

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Noelle Weekes
LSS, NYC

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Welcome to the nineteenth 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 throughout the United States. Every September we send 11,000 copies printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper **The Daily Item** in Sunbury, PA to over 3,600 schools.

Send material to be considered for next year's **Apprentice Writer** to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870. Please include your name and address on each page of your submissions.

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Table of Contents

Editor: Gary Fincke

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Poetry

Allegra Johnson	3,9
Miriam Lawrence	3,5
Aditi Gupta	3
Victoria Joyce	6
Christine Malvasi	5
Jessica Katz	7
Anoush Khachatrian	7
Katherine Nyce	12
Alex MacKenzie	13
Emily Caponetti	13
Dena Weisberg	13
Vicky Reichman	14
Lauren Dawson	17
Sarah McLemore	19
Emily K. Miller	19, 33
Leah Pollack	22
Jenny Bordo	22
Carling McManus	25
Christine Prentice	25
Sara Watson	26
Joleen Rivera	26, 30
Sarah Maloney	27
Matt Seigel	31
Johanna Smith	32
Will Holman	32
Rebecca Schonberg	32
Nora Rawn	32
Lakie Wakim	34
Victoria Young	34
Catherine Combria	34
Abbey Marshall	35
Sarah Shatzer	35
Clare Fieseler	35
Dave Rochelson	39
Richard Gottesman	40
Sara Jones	47
Belinda Bidlack	48
Kaity Ryan	50
Charlotte Housel	51
Whitney Crispell	52
Jennifer Barr	52

Prose

Susan Elizabeth Ulbrich	4
Vicky Reichman	5
Elizabeth Golub	7
Aditi Gupta	9
Justine Gabbard	9
Sarah Hsu	10, 17
Grace Wilentz	14
Caitlyn Schwartz	15
Jonathan McSparran	19
Andrea Sayloro	20
Faith Niesley	21
Alexandra Eastwood	23
Sarah McLemore	24
Christine Prentice	27
Laura Holzman	28
Rebecca Connolly	29
Jackie Dawn	36
Carin Barbara Glaser	37
Jodi Eisenberg	40
Kim Henderson	42
Lauren DeSimone	48
Logan Chace	50
Natasha Wray	52
Suvadip Bose	53

Photography and Artwork

Noelle Weekes	cover
Keith Considine	14
Stephen Siperstein	27, 44
Geneva R. Szulewski	31
Anandy Germosen	35
Rachel Kolber	41
Tyler Agin	46
Laura Colyar	50
Maxanne Finer	55

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FROM BROWNSTONE STEPS

August is lazier uptown,
where the tenements tower
above littered lots like
jagged teeth
and the red bodega lights
yawn at the dusk.

chalk dust,
De La Vega murals of dead heroes,
lingering sounds of double dutch ropes
whipping the fault lines in the sidewalk

Uptown, on a forgotten side street
still warm from the languished afternoon,
the black and red fire hydrant regurgitates water,
spewing like an angry hose,
flooding the curb,
gum wrappers and cigarette butts
setting sail in the raging puddle.
A man with a raisin face watches
from his perch on the broken brownstone steps,
the can of Colt 45 germinating at his feet
alongside the weeds.

the Puerto Rican flag leaning out the windowsill,
the tides of sirens that climax and then withdraw,
the tumbleweed garbage bag
rolling down the street, a bloated plastic ghost

Salsa music dances down
from the third floor fire escape,
the metal railing unable to cage the notes.
Negative space joins positive space
as a young
Miss Spanish Harlem
whips her hips in
a primal rhythm,
catwalking through the neighborhood
with the click-click cadence
of stilettos.

Allegra Johnson
The Chapin School
New York City, NY
Mrs. Jane Rinden

TWO GIRLS TANNING

Outside, where heat hangs suspended like clouds of dust
and the lawn glows smooth and green like sea glass,
my daughter and her friend sunbathe,
as if the light is water;
they soak themselves and drown themselves beneath it,
feel it drip from strands of their hair, down their cheeks,
and rest in pools on their backs.
I told her she'll get wrinkles--
her skin will bunch and fold and crumple like dough-
beneath the kitchen window
they bake and brown like meats.
The friend wears a bikini, and her stomach,
slick with sun block, shines like a compact mirror,
flat and small and even, up and down her abdomen.
She squeezes half a lemon on her bent and brittle hair
and slides three fingers over her ribs.
My daughter wears a one-piece, black, because black hides
and a tiny sheet of extra skin pushes the suit, imprints
and dents and shapes it, like rocks beneath a snow drift.

Pg 3

Her mouth contracts, and I can see her try to keep it down
sucking back breath to smooth it out.
She's started doing jumping jacks before she goes to bed-
above the living room, the ceiling thumps and rumbles
like drum canvas with her steps-
and now I rinse dishes at the window,
watch her watch this friend and watch herself in turn,
and don't know how to stop it before it starts,
or if it's even starting.
Beginnings are like fires;
match strike after match strike until one works
and it all blazes upwards,
and who's to say which strike
should have been nipped, eliminated, for prevention;
who can know just when an intervention could have kept it
dormant, raw and cold?

Miriam Lawrence
Milton Academy
Brookline, MA
Mr. James Connolly

UNDERWATER

*Nothing of him that doth Jade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.* - Shakespeare, The Tempest

I have always wanted to be a mermaid,
seeing through air so thick
that I am light in it.

I leave behind white beach and tropical trees,
splashing awkwardly with rubbery webbed feet.
Drops of bitter ocean leak through my snorkel
as I plunge into reef-infested water.

And I enter a world where fish are silenced birds
flying through canyons of dirty pink coral.

They are two bright spots
yellow and purple
perched on the jagged reef.
Slender beaks and small improbable fins
flutter past me
as I come too close.

Flocks of tiny cobalt fish
dart before my eyes,
facets of an immense jewel,
swimming in one graceful movement.

Large daring fish circle my ankles,
their gray whiskers swaying
in the underwater breeze.

My hand reaches out to stroke
a glistening underwater feather,
a fluttering outspread fin,
the delicate membrane of a tail.

And as I grasp for the mermaid's world
the fish swim away,
smelling my fear of drowning.

Aditi Gupta
Clarkstown High School North
New City, NY
Ms. Christine Potter

RHYTHMIC LIKE COUNT BASIE

I was particularly squirmy the day I listened to Mrs. Ravenport's conversation with her son, as I guzzled down my cherry and vanilla bean ice cream soda. My mother eyed me across the glass-plated table, and with one whip of her fragile hand smoothed down a lost wisp of an auburn bang that stuck straight out of my mop hair.

"It's sweaty out," I declared to Mom across the table, but she rolled her eyes and said it couldn't be sweaty out. I thought it was sweaty.

"Sweltering is more like it," Mom said peering at me through her brass-rimmed spectacles. Sweltering. I repeated the word over and over again and rolled the syllables around my mouth before I popped a cherry off its stem and moved it back and forth within my chubby cheeks. It was sweaty in the air, and I wiped the perspiration off my forehead and onto my yellow, floral sundress. Mom was reading *The Wall Street Journal*, and I tried making out a sentence from across the slippery surface of the table yet the lettering was so small, so fine, that the words were unreadable.

Leaning against the cool plate of stained-glass, that separated our red leather cushioned booth from another identical booth, I felt the chill of the smooth surface run down my cheek, up my neck, and into my ear. I pressed my forehead against the glass, cupping it so it suctioned to the multicolored plate, and then I pulled away slow and listened as my ear made a hollow, popping sound. I pressed my ear once again to the stained-glass, resting it on a triangular shaped piece of blue glass within the booth's divider.

I didn't even mean to listen. Honest. Mom always said that I shouldn't be so nosy because eavesdropping is incredibly rude. But here I am, sweltering on a sweaty day, and I hear the word "god-damn." As a little girl, I was struck with a horrible, yet the same time, mischievous sensation. I knew "goddamn" was a bad word, because once Mom smacked me on the bottom for screaming it at my cat when he bit my ankle. I learned the word from Tommy up the street and I didn't know it was bad until after my bottom was stinging and pink. After hearing "goddamn" through this blue chip of shin glass in the divider, I formed an "o" with my sticky lips. This surprise reaction slowly crept into a playful grin, as I continued to listen intently to the conversation between these intriguing people in the booth next door.

"Mother, it is plain to see that you cannot and will not be able to take care of yourself without Father around anymore." A starchy man's voice spoke deeply to his mother, his tone neither kind nor reassuring. The mother didn't respond.

I remember being as silent as when I have time-out at home, and I sat motionless in the booth, listening to the low growl of the son's voice as my heart beat rapidly against my chest. There was silence for a long while, and all I could think about was the word "goddamn" and how I wished that these people would say it again. Or, for that matter, maybe they would say another curse word, and this time I would make sure not to repeat the bad word near Mom.

The mother spoke: "I am not going into the home, Joseph." She sounded disturbed through her quaking voice and I immediately liked her. I could tell from her voice; she had a sweet, high-tone, consoling, and melodic voice and it was warm honey to my cold, little ear. I leaned back, and as my eyes traveled up the divider, I could see Joseph throw his big, burly hands up in frustration. "Mother, we both know your medical condition, and it is not safe for you to be alone in that big house! Let's bring you to Granby's Home and see how you like it."

The honey voice retorted, "No. I don't care if I live alone. I got along fine for forty-seven years with your father, and I will get along just fine by myself" I was startled when I heard the sharp rap-

ping of her palms against the glass table.

A cheerful waitress interrupted the old woman. "Hello, Mrs. Ravenport! It's nice to see you again. May I get you anything to drink?"

Mrs. Ravenport was her name.

"Good afternoon, Sandy. May I please have a hot, herbal tea. Thank you."

No longer refreshed against the glass, my ear felt clammy and hot. My cherry and vanilla bean ice cream soda was a mere pile of foam at the bottom of the cloudy mug. I sat up and leaned across the table and imitated the formal address that Joseph had used. "Mother. Mother." Mom answered me coolly without looking up. "What?" She continued to study her paper. "Mother." She snapped, "Why are you calling me that?" I didn't answer but breathed in deeply and sucked the foam out of the bottom of the dirty jug with an unladylike sound. Mom didn't even look up.

Wondering how Mrs. Ravenport was doing, I again pressed the side of my flushed and sticky face to the stained-glass avoiding the sweaty vestige from earlier. This time I pressed my ear upon a newer, green chunk of cold, refreshing color. I heard Mrs. Ravenport sobbing quietly. I could tell she was sobbing for she was hiccupping. I always hiccup when I cry intensely. When I hiccup-cry no one hears me but my cat. Tommy heard me once too but that just because I fell out of our tree for in the back woods and hurt my right elbow Mom never hears me hiccup-cry. She says that crying should be against the law because it only shows how weak a person is. "Especially never cry in public," Mom always says. "That, in itself, should be considered a crime." Mrs. Ravenport was hiccupping in public, and I briefly wondered what her sentence in jail would be if Mom were the harsh judge. I heard Joseph mumble something, low and rough, not kind or consoling in any way. I wanted to jump over the divider and give Mrs. Ravenport a hug and tell her that hiccup-cries were okay and that her son was being mean. Unfortunately, I couldn't see over the divider without standing up on the red leather cushion. My feet could hardly reach the black and white tiled floor below the table, let alone peer at the identities being hidden from me.

"I'm not going. I'm not going," whimpered Mrs. Ravenport. "Yes you are. Don't start this again, Mother." Joseph stressed the word mother in a condescending and horrible way that made my nose wrinkle up just like it does when I taste the pasty film of lima beans. "Suzy. Suzy." I leaned up when I heard Mom's voice trailing in the air. "I'm going to the ladies' room. Be good and sit up straight." There was jazz music playing in the background. Tommy likes jazz. Usually I play the imaginary trumpet or saxophone when we are pretend practicing with our famous band, but sometimes, only rarely, I am allowed to beat those drums. Tommy almost always beats the drums. He bangs his two branches from the large sycamore onto the hollow sounding, empty paint cans and we make music just like his idol, Count Basie.

Mrs. Ravenport was quiet now, and Joseph ordered, "Have your belongings packed and ready by tomorrow. I'll go call you a cab." I noticed him rise and a dark shadow was cast upon the seat where Mom had been sitting. Joseph was as burly as his thick hands. His dark, unshaven face emphasized his broad shoulders and protruding belly. Drawing tightly toward his square jawbone, his narrow lips anchored into a large scowl. He trudged away from the table leaving Mrs. Ravenport all alone.

I stuck my sticky palms to the table and pushed myself up. Standing on the booth's padded seat, I could fully absorb the actual Mrs. Ravenport through my curious eyes. Silver hair, like the color of my cat, twisted neatly into a bun at the top of her tiny head. Her piercing blue eyes were puffy and red-stained like my sundress spotted from the ice cream's cherry dye. I smiled shyly, and as she

beamed back I noticed that her smile, surrounded by fine lines, was soothing like her voice.

"Hi," I announced. "Hi there. Have you been listening to me?" I felt my sweltering face perspire further as I shamefully nodded my head up and down. Mrs. Ravenport laughed lightly and reached up to cup one of her hands over mine. "Are you okay?" I asked, reassured by her touch. "Oh yes. When I have a sweet, little girl care about how I'm feeling, I know everything is going to be quite all right." She blinked away a lonesome tear and smoothed her lace shawl down across her breast. "Are you sad because you have to move?" I asked. I smoothed my dress, mirroring her gesture, and tucked a strand of my wild mop behind my clammy ear. Mrs. Ravenport sighed and squeezed my hand. Straining her shriveled face towards my freckled skin she whispered. "I'm sad because the one I love is hurting inside, and I'm afraid I won't be able to do anything about it anymore." Her voice trailed off as I saw Mom walking towards the table. "Bye Mrs. Ravenport." I quickly laid a light kiss upon her frail and wrinkled hand and flopped down onto the red leather cushion sprawling my feet out on the end.

Mom arrived at the table fishing for some loose change deep within her pocketbook. "Get your feet off the booth. Haven't I taught you anything?" She muttered something under her breath that I could not translate, and I instantly wondered if she was still missing Daddy. Trailing behind her clicking heels, I followed her out of the restaurant. Clamped in my moist fist was my straw wrapper that I intended to fling at that horrible man, Joseph, but he was nowhere to be found. Upon exiting the restaurant, the wrapper floated and drifted silently to the scorching pavement below.

"Why are you littering?" scolded Mom and she bent down to retrieve the crinkled paper at my feet. Her face was so close to mine when she stooped toward the roasting concrete, that I could feel the silky strands of her auburn hair against my skin, and I could smell the sweet aroma of her lilac perfume. She grabbed the paper wrapper, and as she began to stand up, she paused when she caught my hazel eyes drilling over her delicate features. Kneeling in the middle of the parking lot, outside of a restaurant with connecting red leather cushioned booths, my mommy looked me in my eyes and asked softly, "Suzy, why did you drop that? You know better." I wasn't listening; as I ran my damp fingers over her face, our noses almost touched, and our breaths pulsed in time with each other, rhythmic like Count Basie. And I hugged her. I pressed my sweltering body against her starched suit, and I didn't let go. My sticky, pudgy hands clamped onto her back, and I felt her delicate fingers hesitantly grasp the stained, yellow sundress.

Susan E. Ulbrich
Coginchaug Regional #13 High School
Durham, CT
Mrs. Melissa Frey

WINNIE

The best dirty joke I've ever heard emerged from the shriveled lips of a reed-like, eighty-one year old woman. The joke, foul enough to make a scarred truck driver flush, was not delivered timidly or coyly. A hot, liberated thing, it sprang boldly from the wrinkled woman, landing square on the housewife sitting next to her in the waiting room of the doctors office where I work. The room drowned in thick silence as the other patients pulled and tugged at their clothing, scandalized. Then, the woman, now a demi-godly, holy figure in my mind, grinned with her sparse teeth and laded gums and jabbed a bony elbow into soft housewife flesh. Almost coquettish with her gravelly voice, "she muttered, 'Oh! Isn't it

filthy?!" She was delighted. As was I.

Grey, crotchety old men who have known wars sit playing chess on scratched park tables; fresh, slim-hipped girls walk down streets swinging their hair and snapping their short fingers. Marvelous creatures, velvety, lush characters are everywhere. I've often felt that I shouldn't leave the house without baskets, butterfly nets, and notebooks, to best capture them in all of their blooming being. All of their qualities are rich; all of their stories are golden.

A conjured Jack Kerouac, standing in the dim smoke of an alley, scribbles madly in his tiny pocket notebook, each page just big enough for a single blues chorus, recording the rhythms and melodies of the life pulsing all around him. A true master of the moment, he writes on stained cocktail napkins in fits of hot, driven inspiration; he unlocks the present like peeling a secretive fruit, he desires, as I do, to see everything, to love it all, to meditate and to write about it.

To write on something, to encapsulate its essence inside of a few significant sounds and furious letters, is perhaps the most sacred way to love it. For me, the measure of a truly holy moment has always been my need to write of it, to funnel its sparkling existence into words. These moments are glowing things; within one, I sink inside the endless ways of creating textures and flow, the possibilities of language. These moments are for me true twice: I live inside their present and die promise of their future all at once.

The eighty-one-year old, a gem of a soul named Winifred, is a survivor of throat cancer. Yet she is a feisty, spirited woman who goes to the Senior Center for bingo nights and tango lessons and to stock up on her dirty jokes. She tells me I should call her by her nickname, Winnie, and that she is entirely sick of having to sputter up with the conservative audience in the waiting room. Even so, every time she comes in, she picks the most sheltered looking housewife and sinks down next to her, telling the same dirty jokes loudly, proudly. Her story sings to be written: moments with her are thick with laughter and strings of timeless words.

Vicky Reichman
Lexington High School
Lexington, MA

MOZART'S FANTASY IN D after bar 97

My fingers miss their destination
Somewhere between F and F sharp-
A major slip against your minor undertones.

Your last chord lies
On nervous piano strings,
Lost in the air,
Without an adequate ending.

I want to reach directly back
To the conception of your fragmented fantasy,
Before the candlelight sliced you
Into five premature lines, smeared by ink spots
Streaming down your "Kleines Deutsche" face.

You abandoned the notes after bar 97,
When all you could hear
Was the absence of your mother-
the grayish corpse with eyes open

and arms extended to fold

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

you back into her womb, where your music
was only hers.

How can I tell you it's all right
To close her coffin,
Bury her under the piano's lid?

How can I tell you it's all right
To tuck bar 97 into the finished pile
And sit only in silence?

Christine Malvasi
Atlantic City High School
Ventnor, NJ
Mr. Peter E. Murphy

ON ISLAND

We silently scaled fish:
hands piled on peelers,
scraping back, back, back--
raking away slimy sheets that flaked off
like the coatings on the wood lobster traps
stacked on the market's back dock,
white barnacles and strings of seaweed molded on their hinges.
We disconnected heads and tails--
eyes and flits dropping like flipped coins,
pennies into water-- slit stomachs, eased out
lines of fragile bones just wide enough to lodge a throat,
displayed fresh lumps.

We avoided bumping elbows, touching:
last night, when the counters had been wiped,
and shone, arid stank of gills and disinfectant,
with waves slapping the dock posts, a reprimand,
you hoisted me like a bucket of crabs,
my swordfish-soiled arms around your neck,
our tongues meeting like minnows; nothing

that I could have conjured at thirteen, my first summer
of shaved legs and bikinis, when I'd watch you in the ocean--
disappearing under waves, then coming up, shaking drops
of water from your hair like a Labrador, We went crabbing, scyth-
ing nets
along the dirty bottom of the salt water pond,
filling tin pails with twitching crabs and shells, and I watched your
hands-
a finger on each side of a squirming pallid belly, the nails short
and stuffed with sand-- and saw them on me.
You knew things--how to open oysters, ward off bluefish, how to
tell
if a horseshoe crab's alive--from a lifetime here,
in a small share of sea and shingle on Menemsha Bay, a block
down
from your family's market-- things I tried to learn.
You were tall, fourteen and lobster-tan,
and on the mainland, your initials inked their way
all over my books; I pretended that my Chilmark sweatshirt
came from you. I was impatient;
each year you told me about the store--
a customer, a shipment--I told you about home, and wanted more.

You never knew what I harbored
through three more years of boiling afternoons
spent shrieking at salt water sprays on our baked bodies,
of sitting on the sand in sweats at sunset,
watching flames lick the sky and peeling crisp brown cases
off toasted marshmallows, their soft white flesh pouring out.
At your store, I saw you from the middle up behind the counter,
in your navy apron, hacking hunks off halibuts,
and leaned forward to watch you work the scales
while I recounted my day's work-
folding imitation Black Dog T-shirts in Oak Bluffs-
and somehow felt unsatisfied.
You smelled of fish, the scent a hint around you; you had
small red pokes on your palms where your hands
had slipped onto a oyster's spike--symbols that I envied.

This June, I joined you,
severing clam muscles, slicing slabs of salmon,
tying lobster claws to keep them from scissoring us,
shredding us. Beside you, nights, sponging brine from pots,
the huge faucets gushing waterfalls that ricocheted against the
empty bottoms,

I told you how I wished for what you knew,
how in the winter, away from water, land on land around me,
I would itch to be where you were.
For the first time you told me everything-squeaky desks and used
books
at Martha's Vineyard High, orange beams like tiny flashlights
chasing cigarettes, joints, down to stubs on Saturdays nights,
ice-laced air gnawing knuckles chapped on snow-less January
days,
the year round grocery store, red vans bucketing
off the ferry ramp in May like ant armies,
tourists filling up the towns, ready for the islanders
to mix their Bloody Marys and grill their bluefish.
You told me, you were getting out--
a letter, college crest in the left hand corner,
a duffel, a ticket-- you were waiting.

Tonight, we heard the ferry's whistles over the hissing lobster
tank,
cars full of folding chairs and shells in the boat's belly,
people going back. It's almost Autumn; we both know
I'd stay, but this won't last the winter.
We closed up, turned the hoses on, ran water
over rubber floor pads, watched it wash away the day's debris,
the shards of fish, the slim bones, watched it drench the ground
like floodlights.
We brought our eyes up from the wet, and, with this water all
around us, kissed
I thought how, if I could, I'd peel away what covers you, strip your
case off,
watch the coating fall, find what's in your bones that bothers you,
pick it away, leave you smooth and pink and clean, using what
I've learned from you; it satisfies and leaves me lacking
to do this, foreheads together,
two forms flat against each other like sand and sea.

Miriam Lawrence
Milton Academy
Brookline, MA
Mr. James Connolly

Cashews.
The sweat that glosses your lips
tastes like salted cashews.

And the fan in the window
smells like lawn
when I awake in your morning,
in your suburbia.

I once had my own.
Where I'd sit outside and play Monopoly,
eat saltine crackers.

But I still bring my blanket to sleep over.
And I still can never sleep.
Because murderers have families too, ya know.
Just ask your mom, she only kept you.

So I cut my hair
instead of washing it.
And I know you liked it
'cause you were scared.
It was the rebirth of a dominatrix,
sex-packed and sincere.

So you would ask me to sleep over.

And I can inhale your fan.

Victoria Joyce
West Morris Mendham High School
Chester, NJ
Mrs. Carolyn Neville

NIGHTFELT

I sit under the soft white sheets in the
blinding darkness.
I am yearning.

Lightning bugs, tiny flashes of electric
green
ideas: flicker.

Being aimed in a circle around my head,
I loose my thoughts like darts.

words skim your mouth
so thin that I can see the milky froth line
your upper lip.

You dip in to take another sip,
but before you have the chance I drink you
in.

Ladybug legs skittering down,
you tickle my esophagus.

Leaf being caught by a light spring draft,
my slightest will flutters away.

The window is our dialogue.
we make imprints on it and sit back to watch

them fade.

Jessica Katz
Saddle River Day School
Woodcliff Lake, NJ
Mr. Eric Wilhelm

I SAW MY GRANDMOTHER

I saw my grandmother dancing in the moonlight
Her legs so stiff and frail
Her experienced hands like crinkled cream,
Thin and fragile
They say she's sick, my grandmother
Her mind fraught with childish memories and absurd notions
I won't tell them then, that I saw her dancing
Like an apparition so light and unchained
When no one was watching
A faint smile painted on her lovely face
A hearty chuckle
My grandmother in the night light
And I in the window, smiling

Anoush Khachatrian
Bishop Kearney High School
Brooklyn, NY
Mrs. Ann Lindner

(VICTOR LIKES ROSES)

Victor looks like he's built from rock.

His face is fleshy and almost square, and his limbs are thick and
squat.

He looks like a shot-putter,

He's obese with muscle,

A real workhorse.

*"I'm always going to different churches" he says, "Every Saturday
to different churches. Different churches, different religions, I
switch around. Especially in the winter, you know, every winter I
become a Muslim, every spring I become a Catholic. Christmas I
do not celebrate Gatita, you would not believe." Why Victor?
"Because I have my family! When they come at Christmas for their
presents, I tell them no! I am a Muslim I don't celebrate the birth of
Jesus!" And then he laughs, a laugh that begins with a quick sharp
H and expands like a leech, sucking the color, the blood, the flesh
out of his face until he stops and is quiet, quieter. "No, at Christmas
I give presents, I give a flower to everybody. I give a rose to every
body because a rose is my favorite flower." Yes Victor, I know, you
already told me you like roses.*

Victor Cortes was born in San Miguel, a city to the east of San
Salvador. I know this even though I've only been here two weeks.
I've only been here two weeks but I've driven across the country,
almost to Honduras and back. It only takes three hours each way
because El Salvador is the smallest country in Latin America.

*"My sister, Gatita, I will visit her when you leave. She is a nun, she
is a sister you know, kind of crazy in the head. You know. She
loves Jesus and forgets everything else, and I say how can you live*

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

in this damn city and see all the houses of cardboard and love Jesus and nothing else." Do you believe in God? "No. Romero he was a great man, he was a great man and he was a saint. But I don't believe in god. But my sister, she is crazy not because she follows the church. She is crazy because she does not follow the world."

Victor has three sisters. Three sisters and one brother. Has three sisters and had one brother. But Victor really has two sisters, two because one is a sister in the church. Victor has a family. Victor is an auto mechanic in Kensington, Maryland. His sisters are wives and house cleaners in Kensington, Maryland. His mother is old in Kensington Maryland. Victor came to Kensington, Maryland when he was sixteen, he left El Salvador to come to Kensington, Maryland when he was sixteen. Victor left El Salvador when he was sixteen and that was ten years before Romero was shot "Romero used to be a friend of my fathers when I was little, he pick me up when I was only two ore three. My father was a rich man like I tell you, he had lots of land and even sons to take it when he died. I did not like the land, I liked to fix cars can you believe! I came to America because I like to fix cars and my father he doesn't like that I do. But my brother, he became a doctor, he was my father's son. But Romero he was my father's friend, he pick me up when I was two or three"

Oscar Romero was the bishop of El Salvador. He was shot in 1980 because the army did not like him. *He was shot in 1980 because he cared for the people.* He was not shot when Victor was little because the army liked him then. Romero is a saint, he is on the walls (*Romero vive!*) he is on the schools (*Romero vive!*) he is on the tongues and in the hearts and in the souls of Salvadorenos. Victor left before Romero was shot but when Romero was shot he came back. And then he left and then he came back again which is why he is here, now, with me.

"Gatita, you would not believe. I come to the United States when I was only sixteen, I was living under a bridge in Kensington when I was only sixteen. My brother he stayed because he was a doctor, my two other sisters they come but only much later and by that time I come back. I leave El Salvador because I want to fix cars, I love to fix cars, I always love to fix cars. I always love the people, see, I always with the people, I always with the FMLN. I come back to help them when Romero, when he is shot. My two other sisters are in the United States then. My mother is in the United States then. My father he is dead then and Romero he is dead and my brother he is a doctor and he is still in El Salvador so I go back to El Salvador and so I come back home"

Victor came back home then because there was a war. Victor came back home now because the war is over but it is not. People were poor and they are still poor. People were hungry and they are still hungry. People were dying and they still die. People can be less poor but not less dead. Victor came back because I came here because a bunch of gringos came here. To bring computers to a village that is To The East and almost in Honduras. To build a fence in a village that is To The East and almost in Honduras. *You bring tears to my eyes you are all so beautiful* he says. We are done now and tomorrow we are going home. Victor will go home too after he sees the sister his crazy sister. Go home to the United States which is To The North of El Salvador. To The North which is so far away. *You are all so beautiful* Victor says over and over again.

"My brother, Gatita, my brother he was a doctor. He was a doctor

but he was for the people, he was a doctor in the FMLN. I join him, I join him to take pictures, I filming at over the place, in San Salvador, in the mountains, everywhere. I taking pictures and I fighting. All over the place." Were you near Santa Marta Victor? "Yes, Gatita, I was all over the place."

Santa Marta is a little village To The East that now has ten computers. Santa Marta is a little village To The East that now has a fence. Santa Marta is a place where people have been dying for a long time. A place where the babies are fat because they are hungry. A place where the babies are fat because there are parasites in the water and there is water in their stomachs. A place where one baby is fat because her anus is close up and she has to go to the hospital and I did not understand the rest because I don't speak Spanish. *Ella sufre*, Victor says; *You are so beautiful*, Victor says. The FMLN came to Santa Marta, came from Santa Marta because too many people were dying. You cannot be any less dead. *Ella sufre.*

"My brother I say goodbye to him in a cave, Gatita." A cave? "A cave, a cave that is called a tatu. It is underground, it is where the FMLN go when the American bombs come, it is where the FMLN go when the army of El Salvador comes. It is where I say goodbye to my brother." Why? What happened? But I do not ask. "The next day I am going back to the United States for awhile. The next day I am going back to develop my film and so I am going to a plane in the city. I have to go. But my brother have to stay. He have to stay so I say goodbye to him in a tatu, Gatita. The next morning he leave because they need a doctor and I am ready to leave too when the bombs they come. And so I stay. And so someone come back to the tatu and say that my brother he has left his gone he is dead."

My brother is dead. A cave is inside a mountain. Victor's brother was not inside a cave so he is inside a mountain. Victor calls me a little cat because he says I look like one. Victor likes cats but his brother is inside a mountain. *When the bombs come* he says. When the American bombs come he says.

"My brother I bury him in the mountain. I put rose petals in the grave. Rose petals from my pocket from United States because I like roses. I come back later five years later I come back to find him", but Victor, I thought this was your fist time back you told me and I thought that it was your fist time back, "No, I come back once more, I come back to his grave where there is a rose bush were there was not any before. I come back for my mother she don't believe that she have one son she don't believe me and tell me to look Oh Victor.

