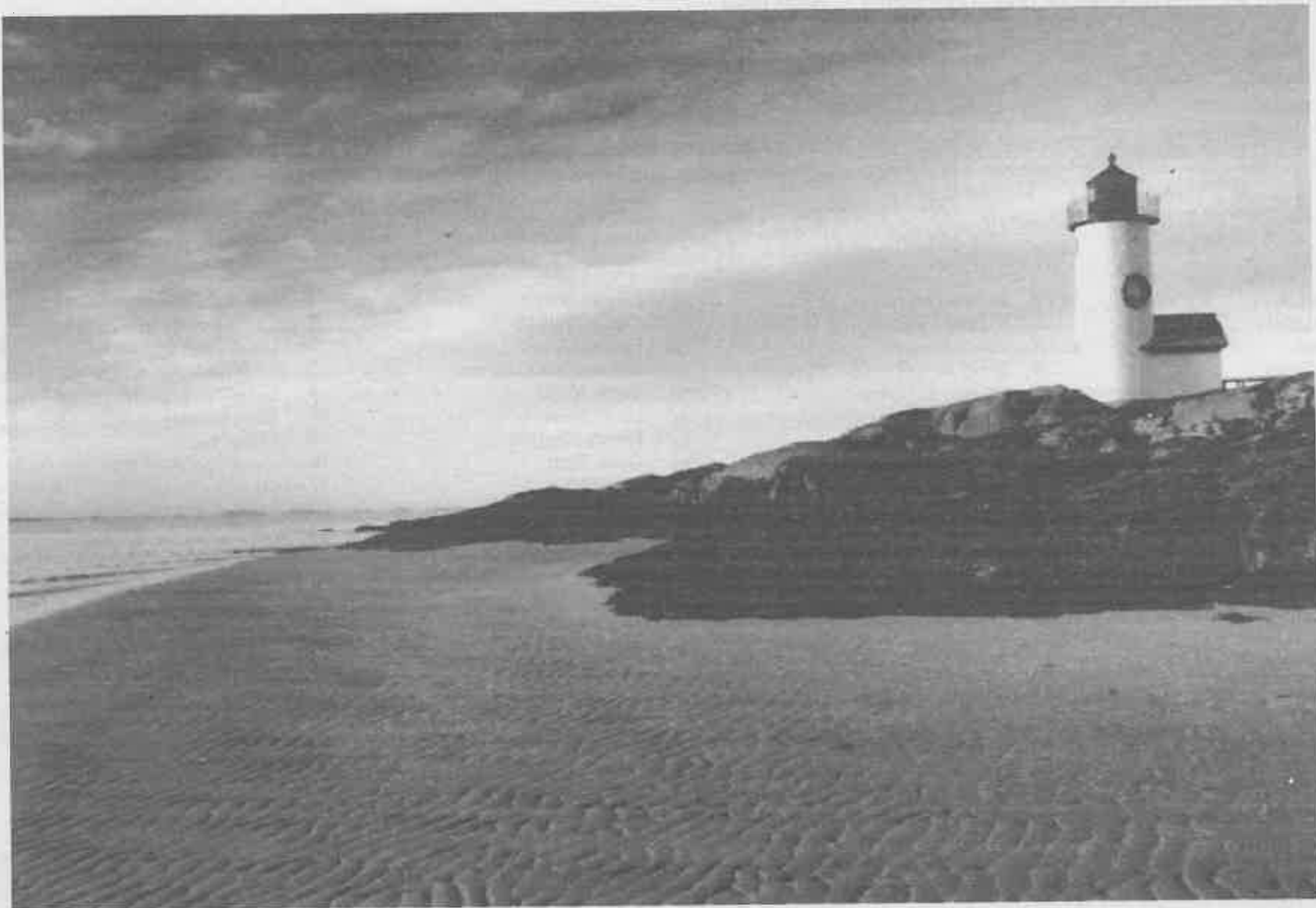


Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Stephen Siperstein
Marblehead, MA

VOLUME 20

\$3

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the twentieth anniversary 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 3,500 schools.

This year I want to call attention to the special alumni insert that presents work by former contributors to **The Apprentice Writer**. It was difficult to track down some of the writers we selected from past issues, but these present a fair sample. Some are writers now; many are not. Some attended Susquehanna University; nearly all went on to universities, many of them the most prestigious in the United States.

Let me put it this way about the writing they have done. I have run across work by dozens of former submitters in the magazines in which I publish my own work. I have seen movies (*Requiem for a Dream*, for one) directed by one of our alums. I have read

books (the novel *Necessary Madness*, for one) written by past writers. And I have seen the names of our writers on the lists of winners of some of the most important literary prizes awarded in this country.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and I hope you take notice of our flourishing writing program described on the last page. Send material to be considered for next year's issue 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. **The deadline is March 15, 2003.**

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UNSEEN

Autumn ends
with the jagged rain of early December,
when its redundancy
has driven my mother
to haul patio furniture to the cold storage
beneath our deck.

When the air tightens around her face
and the entrails of her breath
become visible.

When the lobes of oak boughs
look petrified,
icy rain-beads cling to their branches,
shivering and contorting before the long,
shapely separations.

She has never like this replacement of seasons:
the cold, hostile and subliminal.
Her sorrow is the cyclic
and progressive exchange of weather.

She remembers, as a child
knowing only her island
of the Pelham Parkway projects,
her family of six
and a pervasive compulsion to argue.
Her mother later traced
this recurrent tension to Gershwin's Concerto in F
weaving itself in the background;
her father was a tombstone,
unmoving.

My mother knows every year
the frost will imprison her life,
force her to lodge the glass pane
into the nook of the screen door.
By this time half-snow
has coated the cedar bush out front,
unshaven over its needled waterfall.

The soundless collapse of light. And then the early, cancer-
ous shadows.

Alex Cherek
Clarkstown High School North
New City, NY
Ms. Beck

LETTING GO

Through the thick glass of the window,
I look outside at a man
blowing leaves from his lawn,
leaves that scatter on the street like
yellow and orange confetti.
Autumn, like laughter, seeps through
the sides of my window as if the builder
of our home, years ago,
had been daydreaming and not paying quite
enough attention to details such as insulation.

The first fall I remember;
I was six that October,
with my father in the local
toy store, there to buy my very first bike.
Pushing through the store's huge doors,
portals to my childhood fantasies,

I inspected each bicycle and chose a shiny green one,
the color of forests in children's books.
It had silver handles, a tiny bell,
and begged to fulfill its purpose.

On the way home,
I gazed out the car window
at all the different auburns of fall,
like the colors of a professor's study.
I saw kind apples blushing in hints of red
and acorns on trees, like the buttons sewn
on my father's overcoat.

I remember my father holding the back of the black
leather seat of my bicycle as I rode that night,
and finally, without my even noticing it,
letting go.

Tara Strogov
Scotch Plains, NJ
Mrs. Freeman

A POEM NOT ABOUT LOVE

I like three-pronged forks,
goodbye kisses (more than hello ones),
sleeping in rooms with dusty books
while it rains hard against the window.

I wear goggles while chopping onions,
and count everything that is white:
Sugar, the paws of my lady-cat,
my mother's orchid that is in perfect bloom
and just about to die.

I think about your soft, brown, dissimilar eyes,
and how I pretend
they never reach me.

I think of the way you touch me sometimes,
so gently, at the hip,
as if this ache were suddenly allowed,
as if we were about to hop on a train
towards some kinder,
more understanding universe.

Tara Strogov
Scotch Plains, NJ
Mrs. Freeman

AMORETTE

I watched with ripe desire as Tracy Howard smeared a tube of
Revlon Flaming Lust Lipstick over her thin, cracked lips in the girl's
bathroom. The tips of my compact, pudgy fingers stuck to my palms,
lubricated by the thin membrane of seat seeping from my pores, as
Tracy Howard pressed her new, lustful lips together, her lower lip jut-
ting out and pushing scarlet smudges towards the small hairs dotting
the area under her nose. I imagined my plain, pastel-toned mouth
curling up, accepting a splatter of color alien to my face, and lighting
up with the penetrating glow of an angel in a Michelangelo painting.
I pictured my plump fourth-grade body stripped of its boyish haircut,
overbite, and hand-me-down clothes, set adrift on a sea of preteen
sexuality via one tube of Revlon Flaming Lust Lipstick.

Fourth grade. 1996. The year I started wearing lipstick.
Lipstick. I whispered the word to myself in the middle of Mrs.
Pennypacker's long division lesson, at home while watching reruns of
"Fu! House" with my skinny stepsister, and between turns in a slum-

ber party game of "Truth or Dare."

I chanted "lipstick" in my head during school, in the shower, while taking horseback-riding lessons, even as I nearly passed out while hiking with my uncle in the Sierra Nevadas.

Lipstick.

But while I longed for color, my lips remained void until I returned from school, my mom still busy at work. I didn't dare wear anything to school but clothing, knowing that beautiful girls like Tracy Howard were the only ones who deserved to wear make-up, deserved to get attention, the only ones who deserved to look pretty. But I also knew that my mother wouldn't let me leave the house wearing make-up, looking like a thirteen-year-old—God forbid.

So I kept lipstick to myself.

We collaborated after school.

I launched myself off the bus, ran home in my dirty sneakers, and fiddled with my house key before throwing the door open, racing to my bathroom, unlocking a tin box, and unscrewing the top off of a Revlon Flaming Lust Lipstick. I flopped onto my creaky mattress and smeared the warm paint over my lips.

I pushed hard, harder than most women do. I layered it thickly: two coats, three coats, four coats, until my lips were so caked with color that I could feel a definite layer of clumpy residue weighing down my face. I held a small Snow White mirror above my body as I glided the lipstick tube over my lips, following an imaginary path over the north, east, south, and west of my face.

"You are so pretty," I whispered breathlessly to myself.

One time my older brother caught me, and I conjured a lie, telling him that I was doing a project for science class on animal by-products in cosmetics so that I had to smear lipstick all over my mouth to test its effects. He laughed, walking out of the room in a dizzying hurry known only to rambunctious fourteen-year-old boys.

Why did he laugh? Did I look bad? Was it a mistake to douse myself with color so that I looked like one of the beautiful women in an Andy Warhol painting? Was it wrong? I walked with lead feet toward the bathroom, wanting to see what my face looked like with lipstick. I turned the corner into the room and heaved a look of fright towards the mirror where my reflection glared like a cartoonish donkey with cherry-red lips and tiny features.

I smeared the lipstick off my face, penetrating the washcloth into every crevice, absorbing every pixel of color, disregarding my vulnerably thin-skinned lips as I scrubbed ferociously, staining the white washcloth with vulgar strokes of red.

I ran into my room and grabbed the tube. I rushed towards the kitchen where I ritualistically lit the stove and cut the lipstick out of the tube, hurling it into the pan to watch it burn slowly, suffering.

Lauren Shopp
Cedar Crest High School
Lebanon, PA
Mr. Shank

THE DEVIL

I used to say,
I need to spend a week
talking with the trees in Central Park
to get over a day shopping in Chinatown
with Mother.

But now, even those words hesitate at the tip of my tongue,
as if pausing in respect for the sick.
Those evil thoughts that had once
slammed doors around the house,
now go on their knees and pray
to a God I don't believe in.

I wake to her moans of pain at night,
the cells twisting and turning in her breast.

I stop in front of her bedroom,
staring at the newly installed mirror on the door.
Father said it is supposed to stop the Devil from entering.
I see myself and turn around back to bed.

Ruby Choi
New York, NY
Ms. Lustbader



Dari Horowitz
Great Neck North High School
Great Neck, NY

HOW TO BE A BALLET DANCER IN EL PASO, TEXAS

Start ballet lessons when you are six and your stepmother still thinks you are cute. Keep dancing for thirteen years. Exhaust your body to the point where it hurts to eat. Stop menstruating. Skip lunch, save the lunch money for cigarettes. Wait to cough until you're outside of the studio. Tell the other dancers it's allergies, but they'll know.

On your way to the parking lot, don't turn around at the bearded university janitor when he whistles at your pink calves. Get used to ignoring catcalls from dirty Mexican bastards. It will be hot and windy on the street. Rip your tights as you scratch the sunburn on your left leg. Crack the window open so your drags won't reek up your father's car.

Hate school. Sign up for as many male professors as you can so you can pass without doing any real work. Mexican men have a weakness for cute white girls, and Mexican women hate them for it.

Fat girls will make you nauseous. Food will make you nauseous. Swallowing your own spit will make you sick. Wake up one morning after not eating for two days, brush your teeth, vomit because the toothpaste has flavor, and begin brushing your teeth with tap water from then on.

For the rest of the day, spit into a mug to keep your mouth dry. Your live-in, dark-skinned, financial-aid-recipient boyfriend will ask you what you are doing. Tell him your coffee is too hot. He will think you are pretty. Get pregnant. Don't realize you are pregnant because you haven't had your period in over a year anyway.

Break your foot at *pas de deux* rehearsal. Ruin your career. Go clubbing across the border with your girlfriends after you get a cast. The bartenders at The Cave and Shooters will want to rape you so bring Marcos along. Get plastered so you can sing "Soy

Borracho" with Triz and Julie. Drop your eighth shot glass and cut your hand on a piece of it. The tequila will make the wound sting. Someone will call it a night (not you).

Go back to the apartment with Marcos. Feel full. Make a resolution to drink only things that you can later throw up. Drink more so that you do. Sleep in the bathtub. When you wake up Marcos will be at work. You will have stomach cramps. Take four white ibuprofen pills from the bottle in your dance bag. The cramps will worsen. Have a miscarriage. Don't cry. Don't tell Marcos. Pack up the car and drive over to your father's. Tell him you were wrong about everything.

Your father will be proud of you for coming home. He hated that dirty Mexican too. Tell him about the miscarriage. His eyebrows will crumple together like your teachers' when they try to pronounce your name from the roster.

"See a doctor," is the only thing he will say for the rest of the night.

She will say you are underweight. Take it as a compliment. Tell her it was just depression. When she frowns, her roots will show. She will make you queasy.

Tell your father you want to keep dancing. He will make you get a job at his office first. Wear the yellow blouse on Mondays, green suit on Tuesdays, and navy dress on Thursdays to match the other office girls. Answer the phones. Tell whoever calls that he or she has reached the law offices of Michael McCormick and Sons. When no one is around just let it ring.

Marcos will call. Don't return his messages. Two of your ballet directors will tell you you've put on weight. Start driving to the studio at midnight to practice. One night you will return home at two in the morning, and your stepmother will be awake. She will call you a whore. Don't bother trying to explain that this time wasn't about a guy. Just slap her the way she slapped you that year you told her you wouldn't call her "Mom" anymore. This will hurt your raw hand as well as her face.

Move out. That night, sleep in your (father's) car. Tape up your palm for *barre* work at noon. The dry air will make your scab crack. Start sweating more. Skip school altogether.

Move in with Julie, the rancher's daughter. Tell her it's only temporary. Begin dancing *en pointe* again two weeks before you're supposed to. Finish the bottle of ibuprofen. Pawn your mother's ring so you can buy new toe shoes that don't have bloodstains. You didn't know her anyway.

Stand in front of the refrigerator to cool off after practice. It will be full with frozen packages of meat. Later, ask Julie why.

She will tell you, "veal is a delicacy."

Take her word for it. One night, sleep with her boyfriend Dane. He will have tan lines that make a big pale "H" on his torso and thighs. After, when you hear him crying over the sound of the murmuring sink faucet, use the back door so he can't hear you leaving. Deny that you miss Marcos.

Smoke four cigarettes instead of eating dinner. Take a laxative before the *Giselle* audition so your stomach will look flat. Duct tape your breasts underneath the black leotard cotton. Wear red lipstick to highlight your translucent skin. The audience likes ballerinas who look like sexy ten-year-old porcelain girls.

As you look in the mirror, try to imagine your mother's face by ignoring the features that remind you of your father. Decide you have her nose, hair, and lips. Especially lips. They will be full and pout without any effort.

Then, dance. After the audition, wait until two o'clock to faint in the bathroom stall so the judges won't see you.

If you don't make the *corps de ballet*, stop following your mother's lead. If you try to blow your brains out, your baby won't be alive to save.

Claire Tinguely
Milton, MA
Mr. Connolly

FARMLAND

Farmland stretched out for as far as the eye could see. Golden fields, bearing perfectly straight lines of vegetation, hopefully to reap food for the country, state, city. *What is this city, anyway?*, Gus thought vaguely in some unused corner of his brain, though his inner voice still sounded like it belonged on *Sesame Street*. A twist of fate, really; Gus loved kids.

He was in Kansas, he knew that. But his sense of direction was skewed; he'd never seen so much empty, seemingly unused space in his life. Hailing from Baltimore City, born and bred, where every inch of space was filled with buildings, people, and activity, this...this *farmland* looked as dead as a static television set. *Focus!*, Gus's head suddenly demanded of him. *We must go west. We must reach California.*

But Gus couldn't focus. His mind was reeling with all of the possible consequences of his *very* spur-of-the-moment actions. *Where did the little kids go?* He stole the van he was employed to drive, the van that was used each morning and evening to pick up and drop off the few elementary school students who could afford to attend Francis Scott Key Academy. *What did the neighbors think?* The neighbors would think—and have thought—that he was losing his mind. That's what they'd been telling him, each Sunday after church, when they got together to throw their trash into the neighborhood alleyway.

