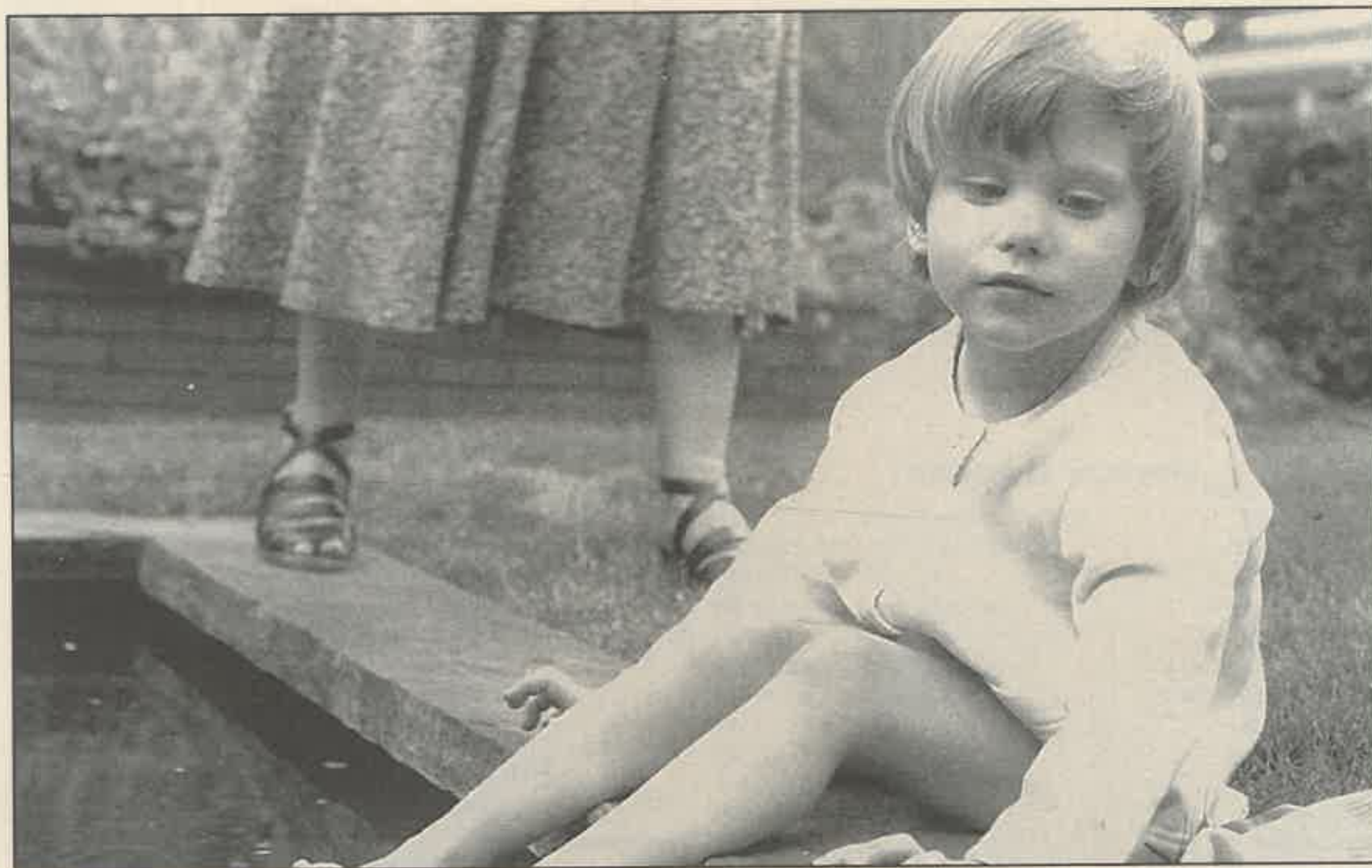


Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Jesse Kates
Lloyd Harbor, NY

VOLUME 18

\$3

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the eighteenth issue of **The Apprentice Writer**, which annually showcases the best writing and illustrations from the 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, PA—to

over 3,500 schools in the thirty states from which we receive submissions.

Send material to be considered for next year's **Apprentice Writer** to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selingsgrove, PA 17870. The deadline is March 15, 2001.

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PROSE

PHOTOGRAPHY, ARTWORK

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AIRLINER DOWN, ATLANTIC COAST

There's nothing to fear, really –
Just one big bang and the sinews
erupt. Metallic coffee grinds sprinkle
like ash over the lapping tide.

The orange silk scarf Mrs. Sweeter bought –
on sale – at Saks Fifth Ave. floats

first, later is pulled downwards by a limp,
protruding arm before it finally

tangles in the anchor that once belonged to
Jacob Marshall III. His wife dropped one

day from the purple widow's walk above their
white-laced Nantucket colonial. Her father,

too, had been a sea captain – it was what
they called a family business. Nearby, a

crab is enveloped in a passport
belonging to David Aronson, a business-

man from New York. Hundreds of feet away,
his briefcase bruises the leg of Rosie Davis,

age 5, whose mother, Cecilia, is teaching her
daughter to swim while proud father Jon watches

from behind the *Cape Cod Times*. Near Jon,
Terri Myers, age 22, unties her bikini strings

for a sharper tan. Later, she and her
boyfriend, James Nicholas, Jr., will wade

and happen upon a glass doll
that Kenneth Stanley of Garden City, New Jersey, was

to present to Cheryl Ann Smith as they walked along the
Piazza Navona in Rome. Fifteen years earlier, he

lost his virginity during a semester in Italy, put on
twenty pounds from pasta, bulging his stomach

like gulps of water accidentally swallowed that, once
down,
cannot resurface. Fifty years later, in Portugal,

a thick grandmother will be floating, letting the pastel skirt
of her bathing suit
glide over a wave. Straightening herself, she will find in
her toes
a gold band with the name engraved inside
faded after caressing so much altitude.

Elizabeth Frieze
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

ROLLER SKATE POEM

I remember the roller skates exactly:
pink wheels, white synthetic leather,
pink and silver laces,
a picture of Barbie on each ankle.

The summer my grandfather got sick
for the last time, my sister and I
skidded in erratic circles around the broken fountain,
the wheels bumping and rattling
over the driveway of my grandfather's house.
My uncle's Labrador
rolled in the fountain basin,
his fur tinged slightly green
and smelling of the stagnant water.
Pots of red geraniums
dotted the brick patio.
Anne and I sat beside my father
each holding a shirt sleeve,
the stone steps cold against our legs.

My father's eyes were blue
under his wild eyebrows,
his cheeks unshaven;
his eyes were tired
after watching his father's skin
grow to wax for six weeks in Intensive Care,
watching the machines become his lungs
when even my grandfather's anger
wasn't enough to keep him
breathing on his own.
I'd known my grandfather
as a bitter old man with a glass of scotch in his hand.
Then I'd known him sick,
his body only a frail outline in a hospital bed.
I remember the roller skates, the geraniums,
the pine needles on the driveway,
my father's eyes that afternoon;
I remember that no one was crying
the day my grandfather died.

Nancy Reddy
116 Trolley Ct.
Pittsburgh, PA
Mr. Eric Graf

NASHVILLE SICKNESS

The doctor himself will call when
Arteries faint into themselves.
First thing tomorrow
Dad'll keep the radio low
In the red pickup,
The interstate stretching
Shiny as a scalpel.

He'll exit
In Music City, USA,
His own father rushing
To fall, to pull at tubes.
The process is long,
Nurses cracking pink gum
While Dad keeps a dying man's fingers
From the needle feeding his wrist.
His father twitches with sleep;
Dad buys a Clancy paperback,
Makes a quick call home,
And, eyes on a dozing redneck,
Wonders what in the hell
Elvis knows about Heartbreak, anyhow.

Katherine Cummings
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

"Just throw it," Dan said. "Nothing will happen. Who, besides you or me, is going to know anything? It's just snow."

"Alright, but I'm gonna wait for the next bus to come by," I huffed. My breath crystallized as I spoke, and he shivered, grinning away his apprehension. "Here goes nothing."

Those were the last words I remember that day. I threw the snowball, as Dan had, but mine broke a bus window, and his had not. Two divots were missing in the freshly laid snow, and behind them, footprints led to a tree house.

"Dude, I really wish I hadn't done that. I mean, what if we get caught? I've never been in real trouble before."

"Reed, you're alright. I promise," Dan said. I believed him a little, but I could sense the doubt in his voice.

"Well, I'm off. I told my mom that I would be home for dinner."

"See ya. I'm going to put up the posters we found." I chuckled to myself and tacked up a Cindy Crawford swimsuit poster. Our tree house was the only place where I could indulge in breasts and thighs without condescending lectures from anyone.

Dan and I had built our tree house the previous summer. We had not originally planned for a tree house. They were too childish. Everyone had one, and we had wanted to construct something newer, and more amazing. We had wanted to dig a bomb shelter. My yard had not been large enough, so we looked to Dan's. However, his mother was not too wild about us digging up her flower garden. After a yelling session, we curtailed our plans, resorting to the much-hated tree house.

Two full months of sweat saturated our house. Every morning, Dan would bike to my house, where I abandoned my brother to ride off with Dan to the community-recycling center. There, we took lumber, old doors, and nails to add to our pile of materials. We used my father's ladder to hoist planks onto the tree's lower limbs, and sat together on those limbs, silently nailing two-by-fours into living wood.

"You think we need blueprints?" I asked Dan, nailing a piece of lumber to a thick tree limb.

"No way. Blueprints are for wussies. People only use those to get ideas, and we already know what we want to do."

We did not speak much, only a quick glance and smile would express our satisfaction. When we had finished nailing a large box with a pink door to the large Cedar tree, our house was complete. No two pieces of lumber were the same pigment, and sap from piercing nail wounds had hardened in veins along the tree's trunk and sides of the house. Already our tree house looked aged and well broken in, even though the door was pink.

I did not see Dan the next day. Unusual, for we always met after school, stealing away to the tree and etching our initials deeper into its limbs each afternoon. I thought about what I had done the afternoon before. I had wanted to make another snowman, but Dan had thought it more exciting to snowball cars. So, I had agreed. At least we had gotten away with it. A false sense of invincibility echoed through my body, and I wanted to risk something, anything again.

"Reed, sorry I didn't come over yesterday. I got in trouble at school, so my mom wanted to talk to me," Dan yelled through the wind.

"What did you do?"

"Oh, nothing. I flooded the girls' bathroom by accident."

"Neat, what were you doing in there?" It seemed a little odd that Dan had flooded the girls' bathroom. Teachers never allowed guys in any of the girls' rooms.

"That doesn't matter, but check out what I found," he smiled, displaying a small metallic box. "This is some sort of an animal trap. I don't really know what it does, but I think that it works on squirrels and other small critters."

"Where are we going to catch a squirrel? It's winter. Don't they bury themselves and sleep for a couple months or something? You know, they eat nuts and leaves and then sleep for a while," I replied in confidence. We had just learned about mammals in class, and I was sure that squirrels hibernated in the winter.

"Those are bears, moron. Squirrels live in trees and eat the nuts they gather. And I intend to catch one. There must be like a thousand at least that live in your woods. But first we need some bread."

"Okay, let's find one then," I said, running into my house to find a piece of bread.

As I ran into my kitchen, Dan sat on my porch, tenderly moving the springs and metal hinges on the trap. The top was airbrushed metal, and it had a heart punched into it. Mesh wire covered the sides, and one end opened when two large springs were cocked into place.

Once we had the bread, we tore off into the woods, trap and bread in hand, searching for a tree large enough to house squirrels. It was still snowing, and the wind was picking up, chilling us and concealing our footprints.

"Here's a good tree. How about the base of this one?" I yelled over the wind.

"Let's do it. You catch me a big squirrel now," he replied, patting his trap.

The trap was alien to me. Its springs and hinges all connected in some fashion, but it did not look very stable. I sat in a clump of snow and watched Dan pull back two springs, hinging a metal bar between them. He set the trap between two trees, which grew in a "V." They were the only green trees we saw.

After the trap was set, we placed the bread inside and started to retreat back towards the tree house. Seconds later, we heard a clasp sound, followed by a squeal.

"We got something. We got something!" Dan screamed. He ran towards the now-closed trap, slipping twice over covered roots and brush.

"Oh my God," Dan whispered. I caught up and looked at our trap, trembling with victory.

A small squirrel lay inside, but not fully. It had set the springs off too suddenly, and the trap door had closed, mangling its leg. A small patch of blood seeped into the white snow, and I shuddered at the animal's aching whines.

"We've got to help him," I gasped, flicking open the trap. The squirrel hobbled out of the metal cage, prying its leg from the hinge. Both Dan and I stood frozen, watching the small animal gasp for air and scamper in small circles. It successfully made a dash for its nearby green tree, and then, disoriented, darted for a dead oak, where it fell over, panting.

"I know what to do," Dan whispered. I watched as he picked up the squirrel and cradled it in his hands, the blood smearing on his bare palms. He whispered one more inaudible phrase and then placed the squirrel in his right hand, cocking his arm behind his head.

"What are you doing?" I breathed through my clenched teeth. "Stop, put him down. No, give him to me,

Continued on page 5

my mom will know what to do."

My action was too late. I headed towards Dan, arms out, watching his movements as my heart raced. He raised his cocked arm slightly higher, gaining momentum, and flung the squirrel at the base of the dead oak. I stopped running and watched the squirrel flip in beautiful somersaults through the air, swiftly careening towards a large bare root. An awful crack followed. I started to cry.

I could not say anything. I could not even moan, tears blurring my vision. Dan retreated towards my house, and I stooped over the squirrel. Both its eyes were open and its back was sandwiched in two halves. Blood poured from its nose; one ear was missing, torn off by the collision.

Furiously, I tore up the frozen earth below me and brushed the squirrel into it, covering the shallow grave with brush and snow.

"I hate you," I howled, running at Dan. He had not expected my anger and turned to meet my open palm. His nose squished against the girth of my wrist. He fell, clutching his face, as I ran into my house.

With my brother's help, I tore our tree house down the next day. We burned the wood, nails, and sweat that had gone into our two-month project, melting a deep hole into the snow. I never spoke to Dan again.

"I never really liked that tree house," my brother told me as we stared into the leaping flames.

"Yeah, but it had its moments I guess. I sort of miss that poster I showed you."

In the springtime, I tried to find the buried squirrel and place a quartz rock over its grave. All of the trees were in bloom, and I never found the burial grounds. I did see an old oak though, teeming with birds and other squirrels, so I left the rock at its base with a eulogy, and a small piece of bread.

Reed Macy
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, NH
Mr. Douglas Rogers

FROM THE STUDIO

A smoking woman,
a plastic bag skidding down and out of sight,
the wind bending bare branches,
pushing for the extra inch
like the crowbar against my lock:
November in New York.

The canvas rests,
white,
darkening with night.

Wrapped in blankets
I touch headlights,
strokes of bright that paint the walls,
moving through my darkness.

Sam Taylor
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

She hides under the heat, under the dust storms,
crushed by sand,
shaded by windows with plastic covers,
she is bowed by eaves and gables,
caked with mud,
a mask two shades darker than her skin.

She forgets water and the smell of grass,
beyond the henna-dyed expanses
where sky and ground are indistinguishable
and her skin chafes against sacks stuffed with hay,
specked with puberty,
legs sticky with piss and blood,
wrinkles molded over flesh.

Her voice stumbles in the air,
accent hitting barbed wire, coming back
through narrowed halls, knocked out stables, and built-up
walls,
dying out, underground, in concrete foundations.
Her breaths startle bulbs diving from plaster ceilings,
or stir tea leaves,
tucked inside her ragged bra and socks.
Her frown wrestles with a smile,
in the pictures forced on her
beneath our stripes and stars.

Kristian Laliberte
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

ON THE BEDROOM FLOOR OF BEN'S HOUSE

Smells like Wild Turkey
and lemon-scrubbed vomit.
Idle voices crawl by the door
like sounds of hornets
drunk with smoke.

(Anna dreams...)
Her dangerous smile,
honey on the candyman.
She gave him the fantasy
that Julia couldn't have.

Lying like a pile of dirty clothes
Brad's arm tight around her,
she heard him sob once,
feeling the wet on her back
spread like a crack in the glass.

Like a pouting child, he cried
soft and ashamed.
Anna fell asleep with his face on her neck,
a smile over her mouth,
feeling him tremble behind her.
Hornets fade to black.

Courtney Evans
George Washington High School
Danville, VA
Mr. Bernard Leigg

LETTERS FROM CHINA

When I was five, my father got letters from China. They were thick, and the writing was as foreign to me as the look in my father's eyes when he read them. Carefully, meticulously, he would open them in the privacy of his study. I watched him through the keyhole. He touched the paper as if it were skin, and his lips moved in his language, not mine.

My father never visited China during my lifetime. He said the air there smelled of incense, that the rice fields stretched out into the horizon like the green silk that his mother wore. In school we learned that China is a communist country in southeast Asia, overpopulated with smokers and drinkers of teas with strange names.

Once, I put on a Chinese-style dress from my costume box. My father told me to take it off.

"Oh John, she's only playing," my mother said.

"Tell her to play somewhere else," was his response.

I look like my grandmother. And I know that when he looks into my eyes, the only Asian feature time and Revlon cannot change, he sees her. My father's mother died when he was eight.

I met my uncle once. He was the only man I've ever met with a real Chinese name. *Xing Po*. Short and nearly bald, he might have been a member of the Shanghai Triad. He at least must have known martial arts. *Xing Po* wanted to teach me to speak Mandarin. He called me by my Chinese name, *Shan le*.

"*Shan le, ni shi ni de baba de nu er,*" he would say. Today, after struggling to learn the language of my father, I know what it means: "Sarah, you are your father's daughter."

Xing Po died when I was twelve. He gave me my first cigarette and a pen. He wasn't my real uncle. My real uncles live in New England and speak my language and aren't communists.

Categories baffle me. People baffle me sometimes, too. They used to come up and tell my mother what a wonderful person they thought she was for adopting a little Chinese baby. Because those awful Chinese, you know, they drown their children in the rice fields rather than take care of them. And wasn't I a cute baby by the way! They thought they might adopt a baby themselves from that place if it was certain to be as cute as me, oh, and if they didn't actually have to go to that country to get one. I couldn't get mad at people for saying this; I partly believed it myself.

Years later, while cleaning out my father's drawers, I found the letters. Hiding beneath old stock reports and tax returns, there they were. Something inside those letters seemed to glow, hopeful, yearning, like the memory of a dream. I can read the language now. Subtle brush strokes form syllables. This is not my language.

The woman's voice that spoke from inside wavered:

Bian tian, ni ke kan dao

Lan tian, bai yun he tai yang.

Ye wan, ni ke kan dao

Yue liang he yi shan de xing xing.

Hong de hua, lu de shu,

Qing qing cao er pu man di.

Gao gao de shan, wan wan de he,

Ke ai de xiao niao fe man tain.

Dan shi, dou shi leng he si.

Yinwie ni qu

Wo de gui

"In the day, you can see the sun and white clouds in the blue sky. At night you can see the moon and the twinkling stars. There are red flowers, green trees, green grass. There are high mountains and the curve of a river. Lovely birds fly in the sky. But all is cold and dead. Nothing without you my love."

My translation took away the breath and the life in this woman's words. Now I knew why my father saved his letters from China. The name of the woman was, is perhaps, *Mingtian*, Tomorrow. It's not common.

I think my mother knew about *Mingtian*. When I came to her with arms full of these letters, she merely made a gesture with her hand for me to take them away. There are depths to the people we call our parents that we will never reach. The letters were like whispers lost in the wind. Like looking at a flower bloom in front of you; its petals fragile, the veins apparent; it grows with the season and begins to brown at the ends and turn over into itself. You watch all this without knowing why, and yet, it still remains beautiful. The flower dies, and still the why remains. It remains until it doesn't matter anymore why, and what matters is that for a while, for a fleeting instant, it was beautiful and alive.

I went to China that year, by myself. I visited my father's father's grave. Steps carved into a hillside crept upwards towards a crumbling shrine. Flowers were quietly growing for the gods, and the bent trees that only seem to grow in China twisted upwards toward the sun. My grandfather's grave has no marker. It is a pyre of poppy flowers that grow and bloom together. Sitting on my grandfather's step, his own rung in the stairway to heaven, Jacob's ladder, I felt the sun on my neck. I looked out to the horizon and I saw it. The rice fields stretched on forever like green silk. They picked it the way it has been picked for a thousand years. The rice grass moved in harmony with the water, and I watched with the trees as the sun turned in on itself and gave birth the stars.

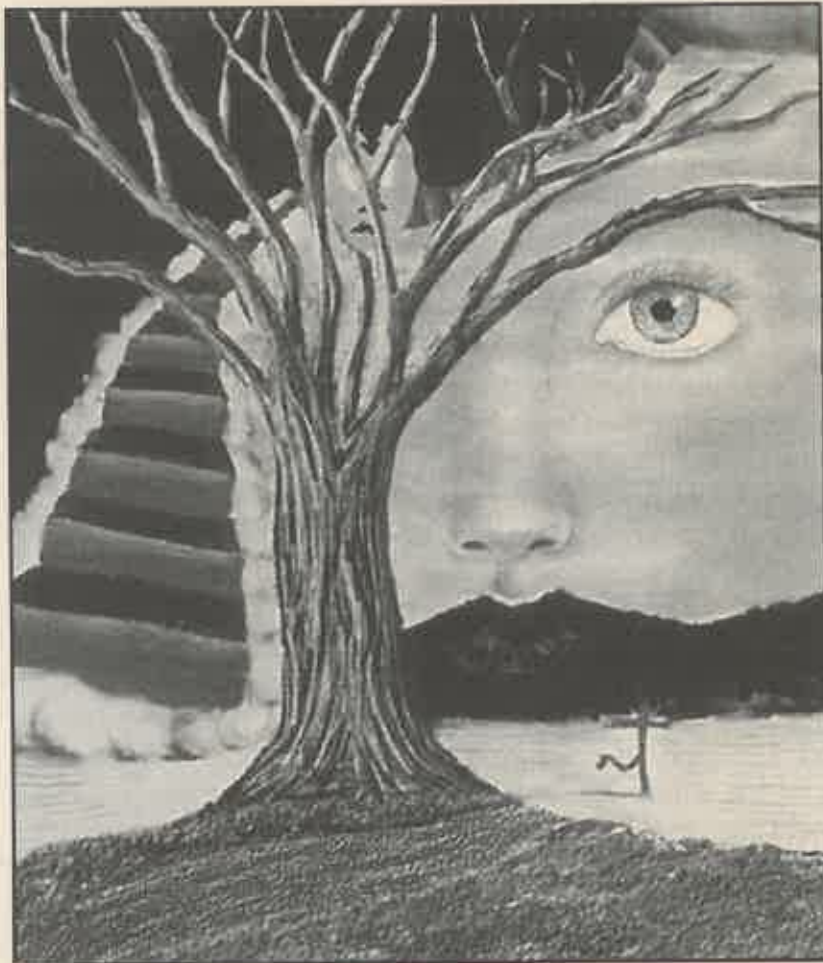
That was the first time I ever saw my father's world. Until that day, I never knew he even saw.

Sarah Hsu
20 East 68th St.
New York, NY
Ms. Upham

Things Physics Can't Explain

Frequencies of waves of light and sound, atomic structures
fall light years short
of autumn colors, of Pacabell's cannon,
or the scent on your skin.
The force of a magnet moving
through an electric field
cannot describe the moment
before you touch me.
Nor can you graph on a plane of X and Y
the feeling of that house
when you left, empty,
or the starless Alaskan sky.

Sam Taylor
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly



Vanessa Fitzsimmons
Matinsville, NJ

BROTHER MADDSON

He is a sack-cloth and ashes type of man,
a freemason who should have charged more.
Nothing merely pleasurable has ever
entered his brain, or even been told
to him. But this prophet, now 86,
always grins beneath a feather
silver mustache under a rose nose
that seems to slope off of a big bald head.
Even now he stands 6 feet 5. He wrestled
trees in Canada in young lumberjack days.
Every Sunday he is The Word though both
his daughters left his church years ago.
They're old women now. Every Sunday
he tells us about his visions.

I remember being in the hospital...
*recovering from a heart attack... as
I was asleep, I saw the church...,
and it was covered in dark green foliage
..., and inside... oak trees grew
through the roof and everyone wore
white... Everyone sat together; the chapel
was full..., and everyone had a large basket
of fruit..., and that fruit was truth!*

He talks about Jesus and leans on the pulpit.
I can't see his eyes for the heavy glasses.
Brother Maddson uses them to shoot
soul-light at me; something inside of me
feels like it's burning. His voice
booms thunder; I want to touch him, but
would it shock me? Would it turn my body blue?

Rob Greene
George Washington High School
Danville, VA
Mr. Bernard Leigg

THE STENCH THAT IS JULY

this sweater of mine
was
purchased for a
funeral.
its black cotton cloth
hugs the skin of
my shoulders
as if, it too,
were flesh.
we drove (ten hours in the
dead of July,
the heat sticking to my skin
and like fever, i sweat, red
hair pulled back...)
to a funeral
over 600 miles away.
600 miles
to gaze upon a
man embalmed,
a stuffed pumpkin
of a man.
my sweater
hung on my skin
like toil that day.
i could never peel away
the cloth
the grief
from the stench that was July
encompassing
my body.

this sweater of mine,
composed of cotton
and black thread
bears remembrance
of July.

Emily Miller
41 Center Rd.
Quarryville, PA 17566
Mrs. Pasko

UNTITLED

Today,
I have old
lady wrinkles
in my knuckles
Powdered
White &
dignified like
grandma Egan
just before
she died
in yellow
blankets
of various
shades
and dimensions
that only her
eyes saw.

Caitlin Fouratt
27 Corn Lane
Shrewsbury, NJ
Ms. Karen Haefelein

TUESDAY THERAPY

It's another Tuesday night, and I should be home studying trig – how to graph the inverse function of sine theta x. But instead it's just me and my dad in a car heading down roads new to these tires. I know he's nervous because he doesn't comment on the song the radio is playing, the one that usually makes him tap his nail-bitten fingertips against the steering wheel. I wait. Instead, he turns, brushes my cheek with should-be tapping finger tips, smiles. I realize I need this silence.

My uncle Fred comes tomorrow; he's the one my dad hasn't spoken to for fifteen years. I've never met him, but he supposedly had emotional problems growing up and had to be sent away to some school in California where he probably went to group sessions to "explore his anger." Now he's a psychologist in some small town in Oklahoma, a town where the driving age is only fourteen. I know because my dad told me how my "long lost" cousin, August, can drive, and this usually makes me laugh, just thinking about it – about how her parents named her after that month makes me think my cousin is just as imperious as her namesake – but not tonight. My dad says Fred caused problems, disrupted family life. And for the first time, this makes me sad, makes me wonder if some day this is how my sister will refer to me, that her friends will know me as the one who had to get her head "shrunked," the one who moved to some invisible town to run away from an invisible family she wouldn't, maybe couldn't, love. I guess it's in my genes.

My mom's a social worker, a firm believer in this process known as therapy. My dad's a non-believer, questions the good that can possibly come from talking to a complete stranger. I think he's still mad at his brother. "But never mind that," he says; he can't listen to my tears any longer, wants me to be happy.

I think my mom got the call last April, the one from the school nurse. Some friends supposedly told her they were "concerned," worried that I was losing weight, that I didn't look good, that they thought I was starving myself, so that night, I ate chicken and chocolate cake and asked if I could have some more please? I felt her watching, knew my friends were just jealous.

I try everything. I eat lettuce for lunch and dinner. I subscribe to Fitness magazine and read diet tips. I run until I feel my legs giving out beneath my body and protest I simply won't be happy until my favorite pair of jeans from two summers ago, the boot-cut ones with cute flower patches on the knees, fit again, that when they do the boy with the red hair and freckles, the one who reminds me of the Hawaiian sunset, will finally ask for my number. Another red light.

When I was younger, my aunt used to tell me to beware of boys, stories how they would line up to look into my blue eyes, whisper broken promises into my innocent ear. It's eleven years later, and I'm still waiting.

The girls roll their eyes – I tell myself they're just jealous, that they wish they had the will power, can't believe that I do. But I hate envying the girl whose thighs don't touch as she walks down the street in July-baring shorts, and my friend whose every whim is answered through the simple batting of painted eyelashes.

I've gotten used to the slam of doors, the ripping noise exploding through a room, into your heart. "I can't live like this anymore," my mom exclaims, followed by the cries of a little sister and the screams of a father. She tells me it goes deeper, that there's a cause for this drawn face and these bony hips. Sometimes I wonder how they still love me.

We continue to drive down darker roads, farther from home. I notice a familiar street sign and think I used to have a friend who lived there, the kind of friend whom you know from those fifth grade soccer Saturdays when being the best didn't matter. We used to ride our bikes to a convenience store called Artie's, kind of like Seven-Eleven, minus the high school football players desperately trying to buy Friday night beer with fake I.D.s. I think her name was Kim – her thighs didn't touch.

He says we're only five minutes away and I would like the heat, I seem cold. I shake my head, despite these goosebumps that make me wish this April wind would warm me through my window. It's spring, but something doesn't feel right, perhaps the way the budded trees are blown by harsh, almost January air. This silence is getting old, building up, rising, nearly suffocating me, so I turn the radio back on. To the station he loves, I hate. Progress.

"Just down the street," he says, and points to a dead end, to the end of a dim, narrow road. I feel trapped, don't want to meet the woman that lurks behind that two-story wooden house, behind a door, sitting next to a couch made for that moment in therapy every patient waits for, that "break through." And I don't want to see her, tell her these feelings because I'm scared, scared of losing this thing that has become part of me, stayed with me for so long. I've finally gotten used to this tugging.

We pull up next to a gold Acura in the driveway; I pray that there is no one else behind those doors, don't want anyone to know about this trip. My dad unfastens my seat belt, sees my hands trembling, and kisses me, on this designated place reserved for when I was a little girl. He knows what I need.

It's another Tuesday night, and I'm trying hard to love myself.

Heather Goodman
47 Fox Hunt Lane
Cold Spring Harbor, NY
Ms. Henry

UNFOLDING

We whispered
as we unfolded
the stiff white shirts
that mama
so carefully plied.
As you ironed out wrinkles
I told you how
the underwear was the postman's
how we couldn't afford socks
how daddy always came back with
red lipstick on his blue collar
how Stevie went out in the morning
with a corn-starched white shirt
and sparkle in his green eyes
but came home stormy
with no green in his hands.
Then you flung the laundry out the window
into the cloudless, blue, blue sky
and we chased the underwear,
flying away.

Alison Hwong
10 Brook Drive West
Princeton, NJ
Merle Rose

ICE CREAM SUNDAE

The buzzer is ringing out front.

It's always ringing. Every time I sit down and get comfortable, when I finally think I'm going to make it past tired, dog-eared page 286, the buzzer rings and I'm up and I'm running and I'm ready to go serve ice cream to whatever lost soul has walked up to my window. This time I really have to though because Tess just ran out to pick up sandwiches for dinner because Tess always picks up sandwiches for dinner because Tess is obsessed with food.

So I grab an apron and tie the flimsy, blue strings around my ever-expanding stomach and yank at the loop around my neck because it feels like a noose. I walk to the front and hope that it's not a whole mob of rich people just getting back from some huge dinner party at some fancy restaurant, which will just remind me of how poor and pathetic I am. Although sometimes the young preppy guys tip well because they're trying to impress their young preppy dates like they have to prove they have money to just throw around or something. Or maybe they just feel bad for me because they know other than the extra nickels and dimes they throw into my coffee cup by the window, I get shit pay and no benefits and am scooping their ice cream for the sheer reason I have no other choice.

But it doesn't even matter because it's a family of four outside my window with their golden retriever on a leash next to them and their shining Jeep Cherokee parked in the lot. They have two little girls who look so close in age, I wonder if the mother even got a chance to recover after she popped the first one out. They're both blond-haired and blue-eyed with rosy little cheeks and pudgy little baby legs. They look like they don't give their parents a moment's trouble, and they play nicely and their grandmother buys them a new Barbie doll each Christmas. Their mommy is real pretty too. She has dark, dark hair, which I'm sure she dyes to keep from going gray like my mom always does. The father has glasses and his socks are pulled up a little too high, leaving a whole three inches of visible skin below his too tight khaki shorts... so I figure the only way he could look like that much of a nerd is if he's a doctor, which probably explains the Ralph Lauren polo shirts and the SUV.

The woman turns to her husband and whispers something in his ear. They wave to me, then pick up one of the kids and the entire gang moves inside.

The door is triggered to ring when someone comes in and it's much shriller than the buzzer at the window. If I had nightmares - if I had dreams at all - that door buzzer would be the main focus. I hate that they came inside. I like it better when people order from the window. That way they can't see my stomach, and they don't treat me like I'm stupid or something.

They're staring at the sign like their lives depend on which flavor of ice cream they order and it's so nail-biting for me I want to tell them that if it comes down to it I can put more than one kind on each cone. One of the little girls is hanging on the counter, so I can just barely see the tips of her fingers as the rest of her is hidden underneath.

The man asks if it's okay that they brought the dog in and I tell him it's fine and ask him how he's doing today, and he says he's okay but he wishes that it would rain because his lawn is looking like a Triscuit. I nod but know that this weather has just been better for business and that people usually don't want ice cream if it's raining.

The mother is staring at the dipping cabinet in front of me. We have some good flavors today: mocha chunk, peanut butter cup, cherry vanilla. And pistachio. That's

my favorite. I know a lot of people don't like it, but lately I have a constant craving for it. She points out the cherry vanilla to one of the little girls.

"Look at that one, Lizzie." I follow her pointed finger and see a glob of chocolate among the black cherry chunks. When they're gone, I should clean up the freezer a little. The little girl pulls herself up to the edge, pressing her palms to the glass. From my side of the cabinet, I can see the underside of hands, the smooth ridges and hills. Her fingers are tiny, smaller than I can ever imagine my own being. The skin turns white, she's pressing so hard against the glass.

The mother pulls her away. "You're going to leave hand prints, honey."

The father has been reading the signs above my head. "Where do you keep your water ice?"

I turn around to the counter behind me, pulling up two little handles on either side. "We have a freezer right here. Water ices have to be kept at colder temperatures than regular ice cream because of the fact they're made with a water base rather than milk."

They look taken aback. Most people see teenage blond and assume dumb. Most people see pregnant and assume whore. One of the kids is pointing to the chocolate, murmuring and whining and trying to get her parents' attention. Mom and Dad finally turn to look at her and toss her appeasing words. "All right, if that's what you want."

The man looks at me and says, "Can we have one small chocolate cone?"

I smile back, but I know it's not real because as nice as these people seem and as cute as their kids are, they aren't doing anything to help me. I take a napkin and wrap it around a cone, gripping the smallest scoop and lunging for the freezer. It's harder to reach to the back now that I'm beginning to show. The belly gets in the way and I've found the best thing to do is just attack the thing head on and grab for whatever flavor I want and try to work as fast as I can.

I hear a muffled question from above. "What's the difference between gelato and water ice?"

I put a scoop on the cone and try to press it down as hard as I can so it won't fall off and I won't have to give her another free cone like they tell us to when that happens to little kids. I struggle out of the freezer and as I'm cleaning the scooper, I give the same answer to the same question I get on average 3.3 times a day.

"Water ice, in essence, is made with water and special flavorings. Gelato is a traditional Italian dessert, made with seventy-five percent water and twenty-five percent whole milk. In general, it's much richer than water ice and often has a juicy, fruit flavoring."

"Oh." People usually don't have a response for that. I hand the mother the cone, who then hands it to the little girl, who then nearly drops it on the floor which I just mopped this morning.

While the mother tries to prevent disaster, the father orders for himself. "Okay, I think I'll have a medium mocha chunk... But can I have that in a dish?"

I tell him sure and reach for the medium scoop and a bowl. I stare into the dripping cabinet looking at the mocha chunk, which is fortunately close enough I don't have to kill myself to get it. And as I do, I steam over his incessant questions about water ice and gelato and things that it seems that anybody who spent eight years in college should know. Sometimes I wonder if people just ask those questions to see if I'll trip up, if I'll flounder and roll like the beached whale I'm becoming.

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I hand him the dish and hope he drops it all over his car's brand new leather interior. "Will there be anything else?"

The mother is conferring with her other little angel. A solar eclipse later, she looks up. "Can we get a strawberry milkshake?"

I nod. I wish I could tell her no but I know I can't so I don't, and I stand on my tiptoes to reach the shelf where we keep the steel milkshake containers. You know, the ones that hang on the machine that's kinda like a blender but not because it makes more of a mess and it's impossible to clean up. I put the strawberry flavoring in and then the ice cream even though you're supposed to put the milk first because there's this line at the bottom of the cup that shows how much you pour in and you can't see it when the ice cream is there. But at this point I really don't care, and most people can't tell a quality milkshake from a crummy one. My back is to them. I'm not sure what to do next, and I'm not sure how to do it, and I'm not sure what's going to happen when I do.

