he was ten, or maybe twelve. That was when the stars were just out of reach, and the horizon hovered just below the clouds.

But he had waited too long. By the time he entered the Air Force, the stars had moved to a different galaxy, and the horizon had acquired a certain mobility.

"How was it up there?" his friends wanted to know after he flew alone for the first time. For a moment, he stared at them and said nothing.

"Peter?" they asked.

"I discovered gravity," he said.

No one had told him that the horizon would still be there.

And it was July.

Peter stood on the sand and watched the firecrackers hiss in the darkness, erupting into a mass of crackling stars that snapped as they fell and hit the water below. Their reflections bloomed upon the sea in bursts of scattered light, then faded as quickly as they had appeared. Bubbles, Peter thought. He looked at Christopher, the boy sitting on a boulder with his face turned toward the evening sky.

"There are firecrackers in your eyes," Christopher said suddenly, squinting at his father. "I can see them."

"Oh, yeah? What else can you see?" Peter was amused.

"Me, but my face looks funny. Water, and the

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lighthouse. And icebergs."

"Icebergs? There are no icebergs in California," Peter reproached.

"I know," said Christopher. "But there are in your eyes. There's one behind the lighthouse, and then the others are just a bit off to the side, where I can't see them." He paused. "But if they're inside your eyes, *you* must be able to see them, right?"

"See what?"

"The icebergs."

"Don't be silly," said Peter.

He had gotten a job in the city, as a seismologist. It was, perhaps, a strange profession for him to pick, but he had always been afraid of earthquakes and this fear bothered him. Perhaps that was why he was still living here, in LA. "There's no fear that anyone can't overcome," his mother had always said. "You just have to face it." Peter was afraid of the city too.

Everyone said that they were still waiting for "the big one." Peter didn't think it would ever happen, but when he closed his eyes he could almost feel the earth shifting beneath his feet, the glass of every window in LA shattering at once before the dust had cleared and all had become

One day.

"It's a jellyfish," Christopher was saying. Together they peered into the tidepool and watched the clearness pulsing gently through the water, its amorphous surface streaked with magenta.

"Watch it, they sting," Peter cautioned. Christopher grinned.

"I know," he said. "Maybe it's stung everything in there and they're all dead." His father peered at the muscles, the seaweed, the tiny hermit crabs that scuttled uneasily around the rocks.

"I doubt it. But don't worry," he said. "The tide will be coming in after a few hours to take jelly out to sea."

"After a few hours," Christopher said, picking up a stick and eyeing the jellyfish thoughtfully.

He could see the ocean from his condominium. Every day when he woke up, he would sit on the balcony and watch the sun rise while Christopher dreamed of baseball and golden canyons.

The first ray of light would fall upon the water, and then a second, and then they spread--a great, bright fan--until suddenly it was morning, and Peter watched the light echoing off the waves until Christopher came down mumbling for his breakfast.

He had not always stood on the balcony; Peter used to stand just inside the sliding glass door and watch from there. But once, when Christopher crossed the room, Peter saw his son's reflection in the glass of the door, and Christopher was walking across the surface of the waves. Peter had always opened the door after that.

Some Day.

Peter looked down the coastline and saw the concrete structures glittering in a cloud of smog and heat. When he was a boy, his parents decided to drive cross country one summer, and Peter used to put his thumb close to his eye and block out entire cities as his family approached them in their Oldsmobile. New York fit on his thumbnail. Heck, he could stamp out the world.

"Christopher, look at this," he said. "If you put your finger close to your eye, you can cover those apartment houses over there." Christopher squinted and then put his thumb to his

eye, stepping forward once, then twice. Again.

"Not if you walk closer," the boy objected. "Then the buildings get bigger."

Or do you get smaller, Peter thought. He remembered seeing the cities swell before his eyes until he couldn't cover them anymore.

And suddenly he was inside and the sounds of the city were filling his ears and the apartments were too tall and there were too many people and the light were too bright and the asphalt was so black that it became

A day.

Christopher was chasing seagulls. Their raucous cries excited him; he screamed back and leaped at them when they flew off.

Trying to fly.

"Come on, Chris," his father said. "Time to go." Christopher shrieked a string of unintelligible words and returned to the chase, tripping over his own feet and laughing when he fell.

"It's getting dark," Peter called, louder this time.

"What?" Christopher mouthed.

"Dark!" and Peter pointed to the sky.

But the boy shook his head and pointed to the sky, too.

It was then that Peter saw that something had happened to it. Someone had flooded the water with rose, but the setting sun had dyed the sky pink as well, and the two blended together with nothing between them. The sky had become an extension of the sea; the water was expanding--it was the universe. Peter stood and watched the waves rushing across the broken horizon, tumbling onward and fading into space, and the world, once round, had been turned inside out. If he listened closely, he thought he could hear the echo of shattered gravity reverberating through the clouds. Just for a moment, before all became quiet, before he drowned in the stillness, the promise of motion.

Irene Hahn  
Woodbridge CT  
Hopkins School  
Mrs. Elizabeth Lowery

## The Gap

The question of one's identity is at the same time a simple and a very complex issue. Is one to be identified by place of birth, place of death, place of longest residence, race, nationality, by how one perceives oneself, or by how others perceive one? Further complications are ensured when, for instance, one is born in a country, reared in another, and finally settled in a third. A simple answer to the question of racial or national identity cannot be given. And when one is so confused ambivalent feelings such as confusion and bitterness can exist in people who are even as young as I.

Having grown up in America for fourteen of my sixteen years, I consider myself a Korean-American. I am fully aware that I have been Americanized in many ways. Although I am not sure in what ways or how I have been Americanized, relatives and friends living in Korea have told me that it is obvious that I am Korean-American as opposed to Korean-Korean. They say that it is evident through the way I walk and the way I dress. Even though I have no American accent when I speak the Korean language, I am still probably considered a foreigner in my home land. Of course I am aware that my vocabulary of the language is probably still at the level of an elementary student, but compared to most of the teenage Korean-Americans living in the States, who have lived here

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from an early age, my capacity for the language is rather commendable. However, I suppose just knowing the language does not make me a "real 100% Korean."