"You're really losing it, Gus," the men his age would chortle over their beer cans every time he mentioned his desire to get married. "The only thing I want out of life is to *ditch* the ball and chain. Hell, we're 55. When in God's name can we go live in a retirement home and have beautiful, young nurses take care of us?"

But Gus didn't care for their light-heartedness. His desire for a wife had nothing to do with sex and definitely nothing to do with being bogged down. More than anything Gus wanted to be a father.

"But Gus, honey, you can't find a woman your own age who can still pop one out," the women said in their husky fifty-five-year-old voices, obscured by years of smoking. "Only a young girl is fertile enough to do that, hon."

Gus believed them, of course; women knew more about their own menstrual cycles than men ever would. But as more and more time passed, while Gus looked at his graying hands, then the coveted kids in his rearview mirror, he grew certain that he had to have a fertile wife, no matter what the age. So quite without thinking he'd taken to surmising about the young teachers who got to spend all day with these wonderful boys and girls. Surely these women would make good and happy mothers! Surely their bodies, with flat stomachs and firm breasts, could bear a child!

As time went on, he started to think of courting a lady twenty to thirty years his junior more and more plausible. Until finally, when talking to his twin sister, Dottie, on the phone, he could admit his obsession quite causally and without embarrassment.

"Gus, you gotta be goin' insane; I really believe that." Dottie's voice sounded cracked and senile, from way out west in California. "What would drive you to even *consider* dating someone who's young enough to be your daughter?"

Daughter, Gus thought dreamily. *I want a daughter.*

"Gus, you there? You listen to me now!" Dottie sighed in exasperation. "You should be in the loony bin, really you should! Momma always said you had brain damage."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Something in Gus snapped, you could tell because he never swore. "Who are you to tell me who I am? What do you know about me? You never cared to know me, Dottie, your only remaining family! What good's college, all the way out in California, without family?"

Dottie didn't say anything over the crackling reception but Gus could almost hear her pursing her lips the way she always did when he talked about the decisions she made thirty years ago.

She's been alone too long, Gus decided. *Maybe I should go*

out there, so she'll remember how important family is. Suddenly struck by inspiration, Gus continued in thought, *Maybe I'll meet the right woman out there! Baltimore sure isn't working out. Maybe it's time for me to go on an adventure!*

But his new resolution was his undoing. That night, without even thinking, he snuck over to Francis Scott Key Academy (shocked that his portly frame wasn't spotted), complete with a twenty-dollar bill jammed in his jeans pocket, and boarded his van, roaring out of the city.

Now, three days later, the motor of his dust-covered van was breaking down in the Mid-West sunshine. *What am I gonna do?*, Gus frantically thought. *Where do they keep gas stations in the countryside?* His mind had given way to such a panic that he didn't even notice the little boy riding in the middle of the road.

Crunch! With a lurch, his van tumbled over a large object. Panic-stricken, Gus got out, engine still running, to see what he'd hit. Cylinders of rusty metal had collapsed under his tires.

To his right, he heard a scream. Gus turned and saw a little boy, perhaps nine or ten, scarred with fresh cuts, as though he'd recently fallen to the ground. "Well, hey there, little fella," Gus dropped to his knees, smiling up at the child. He'd always been good with children.

As always, when looking up into the face of a young boy, Gus was struck by a reverie, a memory, from his own childhood.

He remembered his father, swinging his then-small body around and around in the air. Gus didn't know who was laughing harder—himself, or his Pop.

"Ah, Gus you're the only thing that makes my life worth livin', you know that boy?" His father was a tall and robust man who drove trucks for a living. "You and Dottie."

Pop laughed, the most elated sound Gus had ever heard, as though his father was a slightly younger, dirtier, and dimmer version of Old St. Nick. "You know, when two little pups popped out of your ma on the same night I thought I'd have my hands full." Gus looked at Pop's hands, wrinkled with age. "But the two of you turned out bein' angels from heaven. I love you, son."

"Gus," his momma called from the porch, a short and round woman, much like a white chocolate ball wrapped in an apron. "It's suppa time, hon."

Gus bounded up the stairs, thrilled at the prospect of food, and flashed his mother a toothy grin. His momma smiled back, before turning to his father, a pained expression on her face.

"Don't even think it," Pop said shortly, and Gus had the premonition that his already perfect parents could communicate telepathically. "There ain't nothing wrong with him. He's just as smart as Dottie."

Or smarter, Gus thought, now in the present. *Momma and Pop taught us to be lovin' and family-centered human beings. They let me live in their house until I was twenty-five, all the way up to—* Gus paused in thought, as though depressed. *If they could see Dottie now, they'd roll over in their graves.*

Lordy! He'd forgotten about the boy. Feeling embarrassed, Gus smiled extra big for him. "Is that your bike under my car, big guy? I'm awful sorry. Hey, perhaps I can stick around and help you fix it!"

"My bike!" the boy wailed, obviously not hearing a word Gus said. "You crushed my bike!"

"Timmy? Timmy!" a shrill voice cried. Suddenly, a tall, bony woman was upon the child, glaring down at Gus. "WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO TO MY KID?!"

Panic danced upon Gus's heart; he'd never seriously upset anyone before. And something in her angry eyes reminded him of all the women on his block...and Dottie. *You can't find a woman your own age...* Their voices whispered in his ear. *What would drive you to consider dating someone who's young enough to be your daughter?*

I'll show them, Gus thought with determination, remembering Pop and filling his heart with confidence. "Sorry, ma'am, I'm new to

the area—"

"GET OUT OF HERE! JUST GET OUT!"

"But Momma, we should make him pay for it!" the child wailed.

The woman looked upon her son, the expression on her face immediately changing to that of sympathy. "It won't do no good, darlin'. Look at that piece of junk he's drivin'. He ain't got no money." Slowly, she put her arm around the boy, and they walked away.

Gus, still kneeling on the ground, looked after them, wearing the pained expression of his mother, as the sun slowly set upon the not-yet-ripened fields.

Rachel Mauro
Towson, MD
Mr. David Belz

A SEASONAL SINCERITY

It's nice to wear a skirt,
and drive alone.
And on a watery March morning,
when the streets
have been rinsed in chlorophyll,
I will go to church
to let the damp organ chords
penetrate and pull at my insides.

For the other months,
God rests in dusty smells,
old wood and stained glass.
But your image stands in stark ink
drawn on bleached linens.

I can picture you approaching
to join me in bed.
Married and decent.
When in truth,
we are teenagers slumped upon each other
in a twin size bed.

We ate dinner with your parents that night
in the warm weather.
And still when I see you in your father,
I want you in bed with me.
Which perhaps is obscene, but only
out of context.

Later, summer mixed through your windows.
My bare leg huddled yours beneath
a single sheet.
And I took the opportunity to learn
the nocturnal language of your house,
my black lids falling shut, until March.

Victoria Joyce
Chester, NJ
Mrs. Susan Neville

CEILINGS

My sister
did not like church.
She hated rooms she could not touch
the ceilings of,
even when she straddled
someone's shoulders.
She'd lock her knees around their collarbones.

and fan out her fingers,
 like cards to be chosen,
 to reach that substitute sky.
 If she could not touch a ceiling
 then how could she trust
 it wouldn't fall on her?
 Once she told me
 in the stillness of her room
 that to her,
 ceilings were only floors
 fallen upwards—
 newspapers over her head in the rain,
 or giant windblown leaves
 caught in air.
 The church ceiling seemed untouchable;
 not like the ceiling she'd claimed at home
 with dirtied handprints,
 paint peeled away to the shapes
 of animals and letters.
 The church had not been chosen
 by our parents with her in mind—
 how could they have known,
 lying awake in bed,
 imagining their future child,
 that she would need a place
 which felt safer than this?

Janna White
 Natick, MA
 Jessie Schell

CANTO

while dying, my mother kept "the inferno" beside her bed.
 she divided her disease into circles—
 the prozac pills, the swollen flesh, the strange bald head.

i didn't need dante to describe hell,
 i could feel it, those anxious waves of grain
 tossing and beating me into the sand, the shells

balance gone, breath gone
 i, five and bathing suit twisted, reaching
 across the shores, the ocean shrieking *so long...*

i had no virgil, only vigil to keep
 tucking my head underneath the drawn curtains
 to catch god, counting prayers not sheep

knock-out chemotherapy never
 did her body god
 swinging a left hook like a knife, an uppercut like a lever

she was my aging champion
 her green and white silk robe wet and worn
 a sop of the sponge, a trainer's touch, but she could not go on

and now i just have my existence
 i have this name that i write on apathetic bathroom stalls,
 i write it and that is my resistance

to that box that holds her senior yearbook
 to that message she left on the machine
 to that letter she wrote that deserves a second look

i hold on to what i need to know
 i set my alarm, shampoo my hair
 —i am descending, i take it slow.

i have my screwed up beatrice,
 yalite and martyr at twenty,
 christian haley prince

in a quiet glass room, we gather our
 courage into our hands,
 farmers of a great secret in the dusky hour

and we step into that deep blue, the dark outlines of maybe trees, no
 stars, just space and grass
 we are in some circle of hell, i don't know which, i think as another
 car passes.

Catherine P. Cambria
 Oak Knoll
 Green Brook, NJ
 Harriet Marcus

UNTITLED

When I was little,
 it rained for three days once.
 The grass in our yard became like a carpet over quicksand.
 My bedroom had one leak in its ceiling
 that had been opened up to the glittering beads outside.
 They fell into a frying pan like the tips of snow peas.
 There was so much mud
 that my shoes got sucked off my feet and swallowed up
 under the bowing peach trees.
 I had to walk into the house barefoot.
 I asked my mom if she was angry
 but all she said was "Look at my face."
 I could never tell with my mom's face though.
 My dad says it's because she's so beautiful.

The weeping willow outside my window
 got so wet that its branches reached all the way to the ground;
 stretched so far I thought they would break.
 Each leaf was filled
 with as much moisture as it could hold,
 dripping with the green so close that there were no windows
 onto the tree itself.
 I am on my tiptoes,
 my arms straight up over my head,
 stretched much farther than I thought I could reach.
 I am soaking,
 I don't think I can get any heavier or longer.

I like blond-haired boys and sleeping late.
 I like being sixteen.
 Poets say that things like age aren't part of your soul,
 but I don't think they would say that
 if they were like me.
 I like to swing my hips when I walk.
 I like to hold my coffee in my left hand.
 I like to be kissed on the neck.

My soul is tumbling all over itself
 and going crazy
 trying to figure out what really belongs to it.
 I think my soul feels the way I feel when my leg falls asleep.
 If it's attached at all,
 I can't feel it.

Lily Bower
 Guilford, CT
 Mr. Thomas Kelly

PUMPKINS

I look again to confirm the fact that a pumpkin is basking in the sunlight on my front porch. Autumn always has a way of sneaking up on me; I see the acorns that litter my street, and the squirrels dancing in praise of the harvest, but it never really sinks in until I see a pumpkin on the porch. Then all truly begins to live, and all of its memories wash in with it. In particular, I think of my mother and me planning for the St. Vincent de Paul Annual Pumpkin Decorating Contest. Our majesty proved unparalleled. I won year after year, with pumpkins such as Yoda and the three blind mice, but what I enjoyed most about that time was not the gleaming jewels of prize candy, but the time that my mother and I spent together.

When the pencil sharpening and uniform pressing of September had passed, my mother and I would take long drives to watch the fiery dying of October leaves. The vivid colors always inspired us with our best ideas. Mom always said that if you had to die, take a lesson from the autumn leaves. The cool comfort of our Volvo station wagon juxtaposed with the passionate heat of those leaves flowed through my brain, and it was that tension that seemed to inspire my concept for pumpkin virtuosity.

It was so simple after that. Mom and I would head off to the craft store, singing country ballads through Aisle 9, bickering over whether I needed a new pair of khakis in Aisle 12, and talking about her health in Aisle 13. (That was never easy, because Mom was never quite that healthy.) The actual putting together of our collected elements became its own science. My mother would spray-paint the pumpkins in the garage, her long fingers steady and controlled from years of banging Protestant hymns out on the piano. After the paint had dried, I would begin to shape my idea with pipe cleaners, felt, and glue. Though she never meddled, my mother remained as a sort of ubiquitous force in my work. Her faith in me was endless.

Still, even science has its way of breaking down. The tapestry of my mother's illness wove into my everyday life, and my beloved pumpkin process was no exception to its sweep. Like the time I went into her bathroom to ask about an October drive and saw her freshly hairless scalp. Or the year she was in a New York City hospital and could only offer me advice via phone. But even then, the pumpkins got made. When the fall of 1997 began, my last year to defend my beloved title, my mother was fading with the leaves. And while the wind began to whip through the branches and scarecrows appeared in open fields and orange pumpkins grew on the green vines, my mother slipped into a coma and died after a six-year fight with breast cancer. I decorated a pumpkin, and won my fifth title.

Back at home, my dad and I carved a pumpkin for the front porch. We scooped out the pumpkin's fresh orange flesh like our grief, and felt as hollow as our finished product. Halloween night arrived and against my better judgment that I was too old for this sort of thing, I ventured out. Walking through a darkened street, grasping my sack of treats, I stared into the light of a grinning jack-o-lantern, shining amidst the monsters, the ghouls, and the thieves. Pumpkins have a wonderful way of revealing things.

Catherine P. Cambria
Oak Knoll School
Green Brook, NJ
Harriet Marcus

WINTER

I will wake up early and get dressed in the dark, letting the blinds cast striped shadows on the walls of my bedroom, the light from the street reflecting all golden and glossy on the new snow. I will pull my jeans on one leg at a time (because I am only human) and shiver as the cold metal of the button touches my skin. My sweater will rub scratchy red against my goose bumps and I will pull at the tight collar and make silent allusions to its resemblance to a

noose.

I will brush my teeth, comb my hair, wash my face, put on the bracelet he bought me from Italy. I will walk down the steps, past the yellow wallpaper my mother hates and my father's coffee already brewing in the kitchen. I will pick up my chemistry text from the table, my English notebook from the living room, and my history paper from the study. I will find my coat in the hall closet, pulling it on one sleeve at a time (because I am only human), and struggle to move my arms because of the bulk of my sweater. I will make no pretenses of quiet; the rest of the household will be up soon enough.

I will slam the front door shut, pulling my car keys and gloves out of my pockets, greeting the morning and winter for the first time. As I walk to my car three inches of snow will crunch under my shoes. It will sound like the bones of baby birds breaking, except there will be no birds because it will be winter. It will be December.

My car will take seven minutes to warm up. I will not scrape the windshield; there are some times when it is too cold even to move and it seems warmer just to sit, huddled in the front seat, watching the ice dissolve from the bottom up like a sunrise. I will turn the heater down because otherwise it will just blow bitter air in my face. Of course my breath will cloud and smoke in the darkness as if I were on fire, as if there were a fire in me. And the air will be so still and so silent and feel so light in my lungs that I will wonder if maybe I am the only one in the entire world who is awake.

As I drive, my mind on automatic, making the turns without thinking, watching the lights unconsciously, I will look out the window. The snow-covered fields before me will glisten in the half-light, brown crops rising above the white in places, dead twigs dotting the surface. The road, empty at such an early hour, will stretch on for miles before me, flat and glittering. I will love that I live in the country.

Occasionally I will glance at the clock, its green numbers dim. I will be early and terrified that he will not be there when I arrive, that I will have to wait for five, ten minutes, wondering if he's going to show up at all. I will allow myself to worry over this—worry hard, so that my palms sweat in my gloves and my heart beats faster. I will worry and worry and worry and then I will stop.

I will think about Christmas instead. Not many people will have their decorations turned on at six o'clock in the morning. Reindeer and sleighs and packages will flash by me in a gray, their brilliant colors lost in the darkness. Then I will be reminded of presents, of the bags I have shoved to the back of my closet. I will not have wrapped them yet, wanting to see him first, to make sure everything is all right. I will think of wrapping them as a commitment and dread the idea of having to unwrap them myself before taking them back.

I will glance at my speedometer, my rearview mirror, and the road in a slow calculated pattern as taught to me in Driver's Ed. This deliberation will help me not think and to stop looking at the clock. I will not think. I will not think. I will not think.

Until I am there.

The parking lot will be full already; the spaces packed with pick-up trucks and battered sedans—the cars of working men. After I cut the engine I will search for his car, unbuckling the seat belt to twist in my seat. When I find it a worried moment later, I will grab my purse, wet my chapped lips, and open the door, letting the rush of the wind roll over me.

The diner will be bright and alive, fluorescent yellow lighting spilling onto the pavement where I walk. They will have been open for an hour already and I will wonder about the people whose days began before mine, whether it is more silent at 4:30 than 5:30 in the morning.