I just take the plunge and walk from behind the dipping cabinet over to the refrigerator on the other side of the room. I feel naked and exposed and I'm sure all of them are staring at me. I grab the milk, dashing back to my hiding space like some stupid, scared rabbit trying to cross the interstate in the middle of rush hour.

But in the end it doesn't help because the same little girl who I thought was cute two seconds ago points at me and says, "Baby."

I've turned around again so I can't see the parents' faces but I know what they're thinking, and I know the looks they're giving each other. I see them every day. Every time I walk down the street or through the mall or when I serve someone their innocent strawberry milkshake. I pour the milk. If my life were a soap opera, I'd spill it all over because my hands are trembling so much. Except it's not and I don't and they aren't. I hook the container to the machine and I hear the hum and swish and rattle of a milkshake in the process of being made. I pray I've put enough milk in or enough ice cream or enough anxiety to make a decent shake. I face the family again, leaning against the counter, so my stomach sticks out even more. "Is that going to be everything?"

I don't look the mother in the eye. There's a poster above her head with this demented ten-year-old boy eating a vanilla cone and holding this little puppy on a leash. On the top it says in big red letters, "Eat More." I don't think I've ever seen it before. When Tess comes back with dinner, I'll ask her about it. Of course, by that time I'll probably forget it's even there and I won't notice it again until I'm faced with another wonderfully awkward situation.

Then out of nowhere the lady with the dark, dark hair and the little blond girls and the nerdy husband asks, "So when are you due?"

And the way she says it makes it sound like a different question than the one I get almost as often as the gelato/water ice debate. Her voice hums and sings as she says it like this baby is a good thing. Like I should be happy about it. Like it shouldn't matter that I had to drop out of school and that I'm only seventeen and that Daddy hates me now and Mommy thinks I was asking for this to happen. Like that it's going to be fun being a mother or something.

And it feels like when you sit out in the sun and you close your eyes and you can feel the heat on your body, in your blood, and the rays are behind your eyes and it lights up your lids so it's bright like heaven's supposed to be. It's light like whip cream but sweet like chocolate sauce.

Usually when people mention it, I want to tell them a whole list of things in my own defense. Like that I used to be an honor student and I was supposed to be an environmental lawyer. And that I only had sex a few times before and then the condom broke one night so it's not like I was being irresponsible. And that I would have had an abortion, but I got so scared I told Mom and of course she wouldn't let me. And that I hate scooping ice cream and I would do anything not to do it for the rest of my life.

But with this lady, I don't have to and I don't want to, because I just look her in the eye and she knows it all.

"Middle of October."

I realize I forgot about the milkshake so I whip around and grab the steel container. It's slippery with dew dripping all down the sides. I reach for a large soda cup and pour the shake in. It's perfectly blended, no lumps and with little red strawberry specks. Perfection. I put a lid on the top and hand it to them. "That's going to be all?"

The lady points to one of the girls. "Yeah, she'll never finish this. I'll just drink the rest." She grins at me with a knowing look like I'll be doing the same thing soon.

I ring things up on the defective, damned cash register and give them the price and the man hands me a ten. I make change, but by the time I look around, the lady is out the door, her dog and her daughter in tow. It's the one I gave the cone to. By this time, she has chocolate all over her face and on her hands and I think she has some in her hair. She waves to me as she closes the shop door. The man is waiting for me to give him the change, so I do and say, "Have a nice day."

He looks at me with caring eyes and replies, "You too, and good luck." For some reason, when he cocks his head towards my belly I don't get mad, and instead I feel like crying with the sheer niceness of it all.

I begin to wipe up the mess I made with the milkshake, and I hear the ring of the door buzzer followed by the sharp clang of coins hitting the bottom of a coffee cup. The tip jar outside. I glance up to see him walking from the window and opening the passenger door to his Cherokee. They drive away, and I finish with the excess ice cream spillage.

I take the container I made the shake in to the back and add it to the pile of dishes. Patting my tummy, I pick up my book, read over page 286 and wait for Tess to come back with dinner.

Sarah Major
Hershey High School
Hershey, PA
Mrs. Susan Atland

*A National Scholastic Gold Award Winner

GRANDPA'S EYE

When he was little, outside on the front driveway, someone threw a rock and it hit his eye. As he grew, his legs longer, shoulders wider, his eye grew veiled. Scar tissue pulled the iris in towards his other eye and caused its path to veer from straight, to the side.

My grandma married him, perhaps she looked at him, saying her vows, and he stared back, but to the side. And at night, when they lay in bed, he may have faced her, and yet looked away.

He would come home late, the day's work and boss' yelling trapped in a film of mucous formed in the parched mouth. He'd sit in His Chair, with a beer in hand, and

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wash it away. She'd protest, looking him in the eyes, but one always looked away; *he needed that one glass*. She'd watch the empty bottles pile up in the sink and yell, but she'd grab a sponge and wash them.

On weekends he slept past noon, his liver working overtime. And she'd wait for him to wake, complaining he slept too much. And he'd open his eyes and growl at her to go away, his face facing hers, but the eye looking to the side.

So she'd clean, redecorate. The clicking of the vacuum as sucked-up, pebble-like dirt collided with the vacuum's sides. Dishes, glasses and silverware covering the kitchen counters, as she reorganized the cabinets. Lining up all the glasses and pasting felt on the bottom of jars to muffle noise. And, with that one eye looking to the side, he would complain *things always had to be so orderly*, just as he had of the noise.

She dipped brushes into open cans of paint to repaint the walls, already unsatisfied with last month's yellow. He'd come home, yell about the smell and the cost of the paint cans. She'd yell at him for yelling and he'd comment on her new blouse: "That looks awful, take it off."

They were poor, but their closets told otherwise. She'd buy all their clothes – his clothes too; everyday his outfit, hand-picked lay on their bed: socks, shirt and pants. New outfits always appeared, and a shouting-match accompanied every one. He'd yell about money; she'd yell about their need for clothes.

Once *he* bought a jacket. Came home wearing it, with a smile that could have broken his face, had he pushed it any further. She shouted for days. *It looked like vomit*, the colors like half-digested chunks of food lumped together. She wouldn't be seen with him wearing **that**. He'd find the tweed, patchwork-color jacket in the back of the closet, or in the trash. He'd take it out, brush it off and come into the next room, jacket on, face glowering at her. But his eye always looking to the side. Sunk rigidly at an angle in its socket, so that when it looked out, it never looked at her, but always to the side.

Amanda Nagai
South Brunswick High School
Kendall Park, NJ

UNTITLED

I.
Are you still Mamagazunta?
Oi, she replied.
Her claw hand wiping the corners of her dry mouth.
The shadow of a woman who had been so strong,
Now wasting away,
Slowly,
Weighing as much as the groceries she had once carried
on
Queens Boulevard.

II.
Slowly,
Like the trees from season to season,
Change of color,
The first falling leaves,
To the bare tree,
Slowly,
She weaned herself from life,
Her life,
Our lives.
She tried to make it easy,

Similar to the way she had made her gefilte fish,
with love and care,
Sparing herself no pain.
For seven hundred, and thirty six days,
Slowly.

III.
Shovels of dirt poured in backwards,
To show reluctance,
Slowly,
An empty echo as the dirt made contact with the smooth
wood.
A dreary day,
The rain ceased, allowing just enough time for a poem
and
few short prayers.
Family gathered,
Her three little boys, and their four little girls.
The stone clean of words,
A pile of fresh earth the only marker of a life so
important to the few gathered to say their good-
byes,
Slowly,
To their Mamagazunta.

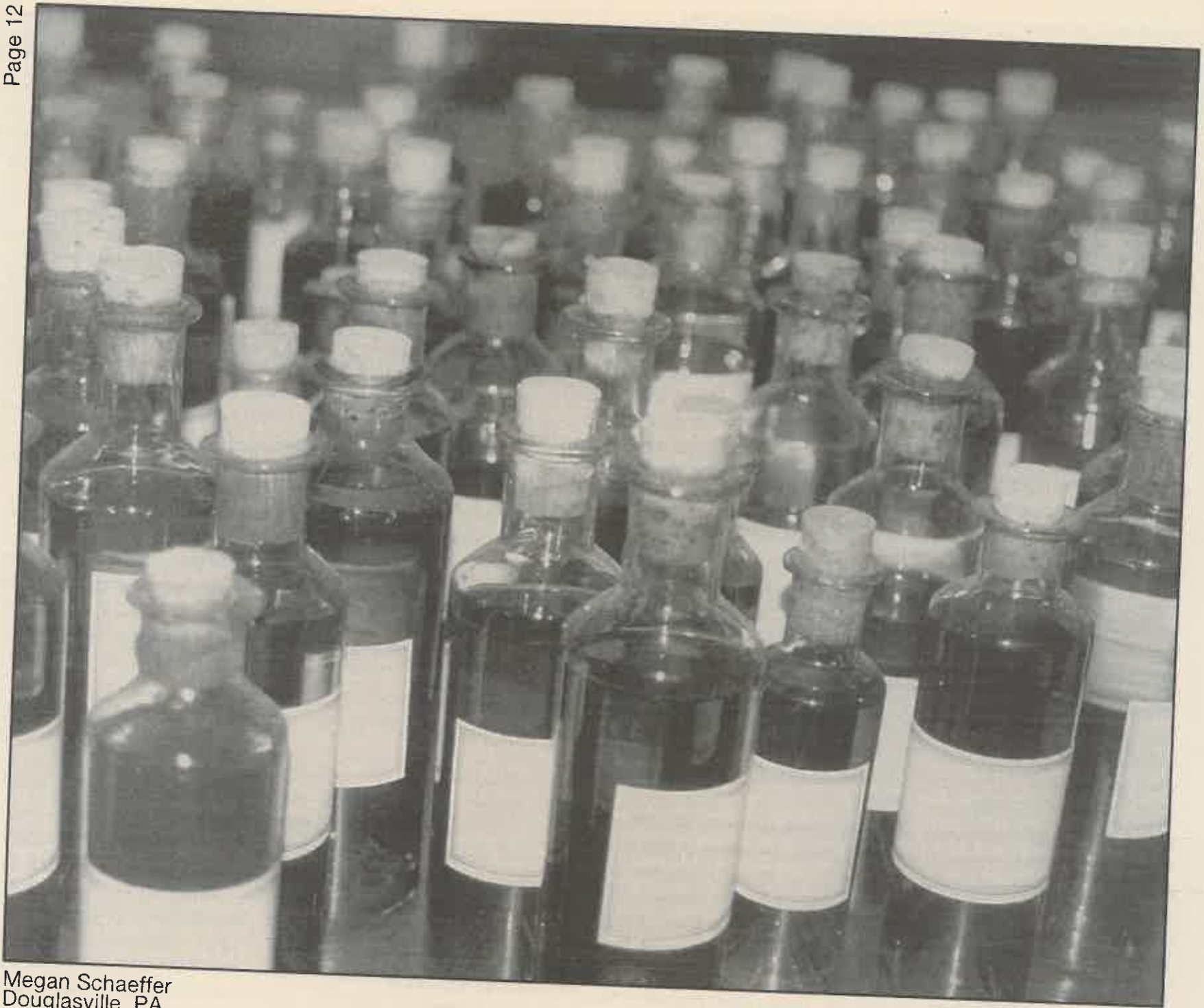
Caroline Page-Katz
627 Summit Ave.
Westfield, NJ
Mrs. Carol Nolde

NOT QUITE RIPE

They threw stones
at the bluejay.
Its carcass
decays
on the highest limb
in the pear tree.
I can reach
some of the feathers,
where they lie
quivering when
the gentlest breeze blows.

That dark day
he sang,
safe from the raindrops
where he was
under the green canopy
Dead
with the blow
of many small stones.
Deluged by rain
my eyes weep
and I reach for
the sweet pears
that I used to eat
last summer.
Greener
with each tear.
The first
and last bite
tastes sour.

Tamara Rosenbloom
318 Crum Creek Lane,
Newtown Square, PA
Mr. Thomas Williams



Megan Schaeffer
Douglasville, PA

POSING FOR MY MOTHER

Circular History

1.

Two tarnished, silver cigarette cases
 lay at the bottom of the
 middle drawer, under a pile
 of color-splotted scarves
 that one you wore
 to hold your hair off your face
 when you painted his picture,
 when you scrubbed the kitchen floors,
 and you polished this silver,
 as I polish it now,
 so that I may bathe
 in curls of smoke with a hint
 of clove, and I may
 spray lavender mist
 to linger in the hallways.

2.

You came back from your affair
 and cut your hair short.
 You put the fabric away,
 cleaned off your brushes, put
 your work into storage, and
 called your own mother
 for the first time since

he brushed your hair off
 your eyes.

3.

I suppose that this is what
 I am for,
 sipping iced tea in a sundress from a
 trunk in your attic,
 I found his portrait too,
 so I am sorry.

You lost him to a far away museum
 like the one around the corner
 where that painting belongs.
 Pretend he's there, where you can visit
 for 4.50 on a Saturday afternoon.
 I will paint for you,
 I will smoke,
 I will tie up my hair
 in one of your scarves
 and lie in the shade.

Margot Pollans
 Milton Academy
 Milton, MA
 Mr. James Connolly

DUE WEST

When my mom got sick, my father built a sleeping porch. It was cantilevered from their bedroom over the cliffs, a forty-five degree angle supporting the weight of a plywood platform. She lay under white sheets and read all day. At night, she tossed, rolling back and forth, shifting from side to side. She would sweat, and cough – small, polite coughs as though she were thinking of her sleeping family. The tropic heat weighed down her sheets, and her sweaty arms stuck to the bed. Nights, lying in my room on the opposite side of the courtyard, I worried the bed would crash into the midnight sea below. Just fall through the porch floor and bring the whole structure down with it. I worried that when I woke in the morning, the side of the house would be flat, as though there never were a porch, as though I never had a mom. I thought that, if she were strong enough, when she hit the water she would probably swim across the harbor and sit on Buck Island for a while, on the white sand beach, shimmering wet in the moonlight. She would look like an angel, Caribbean sea cooling her off so that, when she got back, she could finally sleep through the night.

The weather service started predicting the hurricane in the second week of November. The weatherman went on and on during the morning report about how everyone needed to "get prepared. It's going to be big, and it's going to be rough." By the afternoon news, the weather channel had the storm on the screen, a big purple mass moving in from South America to the Leeward Islands. Thomas, from the driver's seat of his white cab, shook his head and stuck his neck out the window. "Dis ain't hurricane season. Dis be bad news fer all dem who just fixed up from da last one."

"You going home, Thomas?" I asked. Sweat had soaked semicircles under the arms of his faded red t-shirt as the heat warmed the black leather of the cab. From where I was standing by the driver's window, I could smell the cab's odor of armpits and suntan lotion. Thomas' ebony forehead glistened, and he ran his hand over the crest of his scalp to swipe the perspiration off. I could feel myself sweating too, as the heavy storm air settled over the island. The breeze was gone, and the harbor was dead calm. The boats hung at their moorings, pointing due west.

"Nah. Dey shut da shuttle down yesterday. Dey all in Tortola by now. Guess I be stickin dis one out here." Thomas glanced at the sky. I followed his gaze up and saw that the sky was as clear a blue as ever, broken by the occasional white cloud. It looked like an artist's painting of the perfect Caribbean day, a disguise for the coming storm. "It won't start up again until afta da storm, three, maybe four days."

"Well, you know, our home's your home." I felt better saying it aloud. He knew that, I was sure. He was my dad's right hand man. When he wasn't taking tourists from resorts to the beach, and back to the resorts, he was picking my brother Jack up from school or running to the grocery store for my dad. I would walk in after school and find him at the kitchen table. He was always camped at one of the four kitchen chairs with a roast beef sandwich, a rum and coke, and the St. Croix Gazette. He would greet me with his "hey, mon" and tell me to sit awhile.

"How are you, Thomas? I want to sit, but I have to run. I start work at the hamburger stand at four, and I have to do some homework before soccer at eight. But I wish I could." I said it honestly. From Wednesday to Saturday, all the cruise ships were in port, and he told great

stories about sunburned families from Minnesota and old women "seeing da world."

"Eh, dat's all right. Say hi to ya mother fer me." I would creep off to my mom's room and swing the screen door open to the porch, carefully, in case she was asleep. She was invariably there, propped against white king size pillows. She was the only one in the house who drank hot tea – said it felt good on her throat. The mint scent lingered on her clothes even after she took them off. Some days, I would be doing the laundry in the dark, wet room behind the garage and inhale mint, like mouthwash. The porch faced south, with walls open to the east and west. From her bed, sitting up, she watched the sun set behind Buck Island. It slipped behind the hills and glowed behind either tip of the island. She said it dropped over the island like an egg had been cracked over the high hill, yolk dripping down the sides and pooling in the bottom. I told her that she should read a good murder mystery once in a while, and she wouldn't have such disturbing images in her head. I told her I just liked the color of it.

My grandfather came down the day before Mom's funeral. He flew his jet from the hangar in Connecticut to the open-air airport on the island. I took the white pickup truck and Jack to greet him. My dad refused to come.

"He'll come when she's dead, all right. What about when she's alive? What about all those times she asked him to come visit his grandkids?" my dad said as he clenched his jaws and turned away from Jack and me. He never liked us to see him mad. Mom said his eyes always got madder than his voice. The only times I had ever seen him furious had to do with my grandfather.

We waited at the edge of the runway for our grandfather to descend the stairs that he had dropped over the side of the plane. He jumped down, ran his hands across the front pleat of his pants, adjusted his aviator glasses and then walked briskly to where we stood. "How you boys doing?" he asked and extended his hand. Jack looked at me, and I didn't know what to do, uncomfortable with the formal gesture of shaking hands with my own grandfather. I decided to give him my right palm, which he shook fiercely, his ring digging into the skin on the edge of my hand. "Nice to see you, kid. You look all grown up."

"It's good to see you, sir," I replied, not knowing how to act around this man. I liked him, I really did. When we were little, Jack and I used to go visit him at his home. He had this car, this navy blue convertible. He used to tell us that if he drove fast enough, our hair would fly off. Our mother used good glue, he said, to stick it on when we were born, but the wind could rip it off. Then he would drive eighty miles an hour over the back streets of Greenwich, under the dark green ceiling of trees, by the entrances to houses with names like Fox Hill and Round Ridge Estate. We would fly from stop sign to stop sign, inhaling the cool air as we lurched around the narrow corners and flew over the occasional cracks in the asphalt.

"Where's your father? Is he at work?" he questioned, tapping the glasses down the brim of his nose as he wiped the sweat from beneath with a forefinger.

"No, sir, he's at church getting ready for the service." My dad and grandfather stopped talking two years ago. My grandfather had flown down on a Sunday afternoon to take my mother home.

"This is her home, Walter." My father's hands tightened in a knot, fingers intertwined behind him, where my grandfather couldn't see.

"You know the medical care is superior in New

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York. What can this little island hospital do to help her? I have a specialist, he's a friend of mine..." My grandfather moved closer to my father.

"I don't care what friends you have, what specialists you can buy." My father spoke in a low voice, and I could hear the anger rumbling right beneath. "She's not leaving. She needs us, we're her family too. She has two sons who need her. You can't do anything for her that we can't do." My father looked right into my grandfather's pale blue eyes. "We can visit the doctor when we need to, but she is staying here."

"You're too stubborn. She's my daughter." My grandfather stood with his arms by his side. "I raised her, and now I'm going to help her." He wore a blue open-collared shirt, the blueness making his eyes seem paler and harder. I had never once seen my grandfather give in, not to anyone. He used to talk with the cops who pulled him over for speeding and show them a business card or two. They would end up laughing, and my grandfather would hit the accelerator and pull out from the side of the road.

They left it up to my mom. She chose us, to stay in our house. We hadn't seen my grandfather since.

I tell you, love, sisters, is just a kiss away. On his bass guitar, Will strummed the notes to a Rolling Stones song, words made thick with alcohol. He lived in the Exxon compound. His house was one of fifty trailer homes propped up on cement blocks inside a square chain link fence. At night, we could look up from the back lawn and see the oil drills pumping. The whole scaffolding structure was lit with alternating white and red lights. Now and then, red flames would leap up from the pit and lick the sky. I always thought that would be the worst way to die: fall down into a pit of flames and keep dropping, while you burned, to the oil pool way below the surface. It went down to the center of the earth, Will assured me. Tonight, we lay sprawled out on aluminum lawn chairs. Will was trying to set me up with this girl who had just moved on island. "She'll be easy, she's from New Jersey."

"Will, I'm not that desperate."

"She's not bad looking. Come on man, the only thing I can see," and he lifted the bottle of Southern Comfort to his lips, "Only thing is she's got rough palms. That's no good man. Why do girls do that? Perfectly hot 'cept for those sandpaper palms." Will's fingers were curled around the black label, knuckles white where they hit the bottle corner. He was from Buffalo, where there were more girls. Not that I trusted his advice because of that. "Besides, man, it would be good for you. You know, you haven't exactly been going out since..." His eyes as he looked at me were lit with flames and moonlight.

"Will, my mom has nothing to do with it. That was months ago. Maybe I just don't like the girl, okay?" I glared him down for suggesting it. Of course that was all it was about, I just wasn't interested. I hadn't even cried at my mom's funeral. I knew she was going to die - I was prepared. She was sick for so long. During the service, I had held my father's hand and patted my brother's back, while looking out the chapel window opposite my grandfather. Over the crest of the church hill, I had seen the ocean and decided what beach I would find the surf at later that day.

Will didn't respond to what I said, but looked down at his guitar. With stiff fingers, he picked the strings. *Oooh, the storm is threatening, larger than life today, if I don't get some shelter, oh yeah, I'm gonna fade away.*

My dad took me to the site of a house he was building. It was commissioned by a man who lived in town. Mr. Carlisle lived one floor above the bakery, and had lived there for fifty years. He came to walk through the site with us. My dad held the blueprints, folded in quarters, on his clipboard. He had a pencil in his other hand and was marking up the blueprints, doing his last modifications of the site plan. I stood by Mr. Carlisle as Dad walked away, surveying the land from a different angle.

"I love living in town, I really do." Mr. Carlisle was wrinkled from the sun. through the wrinkles of skin hanging from his brow, falling from his hairline down, I could see his eyes. They were small eyes, striking in their blueness. His head was nearly bald and freckled from the years of sun. "It smells great every morning. I rise to the smell of bread. Hmmm." He closed his eyes and inhaled, as if sniffing the bakery. "But it's just too much. So many young punks running around town. I couldn't afford the tires any longer."

"The tires?" I asked and smiled, waiting for his answer. I had shoved my hands in the pockets of my shorts. We were standing on a grassy hill, east of town. It was near the highest point of the island. Before me lay Christiansted, Danish stucco buildings in the distance. I could make out the rising and falling red stucco roofs as the town climbed from the harbor docks up to the cathedral, steeple white and stark against the sky. The steeple looked like it was watching the town, spread beneath its gaze.

"Yeah, I park my car outside my front door, along the street. It's old, for God's sake, no need making special arrangements." He gestured towards his car, a beat-up old Mercedes. The cream-colored car was accented with streaks of gray, where rust spots had been patched. It sat low on the tires, bottom closer to the ground than it should have been. "I've had my tires stolen three times in the past year. It's ridiculous. I'll get up in the morning and the car will be sitting on the axles. Eventually, something like that just wears you down." He surveyed the site. The construction crew hadn't broken ground yet.

The tall grass was tan from the dry weather. It was tough and didn't bend when I stepped on it but cracked beneath my feet. Over the top of the hill, I could just see the roof of a condo complex, built lower on the hill, just across the road from the beach. The road ran along the shore, a hundred feet between it and the cliffs that distinguished the east end from the rest of the island. Those cliffs, that dropped straight to the water, no gradual slope easing the change between grass and sea.

Dad called me over. "You see that building?" He pointed down the hill towards the condos. "What's wrong with it?"

I looked down at the gray building. The entrances were staggered so that it was shaped like a staircase on its side. The walls had vertical siding, long strips of wood reaching from the roof to the base. The roofs had a large overhang, eaves shading the doorways. "I don't know, Dad. It's ugly?" It was different from the old Danish stucco buildings that were in town.

"Well, yeah. But more importantly, it should collapse in a hurricane." My dad pointed over the roof, towards Christiansted. "The old Danes knew how to build houses. They built them with the bottom of the roof even with the wall. Not those big overhangs you find on all these new developers' places. This is the way to do it." He pointed down at the clipboard he held, to the plans for Mr. Carlisle's house. "Those overhangs, over there, are

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like parachutes, they catch the wind and then your roof is gone. This roof will work better." The exterior drawing showed a stucco house, much like the old ones. A gallery ran along the front wall, and the roof sloped down to pillars which were anchored to the ground, forming sections of the wall. He flipped from the exterior drawing to one of the floor plan. My dad continued, "Also, you have to make a passage for the wind to go through. That way it enters, wreaks havoc, and exits through the other side. It'll do damage, but I guarantee that the house will be left standing."

I looked back over my shoulder at Mr. Carlisle, sitting on the hood of his car. His arms were crossed over his chest, and he was smiling. He caught me looking up from the plans, looking in his direction. "It's really going to be something, huh?"

"Yes, sir. It'll be a great house." As I spoke, I looked over the hill, towards town, and wondered if anyone really cared for a house with its walls intact but its insides wrecked.

No one wore black to my mom's funeral. She was adamant about it before she died. She believed in the "celebration of life, not the mourning of death." She probably found that phrase in a psychology book she read about how to help kids cope with the death of a parent. Thomas said it was an old island tradition, wearing only white or colors to a funeral. He asked, "Can you see us wearin' black in da middle of a sunny day? We would be disrespectin' da island, all dark and sad." The procession went down the hill from the white stucco church. We walked in a single file line, my dad at the front. He wore a blue linen suit with a white shirt and a yellow tie. My brother Jack had tried to wear his navy church school suit, like he wore to our grandmother's funeral, but my father made him change into khakis and a red button-down. I wore an old Hawaiian shirt, turquoise with white flowers, and didn't watch the coffin. We were walking down a cobblestone street, and I was scared one of the pallbearers would miss a step, twist an ankle, and the coffin would fly open. I hadn't seen my mom since she'd died. I refused to go into her bedroom. I refused to look into the open coffin at the service. And I refused to be looking towards the front of the funeral line in case one of the men dropped her. I looked over at the plywood wall lining the right side of the street. Behind it, the government was fixing the city hall that had been ruined in the last hurricane. It was scheduled to be finished in a few months, six years of work. The wall was spray painted by an island artist who thought the plywood was too bland to be decorating his street. The scene was of an old sugar plantation, mill rising above an ocean cliff and fields with donkey-drawn wagons and native laborers picking sugar cane. The outline of Buck Island was in the background. The brightness of the painting matched the yellowed shuttered office buildings and the pink chameleons baking on the sea wall. I smelled the ocean as I walked.

My dad set me to work shutting up the house before the hurricane. I made masking tape triangles, then shuttered close the windows. Jack worked with me on it, and I wanted to talk to him. I could feel him breathing as we both leaned into the window and taped. I saw where the sun had burned his nose, knew that he'd probably not been wearing any sunscreen for months. His pants were too short; he was growing. I wanted to ask him about girls, if he liked a special one. I wanted to know what music he was listening to lately. "Jack, make sure you get the windows in Mom and Dad's room; I'll get the kitchen."

"Okay, what do you want me to do about the

porch?" he replied, looking at the roll of tape to see how much he had left.

"Uh, just shut it up, I guess. Dad might want you to take out the screens. Just ask him." Jack shot me a wary look.

"So why don't you ask Dad?" he asked. I looked at him, surprised at the challenge in his tone and the tightness of his mouth, lips pressed thin.

"Why don't you?" I asked, getting mad. He was my little brother, since when did he question me? "What are you, scared of the porch, or something?"

"Scared? Me? Look who's scared!" He was screaming now, as though he had been waiting to be asked. He had it prepared, all of it right under the surface, stretching at the seams of his skin. And now he was looking at me. "Why didn't you cry at her funeral? Didn't you love her? Didn't she kiss you goodnight and tuck you in bed?" I left then, biting my tongue and scared of my fists. I walked out of the house, with no direction. I started down the dirt driveway and made it as far as the road. My grandfather pulled in, in a rented gray Taurus. He had returned a week before to haggle with the lawyers over the terms of Mom's will.

"Hey there, where are you going?" he asked, smiling, white teeth in a perfectly typed row.

"What do you mean, where am I going? Where have you been? Answer that." I spit in the dust that had risen around his driver's side wheel.

"Whoa, I was just at the grocery store, thought I'd pick up somemilk for breakfast - for wherever we may be." He said it like it was a joke, like "Let's try living the island life" was a new ride that had opened at Disney World, and he was one of the first to gain admission.

"Not where were you today, not yesterday. I don't really care. How about where were you when my mom was sick? How about when my dad would call you on the phone and ask if you would come down and spend some time with us? Where were you then?" I looked at him, in his seersucker suit, and thought I could see right through, right through to his pasty belly rolling over his belt. I stared at that point, about five buttons down from the collar, and waited for him to reply.

"I tried, you know. But, what with business, I couldn't get away." His hand was resting over the ledge, fingers toying with the top of the rolled down window, his Princeton class ring tapping the steel gray of the car.

"Well, you should have sent a note telling my mom you loved your business more than her so she could understand. She missed you, you know. And she always loved you. Even at the end." I left, and walked down the road. I knew I would go back, probably before night. But I thought that if I stayed away long enough, he would feel guilty. What if I had been hit by a car or jumped off a cliff? What if I got caught out in the hurricane and was swept out to sea? But, then again, I had no evidence that my grandfather would care, that he would wish he'd done something different. Like maybe get in his car and try to find me.

When I was ten, Mom took Jack and me with her to get a dress made for a black tie dinner she and Dad were going to in town, in celebration of the opening of some fancy hotel. It was a Saturday, and I was sitting on the couch in the kitchen, watching cartoons. Jack was curled up next to me, having just stumbled in from bed. His eyes were half open, and he wasn't ready to give up.

"Wake up, morning glory, show your face to the world. We're going to Christiansted." Mom had probably been up for two hours, eating breakfast and gardening.

She was in her sweat shorts and a tank top and was smiling.

"Aw, come on Mom. I'd rather not." Batman was leaping off some building in Gotham City, and I wanted to watch.

"It's not your choice. Get dressed. I'm going to teach you to be good husbands yet. We're going to visit Maria." She leaned over Jack's little body, curled into the couch pillows. "You too, buddy. I want you to recognize a nice dress when you see one." She tickled Jack until he giggled, and he could no longer pretend to be sleeping. "Someone special will appreciate this someday." Five minutes later, we were in the car, dressed. Jack was still rubbing his eyes as he woke up, suddenly plunged from the dim house into the bright day.

My mom pulled the dress from the car and brought it up two flights to the seamstress' loft. Maria, the seamstress, met us at the door. She had skin the color of chocolate milk, and her dress fit her like a paper sack, white with rainbow-colored beads across the chest. Looking at her, I doubted her ability to make a pretty dress for Mom.

"Come in, children, come in. Sit anywhere you want, Maria isn't picky!" She smiled a huge crooked smile, lips glancing over a large patch of gums on the left side of her mouth. The rest of her teeth were tinted yellow, looking even more yellow next to her white dress. She pulled Mom's dress fabric from beneath its clear plastic sheeting. "Ohh," she murmured. "This is going to be a beautiful dress." Her voice was thickly accented, rolling like the speech of a boy in my class who had moved from Puerto Rico two years before.

Jack and I sat on the ground, across the room out of Maria's way. Jack was making a pattern with fallen pins he found on the floor. I watched as Maria adjusted the shiny black fabric to Mom's slender figure, placing pins at the hip and bust. Mom stood on the square cardboard box, as Maria turned around her. As she stood there, I thought she was beautiful and wondered why I had never noticed before. Her hair was pulled up, and she was watching the seamstress move about her waistline. I thought about whether I really would be a good husband, whether I could take care of a baby for my wife. I decided that the moment my child was born, I would call Mom. Then she could be up with me nights, while my wife slept. She could show me how to cradle the baby in my arms and sing her to sleep. I looked over at Jack, still on the floor, and thought that I should make sure he didn't hurt himself with those pins. "Jack, don't stab yourself, okay?"

"I won't." He grinned, like he was doing something bad.

"They're sharp," I said and watched him play.

"I know," he said without looking up. He was shaping a sailboat, with one mast and a triangle sail.

"Boys, come look at your mother!" Maria shouted to us and stood up. She stepped back to admire her handiwork. I took Jack's hand and walked him around the pins so he wouldn't step on them. I looked up at Mom, standing on her box. She was looking at me and smiling, as I held Jack's hand and stood before her.

The hurricane came in like a freight train. It plowed across the Caribbean Sea from South America, near Brazil, and up towards the Gulf. Dad, Jack, Thomas, my grandfather, and I rode it out in the basement of the Exxon building, an inland factory, the four of them playing a never-ending game of poker with peanuts as chips. I walked upstairs to the foyer and leaned against the double

doors. It was a force five, the highest category a hurricane could be classified as. The meteorologists called it a "freak accident." The fishermen who came into my hamburger stand agreed. "Last week, we was celebratin' a safe season. We got our nets, our fish and our boats. We gave thanks, fer no hurricanes. What da hell is dis?" I wondered why we lived here, on this island that could be tossed by nature, ruining lives like the toss of a coin. The rain pelted the windows and shook the doors. Banging against the jams, the doors sounded as though someone must be trying desperately to enter the building. A palm tree flew by the window pane, dragging its root ball of dirt behind. Rain pooled six inches deep under a green sky, opaque in the cloud-covered darkness of the storm. Jack came up the stairs and pressed his nose against the glass.

"Wow," he said. "That's really beautiful." And I looked out, in the same direction, at the palm trees bending and gyrating against the wind. They whipped their leaves up towards the sky and then covered towards the earth. "I don't remember the last one very well. I just remember when Will's mom found her mattress across island, in Christiansted. That was funny. Oh yeah, and when Dad flipped out and bought provisions for a month." His breath fogged a small patch of glass.

"Yeah, he had condensed milk and canned beans to last us and an army a month. Do you remember how he brought the hibachi grill and the teapot with us to the shelter?" I smiled at the image of my father stumbling out of the rain with two huge cardboard boxes hiding his face.

"Yeah, and Mom made tea at midnight for all the screaming kids and then told that story she used to tell."

"Which one?" I looked at Jack, who hadn't moved his nose away from the glass.

"That one about how there was big giant sitting up in the sky, and this island was a rock he had in his bathtub. When he was bored, he would just move the boats around and swirl his hand around by the drain until there were waves hitting us. You remember it?" I nodded.

"So, how are the girls in your grade?" I asked and smiled at Jack, then out the window at the storm. *Oh children, it's just a shout away, it's just a shout away.*

The storm took the porch off the house. Clean off the side. The roof of the house was fine, the walls fine, but the porch was gone. My dad commented on the damage. "Don't worry about it. It was easy to make, it will be easy to fix. Besides, it was only built to be temporary." He strode off to inspect the rest of the house, to make sure the rest of the walls stood solid and weren't cracked. I stood, for a few minutes, looking at the rectangle of orange stucco that the porch had covered. It stood out against the south wall because it hadn't been faded by the sun. The support beams had ripped holes in the wall, two-by-four squares drilled to the interior. Small cracks spread from the holes across the stucco, and I wondered if, eventually, they would spread across the whole south wall. I thought the damage must be worse on the inside than the outside, where all I could see, if I stepped two feet back, was a bright orange rectangle. Later, in the moldy laundry room, I smelled the scent of her sheets, removed when my brother shut up her room. I pulled the white corner of the bottom sheet up to my cheek and breathed in. I cried, then, to the mint smell, like I hadn't cried for my mom at her funeral. I cried because, when I was seventeen, I had let my mom sleep on a porch that

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my dad built as a temporary part of the house. I had listened as my mom slept on a bed that my dad knew could be blown away in the wind, and wondered if it would.

Stephanie Bridges
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

TWO CRABS MATING

We put on red rubber boots
to our knees,
sang our way through Hull towards Duxbury.
We tumbled across the longest wooden bridge in Massachusetts,
pretending we were six,
chocolate milks between our thighs.

In the bridge's cast shadow,
orange porifera blossomed.
One tailless horseshoe crab was found,
perhaps the one the beach boys chose to throw rocks at.
I learned that sand dollars are red, not white, when they are alive.
We found bucketfuls.

I've always had a sharp eye
like both my grandfathers.
One flew planes,
working the needles and gadgets.
The other spotted shiny green egrets,
and perfect winged coquina shells.

