

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE  
WRITER



Leah Grossman  
Dewitt, NY

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Welcome to the fifteenth issue of **The Apprentice Writer**, which annually showcases the best writing and illustrations from among the nearly 5,000 entries we receive each year from secondary schools. Every September we send 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper **The Daily Item** in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to 3,500 schools in the twenty-one 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 in fiction and poetry, 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, Art Spiegelman, Melanie Rae Thon, Gerald Stern, Joy Harjo, Madison Smartt Bell, and Judith Ortiz Cofer to

campus. **The Susquehanna Review**, a literary magazine, is written, edited, and produced entirely by students. Some of those students enroll in graduate creative writing programs, and others have published in national magazines while still enrolled at Susquehanna.

I am happy to announce we now offer a **Writing Concentration Major**, which has begun to attract talented students who can take introductory and advanced workshops in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and playwriting. Internships and independent writing projects are overseen by faculty who have published eight books in the past six years and have had their work featured in national periodicals such as **Harper's**, **USA Today**, **The Paris Review**, **Newsday**, **Poetry**, **American Poetry Review**, **The Los Angeles Times**, and **The North American Review**.

We welcome inquiries from students and teachers about **The Writers' Institute**, especially through its web site at [www.susqu.edu](http://www.susqu.edu) or directly to [gfincke@susqu.edu](mailto:gfincke@susqu.edu). Send material to be considered for **The Apprentice Writer** to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870. The deadline for manuscript submissions is March 15, 1998.

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I remember hearts on the table  
laid out among diamonds, clubs...  
like bleeding soldiers.  
"Bet big, win big,"  
my brother would chant  
(like a hail mary all year)  
as his fisher price hands shuffled another game.  
"Hit me-" one spade to himself  
then eyes to my father  
(who stared at his cards like the uneaten meals)  
as if a paper heart, a won game,  
would keep him alive;  
like blackjack with a 10 year old son  
could dissolve the cancer.  
I knew not to play- these were my brother's games  
begun every 1991 evening,  
my brother perched at the kitchen table  
his legs bent under him  
like a cat's, ready to spring  
at sickness, my father draped  
in a chair, his flattened feet  
rested delicately on the linoleum  
like he carried light bulbs between his toes.

I'd sit in the background  
watching my father die,  
watching my little brother  
try to hold him up  
with those cards  
Betting big, losing...

Vida Engstrand  
Naples, FL  
Community School of Naples  
Anna Segreto

## HUNTING SEASON

When the dirt driveway got hard  
and our breath fogged the windows  
we spent afternoons raking  
and loading the rusted bed  
of the brown '49 Willys,  
packing so tight the leaves couldn't  
slip through the stake body.  
The air stung our lungs  
and we could smell the dark.

My father made us wear orange  
and he wore his red vest everyday.  
Men came in camouflage and boots  
and I watched him talk to them,  
leaning on his ax and wiping his nose  
on his sheepskin gloves.  
He pointed toward the back pasture  
and they put on skunk scent  
and disappeared into the woods.  
guns swinging in step.

Almost all the leaves had fallen  
and we had to wear socks to bed.  
We squeezed into the truck  
and the engine ground through the cold  
to the top of the hill so we could see ice on the lake.

One night we brought a tractor part to the Wyman's  
and they invited us in for hot cider.  
The warmth made our fingers itch.  
We took off our gloves and hats  
and let the steam feel our faces.  
Mr. Wyman and his friends asked us to the barn  
and their boots echoed in the rafters.

Hanging from its ankles,  
slit through its throat,  
a deer dripped blood in a dark circle  
in the dust of the floorboards  
like a ripped leather wine flask.  
The light from the kitchen reflected in its eye.

They finished their liquor, walked out to the night  
and my father's hands began to guide us away.  
His fingers jerked when they shot  
at the old cars in their junk pile  
and we watched them open holes in the metal  
like they could make the cars bleed too.

David Modigliani  
Brookline, MA  
Milton Academy  
James F. Connolly

## DRIBBLE CASTLES

Just Mom and I sit embedded in Fripp Island's  
sand with its milky foam residue.  
High tide's at one p.m. and the Atlantic  
is creeping closer to the dunes  
with every break of its waves.  
Bucket and shovel left behind,  
I sit on the beach with the sun  
painting my back a summer red  
and stare at shrimp boats in the distance.  
Warm water rushes past peeling legs  
and slowly slips back.  
Mom sits beside me and builds up  
a small clump of wet sand  
between our thighs,  
molding it into an ants' hill.  
She waits silently for the tide to return,  
this time scooping up drenched grains,  
letting them dribble down from her fist,  
drop after drop on top of the mound.  
I watch curiously as she grabs another handful,  
droplets slipping from her grasp  
to form rows and rows of lopsided cones.  
With seaweed princesses and armies of shells,  
a salty kingdom grows before my eyes,  
sculpted by the falling distance  
between my mother's fist  
and the last tower's balcony.

Susanna Samet  
Lutherville, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones



I like to imagine, sometimes, that I am a nurse. Not at six-thirty, when every truck on the road gathers in my parking lot, when Joe and Pete and Bob and James collect in the doorway under the sign in lights that should read "Charlie's" but whose "C" no longer lights. One of them makes a comment, every time, about motorcycles. I haven't had the courage, yet, to tell them about the spelling. Maybe they already know.

At six-thirty, Joe and Pete and Bob and James stand in the doorway, and an aging man and his wife, sipping second cups of coffee and arguing softly over who should drive next, suddenly demand the check -- they must be going. The man pulls his wife, who glances reproachfully at greasy hands and lewd t-shirts, through the doorway, and the men step forward, demanding "the regular," or "Today, I want two double cheeseburgers and my big Dr. Pepper," or "Ned, kid, you know what I want!"

I stand behind the counter, arms akimbo, jaw forward. I wait for the shouting to end, and I turn to the grill. I push my sleeves up my arm, rub clean palms against my apron -- and it is then that I imagine myself a mechanic, turning a dial to the right, nodding carefully as the heat rises, or a bartender, measuring equal amounts of potency with discerning eyes. I toss handfuls of patties on the grill, open a new bag of french fries, and pull extra-large cups from beneath the counter.

I cry, "Dr. Pepper, Mountain Dew!" and watch the eyes of the man on the end brighten. This is Pete, I realize, and add bacon to the grill. I know what the orders are, and sometimes the names that go with them, but the words shouted over the counter seem to float aimlessly, cross in the air, with no origin, no destination, so that I know what has been said, but not who said it, or why.

So I pour those huge glasses of soda, grill batches of french fries and handfuls of hamburgers, trying not to feel expectant eyes on my back, and turn from the grill with authority, shouting the order, hoping someone will claim it. Usually someone does, and most of the time I am left with a lone cheeseburger or an order of bacon, and so I stand facing them, these huge men leaning aggressively over their plates, drooling ketchup or sliced lettuce. I lean over my own plate, guarding the size medium t-shirt that collects at my waist, and I fix my eyes on one of the men. Copying his gestures, I feel most like a patient, a victim of amnesia in physical therapy, trying to remember these things, these simple things that I don't think I ever learned.

But late at night, when the clock on the wall sounds uneven as it ticks, when no one is there or when an older driver sits in the corner, staring vacantly into the counter and sipping his coffee like medicine, I remember when I was very young. My mother was a nurse, and, when I was little, she worked the night shift - 10 to 6. I would climb into bed, settle on my side, and she would tuck the sheets around me, close, so they held me all night.

I would concentrate on not moving as she told me stories of the things that happened while everyone in the world slept: of the old man who couldn't walk during the day but who she would find hobbling down an empty corridor twice every night, of the boy, my age, who was in a wheelchair and who woke up early to help her change IV's. She never told me about the antiseptic smell, about the yellow walls, about the sight of people whose only connection to the world was a bracelet on a gray, bony wrist, and she never let me visit.

So when I went to the hospital, years later - she was working the day shift, from 6 to 2, then, and school had been let out early because of snow, I never made it to the nurse's station

at the center of the floor. I walked halfway down one hall, past insistent beeps and past rooms with name-tags and signs: No Solid Food. Then I turned around, slowly, as though remembering something, shared the elevator with a boy in a wheelchair who I tried not to look at, who was probably my age, and I ran. Through the lobby, out the double doors, left to the end of the block, across the street without watching for cars, blinded by snow, guilty that I could walk, I ran.

I don't think my mother ever mentioned people dying, but, when I asked her about someone she had stopped talking about, sometimes the melody of her voice would break when she said, "Oh, she's -- she's not there anymore," or she would offer brightly - too brightly: "Oh, Patrick got to go home! Isn't that lucky?" One morning, I woke up to feel someone touching my hair, and I heard choked sobbing. So unlike her were these sounds that it was only once she whispered, "Baby, baby," that I realized it was my mother. I didn't open my eyes, and after she left, I ran my fingers over the place where her tears had wet my sheets, until that place was dry and the sky grew light. She never mentioned it, and so I never did either.

But that night and for so many nights after, I fell asleep to the ringing notes of her voice, and sometimes I would declare, "When I'm old enough, I'm going to be a nurse."

Then she would laugh, that laugh that defied piano scales, she would tickle me, and she would say, "Ned Adams, you're a silly goose. Boys aren't nurses. You can be a doctor."

I would shake my head, thinking of the pediatrician's needle. "No. I'm going to be a nurse." She would laugh again, my mother, and tell me another story.

I like to think of these things late at night, as I scrub the counter until it shines or without words add coffee to some nameless man's cup. I try to imagine what she was like, then, and how she knew, when her blond hair still fell softly to her shoulder, to tuck me in so I felt safe, to quiet me with words. I imagine that someday I will meet her, the mother I had before she married a widowed doctor, the nurse she was before she joined the PTA. One day, or one night, I will see her. She will wander through this deserted store, and with her laugh, and with her gentle efficiency, she will teach me to love her.

Ashley Evans  
Greenwich, CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Mrs. Marilyn Ebbitt

#### MOTH'S END

The moth perished  
between the screen  
and panes of glass.  
I noticed his blue body  
and oil rag wings  
in the kitchen  
and nudged the outstretched antennae.  
It rolled over, his legs  
crimped and haphazard.  
I slid the window shut  
And let the rain wash it  
while I kept myself alive  
Reaching for a peach.

Beth Stillman  
Norwich, NY  
Norwich High School  
Richard Bernstein



Tomorrow, my parents return me to their homeland  
as they would ship their old blue jeans home  
in a *balikbayan* box.

My aunt and uncle await my arrival,  
prepare a mattress for an American,  
set up the mosquito net around a bed.

I'm nervous about finding a toilet there;  
last time, I fought back flies and critters  
trying to do it in the outhouse.

My cousins, I know,  
will think five feet, two inches  
an impressive accomplishment.

But I will disappoint them  
when I open my mouth.  
They'll find my *Tagalog* never improved.

I hope I get their names right,  
my last visit, nine years ago.  
For right now I can only remember

that they put me on a car tire  
and floated me on the Pacific,  
the only kin who couldn't swim like a tuna.

I gripped the rubber tight  
though they were all around me,  
every time the sea coughed up.

We were just brown bodies and ocean,  
common in that place  
of hammocks and roasted pig.

We belonged there like mango trees  
and those butterflies nearby  
where we buried my grandmother.

Sofiya Cabalquinto  
New York, NY  
Bronx High School of Science  
Mr. John Kelly

#### NO GAS FOR TWENTY-TWO MILES

I spent this past Thanksgiving break at my uncle's house in Williamstown, Vermont. My uncle, Uncle Jim or just Jimmy, owns a small country store that sells everything from homemade sandwiches to hunting clothing. The building has been home to various country stores since before the turn of the century. Next to the color photos of last year's prize bucks hang old black and white photographs of the store. An ex-carpenter, Jimmy built his home in the upper levels of this three story building. The result is a comfortable, almost rustic, apartment-like house full of wood floors and thick old beams. I spent Thanksgiving afternoon in my Uncle's bedroom up in the attic looking at family photographs. My sister and cousins and I lay on the floor flipping through an old photo album. My sister and I, the two oldest, flipped through the yellowed pages and marveled at the pictures of our enormous family. There were many pictures

from before my sister or I were born and many of us when we were little, doing things we had long forgotten. I was struck time and again by how the pictures revealed aspects and moods of events in my life which contrasted with my memories. Looking at a picture of a family gathering at a Christmas several years past, I noticed how my aunt's expression was always one of annoyance or lack of interest directed towards my Uncle. With my sister's help, I figured out that that Christmas was shortly before they separated, eventually divorcing. In a photograph of a cousin's birthday party, a party of which my clearest memory was my other uncle dancing around like a mad man, I saw that in each picture he held a beer in hand. It was kind of like revisiting the past, not just remembering it, but traveling through it again, just at a faster speed.

Perhaps the greatest pleasure, in an egocentric sort of way, was seeing my past selves, observing these past mes, which were me then, yet are not me now. These pictures had the greatest effect and triggered the most vivid recollections. One picture especially made me stare and keep my sister or my impatient cousins from flipping the page. Amid the pictures of my Uncle (cliff jumping into a quarry lake), of my much larger and less gray Dad arm wrestling both my uncles (one on each hand, and winning), of my cousins and me swinging on their swingset; amid all this lay a solitary picture of a young boy of about six sitting in a small orange sled atop a snow covered mound. The mound could not have been much more than a few feet tall, yet there kneeled that boy, that past me, caught just before beginning his run, held in the suspended joy of anticipation.

In the short period of time between turning to this page and flipping to the next one, my memories of that day flooded through me in a torrent. There I was, my black ski-pants, their knees worn through, barely containing the boy within, my "hunter orange" hat pulled far down around my ears, sitting there like King of All There Is. I remember that it was one of those rare moments in my life when I felt so much pure joy that I could not stop smiling. I remember that that was Thanksgiving day many years ago. My Uncle and his wife Karen (they were still married then) and my other uncle and his wife, Uncle Dave and Aunt Michelle, and all the assorted cousins, as well as my own family, had bundled up for our pre-dinner walk. It was cold that day, not the bitter January cold, but the crisp, beautiful-sunset cold of November. Fresh snow had just fallen. We walked from my house down the street to a small housing development called Mountain Shadows. My Dad and uncles took turns pulling my sister and cousins and me in several well-used sleds. We loved being pulled, riding in complete bliss, the sound of their plastic bottoms grating over the snow-covered road filling the air. After trudging along beside my cousins, swathed like little sultans in many layers of clothing, I decided I wanted to pull them. I loved to make my cousins laugh, almost felt it was my duty in life to keep them entertained. My Mom has three sisters and two brothers and three of my aunts had children at almost the same time, providing me with a constant source of entertainment at family gatherings. So I took the rope from my Dad and pulled them as hard as I could, running ahead then having to stop from exhaustion. By the time the rest of the group caught up, my energy had returned and away I went.

When I finally tired of this I convinced my cousins to get out of the sled, basically dumped them out, then ran ahead into the small, incomplete development dragging my empty sled bouncing and jerking behind me. When I reached the hill in the picture, which was probably no more than a mound of leftover loam, I walked up it and balanced the sled precariously on top.

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Then I kneeled in it and hesitated, let that feeling of anticipation, perhaps sweeter than the act itself, flow through me. I leaned forward and zipped down the short distance and then out part-way across the road, where I stopped but continued rocking the sled backwards and then forwards again.

As they approached, my parents watched me repeat this, climb up and then zip down, run up and then zip down. The picture was of me sitting on this tiny hill, as content as anyone of the earth.

Then my Mom's voice called up from the kitchen below, pulling me back into the present and asking my sister and me to help set the table. I did not give the picture a second thought until somewhere on the long ride home we passed a great sledding hill. To the right of the road the ground dropped off steeply then flattened out for about a hundred feet before bursting up to a hill of several hundred yards. A large strip about fifty feet wide tore through its center. I suddenly felt the urge to pull over and sled and wished that out of some mystical insight we had brought sleds. My mind then returned to the picture of my six-year-old self sledding on that tiny hill and loving it. I thought of all the hills I had sledded on over the years, how they had progressed in size and steepness until sledding gradually lost its joy and I began skiing. This love of speed and snow, of practiced skill, just bordering on a total lack of control, was something that had grown and evolved as I grew and evolved. I had carried this love from my childhood into the present and knew it would follow into the future. As I sat in the car, watching the trees and houses blur past, I thought of other things I had brought with me as I grew older, thought of the pastimes which my present self has shared with my past selves. And I thought of the things I had been forced to leave in the past. So many things, taken for granted at one time or another, yet intrinsic to who I am today and who I am growing to be. Memories surfaced: coming home from school on a rainy day to warm chocolate chip cookies just out of the oven, snowball fights that last for hours, long, direction-less treks through the woods, waking up early on Christmas morning and staring done at all the presents under the tree.

I thought then too of all the time I have spent with my father and the things we used to do together. I remember following him through the vast New Hampshire woods, imitating his flat-footed walk. I would pick each foot up off the ground and then carefully set it back down on the earth, being careful not to drag it or break any twigs. I would follow him like this for hours, sometimes falling asleep when we would stop in one spot for a while. I remember standing at home plate, bottom of the sixth inning with the bases loaded and two strikes, feeling the heft of the aluminum bat in my hands and looking over at my Dad, mouthing "You can do it." Not for the first time, I realized how much my relationship with my Dad has changed over the years, how much my parents' divorce has affected me. There was a time when I thought the Dad I had known and loved so well before their divorce was a different man from the post divorce Dad. My earlier memories of my Dad are of us fishing and camping, of baseball games and watching "R" movies when my Mom wasn't around. My memories concerning my father around and right after the divorce are mainly of his absence, not being at baseball games or arriving late, promising to do stuff and then calling with a perfectly good excuse.

For a long time I did not see my father. Out of anger towards my Mother, or for what ever reason, he did not pay child support, making things very tough on her and on my sister and

me. My Mom had to work all the time and was always tired and stressed. As I walked home from the late bus in the dark one night, taking a shortcut across a snow-covered field, blue in the moon light, I felt I had lost both my parents. At times I hated my father, hated what he had done to my mother and my sister and me; at times I cried myself to sleep at night engulfed by the vast hollowness of the realization that things would never be the way they once were.

Yet other times I simply longed for his presence, just wanted to see him, to play catch or go camping. My Dad out of stubbornness, or hurt, or perhaps guilt, did not call or write or communicate with us in any way. For all of this neglect, for all the problems he caused my Mom, for all the sacrifices she had to make, she always told us that he loved us deeply and that he was just confused. My feelings toward my Dad varied, but eventually I decided that if I was to have a future with my father it would have to be me who made the call. So I did.

\* \* \*

My Dad sits comfortably at the wheel of his pick-up, his mind wandering amid the hundreds of crisscrossing deer tracks branching off from the worn pavement. His truck, less than a year old, already exhibits the signs of a laboring man. It could be any one of a hundred similar trucks, trucks owned by carpenters or electricians, dirty, littered with food packaging and cigarette packs, overflowing with tools and wires, pushed out of the way to make room for me. Any one of hundreds, yet specific and familiar; how many times had I ridden home from games in this truck with a hot fudge Sunday dripping onto my uniform, gone to work with my Dad to "help" him on the job, plunged rockily ahead on some logging road to get a perfect camp site he used to frequent as a kid.

Occasionally he glances over at me, squeezes my knee tenderly with a large, callused hand, holds it out for some peanuts, smiles, and drifts away again. Neither one of us is sure what to say. Occasionally we pull over and climb down to the river below, where my Dad stands silently assessing the spot. With a sense born of years spent on rivers such as this, he senses the prospects and then, unsatisfied, we climb back up through the roots and rocks to the truck and drive on. Sometimes he sings along with the radio, dances for my benefit, continually checking that the smile embedded on my face has not worn away. In time we find a spot he approves of, and get out our fishing poles and our cooler holding a small container of crawlers. I follow him down the embankment, holding my pole in one hand and using the other to grab trees for support.

He sets the blue plastic container on a rock and pulls out a crawler which he then pierces on his hook while it wriggles futility, looping it and then piercing it again. Less confident and out-of-practice, I try to imitate him, but the worm refuses to hold still long enough for me to pierce it. My Dad watches me for a minute then sets his own pole down and envelops my hand in his, as he used to long ago, firmly grips the crawler between my thumb and index finger and guides the hook through the squirming body, loops it then hooks it again, and again. He grabs his own pole from where it lay on the brown earth and points out a good spot. I watch as he casts deftly just above the intended spot and allows the river to carry the hook down into a deep overhang. He reels in his line and casts again, steps confidently across the rocks to another such hole. I try to mirror him, but generally end up casting into a rock whenever I try to follow his lead. Once in a while I glance over to see what he is doing, occasionally I catch him watching me and our eyes meet. Time passes in quick slices; one instant he is twenty feet away, the next he has moved ten feet to the left. And as we fish,

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separate but together, lost in the invaluable repetition of our actions.

We finish lunch and resume our melancholy ritual. As my body loses itself in the repetition, my mind is freed. The smell of the coming rain weighs heavily in the air. Suddenly I find myself standing in center field; smelling the freshly cut grass, the line-dried smell of my itchy Hunter's IGA uniform, the acrid bugspray on my visor, the oily leather of my mitt, and above all, the smell of the coming rainstorm. Lightning slashes the sky and thunder rumbles, and as if on signal the rain sweeps across the field, breaking like a levy. The coaches yell to us and we run into the old, run down dugouts, the water running down my back in little rivers. My Dad, his IGA coach's hat barely covering his head, helps me grab my stuff, picks up my batter's glove from the ground and runs to his truck with me close behind. Inside and dry, he congratulates me on a good game, and another win, it was the fifth inning and counted as a complete game. He asks me if I feel like a burger at Bailey's, "just don't tell your sister," and we pull into the procession of cars, tail lights blurred, the sound of the windshield wipers trying vainly to defeat the pouring rain.

I feel a tug on my line, and again, then pull slowly back on my pole, then a quick jerk, and reel in the desperate fish. Before I pull it out of the water I know it is too small. I gently hold it between my foot and the rock I stand on and work the hook out of its mouth. Then I toss it back, think maybe I'll see him again in the future.

The shadows grow long over the river, the bottom becomes more and more obscure and the wind picks up. I glance up and watch as my Dad strides over the rocks towards me. He asks me if I've caught anything new and I show him my two small Brook Trout which he lays on top of the others in the cooler. His eyes sparkle as he mentions how he plans to fry the trout up in bread crumbs, seasoned with lemon and tons of pepper.

We bend our poles slightly and secure our hooks to the guide rings, then march up the embankment. The sky has become overcast and it has cooled off. We place the poles in the bed and get in. My Dad reaches back into the myriad of stuff in the extended cab and pulls out a flannel shirt, which he hands to me. I slip in on and say thanks, deeply inhaling his smell imbedded in the worn fabric.

We drive back the way we came. Somewhere on that great expanse of highway it begins to rain, first a drizzle and then picking up to a downpour. The rain pounds methodically at the roof and I, wrapped in warmth and familiarity, begin to float off. I am aware of the beating rain as if it were in some area deep with in me, or falling gently on a roof far away.

\* \* \*

I once thought that before the divorce I had been as close to my father as I ever would be, that the divorce had forever changed what we had. For a time I disregarded the present, clung futilely to my sacred memories of the past. With time, I have learned to accept the past. To learn from it, treasure it, but not to let it dominate me. I have to let go of that time, of that Dad, and accept the new one. If I don't, any future we might have is lost before it has begun. Neither one of us is the person we once were; my Dad has grown older and so have I, our interests have changed. We will probably never hunt together again, never play catch on a summer evening, or share a Christmas morning. These things now belong to the past, to our past. Yet some parts of our relationship will remain the same.

My Dad will never really grasp that I can't stand mayonnaise-slathered sandwiches or "bleedingly" raw meat, but he will always be willing to drive deep into Sandwich Notch to find the perfect campsite or take me out for cheeseburgers and frappes after work. Through my memory I will always have these times, can follow my Dad through the forest whenever I want or stand immobile beside him on a flat boulder next to a rushing river. Through my memories, these times with my Dad are never more than a familiar scent, a particular light, or a phone call away.

Stephen Huff  
Melvin Village, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Harvard Knowles

### JULY IN PARIS

It is July in Paris and hot.  
My dress is an indescribable color  
and makes me feel beautiful.  
As we walk toward Les Halles,  
it clings to my legs like smoke.

We pass a man selling postcards.  
I think of home,  
Mom, waiting at the airport  
with my best friend,  
and the news team,  
to talk about the bomb.

I wonder if the people on the metro  
felt beautiful when they died,  
wearing smoke.

Rachael Bandell  
Baltimore, MD  
Carver Center for Arts and Technology  
Mrs. Bonny Boto

### IF TIME WASN'T LINEAR

If time wasn't linear, maybe I could spend years  
lying next to the river sipping diet cola  
& talking to you. Maybe I'd let you take us rowing  
the way you did that day, renting a boat,  
promising not to drown us.

We floated under a stone bridge & were swallowed  
by the silent river valley world, stared up  
at slanted shapes of houses and churches  
of the town on the hill. I peeled oranges  
& we sent their peels floating like tiny orange canoes  
to nourish ducks who swam slowly beside us.

This time we'd stay out longer, stay so long on still  
green waters we'd learn again to make stories  
of cloud shadows & time would stop pushing us forward.  
I envy our orange peel canoes, so willing  
to be pushed along, never having to fight  
the strong winds of time.

Jennifer Burke  
Baltimore, MD  
Carver Center for Arts and Technology  
Bonny Boto





Vikki Leta  
St. Marys, PA

#### UNTITLED

"There was nothing in our experience, nothing that had prepared us for being taken from our life."

- *A Map of the World*, Jane

Hamilton

When winter slides under the door, makes the grass crispy, and colors the world a smudgy grey, I get the sense that something is being pulled out from under me. The earth's axes tilt, thrusting us toward the darkness, taking the sunlight after only a few precious hours. The memories of warmth and beaches and afternoon lemonade can make the grey grow brighter, but I can't help feeling that spring rebirth is just a fancy for those who rejoice over first buds. Death seems so final, so dark, so cold. The green, encased in layers of bubbly, cracking ice, looks so far away; it is as if warmth stands on the other side of the glass, and I have no hammer with which to shatter it and set it free.

Each year, of course, spring returns, fragile as breath.

Yet, I cannot help but wonder about those few who do not find their spring, those for whom winter comes, and never retreats. I find myself reliving the sympathy that overtook me while watching "The Browning Version," a movie about a teacher who realizes, after devoting his life to instructing, that he has failed to convey his love of the classics to his students, and thus, failed at his work. Aside from that, he discovers that he has lost his wife and the respect of his colleagues because of his lack of self-respect. His only apology, during his final speech, asks for forgiveness because "I will never be able to forgive myself." Can a man ever forgive himself for wasting his life?

And, was his life truly wasted?

The birth of a star is a common, miraculous, unbalanced occasion. The gases in a huge molecular cloud in space will, simply by chance, be slightly denser in some areas than in others. Due to gravity, the region will begin to condense further and further into itself, compressing the gases and heating up that section of cloud. Within that dense area there will be smaller pockets of gas that condense and compress faster and, as the area heats up, a star begins to form. At extreme temperature hydrogen begins to fuse, and thus our little pocket of dense gas has officially become a star. It is quite remarkable, that all this happens without the aid of humans. A perfect, glowing, white mass, controlled only by the forces which created us and, in turn, will cause us to die.

How can you tell if you have wasted your life? Is there a sign at the finish saying "Turn back now, wrong path chosen"? The teacher in "The Browning Version" had what he thought was complete command over his life. He taught what he loved, he kept his marriage under control, he was pushed around but he didn't mind much - his world moved in a cycle of comfortable normalcy.

One day, all that lived around him began to condense. The natural gravity of the universe took over and pressed everything together like two palms and the teacher discovered his foolishness. Is this because of a miracle? Did God look down upon this courageous soldier and decide to show him true order?

No - just as the creation of stars is random and certain, so is the surrender of human order to the celestial. The universe has been up and running for considerably longer than we have been taking charge; eventually, all lives are hurtled into orbit and forced to gather themselves up again. Just as winter slides absolutely into spring, so must every human be completely aware of the force that controls us. We think we are perfection, but then, humans have been selfish for centuries; we believe that we are all there is in the galaxy and that evolution has led to us, naturally.

On the contrary - we have led to evolution. Our imperfections, our imbalances with the natural cycles of things have led the universe to seek a better alternative. And thus, all lives are in vain unless we force ourselves to become part of the celestial movement - unless we force ourselves to become part of the stars.

As my high school graduation approaches, the child inside my heart is screaming. She knows that her time in this body is almost over, if I wish, and that she will soon be locked into darker chambers until she is rediscovered. I can hear her crying, not because she knows I will lock her away, but because she knows that, no matter how much I want to hold on to her, I cannot; the passing of childhood into adulthood is inevitable: I can kick and scream forever and some of her will still slip into the darkness.

It is this surrender of control that turns the backs of my eyelids red at night and draws me out of the conscious and into the imagination where I can play. In the deeper regions of the mind, where magic is condensed, tiny stars are still forming.

Alyssa Joy Brightman  
Simsbury, CT  
Westminster School  
Dr. Brian Ford



WAITER, SERVE ME UP A MAN

Waiter, serve me up a man,  
toss him in a dish  
with seven cherries.  
Offer lofty sponge cake for  
his head to lie on.  
Pile fresh whipped cream  
aboard his stomach.

Waiter, serve me up a man,  
flower him with parsley,  
the sweet fragrance of quince.  
Dabble his core with spice,  
slowly baste his skin  
with molasses,  
wrap his body in a warm pita shell.

Waiter, serve me up a man,  
don't spare the pepper,  
but keep the bitter lemon away.  
Give me side dishes:  
oven-warm bread stuffing,  
fresh cherry tomatoes,  
sweet baby corn in melted butter,  
and for a special sauce,  
let him tickle my taste buds with love.

Amanda Ludwin  
Towson, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones

SULMONA, 5 A.M.

The linked cars, like connected sardine tins,  
suffocating closely packed passengers,  
creak to a halt, and my mother as usual, in no rush,  
straightens, raising travel wearied arms  
and useless legs, as she casually watches  
the frazzled businessmen in their crumpled tweeds,  
tripping to reach the freedom of the station.  
My mother stands at last, a ruffled swan,  
collecting her crotchety children,  
and slowly making her way off the train -  
baby snuggled into the pram,  
bags hanging off each handle,  
children hanging onto the bags.

The Italian streets are bumpy and narrow,  
I stare in disbelief as the trim car  
squeezes through the bluish dawn  
to our destination -  
the piazza empty,  
the majestic fountain, dry,  
and the cafes and groceries, still.  
I can imagine the jovial owners  
groggily having their morning coffee  
and *pain chocolat*  
before light forces them  
to fully open their eyes.  
Just as the cobblestones and shops blur,  
and as my mother's broken Italian

starts to ring in my ears, dimming slowly,  
the whirring engine shuts off.

My mother and I trudge up  
the dimly lit stairs,  
with Jeannie and Meg in tow.  
She is victorious, her purse heavier  
than she had expected after the ride.  
My aunty Sheila, her  
henna-dyed hair standing out  
from the roots, in a mass of frizzled disaster,  
stumblingly greets us, as she overflows  
with apologies for not showing up.  
Her thyroid had started to act up, and she'd fainted.  
My mother drops the luggage  
and leads her sister to the kitchen  
for a hot cup of tea and some food.  
Meanwhile, I find a bed in our room,  
and as my ears begin to ring,  
I glance around at the walls of old books,  
and try to warm my feet, burrowing  
in the feather covers,  
and absently pushing Shempsa's cold, slimy  
nose away from my face.

Katherine McDonald  
Baltimore, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones

NEW HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

This land was a find, she thinks, for the hundredth time,  
scrubbing the lettuce in her new sink,  
her husband's back curved over newly tilled soil,  
unplanted pots of morning glory,  
and her daughter's tiny hands  
cradling handfuls of the dark earth  
as if its warmth could seep to her very bones.  
She pushes the kerchief from her forehead  
with the back of her wrist,  
rubs a wet palm through her hair,  
lets the dirty drops of water roll down her neck.  
From the heat of the afternoon  
Rose runs onto the linoleum,  
dirt crumbling off her  
as if she had just emerged from the ground herself.  
She has a discovery:  
she runs up to the sink,  
drops it in among the floating lettuce leaves.  
The dirt cakes off slowly, floating to the surface  
and the object begins to take shape.  
Rose, impatient, pulls it up for a second time,  
stretches out her arm,  
presses it to her flesh,  
and the match is perfect:  
wrist to elbow.  
Her slow gait to the porch becomes a run,  
the dogs begin to bark,  
and in seconds  
she is at her knees  
on the edge of the hole,  
ripping through the earth with frenzied fingers.  
There, in the corner of the garden,  
traces of aged white, the fragility of a child.

Elizabeth Lee  
Sudbury, MA  
Milton Academy



It took four men to carry it inside. I couldn't figure out why the box was so heavy; Joey had only weighed 85 lbs. A few days ago, my father, Mr. Brandis, Dylan, or even the aging funeral director, could have easily bench-pressed him on their own. The ornate cherry box covered with intricate carvings and a new coat of wood polish looked only a little larger than the drawers to my parents' cherry dresser; it obviously couldn't account for very much weight. The only other time I had seen a casket that small was in a funeral procession we drove by at St. Patrick's Church in New York City. I remember asking my mom why the casket looked so stunted. She told me it must be for a really short adult. Even then, I hated being patronized.

Despite the size of the casket, the four men struggled as they headed toward the front of the room. My father's feet pushed along slowly, in no hurry to end the physical discomfort. At that particular moment, the other three men seemed much more concerned with their increasingly white finger tips than the occasion. There seemed to be an unspoken war among the four pairs of feet, my father greatly outnumbered. The men silently agreed upon an average speed, and soon after they reached their destination.

Everything looked ready. The cherry box sat on a stand, and eight chairs stood in perfect formation to the left of the immaculate room. The bright yellow walls clashed against the solemn faces which they enclosed. People were scheduled to arrive momentarily. I wasn't ready to face such a crowd - people I hadn't seen since the accident - people from another lifetime. I felt like an actor with a big part in a play, yet I hadn't read the script. My parents lowered themselves into the first two chairs and Mary, my oldest sister followed suit. I hesitated for a moment before realizing that with Joey gone I happened to be the next oldest. After my younger sister and brother took their respective seats, Mr. Brandis and his son, Dylan, took the last two chairs. Dylan, Joey's best friend, had witnessed the accident.

The things they carried were partly determined by the size of their bank accounts. Flower arrangements varied from a daisy wrapped in babies breadth to dozens of roses and wildflowers in crystal vases. Most of Joey's thirteen-year-old friends carried a single flower to place on the bottom, unopened half of the casket, about all their allowances could buy. Mr. and Mrs. Haffar, notorious for their wealth, brought a breathtaking arrangement of lotus flowers in a basket as large as the cherry casket. Aunt Theresa, Joey's godmother, entered the wake carrying a large pine wreath into which she had interwoven shiny baby blue ribbon and tiny azure buds. Next to the wreath and other flowers, the soft white lotus flowers stood out like a swan amongst a group of ducks. I appreciated the time and energy Aunt Theresa had put into the wreath.

What they carried was partly a result of, or lack of, tact. Halfway through the wake a classmate of mine named Karl emerged from the tidal wave of people hurling toward us and Joey. A small spot of white leaked out of Karl's tightly clenched fist. He came over toward me and opened his hand, revealing a piece of paper with something scribbled on it.

"I'm, uh, sorry about what happened. A really bad thing happened to me too, so I wrote this poem about it for you. Maybe it'll help."

I looked down at the paper. He had written a poem about his dog, Pepper, getting hit by a car. Several minutes later, Joey's eccentric art teacher came to the front of the line. Wearing pink bell-bottoms and a purple crocheted sweater which desperately called for a shirt underneath, she carried withered roses in her hand.

"Everything that is beautiful dies. Joey was beautiful."

With that said, she handed each one of us a dead flower and walked away.

Only giving us a few seconds to recover this time, Mrs. McCarthy directly followed. Her son, Dave, and Joey had been good friends. She carried nothing but a look of relief. She approached my mom and wrapped her large arms around the entire circumference of my mom's stomach and arms.

I'm soooooo sorry about Joey, I mean, that could have been *Dave*. I almost brought him, you know. But then, well... we decided that the weather forecast looked poor, so we stayed home. Gosh, I've never been so happy to miss a ski trip. Listen though, be strong, and never blame yourself. It was an accident. No one could have predicted it... I just got lucky."

The things they carried varied in usefulness. Our next-door neighbor handed my mom a gift certificate to go out to dinner since, as the neighbor explained, she probably wouldn't feel like cooking. I'm not sure she felt like going out either. Other people left frozen food in a room next door. Dead meat in pretty containers. People carried a wide variety of forms of consolation as well, the most popular being the hug. Perhaps a hug could make everything better, as though your bruise might vanish if Mom kisses it. People I didn't even know hugged me that evening. People who didn't even know Joey hugged me that evening. I had no idea what the right thing to carry was, but I did know I hadn't seen it yet.