I will pull open the door with confidence, my eyes scanning the room for his face knowing it is ridiculous to question if I will still recognize him. He will be sitting in a booth, facing away from the door, hunched over a cup of coffee, thin frame curved perfectly. I will stop breathing for three seconds before I catch myself and force myself to start walking, fingers shaking, in his direction. When I slide into the booth he will finally notice me, looking up startled.

"Hey."

I will smile shyly and it will be one of the first times in my life that I will have done anything shyly and damn it if I won't respect him for it. "How are you?"

He will not smile. "I'm okay, I'm tired, I guess."

"Oh." I will pause for a moment, to study him because even though it's only been a month, a month is still a long time, especially when you're only eighteen. I will touch without touching, letting my gaze scratch against the ginger stubble on his cheeks, rub the crooked corners of his mouth, hit the red bump of his nose. His fingernails, clutching the mug in front of him, will be cut short, as usual, and his hair, orange but fading, will be hidden underneath a baseball cap, only little wisps visible. Then I will fiddle with my silverware and my placemat, running my hands over the plastic wood of the table-top, feeling the tiny scratches against my skin, otherwise invisible.

I will ask, "How's school going? How are your classes? How tough did that lit class end up being?"

He will nod. "Pretty tough." He will know that he should say more. "But things are going great, really great. I love it. I do. I really do."

"That's good."

It will sound as if we haven't talked to one another in years but in fact, I will have called him last week, before finals started, and we talked for an hour. The night before he will have called as soon as he got home but I would have already been in bed. We will have talked only long enough to arrange this meeting.

When the waitress comes, wearing a scarlet cardigan over her uniform, she will find us staring at each other blankly, gazes locked. He will order cream dried beef over home fries and I will order a bagel and a grapefruit, sliced.

As if my breakfast choice piques his curiosity, he will ask, "Have you lost weight? You look good. How's track going?"

Tight-lipped I will answer, "Fine," not telling him how much I've improved, how much time I've taken off this past month alone. I will like the way the modesty rolls around in my belly and turn the conversation back to him. "How about you? Have you been running at all?"

And he will laugh. It will not be a nice laugh. It will be a laugh that mocks me and my silly questions and my silly interest in his life and I will be able to see it all in his eyes. "No, I haven't been running at all. I barely have time to sleep."

I will grow very still trying to look happy and unaffected playing with my straw wrapper and biting at my lip. "I was just wondering, you know."

He will laugh again, but this time it will be a lighter laugh, a little more friendly. He will look at me expectantly, as if he wants me to start laughing too, along with him. But I won't be able to.

"I'm sorry." He will stop suddenly, realizing maybe. "I'm sorry." He will touch my hand, at the base of the thumb, where I have a tiny scar. Just for a moment, then he is gone, his face sad and white as the sky outside. "I'm sorry."

That's all I'll be able to hear, the constant "sorry, sorry, sorry" of his voice until I know he's not just apologizing for the laughing anymore. The sound will rise up like an ocean, like the roar of a wave inside me. Then I'll think of the places where water meets sand and I'll remember last July at the beach.

For three days we parked our blankets and umbrellas in the same spot and let the heat and sunlight consume us. They were the hottest three days of the summer and we found our bodies, whether from sweat or humidity or sea spray, continually sticky. We lay next to each other in the sand, only our shoulders touching for hours at a time, not reading or sleeping, just merely lying, until our blood pulsed in our eyelids. Then we'd cool ourselves in the ocean and he would hate the way he could never get all the sand off his feet afterwards and it would stay, gritty, on his towel when he went to lie back down.

There was a family next to us—a man, a woman, two kids. She was blond and skinny and he was tan with broad shoulders. The children were girls—one just a toddler, the other slightly older,

maybe five or six—and their swimsuits matched.

The father took the older daughter out by the water, both of them trailing buckets and shovels behind them. They built sandcastles, great, huge sandcastles, which towered over all the other sandcastles on the beach. The daughter running to and fro, collecting water and sand, packing the dirt into tight, thick mounds, which the father shaped, a look of concentration on his face, a spark of something in this eye. He was having more fun than she was, his hands caked with mud, his brow glistening with sweat.

Around lunch time, when the sun beat, beat, beat overhead, he called the mother over and she stood from her seat in the shade, picking up the youngest daughter from her place in the baby pool. He stepped away from his work, presenting the structure in front of him, the older daughter pulling at her mother's arm. She put down the youngest, moving closer, praising their work. But in a flash the toddler ran forward, knees shaking this way and that, ankles loose and threw herself into the sand.

Towers crumbled, turrets collapsed. The bridge fell to pieces, tumbling into the moat below. The sandcastle was destroyed. The beautiful, magnificent sandcastle that they had spent all morning on, that the father had pounded so hard it was supposed to withstand anything, that the daughter had decorated with little dribblings of mud, which had fallen like icing atop a cake.

The girls began to cry—the first for her masterpiece gone, the second for the sand which had fluttered into her eyes. I will remember thinking that their cries weren't too bad really—not too loud or screechy, almost delicate. The cries of little princesses.

Then I looked at the mother. She was young—she had probably gotten married right out of college. Her long hair, nearly white from the sun, was pulled up loose in a ponytail. Her tan face quirked as she stared down at her wailing daughters, catching her husband's eye, amused. He smiled back at her. And there was something in those smiles, some kind of contentment or happiness or love that made me want to cry.

As the woman moved to pick the youngest up I nudged the body next to mine. He turned his cheek, opening one eye. I nodded in their direction. "I want that."

He watched them for a while: watched the mother running her fingers through the little one's hair, making comforting noises, watched the father half-pleading, his voice slightly entertained, with the older daughter, offering to build a new castle. He watched the girls finish their tears, pump their fists tiny and pale as snowflakes on their parents' skin.

Then he turned back to me, dipping his head slightly in understanding. Just as he will dip his head, five months later, to gaze into his water glass, his face crumbling. "I'm sorry." I will understand what he's talking about because, for god's sakes, I always understand.

The clock on the wall across from me will become suddenly fascinating. I will stare at it for a long time, my eyes following the red dragging tick of the second hand trying to think of something to say. I will be numb, dumb, dead as I sit there, my mind blank, unthinking. I will wish that there was something I could say, some last dramatic line or poetic stanza I could spit out, but part of me will have shut down and all I will be capable of is studying the black numbers a dozen feet in front of me.

"Is it another girl?" I will hate the bitterness in my voice. Hate that I have been preparing myself for this moment ever since he left for school in August.

"No."

"Yes."

"No." He will hit the table, the palm of his hand smacking against the fake wood in an altogether unconvincing fashion. "No, there is not another girl. Why does there have to be another girl?"

I will feel my face sneering, imagining his tone as more condescending than it will be. "I don't know. Why else?"

"I just need a break."

"So you can find another girl?"

He will throw his head back, wiping his forehead. "God, I knew—"

I will stop him. "Shut up." And when I slam my hand against the table, it will be intimidating. "God, just shut up. I cannot sit here and have an argument with you. I have a chemistry mid-term first period and there is no way in hell I'm going to go in there in any kind of emotional state."

He will sigh, obviously relieved. "That's fine. I understand. Let's just have breakfast."

I will sit for a moment, unsure, picking at my cuticles and licking my lips—staring at his hands, splayed out on the placemat in front of him. Feminine hands, with long, thick fingers. He will still be wearing the ring I bought him. Perhaps it won't be real. I will wonder, because, if that moment, in our hometown diner with the chipped coffee mugs and the winter wind singing outside, isn't real, maybe nothing is. Or maybe it's just too real. Or maybe by that time I won't know what's real.

"I'm leaving." I will stand and grab my purse in one movement, noticing that I never even took my coat off.

"Okay." He will look up, confused, surprised, probably elated.

I won't return the look. No last romantic gaze or pondering of what may have been. It will not be the last time I will see him and I will know it. It won't be the end—things aren't that easy. At that moment I will be too confused to think about remembering his face. Maybe if I move fast enough, if I drive home soon enough I will be able to get back in bed, go back to sleep, and go to school pretending none of this will have happened. Or maybe not. All I will want is to leave as soon as possible.

"Uh, you can pay for my food when it comes."

"Sure, sure." His manner will have become genial again.

"That's not a problem."

"It wasn't a question."

I will move quickly when I get outside—not because of the cold weather, but because, for some reason, I will believe that when I get to my car everything will be all right again. It will still be warm when I unlock the door and climb inside, my head just barely missing the roof in my rush to get inside.

I won't put the key in the ignition for a full five minutes. Instead, I will bring my knees up to my chest and think about chemistry, about the purity of the numbers and the quiet simplicity in the periodic table. Oxygen's atomic weight 16.000 amu. Hydrogen 1.0079 amu. Carbon 12.011 amu. So dependable.

But then I will stare out into the snow-covered lands in front of me. The sun, a tiny pinprick of light against the horizon, just barely visible, will be starting to rise, its beams just beginning to cast shadows across the earth. The white of the fields, flat and straight, will reflect like water, tiny ripples in the distance. Yet in the orange glow of the December sunrise, it will shine like beach sand, dirty and brown at the same time.

My hands will begin to shake as a fierce wind whips the car, whirring thorough the windows. And then I will begin to cry.

Sarah Major
Hershey, PA
Mr. William Altland

BEFORE COMMUNION

I sang in Christmas pageants,
carried candles up the center aisle,
my shiny black patent leather shoes clicking
on the cold stone floor, like the girls I would
see in the other classroom after Saturday
morning ballet class.

I always tried to walk slowly so
they wouldn't squeak, I felt
the glares of the saints from the walls,
the pompous stares of the altar

boys after they stepped to the side.
Sometimes, my shoes echoed so loudly in my ears
they drowned out the singing of the choir, the
alleluias and hosannas that my mother
loved so much.

My father fell asleep
before communion, being jostled by my mother
during the responses. She would whisper things
about setting an example, and hand my sister
Cheerios to keep her quiet. I swung my legs and inhaled
the smell of the pews, mildewed wood
and layer upon layer
of incense. I remember dipping my five year old
hands into the holy water, wetting my fingernails,
then my Sunday clothes while making the sign of the cross.
I couldn't wait to be seven,
to wear a white dress, get a gold cross,
drink the blood and
taste the body.

The first stale seconds of the host on my tongue, a panic.
I had God stuck to the roof of my mouth.

Carrie Murphy
Towson High School
Baltimore, MD
Mr. William Jones

AFTER A FEW WHIFFS OF ANOTHER WORLD

AFTER THOMAS LUX

After a few whiffs of another world,
His lungs were whimsy cabbage.
Three sniffs of garbage scows
coming in from the river,
and he could feel his olfactory muscle
doing a triple axel.

It was not that he minded the scent,
it was that he preferred the smell
of sodium, raw fish and old fishermen's boots.
The worms in their baskets wiggled away
when the scent inhabited the air
and the little boys tentatively holding fishing poles
stifled their noses as if they had barbed wire hooks attached.

Only the fishermen stayed calm, accepting it
like they embraced the scales and blood
engraved in their palms,
the way their wives secretly complained
they couldn't make love anymore.

The way their way of life flowed like the river,
the way the scent of garbage scows
traveled through their bodies and noses like drugs.
The waves held back, arching away from the boats,
As if to say even the dumb have this sense.

Victoria Rukovets
Tenafly, NJ
Mr. Whitehead

THE RED WHEELBARROW

Inspired by

William Carlos Williams' poem, *The Red Wheelbarrow*

she sat on the mountain under the storm. small rivulets of water maneuvering its pebbled skin to the lake below. her red backpack was three feet beneath her and to the left. it held her thermals, her toothbrush, her headlamp, her sunscreen, her stove, her sleeping bag, and her food. above her she could watch the masquerade ball of the mountains moving in and out of grey masks to the beat of lightning. beneath her rain jacket she gripped her Nalgene and a dry shirt, her weapons in a fortress, like every other barrier she had hiding her insecurities. insecurities about her job, or lack thereof (what will her father say), and about her "odd-looking" (as her mother had dubbed them) feet, and about her tattoo of which she had no recollection when she awoke the next morning to discover it on her back (what will her grandchildren say). insecurities that her dog did not know she had, and he knew everything. he knew that she kept the bathroom light on while she was asleep because she was still afraid of the flushing monster. he knew where her journal was. and he knew that she did not like her mother's birthday cake but that she had swallowed it for the last twenty-five years to please her mother.

but all her insecurities were waiting deep in her mind while she was sitting on the mountain watching the storm defiantly glide up the valley she had just climbed. she was thinking of the storm just then. the storm that should have been threatening like every other thunderstorm. but this one could not be. it was calming and reassuring. and she was thinking of the mysterious mountains whose rock confidence was impervious even by burning hail. and of her backpack.

she bought her backpack when she was seventeen. instead of a car. it was freedom in red without gasoline charges. it was happiness. three pockets of independence. she took it to friends' houses. she took it to the woods. she packed and unpacked and she made it her headquarters. she liked that it was a minimalist like her. and that unlike her other bags their relationship went above aesthetic taste. they were a team and she could survive with it like she was thriving now. she could take it wherever she wanted, and it could take her, like it had taken her into this storm.

water crept up and down her crouched body. first it gathered in pools in the creases of her jacket, then it settled on her skin. she tried to cover the exposures, but the water was adamant. it moved into her jacket. it was in her hair. she sat on the mountain imbibing the storm. but the storm drank her instead. the rain crawled along her skin and through the material of her clothing. it pried open her pores and was sucked into her veins like bathwater is sucked into a tub drain right before it all disappears. soon the storm was in her more than it was outside her. it felt like happiness but it was more. and she had it and it came from her. she could sip it right from her veins.

the storm moved overhead taking all of her clouds with it. she stood up and put away her jacket. she drank from her Nalgene. she put on her backpack. and she walked on towards the horizon of rock confidence. just she and her red backpack. no thoughts of her parents or grandchildren. just herself and her own happiness.

Kate Thomas
New York, NY
Ms. Taylor

I WRITE MY FIRST POEM

In fifth grade, I am eleven. I love to wear
Those sweat suits from the Gap
That are all one color and cotton,
Yellow or periwinkle or blue.

I wear my hair in loose, defeated ponytails,
My front teeth are rodent-like, and I still have glasses.
I am in love with a blond boy named Arthur
Who is, at eleven, as handsome as any teenager
I have ever seen since. He doesn't know.
But if he were any older, he'd guess.
I love looking into his eyes, which are dark green, faceted like quartz
As much as I love playing foursquare, or the end of art class,
Or sliding down the sandiest part of the playground
Over by the swings, which is where the asphalt stops
And there is the mystery of grit and dirt and dried-out pine trees
Where the popular girls hold their court and one, Vanessa,
Is fascinating because the sun hits her pale limp braid right at the
nape
Of her neck, makes her neck look radioactive and her hair beautiful.
I find a log there that I watch for a few weeks—it is tired and dead
And the pine wood is so soft I can flake it with a fingernail and carry
it inside
To social studies class in my pocket. I can't get that wood out of my
head.
The cracked old log is overlayersed with resin
Solidified into drops that gleam when the sun hits them
And that is the first idea of the poem I wrote in fifth grade,
That flows from sap to Arthurian legend
Within the first three lines.

Jillian Saucier
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, New Hampshire
Mr. David Weber

UNCLE DANNY

He used to sit for hours
at the piano,
head cocked,
eyes squinted shut,
fingers tickling keys,
and listening
until the piano laughed
just the way
he wanted her to.
Then he'd smile.
He'd play it again
just to make sure
he heard it right,
and he'd write,
dots and dashes,
the occasional scribble,
chicken scratch
on manuscript paper.

Years later he sat,
in a swamp green seat
of a military transport,
coming home,
head hanging, shoulders
sagging, feet and fingers
stationary, no longer romping,
jiving, bouncing
in time.
He'd left his music
in Vietnam,
then found himself
caught up
in *The Way*
somewhere in southern
Florida.

Now he sets a buffer
 against a blue '94 Toyota
 and cocks his goggled head,
 flexing his body
 at once to brace
 against the motion
 of the spinning tool,
 pushing and pulling,
 forcing it in a loose circle
 like a farmer
 trying to move
 a jackass,
 as whirs,
 screeches and buzzes
 whirl around his head
 in the shop.
 Uncle Danny can't hear
 much anymore.

Pat Breiner
 Towson High School
 Towson, MD
 Mr. William Jones

ISLAND, LOCH RAVEN

She flicked the end
 of her cigarette,
 white like bathroom tile,
 sending grey ashes fluttering
 with glitter-orange confetti embers.
 She leaned forward and hugged
 her shins, placing her head
 atop her bluejean-clad knees
 and drawing her eyelids closed
 as her middle and index fingers released
 the cig into her welcoming lips,
 cheeks sucking in, creating caverns
 beneath
 her cheekbones.
 Her eyes opened, satisfied slits
 in a round face drawn tight
 with half a smile
 against the breeze blowing
 off the reservoir, gently
 pushing smoke around
 her face and neck,
 the smoke joining air
 the way a river joins the ocean
 after forking around an island.