Under bryozoan covered rocks,
we found two crabs mating.
Her yellow abdomen extended to his,
and she hugged his slippery belly.
I placed my finger tips a top her rusty colored shell.
I could feel her pulse.

My mother is tired.
The hormones she once had
are in a ziplock bag full of lentil soup.
It sits frozen at the bottom of our freezer drawer.
Her energy goes into paint chips now,
our living room is the color of a ripe pumpkin.

Meanwhile,
Beethoven's fourth echoes off the sides of our dog bowl.
My father scrapes the grease from his silver omelet pan,
with a patience he inherited from my grandfather.
He was *truly* steady,
in the cockpit of his DC-3,
swift loop-di-loops through the clouds,
even a seventy pound tarpon on his rod.

I watch from the top of my carpeted stairs,
waiting for them to be in love again.
But the suffocating fumes from their chores send me to my room.
Occasionally a waft of sea salt air drifts upstairs,
as my mother and father glide to Dizzy Gillespie,
their abdomens briefly touching,
but instantly gone.

My mother returns to her paints,
and my father to his pans.
The mating duo have now found peace,
returning to their burrow under wet,
glacier-shaped rocks.
Slower now,
they continue to pulse.
Their arms and legs tangled,
their bodies
alive.

Maggie Turner
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

ENTROPY

Our children are losing the land. It doesn't go to work on them anymore. That's why some get into trouble.
— *Mr. Ronnie Lupe, age 42, White Mountain Apache Tribe, 1978*

I come downstairs,
and mom is sponging the counters.
And I want to say, "Mama,
I want to know more."
The hum of cars blurs
with the refrigerator.
And I stand in my bare feet
and pajamas,
Muir overlooking the land,
and watch as my mother walks
to the sink and back,
sponging up crumbs
and jam.
This light is nothing like traveler's
light.
My mom pauses to look
at her palm, wrinkled now.

Our children are losing
the land.
Steam rises out
of the hot sink, and her face
is saying to me - what? what? -
The windows fog
up and I think: "like passion."
I think of the sound
breath makes, like steam, like H's.
My mother reaches to turn
off the water, and the sound of night
floods in. Light
falls limp on the counters.
The land looks after us.
I watch my mother
dry her forearms with a dishtowel.
I find a crumb under my
toe. And I say,
"Mama
I'm hungry."
And she sighs, as steam does,
saying "that's the trouble."

Claire Cheney
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly



Jesse Kates
Lloyd Harbor, NY

HIJACKING THE MAIL TRUCK

It's almost irresistible.
The open door
the keys dangling from the ignition
the mailman down the block
staring at the magazines
not even glancing in your direction.
It would be so easy
to slide into the seat
close the door
turn the key and drive away,
looking back at the mailman who's just realized what's
happened
and shakes his fist in the air as you make your getaway,
letters flying out the window,
the feds in their cop cars, years later,
chasing after you and your mail truck
speeding down the highway in the southwest,
flying right off that cliff
Thelma and Louise, baby.
There's potential for romance and tragedy in that mail
truck.
Who knows what adventures you'd have
if you weren't so afraid of the angry looking mailman
watching you like, "why are you staring at my truck?"
and the feds who aren't so nice
about people taking their mail trucks.
They'll take you to court and hire some fancy pants law-
yer
to beat you down and make you say things you don't
mean
until you're serving twenty-five to life just for a little joy-
ride.
Those insane hateful mailmen and the feds to back them
up
can ruin you and your life.
They're tempting you, man,
leaving the door open like that
those keys dangling from the ignition,
the mailman far away watching you from the corner of his
eye,
they're out to get you and they're out to get me.
No, it isn't worth it man. Just walk on by.

Sarah Goff
66 Windsor Rd.
Tenafly, NY

THEY SAY PICTURES STEAL YOUR SOUL

He said that the house was in complete squalor
He said that the walls were dirty, and he wouldn't even
describe
The way it smelled.
He found a few polka records
and a geography book from 1884.
He took it home for me
He said he thought I'd like it -
"It's pretty cool," he said
"It's a hundred years old."
He found his diploma under a pile of something.
It smells weird
it says Boston University
1972
and it's still got that fake gold sticker seal on it.
He worked three jobs at once
To pay for that fake gold sticker.
He went to Australia after he got it
"It was that or the army," he said
"I couldn't stay home."
He hated his father.
He has a problem with his back
And there are lots of whispered things
That people don't think I can hear
But I know his father beat the shit out of him
And he was 12 when his father did his back in.
He brought a book about Aborigine myths
Back from the house.
The house is cleaned out now
It's up for sale
His father is in a nursing home
He says he doesn't hate him anymore
"I'll bury him," he said.
He gave me the Aborigine book.
It's face down on my desk
Because there is a picture
Of a man on the cover
It scares me
They refuse to have their pictures taken
And the man is screaming
like someone is stealing his soul.

Elisabeth Gonsiorowski
8 Fairfax CT
Princeton Junction, NJ
Ms. Zimmer
Mr: Gary Whitehead

Softly, softly, he strokes the short stiff hairs of her back.

"Come on old girl, easy now."

He is older than you think, despite the gray hair, but he is tall and strong and fierce. He moves deliberately and decisively, each action without regret. Still, they are movements made with care, with effort.

He lowers himself to the ground, knee on wooden boards, a dull thud that echoes in the silence of the barn. One gloved hand rests on her heaving side, the other tense with the weight of his body, muscles tightened and protruding.

"Easy, easy," he whispers into her belly, the roughness of his unshaven cheek against the tender skin.

I do not know this man well. When they ask me, "What is your uncle like?" I can tell stories, so many stories about him, but I cannot tell you what he is. He is too blurred, too hard to define, too much a contradiction to say — this is who he is, this is how I feel about him. All I have are stories.

He is down on both knees now, palms on her belly. He pets the area where her black and white coloring becomes soft pink.

"Oh mercy." He sighs.

Women are drawn to him, but always the wrong type. Like the hopeless dreamer he is, he once placed a personal ad. It read:

Divorced white male, 54, seeks playful, attractive woman.

Enjoys walks on the beach, animals and children.

He has been married twice and engaged twice more. His last fiancée was killed in a car accident last year; a picture of her is taped to the ashtray in his truck. His five children range from age 8 to 28. He will become a grandfather this October.

He pulls the gloves from his hands, and they slide between the cow's thighs, around the head of a struggling calf, shiny with blood and slimy with placenta. The cow makes a high, desperate bleat, head strained off the ground, sweat running down her twitching body. The knobs of her spine show clearly, the skin taut with the downward strain. Moonlight bathes the scene with a pale glow. The half-finished walls are open to the night sky.

He has more plans for one week than most have in a year. I have never seen his house whole, since he is always building, or taking down, or changing. It is in a constant state of transition, caught half between what it never was and what it refuses to become. He is better at destruction than construction and his property stands testament to this. He owns at least eight cars, only two of which run, but he keeps buying more because he swears he can use the parts — piles of rusting cars in every corner.

Last time I visited, there were bulbs spouting in their bags, the plastic sacks a tangle of green sprouts and thin, flaking bulb skin. He bought a post digger; it lives beside the barn, leaning against a tree, every year a little more, its yellow paint chipping, the grass around it stained.

He slaughters cows; it is not his day job. He works for some mysterious company in some undefined construction job. He is no doubt demolishing something new every day.

"Oh, mercy, this is a tough one," he says, down on all fours now, guiding the calf's head from between the

rambling, rotting wooden fence and made her way through the center of Chester, moseying down Main Street, munching and moseying, eating her way through the neighbors' gardens. The town ordered him to, accompanied by a police officer, apologize to every traumatized citizen. He was supposed to pay each one for the replacement of their rare intertwined male and female fig trees and English orchids, but his charm was the only payment they ever needed; one of Rosie's victims asked him out on a date.

His bent head rests between his hands; he gazes down into the black of the mother's crying eyes. Her eyes look at him desperately; he leans closer, staring back into her frightened pupils. His reflection in the glossy black of her eye catches him, a window to another world, rounded and misshapen. The cow blinks and breaks the glass.

"It's gonna be fine," he says soft and low, his voice rough. His eyes look toward the house, where his children sleep.

The night is a little less black now, the air a little less cold. He watches as the calf finally breaks free from his mother and lies squirming on the ground, gasping for air. He leans over quietly and picks up his leather gloves, backing away into the shadows of the barn as the mother swings her mighty head toward the trembling calf, one mighty lick after another. He stands and watches them in the moonlight for a moment, before he turns his back and begins down the broken pavement driveway to his dark house, the first rays of dawn lighting the bloody footprints he leaves.

But this, these words, are not my uncle. All these are are stories.

Nellwyn Thomas
49 Woodland Dr.
Centerbrook, CT
Mrs. Deirdre Christman

THANKSGIVING AT A SOUP KITCHEN

Down beneath the whispered rays:
A granite midnight fortress, steep.
I walked the lines of silver trays
And felt the heart of plenty weep.

I wanted silence, but heard instead
The collected gasps of poisoned lips.
Through scoops of sweetness, tainted red,
I served life from my fingertips.

Once within the shaking hand
Of a martyr lost in tacit sighs,
Life was delivered, delayed, to land
Where children dream beneath the skies.

But when she felt the baby's kick,
The life inside her body bloom,
Did she suspect it would grow up sick
With hunger as its bleeding womb?

Alaina Burns
142 Mt. Joy Pl.
New Rochelle, NY
Mr. Dollard

You Want Fries With That?

On a gray winter day the broad Kiev main street, *Kreshatik*, is nearly deserted. If you took a color picture of the city that day nobody would believe you it wasn't black and white. Little gray people hurry themselves, one gray place to another; they're scattered on a gray broadwalk in front of huge gray monumental buildings built after WWII in a distinct style called *Stalin's Architecture*, which makes people look strikingly hopeless and much smaller than they are. The main floors of those magnificent buildings are fortified with granite rocks each taller than a human being; upper floors consist of tiny apartments with closet-sized rooms in them, which create the multitude of windows on the outside. But walking down *Kreshatik Avenue* in the winter wind you just stare at the gray pavement and try to move at the speed bordering with running. The wind there is the only thing that fills the tunnel of the street completely from one side to another, except for military parades and Independence Day celebrations; and in winter this wind feels free to freeze you to death. But the shelter isn't far away.

One little plaza is squeezed in between those wide gray arched structures. It still serves a busy public purpose of a subway entrance structure shared with what used to be a slow-food restaurant. By now the part of the pavement has gained distinctive red tile and half of the building has a huge semi-clear window with a "*McDonald's*" sign above it. This is my destination.

Behind those glass doors shining cleanness, light and life reside. A stream of hot air hits my face and I come out of cold darkness into the soothing comfort. Once inside I regain my human posture as meant by Mother Nature and glance around. This guy and three girls with four paper cups of milkshake are students, having a lovely chat at the table. These two guys struggling with piles of burgers are middle class businessmen on a "business dinner," dressed appropriately only for something crazy such as a riot or a fanatic sporting event, equally distasteful. All the seats are full of characters you could watch for hours. Today I just come here to have a good meal and enjoy myself.

Most people in Ukraine or Russia will not go to a fast-food unless something extraordinary happens. There is always a grandma or mother who lives with you and has a duty of cooking meals from scratch; avoiding eating at home is disrespectful to your relatives. But I couldn't wait to have a McDonald's built in Yalta; it was all I needed to feel the freedom of choice of my food, at least on weekends when there's time to get there. There are mainly low-class restaurants and a few fast-food chains in Yalta, but they are different: they represent no culture.

My first experience of a fast-food dates back to the summer of 1992 when I first got to go to McDonald's in Moscow, when together with my brother we dragged our dad to Pushkin Square. For me the place was so magnetic not because of the Culture Center named after Russia's greatest poet, but for the biggest McDonald's ever, first opened on January 31, 1990. On that day 30,657 Muscovites were served American freedom, dawn to midnight, and the line was said to be five miles long at times. George Cohon's fourteen-year-old dream had finally come true.

Formerly a lawyer from Chicago, Cohon took his chance to open McDonald's franchises in Eastern Canada in 1967 after stumbling into McDonald's owner, Ray Kroc. Meeting a complete success in Canada, Cohon came up

with the utopian idea to open several franchises in Moscow. The year was 1976, the country was rigorously Communist. Concerns about cutting the deal with the Communist government, building to American standards, training Soviet staff, getting supplies, and finally making money didn't discourage him from the idea which seemed impossible at the time. In the early 90s, the senior chairman of McDonald's Restaurants of Canada and Russia helped to bring capitalism to the Soviet Union. One hundred McDonald's restaurants were opened by the year 2000 in Russia, jointly owned by Cohon and Municipal Government of Moscow.

Two years had passed since the first restaurant in Moscow was open, but the famous line was still there in its mini-version. We only had to stand about an hour, advancing step by step to the odd-looking (against its background of gigantic gray structures) traditional American McDonald's building, only about five times as large. Its roof looked as if it were cut on the right front side with a huge piece of glass, which remained there, slicing part of the second floor.

At the entrance to the symbol of everything American, the guards with their KGB look were letting the rushing waves of people in. Inside was flooded with light and organized waves of humming crowd breaking apart at the pedestal in the temple of American merchandising religion, with its menu choices instead of everyday services and prayers. The popular feeling, which I shared, was that the place was American and therefore the best. It was something new to feel yourself comfortable in a completely unknown world, the feeling you have after passing a rigorous passenger control and are about to step aboard a plane.

My grandma is a representative of her generation. She is very traditional in her outlooks and when she's right, she's right. As most grandmas do, she stays at home in her apartment in Yalta, Crimea, most of her time, and the outside to her is associated with all kinds of expenses. Trips as far as Kiev she considers ruinous, therefore she's never been to McDonald's, which is considered by her as a threat to her traditional home-made cooking style.

"Not that I care for money that it cost, I just think you're going to destroy your digestion system," she says. She's been a head of kindergarten for thirty years and gives an impression that she knows everything about healthy nutrition. "That's why whoever comes to our house says Valentina Afanasievna" (it is a tradition in former Soviet Union to call an adult by his or her first and middle name) "cooks the best meals," she praises herself. I try to reply.

"Well, I've been living with you and your meals for fifteen years, not that I say they're bad," which is occasionally true, "but a little var..." - She never lets me finish.

"Those hamburgers and cheeseburgers they cook at how do you call it, McDonald's, what do you think they're as fresh and as good as my kotlets?" I think instantly of her pan-fried spiced and breaded meat nuggets. "You think that's healthy?" By that time I don't stand any chance.

"Grandma, food is only part of the reason I'd eat at McDonald's. And by the way, what can you call healthy..."

"I don't care, it's yourself you're harming. Someday when it's too late you'll recall my words and say, 'Grandma was so right!'" And then she becomes horribly busy cleaning the kitchen table. It's hard on grandparents when their grandchildren don't obey all that much anymore. Despite her saying it doesn't, money does matter in our fast-

food arguments.

Some may disagree with me, but I think the prices on meals at McDonald's restaurants are about the same if converted in U.S. dollars. But in Ukraine a five-dollar lunch is an expensive meal for an average person. This is part of the reason you don't see an average person there.

Going to McDonald's is not part of a student's everyday life in Ukraine. If you're a good student like my brother, your university will grant you a six-dollar monthly allowance, which gradually comes closer to zero as currency inflation continues. So the only way students can eat at McDonald's every day is when they work there. If you work at a McDonald's in Kiev you are likely to be a college student, and you make a couple of dollars an hour, the same wage in Moscow and I would suspect some other places of former Soviet Union. That is the sum considered a lot of money for this kind of job.

One summer day I was in the center of Kiev fulfilling my uncontested responsibility of picking up some groceries and junk food for my brother Alexander, or Sasha. He is a student at Kiev University and would rather starve himself to death than go grocery shopping, or so it seems when I come see him on vacations. Plus he doesn't want to spend his own money while I'm around. I was taking my time hopping from one store to another and was getting hungry, too. When I finally felt like sitting down and having a quality meal I directed myself to that familiar building with the double-arched yellow sign.

There is one table that I always try to take whenever I'm there. It is a small coexistence of two double-seat tables which when fully occupied provides very limited elbow space. The superiority of its position beside the window is the view it provides: Kreshatik, the most important street of the country, with its Ukrainian Government buildings and best stores in the country on it, its beehive subway station entrance and everyday multitude of people – atoms in their unsteady flow and never-ending background noise inaudible from the inside. The soothing music and the comforting smell of melted cheese on your Big Mac harmonically mixed with unbeatable fries, that is as good as lunch can get.

This time I could see my seat at the window was taken and I got upset. That time my regular order was a large Big Mac meal (it is the only sandwich that actually looks as good in reality as on that lit up menu screen) and an apple pie. On top of all, you have to order ketchup separately, and a package of it costs 30 *kopecks*, an average subway, bus or a tram fare.

While devoted McDonald's workers were creating my lunch, I was staring at them: something wasn't right. Their uniform was completed with black elastic nylon belts with yellow Ukrainian-styled ornaments of plants and birds on them. Traditional Ukrainian ornaments are actually black and red on a white background, but the effort to mirror some local culture was something you don't see often.

My total was seven dollars and thirty cents, and that was exactly the amount I had in my pocket after being carried away with necessities like caviar and French rolls in my devotion to bring variety to the student's poor ration. I had a choice now of either having my fries without two packages of ketchup that cost me those extra thirty cents or walking home ten miles. I made up my decision and in a minute I was sitting at the table enjoying unbeatable French fries and looking outside at crowds of walking people, still not realizing that soon I would have to join them for an extended-duration hike under the cruel summer sun. That time I had the best ketchup and fries in my life!

Here's my brother's idea of a "perfect" dinner, which is a dinner out. We are next to the road catching a ride to the nearest McDonald's, which is about ten minutes away into the industrial part of the city. Some of the drivers who are coming back from work don't mind to make an additional three bucks for the scenic route home. A mix of taxi service and hitchhiking is common to the part of population that is deprived of the means of personal transportation.

A couple of drivers who stop are not interested in going our direction, but eventually somebody is. We end up in an old model *Zaporozhietz* that seems to have been a workhorse for a good couple of decades; sometimes we're lucky enough to ride in a nice foreign car though. Our driver seems to know where McDonald's is, but he doesn't seem to know exactly what it is and how the drive-through works. He agrees to take us on a round trip for four dollars. It's going to be a twenty-minute ride.

The bright-shining structure is caught inside of the highway "ring" and seems to be a local landmark contrasting with rows of dwellings and factory chimneys in the background. My brother is busy pointing his finger at the correct driveway; the driver seems indifferent to my brother's ordering routine, but you could tell by his look that he doesn't know what's going to happen next. First, Sasha has to lean across the driver to place the order at one window and then direct the car to the next stop. We get a bagful of "double cheeses" at the next window (my brother heard how McDonald's staff refers to double cheeseburgers and thought it was pretty cool), swirl around onto the road, and the car fills with the so recognizable smell of good food. We will eat it at home later on, and it won't last for too long. The car stops at the same spot where we had been picked up half an hour before; our driver gets his ten *Grivnas*, and everyone is happy.

My brother's monthly two hundred dollars allowance given by our mother "for necessities" is hurriedly spent in the first days of the month, and partly at McDonald's. A huge part of that is spent on transportation in hitchhiking style. I haven't seen him struggling with his college courses staying at his apartment; instead, he would go to his friends' or invite them over for a party. If you ask them about McDonald's, you will find out it's nothing special for them, just expensive and not a creative place to eat.

It's not that case with me, though. If I ever travel to a foreign country, I don't consider understanding it until I saw their way of adaptation to American culture. In Krakow, Poland, there is a McDonald's that looks like it served as an ancient castle before Americans arrived, conquered it, and put a smiley face on the formerly hostile fortification.

The street it is on looks medieval, except now the buildings with their former narrow windows that have mutated into glass giants are occupied by *Levi's*, *Fender*, *Lego* and other "Western" stores. Actually looking like an integral part of their surroundings are neat granite buildings bricked together for a good half-mile location-wise and a good half-millennium time-wise: each is a weather-beaten masterpiece, stuck in an unchanged museum exposition.

In Poland, they speak Polish, but my friends and I don't. One of the good things that you always get in any McDonald's all over the world is understanding. For that, of course, you have to know either the native language of the country you're traveling in, or English. I prefer the second option. In McDonald's, meals always meet your

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expectations, and this is the way I prefer to deal with foreign countries, and I suggest that to you. Unless you like to explore meals that seem to sound creative, like my mom when she goes to France and points at the raw meat, and when the surprised *garçon* tries to change her decision by suspicious "*la viande viv pour dejeuner, Madame?*" on which she nods, smiling.

As students selected for a special language program at school that carries you through eleven grades, my classmates and I have been taught English since the first grade and French since the fifth, without quitting English. That does not mean that we all could speak English; in other words, I had to order for all five of us.

"Hi," I say, trying to sound filled with American confidence, and I roll my eyes to the ceiling to start reading my list: "Can I have three regular double-cheeseburger meals with... Coca-Cola, three teas with lemon" (what a mistake!) "and a cup of coffee." Now I sound exactly like our English textbook.

"Coffee," states a young female, pressing the colored buttons on the register.

"Yes, and two Big Macs, four apple pies, oh-you-have-cherry!" I surprise even myself - "sorry, three apple pies and a cherry one" (now I get better) "and a large strawberry milkshake a-and..." and I get interrupted.

"*Morozhenoe!*" I hear a yelling from a distant table, which seems to turn everyone's heads in the restaurant, fortunately not on me. So I continue, "... and a strawberry sundae." And to make my way out faster, I say, "Yes, that's it. And we'll eat inside."

I take out the total sum in Polish Kronas which appears on the screen, pass it one the cashier and wave to get one of my friends to come and help me carry the two trays. The sundae comes in an unstable cup, but by that time I just want to get out of the crowded area into peaceful meditation with the milkshake. And then I drop somebody's sundae from the overloaded tray - on the floor - "smack!" - and all the customers turn around to look at me. "Sorry."

I still felt I was cool, though. I spoke English and that gave me the position of a respectable foreigner, and the fact that I screwed up didn't really matter.

Opinions on McDonald's in America vary from enthusiasm of kids and teens to indifference and concerns about healthiness of food and effects on the environment of the grownups. For busy working people, it is a convenient way to get their breakfasts and lunches, fast. In Russia and Ukraine, McDonald's is a Sunday family feast, also suitable for special events such as marriage. It's an ideal place to eat when you're on the go, granted that you have money for that. In general, American population knows how unbalanced nutrition in McDonald's and other fast foods is, but they don't mind to stop occasionally. Some are concerned about some invisible evils fast-food culture creates, such as destruction of rainforests for pastures in developing countries, caused by increased demand for beef, the issue which is denied by McDonald's representatives.

For me, McDonald's, as Pepsi Cola in its time, is the part of America that extended into Russia as the first sign of freedom of choice. Communist dictatorship was doomed by perestroika at the same time. "I can touch my perestroika, I can taste my perestroika. Big Mac is perestroika," said the head manager of McDonald's in Russia. And there are people who will agree with that statement.

The fact is that the biggest McDonald's in the world is located in Moscow, Russia. Still another fact is that it

has fewer varieties of meals: you're lucky if you get to supersize a menu or have an item outside the basic choices, as a special limited-time promotion.

In America, McDonald's doesn't create an image of place that makes a big difference to anything around it; it's just another *greasy spoon*, as my host family father puts it. In Russia and other Eastern European countries, one had to find places that already attracted thousands of people just to find their clients; it couldn't be a restaurant facing a brick wall or any highway. McDonald's couldn't become affordable to an average person, so it had to become something special, a nice place where cashiers would thank you for giving exact change and say "come again" without exception and no matter how busy they are. They got me. But the very first time I went to McDonald's in Southington, Connecticut, with my host family, I felt deprived: it was eat-and-run, not a pleasurable experience. The miracle was gone, overrun by everydayness; it became a necessity, and therefore ceased to thrill. I haven't been impressed by any McDonald's restaurant ever since.

One fall day a couple years ago there was a rumor that soon construction of a McDonald's in Yalta would begin. Soon some odd concrete building started taking shape in downtown Yalta on the embankment, with a view on the Lenin's monument in red marble on the north, the commercial seaport in Yalta harbor on the south and on a historical area in general. And for a while, I felt very happy for such a change, but then my disappointments began. At first, the word *McDonald's*, with phonetic stress on "a," in Ukraine may really mean "*Amigo*" franchise from Turkey or any fast-food restaurant in general. Secondly, city mayor elections were coming up, and you never know what might happen when power changes hands in a government guided by economic group interests.

It was raining lightly one weekday afternoon a week after elections when I met my friend for a usual walk on the embankment and a talk about life in general, and the newly elected city mayor in particular. The fence at the construction site had been hurriedly removed and the building... gone! Only some twisted orange metal rods spiked the ground trying to reach the gray crying sky, and human-produced concrete stones were kicked around by careless pedestrians. It wasn't hard to realize that this McDonald's stood in somebody's way; now its remnants were in mine.

Vlad Solodovnyk
South Kent School
South Kent, CT
Mr. Arthur Brown

MEATBALL DINNER, WEDDING PICTURES, AND MOM

"I'm short. When I am no smart, I have nothing special." I knew that my mother was relating her few words of wisdom, but I kept my eyes on the Price Club meatball she had put on my dinner plate.

"Your dad love his college. He find out that he like research. I have bad college. I did not find what I like. I still do not know." Searching for her tears, I raised my eyes from the meatball to hers. She smiled.

As I cut my meatball into thin slices, I could only focus on all the mistakes in her grammar. I was not ready for the mother-daughter chats that I had often once desired.

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"But like I say yesterday, I look back and I have good life. God bless me so many ways. I should not feel bad. I just feel like I didn't do anything."

She smiled again.

My eyes moved to the bowl of tortellini centered between us. It was filled with spaghetti sauce, meatballs, and green peas. It looked like a repulsive combination of leftovers, which is exactly what it was. Next to the bowl, the gray pot of rice seemed out of place. My mother viewed rice as a staple: a meal was not complete without vegetables, fruit, and rice. On my mother's plate, the rice was mixed right in with the tortellini concoction.

The silence that normally characterized dinner without Dad resumed. Seven minute dinner, plate in the sink, homework time. I glanced at the clock and readied myself for my retreat to the sink. But before I could move, my mother decided to impart some more of her ungrammatical knowledge.

"My sister, the who..." My mother looked at me, as if she were unable to say the word "died." I nodded quickly.

"She was so pretty." Impatience began to rise, and I rolled my eyes. Could she not think of anything to say besides the fact that her sister was pretty? Physical appearances were not that important. God, she had said the same thing last year when my cousin died of heart problems.

"She died of drug. We didn't really have drug like now. She sniff, what you say, something like glue," she said, more to herself than to me.

"No kidding!" I had always thought that she had died of some disease.

I looked at my mother again: her white shirt, short hair, plastic glasses. I saw her often, talked with her less. She had told me little about her life. Well, I had never asked. I had viewed her as a person I would never become. I never bothered to find out why she had gone from the top of her college and top of the world to become a woman who spent a lifetime cooking meatballs and cleaning the kitchen floor. My curiosity about her had grown. Perhaps, I was searching for an explanation for her depression. Perhaps, I was frightened because I was slowly learning that I was more like my mother than I had ever imagined.

After leaving my plate in the sink, I went upstairs and pulled out an album from under road maps and old Bibles. The cover was stamped with orange and brown flowers; the binding was undone. Though I could not recall looking through the album before, I knew it had to be their wedding pictures.

I laughed. There was Dad, skinny as ever with the same mocking expression. And then, there was my mother. She was wearing a strapless yellow dress and platform shoes. She was smiling, but it was an expression I had never seen. It had spirit.

"Am I pretty?" My mother stood behind me. In my mind, I nodded my head, but said nothing aloud. "I told you. See? I was pretty."

She pointed to a close-up of her face. "I really not that pretty. I had one of the best make-up person in the country. See? I ask for light makeup. At that time, most people wear dark makeup. You see how light that is, looks natural." She pointed to the yellow-dress picture. "I look more like that." I said nothing, but I thought my mother looked much prettier in the yellow-dress picture.

"You should know my family," she said. I was much closer with my father's side of the family. I really knew only one of my mother's sisters. She had given me

the stuffed-to-ripping Hello Kitty wallet that I carried around to the dismay of my more sophisticated friends.

"This is Grandma." My grandma seemed so different from the person who called once in a while for my mother. I hadn't seen her for eight years, and there were no pictures of her displayed on our walls. Grandma was chubbier and less fragile than I had pictured.

"Grandpa." I remembered him even less. I had recently learned that he had divorced my grandma. Though he seemed like the "bad guy" of the family, my mother sympathized with him.

"How old were you when they got divorced?" I asked.

"I had just come to America." My mother came here after college. I had figured that her parents had divorced at sixty or something.

My mother pointed to her sister (the one who gave me the Hello Kitty wallet), and her brother. Then, she pointed to a girl in a blue plaid dress, with straight hair that fell just above her mouth. She must have been about thirteen years old. I stared at the girl - it had to be my mother's youngest sister, the one who had died at nineteen. I had spent one summer with her daughter, who had been adopted by one of the other faces in the picture. A whole summer, and I just passed her as some relative of mine.

The last page had four pictures, but my eyes were drawn to a dark picture in the bottom left corner. My father and mother stood with glasses of wine. My mother was laughing. Around her neck was a Victorian choker.

My throat tightened, and I couldn't hear a word my mother was saying. I kept staring at the Victorian choker - its dark velvet material, ivory stone, rose bead. It was the same choker that my mother had kept for twenty-five years. It was the same choker that I had taken out of her drawer, unaware of its history. It was the same choker that I had lost one day, and never found.

"And that's the pictures," I heard my mother say. I smiled at her. When words fail, I have learned to smile.

"Goody, goody?" my mother asked.

"Goody, goody," I replied.

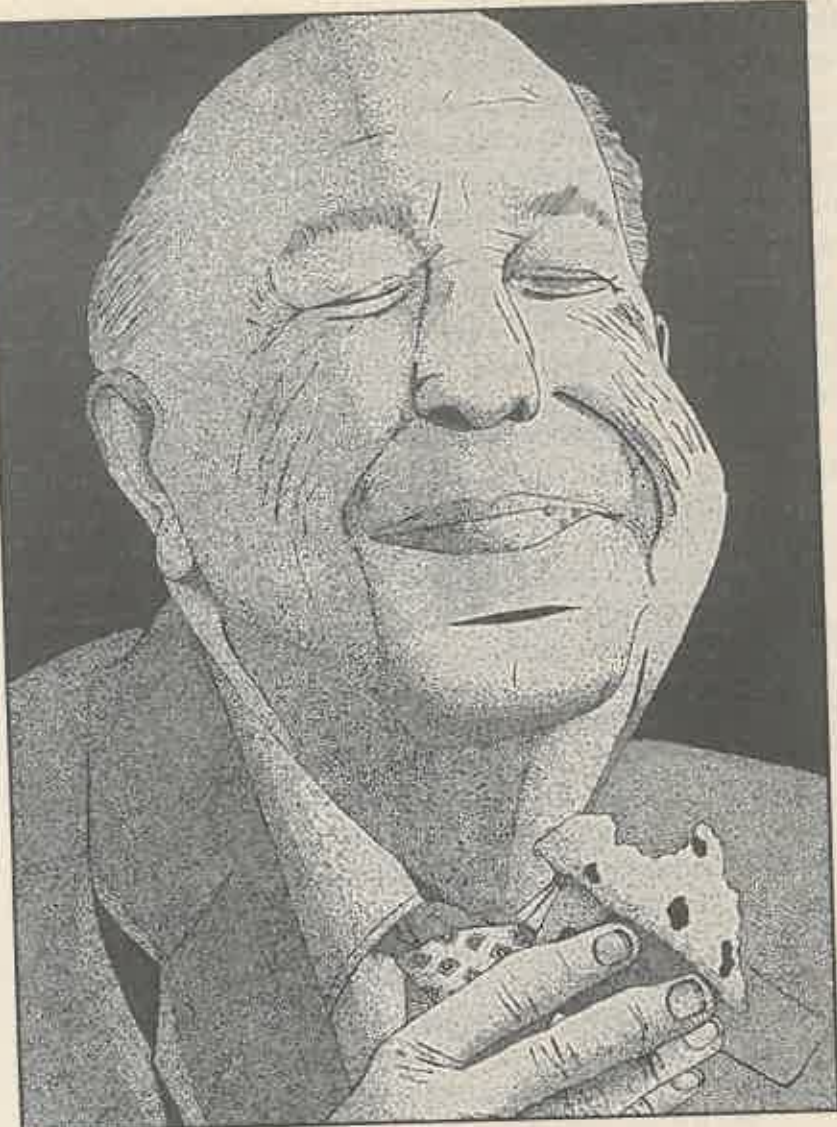
I watched my mom as she left the room. And then, staring at that lost choker, I began to cry.

Joanne Wang
252 Hallock Rd.
Stony Brook, NY
Mrs. Faith Krinsky

INFUSION

Dance ate me from the inside out,
first nibbling, then gnawing, finally ravaging me.
On the best days, dance devoured me.
I smiled the whole bus ride home,
feeling the deep aching in my bones.
At home, as my mother labored over a pot of soup,
her sweat smelled nothing like
the aroma of ballet work,
so gracefully carried on the backs of
the resin particles in the studio.
God sighed from underneath the floorboards
and I flew.
When he held his breath, I was dormant,
no longer a feather on the breath of God.

Lysandra Ohrstrom
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Ms. Chang



Chris Bosack
Scranton, PA

THE TROUBLE WITH A DRUNKEN POET

Again the plane has crashed
and seven children on Dorchester Ave.
have been found burned in their pajamas
that weren't polyester.
And again you've wrecked yourself,
for my sake you tell me,
as if you smashed your body against
the breakwater to save your dinghy
from the rocks.
You can lie there, furry-toothed and dizzy,
yet still thoughtful, always thoughtful,
and tell me there have been worse wrecks –
the *Endurance*, the *Andrea Doria*, the girl
on your street who slit her wrists
and hung her brother by his
on a final hit of acid.
And your wreck, on these terms,
(your terms) – is so poetic.
Explorers in the Arctic dashed into icebergs,
Italian lovers funneled down into the graveyards
of Nantucket harpooners and Indians.
Yours shall be a story for the days,
mightier than the downed 747
or the charred kids on welfare on Dorchester Ave.
To torment is to be loved, you say,
And I'll take your word for it,
and let you wreck yourself,
so you'll have something
to write about in the morning.

Shannon Gulliver
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

ANCIENT KITCHEN

I know there are faded flowers hidden there
beneath your tarnished pots and Tupperware
that sit plainly on your counter in precarious piles,
like heaps of rubble,
smelling of lemon-scented soap.

Your refrigerator is small and white,
resembling snow after a few days have passed;
cloudy with dirt and soot and further muffled
by tattered treasured snapshots
of your grandchildren
stuck on with peeling masking tape.

To the left,
a small ceramic bowl sits patiently
on your blue and white tablecloth
with five bruised apples nestled inside.
They are crimson and defiantly beautiful,
speckled with green like stubborn freckles.

A sepulchral aura lingers in the room,
mourning a man that has long since passed.
It still smells of his tuna sandwiches
and spicy cologne that engulfed me
when we would embrace.

Your friend is her to take us to breakfast,
I think her name is Silvia.
She stands awkwardly,
quietly fingering the peeling cream molding
that cradles your kitchen
as we wait for you to get your purse.

She looks as though she is thinking,
maybe about the weather,
but perhaps she too is wondering
if your contagious smile
faded with the flowers that I have yet to uncover.

Heather Fishberg
504 Colonial Ave.
Westfield, NJ
Mrs. Carol Nolde

SUPERMARKET

The young thin woman with bad skin
in the grocery store, telling her
little boy to keep his hands off the vegetables,
people have to eat those.
She pushes her hair back over her shoulder,
frowning when some comes out,
twisting it around her fingers.
She untangles it, letting it drift to the floor,
and starts to cry,
ridiculous here in the produce department.

"What's wrong, Mommy?" the boy asks,
and she dries her eyes and answers:

nothing. Time to go.

She pushes her cart away quickly
It's all we can do to look away.

Angie Haley
34 S. Hawthorne Rd.
Baltimore, MD

BLIND CALCULATIONS

My best friend got a car for her 17th birthday. It was part of her parents' divorce settlement somehow, her father's penance for leaving the family, court-ordered or self-inflicted, I don't know. She told me she didn't even want the car, she'd give it back in a second if she could just have her parents back together again. I remember thinking, *but she has a car*. That's something solid. You can't trade that in for marriage. There's just no exchange rate for that. I'd take a '91 LeBaron over an abstraction like love or marriage any day.