What they carried physically, depended on the guilt they carried emotionally. My grandmother arrived fashionably late, as usual, with gifts for everyone in my family. It never failed. Grandma saw every occasion as a chance to give gifts, although the occasions on which she visited I could count easily on two hands. In her family money spent equaled love held. My mom, two sisters and I all received locket; my dad and other brother, framed pictures. My locket proudly boasted the soft glow of 24 ct. gold into which three small letters, **CBJ** had been engraved in the bottom right-hand corner. She told us the three initials stood for our first name, Bryne, and Joey, respectively. A small picture of Joey was pasted on the inside of the locket alongside a braided lock of his hair. I wanted to clasp it around my eleven-year old neck and carry it for the rest of my life, yet another part of me fought desperately to resist the temptation of throwing it back in her satisfied face, disrupting the perfect equilibrium of the layers of make-up applied that morning in an attempt to conceal her growing number of wrinkles. I didn't need a picture to remember Joey; I didn't need a locket carrying his picture next to my heart - I already carried him **inside** of it. I placed the locket inside my left coat pocket. My grandmother's lips pinched in a tight smile, and her head tilted backwards. She felt good about herself. She had lots of pictures of Joey and having the lockets made was a nice gesture, but it didn't make up for all of the lost time. She knew his face from pictures and his name from her Christmas list. She had missed her chance to get to know Joey. Later that night I caught her staring at his picture. For the first time I watched my grandmother's stone cold eyes melt into tears. Her Adam's Apple caused a small ripple in the loose skin of her neck as she swallowed hard and released a sigh. She knew.

Others carried tears, well-planned apologies, and advice; some because they genuinely cared and some because they felt obligated. I heard hundreds of apologies that night, yet none of them stand out in my mind. I saw thousands of tears; yet none affected me aside from the incessant rivers flowing from my mother's eyes. The other occupants of the eight chairs cried sporadically; their periods of silence drew more of my attention. My eyes remained dry and dead that night. I wasn't sure if I had simply used up all of my salt and water resources or if the lack of emotion I displayed was solely a result of the large number of

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people around.

For the most part, the same notion went for the advice given that night. No one said anything extremely lucid. The basic sentiment was, "Things will get better." A man I had never met, proved the exception, his advice a combination of maturity and personal experience. What he offered wasn't particularly uplifting or optimistic, but it felt true and real, two characteristics which had gotten lost amidst the confusion of the past few days.

"I can't tell you that things are going to get better. I can't tell you that the pain will pass as the hours do. All I can say is that you are lucky to have had thirteen years with Joey and you have to make those thirteen years last a lifetime. All you can do now is put one foot in front of the other and focus on what you have to live for."

Their connection to what they carried could often be found in their connection to Joey. A lot of the people who passed Joey's casket not only saw him for the last time, but the first as well. They were attempting to provide emotional support for the members of our family or Dylan; they hadn't come for Joey. They came bearing flowers for Joey and other gifts. One of my best friends, Trista, brought me a silver necklace with a lacrosse stick dangling from the end. A single pearl rested in the molded mesh of the stick. Trista, who refused to wear anything but jeans and sneakers, knew Joey from their lacrosse team, but she was my friend.

For the most part they carried themselves with decorum. I never fathomed just how much everyone had loved Joey. The past three days had given me ample time to contemplate the amazing qualities he had embodied, yet I never realized how many other people had seen the same things in him. I didn't recognize some of the fairly rowdy and immature kids in Joey's grade. That day the solemnness of the occasion weighted heavily on their shoulders as well; their hands folded neatly in front of relatively formal attire, instead of plastic wrapping the toilet bowls in the bathroom and tying girls' pigtails. Most of the boys shed no tears, wearing instead the more manly concerned-yet-not-overly-sensitive mask. Most of the girls hid nothing. Those who felt like crying, cried; those who didn't, didn't. I belonged to the latter group. The emotional girls' tears stained their perfectly ironed dresses, yet for the first time none of them seemed to care. The situation proved to be more than little products of "Fluffyville" could handle; it was more than I could handle.

Although most people carried themselves with decorum, not everyone remained composed. For some, the lack of composure was understandable and appropriate. My mom frequently had to leave the room. For others, displays of emotion and devastation intended to display compassion were forced. Aunts and uncles, who had never taken the time to get to know Joey, acted hysterically. Teachers who dished out detentions and character judgments more frequently than the woman working in the cafeteria dished out lumpy mashed potatoes, were the first to bawl over the wasted potential. I'm sure they were carrying grief, but I had a hard time remaining arbitrary. My thoughts were more focused on my parents who took their kind on a ski trip which cost them their only biological son; Dylan, who watched his best friend catch an edge on the snow and hit a tree head-first; my brothers and sisters and me who lost our brother, our friend, our favorite practical joker (most of the time), and any semblance of a stable family life. I'm sure they were carrying pain, but I had a hard time remaining arbitrary.

Eventually everyone left, leaving their baggage with the eight of us. They left behind their gifts and much more. They had carried into the funeral parlor a sense of obligation which was relieved the second they made it through the long line.

They also had carried advice, pity, apologies, and guilt, which they unloaded onto our already drooping backs. They may have carried some of the sadness back home with them, but we could never leave any of it behind. The love, the anger, the good memories, the bad memories, the guilt, the betrayal, the emptiness, the gratification - they clung to us like incessant fleas; fleas which were dually parasitic and advantageous. The others left and went on with their lives, picking up new baggage. Our baggage seemed permanent, both a comforting and discouraging thought.

In addition to everything else, almost every one of us carried a single object which we thought Joey treasured. The casket was small; he could only be buried with so much. An uncomfortable pause filled the room. I don't think anyone felt sure of how to proceed. Dylan and Mr. Brandis shuffled their feet in unison. They set their gazes directly on their shoes and it didn't appear their stance would change without some sign from a person in my family. I looked toward my older sister figuring she would know what to do, since she always thought she knew best, but she seemed baffled as well. She sat nervously cracking her knuckles and biting her lower lip with metal-covered teeth. My two younger siblings sat Indian style in front of their respective chairs, their heads cradled sideways in their laps and thumbs in mouth.

My parents appeared less confused, than emotionally drained. My dad, shielding his face with his large hands, sat slouched over. Dark bags had formed under my mom's eyes, and the rest of her skin looked red and raw. It was as if the two of them were drowning under feet of water, and I didn't know how to swim. I didn't know how to fix this situation either. Part of me felt like it wasn't my place to get involved; I had fought with Joey more than anyone. I had also spent more time with him than anyone.

My mom finally stood up and made her way toward the casket. She knelt down in front of it and bent her head down like someone asking for penance. Her lips moved, but I could hear nothing. The room held an eerie silence, as if someone had a TV control for the building and pressed the mute button. She stood up and kissed Joey's forehead. She lifted the gold cross nestled between her thumb and forefinger vertically, like a priest holding the host. Then my mom buried in neatly with the confines of his casket and sat back down.

No instruction period followed as usual. My dad simply walked up next. For the first time, I noticed that he carried nothing in his hand. Maybe it was in his pocket I thought to myself. He too, spoke silently to my brother and then rose to kiss his head. Only my dad never placed anything in the casket. I knew he didn't treasure material goods, but there had to be something, some tangible representative of what Joey wanted to be buried with. Then he turned around and I understood. His eyelids were drooping and he was bent over as if he had just ran a long race. I had never seen him so emotionally drained before. It was love. My dad gave Joey love to take to his grave with him; the one thing Joey had always sought for. My dad disliked sharing his feelings, and he rarely chose too. Yet, the vast emptiness reflected in his transparent eyes revealed how much love he held inside of him.

And that set the scene for the hour and a half to come. There seemed to be an unspoken chronological order; the same order as the chairs, with one exception - me. I wanted to go last, so I would be alone with Joey; I didn't want to perform. When my turn came about I whispered to my younger sister to go next.

Mary carried Joey's first drawing of the cartoon character he created, Lucas. Lucas had come to Joey one night in a dream, or so he said. The morning after the "enlightenment" Joey had bounded downstairs and told Mom to drop everything she was doing; he needed to go to Commercial Art Supplies before the

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"muse" left him. He had spent days creating Lucas, a large head with a jutting chin and odd smirk atop a proportionally small body. Some of Joey came out in the drawing; the sensitive eyes, boyish hair-cut, and a special "I know more than you do" look.

Katie carried a lacrosse stick. He had treasured that stick. Joey had dyed the head blue with permanent R.I.T. dye, only leaving the word "Tarheels" in white. He had shaped the head perfectly, nuking it in the microwave to soften it. His first attempt at this process had not been so successful; the head formed a flat layer of green plastic on the bottom of the microwave. The perfect blue head was his fourth attempt at this process. He had purchased a wooden shaft for it and taped it to fit his own hands; hands which would never receive enough time to fully heal from the boiling blue R.I.T. dye they accidentally exposed themselves to.

Jimmy carried a picture of our family; the last picture with seven visible members. I glimpsed at it before he stood up. It felt like yesterday that my mom was desperately trying to color-coordinate our outfits, yet the frozen smiles looked so out-dated.

Dylan carried a white lacrosse team jacket signed by the Gate brothers. It was the jacket from the team Mr. Brandis coached, and the team Joey and Dylan co-captained. Joey had gotten the signatures at The Final Four, the only evidence that he had watched the greats play since he had his thumb in front of the lens for every picture he took.

My turn arrived, yet no movement. I wanted to do this; I needed to do this; I couldn't do this. I wanted to be alone.

"Mom, is it all right if I do this alone? Then everyone can come back."

"Yeah, that's fine. We've all said our good-byes. Take your time."

"Thanks."

After they piled out of the room, I approached the casket slowly. It felt as if a hundred hands were pulling at my feet, pulling me away. I won the struggle in the end. Looking at Joey's body inside of that casket is something I will never be able to explain. The smell of my brother's beautiful body reminded me of unhardened Elmer's Washable Glue. They were my brother's hands, lips, ears, arms, yet he looked molded, like painted plaster-of-Paris. The sarcastic, playful smile ceased, the intelligent eyes closed, and the skillful hands slept. We had practically filled the casket with the things that had cluttered Joey's life; with all the objects he loved and hated, and all of the objects which loved and hated him. I wondered what they would put in my casket if I died. Would mine be empty? Joey had been so talented; he had had so much to live for. Why couldn't it have been me? I'd take his place.

I came with full hands. Characteristic of my indecisiveness and inability to pack light, I carried **two** objects: A Led Zeppelin C.D. and Where the Red Fern Grows. Where the Red Fern Grows doesn't rank among my favorite books now, but at the time it had provided the grounds for a brief friendly relationship. We read it at the same time and both loved it. At night when we discussed it across the hallway separating our rooms we let our shields down. We cracked no jokes and pulled no hair, we simply talked while we played a game of cards.

The Led Zeppelin C.D. stored Joey's favorite song: "Stairway to Heaven." I hoped his stairway to heaven was as he imagined it. It should have been a nice trip: no more pain to carry. He climbed the steps free of embarrassment, fear, loneliness, hatred, confusion, jealousy, regret, enemies, zits, anal people, boiling dye, shots, propaganda, and prejudices. For him, all of that died when his body did. He carried only his soul, some of which stayed with us through his legacy and memories. I kissed his left cheek, which felt like cold moist clay, and a tear spilled into the casket, filling the only room left once the C.D.

and book joined its contents.

I ended up at home later that night. I made my way up to my bedroom, like a car on cruise control. I clumsily shed my jacket and threw it on the hardwood floor. A small golden object fell out of my pocket and spun a few inches across the practically friction-less surface. I had forgotten it was there. I bent over and inspected it for a few minutes before putting it in a small wooden box on my dresser for safe keeping; another small wooden box which carried relatively little of Joey.

Chrissy Byrne  
Fayetteville, NY  
Phillips Exeter Academy

## JULY

Once I ran,  
hot-blooded, fevered, tan, spindly legs,  
sticky popsicled hands,  
And my brand new stars and stripes dress,  
through the thick streets.  
The fireworks, boat-slip, drag-queens, stumbled walk,  
cooking linguica, and the hum of the T.V.'s  
inside each glowing house,  
with shouts of the big game  
swimming by.  
The crowds, like protesters on Washington,  
like kids to the last lick of batter,  
like lions to the kill,  
swept me up  
and buried  
me  
away.  
All night while the fireworks screamed above the harbor,  
I crawled through the crippled streets,  
searching each empty alley  
for familiarity.  
Midnight would come,  
would find me suffocated in my father's scoured apron.  
He, home from the restaurant,  
smelling of Linguini Alfredo and Involtini,  
and I, lost again in the folds of gingham,  
with his hot palm  
pressed against my sweaty back.  
And outside,  
Red banners, loose shoes, ashing Reds, burning charcoal,  
the elegant transsexuals, the fat, camera wielding  
tourists, the pot-smoking high-schoolers, the dirty  
children, a squid fisherman, a foul smelling dock,  
a poster, a parliament, a picture, a posse,  
an oyster, an outhouse, an open fortune  
Teller, a t-shirt sale, a tambourine  
player, two lesbians and their  
pittbull, and the raging  
fireworks hung from the  
silent trees  
like omens.

Julia Minsky  
Englewood, NJ  
John Brancato  
The Dwight-Englewood School





Erica Ianuzzi  
Eastchester, NY

### THE PIPER

Innocent and pure,  
we watched  
your steady treading  
through the dust and the dung  
of the alley,  
and your soul  
called ours to follow.  
So we came,  
stepping carefully  
in the prints you had made.  
Until, one by one,  
we formed a silent army  
who trod in the footsteps  
made before us.

"Gone," they cried, "the children are gone  
from their games in the streets!"  
"Gone; as the wind from the boughs,  
they are gone!"  
"Gone; as a songbird pierced through the breast,  
they are gone!"

I, as the last  
in your long line of followers,  
heard from afar,  
the oldsters' cries,  
carried on the wind  
like the voices of angels.

With what calm they could muster,  
the mayor and his council,  
in the quiet of his parlor,  
reasoned with each other, saying  
"Who would have thought it?  
He was such a nice man-  
played for our wives at the annual county fair!"

I once heard the grocer  
tell my mother what your plan was-  
lure all the rats from  
the grainary and the garret,  
from petticoats and pockets  
to their doom  
in the river.

The council and the mayor, unaccustomed  
to the grime and the dirt of the streets  
searched, as they were in  
their waistcoats and their frippery,  
down through the alleys  
and the whitewashed lanes of Hamelin.

We went through a cave  
that simply wasn't there before,  
and you unstrung your bagpipes  
and played to my comrades  
who were fresh from their  
hopscotch and their jumprobes  
till they kicked up a storm  
of dust  
in the thoroughfare-  
kicked up the dust you had trod upon.  
Around and around  
in groups and in pairs  
they twirled till they sagged  
and your breath began to shorten.  
And still we were silent,  
like rabbits seeking safety.  
Silent, for the sounds  
of our toes in the dust.

Finally, the citizens of Hamelin  
stopped their desperate search  
and the mayor made a speech  
on the steps of City Hall.  
"Friends," he said, "I am sorry.  
We still have our money,  
but the rats and the children-  
they have gone from our lives  
like the dew from the grass  
in the morning."

You have taken us away, Sir,  
but there are rats in the street here,  
here in the mountain.  
Rats scabble on the stone  
so their claws click  
softly in the dark.  
Take me home to Hamelin-  
you may have your money  
if you'll take me home to Hamelin.

Rebecca Silverman  
Conway, SC  
Conway High School  
Ann Twigg



I was uncomfortable standing there in the corner of the large ballroom, but I didn't want to admit why. I took a sip of the cold Sprite in my hand and tugged at my tie; the know seemed to be getting tighter. The scene around me was a beehive: busy worker bees in tuxedos and cocktail dresses buzzed around to each other, some speaking, others doing some strange motions. The hive was the Pittsburgh Hearing, Speech, and Deaf Services 75th anniversary gala, and the bees were the guests. Some were staff of the organization, some were donors, and about a quarter of the guests were deaf. Being around them made me uncomfortable, and I was petrified that one might come up to me and start signing and expect an answer.

Why was I so uncomfortable around them? When I thought about it, I remembered having the same feeling around other people with disabilities. Was I the only one who had this unsavory attitude? I had to seek either justification or remedy.

How could I do this, though? I couldn't just take a survey to find out other people's thoughts. Most would probably answer according to what is "politically correct," not what they truly felt. I had to get on the other side; I had to become disabled and see how people acted around me. Since I am not disabled, I had to come up with some other way to experience it. I thought about asking someone with a handicap to describe the reactions they get, but I needed to see firsthand from an unbiased source. Having played many characters on the stage who are very different from me, I figured that I could finally use my thespian skills in a less conventional way: I would become blind for a day.

As any actor knows, a prop and costume always help to get into character. I needed something that would convey my condition to everyone immediately. The first thing I thought of was a seeing eye dog, but I realized that my Black Lab might have been a little too excited to be convincing. The next best thing, I figured, was a white cane. I called numerous surgical suppliers and very few had any. Plus, most of them were too expensive for a one time experience. I decided to make one myself. To do this, I bought a three-and-a-half foot wooden dowel rod, a black plastic tip, red electrical tape, and a foot of black hose. I painted the rod white, glued the black tip on, wrapped the red tape around a portion of it, and slid the hose on as a handle. Since I had never studied a blind cane up close, it looked quite unconvincing to me. I could only hope that it would have the same effect on everyone else. To complete the costume, I found a pair of dark sunglasses to disguise my eye movements and a black hat to discourage anyone I knew from recognizing me. The overall appearance was very effective.

Next, I chose a spot for my observation; it had to be somewhere where a blind person would have trouble getting around by themselves. Also, it had to be a place where I wouldn't run into anyone I knew. Based on these two criteria, the Pittsburgh airport was a perfect lab for my experiment: safe, public, familiar, but also big and confusing. There would be plenty of situations in which a blind person might require assistance.

There were a few things I was looking for: how many people offered their assistance, the way people acted around me, and what made them feel that way. Maybe through observing how other people acted, I could clear up the preconceptions which made me feel the way I did.

I slipped on my black J. Crew baseball cap, positioned the dark sunglasses on my face, and wrestled the homemade white cane from the back seat. "What the hell am I doing here?" I muttered under my breath as I awkwardly pulled myself out of

the driver's seat. I couldn't believe I was going through with it. I tapped the cane from side to side as I walked quickly out of the dark corner of the parking garage and navigated my way nimbly between parked cars and over drains. Too fast, I thought; a blind person can't walk this fast. I slowed down, walked in the middle of the aisles, and tapped my cane heavily on the ground. Every few steps, the cane lodged itself in a crack in the pavement and the handle jammed into my palm. Great, this was going to be even harder than I'd thought.

Upon reaching the hallway, I came across a woman and her twenty-ish daughter. They were discussing the daughter's trip with fervent hand motions and smiles: the airplane food, the vodka she'd sneaked off the beverage cart, but they stopped in mid-sentence when they noticed my cane and sunglasses. They stared for a second, not looking me in the eye, then quickly snapped their heads straight ahead and continued on their path without speaking. The silence was probably just as uncomfortable for me as it was for them.

I continued tapping my way through the long corridor, then headed toward the escalator. A boy of about five stared at me for a while and tugged on his mother's wool sweater. Succumbing to her son's nagging, she turned to see me. After staring for a second herself, she thumped her hand on the top of his head and turned it away as I passed by.

I had to suppress the urge to speed down the escalator to the train which led to the airside terminal. I knew the way so well, but I knew if my director were there, he would tell me to "hold my character." I slowed down and eventually boarded the crowded train but no one seemed to notice me in the confusion. My left hand grasped the cold aluminum pole tightly, and my right held firmly to my cane as the electric motor pushed us along.

"This train is now arriving at concourses A, B, C, and D. Please hold on."

"You'll be getting off on the right," a voice said quietly a few feet behind me. I swung around to face the voice, but there was no one who appeared to be looking at me. The train slowed to a stop, the doors rolled open, and I stepped out, tapping my cane left, front, right, front, left, front, right, front. I walked straight ahead, even though I knew the escalators were to the left. "The escalator is to your left. About fifty feet." It was the same unidentified voice I had heard on the train.

"Thanks," I said quietly, turning my body but keeping my head down. As I made my way to the escalator, I could see the man who had helped me out of the corner of my eye. I judged from his thinning hair that he was around forty. When I was a few feet away from the first step, I started to wander off to the right slightly to see what his reaction would be. My cane bumped the side railing and I felt his hand take my arm hesitantly and guide me in the right direction. I thanked him, but he didn't respond. When we stepped off the escalator and into the center of the airport, the man breezed off in the direction of a gate without looking back.

His reaction to my disability was like that of many others that day. They studied my uncertain gait and swinging white cane from across the corridor for minutes before deciding to come near me. Even when they finally had built up the courage to approach me, they acted as if my arm were made of glass; like it might break if they squeezed too tightly. A few people tried to make small talk: "So, are you having a good Christmas?" "You from around here?" "Nice airport, huh?" Besides the childish manner in which everyone treated me, there was one other thing that really bothered me: no one openly referred to the fact that I was blind. What were they thinking, that I didn't want to talk about this fairly central aspect of my life? Did they think it had slipped my mind that I couldn't see? Or perhaps they didn't want to remind me and risk disturbing my fragile emotions.



continued from page 14  
There was one exception: one person who spoke to me candidly. I was in the center of the food court trying to look like I needed help finding something. I had been there for quite a while, getting hungrier by the minute, when I noticed a woman bussing tables coming towards me. "Do ya need some help?" she asked, taking my hand tightly and speaking gruffly. I was shocked by the contrast of her firm approach to the incertitude of all the others.

"Yes, please," I said. "I'm trying to find the Sbarro. I can tell it's around here somewhere, but there are just too many smells to tell."

She took hold of my shoulders firmly and swung me around to face the pizza place. "It's right over there, deary." She walked me to the counter and went back to wiping down the tables. I ordered my lunch and one of the employees at Sbarro started leading me to the tables. The lady looked up from bussing a table and marched over. "I'll take it from here," she said. "Right over there, straight ahead about thirty feet." I took her arm and she led me briskly to an empty table for four. She took my tray and put it down on the table as I situated myself in the chair and put my cane on my lap. "Y'know, they didn't give you a napkin," she said.

"Really?" I responded, groping around on my tray.

"No. They usually don't, but I certainly will." She sauntered over to Wok 'n Roll and picked up a stack of napkins. "Here y'go. They're right next to your left hand."

"Thanks, I appreciate it," I said, picking up my pizza, which was soggy with grease.

I tried to listen to the conversations around me, but they were too jumbled together to hear one at a time. I looked at the three empty chairs around me with a guilty conscience as I watched a family searching for an empty table. "Good pizza, isn't it?" a raspy voice surprised me from behind. It was the lady who had helped me to my seat.

"Yeah, just a little greasy," I said.

She walked around the table, pulled a chair out and sat down across from me. "So, where ya headed?" she asked.

Where was I going anyway? I thought for a few seconds before I answered. "Uhh, I'm just meeting someone."

"Who?" she asked bluntly.

"My sister. She's coming home from Chicago."

"She'll be glad to see you, I'm sure," she said. "Is she blind too?"

I was about to answer when I realized that she was the first to utter the "b-word" all day! I was a little taken aback. "No... no, she's not."

"It must be hard for you," she said. "I mean, gettin' around this big circus. Especially today; such a busy travel day."

"Yeah, the people movers are tough. I've just started to walk instead." I laughed and it startled me to realize that I was having an actual conversation. I looked around and noticed several tables with trays waiting to be cleared. "Don't you have to work?" I asked, hoping the answer would be no.

"My shift is almost over. I haven't taken a break all day," she said, bending over to rub her ankles. "My feet are killing me."

"I know how you feel." I picked up my drink and took a sip.

"You get around pretty well for being blind." There was that "b-word" again! "And you keep yourself looking pretty sharp." She winked and I started to blush, forgetting that I shouldn't have seen the gesture. Character, Chris! Character! Luckily, she didn't notice. "Were you like that when you were born, or did it happen all of a sudden?"

I hadn't worked out that part of my story yet. "No, I had my sight until I was seven."

"Well, what happened?"

"Uhh, my retinas started to deteriorate," I said. Luckily, I'd done a little reading on the subject.

"That's too bad," she said. "It must be tough to know what you're missing."

"Yeah, I miss it a lot." It was a dumb thing to say, but I didn't know what else to add.

"Oh damn, there's my supervisor," she said as she hurriedly gathered her spray bottle and rag. "She'd give me hell if she saw me sitting here blabbing with you." She stood up, walked around the table, and put her hand on my back. "You take care of yourself," she said.

"I will. Nice talking to you." I went back to eating my greasy pizza.

It's amazing how much that woman in the food court taught me from our ten minute encounter. But what was it about her that made her different? One thing was that she was not hesitant to help. Remember how she took my shoulders so firmly? But more important was that she was the only one who openly spoke to me about being blind and actually took the time to get to know me. Should I have been offended? Was it politically incorrect? Not actually being blind, I cannot answer that question. However, I can say that she was the only one who made me feel like I belonged; like I wasn't different from everyone else; like I was a person and not one big, helpless handicap. Ironically, when I spoke with people who never once mentioned my disability, I was all the more aware of it. But with that one lady with the raspy voice and strong grip, I almost forgot all about it.

So what was it that made me so uncomfortable around people with disabilities? I think my problem was that I saw those people at the gala as "deaf people." The structure of that phrase makes it sound like being deaf is more defining to their personality than being a person. After my little experiment, I've started thinking of them as "people who can't hear" instead. That way, just by knocking over that little fence of an adjective, I've realized that their personality, not their disability, comes first.

Chris Johnson  
Sewickley, PA  
Sewickely Academy  
Lawrence Connolly

#### FROM A HERB RITTS PHOTOGRAPH

The girl stands naked on a barren beach  
Suffused with chilly graying light.  
Her hair, a blackened seaweed mass,  
Twists round her face and slithers down her front.  
Her eyes are hidden by the living mask,  
Mouth choked by sopping, heavy strands.  
She does not breathe - she waits,  
Tensed into panic, for the shutter snap.  
The picture's taken, she can now  
Escape the artist's cold ideal of her.  
She grasps her personality again.  
Later, the silver print will make her shudder,  
Remembering the suffocating feel and seeing her skull  
Emerge from beneath her wet hair.

Liza Beth  
Worcester, MA  
Bancroft School  
Elizabeth Tsang



Papa, you don't come  
of course, on Sundays,  
to watch Reverend Reeve,  
to see me wear the blue suit,  
with a tear in the sleeve,  
the one I wore  
the day after  
your head caught  
in the saw  
that sprayed  
scalp across steel.

I don't flinch  
when the plate mocks our row,  
waits for Ms. Lamb's  
fan to change hands,  
rests in my lap.  
I "loose them joints"  
like your liquor laden  
breath preached,  
my eyes stay  
on the man sweating lies  
when I drop a dime,  
flick bills up my sleeve,  
send the lightened plate on  
without looking down  
to see the green  
show through my sleeve.

I'm damn good, too, Papa.  
I "loose them joints"  
like when you  
slipped black leather  
from a white man  
on the train,  
gave it back  
without the pictures  
of his wife,  
like when you coaxed  
a gold pocket watch,  
nestled next to smokes,  
kept the chain from jerking taut,  
checked the time,  
replaced it, cold.

It's not a game now, Papa,  
like yours after the rum that  
"loosed them joints,"  
warmed the delicacies  
in your wrist, let it move  
like the rubber pencil trick.  
Did it "loose" your neck too, Papa,  
the morning the saw left your skull  
in white powder  
on the floor of the mill?  
I don't laugh and thrill  
at half-thefts like you,  
think my condition  
does all the repenting,  
or do it, like you,  
because I know that I can.

I don't want to steal from God,  
but, you're gone, Father,  
and at the end of Mass,

when I squeeze  
bills to her hand,  
Mama doesn't ask.

David Modigliani  
Brookline, MA  
Milton Academy  
James F. Connolly

#### DECK OF RIVER BOATS

My uncle was a wonderful cheat  
in Thursday night cards  
serving beers with heavy, German  
names, Lowenbrau, Leinenkugel  
sounding like lumber or chocolate pudding

He set the table  
on green velvet and oak  
race-tracks of gold-gilded aluminum  
piles of blue chips  
deck of River Boats  
a spare upstairs robbed of its royal families

He laughed and smoked and drank  
a little  
sliding dog-eared misfits after one a.m.  
telling me he was Robin Hood

Winning sly, serpentine  
green like the table  
they slapped his back  
cheering lucky, lucky, lucky at cards

Irene Shih  
Mechanicsburg, PA  
Cumberland Valley High School  
Jane Scott



Vikki Leta  
St. Marys, PA



We are driving home in silence, and I search for something to say, something valuable in the leaves the headlights illuminate briefly as we turn another winding curve. It is as if this small grey car invades the serenity here.

His head is bent toward the road, arms on the wheel, brim pulled ever so slightly over his brow and vague brown eyes. Eyelashes move quickly, once, twice, a minuscule movement, a refocusing. I think he senses me watching but does not turn his head. He clears his throat. I draw in a breath of the warm, tremulous air and, after considering, move my hand from where it has been folded on my lap to the window crank.

We've broken out of the woods and we're in an area of fields and open air. We pass over the Northway, relatively quiet for a Friday night. There is no moon, but I still can see familiar broken fences and single trees occasionally edging the road, looking forlorn. I find nothing to say in them either, then realize that I had been searching.

His hand stiffly slips from the wheel and fishes below the radio for a cassette tape, which he, after picking it up between two fingers for examination, pushes into the tape deck. He switches it on, the readout orange with black digital bars. I focus on the road.

Sudden strains of bagpipe and recorder faintly coast with us over the swells of grey that cut through the fields, roads that seem to extend everywhere but in front of us. The little hills hide, dip down one way, swerve another. I try to block out the desperate and disturbing moan of the pipes with concentration on the rippling noises my hair makes as strands of it escape from my head and dance in the rushing air near the window.

He is fixed on the yellow lines that lead us home. His gaze is careful, determined, like a child's. I watch his mouth, waiting to see even the smallest tip of tongue appear on the surface in this concentration. He is with the road and the grating cries from the speakers.

Gazing, too, at the yellow lines I find myself still at the bagpipe, at its repetition of what at first seems like no melody at all, just pitches bouncing off one another that, when one cannot stand it anymore, slide into a pattern. It is plaintive, so melancholy; heavy, and as distant as he who is only an elbow away.

We sat in the audience that evening, the stage swathed in blue, steamy light as the singer, whose eyes were very small in the theatre light, kept the beat of the jazz with stampings of one black velvet pump-clad foot. Her mouth was very red against the microphone. I watched as she formed her vowels, reaching low into her chest for the tone, then standing on her tiptoes for her high, tremulous notes to sink back down again into lush lower register and give it to the bassist *one last time*.

My eyes moved from her foot to her mouth to the guitarist's mischievous fingers, flying faster and higher and to the pinnacle. And, as if some wave suddenly washed over us, the bassist entered, edged in with some new discovery. The voluptuous sides of the stand-up bass captured me as it moved with the guitarist's fingers, who'd look up at the audience and smile from time to time, and I was there, though it was elusive and a secret held by the magicians before us.

The singer swayed and I swayed and his hands stayed on his lap, legs crossed, not feeling what I felt, not letting the music's sudden metaphor inside him. He was just knowing some kind of distance in the music, in the elbow's reach from me because I seemed to know and he couldn't. He was in the place I had been when he sat down to the organ and began to remember sheet music from hymns he memorized long ago, as a short-haired, white-robed altar boy with beat-up shoes and no smile. Always to listen, always loving, however silently, what

he was expected to be and knowing that I was expected of it too. But I defied; God love him. He carries a small, black rosary in his pocket.

And now how not to hurt him, how just to let him go without callous feelings, this damned bagpipe drone still in my ears, always the same. One small, fine finger moves once, raising a vein in his hand. Works hard for what it has. Holds on to what it's got, with his feet firmly on the ground. And I am carried away so easily in a strain of music the distances are so wide, past the link of mere attraction.

And there is no pretending in this, in this song with no lyric to soothe. I am not here, in this car, driving home on this damp night. I fold my hands tightly in my lap to steady this slow frenzy but all of this is old, feels like somewhere it has been felt, tried on before. I think I hear him sigh. *Your sigh...lullaby of birdland...* The wind gusts into the car and tickles my neck with nimble fingers, guitarist's fingers, not worker's strong, determined hands that do not move. It's an old shiver that runs down my spine, though, like dull thunder.

A pause in the trill of the recorder, and then a man's voice jumps over the speaker, a voice of the ancient isles. He sings, skipping over into the silence. Inflects gently on words of love, cryptic words that dance without music, that are gentle despite the shrill of his voice. The voice skips and dribbles and is nimble, like a child.

I stare off into the darkness. Apart from him and from the man who sings. Instead, I float in the sounds my mind has captured, remnants of lyric and improvisation: I hear this music and through the man's lithe words that begin to fade over the speakers the silence becomes a little easier. And I wonder, then, if my jazz is his lonely, as well?

Tiffani McDonough  
Keene Valley, NY  
Keene Central School  
Mrs. Joy McCabe

## DRILLS

There's an oilwell  
behind my grandmother's house  
in Oklahoma City,

and every August, when we slave  
nine hundred miles  
to stare at that twisted shell

and have it stare back at us  
like a mummy,  
silently above ground,

my bored eyes stray  
to the pumping of the outside well,  
up and down and forever and ever,

as we tirelessly pound chatter into her empty hours,  
digging for gold  
in this old ghost town.

Mike Silverstein  
Canton, MA  
Milton Academy



The quad reminded Ben of his grandmother.

At 2 o'clock, just after class, Ben stepped out of the stone building and into blazing sunlight. He stopped to let his pupils dilate, and saw the quad as if for the first time. It had been either raining or overcast for the past week, and this was the first time Ben did not feel the need to run to his car.

So he strolled.

And for some reason-- maybe it was all the time he had been spending with his grandfather recently-- the field in front of him reminded Ben of his grandmother's funeral. The sunlight helped. It was on a day like this that Ben had seen his grandmother buried on a mountain in North Carolina. His mother's moth always lived down south, and finally returned to her birthplace when she died. The cemetery had lots of trees; big, green, living trees, like the ones in the quad. Two large black women had sung at his grandmother's funeral. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, to have saved a wretch like me. They all sat in the shade of a tent and smelled each other's perfume or aftershave mixing with the scent of lilacs. The women finished, Ben left, and when he came back, all that remained of his grandmother was a patch of earth and a headstone.

This was really all Ben remembered of his mother's mother. His mom had not liked to leave the city too much when Ben was young, and so he had grown up with little affection for a grandmother that he never saw. The only other thing he remembered about his grandmother was that she always sent three packages full of gifts at Christmas. They would always contain mounds of North Carolina newspapers for padding, and they would always have a package of walnuts buried somewhere.

Ben's father was not at the funeral. The last funeral he had attended was his own, and that was a few years ago. Ben had no memories of his father's funeral. He didn't have a lot of memories from when he was six, and now that he was twenty-two, he had too many.

The stone buildings ruined the feel of a North Carolina day, though. Huge and immobile, they overshadowed even some of the trees. One building had an inscription. "Smythe-Williamson College, founded AD 1807. Burned down 1826. Rebuilt 1829."

He always wondered about that. Why did the college get a gravestone if it was still here? A gravestone situated high above the ground, with letters a foot high, demanding to be looked at. What had the college ever done? Smythe-Williamson, died 1826, rose from the ashes 1829. Lives to this day.

What did his grandmother get? "Lucielle Byrd, 1903-1989, loving mother." And a mound of earth.

"Grandpa?" He did not stir. He did not seem to breathe. "Grandpa? You there?"

The old man turned over in his bed as he lay there, showing his wrinkled face to the ceiling. Ben shook him gently. "Grandpa? I'm here. It's me, it's Ben." The old man ruffled his bedcovers as Ben continued to shake him. Soon, Ben saw his grandfather's eyes peel open.

"Hello? Unhh..." A groan came from the wrinkled lips.

"Grandpa? It's me, Ben." The old man's eyes fluttered shut again. "Damn..." muttered Ben, and continued to shake the shoulder of the frail body beneath him. "Wake up, grandpa."

"Unhh..."

"C'mon, grandpa, stay awake." Ben sighed. "Goddamn it! I don't want to be here! Wake up!"

The old man opened his eyelids slowly and stared at Ben. "All right, grandson."

Ben felt a rush of heat. Why did the old guy have to do this? "I'm sorry, grandpa. What can I get you?"

"Give me my shot."

Ben looked at him disapprovingly. "You know you had your last one three hours ago. No medicine until four o'clock."

"It's right over there, Ben."

"Grandpa..."

"Please get it, Ben. I need my shot."

Ben sighed. "No, grandpa."

The old man fell silent again. Ben reached back to the writing table next to the bed and pulled up a bare wooden chair. He lowered himself slowly into it, hands on thighs.

Nothing from his grandfather for a while as Ben half-heartedly studied the wall. Concrete half seen under nic-stained wallpaper; in a strange nod to decency, it was designed to look like bricks.

The raspy rhythm from the bed next to his made Ben think the old man had fallen asleep again. He reached for the liver spotted shoulder again, when his grandfather spoke.

"Ben?"

"Yeah, grandpa?"

"If I tell you a story, will you give me my shot?"

Maybe if you don't tell me a story, Ben thought. But the old man didn't need to hear that. "Sorry, grandpa, no deal."

"All right, Ben," he sighed.

Ben turned until he was facing the chair back and stared at the writing desk. It seemed to have a decade layer of dust on it, dead insect and cigarette ashes entombed in the semi-opaque gray powder like dinosaur bones in rock strata.

Then from the bed: "Ben?"

He addressed the wrinkled head staring at him from beneath the covers. "What is it?"

"Can I tell you a story anyway?"

Ben sighed internally. His mother had no right to make him come here. "All right, grandpa."

The old man coughed wetly, touching the folds of his throat with thin fingers. "Could I drink some water?"

Ben got up wordlessly and went over to a square, tall table standing by the door. He poured a glass of water from the customary pitcher that sat there. When he turned back, the old man was feebly trying to get up. "Stop it, grandpa, let me help you." Ben put the glass down on his granddad's cluttered bedside table and put a hand under each of his armpits. He pulled gently until the body was resting against some pillows propped against the wall.