Pat Breiner
 Towson High School
 Towson, MD
 Mr. William Jones

ISN'T THAT NORMAL?

She pokes her face into the window and looks into her yellow kaleidoscope. Every night the light outside her window is on, and while looking through the window and the bubbles of condensation, she twists her head and makes pretty pictures. And each night she takes a bath. Not a shower. The tub is deep and blue and it feels like the ocean when she puts in a scoop of bath salts. Sometimes she uses the showerhead to make rain, letting it sprinkle all over her, making circles of songs. Music is in the rain. Music is in the water. She hears it because she listens for it. Because she is music.

Her parents wonder about her, why she's still taking baths at age twelve. Why she refuses to have play dates but won't part with her walk outside everyday. Why she makes cookies almost every week to leave in the mailbox for the mailman, and why she doesn't fit the description of the typical twelve-year-old girl in all their parenting books. Why *doesn't* she yell at them or get sassy and talk disrespectfully to them? Why doesn't she? Isn't that normal?

She is captivated by the man who lives across the street in the blue house. For her birthday she asked for a pair of binoculars for her "spy" work except she wasn't an intrusive spy with any ulterior motives. She only spies because she loves him, and she can understand him. Every day this man comes outside to the sidewalk in front of his house and moves around rhythmically. He's not quite dancing but he's not just walking around either. Others would assume he's crazy because there is no music and he couldn't dance without music, but she know that he hears the music inside, like she can. Sometimes he even brings out a silver sword and holds it as he does his meditative dance. She watches from her room with her binoculars poked to window and studies all his movements. After watching for so long, she recognizes similar movements and she tries to predict which one he will do next. Sometimes she is right because she thinks that maybe she can hear his music too. He doesn't know she watches him; well, at least she thinks he doesn't. If he did, it wouldn't be fascinating anymore, so she takes all precautions to make sure he doesn't find out. She doesn't want to know his name either because then he wouldn't be a mystery. Then she wouldn't be able to create his life because it already exists. In her mind he lives as the gold toothman, since he has a shiny gold tooth. When her parents tried to take her over to meet the new neighbors across the street a few weeks after they moved in, she threw the biggest fit her parents had ever seen. And to be honest, they were almost happy that she was showing signs of anger and disagreement, so they let her stay behind. He is still her open book and she continues to imagine his life and tries to join his dance.

Every day after she comes home from school, she makes a snack consisting of either Cheerios, milk and peanut butter in the blender, or, on more eccentric days, little s'mores sandwiches on cinnamon graham crackers with creamy marshmallows roasted over the stove, Hershey chocolate chunks, and of course peanut butter. Then she takes a walk. She always goes the same way too, with the park as her destination. Gold tooth man is never outside this early so she doesn't worry about him seeing her, but just to be safe, she avoids walking directly in front of his house. And just in case he was taking a walk for some odd reason, she wears a big purple baseball hat, and some funny old sunglasses she found in her mother's closet. Once she passes his house, she takes them off. At the park, she goes straight to her swing. There are only two big swings, and hers is the highest so that her feet don't drag. Usually a few little kids roam around her, and one builds up enough courage to sit next to her on a big swing. Fidgeting with their dangling feet that were nowhere near touching the ground, they admire the big kid with stretched-open eyes and pulled-tight mouths. She hops off her swing and asks in a voice trying very hard not to sound scary or overpowering, "Want a push?" Most kids are surprised that a big kid would actually talk to them, and she waits patiently as they turn a little pink in the cheeks before saying, "Yes please." Now, she isn't just any pusher, she is a pro pusher since she has many months of experience pushing little kids on swings. Her rules are: don't push too fast, ease into the push as not to frighten them, and always ask if they want to go higher or faster after they're above her height or if they seem nervous. Also, she needs to be careful not to push too hard, because she could push them off. Once a boy actually fell off the swing because he didn't hold on and she felt so terrible, and it took her almost a week to recuperate and return to the park. Even after he fell to the ground he was still smiling, like he was in some euphoric dream, and he barely even noticed he was tangled up and muddy. She had to pick him up and send him to the merry-go-round, which he scurried off to in a happy daze. She was glad the kid's par-

ents didn't see, or else it would have ruined her pushing career. Since then she always gives them a nice little reminder; "Hold on tight!" She has quite a reputation among the little kid circle and is known as the great big kid pusher. Most of the little kids only dream of getting a turn to be pushed by her.

After the park, she heads home, always stopping first at the white house with the rose bushes. The sweetest little white bunny rabbit lives in a cage on their front lawn. She loves animals. Her parents refuse to have a pet though, because "daddy's allergic." So she stops by to hold and pet Buster. It's a terrible name, but she doesn't say this because Mrs. Rose is kind to let her play with Buster. Mrs. Rose always waits for her, sitting on a white lawn chair with flowered cushions, and when she comes into view, Mrs. Rose stands up. She's always greeted with a great hug and is asked how she's doing. "I'm happy as usual, Mrs. Rose. How are you doing?" Mrs. Rose hasn't recovered from her daughter's death about a year ago. Even though she is always smiling, it is easy to see the glazed look of grief in the corner of her eyes that are always somewhat swollen and red. Seeing a girl almost her daughter's age is very difficult, but it's also comforting, and Mrs. Rose always tries to make excuses for her to come in and have some chocolate chip banana bread or other treats. Afraid Mrs. Rose may get too attached, she usually declines this offer because she doesn't want to upset her more. But just the look on Mrs. Rose's face when she walks up her driveway is enough for her to know how important her visits are.

When she comes home she checks the mail and opens her note from the mailman, who is her good friend. Every day at the beginning of her walk, she puts his letter in the mailbox, which she even decorated with a poem she wrote about mail. By the time she finishes her walk, she receives his letter. It feels more official using the mailbox instead of exchanging the letters in person and she couldn't anyhow since she is at the park when Rick stops by. Thursday is cookie day, and she makes his favorite chocolate chip cookies wrapped in purple saran wrap and a curly ribbon. She opens the letter and it says:

I loved the picture you gave me. It's so vivid with all the reds and purples. I think you're the most talented kid I know, to tell you the truth.

Today Mr. Saulsman announced that since a few postal workers quit, we might need to cover extra routes. I'm glad because I'll have a chance to earn extra money to save up for my trip to Europe. I promise to bring you back pictures and to send you a postcard every day.

Once again thanks for the delicious cookies! What can I say but you're the best!

Do you have a portable tape player with headphones? I wanted to know if you have a chance to listen to all your favorite music on the go.

*Have a nice day!
-Rick the mailman*

With a small grin on her face, she folds the paper back along the original fold and puts it in her pocket. When is Rick going to Europe? she wonders. She hopes not soon, because it is December and soon it will be time for her to give him his holiday gift which she's been working on for weeks. In a green sketchbook she drew pictures of all the mailboxes in her neighborhood. Without much experience in art besides her art class at school which everyone has to take, she is by no means the greatest drawer, but she has a feeling that Rick will appreciate the idea. She used her special colorful pencils and wrote on the cover "A Collection of Mailboxes for Rick." In addition she recorded a tape for him of her playing piano as she thought about mail and attached a note to it saying, "Play as you read 'A Collection of Mailboxes for Rick.'" With only fifteen mailboxes left to go, she has almost finished the book. She also wonders if Rick's question about a portable tape player with headphones is a hint of what he's getting her for the holidays. He's not artistic or

good at keeping presents a surprise like she is. But that's all right, since he's one of the few adults who understands her and appreciates her creativity.

When she was seven years old she discovered the piano. At first she would sit on the bench and play one key at a time, and then just sit and think about its sound. Soon she made up names for each key, for example the highest note is "glass" and the lowest is "jaw." Then slowly she started to string the words together, on top of each other, and this opened an endless field of emptiness for her to fill. Now, her parents thought that she was crazy to play only one note and then sit for minutes playing nothing. Right away they found a piano teacher for their daughter. The teacher tried to explain the basics of piano, that each key has a name of A to G, flats and sharps, rhythm and rests, but this completely upset her since she had already formed her own names for the keys and had created her own system. "No, this is not 'A,' this is 'moon,'" she repeated over and over but the teacher just looked at her in bewilderment and said "A" until she was so frustrated she just stood up and left. They didn't hire another teacher. Instead they finally started to realize how different their child was, although they didn't want to accept it. They couldn't take her away from the piano either, so they made a rule that she was not allowed to play when they were home. This seemed like the worst thing they could ever do, but after a while she grew accustomed to it and realized she worked best alone anyhow. Her parents came home from work at six o'clock, which left her plenty of time with the piano. She never writes her songs down, but somehow she can remember every single one. Many times she thinks of an idea during school, on the bus, or in the bath, and she whispers it over and over until it is recorded in her mind. And when she sits down on the creaky wooden bench, it all comes flowing out through her fingers, like water from the bathtub drain. Sometimes she plays songs about feelings or situations she's been in, or about pictures she has seen. Never stopping to end a song, they flow into each other, like her thoughts do. So in fact she doesn't make songs, she plays one continuous song that doesn't stop even as she removes her hands from the white words because it reverberates inside her body.

She is a song. She is an artist. She is a kaleidoscope. She is a pusher. She is a spy. She is a light. She is water. She is a picture. She is a poem. She is a letter. She is music. She is writing her song. She is only twelve. She is not normal.

Miss Leora Nesson
Morristown, NJ
Nancy Gorrell

THE PIT

Buried under thin red skin and sweet juicy flesh, it hides.
Exposed, bit by bit, you come to expect it.
But when it is left
alone in the palm of your hand
it looks like a tumor, a rotten brown cancer.
Its ugliness disgusts me and I grab my stomach
wondering if I have a pit
embedded somewhere in my flesh
in my center
that I won't know about
until someone takes a bite out of me
and it is exposed,
gnarled, sprouting growths,
tooth-breakingly hard.

Katherine Bollbach
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Mr. Howard Schott



Stephanie Kohan
Horseheads, NY

POM-POMS

In the year 1989, the United States Cheerleading Championships took place in Florida, Universal Studios to be exact. Teenage girls galloped on stage with smiles that were a result of obsessively squeezing a tube of Colgate toothpaste. They flung their arms in the air and flipped, cartwheeled, and soared to their starting positions wearing brightly-colored uniforms tattooed with the name of their high school.

Then the girls stopped moving, and so did my world.

I held my breath as their curly hair, made-up faces, and fake nails stood still, waiting for the crackle of the speakers to signal the beginning of a flawless dance routine. My house's living room faded away as I sat, eyes cemented to the rhythmic rise-and-fall of the cheerleaders' chests.

And then Michael Jackson's "Bad" exploded from the speakers, kicking the formerly-stagnant Plantation High School Pythons into a series of robotic flips, jumping kicks, pyramids, basket tosses, and handsprings.

I was just five when the Plantation High School Pythons won the 1989 United States Cheerleading Championship, and maybe that means that my mind was porous, allowing the girls' glowing sweat to translate into beauty, attention, and victory. But to me it just meant that my calling in life was contained within the spectrum of the pom-pom. It meant that I would make up my face with glittering pink lipstick and prance around the house in dangerously short skirts that exposed my knobby, bruised knees and dirty, size-6 feet.

Every day after kindergarten I shoved my worn-out copy of Madonna's *Like A Prayer* into our beat-up Sony boombox and blasted the song "Cherish" to full volume. When the song's opening beat started, I threw myself to the floor and began a sexually charged interpretive dance of Madonna's popular song. I rolled across the itchy Victorian rugs in our living room; I crawled to the couch, mounted the cushions and jumped off like a dying bird being hurled to the ground. I pounded my feet on the floor as I performed haphazard, mangled cartwheels and attempted splits and straddles. My mother watched from the dining room, urging me on as I bounded across our small Cape Cod house.

Two weeks later I was completely hooked on rah-rah. The cheerleading bug had bitten me and had managed to stay suctioned to my skin for months. Like a tick, it sucked my blood, the blood that was once stimulated by books, nature, and art, and replaced it with a type of liquid that forced my five-year-old body to contort itself into grotesque positions of gymnastic glory.

After kindergarten classes, my mother shredded plastic bags and tied their ends together with rubber bands. I sat at our kitchen table finishing my coloring assignment for school.

"Here are your pom-poms, sweetie," my mother said, holding the tattered grocery bags out to me like two decaying plastic bouquets.

I threw my arms around her neck with joy, not letting go until she placed the shreds in my hands. The orange letters spelling "Giant" remained on some of the pieces, but they fit perfectly in my tiny hands, begging to be thrashed with delight at some distant sports event. I stood on the kitchen table chairs, held the pom-poms above my head, trying to ignore the way they drooped over my wrists and masked most of my needle-thin arms.

"GO TEAM! GO GO GO!" I shouted, waving the pom-poms in the air like I was flagging down a massive aircraft. My mother clapped and my cheerleading career began.

On Saturdays I could be seen perched atop the Weiss Honey Company Boy's Tee-Ball League bleachers, kicking my leg toward the sky like a midget Rockette and screaming words of encouragement to my extremely embarrassed nine-year-old brother on the baseball diamond.

For weeks it continued, my obsessive chanting and my brother's equally obsessive complaining. Matthew, an extremely immature fourth grader, had no idea what my cheering was all about. It wasn't about him, the crowd, or the team. It was about *me*. For once, something was all about me—tiny, hardscrabble me.

But not for long.

After having graced the aluminum bleachers at Roherstown Elementary School for just three weeks, the parents of the boys on the team began to complain, stating that my screaming and foot-stomping was disrupting their "game experience," whatever *that* was supposed to mean.

Usually my parents were complete nonconformists and would have encouraged my displays of public embarrassment, but this year it was different. For one thing, my dad was the tee-ball coach. For another, people hadn't found me cute, since they felt my 4'10" frame was not something that belonged to a five-year-old. I just looked so

much older, like a little girl who had long outgrown her place in the adoring limelight. My prime had ended before I hit first grade.

And so my presence was not tolerated.

After June 15, I gingerly tucked my Giant Grocery Store pom-poms into my bedroom closet behind my hidden make-up stash, bubblegum, and Tiffany CD. I embedded a cardboard box with tissue paper and laid the pom-poms inside.

I unearthed the pom-poms two years later when my parents divorced and we left our home. I had partially forgotten my days of cheerleading but knew that I owed the old plastic bags a proper resting place. I dug a deep hole in our backyard and buried my pom-poms forever, turning the rocky earth with a shovel and wiping the sweat from my brow.

Lauren Shopp
Cedar Crest High School
Lebanon, PA
Mr. Shank

UNCLE RICHIE

Sitting at the hotel bar in London,
I ate peanuts as he drew sketches for me
on the wet bar napkins.
He told me stories about Vietnam and the green berets.

My father later told me that Uncle Richie never went to Vietnam,
that he had a weak heart and hint of crazy
but I already knew.
When he laughed his black mustache stood straight out,
his forehead shone,
his nostrils flared
and then he let loose a booming cackle,
so evil it made my arm hairs stand on end.

Perched on top of the bar stool next to his
like a cartoon villain's sidekick,
I gazed at him
as he held the charcoal pencil in my hand
and in a few moments
I had drawn the fat man at the end of the bar
who was falling asleep in his beer.

Less than a year later I sat alone
on the plastic covered couch in his living room.
I watched everyone eating the six-foot hero
and grabbing light beers out of the cooler in the backyard.
A car alarm blasted from the gas station on the corner of the block.
My thirty-year-old cousins were playing stickball in the street
and one of them had just hit a home run.
His wife was passing around a box of chocolates.
Everything left in the box was now half-eaten or had a finger hole in it.

Runny caramel and pink cream oozed
from the disfigured chocolates onto the sides of the box.
When she saw me, she put them down and told me to follow her.
I had never been upstairs in their house.
She dug in the closet as I waited, sliding on the waxy floral bedspread
that reminded me of the Holiday Inn.
Finally she emerged,
dropped several boxes of charcoals, pencils and notepads
on my lap and mumbled something
about how he would have wanted me to have them.

Katherine Bollbach
The Chapin School

New York, NY
Mr. Howard Schott

MY ISLAND

I am off-duty.

I walk gingerly up to the bow of the boat, hands down, fingertips up, ready to break a fall. Shielding my eyes from the sun with one hand, I look out over the harbor.

Nothing has changed. Good. That is how it should be.

Directly ahead is the island museum, a small, quiet building to overlook a small, quiet harbor. It houses a collection of dusty objects—wedding dresses, paintings, dolls—crammed together into a tiny room. I wonder if Lillian and Vivian are still there, keeping watch over the mish-mash of memories. Two elderly ladies with big smiles and a love of conversation, their story is unique: sisters from the mainland, they grew up to marry brothers from the island. Now they, like ninety percent of all the (forty) others who live permanently there, have the last name of Lunt. I smile to myself, thinking that the Lunts are like the Rockefellers or Kennedys of Frenchboro. Everything here is named after them, from the harbor to the deli.

The deli. I bring my binoculars to my eyes and strain to see closer. My stomach growls. I'm hungry after a full day's sail, and I remember how delicious the lobster is here. You can't get fresher lobster anywhere. Sometimes after we order, we have to wait for a lobster boat to come in with a fresh batch before we can be served. I could go for a nice, big two-pounder right now. But I'll have to wait until we moor.