I'm thinking about all this as I'm driving down McKnight in my mother's Taurus. My parents divorced when I was seven, too young to get a car out of the deal. I pull into the parking lot of Damon's. I have to reverse and straighten the car twice before it fits into the spot between a red Explorer and a black Blazer.

I'm five minutes late but earlier than Alex. He called to ask me to dinner after he got home from Villanova for winter break. I knew he'd suggest Damon's. We went here for our first date, our six-month anniversary dinner, and a dozen other times in between. I hate Damon's. The waitresses wear these horrid red and white striped shirts, and I always end up staring at college basketball or whatever is on the TV in the bar when he's talking. But it's easier to just meet him here than decide on someplace else to go.

The hostess seats me at a booth, the same one Alex and I sat in the day I skipped play practice to see him. Alex walks in and for a moment, he looks nothing like the guy I dated for nearly a year. After a semester away, he looks old, and changed.

Alex is all smiles when he sits down. He's wearing a bright orange sweater and the same J. Crew khakis he's always worn. His hair is longer than usual because he won't let anyone but his barber at home cut it. He asks me how senior year is and starts telling me stories about the kids in his hall at school. I remember a few of his friends vaguely, from an afternoon I spent at Villanova when I was visiting my uncle who lives in Bryn Mawr. Fitz and Phil interrupted the beginning of an argument I was having with Alex and then stood in his room for 45 minutes talking about Sega Dreamcast. Then Alex took me to meet Blaire and Carol who lived down the hall. Carol was eating Combos and throwing them at Phil. Blaire was telling Alex about a story she wrote for Spanish with him in it, and she was touching his shoulder and standing close to him. I remember leaning against the door frame and focusing on a point in the back of Alex's head until he turned around and asked when I had to go back to my uncle's.

The waitress introduces herself as Jeanette and smiles a little too sweetly. I can tell Jeanette thinks we're on our first date. The way Alex is babbling and I'm just listening, it probably does look like first-date awkwardness. I can tell Alex knows what the waitress is thinking from the way he smiles at me when she comes to take our drink orders. I want to let Jeanette in on the joke (this is post-breakup awkwardness, not getting-to-know-each-other awkwardness) but instead I just ask for a glass of water. I frown when Alex orders root beer instead of the lemonade he drank at every meal for more than eleven months. If it were anyone but Alex, I'd think his change in beverage was intentionally chosen as a symbol of his new life. Up till now we've been smoothly acting out a familiar scene, but now it's as if he's changed a line and I don't know what's coming next.

Jeanette comes around again with my chicken

sandwich and Alex's steak. I can't remember ever seeing him eat red meat at a restaurant before. Jeanette lingers a little too long at our booth, maybe hoping to hear interesting details of our developing relationship. I'm still trying to remember what this used to feel like, eating with Alex, having a normal conversation.

So this is being friends, I think. I'm still watching Alex talk and he gets silent for a moment. His eyes look hard when he's not laughing. I'd known we were done when he called me from school before fall break to tell me he'd cheated on me and I couldn't even picture his face when he was talking. I lay on my bed and stared up at the stars on my ceiling as he was explaining how he hadn't really cheated and it didn't mean anything and he still cared about me but we couldn't stay together anymore. I remember looking at the picture of us from his senior prom that was sitting next to my bed. We looked so posed, like figurines, and the voice coming through the receiver sounded foreign. I put the picture into a shoebox in my closet along with ticket stubs from movies we'd seen and emails he'd written me in his first weeks at school.

Alex is telling me about Blaire, and I can tell by the way he's talking about her that she's not just some girl who lives down the hall. I take a bite of my sandwich and the roll tastes like paste against my throat. Jeanette comes around again to clear our plates.

"Any dessert? Something to share?" she offers slyly. I shake my head no. Alex's mouth is moving in patterns I've stopped hearing. His leg brushes mine under the table and I say "excuse me."

I call my dad when I get home to ask if he is coming to my sister's band concert on Thursday. After the third ring I remember he's on a business trip to Cleveland tonight. I hate the sound of his answering machine, the toneless quality of his voice, the generic message intended for business calls, not a daughter. I number to the seventh ring in my head, then hang up when I hear the flat pre-recorded voice. He has caller id. He'll be annoyed I hung up on his machine.

I find Dad in the lobby of the auditorium after the concert, amidst a crowd of grandparents and parents. He's wearing the plaid shirt I gave him for his birthday. He wears a shirt I gave him every time I see him, trying to point out how appreciative he is. The pleated gray skirt he gave me last Christmas is still in the bottom of my sweater drawer. I haven't worn pleats since second grade. He hasn't noticed.

Dad hugs me and he's still a whole head taller than I am, even when I'm wearing heels. He feels soft when he puts his arm around me, and when I pull away the fluorescent lights reflect brightly off the thinning hair on his head. The clamor of chattering parents and whining younger siblings is dizzying. I tell Dad I have to go but he can find Caroline if he waits in the hall by the stage door.

Wind hits my face as I walk out the double doors of the middle school. I turn around and I can see Dad hugging Caroline. She holds onto his elbow as she reaches down to pick up her flute. A strand of her hair, carefully curled at the end, falls over her cheek, and I can see him laughing. I run to the car and my heels wobble in the gravel parking lot.

The car interior is so cold I can see my breath. I shift abruptly from reverse to drive, merge right as I leave the school. My fingers switch quickly through all the preset dials of the radio. I pause at the soothing sound of a female voice. I look up to see the light change from yellow

to red and slam on the brakes. I wrap my arms around my elbows to warm myself and rest my head on the steering wheel.

I remember the way Alex's words had bounced around the inside of my head the night of Laura's party. I'd been fine until I was sitting in her living room. All the guys were watching football and yelling at the TV when suddenly I felt my chest grow heavy. The edges of the room grew dark, and I pushed myself out of the deep cushions of the couch. I walked out the kitchen door, careful to keep the screen door silent. I ran up her street, around the cul-de-sac and back down past her driveway, thinking I could force my body to focus on movement so I wouldn't be able to cry. I sat down on the curb and felt my chest heaving as I bent my face to my knees. The denim of my jeans was rough against my forehead and I finally stopped crying.

When I walked back into Laura's kitchen, I wiped the mascara from under my eyes. I was holding my breath to keep my pulse even but when Megan and Christine asked, I said I was fine. I asked them who was winning the football game but I didn't know who had been playing.

I close my eyes in the darkness of the car. The woman on the radio is talking about insurance for Internet companies. She says they're developing "new ways for clients to measure these losses." New ways to measure these losses. These losses.

I open my eyes when I hear the horn of the Geo behind me, telling me the light has changed. The flash of headlights in the opposite lane is blinding, and I blink hard to clear my blurry vision.

Nancy Reddy
116 Trolley Ct.
Pittsburgh, PA
Mr. Eric Graf

PICTURE POEM

The Webelos from Pack 79
Smile at the camera.
The Den leaders beam proudly
Because their sons have just won second place
In the Conestoga Wagon Derby.
Some kids play on the grass
While others mourn their loss.
The Den doesn't know how to act.
They don't know whether to be happy
Or play it off as if they're "cool."
The kid in the middle
And the kid on the right
Show all teeth.
They came through when it counted
And they know it.
Some hands are closed,
Some arms are around the others,
But some just don't know
What to do.
In the background the blossoming trees
Give way to the blue sky
Which chose to shine down on them
That day.

Brian Cordes
705 Dartmoor
Westfield, NJ
Mrs. Carol Nolde

DRAPED DREAMS

Grandmother
triple-bolts the door
as we head home
down the Lysol-ridden hallway
where she shuffles each day
every step a burden
for her vein-plagued legs
and heavy frame.
She's alone again
in her spacious, fancy condo
with antiques to spare
each one a relic of decades together
and a steady phone to
beckon her grown children with every whim.
But the rooms are filled with
the sad wash of loss
for he's gone.
What love has she now to claim as her own?
In the kitchen, she stoops
next to the chair
where he'd sit and be served soup
akin to a king
by his ever-obedient wife
(it was the times they'd
lived in, was The Explanation –
Men never buttered their bread,
they only brought it home)
I chatted, as if to mask her half-life
The apartment's sure looking nice these days.
Then, cutting into my cheery tone,
rose deadpan gloom from my nana.
It's not the same without him,
she mutters.
Nothing's the same without him.
She walks to the window,
strokes the old drapes
comments on their value
and softly sighs.

Dena Weisberg
Newton North High School
Newton, MA

ASHES

Another hot sun
burns another day
to ashes
to rusted mufflers
scraping orange against
the road
even ashes in the air
a grayish haze
with sun behind;
how an ant must see
the looking glass
through smoke,
its body burning.

but it's just an ant
turned to ashes,
plodding on like every
fetid, heavy day

Justin Goff
959 Country Club Dr.
Pittsburgh, PA
Mr. Dan Petrich

Some Things Never Change

As I sat in Dr. Forest's chemistry room that cold December morning, surrounded by beakers and flasks as fragile as my own patience, I glared at Preston and wondered how long it would take him to answer the impossible mole problem on the board. The soft ticking of the clock was the only audible sound in the room, breaking through the thick, thought-laden silence. Some attempted the problem at their desks, feverishly entering numbers into their calculators, and scribbling in their notebooks. Others, such as myself, merely gaped at the foreboding board, as if the future had just been sealed in Dr. Forest's chicken scratch. We were failures.

Just as I was coming to this crushing realization, I saw the tailored plaid sleeve shoot into the air triumphantly. I couldn't help but wonder why Preston insisted on raising his hand so quickly, as if sprinting to the finish of a long race with a competitor breathing down his neck. The blank expression of his classmates should have told him that he'd left the other runners in the dust.

Every class has a student like Preston Burlington, the child whose mere presence eats away at the other students like maggots at raw meat, slowly gnawing away the tasty flesh and inevitably reaching the chilled bone. There he sat, in the front row as always, sitting so straight and rigid that you would think the hanger had been left in his well-starched shirt. Atop his swelled head lay a mess of heavily gelled blond hair, combed neatly to the side from an arrow-straight part. A pair of square gold wire-framed glasses rested upon his ruddy cheeks, dampening the severity of his piercing blue eyes.

Dr. Forest then lifted his head from the mammoth stack of test papers he was grading at his desk. I often pondered how the miserable man could find anything on that desk. When looking at it, the first thing that always caught my eye was the little red apple stress ball lying in the front, always untouched. Next to it was a test tube-shaped bathroom pass that some former student had hastily made in wood shop. Behind these staple items, there could be any variety of scattered lab notebooks, teacher's editions of textbooks, and, of course, test papers. There were never any pictures of family or pets.

Upon seeing Preston's raising hand, Dr. Forest's bearded face eased into a pleased, but unsurprised, grin. He scratched his graying beard and stood up, exposing a particularly vile green tie with chemical symbols and molecular representations hanging from his thick neck and resting upon a wrinkled blue dress shirt. His cloudy gray eyes fixed themselves on Preston from behind disproportionately large tortoiseshell glasses.

"Do you have an answer for us, Preston?" His dotting tone of voice made my already nauseous stomach churn.

" 1.09×10^{25} moles of chlorine, sir." An immense anger consumed me as I watched Preston nervously tapping the heel of his suede shoe on the hard tile floor. The jocks didn't steal his gym clothes and throw spitballs at him for nothing.

"Excellent. Now that you all know what the right answer is, I'm sure you can go back and find what you did wrong. Our next order of business is the tests you took last week." Forest turned his attention back to the jungle of paper and stress balls.

After rummaging through some odds and ends, he finally located our tests. A pit began to grow in my stomach, sucking me in from the inside. I felt that any second I would just implode, leaving the horrified Period 2 class to wonder what had happened to me.

Forest indifferently slapped the test before my

eyes. It was worse than I thought: D. This was going to kill my B average. The class had been snowballing all year for me. Right now, I had the base of a fat, terrible snowman before my eyes, standing firm in the frostiness of my confusion.

I stared agape at the multitude of red pen marks covering the diseased piece of loose-leaf. So great was my shock that I completely tuned out Dr. Forest's explanation of a major project on chemical reactions that was due next week. The last thing I wanted to hear at that moment was that evil man's emotionless voice from the crypt. My mind flew from the classroom to the sanctuaries of my favorite music videos and computer games. Just as I was developing the perfect strategy for my next game of Star Craft, a voice sliced through my fantasy and cruelly dragged me back to reality.

"Matt? Matt Wessler?" The corpse himself was staring right at me, shooting daggers of impatience through his spectacled eyes.

"What?" I wondered what the smug, unhappy excuse for a man could possibly want from me now.

"What?!? Matt, do you have any idea what we've been doing for the past ten minutes? You'll never bring up those test scores if you don't get your mind out of the clouds! Now, who do you want to work with on your project?"

A plethora of desperate thoughts surged through my mind. Whatever project he was talking about, it had to be important. I looked down at my desk to see the dreadful test paper glaring up at me with taunting red eyes. I frantically glanced around the room, searching for deliverance from my grave plight, like a ship in a frenzied attempt to find shelter from a raging tempest. My crazed eyes then rested on Preston Burlington. From where I sat, I could just make out the single, red letter in the corner of his paper.

"Preston." As the name left my lips, it occurred to me that it would be a miracle if the boy wonder had not already been gobbled up by the pack of grade-hungry lions comprising my second period chemistry class. However, Forest's two quick pen marks on the clipboard he was holding told me that the beasts' pride had been greater than their appetites.

Preston slowly turned his cardboard frame and looked at me with bewildered eyes. I had never actually spoken to Preston outside of the chemistry classroom, and even in there our communication had been limited to cations and solubility rules. My motivation for selecting him had to be painfully clear, and judging from the disappointment in his blue eyes, it was.

Within ten minutes, the bell rang triumphantly throughout the school, freeing me from Forest's black dungeon. As I fled from the classroom, I met the disgusted expressions of my disapproving classmates. Apparently, they saw through my plan as well.

Finally, I reached the refuge of the hallway, packed with slow-moving students. Fragments of conversations would catch my ears, only to fade in the shouts and laughter of the bustling crowd. "The party Saturday was wild. John did the funniest thing..." "Scott asked Keri! She..." "Laura! Did you hear?"

As I weaved through the cattle-like mass of human flesh and bones, a variety of fragrances met my nose, a mixed blessing as always. That particular day I was indulging in the enticing scent of Tommy Girl, its wearer anonymous in the flood of people. Within seconds, the heavenly aroma gave way to acrid body odor complemented by a nauseating stink bomb.

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"Matt?" A barely perceptible whisper penetrated through the din. At first, I was certain it was seeking a different Matt, but soon it was right behind me, still uttering my name persistently.

"Matt?" I jerked my head around to meet Preston's quivering gaze. Traces of fear revealed themselves in his eyes like little waves in the crystal sea of blue. My cheeks burned with annoyance at this. Did he think I was going to swallow him whole right there in the hallway? Was I such a terrible person that I'd get angry at someone for saying my name?

"What?" I made sure that my tone made clear that I was extremely agitated and the very act of talking to him was cramping my style.

He cleared his throat apprehensively.

"We're going to have to get together tonight to get a start on that project. I'm going skiing with my family this weekend, and it's due Monday."

"Whatever." I turned sharply into the gym locker room to my left without saying another word.

The stale smell of dirty socks and sweat counteracted by deodorant slapped me in the face as it always did upon entering the Winston County High boys' locker room. I reluctantly climbed my way past five rows of blue mesh lockers and dozens of half-naked boys to find my locker in the sixth and final row. Skeet and Leo were already there, busily stripping off their cargo pants and flannels and slipping into basketball shorts and tee shirts.

"So Matt, we hear you're getting in tight with good ol' Preston," Skeet snickered wildly while tying the laces of his beat-up gym sneakers.

"You know, if you sold your skateboard, you'd probably get enough money to buy one of those snazzy chess sets at Mr. Bodine's store downtown," added Leo in hysterics as he pulled an old Smashing Pumpkins tee shirt over his head, concealing his measly white chest.

"How'd you guys hear about that so fast?"

"Charlie told us on the way to dramatics. He couldn't believe you'd stoop so low for a grade." Skeet simply couldn't wipe his ear to ear grin off his face as he checked his hair in the magnetic mirror on his locker door.

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." A reluctant half-smile accompanied my pathetic defense.

"What, man?" Leo barely got this last witticism out through his hyena-like cackling. I thought the two clowns would never let up when, all of a sudden, the laughing ceased as if a cloud had just floated in front of the sun and ruined their joyous picnic. I lifted my head from tying a pair of old Converse all-star gym shoes to see what had brought on this abrupt sobriety. At the end of the row of scattered clothing and backpacks stood Eddie Muller, towering over the other boys and me. He haughtily strutted to his locker, which happened to be right next to mine.

Eddie Muller instilled jealousy in the hearts of all of us short, scrawny tenth grade boys. His well-sculpted biceps and six-pack seemed straight out of Roman mythology, the embodiment of the perfect man. Whenever he entered a classroom, I would enviously follow the girls' eyes as they traced his flawless form, analyzing every muscular curve and blemishless inch of skin. We were peasants, the lowly soap-scum coating of a bathtub just waiting for Tilex to come and wipe us away.

"What's up Weasel?" It never ceased to amaze me that Eddie still found my third-grade nickname amusing. I wish I could remember the first person who'd realized my last name sounded remotely like "weasel" so I could thank him for the years of torment and name games I've been subjected to. However, besides the demeaning nickname,

Eddie had always treated me decently. In fact, I thought we were on the verge of becoming what you might call "friends."

"Not much. Do you know what we're doing in gym today?" I prayed that he had not heard about my stint with Preston as I asked this; apparently he hadn't.

"Well, we're climbin' up ropes, you oughtta like that." Eddie always did have a sense of humor. I chuckled to myself and walked out to the gym for warm-ups.

After school that day, Skeet, Leo, and I assumed our positions in the school parking lot. None of us actually had cars, or even knew how to drive for that matter, yet every single day we stood around vacant spot 101, as if we were assigned to that area by some all-powerful director. Leaving our places would simply ruin his grand production and leave us out of jobs.

That particular winter day, as Skeet lit up his second cigarette, Eddie Muller was making powerful strides toward his '98 BMW Z-3. The shiny red sports car was parked just a few feet from where we stood. We all knew instinctively to play it cool. Leo and I leaned nonchalantly against the Taurus behind us, while Skeet took a long draw off his Marlboro. Our eyes fell to the pavement, so as not to stare at the approaching colossus. Soon we heard his heavy footsteps assaulting the asphalt just a few feet from where we stood. They abruptly came to a halt and gave way to the metallic clanking of keys. Just as we heard the car door open, a deep voice barked our way.

"No wheels, eh Weasel? You pathetic sack. Get in the back!" Eddie ordered like a drill sergeant.

In grateful disbelief, we all scurried over to the coveted Beamer like children to a new toy.

"Not your queer friends, Weasel. You think I have time to drive home every scrub without a license? Just get the hell in if you're coming." Eddie slammed the front door and started the car.

I shrugged apologetically at Skeet and Leo and hopped into one of the three leather seats in the back of Eddie's car.

With the radio blaring, Eddie sped through the parking lot. The heavy bass tones of rap music, magnified by a kicker, pulsed through my body like a second heart beat as the speedometer climbed past 40. As we clipped the corner around the building, a figure hunched under the weight of a greatly oversized backpack and carrying an armload of books appeared directly in our path.

"Holy crap!" Eddie slammed on the brakes with a screech, and we both jolted forward like crash dummies. For the first time in my life, I was glad I'd buckled up.

"That Burlington fag! I swear, he's ASKING for a beating! Lucky I didn't kill the little bastard." Eddie hastily rolled down the window, his mighty forearm pumping with rage.

"Burlington, you little queer! Get that sorry little ass over here!"

Preston hesitated before turning around, as if possessing just the tiniest flicker of hope that Eddie was not addressing him. After a moment however, he slowly made an about face and hobbled over to the car. He reminded me of a well-prepared hiker lugging his load through the woods. The fear in his boyish face, however, betrayed this image. I watched curiously through the tinted back window, to see how Eddie would handle this nuisance.

"You better watch where you're going, you little dick. Next time, I ain't gonna stop so fast." Eddie looked over Preston's hunched figure with disgust as if he were inspecting a piece of property.

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"What's the matter? You got too many books or something? Let the Ed man help ya out with that." Before Preston could cry out in defense, Eddie had seized the top book on the stack, a green Mead history notebook. He ferociously tore out every page in a matter of seconds.

"There, it's lighter already." The papers blew in the winter wind as we sped away, leaving Preston crawling around on the pavement, trying to capture the dancing white leaves. Something is always easier broken than it is fixed.

After logging in about two hours on the computer at home that afternoon, I decided to give good ol' Preston a buzz to get the darn project over with. The thought of working with him grew more dreadful by the moment, with his plastered hair and beady eyes. However, visions of the horrid test paper ran unceasingly through my mind, directing me to the thick Bell Atlantic phone book. I needed an A. I needed an A.

There were five listings for Burlingtons in the white pages, only two of which lived in my school district. I decided to try the one on Oxford Court, where all the rich people lived. Preston's Dockers and Ralph Lauren shirts made me quite confident that this was the right choice. I carefully dialed the seven digits into my touch-tone phone. The phone rang three times before a chipper female voice answered.

"Hello, who is this please?" it chimed pleasantly.

"My name's, uh, Matt. Is Preston there?"

"Just a moment sweetie." I could faintly hear her calling Preston's name several times through the uncovered receiver.

He must have been somewhere deep in the belly of their enormous house. Finally, he picked up the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Are we gonna work on that *thing* or not?"

"Yes, that would be ideal. Do you know where I live?"

"The address is right here in the phone book. I'll be there in a half hour." Click.

I actually didn't arrive until a full hour after I hung up the phone. It was a long walk to the other side of town where Preston lived. My mother had refused to drive a car since she crashed into a telephone poll three years before I was born, and my stepfather didn't get home from work until seven. So I ventured into the frosty night alone and slowly made the journey to Oxford Court.

The sharp December wind cut right through my frayed green corduroys and flannel shirt. As the biting winter air pricked my flesh, I wished I'd worn my winter jacket, lined with soft fleece. It had been hanging on the coat rack just inside the peeling red door, calling to me as I hurried to leave the house. Just as I was about to grab its heavy gray sleeve, my mother's piercing voice rang through the house, straight into my weary ears.

"You better wear that jacket, Matt!"

My outstretched arm coiled back by my side in a serpentine fashion, leaving the forlorn jacket, begging to be worn, untouched on the rack.

My teeth chattered slightly as I approached the well-lit white Victorian house. Everything about the place seemed to radiate with brilliant, almost divine light. At the foot of the red brick path, I paused and noticed a strange sound, a subtle humming in the distance. As the house grew closer before me, this barely discernible buzzing transformed into a festive melody, gleefully being fiddled on a violin somewhere within the gigantic house. As I continued down the path, the song grew stronger and

stronger and more infectious with each step I took. It led me down the long path and drew me nearer to the soft green door. The meticulously trimmed shrubs in front of the house all wore suits of tiny, multicolored Christmas lights. Two little white wicker reindeer greeted me on the front steps, with twinkling lights garnishing their red collars. After climbing the five wooden steps, I finally stood before the emerald door. I stared at the shiny brass knocker with the letter "B" etched in perfect calligraphy across its chest. It sat in the middle of an ornate wreath of real pine, which donned tiny silver balls and a majestic red ribbon. My hand reluctantly slunk from its snug hiding place in my pants pocket into the icy night air to grasp and lightly rap the lustrous metal. Again, the pangs of December's brutal chill stabbed straight through my shirt. Someone within the house was still playing the wholesome stringed melody that had followed me down the path. Though I am usually passionately against classical music of any kind, that song had an entrancing quality about it. Like the inexplicable allure of a tiny flame flickering on a birthday candle, its beautiful simplicity captivated me.

All of a sudden, the tantalizing music was severed. I heard the scurrying of footsteps down a flight of stairs, thumping closer and closer. The door quickly flew open to reveal Preston's panting face. Where a stiff, gelled mass usually resided on his head, there rested blond tufts of downy hair, feathering wildly in every direction. The heavily starched shirt was replaced by a ragged old gray sweatshirt.

"Come in. I just need to put my violin away and get my notebook. Make yourself at home." He disappeared up the light blue carpeted stairs immediately in front of the door, as I slowly stepped inside.

At once, a blast of warm air embraced me like an old friend, and I began to thaw from the blistering winter cold. A sweet medley of aromas slithered up my nose, filling every crevice with its homespun fragrances. My mouth watered at the scent of freshly baked apple pie, long absent from my TV-dinner-dependent home. I ventured deeper into the dwelling, beyond the staircase, and through a short hallway decorated with family pictures. Smiling babies, newlywed couples, and vacations on the beach lined the white walls.

The hallway opened into a living room to my right, into which I curiously crept. Faint holiday melodies whispered quietly from somewhere deep within the room, perhaps emitted by a small tape or c.d. player hidden from my roaming eyes. Opposite the entrance of the softly lit room, a fireplace crackled pleasantly, ushering me inside like a well-bred Southern hostess. Perched above the gently hissing hearth was the most soulful mantle I'd ever seen, well decorated with candles, garland, wooden soldiers, and other tiny trinkets of holiday cheer. However, the object in the room demanding the most attention lay behind all the Christmas ornaments. A tremendous portrait of the Burlington family governed the room from a thick, intricately carved oak frame. I inched past the plush blue sofa to my left, adorned with a carefully homemade patchwork quilt. It faced a matching love seat and old wooden rocking chair, as if the three pieces of furniture themselves, and not the people who sat in them, were engaged in intimate conversation. On the coffee table in the center of the room lay some open magazines and two empty "I love Vermont" mugs. As I passed, I noticed that the bottoms of the mugs were tainted with a faint brown residue, evidence of the soothing brew that once slept in their porcelain interiors.

Finally, I stood directly below the marvelous mantle

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and gazed right into the eyes of the blissful Burlington family. Not a single face in the photograph was without a smile, and the picture itself appeared to shed holy white light across the cozy room. The subjects of the portrait seemed to be firmly held together by an invisible yet unbreakable bond. The first row of the clan was occupied by three little girls with blond pigtails in frilly red dresses, little dolls so perfect and innocent that I could scarcely picture them ever actually coming to life. Preston and his parents comprised the second row and, upon close observation, it occurred to me that this was a recent picture.

"Ready to get to work?" In my fascination with the portrait, I hadn't even heard him enter the room.

"Sure." I indifferently followed the boy wonder back through the hallway and down a flight of stairs to the basement.

At the foot of the stairs, two of the three petite angels from the portrait were sprawled in front of a big screen television playing a racing game on Sony Playstation.

"Could you two please go upstairs? I need to get some work done." The two sets of bouncing pigtails were gone before we reached the bottom of the long staircase. I quickly surveyed the room before plopping down on an old, beat-up couch which had apparently been banished to this playroom. Among an abundance of other toys, plastic baseball bats, Nerf basketballs, Barbie dolls, and Beanie Babies littered the floor of the Burlington basement. I put my feet up on the short, wooden coffee table in front of the couch and started to sing "In Bloom" by Nirvana to myself. "He's the one who likes all the pretty songs/ And he likes to sing alone/ And he likes to shoot his gun/ But he knows not what it means..."

"Could we please start this? I have a lot of other homework and really can't afford to spend all night on this project. If you want, we could put 'Nevermind' in the c.d. player down here. That'd probably make our work go a little faster, wouldn't it?" Preston again looked at me with those fearful eyes, as if I'd stab him repeatedly for mere suggestion.

It took me a minute to comprehend what the chemistry wizard had just done. He had just offered to play my favorite Nirvana c.d. to make our work go faster. Since when did Preston Burlington, the butt of everyone's jokes and object of many a student's hatred, listen to the same music as I did? The shock began to give way to annoyance, the annoyance to anger burning within my soul like a great untamed inferno.

"Whatever," I muttered under my breath. I suppose my craving to hear Nirvana's angst-ridden riffs outweighed any resentment I had toward Preston.

Preston quickly popped in the shiny disc, and we got to work. I volunteered to make posters of household goods that incorporate the particular chemical compounds we were working with. Preston labored over the chemical equations of the reactions that formed these compounds, carefully balancing each chemical sentence and rattling off solubility rules.

After about fifteen minutes of drawing Clorox and Toilet Duck logos without a word being spoken between us, Presto opened his mouth to speak.

"This is such a remarkable waste of time. It's the exact same thing fifty times. Could you please do some of these reactions? They are not hard, just tedious." Preston placed a blue Mead five star notebook on my lap.

"Um, you gotta be kiddin' me. I failed the last freakin' test. I'm dumb. Just let me do the posters, ok?" I began to hand back the thick notebook, but he gently

pushed it back into my lap.

"Trust me Matt, anyone can do this stuff. Dr. Forest just has half the class believing they're stupid because he cannot explain things very well." He then stood up and slid onto the empty cushion next to the one I was occupying on the couch.

"See, you take the compound in this column and react it with the compound in this column. Then, you check your solubility rules. If one of the products is insoluble, then a reaction takes place, understand?"

I felt the fog within my thick skull clear.

"Yeah, I understand that, but I don't get how to balance an equation. Really, I think I should just stick to the posters." I again attempted to rid myself of the plagued notebook.

"That's easier than this. Just watch." For the next twenty minutes, Preston taught me everything that Forest had failed to make any sense of. He was like an interpreter, translating every foreign rule and symbol into something I could understand. We were actually almost done with the equations when the upbeat female voice I'd spoken to on the phone descended the stairs.

"I think you boys could use a break. Come up and have some pie! It's hot out of the oven..." Her melodious tone and irresistible invitation caused us to promptly drop our books and follow the heavenly aroma to the kitchen. I could almost taste the sweet cinnamon goo and flaky golden crust as I anxiously trailed Preston up the stairs and through another short, photograph-covered hallway.

At last, we reached the Burlington kitchen. It was at least three times as large as my own, with a central island and two long stretches of gray-speckled formica counter top lining the walls. However, the shiny gray was hardly visible through the various kitchen gadgets covering nearly every square inch of counter space. Among other devices, I noticed a toaster, a blender, a Cuisinart, a Brita water purifier, a juicer, a bagel slicer, and a waffle iron. Pots and pan hung stylishly from the ceiling, as if Martha Stewart herself had placed them there. The refrigerator behind me proudly displayed A+ test papers, art work, and snapshots of the Burlington family. In one picture, Preston was swinging a baseball spot with authority.

"That was taken with the church league," Preston commented upon noticing my puzzled expression.

A pleasantly plump middle-aged woman wearing a red-checked apron and red and green plaid oven mitts waddled over to me. I instantly recognized her from the living room portrait. The ceiling lights reflected off her short dyed auburn hair as she introduced herself.

"I'm Preston's mom. You must be Matt. How nice to meet you!" She removed her right oven mitt to shake my hand. The soft fingers felt very warm and smooth to my dry, bony hand.

"I hope you two are hungry, because we have a lot of pie! Just sit down at the table there, and I'll bring you some with a little hot cocoa." She waltzed over to the counter, where the beautiful pie lay steaming. I felt my mouth salivating like a dog at the opening of a can of puppy chow. Watching Mrs. Burlington delicately extract two huge wedges from the opaque glass pie pan, I impatiently squirmed in my seat. At last, the piping hot mound was placed daintily in front of me, its innards oozing out onto a Christmas tree plate.

The first forkful of cinnamon syrup and mushy apple merrily met my mouth and floated effortlessly into my empty stomach. Likewise the following bites of buttery crust and tender filling disappeared, soon leaving the tiny glass plate empty before my disbelieving eyes. When I awoke from my sugary dream, I realized that Preston was

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only half done with his slice.

"That was good pie," I said quietly. I could not remember the last time I'd complimented cooking, and the words felt strange on my chapped lips.

"You can have more if you would like, dear. There's plenty." Mrs. Burlington was already bringing me a second piece of the heavenly confection as the last of these words left her mouth.

While I was devouring my third slice of pie, a tall blond man of substantial build in his late forties or early fifties walked through the kitchen door. Another figure from the portrait was brought to life. The photographer, however, did not do justice to his real-life size and stature. If he was not wearing a black suit and carrying a brown leather briefcase, one could easily mistake him for a retired professional football player.

"Hey Pres. Who's your friend?" The burly man gestured to me with a pudgy finger.

"This is Matt. We're working on a chemistry project. Matt, this is my father." I reluctantly looked up from my pie for a moment to nod my head in acknowledgment.

"Do you think Matt would like to join us in a little basketball?" Mr. Burlington turned his head back and forth between me and Preston as he asked this, like a scale weighing our interest in the proposal.

"Dad and I usually play when he gets home from work. The court outside is lit, and if you wear a sweatshirt, it is not cold once you start running around. We're almost done with the chemistry anyway, so do you think you'd like to play for a little while?" The fear was finally gone from his eyes; the veil between us had lifted.

"Yeah sure." I actually didn't care much for basketball, but I couldn't say no with the two sets of pleading blue eyes gleaming at me. Before I knew it, I was outside in the December evening once again, this time armed with a heavy windbreaker and mittens that Preston had let me borrow. As the three of us stood around on the smoothly paved driveway, it was decided that Preston and I would be a team against the brawny giant. The first team to score twenty points would win.

Preston took the ball out first. He sent a powerful chest pass straight at me, one ruefully intercepted by his father. With a short little hop and flick of the wrist, the ball was sent straight through the orange hoop. It soon became clear that this would not be a contest between three people. I watched, amazed, as Preston dribbled the ball between his legs and drove toward the basket. It was as if the ball was an extension of his arm, a part of his body that he had complete power to control as he pleased. Lay-up after lay-up bounced off the backboard and through the net, leaving me speechless on the sidelines. Occasionally, Preston would try to pass to me, but I would shake my head and motion for him to keep it. The simple act of watching the unspoken bond between the two men satisfied me. Honey tastes sweetest to the bee whose own hive is empty.

When Mr. Burlington finally reached twenty points, we headed back inside. After peeling off the borrowed jacket, I glanced at my cheap black watch. It was already 9 o'clock!

"Preston, I gotta go now. It'll take me about an hour to get home. I'll finish the last couple of equations and the poster this weekend." I turned to go get the materials downstairs, when Preston lightly grabbed my sleeve.

"My parents will drive you home. You cannot walk home alone at night, especially when it's cold like this. Besides, I want to show you something before you go." He motioned for me to follow him, and we climbed the

steep, blue carpeted staircase in front of the door. At the top of the stairs, we turned into the first room on the left.

Preston flipped the light switch, revealing a colossal, well-furnished bedroom. There was a double bed in the center, wearing a white and blue plaid comforter that perfectly complemented the carpeting that had followed us in from the stairs. A color poster of Ken Griffey Jr. stood proudly behind the bed, in the midst of several smaller magazine clippings of ball players and musicians. The Beastie Boys shared wall space with Michael Jordan and John Cage. There was a computer desk against one wall and a dresser against the other. Two large black leather cases leaned in the corner of the dresser side. One obviously housed a violin. Its petite case looked worn but dignified, like an old man smiling proudly at his life and accomplishments. The second case was a bit larger, yet had the same basic form as the violin's. Preston scampered over to this case and unfastened the silver clasps. Well-polished wood shimmered in the soft lamplight.

Speechlessly, Preston sat on his bed with the guitar in his lap and began to play. I immediately recognized "Polly" by Nirvana. I heeded Preston's inferred cue and at just the right time began to sing:

"Polly wants a cracker/ Think I should get off her first/ Think she wants some water/ To put out the blow torch..."

In this way we went through five more Nirvana songs, then diverged into some Led Zeppelin and Smashing Pumpkins. By the time 10 o'clock rolled around, we were still singing and laughing joyously. Mrs. Burlington then appeared in the doorway, beaming as brightly as ever.

"I'm so glad you two are having fun, but you have school tomorrow. I'll take you home now, Matt sweetie."

"Guess I'll see you tomorrow, Weasel." Preston gently patted my shoulder as we rose from the feather bed. I flashed a quick smile and followed his mother out the door.

On the way to first period chemistry the next day, I passed by Matt Wessler and Eddie Muller hanging out in the hallway with a trio of blond cheerleaders. Matt was standing on the outskirts of the circle, like the runt of the litter, doomed to waste away from lack of his mother's nourishing milk. As I neared the door of Dr. Forest's room, I felt a small, wet ball of paper hit the back of my neck. I heard giggling and turned around to see Matt taking the straw from his lips.

Abigail Williams
Northern Valley Regional High School,
Old Tappan, NJ



Jill Friedman
New York, NY

MEURSAULT HELPS FACTORY GIRLS LEAP TO THEIR DEATHS ON GREENE STREET, 1911

The building was fireproof – the fire spread on shirts like coffee, creeping from loom to loom, out from the center on the backs of newborn spiders along the threads that lined the floors and walls, chests and legs, swallowing months of work on 34/35s, black pinstripes, slate blue business shirts popular among office clerks and accountants, skirts grey, yellow, daisy blue, the saffron one Miss Cummings liked to wear on Sundays to bring out her eyes for the boys

playing stickball down by Washington Street in their brown slacks, dusty caramel paperboy vests, off-white shirts made on the seventh floor.