After living in America for so long, I have also learned some terms that refer to different "types" of Korean-Americans. A "leetaewon" is one who has lived in America for most of his or her life, but is still very cognizant of the Korean culture and is more "into" that than American culture. A "FOB," other wise known as "fresh off the boat," is one who has just come from Korea and usually wants to deny the American culture. A "yangachi" is referred to one who is Korean, however is totally oblivious to the Korean culture. A "twinkie," one who is "yellow on the inside but white on the outside," is another term for a "yangachi." Usually, children who have lived in America from a very young age, are the ones who are "twinkies" and "yangachis." This is because they feel the need to be accepted by others. They do not want to be different, because when children are young, they are ignorant and anything that is different is strange. However, as they grow older, terms such as "leetaewon" and FOB" come into being. Such teenagers who have lived in America for a long time among "leetaewons," and teenagers who have just recently emigrated to the States are then known as "FOB," because they do not want or like to associate with Americans. They also often look down upon twinkies and "yangachis" with disgust.

Then there is also the complete distinction between a "real 100% Korean" and those, like me, who are Korean-Americans. An "FOB" is usually a "real 100% Korean" until he or she becomes unknowingly just a "100% Korean," for it cannot be helped that one becomes Americanized in some ways even if one does not wish it so. The reason for this essay is to explain and complain about why Korean teenagers, in general, feel like they need to make this distinction. To be honest, sometimes I wonder myself and am not absolutely sure. Nonetheless, this is what I have concluded.

In the last couple of months, I have not only thought about, but have also encountered unexpected events which have prompted me to think about my status here in the States. With much contemplation, I have come to one conclusion--I do not belong here. Despite the fact that I have lived in the States for fourteen years, and that I should feel more at home here than anywhere else, I still feel as if I am, as my visa states, an alien. I have a couple of reasons for this. One of them, to put it bluntly, is that I am not American-American, I am Korean-American. I cannot and do not want to hide from this fact. I am proud of my Asian nationality. The fact that I am Korean and was born to Korean parents, also plays a major role in my academic life. It is a well-known fact that amongst us, that most Korean parents have extremely high expectations from their children. They not only expect straight A's from us, but also for us to excel our peers in everything we do, such as playing instruments. Taking into consideration the fact that I have these kinds of "Korean parents," I feel as if more stress is put on me and other Koreans when it comes to college. Since most of my Asian peers have "Korean parents," they all usually surpass the average student, and therefore make it more competitive for Asians to get into college.

Just recently, my friend from New York City, also a Korean-American, told me of an example of such a case. She told me that she had done a survey where questions were asked about SAT scores, which in turn would give her an idea of which colleges to consider. However, the first question on the survey asked if the person doing the survey was an Asian. If the answer was 'yes,' then the applicant was to subtract roughly 100 points off the SAT score and continue with the survey. This was

not surprising to either of us, since we were already aware that as Asians, we were supposed to excel above Caucasians to be equal to them and our other Asian peers to make something of the competitiveness. However, it did make us somewhat bitter towards the American society. Another example of academic stress put on Asians is the SAT score itself. Two of my senior friends, once again both Korean-American, have obtained well over a 1400 score on their SAT's during their junior year. Nonetheless, with the advent of their senior year, they retook their SAT's in hopes of breaking a 1500. In the Caucasian view, this would most probably seem ridiculous, for a 1400 on the SAT's is nothing to be embarrassed by. As a matter of fact, a Caucasian achieving a 1400 on his or her SAT's would probably stop there with almost definite hopes of getting accepted to an Ivy League school. However, a 1400 SAT score would not delete all the doubts in the minds of the Asian student. As a result, the pressure and stress begins to mount, and we, the second generation of Korean-Americans, turn to each other for understanding. Caucasians do not seem to understand the pressure put on us by our parents which is a major force in our lives.

Of course, our parents put this burden on us with the best intentions, but at times, it is very hard to see this good intention. I find that my attempts to explain this to Caucasian friends, or to friends of any other nationality, for that matter, are extremely difficult. They simply do not understand, which frustrates them and frustrates us because our attempts are so useless. However, with my Korean-American friends, all I have to say is "Korean Parents," and they know exactly what I mean. This gap between us and the Caucasians is what I believe to be the beginnings of why distinctions were made within the second-generation Koreans. As the bitterness mounts within us, some of us are left confused about our nationality and our racial status. They ask themselves, "Am I more American or more Korean?" Or, "Would I rather be a 'yangachi' in America or a 'leetaewon'?" We are all supposedly equal, yet we are so blatantly not. Are we supposed to be so stupid as to believe the fact that no matter what color you are, you're considered an equal of Caucasians? Obviously the answer is no. The survey my friend has done is clearly an indication of that.

When first coming to the States, I had only reached the naive age of two. This is an age where the child is quite vulnerable and any type of perpetual feeling of being left out will make a deep mark on the child. This is what happened to me. Starting in nursery school, many children looked at me differently because I could not speak the English language very well, and also, my very appearance was quite different from theirs. One might question why I could not speak the English language since I arrived at such an early age, but the reason for it was because my parents thought through school I should learn English and at home Korean. Therefore I was made to speak only Korean at home under all circumstances. Whenever my Korean friends came over to my house, my parents made us all speak only Korean and chastised us for speaking English at home. As a result, my friends did not like coming over to my house, and I hated the Korean language when I was young. (Thus becoming a "twinkie" and a "yangachi.") At school, I began to attend ESL classes because I never had the chance to practice English at home.

Another reason I hated being Korean at a young age was because of the isolation I felt. One might laugh at the naiveté of a young child, however, sometimes this ignorance can hurt the feelings of another little one. My clearest and earliest remembrance of bitterness for another child was during nursery school against a little blond girl. We were in the middle of

coloring Little Bo Peep, when I decided to color the face of Little Bo Peep yellow for no other reason than I could not find the crayon for beige. However, the little blonde girl, who had happened to sit next to me, loudly mocked me for my preference of color, and I remember feeling hurt because I felt that this ridicule not only put a deeper gap between my peers and me, but I had already begun to feel as if my classmates did not accept me as their equal. This attitude of wanting to be assimilated with others consequently brings about the defiance of one's original race.

However, terms such as "leetaewon" and "FOB" come about in a totally different point of view. The older the children grow, the more resentful they become against the Americans. This is because of the prejudice that they first-handedly experience and the inequality they feel. Although I do not feel as bitter as some of the "leetaewons" I know, I can fully understand how they feel. They particularly hate America, when they emigrate from Korea and enter the sixth grade or above. This is mainly because they feel as if they are looked down upon for their inability to understand the language. They hate the condescending looks they receive from others and the pressure put upon them by their parents to quickly blend to the top of their class. Not only is that hard for the Koreans to do, but the fact that colleges look at Caucasians and Asians on a different level adds to the ire and hardness. Consequently we look at each other for understanding since being in the same quandary with the same problems helps us to relate to each other.