"Where's my water?"

Ben bit his lip. "Right here, grandpa." He guided his grandfather's hand to the water glass and helped him support it until he had taken a sip and returned it to the bedside table. His grandfather smacked his lips and arranged himself slowly. "All right, Ben. Now I will tell you a story. I will tell you a story about the army."

Ben tuned out like he was trained to, like he did in college when he didn't care. The air of years invaded his nose, an alcohol-laden old man smell mixing with stale cigarette smoke. A faint buzzing in the background from a heart-rate monitor and the old man's voice droning on.

Ben looked at his watch. 3:17 p.m. He hated it here. He hated his mother, she was so busy, too busy to come out to the small, old house in Rockport.

He raised his eyes to the ceiling and thought, when I get out of here, I will be two hours older. Two hours closer to death. Two hours closer to my grandfather.

Ben found himself today, instead of at his grandfather's,

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at his friendly neighborhood King Kullan, shopping for his grandfather's groceries. He wiped the snow half-heartedly off his hiking boots as he stepped from the cold winter into the warm, dry air of a heated supermarket. Pulling the shopping list from his pocket, he looked around for a grocery cart.

The first item on the list said "oranges-- 5." His mother had then added "Make sure you buy good ones!!" in her hurried scrawl. Ben gave a sardonic little half-smile and pushed his cart over to the produce section.

As he quickly took a corner, he saw a mass of life. Fruits and veggies spread out before him like the riches of some ancient city. Bright colors, reds, yellow and greens. And oranges.

He pushed the cart in the direction of the mangoes. Threading his way between the plastic walls of the produce bins, he noticed the supermarket was fairly empty. The only other customer perusing the fruits and vegetables was a blue-haired lady. She wore a faded cloth dress and was staring intently at the cucumbers through her plastic-rimmed glasses. Ben ignored her and headed for the oranges in the adjacent bin.

He hurriedly ripped off a bag from the roll that was impaled on a nearby metal pole and inspected the oranges. What the hell was a "good" orange? For that matter, what was a bad orange? One that microwaves small furry animals in the privacy of its own home?

He shook that thought off and surveyed the sea of fruit before him. He didn't see a lot of differences. Shrugging, he started picking oranges off the top of the pile.

"Oh no, you don't want that one," said a voice behind him that seemed to cackle. "Squeeze that. I bet you it'll be mushy."

Ben turned and saw the cucumber lady pointing at the orange he had picked up. "What?" he said.

"These are four for two dollars, so you have to be selective. Selective!" The blue-haired woman was wagging her finger. "You therefore want to get the largest ones. Look at this one"-- she pointed at an orange in Ben's bag-- "puny. Put that one back."

Ben looked at her strangely. "Don't worry about me, ma'am."

She pursed her lips. "Here, I'll do it for you." Her hand reached into the plastic bag and retrieved the offending orange. "How many do you want?"

"Er...five."

"Three more then. Let me see..." The woman put Ben's orange back on the pile and proceeded to grab fruit, going through some strange inspection ceremony that involved squeezing, staring, and sniffing. Ten minutes later, Ben found himself with five oranges as close to God as the cucumber lady could find.

Ben threw the bag hurriedly into his cart and let out a whoosh of air as if to say, "Finally!" The cucumber lady yelled something about bruising as Ben rushed off to the sauce aisle to buy some Ragu.

Fridays were his day off, and this particular Friday he found himself, for some reason, taking the elevator up to his mother's apartment. He leaned on the well-polished glass wall, the breath from his nose making small puffs of moisture on its cold surface. He looked out through the wall to the stone surface of the adjacent apartment building that lay outside the window.

The bell dinged, the doors opened, and Ben got off. He walked down the tastefully carpeted hallway to number 72 and knocked.

"Who is it?" came his mother's voice.

"It's me, mom."

"Who?"

"Ben, mom."

He heard footsteps from the other side of the door, a light thump-thump. They stopped and the door opened.

"Ben! I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting you. How are you?"

"All right," said Ben. "Can I come in?"

"Of course! I'll get you some coffee. Have a seat. Try out the new sofa."

He followed his mother inside the doorway and into the apartment. The living room gleamed. Mom must like the new cleaning service, Ben thought. He saw the new sofa, white, very expensive-looking, and sat down.

His mom came in from the kitchen, carrying two cups and saucers. Ben knew what this meant. He would have to have a conversation. This was not so bad. He could half-tune out, mostly just sit there and blow on his coffee.

His mother put the cups down on the mahogany table in front of Ben and began to talk almost before she hit the sofa. She asked him how school was, and how the drive was, and how he was. And this led, naturally enough, to how "your grandfather" was.

And Ben tried to be polite, saying the old man was no trouble. But then his mother went through this whiny little checklist -- was Ben being nice, was Ben not being rough, was Ben not giving him morphine too often. Did Ben realize how painful pancreatic cancer was. Ben clenched his teeth, wanting to take a chunk out of the coffee cup.

"Maybe you'd be better off doing it yourself," he growled.

And Ben's mother nearly broke into tears, going through a whole list of modern-day woes, the job and the city and the shopping. And was this any way to treat his mother? And "your grandfather" didn't want to go into a nursing home. This was what he wanted, not what Ben's mother wanted.

"But mom, I hardly know the guy."

"Hardly know the guy? He's your father's father. If it weren't for him, you wouldn't be here."

"Dad's not here. Dad's dead."

Ben's mother sighed. "Look, Ben. If you can't do it for me, and you can't do it for him, do it for your father, OK?"

Ben got up, walked out the door, and down the hall. The coffee sat on the mahogany table in the clean living room with the expensive-looking white couch.

Ben had gone into the house, as usual, at around ten minutes to three in the afternoon. In the front room he had met the nurse, and on the table he had found his normal cup of tea. He and the nurse made small talk, she catching Ben up on how the old man was.

"He didn't sleep much this morning," she remarked this particular day. "He kept asking after the time."

Ben finished his tea and saw the nurse off. Then he walked into his grandfather's room.

"Ben! You're here!" The old man was already sitting up in bed. "Get me some water, then sit down." Ben followed his instructions. He wondered what had gotten him so excited. "Ben! I remembered!"

"Remembered what, grandpa?"

"I remembered what I've been wanting to tell you! The medicine finally let me remember!"

Ben smiled. "All right, grandpa. What do you want to tell me about?"

"I want to tell you about your father."

Ben started, but the old man went on. "One day your father got very old. He got so old he got young." (Alzheimer's, grandpa, Alzheimer's, Ben thought), "Your father couldn't care



continued from page 19  
 for himself anymore. He had to always be watched. He was only 47 at the time, and this scared all of us."

The old man coughed. "Don't let me stop, Ben, I want to tell you this. I have six sons, so your father had five brothers. That's all he talked about. His brothers. All he remembered of them, all the things they had done. Then one day, he demanded to see them. He threw a tantrum and was furious when I told him they were too far away.

"So, I wrote all five and told them about their brother. I told them how sick he was. And I told them to come."

His grandfather began coughing furiously. Ben offered him water, but he waved it off. He swallowed with a great amount of effort, then went on. "Ah. Where was I? Oh yes. The brothers came. One by one, they arrived at the airport, some coming from California. I have not done a good job of keeping this family together, Ben. But they came when I called them.

"They decided to talk with their brother for a while, then go out to the house on the tip of the island and stay a while there. They would all go, the six brothers, together again. They all sat in the front room of your house for hours, just talking, just remembering. Do you remember that, Ben?"

Time seemed to freeze for Ben, as something clicked in his head. His grandfather's room faded out, and in its place was his bedroom, from when he was a kid. Ben was sitting there watching Scooby Doo. He heard something. "Ben?"

It was his father's voice. And it was his father's footsteps, coming up the stairs, and his father's hand, opening the door.

"Ben? C'mere, I wanna show you something."

Ben looked at his father. He was smiling, his gaunt features stretched in a grin. He was carrying a pack of cards in his hand.

"Watch this, Ben." His father reached into the deck and pulled out the ace of spades. "See that?" Ben nodded. His father put the card back into the deck and reshuffled it. "Now Ben, I can get that card back. But you hafta help me. Hold your hand over the deck and wish with all your might for that card to come out. C'mon now." Ben reached out and did as his father said. And sure enough, there was the ace of spades.

"Wow!" said Ben. And then his father showed him how to do it. Ben sat there, enraptured, Scooby Doo forgotten. Then his father left, and Ben remembered the TV.

The room came back into focus and he heard his grandfather's voice again. "So as they drove out to the house, your father demanded to stop at McDonald's. And so they pulled into the parking lot, and they all got hamburgers. They sat around a booth, and I can remember one of them telling me about a french fry fight. They were all happy.

"They got to the beachhouse, and they all went to sleep. About four in the morning, one of the brothers heard a thump, and he came running. There in the entrance to the bathroom lay your father. He was dead."

His grandfather sat there breathing. Ben thought he was done. But he started again. "I always admired that. He knew he was going to die, so he called everyone together so they would have something to remember him by. And then, since there was nothing else to do, he left." His grandfather sat there, and then slumped down in the bed. He sighed. "I think I am going to sleep now, Ben. Don't forget my shot."

One night his grandfather died. He died in his sleep, and the nurse said he died without pain. They buried him in Woodlawn on an overcast day. Ben was not there. He had seen his grandfather die too many times to want to be there when he was buried. He had all he needed of his grandfather buried in his head. Ben would always carry him with him wherever he went. Somewhere in Ben's mind, it would always be three o'clock in a dusty, dark room. And somewhere up there, there

would always be a room where Scooby Doo was on and his father was coming up the stairs.

Mike Barthel  
 Clinton, NY  
 Clinton Central High School  
 JoAnne Blaszcak

## THE PLANTING SEASON

She has the hands of an old woman. When we are outside in the day time planting flowers in the garden or pulling out weeds, the light seems to bury itself in the wrinkles of her skin and I am scared to touch her, my own wife. I am scared she will hurt herself. I ask her if she would like a pair of gloves, but she always says no. And so I stare at her skin when I forget to act normal, and I can see the light brown spots that are beginning to appear beneath her pale, translucent skin.

It was her skin, I think, that had attracted me in the first place. She looked luminescent in the night's darkness where the color blue seemed to ebb in waves around her. It fit her, strangely enough -- the same way colors can mix and form another. But now it seems the colors have faded, smeared together in the haste to make something new. She is still beautiful, though, and I hope she knows that I still love her.

How odd, it seems, to have to say that now. I never thought our life would come to a point of urgency, a haste to squeeze in all those golden moments of life. But, in a way, it hasn't. I am the one who brought brochures of tropical and exotic places when we first heard. It seems so shaming now, to have caused such a commotion when she was still well. I feel as if I have dishonored her in some way, which is even more saddening because she is not dead and there is not yet a memory to honor.

The doctors spoke of supporting her in her times of depression and rage -- common emotions to be felt -- but they forgot to tell me that my wife could be a special case. She could be the one who is calm and complacent, always, accepting the fate of her life for what it is. There is no question that she is the strong one, and her strength seems to drain me.

We spend our days in the garden. I have taken time off from my job. She protested, of course, telling me that there was no need to make such a fuss.

I can see her through the window right now, sitting with a light blanket over her legs as they stretch out along the row. Her hands are patting the dirt down around the bottom of the marigold, a ball of fire that seems to stand on her command. She moves to the next plant and turns it gently out of its container. Shaking the loose dirt away, she places the flower in the hole and pushes the dirt until the walls cave in. It looks secure in her hands, but I can see her looking up at the house, wondering how to move down the row without my help.

I walk out of the house with two glasses, my face prepared with a smile. "The flowers look great," I say. "Take a break and drink some iced tea."

I can see her stiffen and she is mad at me now for being patronizing. She says, "I only planted two flowers, Chris. I'm not tired. Help me move down."

I kneel down, careful to avoid the flowers, and pick her up slowly. I am always surprised at how light she is. Each day, I seem to lose more of her and now she is barely anything. I can feel her limp arm across my back and she rests her head on my shoulder. Without looking, I know her eyes are closed and she is trying to fight her fatigue. I lower her gently back onto the earth although I do not want to let her go.



I sit down in the row beside her and pass the next container. Looking up, she says, "I was thinking about putting the marigolds as a border around the garden instead. Then we can have the fruits and vegetables inside, perhaps." I remember now that she always has a plan for everything. In the grand scheme of things, everything she does is meant to mean something. I like her idea, though, and I tell her so.

She looks down and says, "Now we have to take out these two flowers." Putting her fingers into the loose dirt beneath the flower, she searches for the roots and pulls gently. The plant comes out and she places it back into its container. She moves to the next flower and does the same, except she pulls too fast and we both see that the roots have been severed. I look up quickly to gauge her reaction, and I can see the pain in her face before she says matter-of-factly, "This one will take longer to grow."

Before she has to say anything, I pick her up again and move her to the border of the garden.

Today is the first day in two weeks that we have been able to go outside. The rain fell almost everyday and on the days it didn't, the ground was still too wet for her to sit on. She lay on the couch most of the day while I read books to her. She could only stare outside, her eyes following the path of each drop as it zigzagged down, catching on invisible obstacles. She predicted the path of the drop with her finger, clearing the condensation from the window in uneven lines.

We went to the doctors yesterday and they said we would have to wait and monitor her actions. I know what they are thinking; we both know. And I can only think that it is spring and the flowers are growing in our garden.

She is excited to go outside again and it is nice to see some sign of spirit left inside her. Things are worse now, though, and she cannot be in the sun for more than two hours a day. The medicine makes her skin sensitive to the heat and she becomes dizzy easily.

"Come on," I say, "we don't want to waste any more time!"

I scoop her up from the couch as I always did in the past when she would laugh happily in protest. This time, though, I am careful to bring her up gently and she tries to put a big smile on her face.

I lay her down in the chair I have set up for her. It is in the garden, close to the ground so she can still touch the flowers and the dirt. I sit down on the earth and look up at her. She is like a scene from a movie -- the long, flowing dress that seems to envelop her whole body, the round-brimmed hat that shields the sun from her face, and the eyes that struggle to stay open.

I can't bear the silence that hangs in the air now; it is like the pattern of the walls that never has a beginning or an end. I find myself talking incessantly about the weather and the day and the stars and anything else I see before me.

I stare into the orange center of the marigold and think aloud, "We should go to the park tomorrow and have a picnic. What do you think?"

There is no response and I look at her face. Her head is tilted with her eyes closed and she looks asleep. "Hey sleepyhead," I say, "wake up." There is still no response, and fear runs through me as I reach for her wrist. I can hardly feel or hear anything except for the pounding of my own heart, but the faint rhythm of her body is still there.

I pick her up again and I can feel her limp weight in my arms. I lean her back so her head can rest along my shoulder and I try not to see her arm dangling awkwardly at her side. It seems too familiar -- a nightmare coming back in waves that are stronger than the last.

When we are inside the house, I hold her body in the doorway and twelve years ago comes back in a moment -- the threshold, the husband and wife, a blushing bride. There is no color now, only an ashy-gray that is still fading fast. I close my eyes, feeling the heat infusing my eyelids.

I climb the stairs slowly, shifting her weight every few steps to keep her leaning against me. I lay her down in bed and pull the sheets up around her body. I stand and watch her sleeping and I am so tired. It could happen at any time. I try to remember what it was I said, what I said last. I think words are important. What I remember is saying that I didn't want to waste time. It is a nice thing for a husband to say.

I can see her garden outside the window. The sun seems almost blinding. It is hard to make out the flowers around the border. The fruits and vegetables have not broken ground yet and the chair lies in the garden like a glass waiting to be filled. My eyes are stinging from the glare.

Lily Chiu  
Milton, MA  
Milton Academy  
Mr. James Connolly

### WET PAVEMENT

rain slaps at the windshield  
pinging over glass & metal  
& it's another aimless drive  
toward the harbor  
on a night-swallowed  
fleet street,  
mint melting  
stickysweet in my breath.  
my father said to me once  
*you only get one crack at life*  
*do the best you can*  
*you don't want any*  
*regrets when you're dying*  
this on a drenched south jersey  
thanksgiving night when my grandfather  
was gasping toward death  
in a rented hospital cot  
in his bedroom,  
& i wondered, 14 years old,  
how to know when the  
deciding how to live ends  
& the living begins,  
splashing into books & movies  
for answers, finding none.  
but now, i abandon  
logic, ignore questions  
& simply drive,  
accelerating away indecision,  
turning and braking methodically.  
grasping at life is  
less complicated from behind  
the wheel of a volkswagen  
sloshing over soused  
south baltimore streets.

Ian Moore  
Towson, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones





Cassandra Lizza  
Newton, NJ

A LIST OF MY FEARS; OR, A VARIATION OF DAVID  
ANTIN'S "A LIST OF THE DELUSIONS OF THE INSANE,  
WHAT THEY ARE AFRAID OF"

drowning in the ocean  
drowning in the bathtub  
drowning in the rain in Baltimore  
drinking water will evaporate  
people leaving me  
leaving someone  
leaving the house to go on vacation  
being naked  
bathing suits  
getting too physical  
being hungry  
being full  
eating excess fat  
eating too few vitamins  
eating too many sweets  
eating, in general  
tests of knowledge  
tests of faith  
being too cold  
sweating too much  
too many people  
too few people  
too many pills  
contracting rabies  
losing my hair  
not being able to breathe  
insomnia  
stomach pains  
back pains  
dying long after I've grown tired of life  
dying too soon  
forgetting the year  
forgetting the month  
forgetting the day  
forgetting how old I am  
that I lost my heart somewhere  
that I have too much heart  
that my heart will quit working

that it already has  
that my brain will lose control  
that my brain will commit treason against me  
that my stomach will quit accepting food  
that I will quit accepting lies  
that there is a hell  
that I'm already there  
that there is a heaven  
that I'm not qualified for it  
dreams of people I thought I could forget  
the absence of dreams  
that love is a dream  
that my friends are all a dream  
that my whole life is a dream  
that I will wake up.

Jennifer Wadsworth  
Richmond, VA  
Monacan High School  
Mrs. Judith Land

ON A PHOTO OF SITTING BULL

One eye to charge me with treason  
and the other to take me hostage,  
carving into my head  
like tempered steel.  
I move to escape your gaze  
but you follow me from the page.  
Your polished face shines  
from Dakota sand and sun.  
A canyon frown,  
a five hundred year old wound,  
cuts across your face.  
Your hawked nose jabs out of the page,  
your black hair meets at a single feather.

Near Rio de la Plata  
they built a city on the ruins of a city.  
The Indian graves tremble from below.  
The children die from shaken baby  
syndrome, and looking at the babies  
I think of the local shop-girl with black eyes  
and a blue head, the one who dove from her window:  
crumpled scrap-metal, bones like gravel.  
The priest said "She let the devil inside her,  
the un-cultured devil."  
And what would you say to her,  
you, with your obsidian arrow head gaze?

Now these girls from Standing Rock Rez  
skip stones from strips of limestone crumblings.  
They watch the sun fall behind them,  
bleeding across the sky like yoke.  
A channel of light christens  
the water of Chankpe Opi Wakpala.  
They know that anything will skip,  
if you flick your wrist.  
These girls skip six even seven,  
and I wonder where they learned this grace,  
as the sun sinks into the grass,  
as the sky grows dark.

Parker Everett  
Scituate, MA  
Milton Academy



*My Grace is sufficient for you. In your weakness, you will be made strong.*

I softly close the Bible to the passage where God spoke these words to the Apostle Paul who had a "thorn in his flesh," or something that plagued him greatly as he journeyed and ministered. This verse seems like an oxymoron or a contradiction. How can something that makes you feel weak to yourself and others possibly give you strength? But reading it at this moment, these words make perfect sense to me.

It is an enduring challenge to walk in faith when you feel that there is something about you that is a stumbling block. I have always known that at birth I was born legally blind from partial albinism, but that was something I wanted to keep out of focus. True, I would wear eyeglasses at age six, but I hated to admit how handicapped I felt without them. but I always wore them; in hopes that my eyesight would dramatically improve. Eleven years later, I still wear eyeglasses and contacts, but my eyes have grown considerably stronger.

Albinism is the loss of or absence of color from the hair, skin, and eyes. Doing my own personal research, I found that albinism can cause legal blindness, skin problems, learning and other disabilities; amongst other complications. Hair is waste and an attribute so I've nothing really to lose; I've always received compliments on my natural blonde hair. Because my skin is so fair, it does get dry and sunburns. But this isn't such a great problem because I can take precautions. But if my life is flesh, then my eyes are the thorns.

My eyes are a pretty hazel color, and for the longest time that was all I could say. They move because of their weakness and sensitivity, and eyeglasses have become a permanent part of my wardrobe.

My parents enrolled me a special preschool called "The Little Lighthouse." It was founded for children with disabilities as a head start; it also had a Christian emphasis and environment. It was there that I learned to use my eyes to my best ability. Years later, beginning in the fourth grade, I would run in the annual "Laps for Little Ones," a fund-raiser for the school. I would eagerly collect donations and sponsors for each lap around the track I could run. Then the big Saturday would come. I would fill out my sheets, put on my favorite T-shirt, and pin my number to it, and head to the track. There would be doughnuts, coffee and fruits on the lawn. My eyes would scan the crowd for those I knew and those wearing numbers; other running mates. My ears would be open to the loudspeakers where a voice would be giving announcements and encouragement. Then nine o'clock would come, everyone would take their assigned place on the track, and the gun would fire! It seemed that every time you went around the track, the crowd would yell and cheer each runner. This was my way of truly giving back to the school; I was proud of the 100 dollars I raised that day.

But this excitement would not come to me for a few years. In those early days at the school, I was setting and reaching new goals. By the time I "graduated," I was able to see my strengths and utilize them. I was able to identify certain objects and answer questions faster than my friends Whitney, who has spina bifida, Kiesha, who is profoundly deaf, and David, who is mentally retarded. And, unfortunately, I was the only one

I received a significant confidence from that small school in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It was a strength I needed because throughout my elementary school years I would be met with stares and insults. Kids would ask, "Why are you white and your parents black? Did you bleach your skin and hair? Why do your eyes move like that?" White and black students alike would hold me at a certain distance because their ignorance made them feel that I was beyond being related to, and they didn't know where to place or group me. I often did not know how to answer their questions, but the norm was, "I don't know. I was born like that." To me, this had different meanings. Sometimes it was like saying, "Leave me alone, I'm helpless." There were other times when I would declare it proudly and use it as a rhetorical conclusion to a confrontation. I have three younger brothers; two are partially albino and the youngest is not. My parents had always raised us the same and never acknowledge us as "different."

As I grew, I accepted my complexion because though light, being black, we vary in shades anyway. Besides, what could I do to safely change it? I knew that I could never stop people from staring at me or whichever parent I was with - wondering if the other parent was white. My eyes were getting stronger, but they kept the glasses on my face and my seat at the front of the classroom to see the overhead or chalkboard. And I still have difficulty even recognizing people I know from longer distances. How do I explain to my friend why I didn't wave back to him; when he was right up the hall?

Middle school passed by; it was a pretty good time for me. I had my boyfriend, made more friends and moved amongst my clique. I strongly believe that it is during those years that teens form concepts of who they will continue to identify with. This time was also marked by our family's move to Baltimore my eighth grade year. Now, though I was older, I still wondered how people would view me. I hadn't reached the point of 100% accepting myself just the way I was. Not only did I look different, I had a slight country accent as well. More importantly, I wasn't accustomed to such a big city. But I learned faster than I thought. I got into the whole hair and shopping thing, and riding the MTA.

When high school started, my biggest fear was that I didn't know anyone! The Carver Center was far away from my house and none of my new friends would be attending school in Towson. But, if anything, it was helping me continue on my inner growth process. I was by myself and learning to be an individual. Anything that I had learned before had to broken down into what I myself believed. People would sometimes glance twice at me, but at this age, they would either ignore my differences or make quiet comments among themselves.

Towards the end of freshman year, a friend of mine told me that her science teacher had used me as an example when answering a question about "albinos." The teacher had singled me out in her discussion about albino cats and didn't even know my name! She went on to say that something was wrong because my family has more than one partially albino child. I was offended because it seemed to ostracize me from the other students. It detracted from the imaginary acceptance level with others I had tried to create and raise all my life. It also brought to the surface an old hurt that I thought had dried up. I confronted this teacher the very next day and told her how I felt and that I really did not appreciate what she did, especially



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because she didn't know me or consider how I would feel. Had she been my own teacher, perhaps I would have felt differently. She could only mumble some "I'm sorrys" and look away. In the hallways she would always avert her eyes from my direction, as if I posed a threat. After all, I had every right to present my story to the administration.

Last summer, I asked my eye doctor if I would be able to drive with my vision. He told me that he would talk to a specialist and let me know. I don't really know what I was expecting, but I don't think it crossed my mind what I would do if he said I could not; which was a strong possibility. When we spoke again, he said that I would be able to drive and if the test proctor had any conflicts with my vision results, he as my doctor could overrule it. But he went on to say that I am "borderline" and I would have to make the decision about night driving. It was then that I realized how privileged I am. I was not Kiesha, David, or Whitney, and I was not blind. Young people pride themselves in the freedom that they have to drive and I too, could be a part of that, no different. It may seem like a small, or even trivial victory to others, but to me it is the concept alone that I have the ability to drive successfully that makes me happy.

I've grown to see the true beauty that God bestowed upon me. I have my poetry and speaking ability, and I carry a special kind of wisdom with me; one that I know can only come from Him. I have developed strength through my weak eyes by not seeing them that way. *The way I look is what sets me apart and makes me uniquely beautiful.* There are still times when I do view my eyes as thorns piercing my flesh. When a boy says how "pretty my eyes are without my glasses," or when the word "albino" hurts as much as the word "nigger."

I've accepted that my eyes may never be considered "normal," but refuse to allow a stumbling block to stay in my path. Only the obstruction wasn't my *eyesight*, but my *attitude* towards it. I had allowed self-pity and seeing myself as flawed because of how I was born. I know now that the most important objects I see aren't chalkboards or street names. It is myself, just as I am.

Rhoda Dixon  
Baltimore, MD

NOTES FROM JAPAN:  
RICE POEMS

They were hard.

His train screeched on in the cold  
Over the wide rice paddies.

Hard women bent down to work  
Wading in the swamps of rice  
Soaking their clothes.  
Rusted strips and tires  
Leaned on sheds.  
Tractors rested  
While the women worked.  
In the distance were shingled roofs  
Beyond were ash mountains  
But the workers could not see.

He said,  
"I'd hate to live here,"

And fogged up the window with his breath;

Making the women soft.

Green  
Were the sunlit billows  
Of rice.

Two schoolgirls  
In white sailor collars  
And fluttering black skirts  
Whizzed by on bicycles  
Blind  
To the sky.  
A band of crows, startled,  
Flapped out of the field

And headed for the  
Blue.

Stubble was left behind.  
Smoke  
Rose from the trampled fields.  
Burnt stubble was  
Left behind  
Like broken spears.

A tiny man  
With angled cheekbones  
Worked among pigeons.  
He heaved a dry bundle  
Onto his shoulder  
And walked across the spent field.

The pigeons scattered to the edge.  
He  
With puckered eyes

Looked ahead.

Masayuki Gibson  
Scotch Plains, NJ  
Mrs. Davie

SLEEPERS

Two women, black with red clothes  
stand up in the window  
at the front of a car  
of a train  
Unbeknownst to the conductor, they are whispering  
to the station-stops in front of them  
far ahead  
and out-of-sight  
Holding pushpins of hope for the future  
in crumpled paper bags  
at their sides.

Cheyenne Picardo  
Pottersville, NJ  
Kent Place School





Nancy Strasfeld  
Beth, MD

BOY

Cory is my best friend, a girl with hips and breasts and lips and eyelashes, the whole package. But I'm not allowed to really look because I'm a boy and a "friend." This situation is all right with me because she's the only girl I can tolerate and it's nice to be around the femmes once in a while. Whatever her crazy conditions are are fine by me.

She's walking towards where I sit and wait in front of the Boston Public Library wearing a slim floral dress with her hair all done up nice and make-up all perfect. She looks so damn pristine; all the lounging bums look at her with menacing stares which she brushes off her shoulder. As soon as she steps in front of me she spits a big glob of black lung onto the pavement and throws a pack of cigarettes at me.

"Take these killers away," she coughs. I place them into my bag reluctantly, knowing she'll kick my ass if I don't give them back sooner or later.

We walk. Looking in the glass windows of liquor shops and clothing stores, I see us: her little white nose high up in the air, as is her aerobicized butt that I'm not supposed to look at; and me, a skater wanna be who makes fun of skaters. I think the long hair in my eyes makes me look like a British rock star and I stand, sexily cringing into the towering Jack Daniels and vodka bottles behind glass.

"C'mon, dick head."

We're still walking. Past Hynes Convention Center, past Berkeley where big kids dressed in black play bongos while waiting for their bus. There's an old ugly man talking to himself sadly and shaking from a certain drug addiction, or old age and homelessness, and I jokingly say to Cory, "That's me. See that

man, that's me," so she'll laugh. And we walk. I watch a chunky, ugly-ish girl walk by with cleavage displayed, and I don't know what I think of her exactly. Sexy or ugly, ugly or sexy...

"You chase away girls." Cory is looking through the bag that hangs heavy on my shoulder. "You see a girl you think you like, then when you figure something chemical might be possible, you do something stupid."

"Like what?"

"Like act like an ass."

I guess she's right because I've never had a girlfriend, but it seems like they're always all over me. They can't resist me, that's all. The virile way I carry textbooks to class, my cute stoner absent-mindedness. My British rock star haircut.

"So, tell me, why do I push them away?"

"Because you're in love with me and nobody else... or you're gay." To my surprise she's stolen my apple from my bag rather than the cigarettes, and is chomping and slurping away, wiping the sweet apple juice drool with her hand.

Maybe she's right. Maybe I am gay.

The summer in the city is hot and gritty, and Cory and I have to go into Baldini's Pizza for some reason. There's a single standing fan in the corner blowing dust across the room and the hot ovens just make me hungrier. I insist on buying her a slice, but she says I shouldn't try to be so manly when it's hopeless. I don't know what she's talking about, so I let her pay with her own stupid money.

Ah... the cuisine of Italy.

Cory sees somebody she knows outside and motions for him to come inside and visit. It's this little skater punk, much smaller and stupider than me, but I know Cory thinks he's sexy. He stands by the table, with his shoulders back but his body kind of hunched, and he keeps sniffing and moving like he has to go to the bathroom really bad. He's a fool. I saw him once getting high alone in the cemetery; he freaked out because he thought I was a dead person and I'd dug myself out.

He finally lights a cigarette and leaves before the lady at the register tells him it's a non-smoking establishment. Cory checks out his butt as he walks, steals a handful of sugar from a table, and says dreamily, "He's so screwed up."

We walk, again. I'm really bored and she keeps talking about the skater, *Daniel*. The heat is getting to me, and Cory is getting to me and Daniel is getting to me, and the city is just Hell and school will never end. I feel like running away to the country, or to another city, or to some tourist attraction place like Provincetown. I'd like to find some kind of inner peace or wholeness but I'm convinced that stuff's all a crock anyway, and I'd like to try on a dress and see what it's like or get something pierced.

Cory tells me that the city is safer to her than the suburbs. She tells me that when she walks down the street in a nice, usually pretty affluent neighborhood, she gets harassed.

"By who? Fifty year old fathers mowing their lawns?"

"No, truckers. Dirty, slimy, toothless... *landscapers* or something. Hootin' and hollerin' like they've just passed bail. And you know what I hate most about it is that, rather than make me angry at them or men in general, it makes me feel slutty. Like I caused them to honk their horns."

She stops walking and faces me. "You know I'm not weak, right? You know I can handle stuff. I'm tough, I'm tough." She's talking to herself now. Suddenly she starts punching the blue mailbox next to her and it makes resonating drum sounds until you can see she's in pain; then we continue to walk towards the river silently.

Later she tells me that the other night she'd been walking



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 home through Newton and a truck with three guys in it began to follow her, passing her and then turning around to pass her again until it pulled over and then one of the guys got out and asked her if she knew where the police station was. She ran and jumped over a fence into someone's yard. Though the guy didn't put in any effort to go after her, she waited until she heard the truck drive away from her little hiding spot in the bushes. She cried and cried for half an hour, and then walked the rest of the way home. Cory says that I could never understand what that fear is like.

There are chickens in her tree in the backyard and they flutter as they sleep, out of reach of her two dogs, peering up into the branches, confused and patient. Cory is sitting on top of her little brother, who's struggling to escape; she's slapping his face lightly and laughing water drips of giggles that are absorbed by wet grass, shining and bursting from the ground.

"Boy! Help me!" Cory's brother is yelping.

My name is Guy, but I always get these dreadful shivers of hatred for the name when people call it, so I've been telling everyone that my name is *Boy* since I can't remember when. The only person who still calls me Guy is Cory, sometimes to really get me angry, but if she ever did it in public I'd have no shame in hitting her. Except that she'd hit back.

Shaking my head *no*, I start to climb one of the four trees by the defunct shed, and with my weight shake the branches as much as possible so the chickens will fall out. The shed has a big hole in the top that I look down and spit into until my mouth is dry.

There is nothing to do here. The windows of Cory's house, from the back, make the shape of a puckered face, the lips sucked into a square protruding window seat. I can see Cory's parents kissing up on the top floor next to a pink lamp. I call, "HardCore, let's go," and we jump over the back fence together to follow the train tracks into the downtown. The eight-year old jumping bean straggles behind us, hair cow-licked and feet tripping on rocks, but Cory and I pay no mind.

The big-city lights! The crowds of people and dirty magazine stores! Hookers, pushers, vagrants.

There is none of this downtown.

By *downtown* I mean the main street of this here yellow and green lawned suburb. Jeep Cherokees, pet stores, one pay phone, and the train tracks that lay in the background. Dead tracks with weeds and graffiti, the most solid and stationary part of this morphous waste land.

Cory's brother is a little slow I think, and stands drooling over bouncing puppies behind glass, ignoring his melted ice cream as it migrates down his fist. We leave him and go to the back of the pet store, away from the front windows where it's dark and glow-in-the-dark fish swim in circles like slowed sparks of electricity. There are also red and black scorpions and fat rats that I want to pick up by the tail and swing around - they look the perfect weight for that activity -- but right now the mood is for love.

Cory grabs my stomach in her hands and kisses me, but it makes me feel sick. It's so sudden, and she's closer to me than my sister. I had planned to be the one to initiate a "real" relationship with this girl with blond streaks in her hair and a dirty mouth like my grandmother's. I had wanted to start it, so that if need be, I could be the one to destroy it.

She kisses me again and I realize even stronger my true feelings. I've seen her pick lint from between her toes; I've seen her puke doughnuts and beer and sit up to eat more, I've seen her not sleep or shower for weeks of depression; I remember how gross she looked then and even now the intense light coming from one of the fish tanks is hitting her face in a way that makes her look like a fatty skeleton. I love her and hate her

for being as disgusting as everyone else, and for having an eight year old brother who needs taking care of, but mostly I hate her because she likes me and that's her worst characteristic.

I jerk away when she tries to kiss me again. She looks at me, as if I am a curiosity, something she's never seen before, and as she starts to walk away, out of the store into the bright light of the street, she turns. Slowly, and then, as if with sudden inspiration, she punches me hard in the stomach, the softest part, so I fall with lost breath into the shelves of delicate glass tanks and, in a rush of aquamarine water, they fall and crash with me.

And there I lay, sucking for air along with the drying fish.

I don't speak to Cory for a week, and she doesn't speak to me.

Then it's a month.

Half a year.

When her dad drives by in his high seated van, he waves, and I nod and cross the street and that's it. Cory's face is in some pictures and I say, "That's my old friend," or "That's a girl I used to know." And I still have a shirt of hers in the bottom drawer of my dresser next to dirty knee pads and ugly winter hats, but I don't bother to bring it back to her.

Maybe I should go to her house, or call, and we could talk and work everything out and be happy friends again. It wouldn't be that hard, a little acting, a little emotional stress, and then we could get coffee and have everything the way it used to be. She still hadn't taught me how to pick locks, or the secrets to faking sobriety.

She is definitely a cool girl. So I self analyze, and what do I come up with?

I need Cory.

Cory's house, half a year since the last time I've talked to the girl, and the house looks exactly the same, except the chickens are all dead because the dogs finally got to them. Through the backyard and into the porch door, I enter the kitchen, pour myself a beer, and sit down and wait for somebody, something, to approach me from some edge of the vast mess of rooms. The dog, brownish white and fluffy, taps and slips over the linoleum and encircles me as if I never left; I pour him a little beer into his water dish so he'll leave me alone. When I sit back up there is Renea, sitting at the sticky table looking at me and rolling a cigarette between her fingers.

Renea is Cory's half sister, a little younger, but in the same grade, and sad as hell. I suppose she's just depressed, or quiet about something, but she barely ever smiles. It's not that she has an invisible weight on her shoulders, just that she seems to be too tired even to imagine any weight. She's lost her hope, and you can see it, you know what she's lost in the way she never looks out the window, even if you stood her in front of one. Her hair is as uncombed as it was the last time I was here, and her hands as dirty - a girl who simply refuses to take care of herself, but, Jesus Christ, she is beautiful, and for a second I forget why I came. Renea fills my vision, and I can't help but purse my lips in a little thanks to God for this creature. She's like a plate of food, steaming, colorful, smells that fill your stomach with an ache and a feeling of inevitable nourishment. She was meant to be a mother or something because I just feel safe near her. Her eyes so unjudging.

She says, "You're back."