Tomorrow we will go north which is so far away. Victor will go north too but tomorrow he will stay.

Victor likes cats, but his brother is inside a mountain.

Victor likes cats but he likes roses and his brother is inside a mountain.

Victor is built like a rock and a mountain is built from a rock.

You cannot be any less dead but Victor is built like a mountain.

He looks like a shot putter,

He's obese with muscle,

A real work horse.

Elisabeth Golub
Washington International School
Washington, D.C
Mrs. Catherine Bell

Dawn is a crisp apple to bite into,
 crunchy and tart,
 cold like broken glass.
 By now, the gun-metal grey pond
 has solidified
 into a concrete block,
 mirrored by the wide-eyed fallowness
 of the fields.
 Leaves play ring-around-the-rosie
 around the lakeside picnic table.
 The rust is closing in.

It happens every year.
 September folds her wings
 and droops her head
 as October marches to the
 rifle beat.

The fool's gold of death
 creeps along pumpkin vines,
 nestling beneath muddy fauveness,
 and dried blood trees darken

before they fade.
 Snow gathers at the corners of clouds,
 on the froth in the clear-jelly brook
 and in the whites of the goose's eye.

Allegra Johnson
 The Chapin School
 New York City, NY
 Mrs. Rinden

WHY I WILL NOT EAT POMEGRANATE

My mother gives me a pomegranate and tells me to peel it. "Here," she says, before rushing upstairs to change out of her black slacks and blue-gray blouse, I thought you would like it."

She will emerge cocooned in a knee-length kameez, a salwar overflowing with excess cloth that bunches around the knees until tapering at the ankles, and a chuni worn like a long long scarf. Her lab façade gone, she will start cooking the same dhal and fulka that her mother and her grandmother made before her. Every day I watch her metamorphosis from the independent scientist to the dutiful housewife. I feel betrayed.

I stare at the fruit she has left in my hand, hating its very color, its sweetness, its

I remember sitting with my grandmother, under the shade of tropically green trees. The heat of summer is so thick it is a presence, sitting with us, watching us. My grandmother, cross-legged in her traditional gray clothing, is hidden hut for her hands and feet and face.

Her fingers, swollen with wrinkles and her knuckles large with age and labor, deftly remove each red seed for me. I watch her brown wrinkled hands peeling, peeling, peeling without pause. my mouth watering and my tongue impatient.

My grandmother's traditional metal plate is filled with all the stages of peeling. "the knobbed spherical fruit sits next to discarded rosy peel, inedible yellow-white pulp that surrounds the edible seed, and a growing pile of nail-sized rubies my eyes gaze at greedily.

And I only see the seeds. The seeds, as odd as the fruit, are angular faceted gems with pale pink cores. Because I sit with my own hands idle. I forget that each layer of crimson seeds is hidden

impossibly in the shape-shifting pulp.

And I devour the scarlet jewels. my teeth crunching the solid cores. I devour them by the handful, sweetness and coolness running down my throat, in the thick watchful heat. My careless fingers, plump with childhood, spatter my dress with permanent rosy stains.

Then my grandmother pauses. her hands pinked by her toil, a smile upon her worn face. She watches inc devour the fruits of her labor.

And she is gone. She no longer separates pulp from gems for me, under happy humid trees. The leafy haven is gone. I realize this only after peeling my own pomegranate. its heart lying open, red and glaring in our brightly lit, artificially heated kitchen.

My grandmother is gone, covered in nostalgia because I never knew her. She was a woman now reflected by her daughter, both of them upholding a culture that pushed them down. She was a woman I would have watched with the same betrayed eyes that watch my mother's metamorphosis. And yet, I push that away, and remember only that pomegranate is the fruit of my childhood, sitting with my grandmother under the shade of tropically green trees.

And the pomegranate seeds choke me with my own lies, their biting, sickly sweet flavor, sticking in my throat.

Aditi Gupta
 Clarkstown High School North
 New City, NY
 Ms. Christine Potter

NO SHELTER

There's no imagery here. No tree lined streets juxtaposed against cerulean sky with scattered clouds awaiting afternoon showers and a falling barometer. This is Brooklyn. We've been living in this apartment two days shy of two months and nobody's ever visited, but now someone is out there pounding like they've paid to get in. There's no peephole, so I undo the latch and crack the hollow door open. As I inch the door back and peer out into the hallway, he takes care of the rest with the thrust of a hard, familiar palm.

"It's your father again..." Van says with a hint of wavering laughter in his voice. "He's taken up temporary residence in Grand Central this time. I thought you should know." He keeps standing out there with this stoic look on his face. I try to search for any signs of sympathy coming from him, but only a detached yawn escapes his lips.

Van is a waiter at this overpriced Thai restaurant downtown. He dresses well, almost too well for his own good. The thing is, he knows it, and is not afraid to flaunt his self-proclaimed beauty. He makes me sick. I'm suddenly ashamed to be seen in my holey socks and patched up jeans. Van is my only friend that knows about my father. I try to cover the tomato sauce stain on my shirt, but it's too late. He has already eyeballed it, and I can see the smirk in his eye. I can also see my reflection in his wire rimmed Armani glasses. I want him to leave.

"He had his guitar," He continues. "Trying to make a buck, I guess. He wasn't playing much. Some weird country, perhaps Blues... I don't know. Maybe you should go see him. He was by the bus terminal." For a minute, I felt humanness coming back to Van.

My father has been on the streets for some time now, I'm guessing four years, but I'm not really sure. I haven't seen him

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 10

since I was 10, and the last I knew of him, he was living somewhere in Jersey. He has managed to vanish into the Street corners with clever cardboard signs and those blue, paper coffee cups with a cartoon version of a Greek acropolis and "It's a pleasure to serve you" scrawled across the middle. Those paper cups are always empty with the exception of a few spare coins, rustling and jingling. I don't want to imagine what he looks like now, but my mind keeps forming a mental picture anyway. It scares me.

By this time, Van has welcomed himself into my apartment, and is sprawled out on my L-shaped leather couch. His feet are appropriately propped up under my mother's oriental silk pillows. He's watching TV.

"What?" He asks. The back of his head is facing me. He lights a cigarette.

"What what?" I reply. "You know you can't smoke in here." I say without looking up. Van doesn't seem care. I wonder if he notices the lack of ashtrays around. He continues to pull a long, hard drag from his overly thin cigarette. He smokes these weird Vietnamese cigarettes. It has something written on the package in French. I can't decipher it.

Van and I had our moments. We tried the relationship thing. We failed at that, miserably. His mother always hated me, but he will deny that, just like the ten thousand other things he claimed we never had. His eyes dart above the TV set surveying our tinfoil and coat hanger antenna combination special. Almost laughing, our eyes meet. I look away. He exhales. The smoke encircles the mottled bouquet of 99 cent silk roses I bought at the bodega downstairs. I can feel his stare. He's gripping that cigarette tight now, pulling what he can from the remains of the tobacco. His lips are pursed and I can smell the scent of curry in his hair.

"You're not talking." He says while taking his last and final drag. Van looks around for an ashtray, or somewhere to squash his cigarette.

We head into the kitchenette among the clutter of magazines and my Mom's crushed Coors Light cans. Dishes pile up in the sink from weeks of neglect. Van drowns his cigarette butt in the soapy residue and vegetable bits that clog our drain. He opens my teal vintage refrigerator in search for food. Various broken, colored magnets decorate the hard metal wall of the fridge. Raunchy verses of poetry in motion magnets adorn the side spelling out misconstrued nursery rhymes. Spanish olives and a dry, cracking wheel of Brie cheese stand lonely in the midst of the silver glimmer of my mother's six packs. Van pulls out Margarita mix from under my sink.

"Don't you even... you have no idea how long that's been sitting there, Van..." I said with noticeable annoyance. Van starts leafing through one of my mother's *Redbook* magazines. He's got his work shirt on from the restaurant. The sleeves are rolled up and my eyes fixate on the delicate black hairs that form intricate designs on his arms. My fingers want to trace the veins on his forearm but find refuge in my pockets instead, scrounging up gum wrappers and forgotten trig notes, all of which laundering has rendered pulpy and forgotten.

Thoughts shuffle. Rewind. Fast forward. Avenue X. CBGB's. Dog-eared chapters of my father. I penciled in a running commentary along the margin and tried to visualize the threadbare and supposed schizophrenic version of him. His bandanna, tattered jeans, blue high top Converse All-Stars. The guitar. I wondered if that was the guitar he had taught me to play on when I was seven. I wondered if he was a junkie like my mother said he was. I never liked that word. It sounded too jovial for the occasion.

"He's just lazy.." my mother would say. "He can very well get

a job, but he chooses to live in that elevator shaft, shooting sh..." She would always cut herself off there. "It's easier that way. Out of sight, out of mind."

Outside the lights of the bridge reflect off of the murky waters below. My fingers drum atop the windowsill. Van senses my nerves. I hear him shift behind me and reach for his nicotine. His boots clunk atop the parquet floors. The thick soles pace in semi circles searching for a segue. I press my nose up against the cold glass and allow my breath to create a thick fog. I draw harried figures and scrawl my name in lopsided script on the condensation in a nervous rhythm. He watches me. We say nothing.

I gaze out onto the Manhattan skyline. My brain racing. Woody Guthrie floods my brain and the thick melody escapes the tired strings of my father's guitar. The chords shift and his strumming envelops my fingertips. His patchouli oil seeps through my pores and jolts me back to third grade, as I watched the sting rays and eels from behind the safety of the thick aquarium walls. Coney Island never smelled the same when cotton candy polluted the mouth of a 10 year old who was too embarrassed to hold Daddy's hand. My sentiment sickens me. I press my hands up against the glass and imagine the prospect of falling the three stories down to my death. Or paralysis. Van reads my thoughts and he guides my hands away from the window. He holds my waist gently. It feels unnatural. Rehearsed. My back stiffens "The bus terminal..." I whisper to myself as I clutched my own guitar leaning against the wall. The strings remain cold to my touch. I cannot muster a chord. The bus terminal. I rush down the stairs and out onto the street where the sudden cool autumn air bites my tearing eyes. I gaze up and see Van staring down at me from the window where he is alone in my apartment. I look up at the sparse trees and I begin to strum. Clanging. Music. A music that created his imagery in a world of no shelter.

Justine G. Gabbard
Floral Park Memorial High School
Floral Park, NY
Mrs. Denise Hayden



Stephen Siperstein
Marblehead, MA

CRASHING INTO THE MOON

That was the summer the upstairs bathtub fell through the ceiling into the dining room. The tub was one of those big metal ones with claws on the bottoms of its legs. When it came through, it smashed up the floor pretty good, but luckily didn't touch the antique table, the only memory my mother had of my grandmother.

Continued on page 11

So for the rest of the summer, my Mom occupied herself by watching the sweaty workmen come in and out of our house, changing the floorboards and fixing the huge hole in the ceiling, while my father went to work.

The heat became so insufferable that we had to open all the windows and doors. My mother talked vehemently about getting robbed, but we never were. At night, a breeze came in from the ocean, leaving the whole house smelling of sea salt.

I walked along the beach, picking up shells, letting the gray tide wash over my feet as it wrapped strands of seaweed around my ankles. We lived on the left bank of a "u" shaped island, where it seemed that civilization had forgotten us. My father was the editor of our local newspaper, *The Welbridge Gazette*, and though there was little news in our small part of the world, he always came home excited about an article on the herd of whales Captain McKinney saw off the coast, or the soft-egg phenomenon over at Rolling's Farm. He loved our town a lot.

I watched a dead fish roll on to the sandy shore in front of me and I remembered the first time I was taught about war. It was in fifth grade when Miss Harmony gave me a soft-cover booklet entitled, "The American Revolution." I saw the bodies and the cannons, and the guns, and the blood-so brightly colored on the page that it almost looked cheerful, which was how I learned that people died, killed, murdered, and were killed and murdered themselves. Something in that dead fish made me think of the booklet and I remembered what an easy resolution it had been to me that people killed and were killed. How natural it all seemed.

That night I woke up in my bed from the heat, my legs feeling sticky with blood. I turned on the light and reached over to my sister's bed.

"Gwen! Gwen! Wake up! There's something wrong with me!"

Gwen turned over, her hair all twirled up in rags so that it would be curly the next morning. "What?" she said, only opening one eye.

"Gwen, get over here right now. I think I'm dying."

She got up, rubbing her eyes and walked over to my bed. "Ugh, stupid," she hissed. "You're not dying, you're just having your period. Congratulations, now go to the bathroom, clean yourself up, and get a pad." And with that she rolled back into bed.

I made it down the stairs to the bathroom. I was a woman. It was disgusting.

The next day I rowed across Salt Pond, the tiny body of water separating my house from my best friend, Brian's. Our parents had been good friends ever since they moved to Welbridge, and we had barbecues with them pretty often.

Salt Pond wasn't really a pond - it was a bay - our own little piece of the sea. Watching the sun rise over the ocean I felt an aching inside me, an aching to grow up and leave, to build something of my own. I had the world, the great wide open of the ocean sprawled out before me like a newly paved road, but I felt only suffocation, like the waters were closing in around me. The new blood that I could almost smell lapped at me like a constant reminder.

Brian lived in a comfortable house. It had two floors and an attic with a big telescope, enough space for a big family, but he was an only child. That day we sat on his back porch smoking the Virginia Slims he pinched from his mother. Mrs. Boncielli, Brian's mom, had that old movie star look. She wore flowing dresses and surrounded herself in a perpetual aura of smoke. It wouldn't be until five years after that day that she died of lung cancer. But we sat then, blissfully unaware of what was to occur in our still and small lives, smoking the entire pack slowly, not quite sure how to inhale.

"So I thought I'd go over to George Wylett's place this afternoon. They've got good fishing down by the creek," Brian said.

"Yeah," I said, coughing from holding the smoke in too long.

"What's the matter?" he asked, looking confused. "There's something weird with you."

"Well... it's kind of gross."

"Cool," he said grinning. Even at thirteen, Brian still had the gaps where his baby teeth had fallen out. He started to pick a scab on one of his bony knees.

As I told him what happened the last night- about the blood and the stickiness, the cramps the next morning, he looked at me, scrunching up his nose and forehead. "Gret, that's disgusting. Yuck.."

I kind of wished he'd laughed at me and called me a stupid girl, made fun of me at least. But he didn't. He just kept scrunching up his nose and then went inside for a soda. And, I sensed that the tide had come in, widening the water already between us.

As I rowed home that night in the twilight, I let the events of the afternoon roll slowly through my mind. George and Brian had caught a big fish together. It might have been a trout, but I didn't know fish very well. But crossing the bay, I thought of them, laughing and sipping the light beer from George's refrigerator, and then wrenching the hook from the shiny and delicate mouth. I had watched as it slowly struggled, bled out, and gasped it's last breath. When it was dead, Brian threw it back into the creek. It sank slowly into the deep part of the murky water until we couldn't see it anymore. Coming home across the crisscrossing waves, I wondered how many fish swam beneath me in the black depths.

A few days later my bleeding went away and was replaced with a cool numbness. I felt so like a ripe apple on a small tree. So ripe that I was dying for someone to pick me. My own weight felt heavy on the branches that bound me.

As I watched the lighthouse beam going around and around at the mouth of the bay, I had the indomitable urge to swim to it, because if I didn't do it now, I never would.

And I walked into the water, feeling something inside me, deep down and invisible, pulling me into the sea, towards the lighthouse. And I began to swim, striking the water with both arms, letting the salt from the current enter my mouth and nose, heaving with both my lungs until every part of my body burned. And then I couldn't swim any more. I hadn't even gotten half-way. And as my mind was pulled across the water, my body stayed in place, treading. But slowly they both returned to the shore.

"Gret! Gret! Gretaaaaa!" Gwen woke me up the next morning, shaking my shoulder so violently I thought she was going to tear it off "Greta, get up right now! I have to show you something!" Reluctantly, I got out of bed and followed her out the window and down the rose trellis. I followed her, running through the tall grass on pudgy legs, trying to keep up with her long, thin, lithe ones. Barefoot I ran, girl-breasts swinging underneath a big t-shirt and boy's shorts, my cropped, dark hair in my face (still unbrushed.) We weaved through the skinny trees and wild flowers in the woods behind our house, and when we got to a stonewall Gwen stopped. She was panting heavily and so was I. We must have run at least half a mile into the well-lit summer forest. With one hand Gwen pulled her blonde hair into a fat ponytail, and with the other she pointed at something in the distance.

"Look," she said.

Far off through the slivers of trees and the beams of light falling through the canopy, I saw big yellow machines, bulldozers.

"What's going on?" I said, squinting to try to see further into the trees.

"They're building some sort of resort here," Gwen answered

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

with disgust.

"But why? Why would they want to build a resort in our backyard?"

"Haven't you noticed how many people have been moving away, selling their land?" she asked, looking at me like I was some sort of foreigner.

"Well the Carmines and the Watsons and the Hugheses moved away, but I thought that was for better jobs."

"Yeah right," she said. "and the Cliftons and the Wellses? All for better jobs? Haven't you noticed that all the people living on the shore are moving away? And some man's with Daddy right now in the kitchen trying to get him to sell the house and the land."

"What?" I cried.

"I'm telling the truth. I saw him come in this morning. Come on, he's probably still there." She grabbed my arm and dragged me back with her, running full speed.

"Shhhh..." she hissed with her index finger to her mouth, as we crouched under the kitchen window. We heard my father's calm voice speaking to the supposed real estate man.

"Now Mr. Wright, I understand that this is a generous offer, \$300,000 is more than I could ever have expected, even last year, but this is my land, my home. My children were born on this island, and I want to die on this island."

"This island," began the man, "will not be the same one that you grew up on, Mr. Gardener. In five years it will be completely commercialized. You see, the people I represent already own seventy-five percent of the land here. We plan to turn it into a gated community for the upper class. You know the sort I'm talking about. Golf courses, swimming pools, a shopping mall right inside, so they'll never have to leave. You have some of the prettiest views on all of the island. I'm sure that if I talk to my superiors in the company they'd be prepared to offer you more for it."

"Thank you, really, but my family plans to live here a long time."

"Okay," the man said, as we heard him get up and push in his chair, "but keep in mind that you'll be very out of place here once the construction is finished. I doubt that anyone will buy your paper, and I'm sure you won't like the clamor of golf carts around your house."

I heard my father get up as well and hold open the screen door for Mr. Wright, "Thank you, sir, but I'm sure this is what my family wants. Best of luck with the construction." I could hear a tremor of sadness in his voice, the sharpest fluctuation of the syllables. He shut the door and sat down with a sigh.

Later that night, lying in my bed, I watched the waves outside my window. The moon shone a beam onto the water, reflecting white onto the gray waves. The lighthouse beacon moved in slow circles. I watched it, knowing somehow that it wouldn't be working much longer because all the fishermen were leaving. Maybe the developers would keep it running for charm.

A few weeks later I found myself sitting on a hunk of granite out in the marshland with Brian. We sat, tapping our feet on the big rock, watching the lightning bugs weave between the long blades of grass leading out to Biggon's River.

"You know this river leads all the way out to the sea. All the way out to the Atlantic," Brian said.

"So?"

"No, I'm not done yet," he insisted. "It flows out to the Atlantic with all the big fish and sharks, and then through all the big rivers in Europe, and into the Arctic Sea, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and all the other little bodies of water in Asia and Africa, and then it goes into the Pacific, and then back through all

the great American rivers like the Colorado, and then somehow back here, to this state here that we live in, and then right here, right here where we're watching it slowly go by!"

I wanted to tell Brian that he'd missed a lot of big seas and rivers and lakes and stuff in his little speech, but instead I just looked out at the river and the beach that separated it from the sea for miles and sighed, "Hmmm. . ." The quiet and loneliness of summer nights had a way of making us both a little philosophical.

"So is your family moving out too?" he asked.

"No" I said, dropping my chin. "I guess yours is..."

"Naw... my Dad says this is the best place on the East Coast to see stars, and him being an astronomer, he wants to stay. He says it doesn't matter if a bunch of rich people move in, as long as he has his stars."

I sighed again and put my head on his shoulder. We were still young enough then to be affectionate without complications, to love without heartache, to dream without cynicism.

"Do you know what I want?" I said suddenly.

"What?"

"To shoot a rocket and crash it into the moon, and let its tiny moon chips scatter in the sky like diamonds."

"Aw Gret," he said. "You don't need a rocket to do that. Watch this." And he picked up a shiny black stone from the ground and hurled it towards the moon. It flew up into the sky and then fell silently into the long grass. "See, if I can just get close..." He jumped off our rock and hurled another shiny pebble up into the sky. It fell to the ground.

Brian turned to me and grinned his missing-teeth grin. Racing through the long marsh grass, he got to the edge of the river.

"Last one!" he shouted, and he propelled the shining rock into the sky. And I swear it stayed suspended in the air near the moon for a few seconds before falling with a noiseless plop into the river.

As Brian came running back to me, his chest heaving under his thin t-shirt and shorts, I thought I caught a glimpse of something. Maybe it was the man he was to be. And as we sat together back on the rock, listening to the crickets chirp, I watched the moon crack apart, its pieces floating away into the empty nothingness of the black night sky.

Sarah Hsu
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Mrs. Jane Rinden

TIME FROZEN

Tonight it snowed,
And as I stood
In the parking lot
Below the dimly lit studio,
I looked out across the lot

A crooked dumpster,
Three light posts,
And the roof of a middle school.
All covered in a fine dust
That appeared like powdered sugar
And shards of glass

Nothing moved.
No sounds.

Continued on page 13

There was only the delicate powder
Sifting down
In the eerie half light.

On any other day,
I never would have bothered
To look at the parking lot
But tonight
It draws tears unexpectedly...

Katherine Nyce
Wilton, CT
Mr. Flachsbart

TO THE GLORY

We are a happy hoard of Sunday faces,
taking our weekly places amongst stone sheep and
shiny silver chalices.
We wear a patchwork muddy rainbow robe
of Sunday clothes.

Our dazzled eyes crawl up the insides of each arch
and squint at the intricate art at the top
honoring our afterlife.
We trust that such heavy, high ceilings must be made
of devotion.

We rise, when told, and sing assigned hymns:
symmetrical melodies which we memorized by accident
on other Sundays.
Our Words of Praise muddle each other as a small cross
walks the aisle.

We pray, off the Common page, in lists: the sick, the sad
the dead, though some of those lie under
the thick cathedral floor.

They seep back into our oblivious body as we breathe
their crypt dust.

Alex MacKenzie
Washington DC
Mr. Brendan Short

SHE

Adam was in awe-
of himself and the clear blue canvas
formatted especially for him.

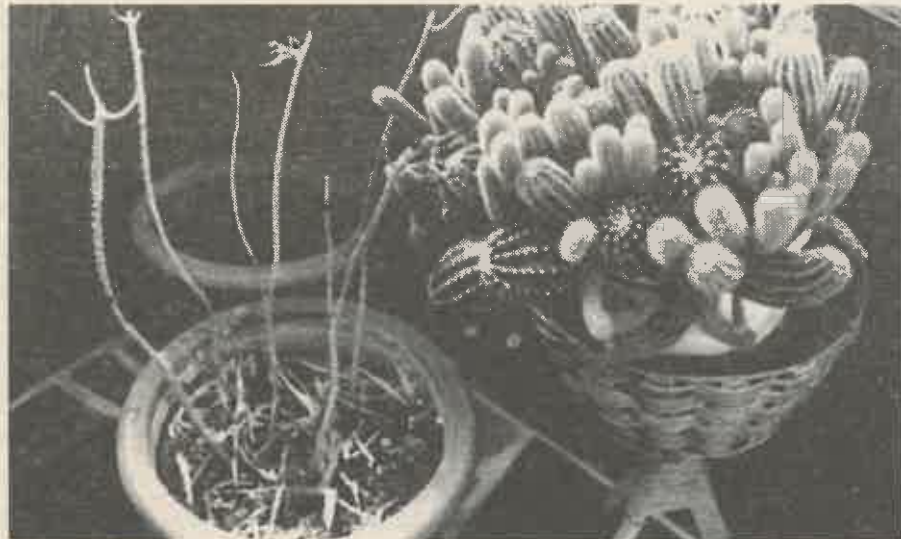
And sure-
water was a convenience,
but in the end,
it's placid reflection
proved to be far more valuable
than any sip on a dry day.

His competition, or rather, companion,
was found with fawn-like beauty,
sprung from him-
so surely She owed him a favor or two.
She would stand next to trees
and sing-

He often wondered what Her insides were...
Then there was the apple,
luscious and ripe
and screaming to be noticed,
like anything else red is.
Apparently there was an eleventh commandment-
one bite equals eternal banishment, although it is the
thought that counts.

On his way out, Adam often mused if She would have tasted so
sweet....

Emily Caponetti
Marple Newtown Senior High School
Broomall, PA
Mr. Thom Williams



Keith Considine
Bishop Stang High School
Dartmouth, MA
Ms. Jennifer Irizarry

Friday Evening, Jerusalem

The sabbath siren wails
across the way.
Approaching dark,
I watch an Arab family
watch us
as we pray in a circle.
We are welcoming Shabbat
and they are picnicking.
Today, I remember, is not their sabbath.
And I recall the distant wailing
from a mosque at four-thirty that morning
and how it had lulled me between
awake and asleep
through my window.

I sit on the grass carefully,
not to ruin my dress, watching
the sun lower over the limestone of the city.
Remembering the wine-tinged taste of dinner in my mouth
rich hummus, thick pita, fresh fruit and cinnamon rugelach
that we had handpicked in the shuk
the previous day.

For all the sweetness, it is tense here.

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

I know that blood and salty tears and misconception
of one another
too easily mix.

I pray for an idle sabbath
without violence. I pray for the people
who are supposedly the enemy. One cannot hate
tonight
when the sabbath queen arrives, reminding us
to make love and eat
to sustain ourselves
and celebrate life. The promenade begins to light up
and the whole city is before me and I would love to wrap my arms
around it and kiss it
but it is too divided, it is divorced
every line drawn down the middle
stones flying through the Old City
and I wait.

Dena Weisberg
Newton North High School
Waban, MA
Mr. George Bower

THEY WERE THROWING WATER BALLOONS TODAY, IN SCHOOL.

All of the girls rushed to one side of the building,
the wall that I was near and
screamed because they didn't want to get wet.

I want to get wet.

I want to run under sprinklers
and through puddles
and stand in rainstorms till there's another flood
and I can have my fill of water. Bathtubs
are good, and sinks, and toilets,
they're calming influences is what my mother always said,
maybe that's true,
but I like water for the wet of it,
for the stickiness,
the cold,
the primal starts of it. It was around before I was,
before my mother was,
before water balloons and porcelain
and flushing. It'll stay, too,
until silly girls want to stand in water and
want to dig up worms like I once did,
standing diapered amid cucumbers,
a worm between each finger.

Vicky Reichman
Lexington High School
Lexington, MA

MY FATHER. WET SNEAKERS. ANT CEMETERIES, AND THE BLUES

A warm hand closes around my wrist and my first thought of
the day is of how gently my father wakes me. When I open my eyes
he is standing over me telling me to get ready if I want to go get a

newspaper with him. For a moment I don't know where I am. I'm not
scared, I just feel like someone else living another life, I remember
we are in Rhode Island and staying at someone else's house, and
that is why nothing around me is mine. As I shift out of bed the cold
air in my room stuns me as it does every morning. The hairs on the
back of my neck raise and goose bumps begin to spread over my
arms. There is a dull ache behind my right eye and I consider sur-
rendering myself and dropping backwards and going to sleep again
in the nest of sheets and blankets already warm from my body. But
I don't. My father is going to drive out for breakfast and *The New
York Times* and going anywhere with him makes me feel important.
As I stumble around to get dressed I examine this room that isn't
mine. The sunlight from the east floods everything, casting its bril-
liance over the chalky white walls and dirty cornflower blue carpet.
The bed frame is dark wood, and high enough off the ground to be
intimidating. The overstuffed mattress is too small for it and slides
around when I writhe and twist trying to get comfortable on hot
summer nights. The radiator is jammed between the bed and the
wall, leaving a gaping hole, which I sometimes slip into in my sleep.
I wake up with my face pressed against a cold wall and my legs
swallowed by the hole beside the bed and my arms tangled
beneath me. The jangling of my father's keys halts my rambling
mind.

I tiptoe down the hall avoiding the black spots on the carpet
by the kitchen where ants have been squashed into it. The family
that owns the house must have had some kind of ant problem that
resulted in the scattered ant burial grounds littering their floor. I
carefully step around them, afraid their bad luck may somehow be
contagious. They make me think of Tuli Kupferberg, someone my
father knew, who was part of the rock group, the Fugs, and how he
lived in New York City and never killed a cockroach. He refused to
kill any of God's creatures. Guess sometimes having too much
humanity can be a nuisance.

I rush to put on my shoes, tying them carefully. I'm good at
tying shoes; it's just something that came to me instinctively, like
blowing bubbles with chewing gum. I was not like the other kids I
knew, fumbling with the thin laces in their clumsy hands.

My father is waiting for me at the door, holding my sweater.
He looks so tall and strong as he leans one sinewy shoulder
against the doorjamb. The light of the morning glows behind him,
illuminating his shoulders and silver hair with a glorious light. He is
a deity in the simple room. I run to him, forgetting to avoid the ant
cemeteries underfoot. I stop in front of him as he bends down his
face inches from mine. I raise my arms up as he tugs my sweater
down over me. I grimace remembering the ants. Now I will have to
go the whole day with death on my shoe.

As we walk down the steps of the porch I want to tell my
father to lock the door in case robbers or murderers come by while
mom is asleep. I know to keep my mouth shut though. There are
no bad people here. My parents are already afraid I am too much
a city girl, so I have to try to pretend to be flexible and conform to
this strange country life. My father points ahead at the pearly mist
dusting the houses and trees. "Look at that" he says, his voice elec-
tric in the still morning air.

We get into the car together, our wet shoes squeaking on
the side of our beige rented midsize. I grab hold of the door's han-
dle and jerk my body back; making sure the door is closed tightly.
My father turns the key in the ignition and the car comes alive at
once. The radio begins to talk, the lights on the dashboard flicker
on, and the engine purrs. I watch his foot sink on the pedal. His
shoes are wet from the dew like mine. He is wearing those auda-
cious lime green Adidas shoes with ostentatious yellow racer
stripes down the sides. Some strange woman accidentally stole
them once when we were on the beach. I told my mother and we

Continued on page 15

chased her down. I held my mother's hand and stood behind her as she explained to the woman that she had just taken my father's shoes. She was very embarrassed and gave them back. She apologized saying she didn't think anyone else's husband could have had the same ugly shoes. My mother wasn't offended, she understood perfectly. I wasn't offended either. I was glad that they loved their husbands, even in the world's ugliest shoes.