It began with a low rumble, swallowed at first by the engines

turning the conveyor belts, the snicker of the shuttles, then hit our floor like grease on a hot-pan, popping the sap from our skin. Lily the Parisian girl

ran from the washroom with her violet skirt undone, Daphne (arrived last week from Jackson

looking for work) tore off the quilted carmine her mother made, patched after trysts

in the orchard, and escaped with black and purple skin on her calves. Some girls ran off

to scream in the elevator, others chose the stairs – the rest of us retreated to the room with windows.

The looms and belts kept raging in the flames. When the fire

had devoured all their fabric and moved over them towards us

we could still hear them growl, tireless in the red-yellow, austere and invisible, blind from pride, howling their rebel-yell,

rumbling tin drums, a hum that once blended in with the whistles of coffee kettles for the workers on break and the radios spitting static, grew louder in the flames to a cry of defiance. Three rooms over, opening the

window, we felt the air gasp when the machines fell through the floor.

I climbed up on the sill – their eyes turned up to me, a small sea of sweat and red, hopeful wet eyeballs – I helped the first one (Julia, I think it was) up onto my ledge

and we peered over the edge: people as Christmas toys, small fire engines, bright like maraschino cherries, the sun settling down behind the buildings, signaling an end to the work day – she began to sob. I kissed her on her forehead. She asked me to push her and I did: her body fell through the glass awning below. Carla followed her, then Prudence (was she the pretty one

I slept with after the cabaret last week?) then all the others. The fire crept, spitting, into our room while more toy men in fire suits arrived with nets that they couldn't position over the pile of bloody mannequins collecting in a mound under the awning. The last girl fell – the room was too hot for me to face it – I jumped into my throne of women, gasped, and smoked in the hard arms of a cotton stretcher before I died.

Days later, the building stands tall and empty of linen, flax, cotton, cashmere, satin, and wool – they scrubbed it

clean of bones and soot, and it stands alive and tall with a gentle indifference to the world. In the streets the cars roll in and out of town, the boys play stickball and tear their shirts to bits in fistfights, spilling coffee on themselves at diners, smoking cigarettes, stripping down for ghostlike working girls who only come out at night.

David William Gorin
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

GREEN

There are moments where
I pull out pieces of string
For you to make a kite,
But when I come back to your
Farm house the next Sunday you

Have tied them to
all the sycamores in your
backyard.

They remind you,
You say,

Of my hair,
And what am I supposed to say

When you start to
Unravel me, there on

The grass?

I cannot help it if

Every string you pull off
Makes me feel more and more

Green. Green because
You're pulling off my red

And blue and purple and orange.
Green because you don't

Ever paint over your farmhouse,
You just paint over the grass.

Green because I'm going to be
Marvelously sick,

This is how little kids on the
Playground really talk to each other,

They make each other
Marvelously sick.

Green because
You swing me up

High in the air,
Above a stadium filled

With the leaves of
Marigolds and chrysanthemums

And of course your sycamores.
And when I come down

You have tied a little
Inch worm to

A silk thread and
Tied it around your neck.

As the green inch worm
Paints sun

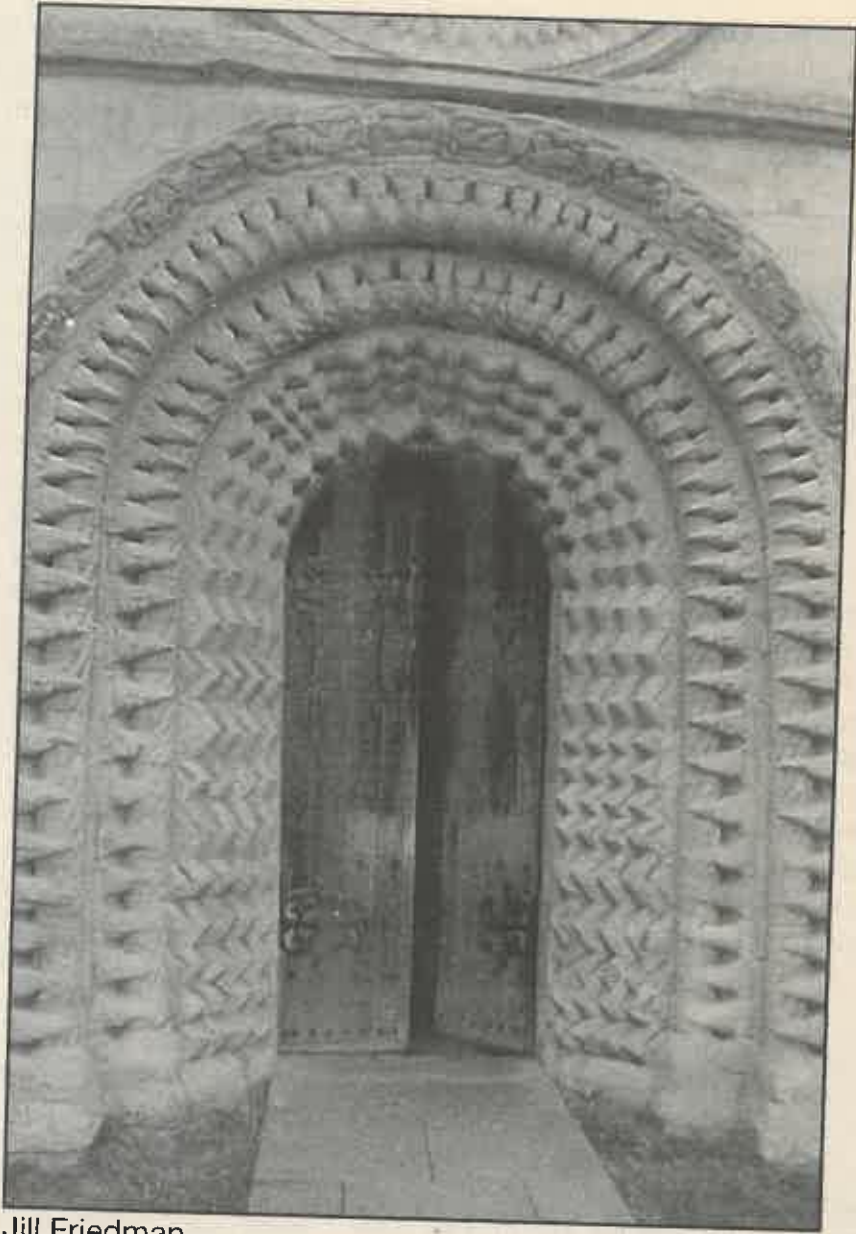
Across your neck
I take my green, once more

Fill my hand with sweet green
And slowly

Reach out
For you.

Neveen Mourad
64 South St.
Roslyn, NY
Mr. Lippman

DRIVE-IN



Jill Friedman
New York, NY

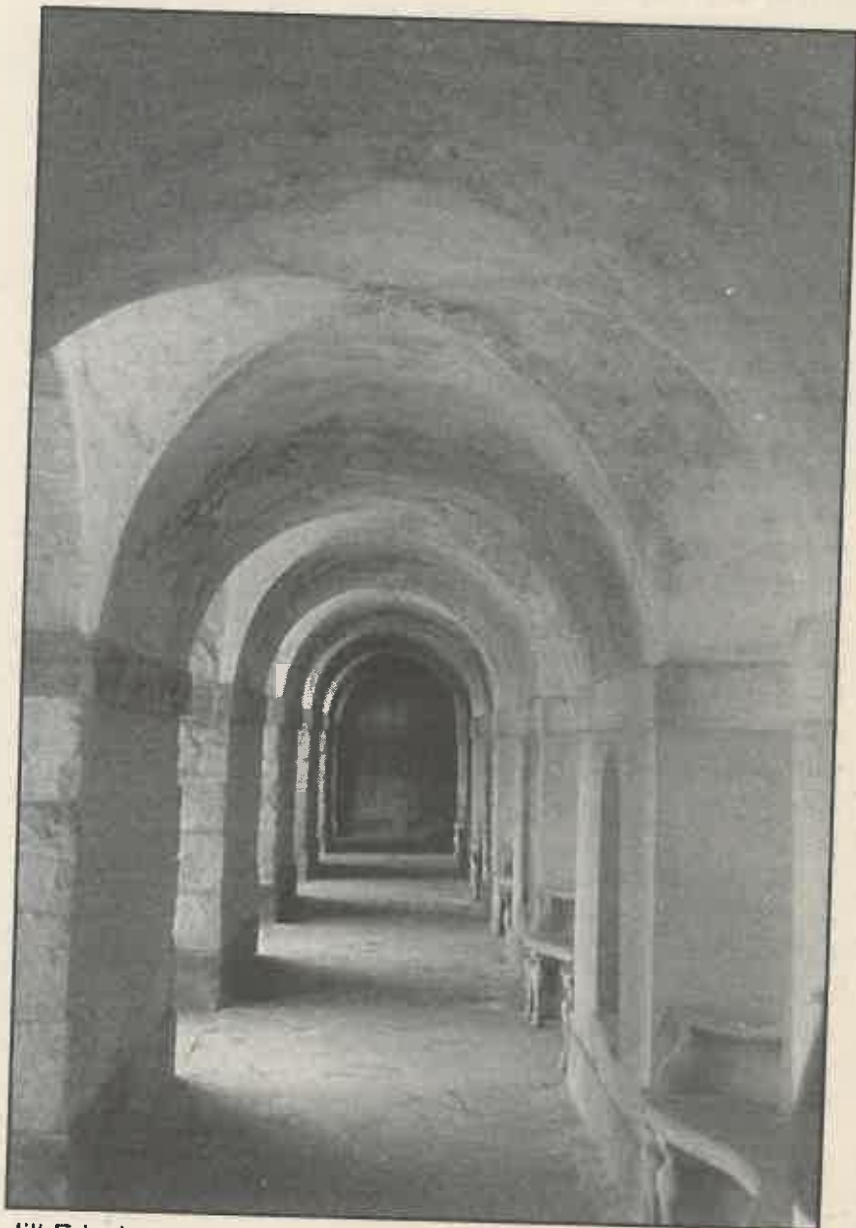
It's double feature night,
When boys seep out of trunks
Like the circus,
Kids rustle into fathers' laps
Yawning already in PJs.

There's a boy fifth row back
Who's picturing himself chatting up
All three of Charlie's Angels.
The girl beside him is thinking
How his hands were on her
Just two minutes ago,
And how the colors now are
Playing off his cheeks.

There are five boys
On the hood of a green Chevy,
Making noises – just softer than the
Screen – at girls who are
Walking down each aisle,
Collecting whistles.

They are connoisseurs
Of the blue glow,
Where popcorn is thrown like confetti,
Where the moon is veiled by movement,
Where boys and girls fix their faces
In a trance coupled with love.

Katherine Cummings
Milton Academy
Milton, MA



Jill Friedman
New York, NY

sums

two feet and two hands
and three cigarettes in the dish.
and the two eyes that
stare down the three dead birches
in the one back yard.
and you say too much
one time –
it will not work
the race between the two
moons of mars –
deimos and phobos.
and you wish we had
two horses to ride back
in the seventy acre woods,
back where the pine needles
and type six moss
coat the ground.
and five fingertips like
chips of ice – it's you
on the two and a half foot
ax handle
chopping the dead birches
up for the fire –
the ones you light with
one, two, three strikes of a match.
two wrists and two calves
and one blink,
and it's done.

Claire Cheney
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

K-MART

Down the aisle walked this scrawny guy in his crinkly K-mart uniform. The light reflecting off his shiny *Manager* badge must have blinded all the employees surrounding me because they all looked down to the floor. He stopped in front of the little circle of dutiful worker ants, and the one closest to him, the only one who could scamper fast enough to catch me, handed him the stuff I had attempted to steal. He shuffled the things between both hands for a little bit. While he was distracted by my cigarettes, hair clips, and tampons, I looked him over. He was about 5'3", middle-aged, probably weighed 127 pounds, and had dyed brown hair styled with mousse as if it were still 1986, and the arms of a high school chemistry teacher. When he got to the tampon box, he quickly rearranged the items so it was conveniently on the bottom of the pile again. He lifted only his eyes and said,

"Come with me, young lady." Then he released the uneasy workers back to man the anthill.

I followed him into the inner depths of the store, down through tunnels of offices that contained service industry horses, whose backs sloped to the wind of their boss's breath and the occasional holiday rush or, most frequently, an irate customer. Each one was on the phone finagling a supplier with their eyes passing over me as they looked up at the clock, counting the seconds until they got to run to their family sedans and rush home, and wondering why an obviously school-aged girl was in the belly of K-mart at 1:30 in the afternoon.

"Through here please," said the manager in a flat voice as he stared at the floor and waved me into his scummy office. There was nothing to cover the lime green paint except a "Thank you" card Scotch-taped to the wall from Boy Scout Troop 185. His desk was almost bare save a few pencils and cheap Bic pens in an old mug and a dingy nameplate. The nameplate was made of darkly stained wood that matched the 70s décor in my dad's trailer in Potomac, Virginia. The shiny brass looking metal part where his name was engraved was no longer shiny, and a few scratches distorted some of the letters. I could still make it out, "Joseph Milworm, Manager." That name rang a bell in my head, but I didn't know why. I thought it over as I counted the buttons on his shirt and bit the dead skin off my lower lip. Realizing I should have also stolen Blistex, I started at the top of his shirt, decided I should count the little buttons that hold the pointy edges of the collar down, and came to a grand total of seven. I figured there might be eight in all, the last one was probably tucked into his pants. I couldn't be sure, but I like even numbers better, they make me feel more comfortable, so I settled on nice, round eight.

"Okay, now..." he said with his voice trailing off. He looked up from his paper and scooped forward in his chair so I couldn't see all of his buttons anymore. Something in the way his shoulders and head moved in his lurching thrust made me know why his name was so familiar. His nephew had given his virginity to me. Adam Kotter was his name, we had gone to elementary school together, and I knew his whole clan pretty well because they lived in the same part of town as I did. Adam's uncle had come to summer picnics in my teensy backyard. I had definitely seen him before, but I was sure he didn't remember me from then, what with the hot summer night and a few drinks in him.

"This paper I'm filling out is a police report," he said as I sat in the chair across from him thumping my fingers in a sequence against the arm rest. "I can give it to my buddy from the police department who always comes

down to help me out with stuff like this. But I can also call your parents and tell them their daughter has stolen..."

"I didn't steal anything! I didn't make it out of the store with that stuff, I only had it in my jacket," I said back.

"Alright, then you can deny all of what this paper and its several carbon copies say and go before a judge," he said as he got up and walked around to the front of the desk waving the paper and lifted his right leg up to do a little lean with one cheek sitting on the desk. "And you can tell the judge how hiding," he answered as he looked down at his paper, "a pack of Newport Slims, blue butterfly hair clips made by Sally's Beauty Supplies, and one box of Tampax Slimfits," here he lifted his eyes to me, "in your jacket is not shoplifting."

"Man," I groaned as I leaned my head back against the middle rim of the chair I sat in and clasped one hand by the fingers with the other and laid them, palms up, over my eyes. "I'm just a little tight for money right now and..."

"Tight for something," he said, and I pictured him glancing down at the tampons then shifting his gaze to my thighs and moving up. My flight-or-fight instinct kicked into gear. My head shot up. When I looked at him I saw no emotion at all, no suggestive stare or any other telltale signs that gross, yet always attractive, perpetrators have in made-for-TV movies. He said flatly, "No matter what it is, it's still no excuse for shoplifting." My blood slowed, my muscles relaxed a bit, and I released my hold on the air in my lungs.

"Hey, Joe," said an employee from the doorway. He was standing with two hunched over ladies. They were decked out in polyester bellbottoms and matching shirts with wide elastic waistbands at the bottom. I could tell they were in their seventies because it seems that when people hit the end of their middle-aged years they tend to stop buying clothes.

"Hold on a minute. I'm in the middle of something."

"These were on sale in your catalog and not in your store. We want our money back," protested the blue haired one standing further inside the room. Her Ben-Gay smell was starting to drift in.

"One moment, please, ma'am. I'll be with you shortly," the manager said as he waved them out. The employee got the hint and closed the door with the feisty one protesting all the way. "Now, let me settle with you. I can tell you're a little edgy and, since you got caught by the people making minimum wage at K-mart, you have to be new at this." I looked sideways and made this little noise that must be a scoff. He continued, "So, from now on don't come here for a while and knock off all of this rebellious crap. Stealing from cheap department stores won't look so great when you're 43 and going on your 13th year as the manager of one." He leaped up from his desk with a smile and said, "Just stop out there in the first office to your right and tell the lady inside, Glenda, the number where I can reach your parents in case you feel the need to repeat this little incident. Now be good," and with that he walked to the door, opened it, and called to the ladies outside.

"Now, ma'am, tell me again what it is you're concerned about," he said. I sat there and stared at my reflection, warped by the scratches, in the nameplate. I was a little confused, yet had the feeling you get when you've watched *Usual Suspects* for the first time. I pushed myself up with my arms and could still hear the chatter in the hallway.

"And how much difference would that be," he asked.

"56 cents," answered the one old lady. I looked

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down at the nameplate again, and this time the angle I had gave me a perfect reflection. I glanced over my shoulder, saw that only the old ladies, herded around the manager, faced me and they were probably half-blind anyway, and I opened my jacket and stuck the nameplate in the inside pocket. I zipped it up, patted it down to make sure there wasn't an odd bulge, and left the room by squeezing past the manager and imagining him in the same 80s-style clothes when he was seventy. I stopped at the first office on the right and gave Glenda the number for a store at the mall where my best friend worked. She wrote quickly, shoved the paper on top of a pile of notes, and I walked back out the hall toward the fluorescent light.

Jennifer Hawbaker
911 Warm Spring Rd.
Chambersburg, PA
Anne Branham

MINIATURES

Drifting over the border
at thirty miles per hour,
the odometer reaches 200,000,
the fatal clicking of five zeros
declaring our silver bullet
wasted, a trade in for one hundred
dollars and a lease on an SUV.
But with Janis' smoke thick
in our ears we take no notice
and slither into Oregon
crusted with two days
of dirt and the smell of leather
molded to our thighs.

Easing into moisture
we adjust our eyes to the dark,
squint and blink with the puffy-eyed
peace of morning, smooth sleeping
bag bed-head behind our ears
and follow flashlights through
the Eugene caves.

"Don't touch" is our only instruction,
the oil in our skin
enough to mutate multi-millenniums
of crystal formations, fingers
printed indelibly on the wall.
The stalactites hang statuesque,
draped from the ceiling
like sleeping bats,
the muted green of jade,
reminiscent of melting ice cream cones;
smooth at the top, dripping down,
congealing in cellulitic layers,
sloping once more into rounded tips,
monstrosities hovering inches
above the floor.

Dipping our ankles into puddles
we peel ourselves of leaves,
still itching with the invisible
presence of microscopic wood-mites,
our skin scratched raw, follicles
falling to the ground leaving
the shiny burn of youth,
the last licks of light
refracting on our shoulders.

Afternoon seeps seamlessly into dusk,
and we climb into the car,
our bellies humming with heat
the constant comfort of chicken broth,
and our jaws slack in awe of our size,
a tinker toy car, teetering down plastic
highways, splitting the fog
to watch the sun sink, ignite
the sky, and light the land like a match.

BELL-ATLANTIC

your eyes are infants floating
in phone booths
open in your smile
closed
and translucent like your
eyes are cupids
floating in a red sea
because the world is
big
and I can't find you
when I need you
anywhere
we've spiraled out of no-
where
into nowhere out of love
enclosed - we should have talked
remember how I
watched
the glass spider web: disintegrate
Before me
And infants spilled out
To fall to the
pavement
A steel skeleton remains in sand -
you're crying in the drive-
way
a parting glance in the streetlight;
my back to you
and the phone
swinging
pen-
dulum-like
howling a dial tone -
the
only
note
sustain
ed in
the twilight air.

Jason Chura
Columbia High School
Troy, NY
Mr. Tom Thornton

Jennifer Taylor
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

I take a deep breath and wait. The play is on. The audience is watching. My part is coming. I press my ear against the large, gray door to hear and understand better what the actors on stage are saying. Then again, it isn't really a *stage*. And we aren't really *actors*. This is a summer drama class. I love to act, so this summer, the summer of '95, I've decided to attend a drama workshop. It's just a small class that meets weekly in one of the basement rooms in McCarter Theater. Six weeks, that's all. Six weeks of meeting, playing games, acting, and rehearsing to put on a play. Now it's Saturday of the sixth week, the actual performance of the play in front of the parents, family, and friends of those who attend the class. All those days of practicing – leading to *now*, the big show. Pamela is our instructor (we call her Pam; none of us know her last name), and she's written up a script for us to act out – a simple murder mystery. Some rich snob named Charles Barney is always picking on and beating his many maids and mistresses and calling them "bloody idiots" and always saying "What the devil do you think you're doing? I said no milk in my tea, you useless, ill-bred pieces of refuse!" (Yes, he's supposed to be British). All in all, Barney is a very obnoxious and quite forceful person, stubborn, selfish, and cruel. Finally, while he's reading his book one night, alone in his bedroom chamber, the lights go out and there's a scream, and when the lights come back on, there he is lying with a rope around his neck. Whodunit? Later some detective comes and some other guys visit the place. The detective, another rather snobbish character in the play, interrogates anybody she feels like and tries to find a solution to the Case of the Mystery of the Murder of Mr. Barney. Or rather she *pretends* to do so. Eventually it turns out she's the murderer, and a long time ago she used to be Barney's butler and, as would be expected, he was cruel and savage towards her, and she fled his house, later to return for sweet revenge. All this is made clear in a short flashback at the end of the play. It is a particularly good script Pam has typed up, well-written and with an interesting yet purposely corny plot – the Case of the Mystery of the Murder of Mr. Barney. I take another deep breath. My part is coming.

I'm standing in the hallway, ready to turn the knob and open the door in front of me, walk into the so-called "theater room" and say my lines. There are a few people behind me, more actors yet to go on stage. Samuel, a short kid with pale skin and brown, matted hair, taps me on the shoulder.

"What?" I say, slightly irritated, as I turn around to face him.

"I lost a page," he says, pointing to the crumpled script in his hand. Then he points to the crumpled script in *my* hand. "Could I borrow your copy of that page?"

"What page is it?"

"It's like – like..." Samuel repeats this word several times while trying to figure out what page number that page he lost is by looking at the pages he does have in his hands and finding the missing number. He finds the answer he's looking for. "Page nineteen."

"Uh... let me see – page nineteen?"

"Yeah. Do you need it or anything?"

"No, none of my lines are on there."

"Good, then can I use it?"

"You need it?"

"Yeah."

"Fine, here." I hand him the crumpled page nineteen he wants.

"Wow, thanks."

"No problem." I then press my ear against the door again and listen. Not a sound. I listen closely, carefully. No one's speaking. No one's saying anything. What are they waiting for? Me! They must've already finished their lines while I wasn't listening. *Great!*

I quickly open the door and burst into the room. In front of me are many chairs, all filled with people. They're looking at me. On the other end of the room is the so-called "stage," just an open space really with some props set up there. Dina and Janice, the two weeping maids, and Tom, playing the infamous Mr. Barney, are there. They're all looking at me. What have I done? I make my way past the audience and to the stage. There I say my lines, reading from my script. I know it's cheap to read from the script during the actual performance of a play, but we're all reading from our scripts and it's easier that way. Besides, it wasn't until the fourth day of class that Pam actually typed up and handed us copies. Two days was not nearly enough time to memorize our lines. This is a complicated story – *sort of complicated*. And, reading directly from our scripts wipes out the chance of any mistakes occurring. Or so I think. Anyway, I'm Richard Brown, Barney's valet. I hate Barney just as much as everyone else does, but at least I'm not nearly as emotional as his two maids are. They're both in tears now, after he called them "bloody idiots" and said, "What the devil do you think you're doing? I said no milk in my tea, you useless, ill-bred pieces of refuse!" and threw the plastic tea cups across the room. If I were them I'd put a noose around his neck and send him flying off the Golden Gate Bridge. That's what the audience is supposed to think as well. It's all part of the illusion of murder mysteries.

I squint my eyes. There's a lot of light shining directly on me, the audience left in semi-darkness. The props I see around me add a realistic touch to the play. The coffee table and chairs, the paintings on the wall, the wooden dressers and wardrobe and the large, green changing curtains towering above us all – it's all well-done, the first time I've ever seen it completely set up this way. Also, the costumes I see the actors wearing are very authentic and look good on stage. Dina and Janice are both wearing plain white dresses with aprons, maid-style, and Tom is dressed up in a suit and tie. I'm wearing a suit and tie as well, which I hope makes me look like his valet. Valets, butlers, chauffeurs, house-servants, man-servants – they all dress the same. I guess I'm made to look like a probable culprit, because I'm the valet, kind of like the butler, don't ask me what the difference is, and the butler is always the murderer. But I'm actually *not* the murderer, the detective is of all people. Oh yeah right, the detective used to be Barney's butler. So I guess it *does* all tie together like the typical "thebutlerdunit" whodunit. Anyway, I'm on, reading my script, saying my lines. It's hot here in this stuffy room with my shirt tucked in and my collar high and tight. Oh well, I'll live. I hope.

"My dear sir, Mr. Barney!" I exclaim. "Whatever are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing?" Barney roars. "I'm severely punishing these girls for disobeying my orders!"

I take a look at the weeping girls, Barney's two maids, tea spilled all over their dresses. Then I look back at the script.

"Would you like for me to get you your tea, sir?"

Barney stares at me for a minute, then back at the script.

"Even though that's not your job – yes, I most certainly would!"

"Yes, sir," I reply and hastily make my way to the other side of the room and through the green curtains.

I'm off-stage. No one can see me now. No one except Pam, the class instructor, who is also standing behind the curtain. The two of us are shadowed in greenish darkness, alone in a small section of the room.

"You were good," Pam says.

"Thanks," I mutter. "Man, this is great. All the props and lights and all. It's really well-done. Hard to believe that this was once that big, open, dusty basement room we would meet in for the class."

Pam smiles. She's tall with brown, frizzy hair pulled back in a ponytail, and she's presently wearing a long crimson dress and a blouse. As she smiles, the wrinkles on her face show, and in her low, thirty-five-year-old voice, she says, "Well, thank you very much."

I turn and peer through the opening in the curtain. I'm supposed to come back out soon. I'll be ready when that time comes. I can now feel beads of sweat trickle down my forehead. I'm hot and I'm getting hotter. This damn tie - it's so tight. Oh well, I'll live. I hope.

I can hear Tom yelling off his script, "Bloody idiots! Cannot anybody do anything right in this god-forsaken place?!" He's a good actor. He makes a good snobbish British capitalist. He should make a career out of it.

"Bloody, bloody idiots! By Jove, get out of this room! Get, get!" That's my cue. As the two maids rush off the stage, that's when I come back on. I grab the small plastic teacup on the small wooden table beside me. Then I walk through the green curtains and up to Charles Barney. Behind me I can hear Pam say, "Good luck," which makes me even more nervous. And then it happens. Disaster! Right when I'm about to say my lines I drop my script, and all the papers are scattered across the floor. *Oh shoot!*

Desperate, I try to remember my lines. "Uh, here's your tea, sir."

"Took you long enough," is Barney's reply as he snatches the teacup from my trembling hand. Oh no, I've forgotten my next line. Just improvise, improvise. Later, I can gather all the pages on the floor and sort them out. Improvise for now, just improvise.

"Uh... would you like anything else with that, sir?"

Tom looks at his script, and a puzzled expression crosses his chubby face. Obviously that wasn't what I was supposed to say. I can hear giggling and chuckling in the audience. I can hear some muttering. It doesn't matter, get over it. It's just a little mistake, that's all. A correctable mistake.

Tom slowly reads his lines out loud. "No, I do not feel like comforting the maids. If they can't do their job, then that's their blasted problem!"

"Oh really?"

"Yes." He holds the cup to his lips, then exclaims, "What?! What's this?! No sugar?! No sugar in my tea?! What's tea without sugar, uh?"

"Uh, I don't know, sir."

"Go back and put some sugar in this, you blasted animal! A lot of sugar!"

"Uh, yes, sir," I say and hastily grab the teacup and dash behind the curtains, leaving the dismembered script on the floor behind me.

Once in that small, dark, closed-off section of the room, I kneel down on the floor and breathe heavily. I wipe the sweat from my forehead and look up to see Pam standing there by one of the tall, wooden poles that hold the curtains up.

"What do I do now?" I ask.

"Yeah, this is a problem, isn't it?" Pam says. "Maybe I can get you another copy."

"I hope so."

"Do you remember any of your lines?"

"Well, yeah. I mean I know what kind of stuff to say, but I don't really know the exact words."

Pam sighs. This is a problem. "I'll tell you what you can do. When do you next come on?"

"Not until after Barney is murdered."

"All right then. In the scene when Barney is talking with Sutton, you know, the friend that's visiting his place, then you go on and say something like, "What a horrible mess this is!" and start gathering your papers together. Make sure you don't interrupt their conversation too sharply, though. Then, as soon as you've got all the papers, come back here, and I'll help you organize it and put it together."

"Maybe you should staple it or something."

"Yeah I will. And then you'll be all set."

"Yeah."

Pam smiles and I smile back. She says, "Is that good for you?" and I say, "Oh yeah, it's a great idea."

"Thanks."

I then turn and peer through the curtains. I listen and wait. Samuel comes on, playing James Sutton, one of Barney's few friends. They talk with each other a while, and I listen and wait for a good point to go back on stage and retrieve my script. I'm growing nervous with all the anticipation. More beads of sweat trickle down my forehead. *Damn heat.*

"And how are you this morning, James?"

"Oh jolly good, as usual, Charles. And you, ol' chap?"

"Oh, fine, fine, except for a minor incident with my maids."

"Maids?"

"Yes, Joanna and Sally. I tell you, they're both imbeciles. I shouldn't even be wasting my precious money on the likes of those two ruffians. It seems they can't get anything straight these days. And my valet is no better. Where's my tea, Jones?! I demand my tea!"

That's the point I've been waiting for. The perfect moment for me to take the spot. Without hesitation, I grasp hold of another teacup on another wooden table behind the curtains and bolt through the green sheets of cloth. I'm on. And I'm ready.

Tom and Samuel look puzzled. They didn't know this was going to happen. How could they?

"I have your tea, sir."

Tom becomes even more puzzled. "Uh, okay. Thank you Jones." He takes the cup and pretends to take a sip from it. "Thank you."

"You're most very welcome, sir." I then kneel down and begin gathering together the scattered parts of the script. Tom and Samuel soon realize what this is all about and resume their conversation. Everything's back on track, going smoothly. In no time at all I have the entire script with me, though not in order, and I slip back through the curtains and hand Pam the papers.

"Good," she says. "Nice and quick. Now let me staple these together."

"No, wait. They're not in order."

"Oh, well, take care of that first."

"I will."

Organizing the script winds up taking quite a long time. It's a long script, and the words are typed in size-14 font, double-spaced, so it takes up more sheets of paper. When I'm finally finished, I hand it to Pam, who staples it

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together. The sound of the stapler firmly lodging that staple through all those pages, fastening them tight and secure, fills my heart with hope and satisfaction. Now that problem is solved, done with. I can forget about it.

"Here you go." Pam hands me the script. "Now everything's back to normal."

"I hope so." *I know so.*

Barney's murder goes smoothly. He sits down, opens his book, lights go out, scream is heard, lights go back on, Barney's there lying on the floor, a rope around his neck. Finally that money hog is dead. I come on, fastened script in hand, and cry "Dearest me! Barney's dead!" That turns everyone on, and Sutton, the two maids, and I all rush to the scene of the crime, eyes wide open in terror. In reality, we'd all probably have a party and dance and sing "Joy to the World, Barney is dead!" but this is play, and not a particularly realistic one, so instead we all huddle about the dispatched body, the maids scream, and we're all shocked, horrified, and confused. More and more actors pour on to the stage: mistresses, servants, friends, and yes, eventually the detective herself, played by Julianne, a tall slender girl who is presently wearing a trench coat, which I guess is supposed to make her look like a Private Eye, and does, to a certain extent.

I'm not needed on stage while the detective is busy interrogating people and asking, "Where were you on the night of the murder?" - "I was in my room." - "Where is that?" - "Upstairs, near the bathroom." - "Upstairs where?" - "In this house." - "Which house?" - and so on and so forth, so I slip behind the curtains and take a rest. Samuel is there, too, and so is, of course, Pam.

We chit-chat for a while, making sure our voices are at a minimum decibel level. Soon Samuel has to go back on stage, but I don't, so I can stay here in the shadow and relax. The end of the play is nearing. All's well that ends well.

And then it happens, one of the craziest moments in my life. I'm relaxing, so I decide to lean against one of the curtain poles. That's a mistake - a big one. I'm leaning there, enjoying myself and then I feel the pole move a little, and I feel myself lose my balance. I'm falling, oh my God, I'm falling. And so are the curtains. With a sickening thud, the curtains crash to the stage floor and topple over a few unlucky actors that happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The fake coffee table falls, all the silverware upon it falls, the plastic kitchen table falls, and on top of all this I'm falling, falling, and I hit the ground when the curtains hit the ground, and Pam is there behind me cracking up and the audience is cracking up and I'm embarrassed as hell.

The play basically went haywire from there. I mean, we got the point through, the conclusion, the flashback, the solution to the mystery and all, but it's hard to rise above an incident like that. First of all, we had to put the curtains back in place and properly balance them so they didn't fall again. That was hard enough. Then there was the mess the curtains had left. The silverware had to be picked up, the tables had to be put back in their original positions, and the actors had to get over all the contagious laughing that was going around, on-stage and off. It was a good thing that by the time the curtains fell, the play was already almost finished. So all we really had left to do was the part where Sutton figures out that it's actually the detective who's the murderer, the flashback that follows that, and then the climax where the police come and the detective tries to get away but can't. Justice is done. Barney is dead, and his murderer is behind bars. There was much

applause from the audience. They obviously had had a great time watching us make all those mistakes. I was congratulated by my parents and a few of my friends who were there in the audience, and when I stepped outside and was greeted by the cool, fresh air and the gentle breeze, I looked back and knew that we had pulled it off. Even with all those errors and mishaps, we had managed to pull it off. For, as you now know, practice makes, no, not perfect, but good enough.

Damien Chazelle
128 Broadmead St.
Princeton, NJ
Merle Rose

UNTITLED

The town sleeps, and it sleeps so still
The gas station man sits waiting to pump gas.
The "junk drawer" store is waiting for its first customer of the day
An old couple walks hand in hand
The gas station man sits waiting to pump gas.
No cars have passed through in quite some time
The old couple walks hand in hand
While sweeping his doorstep the camera shop owner waves to them
No cars have passed through in quite some time
A blanket of dust covers the street
While sweeping his doorstep the camera shop owner waves at an old couple
Two young boys on bikes ride past him
The "junk drawer" store is waiting for its first customer of the day
A blanket of dust covers the street
Two young boys on bikes ride past
The town sleeps, and it sleeps so still

Allison Hoffman
71 Autumn Ridge Rd.
Pound Ridge, NY

WALKING HOME

Jeans two sizes too big and the perfect t-shirt my mother says is worn out
Bookbag slung low, wind-battered hair
Absorbed for fleeting moments into the pulsing red cores of
Hondas and Chryslers
Pointed at through fishbowl walls
Tissue paper-cheeked ladies with sandstone half-smiles
Breathless minivan mascara mothers stretch like chinese dragons toward the next light
The women never look.
But the men crane their necks with myriad interests
Some crusty rough-skinned truckers with hot coal eyes
Bashful cloud-white anybodies peer over the curious crooks of their elbows
Wistful grey-faced gentlemen turn from their autumn rose wives and watch me fade into a whirl of crimson leaves
That dance and soar and collide
And whisper down to clothe the naked pavement until the next car sings by.

Sarah Cornwell
115 Wynnedale Rd.
Narberth, PA
Mr. Fisk

NOTHING BUT GENUINE

It was 8:56 p.m., and Mira still hadn't walked by the window.

Joe Morley's feet were falling asleep in his heavy army boots, but he gritted his teeth and kept painfully still. The boots would make noise if he so much as twitched. He was undetectable, a still form perched on a pile of still forms under a dim, high window. The only noise in the basement was the ticking of some ancient, rusty meter buried away in the shadows. His eyes ached, so Joe focused them on the imperfections in the glass right in front of him and then switched to the alley outside. Back and forth, glass to alley, glass to alley. *Where is she?* he thought. *She's always here by now.*

Each tick of the meter echoed like a snare. The basement was daring him to turn around. Daring him to stare into one of the murky shadows, to get lost. He could almost hear its voice hissing with the meter. Joe. Joe. Joe. There would be wolves in the shadows, salivating madly for him. Their eyes glinted dangerous green and their fangs glistened. One of them crept into the dim light, close to the ground, coiled steel with bloodstained lips. It lunged at Joe and the ticking silence exploded in his head like New Year's as the beast was upon him, as the crunch of bone filled the space...