I nod and want to pull the sadness out of her through her hand, if I could. I take her hand and she drops the cigarette and Cory walks into the kitchen.

She sees us. I'm surprised and gasp like a girl. Renea stands up. And Cory leaves, slamming the front door and running down the street, and I begin to chase her but I get a

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headrush and can't see straight and all I can think is *I'm screwed*, but, really, that's the last thing I am.

I stand outside her house and see that she has stopped running. She's very still and I know she won't turn around until I make some kind of effort. This is the point where everything said sets the future. I have a temptation to screw it all and use the control I have at this moment to destroy everything, to say something as asshole as I can. But instead I say, *Wait*, and she turns.

Renea has come outside and walks toward her sister as if the tension in the air is just wind. I follow, as I feel I am supposed to, and the three of us look at each other and then finally hug in the middle of the street; I don't even notice Renea step out of the circle. She removes herself quietly and goes back to the house alone.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," I say, but I have always known that words don't matter, so I comb her hair with my fingers as my apology.

Cory went off soon afterward to visit with her grandmother on her Virginia farm. Then she calls me long distance to say she's moving in, and joyfully invites me to visit, to help her milk cows and fish in the slow river with sticks and string and bread crumbs for bait. It's as if nothing ever happened, and that's fine with me. Plenty of time has passed for healing, and I know she misses me. She tells me over the phone in January that she saw the dead flowers when she first came to Virginia and had to stay to see them bloom. I go on the next train and arrive in time for dinner and applesauce and all night laughing by lantern lights in the warm backyard with Cory and her grandmother.

Her grandmother is a thin and delicate looking woman - white hair and skin, and dark blue eyes, and the strongest teeth I've ever seen. She bites on sticks when playing with the dogs and helps us push the canoe into the water like a man. She reminds me of Cory, and she's the coolest old lady, and I want to live here forever. I want to see Cory as an old lady like that, driving trucks, spitting, and harassing men like there's no tomorrow.

It is another place altogether down here in the almost-South. I've never lived in the country before, and I never want to leave, but school starts soon and my mother can't handle life without me, probably. But for now I'll forget everything and let the sky's pulsing colors rain in washes over my head on clear nights and allow white days to push Cory and me around lakes in a paddle boat.

My lungs are unwrapped, and my zits have cleared up. I feel like the cows that slowly cross small rivers to be separate from the farm, separate from the other cows, to be love cows.

That's me.

Kim Katz                      Walnut Hill School  
Natick, MA                    Jessie Schell

UNTITLED

The hot sand squished between my toes as I ran with my brother and sister down the grass covered dune to the beach. We each carried a styrofoam "noodle," a towel, and a tube to ride the gentle waves that glided across Lake Huron. My older sister and mother had already claimed a spot for us so we shook out our towels in the wind and laid them down next to one another's. My little brother and I scurried across the steaming sand to test the water...kind of chilly, but it would do.

I fished my book out of the big bag my mother had brought down with her and flopped down on my colorful towel to soak up some rays before I ventured into the water. I soon

became absorbed in my book, and except for rotating every few minutes so I wouldn't get burned, I was lost to the world. That is, of course, until I heard my brother yell out, "Daddy!" which caused me to pop up my head in surprise and delight. We immediately demanded that we jump off the swings but my dad insisted that we wait until after we swam, it was too hot. So we lounged in the sun for about another twenty minutes taking in the sights. The volleyball players had emerged, setting up their net and stripping down to their bright colored bikinis and bathing trunks. I watched them for awhile, the sand flying, soaking in the music pulsing from their boom box. My eyes slowly scanned the beach, passing over snuggling couples; families with coolers filled with juice boxes and sandwiches; aging, plaid blankets and striped umbrellas; groups of teenagers with their sunglasses trying to get a tan. My vision finally reached the stone jetty reaching out into the water, stretching for the far away island. Seagulls were squawking and scrounging for food, and the waves gently lapped against the multi-colored rocks. I then gazed at the majestic white stone lighthouse standing tall on the island in the middle of the lake. The sun was shining brightly and reflecting off the glass surrounding the searchlight. As a sailboat with a brightly colored sail inched by, I thought about how lucky I was to be there right at that moment.

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw black, ominous looking clouds rolling in over the water. In a matter of seconds the sky turned three shades darker and the gentle waves turned black and threatening. Rain started pouring down changing the steaming sand a dark brown. My family and I jumped up with our towels over our heads and scurried to collect all our belongings. As soon as everything was packed back into its now damp canvas bag, we stared back to the sand dune that led home. As we ran to the security of our cottage, I glanced back over my shoulder. I felt a strange, unsettled feeling, as if something wasn't right. But I was leading the pack and was soon pushed forward again, through the wind and rain.

My family and I tumbled through the door and flicked on the lights. We dug out fresh towels and stared drying ourselves off. It was then that I remembered that sailboat with the brightly colored sail that was inching by before the storm stared. I jumped from my seat where I had been toveling off and ran to the back door that led to the beach. I looked out, through the reflection of myself and the brightly lit room behind me I was the same blackness and downpour that had stared just a few minutes earlier. I wanted desperately to go back to the beach and check on the boat, but my parents insisted it would just be more dangerous if I were to go back out into the storm. I waited and waited while hundreds of dreadful thoughts filled my head until the rain, wind, and lightning finally ceased. We took the same path we had taken just about an hour before, but this time it seemed much different. The air smelled fresh, and an mist of rain still lingered in the air. The weeds and grass and flowers were now bent under the weight an intensity of the water that had just been released on them. The sky was grey with clouds, with the sun showing slightly, creating almost a halo in the sky. A slight wind still blew through the chilly air.

We finally reached the beach and searched the water with our eyes. I saw nothing but the dark water gently rolling onto shore. I saw no evidence of the boat and breathed a sigh of relief. We were about to turn and head for home once again when a reflection off the water caught my eye. The brightly colored sail was bobbing slowly in the water, now brown with mud, and slightly torn in places. They told me there was nothing that I or any of us could have done. I didn't believe them, and I still don't.

Beth Glauber  
Jamesville, NY 13078



## HOW TO MAKE A SWEET POTATO PIE

First, my child,  
 you must understand  
 the history of sweet potatoes.  
 Like our ancestors, they were  
 brought to this country  
 in a cruel manner,  
 dredged out of the dirt,  
 leaving many roots behind.  
 Picked just short of ripeness,  
 survivors of chilling nights  
 and hot, parched days,  
 they did not resist  
 new surroundings;  
 instead, they thrived  
 with a unique style  
 and character.  
 They never forgot  
 where they came from.  
 Their master's stick  
 and shovel may have  
 dug into their sides  
 a hundred times,  
 but they never faltered,  
 never showed fear  
 or sadness.  
 No, child! They rose up  
 in grace and beauty  
 from their mother,  
 Earth.

Lauren Hart  
 Towson, MD  
 Towson High School  
 Mr. William Jones

## BLIZZARD

As dusk descends, we walk  
 to Pinehurst and down to Dumbarton,  
 toward the blizzard-closed middle school,  
 abandoned now for a week.

Rachel tells me that she had heard a train  
 in the frosty hours before dawn  
 as she lay half-conscious  
 under her heavy down quilt.  
 I say that it's impossible,  
 the train tracks aren't even near Rodgers Forge,  
 but she says that when it blew its horn,  
 soundwaves traveled over the thick snow,  
 like wind rippling over calm seas.  
 I hadn't heard it, maybe  
 because I slept soundly  
 tucked into the nooks of my  
 frigid attic room.

Rachel talks then about attending Dartmouth,  
 how it will be ten times colder  
 than it is in Rodgers Forge, but  
 I try not to listen, shuddering  
 because I can't help  
 hearing how soon she will be gone.  
 "If you're cold, we can go home," offers Rachel.

She doesn't understand.

The middle school recreation fields  
 look more like a Siberian tundra,  
 and we are heroines from  
*Zhivago, Karenina*,  
 bundled in Communist coats, crocheted scarves,  
 battling deep snow to gain  
 on the weeping willow at the top of the hill.  
 On reaching the tree, we prance and scamper,  
 climb a fence, tumble off backwards,  
 imprinting our forms in the snow,  
 laughing about how people will  
 worry when they see our prints and think  
 of those yellow lines policemen draw  
 around corpses.

Months later, as I finish high-school and  
 Rachel starts at college,  
 my warm breath floats in  
 front of my face like smoke  
 as I wade through mountains  
 of blustering yellow leaves.  
 It won't be long until the snow  
 lies so heavily on the pavements that they crack.  
 Rachel will be home for winter break by then,  
 but now each night I lie awake,  
 listening for trains.

Katherine McDonald  
 Baltimore, MD  
 Towson High School  
 Mr. William Jones

## PAINTER VERMEER'S "MAIDSERVANT POURING MILK"

Alone in the kitchen  
 Where the morning light shines through  
 The little panes of the window,  
 The milkmaid slowly pours the milk  
 From a pitcher into a casserole.

She tilts her head slightly to the left.  
 Her eyes focus on the small stream of milk.  
 She dresses colorfully:  
 A white headdress,  
 Yellow and green petticoats,  
 A skirt of red,  
 And a dark blue apron tucked up to the side.

In the light all objects cast shadows --  
 The basket, the bread, the stove... --  
 Yet she does not.  
 Only a clear contour of her back is cast  
 Against the whitewashed wall.

With the sleeves rolled up,  
 One of her hands grasps the handle of the pitcher,  
 And the other holds it in the palm.  
 Listen carefully,  
 Out of the spout,  
 The milk makes a soft, continuous sound.

Lucy Lu  
 South Orange, NJ  
 Columbia High School  
 Mr. Don Lasko



There are a lot of things that you think about that you want to tell somebody, but you're not sure if you should. There are things that you say to people that you wish you'd kept to yourself. That's probably why I'm especially careful who I tell what, and what I just keep to myself. Unfortunately, I often times get it backwards.

I had the worst time thinking about that for so long after Riley Spencer died. That's still a funny thing to say, that Riley's dead. I feel this rush of heat whenever I say it, like it's a lie and I'm horrible for telling it to people. Maybe I'm still having a hard time believing it. Riley and I were inseparable for the time we were together, like best friends and even more. We were a good couple; everyone said "cute" and "perfect," and everyone was shocked, at the end of seven months, when the once perfect couple suddenly hated each other.

Though we fully intended to get back on good terms, we just never did. It was always too much of a stretch. And so, Riley's last year of high school (my junior year), he and I, Riley and Karen, names that were almost one, and a pair of people that at one time couldn't have been closer, now couldn't have been further apart. Riley had completely burned out over the summer, delighting himself in doing all the things I disapproved of, and doing them in excess. We had both gotten over each other and moved on. But one thing I would never, ever get over was losing my best friend.

When he went away to college, I was absolutely relieved. Having him just out of reach wasn't very comfortable; now that he was completely out of reach, I felt a little better. I stopped thinking about him, or caring, and for a while, just assumed that he was either dead or a vegetable. My best friend, Thomas, who Riley used to be close to, had heard nothing from and very little about him. He claimed that every conversation with Mrs. Spencer yielded the same response, "Riley's very content at college." This probably meant that he had all he could drink and smoke there. And I always thought Thomas didn't tell me everything he knew about Riley -- Mrs. Spencer had a tendency to spill it to her son's close friends. That was just Thomas trying to protect me, the way he always did.

We'd all nearly forgotten about Riley -- except when someone would say, "Remember when we...? Yeah, it was you, me, Hannah, Tom, Karen, Riley Spencer -- whatever happened to him anyway? -- Ben, Dave, and a couple other people..." Nobody knew what had become of Riley. Especially not me.

At least not until Hannah James's tenth or twelfth party of our senior year. Hannah had parties all the time -- they were huge but comfortable, and very clean. Nobody ever felt the need to get drunk or stoned or cause any trouble, partly because they didn't want to lose the privilege of being invited back. Hannah knew how to bring people together.

This party was no different than the rest, until Hannah and Delia came running into the kitchen, where I was filling a glass, and both began talking to me at once.

"Karen! Karen! We have to...! Do you know who's here? Oh my God, you will never guess. Guess who's here!!"

"Is it Tom?" I glanced into the front hallway. They pushed me back into the room.

"Um, yeah, but somebody else, too," Hannah glanced around the empty room, "we just came to tell you in case you decided you want to leave."

"Guys! Who's here?" I tried to look into the foyer.

"Get back in there!" Hannah hissed at me, "It's Riley."

"Riley?"

"I know!"

"Riley Spencer?"

"Yeah, um--"

"Here in your house?"

"I didn't invite him. I guess Tom told him..."

"Can you go tell Tom that I need to talk to him?"

"Yeah, I'll go." Delia went to get Thomas.

Hannah gave me a long, pathetic look, "Karen, I am *so* sorry. I *know* you don't want him here. I swear I didn't invite him."

"It's okay, Hannah. We'll all get along."

"I feel so bad..."

"Don't worry. It's just a few hours," I emphasized, putting my hands on her shoulders.

She smiled reluctantly, "Okay." She turned to leave the room, and I leaned on the wall, pushing my hair out of my face. I heard her greet Thomas, and a moment later he stepped into the room. He was decked out in his usual wealthy looking clothes, and a clean Yankees cap with the brim formed, casting shadows on his face. He had lovely blue eyes that always sparkled, though tonight he wasn't happy. He came to me to hug.

"Hi," I said, confused, as we embraced.

"How's it going?"

"Okay, I think," I said.

"Do you think maybe I could get a ride home?" he looked very serious, "because I will not ride with him again."

"Yeah. Um, why is he here, anyway?"

"I don't know why he wanted to come. He just really liked the idea, and you can't really stop him from doing what he wants."

"Yeah, but did he know I'd be here?"

"I assume so. Don't worry about it, it's just--"

"I don't plan on worrying about it, I just think it's a little weird is all--"

"Shhh." Thomas silenced me, looking over my head into the hallway.

I turned around, and Riley stepped into the doorway.

He had very clearly been drinking, and smelled a little weedy to me. He and Thomas shook hands and had an exchange that I really didn't hear because I was too busy taking in what I saw.

He'd gotten skinnier, his face was emaciated, his hair matted. His style of dress looked basically like whichever lacrosse shirt had been handiest when he'd rolled out of bed. His jeans were a little baggy, and he wore Teva sandals and socks. He had a baseball cap hooked to a belt loop with his keys. He had faint shadows under his eyes. His eyes; they were really what stood out. They were dead. Empty. They were fairly convincing as he and Thomas conversed, but I could tell something wasn't right. And I'm sure Thomas could, too.

Before I knew what was happening, Thomas threw me an apologetic look and left the room.

I looked up at Riley. He sort of smiled.

"Well, hey, Karen," he said, surprisingly coherent.

"Hello, Riley."

He kind of seemed to have forgotten where he and I stood. "So, how you doin'?"

"Good. You?"

"Oh, great, great. Yeah. College is good."

"Are the classes hard?"

He shrugged, "I guess. Yeah. But... there's a lot going on."

"Still play lacrosse?"

"Uh-huh."

"How's that going?"

"You know..." he said. I didn't, not really, but he didn't bother. "So, where have you applied?"

"Oh... not very many places. Mount Holyoke, Nazareth, Hamilton, Hartwick--"



He laughed, "Hartwick!"

"Yeah... why is that funny?"

"Karen, it's a drinking school."

"So?"

"So... you don't drink."

He was right-- I didn't. But why was that his business?

"No..."

He laughed again, "I couldn't even picture you at a kegger," he rubbed his bloodshot, empty eyes, "you're too good."

For some reason, that infuriated me. I felt my face go hot, but I didn't say a word. Riley stared at me with a smile, and there was a sudden and creepy mood change.

"You look good," he said softly.

"Thanks."

"I was thinking about you the other day."

"Were you?"

"Yeah, I was, because," he took a deep breath, "um. Because remember, back during my junior year, we said we thought maybe when we were older we could get together sometime, hook up or something...?"

"I remember."

He didn't have the guts to say anymore for a moment. He glanced around, unsure. He felt shot down, I could tell. He was offended, and it set him off.

"Karen, I don't get you," he said this loudly, "I just don't. I mean, you were always the one who wanted to get back together. Now you're, like," he gestured wildly. If I hadn't been so angry, I would've laughed at how fried he was, "you're, like, blowing me off."

He went on, almost yelling at me, but I didn't really listen. I heard him, and I watched him as his eyes began to look somewhat alive. He had color in his face, and he really did care about fighting with me. This was the old Riley I knew and missed.

He was saying something about how indecisive I was and how it had always annoyed the hell out of him, when I grabbed his hands, "Riley."

He stared at our hands for a moment, "Why are you so repressed, Karen? Do you ever have *any* fun?"

I let go of his hands and turned my back to him.

"What?" he said, "What?"

"Damn it, Riley!" I spun back around to look at him.

The brief glitter in his eyes had been replaced once more with the dull, stoned-out haze, "What is *with* you? Can you even *think* straight?"

He blinked, "What?"

"Do you ever look in the mirror? Do you?" I thought suddenly of a conversation we'd had, our making-up conversation.

"*Sometimes, you think you're a beautiful person,*" I had said, "*then you look in the mirror and it's just... ugh. Does that ever happen to you, Riley, when you look in the mirror?*"

"No," he'd said, "*usually I just think, 'Damn, I need to comb my hair.'*"

"Do I ever...? Of course."

"Look. Right now." I pushed him toward the mirror.

"Look. Is this gonna be another one of your psychological... philosophical... things? 'Cause I'm not in the mood." He planted his feet.

"Damn it, Riley! Just look in the mirror!"

He did, "So what?"

"So what?! Look at you! You're wasted!"

"A little..."

"I don't mean *now*! I mean *totally*! You're a complete burnout!"

"Just because I like to party sometimes and that kind of thing, it doesn't mean--"

"It's not *sometimes*. It's *all the time*. All you do is drink, smoke out, have sex, and play lacrosse. That's *it*."

"Karen, don't."

"Why are you like this, Riley? Is this the only way you know how to have fun anymore? You didn't *used* to act this way. You used to care, you cared about school, and you cared about Thomas--"

"Thomas is a repressed little Republican, just like you."

I had nothing to say to that. I sat down on the floor. I was so angry. I closed my eyes to keep myself from crying. It didn't work. A tear slid down my cheek.

"Karen."

"Go away, Riley."

"Karen, please, I'm sorry," he sat beside me, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you."

I sniffled and shook my head.

"I didn't mean what I said about Tom," he said. I glanced at him, "or you. Okay? I'm sorry."

"Don't you understand why I'm so upset?"

"No," he said.

"You're totally burned out." He started to open his mouth, "No, Riley, you are. You look like crap. You can't think, everyone forgot you while you were gone," I started really crying then, "and you really hurt me and I hate you."

Riley stared at me. I suppose it was a great shock for someone like me who had always welcomed apologies with open arms to suddenly bite his head off. Without taking his eyes off me, his hand went to his pocket.

"Don't even *think* of smoking anything in Hannah's house," I said. His hand dropped back to his knee. I got up, "What do you want, Riley?"

Riley remained on the floor, gazing at a flower on the rug, "Do you have any idea what it's like to be me, Karen? How few things there have ever been that made me feel whole? So please, don't tell me how all I do is drink and get high. Because I'm sorry, but that makes things slightly more bearable. It makes you forget how much things really suck. And as far as me having sex... Karen, you're not stupid. You like to feel wanted, too." He wouldn't look at me.

"I wanted you, Riley."

"Yeah, fine, you wanted me, but you *could not accept* these things. Somebody wanting you does not change the fact that somebody *did not* want you. Somebody got rid of you. Okay?"

I nodded.

"You will not understand what it feels like to be me until you live my life the same way I had to. And I did have to, before you say anything. You're different, Karen, you wouldn't understand. I'm sorry," he got up, "if things were meant to go differently, they would have. Thank you for trying. You did more than a lot of people have." He went to the door to leave, then turned back to look at me. He exhaled and shook his head, "I hope you stay this beautiful forever. No matter what anyone says, I loved you." He opened his mouth, and closed it, as if to say "bye" or "later," and quietly left.

*If things were meant to go differently...* I stood where I was, thinking of something he'd said during the breakup, which was probably designed to be a comforting closing line; "*If it's true love, then we're meant to be, and we'll get back together.*"

I heard him drive away and I thought, *things were meant to go differently, Riley. Maybe it was true love.*

Thomas and I were driving back at about midnight when the car phone rang. I answered it and handed it to him, "It's your mother."



"Hi, mom," he said, "yeah, I'm fine. No, he left a while ago, I asked Karen for a ride home because he--" Thomas stopped, "What?"

I glanced at him.

"When? Where?" he nodded, "She did. All right. I will. It may be a little while. Karen might--" he stopped, "uh-huh. I love you, too, mom. Bye." He handed the phone back to me, and I replaced it.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Can we pull off, please?"

"Of course." I pulled the car over.

Thomas slowly turned to me, and took my hands in his, "Riley just got in an accident. He's..."

I lowered my head a little, telling him to go on.

"He's dead."

Every instant I'd ever spent with Riley Spencer flashed before my eyes as Thomas went on talking. There were so many things I wished I could've told him once upon a time... how being with him made everything so much brighter. The sky bluer, the grass greener. How the sky had always been full of stars and how the snow had always sparkled like a sea of white diamonds. Even the few gray days I could remember seemed to glow like light through a raindrop...

I looked at Thomas, who had finished talking. He was sucking in his lips, like he did when he was upset. His eyes were the same brilliant blue that the sky had always seemed to be two years ago. He wasn't going to cry-- not now. I looked out the window. Time had reversed that night, then gone forward far too quickly, then stopped, then started again, but the world was still the same. I put the car into gear and pulled into traffic.

The toothpaste in the Sullivan's bathroom tasted like Christmas, overwhelmingly peppermint, like a candy cane. I spat it out and rinsed my mouth. The bathroom smelled like Christmas to me, too. Potpourri. I looked in the mirror. *What do I look like besides a Karen?* I thought. *Catherine, possibly. Maybe Annemarie. Kristen. Maybe not.* Thomas's mother was Mary. *I couldn't be a Mary.* His father was Thomas. Riley's mother was Kathleen. *Riley maybe could've been--*

Thomas knocked on the door, "Karen? Ready to go?"

"Yeah, almost." I looked in the mirror again. I blinked my eyes. I hadn't cried at all. In a way it seemed good... but it also seemed like something was wrong.

Thomas knocked again, "Can I come in? I need a comb."

"Yeah, come in."

He opened the door, "You okay?"

"Yes, fine." I said, distracted. I was concentrating on my reflection in the mirror.

Thomas came into view behind me, smoothing out his hair with a comb. He was wearing a dark suit and a reserved tie, "You look nice."

"Thanks, I'm going to a wake," I said.

He tried to laugh, "I know," he took a deep breath, "So..."

"So..." I'd run out of things to say that might lighten the situation. I looked at us in the mirror. He was much taller than me, with freckles and lovely sky blue eyes, and dark hair that was damp and combed back. I was still short, no freckles, eyes not quite as blue as his, and my red hair that was usually straight was curled. We were beautiful. Tragically beautiful.

"So..." he said again, "this is unusual."

"Yeah," I started to leave the bathroom.

"Karen."

I turned to look at him, "Yeah?"

"I'm glad you're here... you know..." he shrugged, "I'm glad I'm not alone."

"So am I." I said. I turned to leave the bathroom.

"Karen."

I turned back around. He was sucking in his lips again. His laughing blue eyes were watery. He seemed so tall, so adult, yet those watery blue eyes were so childlike.

So grown up yet so young. Dear, sweet Thomas. He didn't say anything. He didn't have to. I went to him and we held onto each other. I wished there was something that I could say to him, that I could tell him how much I loved and appreciated him, assure him that everything would be okay, as he'd always done for me. But my mind was so blank, and I felt at such a loss for words... there was nothing I could say.

He said something about "unfair" and "too soon." I silently agreed, but wondered if we were right. Did God think it was unfair and too soon? The suffering of Riley Spencer, one of His children, was over. He was at peace. We, his survivors, were not.

Thomas let me go. I squeezed his hand, and he nodded, "It's time to go."

The Spencers were about fifty each. She was a teacher, he was an accountant. They both came across as healthy, wealthy people, like you might see in the L.L. Bean catalog or something. They were very warm and welcoming; happy people. But it seemed that the closer I got, the stronger the feeling that something was wrong became. They hadn't dealt with the life Riley had chosen for himself very well, and it seemed as if dealing with him put a bit of a strain on their marriage. I'd always thought that Mrs. Spencer was the most beautiful, vibrant woman I'd ever met over the age of fifty, and that I'd never known a man who had it more together than Mr. Spencer did. Nonetheless, it became clear that there were discrepancies between my images and what was beneath the surface; Mrs. Spencer's smile was always a little uneasy, like she wasn't sure if she'd be smiling for long. And Mr. Spencer's outward togetherness was his way of rationalizing things, even if he couldn't always rationalize his family. It tied their loose ends, at least for the time being.

The Sullivans and Spencers talked quietly in a far corner of the room, as Thomas and I stood silently, trying to avoid looking at the coffin. I watched their parents talking, and then placed a hand on Thomas's arm. He leaned down.

"How are they taking this?" I asked.

He straightened up, "They're hurting a lot, both of them, even if it doesn't always show. In a way, I think they're a little relieved.

*Relieved*, I repeated to myself as I drifted towards the coffin.

"Karen," Thomas sounded a little afraid, "Karen, what are you--?"

He didn't go on, because by then he'd followed me to the side of the coffin, and he was looking at his best friend, dead, "Oh my God."

Maybe we were thinking the same things: we'd never seen someone we'd known inside out dead. Maybe it was all the wasted time. Maybe it was everything we'd wanted to say, and the things we wished we hadn't.

Thomas laid one hand on the edge of the coffin, "Riley..."

I put my hand on his, not wanting him to become emotional, not here. *Please don't cry, Thomas.*

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the Sullivans and the Spencers look at us. I could see Mrs. Spencer turn away and begin to cry against her husband. I could see Thomas's father



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reach for his mother's hand. I could smell flowers and Thomas's aftershave. I could taste the Christmas toothpaste. I could hear the clock, and Thomas's breathing, and Riley's laugh.

Thomas and I were driving towards Riley's house. He was trying very hard to act as though nothing was any different or wrong. He kept trying to get a laugh out of me, and I felt it was only right to laugh a little, just to make us both feel better.

We pulled into the driveway, and he paused to look at me, "You don't need to come in. I'm just going to grab my stuff."

"No, I'll come in."

"Are you sure? You could just--"

"No, I want to come in." I unbuckled my seatbelt and got out of the car.

We entered the house through the garage, into the mud room next to the kitchen. He took off his sneakers, and I kicked off my sandals.

"I'll only be a second. You could just walk around or... whatever." He started toward the stairs, then turned back to me, "Is there anything you want?"

I must've looked confused, because he said, "Anything of Riley's you'd like to have? His parents said that if we--"

"No, no. Really. I can't think of anything," I said softly.

He went upstairs, and I began to wander. I walked through the kitchen, leaning on the kitchen counter where I'd eaten a hundred dinners, touching the phone I'd called home on more than a few times, the teacups I'd drank a gallon of tea from. The kitchen was the same-- clean and bright. The cat dish and the dog dish sat where they always had. I walked through the dining room into the living room. My eyes swept the room, from the glass doors out to the backyard and the creek, across the couch, over the table to the fireplace where we'd stood the afternoon before the prom to have our pictures taken. My eyes continued to the foyer beyond the doorway. I left the living room, and stood in the foyer, looking at myself in the mirror. It had been two years, just about, since I'd seen myself in that mirror. I hadn't gotten taller. *Just prettier*, I thought. I tried a smile out on the mirror. Not bad. I glanced up the stairs, where I could hear Thomas recovering his things from Riley's room. I continued through the foyer to the den, and I was finally overcome.

Here it was, this little room where I'd spent countless winter evenings watching movies with Riley, and sometimes his dog. Even the bad movies weren't so awful with him to laugh with. The room smelled exactly the same; homey and warm, and the photo of Riley and his family, taken when he was about twelve or thirteen, still hung on the wall. I drifted over to the TV cabinet. New to the collections of photos was his senior portrait, and our junior prom picture. I reached out and picked it up.

"They brought it out after he left," Thomas said from behind me. I turned to face him. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"Fine." I nodded.

He took the picture out of my hand and put it back on the TV cabinet. "You know, I didn't mean to drag you here."

"You didn't drag me anywhere."

He nodded and we went back to the kitchen. We sat at the counter, and he began to peel an orange. I stared out the window over his head.

"I think it's good that his parents aren't here," Thomas said, "I don't know if they'd know what to say to you."

I didn't think I would have known what to say to them, either.

"They were glad you were there the other night, though. She told my mom..." he shrugged, and squinted at me, "Do you

think that things would've changed if he'd survived? Do you think he would've changed?"

I shook my head, "I don't know, Tom."

"It's kind of farfetched, after all this time, isn't it?"

"Maybe not." I looked at the sun glinting off the creek.

There were flowers growing in the wall along it. It reminded me of all the flowers the day of the prom. So many flowers.

He touched my arm, "Have you cried at all?"

I shook my head, "Have you?"

"A little. I don't cry easily. Why didn't you?" He was probably thinking of how I *did* cry easily.

"I don't know. I just... didn't feel like crying, I guess."

"Why?"

"I don't know," I said again. And I didn't.

"We went through a lot together," Thomas said, "you and me and Riley."

"Yeah," I said.

"Remember, the night before Christmas Eve, when we all went sledding, and you guys all borrowed my clothes and stuff? We all got soaked. But what a time..."

"What a time," I repeated. "Tom?"

"Yeah?"

"I was thinking about what you said the other night. About the Spencers being, you know, relieved?"

"Yeah?"

"I think I understand. Because, it's like," I took a deep breath, feeling a lump in my throat, "it's like, when Riley and I broke up, it was like, I mourned him, you know?" He nodded. "Because I just felt like he was gone, Thomas. Like he was either dead or..." my voice slipped away for a moment, "or maybe he had never existed anyway..."

"I remember you saying that," he said quietly.

"So now that he really is... dead," my voice broke, "I feel... relieved. Because now I... don't have to see his ghost wandering around school... this thing walking around school, pretending to be him, you know? I don't have to see him like that, not ever again. He really is gone. He's happy now, he's safe. I don't have to worry about him anymore, Thomas, he's okay. I don't have to worry, I'm relieved..." I thought I had more to say, but my tears took over. Thomas was instantaneously on my side of the counter holding me.

"It's okay," was all he said, "it's okay." I nodded but I didn't stop crying. Now that I could cry, maybe it was okay. And maybe, even though so many things had been left unsaid and unresolved, my last words to him made up for it, just a little. *I wanted you, Riley*. Wherever he was, I hoped he would always remember that.

Thomas and I sat staring out the kitchen window. We held onto each other. He rested his chin on my head.

Christine Ennis  
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Jamesville-DeWitt High School  
Ellin Adams, Diane Brown, Janet McLoughlin

#### SNOW DAY

You've come on to me  
Like a snow day  
Quiet and unannounced  
Suddenly hanging off branches  
With anticipation

Kevin C. Litten  
Silver Spring, MD  
Springbrook High School  
Mrs. Abeshouse





Currier Randall  
Bethesda, MD

### THE PAPER FLOWER

The dream came back. It is some kind of reoccurring nightmare, the result of a seemingly trivial matter I only noticed in my subconscious mind. I'm sure a shrink could analyze it and tell me what deep fear I have, but I'd rather not know. The dream is too gruesome for some third person objective opinion.

I see a man holding a clipboard, clothed in white, more like a banshee than a human. His hands are covered in sterile rubber gloves, and he always looks at a scene opposite me, grinning as I picture Satan when he has captured another sinner's soul. For an instant I am watching him from outside a window, and then a moment later I become part of the scene.

I look at the blood on the floor, the gutted carcasses hanging on the pulleys. They say you have no sense of smell in a dream, but I tell you that I could smell the death in the room. The stench of dried blood and starched hair always seems to remain in my nostrils even in daylight.

I glance down at my hands and my feet, covered in hair I never remembered owning. I catch my reflection off a metal blade and I realize I am a dog. Why a dog, I wonder. I don't even like dogs.

Then I look and I see this other man with what I think are large tweezers. He flicks a switch and a spark jumps from one point to the other. Ah Ha, my mind cries! An electric current. (Do dogs know what an electric current is?) And I experience a gut reaction, an instinct to run and escape as far away as my canine limbs can take me. If I ran track as a human, I must be able to run like lightning as a dog. I try to move, but I am tied down, like an animal led to slaughter. I close my eyes, waiting for the moment when I will join those on the pulley...

Then I awake, bathed in sweat, scared to look at my body in case I might still be that dog. Thankfully, all I see is my baby sister, slumbering peacefully across the room. In the daylight, I

always laugh at myself, attributing this dream to the discussion of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle during English class this week.

I live in a typical American town, the stereotypical white suburbia domain. Altoona, Pennsylvania is not exactly the hot spot for action, be it political, violent, or otherwise. Our claim to fame is that we have the oldest wooden roller coaster in the world. Otherwise, our economy is slow and we have four lane highways through the middle of nowhere (ah, the product of pork barrel legislation). Residing here are a large variety of lawyers, doctors, and assorted other white collar types, but the blue ones live in mass. Despite it all, I enjoy living here; Mr. Rogers could be my neighbor. Everyone knows everyone else and I can run in the mornings down my street without a partner or mace. It's peaceful. I'm a peaceful person.

I'm a typical American female. Brown hair, blue eyes, tall, average build, I'm not a standout in any crowd, but then I have no desire for fame. If I was beautiful, I'd probably be vain, like many of my popular "beautiful" (but then, isn't beauty in the eye of the beholder?) friends. I have more important things to do with my life than worry about the dating gossip or the up-and-coming rock concerts. I have respectable grades, a few good friends, and many acquaintances. So much for the story of a beautiful teenage queen and her wild social life in an exotic place.

This is my senior year, that time when I should be able to do as I please, attend AP Study Hall during every period if I wanted. Let me say that's one big joke. I worked harder in the first half of senior year than in the rest of my life, and I now stress over colleges in the second half. At Saint Catherine of Sienna High School (we usually call it Sie High), I have a graduating class of 80. For entertainment, we catch movies in the theater, go bowling, or skate. Everyone has their own thing to do. Local bands throw gigs; if you know the right people you can always get in for free. It's fair to say I don't know the right people, but I hear about them often enough.

Today I sat in physics class. We have a really cool teacher. He claims to have housed Monica Seles in his basement. That's the reason she took so long to recover from the stabbing incident -- Monica was hanging with Mr. Rivera. They played table tennis into the "wee hours" (according to Mr. Rivera).

I don't get physics. I do well enough, and I would fight any doofus who says "Females are not as good at developing mathematical concepts as males, so the SAT standards for them should be lowered." It doesn't help when the kid behind me, Jason, is a physics whiz (Physics Weenie, as Mr. Rivera says) and hammers any error I might make. I once asked him why he picked on me, and he said because I leave myself wide open for insults; since I am so smart, I have no common sense. I have chewed out several kids in my class for calling me a "genius," but it doesn't do much good. I suppose I don't come across as hard core, and probably never will.

Today we worked in small groups on force, gravity, and centripetal acceleration problems. I always work in Sally and Jason's group. Sally and I joined the marching band together, but Jason and her also went to the same school before Sie High, so he hangs with her. Sally is really quiet and just laughs as Jason and I trade insults, bantering back and forth. She once opened her mouth to say, "You two fight like you're married." I laughed and Jason did too, but he said that we wouldn't have enough room in the church for both our families.

Today was typical of Jason. "So did you see Star Wars this weekend?"

"I loved it! And I stood in a line before the box office



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opened for 20 minutes. I went to see the Saturday 7 o'clock show with my two brothers in the surround sound theater. It was awesome! I can't wait for the re-release of *The Empire Strikes Back*."

"Yeah. Me, Sally, and the gang went to see it on Friday night, although it was a different theater, not quite up to your standards." The sarcasm was not lost on me. He paused, then slyly asked. "If you're such a genius, then why'd you wait in line? I'm sure your stepdad knows the owners of the theater and could have bummed some opening-night tickets off of them. We got in opening night. What's the problem - he's not rich enough for you or something?"

Jason infuriates me. It's one thing to pick me apart, but touch my family, say one insulting thing about my family, and my best friend would be going down. And Jason is not in the least my best friend.

"At least I had the sanity not to come with *you*," I said icily. So much for going down. I was not to be let alone for long.

"Are you implying that I would go with you? I don't take brainiacs to the movies. You may recite the speed of light in your sleep, but you still have no common sense."

"I want you working on those problems," Mr. Rivera commented, noticing we were still on the first one.

"Egotistical jock," I muttered under my breath.

Each day went about the same, which is why I'm always so thankful when Friday rolls around. When school lets out on Friday, it's time to forget the books (at least until Sunday night) and live. A friend and I decided to drive 20 miles up to State College, and spend the night in my sister's college apartment.

We hung out, played pool, cruised around the Nittany Lion Mall, and surfed through a couple of frat parties. My sister likes them, but I always feel so lonely. I'm in such a big group, but I'm sure I stand out. There's a big sign on my head that says "I don't belong here," and another on my back reading "Beware of the loser." This isn't a new experience to me; even at my high school dances, I always seem to have my head down, like I'm not good enough for everyone else. The fancy term is "inferiority complex," I believe.

We were driving back from State College when my friend pulled over for gas. I sat thinking (a dangerous thing, so Jason says) when I saw an old man, just sitting in the darkest corner of the parking lot. He had a dog, an old dirty white and brown speckled creature. I could see the mutt's paws from my position; they were caked in dirt, the nearby fur as sparse and scruffy as the rest. The man's clothing was in tatters, his sunken eyes appearing above a tangled beard. I thought he must be another bum off the street. He looked straight at me, and my eyes were somehow held. He was asking for help. And that dog, his eyes too seemed to reflect my own...