Our boat turns in slow circles as we look for a mooring. If we don't find one, we'll have to anchor. We can't just turn around and sail back to the mainland—it's thirty miles away. Even the mail boat only makes the trip once a week.

I spot one in the distance with the appropriate black numbers written on the side. I turn to face my grandparents in the cockpit. Cupping my hands to shield my words from the wind, I yell at them. "There! Dead ahead! I think it's ours!"

As we get closer to land, I can smell the pine in the air. That green scent, so sharp yet soothing, is a smell that people sew into neat little pillows and sachets and sell at the tourist traps in Bar Harbor. But it can't be contained. A snapshot of a place isn't the same thing as being there, and smelling the Maine forest is not walking through it.

It sounds dull, I know. Like an activity you could do in your backyard. Why do you have to sail for eight hours to walk through the woods? But the forest on Frenchboro is different. It is absolutely silent except for the sound of waves, hushed in the background. No planes, no cars, no life—save a fawn or two. And because it is mostly only the natives who use the paths, signs and safety measures are scarce. Simply getting from one side to the other is a feat. I remember crawling on hands and knees over three tree trunks that formed a sort of primitive bridge over a deep gorge.

After a half-hour or so of tiptoeing through mud and over fallen, mossy logs, you hear the roar of the ocean become louder. You glimpse gray water through the heavy-hanging pine boughs. As the trees go scarcer and the path winds towards the sea, the dirt gives way to hard, smooth stones, some bigger than tabletops. Bleached shells of sea urchins are scattered like fragile skulls along the edge of the forest, rejected by sea gulls finished with their meat. Waves crash onto the shore, each whitecap's caress printing the pink granite a maroon blot. Out farther, in the heart of the ocean, lobster-buoys sprinkle the ocean like colorful confetti.

As we approach the bobbing mooring, I kneel in the bow. The sky is already beginning to turn a dusty pink. It will be dark by the time we return from our lobster dinner. The island is as magical at night as it is during the day. When we row in to go eat, shooting stars follow the swish of our oars. The harder I churn the water, the more it glitters with the phosphorescent creatures. The real stars are

just as beautiful and bright. Although it is an old and overused phrase, "diamonds in the black velvet sky" perfectly describes the night sky at Frenchboro. Before my first time here, I didn't think that stars really shimmered. But they do. They twinkle and glimmer like they're winking at the earth. Like they have secrets to keep.

"Mandy!" my grandmother calls. I shake the stars from my eyes, seeing again the bright clarity of the harbor. "Get the mooring!"

I crouch, ready, and stick out the hook. With one sharp movement, I scoop up the line, draw it onto the boat, and tie it fast to the cleat.

As I do so, I remember one more thing about Frenchboro. The one thing that keeps me from begging to stay here for the whole summer.

There are no showers.

Mandy Ruggeri
Middlebury, CT
Ms. Perreault

THIRTY SECONDS TO COMMERCIAL

I was watching CNN today
I saw I was the summer on fire
the coffee bar in Kiryat Chayim
charred black and sour
Like the espresso

On that cobblestone bridge
That was really a museum for someone or another
A soldier was attacked
The museum stood desecrated
Biologically, war is enough

My pockets rattle with shekels
Delicate guitar chords
but the strings break

I catch the smell of baking bread from an Arab market
I follow my nose to an older man selling bread
He grasps a loaf in finely wrinkled hands
"God told me you'd be coming today," he says
and he hands me the bread

People cower from stray bullets
In that sand dune I rolled down
carefree
Yesterday I was looking for change in my wallet
Sand fell out

I didn't bring anything back to my home
I only took away as much as I could
Should I feel guilty?

Charles Radin
Jamesville Dewitt High School
Dewitt, NY
Ms. Shelton

WRITING AGAIN

I didn't write for a week,
until I scrawled a grocery list
on a receipt last night,
and found my fingers
enveloped the pen as water would;
the paper thirsted for my words.

The list was thrown aside. Instead

I scribbled all that week had brought me:
how coffee-brown leaves tumbled
across the forest floor, rustling like pages turning;
how snow filled all the darkest corners with white;
how I could hear both
my brother's and father's breath
throughout the night;
there was always
one moment when they breathed together.

I felt as though I had been speaking
a foreign language for a week,
and only now let my tongue return home.
My pen captures the rhythm of my mind:
the skips up and down, the leaps from left to right.
Only to paper do I speak this language,
the only language in which my thoughts can sing.

Piper Wheeler
Natick, MA
Jessie Schell

UNTITLED

Science class that day was listening to our teacher tell us that we had raised the butterflies about to be freed, and should be proud to see them reach maturity. With imperfect articulation, I in turn told myself that I deserved no such credit, and that the only role any of us had played was witness to this momentous and independent creation of new life. Still, as we trudged outdoors in a line that would have been single file only a few months earlier, but that in the confidence of established second-almost-third graders in May, we had allowed to become an amorphous, diminutive mob, I resolved to feel appropriate, unmitigated exhilaration. This decision seemed especially prudent once I realized that many of my classmates appeared ready to assert their positions as naturalist prodigies, apparently suffering from a merciful delusion that could be considered tantamount to amnesia by the uninitiated.

Once the covering of the mesh sack that had contained the four butterflies was opened, we were all adequately pleased. We made what we considered to be poetic observations that they looked like fire and flowers and fireworks, though one obstinate detractor insisted on wondering what the good of seeing butterflies escape was when we ourselves were still compelled to remain in school, in a tone of voice sullenness that a remarkably prophetic seven-year-old would have recognized as precocity. And then, something unplanned happened. One of the butterflies, instead of quickly evaporating like the water that had served as the subject of our last experiment, gave a few unenthusiastic flaps and fell to the ground underneath the window of our class where it had been born. It too, then vanished; only this monarch went to the earth with indifference equal to the passion with which his contemporaries had become intangible parts of air. But it was May, and warm, and the rest of the school was still learning, so it was not fit that we should mourn or even give voice to the vague uneasiness lying palpably between our butterfly's fall and the ascension of the next. We were allowed to remain on the grass until the bell released us to our lives.

I then made sure that my class had safely dispersed before motioning a few friends aside, like a burglar unaware that his crimes, if they must be committed at all, were not fit for daylight. The four of us ran to the window.

"It's still alive!" The orange and black wings beat without knowing that by democratic vote the rest had already proclaimed them forever motionless.

"It's dying," said David. "You shouldn't have showed us, Carra."

"No, we can help it. It just has broken wings," said Rachel. This was the year for pacts and pinky swears, so we took a

solemn oath to tell no one about our plan to save our small friend. And even though I was wont to tell my parents everything, I kept this from them for some undefined reason that I told myself was noble. When I went to sleep that night, I did not invent stories about heroic times and people, but imagined the class thanking us for performing a surgeon's task as the beautiful creature left me under the windowsill.

For three days we held a vigil by the side of the butterfly that we now made ours. We decided that the only obstacle to the butterfly's survival was it being unable to forage for food. Since the butterfly had conveniently landed in a patch of grass, we reasonably surmised that this must be the appropriate source of nourishment for members of insect species, and further sage notions inspired us to spend all of recess poking sharp blades of grass into every pore of the butterfly's body, hoping that we would eventually find the mouth. Unacquainted with the ethical quandaries surrounding euthanasia, we unwittingly broke our improvised Hippocratic Oath and probably tormented the poor creature to a merciful end.

It was Dana who first noticed that the wings had stopped fanning our fingers, and now lay still. "It still looks so pretty," I protested, for hope's sake. The wings barely even moved with the wind, as if desperate to confirm its definite place in one world or the other. David solemnly pronounced the official doom: Dead.

I had always been sensitive and already possessed a fear of death beyond my years, but I didn't cry. We performed the burial with grim solemnity; this, too, was our task. For all I know, it could have still been living. None of us had attended a funeral, but we eulogized the butterfly with sincerity often left out of more eloquent affairs. Mostly, I talked about how brave it was to fight for so long, and how we were giving it possibly the best ceremonial rites of any of its species, a feeble compensation for its brief life. David mentioned heaven, but maybe there wasn't one for butterflies. We marked our involvement with a circle of stones, and unreasonably considered it a lasting memorial.

The next day, we visited the grave with dandelions to sacrifice, but the site had been desecrated. The butterfly had been dug out, and I almost cried for joy before I realized that no energy could have resurrected it; our dirt had ensured that. We quickly reburied it, only to find it in the same place the next day. Its means of flight from the grave were now decomposing, large holes tearing the creature's last claim to existence. It stayed dead this time.

Several years later, David and Dana admitted to having dug up the butterfly. And even from the space of time, my child's heart filled with impotent rage against liars, and death, and butterflies.

Carra Glatt
Livingston, NJ
Mrs. Glucksman

LAUGHTER

I am out of breath. I am running up the steps and I am tired. I am exhausted. Suddenly I see something out of the corner of my eye that invites me to slow and turn. Not that my beat-up burgundy station wagon is much of a sight. What is it doing here? I look at the top of the steps. I look back at the car. I walk back over to the car, slowly, and peer through the windows to see if this really is my car, though it doesn't seem as though it is within or even lingering just outside the realm of possibility. I am floored. Everything is gone, everything. I don't own a Tricky CD, though, and it's here for some reason, but all my CDs and tapes and even my sweater that was in the trunk are gone. But what is my car doing here? My fingers are pressed against the car window. Completely boggled, I begin up the stairs again, more slowly this time, almost suspicious, or maybe just scared. My keys are in my pocket, somehow, but my apartment is unlocked anyway. I am holding my breath. I am already wondering if I even own enough garbage bags to clean this place up. I remember the last time I was in here, but not clearly. The door feels cold on

my palm and I pause and tell myself to breathe deeply.

I woke up in a strange apartment, too tired to move. I didn't move, but I needed to get out. A feeling not unlike claustrophobia suddenly enveloped me. Everything was moving in on me and I didn't know where I was, I didn't know where I was—I jumped up. I ran around, not noticing the dark-haired slumbering body on the floor for more than a moment. When I found a door, I lunged for it, feeling its coolness on my palm. I knew that my car wouldn't be there when I got outside. I remembered. Vaguely. So I ran. I ran until I found a street sign that I recognized, until I found a bus that would take me in the general direction of my apartment. I sat on the bus and thought thickly about my apartment and all the things I would have to clean up, all the beer bottles and soda cans and the salsa that I knew had spilled in front of the TV. I could picture it. And I could imagine the smell, that sickly party smell. They weren't even my friends. My friends weren't like that, my friends weren't like that; I repeated it like a mantra. It accompanied me all the way home. I was out of breath. I was running up the steps and I was tired.

My eyes are closed when I first open the door. That's how nervous I am. I look inside. I freeze. The first thing I do after I close the door is sit down on the floor. For some reason it makes sense. My body aches and my mind begs me to let it rest. I look lazily around and lean back against my door. I close my eyes. I don't want to think about it. I have been trying to prepare myself for this moment all morning. Now everything is different. I am not awake enough to react to this. I am tired. I am tired. I am tired. My kitchen is clean. There are no bottles. No cans. No stain on my carpet. I stand up. My whole apartment shines, like no one has ever used it before, like there had been no midnight trauma here. I am scared.

I was screaming out of a car window into the night air. Yelling loud. It was my car. Whatever CD I was listening to ended. I stopped yelling.

"Let's put on some Tricky," said someone from the backseat. I looked over at the nervous-looking boy next to me in the driver's seat. He had long brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. I didn't know him. I may have actually, but I couldn't see too clearly. Things had stopped spinning now, but instead they were fuzzing. I wasn't really listening to the music, but I noticed it, and it was loud. It pulsed. I could feel my pulse. My head throbbed. My vision blurred and I couldn't see anything except a smudged raining spiral of dark colors. My stomach was trembling now and it turned and turned. I think I was rocking back and forth, but it didn't matter, and even if it did, I didn't have room in my body for it to matter. Every cell, every speck of attention was focused on one thing at that moment: the sick, quivering, painful and revolting sensation that beat through my stomach. I knew I was going to vomit. Through my smeared vision I could see the speckled yellow-white lights of a gas station. A thought, half-formed, echoed through my mind: bathroom...somehow I summoned my voice through whatever was rising slowly to my throat.

"Stop the car!" I said.

"What?" yelled the ponytailed boy who was driving my car. Driving my car...?

"Pull into the gas station!" I screamed, the pain dulling, the panic suddenly setting in on me. "Come on!" I jumped out and went over to the bathroom on the side of the gray cinder block building. I pulled open the heavy door and immediately vomited. There was a sick stinging sensation in my throat and the taste was awful. I cupped my hands under the cold tap water and lapped it up. It tasted like metal or blood or both. I filled my hands again and ran them over my face. The mirror was cloudy and the lighting was bad, but I could see that something was wrong. I traced my own image in the dirty mirror. *Who is that?* I looked vaguely sick, but I wasn't sure what was wrong with me. I kept on watching myself there in the mir-

ror, without a sense of time, or of anything else, really. I was more awake, but my thoughts wouldn't make themselves coherent. Party...strange people...lemonade...not my friends...lemonade...now I remembered. I suddenly became alert. I remembered the strange boy driving my car. Driving...my car? Mine? I ran outside and searched for my Volvo. Whatever it was that had made me sick was forgotten, because panic, like a timer about to go off, had taken over. I didn't see my car anywhere. I ran around every side of the building and still couldn't find it. I ran around again and again. I sat on the curb and waited. The light from the gas station looked like daylight, but there were stars flickering in the sky. I didn't look at them. I was watching the road, only dimly aware of those tiny pricks of light that spread themselves above me. Every car that went by gave me shivers and still, the lights raced past. There were no Volvos. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes, but I could feel myself becoming less panicky and more sad and confused. I began vaguely to realize that someone had stolen my car. It was hard to believe. I found myself repeating it in my head again and again, checking myself for a reaction. There was none. Next I tried telling myself that I had been left at a gas station, abandoned, betrayed. There was a faint reaction. I saw a couple kissing greedily by a payphone. I am stranded, I told myself again. There was a reaction this time. I took one last look around for my car, even asked people inside if they'd seen my lost Volvo. They said no. What did I expect? I went to a couple-free payphone and called a friend.

"Where are you?" Anne said, concerned. "Where can I pick you up?" I started to cry. I was scared, and I didn't know what was going on. So I cried.

"I don't know," I told her, choking and sniffing. "It's a gas station. It's a Texaco gas station with a Stop 'n' Go." I closed my eyes and found that it felt good to have them closed. They hurt.

"And...you're alone?" My friend sounded perplexed, but I could almost hear a touch of guilt. A murky thought waddled its way through my mind, then sorted itself out and threw itself away, understanding its own silliness. She couldn't have done this to me. That's ridiculous. What could she have done?

I nodded then realized that she couldn't see me. Feeling foolish, I hiccupped a yes.

"All—all right..." my friend said. "I think I know where that is. You're in Chapel Hill?"

"I think so," I told her. I was bawling and it was hard to get the words out. "Yeah, I think so."

"All right," she said calmly, as though it would rub off on me. "All right, I'll be there in ...fifteen minutes. Sit down and relax. I'll be there soon. Are you...all right?" she asked, carefully. She thought I'd been raped or something, I could tell. I was overreacting, and now I'd worried my friend.

"I'm fine. I really am. I...well, I only drank lemonade...I don't know. I'll explain. Just come and get me. I'm fine," I said. I felt guilty, and then merely exhausted; all the pain was gone, and it had left me with its shadow, confusion. What had happened? How had I gone from pouring salsa into little bowl to throwing up in a Texaco bathroom? How...how had I...there was little left in my mind and body but fatigue, bewilderment, and drooping eyelids. I fell asleep. I was on the curb. I should have gone inside or something, but I couldn't help it, there was nothing else I could do, and as far as I know, no harm came to me. I woke up in a strange apartment. It was not my own.

I feel more alert now. I walk to the fridge and investigate. There is no beer. No soda. But there is a pitcher of lemonade I made from frozen concentrate. I furrow my brow. I take it out, put it on the counter and look at it. I open it cautiously, as though I think it will explode. It doesn't explode. I sniff at it. It smells tangy and sweet and kind of like tap water. I dip my finger in to taste it and then think better of it and run my hands under the tap water. I look back at the pitcher as I dry my hands and decided to pour it down the drain. It's a pale translucent yellow. I feel foolish for getting rid

of it the moment I start.

The salsa jar was cold in my hand as I poured its contents into a small red bowl. I knew, somewhere in the back of my mind that it would spill, but I knew my friends. They couldn't get too rowdy. They wouldn't drink too much. Besides there were only a few coming. I pushed my fears aside and put the salsa on the counter. A few of my friends came in as I was mixing up the lemonade, Margaret, Anne, and a guy with long dark hair pulled into a ponytail. I said hi to my friends, gave a flat, stale smile, to the brown-haired stranger, and shot Anne a look—who is he?