For example, I had the opportunity of having access to American On-Line for two weeks. During these two weeks, I became addicted to entering chat rooms and chatting. Despite the numerous chat rooms, I only became addicted to a room called "Korean chat." I think the fact that the other members of the room were Korean-American made me feel somewhat more comfortable. Even though we had never met each other, just the fact that we were all of the same nationality made it seem like we could all relate and understand each other. The fact that we had such a strong link with each other made me realize that this unity I felt with my *kind* gave me a sense of belonging. I suppose that what I felt was because we were all equal. We all had stress coming from society itself and from parents; and the fact that we were not Korean-Korean united us. Unfortunately, this sense of belonging that I felt with the American On-Line members diminished as my parents canceled our membership on the grounds that I spent too much time on it. Once again, I felt like a foreigner amid my surroundings. I only felt that I was relating to someone when I talked to my Korean-American friends. As a result of this out of place feeling again, my thoughts ran in all directions of wanting to be accepted and understood by others. I have often thought about moving to Korea. However, over there I would also feel out of place because no matter how much of a "100% Korean" I felt here, over there I am still not one of them merely because I am not Korean-Korean. As Lindo Jong tells her daughter in Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, "When you go to China . . . you don't even need to open your mouth. They already know you are an outsider. . . Even if you put on their clothes, even if you take off your makeup and hide your fancy jewelry, they know. They know just watching the way you walk, the way you carry your face. They know you do not belong." This is exactly the same for Korean-Americans in Korea. The feeling of being between worlds, totally at home nowhere, seems to be making us, Korean-Americans, stand out from Korean-Koreans.

Being unwelcomed from our native land and not only feeling but looking foreign in our immigrated lands, we do not belong anywhere. For example, when American-born Korean-Americans are asked where they learned such good English, they

too are made to feel foreign and alien. W.E.B. Du Bois depicted African-Americans with the term "double consciousness"-- "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity"-- equally represents Korean-Americans. Thus I consider living in the States extremely difficult. The concepts of being Korean-American are not tangible to my Caucasian friends. Our need to achieve beyond the Caucasians in order to be equal to them, especially since we are living in the land of Caucasians can be understandable. However, growing up in this type of environment makes us bitter, and when we do surpass the Caucasians, their bitterness towards us also in turn adds to our anger. Why should they be angered when we work so hard in a foreign land for the position that we deserve? Unable to always be in a surrounding where you are understood makes things even more frustrating. Being a Korean-American is tough because you cannot define your nationality. Instead I am a mixture of both and therefore not fully understood by either. The mixture of the different cultures distinguishes me. In a way, I sort of see myself as an individual with a brand new culture. Nonetheless, something new is not always accepted easily. This is too evident to deny. Nevertheless, I know I am not alone in feeling this way. There are many Korean-Americans that are out there in America sharing my thoughts and wishing to scream out their frustration. I have done mine, and although I cannot change anything, I hope to better my society in letting them somehow understand our situation here and our hopelessness in having really no place to go but assimilate with each other.

Jae Song  
Broomall PA  
Mrs. Barbara Giorgio

### Mother Raking Leaves in the Yard

Mother worked the whole afternoon, her rake  
in hand, like a many-fingered claw sinking deep into the carpet  
of dead yellow leaves, tearing it apart and baring  
the cluster of lush green underneath, and the moist brown earth.

Mother worked the whole afternoon, in the sun,  
until shadows of trees stood out against a transparent sky,  
like a farmer plowing, her back arched, her arms outstretched to  
reach  
clumps of yellow flakes in the farthest corner,  
and gathered them into small round hills  
scattered across the yard.

Mother worked the whole afternoon, said she remembered  
her younger days in the countryside, when the harvest of corn  
left fields flowing and empty, with stacks and bundles of tall  
filaments  
lining like small golden lighthouses floating in the vast sea.

Mother worked the whole afternoon, was dirty when she came  
in,  
her gloves wet and muddy, her palms stained a deep golden  
brown;  
She said it was the color of autumn.

Greta Ge Gao  
Edison, NJ

J.P. Stevens H.S.  
Mrs. Maroney

Sitting at the white marble table, I wait for dinner and watch my grandmother. The smooth, thick smell of boiling lentils with bay leaves, the sizzling splashes of vegetables tossed into hot oil spill out from the kitchen and fill my home like liquid. The gold bracelets on my grandmother's arms sing to the rhythm of her quick strokes, back and forth, back and forth, until a soft ball of dough is thin and round, ready to be cooked. She stirs cloves and cardamom into a pot of boiling rice until their flavors leak out with the steam. Then my grandmother shuts off the stove and walks to me slowly. I begin to stand, saying to her that I will come around the counter to get my food, that she doesn't need to carry the heavy plate and hot bowl. Saying that I know walking is hard for her, that it is all right. But she puts her hand on my shoulder, and take the bowl and plate from my hands; her smile tells me to sit down. I say thank you quietly to myself, knowing that we do not say that in my home. She turns around, and still smiling, she shakes her head and waves her small index finger at me, back and forth, back and forth, telling me not to say thank you, telling me to leave formalities like that for strangers. I remember her shaking the same finger at everyone who enters our home.

I watch my grandmother cut thin slices of almonds into a pot of boiling milk sweet with sugar, rich with cardamom seeds and saffron leaves. I remember drinking bowls of this warm milk, my favorite, when I was four feet and chubby, when my feet dangled at dinner, when my grandmother could rock me to sleep in her arms. She stirs patiently, until the milk is the right consistency, leaving a thin film on the side of the pot. My grandmother scoops four ladles into a bowl and decorates the surface with crushed cardamom. When she places the bowl in front of me, she tells me that growing older means staying young. She has not lost her patience for creativity, her attention to details, her respect for her art. And I tell her that I understand when I accept another bowl and lick my upper lip as if I am five again, and my feet are still dangling. I will not lose the sweet taste of my childhood, I tell her, she can be sure.

I shake my head no to another piece of fresh warm bread, with its pool of melted butter. My grandmother squints her eyes and tilts her head, just a little, asking if I am sure. I do not protest; she tosses it gently onto my plate. She knows I can eat one more. then when my plate sits naked on the smooth white table, her eyes smile at me. A smile of peace, of satisfaction because I am full and can eat no more. She tells me then to serve others selflessly and tirelessly, to enjoy and respect the privilege of giving of feeding of eating. She tells me to make the happiness of others my own. Whom or what or when I am serving does not matter.