I shook my head, pulling me out of the reverie and back into reality. He was a bum, a guy who would take my money at the smallest provocation. The car started, and I realized we were leaving. I don't know whose eyes pierced the back of my head - the old man's or the dog's.

The dream came again that night.

The dream had changed. I was the inspector, the man with the lily-white hands covered in surgeon gloves. I was the man holding the electric tweezers, placing them to the creature tied to a conveyor belt. I held the tweezers first to the German Shepherd's brain, and then to the old man, whose eyes mournfully searched my own.

The next evening, I sat at a mime exhibition. It was a

program run by the school; Sally was in it (how appropriate; she didn't have to talk), and asked me to come. Of course, I promised I would.

I did not notice the strange movement of hands in front of me. I just sat, nearly falling asleep in the first half, wondering why I must have these dreams. There was no reason for this haunting. I'm an average person, and I just want peace. I never have a day of rest during school for fear Jason will verbally attack me if my guard was down, and now this. And then the next thought is a typically teenage one - I'm fat, I'm ugly, I can't wait to go to college.

I would never voice these complaints to anyone; I would be labeled a spoiled brat, and rightly so. There are so many people in the world who suffer so much more, and in complete silence. That man and his dog, for example.

A light tap on my shoulder awakened me from the vale of self-pity. I looked up to see a boy, who smiled and thrust something into my hand.

The flower is beautiful. I hold it in my clumsy, unworthy fingertips, fearing to destroy the artistry. I know my heavy heart must be destroying the delicate stem as I speak, yet it remains in form. I looked at the boy's shriveled ears, and for the first time that day, smiled and said, "Thank you." Although I knew he could not hear me, he nodded and I knew there must be a universal language between us. It did not matter that the flower was made from one of the mime programs. But at that moment, I began to feel ashamed for my self-involvement, my continued ability to shut out the world. That boy had so much less than I, but gave so easily to someone who had so much more. I wanted to be safe in my little world, yet I could not accept myself as I was, even though a stranger could.

I never saw that boy again, did not even see him when the show finished. I stopped at a grocery store on the way home, picking up a few basic supplies: bread, milk, soup, and dog food. I steered my car on a lonely road toward a tiny gas station somewhere between Altoona and State College.

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## SUNDAY VISIT

Today my daughter visited me at my house for the first time in four months. I was getting dressed in my bathroom, I had my portable mini-t.v. on to the Jet's game and I didn't even know she was there until I turned off the t.v., turned off the lights, opened the door, and there she was sitting across the carpet on a chair, stocking'd ankles crossed, waiting for me to come out of the bathroom just like she'd used to do when she was smaller.

It had been a while since I'd seen her, maybe two months. I wasn't prepared for her to be there, I don't know what I expected, but it seemed strange to see her in my hallway. My hallway my hallway, I guess it's her house too, but she hasn't been here in such a long time. I remember when she'd walk around in those shirts I used to give her, RDM near the breast pocket, embroidered in blue. She always seemed to wear the starch away by sleeping in them.

When I opened the door of my bathroom, she was sitting in my hallway. She was wearing a new skirt that I'd never seen and new shoes and I was taken back because she looked just like her mother.

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She was wearing the same perfume that she always did on the weekends, I remembered she had a boyfriend whom I never asked about, and I could tell by the way she was sitting that they were in love. At that moment, my daughter seemed mature and very beautiful, and standing there, surprised by her silence and the shock at seeing her again after so long, I wanted to pull her to me, walk away, or lock her up in my cabinet made of antique oak like a private, biting memory I wanted out of my sight.

I don't know what I expected, her hair was the same length though I'd guessed it would've grown, and she was the same weight though her stomach was flatter, and I wasn't sure if a father should notice these things, but although nothing had changed with her, everything was different. When she looked up at me she didn't pretend to notice the new painting on the wall, nor did she attempt to make things anymore or less uncomfortable, though she always had before. Her honesty frightened me, and I could tell she knew.

A hundred things running through my head, and although it's been only seconds, I'm getting used to the picture of her being here again, she's looking more comfortable in that chair, as if she'd been expected. Expected... no, we'd always told her she was wanted here, *welcome* in fact, as long as her room was neat and the doors were left open and she was polite and prim and pretty just like a daughter should be, it didn't seem much to ask but now she doesn't visit at all, so she's either stubborn or spoiled, Jesus, I only wanted a tidy room, but she said, "No Dad, it wasn't about that," so I ask her then what's it about, and she looks at her hands and tells me I'll never understand.

Well that's for damn sure, what are you supposed to understand about a daughter who goes away for half a year and reappears in front of your bathroom door one Sunday afternoon? She's always doing this to me, demanding when I'm vulnerable, manipulating me to weakness by surprising me with her wide eyes and crafted phrases. She can make me feel guilty for things that *she* did. I sigh. I don't know what to say. Jesus, Courtney... I ask her if she's said hello to her stepmother yet.

She answers no, and she's not ashamed. I tell her that's rude, and her dark eyes narrow and my god she's burning through me those could be my own eyes looking in on me and I realize that I haven't even said hello yet.

I tell her she looks nice, and I edge forward to pull her to me. She doesn't stand up and I don't bend down as far as I should, so when we embrace it's awkward, but this is nothing new. I have to make sure there's enough distance between us, it's like when she first started wearing a bra, I didn't want to let her know I realized, so I had to keep a distance and watch the position of my arm, and although it's years later, not so much has changed. She's a young lady now, and I wouldn't want to embarrass her.

There's a bag at her feet, it's zippered up and full, and I ask her what it is. She tells me what I already knew, it's things she's taking back with her, "stuff I forgot before." My daughter's packing up and leaving me just like I once did to her.

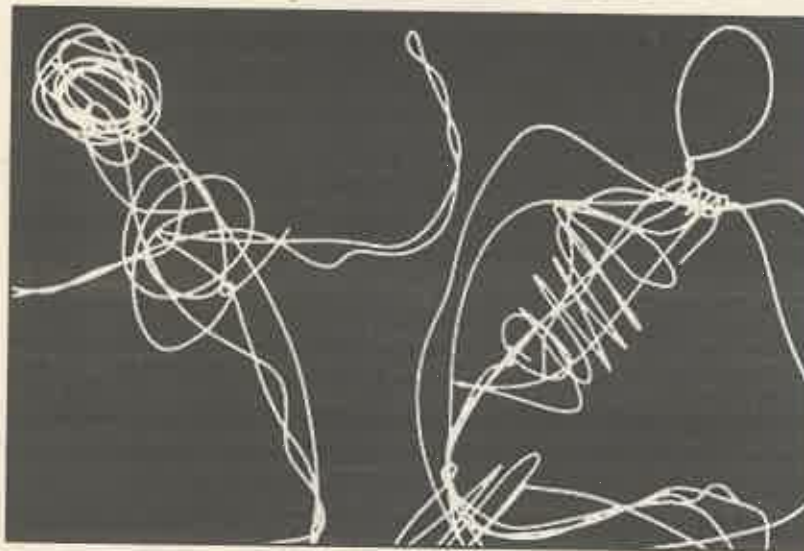
Like father, like daughter, she stands up and she's very tall, almost eye level with me, and I think thank God, she did get some of my height after all. Her hair's just a bit darker than mine used to be, but she's got my small wrists and tiny ankles and even though she's getting better at hiding it, I know she finds it easier to write her way through confrontations, just as I still do. She says she just stopped by to say hello like this was any normal visit, it occurs to me she drove here, so I guess she got her license. She asks if we can have dinner some time, just me and her. I remind her I have a wife, and she pulls her lips in she takes a breath and I'm left wondering why I had to say that because I know it hurt her feelings, she pulls at her fingers and I

guess it's hard for both of us. Doesn't she see I don't know how to make things better? We went out once, and she didn't want to talk about school didn't want to talk about sports or the theatre or the movies she had seen, she wanted to talk about why I left and why I lied to her and how I could ignore her like I had but this isn't something you discuss over an expensive Italian meal, especially with the tables so close together and all the work I had to do before morning... no, those sort of things we never used to talk about at all, but she doesn't want to visit me at my house anymore like she used to, every other weekend she'd come and now it's maybe twice a year and I could make her stay with me, it's my right as her father but why should I drag her to court, I keep hoping she'll change her mind, but now she wants to talk. Talk, when I thought we had some sort of lucid agreement between us, five bucks for every A, breakfast on Sundays, camp in the summertime... we were a real family, as long as we didn't talk about anything upsetting.

Now she doesn't want to pretend anymore, my checkbook stays inside my pants because she just wants to talk to me. So, maybe we'll have dinner sometime but I've been so busy and somehow I can't return her phone calls, she looks so much like her mother now, and talking to her's like looking at photographs you wished you'd never taken. Besides, Carolyn's pregnant again, so there's just so much to do and so many things to fix; I don't have the time to be an honest father, I have a lot to regret but why does she have to realize it now?

She reminds me that I have a daughter and I think, God, don't you think I know that? Every night I lie down beside a woman I thought I loved and this house is much too big for me, I'm lonely and getting older and I remember how my firstborn used to run to me with her hair down, I'd scarcely be through the door when she'd be pulling at my briefcase, and I'd drop it not worrying whether it was leather or suede or fragile or not closed all the way, nothing mattered but my darling daughter as I'd spin her round the hallway, not caring whether her underwear was showing and she'd push her face into my collar saying "daddy you smell good," and I could really hug her tightly and I'd never done anything to make her ashamed of me and now here she stands with her body like a woman's, and a suitcase at her feet saying it was nice to see me and Merry Christmas and I want to say I love her but for some reason I don't.

Courtney Maum  
Greenwich, CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Linda Vasu



Melissa Gonzalez  
Rochester, NY



"Jordan Bell" I read the name tag on the wooden desk across from mine. It was the first name I learned at Penn Charter. "Hi," said a squeaky little voice. "I'm Jordan."

"I'm Janey," I said, sitting down across from Jordan. He had big eyes.

At recess time, Jordan came up to me holding a big blue box. "Do you wanna play Connect Four?" he asked me.

"What's that?"

He stared at me like I was from another planet. "You mean you don't know how to play Connect Four?!" I shook my head. He sat down, opened the box and began taking out a bunch of red and black circles.

"What are you doing?" I was really confused.

"I'm going to teach you how to play!" he told me with a smile. Jordan was pretty neat. I liked him.

I sat down across from Jordan and watched him put his black checker into the center hole. Jordan said that black always goes first because "smoke comes before fire." The red checkers were the fire, he explained.

Then it was my turn. I put my red checker on top of Jordan's black one. Then he put in another black one and I topped it. I liked this game. It was fun.

"Connect Four!" shouted Jordan.

Hey, I wasn't supposed to lose! "Let's play again," I suggested. So we played another game, then two, three more. Connect Four quickly became my favorite game. Every recess, Jordan and I raced to the shelf to see who could grab the box first. Then, laughing, we sat down on the green and blue checkered rug and played Connect Four until Mrs. Sykes told us recess was over. We even had tournaments. My goal was to beat Grant Buerger, the Connect Four champion. Grant had a brother in fourth grade who taught him how to play, so he was *really* good. I got better and better and started beating Jordan all the time. He got mad and told me that if it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't even know how to play.

Connect Four tournaments were the most exciting events that happened in kindergarten. Everybody looked forward to recess time when we would all gather on the rug and cheer for our friends and make bets on who would win the game.

One day, Jordan invited me over his house to play.

"Mommy, can I play at Jordan's house?" I asked when I came home from school.

"He's my friend."

"Well, I'll have to call his mother first," she said. "I'm glad you're making friends at school."

"Here we are," Mommy said, pulling into the driveway.

Jordan's house looked a lot like mine, except his door was painted blue and white, and mine was brown. When I knocked, a lady with light brown, curly hair opened it and said, "Hi there. You must be Janey."

Jordan was standing under her arm. "Let's go up to my room and play," he said.

"O.K.," I followed him. "Bye, Mommy," I called over my shoulder.

"Bye, sweetheart."

As it turned out, most of my Saturdays and Sundays were spent playing with Jordan. Sometimes he came to my house, but mostly we played at his house. He taught me how to play "Battleship," and I helped him put together his model airplane kits. They were so neat! One time we made a big white plane with a red and a blue stripe. Jordan's daddy said they used that

kind of airplane in the Army! We felt really important.

Jordan also had this neat game called "Lite Brite." There were colored pegs-- red, yellow, green and blue-- that lit up when we plugged them into a black board. We made rainbows, a birthday cake and a bouquet of flowers. But my favorite was the hot air balloon. Jordan and I plugged in all the pegs and then sat back to admire our work.

"I wish I could go up in a hot air balloon like that,"

Jordan sighed.

"Let's do it!" I said. "We could get one and go up together. Then we would be taller than everybody-- even my Daddy!"

"Mine, too," added Jordan. So plans were made for our ride in a hot air balloon.

In Mrs. Sykes class, we did "The Wizard of Oz" for our class play. I was Dorothy. I wore a blue and white checkered dress and ruby slippers, just like the real Dorothy in the movie. Everybody called me Dorothy because I liked that name better than Janey. Jordan wanted to call me Janey, but I told him that he *had* to call an actress by her proper name.

Jordan was the Wizard and he wore a long black cape. In the last scene, he was supposed to take off his cape to show everybody that he was just a regular person, and not really a wizard after all-- but the string got stuck in a knot. He told the audience to "hold on a minute" while he ran off stage to ask Miss Costello for help. (Miss Costello was the lady who lived in the yellow office at the other end of the hall. We all used to look at her through a glass window, but we never talked to her.) Miss Costello's fingers worked at the string, but the knot refused to come out. Jordan ran back up on stage with the cape hanging from his neck. He didn't cry or anything, but the laughs of the big, grown up First Graders in the front row made my cheeks turn red.

At the very end of the play, I sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." It was my first solo ever, and my hands were really sweaty. "Some - where -" my voice cracked as I hit the high note. I quickly glanced around me to see if anyone else had noticed, and I saw Jordan standing against the wall behind the curtain, still fumbling with his twisted cape. Oh, good. He hadn't heard me mess up.

When the play was over, everyone clapped as the actors and actresses bowed. Jordan and I stood next to each other on the bottom step of the stage, not looking at each other. I was still mad at him for ruining the scene with his stupid cape.

"Your solo was really good."

I turned my head and Jordan smiled.

That was kindergarten.

The next year, in Mrs. Carl's first grade class, I was first to earn my way onto the famous "Tooth Chart" when my right front tooth fell out during lunch on the third day of school. A week later, Jordan wrote his name next to mine.

By the end of January, I was minus both front teeth and one on the bottom left side. I had two checks next to my names; Jordan had only one. But then, on Valentine's Day, Jordan bit down on a candy heart and we were tied again.

Mrs. Carl promised the person who lost the most teeth by the end of the year a whole jar of candy corn. I didn't like candy corn-- didn't even eat them on Halloween-- but I wanted to win. Jordan and I had made a bet on the first day of school about who would lose more teeth; I bet that I would.

We were tied four-to-four with a month of school to go. Then, just when I thought everything was O.K., Jordan reported a loose "pointy tooth" on the top right side of his mouth. The next day, there was a hole in its place. Now he was winning. I had to lose another tooth, but none were loose. I was determined



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to make one fall out, but nothing worked. Even the old string-around-the-door-knob trick failed me. I was defeated.

On the last day of school, Jordan and another boy named Robert Quattlebaum got the jar of candy corn. Robert lost five teeth, too. I decided that the big hole in the front of my mouth just wasn't worth it.

By the time second grade came along, my Mommy and Daddy were good friends with Jordan's Mommy and Daddy. I invited Jordan and his whole family over to our house for dinner one night. I spent the whole morning and afternoon in the kitchen helping-- baking chicken and cutting fruit for a big salad. Mommy told me I was her official "taste tester," a job which I took very seriously.

At five o'clock, I was setting the dining room table when the phone rang. After a few minutes of silent conversation, Mommy hung up. They were not coming. Jordan had been misbehaving all day, and his punishment was that he could not see me that night.

I put down the stack of plates I was holding and stared at the big chicken and heaping bowl of fruit salad. I wasn't hungry anymore.

Some people used to say I was a "tomboy." I guess that would explain why I hated wearing skirts, especially the ones that came down below my knee. Not only did they look stupid, but you couldn't climb trees in them.

There was a small sapling in Jordan's backyard-- the perfect kind of tree for climbing. It had a lot of branches which shot off in every direction, not too fat or too thin-- just perfect. Jordan and I used to climb our tree and just sit there and watch the birds and the squirrels gathering acorns. It was my favorite tree.

It was Friday, and we were only having a half-day of school. Our teacher, Mr. K., told us that it was "Good Friday." Whatever. All I knew was that a half day of school meant more time to play with Jordan. After school, his mommy was coming to pick us up and take us home to their house. I couldn't wait until 12:30.

I was kind of upset, though, because I didn't like the outfit I was wearing. That morning, when I already had my jeans halfway on, Mommy came into my room with a *different* outfit draped over her arm. I gritted my teeth and watched as she uncovered the flowered vest and long denim skirt.

"I want you to wear this today," she told me.

"But I don't like that outfit," I protested. "I want to wear my jeans."

"If you don't put on the skirt, you can't go to Jordan's house."

That got me. My jeans quickly reversed direction, and I had the skirt on in no time.

12:30 finally came, and Mrs. Bell's light blue station wagon pulled into the parking lot. Jordan and I ran out to meet her. When we got to his house, we dumped our schoolbags by the front door and went straight to his room.

Jordan pulled out Connect Four, and we assumed our usual sides; he was black, I was red. After two games, he suggested, "Let's go climb our tree."

"Sure!" I jumped up, but then remembering, "Oh, actually, I don't think I should."

"Why not?"

"Because I might rip my skirt," I answered miserably. I hated skirts. And mommies, too.

"That's O.K.," said Jordan. "We'll climb trees another

time." He was a pretty cool boy for understanding. "Come down in the basement-- I have something to show you."

We went downstairs and he led me over to a rectangular glass box. Pebbles and tiny shells lined the bottom, and three bigger shells-- the size of giant gum balls-- rested on top of them.

"What are they?"

"They're hermit crabs," he told me. I had no idea what a hermit crab was, so I just pretended I did.

"It looks like they're asleep," I observed. He nudged each one, but they didn't wake up. One of the crabs was bigger than the others. It had a yellow shell with a light brown swirl on top and some white around the edges.

"You see her?" Jordan said, pointing it out. "Her name is Janey."

"Like me," I said.

"I named her after you." Wow! I thought that was pretty neat.

We sat down on the sofa and put our feet up on a wooden table covered with magazines and old newspapers. "Man, I wish I could climb the tree right now," I said.

"Don't worry about it," said Jordan. "By the way, your outfit looks nice-- for a skirt."

"We're moving," Jordan told me in April.

"To where?" I asked.

"Baltimore."

"Where's that?"

"In another state."

"Oh."

It was the last day of second grade. The partition between Mr. K's and Miss Anderson's rooms were pushed back, so everyone was in one big room. Mommy was there; so was Jordan's mommy.

"I'd like to ask Jordan Bell to come up here because we have something to present to him," my Mommy said. Jordan got up from his chair. "For the past two months, your classmates have been working on this," she said, handing him the package. "We hope you like it."

Jordan tore off the wrapping paper of the album we had made for him as a going away present. Inside was a picture of each of our classmates, along with a story or letter each one had written. It was the best present I had ever seen.

Jordan looked at me for a long time, and I looked at him. Then the teachers said it was time for summer vacation. Everyone cheered and ran to their cubbies. Jordan came over to where I was still sitting at my desk and said, "I'm going to miss you."

"I'm going to miss you too," I said. "Send me lots of letters, and I'll send you letters too."

"I will," Jordan promised, giving me a hug. "Bye, Janey."

"Bye."

Then Mommy took me home, and Jordan's mommy took him to Baltimore.

Jordan came back to Penn Charter to visit for a day in third grade. He wore an orange polo shirt and khaki shorts, Nike sneakers and white knee socks. I guess the styles in Baltimore were different than they were in Philadelphia. No boys here ever wore knee socks to school.

At recess, I wasn't in the mood to play Connect Four. Instead, we walked around on the playground and talked about our different schools. Jordan told me about his lacrosse team and his new friends. He didn't mention his hermit crabs.

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Before I knew it, the clock said 2:30. For some reason, the day seemed to have been a lot shorter than usual.

"It was nice to see you again, Jordan," I said as he walked me out to my bus.

"Yeah, you too," he said. "I'll call you again soon."

"Bye, Jordan." I waved from the window of the bus. And I didn't see him again for five years.

On Passover my family had a big Seder. We invited our closest friends: the Frankels (whom we had known since I was three), Irene Blumenfeld (my mom's best friend), her family, and Roger Weschler (my dad's friend from high school who was a professional cantor). My mom also had a big surprise for me.

"The Bells are coming in from Ashland this year for Passover. Isn't that great?"

"Where's Ashland?" I asked.

"In Kentucky," she answered. "Didn't I tell you that they moved last year?"

"No." I went upstairs and lay down on my bed. I could not believe that Jordan was actually coming! The last time I talked to him was back in fourth grade when he still lived in Baltimore. I couldn't wait to see him.

I came downstairs ready for the Seder in a silky black shirt and plaid skirt which fell way below my knees. I sat down on the sofa and fixed my gaze out the window, like a little girl waiting for her friend to come over and play.

A little while later, a white Range Rover pulled up in front of our house. I guess they had gotten rid of the blue station wagon somewhere between here and Kentucky.

"Hi," I said to him, opening the door.

"Hi, Janey," he said, flashing a smile. His voice had grown older. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, how are you?"

"I'm good."

I sort of stuck out my hand for a high five, but Jordan walked past me as his parents came in the door. I felt my cheeks darken, but I quickly recovered myself.

"How do you like your new school?" It was a safe question.

"I hate it," he replied, his voice elevating. "All we do there is learn useless information from exhausted teachers."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," I stammered, caught slightly off guard by his response.

"What about the people, are they nice?"

"No one there is real. They just pretend to like you, but then they go around spreading rumors behind your back." His bitterness surprised me and left me at a loss for words. Luckily, Jordan continued. "In the fifth and sixth grades, I had about eight different girlfriends, all of them meaningless relationships."

I hadn't had any boyfriends.

"Believe me," said Jordan, "you don't want one." But I did; I could not understand him. He seemed so angry-- like it was him against everybody else.

"How is your family?" I attempted, thinking that perhaps a new topic would cheer him up.

"I can't stand my parents," he said. "They don't understand me at all, and they try to run my life. It's so hard living with them."

I didn't know what to say so I just stared at Jordan. The ends of his lips, which had once turned up, now hung down, and I had not remembered that his eyes were surrounded by shadows. His eyes seemed to burn with the flames of something more intense than fire. Indeed, his face was so altered as to be almost unrecognizable to one with whom it had once been so close.

Jordan and I sat opposite each other at the Seder table,

but we didn't look at one another. Once, I glanced at him, but he was staring blankly out the window. Then Alexis Frankel started telling me about her science project and I spent the rest of the Seder talking to her.

Now I am sixteen.

My Connect Four game sits on a shelf in the basement covered in dust. Walking past a Halloween store, I pause to look in the window; the white face of a mannequin stares back at me from under a black cape held by a knotted string around the neck.

My brother, Drew, lost his first tooth the other day; he bit into a candy corn. Folded away in a closet is a blue and white checkered dress, alongside a pair of ruby slippers.

Sitting on the branch of a young sapling, I raise my head to the sky, and a hot air balloon looks down on me. My fingers smooth out the wrinkles of the skirt hanging at my ankles.

A picture hangs on my wall of a boy in Nike sneakers and white knee socks. You could have kicked a field goal through his smile.

But everything else is blurred for as far as I can see. To one side, the scattered ashes of a fire that burned out long ago; to the other, two children looking through each other from opposite sides of a long table.

Ten years ago, a girl and boy watched from wooden desks as a hermit crab tried to burrow into a green and blue checkered rug. Somewhere beneath that rug, a smile is waiting to be recovered.

Janey Lewis  
Huntingdon Valley, PA  
The William Penn Charter School  
Mr. Mark Franek

#### RELIGION

It was summer when the only girl who wore bikinis to morning swim shared crystal forces and tarot cards, charted the movement of Pisces, and told him he was born on the cusp. Reading runes beneath a full moon, she whispered to him on the cabin floor that she was only telling a story.

He remembers, younger, another summer, living at an uncle's house and getting his first beating - stripped of swimming trunks, shins, and hands ground into carpet, then the clasp of a fist around wet hair, pulled up hard to arch his back, the feel of belt buckle breaking skin like fingernails through peaches.

He remembers the puddle he left on the floor, some of it crying, mostly the ocean, and sand still sticking to his feet when he stood and shivered to wear dry clothes. In the mirror his face swelled like blushing, and in his eyes, the irises were lined in red, in rings, the penumbra of a lunar eclipse.

Jennifer Nelson  
Sharon, MA  
Milton Academy  
James Connolly



## WALKING IN GRACE

Yeah, it's true,  
I used to dream of being you.  
While you were downstairs  
barin' all that was woman,  
I used to be dancin'  
and singin' in your shoes,  
imaginin' that I had the  
strut of Grace herself,  
shakin' my hips with  
the sway-switch walk  
that could only be  
mastered by a woman like you,  
a woman of your character.  
It was okay that you were a whore  
and made your annual on your back;  
welcoming anyone  
with everything  
like the gates of hell does sinners.  
I wanted to be like you.  
I wanted men to want my body,  
to drool at the sight of my breast,  
to cherish me like a barbie doll  
and a string of sapphire gems.  
But it was only a dream.  
I was black and ugly,  
skinny as a brim of a hat.  
I was only nine.  
I had no hips,  
no voluptuous lips,  
nothing that men could caress.  
Nope.  
Instead, I'd dress up in your clothes  
and imagine that I was beautiful,  
stuffing your silk  
and laced bras  
with Scots  
and thrusting my bareness into the air  
while I twirled your long beads  
like the hookers on 5th and McKay.  
Like you, I'd pick up customers  
and imagine that I was loved.

Ersula Jawanna Ore  
Randallstown, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones

## A PLASTIC RAZOR AND A CAN OF WHIPPED CREAM

The day you let me shave your face  
With a plastic razor and a can of whipped cream  
I pretended I was a barber  
And you were my most handsome client  
We laughed at the way my hair removal process  
Didn't remove any hair but still left you rugged and  
Remarkably sweet  
I bent down to kiss the foam from your upper lip  
Pretending I was your mother  
And you were my perfect son  
A good boy at heart but still prone  
To eat cookies before dinnertime  
We rinsed your sticky face  
With the nozzle from the sink  
And I pretended I was your favorite superhero  
Rescuing you from the grasps of  
The evil Store Bought Whipped Cream!

It ran down your not-so-hairless face  
Leaving you exposed  
The same man you were before I ever started  
To shave your face with a plastic razor  
And a can of whipped cream.

Courtney Conanan  
Spotsylvania, VA  
Spotsylvania High School  
Ms. Renee Soto

## TALKING TO MYSELF

I know this girl. She  
wears Converse sneakers.  
White ones that are a  
little bit dirty.  
And sometimes she drinks  
kiwi strawberry  
Snapple. But only  
sometimes. Water is  
much more pure, she says.  
She used to dye her  
hair black, but she grew  
tired of it, and  
when the dye at last  
faded, her pretty  
red highlights were gone,  
too. And her hair was  
just dark. When she goes  
home late at night, she  
can't sleep so she makes  
her bed and cleans her  
room. She brushes her  
long hair over and  
over until her  
hair shines and her scalp  
tingles. She is shy  
around strangers and  
quiet in groups. She  
has three small scars that  
you won't find unless  
you know where to look.

Laura Magnani  
Scarsdale, NY  
Eastchester High School  
Mr. Richard Leonard

## AFTER HOURS

Empty in the afternoon  
When kitchens are aglow with dinner preparations  
And the light fades  
So that the green grass looks black  
The sand has scattered from the sandbox  
And traces can be found on the blacktop  
Six swings, all in a row  
Next to the big silver slide  
And the wind picks up  
And the swings start to sway

Laura Magnani  
Scarsdale, NY  
Eastchester High School  
Mr. Richard Leonard



"Does anyone still live in a house that is silent at night? So silent you can hear all of nature speaking outside your window? Are there such people in the world who live in such a close relationship with the land?" These were the questions in my mind after looking at a beautiful photographic biography of the Amish. The Amish are a culture I have always admired and in a way, envied. I wanted—no, more than wanted—I longed to be in a place where I could *live*. There is a place in my soul that longs to be home. That is the part that sings when I am high on a mountain surrounded only by God's nature and the sound of my own lungs breathing. It is the same part that cried with longing as I read the book of the Amish that day.

I was eleven years old living in a town outside of Chicago. It was a good town. I went to a good school. I had friends. I had a backyard. I had a thriving garden. Still, I was aware of the feeling that I was not home. I recognized being claustrophobic in a town with too many people. I am quite an extrovert; but I do need space. As much as I get stir crazy without people around, I need to be able to find solace in nature in order to feel really whole. I feel most confident, most centered, most spiritual, and most at peace when I can be somewhere where the land is living. I need a place where I can stand in the middle of a field all by myself and see nothing but living earth all around me. A place where there is sky above the stretches of into unobscured horizons. A place where I can breathe in air that is rich with vibrance and the energy of life, and not air that has been already breathed by other people and is sick with pollutants. There was no place for me in my town.

Studying the Amish culture had been a somewhat of a hobby of mine. Their strange, anachronistic, simple way of life enticed me the way the live of Hollywood actors interest some other kids. I was drawn to their way of life that revolved around their faith and values. What they hold to be most precious infiltrates every aspect of their culture. I have always found it difficult to follow my own profound beliefs about the sacredness of nature in a country with a consumer mentality. I am a part of that society. I contribute to the landfills, I leave lights on, I drive a car. I try to be "environmentally conscious", but I find it is like being conscious of the dangers of U.V. rays on the beach. "No, I don't want skin cancer, and I don't want the ozone layer to disappear, but I want a tan, and I want a ride." I wonder if it there were a way to live a life that echoes my beliefs.

One day a brochure about a summer program came in the mail. "The Country School" it was called. It is a family farm headed by Richard and Penny Barker. They live on a small farm in the very heart of the Amish country of Ohio. They are not Amish; in fact, they are more like hippies who actually meant all that stuff about saving the planet and getting in touch with "Mother Earth". They invite a certain number of kids from all over the country to come and stay for a week on their farm in the summer. It sounded perfect. Now, I would finally discover for myself it were possible to live the kind of life I so much longed to have.

Ohio was a couple hours away and while not the world's most flashy tourist spot, my family decided it was worth a week of their time. So we all drove there together. As we got out of the city and eventually out of the flatlands of the western Midwest, I could feel my psyche start to change. I felt so at home among Ohio's rolling green hills and small, old, well-made farmhouses. I loved even the narrow, winding dirt road that finally led to the Barker's farm. It was clear by the deep groves on the sides of the road that it was most often traversed by horse-drawn buggies. It was also clear by the absence of power lines and the presence of laundry lines everywhere displaying richly colored, simply patterned, well made clothing

that we were now really in Amish country. At least that meant there *were* such a people. Now I wanted to find out if they really did live the way the books said they did.

It was true, I quickly found out. The kind of life I wanted was possible; the Barkers were living it. That week there were about twenty kids ranging in age from seven to twelve. The kids were many different states and many different lifestyles. Some came straight from the city. Some were from the suburbs, some from the country. We did a lot of work, had a lot of fun, and leaned unforgettable life lessons.

I felt a bit like a spy. I wasn't just there to have fun on the farm. I was there to see the how the whole operation was run. The farm tasks we did, the food we ate, the places we went, even the games we played, I was keeping track of it all. I was seeing if it was real, if the life I had idealized was possible. I think Richard Barker, the "dad" of the family knew what I was up to. He saw that I was there with genuine purpose. When we went on walks around his farm I walked at his side and he told me about the plants we came across and how they could be used to heal. He taught me about conserving the earth in every aspect of daily life. I learned from his example that intelligence is not about how many historical facts you know, or how many countries you have been to. It is not how computer literate you are, or how well you do on standardized tests. It is not even doubt how well-read or cultured you are. Those are all good things to have in one's background, but they are not the touchstone of intelligence. Richard Barker could name almost every plant and animal and insect on his property. He knew how to relate to people, especially children. To teach people about ecology in a classroom is nowhere near as effective as showing them by the example of how you live your own life. He was in tune with the Spirit in the land that encompasses all those who are willing to acknowledge it. He taught by word and example.

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David West  
Glen Echo, MD



The things I learned from him about life have been imprinted on my soul the same way the things I saw and did have been imprinted on my memory.

We wore plain clothing and had no watches; our only sense of time came from the sun. We all slept in the farmhouse, a beautiful old building heated by a wood burning furnace and illumined at night by kerosene lanterns. We slept eight to a room, in bunk beds. I arose every morning with the sun, although we didn't have to. If you were up early enough, you could help milk the goats. I am proud to say I have had goat's milk straight from the udder. It's a sensual experience.

In those early morning hours, we who were awake were enlightened into the philosophies behind the Barkers' chosen way of life. They were upset with people doing half-hearted attempts to be environmentally conscious by recycling their soda cans and buying more efficient cars. It is not enough simply to give a token sacrifice back to earth from which we are all created. If people wish to remain on the earth, they must live *with* the earth, not just on top of it. The Barkers, like their neighbors, lived with the land everyday, not just as an ecology experiment.

That summer I did many things for the first time and saw and learned things I will never forget. I learned that if you put chickens and goats in the same pen, the chickens will eat the goat droppings, thereby illustrating the ultimate in recycling. I learned that pigs will eat almost anything, including sausage, showing that even cannibalism can be an aspect of the circle of life. Goats won't eat everything, but they will try to. I learned about composting and flytraps. I can now find the plant with the square, translucent stem that will take the edge off the bite of stinging nettle. I learned that every poison has its antidote. That includes societal poisons.

That summer I learned about life and death first hand. I saw baby chicks hatch. I buried dead rabbits. I learned that horses mate even when you wish they wouldn't. I killed bugs in the garden and helped set up an organic flytrap. I held baby goat kids on their way to auction, knowing that they would probably be butchered. I ate sausage made from pigs raised right next to where I ate it, and met the pigs who would become sausage in the fall. Most importantly, I learned that death on a farm is not always sad, but neither is it heartless. It is as much a part of life as birth and it happens constantly.

I also learned about true home crafts. We did not use any puff-paint. We did not even use recipe books. I made bread from wheat ground a hundred feet away and learned about the virtues of honey. I shucked corn and ground molasses. I churned butter from cream and learned that it is not as nostalgically romantic as it seems; it is very hard, monotonous, and yet very satisfying work. I learned that raw molasses is great stuff if you need a quick snack. I spun wool from sheep I had met. We made a collective effort to chop enough winter kindling for four months of bitter cold and wood heat. I drank the world's best hot chocolate and learned that you enjoy good food even more when you have worked to make it. I heard stories told not from books, but from a storyteller's vast and constantly changing library. These things taught me the value of skills nearly forgotten. There is something nigh ecstasy about making something practical and beautiful and being able to trace each component back to the part of nature it came from.

We went to an Amish auction one day. I saw that "those people" are not much different from me. I learned that you can get a box of forty live chicks for a dollar-fifty. I heard the German dialect of the Amish and learned that you don't need to understand the words to tell the kindly old man with a weathered face is saying, "That's a cute bunny, isn't it?" I learned that Amish children squabble too, but they also play the same games

and you can play too if you can get some basic vocabulary down. You only stick out in a place like that if you don't smile. I learned that you can live a meaningful existence without knowing world politics, the weather report, or what a video game is.

One of the highlights of my days there was the game time. In the evening, after supper, we would all go up to the sheep hill for "new games". I proved that a girl can beat a boy at races and strategy, but she's nicer when she wins. The games on the hill were fun, energetic, cooperative, physical, and timeless. We played snail, human pretzel, British bulldogs, (a thrillingly dangerous game involving physically lifting the members of the other team.) Red Rover, tag, and oh so many others.

My favorite memory from game time, however, is not related to the games. I remember as clearly as if I could still see the sky and smell the air – the wholesome odor of mixture of freshly turned spring ground, clover, and sheep manure – the picture I was a part of that last day before going home. I was "out" of a game of tag, and sitting on the side of the hill overlooking the valley that cascaded down from the sheep hill.

The land there is a patchwork quilt with colored squares as deep and rich as the clothing of the people who love it. There are the dark green patches of the forests – beautiful, old, deciduous and pine forests. There too, are the patches of the crop-fields. In the early summer, some patches are still the deep brown of freshly tilled earth, some are newly green with wheat, corn, oats, or alfalfa. Some are still the rusty yellow of corn stalks after winter. Some are the tangled green of fields at rest, lying fallow for a year or two. The Amish have practiced the "new, environmentally sound technique" of crop rotation for hundreds of years. It is sustainable agriculture at its most essential.

Interspersed amid the squares of land are the old, sturdy, simple and beautiful farmhouses and barns that are home to the people and animals who love and till the earth that nourishes them. They are stitches that tie the patches together. I saw this quilt spread over the gentle hills of Ohio as though covering a child. The warm, rolling landscape stretched on as far as I could see. All of it under rich blue sky with perfect cumulus clouds that appear as animals and people if you see them in just the right way. Right below me I saw the Barkers' Amish neighbor, out with his plow and team of stalwart work horses. He was nearly finished plowing his field and the air of contentment surrounding him was visible even from my vantage point.