Mira. There she was. She was wearing jeans and a bulky green winter jacket. Joe stared through the window furiously, drinking in her eyes, her hair, her gait. She ambled through the alleyway with her chocolate lab on its extendible leash, oblivious. She was glorious, ecstatic, sublime. Her dark hair was frizzled from the night's dampness, forming an airy halo around her face. And what a face. Joe sighed at her perfection. She had fresh cream skin and a crimson mouth that curved and danced involuntarily with her thoughts. Her eyes were richly green, her features formed so delicately that they might have been some craftsman's life's work instead of products of nature.

She stopped and glanced around as her dog sniffed at the pavement. Joe shrank from the window, the thudding of his heart drowning out the rhythm of the hidden meter. Had she seen him? No, she couldn't have. She was walking away. He pressed his face up against the glass to watch her disappear from his range of vision and then sprinted past the wolves, out of the basement, up the stairs, and slammed into his safe apartment.

The next morning, Mr. Stake's fourth period physics class was doing a lab. Joe watched as his lab group went to work getting equipment and setting up. It was composed of two girls and a boy, and as they stared vacantly through him, it occurred to Joe that they were like Tyrannosaurus Rex. As long as he didn't move, they couldn't see him. He took a deep breath and reached as slowly as he could for his bookbag. Suddenly, one of the beasts swung its reptilian head, pendulum-like, toward his face. It halted inches away. Joe sat completely still, his forehead prickling under the warm death air from the monster's wide, slick nostrils. Keeping his head and torso frozen, he felt in his bookbag for a weapon. The T-Rex looked through him for a moment more and then raised his great head to the ceiling to moan in a thousand discordant keys. Joe let his body relax into a shudder and tried to focus. Focus. Focus. He gripped his pencil like a dagger in case of further danger and settled down in his chair to watch Mira.

Today she was wearing a long gray skirt and a soft green sweater. Her long hair was tied in a loose knot at the nape of her neck. She was laughing uproariously at

something the boy standing next to her had said. Joe felt dark clouds as the boy leaned in to poke her side, shoulders angled toward her, usurping the right to be enveloped in her glow. She looked up, still flushed with laughter, and Joe choked as his gaze met hers. The corner of that expressive red mouth seemed to curve upward ever so slightly. He leaped into a pretense of work, eyes down, pencil racing... Did she know? She had to know. When he looked up, she was leaning over her binder with another girl, recording data.

The bell rang. Joe stuffed his binder in his bookbag as the kids funneled out the door. He was straggling. He always straggled.

"Joe. It is Joe, isn't it?"

What voice was that? So familiar, and yet the tenor and volume took on an alien ring when his name was spoken. But it sounded too much like the voice he heard in dreams, the voice he often heard coming from the lips of cashiers, pretzel vendors, cops. He turned to face her, bashful.

Mira smiled sweetly. Cloyingly, actually, but to Joe it was nothing but genuine. "Here's the thing. The bastard who had my textbook last year ripped out the entire section on force and I've been going crazy trying to borrow another one. Have you finished the problems?"

"Yeah," Joe ejaculated. He hadn't.

"So can I borrow your book?" Mira inclined her head and looked at him expectantly, confidently.

Joe looked at his hands, drawing a furious blank. She was tapping her pencil idly on the lab table, inches away from him. Inches away.

"Yeah. I'll bring it in tomorrow."

"No, it's cool." Mira slipped her pencil behind her ear. "I'll just stop by." And then she was gone into the hallway throng and Joe was left with a mirage of her features suspended in the empty air before him. "What the hell," he asked himself, gazing at her emerald eyes, "just happened?"

It took Mira three tries to back her Audi into the parking spot behind Joe's apartment building. The loud Nirvana from her stereo awoke a chorus of dogs before she could turn the key and get out. She hurried through the alley and glanced down at a basement window in passing. Empty.

In the foyer, she scanned the rows of black buttons for one with "Morley" printed above it. Ah. There it was. She pressed it and waited to be buzzed up.

Mira really did need the physics textbook, but she could have gotten it from someone else. The truth was, Joe fascinated her. The more she caught him staring at her with his eerie intensity, the more she maneuvered to be in his study hall, at his lunch period, near his building. It definitely wasn't an attraction, she mused. Joe was pale and a little heavy. He wore the same army boots every day, along with plain t-shirts and jeans. He had a reputation for saying strange things at strange times and giving vicious looks. It was more... She thought for a moment. More a sympathy, really.

Bzzzzzzzzzz. Mira opened the inner door and climbed the stairs to apartment 4D. The door was slightly ajar, so she pushed it open and stepped inside. For a moment she had a strange sensation; it was as if the silence in the apartment was of a different frequency from the silence in the hallway. She shook the feeling and destroyed both silences. "Joe?"

As a rustling in the next room announced movement, she took note of her surroundings. There were a few watercolors on the walls, still-lives and portraits. A

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sofa and a few hard chairs were arranged around a low glass table. In the middle of the table, a carefully arranged vase of sunflowers tried its hardest to brighten the room. *Looks like Joe has a mother*, she thought.

"Ahem." Mira started at the noise. She hadn't heard Joe come in. She tried to hide her smile as she noticed that he had changed clothes. *For me*, she thought.

"Here's my book." He held it out to her warily. She paused before taking it, watching his tense face, so like a squirrel debating whether or not to get out of the way of an approaching car. He dropped his arm and stood dumbly, staring. Mira felt the whole universe jump sideways to make her the center of every orbit. She relished the moment.

"Thanks. I'll get it back to you tomorrow." She regretfully broke free of him and walked into the hallway.

"Wait!" Joe called. She stopped. "I mean, take this. It's sort of cold." Joe reached into a plastic bag on the floor and pulled out a long, rose-colored scarf. Flushed, he quickly laid it in her hands and made as if to go back inside. Mira rejoiced; this was going so well. She hugged Joe impulsively. "That's so sweet! Thanks!" And then she ran down the stairs, leaving him frozen in the hallway with an expression of beatific composure spreading across his pale face.

In school the next day, Mira plunked her lunch tray down next to Joe's while he was up at the condiment bar. "Hey, Mira." Two girls joined her. "Mira, my friend. Do you have a buck?" A boy sat down. "I hate Spanish more than I can ever tell you guys." Two more boys. Mira laughed at their jokes nervously, keeping track of Joe's movements over their heads. He was walking toward them now, little cups of ketchup in both hands. *Does he see me?* wondered Mira. *Should I move to the empty end of the table?* But no, Joe was headed straight toward his tray, straight toward Mira. When he sat down, a moment's hush fell over the table and a few kids gave her confused looks. "Hey," she said, and the conversations started up again.

"Hey," said Joe. There was nothing of the tense-ness in him today. Today he was streamlined, focused on Mira. His voice sounded almost bold. "Did you finish the problems?"

"Yeah," she answered as she slid the textbook to him across the table. "Just in time. Oh, do you know everybody here? This is Mandy, Jimmy, Dave, Susan, and Luke. Guys, you know Joe."

Two of the boys looked up and smiled politely at him. A girl, Susan, waved and then motioned Mira aside. "Be right back," she told Joe. He smiled faintly and followed her with his eyes as she walked away.

"What's up?" Mira asked quietly, sliding into the seat across from Susan.

"I just wanted to find out... what's up with you and Joe? Is this a new side of Mira for us all to learn about?" Susan grinned and leaned in for the gossip.

"No. God no! No new side. Just look at him." Mira's voice rose. "Have you ever seen him sitting with people before? I mean, if you were a little bit different, wouldn't you want people to include you? I'm being *kind*."

Susan put her hands up. "Jeez. Don't attack me. That's just what it looked like."

"Sorry. Sorry. I'm just... I don't know what I am. Stressed out." Mira looked over at Joe, who was poking his soup with a plastic cafeteria spoon. His hair looked a little greasy and his lips were pale and chapped. "I'm doing him such a favor." She sounded feeble. Joe smiled shyly over at her, and she sank a little lower in her seat,

pretending to study the fake wood-grain tabletop.

"Mira," Susan said softly. "Don't fuck with people."

That day Mira gave Joe a ride home. She fingered the rose-colored scarf thoughtfully as he climbed into the passenger seat. "Here." She handed it to him.

"But I..." he began to protest. Mira started the engine wordlessly. They glided through suburbia in separate halves of the car, past the caravan of after-school buses, past the playground, past the library. Mira glanced over at Joe and was surprised to find him not looking at her. She found his eyes in the mirror instead but she couldn't meet them. Something in her blistered now in their regard like milk curdling at the top of the pan. Her hands were cold on the steering wheel.

She sighed as she pulled up to his building. "Look, Joe, do you like indie music?"

"No."

"Do you like tarot?"

"Not really."

"Do you like swing dancing?"

"No... I'm guessing you do."

"Yeah." There was a long pause. "I'll see you."

"Thanks for the ride." Joe clutched the scarf and tripped a little bit as he climbed out of the car. Mira watched him fade away into the alley and disappear around the corner. Her eyes welled up with unbidden tears as she drove away. She was going to miss that alley.

Sarah Cornwell
115 Wynnedale Rd.
Narberth, PA
Mr. Fisk

GRANDMOTHER

So the rain will beat down again over streets
once beset with fog
and the boiled rhubarb
from the barren soil they once ate
will be thrown to the cats
the meat and the butter will replace
the worry
bellies will be whole again, but lines will not wear
so well
suppurating fingertips uncover
gray strands

So the dying kin will cover the youth before bed
but iris will not find a match
over baby's skin, jaded eyes
her parched lips taste
the loss
tales you hear
crisp taffeta, short fringe
steam engines that roar with
a choke
she is old, worthless,
ignorant now
but her voice, though
a whisper
is richer than what's left
behind

Sarah Askoy
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Baltimore, MD
Ms. Yanson

SCRATCH OFF

Their heads were bent as if they were repentant sinners praying after an exhausting night of lawlessness. From where I sat by myself all I could see was their ruffled hair, uncombed and messy from a night of sleep. The drone of the rusty station wagon's heater, that only by the grace of God was working this morning, scarcely muffled the sound of the scratching of an old quarter on a piece of cardboard.

It was Sunday morning again and my mother pulled me out of bed. Her voice, the clear lovely sound of a toad with bronchitis, resounded in my ear in the soft, gentle tone characteristic of any woman suffering from a mild hangover. Then, while I pulled on a dress, combed my hair and washed my face, she went back to sleep. About an hour later, after I had put on my socks and shoes, eaten my breakfast and drunk a glass of orange juice, she and my father would finally make their way downstairs.

Sometimes, the heater worked in the car; most often it didn't. We kept an old, dirty brown afghan on the back seat, but because it smelled like gasoline, I didn't like to use it. It was difficult enough to climb out of a loud, clattering car and walk into a church all by myself, much less doing all of that smelling like gasoline.

By the time we reached the gas station and Dad stood outside pumping gas, I was usually already late. I would watch out the window as my unshaved father pumped the gas, chewing on tobacco and stamping his feet. Then I would resignedly turn to the clock, wishing that for just one morning, I wouldn't be late. Even as Dad pumped, Mom had thrown herself out of the car, hurrying into the mini store, bathrobe fluttering underneath the jacket, the denim jacket with Bill written on the left side, that she had gotten at a thrift store for a dollar. As she threw open the door and disappeared inside, the red letters on the back, CUSTODIAN, waved to me, grinning as I blushed.

By the time Mom had bought the scratch-off tickets and the large economy-size cup of coffee, the Styrofoam cup marked "Bucket" brimming with that black steaming liquid, Dad had pulled up closer to the mini store. As she climbed back inside, spilling the coffee, getting burnt and screaming a profanity, Dad was jumping out to run in and pay for the gas. It was a strange sort of ritual that was neither practical nor time saving but never changed week after week.

They couldn't leave the parking lot until the great scratching was finished. Triumphantly, Dad would pull out two pennies and, after crossing their fingers and offering a perverted sort of prayer, began to scratch.

As they scratched and I listened to that annoying sound that was like mice scurrying on tiny claws, we all began spending the money that we would win.

Mom wanted to be able to smoke all of the cigarettes that she could without worrying about money for groceries. Dad was looking at a new car, something fast and pretty with shiny red paint and sparkling hubcaps. At the moment, I wanted something warm and soft, something I could bury my face in. It would be something that would smell like the fresh cleanness of something store bought, instead of the worn, out of style jackets that stank of cats or stale cigarettes. It would be a coat without a past, without the life that I didn't know, a coat that's new life didn't begin on the rack of Goodwill. Then, maybe I could walk into church without wishing I were someone else who belonged to a different family.

It was always the same. I dodged two scratch off tickets that were tossed at me and they drove me to

church, promising to pick me up, even though Mrs. Bird always took me home. I watched as the car sputtered off, turning away only after Mom's cigarette butt flew out the window and the station wagon disappeared around the bend. Then, I slipped off my coat, left it by the tree and shivering in my clean, ironed dress, entered the church.

We never won.

Amanda Hitz
4076 Pine Tree Rd.
Jonestown, PA
Mrs. Valerie Grimes

YOUR OWN NOISE

The prince will always grow up in the end.
Weather will change
no matter what month it is.
A loud obnoxious friend
will become someone you despise
every so often.
Someday you will be that couple
under the tree,
kissing with meaning.
Traffic will never be pleasant.
Monday will feel like last Monday
if you do not change the sheets on your bed.
Family becomes a blur
when chairs at the dinner table
are empty.
The dance recital will end with noise
only if you make your own noise.

Nikki Jo DiGennaro
1 Sarah's Way
Broomall, PA
Mr. Thom Williams

PRELUDE

bare grass, hilltop, in Southern
Pennsylvania, just past the time
the sun has fallen, in September
just before the leaves are brown
just before a violent

storm, clouds hanging in the trees
rain-wall few short miles
across the darkening valley
sky above us navy-blue
tiny white clouds not pink;
there is no sunset

and wind sweeps here like a soft-
bristled brush, or a pillow dropped
beside a sleeping face, or her
breath on my eyelids as I sleep

I hold her from behind now
hair whipping at my temples,
the wind is strong, a timpani
roll, long and low and not foreboding,
but instead a prelude
to an overture,
the absolute beginning

Justin Goff
959 Country Club Dr.
Pittsburgh, PA
Mr. Dan Petrich

FIVE AMERICAN DOLLARS

My father awoke to the shrill whistle of the train as it slowly pulled to a stop. He quickly sat up and looked out the window. Snow, in tiny flakes fluttering down, covered the platform of the station. Tall wooden columns held up a makeshift tin roof that sloped down in the middle. Piles of debris lay scattered about, some with whole pieces of wall still intact. My father put his hand against the round glass window and felt the cold. He reached for his hat where he had hidden it underneath his seat. It was not there. He buttoned up his jacket. Small groups of men stood outside, dressed heavily in black, and waited, solemnly smoking cigarettes. He pressed his cheek against the window, straining to see far to the left, toward the city. He could not remember what it looked like.

He stepped off the train, screeching and clanking to a halt. The air was cold and fresh. He felt well rested and new. A mass of people pushed behind him, and he followed along until he found himself out of the station. The city was smaller than he had remembered. People covered from head to toe moved slowly along, walking up and down the streets, hunched over, their eyes to the ground. The group from the train slowly became indistinguishable from those on the street. A young man ran past him carrying a large package. Dust from the dirt street rose as the man slowly disappeared. Most of the stores had been nailed shut, their painted signs and posted advertisements peeling off dirty surfaces. The window front of an abandoned restaurant had been smashed in. He moved closer. Glass and gathering snow covered the smooth floor of the inside. The chairs had been taken for firewood.

My father reached into his pocket and pulled out a slip of wrinkled paper. He looked at the address, although he was certain he remembered where it was. A group of tall soldiers in green and brown spoke to a man bundled in a white blanket on the top of a wooden wagon. A thin brown cow leaned lazily against the side of its harness. Its large eyes were closed as the cold wind gently blew across its sunken body. My father froze and watched the soldiers carefully until they finished with the man and moved out of sight. He followed the familiar streets and walked past the old places. Finally, he reached the doorstep. He looked around. Hesitantly, he moved closer and knocked. The large door swung open. A skinny, short woman appeared. Her eyes widening, she stepped back behind the door. He stood very still.

"Tell your mother I cannot help her," she said abruptly. Her tiny mouth snapped shut after she spoke and curled inward. "The army only takes boys older than you anyhow." Her pale face looked as though it had been carved with a tiny knife.

My father stared at the floor. He felt ashamed.

She studied him. "We barely get by on our own," she said. Her voice was loud and piercing.

He felt his cheeks grow hot with embarrassment.

She did not move. Her eyes did not waver. He felt as if she were disgusted with him, with his very presence and with his mother for sending him. And he was about to turn around and run away when quickly, she grabbed him. She pulled him in and tugged off his jacket. She yanked off his shoes with sharp, jerky movements and slammed the front door.

"Where is your hat?" She spoke very quickly.

Silent, he looked her defiantly in the eyes. She slapped him across the face and dragged him into the kitchen. With surprising strength, she placed him in an old chair. Its wooden legs creaked as he fell back into it. He

looked around the one-room apartment from the alcove of the kitchen. A large bed lay in one corner. My father's aunt stood at the stove, holding a small blue bowl and banging a pot violently to loosen the rice. She spun around and slapped the blue bowl in front of him. He ate hungrily. She watched him a moment before getting up to pour him a cup of hot corn tea.

"There isn't anymore. Slow down," she ordered, sitting down beside him.

He drank his tea slowly, savoring the crisp, clean taste and feeling it warm his throat. He finished his bowl of rice greedily, holding it close to his face and feeling the steam on his cheeks. The sweet mouthfuls fell into his stomach.

She pulled her sweater tightly around her thin body. Her eyes tired. She put her delicate hand against her white neck and rubbed it carefully.

"You cannot stay. He will be home from the shipyard soon. You cannot stay," she said quietly. Her breathing became slow, and my father could see her chest rising and falling. She sat back against the torn cushion of her chair and leaned her head to one side. "I have nothing to give you," she whispered.

My father sat uncomfortably. He dropped his arms in between his knees and thought of his mother, waiting at home.

"Get dressed," she said suddenly. She got up and moved over to a set of drawers. "Now," she shouted at him still in the wooden chair. She covered her head with a gray scarf and put on a man's coat. She pulled something from the drawers and dropped it into her large pocket. My father scrambled to his shoes and jacket, afraid she might leave him.

They walked along the streets, huddled close. She put her arm around him and shielded him from the wind. It was growing dark outside, and he could not tell where she was taking him. The wind was dry and harsh. He closed his eyes to keep them from watering and put his face against her side as she led him along. Finally, they stopped.

"Wait here. Do not move," she said sternly. He opened his eyes. His aunt walked toward a café. It was the only thing open on the entire block, and its light seemed to illuminate the entire road. A large sign, with printed foreign letters, hung above its door. Music from within spilled out onto the empty streets. It was American, lively and fast, with a quick beat. Soldiers in ironed suits and pointy hats hovered outside the bar and jeered as the small figure of his aunt entered reproachfully. The sound of dishes clinking, women's voices and laughter echoed through the empty street. One officer's laugh could be heard above all. It was high and loud, and my father wondered what kind of man could have such a laugh. The distinct, exciting smell of whiskey lingered in the cold air. He squirmed around, pulling the sleeves of his jacket over his numb hands, trying to catch a glimpse of the men inside.

Suddenly then, his aunt reappeared. She stumbled across the unshoveled snow, avoiding the soldier's path. Behind her followed a tall woman. She wore a fitted red coat with a flowing skirt. On her head was a delicately placed hat, slightly tilted to one side. The woman stood tall and held a tiny purse. As they approached, he could see her face, white with deep red painted lips. He ran to his sister and threw himself into her arms. She laughed loudly and unafraid as he put his arms around her. She had a beautiful laugh.

"Hellooo," she crooned. It had been a long time.

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He put his cheek against her and pressed hard. It felt like silk.

"Tell your mother I have nothing I can give her," said my father's aunt as she watched them embrace. She stood stoically to the side, her hands in her pockets. Her eyes were blank.

"Don't worry. You don't owe anything to us," my father's sister replied without turning her head. "Just leave. I'll take care of him until it is safe to go home," she said coldly.

My father's aunt stood, caught in a trance.

"Come here Meung-ho," she whispered.

He looked at her, still clutching the sleeves of his sister's red coat, and reluctantly walked over to his aunt.

She knelt down in the snow.

"Tell your mother I am sorry. Tell her I am sorry." Her eyes focused on the lapel of his jacket. "Here." She put her small hand into her pocket and pulled out a brightly colored orange and placed it into his hand. An army truck drove rattling by. "I have to go." She kissed him on the cheek and stood up. She wrapped her coat tighter and looked over at her niece, standing with her back to them. My father ran back over to his sister and took her hand. His aunt turned slowly around and walked toward the other end of the street.

When their aunt was out of sight, my father's sister turned to him.

"Stupid old woman," she cursed. "We don't need anything from her. She doesn't know anything modern at all. Come on. I'll take you home." She looked at him. Her eyes were bright.

They walked toward the bar. My father's eyes widened as they got closer and closer to the soldiers conversing in English around the bar. She led him to the side of the café where there was a tiny staircase. She held on tightly to his hand. They climbed the stairs slowly, as she balanced on high heels. She smelled like sweet blossoms. They reached a hallway with many doors on either side, all with tiny signs posted on the outside in English. They stopped at the end of the hall and opened the last door.

It was a tiny room, with only an army cot and a wash stand. In the wall was a sliding compartment that held her things.

"This is it. This is where I live." She smiled at him with brightly colored lips. She turned on an electric light. Her eyes were big and comforting. My father felt safe.

"I've missed you so much. Mother said she hasn't from you for forever. We thought you had gotten married."

"No," she answered, setting her box purse down on the bed. "I didn't."

"What have you been doing? I thought I would never see you again."

She laughed her beautiful laugh. Her teeth gleamed white. "I have been working. Making good money. Five American dollars a day."

My father's jaw dropped in amazement. He smiled with pride. "Do you work downstairs, at that American café?"

She nodded as she looked into the mirror on the far wall. She delicately lifted off her tiny hat. Her black hair was pulled back in tight bun. Carefully, she smoothed her shiny hair with a little gloved hand.

"Auntie doesn't like it. She doesn't understand. She is so backward in her thinking. So un-American. Like a school-girl."

He laughed out loud. She faced him and laughed, too.

"I have money," she said. "You take it home. You

take it to Mother." My father beamed.

"I've missed you so much, Young-ja." She looked him in the eyes.

"I have to go now. I'll be back. I'm still working, you know." She stood up and put on her red coat. He watched as she refastened her hat with ease and skill. She opened the door. His sister looked at him sitting on the bed. Her eyes were alive and bright.

"You stay here, Yung-mun-ee. I'll be back soon. Go to bed. I'll see you in the morning."

He looked at her lingering in the doorway. She was so beautiful.

"Goodnight, Nuna."

"Goodnight."

She closed the door, and he listened to the clicking of her heels against the floor as she walked down the hall and down the stairs to the café. He lay down on his stomach on the brown blankets of the bed. He could still hear the sounds of the bar below. The smell of cigarettes and liquor traveled up to him and mingled with the sounds of a piano. He twisted around to find the orange his aunt had given him and placed it next to his face on the bed. He rolled it around with the tips of his fingers. The music grew louder, several voices singing out of sync. A glass shattered. Chairs scratched against the floor. A roar of laughter burst up from the floorboards. The piano played faster and faster. He tapped a beat against the top of the orange with his index finger. He wondered if the soldiers had their guns with them. He wondered if he might be able to touch one. The sound of another glass breaking made him jump up. He was going downstairs.

He crept slowly down the hallway and down the narrow staircase, a little reluctant and very excited. He had never been in a bar before. He would just peek in. It had begun to snow once again, and he slinked toward the windows of the café with the sound of snow crushing underneath his footsteps. He knelt down to look in the window, but could not. Tall officers lined the edges of the café, and their heads blocked his view. He wanted to see where the soldiers went. He put his hand up against the door and slowly creaked it open.

The room was dank and cloudy with smoke as he slipped inside. Servicemen, short, fat, tall and skinny, crowded the room. Their uniforms were loosened and stiff hats were scattered on the floor. He looked about. Four were playing cards at a far table. The piano was in the left corner. Officers gathered around it, leaning against each other for support. The smell of whiskey was almost noxious, and the air was a dingy yellow. The small crowd began another song, wavering on each note. He shrank down, frightened by their drunkenness. The soldier he had heard with the loud laugh bellowed out the strange tune, laughing himself out of breath. Just then, the crowd seemed to move back a little, and he could see there were women around the piano as well. He looked at them. They all wore their hair like his sister. Then he saw her. He saw her red coat, a crimson flower in a wheat field. Uncomfortably, she sang along. Her little painted mouth tried hard to keep up with foreign words. She folded her arms across her chest and stared at the floor. As the song came to an end, the soldier standing next to her grabbed her and pulled her close to him. He kissed her hard on the mouth, and she pushed roughly away, with tight fists. She rolled her head away from him, exposing her smooth white neck. Her hat slipped to one side. My father moved into the middle of the room. She saw him. Her white face dropped and her eyes became dull. The

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soldier with her turned around and looked at the small boy.

"Who is this, eh? Does the boy want to join the party?" The soldier paused and held my father's sister around the waist with a swollen hand. "Hey Bill, pour the kid a drink," the man joked. His fat stomach moved up and down as he spoke.

His sister loosened the soldier's heavy arm and walked to my father, who stood silently afraid.

"Go to bed. Go upstairs," she said quietly in Korean. Her eyes were lowered. My father turned and looked around at the faces.

He looked at her face and her smudged red lipstick. He spun around and ran out of the bar. Laughter echoed from the bar as he reached the hallway. Tears fell down his cold cheeks. My father ran into her small room and collapsed on the thin mattress. His orange rolled off the bed and hit the floor with a thump. The smell of liquor still lingered on his clothes. A cold draft blew through the room, and he pulled his jacket closer. The music below started up once again.

Christina Won
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, NH
Mr. Douglas Rogers

LET A YOUNG GIRL, YOUNG BLACK GIRL

Let a young black girl look up at
the stars, and see only
a nebula with dollops
of sesame seeds; let her squint and wriggle
her obstinate, serpentine way through the air's callus-
ridden, black fingers, its impermeable wall to
astronomy and imagination, let her
try and squint to see a spray of dirty white dots.
Let the cold of southern
Detroit leak into
the little girl's apartment, let the plague of freon
touch every one of her kin, behind
the bars of their cradles, to those peering
behind cell bars. Let
the nebula ask nicely for, borrow their
money and savings, as they all do, stealthily, so
a family of ten shares a toilet, two blankets,
a hope, and watches
with angry grins and homicidal thoughts,
the static of the white picket fences
through their Tube that taunts, the noble Tube that
laughs at the school of cockroaches
in each corner playing hopscotch.
Let the little girl savor her
piece of bread that evening, and every
evening, and her
mashed potatoes on Tuesdays; let
her be the kind who calls her shadow a
personal psychiatrist with a tape recorder
in hand that analyzes the fate, the veteran tears
that have traveled marathons, and visited the Alps
of her cheek bone.

Let her relish the simple things, the Barbie
doll with missing legs and tousled hair,
the fools gold,
the penny, the quarter, the oxygen that will
be sucked into the annihilating vacuum
any day now. Let the feeble needle of
the phonograph coo her to sleep in the

midst of warfare and machine guns
skipping every four seconds; the needle with
ripped tendons and cartilage, the feudal lord
amid a government of crutches in the
rotating disk, conducting their serfs playing
ragtime and some discordant Handel. Let
the disk spin interminably, in clarity or in
ramshackle hovels, in continuity or in intervals, until
father puts the conductor, the dictator in the
needle to sweet rest.

Let her go window shopping
aloft, and buy the biggest teddy
bear in mankind – let her awake still
with closed eyes and its paw against her
cheek; let her come down to cold oatmeal's reveille,
still smiling.

Let her lack the feel of a
black robe, a mortarboard on her
skin, let the nebula take every book
she could read from her, every
letter she could sound out away from
her, but let her instead feel the
flesh of twelve babies in her arms.
Let her nose
become numb to the scent of baby poo,
ammonia and floor cleaner, and marijuana,
leaving her without the piney smell of
books on a campus, or a
library, Manager Jim Crow. Let her eyes see only
as far as the corner store across the street.
Let that black woman dust and polish by day, and
join others in an annual home,
a heated home, an electrical home with
stuffing and turkey, dark and white meat;
and let her be kissed
when she leaves as stars come out and blink.
Alex Chertok
Clarkstown High School North
New City, NY
Mrs. Potter

**THE MECHANICS OF A MUSIC BOX;
CHICKEN WIRE AND WEIGHTS**

Jaime ate the cereal that morning
The blue-cereal that turned her teeth blue,
like the numbers on the microwave clock

She returned to lie beneath him,
and the ants above
marched single file
across the white, cracked plane

They rocked like an awkward seesaw,
missing a hinge
And she exhaled radio static words passionately
as her flesh was pulled apart,
and she was dissected
Revealed; her spine had bled away,
now soaked into her night gown

She'd make the bed before his folks came home,
and hold on to the episode
as long as he'd let her.

Victoria Joyce
3 Bell Ct.
Chester, NJ
Mrs. Susan Neville

SIXTEEN CANDLES

"Emerald green wool hats, Jack o'lanterns, brownstone school, September cider, Busch Gardens, amethyst..." Two years ago, when I attended a Sweet Sixteen celebration, my classmate read several phrases for each candle lighted, evoking memories she had shared with her friends. I could not understand those phrases, and envied my classmates, who were able to relive laughter and tears with just a few words. As I listened to her, I realized that I could not think of many phrases or memories. I wistfully wished that I could. Had I been poised over the cake, there would have been few candles lit.

I had always rejoiced in control. At physics camp, I planned my every waking minute to maintain my rigorous music practice regimen. Even seven hours of classes daily could not take time away from my piano. I shut myself away from my classmates and rehearsed in my mind, hearing etudes, scherzos, and concertos. Although I wanted to become a concert pianist and was in constant pursuit of this goal, I often peered out the mildewed curtains of my stuffy practice room. I saw friends painting each other's faces for the carnival, contorting their muscles in a game of Twister, and noisily gnashing at the barbecued ribs. But that could not matter. I had no time, I was in control.

This year, my control unraveled. I could not plan, define, or analyze emotions. Even the familiar bright yellow blankie that settled my anxiety before concerts hasn't been able to comfort my perpetual state of dizzying shock, confusion, and overwhelming bliss. As my every emotion heightened beyond anything I had experienced before, I lost my discipline. I have never been happier.

I have had the most wonderful and laughter-filled, yet humbling, year. Through a chamber music program, I met Peter, a cellist. It still surprises me how much intimacy and inspiration music allows, much more so than words.

When we first met, I saw ulterior motives in his every action only so that I could protect myself from feeling, and from loving, because I could not bear to lose again. Over the past half year, he urged me to give worth to myself, as others have already. He confided in me, and told me of his own darkest season, when his absent soul sank hurt and confused as four hundred pills coursed through his being. I pressed his hand, as if afraid to break its flesh. I flinched for him; I flinched with him. He laid his head against my shoulder, and lingered there. No one had given me the honor of trust, for no one knew my voice or thought. I did not know what to say, but I cradled him, hoping to give myself though I never had before, hoping I was worthy of his trust. I whispered not words but music into his ears, for that is how we had always communicated.

I have long stopped doubting him.

I once love only music and feared all else. I trembled at possibility. I smiled through my physics formulas and spoke confidently at presentations, but I was a blind and a mute. And this weakness he saw on display, and my ingrained pride he took with soft caress. I now laugh freely. I do not agonize over how strangers will perceive me. No longer do I rethink and reconsider the consequences of my slightest motion.

Although I spent long hours at my piano bench last year, I could not find music through rote practice. I had become too wary, too careful. A great artist like Martha Argerich does not depend on discipline or note-precision. I could not either. Music is only as passionate as its performer, and black notes cannot be choreographed into a

performance for the audience. I could not play a Chopin ballad without imagining George Sand in dancing shoes. Perhaps I did not convey my emotions because I could not. I had not felt, touched, or experienced; that was apparent in last year's technical showpieces. This year, I need not imagine George Sand; I had swung and danced to the clip-clops of horses drawing carriages around Central Park, and rocked slowly to Peter's gentle voice.

I know now what I would say if it were my Sweet Sixteen: Rachmaninoff *Cello and Piano Sonata*, practice marathons, Bach, Dr. Pepper, Greenwich Music School, Burritoville, passionfruit lipgloss, Carnegie Hall, Cystic Fibrosis benefit, Bach again, D-Day, diesel-powered LIRR, Henry O'Higgins and my girl Katie, the sun-bleached sandbox, chocolate koala cookies, sultry South Street Seaport, Cinnabuns, saltwater taffy, billiards and mosquito bites, the Cloisters, Penn Station, peppered omelets, and our own Madama Butterfly. In the glow of all candles brilliantly lit, I shall see my eyes wrinkle in laughter, and glance upon others not searchingly, but openly.

Chia-Jung Tsay
15 Sweetbriar Path
Lake Grove, NY
Mrs. Faith Krinsky

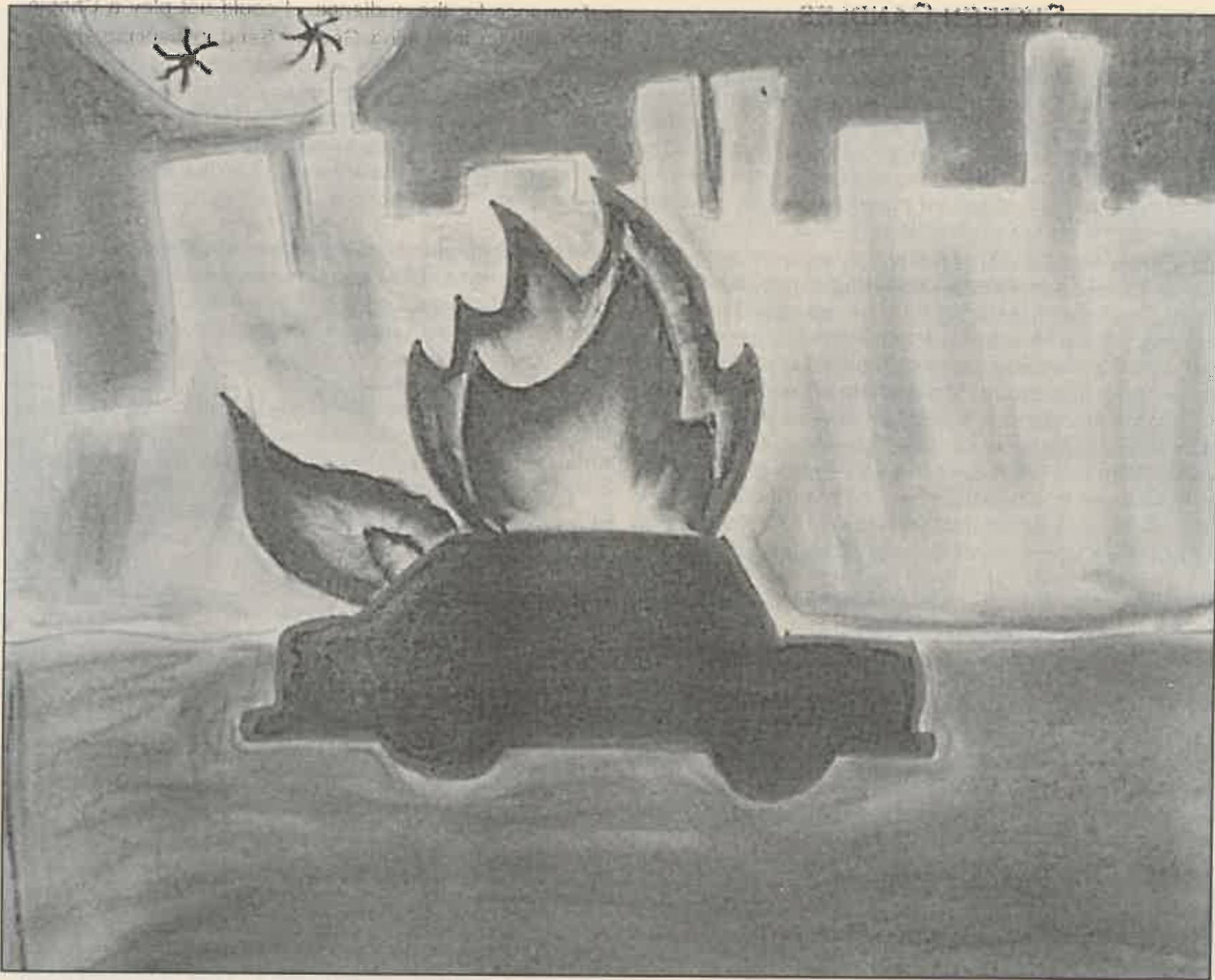
IN PRAISE OF NEW ENGLAND

Somewhere along these beaches
we decided on solemnity and
made ourselves gray like the sea.
We fished food out of the water
and ourselves out of Christian's slough,
letting our blood run bluer as we
drove the ox north and west
and the plow south, turning
our faces from our grandmothers
and their kings.