This is my culture; this is my heritage. So I eat to tell her I understand. I will carry on the tradition.

The first memories I have of my father are the two of us sitting together on the green wooden chairs at that white marble table for dinner; or my father driving me to the bus stop in the mornings; the two of us sitting in the car waiting; and those family vacations by car, when I would listen to my father, but watch the road through the glass of the windshield and feel the rhythm of the dotted yellow line shooting at me. I remember realizing on one of those drives that they were the same activity- that listening and watching and feeling.

"What's the most important thing in life?" my father would always ask me while I sat next to him, my hands tucked into the warmth under my legs, my feet hanging helplessly. I

would swing my feet a few times and answer reflexively; "To be a good human being." It was the right answer, I knew, because my father had told me it since the very first day I could understand him. He would look straight ahead and place his hand on my knee, "Yes, that's right. Yes." I felt his hand, looked up to his face and tried to meet his eyes, deep and sure. But I never said anything; I sat there next to him, taking in the air around me and feeling immensely strong, as though my father had given me an answer.

I watched the arrows of the dotted yellow line shooting at me. "Elitism and mere intellectually have no place in our family. They will never, ever measure the quality of your character."

And on that drive, I thought of the stories my mother used to tell me of her mother and father in India when her hand would stroke back the hair from my forehead, when I would half-listen and half-dream myself to sleep. I remembered living out those stories during trips to India.

I woke up at five o'clock one hot and humid Bombay morning, when the honking of cars nine stories below was somehow softer because I could see the purple and orange sun rising from deep beneath the surface of the sea.

My grandfather is a busy executive who sleeps at eleven and rises at four to make his business calls, to write to his family, and to read three papers in three languages cover to cover. When I was ready, we took the elevator down to the car, and left the building, my grandfather sitting in the front seat next to the driver and I on his lap. We stopped at bus stations on the way to his office, plied strangers into the air-conditioned car and dropped them where they needed to go.

But they were not strangers, he would tell me later, because we have souls and they do too. We picked up as many people as we could fit uncomfortably into the car, men and women and children walking with the weight of the sun on their shoulders, and when I made a face because it smelled and it was hot, my grandfather rubbed his hand on my back, a grand gesture that told me it was all right, that it was only for a little while, that he knew I was young and one day I would understand.

On another morning, I rose in darkness with my mother's mother to cook sweets: small circular creations decorated with bright colors. She spent hours cooking while I sat on her feet on the kitchen floor clanging silver cups and dishes together and yawning. Then with three heavy round plates in her arms, my grandmother and I left on foot to distribute these gifts to all those who passed us by or those we passed who sat hungry and unclad on their only material possession, a dirty white sheet. We walked and fed until the plates were empty, because it was my grandmother's birthday and she wanted the blessings of those men and women and children who I knew by now, or course were not strangers. Not strangers at all.

Standing in a circle, we forty musicians are a flock of birds, knowing that together we can do what none of us can do alone. Within the four walls of a rehearsal room, we travel distant lands and live, if for just a moment, in times that have faded into the past. Forty voices and forty imaginations, each distinct, each separate, and each necessary in the creation of one sound, one voice, one flood of passion, forever interwoven in circles and circles floating. Each of us takes the others, each of us is taken. I know if I fall, someone will catch me; I am prepared to catch.

I give myself to each musician and to the music; together we give to you. We have faith in the power of music to communicate, to change, to connect. We have faith in the power

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of giving, that somewhere there is someone, with eyes closed, who will hear our hearts or perhaps see us standing together, with *our* eyes closed, and our souls open; and *that* someone will whisper softly, thank you, or smile or cry or laugh, and for that moment, we will have given, and we both will have lived, because a man once said that you will find, as you look back upon your life, that the moments when you have really lived are those moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.

There is a passion for creation and a passion for offering when making music which is my grandmothers' faith in the power of feeding, which is my grandmother's faith in helping, and my mother's and father's faith in their power to heal. Having passion in this faith and having faith in this passion are not a part of things or a part of life, I have discovered. They are the whole of things and the whole of life.

On the first day my father left our home to practice medicine, my grandmother served him a warm breakfast. She stood, short and round and soft, looking down at him. When her was finished, he rose to stand taller than she. They stood together for a moment in the young sunshine, I imagine, my father's feet cold on the tiles, his mother's feet warm. And when he knelt down to touch them before he would step pit into that great confusion, she put a hand on his head and said to him in Gujarati, "You have an amazing power to heal. Use it and never forget where out feet have walked."

Go then, she was saying, with your arms outstretched so they hurt, bending forward with your head bowed so you feel the pain in your back and in your neck, and feed. Feed and heal and sing.

When a friend of mine couldn't afford to buy a ticket for a group vacation, I remember my father calling me and saying we could buy the ticket if my friend felt comfortable. My father told me he had not been able to sleep the night before. And when I hesitated, he told me never to count things in terms of money because they will come back to you some day, somewhere, or maybe they won't and that's fine, but to have faith, just have faith, because my grandmother serves food on a circular dish, and makes a circle with both of her hands holding the sides of a hot plate that holds steaming circles of bread, because the choir rehearses in a circle, and because we are never born and we never die, because there is no beginning and there is no end.

And I cried some moments later, in the face of my legacy, because this is my culture, this is my heritage, and I will carry on the tradition.

I have stood in that circle, and so I can now understand my mother and father, my grandmothers and grandfathers. And I have had one of those moments of peace amidst chaos, steeling me like snow drifting softly, settling onto the vast expanse of a field that rolls and stretches out of sight, quiet but overwhelming, calm but powerful, falling until the night is dark, and the field is white, is pure, is grand and daunting and austere in a wonderful silence too loud to hear.

I see my grandmother never removed from her element, never displaced if she can cook and feed. On our kitchen, three bright lights are suspended from the high ceiling and bulbs lie hidden in the woodwork. Often, my grandmother cooks only by the dim light above the stove. That light defines her space and she gives it power. Her words float in circles, too bright for shadows.

My grandmother has an unbounded faith in the power of

giving. She has braided that faith through my father too me, showing me that to feed and to heal and to give music are one and the same.

Those who take, who receive, will realize, will enjoy, will bless.

And in this way, she said to me, in *this* way, one can live.

Anand Desai  
Exeter NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Mr. Douglas Rogers

### Angel

An angel passing through  
On a breeze that whistles nervously  
Wafts past  
Carried by brittle wings.  
Capturing him,  
I cling to his hand and  
Look into his solemn eyes.  
His skin, a deep brown hue,  
Is creased and aged.  
He smells of cherry tobacco  
From a long abandoned pipe.  
The wind rushes across my face  
Stinging my eyes.  
His wrinkled silk hand  
Slips out of my weary grasp.  
My angel blows softly by.