My father clicks off the radio. We are diving slowly down the road now. The countryside grows before me, shades and shadows undulating beside the car. A white house with blushing pink shutters glides swiftly by. Tree limbs dance past my window, then a clean white house with robins egg blue ornamenting the roof and windows like icing on an enormous cake. The windows of all the houses are menacingly vacant like the empty dark stares of shark eyes. My father and I are the only two people in the world. The city is never like this and for a moment I feel a lost, or betrayed by the silence of everything. My father must sense my dis-ease because he switches the radio back on. I recognize immediately the soulful salty sweetness of Lady Day as she croons "Let the poets pipe of love, In their childish way, I know ev'ry type of love, better Jar than they". I love my father's radio station where no one has a name, everyone is just Empress of the Blues, Ol' Blue Eyes, Chairman of the Board, or the First Lady of Song. I sit on my hands and swing my legs because my feet can't touch the floor. The carpeted seat is familiar under my fingers, comforting and a little prickly, like the soft part of a horse's nose.

We turn steadily and park evenly in the designated space between two slightly crooked yellow lines. There are no other cars there, but we park courteously anyway. We get out of the car and my father takes my hand. The tips of his fingers are soft and cool like new leather. As we walk a gust of wind blows by filling my father's shirt, making it billow like a sail. We walk into the little deli together and a bell on the door jangles as it swings closed. My father picks up a copy of the Tunes and asks the man behind the counter for a loaf of sour dough, coffee, and a plain bagel. The man behind the counter nods and as he bends down behind the glass display of bread. Vie grins at me, a wide toothy grin, that makes the skin beside his eyes crease. I carefully direct my gaze away from him and feign a detached fascination with the peeling Boars Head label on the counter. My father hands me the bagel and I go to sit down on the wooden bench. An old man wanders in slowly. His walk is jangly and there is a sadness in the way his clothes hang crookedly off his hips and shoulders. He stands next to my father at the counter. My father says something to him that I can't hear and the old man laughs in the heat of my father's charm. I just sit on the bench and watch my feet swing under me. I am not hungry but I eat my bagel dutifully. I strain to listen to the faint sounds of the radio. The static mixes with the twangy sound of a sitar, suspended in the air like a held breath. The old man turns to leave, a white paper bag clenched in this tight fist. He looks at me and I smile graciously, a smile without a hint of sorrow for him or childish fascination with sickness or frailty or age. He smiles back, an appreciative smile straining across his face. He waves at me as he leaves. My father comes over to me and I take the bag of sour-dough bread from him. He tucks the *Times* under one arm and cradles a paper coffee cup as he holds the door open for me. We get back into the car as Nat King Cole's husky voice fills the car with yet another torch song. My father sort of shimmies his shoulders and does a little dance in perfect rhythm with the song for me. I can not suppress smile. I look at my father once more before closing my eyes and losing myself, wrapped up in all the pleasures of the morning.

The Chapin School
New York, NY
Mr. HowardSchott

ALAE VERBORUM

Every school has one: the girl in the blurred background of snapshots, so thin she almost disappears into the wall. Always, there is some outward stigma. Perhaps it is the case of acne so inflamed and so old that on one can picture her with white skin. Perhaps it is the pair of black-rimmed glasses, or perhaps the book she holds in her hand when everyone else holds a drink.

I sat on the edge of the dusty couch, running my fingers along the spine of *Les Miserables*. My lips were red from biting, smooth and swollen like the inside of a conch shell. I had not realized the party would be this dark, too dark to read. Christina walked towards me, wrapped around her latest boyfriend. She seemed to fall indiscriminately from one boy to another, and I knew that this one, like all the others, would probably brag about her like she was a new bike or a laptop. But I was not about to obstruct my best friend's sudden popularity. Relinquishing the couch, I drifted toward the crowd around the stereo. I glanced over my shoulder toward the couch, but I had left my glasses at home and saw only an indistinct blur.

Clutching my book, I swayed self-consciously at the edge of the masking tape that delineated the dance floor, realizing how different Christina and I were becoming. Until eighth grade, we had been inseparable, and were often mistaken for sisters. But, suddenly, Christina had stumbled across the hormonal tripwire of our class' male population. "That year was strange," she says in retrospect, "I guess I'm a type. Like, guys see boobs and blonde hair and blue eyes and something clicks in their strange little brains, or whatever organ they think with." And I was a type, too, in the eyes of my fellow either graders, who insisted on compartmentalizing everyone. I was the geek, the outcast, the bookworm.

As Christina and I walked down the main stairs of East Woods School the next morning, someone muttered, "slut!" as they passed us. The epithet surprised me; for the past two years, my sobriquet had been "The Blob," although I had lost a fifth of my bodyweight trying to escape it. Then I realized the speaker was a previous boyfriend of Christina's, and he was addressing her. Before I could respond, he had been swept up the stairwell by a sea of seventh graders, and Christina was storming down the steps beneath an angry cloud of blond hair.

I put my arm around her. "Well that was ironic," I said, glancing disdainfully at the boy's departing figure, "he's, like, the biggest slut in school."

"Guys can't be sluts."

"Sure they can. Even etymologically, there's no connection with a particular gender." I did not tell her how, etymologically, the epithet comes from the meaning "mud," and "impure liquid." Sometimes, knowing the origin of the word makes it cut that much more deeply.

"It's not the same for guys. Well, maybe you could use it for guys," she relented.

Alone with Christina, I have always been confident, outspoken. Yet she is the more extroverted one, the one who will introduce herself to attractive boys she sees in town. In old photographs, she smiles endearingly while I stare past the camera, my face blank.

People constantly tell me I appear lost; strangers ask if I

Continued from page 15

need directions, and friends snap their fingers before my face, calling, "Earth to Cat!" I have so many times, countries, worlds, even galaxies in my head that it is sometimes difficult to remain in the real world. On the way to class, I pass a girl on the path and notice her grey eyes. I think of Homer's "grey-eyed Athena," and I am in Troy, and the clang of the Academy bell is really the din of swords striking shields, and I am watching Athena urge Diomedes to fight the god of war. Then, suddenly, the vision is gone and I'm scrambling up the Academy Building steps, late for my Latin class.

When you are excluded from external groups, your only hope lies in making your own head as interesting a place as possible. With my parents' encouragement, I had been a voracious reader since preschool. When my social exclusion began, in fifth grade, I began to read even more. In fourth grade, I had read 44 books; but in sixth grade, I devoured 86. As I counted up last year's reading for my Harvard application, the books numbered over 100.

Every week, in fifth grade, we would report to our teachers what we were reading and what page we had reached. I remember sitting at my desk, in the room that smelled always of rubber cement, and announcing, "The Deed of Paksenarrion, page 949." It was then that I lost of being fully assimilated into the student body of East Woods School, or nearly anywhere else.

Although to a lesser degree than I, Christina, too, loves English. In seventh grade, we would learn obscure and grandiose words, then give one another vocabulary tests during study hall. It was a risky and illicit practice. Mr. Ferrer, our headmaster, monitored study hall, and severe castigation awaited those who dared do anything other than homework. Christina and I decided vocabulary tests were worth the risk. "What's a kakistocracy?" I challenged her, "a) government by the worst people in society, b) a flock of New Zealand's kaka parrots? c) the executives of Gap?"

She handed me my quiz: "1. What does 'osculate' mean? 2. What does 'syzygy' mean? Extra credit if you draw diagrams."

Our linguistic shenanigans continued outside of study hall, when we would embellish words with interesting prefixes and suffixes, to the bewilderment of our peers. A classmate's skirt was "un-sexy," the classmate herself, "anti-svelte," our science test, "meta-difficult."

Christina began attending public school in ninth grade to escape the elitist social environment of East Woods. The five girls remaining in my class were the jangly earrings, argyle knee sock type, the ones who ridiculed me for having better things to do than shave my legs and paint my nails pastel. I could not afford their clothes, I did not date boys or have crushes on movie stars. I did not belong, I no longer wanted to belong, and I was left utterly alone. My classmates would lounge around the common room, talking about concerts, to which I was the only one not invited, while I sat hunched in the corner, cutting my wrists with the point of a pocket knife.

Sometimes I would rage a pen up my arm instead of a knife, writing poetry: not delicate poetry, with meter and manners, but tumultuous free verse, stretching and curling up to my elbows. I was alone, but I had words, and they were life. Ninth grade was when I fell deeply into writing, filling up nearly two journals a term, writing every day, an outpouring of anger, frustration, and self-loathing. Writing purged my thoughts so I could look at them with a bit more objectivity, or sometimes just get rid of them. I was not yet creating characters; I was creating myself. Scribo ergo sum.

When I came to Exeter, I was no longer alone. There are other people here who have read the unabridged *Les Misérables*, people who can give book recommendations on anarchist theory, others who read the dictionary for fun. And yet, most people still do not understand my passion, and, by extension, do not under-

stand me.

Despite the physical distance between us, I will always share a special understanding with Christina. The phone rings and I bounce off my bed and grab it, yanking the cradle off my desk in the process. I swiftly recover the phone, untangle its cord with a practiced hand. "Hey, sorry, I dropped the phone."

Christina laughs. "Yeah, that's how I knew I had the right number. I'm surprised that thing hasn't broken by now."

"This is meta-weird," I tell her, "but I called you earlier because my Philosophy teacher asked our class if we knew what 'syzygy' meant."

"Whoah!"

"I shit you not. And guess who remembered from eighth grade that it was an alignment of three celestial objects?"

"Dude, that's so random!" she exclaims laughing, "Next thing you know, someone will be asking you to define 'osculate.'"

For my seventeenth birthday, my father gave me the *Random House Dictionary* on CD-ROM, countless words at the touch of a key, understandable etymological histories. When I told friends about my presents, they gave me pitying looks. But later that month, Dave Peters and I skipped the Wheelwright dance to look up random words. We sat in my desk chair for half an hour, laughing at the list of synonyms for catawampus, and marveling at the how many words begin with "X," until Dr. Goddard came by and asked us what we were up to. "Reading the dictionary," I told her.

"Mm-hmm," she said, looking suspiciously over our shoulders, "Oh. You really are reading the dictionary." She left looking puzzled.

My father's gift was not a surprising one. In my family, books of any sort are highly valued. From a very young age, I was fascinated by everything from cookbooks to my great-grandfather's leather bound *Haggadah* with its tiny Hebrew lettering. But my own storybooks were my favorites. I remember begging my mother every night for just one more story. She would sit cross-legged in her nightgown and sigh dramatically before saying, "I suppose..." Curled in her warm, silky lap, I would close my eyes and nuzzle into the crook of her left arm; she always smelt of lavender. As one story turned into two, then three, I would become a unicorn, King Arthur, Athena, then at last, a sleepy four year-old on my mother's lap. I do not remember my father ever reading to me, but he told frequent stories and taught me many new words.

Words are crucial. They are my justification, my escape, and my means of creation. More frequently than most people, I am asked "why," and I need words to explain myself. Why aren't I Jewish if my father is a rabbi? Why would I waste my vote on the Green Party? Why don't I have a boyfriend? As Elie Wiesel once said, "I write to understand as much as to be understood." To answer these questions, I write about them, and though writing clarifies my options, work towards answering that other question I am so often asked: "Who do I think I am?"

There are times when I can't stand who I am. Because boys who barely know me mutter "dyke," when I pass, because when my mother comes to visit me, she talks about how much weight I have gained, and how I should try wearing lipstick. Because even if I paint my lips Vibrant Ginger, and wore a size 2 and could fit into the wedding gown she saved for me, I would not be the daughter she wants me to be. So I escape by losing myself in books: history, fiction, philosophy, gender theory, mythology, art.

My own stories change and transport me almost as well as reading the work of others. In them, I create friends, love, independence. I excuse myself from Dining Hall, saying, "I need to get back to Alexandria," or, rather, I need to get back to writing her, my Harvard librarian, who builder her lover furniture entirely out of books. On the Exeter campus, senior year, there is not much opportunity to meet new people. So I create them.

Continued on page 17

Writing is proof of my existence. It is for writing, more than anything else, that I expect to be known and remembered. In the inside cover of one of my journals, *Alae Verborum*, I wrote: "100 years from now, when someone asks, 'Have you read Schwartz?' I want the answer to be, 'of course.'" I want to leave the world a graffito of characters, and questions, and maybe some answers.

Just as a scientist in a laboratory seeks answers about facts of physics, I create hypotheses concerning human interaction and the ultimate questions of being. In the lab of the mind, the situations are characters I formulate do not spring forth full-grown; even in writing fiction, I am exploring and developing facets of my own soul, of which every character is a reflection.

During my Harvard interview, I was asked what I would do if I could not write. I had no answer, staring blankly into my interviewer's patient eyes. I imagined words building up inside of me, words that could not be shared with anyone and had to be written. I envisioned my body made of clay, shattering under the pressure of those captive words.

And yet, I do not live crouched between the pages of books and journals, hiding from the world. I struggle every day to be who I am, and to discover who other people are. I seek out the company of those who, like Christina, share my passion. I am no misanthrope. There is something alluring and redeeming in human interactions, there must be, if I have been writing about them for so long. Characters both read and written have given me insight into the convolutions of my own psyche, and have helped me develop an understanding and appreciation of social dynamics.

Increasingly, I have begun to write for an audience, and I have discovered that the written word is paradoxical: the most private and public of things. After spilling my soul across sheets of paper, if I wish to be immortal, my lucubrations must be read by others. My writing is becoming increasingly public, and I feel the shock of naked vulnerability each time I see it published. But it is worth vulnerability to leave my graffito on the world, to say "This is who I am and what I think." It is worth it, to achieve that curious intimacy writers have with their readers, and to perhaps provide someone with escape and understanding.

Caitlyn Schwartz
Phillips Exeter Academy
Huntington, NY
Mr. Douglas Rogers

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS

I've been back through all those times
I would pout on my bed,
wedged against the wall
curled up in the furthest
corner possible, hiding under
the comfort of my blankets.
I can't recall every reason
things like this occurred,
but I'm sure they were a
meaningless mimic
of a recent lecture.
But suddenly "don't talk to strangers,
no elbows on the table,
don't run with scissors, and
look both ways twice,"
have twisted themselves into bellows
of sex, curfews, and getting

fifteen hours of sleep
after working on a Sunday.
Somehow they faded,
in the cries of my friends
dashing through stop signs
in smoggy sports cars,
absorbed in obnoxious slang,
but smiling against the wind
blowing through the sunroof
until the night we pulled up
to a similar car, with my
little brother in the passenger seat
enthralled the same as I was
and all I could hear
was my mother's voice.

Lauren Dawson
Lutherville, MD
Ms. Jennifer Kemmery

SUNLIGHT ON THE SNOW IN WINTER. 2000. INK ON PAPER, 5 PAGES (8 BY 11.5 INCHES.)

"Dreams delivers us to dream and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus."

"The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Pinks, blues, yellows, and greens live together in Monet's "Waterlilies." Purple fades into puce to yellows and back into a murky deep brown. Monet was an artist who lost his eyesight slowly with old age. I'm not sure if he ever lost it completely, but how sad to be a painter going blind. Whenever I think of an artist losing one of his or her senses I think of Beethoven cutting off the legs of his piano so that he could feel the vibrations of the music he had written after he became deaf. One of history's greatest musicians on his knees like a baby, his head resting on the top of a piano, his eyes closed, he hears music in his heart, but not resonating in his ears.

My sister is deaf. One day I left my stereo on in my room, and when I came back she had her hand on the speaker, swaying her hips to the vibrations of the music. I hoped she wouldn't see me in the doorway, so I waked away.

I am in the Museum of Modern Art (The MOMA) on Fifty-third Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. I would like to say that I often come here, but I don't - at least not as often as I'd like. This is not because the museum is particularly far away from me, or it's extremely expensive to get into; it is because every time I come here I leave with a greater sense of my own smallness in the world, and frankly I don't like it. I love art. I love it because I can practice it and subsequently understand it, but I don't love feeling worthless. When I visit a museum I know that I don't grasp everything the artist was trying to convey. (If I did, the piece wouldn't

Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

belong in a museum.) What I have always grasped is that most likely, my paintings will never hang in a museum, and people like me will never come here on Saturday afternoons to wonder what I would think about while I painted. And I'm not sure how this makes me feel. Maybe if I wanted my paintings on display I would make more of an effort to get them there. I love the feeling of the brush in my hand. With it, I feel as if I have ultimate power, a power I don't often use.

I walk past the rest of "Waterlilies." Monet has often been called the most commercial of all the impressionists. It is unfortunate that we hold it against him that he actually wanted to sell a few paintings in his lifetime. I've heard a lot of people say that Monet is their favorite painter, but I am often disturbed by the airy fluff associated with him. Looking at the waterlilies through I sense something darker about these paintings than many of his earlier works. The murky blue brown seems to ask the onlooker to see a little more of what lurks at the bottom of this pond. Some art critics have even remarked that you can even see skeletons and bones haunting the waterlily paintings. However, it is probably up for debate whether Monet did this on purpose, or if his bad eyesight had a hand in it, or if they are even there at all.

But I think back to my own paintings... They are certainly not worthless. I've spent ten years of my life leaning how properly to shade a human hand, but they don't really say anything other than "she's been practicing..." I ask myself why... And the dark thud of reality resounds back at me like an echo off the wall: maybe I just don't have anything to say. More likely than not, this is true. My entire generation seems to have nothing to say. We're like bears hibernating in a cave under the winter snow; waiting for it to melt so that we can get up and watch MTV's *Spring Break*. Our music is created by computers, our lives revolve around popular culture, fashion (we don't even know or want to know that many articles of clothing we own were made in sweat shops by children younger than ourselves,) watching *Dawson's Creek*, and getting mommy and daddy to buy us whatever the powers that be (and I often wonder who they are) say is cool. We have no social revolution to lead because our parents lead it for us. I do not, cannot disclude myself from the above statements in any way, and this makes my whole body cringe.

My father says that we are undergoing the second industrial revolution: the computer revolution, and the internet revolution. These things have us glued to our computer screens, our TV screens, our movie screens. I think that if we keep going, maybe we can just place babies in front of screens at birth, and that can be life. It would be like Plato's cave made reality.

My generation needs to stand up and kick over the screen, get rid of the Nintendo system and break the chains that hold us trapped and immobile in front of the dancing shadows of "entertainment." In places in the Middle East, in Africa, in Southeast Asia, and in places I don't know exist, people are dying, even people my age, just like me, are dying because of oppressive governments, terrorists, subversive groups, and money. Even people around us are dying of AIDS, of cancer, of violence, and many more things which I cannot think of because I've been too busy playing computer games to read the newspaper to find out what's going on.

Of all the things that I've been ignoring, perhaps the most striking is violence. On TV, in action moves you can see faceless

people dying deaths without blood, and without a fight, but what the producers of these entertaining displays never show is that if a person, a real person, dies, someone will cry for that person. At least one person's sunrise is less glorious because their friend, lover, child, husband, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandchild, grandparent, mother, father, sister, brother, is gone. Gone. It is the end. Columbine was the end for the students who died there. And no matter what religion you kneel for, that lifetime is gone for them. Forever.

David Alfaro Siqueiros' "Collective Suicide" is hung in front of me as I continue to move about the museum. It's cellulose nitrate paints plywood. This is interesting because here Siqueiros rejected the normal "oil on canvas" setup, which he deemed oppressive, in favor of something very revolutionary. Revolutionary in the most literal of senses. Cellulose nitrate is chemically similar to material used to make explosives, and often a connection is made between artists who use this type of paint and revolutionary actions on the times. It is also a glossy, versatile paint, but I'm sure that is not the reason he used it.

In "Collective Suicide," rows and rows of troops march into battle; many men are merely represented by the flags which they hold. A fire burns brightly in the middle of the painting. These hundreds of faceless men will ultimately all burn in the fire; their flesh singed, they scream to whichever God they believe in as they die. You wonder if each man has a family, or even cares about the battle he will fight. Ultimately, in the last second of his life, he feels the bullet plunge into his chest, or the fire enveloping him, he probably doesn't care who wins or loses the war.

A religion teacher once told me that people are blank slates. They must each write their own morals, own experiences, and own laws on their slates, and then they will become individuals. I found this a bit strange coming from a religion teacher whose job (I assumed) was to have me believe what she and the church laid out so nicely for me and my class. I later found out that the person who first coined this idea was seventeenth century French philosopher Descartes. However, I like this analogy. I just think it could be more colorful.

When people are born, they are like canvases: pure, blank, and any color of the rainbow (there's no rule that says you can't paint on a blue canvas.) And every person that you meet, every experience that you have is like a dab of paint on your canvas. Every brush stroke is a heartbeat, one pulsating moment of joy while you lived. No one's painting can ever be the same as anyone else's, for it is the people that you love and hate, the books you read, the battles you fight, (even the movies that you see,) which color your canvas black with loss, red with passion, green with envy, orange with joy. The central tragedy is that some people waste their canvases, and don't fill them up. They leave the edges blank for a gilded frame, which is their coffin. A life is too big to fit in a frame or to box up and store in the attic.

My generation doesn't have to change the world. If we don't forget we're alive because we're so engrossed in *TRL*, we'll change it just for having been here. But I think we want more. We want to change it for the better, and we can if we reject everything that holds us back. We will paint our own pictures and tell our own stories through what we do and how we act.

Your canvas is as beautiful as your actions, as profound as your thoughts, and as big as the oceans you've swum in. With each discovery you make and person you help or story you learn, the colors will become richer and more vibrant. And each time the

Continued on page 19

blood pumps through your veins and you realize it, your painting becomes even more alive.

Sarah Hsu
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Mrs. Jane Rinden

ALBION

a tapestry of tuscan sky
with silver sparks in evening's eye
the heavens heave a heavy sigh
flutter, flicker, fluster, fly

upside up and downside down
silence stifles every sound
quiet creeps about the town
dazzle, drizzle, dribble, drown

hours spent with murmur moon
their final moment coming soon
a shedding of the dark cocoon
crumble, crinkle, crackle, croon

softly slowly starts to creep
an end to years of stony sleep
expanse of calm so cool so deep
wonder, wander, whisper weep

Sarah McLemore
Mercersburg Academy
Camp Hill, PA
Mr. Joel Chace

THE HELGA PICTURES

i ventured
to think that i could
go on cold walks
with sad-eyed boys
with boys who harbor
sadnesses
perhaps more wide
than my own.
i thought that i could
go on winterwalks
with coldboys who
take sleeping-pills
to stay aligned
with their hearts,
but it only
brought me further
to the inevitability
of myself, of winter.

and instead of thinking
of the beauty and the silence

of the stars,
and the brilliance that was the moon,

i felt a part of an
Andrew Wyeth painting
i felt
the cold and the silence
penetrating into
the
cold and the silence
of me.

people don't understand silence,
so i fill my silence with words.

and so i mentioned it
to the coldfaced boy
who watched me walking
in the middle of the road
hopping from
one yellow line
to the next.

he hadn't heard of Andrew Wyeth.

and i thought about the
naked trees slinking
against the wintersky,
shaking and still
with the wiles of
winter's harness
which are never wiles
at all
but instead are
silence, death, and barely at all
anything

penetrable
like
wind or boys
with tangible sadnesses
or boys
with intangible sadnesses.
and are instead
like
Andrew Wyeth.

Emily K. Miller
Solanco High School
Quarreyville, PA
Mr. William Lewis

OUTSIDE THE PALACE WALLS THERE IS A NURSING HOME

Death avoidance is one of the primary activities of all nine-year-old boys. Don't struggle if you fall into quicksand. Don't drink seawater when stranded on a raft in the middle of the ocean. Don't

Continued from page 19

stare at mean-looking dogs. I had seen the after-school movie where Billy shoots Johnny in the head with his father's gun because he presumes it is unloaded, and the subsequent sobbing of the boy's black-clad mother over a closed coffin. I had a solid picture of death at nine years of age; death was something to be mourned, something to be avoided at all times. My view of death was altered upon attending the funeral of a great-grandmother.

The funeral was held in an obscure little church I was supposedly a member of. I stepped into the crowded back room of the church wearing a clean Oxford shirt, clip-on bow tie, and a pair of navy corduroys that showed my shins when I sat but still managed to bag around the hips when I stood. Everyone in attendance was uncomfortably milling about. There were an abundance of tall elderly men with tired and sunburned faces, who walked as though there was a stiff wind at their back, and their accompanying wives seemed to be at their husband's sides even when across the room.

I caught a glimpse of the guest of honor in spite of my parent's efforts to guide my eyes elsewhere. She was pale, not quite white, and was made up as beautifully as an old woman who has spent the last decade of her life in a hospital bed could be. I had seen her one before, less than a year ago, while visiting the nursing home where she lived.

It was on one of the most uncertain days of late July, when seat-belt buckles are scorching and time is perpetually paused at mid-afternoon. Her room was a dull yellow, and devoid of natural light. The blinds were drawn tight; had they been open, the graveyard next door could have been seen under the sickly heat of a sun obscured by its own glare. My great-grandmother peered at me, and then at the nameless relative who had led me there. She appeared to have been placed gingerly on her bed, and out of respect for her caregiver's concerned, continued to lie there as to not disturb herself. She uttered a few confused responses to some general questions my chaperone asked about her health and other things. She wore strangely annoyed sort of expression throughout the conversation. At first I could not place it, but recognized it as I left as the face of someone whose bus is considerably late; someone who is desperately trying to determine what could possibly be holding up the driver.

Had I never visited the nursing home, I would have been puzzled by the overall lack of mourning at the funeral. There were few tears, no sobbing, and the sun that shone through the stained-glass was no longer an intruder to be blocked. My great-grandmother was lowered into the ground with a maple coffin and enormous amounts of love and decisively left there.

Jonathan J. McSparran
Solanco High School
Peach Bottom, PA
Ms. Jennifer Pasko

EIGHT BLURRY SNAPSHOTS OF THE ONGOING PURSUIT OF LOVE

#1.

Emily hated her job at the grocery store. One day, however, she opened the newspaper to discover that Jim Mulligan was battling leukemia. Jim Mulligan was president of a national chain of

grocery stores called Produce Paradise, one of which employed Emily. She'd never met the man, but suddenly work became bearable, as if she was bagging vegetables for a worthy cause.

#2.

Janet sat in the tiny club, ignoring the chain-smoking couple beside her and innocently sipping a root beer. She played with her cropped black hair and twisted the latch on her leopard-print pocketbook. She was content being alone, especially when members of Josie's Dilemma emerged from the shadowy corners and modestly began their set of music for the evening. No one seemed to care that the band was there, but Janet had set aside her Friday night for the young musicians.

She gazed at Sean, her favorite guitar player, who she knew would be on the left side of the stage. She had never spoken to him, nor did she want to. She was content to look at his pleasant smile and sit in the growing web of chords he wove around her.

#3.

Nick was convinced that his lack of success in the world of women was due to his fiery, uncontrollable hair. He could only assume that women didn't like redheads. He tried permanent black hair dye, but the suspicious substance he used turned his hair a strange, murky shade of green. For the next few months, he was occasionally hit on by young girls who admired his nonconformity.

#4.

In the cold, two city blocks stretched out forever. Clara didn't mind her job at the diner, but she hated the walk home. She tried to make herself more compact, shrinking inside her coat, her skirt, even her nylons, as though she could stop her skin from coming into contact with the cold. She wiggled her numb, sore toes inside her black heels. Thinking about all her feet had to endure was extremely depressing.

In another month, she would have enough money to buy a car. It would be a big step in independence for her, her little son, and her feet.

#5.

The cello sat in the corner. Sunlight made a path from the window to its hollow body, illuminating swirls of dust in the air above it and putting a soft shine on its wood.

Erinn embraced the instrument like an old friend. Her fingers danced lightly on its neck; she coaxed the strings out of hibernation with a subtle pull of her bow. In return, the cello sang for her.

Erinn's roommate silently entered the room, and sat down on the floor, mesmerized. Chrissy often compared Erinn's arrival at the clinic to a revelation of momentous importance. She was convinced the cello music was heaven-sent.

#6

MGM chose Raymond Finch, among others, to play the part of a munchkin. He was soon desperately in love with a beautiful girl named Lola, who was also a munchkin. Lola wasn't her real name, but some day he'd have the courage to find out what it was. He was

Continued on page 21

furiously jealous of the man who got to dance with her, a handsome and moody midget who had already been in three major motion pictures.

Raymond silently endured his burning passion through the entire week of filming. Love and longing existed even in munchkin hearts, Raymond supposed.

#7.

Finally, the tomatoes were ripe. Mr. Cartwright slowly leaned down to pick one, his faded, wrinkled, and fuzzy hand gently contrasting with the smooth, vibrant vegetable. In the kitchen, he washed the tomato and methodically began to slice it, the cold knife revealing the tender inside and spilling juice on the cutting board. Halfway through a cut, the phone rang. Mr. Cartwright paused, then resumed his task. Slice by slice, the old man happily devoured the tomato, vaguely aware of ringing in the background.

#8.

Geoffrey glanced, feigning a casual disinterest, at the boy sitting on the couch, reading Charles Dickens. He took his time sweeping the stairs so that he could, once again, ascertain whether or not Elliot was happy.

The wonderful generosity of Milton Hershey allowed the orphaned child to stay in the dorms and go to school with other boys. Hershey, however indirectly, was also responsible for Geoffrey's janitorial job there.

Someday, when he was older, Geoffrey would tell the boy that he was his father, no matter how much his now-deceased mother had protested the fact. He would wait until Elliot had almost completed his education. He would wait until he was someone Elliot, Milton Hershey School graduate, could be proud of.

Andre Saylor
Elizabethtown Area High School
Elizabethtown, PA
Mrs. Michelle Henry

IN MY MOTHER'S WAKE

PARIS, March 2 Brain degenerating mad cow disease has been discovered in England. The disease has not affected citizens in any magnitude though a few rare cases have appeared. Although it is extremely rare it is at the same time extremely fatal. Victims of the disease live only a few months after the symptoms begin to occur. French authorities insist that the fears of the disease jumping the channel are unfounded.

The paintbrush in my mother's hand is trembling. She has lived forty-seven years and she has always been strong. Naturally, in the beginning we all ignored the changes my mother faced daily. She was, after all, getting older. Haven't we always heard that peculiarities like a slight loss in memory and depression accompany women as they reach her age? We were all sure that was normal.