"Oh, she said, "This is Daniel." Daniel nodded to me with a little smile. It wasn't the same how-nice-to-meet-you smile I gave him. It twisted up a little, or maybe it twisted down. I took little notice and excused myself as more friends came in. I was chatting with Anne for a while. She went to get a beer.

"You want one?" she asked.

"No," I said, "Could you get me a glass of lemonade?"

She laughed at me. "You really need to loosen up sometimes you know? I mean, one beer isn't gonna kill you," Anne said. She stared at me expectantly, then raised her eyebrows and laughed again. "All right, I'll get you some lemonade," she said as she turned and headed for the kitchen.

I stood around laughing and talking to a few people about music and classes. They drifted when Anne came back, Daniel at her side. He had an anxious expression and stopped her mid-stride, making urgent gestures, but she just winked and handed me my lemonade. She whispered at me as Daniel walked away.

"Megan's ex-boyfriend. He's kinda weird. Have you talked to



him yet?" I told her no. "You ought to," she said, nudging my side. I rolled my eyes. I sipped my lemonade.

Evelyn R. Shamsian

Great Neck North High School, Great Neck, NY

I'm sure if anyone really needed me to, I could remember the things that happened after that. But really, none of them matter except for a few: my head pounded. The room spun. Colors flashed like Cheshire grins through my apartment. Thinking just didn't happen. At one point, I found myself chugging beers while muffled voices yelled and cheered. The only sound clear to me was the constant invasive pulse and the swallowing sound from the beer. I couldn't tell you everything I did. I suppose it was all harmless. At any rate, it all comes down to this: I was screaming out of a car window into the night air. Yelling loud.

I rinse out the lemonade pitcher. It must have been Daniel. It was his smile, twisted like his mind must have been to do such a thing to someone he didn't know. It was his grin...and my friend's wink. My friend's wink...I don't know what it is, but something, some instinct tells my confused body to look out the window. There is a boy pulling up in a beat-up burgundy Volvo. His hair is long and brown, I notice, as he walks up the stairs to my apartment. I turn my attention back to myself and notice that my mouth is hanging open. I leave it there and run to the door, pulling it open to look at Daniel, whose face shows no sign of feeling. I am full of an emotion somewhere between anger and fear and need. I don't know what it is or why I am feeling it, but it is steaming and vibrating through me. I don't know what should be done with all this emotion and vapor, so Daniel does it for me. He hugs me tightly and securely and somewhere in my marrow I know that this is the right end to my ridiculous night. My brain would be telling me differently were it not for that emotional jumble which has momentarily put it on hold. Suddenly I come to my senses and pull away from this brown-eyed boy that I don't know, who, presumably, put some crazy drug in my lemonade last night, stole my car, and abandoned me, vomiting, in the middle of Chapel Hill, all of which has caused me a considerable amount of confusion. I punch him as hard as I can, but I miss. I am suddenly showering him with lame punches and he's pushing my arms gently away. I give up and he looks at me sadly.

"What are you punching me for?" he asks. "Don't you remember?" I look at him emptily. I remember lots of things, including vomiting in a gas station and chugging beer. What does he want me to remember? He sighs, like he already knows. "You wouldn't, would you? Not after she put that in your drink." She...? I have no time to react. He continues. Slowly I begin to understand. "I was driving you to the hospital to get your stomach pumped or...something. I didn't know what to do with you, you were flipping out. Crazy and drunk one minute, out cold the next. But then you jumped out at the gas station. I went to get you some water, I don't know, I thought it'd help. When I came out, the car was gone. I think she took it. I looked for you, but I—I didn't see you. Anywhere. And I felt so bad, I waited for you, but you never came. I asked a clerk if they'd seen you, but they said you'd never been there. I—I wasn't thinking straight. I left you. I'm so sorry." He pauses. He sounds honest, deflated. He sounds desperately sorry. I stand open-mouthed. He goes on. "So I got a friend to pick me up. I got back to your apartment. It was empty, you weren't there. I cleaned it all up, though. I—I guess you saw. When I got back to my apartment, your car was there, and Anne was inside, she'd put you in my bed. And then you were gone this morning...I'm sorry. I brought your car back. I guess that's mine over there...Jesus, we have the same car." He chuckles, I chuckle. Suddenly we're laughing, which is just what we should be doing, letting the short breaths explode to the sky, gasping for air and clasp our stomachs. The laughter stretches our muscles and our skin. We will never stop laughing.

Julia Sull
Carolina Friends School
Hillsborough, NC

MORNING

Always, in my father's house,
just as night drifted into day,
the coffee grinder's gravelly screech
crashed like a trapped sparrow,
bouncing off windows and walls,
careening about my bed.
It pulled me halfway
out of sleep,
far enough to crack my lids
and see the window—black as ink in winter;
in summer just fading to blue.
I'd slip back out of wakefulness
with granola rustling
from a paper bag, a spoon clinked
against a bowl,
the hum of BBC news turned low.

Here, I daily sleep through dawn,
stirring only when the dew
has already dried. But this morning
I awoke in darkness.
The clock glowed red: 4:30.
I knew at that moment,
my father, states away,
was just padding to the kitchen;
my brother, groaning and turning in his bed.

The room around me
is cold and silent as the stars.
Far away, my father rises to his ritual,
more consistent than the sun.
I lull myself to sleep
soothed with knowing that there,
his morning sounds and scents
are just sifting into the air.

Piper Wheeler
Natick, MA
Jessie Schell

THE CAFÉ LADY

Behind the counter
covered with baked goods
she stands, wearing
her cartouche, as always.
Inside its oblong frame
golden pictograms, birds,
small geometrical shapes,
merge to spell
her name.

I'd like to ask her:
is your necklace from Egypt?
Then, all that I remember
would fill the room:
scented spices
resting in soft dunes
in burlap bags,
the clatter of donkey-pulled carts,
sunlight hitting mud hut roofs,
all contained in that one word:
Egypt.

I miss
the dusty streets
of Khan al-Khalili,
that famous Cairo souk.
There, shopkeepers
offer sugary, cardamom tea,
in thimble-sized glassy cups,
to wide-eyed, pale-skinned
tourists.

There, water carriers
with their bulging sheepskin bags,
jangle bells, and the thirsty come,
dust rising as they scurry
through alleys on their embroidered,
calfskin slippers.

In jewelry stores on every corner,
chains hang, shimmering:
gold snakes, ready to glide into paper bags
for just a little baksheesh.
Signs in broken English read
"Kartoosh 4 you, in gold 4 you."

The café lady in Massachusetts
smiles and takes my dollar bill,
crisp, unlike Egyptian pounds,
grown soft from frequent handling,
during games of backgammon;
there, aging men speak of their daughters:
precious, fragile, fragrant
bougainvillea flowers.

Does the café lady ever think
of pharaohs, I wonder,
or sand, as fine as sugar?
Can she see how
her ranks of muffins
create her own
Khan al-Khalili?

Ancient letters
swing from her neck,
a message
from another place, another time;
a breath of desert wind
in the Massachusetts
winter.

Caitlin Clark
Framingham, MA
Jessie Schell

SLEEP

Where is sleep?
Maybe a tiny man sits in
the vent above my bed,
counting down seconds
on his fingers until the last light is out.
Perhaps sleep is a giant medieval club,
which crashes over my head.
It could even be the steady rhythm
of rain colliding with copper gutter.

And what of nights

that feel as though
dawn is a piece of fiction,
nights when we search for sleep:
in our slippers out on the front steps,
huddled under a blanket on the sofa,
peering inside the kettle on the stove,
or counting the space between seconds.
These nights are essential;
without them, how could we ever fully appreciate
opening one reluctant, pleased eye
to discover morning.

Georgia Lassner
Newton, MA
Jessie Schell

MY FATHER'S FISH

A yellow one streamed across the tank in a wave of flashy colors while his dorsal fin flew high in the water as if propelled by some invisible fan. My face pressed up against the glass of the tank, I puffed out my cheeks to mimic the motions of the guppies that swam by. Hyperventilating quicker than usual, I stepped away from the glass, and walking backwards, let myself graze the front of a washing machine. My hands running down the front of the powerful machine.

A two-year-old Whirlpool, she knew how to do her job well. Not only could she wash ordinary things such as a pair of grass-stained pants or an old T-shirt, but there was also a delicacies cycle for his new wife's lingerie, and another cycle for his filters. In one suave move I had scaled the washer, pushing it farther back beneath the overhang as I jumped on top. Looking down, I only saw the floor. There were no fish. But all of my other senses pointed to the fact that the fish were indeed there. The musty air filled my nostrils like the taste of someone you remember long after they are gone. My palms touched the wetness of a day's condensation on the washer's surface. My eyes rising rebelliously, glanced up at the tanks. Three rows filled the back and side walls. Each one had been carefully labeled with their date of birth, color, and type: Half-black Reds, German Snakeskins, Yellow females, and my father's favorite, Half-Black Pastels. No one medicated, fed, or touched the fish but him. When a fish had an uneven dorsal fin, he would meticulously remove it from the tank and even it out in one quick motion with a razor blade. Friends would come over and stand in front of the tanks, praising the superior qualities of the fish, commenting on the layout of the room, and marveling at my father's many attempts to breed a green guppy. My father's fish and his clothes were the only things he could control.

Sunlight streamed in the car windows. My elbow rested uncomfortably against the gray car door, my eyes staring intently through the glass window at the overhead wires we passed. My father sat, the steering wheel in one hand, his cell phone in the other, chatting away about endless clients and city projects. He conversed on how there wasn't enough money, or how so-and-so hadn't produced the proper documents in time. Much as my father was convinced that he was a serious and successful lawyer, things were always going wrong. The stockbroker was always his last call. Greg, the name my father always called people he didn't really know, would report on the Dow and the NASDAQ, and how my father's earnings were quickly being squandered.

A door slammed above me, my eyes rushed up, and I shifted on the washer. Now I was at my grandparent's house and it was my turn to serve dinner. I stood anxiously behind the shutter door, afraid that I would drop the tray. Images of myself with tomato sauce and manicotti spread all over me and the wooden floor invaded my mind. My father's voice wafted in from the dining room. They were waiting for me, and yet the conversation that I wasn't privy to continued. He didn't know what to do. "Should I tell her about it?" he kept saying. Everyone urged him to let go of his secret. It is becoming ridiculous.

they warned. The longer you wait, the harder it will be when the time comes. "Tell her now." "She must know..." "The marriage." "You must tell her." The voices grew faster and louder. Marriage. I shivered and reached forward to grasp the drapes, pulling them nearer to me. Musty yellow light streamed across my face. The sink squeaked under my weight as I stepped up. Clouds of dust filtered up to me, I coughed. Pulling open the window, I jumped.

Leaning against the washer, I hit a button and was suddenly reminded why I had come to the fish room. Turning, I programmed the washer and it began. The timer on the wall kicked in and the lights began to dim as a reminder to the fish that it would soon be time to sleep. Taking a hint from their cue, I too remained where I was and tried to fall back into a blissful sleep. Instead, an image of myself standing in my bathroom with a black portable phone was projected onto the back of my eyelids. My right foot straddled the toilet seat as my left leaned on the ledge of the bathtub. A pale and shaking right hand reached backwards to turn off the light. A voice spoke to me from the receiver, it was my father. But what was he saying? His words spewing forth in incomprehensible syllables. "It's not fair," he said finally making sense, "I don't get to see you enough. I should have priority; after all I am your father."

He was my father, the wonderful other half of my genetics, but he knew as much about me as any other stranger could gather in a glance on the street. My mother called him the sperm. The situation, him seeing me, was what he made it. It's what he made, he made it, it's what he made it! How hard is that to understand? Silence. The image that was myself whispered those words into the phone. My one statement of freedom had been made. He was baffled. I had come around and delivered what to him, was a full force slap in the face. "The situation is what I made it, eh? Tell me, what is that supposed to mean?" That he made the situation what it was. The fact that he didn't see me often resulted from his decisions. "Well," he ended, "I will defer this time, my daughter. But don't think it is because I do not want to see you, but it is not worth fighting with your mother. I'm sure that you will be very happy spending the day with your aunt and your grandmother. The happiness of four will be held above the happiness of one." Even when talking to me, his stiff and formal law English never subsided. When his voice was raised, I often felt like a small defendant he was looming over in court.

But my father was right. If he were to see me, it would only result in the happiness of one. I didn't want to see him; I still don't. He was eager for me to drive, believing that if I could that I would come around more often. I never bothered to correct his error, his disillusionment serving me well. Seeing him was not something I considered a joy; I considered it my duty. Every day he would call, his voice echoing on the answering machine as he recited the trademark line, "I just called to say I love you." My father, the great actor, daily showed his effervescence and belief in what he said. It was too bad that he just couldn't convince his audience.

The washer was shaking now. A new cycle had begun. The tiller pushed and pulled the clothes clean in an attempt to wash away everything that they had experienced that day. Ancient filters disintegrated and became clean beside months of laundry. As a child, my father had cultivated guppies everyday with his father on what he called "father/son bonding sessions." When he found all of his old tanks in my Grandmother's attic, he instantly thought that we too could achieve a similar sense of euphoria. The whole room, originally intended for me, had become his obsession. With guppy conventions and club meetings, it was his whole world.

The washer had stopped. Jumping down and opening the lid, I could see the clothes for what they really were. Wet, sopping pieces of cloth intended to cover up what was really there. Opening the door, I looked around the room and then back at the clothes. My father's fish and his clothes were the only things he could truly control.

Melissa Raimondi
Towson High School

Lutherville, MD
Mr. Matt Hohner

FORGIVENESS, 2001

this is years after her wigs,
after her hospital bed.
years after i had called
and you had hung up.

you've taken me to lunch
though i'm not hungry,
just nauseated by the raw sad taste
of my tongue.

it's years after
and here you are, ordering lentil soup,
thick indistinguishable mass
of bean, of vegetable, of broth.

thick in your spoon, you slurp it
down with your longing and the
things that you had been planning
to say.

but the soup settles and your composure wavers
and you say, almost smiling at her memory,
almost hoping it's true,
"wasn't she wonderful?"

—i gaze into the light
pushing through the
perfect ice squares
in my dark soda

and nod,
my words drowning in a wave of love

Catherine P. Cambria
Oak Knoll
Green Brook, NJ
Harriet Marcus

THURSDAYS

thursdays were sacred days
when grandma drove her white Cadillac
downtown and met me under the red and white canopy
outside Woolworth's after school.

when i saw her coming
i ran inside to save two red chairs
that pressed against the counter top.

and in my pocket
i pulled out a crumpled report card
from last semester and pressed it hard
on the table.

straight A's won first prize:
two grilled cheeses
with tall glasses of cold coca-cola
and chips for me, not for her.

we savored the days
when the fountain
still spilled out sweet soda,
and children

who paid five cents for a handful
of salt-water taffy
still lined the aisles with laughter.
and still i remember thursdays
when i can't find the Woolworth's
that saves our memories
in the foundation of a building
that burned long ago.

Larissa Curlik
Oak Knoll
Westfield, NJ
Harriet Marcus

NEVECA

night falls and scrapes her knees
drones softly between the paper wings of crickets:
I can't deny I love something of hers.
her eyes are jagged almonds I halve in my mouth.
wedges dig into my gums,
bleeding, swollen, impatient to grind the bitter nuts of her eyes
when they are open.
when she sleeps,
her green hull eyelids graciously turn me away,
shy and trying to filter her nitrobenzene from my lungs;
hers are irises that can only imitate oil,
incapable of distilling themselves in my presence.
a wakeful, shallow February pink
stirs early; bare flesh
braving the cold.
finally she is vulnerable; I will show her the incisions in my gums,
not for revenge, just so she knows the danger of fervent eyes
but when I open my mouth, she will close her eyes
and the pale tanned leaves will come soon enough,
and go just the same.
in September, the month of lifeless, unrecovered love,
of blue yellow skies and so much dust,
the whites will become elliptic again
and the almond blossoms will fall like snowflakes
to numb my burning tongue.

Katee DeCotiis
Oak Knoll
Morristown, NJ
Harriet Marcus

NAKED COLORADO

It seems I should do something beautiful with beauty
Because it's here
And I'm naked
Letting the sun burn that spot where leg meets body.
It's not often that I'm naked,
Or this kind of naked,
When I can't squelch my thoughts
like I can my screams
or as easily as I can flash a nothing smile.

I wish there was another layer
That I could take off and
Expose myself a little more,
Or a scab I could pick to bleed alongside the sun
Because
This world here has no space for me,
And I don't fit in,
So I can't resist wanting to sip the sky,
Ingest a corner of a cloud,

And steal a piece for myself.

I hold the novice tips of my thumbs up to the sun
To count the hours, I figure that it is
Just after 5
And I'm glad that it isn't an even number,
Because I'm crooked too,
Leaning against the moody curves of a boulder,
And letting it mold my spine.
But the sun is small
When I cover it with my palm,
Maybe on purpose,
So I feel bigger
And the trick works
And I am beautiful too

Because I'm wearing
Colorado's ball gown.