Casey Statler  
Chambersburg, PA  
Mrs. Branham

### Grandpa's Closet

The mop fresh  
The smell of pine  
Dirt, all over  
Me, inside the closet  
Sitting  
My hands around my knees  
My fingers tightly grasping each other  
I smell the sweet humid rugs,  
My bare feet touching the cold floor.  
It was dark in there  
It was small and dark  
I was all by myself  
I was sitting alone

Ana Rebolledo      Voorhees HS  
Glen Gardner, NJ      Lois Harrod

### The Pigeon Sky

The sky is  
a pigeon's grey underbelly  
shedding its down  
over the evergreens.  
Its wings whip the  
wind and buffet  
the white currents  
over the drifts.

Andrew Isleib      Hightston HS  
Cranbury, NJ      Peg Van Patton

### Making Dinner and Light Conversation

"I have to write a story," I said from the corner of the kitchen. I balanced on the edge of an old dining-chair, part of a set, and rattled the glass of ice water in my hand.

"Yeah?!" he said, flicking his head back to get the hair out of his eyes as he lifted dinner out of the over. How can four people eat that much chicken? He tilted the tray and slowly drained the golden grease and hot fat from the bottom of the dish. "About what?" He wasn't ignoring me, he doesn't do that.

"That's my point," I said.

"Oh. I didn't know there was one." He wasn't being mean. He was being honest.

"It has to be a thousand words," I complained.

"That's not a lot," he said closing the oven door. The dial clicked as he turned it from 'bake' to 'off.'

"I know," I sighed. "It seems like a lot when you don't know what to write." I was glad I had already eaten, but it wasn't the food. He is a good cook.

"Well, what are you interested in?" He stirred whatever was in the white pot and turned off the burner.

"I don't know," I sighed. His eyes laughed as he looked up. His smile made me smile.

"You don't know what you're interested in," he said flatly. I had known it was a dumb thing to say, but I couldn't think. I wished I could write a poem instead.

"I wish I could write a poem."

"I know." He emptied the contents of the pot, rice, into a glass bowl. I wasn't hungry at all. He came to the sink next to me to rinse the pot. He is very tall and very handsome. His dark brown hair is longer now than when he first came. He used to ask me if it was long enough to wear in a pony-tail. I would smile and shrug. He was impatient for it to grow. I looked at his eyes in profile. From that angle they seemed almost transparent, but at the same time glowing, full of color. I wish I had brown eyes.

"I used to write stories a lot"-- he opened a can of mushroom soup-- "and then I started writing poetry. That's all I did for a while. I'm still pretty much like that, except sometimes I get an idea and I just bang out three or four pages." He was serious, stirring broccoli and the soup into the rice.

I hadn't known any writers before I met him. I knew people who wanted to become writers, but no real authors. Of course he doesn't make any money from it, but he's a grown-up, so it counts.

He smiled a child-like grin. The theme of "Jeopardy" leaked from the TV as Bill, Doug, and Ramona tried to come up with 'who is Jack Kerouac?' He banged the spoon against the side of the bowl and Alex said, "Contestants, are you ready?"

I said something and the subject changed. I was procrastinating. I didn't want to think about what to write. I didn't want to deal with it. Instead we talked about the Metro, about Paris. I told him about the horrible man in the subway tunnel who had frightened me so much I couldn't cry, the story I had not meant to tell anyone. I told him how I had hated, how I had wanted to hurt the man. I explained that I had never really been angry before then. I said it in fewer words, but he didn't pry. He didn't ask. He did care.

"Write about that," he said matter-of-factly. "Write about how you'd never been angry before and how this made you hate."

"I know," I looked away for a second. "But I can't." I didn't want to.

I sat some distance away from him, separated from myself and from the scene I was part of. I watched his gentle movements, harmless focused on his task. I saw the strength in

his back and arms.

I saw, in another scene, the man in the tunnel, the same height, but this man had a weakness, a sickness. I saw my fear in the man's eyes. Sounds came back at me like echoes from a nightmare. The image of the man in slow motion, harsh gestures, blue-gray hatred, flashed violently in my memory. The stagnant air, my prison, pushed in on my lungs. All the heaviness of that one moment fell on me. . . .

He moved so gently, so comfortably. The kitchen was well lit. The air inside was clear and moved freely. I saw the extraordinary normality of it. I saw things from the outside, not trapped in fear and dark, deserted tunnels. *And he doesn't know, I thought, how safe I feel here.*

"Write something. . . and show me." His tone was at first light, then serious. "I can help you. You know."

I knew. I breathed consciously. I watched him pull his hair back with one hand and taste the finished rice carefully, as if it were very hot. It didn't look too great, but I believed his when he said it was good. I'll have to marry a man who can cook.

I leaned back a little in the chair, getting a new perspective, like a person in a gallery stepping back to get a better look at a Monet. I thought about where I was and who I was. I thought about the assignment I had to get started on. I watched him from my corner. Hands on hips, he turned his head slowly scanning the kitchen, looking for loose ends or finishing touches. On the inside I smiled at the simplicity of it.

"Are you eating here tonight?" He turned and looked at me, questioning.

"Um-hmm," I nodded slowly. I hardly knew what I was saying, but saw kindness and brown eyes, and I knew who I wanted to write about.

Jessica Macie  
Washington, DC  
St. Andrews Episcopal School  
Dona Weingarten

### I Want Her Signature

I want to write like Pia.  
I do not want her literary form, style, or voice.  
I want her

handwriting.  
Her signature is perfect.  
Her "P" is large and beautiful,  
And the "i" and the "a" that follow are just as pretty.

My signature is ugly.  
I practice my handwriting, For hours and hours,  
Only to end up with the same handwriting.  
My name is not Pia, it will not look like Pia.

My adolescent script will follow me forever.  
I will never have Pia's handwriting.  
My license, checkbook, and bills will all have  
My signature  
It will always be a scarlet letter  
Hanging around my neck.

Nicola Gammon  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

## Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel. . . and ransom captive Israel

The chorus lamented the Israeli plight as my eyes searched past the pews. Outside it was quiet and cold; outside the stones of the temple cast shadows thrown by the distant moon. Inside, the red memorial candles glowed, and the bumbling priest began to read the Gospel according to Matthew.