At the same time it seems the entire world has erupted in clouds of paranoia as "mad" cows, sheep, goats, and now even humans are losing balance, shaking, twitching, and dying. We live in the French countryside, but we still read the news. Cows die

rapidly here, but not humans. The English have our sympathy, but we have our health. Yet these changes have happened to my mother, and now she shakes. England is closer than it seems. At night we close our eyes and we see the English faces quivering, panicked, separated from us only by a channel that perpetually decreases in size. We all shake.

England grows closer and the sight of the channel, my mother's sea, becomes frightful. The beginning of her "uncharacteristic seasickness" and lack of coordination has ended the desire of every member of my family to revisit the coast. Only my mother's entreaty is capable of returning me to this scene. She stares out to sea and her eyes perceive what cannot be said. The paint brush trembles in her once steady and skilled hand. Watercolor ebbs and flows, resulting in a sandy and muddled wash. Her muscles jerk and she surrenders. She wants to return home now. She carries her chair, I carry her paints and her warped easel and she clings to my arm, weak and uncertain.

Her feet stumble on the jagged stones that form these great cliffs. The worn path has forgotten her. The slopes drop dark dirt and green to the ashen sand sliding out towards the horizon. We stand at the limits of our nation. Patriotic spirit loses its gleam. We are powerless, and I ponder this sobering truth as the scorched leaves rustle with the breeze that moves with us, away from the sea. Pebbles scatter in my mother's wake. It was on days like this that she once did her best work. Pristine fall afternoons revealed all their mysteries through the colors and strokes of my mother's paint brush. The path leads us slowly down to our village where I see familiar faces and hear their voices calling me to surrender any of the somber truth I had so recently pondered in exchange for a comforting life of routine. But there are persistent reminders that cry out, never again allowing our lives to take on the comforting motions of routine.

Saturdays in August never passed without my mother taking command of the sailboat that forever rests in the shade of the wall. The wall is always covered in shadow, deep, and unrelenting, while all three remaining walls are bathed in pale gray and yellow light. The trees have grown and the ivy has persisted and the wall has become ominously dark and isolated. Yellow paint chips to reveal dull, uninspiring metal. Once the object of our most treasured tradition, it has become an eyesore.

In my spirit now I am overwhelmed. Something must be done. There are tears in my eyes and my mother's sentences ramble on misplacing words, syllables, and my name. My mother is dying. Tomorrow she will go to see a doctor, then she will go to see a neurologist and I fear she will never come back. If we could just be anywhere else. Somewhere away from this stinking, rotting sea and crumbling walls. I can imagine sitting in front of a television screen in America thinking "Mad cow disease!? Is that like rabies?" I will never have those questions. I know that no one is mad.

My mother never appears angered or insane, only ever terribly, deathly worried and nervous. Her physical condition reflects everything I feel. She has taught me innumerable lessons, but this is one I must face on my own: I must become the woman in her household. At this moment, my small untrained fingers shake more than hers.

Faith Niesley
Penn Manor High School
Washington Boro, PA
Ms. Marianne Sullivan

Pg 22
THE PRISM

In the cool dawn I sat on the ivory pile of
My mother's lilac scented sheets
A private moment shared by us
A woman and a girl
On Mother's Day

I knew my sister had forgotten the date
But I did not remind her
And we did not wake her up
As the sun spilled its aureate light
Through the big bay windows

I had gone in secret to get my mother's gift
Using my babysitting money
To take a cab downtown
Where the bank façade has flowers on it
And the businessmen plan the day around the parking

I bought my mother a small glass prism
That spilled rainbows all over the room
When its facets caught the light
And she swung it a little by its emerald ribbon
And I think she really liked it
Although she didn't say

The prism still hangs near the kitchen window
Splashing rainbows each morning on
The counters, the cereal bowls, the bread
Even, sometimes, on our faces
Tinting our skin with thin, watery colors
Reds and greens and blues
Pale as bruises

The beauty of them still takes my breath away
And I remember the magic of that cool room
The lilac sheets
The knowledge that my sister was still asleep that morning

And I want to believe that rainbows are
More than water and light
As the little prism spins on its emerald green ribbon
And my mother yells who left the knife in the peanut butter
And doesn't notice it at all

Leah Pollack
Bruriah High School
Staten Island, NY
Mrs. Estelle Glass

MEMORY GAMES

I knew you had lost your memory when you bought the railroads:
The railroads won't make you rich, you always told me
Property is the only way to win.
You always giggled at my "spendthrift" habits

When I foolishly wasted money on the first spot I came to
Property, property, property is what you went for,
And I always went bankrupt, first.
But you landed on the B&O
And handed me a distracted pile of IOOs and pink lives
And I had to double check - you're really buying it?
Yes - you were assertive; yes - you were too tired to pay attention
And I cashed in your memory to the cheap, plastic bins
And handed you the smudged RR card, your Certificate of Loss

Remember when you came down here and it snowed?
You stood inside the back door watching me hollow out my igloo,
Ready with a game of Sorry when my gloves got too wet.
We went walking down Eighth
The drifts on the boulevard kept swallowing me with a crunching sound
You'd fish me out with your grin that seemed to crack your face in two,
And form new wrinkles like apostrophes around your eyes.

We'd talk books. You always read them before you sent them to me -
So we could talk books all the time:
For Jen, love Grandma, the books said

Now, on the phone, when we have our two minute circular conversations

(What grade are you in at school? Oh, I remember 11th grade...
What grade are you in at school? Oh, I remember 11 grade...)
I think, it's too bad that I was so near-sighted as a kid
I couldn't see everything at once

So now I can't remember it all
There are certain memories that I can see,
Momentary definitions of my childhood grandma:

Your shapeless dark socks pulled up high
As you fold your legs while reading -
My mom used to joke that you looked like a bag lady
The tower room in the attic where I used to stay when I was
older

Before that I thought your house looked like a castle
The bike path along the canal
The dim cliffs beside the river the time we rented bikes
And rode out to Hogback Falls - and the looks
On the family's faces when we told them I'd really fallen in
Your face puckered into a cross-word puzzle frown
When I came down from my bath to kiss you goodnight

I line the scrabble letters up across the board:
r-e-m-e-m-b-e-r (53 points)
You shake your head; you're out of letters
I fold up the scrabble board, pour
Snapshots of bubble baths and sledding and in Canada it's zed not z
and long walks down
the canal and branflakes for breakfast and paddle boats and going to
see the locks and
(and...)
Back into the bag

Jenny Bordo
Highland Park, NJ
Mrs.. Christine Dawson

The air carries a certain vengeance this morning. I pull myself out of bed and pad over to the kitchen, callused feet and achy limbs gracing the pre-dawn stillness. Shivering, I put some coffee on to heat and unlock the front door in a series of subconscious motions. Cold air rushes into the house, quickly dissipating the stale heat that lingers after sleep. My toes are hard and heavy against the frozen blue planks of the porch. Swinging myself down onto the couch, I fumble for a cigarette and then light the tip with a certain solemnity before settling back into the stiff cushions. The houses across the street stand like crooked shadows against the new sky. There is absolute silence, and I suck on my cigarette and stare thoughtfully out at the thinning mist.

When I have slurped down the last of my coffee, wiped my mouth with the side of my sleeve, and then rinsed the mug out with a trickle of tap water, I lock the door behind me and drive the fifteen miles to the plant. The sun is rising steadily, running its pink finger along the horizon and then finally gaining the courage to extend its whole hand up and embrace the day in a flurry of blue and gold splendor. The warmth of my breath projects a soft film over the windows, and at one red light I stop to drag my index finger along a section of glass. I spell my name: K-A-T-E. I spell it all in uppercase; I like it better that way. I am surprised by the sharpness of the letters. They seem to cut right through the landscape, carrying the heat in the car, the notion of sunlight, away with them.

The trucks have already arrived when I pull my car into the lot. I look around for Amanda. She's standing fixedly in front of one of the semis collar up against the wind. I can make out the orange tip of her cigarette. Digging my hands snugly down into the pockets of my jeans, I walk slowly towards her, head bowed.

"Cold out today," I mutter in greeting.

She looks at me, nods, and then extends a pack of cigarettes in my direction. I shake my head and step beside her, leaning my back up against the metal siding of the truck. We're one in the same, Amanda and I. Only difference is she's got ten years on me, and a few more scars to prove it.

I can't believe it's November already. Though this started out as a summer job for me, by the time fall came I'd grown quite accustomed to this line of work. Each day is a new beat in the rhythm of time cards punched in, then out, cigarettes smoked, muscles pounded. And when my white undershirt is soaked through with sweat, and my arms shake with exhaustion, and the sky begins to darken and to take on a certain pulse, the two of us take hit the bars of downtown Des Moines, the fruits of our labor wadded up stale and green within our firm fists. For all the garbage we take for being the only two women in this goddamn plant, you can still enjoy those beers at the end of the day, and the immense strength that comes from biting your lower lip and pushing onwards.

The whistle blows this morning like it does every morning. Amanda and I pick up our bodies and ourselves and stride towards the other workers, a clump of men clutching coffees with coarse hands, dirt permanently embedded under unusually thick fingernails. We have four trucks of frozen meat to unload. It will only take eight hours if we are lucky. The day begins suddenly. Men walking off to get trolleys, the lot of us forming stringy lines connecting the interior of the trucks to those carts. Amanda pulls herself up onto the truck bed and rolls the fraying cuffs of her plaid shirt deftly. I watch as she leans over to pick up the first box, trudging to the edge of the platform to pass to the bulky cardboard mass down to the next man, who in turn passes it to yet another man, then to me,

and so forth. We go on in this way for hours, a human machine of sweat and cramped fingers, cold toes. Amanda makes it look so easy. Her movements take on a rhythm of their own, like the cycle of the seasons or of womanhood, or of anything else that is natural on this earth. I spit onto the gravel and rub my saliva into the ground with the toe of my boot. Grasping each box as it comes my way, I grimace at the weight and breathe out again as I pass it forward down the chain. Rays of sun form strange slants against the interior of the truck. They articulate bits of dust, and it is only from the way they make the thin layer of sweat on her forehead glisten that I can tell she is even exerting herself. Everything about Amanda screams fluidity. Quick hands feel their way along the smooth cardboard corners, tanned forearms flex, and in that second the box is up, riding against her belly and funneling all of its weight down into the forward motion of her thighs. It is as if the box was never on the truck, like it floated through air into the first ground man's arms. The contrast of the stumbling jerks and heaves that punctuate the journey of one box along our pathetic line, and the soft accuracy of the beginning of its movement, is great. It is the sex not the strength of Amanda's body that prevents her from being promoted.

At noon there is a half-hour break. The sun is high in the sky and burning down against us with vicious strength. Amanda and I wander over to some benches lined up against the back of the plant. We sit down, legs spread, leaning forward in silence to eat soggy sandwiches. I brush a piece of onion off the side of my chin with the inside of my wrist and glanced over at her. She has finished eating and keeps crumpling up the paper bag she brought her lunch in with her right fist, then straightening out the creases by dragging her fingers delicately along them. She looks up at the sky; I'd never noticed how blue her eyes were before. She catches me staring at her and I quickly turn away. The whistle shrills. We get up slowly and march back to the truck.

The second half of the day is always the hardest. Twenty minutes into this shift I am ready to go home. My arms burn, and I feel a searing pain shoot up my back every time I lift a new box. A harsh wind whips my hair and smudges frostbite along my weathered face. And there is Amanda, steady as ever. There is no morning, no afternoon. Just one long period of work that she grunts through. In the three years I've worked at the plant, I've never seen her punch out early. The only time she calls in sick is if some men, cops maybe, have beaten her up real badly the night before. They don't like women like us or the bars we go to, no matter how many trucks we unload during the day. I watch her, and find the energy to keep going.

By the end of the day I am about as useful as the meat we are unpacking, my whole body groans with the slightest movement. I hate the days when the trucks arrive. The pain and the monotony are so overwhelming that all I want to do is sit at home in room and peel the paint off of the walls with my teeth.

When all the boxes are stacked neatly in the back rooms of the packing area, and the sun is reluctantly resigning for the day, all the workers pull their time cards out of their pockets and punch out. My mind is numb as I head back towards my car. I run my hand through my hair and button up the top of my jacket. Amanda is leaning against the hood of her car, smoke flowing upwards from a hand hanging loosely at her side.

"What's up Kid?" She asks. This is her way of asking for company.

Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

I reach into the back pocket of my jeans with trembling fingers, light my cigarette and sit down next to her on the car.

"Well I'm sure as hell glad that's over with," she states.

I look up at her in surprise. We laugh. There's something to be said for an honest day's work.

I don't go to the bars tonight; I go home. I sit out on the porch for a long time and let the stars burn holes in my eyes. Their beauty pours through me, and while I cry, I think of Amanda. Glancing down at my hands, I notice that my fingers have stopped shaking. I wonder what she is doing right now.

I get up, and go to bed.

Alexandra Eastwood
Exeter, NH
Mr. Douglass Rogers

GHOSTS

I spent a significant period of my life convinced that death and artichoke dip were intimately connected. The earliest memory I have of childhood is at my grandmother's wake. I am maybe three years old, wandering between the piles of newspaper that tower over my head. My grandmother collected them, and had every edition of the Philadelphia Inquirer to be published since 1952, as well as a respectable collection of Time Magazines that occupied the bedroom. They were kept in no perceptible order and she never read them. They sat and accumulated dust, but they comforted her. At least that's what my father always said.

I am walking in the neat little paths she created between piles following in the dusty wake of an unidentified pair of feet. The feet are much faster and I fall behind. Someone turns off the light and there is a noise. I turn suddenly, knocking a pile of newspapers over on top of me, and sprint terrified from the darkened living room. I run straight for the kitchen and bump into the legs of my aunt Susan who is carrying a huge pot of artichoke dip. The steaming dip spills all over me, in my hair, in my clothes.

The burns blister immediately and I'm in no condition to go to the funeral. My father has to drive me home and find a babysitter, a terrible burden in his time of grief, they say.

In the distorted language of memory, it all combined to mean that death was something that burned you and startled you and smelled like artichokes.

Sarah Elliot was my absolute favorite babysitter because she let me stay up late and watch TV with her. I was always good and went to bed when I was told, but I couldn't always sleep. Once I came downstairs and found her watching the Home Shopping Network.

"There's nothing on this late," she said. "Except for infomercials."

"Well can I watch?"

"I guess so."

And that was how our understanding began. I always begged my parents to call her because I knew I'd get to watch *Saturday Night Live* or *Arsenio* or something like that. One night, just before she stopped coming, she let me watch a rated-R movie:

Uncle Buck, starring John Candy. I wasn't really interested. Although there were some funny slapstick moments, all the bad words were beeped over or taken out altogether. A major disappointment for my second rated-R movie.

A few days later I was watching the news in my parents' bedroom before school and there was a story about John Candy's death. I was shocked, absolutely rooted to the spot. The guy I had just seen being funny days before was dead. There was never, ever going to be another John Candy movie, never another episode of *Northern Exposure*. The revelation hit me like a brick.

I had been to a funeral before. I had known people that died. I had even seen my grandmother's dead body, but I never understood before that moment the finality of death, the fact that it all came to such an abrupt end. My grandmother died but I had never known her. The first time I saw her face it was already cold and pale, painted up like a clown, ridiculously pink blush trying to liven her blank expression. I felt like I knew John Candy, like we were somehow intimately connected and that he had been ripped away from me without the slightest hint of warning. It all seemed so cruel and unfair to me that someone who was funny should be dead, that now when people laughed at *Uncle Buck* knocking an antique vase off the piano they were laughing at a dead person.

It wasn't until I was eleven or so that I actually saw someone die. It was my first time in New York and I stood on the corner of 75th and Broadway, waiting for my family in front of the Beacon Hotel. I was busy pretending I belonged when a loud noise broke through my concentration. My mother burst through the revolving door of the hotel and sprinted across several lanes of traffic to the median in the middle of the road.

"Mom!" I called as I ran after her, despising the fact of making a scene but seeing no other viable option.

"Oh, God, you're safe!" she cried and held me to her. It was clear she was my tourist mother. I cringed.

I followed her gaze across the street, noticing for the first time the cause of her alarm. I registered the loud noise from before as being the squeal of tires and the sickening smack of a delivery truck plowing into a middle-aged man leaving the grocery I could hear my mother somewhere in the background, but her words didn't register. I couldn't take my focus off the man lying motionless on the pavement. He was dying and I knew it. For the first time ever, I was watching the life seep out of a human being. The blood was pooling around his head and oozing, red and viscous, into the uneven surface of the macadam. I stayed rooted to the spot, a part of the growing mob of tourists gawking from the median strip. The real New Yorkers walked by, going about their business. I could pretend all I wanted but I still felt.

I had almost talked myself into turning my head and walking away when something caught my eye. Groceries. Scattered all over the street were white plastic bags flapping in the wind, filled with boxes of cereal and elbow macaroni and cans of frozen orange juice. The poor man was dying and they were staring, just standing there letting his groceries blow away. It all seemed like such a terrible waste. I escaped my mother's grip and darted into the street. She cried out as I went from bag to bag, collecting lettuce and toothpaste, sobbing uncontrollably as I shoved them into the face of an unsuspecting EMT.

"Take them," I said, nodding towards the bags. "His groceries."

Continued on page 25

He smiled at me, practiced indifference replaced by amusement at my naiveté. I felt naked and obvious, grossly out of place. "Little girl, he won't need them where he's going."

When I heard about my mother's death, I was surprised. Not by the announcement itself, which was no shock at all. We'd been watching her die for years - the doctor said it himself, only a matter of time. What surprised me was my reaction. I sat there, numb, at the funeral, knowing I was supposed to be crying, knowing that the eulogy was supposed to make me think about all the good times we'd had. I just couldn't do it. My head was full, instead, of Northern Exposure reruns that I'd watched out of reverence for a dead John Candy. Suddenly, I was three years old, alone in the dark, startled and afraid, then riding all the way home in the station wagon. I was in the basement of my house, studying fifty years of Time Magazines, trying to figure out who this mystery woman, my grandmother, was and why everyone cried for her and not for me with my blisters and scars. My mother was nowhere to be found.

I didn't cry until I got to the cemetery when I saw the roses, their scarlet petals scattered over the black of the coffin. With the rain and the tears, it might as well have been blood pooling on the pavement of 75th Street. I cried at first for the dead stranger from so many years before, and then I cried because I was crying for him and not my mother, and then I cried for myself because I didn't know what else to do.

On that day so many years ago, I had stayed in the street, after the crowd was gone and the traffic was being re-routed around the scene. I stayed at the spot, unable to take my eyes off of the crimson puddle, studying the way it spread so slowly through the cracks in the macadam, never becoming dilute, always retaining its blindingly vivid things I no longer had the power to protest. I left the graveside before the rest, afraid if I allowed myself to stay any longer, I would never leave, not without my mother to pull me away.

The funny thing about dead people is that you never get to choose how you remember them. My mother will jump out at me suddenly, without warning and at the most unexpected times. One would think you'd remember important things, like Christmases and birthdays, your first day of Kindergarten or the last time you saw her, but that's not how it works. She always appears in the most mundane context. I'll be in the shower and it will just hit me, some Tuesday night when I came home from school and she made macaroni and cheese for dinner, like she knew I'd been thinking about it all day. Or I would be furious over some adolescent out-rage and I would go on, for hours sometimes, blaming some one else, knowing full well I was equally at fault, secretly thankful she didn't have the heart to tell me I was repeating myself. But it isn't always good stuff, though. Sometimes I'll be overcome with regret over some small injustice I did her, a time I pushed her too far, just because I could, my feelings grossly magnified in retrospect. And sometimes I get angry too, although not so much. When I feel guilty, I tell myself she's dead; she's not a saint, that she did her share of things to hurt me, but I still feel like a shit. There's nothing I can do.

And that's where she is now, mixed indiscriminately with all my other memories, no different, in a sense, than the plot of a

movie or the layout of a room, the same as artichoke dip and uncle buck and piles of newspaper towering above me. Of course I can call her up if I want to but it's far better when she just appears. Instead of the same tired memories I get something new, a moment I didn't even know I remembered until I did. I get to see her as she was, not as she appears in the images I've distorted with overuse. It's those times, when she comes to comfort me with a wink or a private joke; it's then that I believe in souls.

Sarah McLemore
Mercersburg Academy
Camp Hill, PA
Mr. Joel Chace

SISTER

In the winter we got restless.
The rain pulled the snow
Down off the tree limbs
Exposing their broken fingers.

We lay at the bottom of the stairs
Holding hands and kicking our feet
In the beds of light
Cast on the slab stone floor.

I cried when I heard you fooled around
In Peter Devun's station wagon.
You came home with your hair messed
And your eyes drunk and crying to me.

I kissed you between your eyebrows
And we lay on your bed and breathed slower
As we watched the snow
Come down in fistfuls.

* Carling McManus
Milton Academy
Marblehead, MA
James Connolly

SHOPRITE

It is one of those days
when the clouds
glow, and cast a hazy, mild gray light
onto the road and trees
and I am in the car
but I might as well not be
and music filters from the radio
with fuzzy resonance
and someone searches for a heart of gold,

and near the double yellow lines
there is a squirrel with its head
alert, but its hind legs

crushed, and a crow bounces toward it
from the grass, and with a half-hearted hop
avoids the tires, and I do what must be done
though afterwards I am sullen and my hands
feel thick on the wheel
but then the green leaves heaves
and breathe in the humid breeze
and I know the energy transferred itself
and I am different for it,

and the sky still gleams thinly, as
before-
but down, past the bill and trees
the sun punctures the clouds
and-a pale yellow, golden haze
seeps out, and the song
ends, and in the moment of quiet a crow
caws
and the engine and the wind
mingle, and God-oh God
I will miss driving to the supermarket.

Christine Prentice
Franklin Lakes, NJ

TOKEN

Nichole slides that thimble
onto her thumb, extends
her arms, tilts her head,
squints at it.

Ashes.
The house was practically
ashes some black, some gray.
I imagine her digging, sifting
through the burnt-up lives
of strangers who left their pots
and pans, who left their charred
photo albums and their spoiled
bathroom sink. I imagine her
finding the one perfect token
in all that disaster.

She smiles so big
and so sweet, like she's
seven and not seventeen.
"This," she says.
"this is the best," as she slides
the thimble onto her thumb, extends
her arm, and squints at it.

I imagine someone who might
Have smiled at it the way
Nichole does now.
And for a moment. I try
to imagine that there is
no such thing

as fire.

Sara Watson
Rouseville, PA
Mrs. Melodee Titus

RICHARD'S STORY

1950, my parents Lisa and Carlos came to the Bronx,
from Puerto Rico.
Hard Coconuts had rested on their branches, crowning their house
But now, curved lights, wept over their block

Neighbors no longer brought arroz con gandules or town gossip
to their door step
Now, they spoke in funny tongues
the foreign spices they cooked with, spilled through the cracks of
their metal doors
stinging the insides of nostrils.

The lady who lived below,
was Puerto Rican, she always knocked on the door,
her heavy, perspiring head slowly lowering to the floor
She begged for money while she wiped her sore nose with her
sleeve "Por favor, un poco de dinero."

My mother Lisa, had five kids,
I was in the middle Carlos, my father, joined the marines
His 8' by 10' picture sat like a king in the middle of the dinner table,
so we wouldn't forget his face
or his power

Lisa folded and creased clothes over the board
her wrinkled skin grasping the iron
On her knees,
she wiped the scuff marks off the Uptown floors
an apartment full of noisy kids, she came home to
and ate peanut butter on bread,
while they had peanut butter and jelly,
for dinner

Carlos, my father came home for a year
My name became Nino and my sister Nina.
the rain fell often that year,
leaving the streets dirtier
With every fight he threw more harder
against the kitchen cabinets
he pulled her hair out with his fits,
telling her she was fea.
She cooked whole meals now, platoon, arroz con pollo y habichuelas
And she worked nights

Leaving us alone with him
I hid the books from the library across the street,
under my bed
and got the action figures out
My sisters' wore their Easter dresses
clean and crisp for his fingers to touch

When we were loud

Carlos, my father, threw
rice on the floor, like frozen rain
Our naked bodies knelt on the linoleum
picking up kernels with our sticky skin
They dug into the creases of knees and
poked into the pores of our skin

Soon Carlos put his Navy uniform on, with the shining medals
hanging perfectly on his breast
he placed his bags at the door.
The kernels came out as angry tears
as I chased my father around the apartment
with a knife,
clinched in my palm.
I caught him like a slippery fish,
he shrank into his uniform
and his eyes became as dead as his medals

We never saw him again,
but the kernels are still at the surface
of our skin
And I will never let go of the knife.

Joleen Rivera
High Bridge, NJ
Mrs. Harrod

WHEN ICARUS'S LOVER SAW THE PAINTING

I would never stop in an art museum
to gasp at you,
or even glance at you.
You with those ships,
on dull oceans,
rolling up on to sheep-covered shores,
under a freshly plowed cliff-top.
You with that graying sky
and disappearing yellow sun.
You with harsh shrubbery of dark green.
You without anything to capture me-- -
except your title,
with that name.
Icarus.
I know you.
Well, I know him.

I fell in love with him
when he flew to kiss the sun.
When his wings dripped apart
and he fell,
I loved him.
When no one heard his cry,
I loved him. I loved him when the last bit of air
was replaced by salt water in his lungs.
I loved him when he could no longer see
out of open eyes.
I loved him when his father
couldn't find him.
And I loved him when a ray of sunlight

fought through the water
to finally give him his kiss.

Sarah Maloney
Pennington, NJ
Mrs. Judith Michaels



Stephen Siperstein
Marblehead, MA

GABRIEL

"Is he still out there?" I ask, even though, from my seat, I can
see his black, stooped figure.

"Yes." My mother does not look up.

"Oh."

I trample upstairs because I don't want to see him any more.
I have work to do. I have a life that needs to be lived.

Equations and logarithms mean nothing today, though, as I
slump at my desk and attempt concentration. I steal a glimpse

Continued on page 28

Continued from page 27

though the slits of the venetian blinds, hearing the clinking sound as they bend, my fingers sliding along the dust.

His warped, callous-of-a-figure mars the impeccable white around him. His black cotton hat is gathering now, becoming gray, as he sits, hunched over in that dirty, off-white lawn chair in the direct center of the snowy backyard, his gloved hands wrapped around his neck, his face focused downward as if staring at that snowflakes as they descend to his boots, then disintegrate to water droplets against the black leather.

I imagine the pinkness of his face now, his nose especially, imbued with cold. I see his blue eyes glistening, reflecting the brilliance of the snow.

Seeing those frigid blue eyes, my stomach burns. I hurl my fist into the wall, I hear an irate crack, and my hand bleeds. I hold the writes of that hand with my other.

I watch the blood stain my white carpet, drop by drop. I watch each drop bead as it tumbles to the whiteness of the floor. The bleeding languishes. The blood sits on my knuckles.

I lay my head on the carpet, I lay myself down next to my blood. I make a snow angel on my carpeted floor, but only one.

I stop because there is no need for angels here.

He taught me how to make snow angels. I remember the wetness of the snow against the skin of my neck, the warmth of our house after our journey outside, our recession from reality.

I squeeze the skin around the knuckle of my ring finger. It bleeds again. Angrily, now. I gape at the colorless ceiling. The redness of the blood has dulled and become brown. I glance out the window again--he hasn't moved.

I feel an angry protest in my stomach, rising to my throat. I hold it in until it grows cold, coagulates, cuts off my breath.

My mother is in the kitchen.

"Is he still out there?" I ask angrily.

She stares at m, at my tumultuous red eyes and my dripping hand. She glares at the glass table top, searching for something, then resumes mending the hem of a pair of his dress pants.

"Well, is he?"

"Let him be," she says, forcing the needle through the tough, ashen material.

"Let him be?" I ask, offended.

"Let him be."

As if that makes it better.

As if that makes it easier to concentrate on logarithms.

She pulls the string through, lifting her arm gracefully, penetrating the cloth again, more forcibly. I hesitate on the stairs on the trek back to my chilly, silent room and my bloody carpet. I gaze out the window at the falling snow. It doesn't fall so much as it floats. Without thinking I force my boots on my feet, boots I have outgrown.

When I am outside, I am shocked at the tranquility of it. From my room, this world looked enraged--blazed. But it is actually quiet and cold, mollifying. The ground glows and the sky is dull.

The world is backwards.

Ice clings to the black tree branches, afraid of letting go. Afraid of the brilliant earth below. In the distance, I hear the slish of cars speeding too quickly along slush-filled roads. My family knows all about the danger of speeding on days like these.

I tread tediously, with deliberate steps, forcing my boots into the snow, shocking the earth. I try not to look at his figure as I approach, but his dark frame is all I can see in this gray, tepid

world.

He keeps his face down, watching the snow collect around his feet, even as I stand before him.

"It's cold out," I say, and my voice is hoarse.

The slish of the cars abates.

"You shouldn't be out here," I declare bitterly.

Not a sound. We exist now, together, in this gray vacuum.

Only, if we are together, I am still alone.

"Come inside."

The flakes that once hit the ground soundlessly now reverberate in my ears. I hear their furious pound against an angrier, colder earth.

"Please," my voice splinters.

My words are devoured in the viscid wind.

"Please, come inside."

No more bitterness.

It melts.

I melt.

I hit the ground as snowflakes--and yet my ears ache to hear it.

"Please," I whisper. "Please, Daddy, come inside."

Now my figure mars the perfect ground. My cold, frostbitten hands cling to weightless snow.

I lie on my back and create a snow angel next to his lawn chair. I feel the cold snow, against my head, matting my hair, numbing my scalp. I stare blankly at a blank sky. The wind surges, I hear the trees bristle against it.

I stand up and his face is fixed on me. His eyes, in fact, are blue, but not cold. They glitter, gasping as they die. He looks insipidly at my angel at his feet.

"It wasn't your fault," I say, but the words must be lost her, because he just stares.

I avoid trampling the snow when I walk back inside. The air is warm inside. I leave a path of snowy footprints along the stairway to my room.

The warmth is overpowering, suffocating. Logarithms have no pull--his form is a better magnet.

I gaze out from the blinds that line my windows like prison bars, going the wrong way. I see his figure, his face now gaping at the angel beside him.

I stare at the angel, too.

I see her form, her powdery dress. I imagine her halo. She is an angel that would have made him proud.