Megan Hellerer
The Chapin School
New York, NY

A STRANGE SORT OF LOVE POEM

My boyfriend loves to read
Russian literature.
Dostoevsky, Nabokov, Tolstoy
line his shelves like the grim
factory stacks of the U.S.S.R.
On the street walking, he will
look blankly out towards
the distance and look so
sad that I turn up the corners
of his mouth with a finger and end
wrapped in a kiss.
His nose is a piece of angular
flesh that slopes down straight
and soft to touch.
I watch him standing silent
when he isn't looking,
again and again his jaw
dropped, lips parted, breathing
so that I can almost
feel the air like hot vodka vapor.
He said that God is a goldfish,
so I painted for him the
bright yellow creature full of
acrylic chunks, swimming through a
canvas of blue patterns.
The awkwardness of his steps,
the right foot turned slightly
inward, gives his walk an almost
criminal sharpness.
On occasion he has been
known to argue both sides
of a debate while believing neither.
He condemned Plato's *Republic*
with me as fascism, though
he often likes to play Socrates.
In the museum we watched the
photographs of naked women transform
into landscapes and modern
buildings. We decided, looking at the
soft lines and the lush flesh curving
in and out like a watercolor,
the artist must have wanted to be a painter.
And I made him promise me then

that I could draw his overgrown
boy hands, so incongruous
with his man's face.
For Christmas he bought me a
fig tree, remembering my favorite
passage from *The Bell Jar*,
and I loved him for it even
though the plant will bear only
flowers, never fruit.
And as lightly as I put pencil to paper,
my stories and *his* stories becoming
our stories, the leaves
of my tree are as smooth as
the palm of a hand.

Sarah Hsu
The Chapin School
New York, NY

JACOB ALLAN IS A BIG FAT IDIOT

They call me Jacob Allan, but that's not my real name. Not that this means much. I'm just another kid. I go to school, but I don't really care much about it. I don't have any special talents. And when I say this, I sigh. Go to school, eat, sleep...you know what I'm saying? I try explaining this to people, but do they listen? Hell no. Nobody ever listens to me. Well, almost nobody, except for Randy, sitting next to me right now in the cafeteria. He's stabbing a slice of bread on his lunch tray with a fork, because that's the way he eats bread. The kid's a lunatic, no doubt. Randy jumps up after finally defeating his bread and devouring it with no mercy. The battle's over, and he looks happy. I follow him to our next class, knowing that I still have a long day ahead of me.

"Whadduyasaywegobacktoomyhouseafterschool?"

Randy talks in this rapid, slurred Boston accent, and he looks all scruffy and peculiar. He's a very bony kid. He has crazy black hair that's always sticking up, and his skin looks like it was plastered on at the last minute. Today he's wearing a black shirt, the one he's worn a million times. I can see how some people are freaked out by him, but I like the poor bastard. I think he's the man.

"What do you mean back to your house?" I say. "We were never there."

"Um...IhavenoideawhatI meant...butcanwe?"

And I have to laugh. "Sure we can, dude."

His parents are very whatever-comes-their-way types of people, so they don't really care who comes over, as long as they have some connection to Randy. But you won't see many people besides me around here with a connection to Randy anyway, so it's always me they're expecting to see. They are some of the nicest people on the planet, I say. If the world had more people like them, no one would have to worry about what to say in a conversation, or who, or who might not, do something mean to you, just for the hell of it.

Our school is the epitome of all public schools. The hallways smell of smoke and sweat, and the walls are painted an unwelcoming greenish-gray color. In general, the halls just tell you to keep moving, instead of welcoming you. You might picture posters and mottos glorifying education hung up everywhere, but this place doesn't even have those. It looks just bare and stripped down. Masses of kids flow through the hallways non-stop, like ants—very noisy ants, with dozens of different voices talking all at once. I'm heading to math class right now, and I gotta tell you, I'm getting suffocated by all the kids shoving around me, each and every one of them indifferent to each other.

"Having fun, Jacob?"

I look up from my worksheet to see my math teacher, Ms. Fastiosa, her gleefully sarcastic smile shoved into my face.

No, go away. Instead this comes out as "Yes, I am."

"Just remember those good old input and output numbers,

they'll save your life," she chirps. Actually, I'm glad she didn't sit down with me to go over the problem and make the class think less of me. Instead she just goes to her desk, puts on her weird reading glasses, and starts correcting last night's homework. What I really don't like about her is that she picks on me, just because I suck at math. She told me once that she's not trying to punish me; she's just trying to help me. But if she were really trying to help, she won't be saying it in front of the class. She just loves to watch me suffer.

One thing Randy and I like to do on afternoons is walk along the sidewalk by our school and look for these pages that always lie around there. We've discovered they're all part of a novel called *Man o' War*. We find them almost every day. It's like there's a book lying in a faraway land somewhere, and every day the wind blows a page away and scatters it around this spot. We seem to be the only people in town who actually notice this. We're like The Searchers. Of course, the novel doesn't come out in order. One day, we'll find page 34; the next, page 210. This might strike you as mysterious, but I don't think of it like that. Besides, I just have an interest in collecting anything that comes my way; it could be a part of a car engine, or strands of film roll, I don't really care. Randy's not really into it, but he comes along anyway. What a great kid. The book is actually pretty good. It's about a horse and how he gets bought and sold by different owners. Eventually, he becomes a racing horse champion, I think. Sounds corny, like *Black Beauty*, I know, but it's a lot better than that.

Randy and I are down there again, walking back from school. The scene matches my mood pretty well: bleak. There're no leaves on the trees anymore, and although there are masses of them on the ground, they're all crinkly and brown. And it's cold. I've never felt it get as cold as this in New England...but that's not really true. I feel this way every winter: bleak.

"Dyathinkthepageisunderalltheleaves?" Randy asks.

"I dunno, Randy, what do you think?"

Randy stares down at the leaves, looking dumbfounded.

Then he leans over and sticks his hand into the pile, as if it's a box of candy, and draws out today's page.

"Whoa, you're psychic," I say, and partially I mean it. Randy's predicted some crazy stuff before. I take the page from him and look for the page number. It just says: THE END.

"Whatdoyoumeantheend?" Randy says, echoing my thoughts.

I'm a little disappointed myself, but I'm still hopeful. "Don't worry, more of it'll come tomorrow." I start walking towards his house, the page crumpled in my hand. Randy's still standing there, contemplating our misfortune, but I know he'll catch up, eventually.

Later on this afternoon, Randy and I are bouncing around the town, mostly laughing at the dumb jokes we make, and talking about everything we see as we pass by. This town's a fairly small one, on the border between suburban development and rural small town. Randy's trying to figure out what the graffiti on the bridge says, when we get down there. To him, it's an artistic masterpiece, even though it's just meaningless words from a teenage low-life's head. There's also the old, broken-down town hall that I always see little kids playing around, and a sort of mini-dump right next to it; it was shut down five years ago, and is now basically a ghost dump. Overall, it's an okay town, there're actually some really cool parts to it. Some parts look like people stopped working on them halfway through, trying somehow to reconstruct the town into the way it looked in the 1800s. Other parts look like whoever worked on them was just plain lazy. But I like the town anyways. It's better than your average suburban development, which usually looks more like skeletons that people created out of boredom. This place actually has *character*. It's also pretty easy to get around in. The restaurants are right next to the restaurants, the library right next to the bookstores, the record stores right next to the performing arts center. It tells you how to get around in that way. You don't really have to know.

It's Friday and I've been sleepwalking through the entire day. I

didn't sleep that well at Randy's. Daniel Croon (I like to call him Daniel Boone) sits on a couch in the school lounge area, looking ridiculously proud, with Kimberly Camoia in his arms. Next to him is Joseph Ferrin, a new kid who hates me, I think. That's okay though, because I hate him too. Kimberly's legs are draped over Joseph's legs, and he looks absolutely fascinated with her huge black shoes, the kind all the girls wear. That's the thing about Joseph: if he ever gets any of the girl, it's just half of her.

"Oh, look, it's my favorite person," Daniel says, the second I enter. He and Joseph raise their obnoxious laughter so that the whole damn school can hear it. I lift my middle finger in their general direction. Not that this will shut them up. Daniel and Joseph aren't really friends, but when it comes to me, they behave like a perfect pair. Daniel does the talking and Joseph does the facial-hate language.

"What are you doing here kid?" Joseph sounds like he's pretending he has no idea who the hell I am. He's probably trying to.

"What does it look like, *kid*?" Witty comebacks are not my specialty.

He starts laughing quietly and then he and Daniel exchange looks and grin. I hate it when people do that. It makes me wanna knock them out.

"Hey Jacob," Daniel says, "Where's that kid you always hang out with? You know, Randy, that's his name."

"Why do you wanna know?"

"Maybe 'cause the kid's always around you? I figure you probably know where he is."

Daniel sounds like he's talking to someone from a foreign country, making fun of his poor command of English. In my mind, that's exactly what I am, of course. "He's sick," I say. "He had to stay home."

He just looks at me. He doesn't care about the answer; he never does. Joseph is staring at me also. He looks more like he won the lottery and I didn't.

"What time is it, Daniel Boone?" I ask, just to be annoying.

"You're not funny, and it's 10:26."

"It's 10:26, *kid*," Joseph says. He and Boone crack up. Then they start firing Simpsons jokes back and forth, as old as they've always been for the last thousand times.

"You know what it's also time for, man?" Daniel says. "It's time to get a life. Think about it: all you do is go around pissing people off, making dorky jokes, and hanging around with the same old loser everyday. You gotta try out new stuff, explore new horizons! And speaking of time, it's time to get some nicotine in my system." He looks at Kimberly who seems to have been asleep on his shoulder the whole time.

"Kim, be a good girl and go downtown for some cigarettes, okay?"

"Danny, I don't have any money," she whines.

"Don't worry, I'm loaded."

"Okay, I'll come with you."

Creep #2 is still sitting, completely silent. His black hair is an obnoxious mess of curls. His eyes are empty, staring at nothing, like he always is, even though his gaze is directed at my feet. Completely creepy. Luckily, I have class and can leave, but I hope his lifeless eyes won't follow me.

Sometimes it's hard to see corners and ends, but they're there. I know, because my life has been one long repetition of them. I've always been at the end of the line, whenever I had to be in one, like the lunch line or in fire drills. Whenever I turn on the radio, it always seems to be the end of the song. I was even born on December 31st, and I'm at the end of the family tree, because I'm the youngest in my entire extended family.

As for corners: I live on Corner Street. My desk has always been at the corner of the classroom. Whenever I go to a sports game or a concert, I always get put in the corner of the stadium. But the biggest corner I'll ever experience is the corner I've lived myself

into. I've trapped myself in a corner that keeps me from getting to know other people, or even myself for that matter. The trouble is, I didn't notice all this until about a year ago, and then it felt too late to fix. I do know Randy, and he's kind of my saving grace, but otherwise, I've been an idiot for not trying to get around more and meet more people, try to live myself out of my corner. What worries me is that I might live like this until the end of it all. That'll be the worst end I'll experience. But I'm still trying to get out; I'm hoping there's still some way I can.

My real name, by the way, is Jacobo Allanson. It's Italian. Everyone just started calling me Jacob because it's easier to pronounce. It's Italian. I would definitely say I'm more American than Italian and I would also definitely say that Jacob's an easier name to go by than Jacobo, but I still love the ring to that name.

Jacobo.

Jacobo.

Jacobo.

I could say it a million times and it still wouldn't lose that ring. As for my last name, people just shortened it to Allan. Who knows why.

I've always had the reputation of being a jerk. I've never *meant* to be one, with the exception of a couple of times in my life, and really, I try to be nice to people. I just seem to act like a retard spontaneously, I guess.

In second grade the word everyone used was "stupid." In third and fourth, it was "big fat idiot," in fifth, it was "dumbass," and in middle school, the words moved deeper into profanity. I guess I have done some stuff to deserve them; in second grade I accidentally hurt a kid, when we were swinging and I jumped off my swing and hurt him. For a while after that, nobody wanted to be around me when I was swinging. In sixth grade, I was reading a comic book in a drugstore and I got so into it that I walked out reading it; one of the guys working ran out and stopped me. After that, a rumor went around that I'd tried to shoplift.

I could make the *Guinness Book of World Records*; I'd hold the record for the person who's received the most insults in his lifetime. I don't mind it so much now. The words used to feel like a knife, but these days the knife has a blunt edge; it only pokes slightly these days without drawing blood. Still, I seem to have felt each thrust my entire life: the whole fourteen years.

Randy's house is a small, sheltered place that looks as if it fell from the sky. The walls are uneven and it looks like the planks were just flung together instead of being nailed together. Coming into his living room, I hear the drumming interlude to "St. Thomas" playing on his cheap CD player. A disorganized fire is burning in the fireplace, sending smoke wafting out into the room. "You feeling better?" I ask. "Mr. Devani said you went home sick."

But it's obvious he isn't. His hair is tousled, and his eyes are glazed over like he's stoned. Even worse, the left side of his face has a big, mean-looking cut. He looks like the son of Two-Face.

"What the hell happened?"

For a moment Randy is silent, trying to ignore me, but then he says, "Ohyoumeanthis?" and points at his cheek.

"I...fellover...nobigdeal."

"How'd you fall over?"

He turns to me and sighs. His face is turning bright red.

"Ok,lookJosephFerrinpushedmeokay? Itsnobigdeal."

"Why'd he do that?"

"I dunno, Jacob!" Randy sits down and buries his face in his hands. Then he starts to cry.

"Idunnowhat's...wrongwiththatkid...hereallyshovedmedude...hard..."

I feel like crying myself, with this sweet, innocent kid breaking down before my eyes. It kills me.

"Listen, Randy, it's okay. When did he do it?"

He says that it was after school that it happened. He had

been looking for me. He had seen Joseph walking around just outside school, and Joseph had started following him. Eventually he had run up to Randy and pushed him face down on the pavement and then hit his face with a metal ruler that he had been carrying around in his pocket. Randy said he had almost blacked out for a second and then sat up and saw that Joseph was running away. Then he had noticed that his cheek was bleeding.

"He pushed you?"

"Yes..."

I look at him all bent over, crying his head off. The kid can get emotional over some pretty petty stuff, but this is definitely not petty.

"Randy, hey Randy, stop crying. I know the kid's a moron, but I'll hold you down; I'm on your side man, it'll be okay."

I can see my Mom's car outside now, waiting to take me home. I need to go, but I know I should stay. Mom starts honking the horn, I know I've got no choice, I have to go.

"Randy, I have to go, but I'll see you tomorrow. Don't worry, it'll be okay I promise." At the door I call, "I'm sorry Randy," and with the door's creak and a groan, I'm gone. But it's so hard leaving him there by the fire, hands clenched together, tears falling, the fireplace smoke puffing around him.

There's someone like Joseph in every school. Someone who lives in his own horrible world, in his own horrible past. He may be an extremely smart kid but he's also totally screwed up. I heard that once he tried to strangle his sister and she had to call 911. And I heard this from Joseph, himself.

The kid's life might be hell, but it's *still* pretty damn hard to feel sorry for him. Maybe he's angry about stuff I don't know about, but even still, he doesn't have to take it out on me. He's a very strange sort of bully; he picks on people through facial expressions and through words. He's really paranoid too.

"Are you talking to me?" He'll ask to anybody who's trying to have a conversation. "Stop talking about me behind my back." The list goes on forever. And out of everybody he hates, which is just about everyone, he hates me the most, who knows why, but I always try to stay away from him.

Go away, get out of my life, I'd like to tell him right now. I bet that's exactly what Randy wants to say, as well:
Goawaygetoutofmylife.

But instead I can only live in my anger fantasies. I spend a lot of time staring at the ceiling, decorated with pasted stars and planets, as it's been since I was six. Sometimes I wish they were real; then there'd be no limit to how much I could see of the universe, so large and endless that I know it would help me somehow. Night skies always calm me down. Instead I always wake up from these daydreams back in my room, and planets are only plastic again, and there's Kurt Cobain sweating and playing his guitar on the wall right in front of me. My universe is a mess.

Creak.

The door opens and my mom comes in. She's wearing a red sweater that's too big for her; she's pretty short and also pretty skinny, so not much fits her just right. She's taking her glasses out of her pocket and putting them back on. Looking stressed out, like usual. Not abnormally stressed, just casually stressed. She's going back to college so she has a lot of work to do, and being a single mother...well, even I know how it would be difficult for her.

"Jacob, honey. Randy's mother just called and said Randy was really upset. She says that he has a cut on his face, because he tripped and fell on his way home but after you left he got really sad. She's worried something happened between you guys and I am too now.

"Nothing happened."

She raises both eyebrows. "Is that the truth?"

"Yes," I insist. I really don't have the energy for interrogation, but my mother always does.

"Please don't get mad at me, honey. I'm just trying to find out what's going on." She has a sympathetic but determined glare on her face. Looks like this might go on for a while.

"OK, I'm sorry. But I'm telling the truth."

"Alright, but she says he's seemed really sad lately, and she's wondering if it might be because of you." Her glasses look nailed on to her face. They always do when she's trying to drag the truth of something out of me.