I stood in the lobby of the church, shifting my weight from one foot to another, watching the crowd. The older members seemed devout as the children rolled their eyes and yawned. They all had pews to themselves. You can tell who is a regular parishioner and who is not by the proximity to the altar. The lapsed believers stand awkwardly in the back, hoping to redeem themselves the coming year. I used to attend Mass twice a week: every Friday morning at school and then on Sunday at 9 am with my parents. Since I graduated two years ago, I haven't set foot inside. I used to know every stone inside this building every picture of the saints, every droplet of blood draining from Christ on the cross preparing for the Eucharist and comparing which tasted better, ours or All Saints' in Manassas.

I glanced through the people again. I recognized several: some parents, the younger siblings of my former classmates, my former classmates. My old friends looked generally the same. Erin's hair was longer, and Brian had contacts. Erin's little brother was serving at the altar. I guessed he must be in eighth grade now. The other altar boy looked familiar; he was a few years behind me. I wondered what they were thinking. Did they recognize me as I knew them? Were they bored, tired, secretly laughing at the drooling elderly parishioners who fell asleep? When all the boys in my class were altar boys, they used to tell horrible funny stories about people attending the service. They used to gloat about getting out of class for funerals and weddings. As much as I hated the Church, I was always comfortably seated and arrogant observing the late slobs who stood in the back. Now Erin and Jennifer, my old schoolmates who attended Notre Dame Academy, acted appropriately solemn.

I shivered at the ghosts I saw. The pastor, whom everybody thought was senile, lapsed into a homily I had heard at least three times. My thoughts turned to the last year of Saint John's, when the eighth grade always escorted the kindergarten to the Friday Mass. Those grubby little hands clutched my larger palms, and they squirmed during the long repetitious sermons. Now they would be ready for First Communion, a sacrament I had ceased to receive. The nuns are gone now. There used to be three: Sister Carmelita, Sister Annamae, and Sister Donna. Sr. Donna still ran the parish Sunday School, but Sr. Carmelita retired three years ago. I was glad when she left; she was mean and rusted after fifty years of entering the order. Sr. Annamae was terrific, though, and she was transferred last spring. I had not met the woman who replaced her as principal of St. John School. The associate priest was different, also. The man who was there five years ago, when I first started, left the rectory and the order. A rumor circulated that he was married. The next priest was Father Mike, who gave neat homilies about relevant topics and liked to go fly fishing. He left because he could not tolerate the pastor. Then next priests, I had heard, is good, but impersonal. I missed the familiar clergy I used to know.

I knew exactly where I was. I could pin-point it on a map of the county. But I didn't know the people, and I couldn't sing the hymns. For all of my differences with the Church politics, and my differences with my classmates and teachers, and friends, and my biases against Catholics, this church used to be a safe place to think and pray and reflect. It used to be filled

with religious people whom I respected and souls whom I considered daily companions. I was lost, however. This was not my sanctuary. It was not my temple. I used to know every aspect of this place; I didn't recognize it now.

A hundred voices woke me from my reverie. The Mass had ended, and people filed out into the cold air. It was Christmas Day now, somewhere around one o'clock. I wandered outside and past several old acquaintances. The moon was bright as the star over Bethlehem must have been. I heard the courthouse bells ringing, and as I walked into the street, I knew exactly where I was, and it was home.

Katherine Valentino-Bowerman  
Warrenton VA  
Fauquier HS  
Ms. Peg Culley

## The Phantom Lamppost

Holding on to the sliver of light that shines beneath the door, I step slowly through my room, avoiding several pieces of clothing and scattered books faintly outlined against the dark. My two roommates sleep softly in their beds, one snoring quietly; his nasal breathing barely reaches my ear over the constant hum of the window fan by his head. I am aware of the creak of the joints in my leg and my own steady breathing as I step. Concentrating on the familiar night sounds slows the series of images racing through my mind, I grasp the cool doorknob and open the door slowly. I look back at the room lit by the brightness of the hallway. The room remains as I remembered it before I went to sleep that night.

My room is at the end of the hallway by the bathroom; I step out into the painful brightness, letting the door close behind me, and squint down the hallway at the bits of trash that stain the carpet and line the closed doors. A light bulb flickers somewhere down the hall.

I walk into the bathroom and push up the light switch. The bathroom lights blind me for a moment, and the huge mirror above the three sinks intensifies the brightness. I squint at the sink top covered with my dormmates' toilet articles, at the two white toilets and at the entrances to the two showers, enduring the pain until my eyes become adjusted to the light. Turning towards the sink, I notice my reflection in the mirror. I look puzzled, as if I'm not quite sure how or why I am standing in the bathroom gazing at the mirror. My disheveled hair and baggy eyes tell that I have just gotten out of bed; the stiff, pained position of my lips and cheeks reveal the discomfort of not being asleep. I turn my head slightly to see if I will appear more alive from a different angle. My nose has the remarkable quality of appearing pudgy from the front and sharply cut from the sides. My eyes ache when I try to see how far I can turn my head away from the mirror while still keeping my reflection in view; my face elongates strangely the further I turn my head and shrinks back as I turn to face the mirror again. Tilting my head slightly, I stare blankly at myself for a few moments, and scrunch my nose before turning away.

I am tired but cannot sleep because my mind will not stop showering me with images of things I have to do, things I just did, and things I should have done. I need to calm down, so I stand and wait. I am tired of seeing the messy bathroom: the pieces of toilet paper on the floor by the toilets and the blue glob of toothpaste stuck to the side of the sink. But I enjoy the feel of the moist air against my skin, not steamy, because no one has taken a shower for several hours; the air feels cool and clean



with the familiar fragrance of mingled shampoos and soaps. I listen, but still no one stirs outside the bathroom door. I turn off the lights; the bathroom becomes an empty street on a damp night.

I stand and peer into the darkness around me, making out vague corners and angles. The darkness is interrupted by a light which shines from a distant lamp post. My eyes lock onto it; the darkness dodges the slender white beams. Shadows grow around me, the hovering weight of old Victorian houses and tree branches with heavy leaves. A drop of water falls in my eye; the concrete crackles after a gust of wind tears water off the leaves. The light shimmers off the wet concrete as I take a step forward. I let the light absorb me; it affixes itself to my eye. I close my eyes but can still see the white shape of the lamp. Wherever I turn it stays with me. As long as I keep my eyes closed, I can see the lamppost.