It was a cool summer evening with a gentle breeze blowing across my tan face and arms, cooling my young, strong body and rustling my own plain, sturdy clothing. Behind me were my friends, the people I loved. I was pleasantly tired from a long and very full day. Tired, but enlivened with the energy and life that comes with being exactly where you want to be at that moment in time. I had ahead of me the prospect of stories, indoor games played by lantern light, hot chocolate to drink while recounting the day's adventures with my friends, and sweet sleep with the sound of crickets chirping and an occasional owl outside my window.

I thought to myself, "This is where I want to be. I've seen it now. It's true, people can live with the land and not on top of it. Life can be this rich and satisfying. It's not an easy existence, but it is good and real and it is how I want to live. And I am not the only one who feels a passion for this way of life. I will be back. Maybe not here, but I will – I must – end up in a place where I can stand alone with God's nature all around me and hear the sound of my own heart beating and my own lungs breathing and say, "Yes this is where I want to be. This is where I can *live*."

Christina Kimball Belmont High School  
Belmont, MA Risa Soble



## THE CARROT GARDEN

Dyomar tore a fine orange specimen from his carrot garden with a burst of dark hazel soil. He glanced around at the baby blue house, a larger than typical suburban four bedroom model with an acre of land surrounding every side but the front. Dyomar's carrot garden stuck out to the side of their house, and it was bordered by thick, overgrown hedges. Dyomar straightened his body and raised the carrot high above his head with both hands. He inhaled a deep crisp breath of warm Pennsylvania air and began his ritual. "O Great Harmockolipse? I am awaiting your arrival on the Day of the Cucumber, as You have foretold? My fellow Earthlings are in need of Your punishments? In honor of Your blessing of my carrot garden, I sacrifice the last carrot of the harvest to you?" Dyomar bellowed his prayer and heaved the carrot high into the sky, waiting for the hand of Harmockolipse to descend and receive it. Instead, a moist rustle of leaves sounded out as the sacrificial carrot made its Holy landing in the hedges.

I left my window and sat down in my bedroom flipping through the channels. I quickly realized that none of the sleazy talk shows and paltry soap operas were half as interesting as any of my older brother's rituals. I couldn't really watch anyway, because Geraldo's voice clashed with the vegetable chants coming from outside. Although I found my brother very fascinating, I had recently been getting annoyed with him. He had been making noise in the garden all day, and my room directly faced it. Dyomar was a nineteen year old paranoid schizophrenic, and living with him was never easy.

I had always wanted to know more about his condition, but my parents wouldn't tell me much. They had tried shock therapy a few years ago, but he just became more reclusive. Since then they've just been giving him medication (the bottles read "phenothiazines" and "butyrophenones" which some of my more dreary friends occasionally begged me to steal) and let him go about his business.

I went down to the Jenkintown Library last summer and looked up schizophrenia. After cracking a few dusty encyclopedias and technical medical journals, I noticed that Dyomar suffered from almost all of the symptoms listed. The most abundant ones, besides hallucinations and loss of social interest, were delusions and thought disorders. He was always making new words and talking nonsense, but I just put up with it. The most prominent and severe symptom was the fact that Dyomar had created an entire false identity for himself, but one that he believed was real with every ounce of sincerity he had.

I remember when he was sixteen and I thirteen, he heard a "voice" that explained some whole big religious thing that I did not understand. Dyomar often spoke of "Harmockolipse" and many matters regarding him like holidays, other weird characters and sacrificial ceremonies (usually held in his carrot garden which he laboriously worked on year after year). In fact, his name was Stephen before he renamed himself "Dyomar". Most of our relatives would occasionally call him Stephen, and he'd run off crying and not be seen for hours.

When I joined Dyomar on one of his rare trips out into public, people would ask immature questions like, "Hey Will, you goin' shoppin' for straight jackets for the psycho?" and he'd just mutter some prayer under his breath, but I tried to stick up for my brother when I could. I loved Dyomar, and even though he had been getting worse, my upcoming actions were far from justified.

A few days after the carrot ceremony, I woke up on an early October Sunday morning at about eleven-thirty. I didn't usually sleep so late, but I was tired from the 3-D, FEST at the Highway Movie Theater on Old York Road the night before. I

got out of bed and walked to my mirror, bracing myself on the dresser that stood in front of it. Looking at my light face I realized that I was sprouting a few freckles, as I always had in the summer. A stray piece of my wavy brown hair fell into my eyes. I pushed it up into the ear length mass of hair lying across my head in every direction possible. My hair looked a little less awake than I did, and my pug nose stretched upward as I laughed at the sight. I went downstairs, walked into the kitchen and sat down. The house was utterly silent, Mom and Dad had probably left for the Country Club in Abington a few hours ago.

Dyomar walked in holding a small shovel and a basket containing about six carrots. He was wearing dirty khaki pants and an old white shirt that was too small for him. It had two horizontal red stripes across the top and it was very 70's. "Brother William, I trust you are well slept and seven..." He scratched his short brown hair as he looked for lost thought, looking very pleased with himself.

He began tugging lightly on a tuft of what looked like a well combed head of hair after a few days of drugged sleep and gardening. I sat limply in my chair at the table watching him stand blankly in the doorway straight ahead of me. I got up slowly, feeling heavy with sleepiness. I walked across the shiny white linoleum floor to the counter, turned around and leaned against it. The table was on my right and Dyomar on my left.

Looking at Dyomar I noticed that he would have been a very handsome young man if he had ever taken care of himself. He had chestnut eyes, a little lighter than his hair. His face was wonderfully angular and his many hours spent working in the garden had given him a light tan. I had always noticed how strong he was getting. Although he was skinny and tall, he had quite a lot of muscle. I watched Dyomar as he concentrated and looked down at our cat Lowly, who was peeking her head through his legs from behind him. The off-white feline walked through his legs rubbing her side against him on her way through. "Well hello, Mrs. Furhead!" Dyomar said softly, raising his voice at the end. He looked mildly annoyed and I didn't know why.

A growl echoed through the empty cavern of my stomach, and I realized with surprise that I was very hungry. I turned around to survey the toaster area for breakfast ideas and grabbed a poppy seed bagel. I asked Dyomar if he wanted anything, but when I looked back for a response he was gone.

I put the bagel in the toaster and noticed a basket containing six fresh carrots. After a closer examination, I noticed a carrot in the bottom of the basket that caught my eye. It was hidden underneath all of the others, so I had to remove them all to get it out. I held it in my hands, feeling its moist outer layers. This radiant carrot was at least seven inches long and two inches longer than the others, but it was strangely deformed. While the other carrots were uniformly straight and dull orange, this one was lumpy, misshapen, and almost red. I decided that this was the King of the Carrots, so I placed it on top when I put the carrots back.

The rest of the day was very mundane. I did a little work on my blue Toyota and went into town to run a few errands. I went to bed that night totally unaware of the chain of events that would occur in the newborn week.

I went through school the next few days as usual, trying to concentrate but having increasing trouble. A few of my classes like French and Precalculus were getting so boring that I spent most of my class time doodling elaborate landscapes and city scenes. I was good artist, and I had becoming more and more interested in it lately. My style was developing at a rapid pace.

I was getting along well with my friends, but becoming less interested in being with them. We'd hang out somewhere after school everyday that I didn't have work, usually at



someone's house or Leans's Diner. I wasn't satisfied with just sitting around and talking any more. There was something missing.

I got fired from my job at Oswald's Drug Store on Friday. I was working the five to ten shift after school, and around six thirty my boss Jonathan called me into his office. I walked into his office, sat down facing him in a black revolving chair and adjusted my blue tie. He was sitting behind his orderly desk in a light pink shirt and striped tie. "William..." he said in a greeting tone, positioning the green stapler on his desk parallel to the wall. He turned the stapler about half an inch and stared at it threateningly. With one swift movement, he slammed his hand down on the top of it like a Jeopardy contestant clobbering his buzzer. The rigid stapler spat forth a shiny mangled offspring.

Jonathan turned around and redirected his attention to me. I began to wonder how much of his paycheck he spent on coke. He sat like he had a metal pole for a spine, and he reached up to smooth his hair from one side all the way across his gleaming scalp. He was one of those people who thought they were fooling everyone that they weren't bald.

"On Tuesday your drawer came up forty dollars short. There's a 'No Sale' hit on your receipt. You can try to explain this if you like but I think I know the answer." His pointy nose twitched as he spoke.

"Look Jonathan, I didn't steal the money. I hit the no sale button to give some woman change. Are you sure I'm forty bucks?" I tried to explain.

He interrupted me yelling, and spittle flew from his mouth. "Did you think I wouldn't catch you Will? I've been watching you for a long time, and this time I'm fed up with your lies!"

I hopped up from my chair and yanked my maroon vest apart. I heard four small clicks as the little red buttons popped off the shot at the wall. The vest slid down off my shoulders and I tossed it in the trash can. I turned to face him with a sneer.

"I don't need your crap or this worthless job." I said as I stormed out of his office. I slammed his door, and went to the counter to grab my bag. I left the store for the final time, never bothering to get my last measly paycheck. My car just barely started, and I started for home.

I drove home teasing the speed limit, and had a few close calls making turns. The moon was just starting to peak out from behind the horizon, but it was still bright out. The lingering light from the sun made the October leaves glow a vibrant orange. I heard a goose sound out its squeaky mating call above me like a rusty hinge

I pulled into the driveway and skidded the car to a halt a few inches from the garage and got out. Walking into the house I noticed winding trails of muddy footprints throughout the first floor, but I hardly acknowledged them. In my hazy state of anger, only one thing interrupted my anger.

Walking through the kitchen I noticed the King of the Carrots, the carrot that presented itself to me earlier that week, in the garbage can. The other nondistinguishable carrots lay on the table, washed and resting on white kitchen towels like a red carpet of royalty. My deformed carrot sat dirty and lifeless among a heap of banana peels and newspapers in the trash. This disturbed me, but not enough to distract my thoughts for long.

I was furious. I am not a liar, and I hate being accused of doing things I didn't do. I walked up the stairs to my room, still unintentionally following the muddy footprints. Dyomar was always making a mess, so I was used to it. Maria, our Spanish house cleaner would come the next day and afterwards the house would be spotless as usual.

I walked up to my door, twisted the familiar knob and

shoved it open. I stopped in amazement and looked about my room to see every electronic appliance I own scattered about my floor, completely dismantled. The innards of my T.V., stereo, alarm clock, lamps and guitar amplifier lay in heaps on the blue-green carpet, like a mechanical buffet table.

To this day I don't know why he did it, and it doesn't matter. He probably thought that one of his gods told him to do it, and I know that he wasn't aware that he was destroying my property. But this was the final straw. Each spiny circuit board I laid my eyes on made me angrier. Without thinking, I walked over to my window facing the carrot garden and looked out. Sure enough, Dyomar was on his knees, churning dirt with old light blue gloves on. I placed my hands in the cool wooden groove in the bottom of the lower pane and threw it upwards. It made a loud 'wack' when it hit the top of the window and Dyomar's head immediately snapped up. I heard the sound echo across the carrot garden as I watched him look into the clouds. I had listened to his religious babbling for plenty long enough to know what to say to upset him.

"Dyomar! It is I, Harmokolipse!" I bellowed out in a deep voice. Dyomar rose from his knees without moving his wide eyes from the clouds. He trembled as I spoke, and it felt darkly pleasing to watch him.

I drew in my breath and spoke again, "I have been watching you, and I am ashamed of your pathetic deeds. I asked little of you and you failed. Do you hear me Dyomar? You failed me." I felt hate consume me as I watched him pull his hair out and cry, gazing miserably at something invisible to my eyes.

Dyomar sprinted across the garden into the front yard where I couldn't see him. Although it sickens me now, I couldn't have cared less then. I sat on my bed and absent mindedly stroked a Berry Blue Kool-Aid stain on my sheet, trying not to crumble under the emotions coming to life around me. A few minutes later, I left the house, got into my car and left.

I drove out to Penny Pack Park, about fourteen miles from my home. I walked through the night air on the trail in the woods, finally settling down on a large gray rock next to a stream. The soft riot of the rushing water was calming, but I was still very confused. Thoughts of Dyomar invaded my mind, but I figured he found a place to cry and then went home.

A bright green leaf under the water caught my eye. The leaf was caught between two stones in the stream, trying to hold on as the current grew stronger. Liquid rage tugged away and finally yanked the leaf free from the stones, and carried it unwillingly away from its niche. While all the other red and orange leaves in the stream seemed to ride the current beneath the surface, this green one stayed afloat on top, in contact with the October air and the cleansing water.

I left the park after thinking for an hour or two, not really reaching any conclusions but sorting things out. I arrived home around ten to discover my parents and two tubby Abington cops standing outside of our front door. The light from the fake lantern on the house shined at them, creating four elongated shadow caricatures which stretched across the front lawn. I pulled in, got out of the car and started across the front of the house towards them. I stopped facing the house, and the four of them turned to face me. My own shadow joined the picture, looking quite out of place.

"Will..." mom tried to talk to me but looked as if she was drawn a blank. Dad squeezed her closer as her mouth hung partway open. He stared at me concentrating with a furrowed brow, as he absent mindedly rubbed his green and white v-neck sweater. "Your brother has passed away. He ran into Old York Road a few hours ago. He was hit by a...ah-" he looked at me in confusion. One of the cops, the larger of the two, stroked his



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orange mustache and spoke. "A large cargo truck, hauling, eh...dog food, I believe."

I flinched involuntarily after these words sunk in, but they didn't seem real. My parents stared at the ground, and they began to look distant. One of the cops snorted and scratched himself, and I noticed my reflection in the window behind him. I was still wearing a white button down shirt from work, and its brightness screamed at me from the glass. The hair on one side of my crooked part stuck behind my ear. The other side hung down half covering my eye like a period finalizing a sentence. My face looked tired and foreign. It was like recognizing someone from the past but realizing that you no longer know who they are. I was growing weary trying to keep my self together. I rubbed my eyes and held back tears of grievance, fear and confusion. I would cry for my brother, but not here.

My parents looked at he half concerned. Dad watched me curiously with squinting eyes, appearing more like he was trying to figure out why I was so different than them than getting concerned about the loss of their firs son. Looking at my parents had always made me feel so empty. They were so fake.

Now that high school is over, I stay at home. I have the house to myself, and I love the peacefulness that the day brings. All I hear is the rustle of the leaves and an occasional bird. During the day I paint and take care of the carrot garden. I find the gardening relaxing, and I like to think about my art while I work in the sun. Sometimes I paint Dyomar or Lowly, but usually I create landscapes and cities of wonderful cultures. Some of my inhabitants resemble Earthly creatures, but most do not.

Some days, like today, I will just lie on my bed and immerse myself into a new world, into new identities. Sometimes I can stay in here for many hours at a time until I wake up. It's like the connection to two worlds, where my creations roam about my truly empty room Everything makes so much more sense to me here, and for now I think this is where I'll stay.

Dan Redding  
Doylestown, PA  
Mrs. Streznewski

## ME

i am sometimes alone. i wear birkenstocks year round. i chew on my pen caps. i like to be outside. i have a lot to say and sometimes i don't say anything. i like black olives in my salad. i bite my nails. i don't believe in God. i laugh when i'm tired. i eat dried cranberries. i miss people who are gone. i have a favorite green shirt. i see a lot of things in clouds. i enjoy quiet. i cry a lot. i like the sound of crunching leaves. i like to get mail. i write letters. i've cheated on tests. i'm not afraid of my own words. i've broken hearts. i have thumb holes in my shirts. i have long hair. i have split ends. i won't pledge allegiance to the flag. i know people who have died. i've skipped classes to go to the park. i wear corduroy pants. i can't parallel park. i buy 25 cent rings from grocery store vending machines. i've smoked. i've coughed.

i like to watch candles burn. my best friend ran away. i whine sometimes.

i'm not always patient. i like long car trips. i fall asleep anywhere. i have beautiful friends. i hug trees. i sit outside in the rain. i wear wool socks. i get a "bewildered cat" look when i'm sad or confused. i like to watch people. i get along with my mother. i had a normal childhood. i write. i wear a turtle around my neck. i like to be barefoot. my eyes are blue. i cry a lot. i like to be alone sometimes.

Katharine Walmsley  
Ballston Spa, NY  
Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School  
Mrs. Carol Reynolds

## BULBS

The soft colors of the lamps  
melt away sounds from within.  
Oak pieces, remnants of an empire  
stand in the corners  
like monks shrouded in brown robes.  
Here my mother sits,  
among her tastes and fabric swatches,  
a magician with no more secrets.  
She brushes the hair  
back from her face as she  
did in the garden  
on April afternoons.  
Kneeling on a bending wooden plank,  
she'd wiggle her fingers  
into the soil, damp and slimy,  
and dig holes for the iris bulbs.  
Then she would lean back,  
against the fence behind her,  
and wipe her forehead  
on the back of her hand.  
She planted flowers in  
that garden for each of us.  
Every color but red  
and she weeded along the stone wall  
every week as we collected  
the robins' shells that fell  
from the garage nest to the driveway.  
We stood under the hole in the roof  
and listened to the babies cry.  
She cradled the shells  
in her hands and ran her fingers  
over the blue specks.  
Now her hands are pained.  
The blue veins tying them  
into knots. She cannot dig  
but she believes that the irises  
will bloom even if she is not there  
to untangle the roots.

Sarah McGinty  
Boston, MA  
Milton Academy  
James Connolly



You know that triumphant feeling you get  
when you dive into a gloriously bright blue pool  
and go all the way down  
like twelve feet or so  
and touch the bottom, and do a  
one-handed handstand,  
and hold it for a while,  
and then push yourself up,  
toward the sky  
kicking and fighting  
with your lungs screaming  
and your head saying  
    we're not gonna make it  
and your heart saying  
    try anyway  
and the farther up you get  
the brighter the water is  
and the cleaner the sky  
until that last moment  
when you pop through the water  
and breathe in the air  
and laugh to yourself  
and say to yourself

    I knew I could  
and you bob up and down  
and feel dizzy from the lack of air  
and promise yourself,  
    that that was the last time  
but twenty minutes later you do it again.  
You know that feeling?

Lisa Collado  
Woodbridge, VA  
Woodbridge Senior High School  
Mrs. Hailey

## INDULGENCE

She often went to the mall when she had nothing to do, as most girls who have discovered the mall do. She loved the mall, its long branches of glittering avenues, the luminous din of so many strangers, so many strange, staring, indifferent faces. She loved shopping, but she loved shopping alone; alone she could do what she pleased, shop where she pleased, act, move, indulge as she pleased. With a friend along she could not ignore the stares, for her friends would stare back and whisper in her ear, *Doesn't it bother you? Why must they?* Today she was alone.

She was beautiful, it was true. Eyes as dark as chocolate, hair that fell to her stomach, a small, aristocratic nose and small, round lips between flat cheeks that flushed deeply, angrily her mother said, *You are angry, or you drink too much, which is it? Both?* She had once thought her mother must be fiercely jealous of her, beautiful and slim as she was. She was slim, too much so, really. She could not believe her mother was jealous now.

She was mildly upset today but felt her anger falter as she walked towards the mall entrance. The tall bearded man sweeping the cobblestone entryway smiled at her, passing his broom lightly from hand to hand, and said hello. She did not respond, of course. Pulling the doors open widely she strode inside. Impulsively she went toward the bakery on her left. Her mother had always warned her not to go to the mall on an empty

stomach, mall food prices were so high; but she found herself too irritable when she did not attend to her hunger, and adored the bakery: *Tous Les Pains*, read the marquee, in full, loopy yellow neon script. It was gaudy, but still it was French, sophisticated. She ordered three chocolate croissants loudly, pronouncing *croissant* slowly, leaning forward. The girl scowled at her as she put them inside the bag and said the price.

She sat at the nearest table she could find, crossing her legs slowly, right over left, and looked around: the mall was crowded, as usual. At the next table sat a thin girl in a big, torn flannel shirt, and her overweight boyfriend, also in a flannel shirt, the plaid identical to the girl's, in different shades. The girl wasn't all that ugly, she mused. She could do better than him. The boy was teasing her, and she felt her stomach turn. She set her bag of croissants on the table and watched the boy and girl share a plate of nachos. The girl's back was to her, and she could not see the girl eating. She did not like the way the boy ate, picking up two nachos at a time with his ruddy fingers, pursing his lips as he drew the morsels in on his tongue. His cheeks were round and glistening. She imagined him licking the plate, the tomato sauce, the broken thready cheese. She imagined his tongue searching the plate for the last speckled shards of nacho, and she imagined cutting his tongue. She imagined blood running down his chin, long streams of blood red as the sauce.

She looked away, opening her bag, removing the croissant between her two fingers. Powdered sugar sprinkled her thigh, the textured vanilla silk of her skirt, and she brushed it away. It was new, Donna Karan, \$138. She had charged it on her mother's Discovery Gold Card. She had not used to like Donna Karan, who tailored so much for the "real" woman, which meant fat of course, old and fat. It amused her sometimes to think of euphemisms. Real. Womanly. Mature.

Experienced. *Wise Woman* was a store in the mall she knew of, though of course she had never gone in. It was, ironically, a rather small, narrow store, tucked around a sharp corner after one of the department stores she frequented. She had never gone in but knew her mother had, although her mother was not in fact fat by any stretch of the imagination, but when she used to shop with her mother, she had once made a rude comment as they passed it, to which her mother said *Some of their clothes really aren't that awful, you know.* She laughed *Oh Mother of course they are* and her mother frowned. *Oh, don't be that way.* She said: *Mother, I will never be that way.*

She picked the first croissant up carefully and tilted one end toward her lips. Tasting it she closed her eyes. She remembered now the last time they had eaten together at the mall. They had spent most of their time together at the mall. He would follow her as she shopped, carrying what she bought, hour after hour. When he complained of hunger she agreed they would eat, but never where he might want to. They usually went to the bakery. He could manage to find something to eat, couldn't he? He would eat anything.

She recalled the last time they ate there together. She had sat eating her almond cheese croissant hungrily, her hand cupped under her chin. They had lost all interest in each other, and it would end soon. She spoke to him cruelly, distractedly, her mouth feeling wet with anger. She hated him.

"Do you know how many calories are in that crazant? How much fat?" he asked.

She closed her eyes disinterestedly and chewed. "Fill me in."

"It will fill you in."

"It may," she said. She looked at him with her eyes bland and picked up her second croissant. "Lots of things can fill you in. Whether these do or not, I don't care."



She knew he hated her too. He hated that she knew how beautiful and clever she was. Better than him. She did not listen to him. She did not get angry when strangers stared at her, though naturally he did. She imagined he liked her in bed, and so the relationship had lasted. Shortly after that afternoon at the bakery, it had quickly ceased to last.

The thin girl and her boyfriend had left the table. A new woman sat there, her chair pushed back further to accommodate the bulk of her legs; she watched the woman try to cross them. She could not and let them fall thickly apart as she fumbled in her purse for a cigarette. The girl watched her light it and draw the smoke heavily into her cheeks, and she marveled at her smooth slope of cheek into neck. She did not smoke cigarettes anymore, and they rather disgusted her, but she did not mind the woman smoking. She left the table anyway, remembering she had to shop now, of course, because her friend had told her of several sales.

Walking from the food court briskly, she felt renewed, refreshed with each new store she passed: bright, spacious interiors, voluptuous, made-up mannequins populating the windows on either side of each entrance, music of all sorts filling her ears for equal intervals, some silky, slow, gentle, some pounding, hard and driving. Stores playing the latter she never went into anymore, as she passed them wrinkling her beautiful face in unmistakable distaste for anyone to see. She really didn't like the music; it gave her a headache. She passed *Wise Woman*. Fat: how disgusting.

She walked until she reached *Vous Etes*, the trendy boutique that proclaimed itself French and played French radio stations and listed two prices on its price tags, the first in francs, the second in dollars. She often shopped here, usually with her friends, true, but she did like it; it was a little too trendy, perhaps, and she was not a trendy dresser. She did not mind the way her friends dressed, even if at times she thought it a little much, and indeed sometimes felt herself liking a particular piece and wondering if she might borrow it, or buy one like it and make it her own. She did not like the feeling but she had it occasionally. She was usually not trendy at all. She liked classic looks: pants, pleated or fitted, pencil skirts, clean-lined button-down blouses, well-tailored jackets, and heeled pointed shoes, and all, always, in mature colors and materials of good quality. She detested poor quality in everything.

She wandered about absently for a while, but inevitably was found by a salesgirl. She asked the salesgirl if she could use the dressing room. The salesgirl looked confused, of course, because she had nothing to try on, it seemed, but led her to the dressing room area. Inside the stall, alone, she undressed. She ran her hands over her body, down her back, cupping her hips. She remembered the feel of them touching her body, the way they did, telling her how small, how beautiful, how perfect, and thought how strange it all was. How disgusting. Had it excited her? Had it excited her to let them touch her body and tell her what they did? She put her hands on her hips and sighed, her stomach filling into her hands; she sighed harder, pushing it out further: God, yes, how disgusting.

She had lost interest in him, he said. They went to the mall and ate at the food court and bought clothes for themselves, with each other but never for each other, but together. They did not have sex anymore. This they discussed to no end. It came up, on all occasions. "You'd rather lick your fingers than anything else," she remembered him saying. She was eating then, a sundae. She felt empty with anger. She licked the whipped cream off her fingers, wondering if it really pleased him as she did it, staring into his eyes and hating him.

She dressed again and met the salesgirl hovering outside. She wondered if the salesgirl had been watching beneath the

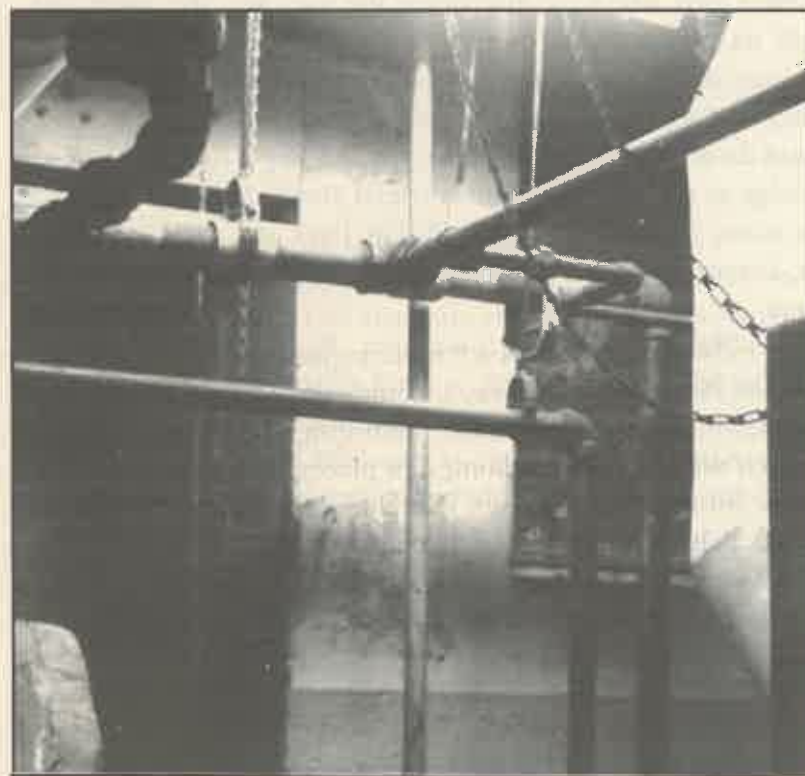
door, or listening as her clothes dropped to the floor. The salesgirl said how awfully thin she was, what was her secret? She wished she was such a fox, but how could she give up fast food, especially working at the mall? Where would she take her breaks? She smiled at the salesgirl and shrugged and walked away, pretending to be suddenly enamored with a display of silky pistachio green sweater twin sets. Really, she thought, how ugly, how trendy a color - but it was not so terribly ugly, she reasoned. Not a bright, horrible chartreuse, like the color of the gum her friend chewed. A sweet green, almost delicious to the eye. It looked a little small, she realized, casting it back. Such fabric did not allow one to breathe. She tried one sleeve on her lower arm, and quickly peeled it back. She was right, it did not breathe. They would peel it off her, and she would want them to.

She left *Vous Etes* and had only to wander again for a short while before she found another store that interested her, then another, another, and another. When it was announced that the mall was closing in fifteen minutes, she had bought only two garments, but good pieces, charged to her mother's Visa. A full, ankle-length skirt in chocolate satin. Loose-fitting lime-colored slacks, for spring. She had doubted the fiber content, but dismissed it from her mind. She was tired. She could decide later if she truly hated them; for now, she liked them.

She winced, thinking of the way the sales clerk in the store where she had bought her skirt smiled at her: she tried to put him from her mind. She hated to leave before she had to. She had fifteen minutes. The bakery was closed. She went quickly towards the burger joint, which did not have a name, only a marquee trumpeting a large burger insignia, brown, yellow, red. She ordered a dish of onion rings. When she was younger, she had refused staunchly to eat onions; she did not want to smell like her grandmother, did she? Sliding halfway into a booth, she ate the onion rings quickly, smiling, thinking how her breath would reek - it would be revolting. How surprised her mother would be. How surprised she was.

She licked her fingers and stood up, feeling a slight burning in her stomach. Outside it was dark and cold, but she would wrap the warm fur of her mother's coat more tightly about her body as she walked toward the door.

Pamela Jane Parris  
Exeter, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Mr. John Kane



Erica Ianuzzi  
Eastchester, NY



"As with synecdoche, that most amazing form of metaphor, we see a person, hear a person, anticipate a person, and then we instantly fill in what is missing, transforming the person into what we would like him or her to be, hope to be, want to be. And so fancy plays its part and we throw each other into images and then the journey begins...."

Kilbourn

-Tom

December 30th, 1995:

I have arrived in Bethlehem, a small town in Connecticut and what I might call a second hometown. I turn the corner in my cousin's house (a stop on the way to my final destination) at the sound of the door opening. I am eager and impatient, looking to welcome Josh. He bounds into my field of vision, a glowing mass of blondish hair and taller-than-I-had-remembered body, and I take him in, breathing a half-unexpected sigh that conveys to me how much I have missed seeing him. As he closes the door and we walk into the pale yellow winter afternoon, it is just him and me, and I walk to his car full of anticipation.

As we chat, my senses awaken to his presence after so many months; the warmth of his voice, his size and shape and even the difference in myself as I ease into our coupleness. While unromantic, I find in it a loving familiarity that is unlike any other relationship. Perhaps it is just that which urges us to explore it as we do, urges us to be together. And we are.

We arrive at his house after a short drive. It is situated not unlike a cottage in the woods, but more modern and somehow more beautiful. It was built by his family, and its walls and rooms, its pace, its pictures, its everything smile as I walk in. It contains a glorious sort of humbleness, a beauty made real by its unassuming frame. It seems entirely wooden, handmade life pottery with a sense of pure home embedded in its lines, edges, and corners. The winter weather outside only makes it more so, and as I greet Josh's parents I feel a sense of homecoming myself. I am home.

"Home is also, I think, whatever you rebel against. A place that propels you away from it, in a sense, proves that it's your home."

-Pico Iyer

Perhaps I label your house as a part of my home, my personal sense of home, because the positive connotations of that word seem to correspond with the safety and comfort and love I find there.

I am disappointed to find that Montclair, this suburb of New Jersey which I adamantly refuse to love, is becoming home. Having lived here for only six years and having spent the other nine in New York City, I am more inclined to call New York my home. Perhaps I should say I would rather New York be my home. In truth, I like it more. I am split, in a sense, and find myself with a choice of homes, or places on which to affix that name for my own purposes. But the very fact that New York, rather than Montclair, is so much more appealing makes it clear that Montclair is fast becoming the home I will be propelled from, the home that represents a place in which I sit and long for foreign things, a place of restlessness.

Foreignness creates the desire to remain wherever you find it, the desire to make an exotic place home and therefore become exotic yourself. We, as human beings, are constantly bored with ourselves and our natural homes, especially if they are made for us: I long to be who I am not, both externally and

internally, both spiritually and physically. It is not a sense of repulsion at my inner self, but of boredom.

"That's a mighty large tree you got," I announce, noticing their traditional Rockefeller-size Christmas conifer in the living room.

"How's Abigail?"

"Old. Fat," says Josh. The yellow lab looks up from a corner near the door. She is a grandmother, the fourth member of their family, and unquestionably old and fat. But I love her, just as I love all her surroundings.

We retreat to the basement, Josh and I, and I breathe another sigh of relief inwardly as I fall into that wonderful space where memories like love letters were bread: I kept them in one special place, held on to them as others would priceless and precious gems. We pick up the pool cues, rack the balls; like knife and fork at dinner, they are instinctive reactions. We chat some more. I am stammering slightly, in my own way, and I have obviously conveyed my tension to him, for he, the psychic (or maybe just soul-mate) says,

"OK, you're tense, why?"

Once more, I exhale emotionally, feeling the lead blanket around my shoulders slowly being pulled off.

"Good question. A lot of things."

I tell him. It's of no importance, really, but the talking, the exchange is artful as we toss our voices, words and phrases back and forth simultaneously with the pool balls. The track the fabulous rhythm of the conversation we keep. Rapid-fire, friendly, and reassuring.

"What do you think?"

"I think a lot of things. Be more specific."

"Thoughts."

"About?"

"Thoughtful stuff."

I laugh. If there were such things as icebreakers between us, this would be one.

We have stopped chatting-we are talking. The pool cues are down, and we roll the balls back and forth across the table, listening to the clacking and rumbling; I am soothed by it.

It's therapeutic, I tell him. I needed to see you. It's so good to be here, I say.

"... I had a thought and brought it into the 'light' by putting it down and laying it out for everyone to examine. I think that which makes me tick, so to speak, is my relationships, my friends.....I know I have said this before, but there is a gone between true friends. That bond holds the most powerful energy know to man, and is constantly growing. Each side feeds into it. Give to it what you can. Take from it in times of need. Draw from it, and drink in the nourishment it provides."

--Josh

Gregg arrives before sunset. We go out walking. There are terrific woods behind Josh's house that I had never been into before, and Josh, Gregg, and I trod through deep, white, real Connecticut snow, pointing out animal tracks along the way. We enter a clearing.

"See that? That's the tree Gregg knocked down yesterday."

"Yeah, I got really hungry and ...I guess I couldn't



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control myself."

Gregg is a bug guy, and like Josh, has a frame that is not intimidating, but welcoming and warm, embraceable.

I laugh, as Josh and Gregg tackle each other and frolic like the free and innocent animals they are. In wonder sometimes if they are bears, or dogs, perhaps. They have a fiercely gentle quality, a playfulness sustained by the treat of mock-adversity. We wander down into a glen, reach a brook bubbling under magnificent formations of ice and snow, some like plastic sheets of futuristic crystal covering the boiling brook water underneath, some are snowy islands blocking the path of a foot-long microcosmic waterfall winding down under the drifts. We jump over snow-covered plateaus. Josh and Gregg know them well; I am taught their placement. I am shown how to jump, like being shown how to play again, something regret losing memory of. We enter another clearing.

"Gregg and I were chasing leaves yesterday." Josh points to the tracks in the snow and the sled resting on the top of a hill. They debate over whether the sled is theirs.

"Did you take it in last night?"

"Yeah, but then I couldn't sleep, so I took it out again at about three." Gregg is the only person I know who does that. Who has the freedom to do that. I love him for it. He takes the sled, and with a grin that is full of joy and liberation, scrambles up the steep hill. Josh and I trail behind.

"I wish I had Gregg's energy. He has incredible energy," Josh says.

We watch him run up the hill. He does. It is a spiritual characteristic for Gregg, fed by something more than physical endurance. We talk, we sled.

Josh and Gregg dream.

"How much does it cost again?"

"We could rebuild this shed and fix it up."

"The old guy who owns this place comes by maybe once a month."

I am so happy in their presence. As we walk back, Gregg stops and stands triumphantly on top of a small incline. With a high-pitched but drawn-out yippish sound, he throws himself down the slope with complete abandon.

"It's fun. Try it."

I run up to the top, hiding a small sense of self-consciousness, and tumble down. I had forgotten, too, what it was like to just let myself fall.

"See?" says Josh. "That's the leaf I caught." There is a crater-sized imprint in the shape of Josh in the snow, and, flattened inside it, a leaf.

"As we appear to be changing, and I am not setting a scale of how big or small the changes are, we are adding more 'elements' of identity to the collection that makes up who we are.....It seems that with everything we do we are learning and expanding our views on life, and in doing so discovering more about our true self. In learning and experiencing with those closets to us it seems that we learn more about the deepest innermost parts of ourselves.....And then there are the time, and this I still find to be most interesting, when we are not learning for the benefit of living and discovering how to live, but rather we are living, living in the reality of that which we have learned, and then what we learn is not about how we are living or relating to others, but about just living in the purest form."

-Gregg

We arrive back at the house and, as Josh and Gregg shower, I curl up on the sofa, guarded by the cat. He plays the part of a familiar, the muse, as I read and explore the books on

Josh's table. His house is full of art, in fact Josh himself is an artist and some of his paintings, as well as his mother's photographs, hang on the walls. I love his mother's pictures. They are all black-and-white, and most of them are pictures of Josh and his father when Josh was younger. What interests me is that they are not the pictures a doting mother would take. They are almost objective, a study of childhood rather than of Josh. I study the walls, feeling a warmth, a sense of where I am. I have decided that here and now is the best place to be.

Gregg and Josh return and, seated, talk to me in warm, throaty, sweet tones, laughing and letting me in. They share something quite obviously special, but more than that, too, it is a connection, the sense of knowing each other that grows and expands from childhood on. They have no secrets to keep from one another. I watch them and listen.