Except for one flaw. I start back from the window when I see it, my eyes flinch, and I grasp my bloody hand.

He sees it, too, and I think it scares him.

It terrifies me.

An angel with a bloody wing.

Christine Prentice
Franklin Lakes, N.J.

SAGE

As I tumble out of bed on early mornings before school, I hear the running water in her shower. She gets up earlier than I do, not because she enjoys having extra time in the morning, but because it takes at least 20 minutes to blow-dry her thick, blonde hair. As I wash my face I hear the hairdryer, and I know that she is

Continued on page 29

obsessing about the way her bangs fall over her face. Her contacts are already in, and she observes every misplaced strand. The scent of mousse and hair gel waft from her bathroom to mine as I pull a bandanna over my unbrushed hair. I find a tight shirt and a pair of jeans, slip on my sandals and head downstairs for breakfast, while she decides that the pink shirt makes her skin look a richer shade of pale cream. The carpool comes to take us to school, and I call in the direction of her bathroom for her to come downstairs. I scurry out of the house as she promenades atop Steve Madden shoes to the car. The first thing she says to me is "Help me put on my Tiffany's bracelet."

I call her Sage, but her name is Sarah. When she was a baby, my parents called her Sarah Jessica, which eventually morphed into Sage. I address her by this nickname, as long as none of her friends are around. They don't know Sage.

My sister has two names, because she has two lives. At school, she lives in a world that she thinks my parents and I can not fathom. But her popular eighth grade friends are so cliché that they are the same as the people my mother was friends with in 1968. Sarah thinks that her experience of going to parties with the same 30 people every other weekend is one that is unique to her and her friends. She minimizes the instant massager window when I enter her room, and she tries to whisper on the telephone because she thinks that I don't know what she's talking about. She doesn't realize that I had the same conversation with my best friend three years earlier.

The life that, according to Sarah, my parents and I are able to understand, the life that is "public" to us-"private" to her friends, is Sage's world. At home. Here, she plays the piano for a half-hour every day. She does her homework meticulously. She has a sense of humor, and is deeper than her reputation for spending Sunday afternoons at the mall. But hidden in this world is another side of her that no one knows. No one except me.

When I was in third grade, and she was in kindergarten, we fought incessantly. We were in the TV room, on the old green and gray couch, arguing over the remote control, and she hit me. But I didn't give in. She was my younger sister; I should be the stronger, domineering one. At least that's what my friends told me. But they didn't know her. They never saw her run out of the room in a blaze of anger that day and slam the slatted folding door so hard that it broke off its hinges. We didn't replace the door.

My grandmother, an only child, repeatedly told me how she would love to have had a sister. "One day, when you're older, you'll be glad that you have each other," she instructed me. But she was unaware of the fire in Sarah's eyes in the moments of anger. Grandma never heard the wretched gravely sound that entered Sarah's voice when she screamed at me because I wouldn't let her use the computer when I was doing homework. The voice that made me run into my room and hyperventilate from crying when my parents told me "Be tolerant. You're the older sibling."

Sage and I share a room when we visit my grandmother in Sanibel. One night during Christmas vacation when she was in seventh grade. I heard her voice as I was drifting off to sleep. "Who are you friends with?"

"I don't know, Sarah, I'm trying to sleep," I murmured from under my covers.

"You don't have any friends, do you," she tried to provoke me, but I was too tired for her games.

"Sarah, of course I have friends, I'm just too tired to discuss this now." But my weary voice did not cure her obsession.

"Name some." Her command forced me to prop myself up in my bed and open my eyes. I could not see her face in the darkness. "Emily. And Jacob. And, and I don't know. I'm going to sleep." I abruptly lay down again and pulled the covers over my head.

"You only have two friends," her voice resonated in the room as I nodded off.

She brings a friend home from school today. Karen. I hear the key in the door, and the chattering of girls voices behind it. They come in and head towards the kitchen, where I am.

"Hey, what's up?" she addresses me as if I am one of her friends. For a moment, her worlds have collided. But then the girls scamper upstairs, and a door noisily shuts. It opens again, so Sage can come back downstairs to harshly instruct me, "Don't use the phone, we need to go online."

On her way out Saturday night, my parents holler downstairs, "don't forget to call us if you leave Karen's." They're good parents. Naturally they want to know what Sara - is doing when she leaves the house - guidance counselors and after school specials warn about the dangers of not keeping track of children. She spends the evening with her friends, and returns home around eleven. My parents wait up until I get home, too. But when they hear my footsteps in the hail downstairs, they shut off the television and go to sleep. I come upstairs and see light radiating from Sage's room. When I open the door, she snaps, "What do you want?"

"Are you going to be online for long? I need to use the phone."

"I'm not online," she pauses then adds hastily, "but I need to use the phone."

"Oh, come on! You just spent the whole night with your friends. I need to call Jacob. I told him I would. Why do you have to be so difficult?"

"Fine. Call your dumb friend." Pause. "Jerk," she sharply adds under her breath. We don't hit each other anymore, but our harsh words are sometimes more abusive. At times like this I remember what it is like to need a friend. Is this how she always feels? wander into my room and quickly telephone the calm, soothing voice to escape from Sage's attacks while Mom and Dad lie safely in their beds, unaware of the battleground that is their home.

Laura Holzman
South Orange, NJ
Mrs. Anne Wessel

COUNTING STONES

I've been to ten funerals in seventeen years. The first one I went to, I didn't cry. I didn't even have the urge to cry. I was seven at the time. My dad's father had died of colon cancer. My first experience with death was warm legs and bodies, moving in and out - quickly and slowly, shrouded in the folds of black linen and white stockings. I was swept into the small funeral parlor by the unceasing movement, not really moving myself, just pulled and pushed by the ebb of the motion. The walls were covered in cream wallpaper that seemed to emit waves of liquid heat from the dank warmth of the room. The legs kept sweeping forward and back, towards the coffin and then trickling down the walls to the chairs in the back.

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

Life, slowed to nightmare pace from the heat, was embodied by family and friends acquired over living in the same neighborhood for a lifetime. I sat with my cousin, pushed against the back wall slowly collecting legs around us, staring at my grandfather's coffin. I wasn't all that interested in his lifeless body, as much as the delicate lilies over his head wilting towards the soft satin of his bed. I had wondered why the women all had black streaks on their faces. I had wondered why my dad seemed so quiet.

That August when I was seven, I went to three funerals in one month. My great grandfather died. My mom's dad died. I sat with my mom at our third funeral in a month. Her dad had died of cancer. She seemed so very porcelain. I tried to make myself cry to let her know I cared. I sat and choked back gags from the force.

When I was in fifth grade, my best friend Evan and I were playing with legos when the tumor inside his dad's head exploded. Mr. Mercier was walking out of a movie theater a mile away, as we cracked and snapped plastic pieces together in the depths of cerulean basement. Evan and I instinctively stacked the colored plastic into forts and walls and bridges - paths to escape the land we'd created. At the funeral for his dad, I sat diagonally from Evan. I couldn't take my eyes off his face, waiting for the slightest movement to let forth a swell of tears from his eyes. When we were four, I had pushed Evan off a swing in the playground. I had watched heavy droplets of tear scatter over the small scratch on his small palm, and then began to cry myself. Through the choking waft of flower in the funeral parlor, I watched those same eyes. Even when "Only the Good Die Young" echoed off the marble vases by the casket, Evan didn't flinch. I didn't cry either.

Every time was the same. The wake - sitting on hard, awkwardly cut wood. Face a dull red from the aching heat of the room. Stomach muscles tightened in fight or flight reflex. Fingers numb with lack of blood flow. Sharp pain in throat from clenched teeth. I did cry a few times. Tears discreetly fell from my eyes when looking at the collage of photos of a man with a round stomach and deep dimple in his left cheek, throwing a baby into the air - glancing to the left to catch his still and shrunken features lying gently in flowers and satin. I cried when "I just want my Daddy back" rang in my ears, a longtime friend slowly collapsing into my arms. Then I cried. I cried in sympathy, of desperation, for there was nothing left to say.

Ten funerals in seventeen years. Yet there is a point at which everyone breaks -when a faint gust of wind loudly shatters immovable roots and pushes the mighty elm crashing to the earth. My Mom called me at school. My ten-year-old sheepdog, Charles was old for a big dog and suffering from the weight bearing on each of his fragile joints. She told me over the phone that they were going to put him to sleep. I thought about how I had kissed his warm head that morning. I slowly dropped the phone back into it's cradle, and walked back to class, wondering if he knew it was the last time he would see me.

It wasn't until I got home and caught eyes with my mom in our eerily silent house, that the immovable base of my life loudly cracked and rained shards of the truth of death around my small figure. I silently walked to the darkness of our living room and lay shaking on the deep softness of the couch. Seventeen years of the

incomprehensible suddenly were connected in a poignancy so deep I could only cry. I had no great epiphany, simply memories. I remembered the day we got Charles, opening his crate for the first time on the grass outside the airport, a tiny puppy tumbling out of the dirty plastic, licking my dad on the lips. With each painfully deep sob there was another: Nana at my eighth grade graduation before she got sick, and my Mom slowly placing an almost black red rose on her casket. My PopPop reading me stories before I went to bed, and my dad silently reaching for my mother's limp hand in the pew of the church. Mr. Mercier telling scary stories on the bus ride to Boston, and Evan's little sister playing with a doll in front of his casket. There was no conclusion, no answer bubbling out of the chaos. The rhythm of my crying seemed to web the memories together, event to person, person to object, object to feeling. The profound simplicity of death, looming heavy among my fading memories seemed to emerge in a beautiful, tangible web when a stable, unmoving part of my immediate family was quietly and resignedly gone.

My mom gently helped me off the couch, and together we walked outside. It was October, and the sun was just going down. My Dad was throwing the last layer of dirt on Charles' grave, and told us to get rocks to mark the site. With blurry vision I began grabbing rocks, my dad, mom and brother carefully doing the same. I gently placed my rock on the fresh dirt and reached for another, counting to myself "One, two..."

Rebecca Connolly
The Derryfield School
Windham, NH
Mr. Robert Cole

FINGERPRINTS

I do not know why you take a train
all the way to Newark,
to see my face in the crowd, grab my hand
and lead me to the next train,
back to your dorm,

We snuggle under your covers,
my head rests on your arm
I tell you I am tired
You tell me you woke up at 6:30am to meet me
Our elastic lips latch onto one another,
they roll onto hidden parts

Hours pass and you head for the shower
I want to follow you,
but I would rather snuggle with your fingerprints.
under the covers
that look like fossils of our bodies.

Joleen Rivera
High Bridge, NJ
Mrs. Harrod



Geneva R. Szulewski
Bishop Stang High School
Fall River, MA
Ms. Jennifer Irizarry

1/10/01

morning comes with headswells and nosebleeds
as the bridges of frosted noses harden
and make cheap American cars skid
nervously as the fuel light
stares back from their dashboards.

remember which ones know
what shift-4 means:
the dollar sign,
just one slash away from serenity,
and four letters away from snake.

they will crunch the splintered fingernails
off all those who climbed up from nothing
with those new low cut, black Doc Martins,
their six silver holes for the laces screaming hack off

those boots will be long ago cleaned and re-cleaned
by the time the scattered dark red, almost black paint
has been washed
into a grumpy storm drain,
that eats and eats,
as the fallen bleed

and bleed.

don't let your mouth open up;
you might swallow the ambulance lights,
those eighth grade Bunsen burners and the fireplace
used when they thought things would work out.
but it's all obliterated by those new low and black Doe Martins
that with all six silver holes cry, what have I done
as they walk off the scene,
as the ambulance just speeds off
with the crushed.

Matt Siegel
Charlestown High School North
Congers, NY
Mrs. Christine Potter

HOLOCAUST

say maryland sank into the
deep blue sea
slid down the chesapeake
on a sluiced slope

hallowed hollows of stripped skeletons' burnished bones
are filled by those felled with the movements

Continued on page 31

Continued from page 31

of a bloated fish sinking under silt

six million people
drowned and disappeared
into atlantis
still need three million more
to fill the quotas

some like those that are thrown back
to thrash under the debris of their burial vaults
and others long gone from want of water

of the nine million
who sank their ashes into
the grime covered
mausoleum of europe

and still more sending water through their gills
to get past annapolis and baltimore
as quickly as possibile

quicksand must have been
under the foundations
of the black eye susan state
and it dropped
like the deadweight
of a manacle

Nora Rawn
Towson High School
Towson, MD
Mrs. Jennifer Kemmery

TO AN AMERICAN FROM AN AMATEUR
Crosses, Warhol (1981) synthetic polymer paint and
silkcreeen ink on canvas, 20 X 16 in.

You did these after the Torsos,
tilted indescribably so,
pocked along the edges, like potato prints,
evenly thick,
some arms overlapping,
creating a web of rectangles.
Muted blue, slate perhaps,
 you had already turned back
 to commercial, already moved to your
 final Factory
 where you painted this
 in a space six feet square,
 surrounded by antiques,
 Coca-Cola,
 Brillo,
 jewelry,
 Campbell's.
 Always bringing home the bacon
on a black background
matted to perfection
along the assembly line

in that Factory
where men would drop
their pants to gain
access and you would
Polaroid their genitals.
Whatever felt right.

Flowers-- you were the dark roots
of the whole movement:
those wonderful, bright, multi-colored flowers
to define us all.

You don't suppose the church took it well.
You shall not lie with men...it is abominations (Leviticus 18:23)

Johanna Smith
Chestnut Hill MA
Mr. James Connolly

**SOULS CRACK LIKE ICE ON THE SOCCER FIELD IN
MID-JANUARY**

*"I have squandered my resistance for a pocketful of mumbles; such
are promises." -Simon and Garfunkel*

Sometimes, if you listen real close
and know where to look,
sometimes you can hear people's souls cracking
breaking, shattering and splintering,
shrapnel and incidental wreckage from
thousands of imagined slights and introspective
cups of coffee. When they crack, you'll know,
'cause people seem to slump under the strain
of days and weeks, spend hours by the window
looking nowhere but the same witless, drab
street, dripping with rain and late afternoon
headlights of other worn people wending their
ways home. You'll know when they
start to pine and think on lost relatives
and distant friends that they wish to see
just once more, you'll know cause
a crack in the soul doesn't open slowly
like cocoons or stubborn oysters, but collapses in one
terrific moment, sounding off like a clarinet
in un-qualified hands, a belt snapping
off its loops, or ice cracking on the soccer field
in mid-January.

Will Holman
Towson High School
Towson, MD
Mrs. Jennifer Kemmery

4.5.199-135 [EXEUNT OPHELIA AND GERTRUDE]

She would've regretted the step she took the second after she took
it.

A little older than me, hair longer,

Continued on page 33

eyes greener: she would've watched her dress flare out around her
letting the thirsty fabric drink
kicking her legs hard under the cloud of her clothes
breathing in,
and out,
river.

She would've regretted the step she took the second after she took
it.

She would've closed her eyes tight
squeezed
closed
out
of them until her eyelids melted
and then one foot and then the other, her ankles shins waist chin
eyes over the edge,
she would've gagged, again and again,
heaving up sludge,
and sucking down water, her eyes
greener still
with fern-light and loss.

She would've combed stars from her hair
with her liquid lines of fingers
and shimmered as she sank
that mysterious line threading beneath her face--
sane, not sane, sane, not sane, alive,
not alive,
exhaling waves of green glitter,
drifting irresistibly downwards through the shine.

She would've given crazy a new name
spoken softly, and with lowered eyes,
and all the fishes nestled in her final breaths,
beckoning to her like the spent fingers of dead men,
would've known only
to swim around her, like angels,
around and around
trying to save
their crazy fish souls, all but lost
in the ripples she shed.

Rebecca Schonberg
New York, NY
Mr. Zegers

FOOLING JESUS

i went to ChurchChoir
and my third grade thighs
stuck to the cold, metal
chair.
they told me i was
an Alto
and
fed me baked goods
at the end of each practice
to ensure

my Return
and
to block the
stench of the Ladies in their Sunday
their Wednesday

church clothes-
the Ladies who wore
different colored solid sweatshirts
and tapered pants on
middle aged thighs
and thick woolen jackets
and their best Church smiles
plastered up against
their mouths
when they begrudgingly left
their Sofas
to pick up their
Children
from Church Choir...

it was a good place
for a Wednesday Night
(for me it was eight years
of my volitions
worn thin)

they told me i was
an Alto
and how nice that
i could sing the notes
so lovely
and
so low.

and so they let me
sing alone

eight years old

and blocking the stench
of the cold metal chairs
beneath my
not yet spent thighs
yelling in false Sopranos
of a categorical Jesus

who loved me

but not just me
he also loved
the lonely smiles of the Ladies
and the other Children, too
who
mimicked the notes
not so lovely
or
so low

the Children who could not

Continued from page 33

sing alone

and their daddies who drove big cars
and made their wives
pick them
up
from Church Choir

where they told me
that it was lovely
how i could match the shallow
pitches
from the piano
but that
i had the stench
of new ideas portalled from the smile
of my lips
that contrasted the old traditions
of cold metal chairs
and organ music
that played stale like
the categorical Jesus
of whom
they told me
to sing.

Emily K. Miller
Solanco High School
Quarreyville, PA
Mr. William Lewis

UNTITLED

Johnny jump ups and snow drops line the stone wall
salamanders flip and turn
Sally and Sam
doing laps in the pool
frosts still the grass on the first of April
fresh rhubarb with salt
and wild chives surrounding the tennis court
Needles from the Christmas tree
prick my toes through green carpeting
as you play the drums on my stomach
and turn cartwheels with Allison
The scalloped shell sink of marble
and the stool that brought me to it
the vent that dried me after a bath
in the blue towel
with the hood
and the ears
and the brick where I got my first bee sting
in my baby toe
And the yellow glider
With the harmonica on it
and the baby carriage parade
with Fee
Game of Games day
and Mrs. Malivozos

I was a paleontologist once
Me and Joy both
In a baby pool
with Timothy turkey
who threw up on me once on the bus ride home
"What do you think I am, a loaf of bread?"
No. I'd rather be Shee-Rah Princess of Power
Or pick at what was left of the gingerbread house
Or drink milk from the carton
under the kitchen table.

Lakie Wakim
The Williams School
Noank, CT
Mrs. Deirdre Christman

UNTITLED

You think you know everything until you tilt back your head to look
at the stars and don't recognize them.
As Orion's belly sags under his diamond belt you see you don't
have everything, and the
highest, naked branches are the slightest shade darker than the
night.
You're not scared of the emptiness that reflects your eyes.
You don't fear an eternal night, you trust the sun will rise.
And now you dream in lightyears, black holes, and galaxies and
nod proudly knowing that American flag-clad metal will orbit forev-
er as the first intergalactic litter.
And then a thin sheet of stratus clouds lazily obscures
the grin of the moon, like a spotlight,
projecting the branches heavenward and weaving their shadows
into the quiet migration of
the sky,
they are dim and hazy images on a transparent ceiling.

Victoria Young
Spotsylvania, VA
Mrs. Drist

SUBMERGED

my mouth swims in words
like laundry, wonderfully wet
from the machine.

clean with detergent
sopping with desire
--wring out their drippy poems.

the water yawns in turquoise
daughters of hydrogen, sons of oxygen,
bond as if they will never break

but for a current of electricity,
swarming with ions.
i sigh because i've never been stable.

submerged, my tongue becomes
a pearly pink fish, living off

Continued on page 35

the vitamins of this aqua lake.

hooked and lined,
its gills flutter
and sink into suffocation.

save a scale
that glimmers of
the alphabet i once knew.

Catherine Cambria
Green Brook, NJ
Mrs. Harriet Marcus

A NIGHT OF THE CHEATERS

At 7:28 on this Wednesday night
The closed eyes are seeing too.
He moves her hands into his backseat
that becomes a bed like a kitchen counter.
She turns her head
He is absorbed in porn, lost
As a tropical fish in the desert.

Her only thoughts: "when is this going to end"
This emptiness,
of desperation where only a young
Girl moaning is heard,
where a little teasing stirs the mind
And comes again.

He'll mark his place.
He'll mark her like a dog with no territory.

Abbey Marshall
Voorhees High School
Califon, NJ
Mrs. Lois Harrod

SISTER CHRISTIAN

I clung to your hand as you cried
Sitting in cold, plastic chairs
Designed for discomfort
Flipping through year old issues of
Highlights and *Cat Fancy*
They called your name then
Whisked you away into a dark torture chamber
I'm alone and shivering
Remembering December 17th
When you told us
Dad wringing his weather beaten hands
Mom, sitting completely still
Turned to a pillar of salt
Seeing the Sodom and Gomorrah
Her daughter's life has become
And then, myself, a spoonful of peas

In my mouth, thankful for it being filled
I can't respond
You declared your decision with dozens of reasons
Reasons that didn't convince
Didn't even convince you
I wept, swore I'd be there for you
The bonds of blood are thicker than the blackness of sin

Sarah Shatzer
Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Chambersburg, PA
Mrs. Anne K. Branham

ALCIE'S CRUMBS

I see Irish doorways littered with confectionery crumbs
My grandmother dusts of her apron
She reaches for the upper cabinet
On the table, slain fruits lie peacefully in their doughy graves
Powdered fragments rest sweetly atop
My sister picks at the sugary soil
Her dusted mouth gives witness to her greed
Across the table I remain innocent
Smiling Irish doorways carry our feast away
And she returns with a warm crusted melting
we scramble to consume

Making the apple smell in permanence with the linoleum
My sister and I would always request this ritual
But I only have this one
An apron primed with the doorways of Ireland
My grandmother has no face and leaves
A offering of apple crumb cake

Clare Fieseler
Florham Park, NJ
Mrs. Harriet Marcus



Anandy Germosen
Leadership Secondary School
Bronx, NY
Ms. Shannon Fincke Garver

BROKEN

She stared out the window, watching the light rain falling. Her eyes zeroed in on certain drops, watching them make their descent from the moonless sky to the cold, dampened pavement outside. She watched the passers-by, some scurrying in order to save their new hairdos from the rain, others prancing about the streets, dark umbrellas hovering over their heads like halos.

She looked down at the parking space just below the window. Stretched out between the cement block separator and the parked Nova's front tire was a patch of ice. The sight of the rain had made her forget it was an unseasonably early winter. Her eyes studied the puddle, her gaze seeping into its deeply set cracks. She sighed.

"You know, that busboy's been staring at you for the past ten minutes."

Her head shot up from her fixed gaze out the window back into the diner. It used to be her favorite place in the world, with its signature mint green and baby pink trimmed napkins and perfectly shiny silverware always placed. It was just like that now, the small lamp ablaze above their heads, the cozy window table with the booth seats that felt like you were sitting on blankets and pillows. She could hear the tiny jukeboxes faintly playing at adjacent tables, could hear the bustle and clanking of the dishes in the kitchen. She watched the waitresses, even Fran, her favorite, as they danced back and forth across the gray flecked linoleum. They still made the best milkshakes ever. But it just wasn't her favorite place to be anymore.

She glanced across the table, staring at his giggling eyes for a minute before realizing he'd spoken to her.

"What?" She asked quizzically.

"Well, I was pointing out that the busboy over there has a bit of an eye problem, but as usual, you're not noticing. What's up, anyway?" She shrugged in confusion as he continued, "Are you okay?"

"I think that's the problem."

"What is?"

"Am I okay.. .well. .I don't really know."

"What? What's not to know?" She paused for a minute to stare again at his inquisitive eyes.

"Me?"

"Okay you've officially confused me now."

"It's just. .well, I mean.." She rolled her eyes, giving an exasperated sigh, "I'm old enough now where I should know who I am, you know?"

"You do know who you are. You're that same girl who I've known forever. I used to ride my bike around the block to your house when I was ten. We shared lockers in high school. Come on,, that wasn't such a long time ago, you know..." His voice went on, rambling on about how her favorite subject was science and how she loved to play volleyball. He was talking about the time she fell down the stairs at his house when she began to tune his voice out. Her gaze left the table and traveled downward toward her lap. She stared at her jeans for a minute, wondering when she bought them. She looked at the sleeve of her sweater. It was beige, one of the big, baggy kinds with the hood that buttoned down in the front. Her grandmother had given it to her years ago and she'd somehow become attached to it. She studied the fibers of the sweater, trying to decipher what had been store bought or sewn. She stared at it harder and harder, almost distastefully.

"Do you think my sweater looks like an afghan?"

She didn't realize what he had been saying, but she knew she'd cut him off in the middle of his sentence. He looked at her in that way he always would when he was interrupted. God, he hated to be interrupted. She'd forgotten.

"What the hell are you talking about? Does your sweater look like an afghan??" He winced as he said it sarcastically, completely bewildered by her statement. She shrugged again.

"It was just a question, Billy." He smiled slightly and looked at her. She studied his face, his slight dimple as he smiled.

"Why do you still call me that?" He asked quietly, still smiling, "Nobody ever calls me that anymore."

"Well, I don't know. What else am I supposed to call you? It's the only thing I've ever called you, Billy." She paused for a minute, "Yeah. .it's the only thing I ever called you. Whoever that is, anyway.." She added quietly. She looked up at him and saw the look he got whenever he was antsy to change the subject. He looked into her eyes for a moment before snapping his head up slightly.

"Oh hey! I was cleaning out my dorm room the other day and I found something," He reached over to his left side on the booth seat and hoisted his black school bag onto his lap. She watched him as he carefully tugged on the zipper. Once opened, he rummaged around inside, biting his lower lip the way he always did. He smiled.

"Found that," He said, still smiling. He pulled his hand out of the bag. Cradled in it was a small square. A picture. He placed it slowly on the table in front of her. She peered into it for a minute. There was Billy, in all his football-player glory at the closing of the winning Homecoming game. He was wearing his backward hat, like he always used to, and the sun shone down on his bright red football jersey. His smile seemed a mile wide, gleaming in the spring sunlight of the picture. She smiled slightly. Standing next to Billy was the girl. Her long blonde hair flowed over her shoulders, framing her red and white cheerleader uniform. Their arms were slung around each other, their smiles as bright as the sun on that day. Her eyes trailed down to the girl's hands, the small silver sweetheart ring adorning her left ring finger. Her smile faded. She could still feel how itchy that sweater was, and how uncomfortable she felt in the almost non-existent skirt. She shook her head slightly, raising her gaze. Billy was looking at her, his smile exact to the one in the picture. He was glowing.

"That's not me." She said shortly. She watched Billy's face fall.

"What?? What are you talking about?!" He exclaimed, snatching the picture. He held it upright so she could see it, "Look!"

"I already did."

"How can you say that's not you?! Don't you remember that game? Look at how blonde your hair was.."

"My hair isn't blonde."

"Well sure, not since you dyed it!"

"Billy, that's not me."

"Well what other cheerleader would I have a picture with? Come on, you're getting weird on me now." She just sighed again, drawing her attention to Callie, one of the new waitresses at the diner. Callie was walking by the table, a stack of freshly washed dishes in her hand.

She watched Callie, rushing by, the stack of dishes gleaming in the diner light. As she approached the table, the stack teetered a little. Before Callie could catch them, two dishes slid off the top. They plunged to the floor with a sickening crack.

Continued on page 37

"Oh my. I'd better get someone to clean that up." Callie muttered and rushed off. The girl's eyes slid to the floor. One dish had landed face down, completely intact. She stared at the bottom of the dish, where the glaze had not been applied all the way. Her eyes jumped to the other dish. It seemed to have landed face up, but was cracked and broken into small pieces. She looked at the jagged edges of the cracked ceramic, the pieces laying on its side. She stared at it, thinking how it would never be used again.

Billy was leaned over, looking at the smashed dish on the floor as well. She looked up at him, her eyes meeting his for a minute.

"That's me." She said to him, gesturing to the destroyed dish.

"But...it's broken." Billy said quietly. She just nodded slightly and sat up again. They sat in silence as a busboy cleared away the dish. Her eyes focused back outside on the rain, falling a little bit harder now, Billy studied the gouges in the tabletop. Fran dropped their check on the table.

"I think I'm leaving." She said quietly. Billy looked up from the check.

"You want to go home? I'll take you home."

"No. I mean. that's not what I meant." Billy reached across the table, resting his hand on top of hers.

"What do you mean?" She looked down at his hand on hers, and looked at his face. His dark eyes looked sad.

"I meant that I think I'm going to. ...I think I'm going to leave this place. For awhile."

"But I thought..." A confused look came over his face, "I thought we were going to be together."

"But its only you, Billy." She whispered to him.

"Since high school..." Billy trailed on, "Its always been the two of us since high school. Since Homecoming..."

"Who was that blonde cheerleader in the picture?" She asked him quietly again.

"It's-" Billy stopped short, to look up at her, "I...thought it was you."

"I think we should leave." She got up, looking down at her sweater once more. She unbuttoned it and threw on her gray pea-coat over her black short sleeved shirt. She looked around the diner once more, and then her gaze fell to the floor where the broken plate had once been. It was gone.

"Here," she said, handing the sweater to Billy. He paid the check and they stepped outside. It was raining harder now and the cold air stung at her face. She looked up at the sky like she had done while inside the diner.

Billy walked around to the driver's side of the Nova. She didn't move, standing right next to him. She eyed him for a few seconds before he returned her gaze. He pulled her close to him, hugging her tightly.

"I just want to help you. Isn't there any way I can help you?" He whispered to her. He released her, looking back at her blank stare. He sighed, "Come on. I'll drive you home."

She looked down at the cracked puddle. It was beginning to melt in the slightly warmer temperature. Soon it would disappear. She looked at the front headlight of Billy's Nova.

"Actually. I'm gonna walk."

"But it's raining." Billy didn't even finish his sentence before she had turned, exiting the parking lot. Realizing he still had her sweater in his hand, he called her name. She didn't turn around.

He watched her go, crossing the street and disappearing into the shadows of the night. He wanted to call after her, to ask if

she'd be okay. He found that there were no more words left to say, and watched her as she slowly faded away, slowly heading down the block that didn't lead to her house.

Billy sighed, looking down at the small patch of ice near his front wheel. It was melting. His gaze met the car, the front bumper. He looked up slightly at the front headlight. A small crack was creeping up the side of it.

He'd have it fixed.

Jackie Dawn
Floral Park Memorial
Floral Park, NY
Mrs. Barabara Paulinksi

I WOULD PREFER NOT TO

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do - namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when, without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, "I would prefer not to."

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume; but in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, "I would prefer not to."

Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener*

The year in which my father became a character in a Melville novella was the same year in which I experienced my first love. I was sixteen when a cold December brought a dark depression into my father's mind. As the North wind blew, and the snow swirled around, my father smashed windows and walls as ruthlessly as he walloped people. He had always had a dark and brooding nature, but until then, he had reserved his physical outbursts for my mother. During a petty argument over control, I, too, became the recipient of one of my father's blows. His subsequent banishment from our home thus marked a turning point in the interrelationships of our family. Choosing to live in his office at a large technology corporation, my father became Melville's Bartleby, preferring not to deal with the reality of his deteriorating family and mental situation. He dined off scraps stored in his desk drawer, shared no conversation with a Ginger or Turkey Nut, and slept on a conference table, instead of his employer's couch. And as the rest of the family cajoled and urged him to get help immediately, he, alone, remained unperturbed by the inexorable truth that nothing in our lives would ever be the same.

In the months that would follow that fateful day, I too underwent a transformation. I became my mother's daughter, choosing to veil my physical and emotional bruises in bandages and lies. I obscured the truth as I wrapped my wrist in an ace bandage and iced my tingling ribs. Even Eric, my most important confidant, would be excluded from the truth, the horrible stench of the act. The pain of my father's abusiveness, and the force of his madness horrified me. I soon found that with a laugh and a stupendously self-deprecating cover story, even someone as close as Eric could not

Continued on page 38

Continued from page 37

really discern what was happening to me or to my family.

"Hey, would you help me on with my coat?" I asked of Eric, when he showed up for a date on the Saturday after the blow-up.

He stood there grinning at me, stooped over in post-adolescent embarrassment because of his six-foot four-inch frame. He was an upperclassman, a senior on his way to Johns Hopkins University in the fall. He whistled in surprise as he viewed my bandage, a shock of honey brown hair falling across his forehead, his green eyes widening with astonishment. "Whatever happened to you, Kara? Are you all right?" He looked up at me, his face concerned and puzzled. "How did you do that to your hand?"

I winced, thinking of how my father's irrational act could ricochet like a bullet through my life, causing mayhem and destruction. I desperately needed to dispel any rumors of disharmony in my home for Eric and his oh-so-proper mother and father. I also needed to be in tip-top condition for a concert at the foundation that underwrote my music education. My thoughts raced ahead to the next week, and then slowed down to accommodate the challenge of the next hours. As my mother and sisters stood in the hallway, at a loss for an answer, I chose my own explanation of events.

"The puppy pulled me down. Isn't that terribly klutzy of me?" I giggled nervously, hoping to convince him of the truthfulness of my story. The charade continued. "My father is out of town, on business, so I was supposed to walk the dog, but I slipped on a wet spot in the kitchen... and... this is the end result."

"Not a great situation for you, I bet, with a flute concert coming up next week." His face expressed genuine sympathy.

"We'd better get off to the movie now, Eric, or we'll be still standing here next week when I need to be at rehearsals in New York." I kissed my mother a hurried goodnight. "Now don't wait up for me. You know that Eric is a good driver. Besides, the movie isn't over until twelve forty-five. If you hear from Dad, give him my love."

Propelling Eric out the door, through the winds and snow of dark December, I covered the truth with make-believe. I chatted heartily with him, praising him for his driving technique and commenting on the reviews of the movie we were set to see. My fascination with my new relationship took the edge off my dysfunctional home life. I had known for months that my father was becoming more disoriented, growing even more divorced from reality. However, what I could not understand was why he would suddenly pummel me and twist arm, with such vengeance and hatred. Was it because I dared to challenge his judgment? Was it because I had unexpectedly become a dissenting female force?

I pulled down the make-up visor in Eric's car and reapplied my lipstick, taking a candid look at myself in the mirror. Dark eyes, lots of hair, an okay nose, pouting lips fit for a flute player, and a determined chin looked back at me. Where did I get these fine features? Where did I get my often haughty, often self-demanding attitude? Were these inherited aspects of me that I gotten from my father, rather than my often passive, overly adaptive mother? Was I another ticking genetic time bomb, waiting for life's stresses and disappointments to push me over the edge?

The movie about the vacancy and superficiality of American life did nothing to raise my spirits. I came home late, disheartened and annoyed with myself and even angrier than before with my father. Although the hour was late, I rang his office to harangue him, my resentment breaking its dams. Surprisingly, he picked up my call on the third ring. I closed my eyes, imagining his descent into a strangeness that would include sleeping in a chair in an

upright position, bathing in the sinks in the men's room, and dining on sandwiches and ice cream from the vending machines that dotted the halls.

"How could you," I sputtered, "how could you mess up my life like this?" I shouted so that my anger choked me.

"Hi, honey, how are you?" the voice at the other end responded with no regard for what I was feeling.

"How long do you intend to go on like this? You aren't homeless; you're crazy. Get some help. Get some help!" I shouted again before slamming down the receiver in anger.

In the months that would follow, as winter turned into spring, my father would continue to live in the non-reality of his situation, and I would find that the lies that I told would slowly gnaw at the core of my happiness. I struggled though the heavy load of honors level course work, dated Eric on weekends, and appeared happy, normal and well adjusted to the outside world. But more and more, little things ate at the pleasantness of my exclusive relationship. I felt constrained by Eric's guiding arm at concerts, his annoyance at other students' or orchestral members' talking to me, and his all too frequent phone calls at all hours of the night and day. When we spent Saturdays and Sundays together, I practiced my flute amid the noise and activity of a large, sports-minded family. The Harts were model suburbanites; they had accomplished what my mother, father, sisters and I could never accomplish. They were acceptable, successful and safe, always gaining on the green, orgiastic light that lay like a beacon on the American plain. It wasn't what they were that troubled me. It troubled me that their life together was so simple, and mine was far too complex. My relationship with Eric should have been a comfort to me amidst the strangeness of my father's madness. However, all I could feel was the suffocating intensity of his gaze when I moved too far away from him in a crowd. I loved being cared for and respected. However, more and more, I began to feel possessed. I stopped during finals week to talk to my mother about my problems. "Did Dad always try to tell you what to do and how to do it? Did he stop you from talking to your friends?" I inquired.

My mother met my gaze with pained eyes. "I wasn't really a cream puff when I started out in my marriage. I was a rather independent, and determined individual. I just never liked to fight over trivial things. Gradually your father wore me down with the number of things he made important, and the ways in which I tried not to be as petty as he was. The end result is the brutality that you, yourself, experienced. If any relationship is supposed to work and work well," she said in a slow and self-examining manner, "you must sometimes rock the boat in order to see if the other person prefers you so much that he prefers not to fight."

I grabbed my lunch bag and snatched up a thermos of coffee as I trudged with her to the car.

"What time is your exam over?" she asked gently.

"Don't worry it. I'll find a ride." Our eyes locked, for the longest moment as she surveyed me calmly.

"I'm sure you will," she replied.

After a killer French final, I found Jack Benson leaning against a locker on my side of the corridor. "Hey, Jack, don't you live off Ridge? Can I bum a ride with you?" I asked in a perky voice.

"Yeah, Kara, that would be cool, except..."

Hey, I date Eric; he doesn't own me. I need to get home to study for a history exam tomorrow. What do you have against giving me a lift?" Jack shrugged, carefully noting the bluntness of my gaze. "Well, when you put it that way, I can see why you feel Eric

Continued on page 39

shouldn't be jealous. But you know that Eric is always jealous whenever he sees someone near you." I had never before heard someone on the outside play back my relationship for me. I stood there, a spectator viewing my own life on video, realizing that much of what Jack had said had been hidden in my subconscious. I knew that I had been hiding out from the truth for a while, preferring not to see myself as someone who had been cast in her mother's mold, or who was walking in her mother's shadow. I felt the truth slap me in the face, and as I reeled under its force, I righted myself and changed my course. "Jack, I just need to grab my book and notes. I really appreciate the ride."

Shouldering his book bag, Jack walked with me down the hall and out to the parking lot. Somewhere in the background, I heard Eric call my name. I turned around, and waved to him, not the least angry or defensive. I was just being me, an independent, well defined me. "Hey, Eric, I'll catch you later," I called out as I opened the door to Jack's car.

Half out of breath, and obviously frazzled, Eric ran up to the auto. "Hey, why don't you wait until next period? Then I'll take you home?"

I looked at his fine-featured face, enunciating calmly the phrase that meant so much to me and so little to him. "You see," I said as I rolled up the window, "I would prefer not to."

After I thank Jack for the ride, my mother met me at the door. "I thought that you'd do something like this," she said as she put her arm across my shoulders. "Come inside and talk with me for a while. I would prefer it if you did."

She smiled, and I smiled too.

Carin Barbara Glaser
Kushner Yeshiva High School
Watchung, NJ
Mrs. Daniel ROsen

AT THE REUNION, WHEN SHE WANDERED OFF

The Source was up and off to the east somewhere, out of sight -
It peeked through the trees and darted low between the reeds,
And then pooled out,
Slowly, like mercury from a shattered thermometer,
Into the stick and stench of the marsh.

The black-necked, brown-feathered geese hopped from one bit of
land to the next, and
The soft-shelled turtles swam slowly in between.

Each inch further from the Source, the reeds grew lower,
The land more sparse fewer,
Until there was only shallow water,
And then, slowly, the Lake.

A pond, really, the work of a dozen men,
With bulldozers and steam shovels,
Sweat and galoshes.
My head would still be above water at the center, its deepest,
And only a short swim to any of its three shores.

In myth it was tile-bottomed,
And the roots and shoots had pushed up through the tiles.
Myth or no, weeds and other stalks swayed slowly all throughout,

Flopping over where it met the air.
And in all the spots the top of the water wasn't covered by leaves
and shoots,

Small spherical bubbles flitted to the surface.

When it started to rain, we could always tell first by watching the
lake,

Where the raindrops caromed off the top.

And the water shimmered like static.

It was usually just the bubbles we were relieved.

The sunnies and bluegills floated between the green or mud-col
ored fronds,

Sometimes they hovered over their nests they were soft pockets in
the sand,

And little clouds billowed along the edges wherever a mother had
just come or gone.

The babies stayed in these pockets.

We would walk along the edge, slowly, carefully,

In search of the place,

Where the light comes in at a perfect angle,

And violet, crimson, melon colored scales reflect back

And up through the surface of the water,

Blinding.

Myth also said the Source had brought bass;

And now they were everywhere, floating by the nests and along the
bottom

But we all knew the men with their shovels and galoshes

Had planted eggs in the soft pockets of sand-

Still we told the Myth to little brothers, and pretty, uninterested girls.

In the west corner, opposite the Source,

Was a drum-shaped hole,

A pipe, really, sticking up out of the water.

Most days the pipe was a foot or two above the water line,

But in a storm the water rose and poured in over the sides.

The pipe was there to prevent flooding.

We thought it was a black hole,

And, from the bridge, we threw stones into it.

We were sure they disappeared, or were jettisoned into space
somewhere.

The Lake ended at the bridge, and became a river again-

Another drainage device,

But of course we never thought of it that way.

To us it was just the Waterfall.

A concrete cascade, where the second river tumbled 20 feet

To a concrete platform,

Where it bounced off trickled to a stream again,

And then off and

Out of sight.

We eventually realized the sewer at the base of the Waterfall

Was the other end of the pipe.

We kept throwing rocks in our black hole, but now instead

We raced down the road, around the old bunks and

Down the hill to the second stream,

Continued from page 39

To see if the rock had come out the other end.
It never occurred to us that the rocks wouldn't float-
We kept throwing anyway.

In a storm, the stream rushed over the Waterfall like Niagara,
Forced away from the concrete wall,
Pouring off in an arc and landing
Far from the base.

In a downpour, once, we dropped a flashlight
Into the lake on one side of the bridge,
And then raced across to see the light go through the second river
and then
Carried by the waterfall.
We couldn't hear it crash on the rocks below-
We laughed and slapped hands
And pushed the wet hair out of our eyes.

Even without a storm, though.
The water never fell straight down.
The bed of the second river, another slab of concrete,
Hung out over the concrete wall that supported it.
And so we used to stand at the base of the Waterfall
And watch the wall of water slide down in front of us.
We came in from the side, stepping so carefully -The force of the
water may knock us unconscious, we thought,
And send us flailing onto the slippery rocks below.
But it was worth the risk, we thought, to stand there,
Against that cold concrete wall, amidst the stink and slipperiness of
the moss,
To see the wonder of the water, falling in sheets from overhead.

And that's where I found my little girl, giggling, smiling,
Jumping back and forth on the concrete base,
The pour of the water matting the hair down over her eyes.
I held my breath, sure she would slip,
But she was smarter than we had been,
And barefoot she was surefooted on the moss.
She stopped in the middle of the base, the water falling square on
the center of her head
And with her eyes closed and her arms spread wide,
She smiled at me.

Dave Rochclson
Stony Brook, NY
Ms. Faith Krinsky

LOOKING AROUND

Looking around, it doesn't bother me that
I can't use the new IBM Windows word processor in the hot after
noon
to write my psychedelic poem.

And as the Concord flies over my head it doesn't bother me that
I'll never be able to play "What's Going On" as Marvin Gaye's voice
masked in static resonates in my ears.

Looking around, it doesn't bother me as I stare out of a cracked

window and
grip almost strangle my new Bic pen that the Manchu dragon
seems
to swallow the entire sun... somehow inhaling the holy fire that I
thought
would blaze for an eternity.

It wouldn't bother me if this poem never really ended...
if it just drifted along forever like a cloud in the sky
occasionally letting loose a few drops of rain, a few screams, a
thunderstorm.

What really gets me- the thing that gives me nightmares- -
is not that Van Gogh cut off his ear or that Godel would walk around
with a nervous breakdown that seemed to ebb up underneath his
eyebrow
or even that I spend my time huddled up in my room playing with
abstractions
that live and die only in the mind.

Nah, it seems to me that the big human problem is that life what
ever that is
is not about working working working... not about neurotic fits... not
to be spent
behind a suit tied behind a tie... is not about 5 point drop in the
Dow...
is not about anger that sticks like
old bubble gum.
Looking around, life seems to be more about children blowing
bubbles...
wobbly little spheres that pop and disappear.

Richard Gottesman
Roslyn High School
Roslyn Hts, NY
Mr. Scott Segal

FLOWERS

He's playing guitar for me again, because he couldn't afford
flowers. I listen earnestly, trying to remember the words so that I'll
have something to comment on when he stops. I study his fingers,
searching for calluses. All guitarists have calluses, I tell myself, and
yet I find none. His fingers are bony and smooth. Maybe he just
started playing, I think, but he's too good to have just started, this I
know.

He sings a song, which I know is about his mother. She died
seven years ago, but it's still hard for him. She went insane after he
was born, which caused his dad to leave them. I sometimes mar-
vel at how well he turned out being raised by a schizophrenic. I was
raised by two relatively sane parents, so there is no excuse for my
behavior.

I live alone now, even though he says we should move
somewhere together. I know better than this. My sister lived with
her boyfriend of two years for less than a week, when a fight over
a plastic plate became so heated that it drove them to break up.
When she moved out, she took the plate with her and melted it into
a ball, which she keeps on her dresser in her new apartment, as a
reminder never to move in with anybody. My sister really disap-
proves of our relationship, especially when she heard about the
moving in together part.

Continued on page 41



Rachel Kolber
Council Rock High School
Churchville, PA
Mrs. Brenda Hall

Continued from page 40

As he plucks the guitar strings more slowly, I can tell the song is ending. He holds the last note in his voice, which is actually very sweet, and then swings his head up partially to look at me, but mostly to get the hair out of his eyes. "I loved it." I say and smile, although I hardly feel like smiling. I am studying psychology, which is basically just a name for everything that could possibly be wrong with people, and it makes me want to cry all the time. I am currently debating whether or not I am manic-depressive, even though I only have two of the twenty or more symptoms. This is what happens to you when you study psychology, everybody says so, but you never believe it until you begin to diagnose yourself with the first twelve illnesses. It's all downhill from there.

Did you really? Love it, I mean. Because I thought you would. I wrote more if you want to hear them. As always, his voice is laden with too much effort. Like my dad, I think. Always trying to please me. Or maybe not even trying to please me so much as trying to get me to act pleased. I congratulate myself on figuring this out.

I look up at the empty vase on my kitchen table, wishing he had bought me flowers instead. It would have been so much easier for both of us. I used to feel really uncomfortable when he played for me, especially when it was a song about us. Now, I am mostly bored. The thought of a musician boyfriend used to seem so romantic, until I had one. Now I look at the men in my classes and

wonder if they have girlfriends. I wonder what their career goals are, and how often they buy new shoes. His are wearing away at the soles, and the laces have almost turned black from dragging in the dirt when he forgets to tie them, which is a lot of the time.

"I loved it." I say again, this time with less conviction. I'm just so damn tired. He looks hurt, and I instantly feel guilt. "Hey, they were great... I love when you play for me. I do," I coax as I push a strand of hair behind his ear. He smiles and I exhale, relieved because we're okay for now. I get up unsteadily and look around my apartment as if I've never seen it before. The walls are dirty, but everything else is exactly how I want it. Except for him. He's the only part of this vision that just doesn't fit.

I head for the door and check my watch as I undo the chain and open it "Hun, I have class in fifteen minutes. I start, but he doesn't make me finish the lie. Instead he kisses me and then lifts my chin and says, "I love you," as if it was "good bye," and I fight off the urge to respond, "why?" and in one fluid motion picks up his guitar case, hoists it over his shoulder, and is gone. I shut the door and turn around and stand with my back against it, breathing heavily the way I've seen it done in movies. He will be back tonight. I grab my jacket off the hook and begin to decide which excuse I will give him then as I head out of the door. I'm tired of everything being so empty. I'm going to buy myself some flowers.

Jodi A. Eisenberg
Parkland High School
Allentown, Pennsylvania
Ms. Candace Brobst

AFTERMATH

Whoever said, "revenge is sweet," never lived on the other side of Revenge. The other side of Revenge is exactly where I live. On the north of Revenge, Mississippi is a huge nuclear waste dump. On the south, a small hamlet called Aftermath. Aftermath is where I live. Revenge, Aftermath and the nuclear waste dump are all located in a long depression in the land. It is a depression because it isn't deep enough to be a valley but it is deep enough to keep many of the harmful fumes from the nuclear waste dump in the vicinity. Actually, about once a year some local "environmentalists" raise hell about the smell coming from the nuclear waste dump and then a whole bunch of lawyers and scientists hired by the government come out to Revenge and Aftermath with booklets in their briefcases assuring us that the fumes from the dump will not harm us at all. They knock on our doors, and a lot like Jehovah's Witnesses, try to sell us their beliefs. You can tell as soon as they leave their cars that they aren't college students selling encyclopedias or Jehovah's Witnesses, though. People hired by the government always have a look of desperation, as though the government goes to loony bins and looks for people with "attempted suicide" written on their faces. I think the government does that to try to convince us that these are just normal Joes and Janes and we should listen to them." Most of us don't. They usually come when they think most people are home, which is about five-thirtyish when mom and dad are still commuting. When I see them coming up the walk I run to the door, lock it and run upstairs. You should see the looks on their faces when they see you locking a door instead of opening it. Sick desperation.

Lots of ex-cons and ex-hippies live in Aftermath. Ex-lovers and ex-dreamers live there too. I am none of those ex's, yet living in a town full of them makes you feel like one, even when you are only eighteen. When you have to walk past a house where "Unabomber" and his wife "Beast-with-the-female-version-of-a-mullet" live just to get home you don't exactly feel all warm and fuzzy. Who would move to a town named Aftermath anyway? My mom and dad did. They wanted to escape the "urban sprawl and all the inner-city corruption." They wanted to raise ten nature-loving kids on the open plans. Instead they ended up between revenge and garbage.

My dad and mom both think this town is "cute" and "wonderful." They commute every day to The Big City, which is well out of the reach of the influence of Aftermath and even Revenge. They work in the same types of offices they would have ended up working at if we had never left the urban sprawl. They think it is awesome that they can have these jobs and still live in a town like Aftermath. They don't know what it is like for me. They make me go to school in Aftermath so I can "hang with the locals." All the kids of Aftermath are as messed up as their parents are. After eighteen years of living with Druggy Dad and Eating Disorder Morn, many of the teens of Aftermath have to pay a visit to the nut house where many of them are no doubt recruited by the government to tell people of the town they used to be from that it is O.K. to live there, that you won't get as messed up as they did. Actually, when you compare death-by-fume-induced cancer to a life of psychological trauma due to being raised in Aftermath, I would rather take the easy way (cancer) out. Maybe that is the message those reassuring booklets are trying to get us to buy after all "Cancer is better than your standard of living is now: a hospital seems like a hotel after liv-

ing in Aftermath!" I can just see the picture on the front of the brochure, a big yellow smiley, like the kind on the Wal-mart stickers.

Now that I've made you all depressed just by describing the depression Aftermath is forever and always deposited in, I am going to describe the locals. Aftermath girls are skinny and pale with dry hair and black circles under their eyes. They look like they spend all their evenings crying and feeling sorry for themselves. I don't blame them, wouldn't you if you lived on the other side of Revenge? Aftermath seems to have an opposite affect on all the guys. They are all tough and thick-skinned as though emotions don't touch them. I think revenge has that effect on some people. Adults in Aftermath look like older and fatter versions of their children. Guys gain beer guts and wrinkles in exchange for hair and teeth, women get cellulous and wrinkles in exchange for eyesight and memory. No one gets especial treatment by the years in Aftermath. By the time you are eighteen in Aftermath you look twenty-one and every year as you get older the years older you look than your age multiples as well. Lots of people in Aftermath who are only in their thirties look well into their fifties.

Locals in Aftermath have three main places of employment-Jamboree Foods, O'Connor's farm equipment factory and the local tavern/restaurant/movje rental/gas station called Pegg's Quick Picker-Upper. Sounds like a drug, huh? A lot of people are farmers and/or welfare recipients too.

Anyway, my senior year started much like any other. I listened to the teachers complain about the summer jobs they were forced to get since our school doesn't pay them enough and I listened to all my "friends," (if you can call anyone in Aftermath friends, people in Aftermath are afraid to make alliances) complain about summer flings that ended the way a long running soap going off the air ends and boring trips to The Beach. The Beach is actually a little sandy creek where all the teens hang out and make out. The few cheerful stories ended up having gloomy endings. I had gotten a job in The Big City at a daycare so I was the envy of all the girls. The girls all said they loved kids although I knew from gossip many of them had gotten abortions before. None of them would ever be mature enough to have kids, but I knew eventually they would all have a few in hopes of stopping the hurt they had grown up with. I had promised myself I would never have kids simply to end my own hurt. After lending a compassionate word of advice to all of them I went to hang out at The Beach with a guy named Trent. Trent and I had been friends since Kindergarten. Most of the senior class was already at The Beach when we got there. They passed cigarettes and pot around and shared dreams of what their future would be like. Staying in character with the rest of the town, their dreams were low and boring. Many of them planned to join an army base on the outskirts of Revenge.

Mr. Rasputian was the army recruiter for our area. He had come to talk to us one during our sophomore year and several times during our junior year. He had pimples the size of overripe blueberries all over his face and neck; he was six two and about a hundred and forty pounds. He wore those dorky plastic glasses everyone wore in the eighties and he also wore one of those elastic bands to hold the glasses on. You'd think he ate at McDonald's every night for dinner the way he looked. Even so, he recruited about half of the senior class. The other half was going to Revenge Community College to learn about hard-core alcoholism and bad relationships. They said they were going to get degrees in nursing and landscaping, but everyone knew they would probably end up

Continued on page 43

working in the same careers, (if you could call them that) that their parents did.

I felt sort of out of place, sitting there listening to all my classmates discuss how they were going to sacrifice themselves to the system like virgin Aztec girls allowing themselves to be slaughtered on mountaintops to appease ancient gods. It's not that I felt above any of them-on the contrary; I had no clue what I was going to do after high school and felt almost as though my classmates who had already made up their minds were being the responsible ones. At the same time, however, I felt kind of sorry for them, as though they were cheating themselves out of life. I wasn't sure if my position (not knowing) was any better.

Trent was kind of in the same boat. His mom and dad had divorced in '85, when Trent was three. His mom now lived in a very artsy part of California and was well off whereas his dad still lived in Aftermath and worked in the factory. Trent when to visit his mother every summer but he always came back to his dad with (in his words) "an appreciation for common good sense and responsibility." Another words, Trent would rather live poor with his dad that live upper-middle class with his mom. But now that Trent was "all grown up" his mom wanted him around so bad she was willing to pay for prestigious college education for Trent, something his dad couldn't do. Trent was completely confused. To make matters worse, Trent told me, he had sort of had a fling of his own over the summer with a girl named Peace out in California. He didn't go into the details, but I could tell Trent had experienced something akin to love with Peace. But Trent also worried about leaving his dad (and his defenseless sister Katie who had been born with multiple birth defects) alone. Trent himself was scared to be alone, furthermore to be lonely, as he often felt in California.

"I guess I would get over loneliness out there, eventually," Trent said "but I never really fit into their lives of party after party, hangover after hangover and their endless revamping of their wardrobe of friends, not to mention keeping up with new styles, fads and ideas out there. God, over the summer mom bought me two new wardrobes, a cell phone and a PC to try to make up for the lack of energy and time she spent raising me." let Trent vent. He always hated his mom for the first few weeks of school and then he would sort of forget all of the heartbreaking sadness he felt out in California and then he would start remembering all the good things that had happened to him out there and by the time summer came again, he was ready to go back. I never tried to remind Trent of how bad last summer had seemed to him only months before, because I knew he had to choose one lifestyle or another on his own. There where certain things Trent really liked about California-the buses that stopped about two feet from his mom's house that would take you all over town, the relaxed, do whatever you feel like doing as long as you don't cause me any heartache feel of his mom's house before the tense drinking parties started at night. He liked the wealth and the free gifts his mom lavished on him even though he knew they were "please forgive me son," gifts. He liked the simple things there. Better water that left your hair shinier, the little balcony off of the bedroom he stayed in. But his mom and especially her boyfriend Dave irked him. Dave was everything Trent's dad wasn't, as though Trent's mom had decided to completely turn her life upside down when she left his dad. Dave was very materialistic and loud, he was rude to those he deemed lower than himself unless it was absolutely necessary to impress them, and then he would go with a sugar-sweet fake niceness that let you know he was only being nice to please you. That was the niceness he used toward

Trent. Dave always treated Trent as though Trent was an ex-lover of his mom, rather than her son. Dave was as hostile toward Trent as he would like to be toward Trent's dad. Dave thought he was "all that."

Trent's mom had developed a sort of sweet fakeness over the years as well, but she wasn't nearly as bad as Dave. Trent could tell there was a side of her that still wanted to be the wonderfully kind artist that had once lived in Aftermath, but there was another side of her that had desperately wanted out of Aftermath and thought the only way to do this was to become selfish and fake. Being fake was her escape; she had once informed Trent as she teetered around drunk with a highball in her hand, being fake was the only way she could ever have gotten where she had gotten. She had looked Trent straight in the eyes and declared "You are too much like your father to understand this now, but everyone has to be a little fake in order to succeed. You have no idea how far you can go Trent. I see you as a very successful young man, a lawyer, a doctor, a computer consultant, but you can't do that without kissing gluteus maximus once in awhile. You will never be happy, Trent, until you learn that little fact in life." Trent's mom said as she toppled onto the expensive Oriental rug, spilling her highball everywhere. Trent was stunted by this suggestion of his mother's that went completely against all of his morals. Nevertheless, he was enough of a gentleman to help his mother to the sofa and to clean the highball off the rug.

After Trent and I talked extensively with the rest of the senior class about our plans, we headed slowly home. Although Trent's house was nearly six miles from The Beach, he said he liked to walk and think things through. Trent always went walking when he needed to think. I was just the opposite in that respect, I always thought better sitting on the couch watching a dumb TV program like Judge Judy. Judge Judy had helped me solve countless problems with my friends, teachers and parents. It was as though watching Judy unravel the hopelessly tangled lives of people who where far more confused than I was had therapeutic value, as though it helped me see how easy my problems where to solve, compared to theirs. I love those shows that show the collective depravity of our nation, because they make me feel like I haven't screwed my life up so badly after all.

Trent told me, on the way home, that he wished he could give his mother's offer of a college education to me, that I would benefit more from the type of college his mother wanted him to go to than he ever could. She wanted him to get a four-year degree first in liberal arts and then move on to a school for lawyers or doctors or something highbrow. I said my parents had been planning and saving for my college education for years and would be greatly disappointed if I didn't use their money and if I moved as far away as California to go to college. They wanted me to go someplace relatively local, so they could visit me every weekend and pretend they knew what was going on in my life. They where a little peeved that I hadn't yet made up my mind about what I wanted to study and they where very peeved that I hadn't taken my SAT test yet, but they kept telling me it was my decision and that they would wait. My parents where generally good people, but in deciding to have only one child, they also decided to rest all of their many hopes for their offspring on her shoulders. They where a little overbearing and the worse part was they thought I didn't notice.

At home, mom had left me a memo on the counter. It read "I

Continued on page 44



Stephen Siperstein
Marblehead, MA

Continued from page 43

won't be home till late, I forgot to tell you about a doctor's appointment and a in-office workshop I have to go to tonight. Tape Friends for me and warm up the spaghetti in the fridge. Dad will be home at the usual time. Love, Mom." Mom was constantly leaving little notes all over the house for Dad and me. We found notes on the inside of the cupboard door reading "remember those five extra pounds you want to lose honey," and notes on our dressers reading "remember the disk for the power point you have to do today." It was one of Mom's quirks that I knew I would miss when I got to college, even though it annoyed me at times. Dad loved Mom's quite organization because he was, by nature as forgetful an unorganized as an Alzheimer patient in the early stages. Mom loved trying to correct Dad's habits of disorganization. Together, over the years, they had both almost come to happy medium.

Dad arrived only a few minutes after I got there. He came bouncing in like a happy little boy on his way out of the dentist's office. He threw his jacket towards the coat tree and ran to give me a hug.

"How's my big senior?" Dad asked as he kissed my cheek. "Did your friends all have good summers?" Dad never asked, "How was your day?" He always preferred questions I couldn't squirm my way out of.

"Well Trent had his usual horrible summer with his mom and Dave.... um Urma got a job trying out a new weight loss product, other than that, everybody was pretty bored all summer."

"Nobody else in your class has enough gumption to get a summer job?"