I open my eyes. A small dot of light follows my gaze wherever it goes. I feel ready to fall asleep if I'm not asleep already. I pick out the sliver of light beneath the bathroom door. When it opens, the light from the hallway rushes at me. I turn mechanically to the left and face my bedroom. Conscious of my roommates sleeping behind the door, I turn the handle slowly and push it.

Light floods the room, over the clothes and books and some food wrappers, over the three beds and two bodies, dressers, desks, and wardrobes, and reflects off the black glass of the window. The sight seems new to me while at the same time familiar. The room is as it is supposed to be, but not as I remember it. I feel like I haven't been here in a long time. The room seems very empty and peaceful; the fan blows cool air. I feel ready to fall asleep. I can't remember walking to my bed.

Peter Fagan  
Groton School  
Groton, MA  
Mr. Jack Smith

### Zero Does Equal

He is my zero  
The empty hole  
In which I place  
My treasures

White chalk circles  
Drawn by teacher  
On dusty green boards  
That begin each day clean  
Wiped in the artificial  
Glow of light in night

Teacher says that zero  
Is nothing  
And she proves this  
By drawing a duck  
Its feathers the murky  
Swamp green of the board

This lonely duck  
Is one

Teacher's black eraser  
Makes him gone  
The empty space  
Is zero  
And in zero  
I draw my dreams  
In the secret night  
With my warm fingers  
Breaking through  
The dust left by  
Ones and twos  
That teacher made gone  
To give me  
My zero  
And she says he's nothing  
But he's everything

Emilie Hardman  
Wellsville, NY  
Wellsville HS  
Miss Kelley

### Let's Get Together

Slow reggae songs fill the room  
As the crowd of familiar faces dances in rhythm to the  
reggae beats,  
While those whose energy time has taken  
Move their heads up and down in rhythm.  
Bun,  
Curry chicken,  
Ackee,  
The aroma of Aunt Dulcy's peppery ox-tail  
Reach me from the kitchen,  
Their smells so sharp  
They burn my nose.  
Gossip and laughter,  
"What a way you grow. You're turnin' into an'  
adult now, man!"  
Uncle Bunny pats me on the back and grins,  
His heavy Jamaican accent sounds comfortable to my ears  
"I can't wait for a sip of thee gingur tea"  
I hear my cousins' English accents across the room  
Another of Bob Marley's songs begin  
The room quiets as people listen to the lyrics-  
One love,  
One life,  
Let's get together and feel all right...  
People nod their head to the beat.

Maxine Lyle  
Newark, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

**Last Night**

my mind is corroding  
rusting from the inside  
no reason or response or thought  
that hurts you is justified

I want to bind my eyes  
shut with tearful glue  
and fuse the lashes tight  
with sleep  
I want to sleep (escape)  
and dream of scenes of you  
and wake up soaking wet  
and free

I can't cry I am forced to sleep  
I can't dream of you that way  
and on the creaking floor  
I step in bowls of pain(t)

I've torn apart my canvas,  
dear Lord.

Mark Stricker  
Greensburg, PA  
Dr. C.T. Wansor

**Untitled**

here I have just walked out of Eastern Religions  
(I grow tired of meditations) and there we go  
walking past l'ycée,  
and Lynn growls  
so low and perfectly  
that I cannot help but join her  
and smile pleasantly  
because rich old ladies  
give us black looks

pressing my face against the cool glass  
of the lizard tank  
as little blond girls  
tug different ways  
on the hamster cage  
their mother smiles at me  
and her perfect children  
and it hits the floor so that  
pine chips fly up and spray me

the clerk looks me up  
and down  
and tells me he can't help me  
the Siamese on the window  
has sores  
on both sides of its face

I look at peoples' eyes  
when the train jerks  
and a boy I recognize  
from school looks through me  
so that he knows where we stand  
and I smile  
at how easy it is to see  
when you have no competition

my ex-French teacher  
goes into Victoria's Secret  
and all the tourists  
gather outside of Planet Hollywood  
so that I wonder  
if people think I am a tourist  
or maybe something else  
and walk

I pick up the phone  
and watch  
as the man next to me dials  
and I write down the numbers his fingers touched  
and listen as he talks  
in some other language  
so that I can call  
when I get home  
and tell whoever picks up  
that I love his friend

the man in the store across from  
Pearl River Mart  
shows me his new perm  
and I liked it better the old way,  
and smile  
and he loves my jacket  
"Chinese" he says  
and he sets Davina's coat on fire

Sasha Leinster  
New York, NY  
Hunter College High School  
Mrs. Miller

**Second Chance**

As the stale water evaporates  
I look down on myself wondering  
whatever went right.  
Soon all the walls will be translucent  
and all the treasures and misfortunes  
behind them will be revealed  
just like a ripe fresh orange being unpeeled  
never to have another chance  
to be dangling from another branch.  
In the orange  
there was the seed that gives new life  
and receives new sun.  
I admire this tree  
this orange.  
Oh powerful seed,  
make me another one?

Demi Moutsoulas  
Cambridge, MA  
James F. Farr Academy  
Gregory Rick



Susquehanna University

Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania 17870-1001

### Taunting the Sailors

as biting grains of sand  
 wedge in each crevice of my  
 salted bathing suit  
 scratching my burning skin,  
 your tawny cheeks  
 glisten with crystalline  
 scraps of emerald seaweed.  
 we scream across miles of  
 white cream,  
 and blue ice.

two mermaids--  
 tangled hair  
 ornamented with  
 sand and pebbles  
 laughing at jellyfish  
 and crying with the seagulls--  
 sprawl sensually,  
 on large sponges...  
 taunting the sailors

Tina Greenberg  
 New City, NY  
 Clarkstown North HS  
 Mrs. Potter

### Keeper of Bees

screen  
 and bulky gloves  
 that he dropped  
 accidentally, on his way to the back  
 to collect from the tenants  
 while  
 his wife smiles at visitors  
 and  
 devil chases his tail  
 disguised as corn  
 set to motion by the chair  
 rocking  
 creaking  
 to the rhythm of her feet kicking the buckets of beeswax  
 which resound in the afternoon  
 and surrender to gravity  
 and honey comb roll out  
 on the wood the spotted-tail white kitten has just licked clean

Alice Popovici  
 Richard Montgomery HS  
 Mrs. Wilchek

### Peter Pan's Mistake

"Dinner's ready," Emily hollered down the hallway, interrupting our game of "run around the pillows as fast as you can, picking up cards with letters on them as you go and try to spell a word with your letters." Emily's little brother Isaac had introduced me to this game, and he and I, along with Emily's little sister Maria, were having a grand time. Unfortunately, we

had to abandon our game to eat, but we agreed to come back later.