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"Gregg and I knew a long time ago that we had signed a contract," Josh said. He spread his hands out on the table as he did when he was explaining something personal; it translated into his hands and whatever else was available. "It was apparent that I would always tell him everything, because we would always share in each others' lives. We signed on the dotted line. I want to be able to say the same thing forty years from now."

As cars and people passed behind us, we sipped our iced coffees and I looked at Josh, and looked at his hands, poised as if he was holding a pen, gesturing toward an invisible paper on the table, facing me.

It is 10 p.m. now, and Gregg has left. Josh and I find ourselves in his basement, having shared undercooked homemade pasta and a beer. With Josh, beer is not alcohol, not something to drink in order to get drunk. It is a symbol of being beyond that; Josh appreciates it for the taste. I try.

We slump over each other like wolves in a den, we doze or we talk, exploring our conversation like a painting, like one of Josh's canvasses, absurd and at the same time very real, colorful and unique. We are sharing a couch, curled up together like a yin-yang. His head rests on my legs as mine rest on his stomach, and as we talk, I fold my arms over him, propping my head up on one elbow to see his face.

What do you mean?

What do you really want to say?

What is here, between us, a warmth of feeling, our touch?

Some questions are asked, others are just implied, just left to hang in the air.

Josh is warm and large and comforting, and I lie on him, breathing deeply the air of a familiarity that is mysterious in its presence around us.

"...it's just a wonder, just a nagging question, a meandering question. You know how some questions are pounding, thundering question? This is a meandering question."

Josh pauses, not intending to answer the question, and says something else.

"If I had a choice of who I would want to spend the rest of my life with right now, it would be you."

I am silent in awed happiness. It is not an answer. But Josh knows. Neither of us really looks for answers. And it is more than enough for me. He snuggles closer to my stomach, and I lay my head once again on his warm torso, my eyes wide with wonder.

"It was though spending time with everyone that made me realize even more so than before what comfortability really is.

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Though it puzzles me to the point that I can no longer find logical reason for why I feel this comfort, it is still there. My friends...and to those who are becoming family to me, I can do nothing but cherish the love and comfort that I have discovered through living and living with you."

-Gregg

The night has grown old, and as a new day is being born, Josh tucks me into the alcove in the hall outside his room. It is right underneath a small window, which gives a tiny view of the stars over Connecticut, and the tops of snow-dusted trees. He pulls the covers over me with all the warmth and tenderness of a mother bear.

"Sleep tight."

Emmy Bean  
Montclair, NJ  
Montclair High School  
Helen Kuryllo

### BETWEEN VOYAGES

This room is some kind of a sanctuary of sane interior decorating. It's the only room in the whole house--and I mean the *whole* house--that isn't filled with about two tons of furniture and "art" and stuff that starts to drive you nuts if you look at it for any longer than a glance. Consequently, whenever I find myself detained in any other part of the house, I glance about furiously. My aunt and uncle glare at me strangely during any of these exhibitions. I know they think I'm crazy. One time they asked my little sister about it and she came and told me right away, sweet kid. My aunt and uncle are real "artsy" folks. And that's not just my opinion, they call themselves "artsy," whatever the hell that means. They seem to use it like it means they like all the crappy plays and depressed artists that no one else likes. Incidentally, they're at some play downtown right now - or at least on their way. Of course I was invited too but cordially declined. First we were headed to some Cantonese restaurant where you have to sit on the floor and eat rice with your hands; apparently all they serve is rice and water. After we had eaten our fill of rice we were scheduled to go to some "artsy" play about a transvestite writer who lives alone in his apartment with no furniture. Actually, he's not quite alone as there's this mouse whom he tries to follow into this mouse hole throughout the play. I imagined the whole situation for about three seconds and decided that I had a splitting headache, terrible stomachache, and my ankles and elbows were all swollen, resulting, of course, from the change of pressure in the airplane. They looked a little confused, but I persuaded them to go on without me. This took much less persuasion than I had counted on, but it didn't upset me in the least. My aunt is one of these people that won't leave you alone for a *second* as long as you qualify as a guest--she is a continuous entertainer. I tried to watch some T.V. this afternoon but I couldn't even follow the plot of the goddam soap opera because she wouldn't shut up. She is the most boring person I have ever met. But nevertheless, I find it quite impossible to ignore her. I'm an expert at ignoring, but it seems that she has a smashing sense of humor and periodically roars with laughter. I feel like a jerk if I don't laugh too, so I have to pay attention so I don't miss anything she might consider a joke. Try as I may, I repeatedly fail to decipher the code and I always end up laughing or not laughing at the wrong time. Clearly this comedic genius constructs humorous remarks far, far above, or perhaps beneath,

my level of comprehension. My uncle, on the other hand, never says a word, or rather, never manages to. As soon as he sits down, and I mean immediately, he bursts into a fit of coughing. Then he stands up, pulls his handkerchief out of his suit pocket, and wipes off his hands and face. He then carefully refolds his handkerchief and replaces it in his breast pocket. Then he ceremoniously relocates himself in a new chair, seemingly convinced that the previous chair was the culprit. I swear that at the same time that his back touches the chair, perfectly simultaneously, his coughing fit resurfaces. After about five minutes, the cycle returns him to the first chair. That is my favorite part: he looks around the room for a second, holding the viewer in awesome suspense, and resumes his voyage. I love him. I can't imagine anyone in the world have a more reliable uncle. After all, if an uncle isn't reliable, then what the hell is he good for? It was almost worth going to the play with them just to see what all the other members of the audience would do between the coughing and the standing -- almost. I imagine they must have gotten at least five extra seats to accommodate the coughing and the guilty chairs. Now there will be six. Oh, there's one more unforgettable component of the voyage: during the trip from the last chair to the first chair, my aunt always reminds him not to cough himself to pieces. That kills me. I imagine one ultimate cough, by which he finally does go to pieces; not untidily with blood and the sort, mind you, but in perfect little blocks of uncle. I can't imagine it any other way, you see he is such a tidy man. He always wears a suit no matter what day or what time of day. No matter what place or situation. I'm sure that if I sneaked into their room tonight and pulled off the cover I would find the suit. Remarkably, the comment of my aunt's about coughing to pieces is not a joke as I discovered after mistaking it so once, and *only* once.

Anyway, there's this goddamn tomcat or something perched on my knees. I'm lying here on the couch and suddenly it jumped and landed on my elevated knees--standing on my kneecaps; it has uncanny balance for an animal of its body fat percentage, which I estimate to be around eighty-five. Now the thing is licking its paws--I'm waiting for it to fall off. When the two art lovers left, my aunt reminded me that the central heating would turn on and off automatically, so I wouldn't get scared (I swear they think I'm crazy), however, they forgot to mention their goddamn cat. When it jumped up here, the thing scared me half to death and naturally I yelled like there was no tomorrow. The cat, however, remained surprisingly unaffected. I figured it for deaf and tried snapping my fingers next to its ears. It was not deaf, however, and was apparently irritated by my snapping; I now have three deep scratches and one shallow one of the back of my left hand. I figure it can sit there as long as it wants. I'm sitting here in some kind of a T.V.-room/basement with a dark green carpet and a comfortable couch. All the couches upstairs are so hard that I can't sit on any of them for more than two minutes without falling off. Any floor space left unoccupied by uncomfortable chairs and couches is filled with transparent glass coffee tables. I haven't broken any of them yet, but let's just say that my shins are certainly not in the same condition they were when I arrived. The whole rest of the house is filled practically to the brim with paintings and sculptures that clearly fall within the boundaries of modern art. If there's one thing that drives me crazy, it's a bunch of pseudointellectuals standing around discussing the "feeling" that the "artist" put into the work. A couple of my aunt's very "intelligent" acquaintances dropped by this morning in a Volkswagen. They were dressed all in leather. They complimented the residents of the house on their *taste* in art and furniture for about twenty minutes and I almost threw up. One of those goddamned pictures seems to have leaked down here. The canvas is all white (raw canvas, not even with paint)

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with three red dots on it within two or three inches of each other. It is called "Anita's Anger". There's a mark on the glass pane in front of it where the price sticker was. The single fact that my aunt and uncle actually paid money for it severely lowers my respect for them, although maybe they moved it down here out of shame. Whoever poured the alloy into the mold for the chrome frame doubtlessly has more artistic talent than the so-called artist. Strangely, or perhaps normally enough, the painting on the opposite wall is altogether intriguing. I can't figure out for the life of me how it ever landed in this jungle. There is a king sitting on a horse. The king is smiling brilliantly as if he is the grandest thing that ever happened to the world. His shining teeth and yellow hair seem to do justice to his greatness, which appears to be spilling out of him every which way. He wears a gold crown with about a million too many jewels on it. It is the only part of the picture that is unbalanced. There is a peasant or someone standing in the background. He is leaning against a very tall tree with his hat in his hand along with a bag labeled "SALT". His other hand wipes his brow and his face is red; he has just arrived in the shade. The ground around him is speckled with light from an invisible sun. The king is struggling, so it seems, to keep from falling off the horse. It appears that he is wearing about six layers of glorious-looking robes -- and on such a hot day. The horse is scrawny but not weak, his eyes say so much. I want to take a closer look but this goddam cat still hasn't fallen off. Now he is licking his paw and rubbing it across his head with striking skill and grace. Maybe if I lean quickly to the right he'll fall. There he goes, he's shooting up the stairs faster than a turtle in a red dump truck. Now that I get a closer look, the painting's details aren't done very skillfully. It's almost as if it were done by a poet who didn't want to explain it to a painter. I'm struggling like crazy to see what color the horse's eyes are. Sometimes I go quite colorblind for minutes or sometimes hours at a time. My mother let the doctor know that I stare at the sun very often and he told me not to go outside without sunglasses for awhile. I told him that he sounded wise, of all things, and he was insulted. I said that he didn't understand because I also stare at the moon, but far more than I'm willing to admit.

Robbie Rafter  
Port Chester, NY  
Brunswick School  
Marilyn Ebbitt

### A BUS WITH A QUEEN IN IT

Dad said he had no idea he'd be in budget administration when he was my age.

In the morning he gives me a lift to my bus stop, while it is still dark so I can get to school. He is in his pajamas and always driving 50 miles per hour to get to the stop in time. While we are in the car we fight over the radio. He wants to listen to the news and I prefer music. This morning a song came on.

"Ooo, child, things are gonna get easier..."

I tell him that I love this song because I think it is about how much easier it will be after I graduate from high school. He looks at my hands and tries to laugh. "Do you really believe that?" he asks.

Last night I was watching my dad eat spaghetti and I wondered if I would be eating spaghetti thirty nine years down the road, after college, after I am settled and making some money. Chances are that I will never be settled.

I read a story by Jen Burke about this girl on a bus going to Philly. She is talking to this guy about her life dream. He leans over and says, "So really you didn't give up your dream, it's still in there somewhere. You just go around contenting

yourself with a lot less... don't feel so bad, most of us end up doing the same."

I was thinking it might be cool to be like John Barth. He had this show with other famous writers and they got to sit on nice chairs and converse about Genesis on public television. I asked Dad why, and he said it was because they were all famous writers. Is it that something is deemed good, only if other people like it? Dad says that I will get into college because I'm good at fitting myself on a piece of paper. He keeps pressing me every night about colleges so much... he is making me think that my dream is a grassy campus where people think and sleep past noon.

If pencils were hatchets then I would go to a university and be satisfied. I could use the graphite point to poke out eyes instead of writing term papers to Aristotle. All I want is to do something I can hold in two hands, that is not thin like paper. In my dreams I think I am waiting for a war where writing is feared and dangerous. Daddy works late most nights. He says good writers are important in government. He works with numbers that represent the county's money. He is in charge of the money that schools will get and garbage will get and how many new high rises will be funded.

I was thinking of becoming a construction worker, so I could eat lunch out of a yellow lunch pail up high and build sky scrapers that could be seen from every window, blocking the sky in the city. The city has too many buildings, that are always rising and never give back. I was thinking then, I could grow good, solid oak trees, because they are rooted to the ground and reach towards the sky. It makes good shade to sleep in and some days it feels like only a tree can understand me.

Dad keeps telling me the life of a farmer is hard. When we lived next to a farm in the old neighborhood, I would see the farmers in the raspberry field laying out water pipes beneath the lines of crops, too early for me to be awake. The farmer's tractor would awaken me. He was father to his vegetables and helped their youngest sprouts break out of the ground. In the summer I would imagine that the bushes suddenly grew violent and tried to reach for me when I passed their growing squash.

Then the farmer picked them and stocked grocery stores. He is a poet, but makes life from soil instead of from the air where social consciousness lingers in and out like rain and droughts. When I am a farmer I will grow my own lunch. I won't go to the supermarket anymore, except to buy cookies. My dad will visit sometimes and stare at my vegetable fields and the lines of crops will be too long for him to see across.

And instead of college, where I could learn about agriculture, maybe I'll throw away everything and hop a bus to Philly. Sometimes it sounds so easy. I'll imagine that the woman beside me on the bus who is trying to sleep is the Queen of England because I'm afraid to turn and look at her. The fat man in the adjacent row in a red and blue flannel, reading the paper for the third time is her bodyguard. Bus stations are about strangers and last minute plans. I was thinking I could get on a bus and ask Dad to wire me money when I get to an ocean. He won't though. He likes to plan.

I live for bus stations, for soil, for the queen and her guard, for reading the stories to discover the last line. Dad wanted to be a teacher once and fertilize minds. He never thought he would end up in government. He says his math teacher in high school would have laughed in his face when he said he would be writing up the county budget. I can imagine Dad laughing at me, when I tell him I am going to ride the bus out of town, with a Queen in it. And when I get to the shore, my vegetables will be dangerous, my buildings will stand like icy trees and I will read my writing to the sea.

Benjamin Wacks  
Baltimore, MD

Carver Center for Arts and Technology  
Bonny Boto



What did I do all day while you were dying?  
 I can't remember any of the hours. I can't remember being bored.  
 How come I was happy when I was in your house with endless days ahead of me of waiting?  
 There was nothing I could do, everything had slipped out of the cracks of my clean, young hands.  
 I had no responsibilities except to watch you gracefully deteriorate; not a job I had to put much *umph* into.  
 That must have been why I was happy.  
 Why wasn't I next to you on your bed every second?  
 What was I thinking?  
 I slept at the foot of your bed in a cot.  
 A squeaky cot.  
 I tried so hard not to squeak so I wouldn't wake you up.  
 But you needed to be woken up.  
 I couldn't let you lie there; still.  
 Why didn't I insist that I sleep next to you?  
*No,*  
 Mom and Dad said, *you can't.* Why not?  
 Was I going to crush you?  
 Or catch something from you?  
 What did it matter if you were dying anyway?  
 How did I sleep, my chest rising and falling with a subconscious ease, knowing you had to try so hard, in the Florida dark, oblivious crickets chirping, to make your chest do the same?

Your face was blue, I remember, as we sat next to you- waiting.  
 I didn't kiss you good-bye.  
 I was scared.  
 I let you leave without me growing up.  
 I let you leave without convincing you that I had grown up.  
 Don't I miss you? Of course I do.  
 What's wrong with me?  
 Why isn't my life falling apart?  
 Isn't it supposed to when someone dies? Even for a little while?  
 I tried to be an accepting stomach for all the sad punches thrown my way, but they never came.  
 And so I stood, eyes squinting, hands out flailing in front of me as if I was trying to cheat in Blind Man's Bluff.  
 Peeking to make sure I knew when the hurt that was to surely come flying at some random moment, was coming. Peeking to make sure I was ready. But it never came-  
 Only in waves of sudden realization that passed before I could find the words to tell anybody I understood everything perfectly now.  
 There were no overused adjectives for people who ached for me to give them some sense that they understood when they asked *how do you feel?*

Why do I miss you like I was another person; like this didn't happen to me at all, but the other *me,* the one I watch out of the corner of my eye?  
 It's not fair

that everyone else got all of you except for me.  
 I was just a 12 year old kid, right?  
*I love you Laura, you're my little munchkin.*

You have a grave.  
 A dumb tombstone with a baseball bat engraved on it because you have always loved baseball.  
 Corny.  
 What were they thinking?  
 My parents- the King and Queen of *Un-corniness* putting a bat and ball on your stone.  
 And that's not really you under there.  
 Those ashes could be anyone, anything.  
 I don't believe in the crematory business.  
 What do they care whose ashes you get?  
 We just want something tangible since we can't have your big hands to hold.  
 It's all the same to us, right?  
 It all looks the same.  
 And where are these crematories? Different planets?  
 Long smoke stacks and brick ovens by the dozens in hidden valleys of unknown states? Where did you go when you left the house? What was I doing? What was I thinking?  
 How could I have let you go without one, big realization about life and death smacking me, like it does in the movies,  
 Without remembering, what must have been, the icy hot light of the ambulances spinning around the living room?  
 Cherry and orange Lifesavers floating on the walls like an underwater disco dance.  
 How could I have let you go at all? What kept me rational? I can't remember.

Would you still be alive if you hadn't been injected with that last dose of whatever it was?  
 That poison to make you feel comfortable.  
 Comfortable with dying.  
 Why did you give up? What made your heart stop beating?  
 It was almost like that lingering *thing* they said was killing you was made up.  
*Don't accept it,*  
 I thought.  
*If you don't accept it, it can't come in.*  
 Knock, knock, knock.  
 What was so fatal in your blood that you, the Unstoppable Man, couldn't stop it?

You're the teacher, so you tell me.

Laura Raskin  
 Pittsfield, MA  
 Miss Hall's School  
 Ingrid Scheitweiler





She strutted in like she was a queen and squished her behind into the chair. I giggled along with the others because half of her butt squished through the opening of the arms.

"Here," she said as the east wind blew across her badly dyed hair that was now terribly graying at the root. "I am going to hand each of you a sheet of colored construction paper. I want you to use the crayons on your desks to express what you feel."

She commenced to hand out the construction paper, giving a cheery smile to all the students as she placed it under their hands. She gave me a black sheet of paper, and as she did, my eyes slightly squinted, and my eyebrows rose high.

"Why was I the only one in the class who got black?" I spoke out, then watched her turn from my desk and glide across the room with the grace of a hippo in her pink dress. The rise of her rear end caught the arch in my brow and refused to let go, only to become free from its hypnotism when she collapsed upon the wooden chair behind the teacher's desk and huffed her breath my way.

I placed my cheeks within my hands and pondered this moment's meaning. I didn't want black; I didn't feel like black. When I thought of black, I thought of sadness and grief, death and chaos. I felt pink and pretty, bright and yellow, too. I wanted to express my happiness not my anger.

Some things should not be expressed on black; they just don't belong on black. It would serve her right if I picked up a white crayon and scribbled the words used by my Mama when she was mad at my Daddy.

It would serve her right if I said what I really felt; maybe then she would give me what I wanted. Maybe then she would be fair, but that's not what I wanted to do. That wasn't how I felt. Instead I raised my hand as politely as I could and caught the hippo disguised as a lady behind my teacher's desk.

"What's wrong, Ersula?"

Remembering to sound polite and calm, respectful and obedient, all the characteristics my mother had taught me concerning how to be a young lady, I said, "Ms. Whitman, I would like another color, please."

"You get what you get," she replied scornfully. The sight of her pale flabbiness jiggling in the hot summer sun made me sick to my stomach. She was horrifying; I could hardly believe that I had brought myself to stand face to face with her, her beefy eyes seeing through the very essence of me, reading me and expressing her extreme dislike for me, as my own eyes watered with sickness.

When I came to realize that her eyes were no longer on me, I sat myself down and gazed around the room. There were no other little black girls with eight long pigtails dangling from their heads as a black sheet of construction paper occupied their desks. There were no other little black girls, at least none in my class. All the children looked just like her, just like this impostor of an art teacher, only minus the dry hair and one thousand and one wrinkles about their chins and necks. They were all staring at me as if I were some freak at a phony circus.

With anger I began to question her authority. I didn't understand! It didn't make sense! It wasn't like she was my Mama or my Daddy and the phrase "Because I said so" overruled all and everything. It wasn't like she was my Mama or my Daddy and could say, "I'ma make this my first and my last time tellin' you!" No! Not at all! She was a *substitute teacher*, a teacher who only got respect when she gave it. She had no jurisdiction here!

Thoughts of my early morning Sunday School filled my mind. The chant that our teacher used to always make us say before we were dismissed and sent off to class. The sound of all

the children harmonizing that one phrase, that one strong phrase. The phrase that stated that we were important, that we deserved respect, and that just because we were young, didn't mean that we were dumb. Oh, how that chant rang about the walls of my mind just as it did those walls of our Sunday School basement. It sang loud and proud and with the strength of all Jehovah.

I rose from my seat with all the pride I could carry and expressed my displeasure with her reply. "Ms. Whitman, I just wanna tell you something, something that I think you should know. *I am somebody* 'cause God don't make no junk! Just because my race may be generalized as black doesn't mean that that's the color I deserve! Besides, I don't want black! I feel like pink and yellow; I want another color."

And boy, did it feel good. I saw that flabby four-layered mouth of hers drop to the floor at the same time as her pride, letting me know that she realized that things had changed and that my kind didn't have to put up with the poop that her kind dished out. Oh yeah, I felt like I was on top of the world then. All the children's eyes were on me, flabbergasted at my outrageous and unthinkable deed.

As I stood, proud as a lioness over her prey, I cheesed a grin of conquering arrogance, allowing them to know that I was big, that I was all that and then some with a bag of chips and a side of coke.

Yeah, I was feeling good, I was feeling real good.

As I grinned, Jeremy Kavalsky, the little freckled face boy with red alfalfa hair who always called me "Big Head! Big Head!" caught my eye. It wasn't so much himself, but his swaying cow lick. As it shifted in the breeze, my thoughts began to flux and I started to realize that I had been dreaming. I then looked across Jeremy's hair to find Ms. Whitman still in my teacher's chair.

All the other children seemed to be content with their paper and enjoying their assignment, as if the dream had never occurred. I glanced at the black piece of construction paper that still occupied my desk top, and then back into my dream, desperately searching for guidance. I closed my eyes and swallowed hard.

"Excuse me, Ms. Whitman," I said as I stood up and shifted my stance.

"What?"

Her words tore through my heart like a hook through ripe fish. I felt weak, unable to stand. I wanted to cry. "Um, can I have another piece of paper? Please?"

"Do you think that just because you dislike what you get means that you can get something different? That's life! Part of life that you need to learn! What makes you think that you're so special that you can rise high and mightily and demand *your* satisfaction?"

She had struck with a fierce and mighty final blow. I could almost taste the tears as they ran down my pigtail and dripped about my bottom lip. My self-esteem had been eliminated, my backbone broken.

"Answer me!" she demanded.

My eight-year-old body cringed with fear as her words echoed throughout my bones. My tongue was frozen, and it took some time before it thawed, before I could answer, "I don't know, Ms. Whitman, I don't know."

Ersula Jawanna Ore  
Randallstown, MD  
Towson High School  
Mr. William Jones





Erica Ianuzzi  
Eastchester, NY

#### PILATE

*Upon this Pilate sought to release him,  
but the Jews cried out "If you release this man you are not  
Caesar's friend;  
everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against  
Caesar."*

- John 19:12

*And so Pilate, willing to content the people,  
released Barabbas unto them and delivered Jesus,  
when he had scourged him, to be crucified.*

- Mark 15:15

Weeks have passed but I still walk the city  
in a fever-dream, impenetrable,  
a thousand eyes scraping my neck,  
a hundred voices hissing to one another,  
*He's no friend of Caesar's.*  
No friend of God's.  
I want to say it, explain to them why,  
but the words curl and dry in my mouth  
and I choke on them.  
I can scrub my hands until the water bleeds pink  
and the servants snicker,  
but this oily sin still coats them.  
At night I lie still and listen to  
the breaths of the person next to me,  
to my own shallow breaths  
pushing against the taut heat  
and try to pray.  
I'm sorry.  
I believed him, The King of the Jews,  
saw in him everything that was good.  
But God, I am a weak man,  
a small man,  
and the crowd was angry,  
frenzied with the smell of blood.

Libby Krum  
Towson, MD  
Towson High School  
William Jones

#### THOUGHTS BEFORE SLEEP

Sometimes, when I slip beneath my sheets at night, their crispness sings beneath my feet. Sometimes my mind slows its whirring and I turn to the right with thought, with intention, feeling the brush of leg on leg, smelling myself in the softness of my pillow. When I turn off my light, sometimes I watch its stubborn residues dance behind my eyelids. Sometimes I hear the sound of my eyelashes blinking against my pillow. These are the nights that Sleep, discriminating doorman, lets me pause before I enter. These are the nights that Morning, frantic pursuer, has faded out of my sight.

On these nights, I lie on my bed, alone in the darkness, stripped of pretension, void of desire. I used to think that these moments, when I was content in merely being, were the moments when I was most myself. These moments, the egotist in me asserted, were the moments that I could hold sacred, apart, the moments that defined me, separate from the world of human interaction.

One night last February, snow began falling - thick and fast - past my window just before I slipped into bed. On that night, as I envisioned myself sleeping late because of that snow, I felt the tensions in my face dissolve, I felt myself entirely content. The blankets held me gently, and through that great stillness that comes with snow, I could feel the rock of their embrace.

That next morning, the sun shone weakly onto cleared roads, and I trudged up a snowy sidewalk to the Headmistress' Office. A Judicial Board meeting would be held before school, the school president had told me when she had called earlier that morning, and, as president of my class, I was required to attend. I entered the office to see the Headmistress standing over a chair, biting her cheek. The office is decorated like a living room, with a tartan sofa and upholstered chairs in a circle around an oak table. A smiling portrait hangs on a wall; an aging chest of drawers stands in the corner.

"Oh, Ashley." The Headmistress identifies me without moving her head or changing her expression. "I'm so glad you're here. I think we need to--" She heaves at the floral-print chair. "Can you help me here?"

Baffled by this early morning re-decorating, I follow her instructions, moving all the chairs but one close to the sofa so that they all face the window and the other chair. The room is not fit for such an arrangement - the door is obstructed - and as the other students arrive, I exchange with them bewildered glances. The Headmistress urges us to sit down, and we all choose the sofa and the seats on that side. The dance teacher and the Upper School Head also enter and take seats by the sofa.

The Headmistress asks my class advisor, the last to enter, to shut the door behind him. He furrows his brow, begins moving chairs, and the Headmistress begins. She tells us that Silvana Perilli, a sophomore, is being charged with missing a series of dance classes -- so many, indeed, that, if she were to serve all of her detentions for them, she would be serving detention into the summer. The Headmistress reminds us of Silvana's history: suspended and put on probation in the eighth grade for drinking in the bathroom.

I don't need to be reminded of her history. When she came to the school in the sixth grade, she was the third minority student to enter our class. She had hard, angular features and a gaze that I avoided. Wearing her dark hair around her face, she said "sorry" without apologizing when the gym teachers chastised her for not pulling her hair back. Something about her, even as she stood in the shapeless jumper we all wore, defied conformity, and it was this defiance of which I was afraid.

As sixth grade became seventh grade, and seventh

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became eighth, Silvana became friends with the very girls I expected she would: the one who pulled my chair out from under me at my seventh birthday, the one who teased me unendingly about my coat the winter I was nine. These girls swaggered when they wore their striped J. Crew jackets - against school rules - and then complained of being cold when asked to take them off. Silvana's jacket was leather, and it smelled of smoke. But when the teachers asked her to take it off, she gazed at them and then complied.

I heard mothers complain about Silvana being a bad influence, and she was excluded, I know, from some of their gatherings. Nevertheless, it was those J. Crew jackets that surrounded Silvana that day in the early spring when she entered the lounge with a stricken face. She missed English and no one said a word when she was late to gym, but she began to cry.

Rumor has it that Silvana never drank in the bathroom; people say that the other girl who got in trouble implicated her to shift the blame. Silvana has never admitted that she was involved, and I haven't seen her speak to the other girl since that day she cried in gym class.

But when she came back from her suspension, she spent more time in the library and less time in the lounge. She wore a rubber band in her hair to gym class. The next fall she made countless announcements for Community Service and was almost always in uniform. We debated in English class, but I still could not entirely meet her gaze. Part of me was still afraid.

And now, at the Headmistress' call, she enters the room. She walks slowly, carefully picking her way through the maze of chairs, and settles in the one clearly left for her. She looks at us, a jury sitting on cushioned chairs, and I can see in her drawn features the defeat of two years ago. She fixes her gaze on me, and I turn my head down to the list of questions placed before me: Was the offender aware that her actions violated school policy? Was the action a repeat offense? Does the offender regret her action?

The Headmistress asks Silvana to explain why she had skipped so many dance classes, and she explains, as she pulls at the fray of her scarf, that she had missed several of the classes because she was out of school for strep throat, and several more as she was recovering from the strep. She missed the remaining few because, and here she looks up from her scarf, she realized she wasn't on the attendance roster. She shrugs, and finishes quietly, "I skipped them."

There is a moment's pause, and then the school president narrows her eyes, tilts her head, and asks, as though it has just occurred to her, the first question on the list. Silvana bites her lip and then responds, focusing her gaze on the school president, who quickly returns her eyes to the safety of the page before her. Silvana talks pleadingly, and I watch the other students avert their eyes from her gaze.

She turns to me, and I raise my eyes to meet hers. Her words rush over my ears, and I cannot hear them. But I do not need to. The dark, deep pools in her eyes convince me. I look into them, and the hardness that I remember - or imagined - dissolves. I look into her eyes, and I recognize the layers of what I thought was defiance. But now I examine it, and I see it was fear. I see she was lonely. And I realize how brave she is, how strong she was for all those years, to have that fear and to hide that loneliness, and to always know she is facing a jury that sits comfortably in cushioned chairs.

On that day, after Silvana left the room, the Headmistress told us that she had already suggested that Silvana leave the school. She said she realized that Silvana was strong, and that she would probably adapt better to a high school in Stamford. Silvana, she said, had never quite taken the responsibility of

being a Greenwich Academy girl, and her actions in the last few months, she asserted, reaffirmed that. Most of the students agreed.

When the Headmistress asked me if I had anything to say, I think I said that I felt like I had grown up with Silvana. I said something about how much she had changed, and about how sad I would be if she were forced to leave. I said all these things, and then, faced for a moment with that jury she had defied for five years, I started to cry.

I cried for Silvana that day, but I also cried for myself. I cried because I had never been so comfortable in those upholstered chairs, because I had never tried to know what it was like to be anywhere else. I cried, too, because for so long I had done what was easy, ignoring, avoiding what was difficult to face. I cried because I had let myself believe that I was the only person who was sometimes afraid, sometimes lonely, and sometimes content lying in the darkness, waiting for sleep.

Silvana probably had not slept easily the night before I looked into her eyes, and she probably did not sleep so easily the night after. She was suspended and put on probation, to be reassessed by the faculty in June. I don't know who told her what I had said after she left -- or perhaps she didn't need to be told -- but when she saw me the next day, she looked at me, I looked at her, and we embraced.

She is back at school this September. I take no credit for that: she obeyed her probation and faced another jury. I know that being at Greenwich Academy is still not easy for her, and I know that most people still won't look into her eyes. But I know something else: sometimes, when she slips beneath her sheets at night, she hears the song of their crispness against her feet. And knowing this is the most important thing of all.

Ashley Evans  
Greenwich, CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Mrs. Marilyn Ebbitt

#### ON HEARING OUR SONG OVER THE KITCHEN RADIO

Crushed garlic cloves rolled loosely  
under my olive-oiled palms  
to the rhythm of the music  
from a radio I thought I'd  
turned off.

Extra-virgin smoothness  
smeared with the scent  
of rosemary perfume  
sucked playfully at my ring--  
teasing the purple stone memory  
of blossoming oregano.

And I cried.  
Lemon tears that swelled  
like dew drops  
on an overripe apricot,  
and slipped untasted  
across strawberry-rhubarb lips--  
your favorite kind.

For three minutes and eighteen seconds,  
I missed you.

Holly Kohler  
Milton, MA  
Milton Academy  
James Connolly



## I.

The night of my grandmother's memorial service, I drank myself sick on deep, red, expensive wine. The empty, nontranslucent bottles were lined up in John Dowd's kitchen window, like fat, glassy trunks, bending the moonlight, which poured in, with their rounded bodies. I peered at these vacant, spherical forms with my glossy eyes and pounded out the beat of some old Irish sea chant, being cranked out on the organ in the living room, with my palms against my bloated belly. This night had fallen down upon me with its acrid air of someone's old VW left running outside, exhaust fumes curling up into the sky, and the curious strangers surrounding me, patting my arm, offering as much comfort as a strange dog licking the bag of my leg. Out of the corner of my inebriated eye, I can see her peering at me, passively, pulling a stray wisp of hair from her mute face, as if I were a reflection in a mirror. I fear, at this moment, she detests me.

## II.

The summer Grace and I were ten, we collected sanddollars off the Point at low tide, stripped them off the soft, muddy sand around the ocean-side marshes like hungry seagulls swooped down upon the water. She and I took hundreds of those sandy, alabaster discs at a time, and piled them high in our arms. Bleached gleaming white by the blazing sun, they reminded me of my grandmother's pearly, unpolished toenails, so serene in her yellow sandals when she rested on the porch. By late afternoon, we stumbled home, the sanddollars gathered up in our t-shirts, which we hoisted up to our necks, and our round, childish bellies poking out as we walked. At home, we would paint them, wild, unconcentric shapes and clashing colors, then sell them on the sidewalk outside her front yard for \$5 a piece. We believed ourselves to be so cunning, such masterminds of profit, thinking our little white plates of unmixed paint were such jewels, thinking that no one else had enough talent to create such as we did. No one bought them. It didn't matter. Our faith was untouchable.

## III.

Lucas was the ideal brother. He was five years older than us, played the guitar like Jimi Hendrix, wore dark, wire-rimmed Oaklies even when he went out at night, and had a motley array of distempered, irresponsible, rebellious cronies. They would gather at her house every night after dinner, these sullen, unresponsive boys, slithering out of sight from her parents, and hide out in his room, blasting Ziggy Marley and Led Zeppelin until those thick wood walls would tremble with the low hum of the bass. Then they would all clamber out the door, and pile into his gray hatchback -- seven or eight of them at a time -- flashing their giant, silver zippos, ashing their Marlboro's out the window as Lucas skidded out of the oyster-shell driveway, as if their night's plans couldn't wait any longer. Grace and I understood that they operated under the pretense that the world had done them some horrible injustice, that they all had a little good fortune coming to them. She told me once, it was the only way he could repent for what he's done wrong in his life, to actually turn the truth around and act as though this world owed him something. "It isn't right to live that way," she said, "Why should he be forgiven? Why can't I have it easy like that?" She was ashamed of him, of the rumors that flew through the town, of the distress he caused her parents. But he was so passive, so harmless, and often stayed up late at night, in the dank funk of his attic room, and let his fingers fly through the strings of his old, warped, acoustic guitar. These lingering, bitter chords, each pulled from the instrument with a discordant

## IV.

My mother was shucking corn husks the evening Grace and I first learned that one day we would die. Her knuckles raw and red from scraping clean the muscles, her face ruddy from a full afternoon spent in the hot August sun, she now labored, in the dim, waning light of dusk, on my grandmother's porch, feverishly stripping down the short, yellow trunks.

"See this?" my mother said, shaking the end of a golden cob in front of my sun-burnt face. It crumbled slightly, brown and dry. "It's no good, it's drying up. Throw out the dead ones," and she picked herself up and headed back into the kitchen.

It is amazing still to me, that even a seemingly lifeless vegetable can wither up and die.

"Stupid," Grace struck me with her most smug, condescending insult, as she sighed and responsibly assumed the more mature mind of the two of us. "They don't die the way people die. Vegetables and animals rot."

Howard Gruber owns the Italian restaurant next to Franco's. He has AIDS. Will he rot too?

"No," she says, simply, intently stripping down the stocky husk with her Pearl Pink Polish fingernails, 99 cents at Adam's Pharmacy. "And everyone knows you can't die of AIDS until you are at least 30."

My grandmother takes four different pills, three times a day, and keeps them in a Styrofoam egg carton, marked with each day of the week. They are blue, and pink, some too big to swallow all at once. Does she take pills to stop from dying?

"No," Grace is prying a June bug off a leafy green husk at the bottom of the bag, watching it crawl up and around her wrist, its tiny wings stretched like a halo. "She takes pills to keep from falling down, to stay awake for the whole dinner, to remember your name on Christmas day, when you show up and she can't quite remember why."

And the Lady Crabs we collected off the harbor rocks? We built them sand castles with seaweed, dug moats adorned with shells and rocks and soft beach glass, tried to furrow caves for them. Yet they would shrivel up in the sun, like candle wicks burned far down to the wax, and sometimes we could not throw them back into the water fast enough. Sometimes they withered and died, right there in our Crab Castles. Didn't they like what we built for them?

"No. We never asked them if they wanted to move." She has finished shucking all the corn, and I have done not even one husk. Nothing made sense to me anymore; how graceless death was, the life in your body drying up, like the flow of sap in some evergreen tree. I imagined, inside your organs, it was like the decay in a dense forest; first the sweet, husk of the ferns droop, the fiery green tendrils unravel, then the wood begins to decompose, slowly, the way old newspapers flake away. And at that moment, I don't believe that I am strong enough to be present at my own death.

"Don't worry," Grace says, as I feel her small palm reach over and rest over my own hand. "We will grow up, and grow old together, without any pills, and one day I will toss you into the ocean like our Lady Crabs, so you will never wither up and die."

## V.

"We don't have time for this, dear," they are telling her, in monotone, sickly rational voices, averting their panicked eyes from her desperate face, like dogs hide from the sofa cushion they destroyed with their own violent jaws.