"Well, you know, I told you about most of their jobs already, its not like I've been ex-communicated from my friends all summer." Actually in the summer I usually kept so busy in The Big City I didn't see my friends a whole lot. Urma had kept her plan to lose weight a secret in case it didn't work, and it hadn't. Urma wasn't overweight, really, but she felt overweight compared to the living

skeletons the rest of the girls in Aftermath where. It seemed the girls in Aftermath didn't mind sacrificing their health for their weight; just as later they would sacrifice happiness for security and the chance of a career. The phone rang. It was Brandy, all out of breath about something. Brandy, I had noticed, had not been at the first day of school although she had been at the senior orientation at the end of our junior year. I had been disappointed, since I hadn't got to talk to Brandy all summer, since she had been away at camp for the first part of summer and had stayed with her adopted grandparents in Georgia for the rest of summer. Brandy was one of those rare people who was as adaptable as a chameleon and could be happy in either a trailer in Aftermath or a

penthouse in Paris. She was genuinely happy too, not the drug induced happiness many in Aftermath possessed. Although people in Aftermath were very concerned about the decline of their health due to the fumes from the dump, they didn't seem to consider drugs (both of the legal and illegal kind) and alcohol as well and a variety of tobacco could also ruin their health.

Brandy was not only genuinely happy, she had lived a life so fantastic, so unspeakable odd, that she had countless interesting stories and antidotes to tell. Brandy knew the secret of living life. She grabbed the bull by the horns, so to speak. To begin with, she had been born in a nudist colony for God's sake! She only wore diapers until she was potty-trained, and then two years after that she went around totally nude. Then her parents divorced and her mom had to teach her to wear clothes so she could go to pre school in NYC. Her mom was in in Greenwich Village, where she hung out with writers and artists and reinvented herself as a hip writer. Brandy must have gotten her skills in adaptability from her mom. College students in paperback and young couples in hardback read Brandy's mom. Because of this, Brandy's mom was able to buy a Porsche and move out of Greenwich Village to rent a really nice penthouse and she was also able to get a little revenge. She kept sending Brandy's dad pictures of his growing daughters going to auditions for small parts on Broadway. She wrote lengthy letters telling Brandy's dad how oppressed he had obviously kept her since she had never been this rich before, and how he was still a miserable loser, working on ranches all over Texas. Although Brandy was really well off at that time, she was miserable living with revenge. She wanted her kindhearted daddy back.

Before Brandy's mom's books fell from the *New York Times* Bestseller list, Brandy got her wish. Brandy's mom's lifestyle caught up with her and she had a really bad nervous breakdown. Brandy and her half-sister Hope were taken away from her by a kindhearted doctor knew no matter how rich a person is, they need security, especially growing up. He made sure Brandy and Hope would end up with Brandy's dad.

Brandy's dad was currently working as a mechanic on a prosperous Texas ranch. Brandy said she was instantly much

Continued on page 45

happier than she had ever been in New York. The old couple that owned the ranch (Mr., Mrs. Boone), where the kindest, most generous people Brandy had ever met. They were a big influence in Brandy's life and still are. Brandy's dad was the only full-time employee. Everyone else came and went with the seasons. Brandy says she loved everything about those years in Texas: the heat and dust of the summer, with a million migrant kids to play with and riding down to the slime-ridden pond." She loved tramping to the "½us stop" at the end of the long dirt road with the migrant kids, pushing her way onto the huge yellow bus that was from the fifties and riding to the cockroach ridden school where grades K-C were all in the same room. She loved swinging on ranch house porch swing with her dad in the winter and helping him trim the hooves of the paint ponies. It was typical ranch life for Brandy and Hope until their dad fell in love or at least had a "romance" with a migrant girl named Esperanza. Esperanza was only older than Brandy by ten years then. Brandy was eight. Brandy's dad ended up in the hospital with eighteen stitches because he had not been aware of the fact that Esperanza was engaged.

Brandy says she remembers the tension felt at her father's hospital bedside when Esperanza and her fiancé came to visit. Innocent Grandpa and Grandma Ranch Owners (their last name was Boone) had insisted they both come and get the "mess straightened out." As a matter of fact, they had driven them in the ranch pickup. Esperanza had shrugged her bony shoulders that barely kept her dress up and had said "Yeah, I guess there were a few things I didn't tell you George (Brandy's dad's first name), I am engaged." Then she turned to her fiancé and told him that there were a few things she had failed to mention to him too, like that she loved George and was pregnant with his baby. Brandy hid with Hope under the bed as the unavoidable fight broke out. Eighteen stitches aren't enough to keep an impassioned lover in bed, nor is the announcement that you aren't loved likely to keep you calm. Police were finally called in to break it up.

Grandpa and Grandma Boone took care of Brandy and Hope while George and Esperanza honeymooned. Soon afterward they moved to Revenge, and from there to Aftermath. Esperanza wanted an "all American town far enough away from Mexico and her ex-fiancé, to raise the baby in." Brandy and Hope got both a step mom and a baby sister named Gloria. Esperanza got a job at Pegg's Quick Picker Upper and Brandy's dad got a job at O'Connor's Farm Equipment. It is rumored that Esperanza "makes her rounds," but anyone who says that near Brandy's dad ends up getting at least eighteen stitches on his or her own.

Anyway, Brandy had called to tell me the reason she hadn't been home in time for her first day as a senior was because her mother had showed up at the airport. At least Brandy had thought it was her mother when she had first seen her. If Brandy hadn't believed in ghosts and visitations she wouldn't have chased down her mother's doppelganger while her plane took off. She discovered that her mother had had a twin sister she had never told Brandy about. They had both been adopted when they were very young and had not seen each other since. Brandy and her new-found aunt went to her apartment where they talked and cried all night about their lives and filling each other in on relatives one of them didn't know existed.

"I didn't completely understand myself until I talked with Aunt Becky..." Brandy told me, she told me things about mom's childhood I had never heard before.... I don't think Daddy even knows some of this stuff.... Mom was such a liar!" Brandy talked for hours

about her mother's terrible childhood. Emotions I had never guessed Brandy had in her bubbled out. I had never guessed that Brandy had held something against her long-dead mother, but now it was apparent as Brandy allowed her emotions to spill out. I read between the lines as I listened sympathetically to her quavering voice, and as I listened, I discovered that Brandy had blamed her mother for a lot of her own worse traits, and now, years later, she was finally forgiving her. On the other side of Revenge, you don't often hear forgiveness. Brandy had never been so open with me before, I felt the way a sincere psychiatrist must feel when they have a breakthrough with one of their patients.

While Brandy was still crying out all of her built-up hatred of her mother, Mom came bursting through the door, looking like a bat out of hell. Mom always looked bad after one of those late-night meetings, but tonight she looked especially bad. If Dad hadn't been in the living room watching *ER* he would have run right over to her and given her a big hug, she looked so bad. I wanted to, but I was still counseling Brandy on the phone.

"I lost my job" Mom wailed as she sunk into a kitchen chair. "The meeting was all about downsizing and who they are going to get rid of.....they fired half of my department, the jerks!!!!" "Hold on a second Brandy, I'll call you back.....what Mom, they fired everyone right there, right on the spot?"

"No, but they told us we will all be gone in two weeks, due to new timesaving methods and technology! Can you believe it? I knew it would happen eventually, but not this soon! What are we going to do, you are going to college, we can't possibly make it on Dad's income alone!"

Dad came out of the living room looking frightened. He moved slowly around to Mom and hugged her to him.

"Tell me what's going on, Freedom Fly?" Dad had called Mom Freedom Fly since junior high school, in reference to an old Elton John song. Mom had once told me Dad could get her to do whatever he wanted when he called her Freedom Fly, as though the words were magic.

"The first time he said it to me, we were in Wally's Malt Shoppe, which must have been almost ready to close by that point, people were losing interest in malt shops by then...." Mom's eyes looked dreamy, just thinking about it. "All the young kids still hung out there though, you know, kids still too young to go to drug parties but too old to hang around the house with their parents. We were sitting there with a group of friends and that song had just played on the juke box and your father looked over at me and said, Elton John must know somebody like you, 'cause you remind me of a Freedom Fly. From then on, he's called me Freedom Fly at all the appropriate times." Hearing this story makes me wonder if love like this still exists in other places. 'cause it sure does exist in Aftermath.

After a lot of coxing, Mom told Dad the whole story about her being fired, and then Dad took her upstairs to "put her to bed," in his words. I called Brandy back and we talked some more about our parents, and their "issues." Suddenly Brandy said something very unexpected.

"Trent's really worried about you."

"What?"

"He called me while you were off the phone and said he's worried that you've been in Aftermath too long, that you've grown up a dreamer and that you won't be able to take the real world."



Tyler Agin
Courtland High School
Fredericksburg, VA
Ms. Suzan E. Mann

Continued from page 45

"What, he said that to you?"

"That among other things."

"What other things?"

"He said he didn't want you to know yet."

"Why would he tell you and not me?" I know she caught the jealousy in my voice I was desperately trying to hide.

"I don't think he wants you to know, so please don't tell him I told you!" Brand could always be counted on to uncover the secrets you most wanted to know, or didn't want to know.

"Why does he think I'm the dreamer? I'm the biggest realist around! I mean, God, look at our town! Everybody seems to think they are going to become something big just sitting here, but I know I need a college education! Trent is living in a dream world if you ask me! Look at how he spent his summer! Down on the beach every day with that Peace girl, getting a tan, while I was working! I know how the world works! I know how people hurt each other! For God's sake, I see hurt every day!"

"Yes, but you haven't lived through it, not like all of us.."

"What do you mean? Of course I've lived through pain! Do you think it's been easy for me, being dragged between this world of Aftermath and the life of The Big City? Don't you think I'd rather be there? Don't you think my parents have problems? They may not be as noticeable as the problems your parents have, but internal problems are usually worse than the ones you can see! Fights, divorce.., is that what you call problems Brandy? The tension in my household is at least that bad!"

"Your parents love each other, they love you! You will never understand what Trent feels when he hears his drunken mom assault his dad or when my step-mom coddles Gloria to no end and ignores Hope and I! You have no understanding what it is like... you who have had the benefit of growing up in a small town and

being well off! Nothing in your life can compare to half of what most kids in this town face!" It was then that I realized my senior year would be nothing like what I imaged it would be. Brandy and I did-

n't talk for eighteen hours, which was a record for us. In a town as small as Aftermath, everyone who calls themselves "friends" talk at least once every eighteen hours. There aren't enough people so that you can avoid someone for long. Trent and I only engaged in small talk that day too. Trent could sense something was wrong, but he didn't know it had anything to do with what he told Brandy. He didn't seem to notice that Brandy didn't sit with us at lunch, either. Trent was so involved with his mind/heart battle over what to do after high school; he didn't notice much of anything. In most places, so I've heard, seniors aren't too worried about what they are going to do after high school until about the middle of their senior year. But for some reason, in Aftermath, there was a big push to know what you were doing the beginning of your senior year. Everybody in Aftermath would suddenly start treating you as though you were their kid as soon as you became a senior. Old guys would come up to you on the street and say, "You are so-and-so's senior, aren't you? I've always thought that family was intelligent people and I think you should go to college. Are ya? Well are ya?" Everyone in the town badgered us this way, but our guidance councilor bad-

gered u the most, much more than her job entitled her to. Her name was Christine White, a name that would bring to mind a young, beautiful girl in her teens, the kind of girl who would win a beauty contest just because the judges knew and liked her, without even participating. Actually, Miss White was so ugly and mean you could only picture her working begrudgingly for a Catholic charity, hoping that would get her to heaven. Like Mr. Rasputian, she wore these huge plastic bifocals that covered half of her wrinkly, hairy-mole infested face. Like Mr. Rasputian, she had atrocious hygiene, if any at all. She came from the age when it was standard to bathe once a week, but I swear she bathed even less. Her slick, greasy hair was always drawn back in a tight, gray bun and she wore clothes that could have only come from the reject rack at the local Salvation Army. She would lean really close to you and peer at you through her thick, ugly bifocals, breathing through her horsy yellow teeth. Her breath smelled like communist nation winter rations. The school kept her on out of sympathy I guess.

Actually, Christine White had been something of a legend in "her day." She had been a scandalous flapper in New York City, once upon a time. She had been very beautiful and many men had "swooned" over her, but she had avoided the bounds of marriage to work as a waitress on one of the first cruise ships. Apparently something tragic had happened on one of the cruise ships and she had given up her life of shiftless wandering to become, first a teacher, and then a guidance councilor in Aftermath. She must have given up on her appearance after the tragic happening on the cruise ship.

Miss White forced all of us to know what we were doing with our future much sooner than most school guidance councilors want to know. She said she pushed us to decide because the tragedy of her life was that she had never been pushed, which I doubt is enough to make you devote your life to being a scumbag in a crumbling town.

"I came from a very wealthy family..." Miss White said, unleashing her odorous breath. "I could have gone anywhere, done pretty much anything, but my parents never pushed me to choose, so I drifted. I was never focused, I never had a center of balance," Miss White droned like a Zen Master. You sort of wanted to listen to the old hag, but her breath was too terrible. Her teeth made you feel like throwing up. "You kids in this town are so lucky," she continued one of her never-ending fables. "You've seen the White Elephant (her term for hardship) and you know what you need to

Continued on page 47

do to get out of it. Most of you will have much more fulfilling lives than I did." I beg to differ!

But you never pointed out to Miss White that she had told your parents and perhaps your grandparents the same thing, and every generation the future looked as bleak as it had to the last generation. You never let her know that Revenge and Aftermath and the depression they were in had always been that way, since the beginning, even the ancient Native Americans had called the area "Place of Troubles." You couldn't be a realist around Old Miss White; it would have absolutely crushed her. Miss White would die three years after I graduated and be buried in Aftermath Cemetery next to an old Beech someone said she had once mentioned liking. Around her rotting corpse, Aftermath would continue on as it had always been.

Thus Trent was worried about his future. He didn't want to scare Miss White, disappoint either of his parents or hate himself for what he chose to do. Yet he didn't want to take a long time choosing either. Trent was one of those people who, once he chose something, would stick to it until it was over. So I knew that, although theoretically he could come back from California if he didn't like it, he wouldn't. That was the way he was.

Brandy and I got over our anger at about eleven o'clock the second night of our senior year enough to talk on the phone for an hour. She supposedly called me to tell me about an article she had been reading in Newsweek about the terrible lives of Afghani women. She was always keeping me updated on stuff like this, as though her own life wasn't enough. Behind her I could hear Esperanza and Brandy's dad fighting about whether Esperanza had been whoring around or not. I couldn't believe Brandy's dad had finally broken down under the weight of all the gossip. He had finally stopped believing his Esperanza could do no wrong and was going directly to the source. But Brandy seemed uninterested in the turmoil behind her. Her chameleon skin had shifted color to a calm blue while, I suspected, something raged within her. Then again, my one talk with Brandy about her mother hadn't totally convinced me that Brandy was not the warm cal little Zen-like energy that we all crowded around for warmth that I had always imagined her to be. She could be as calm as she acted, not really caring if her father divorced Esperanza. Even if a woman like Esperanza is faithful to her man, in a town like Aftermath, it didn't matter. She would still wear the preverbal scarlet "A" on her low-cut baby-sized T-shirt, because even if she wasn't, technically an adulterer, she had something about her that caused the entire male half of the town to commit adultery with her in their minds. Eventually, something cataclysmic would happen, in a town like Aftermath.

"What's going on with your dad, Brandy?" I asked as nonchalantly as possible.

"I really don't wanna talk about it."

"Oh."

I knew it must be a real serious fight if Brandy didn't want to discuss it. Brandy was usually really open about family troubles and gossip in general. If you wanted to know who was leaving who, or who was planning to fight whom, you went and talked to Brandy. She was only mysterious in two cases: to heighten the punch line of a really great story (Brandy was an infamous storyteller in our area), or if something was going to hurt someone a lot if she said it. I never would have guessed that the reason she didn't tell me about her dad and Esperanza's fight was because it would hurt me but later on I found out that was exactly why Brandy kept her lips clamped.

"Let's talk about you." Brandy didn't beat around the bush when she knew it was best to go onto other subjects.

"O.K., did you know my mom is now unemployed?"

"Come on, girl, that happened what, yesterday? Just the entire population, including the Recluse Family has heard about it! Your mom told Pegg at Quick-Picker-Upper that she was going shopping all day to cheer herself up! You know Pegg can't keep a lid on her lips!"

"Like somebody else I know!"

"Well, it's not like a big secret, people lose their jobs every day! Besides, your mom has her Master's in whatever in business, so it shouldn't be too hard for her to find another job! Blue collar workers, on the other hand..." I had never known Brandy to be so moody and sarcastic. I always talked dark and sarcastic, like much of the rest of Aftermath, but to hear sarcasm coming from Brandy is like realizing you have just made an irreversible mistake. I knew now that whatever she was keeping from me would affect more than one life.

"I wondered where morn went this morning. She didn't really talk to dad or me or leave a note, which is unusual for her. I hope her grief drives her to buy me something really expensive, like a car or at least that new stereo I've been pining for!" Brandy laughed her I -am -as -happy -as -The -Cat -In -The -Hat laugh. I knew we were finally on good grounds again.

Kim Henderson
Prattsburgh, NY
Mrs. Doby

MARY'S VOICE (LISHEEN, BALLYNACALLY, IRELAND 2000)

The front door of the house
is closed forever.
Cobwebs outline the corners,
and the doorknob
hangs loosely in its wooden hole.
Sitting on the stone step before it,
I play trucks with her grandson.
He tells me to sit
and stay
while he runs off for his
plastic bicycle.
"She was carried out of that door,"
my aunt has told me in hushed whispers.
"It hasn't been touched in four years."
But as I sit and run my hands
over the knotted wood,
I can't find Mary
in my memory.
She is nothing but a picture
hidden in my thoughts,
a portrait on shiny paper
taken years ago
when her children were still young
and the cancer had yet to show its face.
Mary was alive in that house, though.
She was there on the stone step
in front of the door,
and in her worn kitchen,
putting the kettle on for tea.
I felt her at night
when the house was dark
and the walls creaked.
The hall light would flicker,
and I listened for her.
I knew she wanted to tell me something -
this woman I had never met.
But my stay in her house
came to an end,
and I never heard her voice.

Now,
lying in my bed at night,
I can finally hear Mary.

Continued on page 48

Continued from page 47

She is calling me back to Lisheen
and her family,
to a place where you can see green
expand to the horizon,
and the silence is so great
at night
that it seems the walls
are speaking.

Sara Jones
Baltimore, MD
Mr. Matt Hohner

UNTITLED

1.

I'm looking down at an old picture
of you just now.
Your thumb is holding your ring-finger down,
and your smile shines through the black goatee
that I hated.
I've learned so many things since then.
One of them is you.

2.

I dreamed about the ocean last night;
I stayed for nine hours in Pacific darkness,
the riptide pulling me down.
I walked out onto wet sand, alive.

3.

Your eyes glow with a light so Aquarian
they should be blue.
They stare from miles away,
as dark as your silence.

4.

I sit in thick quiet
and this cough drop tastes like
green Hi-C with a bit of spice.
Silence condenses
until you come and save me from myself.

Belinda Bidlack
Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Chambersburg, PA
Mrs. Anne K. Branham

PEACHES AND CREAM

November 15
Cream,

We're off on the road now. I've spent 40 miles sitting in complete silence staring out the window. I see dead trees, random garbage scattered on the ground, and a possum that doesn't appear to be 'just sleeping' as my mother says it is. I'm going to miss all of it, as sad as that sounds. Just to boost your spirit, you're at the top of all things I'm going to miss. I keep telling myself we're going to turn around but the further down the highway we get, the less I'm starting to believe that any more. Guess what happened this morning? I woke up to delivery men! I'm not kidding! I awoke to strange men in my room moving my dresser out the door and

when they saw me they stopped everything and came over to say 'good morning!' I bet that doesn't happen every day! Remember when we went in to that funky little antique store while we were upstate for our tournament? Well I think on of the movers was wearing a ring from that place! I was bigger than my hand! Okay, maybe not that big, but it was huge! Until I get a litter back from you,
Peaches

November 19
Hey you,

Don't you go "Creamin" me! I'll smash your little Peachy face in! So there! but for real now how's it going girl? You've been gone for like 4 days and it seems like you've just gone to the Hampton's and you'll be back by Saturday. You better not be lying about missing me the most! Or could I at least be above the dead possum? When am I coming to visit? Mom says I can come over for Thanksgiving so we can chill longer. I'll bring the mashed potatoes, although they might get cold on the car ride there! I walk by your house everyday to see if anyone has moved in yet but so far no one wants your little shack! Christian, Dave, Carnie, Krista, and me threw a little party in your backyard the night you moved. It was so crazy! First we made a fire and as we sat around it we all told stories about you. then we started acting out some stuff, like the time you and Dave got caught kissing in the garage last summer. Don't worry, I wouldn't let anyone but me play you in that scene! Blood sisters forever,
Rosie

November 22
Dear Rosie,

I'm so sorry about Thanksgiving, I really wanted to see you. It's really not my fault that the delivery men broke our table! Don't worry, Christmas break is only a month away! I know right now it seems like forever, but hopefully by then I'll have new friends and you can meet new boys. Still upset? I didn't think so! I have a lot of catching up to do in my classes, so I won't be able to set up my computer and everything for a little while. Don't worry, this barbaric for of communication will soon cease to exist once I get my email up and going
Piper

Rosie!!! You would NOT believe how different the people are here! Like, for one thing, they call everyone by their whole name! You know how much you HATE Roseanna! Everyone is really smart here, and if you aren't in high honors, you're considered the biggest loser ever! Hey did I mention that they guys here are incredibly hot! I love them all!
Peace,
Piper

Sorry that I was a no show in your mailbox for a while. Someone accidentally downloaded a virus on my computer went a little tipsy on me! Guess what! Dave asked me to the Snowflake Ball! I know we promised each other we would never date him as long as we both liked him, but you seem to have all those hot genius' at your feet so I figured you wouldn't be mad. Gotta go, Buffy is on!
~Cream

Hey babes I'm really sorry but I don't think we'll be able to get together over winter break. So much is going on in school and I'm really trying hard to fit in and so far I'm doing alright, but there's this ski trip practically the whole 10th grade is going to and I just HAVE to be there! I know you're going to be made at me but it's really hard being the new girl! ~A very sad Peaches

I can not believe you! This is what 8 years of friendship means to you? Is a ski trip really worth missing your best friend? We've never been away from each other this long and you act like

Continued on page 49

everything's cool. Well it's not! I understand the Thanksgiving thing, but this is just really messed up of you. I told Dave and Krista about it and they both said it doesn't sound like you at all to put your image over friends. I agree. What are they teaching you in that school?

Rosie

I'm sorry, I'll make it up to you, I promise! Remember when you had the chicken pox and I came over every day after school hoping to catch it so we could stay home together? I never caught it, did I?

Very strange

~Piper Anne

Happy New Years!!!!!!!!!!!!!! The party was AMAZING! You should have been here! Christian asked Becca out right at midnight! It wasn't the same without you here though. We haven't missed a New Years together in 5 years. Remember our tradition? Even though you weren't here I still ran around with a pot on my head and made a fool out of myself. Call me sometime. This computer stuff is so impersonal! ~Rosie

Rosie!! I had the most amazing time of my life! I hung out with this guy Robert the entire trip and he's not like any of the boring guys back home! He's into making his life meaningful, and not wasting it away with the internet, television, and magazines. He has this amazing outlook on life, and the best part, he likes me! I'm so happy! I don't know why I spent 2 years drooling over Dave!

Hopelessly in love,

Piper Anne

What exactly are you trying to say about Dave? That was really rude, especially since you know we are together now. I'm happy you met someone but you don't have to go against your old friends. You've really changed a lot, and I really wouldn't mind that much except for the fact that we used to be so close and now you act like you've entered a new superior culture.

Write back,

Rosie

Dear Roseanna,

I'm truly sorry for my behavior lately. My life seems to have changed in a matter of 2 months. It's so different here than it is there and I know it's very hard for you to deal with me sometimes but I just hope you know that it's not so easy being me either. Midterms have finally finished, Robert is such a good tutor! We worked so hard, especially in Chemistry, and it really paid off. My parent's love him so much! He comes over for dinner every Sunday now. He loves spaghetti with clam sauce too!

Sincerely,

Piper Anne

Dear Roseanna,

I've been discussing the use of the internet with Robert and I'm really starting to understand why he is so against it. I won't go into the very elusive details, but I'm very serious when I tell you that I'm considering giving it up myself. It serves no purpose but to pursue foolish needs and to gain useless knowledge that will in no way better my chances in achieving high excellence in school, or more importantly, in life. What are your views on the matter?

Piper Anne Marie Baker

I don't know what's gotten into you but you better stop calling me Roseanna! You know how much I hate it when my mother calls me that! And what is this gibberish about you getting rid of email? I can not even believe what I've been reading in your recent letters! You never call, you haven't come to visit, and every time I'm going to visit you, you cancel last minute! I'm sorry, my tiny little brain probably can't handle the mental genius inside of you that you've

recently discovered, but I do have feelings! I still wear my ring. Do you even know where yours is? Did it ever cross your mind in the past few months that just because you moved, other people's lives have changed too! I cried for the longest time after you left and the only times I was happy was either when we were planning a visit or when I was with David. When you kept breaking promises, Dave was always there to comfort me. Where were you when I sat home in tears waiting day after day for an email from you? We were best friends. Why are you doing this? Please write back soon.

Dearest Roseanna,

I feel very bad for your terrible mood, but I don't see how I can be put to blame. I've never been happier in my life. I feel so complete, emotionally and intellectually. I would hope that you would be happy for me. I am very happy that you have Dave to care about you. So why can't you feel the same way for me? I remember when we were little we used to chase the ice cream man all summer long until he finally got so fed up with our childish behavior that he gave us free ice cream and in return we promised to leave him alone. That's what life is like.

Sincerely,

Piper Anne Marie Baker

Piper this is it, I'm not going to tell you not to call me Roseanna again! You know I hate it, so you better just cut it out. I don't care how they do things in your perfect little prissy pants school, but at least here we don't ditch our friends because they can't recite Shakespeare! Please tell me, how exactly does your life relate to ice cream? Are you saying that your new school is like the ice cream, and now because you are in this high society you have to leave all your old friends behind? If I'm right, then you are not Piper. You're not the same girl who used to make oven baked chocolate chip cookies by putting the ice cream in the oven! Our friendship seems as if it never happened, or it did, but not with you. I don't know who you are.

~Rosie

Roseanna McGrath,

I am sorry to inform you that our friendship was purely based on a mutual need. In Human Behavior class we have been studying friendships and how and why they are formed. Most are formed based on a need they seek from one another. If the needs are strong, their bond will last a long time, or at least until the need is no longer there. While this is only a theory, I have taken a lot of interest in it and have based much of my research on it as well. So far it has proven sufficient. I am most dreadfully sorry for the inconvenience. Robert sends his regards.

Piper Anne Marie Baker

Piper Anne I will not speak to you ever again if you do not snap out of this! This is a pretty crummy joke if that's your idea of fun. If this isn't a joke, then I have nothing left to say to you other than to get help. What in the world do your parents think of you???

Rosie

The original message was received at Thurs. February 22, 2001 07:44 EST

<<<550 Requested action not taken: mailbox unavailable
550 <RobertsGirl>... User unknown

The Phone Rings

"Hello?"

"Hey Mrs. Baker, it's Rosie, is Piper home?"

"Yes, she is dear, but she's no longer using the telephone."

"Mrs. Baker, she doesn't have email any more either. Is there something wrong with her?"

"No dear, she's perfectly healthy."

Continued on page 50

Continued from page 49

"Than why is she acting so strange?"

"Well dear, I'm sorry we didn't realize what the community was like before we settled in. honestly, it's a very good environment for young children to grow up in. the schools are very dedicated to every individual."

"Can't I speak to her? Please?"

"I'm sorry sweetie, I have to respect her wishes."

Click

"Rosie...Rosie?"

Lauren DeSimone
New Hyde Park Memorial High School
New Hyde Park, NY 11040
Mrs. Anne Benedetto

SPEAK EASY SILHOUETTES

I'm listening to heart beating soul.
A soul of soundless stutters and bubbling
Bass blood that echoes somewhere deep
Inside the f-holes and comes curling up
The stringy neck with a growing pitch of
Skillfully savvy soul.

And then I'm listening to a duet.
A dance between the cymbals and the brush
That plays around in its flapper dress
And teases that grouchy old bass with its
Snazzy shiny soul.

But where have you come from little man?
Jumpin in on our tune like a winter breeze
In the middle of June.
Tenor man tuck it away or tear this sheet up
Give us some volume, show us if you can sing
And the little man jumps on top of that rhythm
And screams shrilly in his
Sexy-saxy soul.

And topping us all flies the
Frolicking fingers-
Tango-ing fro and to
Undermining all we thought we could do.
The ivory dance floor slips and slides
Away into a flurry of black and white
And red-tango-rose feathers with
The tinkling tiptoeing of their
Singer songwriter soul.

And I'm listening to the heart beating soul.
The song of negro slave roots and
Smoky speak easy silhouettes and
Nineteen thirty twos - Coltrane
And Duke and Miles and Coleman
All in a whirlwind of instrumentation.
And if you listen close you can hear
A beating...
Boom boom shazzz
The heartbeat of jazz.

Kaity Ryan
Pennington NJ
Ms. Tery Solomon



Laura Colyar
Council Rock High School
Newtown, PA
Mrs. Hall

MELTING POINT

When I was ten my father killed himself. That is when I started melting. I first noticed it in Mrs. Nathan's fifth Grade Reading class when a glob of my cheek fell down on *James and the Giant Peach*. I stared down, bewildered at the chunk of skin that had interrupted my reading and was surprised to see no blood. I touched my face and I felt it peel on my fingers like wax. I could have crept off to the bathroom during silent reading time without anyone noticing since my desk was right next to the door, but I couldn't help hurling my flesh at Paul who had been pissing me off the whole day.

It was a beautiful shot. I watched intently as the glob splattered all over Pad's fat face, knocking off his glasses. A huge yelp lifted everyone's head from their books, including Mrs. Nathan's. It was clear that I was the culprit because of my dripping face and my malicious laugh.

"Mrs. Nathan! Peter just hit me in the face with his skin." Paul was the kid who told on everyone for the smallest things even though he got into a fight every other day at recess. Mrs. Nathan raised her glasses and her voice as her face became quite red.

"Peter! Please tell me this isn't true."

"Well, Mrs. Nathan, by the looks of my thawing face, I'm sure you can assume that no other pupil would be able to propel their epidermis onto Paul's obese cranium."