On a hill we built a church
and our own parable to keep us
bent over in the bogs and in the fields.
Then we killed heathen to keep our Sabbath.
We learned to kiss the air
instead of the cheek,
to suspect our neighbors
but husk their corn,
to Work first.

From the town greens and the cities
and the swamps, now,
we can praise our greats
in the name of progress and foliage,
for the whale watch vessels
and the inlanders selling maple syrup
by the side of the oldest American roads.
We can thank Winthrop, and the Lord, too
that these gray lobsters
turn red when we boil them,
and that the yellow sassafras leaves bleed
blue from their autumn veins
for all the nation to see.

Shannon Gulliver
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly



Evans Juke
New York, NY

GRINDING

At school, you heard the sound when they were moving desks
in the classroom above – everyone would moan,
cover ears and pause for a minute, until the screeching
passed.

It made your second grade teacher, Miss Green,
think about the sound the train made as it tried to stop,
then couldn't, then plowed down her baby brother Jim.
Or maybe it was the sound she made one day when she
just couldn't push any more.

You felt it too. Sunday mornings in the dead of winter,
waking up to broken liquor bottles along your feet,
smelling urine in your hair and realizing that it
was your day to work the late shift. August nights,
the apartment became so hot you slept naked
and kept all of the windows wide open, taking
showers every five minutes to keep your body heat
down.

There was lust but never love. There were tears
but never passion. There was just an eternal push
towards the end, an end which could only be the
beginning of the same.

Elizabeth Frieze
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mr. James Connolly

THE HOUSE WE HAVE NO PICTURES OF

When I was young,
my family lived in a house
we have no pictures of.

I only have the vague memory of
a party that took place there once.

The house was loud with conversation.
Everybody's sentences collided into a
mound of words and humming
voices that are completely indecipherable.

Ears grab on to the tail of a sentence and
try to follow it like a leading line that only brings
you to the epicenter of tangles.

I remember weaving my way through the
kitchen crowd on tiptoes, reaching up over the
counter into the sink where my mother had left a
bowl of freshly peeled shrimp.

When my anxious hand reached my mouth,
I thought of the taste and its consistency
on my tongue.

Greta Jee
615 Media Line Rd.
Broomall, PA
Mr. Thom Williams

UNTITLED

I can't help but write this. I'm sorry to burden you, but really, it's just part of the story. The story being *my* story, of course (is that terribly self-centered?). It's unfortunately the only story I can tell. I've never been much with fiction.

Oh, who am I kidding? I exist with fiction. I exist *in* fiction.

I am the old man who sits on the curb in his suit, waiting for success to finally drive up. I am the woman walking her dog behind him. I am the dog. I am the "walking." I am the "behind." Literally. I am the dog's rear. I am the woman swaying roundly as she walks by. She is, *I am*, about forty. We don't have much longer.

I am this paper and this ink. I am all papers and all inks. Someday, when a great glowing parchment descends from the sky, when it flutters down over the hills, and sits there in the air, corners fluttering in the breeze, that will be me. All the papers and all the inks in the all the world will leap from desks and drawers and notepads and human hands and from gutters and from under sleeping heads and they will all flock to the parchment, flock to *me*, in droves and swarms, and they'll all swirl about me in a complex dance for a year or so, splendidly beautiful.

And little boys will watch in awe. They will drop their butterfly nets to watch the papers swirling, for a year or so, until in one moment all the paper and all the ink will flash! into one. One simple sheet with one simple word running down the middle (immense margins), just waiting in the afternoon sun. And that will be the truth of all words ever, and that will be me. That will be marvelously self-affirming.

And that is just the beginning of my many fictions. Here's another, if you don't mind:
I'll tell it as simply as possible.

Five.
Tile. No, linoleum.

Tile *outside*. Plastic slick within. sun. Oranges. Piles, rolling juice. Juice-picked? Liquid sunshine. Flowing off chins to drip... Linoleum. sun.-Sun- splattered and liquid coats.

Poor cat.
Tick-tick-tick on the linoleum to heave down onto-tile.

I am that.

Anticlimactic, no? Well, I'll give you something jaw-dropping, just hold on.

First I need to talk about my father.

Dad's the one who played me "Pennies from Heaven," when I was still a pulsing ball of fetus. Really, that's all you need to know, though perhaps that knowledge alone could be deceptive. Think, though. My dad is a hermit. My dad is not soulful. He does not snap his fingers in time with anything or wear black or smoke. Well, he used to smoke. But not smoking like in clubs where smoke obscures all but the glisten of eyes and the straining breasts on the lady friends, and music even is obscured by the smoke so everything sounds a bit more mournful. Music like a lighthouse wail.

No, Dad smoked in his room. He sat in his room and listened to this music. My dad was a closeted daddy-o and he didn't come out till he dated some sexy sweetheart who told him, "baby, that's *cool*." Even then, though,

too late. After she left it was an affliction and an addiction, but it was also back to being a terrible secret. Music was private and that was that. You made it public and others might snatch it up or worse yet say, yeah, she's great, and then Billie wouldn't be crooning for you but for the whole block: And then who were you?

Dad lived in San Francisco in the 60s and never said a thing.

So I am that, too. I am my father, and it's more than the nose or the eyes or the laugh or the fondness for solitude, even. Dad held the Casio to Mom's belly:

I am fiction and it's because of genetics.

Do you understand?

I certainly don't. But somehow I exist in that inability to understand. Because when you understand yourself, when you grasp yourself in your entirety, what's left? Some might say, well, there's the rest of the world. But how immensely dull the world can be when it doesn't poke around with something inside, with some undefined something that's straining to get back to its origin. What's the use of sweeping architecture or swooping pigeons or views from mountains if you already know where you're trying to go?

This is why I need fiction. For it obscures as it reveals, and leaves all to conjecture. And that's for me as well as for you. I am remarkably afraid that at the moment I finally understand myself, I will just disappear in a flash of fleeing light.

But again I must apologize. There was no need for such an interlude. Or perhaps there was. But no doubt it was better for me than for you.

I am this very ink. You can touch me, just to make sure I'm real. Please, I'm asking you. Touch the ink, hold this paper up to your nose and smell it. Dart your tongue out. Taste me, if you like. I am all of my lies and all of my truths and I am every bit of guilt I feel for making the two one. But I am also this ink. And I am your fingerprints on the ink. And that is comforting.

I promised jaw-dropping. How about revelatory?

One afternoon, I was driving with my father and I looked up ahead out the windshield for a moment, and there, looming in the distance, doing the breaststroke through the clouds, hands outstretched, was God. I swear it. He had massive cumulus hair, a mustache you wouldn't believe, and he was singing "Body and Soul." I said, "Dad, look!" and he said, "What?" I pointed, "Up ahead there, above the overhang, see Him? He looks like the man outside Honey Farms. The one who steals condiments, see?" But we were going under a bridge right when he looked, and my father didn't see God, or hear His sweet song.

When we came out from the bridge I looked around, very worriedly at first because God works mysteriously, or so I hear, and I was just a bit scared that I would suddenly be vaporized. Maybe that's not God, maybe it's Jupiter, who makes girls fly to pieces on eye contact. Maybe it's no deity at all. Maybe it's me.

But I stayed whole, and God was still there, too, doing backflips now, and generally showing off. He was the color of clouds no one can paint, sort of a pearl with a peat-boggy grey behind, lit from underneath by gold in just such a way that salmon sunbursts break through and

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stream off into space. Terribly dramatic. I shouted, "Dad!" and I waved my hands towards God, who was now reclining on his back about 500 feet above a used car lot. But Dad was watching traffic, and he needed coffee, and he had found God about twenty years before, so he no longer had any need for visions. He said, "Ssh. I need to find our street."

And I said, "But—" "Wait a minute."

And I shut up. But as I turned to see what God was getting himself up to now, I realized he had turned himself into a loaf of bread; rye, from the looks of it, a flying loaf dive-bombing rooftops and lawns. Suddenly, then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a small object come flying up towards it, and then another, and another. They were other loaves of bread, smaller than the God-loaf, of course, and not as shimmery, but definitely loaves of bread gifted with the power of flight. They gravitated to the God-loaf.

Other baked goods joined them; first rolls and bagels, but then poundcakes and brioches and sticky buns and even strudels and pies. They were all streaming from windows and doors, from lunchboxes and display cases. A croissant leapt mid-bite from the hands of the man in the car next to us, and crashed its way through the window to whiz up to the God-loaf, leaving the man shocked, hands frozen before his face, clutching at void. There were several accidents because of the carbohydrate exodus, but my father kept on driving, oblivious.

And the breads spun and flipped and wove in and about each other in an impossibly intricate pattern, there above the cars, backlit by the setting sun. And they were up there buzzing a very dough-y, very energetic buzz.

That's how we left them, because, as we turned right on the next street, we entered into a lane of high trees which completely obscured any view of the sky.

I mentioned to my father that he had missed quite a show, but all he said was, "Story of my life."

Sarah Burke
117 Newton Ave. North
Worcester, MA
Ms. Elizabeth Tsang

feel the dead cars

feel the dead cars
skeleton body work
from Al's Four Star Auto Mall
circa 1985

when my uncle's navy blue
Hyundai Excel
was a piece of Pacific art
the future of Atari
sat in the glove compartment
Pong played
between jagged dashboard
and diesel carburetors

cars have fallen
down the junkyard hill
laying in their own filth
pea green pollution
leaking from the exhaust pipe
passed out like a drunk

construction is
always in progress
cranes don't dangle
they remain like a broken bone
awkwardly jutting out among a gunmetal Legoland
and rusty pebble piles
mix with the gravel teeth
of squatters from the abandoned motel across the street
odd
that the opening day metallic bunting
red white and blue
weeps from lamppost
to lamppost
sagging beneath the weight
of an eerie equilibrium that
remains
when the wasted land
endures acid rain

Meryl Alper
Clarkstown High School North
New City, NY
Mrs. Potter

daddy

i miss you at 6:30 am
on a cold morning

singing
in the shower
like
you wanted
to be

Frank Sinatra

why
do so many people die
in the winter

without you
here
to remind me

i forget
to wear gloves
and the cold

breaks the skin
on my hands
it's almost been
a year

i love you
in december
when i can see
my breath

in the air
and it scares me.

Mimi Mayer
Greenwich Academy
Greenwich, CT
Mr. Schwartz

COLOR

"I just can't afford to come get you after school every day anymore. It's simply not feasible. I'm still losing money picking you up three days a week as it is. Try to use the time wisely — do your homework, or something." My mother's words cycled incessantly through my head as the school day drew to a close. After-school. Where kids went when their mothers didn't love them. Even in fifth grade I knew that was being unfair — after-school was a program to help out working parents who didn't want their children home alone after three — but despite my brain's best efforts, my heart was still sure that if my mother *really* loved me she would have found a way. She wouldn't leave me alone, after school, with *Them*.

They had been in After-school together since pre-K. The ones who walked around just *daring* you to mention that they were black, or poor, or "troubled," or any of the other trigger words the public school system fastidiously avoided. Nobody at Hawthorne Pearls would dare discuss race, or money, or social status, or any of the other sore spots in a school where, according to the School Board, all but three students were "from underprivileged backgrounds." And I, one of those three, Miss Southern White Middle-Class Suburban Lawyers' Daughter, was being sent to stay with the core of the underprivileged, who despised everything I was and embodied everything I feared.

"You're gonna miss the bus!" Ms. Russo's nails-on-a-blackboard Brooklyn accent jarred my thoughts as she poked me sharply in the shoulder.

I swallowed sharply. "No ma'am."

"Don't you say *no* to me," she thundered, drawing herself up. "You're nothing but trouble. You ain't ever on time. One day I'm just gonna leave you here."

"I'm sorry ma'am. I'm staying for After-school."

"Since when?" My bus monitor leaned down sharply and peered at me as though she expected some physical change to accompany my shifted schedule. "You sure you belong in After-school?"

I was absolutely positive I didn't. But admitting it, even to myself, sounded like racism to me that I automatically cringed. "Yes ma'am." *Making a generalization about any group of people is the mark of prejudice. Prejudice is wrong. All stereotypes are racist tools. You must hate racists.* I had inhaled and internalized these lessons from my first day of kindergarten at Hawthorne Pearls, encouraged by the militant tolerance of the teachers. The students policed themselves rigorously — especially where I was concerned. Most of my classmates treated me like a curiosity, too shy to be offensive, but *They* were nowhere near as benign. They took the way I feared them as an inborn *racist* attitude. I needed only an open accusation before the whole school turned against me.

I knew I was terrified of After-school but both my conscience and my sense of self-preservation blocked out why. And so as I trudged alone down the hallway to the Annex Gym I found my brain telling me angrily it was wrong to be so sad, while my heart wailed helplessly for my mother.

My feet halted of their own accord just before the Annex Gym big blue double doors. The smudged steel handles, their lower bars directly above my nose, showed me a twisted distortion of the top of my head. Suddenly the doors snapped violently open, catching me between the eyes with a thump. I staggered back against the railing to my left, feeling as though my eyes were swelling and melting away.

Coach Bagley's pendulous face poked around the

door and peered incredulously down at me. "Whaddya doing standing there?" he demanded. "You gonna stand there, you gonna get hit by the door. Where're you supposed to be?" He came out from behind the door, seized me by the straps of my backpack and hauled me upright. "Sounded like a good thump. Are you dizzy?"

"No." I forced the whisper painfully past the knot in my throat. "Is this Ah-ah-ah-After-shool?" I snapped my mouth shut on the mispronunciation, aware that another word would start me off crying. I hate to cry; it leaves me gasping in sobs for air hours after I've stopped shedding tears. I have an inhaler now, but I had nothing then. I just looked up at him helplessly.

"You supposed to be here?" He waddled a few steps down the hall. "You miss your bus?"

I shook my head, determinedly mute.

"Can't help you if you don't tell me where you're going," he said, folding thick arms over his paunch.

"After-school," I said, very fast. A single tear spilled out and ran down my cheek, leaving a warm path that quickly turned cold. I smeared it away with my sleeve. One tear. I inhaled deeply to make sure I was still breathing.

"You're late." He glanced at his watch, casually confirming his statement. "Go in there. You okay?"

I nodded furiously and slipped between the heavy blue doors. Because I'd been facing Coach Bagley, I entered the gym with my back to the center of the room; before I could even turn around I bumped into something soft.

I jerked around to find Ms. Wise regarding me stolidly from above her ample midsection. "You the new girl? You're late. After-school starts at three-fifteen. After that you're late." She pointed up, way, way over my head, to the steel-encased clock above the gym doors. I squinted up obediently. I had no idea what it said or how late I was. I had never needed to be somewhere at a specific time before without a teacher to tell me when to leave or walk me there.

"Coach already gave out all the jump ropes. You just have to sit on the bleachers."

I looked around. As was usual for gym class, girls were playing intricately with jump ropes in the narrow strip before the bleachers while boys in groups of three or four played basketball on the main court. "Aren't there any basketballs left?" I ventured.

Ms. Wise roared with laughter. I cringed. "You think you can play with them, you go ahead." She waved at the groups of boys. "You think they're gonna play with jump ropes so you can dribble around? Just go sit down."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say, *But that's not fair*, but I hadn't really wanted to play basketball anyway. I walked very, very slowly down the entire length of the empty bleachers, skirting the jump rope games and avoiding eye contact, until I reached the far wall. As I passed, the girls stared dully at me, their eyes following my path but their heads never turning. Throughout my walk they never missed a beat in their jump-rope games, their braided and beaded hair bobbing rhythmically in time to the clicking of the plastic ropes.

I curled myself into a little ball behind the first row of bleachers and propped myself up against the backpacks, letting my head hang upside down over the edge of the bleachers. *They*, trapped on the "ceiling," seemed a great deal less intimidating. I glanced briefly at the girls, then away before they could make eye contact. They danced in and out of the beaded ropes almost carelessly, chatting and openly watching me with idle curiosity. The boys

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might truly have been on the ceiling for all the attention they had to spare, their whole bodies focused on weaving the ball between and around dirty oversized sneakers and baggy pants.

Suddenly my vision was invaded by a girl's pale face, framed in long, greasy black hair. I gasped and slid back around upright, slouched down between the seats. She grinned, her hair hanging down almost to my face as she glowered over me. "Hey, little *white* girl, *what'cha* doing *here*?" She almost sang it, stressing the words into some kind of mantra.

My chest seized up, but the sheer absurdity of her taunt hit me before I could surrender. "But-but—" *You're white too!* I wanted to shout, but my brain censored the words before I could get them out. I just stared at her as she bounced on the balls of her feet. She was skinny, a full foot taller than I, with early-developed breasts prominent against her T-shirt. Her too-wide smile showed crooked yellow teeth as she repeated her little chant, her head jutting forward from slumped shoulders: "Hey, little *white* girl, *what'cha* doing *here*?"

I summoned all my courage. *If she can say it so can I.* "But... you're — white — too," I said, putting all the deference and apology into my tone that a statement to the principal would have warranted. As soon as the words were off my chest I felt utterly defenseless.

She giggled as though she had just made some hilariously witty quip. "Nu-uh! I'm *black*, see!" She held out her patently white arms. "All *black*. So *what'cha* doing *here*?" This bizarre proclamation only frightened me further, and I bit the inside of my cheek to keep the tears back.

Apparently the game wasn't fun when the victim wouldn't play, for she pouted for a moment before bellowing, loudly enough for everyone to hear, "HEY, little *WHITE* girl, *WHAT'cha* doing *HERE*?" At the same time she fainted violently in my direction, making me cower back against the wall, and suddenly I really did start to cry, my throat locking up as the tears began to fall.

This was the desired effect. She beamed as she started on her next routine. "What you crying for? I only asked ya a question. *What'cha* doing *here*?" She leered at me, daring me to challenge her proclaimed innocence.

"My mom can't come get me," I said, forcing my clenched teeth apart to let the phrase out. It was getting harder and harder to breathe, each inhalation cut off in the middle by a spasmodic sob.

"You want your *mommy*?" she squealed. "She wants her *mommy*!" She had attracted quite a crowd from the jump-ropers now, and I found myself surrounded by a ring of curious and unsympathetic spectators. They looked unblinkingly at me, their faces stolid, showing only bored curiosity. "That's real *cute*. But *hey*, little *white* girl, *what'cha* doing *here*?"

The rhythm caught on, and the ring of older girls came alive as they began to repeat it, swaying slightly with the words as they formed a hostile background chant. "Leave me *alone*!" I shouted over the knot in my chest. I flung my arms out desperately. "I'm not *white*! Leave me *alone*!"

"If *you're* not *white*, then *what* are *you*?" sang the not-black girl, still dancing from foot to foot.

"I-I'm sort of a pinkish peachish color!" I stammered. "Please go away!"

The background chanting diminished and through a fog of asthma and tears, I became aware that the whole gym was laughing at me. I tried to burrow even farther into my corner, burying my head in my coat. "I'm pinkish-

peachish," I repeated determinedly to myself, my voice muffled in my sleeves, until at last through my hiccoughs I heard the chanting fade away.

I stayed with my head down between my knees for a long time, long past when I sensed the group's attention wander from me and focus on some other pastime. As a matter of fact, I stayed there with my head down until at last my mother came to get me, some time hours later. As my mother took me by the hand and pulled me out of my corner, I could feel every pair of eyes in the gym looking down at me.

"Pinkish-peachish!" called one girl.

"Pinkish-peachish!" shouted a boy.

"Hey!" At this authoritative shout I looked up and found the dark-haired girl giving me an incomprehensible smile. "Pinkish-peachish! See ya!"

The rest of the gym dutifully echoed various good-byes. My mother, oblivious, pulled me on out the door. "You see?" she said, absently straightening my jacket. "I just knew you'd make friends."

Diana Gentry
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, NH
Mr. David Weber

THIRTEEN

I knew her the first time I saw her,
pale-eyed mistress of the mysteries with the
thirteen names
and paradoxes flying from between
her teeth
with all the glib ease of a
leprechaun on speed,
priestess of the cities, bewitching with her smooth mystic
voice
vibrating in their brains,
rendering me invisible.
On romantic days her skirts flowed and she waxed poetic
about the sacred core of urban existence,
insisting
she found Buddha in a burst of
car exhaust
and that her fashionably disheveled
hair meant she was detached
from the things of this
world;
the boys fascinated by her delicate ankle bones
resting in the grass. She always gazed at
the maple's-leaves like they held a
message for her:
Canada holds the secret
of the holy neutron bomb,
hallelujah.
And she was their syrup;
her poetry, swearing she was a student of tongues
and teeth,
spun out like a sticky sweet offer-
ing,
and they lapped like dogs. Opium in
her words, heroin in her eyes, she was
a drug, a trance state
that promised to reveal the secrets we never knew
existed. She
held them captive, but
I knew her at first glance:
charlatan at the heart,
weaving her spoken spell.

Angie Haley
34 S. Hawthorne Rd.
Baltimore, MD

a slide show of 1987

*If only there were no differences between the things
I meant to do and what I really did. It wasn't always this
way.*

I
The world thaws as we drive south to New York City,
through the small towns with no centers and vacant store
fronts,
onto the freeway in our new Toyota, Joe Camel and
McDonalds
and Mobil jumping out of the darkness in garish flashes,
only
to disappear behind my dizzied peripheral vision.
I close my eyes.

Orange lamps flash through my exhausted eyelids, John
Cougar
sings in beat with wheels turning on the road, the flashing
lights of trucks graze my mother's road-weary face like a
film projector's.
As she nibbles on a fast-food salad, I ask if there are
bears in the woods.
Even though I can't see any, I think there are.

The construction workers are carving up I-95 again,
blinking yellow road work arrows pointing to the right, to-
ward the
wreaths and flower bouquets on the side of the road,
where
someone had crashed in a mangle of flesh and metal,
probably in the accident whose aftermath I saw last week.
I wonder what the victims thought about just before they
died.

When we come to the Harlem River Drive, I stare at the
ardent garbage can
fires under bridges that seem to be as homeless as the
shadows of
the people who gather around them to thaw out, the
breath rising
from their mouths in the cold February air, indistinguish-
able
from the smoke of the fire.

II
Bright sunlight slants through my bedroom window
with the heat of mid-afternoon bleaching out
square patterns on the teal carpet. I step into the bright
pools,
only to watch them disappear under my feet.

The city is drenched in sweat that moves in waves.
While walking across Park Avenue, I see a taxi run a red
light
and flip over, spinning on the road. The heated air is sus-
pended
as the driver climbs slowly from the upside-down cab. A
week later,
I see the vehicle parked on Eighty-seventh Street, taped
together
in patches, a casualty of the New York City intersections.

Every lazy July, we go to Jones' Beach to see its brown
sand,
brown surf, and brown sun, the cool white of the plastic
beach basket

like vanilla Dannon yogurt. I am a rainbow in the sun
in my pink and purple striped visor and my green bathing
suit,
my hair tied in a side ponytail that brushes my face
as I dig a hole in the sand to bury myself, until water
seeps
in from underneath and the hole caves in around my legs.

III
The leaves sweep across the drained concrete pool,
the cracked whitewashed surface opening to the gray

October clouds
that sponge-paint the Massachusetts sky as they sweep
westward.

I walk up to the diving board, staring into the valley of the
empty pool,
wondering what stops me from jumping into the white free-
fall of gravity.
Nobody ever taught me how to dive, anyway.

I watch passing cars outside the window in the red dark-
ness
of the evening that is dying along with the season. The
road runs through
our front yard, turning at a ninety degree angle around our
house,
around the dogwood tree. Gorbachev is talking to me
from the black and white television set that is older than I
am,
as I build a graveyard in my living room
out of spare pieces of wood from the local carpenter.
I write my name on the largest gravestone.

New England is tinted orange and red as I go to visit the
local
cemetery, even though I don't know anyone who has died,
and put
dandelions on an ancient tombstone that has been worn
down
by the seasons, so that the name is no longer legible.
Then I go to a tree near the end of the road and pick up
fallen apples to
take home with me.

IV
New York is freezing over; the dirty urban snow trims the
curbs of Eighty-sixth Street like the crumb coffee cake
I ate for breakfast. I wonder how the snow tastes
but am too afraid to take a bite.
I leave winter on the ground.

In front of "A Restaurant," the day after Christmas,
I walk from garbage pile to garbage pile, plucking glittery
ornaments from discarded trees. I feel sorry for the trees,
stripped of their glory and of their warm houses,
so I leave a shiny ball or some tinsel on their brittle
branches.
They have been dead for months, but they still feel alive.

Allegra Johnson
1220 Park Ave.
New York, NY
Ms. Upham



Jill Friedman
New York, NY

MY MOTHER AT THE BEACH

She wasn't married yet
to my father,
the photographer of the moment,
who captured the scene neatly
in a three by five.

It was cold, and she had a Mexican blanket
hugged tight against her shoulders.
She weighed
barely over a hundred pounds.
It would be years before
the four babies.

Her hair hung straight down,
sticking together a little
from the salty air,
long so you'd think
she was a hippie.
in the dirty Broad Channel sand
and the gray of the sky,
she stood
armed with a smile.

The camera can't show my dad
behind it,
but he is there in her wide smile,
scraggly beard and fine hair
that pokes up in tufts and curls
like a Dr. Seuss creation.

I can see that even this early,
They are planning their future.

Dan McCarthy
Towson High School
Towson, MD
Mr. William Jones

UNTITLED

a woman did my portrait
in the reading terminal
with a sharpie marker
while i ate sesame chicken
 (the sound of the orchestra still
 buzzing in my head
 the woman was dirty poor blond)
she chatted inanely (you have a perfect oval face dearie)
as she worked the marker scratched and squeaked
to the harmony of teenagers (him me her and the two at
the end)
she handed me the picture
i handed her a dollar
she walked away
 (her initials were c.g. she labeled it
 y2k! as if i could forget the hype
 worked in black sharpie dirty poor blond)
i'm not sure if it looks like me
but i know i couldn't do it (his took me two weeks another
story)
she made my face too pretty (you have a perfect oval face
dearie)
i think i can forgive her that

Zenia McAllister
1512 E. Sedona Dr.
Downingtown, PA
Mrs. Robinson

UNTITLED

Don't tell them it ended like this.
Give them a story.
Talk about the green bananas.
The sunglasses after dinner.

Yesterday I saw me a hooker
With net pantyhose
Crossed like fences we
Never jumped. Tell them that

-Among other things- you knew
Mother never loved me.
You could taste it in her breakfast.
Please don't forget

To add – in all the dirty details
I do not have – the stolen Burberry's
From shady Uncle Joe
(Tell them we're related).

Because you know you had it easy,
You filthy ghetto child.
I wanted to curse a father I'd never meet.
Drama. A hooker for a wife.

Michael Nguyen
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Mercedes Carbonell

TUNDRA

I tapped my pen against the desk and stared at the paper. I was not worried: I knew I could write well when I had the proper motivation, and I had the glowing comments from elementary school English teachers to prove it. Turning my head slowly, I looked out the window for inspiration. My gaze cut low over the rooftops of the brownstones, grazing the trees behind the first row. It flew swiftly down past the tennis courts and Coney Island, traversed the Atlantic Ocean, sped quickly through northern Europe, and came to rest on an elderly farmer in a forgotten corner of Siberia. He lived at a latitude where the artificial lines of mapmakers no longer mattered, beyond the reach of the petty politics of national affiliation. His house was a simple hut, his life a simple life. The man survived on turnips beaten dutifully from a jealous and unforgiving soil, pushing through each year with a quiet perseverance. Indeed, only two things sustained the man: turnips and pride.

The Tundra is a cold place and a serious one. Permafrost limits the flora to smaller plants with wide, shallow roots and consequently there are few animals. Predators and prey alike are hard pressed to avoid starvation. Virtually all the animals develop thick coats of fur or feathers to ward off the terrible cold. During the summer, the snow melts and creates swampy conditions above the permafrost. During the winter, the temperature drops to an average of negative thirty degrees Fahrenheit. It is an uncomfortable region for humans.

The old man survived the climate, however, and probably he still does and will continue to do so. His secret lay not in his body, weakened by age and frost. Nor did he draw on an outside power, like the zealots and fanatics of forgotten times. He rather turned in on himself, relying on a sort of matured self-confidence that strengthened from year to year. He knew that, for instance, he was born an accomplished flute player. He knew that he could, were he to choose, compete with the runners in the annual marathons of far off cities and win. He knew that he understood the Tundra better than the most distinguished naturalist in the world and that, were he pressed, he could write textbooks on the subjects. The old man did not own a flute. He hadn't run in years. He was illiterate. And yet these fantasies still served a purpose.

The turnip is a root, very similar to the rutabaga. Only a tiny portion of the plant breaks the surface and climbs into the sunlight. The majority lies hidden underground. Thus the turnip can survive in very bad conditions, as the underground section supports the upper parts and while remaining itself safe from the cold. It is well adapted to harsh climates and often described as a "hardy" plant.

The farmer did not believe himself a victim. Rather, he felt like a well-satisfied individual. Imagine it, blessed with a plethora of skills and the luxury to ignore them all! He did not truly enjoy the freezing winters and tiresome work, but he was not dissatisfied. Confident beyond question, he ignored the details and accepted a sort of unquestioning superiority. He did not need to make attempts; he already knew that he could be accomplished regardless of current appearances and situations. He believed himself a turnip.

So the man lived on. I watched in fascination as he sliced up his pride and mixed it with his turnips to make salad. As he ate it the wind blew, and the trees across the street moved and blocked my vision, and the old man disappeared into the snow forever. I never saw him again. Turning back to my blank notebook, I sat for a moment

thinking about how to chronicle what I'd seen. I thought for a long time. I thought about the Tundra. I thought about the turnips. I thought about my own struggles. And then I thought about how lucky the old man was that he'd never seen a flute. I stood up hastily, slammed my book shut, and decided that day to never write again. Perhaps I too can believe myself a turnip.

David Roth
Hunter College High School
Brooklyn, NY
Ms. Gannon

UNTITLED

I have a big butt. Not wide hips, not a preening, weightlifting-enhanced butt thrust up like a chin, not an occasionally saucy rear that throws flirtatious glances at strangers when it's in a good mood and pulls in like a turtle when it's not. Every day, my butt wears me – tolerably well, I'd like to think – and has ever since I first had to wrestle it back into the Levi's 501s that it had barely put up with anyway. My butt hollered, *I'm mad!* at that point and hasn't calmed down since.

But my butt is quite my advocate: it introduces me at parties and gives me space among strangers on the subways when I'm too shy to ask for it. It retreats with me only when I am at my gloomiest, when it has no choice, and even then it does so reluctantly, a little sullenly, crying out from beneath the most spacious pair of pants I own: *When can we go back?* It has been my greatest trial and the core of my latest and greatest trial of self-acceptance, which came only after a day of clothes shopping which yielded the Big Three – pants, pants, and another pair of pants. (Floating out the mall doors with bags in my hand, I thought, *Veni, vidi, vici!*) I think of my butt as a secret weapon that can be activated without anyone knowing: In the middle of an honest conversation with a just-met guy, I shift in my seat, or, if I am standing, lean on one hip, as though to momentarily rest on the other side. *Voila!* My points are suddenly more salient, my words more muscled, and the guy never knew what hit him.

I have come to realize that my butt makes much more than a declaration at parties and small gatherings. Its sheer size makes it politically incorrect in an age in which everything is shrinking – government, computers, distances between people. In a new small-world order, it is hopelessly passé. At the age of thirteen or so, though becoming acutely butt-conscious, I also became aware of its power, how it shaped my attitude and completely changed a simple walk around the block. In arching my back and elongating my stride, my butt was literally thrusting me into the world, and I sensed that I had better live up to the costume or it would eventually wear me to death. For me this didn't mean promiscuity at all, but a full-blown statement that I stood out, that I made a statement that might begin with my body, but that also included silent crushes on boys sitting two rows over. I started a continuing pattern of swerving between repulsion and satisfaction: My butt branded me, but it also thumbed its nose at authority, refusing to follow the idea that "Asians have no asses," and it proclaims from the miserable depths of the sofa where I lie, in a stirring Maya Angelou rumble, *I rise! I rise! Still I rise!* My butt has an incredible reserve of esteem and then some; like the brain, it may even have uncharted capacities to heal.

The moment of butt reckoning always come with a mirror – if it's a three-way mirror, you're pretty much

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standing at the gates of hell. It is a bad day. I freeze my eyes on a spot in the middle mirror that's well above my waist, with no more gut left to suck in or butt left to pull under. I'm trapped with my own excess, which commands my attention though I will myself not to look. The butt swallows my peripheral vision and sops up reserve confidence like it's gravy; it doesn't merely reject my hopes for a size six, it explodes them with a nearly audible laugh that forces the ill-fated jeans back into an ignominious heap around my ankles. My butt looms triumphant: *Don't you know who I am?*

While women talk freely about butt woes, men seem to be even more obsessed with butts – some deprecate it, some worship it. But sometimes when all that matters is a captive audience, men rarely disappoint. Recently, as I was walking through a clean section of New York City, when I passed by a homeless man pushing a shopping cart. He took one look at me, stopped dead in his tracks and shouted in a single breath: "Honey, don't let the buggy fool you! I got means! How about I take you to lunch? You got a man?" I didn't take him up on his offer, even though he trailed me for half a block, but I had to admire his nerve – in fact, I was grateful for it. This attention is still very much food for my soul, even from the ones with no means. It breaks the feeling that I might assimilate and makes me remember that, for all the dressing-room nightmares I've lived and will live, I'd rather be successful at fitting comfortably into my own skin than into clothes meant to cover someone else's.

I'll admit: For all of my hand wringing, I'm growing accustomed to my butt. It's a strange and wonderful development of the last three years or so – as I've gotten heavier I've actually gotten more comfortable with how I look. Perhaps it's a function of maturity or a realization that fashions aren't likely to bulk up anytime soon, but I'm much more inclined to reveal myself now than I ever was before. I've finally concluded that there's no clever way around my butt, as there never seems to be a clever way around the truth – whatever you try leads to the most fantastic lies. In the interest of honesty, my butt now gets accent. I have finally glimpsed the full, unadulterated length of me and don't want to conceal the image any more than I already do on bad mornings. I must burn myself into my own memory, and my butt is more than happy to help.

So what if America, in her infinite generosity, wants to help me get rid of my bothersome behind with its *Self* magazines, "Celebrity Workouts," and the denunciation of complex carbohydrates (whatever those are). More and more, my response has been: I *am* going to eat cake. I *will* wear things that fit. I *don't* have an issue, I have a groove thing. Kiss my you know what.

Joanna Fu
108-28 69th Ave.
Forest Hills, NY
Ms. Helen Scharff

THE STORY OF A CONVICT

The old tire from the mail truck left treads on my belly. On Sundays we all lie on tires, and it feels like someone has driven over our stomachs. Well, Adam, Mike, and I at least. We will lie on our stomachs, then on our backs, and discuss how we got into Medford, how great it is to still be a minor, and how we are perceived as different people ever since our arrests. Omar just looks down on us from above while we talk. He is head of the

volunteer program at the Medford Nature Center. He smokes Newport menthols and cocks his head to the left when he inhales. When I first met him, he told me that he makes \$24,000 a year. "How many 19-year-olds do you know that make that much?" I thought, "How many people do I know that pick up animal shit for a living?"

Craig says we're famous. I say we're screwed because we're arrested. I mean we were all arrested, Craig, Sarah, Rachel, and I. We were driving real fast; well Craig was, because he isn't the most stable guy. Rachel says he's just too scared to miss anything. I think he was just driving fast because he felt uneasy about the beer in his trunk. Craig was going about sixty down Morris Lane and quickly picked up a cop on his tail. The cop started flashing us to pull over. The car's siren was in full blare; it was so damn loud, I thought the fire department was after us. The car's lights illuminated our images on the windshield. Our faces were doubtful; had this really happened to us? Craig finally pulled over to the side of the road and waited for the cop to come to his window. Officer Schutler said the car smelled like a brewery and gave Craig a Breathalyzer. Craig said the test violated his rights. Craig is like that, real loud and obnoxious. He was the first one of us to be cuffed, then Sarah, Rachel, and I. Later at the station, Craig told me that he wanted to be arrested by a real cop; Schutler was a woman.