"YOU don't have time for me! YOU don't have time for



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MY life! You don't have time to listen to one GODDAMN thing I have to say!"

"Now YOU WATCH your language!" Mrs. Sanchez can't seem to help being distracted by every little oddity in the room; steam rolling off the porcelain pot of linguini over clams, the crack in the wall, her reflection in the mirror.

"GODDAMN NO, I won't watch my GODDAMN LANGUAGE," Grace rolls these words around in her mouth like a bad taste, rides them like bullets straight into her mother's face. She has never used them before.

"NOW LISTEN!" her father's tolerance snaps before us, "I've had about all I can take from you! Your mother and I don't work hard at the office everyday to give you a minimal education! Highland Lakes Regional just isn't good enough for a doctor's daughter! You're going to Miss Porter's, AND THAT'S FINAL, so you can STOP PULLING THIS HOT-SHOT CRAP with us. It just doesn't cut it anymore. You better Goddamn grow up, AND FAST, miss. Am I cool now?" he leers, leaning his squinted glare into hers, "Am I hip to your language?"

SCREW OFF SCREW YOU I'M SICK OF THIS CRAP ALL THE TIME YOU DUMBASS DUMBASS DUMBASS.

The words explode in her head like rockets. They set her free, let her slap her parents hard without even lifting a hand, and she drives them through her mind wildly. Vulgarities crowd the bleak corners of her brain, pile up like box-cars in a train wreck, each slamming against the next, each a burning cinder hurled at Miss Porter's Boarding Academy for Fine Young Women.

She is seething with anger. We're spitting vernacular all over the dinner table. But before we sit down to eat, we hold hands and say grace.

#### VI.

My swollen, fat lip, busted open down to my chin, begins to bruise and take on the color of the overripe eggplants in my mother's garden under the fluorescent glare of Grace's bathroom light. Hot, white brightness exacerbates it: my sallow, puffy cheek, the bottom lip purple, and stained with rivulets of dried blood trickling down my neck. She, armed with her giant brown bottle of peroxide and frothy white gauze, cannot stop my blood from falling onto the bathroom tiles, cannot make the welt on my lip subside. But as she bends over me, her breath hot on my flushed face, and the smell of antiseptic cleanser sharp in my nose, I am reminded of when, in our childhood, we would play doctor, with all her parent's professional paraphernalia. Equipped with the stethoscope, shiny and cold against our chests, the real, lighted tongue depressor, the constraining velcroed pump to read our blood pressure, we'd spend hours examining Bianca, her fat, white Labrador Retriever, our best patient.

Now I am dizzy with pain, and she is angrily fussing with the Band-Aids and bacetracin. I marveled at my hands, stared down at them, envisioned my fist wailing into Jess Ahern's jaw.

"You're just so stupid sometimes, you know that? You don't even know about half the things you get yourself into. You just cruise right through, and think that -"

"OUCH!... that crap stings."

"--Sorry. And think that everything is just a life experience. Well you know what? I have news for you," she spills peroxide over my leg accidentally, doesn't wipe it up, just lets it bubble and foam and fizz on my bare thigh. "You don't have to live through it ALL, you know that? You could walk away for once."

"Jess had it coming," I manage to mumble like I'm drugged. "I mean, that skank lay, the first punch."

"You could walk away..."

"I was all set then to beat her to the next, see..."

"You could've just walked away..."

"But she swung a fast left I wasn't ready for. I let my guard down. I know if I had just..."

"WOULD YOU GODDAMN LEARN how to walk away!?" she screams, and with such bitterness, it sets the blood flowing again from my crusted, swollen lip. I want to rinse my body in the sink at that moment, to crawl right in under the faucet and wash myself free of these sins.

In my own mind, during the brawl, there was only me and Jess, I couldn't see anyone else. She and I had rolled and spit and tore each other's hair, hating the hard, blunt forces of pain driving into our bones, but loving the power of our bodies pushing against each other, a dam to the other's river of strength. In real life, it was she and I, and our boyfriends, and Grace watching. I had lost myself, didn't realize she had seen it all: seen my hair tousled in the dirt, flailing like a flame behind me; seen Jesse's spry, puny body crushed to the ground and her mouth full of dirt; saw my bottom lip split open, ooze blood, swell a venom shade of green and purple; saw the fear in my heart that I refused to adhere to; saw my fall from grace.

#### VII.

Flushed, feverish face, I awake sweaty and disheveled, doubled over in her arms. The clinking sound of fifty half empty glasses of Irish Whiskey on the rocks chime through John Dowd's kitchen, with the raucous organ still bleating feebly, and people passing by me on their way out the door. Grace holds me more tightly than she ever has, and with such security I have never woken from a troubled sleep so elated before. Tears like perspiration trickle far down to my chin, make me tremble sickly, and still she holds me, swears she doesn't hate me.

We grow up too quickly, always pushing each other into the next phase, always wanting to be older. Tonight I tell her she needs to throw me into the ocean soon because I feel like death. I feel like I'm stranded in that sandcastle, drying up in the sun, with two brazen little girls tearing sanddollars off the beach all around me. And my grandmother couldn't remember who I was the other night at dinner, so I pressed her cold, veiny hand between my two palms and told her my name, but she only looked absently to the window. I can't handle this night and my drunken, languid dreams. I can't handle my own, failing graces.

"Come on then," Grace says, brushing my damp face dry, "we'll take a walk home through the ocean."

Julia Minsky  
Englewood, NJ  
The Dwight-Englewood School  
Nancy Melser

#### BROWN OUT IN NEW YORK

Where are the editors, Helen Gurly Brown and Tina Brown, when an aspiring writer needs them?

I had spent 5 years on my Magnum .45 Opus. A searing exposé showing the seamy undersides of East Hampton, Long Island. A masterpiece of modern American hard-core-just-the-facts-ma'am-sock it to 'em fiction.

My story Our Town, was a nine year-old girl's take on a scandalous local theatre production of Thornton Wilder's Our Town. Now at the ripe old age of thirteen, I was ready to fulfill every writer's dream. To pound the New York pavements in search of publication.

I had to go there in a style befitting a famous author. Of

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course, this meant The Hampton Connection, that exclusive elusive livery service adored by the literary establishment and perfected by its owner. The C.E.O. told me he was booked through the millennium, only accepting Nobel, Pulitzer and Tony winners listed in The Hamptons Blue Book (certified checks, gold bullion, or cash only). Through bribery, corruption, a signed, sealed and witnessed affidavit to buy him a castle in Ireland, and unceasing wailing, my Dad closed down his Hampton Connection for my one-day odyssey to New York.

As a Hard Rock Café veteran and no alien to Planet Hollywood, a Cosmo Girl like me always felt at home on 57<sup>th</sup> Street. That is, until I was greeted in the Cosmopolitan lobby by a hard-bitten, long faced security guard.

"Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just happy to see...my manuscript?" I cracked in my best Mae West voice.

"A gun." He unzipped his holster.

"I'm here to see Helen Gurly Brown."

"Got an appointment?"

"No. I've got a story."

"Drop it." He stood erect, his long bony digit poking at a hole in the wall marked "unsolicited material."

"I'm not leaving until someone talks to me."

He dialed his phone, playing with the wire.

"Helen? Dick? Peter?"

Dad and I waited.

DING - the first elevator door opened. Helen? Nobody.

DING - the second elevator door. Gurly? Hardly.

DING - the third elevator opened. Not even Brown?

"My name's Mickey." This was the only ding that brought us anything! Another longfellow. Not quite the Cosmo Gal, but this was the 90s. He smiled at Dad.

"Let's see it."

"What?" Dad stepped back.

"Your manuscript, sir." He looked dismayed as I handed it to him.

"Oh, it's yours? Honey, it's always best to start small..."

"Hey! We came two hours so she could start big. Can you assure us it will be read?" Dad's Irish temper rising. The security guard fingered his gun. It rose, too.

"I can't make any promises." Mickey jerked my story away and left for the elevator. Dad followed.

"Stop there." The guard rammed us out the front entrance. Great. An elevator nobody comes down. A security guard who can't keep his long gun down. This was going to be a long day for one down and out Long Islander.

Two blocks to a new image. From a Cosmo Gal to an Esquire Sire. We searched for 250 West 55<sup>th</sup> Street, off Broadway. The sun beat down as we beat a path to a beat-up building.

"Beat it!" A homeless person lurched towards us. Behind him was engraved 7 letters - ESQUIRE. When Hemingway wrote "The Sun Also Rises", the obviously hadn't seen this place. We opened the door.

A woman craned her neck from inside a bullet-proof booth. Boy this really was "Bullets Over Broadway".

"I've come to see the fiction editor."

"He's out to lunch."

"The feature editor?"

"Out to lunch."

"The Associate fiction/feature editor?"

"Out to lunch." A clock above read 1:30. "Return in an hour." She slammed her glass window shut.

Dad and I grabbed some Manhattan cuisine - frankfurters from a street vendor. We used a garbage can as a table and kept a watchful eye on Esquire's door. Ketchup dripping, mustard blustering, we smiled at ever suit and tie that walked by. After all, he could be the one who would be signing my check. When

not one went into Esquire, I began to worry. Were we in the right place? Where were the teeming crowds of eager editors?

By 2:45, not a soul had gone in.

"Wait here, Dad." I went back to the bullet-proof booth.

"You again." The lady raised her eyebrows.

"Name." She picked up a phone as I told her Caitlin Doyle.

"Huh? Oh, his answering machine. Joe, A CATlin Booth is here to see you." A woman in a bullet-proof booth who thinks I'm a descendant of John Wilkes Booth and the Cat Woman. What a purrfect combination.

"Leave your story with me, CATlin." She yanked it behind her glass window, muttering about truant officers.

If we can't find the New Yorker Magazine in New York, we should have stayed in our town, I thought, as Dad and I shuffled away. THERE! A pinnacle of hope! Shining white with gold letters. No desk clerk at the door. No guards posted.

New York! New York! What a wonderful town! Take the elevator up to see Tina Brown! It stopped on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor. Empty hallway. Nobody to interfere. Desolate lobby. Nobody to stop us. Empty office. Nobody at work.

Large woman. Large desk. GULP!

"I have a story for you."

"HMMPH." She pointed to a pile of yellowed manuscripts.

"I'm here to see Tina Brown."

"Ha! Aren't we all?" She gave me a dirty look.

Brown out -- AGAIN! An empty office. An open door. Ghosts galore on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor.

This town's darker  
without Dorothy Parker  
And James Thurber  
And Enda Ferber  
And Ring Lardner  
In the New Yorker!

My story joined the long forgotten works of long gone writers. We left.

"Can I get some candy?" I asked.

"Candy's dandy, but liquor's quicker!" Dad joked.

That's it! The Algonquin Hotel. Those New Yorker writers must be downing rounds at the round table. Except the round table was gone. We sat alone in the lobby. No writers in Cosmopolitan. No writers in Esquire. No writers in The New Yorker. A Civilization Gone With The Wind. So as not to harp on the day's misfortunes, we started off for the last possible place...HARPERS.

We arrived in the village. If the teeming masses of the publishing world were not huddled within, then start spreading the news because I'm leaving today.

Inside, another lady behind a desk. I cringed.

"Here's a story." As I was about to hand it over, a shadow was thrown across my path. I slowly looked up. And up. And up. A 7-foot hiker Viking looked me up and down. At this point, I was more down than up.

"Give." He waved the lady away and took my story.

"Sit." We sat, waiting for the elevator. He flipped through a magazine.

"So are you reading this month's copy of Harpers!" I asked.

"No. The New Yorker."

"Oh. There's nobody there."

"There's nobody anywhere," he crackled.

"Who's the weirdest person that ever delivered a story?"

"YOU!" After 20 minutes, I did not doubt this. How could I? Nobody came through. I was probably the *only* one who ever delivered a story. And where were the literary elite?



The budding intellectuals? The elevators?

DING. A familiar but welcomed sound. Dad and I hopped on, astounded. We had not seen one single worker or publisher all day.

Was pounding the pavement of New York like following the yellow brick road to the Emerald City? Were Helen Gurly Brown and Tina Brown the invisible Wizards of Oz, hiding behind an illusion? Of course, we'd met no good witches in the publishing industry. Only the Wicked Witch of the West seated at every front desk in New York. I had visited four of the nation's top magazines, and not a single drone, munchkin, lion, scarecrow, flying monkey in sight. had a twister sucked up all the workers and left only overpaid over-exposed unavailable Browns in charge? WRITERS OF THE WORLD BEWARE, THERE'S NO ONE OUT THERE!

Caitlin Doyle  
East Hampton, NY  
Miss Porter's School  
Jack Pasunen



Jessica Elliott  
Churchville, PA

BELOVED,

there are rumors  
of catastrophes  
in the cave  
of your chest  
& i'm  
counting them  
ever so softly--  
maybe in trying  
to spank the demons  
from our breath  
(or maybe b/c  
i'm longing  
to be  
a woman)  
you can mumble  
the numbers  
of my roughest sketches  
(imperfect as they seem)  
their themes

are what i cherish best--  
their noise  
their scream--  
& my indecisiveness  
is what i hate  
most in myself  
(next to my fear  
of public speaking  
in private places--  
like when i'm baring  
my very innards  
to a trillion clones  
of your face  
staring  
in the darkest corner  
of my eye)

Raquel Rosa  
Catonsville, MD  
Catonsville High School  
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

## UNDER THE BOARDWALK

There's some sand in my shoe, but I don't bother to try and shake it out; there's no point. The sand gets everywhere. It rubs little by little against your red skin until it feels raw and you have to rub aloe in it to stop the burning. Despite the shower I took, my skin still feels sticky from the salt. The ocean wind blows through his sweater and makes me shiver. I watch in astonishment as an enormous mother in a hideous pink swimsuit pounds down the boardwalk, dragging her screaming, dripping children behind her. They want to stay at the beach just a little bit longer. I remember when I used to feel that excitement. That wanting to stay just a few more minutes in the warm, silky sand. Already the sun is about to set, and the sky has gone that orange-pink that is so beautiful in the sky, but so tacky when someone tries to paint it. We walk along the boardwalk; the neon signs shouting Popcorn! Candy! make his tan face look kind of green. I guess my face must look like that to him too.

He buys me a bag of salt water taffy, which I hate, but I thank him anyway. I pop one into my mouth for good measure. Despite the promising colors, it tastes like plastic and makes me feel like my teeth are about to be ripped right out of my gums. In front of us, a couple is embracing. I get that strange sense of embarrassment that I feel when I'm watching TV or a movie with my parents, and a kissing, or worse, sex scene comes on. Usually at that point I get up to get a drink from the kitchen. He awkwardly reaches over to take my hand. I'm embarrassed and wish I could take my hand back. It's not that I don't want to touch him, it's just that some of the taffy has stuck to my hand, and now I know it's sticking to him. If he notices this, he politely doesn't show it. Naturally now it's too late to drop hands. There would have to be some kind of pretext, like buying me something, or playing Whack-A-Mole. Sure enough, he drops my hand, and does not wipe his hands but reaches directly for his wallet to buy me a soda. Now both of my hands are full, and the problem is solved. He is good at solving problems like these.

We sit down on a bench. It's one of those neat white benches that you can adjust to face either the ocean or the boardwalk. Someone is already sitting on it, so we are forced to face the boardwalk. I think it would have been more romantic to face the ocean, but I don't really mind.

People watching is actually something I enjoy. I place them into categories which I know I shouldn't do for some ethical reason or other, but I do anyway. There are the parents who don't love each other anymore, but brought their kids here to pretend they still do. These ones come in both the rich and poor variety, though they are easy to tell apart simply by their clothes. I'm pretty sure there must be something wrong with me. I have an almost morbid fascination with obese people. I try to keep count, but I lose it after 22. There always seems to be more fat people at the beach during the summer than anywhere else in the world at any time.

Now the teenagers are coming out from wherever it is they hide in the period after the beach but before the boardwalk. It is time for them to play pick-up. The girls stand huddled, shivering in their tiny skirts, showing off their tan legs, their bluish lips painted in ridiculous shades of red. I judge them to be no more than twelve or thirteen, though naturally they will say, when asked, that they are fifteen or sixteen. They giggle and flick their hair, pretending to be listening to each other when they are really preoccupied with keeping an eye on the boys standing nearby. The boys, eighteen or nineteen for sure, also stand in a group, but not so closely together. They don't want to give the impression of being something they're not. They stand with their legs apart, laughing loudly periodically, carefully

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ignoring the girls. They light up, and immediately, like a choreographed dance, the girls rummage through their purses and pull out their cigarettes. After several minutes, one of the boys swaggers over and asks for the time. He is not wearing a shirt, and his skinny, tan torso exposes the watch on his right wrist. The girls do not miss this, and explode in a cackle of giggles and nervous laughter as they rush to tell him the time he already knows. Mission accomplished. The rest of the boys walk over and begin the "What's your name? Where're you from? What'cha doin' later?" ritual. I watch in fascination as they walk away together, the boys and the girls, to pace the boardwalk, always keeping an eye out for a better catch.

I turn my attention back to him and realize that he is watching one of those women. They are the kind that men and women can't help but watch, though for different reasons. She is tall, model-tall, with red brown hair swaying all the way down her rear, pinned back on one side with a silver barrette. She shows off her even tan, the kind you get with the help of a tanning machine, by wearing all white. Tight white shorts, white heeled sandals, small white T-shirt. Envy oozes from the men who will never have her, and the women who will never be her.

I touch his hand for some inexplicable reason, silently apologizing for not being her. He faces me. He has the blue eyes I always wish I had. I guess I could always get colored contacts, but they would just be a lie. What would happen if one day he suddenly just popped out his blue eyes? What if they were false? Would I still love him? I suppose I would, but it would change something. I'm not a blue-eyed person. Blue-eyed people are different from brown-eyed people.

Most people come here especially for the deceit. They come to be something they can't be in their everyday life. They try to tan their problems away, peel away the old skin, put on a new one. I wonder if they realize that tanning will make them more wrinkled. It is, after all, only temporary.

He leans over to kiss me. I close my eyes and can't help but think about the people who are certainly watching us. I know because I am one of those people who can't help but watch lovers kiss in public when I am alone. Maybe I'm looking for their secret. It's like those car accidents on the highway that you slow down to watch even though you're not really supposed to.

I want to go home. Not home to our tiny rented room all decorated in pastels and wicker with watercolor paintings of the beach and sunsets on the walls. I want to go really home. All these beach things, these boardwalk things, they stick to you if you stay too long. Like salt and sand and taffy. All the despair and lights and unrequited lust and loneliness, they rub your soul raw, and it takes a while to wash them off. I toss the empty soda cup and the nearly full bag of taffy in the trash bin beside me. I stand up and take his hand. We walk back to the apartment together; he asks no questions. I guess I would love him.

Nawel Bailey  
Washington, DC  
Washington International School  
Catherine Bell

#### VOODOO

I have been writing down the name of each rose as if later, I might revisit the list. Come back to touch the words in my notebook and stroll through them. Rows of fuchsia, scarlet, and snow white with my eyes closed. Sounding out each name

Broadway  
Honey Favorite

#### Savoy Hotel

The roses slip more into the syllables of their titles season after season. A flower labeled Audrey Hepburn upon the premiere of a movie, begins to give birth beyond tribute, evolves. The rose is the woman, now. Taking a rare pink, clear pitch, carefully moving grace. She is the sound of a tennis ball in volley and you know her. Audrey? I stop and lean as if to smell a rose but I am really whispering smoothly into the petals, perfect vibrant sounds. Telling every flower her name, like a child, so that she will grow into it and behold it

Pristine  
Lemon Spice  
Snowfire  
Voodoo  
Audrey, Audrey.

Emily Troutman  
Catonsville, MD  
Catonsville High School  
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

#### GOLDEN YEARS

These years have stolen my head and carried it off to this small room where I often sit and think of our last day. I wore my blackest dress, though it reeked of mothballs and neglect. You were wearing your best suit, and even in death your face was fixed in your handsome way, and I knew, had it been me and not you, that you would never have such inky lids to hide behind shades of such black. Then they nailed you and stuck you away.

So why is it that I can't do the same? I should have left you there in the earth, but somehow I feel that Time's worm nibbles both of us away. I've done my rotting in this room. It serves me well as a grave—a sort of catacomb assigned to me, purchased through the generosity of our dear family. This is a graveyard for the walking dead, for we wither like some pile of Autumn leaves, and still we cannot seem to slacken the brutal and confining straps which keep us sitting upright in Longevity's cruel chair.

How is it that you were set free with such gentle ease?

Mike Mills  
Gaithersburg, MD  
Richard Montgomery High School  
Mrs. Wilchek



## ORPHEUS IN SUBURBIA

My mother said,  
 what would the neighbors think  
 of that husband of yours?  
 Do they see him naked as a birthday boy,  
 crouched like a frog in the woods?  
 You really should take him to a counselor.  
 This morning Amanda Shelton called,  
 said she was woken up at 5am  
 with that infernal racket, said he was  
 sitting in her garden, his arms dotted with  
 sparrows, blue jays, robins.  
 She said it scared her dog to death,  
 he lay on his belly in the kitchen quivering  
 and when the music stopped, he bolted  
 through the dog door and down the street.

When we lived in the country things were easier.  
 He would come back elated,  
 talk about the songs the river played, the sky played.  
 The trees bent their branches to listen,  
 and we would have our morning coffee  
 uninterrupted by telephones.  
 Only my mother called then.

"Have him committed.  
 He's like a rooster with that harp-thingy,  
 here ever got darned morning.  
 I can't have my girls see a naked man like that."

Nancy Dalworth called him a pervert  
 and called the cops twice.  
 I paid to bail him out for indecent exposure,  
 took his lyre from a cardboard box  
 amongst cigarette packs, Trojans, switchblades.

I calm Mrs. Shelton over the line,  
 smile sweetly at my husband eating his breakfast --  
 the Shelton's dog is lying at his feet.  
 I call it to me, take it into my arms,  
 and drive it back home in the station wagon.

Anna Parrish  
 Natick, MA  
 Walnut Hill School  
 Jessie Schell

## EVELYN NIELSON

The house speaks no more,  
 settled finally after the years,  
 a silent witness.  
 New Hampshire blurs  
 its flattened hay fields and  
 tall bare oaks  
 through a quarter of the  
 window's paned vision.  
 The landscape lost in snow,  
 the remainder of the picket fence  
 attempts to lead the way home  
 from the unplowed road and  
 adjacent gray barn.  
 Left behind for the winter,

the nests of birds  
 balance along the eaves  
 of buildings void of life.  
 Twenty-one years after Daddy died,  
 seventeen after Mother,  
 eleven since William and  
 eight since the last child,  
 I wait for phone calls  
 or next December  
 and a Christmas card,  
 which ever will come first.  
 I settle into the worn cushion  
 and sigh in my father's chair.  
 My head against his chest,  
 here he would rock and smoke  
 the last cigar of the day,  
 looking out at this same blank field.  
 The chair rocks smoothly tonight,  
 while my legs crack taut against  
 the bare wooden floor.  
 Outside, the sky blackens again,  
 light reflecting from the glass,  
 my own face now,  
 the barren landscape  
 before me.

Mollie Fair  
 Lutherville, MD  
 Towson High School  
 Mr. William Jones

## MY FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN...

Father, you used to kiss my forehead  
 You listened to my stomach growl  
 You saw my eyes close and I began to snore  
 You saw the goose bumps on my arms  
     my throat swell from swallowing lumps  
 Your eyes followed me

Father, would you still kiss my forehead?  
 Does my stomach growl for you to hear?  
 When my eyes close and I begin to snore, do they reach your  
 ears?  
 Do goose bumps on my arms appear for your eyes?  
     my throat swells from swallowing lumps  
     Is that for you to see?  
 If I put on black clothes, would your eyes still find me?

Father, my stomach is growling  
     my forehead needs your kiss  
 Father, my eyes are closing  
     I am beginning to snore  
 Father, goose bumps are appearing on my arms  
     my throat is swelling  
     I'm swallowing lumps  
     my forehead needs your kiss

Stacey (Cheong Fui) Song  
 Eastchester, NY  
 Eastchester High School  
 Mr. Richard Leonard



WAITING FOR YOUR STORY

Things happen when you're gone  
the rooms have conversations  
and the books read your favorite quotes  
over and over again.  
Blind shadows  
fall on the rug in prison bars  
locking into the soft plush  
the soles of where you've been,  
like the dirty cafe with cigarettes ground into the floor or  
the black magnet beaches that cling to still-wet sandals.

The walls of your bedroom talk in whispers  
to the walls of the bathroom  
and the floral paper in the living room  
converses in a hush with Maxfield Parrish prints  
and your house knows every sordid detail  
The rooms talk quietly  
so nobody notices  
and even if you sneak in  
the doors feel your hands, your caution  
and the whispers cease  
the tables hush  
and all await your presence

Shauna Sellers  
Natick, MA  
Walnut Hill School  
Jessie Schell

JAPANESE MAPLE LEAF

When you picked this leaf for me  
it was splayed out, open and bright,  
as if it were vacationing in the country;  
nine hours later  
it shriveled into a hooked claw.  
Its red dulled, and growing duller every second  
left me to wonder  
if you knew it would do just that:  
communicating with me through  
this little claw-leaf?

Drew Jameson  
Natick, MA  
Walnut Hill School  
Jessie Schell

IN THE BELL JAR

While the graffiti-marked walls press in on me  
from left and right and above,  
I scream softly.  
Blond-haired, frosty, pouty-lipped groupies, shouting their  
junior frathouse mantra in my direction,  
Lumpy-stomached, cardigan-in-June math teachers,  
snapping chalk on the board with a monotony which scares me,  
forming round circles and straight-edged squares it's taken her  
years to refine.

And I sit at the desk in the far corner right,  
stringing prose together on the graph paper that's meant for  
something else.

But I'm meant for somewhere else, so we make a good fit.

And the boy in front of me with the long hair  
whistles a Bob Dylan song I don't know the title of between his  
teeth,  
leaning tie-dyed arms over a synthetic wood desk,  
as the bag of muscles in the front row makes cocky jokes  
at the teacher's expense,  
while the other girls laugh in tinny voices,  
tossing Pert Plus hair.

And while I stare out into the courtyard,  
only to see more brick walls,  
scribbled with blue and black and yellow words I'll never  
understand,  
the second hand on the looming face over the American flag  
squeaks by 12 once more.

Danielle J. Lindermann  
Port Washington, NJ  
Paul D. Schreiber High School  
Mr. John Broza

RAPUNZEL

Today  
I  
very  
deliberately  
hacked  
off  
my  
hair

using nothing besides blunt scissors  
that didn't cut but tore hair from roots  
leaving me curiously bristling

When the job was done the floor was littered  
with tarnished gold  
which I carefully gathered up.  
My hands bowed under the weight of the mass.

From inside my dark room I coiled those shining strands  
together.  
Shadows flitted toward the sleek braid like night-moths to flame,  
killed just as swiftly.

I knotted the rope to my balcony's railing, tossed it over the  
edge.  
The hair cascaded down to the ground from my tower's window  
like a flag unfurling  
and I swung myself out, hand over hand.  
My pulse hummed in my ears *escape escape*  
but I forced my eyes to stay open and watch my cell disappear  
from view.  
My scissors flashed silver on the edge of the windowsill-  
I left them as mute witness to this wildness.  
The shadows keened over me.

Danielle Descoteaux  
Farmington, CT  
Mrs. Patti Guignino



## ANONYMITY

I am silent,  
Like the dead space of a cassette  
because I think I have something to say,  
but do not know you.

I sit still,  
like the stalker anticipating her arrival  
because movement attracts attention.

I non-descriptly look away  
with a pensive face  
as I intently ponder the gossip  
laid deftly upon my ears.

I am good at awkward.  
I got awkward down pat.

Wading in a cold stream  
between awkward and comfortable,  
That is where  
my skin shrivels up  
my jaw chatters incessantly  
and my mind freezes.

Sean O'Hagan  
Silver Spring, MD  
Springbrook High School  
Mrs. Abeshouse

## CRICKET

Enclosed inside these white walls,  
a strong electrical silence takes over.  
Minutes melting like lava,  
one drop, two drops in the i.v. of the hour.

A single cricket chirps,  
out of boredom I suppose.  
Black and white trees, that were  
never really planted.  
Captured in their beauty  
by a single frame advanced.

I wish I was that cricket,  
then I would have the freedom to chirp,  
without fear of breaking the silence and  
inviting a dozen eyes to gaze upon me.

Shannon McPhillips  
Woodbridge, VA  
Woodbridge High School  
Mrs. Hailey

## UNDER THE OVER-PASS AND THROUGH THE WOODS

I'm the king of fire-escapes and back doors to nowhere  
Always lending a helping hand and cutting  
my whole arm off in the process.  
Those eyes scream out to me  
The cat like, green-yellow, kaleidoscopes of the Sphinx.  
In the middle of the night

A cold sheath of sweat  
Blankets me, glistening with moonlight.

I'm the king of fire-escapes and back alleys in Brooklyn  
Warming hands and slashing dreams  
Cardboard catacombs and Newsday coverings

I'm the king of fire-escapes and ladders to heaven  
Every rung bursting under foot  
With the weight of complacency.  
Even steps  
Steven steps  
Up but not higher  
Into the window  
But the cool metal calls.

I'm the king of fire-escapes and platform thrones  
The Don of steel grading  
I am here  
Above the highways, the street lamps, the "L"  
Staring through the glass onion  
Watching the days saver vanish under  
the brick landscape.

Michael Reichman  
Woodmelle, NY  
G.W. Hewlett High School  
Dr. Marilyn Maxwell

## A TRIP TO THE BEAUTICIAN

The snipping revenge  
of the cold brass scissors  
has left my neck  
naked to the wind.  
How I refused  
to shorten my locks  
until in it his hands  
had lain.  
No, I would not  
betray my shoulders  
and leave my face  
for all the world.  
Blatantly I swore,  
and repeatedly I promised  
to not dam  
my river of gossamer brown.  
Not until  
caressed and stroked  
was it by his  
strumming fingers.  
This tortuous sin,  
I have invested in  
by whims of restlessness.  
Why when I left my strands  
upon the ungrateful floor  
he left his hands  
entwined in my  
unforgiving hair?

Jessica Harvey  
Linesville, PA  
Linesville High School  
Lisa Struski



In Kansas a boy wanted  
to be a sailor out on the sea.  
But mother told him  
it will never be.  
For the water was too, too  
far away from Kansas.  
So he asked for a chair  
and a cloth two by three.  
He stepped out in the yard  
and waited for the wind.  
When the bottoms of the leaves  
were seen in the trees,  
he stepped on the chair  
in the midst of the grass.  
He became the sail  
and not the sailor  
as he held the cloth  
tight in his hands.  
I watched this ship  
sail in the yard.  
I watched the long grass  
transform to the waves.  
The only waves  
you'll ever find  
in Kansas.

Rachel Bauer  
Oil City, PA  
Oil City High School  
Melodee Titus

## SAIGON, MINNESOTA

The only time He lived, he told me, was in that hell,  
alone with the devil, waiting for the man behind the bush.  
"Live in fear and die alive," He'd said,  
smoke streaming from his nose in rivers  
leading different paths. Once He'd told me the  
*Doors* used to speak to him,  
He'd look me straight into my eyes,  
"I'm gonna love till the stars fall from the sky."

He'd never thought that it would,  
at least not in the same shrubbery  
as was behind his house. He backed in when  
*man* told him he no choice,  
had to stare the mirror in the eye with the light off  
and learn to like it. He said He never did  
and came home with tangles that He'd  
discharge in mutter.

He'd give me his ear and I'd take it  
and run, limbs flailing. He was, as He'd said, still  
behind the house. His hair talked to me though,  
calling to me before He'd put it back in place.  
It spoke and I listened, "You know,  
I loved it."

Adam Segal  
Wellesley, MA  
Milton Academy  
James Connolly

## RITUAL

when i am traveling  
dangerously close  
to nonexistence,  
like the night  
fading  
into day  
i play a game  
with myself  
to draw a prick  
of fresh blood.  
i think of exactly where  
you are  
what you are doing  
without  
me  
then i hungrily eat  
the delicious pain  
that fills me  
like water,  
like darkness.

Kaitlin Gregg  
Durham, NH  
Katherine Morgan

## UNTITLED

I hug my knees, burrowing into the back seat of my  
father's car. The plastic seat cover feels damp against my back,  
and the air conditioning is blowing out a lukewarm wind. I  
smell the remains of a cigar, long before thrown out the window  
- vanilla laced, I think.

A fire hydrant's maimed arms drip, making a wet trail  
across the cement to the sewer. The trail reminds me of my  
father's nose, with the little beads of sweat collected on the feet  
of his glasses. He's driving slower than usual tonight, his  
posture stiff and slightly leaning forward - that means his lenses  
are fogged. I roll down the window, hoping the motion of the  
car will bring in a breeze from the street.

We pass by the building that always has fresh laundry  
hanging down from the fire escape, the shirt tails flapping stiffly  
with the wind. I can feel the car slow to a near crawl; father  
extends himself even closer to the face of the car. He shakes his  
head, "No parking spaces left down the street." I sense the  
argument coming - he is in the middle on the road, there is no  
way he could have been able to see all the way down to the end  
of the street. Why does he refuse to turn at the corner so we  
could drive up from the end of the road, and find a parking space  
closer to the house?

I can't believe we are still having this fight. It is the  
same petty argument we've been having ever since he started to  
pick me up from work at the beginning of the summer. What is  
so difficult about turning? We always park the car at a block  
away from the house and walk the rest of the way - leaving me  
to stare at all the empty parking spaces as we pass by. My father  
shrugs and gives his typical "parking is a matter of luck" speech,  
but even I know that is a lie. Where is the wisdom in walking an  
extra ten minutes at twelve thirty in the morning?

The car comes to a stop at a vacant space near the edge  
of the road, and father walks out of the car. He walks across the  
length of the space, measuring the distance with his feet. He  
stops at the end of it - three footsteps short of a perfect fit. He  
furrows his nose in disappointment, and resolutely pushes his  
glasses back up, ready to retrace his footsteps and measure the  
space again. I roll down the window of the car before he starts  
counting, "Dad, it's not going to fit, let's just keep going!"  
Father comes back into the car muttering something about how  
we would have fit if the car in front hadn't taken up two parking  
spaces. How people with new cars are afraid of parking in only  
one space because they don't want other people to scratch off the  
fresh paint when they are parking.

I feel that familiar ball of pressure gather at my throat,  
the one that forces me to breathe through my mouth every time  
I'm preparing for an argument. It's like all the words rush up to  
the back of my throat and collect there, waiting for me to open  
my mouth. I take a breath, prepared to say something; nothing  
comes out. I bite the walls of my mouth, feeling like one of  
those dogs that are held tightly at the collar by their masters -  
thwarted at mid-leap, their legs kicking aimlessly at the air.

I wonder why I want to be driven home anyway. To go  
to bed angry every night? How long has it been since I got out  
of the car without slamming the door behind me? There has  
never been a night this summer that I walked home alongside my  
father. I merely heard his footsteps, saw his shadow, or stared at  
him through the rearview mirror, seeing nothing at all.

When I was younger, I remember telling my mother  
about how father and I would walk through the park looking  
only upwards, to see who would be the first to get scared and  
look down. We stretched our hands out before us and waved  
them madly to make sure we weren't hitting any poles. Once we  
both slipped and fell into a mud puddle, but I still won because I  
didn't look down to see what I fell in. My father and I had so

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much to talk about back then. We argued about which one of us made the best maple syrup-on-pancake pictures, who could cram the most marshmallows into his or her mouth - who could spit them out the fastest. Now we talk about who makes lunch the next morning, and who should do the laundry this week.

The silence in the car made my ears ring. Heat blanketed the air - when did the wind stop blowing? I can still hear my father muttering to himself, "It's too late, all the spaces are taken."

"But dad, did you try 62nd Street yet? Do you want to turn at the intersection?" No answer, we inch closer to the yellow turn signal. Why won't he listen to me just once?

I can see my father's hands grip the steering wheel tighter; he leans forward. And suddenly he looks older. His head is no longer lifted as high, the whites of his eyes are now yellow. His back hunches against the driver's seat like an old doll that lost its stuffing. I look down, feeling the tight pressure on my throat ebb. When did he start to look so worn? When did we stop having marshmallow eating contests?

At that moment, the car turns.

Di Yin Lu  
Forest Hills, NY  
Bronx High School of Science

### TRAFFIC LIGHT

The heat and the city pressed down on me  
The street lights illuminated ugly highways,  
and bleak, broken businesses,  
and I sat in the car with my face

pressed against the glass.  
The car halted at a traffic light,  
and in the garish, artificial brightness  
of the streets, I saw a man  
shoot out of the dark doorway  
of a bar towards a waiting taxi.  
He was followed by a barefoot woman.  
She was very thin with hollow, starved eyes,  
and sharply taut features. She looked weary  
and seemed to be pleading with the man.  
He was so cruel. He wouldn't look at her  
as she cried and clawed at him  
and I somehow felt like  
it was me he was ignoring.  
Then suddenly he brought his fist  
down so violently on the back of the cab  
that I heard the bang through the glass  
that separated my world from theirs.  
And then he was gone in a whirl  
of fumes, leaving her alone and blank.  
As I stared at her, she looked at me,  
and I smiled at her because I didn't know  
what else to do. And she  
grasped at every bit of goodwill  
I put behind the smile, and held onto it  
like a lifeline to keep her from whatever it  
was she was drowning in.

Melissa Mrozek  
Baltimore, MD  
Catonsville High School  
Mr. Gary Blankenburg



# Susquehanna University

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