I was always known as the "smart kid" in every grade after Pre-school. Because I had no friends due to my distaste of the human race and because I was incapable of doing anything physical due to pure laziness, I spent my time studying dictionaries and encyclopedias, gathering up the largest amounts of knowledge I could, hoping that if aliens ever abducted me, they would be so impressed with my intellect, they would keep me with them. My parents couldn't explain my genius and often told me that the doctors at the hospital mixed me up with another baby, but they kept me because they felt sorry for me.

"Faggot." Paul whispered at me through clenched teeth. His face was swelling up with anger. I found the whole situation quite amusing, but no one else seemed to think so.

"Peter, we do not throw our flesh at other students. Now, I'm sorry that your skin is falling off, but this is no way to behave. Do you understand me?" She didn't wait for another one of my smart-ass replies. "Henry, please take Peter to the Principal's office." She handed a note to my frightened class mate and lead us both out into the hail. Henry stayed in front of me, constantly looking back. He was scared of getting too close to me. I was like the kid who had just blown chunks all over the place- the kid who no one wanted to

Continued on page 51

take to the office for fear that they might puke all over them. I caught my falling flesh in my hands.

"Relax, dude. I'm not going to throw it at you." That didn't seem to ease the poor kid for as soon as we got to the office, he bolted back to class.

The Principal looked at me, astonished. He read the note and then referred me to the nurse & after dirtying the nurse's office with my rotting skin, she referred me back to the Principal who referred me to my mother. My mother came to the office, flustered.

"What the hell did you do this time?"

"Mom, I'm melting. I'm liquidating."

"I can see that, thank you, now get your butt in the car."

My mother was not the sharpest knife in the drawer, and in fact, I think I surpassed her intelligence at the age of five. I was always pretty certain that she had driven my father to his death with her stupidity - that and the dildo that she caught him with one night when she arrived home early from shopping. I - his life started to go downhill after that incident and he ended up shooting himself in the head. I never really go to know him. He always seemed to be away on business trips. For some reason after his death, however, I realized that I would have no father figure in my life and that I was stuck with my mom from then on.

I could never explain my melting, though. It would happen randomly and suddenly. Sometimes, I wouldn't melt at all, and others, I would crumble apart all day. It was really quite odd. Once the skin would fall off, there was no blood or scars, and new flesh would then replace it. No one could explain it. The doctors told me that it was a freak occurrence, something they had never seen before. They gave me pills, but once they realized that nothing was changing, they took me off them and made me wear a full body suit to protect others from my falling skin. Sometimes, I tried to sew my skin back together, but it only made me bleed, making a bigger mess. I sat in my room and cried from the pain and also from the fear that I would be a freak for the rest of my life.

My mother was no help in the process of course. She would make fun of me every chance that she could get. When I would be trying to go to the bathroom, she would stand outside the door making wise cracks.

"You better not be whacking off in there. Your manhood will fall right off. Literally." I would hear her laughing to herself as she went back downstairs. If she wasn't making fun of me, she was yelling at me.

"Damn it, Peter. You clogged up the bathtub with your goddamn skin again. Get in here and clean it up. I'm not touching your disgusting, peeling flesh. And don't give me that look. Stop cracking your knuckles. You'll get arthritis."

"Who gives a damn about arthritis when their goddamn skin is melting off their bodies?"

"Don't you use that language with me, goddamnit! I'll wash your mouth out with your goddamn flesh!"

My mother acted like the world's greatest mom around company, and especially with my little sister, Beth. They would go shopping with each other and have the greatest times while I would be dragged along like a pet that no one liked. When we would go out to eat, we would only travel to places like the drive thru of McDonalds so that no one would see my mother's freak son melting away in a full body cast. She kept me in the back seat of the car with the tinted windows. I would try to make the best of it by mocking my mother's intelligence.

"Mother, while we are waiting here for our scrumptious beef and paddies that we will all enjoy so much, let me tell you a little about Greek mythology. You see, Zeus was the king of all gods..."

"Peter, stop being such a ham. Let your Sister order. Do you want a Big Mac, Beth?"

"Mom, do you realize that you just mentioned two Shakespeare plays when you said that?"

"Peter, shut up. And I don't want to catch you spilling any of your skin on these leather seats, or you will get it. You hear me?"

I always worried about my future with my melting skin. Would I ever be able to go to college? How would my roommate react?

"Hi there, roommate. Nice to meet you. Oh, don't worry about my skin. I have this trusty body suit that keeps me all intact. Although, sometimes I might have to ask you to put it on me in the morning or to help me clean up my flesh that leaks all over the room. It is going to be great rooming with you. Do you want me to recite the Webster's dictionary alphabetically for you?" Or how would I apply for a job with my condition? No one in their right mind would hire me.

"Hi. Nice to meet you. Oh, sorry about your hand. My skin falls off from time to time. Here is a handkerchief. Oops. Sorry about your really important stack of papers there. Sometimes I can get a little messy. I'll clean that right up."

I wouldn't even be able to get a janitorial job. I would spend most of the time mopping up my own flesh.

I melted my way through middle school and high school in the same manner. My fellow students did their best to make me feel like complete shit. As it was particularly difficult to get around smoothly in my body suit, kids would push me down in the halls, my books sprawled everywhere, and trip me in the lunch room, usually sending me straight down in my turkey and mashed potatoes. "Ha ha. Melting boy tripped on his skin again." Throwing my food at them and tackling them with my suit of armor never helped and just landed me back in the Principal's office with another dreaded visit from my strung out mother.

In high school, the basketball team made me their mascot because in my suit, I looked like a knight of the round table, thus suiting our school name: the Knights. I was only in action for one game however and made my usual gallant and dramatic leave. When one of the players threw a basketball at me, I proceeded to start a full out brawl by leveling him and bloodying his face. Sir Lancelot was then escorted out of the gym and given an out of school suspension. In my senior year, I was voted "Most likely to melt off the face of the Earth." They were probably right, if anyone would have the misfortune of melting away forever, it would probably have been me.

Somehow, though, when I was about eighteen, I just stopped melting. No one could explain that either, but I gladly moved far away from my mother and went to college. I lived a fairly normal life without my flesh falling off in chunks wherever I walked, but I always waited for the day when one of my kids would look up at me and say, "Daddy, why is your face falling off?"

"Oh, don't worry about that. Sometimes, that just happens. Go get daddy a bucket. We will clean this right up while I teach you the difference of fission and fusion."

Logan Chace
Mercersburg Academy
Mercersburg, PA
Mr. Joel Chace

30 SECONDS ON THE SURFACE

I fold them
Unfold them, fold them
Wrap, wring, and resetttle
And run the tips of my fingers along
The scales, the ridges and ravines,
Small maps resting in my lap
The knuckle ridges, mountain ranges
Cracked through with faults
Travel over the arid land
The color of silt, the color of sand
Down long and wind blown plains
To the great salt-flats
Of the nail

Continued on page 52

Continued from page 51

Smooth, flat
 Dried and caked at the edges
 Where pilgrims pray for rain
 All rivets are rivers
 Lifelines, life-blood flowing
 Veins and streams and
 Mississippi-of-the-palm
 Highways just below the wrist
 Just below the skin
 Twisting in the Arizona sun
 Shaking, trembling, quaking with
 Earth shudders
 Two continents meet
 Un-meet, meet
 The earth rolls over, canyons crumble
 And I, unknowingly, bury two great nations
 And uncountable civilizations, years of culture
 In the pockets of my jeans
 Quietly
 I extinguish the sun

Charlotte Housel
 Hopewell, NJ
 Ms. Tery Solomon

MY MOTHER MUST BE AN AMPHIBIAN

I didn't know my grandmother growing up.
 She lived days away by car
 and light years from me in mind.
 She had two marriages under her belt
 and I was still waiting to be kissed.
 She had golden fields of wheat that
 were flat as desert:
 She was a desert lizard.
 I had buildings that peaked at
 varying heights and a great lake
 outside my window:
 I am a wet fish.

My mother must be an amphibian then
 Because she is all we have in common.
 Sometimes when she becomes rigid
 and unmoving, I think she
 is a dry, desert lizard
 that blends in with the gold wheat.
 But then she's often wild and running
 and colorful to a point of embarrassment.
 It is then that she is like me, a fish
 defying nature, refusing to blend in
 and swimming off to sea.

Whitney Crispell
 Amherst Central High School
 Amherst, New York
 Mr. Jack Duffy

HERBS

eucalyptus antiseptic Vick' s Vapor rub of koalas rubbing it
 rosemary needling with parsley; sage:
 wise herb of stuffing smeared smudge stick Indian enveloping
 smoke beads of
 lavender crushed under a pillowcase carefree dreams and resting
 patchouli
 poked-warm oil anointed ritually at dawn when the sun is a
 giant clove stabbed pomander

injecting the morning with syrupy edges crinkled by
 the spearmint jabs and cinnamon sticks
 curlicued drumming
 to the thyme and mystic myrrh, frankincense
 beads drip dust on sandalwood magic
 spilling into kava-kava areas of my mind
 my jungle
 my garden
 tugging between sensible Irish moss stones
 and heavy lidded jasmine parkways
 which remedy to brew?

Jennifer Barr
 Hopewell Valley Central High School
 Titusville, NJ
 Ms. Tery Solomon

RAPTURE

Did you ever listen to a song that was love and fresh-baked
 cookies; a melody that was like Grandma's perfume, sun-baked
 apples and stolen kisses behind the candy-machine? Or perhaps it
 was the cool, tingling freshness like the first wave that ever
 caressed your little toes, and sent you screaming and giggling into
 the waiting arms that would enfold you and stroke your hair, and
 plant great, soft kisses upon your head like pieces of sky.
 Sometimes it would be something dark and sweet and slow, like
 maple syrup, and like winter evenings at dusk, when the woods
 were like weary sentinels before whom the veiled goddess crept in
 gradient robes, shaking stars from the halo of her hair. Sometimes
 it was like a silken net drawing in all that was you from out there,
 and sometimes it was like a knife that cut through that net you'd
 managed to wind about your wrists. Sometimes it was a rapture.

In memory, most things have no real beginning. Something
 is just there, it's always been there, and so have I. What I think of
 myself as somewhat smaller, I picture Mommy standing before the
 sink, humming something soft and sweet and just a little rough at
 the edges, like marzipan. And she is unbelievably tall; she could
 be in the Guinness Book of World Records. But I am just me, sit-
 ting at the counter, imagining someone named Johnny tying a rib-
 bon in my mother's hair. Sometimes I find myself humming in the
 shower, or some other place,

"Oh dear, what can the matter be,
 Dear, dear, what can the matter be,
 Oh dear, what can the matter be,
 Johnny's so long at the fair..."

But then she was never small enough to wear ribbons, and Papi
 was always as big as a bear, a big teddy bear. He always sang
 slightly off-key at the synagogue, with his great big Papa Bear bel-
 low and he always ignored the insistent little nudge of his squirm-
 ing daughter.

Music was always there. even before Friday Night Musicals,
 the magic dragon named Puff, the Tale of the Woolycat and other
 such frightening themes; before piano teachers with houses that
 smelled like Beethoven--musky and dark; before black flat shoes
 and pinafores and bobby pins and hundreds of little nervous feet fil-
 ing onto the stage, and thousands of eyes gleaming eagerly, greed-
 ily. Even before Gitane came into my life, with her smooth curves
 and long, straight neck, and her mango-cigar-ice-plant voice.
 Before all that, there was the beat. The beat was always there,
 sometimes running, sometimes trudging, and every now and then
 dancing inside my heart, as though there were a genie in there just
 itching to get out.

School, however, was not always there. Neither were wail-
 ing children, nasty smells, and cruel matrons. All day long they
 purred and hissed and sharpened their claws on our stuttering,
 jelly-lipped inadequacy. Then sometimes they would open their
 mouths and a sound would come out which wasn't quite a yowl.
 You might even say it was kind of sweet, like chocolate croissants

Continued on page 53

at Dominique's patisserie after school, when Mommy sipped coffee and I sipped cocoa, and we sat at the glass-topped table and talked like grown-ups. I would wriggle in my seat, forgetting to be lady-like for a moment, as I carefully shared my latest feat of linguistic mastery.

"O clair de la lune mon ami Pierrot,
Prete moi ta plume pour ecrire un mot..."

Poor Pierrot's friend! Why had Pierrot to be so unkind? Later my grandmother introduced me to Edith Piaf, who I pitied a great deal more than the sad, deserted love in the childish song. From crumbly pastries to talented tarts, (as Grandmere delightedly dubbed the short-haired, gravelly voiced icon), French songs were the sugary writing on the cake of music. The batter beneath was thick and slow to rise, but the cake proved filling enough to be my portion.

When I was exactly eight and a half, my father's mother came to visit us from Paris. I was very excited to meet her because, well, because she looked like me. This may not seem extraordinary to some, but I had never met anyone who really looked like me. I had been sure for years that I looked quite like Mommy, when all bedecked in her evening finery, that is, until she herself appeared in time to inspect the fabulous and breathtaking new me swathed in silk and lustrous pearls. The surprise certainly took her breath away, so much so that on such occasions she assumed a somewhat drawn expression before gracing me with her candid and most forthright critique, and promptly assisting me in the rearranging of my wardrobe. As I crept from her room, back into the silent companionship of Pound-Puppy and Rainbow Bright, I felt a twinge like a suspended minor chord, and I thought of the Big Dimple out there somewhere, looking for the Little Dimple who peeked around my lips.

"Betcha they're rich, Betcha they're smart,
Bet they collect things like ashtrays and art..."

I sang, as I stared out the window of the car gliding over the indigo highway beneath the shadows of the 8:30 California sun, peeking shyly from behind the great hairy, hunched forms of the silent mountains.

"So maybe now this prayer's the last one of its kind..." I looked at my mother; she was chanting, as usual.

"Nam yo ho ren ghe kyo, nam yo ho ren ghe kyo, nam o ho ren ghe kyo..." like the droning of the bees who had made their nest in the pine trees at school. Could the notes be hiding themselves in the tiny writing on the page she held up before her? I imagined the distress of the small, bald men with beads somewhere far away, calling "All-the-all-the-oxen-free!" only they can't find the wings to make them free to fly away because they're all hiding. So the words have to scurry along until they remember which way is up.

At last, the plane is down, and I run to the gate. And then I see her: the Big Dimple. She steps through the great, white, multi-plasticked arch and opens her arms like a smile. It's so funny; it's like I'm holding my own neck, and my head is on my chest, only hers is soft, like being wrapped in down. I think of my favorite new word that means just that and sounds s it should. 'Blotti,' that what I am with Grandmere, and I rock with her like a shell in the ocean.

"Oh, hold me like a baby that will not fall asleep,

Curl me up inside you and let me hear you though the heat..."

Saturdays were Papi-days. I think I was born on a Tuesday, delivered from placental bliss into Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco. My mother was interned there for three days after Christmas. I always ask her if it was snowing. She tells me to go practice my guitar. Papi worked on the floor below where I was born. He came upstairs to see me in my crib. "Such long fingers," he tells me, stroking his peppered beard, "I could already hear the music they would make." On his day off, we always had our little outing, sometimes at the mall, or downtown, where the sales were, or in the Botanical Gardens, or at the beach. We'd sit on a blanket

and watch the horizon--well, he would watch the horizon behind his lids, and I would watch it from inside a wet, sandy hold a few yards away. Sometimes, I would scamper back to his side and lay my head on his chest; there was the wind again on the other side of his skin, skin the color of sand, the fine, white kind between my toes and my long, brown fingers. "You know, dear," he would begin without opening his eyes, "when I was small, I loved the beach. Once I learned that things have an end. I stood before the ocean for a long time, waiting for the waves to stop."

Friday night was Papi-night, otherwise known as Kabbalat Shabbat. We drove to Temple in our very best--well, I wore a dress and he combed his hair--filling the dented, old Toyota Camry with laughter and song. Every now and then, Papi's older daughter, Yvette joined us for the ride, but she only grinned redly as we blessed each other in two-and-a-half part harmony. Inside the synagogue, I listened to the wind sailing from between our lips--in Hebrew "ruach" blowing softly. "Baruch," the blessing from the "breath" we took from God, was exhaled and rose slowly to the domed ceiling, filling our prayers with sweet air, like silver, singing bubbles in Jerusalem.

He had always thought I would be a piano player. I wanted to sing. In the former Soviet Union, as in the former British Guyana, (and also in Paris for form's sake), cultured young ladies played the piano or the violin. Guitar was for the Girl Scouts and other such earthy folk. So, I played the piano, the instrument of my discontent. For five years, I played that thing at the insistent nudging of Papi, my mother and Grandmere. Then, as I began to feel the less delicate poke of MTV and older kids, like any good pre-pubescent, I broke out.

"Mommy, Papi, I want to play the guitar," I announced. My mother cleared her throat and looked at Papi.

"Now why would you want to do that, dear?" he asked reflectively.

"I want to sing," I answered, "with all of me," and that was that, and indeed I did sing with all of me. I sang and I played until my voice box called in sick and my fingers burned like my face in front of a microphone. I played late into the night, until the walls lost their comforting rigidity and seemed to breathe, too. Sometimes, my fingers dragged over the strings and Gitane groaned. At those times the genie was hidden; curled up somewhere deep inside me panting softly and squeezing shut her eyes. Sometimes, she grew and grew to fill my limbs to the tip, and my eyes sparked with her, and my lips quivered under her weight, and my voice... There were other times, when she was lotus flower, reaching upward and opening outward from my center of gravity, so that her strong, smooth scent would waft upward and upward, 'til it tickled my nostrils and made me laugh, and then it filled me to the brim and spilled over to drift on the wind which carried me from myself, and upward and outward, so that all that was left was a beat, moving though time and space like water, always coming back to the source. Then sometimes, I could hear the spaces in between the beats. The world stopped. There was only breath and I was only breath, and I knew something before breath and after breath, and I cried because not even music could carry that away. My soul spoke to me then, a little genie with her eyelids fluttering. She spoke rhythms like the ocean, like rolling tires and teacups clinking and shells. All at once she learned that things do not have an end. Breathless, she opened her eyes and exhaled.

Natasha Wray
Exeter, NH
Mr. Doug Rogers

UNTITLED

I knew it was over when the letters stopped coming. I suppose I should've known earlier, considering blotches of ball-point ink mixed with cheap alcohol were becoming plentiful across the page. So much that typed print soon took over for that overly

Continued on page 54

Continued from page 53

exaggerated handwriting. It was already impossible to distinguish her T's from her F's, so the addition of Max Fish's finest tap was no welcome supplement to her deteriorating penmanship. I guess her typed-written monologues to me were less revealing than her illegible accounts of drunken nights and endless flirting crusades with Harry, who never did remove himself from behind the counter to buy her a drink. She didn't write that, of course. It's inference. It's reading between the lines. The lines, well, they just happened to be a little bit clearer.

Mom liked to read. That's what our guests would say. "Books say a lot about the reader," she'd tell me, as I'd flipped through my *Hardy Boys* in defiance. It's not that I didn't agree, I just didn't feel the need to dress up our bookshelves with obscure titles from middle-of-the-road authors to appeal to the neighbors. Basically, we displayed a collection of elite book covers to a group of people far more interested in the dynamics of *Wheel of Fortune* than the thoughts of Y.B. Yeats. I suppose she played to the wrong crowd and was just too afraid to find the right one. After all, you try telling an entertainer that the room is right, but that she isn't. So I wasn't about to break any bombshell. I just went along listening to my Discman and flipping pages at a believable rate, as she eyeballed me through her black, thick-framed glasses.

"Where's your mother?" Amanda asked sneakily. She licked her lips slowly enough to evoke sinful thoughts from even the most innocent boys. Frankly, I was just irritated by the process but hey, I don't claim to be any Saint.

"She's not around," I'd say. That was enough for her and really, it was enough for me.

Things started making most sense when mom decided that she couldn't be my mother anymore. Dad took off from work that day, said that he'd rather be with me. Should I have been flattered? I mean, I bet it was dress-down day at the firm, and mom and I both knew that his fashion sense outside of the world of three-piece suits was next to none. So anyway, she left us. She said, "life had taught her too much for her own good," whatever that means. I bet she read that somewhere. Typical. Off she was with whatever money Dad gave her and a bag. The one that I gave her two Christmas' ago. I wasn't too sentimental or anything. I think I may have cried. Either way, I guess her leaving didn't make things more clear, but it did punctuate a part of me. Well, it semi-punctuated a part of me. Those letters did start to come soon after.

Dad got me into one of those pretentious, holier than thou institutions for highly motivated students. I don't think you could apply that green thumb cliché any more appropriately than to me among those obnoxious self-righteous rich kids. It was the kind of thing that Mom and I made fun of. How those kids wore their ties so tightly, that they must've had their abilities to think obstructed and destroyed by a lack of oxygen to the brain. That's all I could really think about when Dad broke the news to me. Sporting one of his distant smiles. I didn't even fight him over it. I just didn't have the energy.

I'd be home at three everyday. No sports or extracurricular activities for me, thank you very much. Class with those jerks was enough; I wasn't about to share any locker room or Gatorade with them. So I'd have the house to myself for a few hours before Dad brought home the night's dinner and entertainment; normally some McDonald's and a Blockbuster new release. Being home first every day, without Mom looming about on the patio, meant that I got first look at the mail.

I almost missed the first letter she sent me. As I carelessly flipped it away along with some annoying propaganda packet courtesy of this radical liberal group down south. Apparently the governments been stealing "baby geniuses" at birth and has been feeding them to starving pigs in order to avoid an intellectual revolution down the line. I had read an earlier edition of their newspaper, one advocating the legalization of murder, to quote "teach people a lesson". In that envelop, was enclosed a membership card in

Mom's name. Conspiracy paraphernalia aside, her letter caught my eye as our address was written in blue magic marker, complete with cross-outs and whiteout artistry. She didn't include a return address; I guess she was too proud to let me know she was temporarily residing at some sleazy motel; the kind you bring a willing prom date to. I couldn't manage to open the business sized envelop without ripping through her letter. I wasn't nervous or overly excited or anything, I just tend to screw things up things like that. So once I pieced the college ruled loose-leaf paper back together with some scotch-tape, her words became my only connection to her. Seeming years removed from the smell of her herbal shampoo and the torn stockings she'd throw away in the bathroom wastebasket, I was reduced to a ballpoint pen relationship with my mother.

Tuesdays were it from then on. She'd normally write on Saturday nights. Sitting in a downtown bar or something after a few drinks. I could tell because she found difficulty in writing on the lines, something she taught me how to do before I hit kindergarten. Sometimes, her pen would run short of ink, and she wouldn't even notice. Imagine me sifting at my table holding up her pages to the light to read the last lines of her pathetic lies to me. To put cap on it all, it was nothing short of amazing to note just how badly one could place a stamp on an envelope. Sadly enough, her stamp placement became an accurate barometer for her drinking. The farther left the stamp, the worse the hangover. So I'd imagine she'd drop off the letter at some place downtown, and I'd habitually receive it on Tuesday.

I really can't blame her for not telling me about the jobs she couldn't hold or the men she couldn't get into her bed. Or even her address. I guess the P.O. box that she called home was sufficient enough for me. Ignorance is bliss I'm assuming. Tuesday would come, and so would her letter. I invested in a letter-opener styled like a sword. It was nifty and got the job done. It was funny reading her letters. It was like on TV when someone's reading a letter and the writer of the letter's voice becomes the narrator. Strangely, that how it was; not to say that the content of her writing mirrored a made for TV special in any way. She'd write jokes to me, ones she read spray-painted in subway cars. She'd ask what I was reading, and who I was seeing, or as she politely put it, "doing". She also asked how Dad was doing, but it was pretty clear she didn't really care, so I never did answer. She stopped asking a few letters later. I'd write her back immediately after reading her letters. I'd have countless thoughts running across my head but none running across my page. It was OK though. She always knew what I wanted to say, and although she didn't always have an answer, she did manage to make me smile, or frown, I suppose, but I do know that those letters kept me going from Tuesday to Thursday.

She wrote to me about masturbation once and how it just wasn't doing the trick for her anymore. That's what I loved about my mother. How she could write about her self-pleasing endeavors to her son and not hold back. Granted, a few shots of anything could very well have been the reason for her lack of inhibitions. But still, you can envision my thoughts when that TV narrator stuff kicked in, hearing her voice mention things like her sexual accessories and orgasms. In that note, she slipped in a little joke about children masturbating, and cleverly applied it to me. She punctuated that particular sentence with a smile-y face, for whatever reason. I've never had therapy, but I could already see a shrink ripping apart my sexual confidence if he was to ever find out about my mom poking fun at my teenage activities. I mean I couldn't blame him. That was pretty messed up.

Mom also used to write about the things she'd see on the streets of the bustling city. How she spent hours in this one particular coffee shop on the corner of 8th street where she watched all sorts of people sip their brews. She came up with individual profiles for these characters and wrote to me about them. Wednesdays, she'd watch *Nick O'Connor* drink his tall regular coffee while reading from the same book. Mom was convinced that he only read it for the ten minutes he spent in that coffee shop every day because

Continued on page 55

he really should've finished it by now if he was any kind of avid reader. According to her, Nicky was an only child to a single mother and had a short stint in a correctional facility for abusing his wife and dog. She never tried to validate any of her statements, but that's what made them most fun. For all we know, Nicky was a serial-killer, or maybe a respected physician at Mount Sinai.

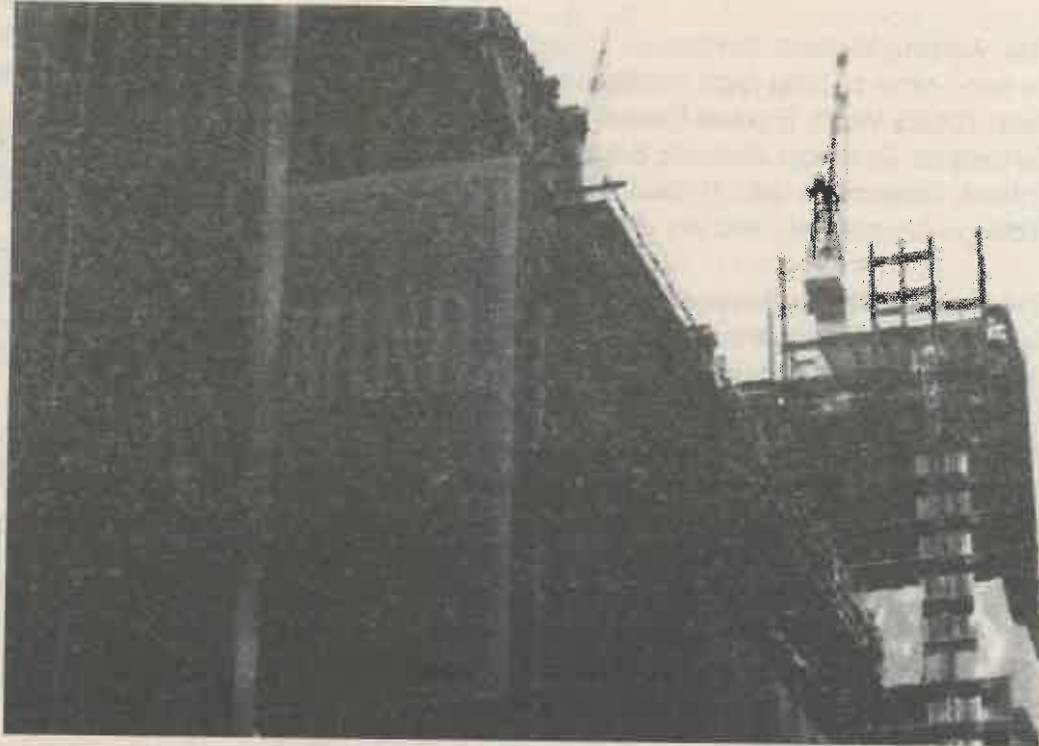
Mom's letters came pretty' regularly although the every Tuesday regime was done with. I never did tell Dad about her letters. I just didn't think he could relate to Mom and I. In fact, I knew he couldn't. Occasionally, when we'd be watching a movie or the Knicks, he'd criticize her for not keeping in touch. "Selfish. Won't even drop a line or a call," he'd murmur and then dig into his fast food and grab his Corona. I'd fight myself to keep from grabbing my drawer full of letters and throwing them at him, but I never did. I'd just bite my lip and lose all appetite.

George Leonard was the fresh material in Mom's letters to me. The letters were more infrequent and less involved, but I could still expect to hear from her monthly. And I wrote her more. To make up for the void. So anyway, George-y, as Morn would call him was a big stock something or another for a company in midtown. She ran into him in the bookstore at Astor Place. He introduced himself and took a seat next to her as she modeled a copy of an obscure Dante piece. Push came to push and Morn had herself a date, and another date, and then a boyfriend. Her descriptions of him made me hate him from the start. Mom had a way with words and those words just weren't appealing to me about him. His hair mousse and aftershave lotion irritated me without ever meeting my nasal. I'm just that way. So I have no problems with blaming him for the decline in written contact I had with my mother.

It's funny how the psyche works. How we create things for the mere purpose of protecting our unstable emotional states, and yes, we're all unstable, to varying degrees. It had been almost two and half months since Mom had sent me a letter. Last I heard from her. George-y had tasted his flavor of the week and moved on, and Morn was back at Max Fish's and had acquired a typewriter of some soil. But that was a while ago and I convinced myself that things surely can change fast. You'd never know it until you really needed a piece of mail, but there are a million different ways the postal system can stand between you and your letter. Consider postage. If the weight of your letter and envelope exceeds the limitations placed under a standard stamp. Your mail is returned to sender. If the address is not printed correctly, your mail is returned to sender. And you can't forget about all the mails that's lost daily on the postal routes across America. These were the things that I left my hope in. My psyche worked overtime to keep me in check, but I'm not totally unrealistic. I'm not totally ignorant. So I accepted it. She wasn't going to write anymore. She was done with me.

But I wasn't done with her, or at least done thinking about her. I never questioned the fact that she is alive. I somehow feel like I'd know if she wasn't. And in a way, it hurts more this way. That she exists, and exists without me. I read more now, but not because of her insistence on its importance. More so because those elite books our bookshelves still display are pretty interesting. When people ask me where she is or why she left, I say "life taught her too much for her own good". No one really understands that, but I think I do now. I couldn't explain it though. You'd have to read the letters and even then, it might not be clear. All I really can really hope for is that Moms found something or someone that suits her better than me because she always did seem out of her element. Maybe, just maybe, she's playing the right crowd.

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