My mother started smoking again. She quit during January as a quasi New Year's resolution in combination with a doctor's warning that her trouble breathing at night would increase if she didn't cut back. But when I came home from the station she ranted and raved for over an hour, until she found herself a heaving mess lighting up a stale cigarette. My father took it differently. He started to garden again with incredible passion. He grew tomatoes the size of grapefruit; his cucumbers were contest-worthy. I didn't really do anything differently; I was suspended from school for a few days, but it really wasn't that bad. It was better to be at home watching TV and thinking about what could have happened or didn't for that matter. The Medford Nature Center is huge. Actually, it's more like a farm. There are ducks, chickens, goats, deer, and sheep; there is even a llama. There is also the biggest pig that you will ever see in your lifetime. Omar told me that it weighed over 600 pounds. Every day Adam, Mike, and I throw rocks at the pavement in front of it, but the damn pig never moves. It just lies in the corner of its pen until Omar comes and feeds it around seven in the morning and six at night, right before the center closes. At this time the pig will haul its weighty mass over to his trough where it devours what it didn't finish at breakfast. Adam is obsessed with the animal's obesity. He always mumbles to Mike how the pig had just too many "Big Macs."

At Medford we usually just smoke a lot, and talk. Adam and Mike fascinate me. They go to a different school, and they aren't like anyone I know. These guys are known felons so they don't have to deal with the same crap I do. Mike has been arrested three times before, once on drug possession and twice on petty theft. This was Adam's second arrest, a car-slammng incident, but he had been known for his bad behavior. They think it's cool that I have been arrested because at cocktail parties I will tell the best stories. They think that a record shows courage and strength – failed attempt yet innovative effort. They promise I can still get a job.

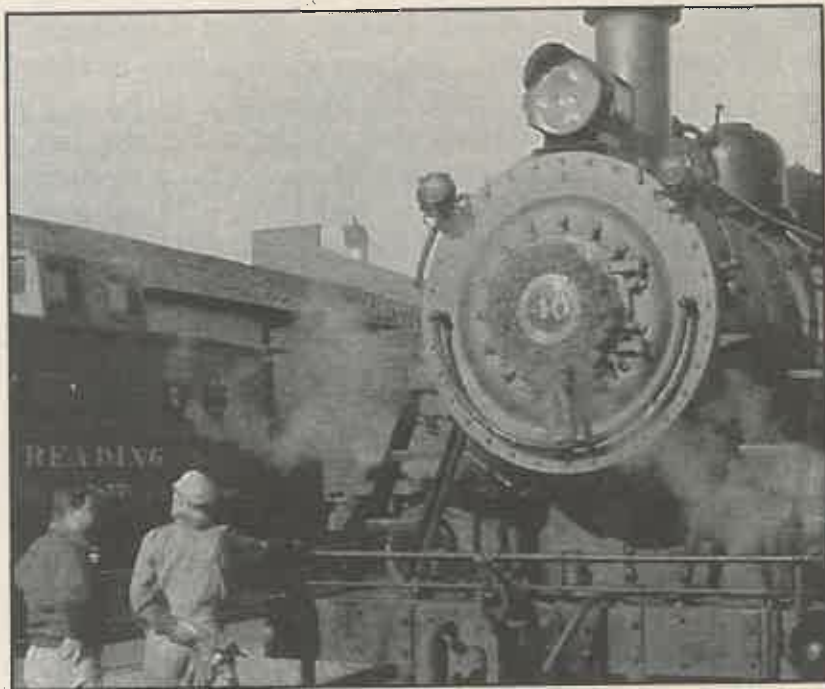
Adam is a volunteer firefighter at the Riverbridge station. He has a call radio so we've heard about the "lost man walking down Summer and turning onto Fairfax" and the "group of suspicious young African-American men

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hanging around the Texaco station, possibly harassing a Caucasian woman." But that's all police business, as Adam would say. He keeps his helmet, boots, and coat in the back of his '75 Impala. I personally think the car is a hunk of tin, but Adam says he bought it for only two thousand and is almost positive he will get more for it when he sells it with the new sound system he put in. Adam is like that, always optimistic. Adam also collects knives. He throws them into the side of the llama's stall while Mike and I get nervous and start kicking the dirt around. Adam doesn't care though, he'll throw until his arm gets tired and then light a cigarette and admire his work.

Monday was our court date, and the judge looked like one of my parent's friends. He had wispy white hair in a bowl cut around his head and thin wire-rimmed gold-plated glasses; they created an obnoxious glare. Before we were tried, we sat around and stared at the rest of us criminals. To our right was a black woman in her twenties sitting with her baby; they were both sucking their thumbs. To our left was a group of boys about our age who had smashed car windows with bats stolen from their school, I think they got one year probation. Rachel said that behind her was her kindergarten teacher; she had been arrested for letting her dog loose at the beach. We were finally called to the stand with our mothers. The judge gave us eight hours of community service to be done in a month and a half and probation during that time. After our hearing, we walked out of the courtroom in single file - delinquent, mother, delinquent, mother, delinquent, mother. The line was a parade for our fathers, a realization that their daughters still had time to grow and live while the real world of adulthood was still only faintly looming over their adolescent years. Sara's mom started crying and Mr. Parkes, our lawyer, told us it could have been much worse.

That first day that I came to Medford, Omar drove us around in his shiny new car then took us to McDonald's. Omar had a new '99 Passat. It was black and shiny like obsidian because he loved to wax it. When we got in it, he made us take off our shoes and hold them in our lap because he didn't want any "farm crap" in his car. When Omar drove, I felt so bad because I sat in the back with my arm out the window and one leg rested over the other. I took my hair down and let it blow into my eyes because I figured that seeing at a moment like that really wasn't important if you could feel the rhythm of the road and hear



Jesse Kates,
Lloyd Harbor, NY

the music around you.

Amanda Armstrong
49 Midwood Rd.
Greenwich, CT
Mrs. Linda Vasu

Across the Street

Mr. Smith, who lived just three doors from the house that I have always lived in, had always been a source of great curiosity when I was growing up. It wasn't just the fact that he lived all by himself in a huge, slowly collapsing house, nor was it just the fact that he seemed to wear the same clothes each day. What bothered us the most about Mr. Smith was his large collection of cats that were in his house, on his porch, and in his back yard.

The cats were far from normal. Not only were they strangely colored, but also their eyes seemed to glow all of the time. One couldn't walk by that house without feeling at least thirty gleaming eyes watching every move. The surveillance was so severe that few people tried to walk up the cracked sidewalk to reach the porch. Nearly everyone that had the privilege of living on the same block as Mr. Smith knew that any attempt to reach the front door would most likely result in several bite marks to the leg. The more creative minds, like mine, imagined being eaten alive by rabid cats with a taste for human flesh.

Needless to say, Mr. Smith kept mostly to himself, yet another habit that bothered the inquisitive neighbors such as myself. If it weren't for the fact that he was mortal, I'm sure that I would never have met the man. I was twelve during the summer that he grew too old and too ill to take care of himself. My mother, being the kind sort of woman who did things for everyone, immediately took it upon herself to fix a meal for him every Friday. Every week I watched her prepare something for him, while humming an old lullaby to herself; she was so preoccupied with her work that she hardly even noticed me until I started asking questions.

"Mom, what is it like over there?"

"Mom, does it smell over there?"

"Mom, does he wear the same clothes every day?"

"Mom, do those cats ever bite you?"

"Mom, isn't he mean?"

The list of questions went on and on. She always took the time to answer my questions, but her reply was never really juicy enough for me to accept as fact. She would mumble something about his being a nice guy, the cats being just strays, and that he wore different clothes but always with the same suspenders.

"But Mom, I would protest. Why do the cats' eyes glow?"

"They don't glow, Louise. Who put that idea into your head?"

"I've seen them, Mom." She would chuckle, tousle my hair and send me to my room.

I'm sure this process would have happened every week until the day Mr. Smith died if I hadn't one day crossed the line.

"Mom," I said, getting her attention as she pulled hot biscuits out of the oven. "Is it true that he keeps bodies in his basement?"

She looked up at me sharply. "Louise, I've had enough of this starting rumors about a man who wants to be left alone."

"Kenny said -" I started to say that the next door neighbor had told me this piece of news, but she stopped me in mid-sentence.

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"Put your shoes on," she said to me. I looked at her in confusion.

"What?" I said, putting my hands on my hips.

"You're coming with me to visit Mr. Smith."

Terror struck my poor, young heart, and I stared at her, aghast.

"Don't give me that look, young lady. Go put your shoes on!"

Now I was doomed. I had no choice. Mother had that deathly tone in her voice and she was glaring at me in the same way she glared at me when I broke her favorite vase. I couldn't go to see Mr. Smith. I imagined the cats biting and scratching at me as I tried to walk up the sidewalk. Then, I could just see being greeted at the door by a knife-wielding Mr. Smith, who was ready to carve us up and throw us in the basement with his other specimens. My life was over.

There was no way that my mother would relent. She wouldn't listen to my pleas. Far worse, the more I told her of Mr. Smith's known psychological problems and the flesh-eating cats, the more she seemed determined to take me there. I was quickly becoming aware of the fact that my mother was having me dig my own grave.

Eventually, I grew quiet and followed her dismally out the door, clutching the biscuits close to my body. As she hummed her happy, little tune, I was beginning to envision the headlines in the newspaper: Daughter killed by mother and crazy neighbors, then finished off by horde of cats!

We were quickly approaching his old, collapsing house and still, my mother walked happily on. Any moment I thought that she would turn and tell me I could go home. With each step, I walked slower, hoping she would forget that I was behind her.

There was no such luck. "Hurry up, Louise," she said instead.

As we reached the front gate, I began to feel that same feeling I get when I'm on a roller coaster and it's heading slowly up the first hill. Let me off! I was screaming. I'm still not quite sure how I made it up the sidewalk without a bite or scratch on my legs; I just closed my eyes and stayed close to my mother.

Many times I had envisioned walking on the front porch and my legs sinking through the old, warped floorboards. I had imagined being unable to move my legs imprisoned in the boards as the rest of my body flailed excitedly. Then came the cats, encircling me and getting closer and closer. Much to my surprise, the porch held both my weight and my mother's. They creaked a bit but remained steady. Several cats on the porch watched me cautiously but seemed too bored to make any move.

While I was preoccupied with the porch, my mother had already opened the door and was heading into the darkness within. I knew I could still run. I wasn't trapped inside the house yet. In minutes, I could be back in my house, in my own room. Still, something propelled me forward. I suppose that at the age of twelve, an angry mother is just as frightening as a maniac killer with blood-thirsty cats is. Rather than face my mother's wrath, I bravely followed behind her and officially took my life into my own hands. The smell of cats overpowered me, but I was determined to press onward.

An hour later I was back on the same porch. The only thing that had worried me was that I would die of boredom. I sat in the living room with Mr. Smith in utter silence while my mother bustled around the kitchen. We nodded shyly at each other when we were introduced and then fell to staring at each other in open curiosity.

Eventually, I grew bored of the old, fragile-looking

man, who just sat there drooling a little bit out of the left side of his mouth. I looked around at the pictures on the wall. There was a younger Mr. Smith with a young woman and a serious-looking boy in one picture. The woman was beautiful, and in the picture she looked to be laughing while a smiling Mr. Smith looked on.

"Mary died giving birth, two years later," a voice said suddenly in my ear, and I jumped.

"W-was M-Mary your wife?" I stuttered.

There was a slight nod from his direction, and I gulped loudly. I returned to the picture and looked harder at the little boy.

"John died in Vietnam," he muttered again. I had quickly grown accustomed to his raspy voice and didn't jump quite as high.

That was the extent of any conversation I had with the poor man. Mom finally came in and began the feeding process. As I watched him eating, I began to hope that I would never get old or lonely. What did he have to live for? I sat pondering that heavy question in my young brain while he ate. His wife and his only child were dead. Most of his friends had probably died as well or were in the same condition that he was in.

A deep sadness washed over me. Is this life? I wondered. You work hard all your life, living each day like there will always be another. Then, without warning, you're old, and you can no longer take care of yourself anymore. Everything that you ever held dear to your heart is gone forever, lost in a mix of striving after things that don't matter and never slowing to look around. All of a sudden, someone's spoonfeeding your applesauce and wiping the drool off your chin. Someone is always there watching you, trying to help you. What you had accomplished in your life can only be found in memories that quickly slip by. "Why do you live?" my brain shouted.

As I was thinking that thought, as my mind screamed the injustices of growing old and dying, Mr. Smith looked at me with his blue, piercing eyes and smiled sadly.

"Someone has to feed the cats."

Even now, nearly twelve years later, shivers travel up my spine as I think about that moment. It wasn't until then that I dispelled any misconceptions of Mr. Smith. He was simply an elderly man who was lonely and ill.

The next time I went back to the house was after Mr. Smith finally joined his family. I had gone over with Mother to take care of last-minute arrangements. His belongings by that time were quickly being moved out, and the house no longer belonged to Mr. Smith. I was standing in the living room, staring dully at the boxes that were packed with all of Mr. Smith's treasures when something caught my eye. I leaned down discreetly to see what had grabbed my attention. At the top of the cardboard box was the same picture that had been hanging on the wall. It was the picture that had shaken me so deeply when I had met Mr. Smith. Unfortunately in someone's haste, the glass of the frame had been broken. That was all that was left of Mr. Smith's family, of his wife and child, a picture that had quickly been broken by a careless individual.

A sob rose in my chest and I hurried out of the house to the great consternation of my mother. She thought that I was being ignorant about the house of the late Mr. Smith.

I decided to wait for my mother out on the porch, instead of fleeing to my house and my own room. Sitting down on the disintegrating rocking chair, I buried my face in my hands. Not seeing the cats approach me, I was surprised to hear the strange sounds of their whimpers and moans. I peered out over my hands curiously.

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Jumping to my feet, a vision of one of my old nightmares leaped into my brain and actively began to play with my imagination. Once again, I could see the headline: Twelve-year-old girl slaughtered by throng of man-eating cats. Around me was what seemed like hundreds of cats. I suppose there were no more than fifteen, but even that amount of feline can scare the general public. I continued to back up farther and farther on the porch, running out of floor and quickly finding myself approaching a brick wall.

Only after I had reached the brick wall and had nowhere to go did I begin to think reasonably. The cats weren't trying to get me. They weren't trying to suck the blood from my body, weren't trying to detach my limbs and weren't even considering using my torso as a scratching post. To my surprise, I even noticed that their eyes weren't glowing. These cats looked like, well, cats. Yet, despite my new assessment of the creatures something still bothered me about them. Together, they were howling out some eerie sort of chorus that was both frightening and melancholy.

As I looked around, I realized that they weren't crying for food or water. Someone had taken the time to feed them this morning. They weren't injured. Physical pain wasn't causing this strange eruption of moans and whines. I tried to reach out for them, tried to pet them with my wavering hands but always they leaped out of the way. A few hissed irritably at me and threatened me with their sharp claws.

Bewildered, I stood there for a few moments before it hit me.

These cats were mourning.

Amanda Hitz
4076 Pine Tree Rd.
Jonestown, PA
Mrs. Valerie Grimes

deer

Sometimes you just have a sense of foreboding.
That night I think it was the trees.
They were a blaze by day
But now at the bewitching hour they were dark
and unfriendly.
Bent like tired watchmen
they lined the back roads of the Connecticut highway.

Through the thick of night
My father drove as I dozed,
past countless cornfields.
Before I knew I was asleep –
I jolted up
A noise like my dad's tire exploding.

A Deer.
Jerking my head around I saw nothing.
My eyes crept to my father's face.
He swore silently as he backed around.
She wasn't yet dead.

Now we went again.
In the headlights she lay.
Kicking the pavement.
Swinging her legs on imaginary ground,
Rapidly rolling in desperation
to no avail.

Her belly was up – all white and gleaming,
As she disappeared under the hood.
We rose and dipped like a speed bump,

Just a speed bump.

My eyes locked in the rearview mirror.
She stopped kicking.
We drove on,
farther down the highway before stopping.
Hoping if she was out of sight,
we could pretend we'd never hit her.

My dad's door wouldn't open
So I clambered out in my socks.
I inspected the damage.
Several hundred dollars worth I guessed.
Sighing my dad pulled away.
Many miles later, I sat awake.
Sleep was far, far away.
the admonition came from my father's lips...
I tried to miss her

Audrey Lumley-Sapanski
Bellefonte Area High School
Bellefonte, PA

THE BEEKEEPER

I never did like churches much.
There is something ominous about
Their black belfries that silently fester,
Gowned in cobwebs and mist,
The iron steeple piercing the sky.
Remnants of a great wooden door
Lie as carrion to termites and beggars,
And the concrete yields to my sandals
As wildflowers crouch surreptitiously
In the cracks in a game of hide-and-seek
While the bumblebees count to ten.
The sun cringes at me as it dives
Headlong into the horizon, and
Blast of dust assaults me, cascading through
The scars of a slender gate.
The trees shake furious fingers at the moon
As if they were my counsel,
Flustered that she'd guide me to this place.
I proceed through the gate, nearly hindered
By the shrewd spider, that crafty little creature,
Who wrapped his silk around my throat,
Whispering conniving contrivances,
So I simply swatted him away,
And pressed onward.

I always did like choirgirls though.
They wink so lecherously at me as I blink,
startled by their sacrilegious seduction.
I watched, powerless to the distortion of
The church bells, that tolled miserably,
Monotonously, as if rigor mortis had
Clutched the clergy in its foul tendrils.
They chimed in celebration of a virgin's demise,
Her eyes were hissing and spitting like a cat,
Clawing at the face of her sharply dressed captor.
A pale shroud fell flat against her face
As a serpent constricted around her throat.
She flailed violently as it bared its fangs and
Sank its diamond teeth into her fourth finger.
I hurled myself upon her to grant her salvation,
And pressured her cranberry wounds.
I asked if she knew which fingers I held up,
She breathed, "I do," and passed away.
The Elect had been thrashing about, jollied by

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The scarlet stains of pagan blood, and
I knew her ruin all too well.
I had barely escaped with one life to spare
From a doomed relationship with Jesus;
He needed my soul, I needed my space.
I took of his body, he took me for granted.
I knew an altar boy from the third pew,
He never could tend a garden.
He had all the right seeds but all the wrong tools,
But I never did like vegetables anyway.
I told him we should leave this place and
Nurture bee hives in New Jersey and
Sell honey on the street corner,
Harboring ourselves some indulgences.
We may very well be these diligent bees,
Born to protect the combs,
To live for the honey, and die for the queen.
But he was a faithful man, and I'm sorry to say
That the cathedral burned down one day.
The cloister bells tolled tearfully through the
Charred remains of the steeple, until
His pulse grew faint in the ash.
The flames danced, brilliant and synchronized,
And never did pastels gleam so beautifully.
Blazes of doubt and blasphemy were
Extinguished silently in a vat of holy water.
The people gathered around the remains to
Mourn the passing of their plastic crosses that
Served as throne to their idle monarch.
Their eyes ravished the clouds, searching for
The featureless countenance of a savior,
Pressing for a sign of his grace, his face.
So I lifted a mirror,
And I showed them.

Michael Traynor
28 Highland Rd.
Bloomingdale, NJ
Lyne Ciccarella

BITTER SWEETS

Steal my candy, baby.
Pluck the sugary sweetness
from my sticky fingers.
It rots my teeth,
makes me sick, but I'm so lonely
without it,
so lonely.
Still,
steal it, take it away,
and leave me with
nothing but sobering solitude.
Because then, I can crawl to you,
beg you to steal my loneliness
the same way you stole my sweets.
I can massage your likes
for as long as it takes
for you to call out my name
and give me enough pennies to buy more candy.

Christopher Rothschild
401 Sunset Pl.
Port Monmouth, NJ

MORNING

I sink into the silver shores
of Pearl Harbor

with Burt Lancaster
only water and sand
between us.

Laurence Olivier's eyes
reflect heather.
He looks into the moors
and calls me
his dear, sweet Cathy.

Don Ameche sings my ballad
at Carnegie Hall
smiling even after
he's lost me to Tyrone Power.
I run through New York City
and don't feel the car that hits me;
I was looking up
where Charles Boyer was waiting
(or, in the remake,
Cary Grant).

I wake up next to you –
long hair, torn jeans
mocking the dress code
of Mr. Sinatra
and his counterparts

You admire my dreams
(darling novelties)
and I look out at you
From behind the letterbox bars.

Angela Tosca
RHAM High School
Hebron, CT

JUDGMENT DAY

There were torrential rains all weekend.
But Monday morning,
The flimsy cardboard sign
Stayed,
Duct-taped
To the wreckage of a shack
Where the Sno-Cones had been sold, days before.
Duct-tape is a truly incredible thing.

i have taped many material things.
She was not impressed.
What held her together had dried and weathered.
She taught me other ways to mend,
But duct tape can not seal a heart.

Duct-tape is a truly incredible thing,
But it can not hold two lives together.
And still i learn,
As i yanked down the sign,
Ceasing its laugh-like flapping in the breeze.
Don't leave before you've gone.

Darl Andrew Packard
1514 Hollins St.
Baltimore, MD
Mrs. Kathie Corcoran



Susquehanna University

1000 University Ave.
Susquehanna, PA 16801

HERO

I wanna be a hero!
 I wanna put right
 what once went wrong.
 I wanna avenge my father's murder
 by the six fingered man.
 I wanna be a super hero!
 I wanna leap tall buildings in a single bound
 and get a
 funky high
 on yellow sun.
 I wanna be the terror that lurks in the night,
 I wanna be the hangnail on the hand of evil,
 I wanna have sound effects when I
 punch
 the henchmen
 and have witty repartee as I
 capture
 the super-villain.
 I wanna be a secret hero!
 I wanna have a car that shoots
 missiles,
 and a pen that's really
 a grenade,
 and a watch that's
 a laser,
 and a radio,
 and a detonator,
 and anything else Q can fit into it.
 I wanna get the girl
 every time -
 even if she turns out to be the villain,
 or better yet,
 even if I know she's the villain from the first.
 I wanna save the world
 from
 Dr. Evil, and
 Number 2, and
 Frau, and
 Mustafa.
 I wanna be an action hero!
 I wanna take out an entire room full of
 machine gun armed thugs,
 using only one clip in a semi-automatic.
 I wanna jump off of skyscrapers,
 and out of planes,
 and through windows...
 into an alligator pit.
 I wanna outrun an explosion
 while the cop who's 5 days from retirement
 gets fried.
 I wanna use every weapon known to man
 and some that aren't
 (even if I don't have to)
 if it means I get to blow up more stuff.
 I wanna be a legendary hero!
 I wanna travel ten years to get
 home.
 I wanna capture a wild boar,
 tame man-eating horses,
 kill a multi-headed monster.
 I wanna find the Golden Fleece.
 I wanna lead France to victory,
 even if I get burned at the stake for it
 I wanna be a true hero.
 I wanna lay my life on the line for
 a million other lives,
 no,
 I wanna lay my life on the line for

one.

I wanna fight for freedom.
 I wanna spend my whole life helping the poor without
 a single
 reward.

I wanna be a hero.

Seth Samuel
 7 Gun Path
 Setauket, NY
 Mrs. Faith Krinsky

stupid

i got a haircut
 so that i would have bangs
 i said something ugly to my mother.
 she yelled
 and i cried
 i ran upstairs
 and looked in the mirror
 i said,
 "this is your face
 these are your bangs
 make sure you remember,"
 i hated the pixie bangs
 and i hated the face even more.
 then i cut it all off
 in second grade
 so i would look like jessica.
 she wasn't afraid of anything
 and she knew what condoms were for.
 i was a freshman
 when i dyed my hair red
 he said he liked it
 he said it was punk
 when i wore the paramount shirt
 i let it fall into my face
 and he brushed it out of my eyes
 he changed his mind
 and decided that i just thought i was crazy
 and he said he missed me
 and he started to cry
 well once there was this little girl
 she wanted to be ariel the little mermaid
 she ripped flowers apart
 she said
 he loves me
 he loves me not in the way that feels good
 but in the way that makes me scream
 well, someday i will have a little girl
 i will show her how to scream
 and how to hurt eardrums
 and how to make them bleed
 because no one
 teaches little girls
 and they're the only ones
 who really need to know
 i wish i had known
 i wish
 i wish my first kiss
 had been with a boy
 i wish that the dye
 hadn't washed out so fast
 i wish it hadn't left stains on the tub
 and i wish i had never
 had bangs

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HOME

20 years, and the lips with which she first said "Yes" have grown tight and cold. The language has escaped her. On a good day the TV plays bounty hunter, fetters the words and deposits them (packaged in a box squirming with animation) at her slippered feet. 6:00 sitcoms even tell her when to laugh, and for how long. So when he comes home at 7:30 the well has dried for the evening and all she has left for him is a terse greeting, eyes pointed elsewhere. *I love you* is a fossil. An ancient treasure for which he always digs, digs, digs, never finds. It has been 12 hours of purgatory. Suspension in a prison of stainless steel and Teflon, bologna slicers and spoons. Barking orders to other people's loved ones, shoveling food onto the waiting trays of other people's children. Because chicken pot pie is an integral part of a complete education. He doesn't know there, during the day, and not knowing makes it tolerable: doesn't know if tonight the corners of her mouth will be rusted shut; remembers a time when he held the oil can. *Maybe today*, he thinks, *will be better*. At home no one rises to open the door, so he lets himself in and is not sure whether he is stepping up or down. She barely notices; he realizes that hell is not quite so warm as it is cracked up to be. Or does she see him and pretend not to? Glaring behind flat eyes, hoping that he'll go away, that he won't bother her with dull anecdotes from work, that he'll be considerate enough not to disturb her program. She doesn't realize that his voice is poetry. There's no one to eat dinner with, so he usually doesn't bother. Food wouldn't fill the void in his stomach, anyway. Lies down in a cold bed, stares at the ceiling, listens to her glut Doritos and White Zinfandel and hold empty conversations with glowing 2-dimensional faces swirling through electronic waves and wires. They only tell her what she wants to hear; otherwise she can shut them up with the remote control. Only laughing tracks and love, home decoration and hilarity. But never any Pain. That's upstairs, staring at the ceiling.

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IN A BOWL OF SOUP

Part of the Solution, it had a nice ring to it. P.O.T.S. soup kitchen in the Bronx seemed the perfect place to become part of the solution. I stepped off of the scummy sidewalk onto the clean-swept, white concrete

stoop of the kitchen. I was ready to learn the workings of the place and what I could do to help. I was ready to learn how to help human kind all at once, to make this world a better place in a couple of hours. I was used to doing a lot of community service, but had never provided a service as basic as handing someone the life force of food.

My motley clan of upper/middle class white kids and I were met by a well-built black man who divided us up like so many commodities. "Table wiper," "bread distributor," "drink server," he dubbed various teens as his eyes fell upon each. When his eyes shifted to me at the end of the line, he looked me up and down and up again and said, "I've got a job for you." He began to stride back through the length of the room, and I followed hesitantly, uncertain of what was to come. We walked briskly across the shiny brown-tiled floor, past the short, angular tables and the people eating at them to the kitchen.

The kitchen was a world of shining metal and strong cleanser. Vats of food warmed on the back stove and steam rose from dishes being scrubbed at a side sink. The real bustle centered around the sleek, metal-topped table in the center of the room. First a plate was grasped by strong black hands and then slopped full of spaghetti by means of a long-handled ladle. Then the plate slid down the tabletop to receive a comfortable helping of canned, diced vegetables, a couple of slices of bread, and finally a prepackaged pastry. I was going to be in the heart of it all.

"Teach her to serve," the order was issued to another man who reached under the countertop and handed me a pair of latex gloves and a white plastic apron.

"Four on Two!" I heard the call from the dining area. I had no idea what it meant, but I was ready to learn. The man lifted two heaping plates of food and told me to do the same. We stepped out amid the scattered tables with their black and white checked tablecloths and their diversity of patrons. I wondered how I might help each one. I surveyed the art on the walls and the subdued atmosphere. He nodded towards each table, telling me its assigned number, one through five. We stopped at table two, near the front, and set down the four plates. Each plate I served with a smile, trying to give a little bit of myself, wanting to be the difference, but it was not really enough. I do not think anyone even noticed. Back to the kitchen.

"Incoming!" We had to hop out of the way as a cart of dirtied plates was rolled into the kitchen.

"A short order is for a child, less food. Some people will want orders to go. Kepp some plates fixed all the time." My teacher offered me these and other bits of advice. I was not sure if I would remember them all; there was so much to learn. I did not have a chance to ask questions as he drifted away to other chores, always work to be done.

"One on three!" I grabbed a plate and headed towards table three to serve an elderly black gent sporting a well-worn blazer and a graying beard with eyes downcast, but who had an aura of quiet self respect. Still, he could have used a razor and a smile.

"Thank you," he mumbled.

I smiled and replied, "You're welcome," but somewhere in that tiny, crazy little part of the mind I realized that if I was not doing this, someone else would be. I knew that I could not change everything, but there was no time to pause before the next call came for a plate on table one.

I dashed back to the kitchen. Finding few filled

plates left, I instructed that more be fixed and, grabbing a dish, headed back out into the dining room among the clatter of plastic forks scraping plates, Spanish chatter, hot tea being slurped from short enamel cups, and food being chewed. I strode to the front of the room and carefully set down the plate so as not to spill any of the precious food. I was greeted only with cold, slushy brown eyes and a tough scar of a mouth that said in a deep Spanish accent, "I want a bagel instead," indicating the roll on the plate. I studied her dirty face and tangled hair. Her clothes were shabby and the deep lines around her eyes said that she had grown old in a few years.

"We don't have any bagels today," I replied regretfully, fully realizing my own inadequacy, but, receiving no answer, I turned away. I returned to the kitchen to add breads and pre-packaged pastries to plates, and to chat with other volunteers. I continued to work until my legs ached and the gloves that I wore made my hands sweat profusely; the smell of people was so strong it made my head hurt. I had received an assortment of "thank yous" and nods but had not encountered any of those heart-warming experiences on always hears about happening in soup kitchens and such places. I loved the bustle of the waitress work, but it had been a long day without any assurance that what I was doing mattered. I felt unfulfilled and almost guilty at the pleasure I got from doing the work without changing anyone's life. I was tired.

My original taskmaster brushed past me, and, turning back, met my eyes.

"You, you have wicked eyes," he said, meaning that he liked them.

"Thanks, I think." I chuckled at his clear mid-sentence change of thought.

"You'd make a good waitress."

"Thank you," I said, and briefly thought that maybe I was making some kind of difference, but I did not really believe it.

"Three on two!" I heard the call from just inside the door frame. I grabbed two dishes of watery spaghetti topped with globular meatballs, colorful veggies swimming in unidentifiable sauce, and doughnut holes on the side and zipped to the table, dodging two fellow workers as I went. With a tired smile, I set the plates in front of two men and turned to retrieve the third dish.

It was only one man's decisive "Thank you" that caused me to turn my head and say, "You're welcome," with a fresher face. Rich brown eyes captured mine. There sat a man who did not seem to belong in this place. His long black hair was too clean and curly, and his lips curled catlike around the tiles of too white teeth. His copper skin glowed with a vigor for life.

"Have a nice day," he said to me.

"You, too," I replied and turned to go retrieve the last plate.

"God bless you," he uttered earnestly, causing me to do a brief stutter step in my journey back to the kitchen. His blessing seemed so great, because he meant it. Here was a man who could not afford to keep food on the table offering a blessing to me. I gave to him what he needed, and he gave to me what I did not really even know I sought, the reassurance that someone knew I cared. How could I remain unembarrassed at the paltriness of my gift compared to his? Still, he seemed grateful all the same for my effort to make a difference through serving plates of food. I thought about how much he had given from the

little that he had, until I realized how rich those brown eyes were and how much I had to learn.

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THE CAR RIDE

I glanced to the street from my second floor window to look out for the silver sedan. I saw it speedily accelerating up the winding hill and slowly stopping in front of my fieldstone house. I reached for my bag and quickly descended the stairs. "I'm leaving, Mom!" I shouted, hoping that she would hear me. I opened the front door, locked it behind me, and ran down my front path. I opened the door of the car, expecting a warm greeting. "Didn't I ask you to keep an eye out? What took you so long? You know, Sweetie, you have no consideration for anyone else's time." I shut the door behind me and submissively responded, "I'm sorry. I tried to look out like you asked."

He took the car out of park and pressed on the gas pedal. We didn't speak for a moment until I asked, "How was your day?"

"It was okay," he answered. "But I don't know how I'm going to write this English paper tonight."

"Well, if you want, I can help you with it. English is my best subject. I'm in the Honors class. If you have trouble with it later, let me know," I offered.

He quietly thanked me. He didn't sound sincere. I knew that he wouldn't ask me for help. I had offered before, and my offer had never been accepted. Usually, the week after an assignment was due, I would see a paper lying in the car with a large red "C+" on it. I can't recall the last time I got less than an "A-" on an English assignment.

We made a right off my street, and I looked solemnly out the newly washed window. I stared at the sky, but could not help but catch my disappointing appearance in the reflection of the sparkling glass. The sky was darkening, perhaps preparing for an early evening shower. I studied the clouds and watched their formations. I longed for conversation but could think of little to say. "Oh," I finally said. "I spoke to Stephanie today."

"Yeah?" he questioned, a bit intrigued. Stephanie and I had been the closest of friends and had not completely recovered from a minor disagreement. It had been eight months since we had spoken at length.

"Yeah, we talked during Pre-Calculus. Mr. Kolton was trying to teach something, but we weren't really listening. Anyway, she was saying how James and she had gotten in a fight. I was like, 'Oh well, Steph...'"

"What did you say?" James was a close friend of his, which is why he was at all interested in Stephanie's relationship.

"I was just thinking that I really am not a huge fan of James, so I wasn't too upset to hear that things might relax between the two of them."

"Well, Stephanie likes him, you know?" he said impatiently. "Why'd you have to be so rude about it to her?"

"I didn't say that to her. I was just telling you what I was thinking," I replied, embarrassed.

"You need to be careful about that. Stephanie and

him are like, in love, so she could get defensive. You say all the wrong things sometimes."

I subtly turned away as he concentrated on the road ahead. Again, I looked out the window. This time, I tried to ignore the inelegant reflection of my pale face. My eye instead caught the crowd of people walking through town. We came to a stop at a red light, and I peered out to the stuffed sidewalks. A man and a woman, both in their late twenties, carried ice cream cones. They appeared to be disagreeing, when suddenly the young woman turned and began to walk away from the man. He followed, but she continued on her own path. I saw her turn her head and utter something. I couldn't hear; the window was up.

The red light turned to green, and we began to move. I rotated my head and remained fixed on the couple until they were completely out of sight. Even then, I did not face forward immediately. I hoped to see if the woman turned back.

"What are you looking at?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," I answered. "It's a pretty day out, isn't it?"

"Sure, Weirdo. What's wrong with you today?" I didn't answer. I just peered out the passenger window.

"I'm going to stop at Wendy's," he informed me. "Do you want anything?"

"Oh, no thanks," I replied.

We pulled around to the drive-through and he placed his order. "A number four, please... Junior bacon cheeseburger, Biggie fries, and Biggie Coke. Oh, small Frosty, too, please." He was told his total, \$4.74, and we advanced to the next window. The tiny-framed woman held out the bag while he searched for his ever-elusive wallet. Shockingly, it was missing. "Uh, do you think you have a couple of bucks you could loan me?" he asked me. I handed him a five and looked away. It was sprinkling now, and I was ready to go home.

He traded the woman my money for his meal, and we drove around the parking lot to the exit. He handed me the remaining twenty-six cents. "Thanks, Sweetie, I'll get you back, I promise. I get a paycheck in a week. But I'll find my wallet before then. I don't know where it could be." I always wondered where it could be. I began to think that maybe it never existed.

He opened the bag as he drove through the zigzag streets of our town. I changed the radio station once and listened mindlessly to what he was saying. I concentrated more on the soothing and melodic music. I interjected with the usual number of "Reallys?" and "Oh my goodnesses." I have to say I was pretty convincing.

At last, we approached the familiarity of my neighborhood and finally my house. I gathered my wallet in my bag and cracked the passenger door open. "All right," I said. "Thanks, and I'll talk to you later on." We leaned to give each other a hug and kiss on the cheek. In a year and a half, it had become a habit. He made a quick joke, one I don't even remember, and I playfully slapped him. Intending to hit his shoulder, I was a bit off aim. "Ah! You hit my lip!" he screamed.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! It was a complete accident!" I said sincerely.

"Just get out of the car," he said.

"I'm sorry! I really didn't mean to!"

"Get out of the car," he said.

So I did.

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