We sat down to the stir fry that Emily had made for us. Emily's parents were away that evening, so she was in charge of her younger brother and sister for the night. She had called me earlier and had invited me to join them for dinner to celebrate the fact that she was finally allowed to cook after her incident with the stove. She has yet to tell me the full story, only that her parents forbade her to cook anything for quite a while. The stir fry was delicious, though. The broccoli was a little burnt in spots, but nothing that couldn't be covered by a little Soy Sauce. As we ate, she looked up from her dinner and out the window at the rain. It was pouring buckets outside that night and earlier, as I had helped her cut the chicken, I had told her of my love for rainy nights. She then turned her eyes to me and said with that mischievous look in her eyes that seemed to say that I was in for some fun, "So, Kieran, are you in the mood for getting wet?"

Before she had even finished her sentence I could feel the smile spread across my face. I knew exactly what she was talking about as she said it, for I had also told her about the philosophy that my sister and I share--always drop everything to dance outside in the rain if it is pouring hard enough to soak you to the bone. Isaac and Maria, knowing that something mischievous was going on without them chimed in simultaneously, "What?"

"Finish your dinner, and then maybe we'll go for a walk down to the creek."

Their systems were thrown into overdrive at that idea. In seconds, plates were emptied, cleared from the table and put in the sink to be washed. Moments later, Isaac and Maria appeared before us, clad in their old pants, creek shoes, and waterproof coats.

As we stepped out the door and headed out to the street, I felt a tiny hand slip inside my own. I looked down at Isaac and smiled as I remembered the "hold a grown-up's hand while crossing the street" rule. I was being regarded as the grown-up, just as I had regarded my baby-sitters to be when I was his age. Funny, I didn't feel like an adult at that moment. I was on my way down to play in the creek, my shoes off and my jeans rolled up to my knees. I looked down and saw the glittery purple nail polish on my toes that had been there for three months. But still, in Isaac's eyes, I was the reliable adult who would protect him as we crossed the street. The thought made me laugh, but at the same time, inside it terrified me. I didn't feel as old as grown-ups were supposed to feel. I had always assumed that they knew what to do in every situation and felt confident making decisions. I had never really felt either of these things before. Is this part of what it feels like to be an adult?

I abandoned the thought as Isaac pointed out the huge puddle in front of us. The adult thing to do would be to walk around it, but this thought didn't enter my mind until I was mid-air, rapidly approaching the heart of the puddle. Isaac hit the puddle with me, producing a very satisfying splash that soaked Emily and Maria as we landed. We laughed as Emily promised her revenge and continued on our way to the creek, splashing in every puddle that came along. The thoughts of maturity slipped farther from my mind with each puddle we bounced in.

We reached the edge of the slope down to the creek. Feeling Isaac's grip tighten as we made our way down, I was reminded of the fact that I was an adult again. His hand in mine prevented me from skipping down the slope as I normally would have. I was large enough that, should he slip, I would be the one to catch him before he went tumbling before my eyes. Not that long ago I had been the one holding onto my father's hand, knowing I was safe as long as he was there. The thought crossed

my mind that perhaps I really was an adult.

When we got to the creek, I was the first to put my feet in to test the water. It was freezing, but the temperature did not stop me from wading several feet out. Perhaps I seemed to be telling myself that I was still a child to be doing so. I felt so reluctant to give in to the fact that I had become fully-grown. I even threw my arms up into the air and tried to do a little dance to prove it, but I realized that this was not such a good idea as I felt the slimy rocks beneath my feet begin to shift. I giggled and, after realizing that not only were the rocks awfully unstable, but that water was also dreadfully cold, I headed back to the rocky shore with a shiver. Isaac had walked down underneath the bridge with Emily, leaving Maria and me happily sitting with our feet in the creek, discussing how the way the lights hit the water made it look magical.

Emily and Isaac returned and we decided it was time we headed home. Again I felt Isaac's hand slip into mine. We walked along the streets of Newberry to return to Emily's house, with a minor detour through Dunkin' Donuts. We splashed in every puddle as we came across it. It became a game to us. Isaac was winning until as we approached the house, Emily yelled, "I know the biggest puddle of them all!" and took off toward the parking lot behind her house. We each chased her, knowing the puddles that the lot promised us. As I rounded the final curve around the house, I could see Emily, mid-air, arms reached for the sky, coming down quickly into the biggest puddle I had seen all night. Suddenly there were four of us in the puddle, laughing and jumping and splashing each other.

We began to look for other puddles and as we did, it began to rain harder. I found myself in the middle of the lot, mesmerized by the sound of falling raindrops. I looked up into the sky and smiled, suddenly feeling very solitary, but not lonely. The raindrops were all I could hear, although I was still aware of the fairy hunt that Emily had started Maria and Isaac on. I listened harder, as if the falling rain could speak and tell me all of life's secrets that I would need to know. I looked over and saw that Emily was standing just as I was. I wondered what

she was thinking, but I didn't particularly want to disturb her thoughts or leave my own for that matter. I was more content not knowing, but rather wondering what marvelous ideas were racing through her mind. I closed my eyes and threw my head back, hearing nothing but the rain and children's laughter.

I don't remember how long I stood there--time really didn't matter at that moment. The sound of raindrops calmed me. I gave me a chance to look back on that night, remembering how my emotions had swayed back and forth between that of an eight year old and that of a responsible adult. As I thought about it more, the idea didn't really bother me as much as it had before. Perhaps I had really matured into a responsible adult, despite many years of the famous "Peter Pan Syndrome." I thought about the adults that I admired and realized that each of them also acted like a child at times. My father for instance was often the instigator of our snow ball fights or wrestling matches. Maybe the secret of becoming an adult was learning the balance between responsibility and childlike fun rather than becoming the no-fun, stuffy, responsible adult that need to be reminded how to smile. Perhaps if Peter Pan had seen this, he would not have been quite as annoyed with adults.

My thoughts were interrupted when Maria ran over to display the fairy she had caught. Fairies live underneath the leaves, so all that was truly visible was the leaf, but she told me of the timid fairy that dwelled beneath. We then splashed in more puddles, until it was time to go in. Maria reached up and took my hand. I looked down at her and smiled, not in confusion this time, but in confidence. I squeezed her hand a little just to say that I was there to take care of her as we crossed the street again. I don't know if she even noticed, but she really didn't need to. The reassurance was more for my benefit than hers anyway.

Kieran Keating  
Williamsport, PA  
Mr. Robert McDonald



Susquehanna University

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