"Well, it's not, Mom. Why's she blaming me?"

"She's not blaming you, Jacobo. She just knows you two are good friends, and she's concerned."

"Well, she's wrong, okay?"

She waits a moment, raises her eyebrows and sighs a better-luck-next-time sort of sigh. She lets the door hang open when she leaves. A moment later, her words start to echo in my mind, and I wonder if maybe it *is* my fault. But, no, I know whose fault it is. Hang in there, I tell myself and Randy, wishing he could hear me.

I've been watching out for Joseph all day. But of course, because I want to see him for a change today, he's completely invisible. I've seen Randy a whole lot since he's in most of my classes. There're black rings under his eyes and his hair is really messed up. He probably got no sleep and he's quiet, real quiet.

Later, when school's finally out, I'm sitting outside on a picnic bench, waiting for my mom's car to pull into the parking lot. I just wanna go home and get rid of all this stress that never seems to go away. I just want some sleep. A dozen people are gathered at the other end of the picnic table and in a few minutes the crowd will be reduced to two or three as the parents' cars line up in the parking lot. But now Joseph walks over here and joins the group. He seems to like his new CD player, which he flashes around for everybody to see. *What an idiot.*

Everything's the same old, same old. They're all into their latest fad: Magic Cards.

I want to say *I'll trade you a zygorth mana ten-predator thingamabobber for a magic dark who gives a damn?* But they wouldn't see the humor. The cards are just ridiculous pieces of plastic with terrible illustrations on them, but everybody's passing them back and forth like precious jewels. Joseph has his out now, naturally, and he's already deeply engaged in trading with Daniel, who (surprise) likes to remind everybody that *he* was the brilliant person who started the whole magic fad. Daniel's triumphant at the moment: not only does he have a huge display of cards in front of him but he's also wearing a *Magic: the Gathering* t-shirt with his usual cool Abercrombie and Fitch pants.

"Some of the rare cards are impossible to find," Daniel says, full of solemn authority.

"Yeah right," a few others agree.

"Well, that's probably because they're *Rare*" I say. A moment later, I realize I should've kept it to myself as usual, because everyone's staring at me.

"What?" Daniel says.

"...Because they're rare," I mumble.

"How would you know?" he sneers. Other voices overlap his and soon, right on cue, I'm hearing a rising chorus of disses.

"You don't know jack about what you're saying, Allan, you know that?"

"...You big fat idiot."

"Jacob, you're such a retard."

Dumbass.

Bastard.

And I'm feeling like crap again, for the seven-millionth time. Then Joseph cuts in, louder than anyone. He looks like he's about to crack up.

"Jacob, listen, I know you think you're cool and smart, but can't you even realize you don't know what you're talking about most of the time? You're... pathetic, all right? Why don't you just get outta here; no one wants you around."

His mouth curves into a little smile, a really creepy, mocking smile. And now I feel something inside me expanding, like an explosion. All the kid's voices that I just heard are ringing. "And Joseph's is the loudest."

I hear my voice say his name, really quiet, and then I'm suddenly up and at his end of the table, and my fist hits his face hard. Joseph lets out a small yell and falls over backwards to the ground.

The next moment, there I am over him, pummeling and cursing, again and again, years' worth of anger pouring out. He cowers on the ground crying. I don't care. For these strangely glorious moments, under all my frustration and misery, I feel good.

"Youokayman?" Randy's anxious voice bleats through the earpiece of the phone. Outside it's a perfect day. The sun is out in all its fall glory, or it was until I pulled down my bedroom shades. Everyone's at school, having a regular day, I'm lying in bed with the word *suspension* plastered in my mind.

"Not a good day, Randy, but I'm all right.

Actually, today is the worst day of my life. Yesterday, Joseph was sent to the ER with what turned out to be bruised ribs, a black eye, and a bloody nose, and I feel like Timothy McVeigh: now everyone has a real reason to hate me.

"Listen, Jacobdontgetsodown, nobody hates you."

Not only is he reading my mind, but he's also talking at normal human speed.

"You saying that just to cheer me up?"

"It's true." He goes on to tell me that everyone in the school seems to be on my side for a change.

"Tell them it's nothing to be proud of. I'm sure not."

"Don't worry man. I still think you're awesome."

"Randy, I don't think you get the sheer irony in this."

"What do you mean?"

What I mean is that Joseph seemed like the one who would commit a violent act such as this, and be suspended, and I was just an innocent good guy, and victim. But that's not the way it worked out. It was kind of the other way around. But I don't really wanna go into all that with Randy right now.

"Never mind. But thanks for thinking of me."

"Ohdontthankmeman. Thankyou." Embarrassed, Randy's back to warp speed again. The receiver clicks at the other end.

"You're welcome, Randy."

Last night I slept okay, for the first time in a week. The night after I exploded, there was no love in the world, only guilt and wretched memories. I kept trying to tell myself that what I'd done was just something that happens to lots of kids, when they lose it. So I got in a fight at school. Big deal.

But it was a big deal. It was a huge deal to me, for a few reasons: one, I never in my wildest dreams imagined that I would ever get in a school fight; I didn't think I was a mean enough person to do that.

It took me about a week to figure it out. I just felt really bad about myself for almost that whole week I was suspended, and for days I sat around being really frustrated and feeling bleak about the whole world and myself. Maybe I really was a big fat idiot, like they said. Maybe they were right to hate me. But I was hoping that I was something more than what they all said. And I spent almost that whole tormenting week trying to find out. Gradually, the answer came to me; I didn't know who I was. I guess I never have, either. I decided that I wasn't going to let whatever everyone thought get to me. They can think what they want, but it's who I think I am that counts. And I don't know who I am right now. I think that's the way I'd like to be, for a while; just not knowing who I am.

Now, I'm back at school. I didn't feel ready, but mom made me get up and go. She was really upset by all this, and I knew I'd put her through all sorts of extra hell. After we talked, she spent the whole week trying not to mention the fight, and talking about other things instead, like how nice a day it was or political issues. That made me feel even guiltier.

Ms. Fastiosa looked over my math papers in disgust today and sighed when I didn't seem to understand a problem she put on

the board. She's always gonna embarrass me in front of the class, and maybe I deserve it for not trying harder.

As for Randy, I keep telling him to stop thanking me. I don't deserve thanks. His mom finally found out about him and Joseph, and she even made cookies. I know I'll probably keep on being my usual self—it's hard for someone to change overnight. Maybe if I try to think about what I do, I'll stop being the way I am. Maybe someday, I'll even be completely different.

Randy and I found another page today, after school. This time the page was near the beginning of the book, page thirty-four. We always argue over who gets to keep it, but this time, he just handed the page over. It's just another one of his "thank yous," only now we're arguing who deserves it.

When I got home, I counted all the pages I had in my desk drawers—a lot of them, hundreds. And when I thought about how many pages Randy has, I bet if we put them together, we might even have the whole novel. That feels pretty terrific. It's also pretty strange that the last pages came right around now. Randy and I are still gonna walk up around there, in that place where all the pages landed, but right now, we're going down to my house, past the end of Louis Ave. and on to Corner Street, which doesn't feel so much like a corner anymore. It's just another street where people live, just another part of the puzzle.

Damon Griffin
Walnut Hill School
Natick, MA
Jessie Schell



Rachel Heller
Grade 12
Ms. Zilka

CHARLES DARWIN'S THEORY OF NATURAL SELECTION
FOR SAMUEL ALEXANDER, BORN 12/28/01

You, in a photograph
Across from us in Bio,

Avert your blackened
Eyes from a lecture on Genetics,

On to a single leaf,
Outside an open

Window, blowing from
The blackened branch

Of a gnarled
Oak, that shudders in the

Sneeze of solitary March and
Becomes to me a metaphor for

Grace.

Branden K. Jacobs-Jenkins
Washington, D.C.
Mr. Joseph Patterson

UNTITLED

childhood was a tenement
and I was a mistake
he was supposed to be sterile.
well that has to make you feel good.

she decided not to breastfeed me,
now I don't want to touch her.
I wouldn't remember
if she didn't keep telling the
same stories to other people
while I'm in the room.

in memory,
I'm sure
that it was a twitch
of lightning and thunder that
woke me
asking for her
in black tenement air
next to grandmother's crawling vein-vined skin.

there was the time
I was pulled from school
to move off of Elderidge Street
after he left a pot of something cooking,
went out,
and burned the place down.
She was very angry
before she took him back.
his sisters had kept calling about him
moping all over their apartments.

I must be overjoyed
she stayed with him for me.

in the tenth grade I took Health class
and told her I thought he'd been depressed
for the last twenty-five years.
she was passive
but the doctor agreed.
the Wellbutrin works sometimes;
it's been years since he would sit up against the wall

under the dining table.

a couple of years ago
while we were watching television
in the lukewarm living room,
I asked for a shrink—
nothing came of it.

Barbie Leung
Hunter College High School
Flushing, NY
Mr. Christopher Zegers

WHEN KELLY WAS BORN

That was the summer
I spent too much time
memorizing the patterns on the ground,
the speckles on my elevator.

I counted the shades of blue as we went down.
Mom told me how dad
was taking me to the hospital,
I'd stay with him a while.
I tried to keep my eyes down,
back to the speckles,
not wanting to see
how tightly her fists were clenched.

She passed him my stuff
over the hot concrete.
I thought she might throw my bike,
smash him with all that shiny metal
and purple training wheels.

The hospital floor was checkered black and white.
It was better than her soft cheeks,
than all that baby powder and fresh pink skin.
I wanted to squeeze her tiny body,
to cry, mouth open, the way she did,
but I wouldn't touch her,
wouldn't lift my eyes.
I knew that if I came too close
I'd make her real.

Kate Fletcher
Midwood High School
Brooklyn, NY
Rachel Axinn

GRANDMA

To get to the house, you must ascend eleven cold stone steps,
uniform to the other houses on the block. You must open the storm
door, and be careful not to fall over the edge of the top step, as the
door opens toward you. Usually adorned with a seasonal wreath, the
second door is black and white. It opens inwardly.

When you first step in, your nose is teased with something
cooking on the stove, and Grandma smiles warmly behind her bifo-
cals at the youngest child, and goes up the ranks until she greets her
daughter. The wooden floorboards creak beneath you as you walk
into the living room and see your Grandpa's empty blue chair. The
chair he sat in when he read you stories as you wondered about the
mole below his knee.

The living room is always inviting. The warm glow of a televi-
sion rests snugly among pictures of family. The cuckoo clock which
once had its chains tugged by Nana, Grandma's mother, has hung in
the same place for years. Leaning against the walls are the couches

protected by a piece of fabric, a tendency of old ladies, looking to preserve a souvenir of their life.

Immediately after walking through the living room, you enter into the dining room. The dining room is the home of two large hulks of antique furniture—the dining room table and the hutch. The oval table is where you and your family sit on special holidays that are hosted by Grandma. On ordinary days, you will find it cluttered with Grandma's broken dreams. The hutch runs perpendicular to the table, and is littered with ceramic plates decorated with cats and birds, fine chinaware, an antique bronze bust, and other pieces of yesteryear.

Turning left at the end of the dining room, you will be in the hallway. Across from the blue bathroom are the dancing ballerinas that Grandpa painted for Grandma when they were "courting." Although the paint-by-number is no masterpiece, you had always admired it, as it gazed back at you from its elaborate frame. Taking a few more steps, you will find the three bedrooms: Grandma's, Nana's and Uncle Chris's.

Grandma's bedroom is pink and abundant with flowers. The flowers are Grandma, a perfect façade for a tormented soul who screams in her sleep. On the dresser are two pictures—Grandpa as a seventeen-year-old who joined the Navy, and Grandma and Grandpa on their wedding day. Nana's bedroom is blue. Her dresser has been abducted by family photographs, but Grandma has since taken them down. Her rocking chair is parked next to her bed and in front of the TV where Nana herself used to root for the Mets. The window is also there. The window that Nana would look out of, at the birds and the garden. Before going to bed, Nana always said her rosary by the light of the touch lamp. Uncle Chris's bedroom is brown; it is the smallest of the bedrooms. The tiny mirror had been covered in photographs but now all you will find is a postcard from Niagara Falls. Behind his door is a poster of Sic Vicious getting high that reads "Drugs Kill." A poster now mildly ironic although Chris's body is not dead. On the closet door, there are pinned photographs and articles about the Sex Pistols and the Doors, and a signed photo of the Ramones in which you notice a grammatical error. This note, given to Chris while he was still in the coma, urges him to get better soon. Pictures and models of muscle cars can also be found in his room, and it's not unlikely for you to run into an incessantly sleeping Chris when he visits on the weekends.

Leaving the bedroom, and turning left at the end of the hall, you will enter the kitchen. You always check the cupboard for cookies and the refrigerator for Yoo-Hoos. After stepping out of the kitchen, you can always go to the basement if you have the urge to get reacquainted with the place you lived in for several months. The broken piano can always release a few notes if you bang on it long enough, and the cat can sometimes be found amid the antique junk.

When the dark basement depresses you, you will want to go back upstairs and look at yourself repeating in two directions between two mirrors right before the front door. You will glance at the horse sculpture that your Grandma has promised to give you, and then exit the house, leaving your Grandma alone with the fragments of her life.

Lisa Tagliaferri
Tappan Zee High School
Tappan, NY
Ms. Stevens

POPPIES

Maria discovered them first.
Behind the mountain
behind our house,
they came like a great orange rash.
From the rooftop my brother and I
agreed they were like the rust
that hovered in the air

to the south. We never saw
Maria's home. We came only as close
as the river. During the hot
days, people died crossing,
pulled under by the current.

She was up before anyone else,
her tangerine gloves waving
like someone drowning
in the melody of mariachi.
Her breath was flat and faintly
metallic: the scent of opium.
Drawn to the cracked beaches of earth,
they slept in shade until we picked them
for a table centerpiece. While sunshine
tweaked bloom and leather,
she fried onions until they caramelized.
Our dining table wood still smells of Maria
and our tears from the fumes.
The sting never burned her eyes.
And I wondered if she bled too.

The hot wind tugged like a fang in flesh
that summer when they first came to our side
of the mountain. Roots twisted in baked dirt,
waded in waves of heat. The air pinched
until everything cried, salt-licked and itching.
The beautiful ones die first,
she said, they give their life
and water to cacti. No longer
ripe, still they let themselves hang—stems
like needles in a dry vein. She wrung
out the linens in the morning and was gone
by night. Petals unfolded
in surrender to the winds. Soon they evaporated.
It took only five seasons.

Claire Tinguely
Milton, MA
Mr. Connolly

RAW MEAT

There is something about
raw meat
that bothers me;
it refuses

to be chewed.
I'm hungry
but afraid to cook
Lest I should burn the house down

I stand at the kitchen doorway
arms crossed
eyeing spatula

You walk around like
raw meat
I threaten
with butter and skillet.

Barbie Leung
Hunter College High School
Flushing, NY
Mr. Christopher Zegers

20TH ANNIVERSARY

SPECIAL EDITION

The Apprentice Writer Turns 20 A Susquehanna Student Looks Back by Jay Varner

Like so many young authors who submit to *The Apprentice Writer*, I first learned of its existence through my high school English teacher. One day in October during my senior year, Mrs. Richard handed me a flyer at the start of class. It was an advertisement for *The Apprentice Writer*, the top graced by the customary quill pen that has appeared on every cover of the magazine. She knew my interest in poetry and suspected I might be anxious to submit my work.

Indeed I was. Before even taking my schoolbooks from my backpack, I was staring intently at the computer screen, deliberating every comma and period of my poems. Homework meant nothing that night; I was a writer. Writers revise, writers stare at the screen until blood drips from their foreheads, and writers publish. For perhaps the first time in my life, I was taking my writing seriously.

On the bus ride to school the next morning I sat with a sheepish grin. At just seventeen I was already sending my work out to magazines. Within the next week I decided to not only send those poems to Susquehanna University, but also a college application.

My poems never made it inside *The Apprentice Writer*, though I was fortunate enough to be accepted into *The Writers' Institute* at Susquehanna the next fall. When I met Dr. Gary Fincke, director of *The Writers' Institute* and editor of *The Apprentice Writer*, he smiled and said that he remembered my poems.

For twenty years Dr. Fincke has been combing through submissions. In that time, *The Apprentice Writer* has showcased the best writing, photography, and art from secondary schools across the country.

What an impressive collection it has been. Currently some 5,000 submissions are delivered, many from the thirteen state area that the magazine is distributed to, some from even farther. Each fall 11,000 copies are mailed to over 3,600 secondary schools. The young writers

"IF *THE APPRENTICE WRITER* IS BEING PUBLISHED 10 YEARS FROM NOW, I TRUST THAT ANOTHER SURVEY LIKE I'VE JUST CONDUCTED WILL REPRODUCE ITSELF FOR WRITERS FROM THIS ISSUE AND THE SUBSEQUENT NINE."

--DR. GARY FINCKE, DIRECTOR OF SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY'S WRITERS' INSTITUTE, AND FOUNDER AND EDITOR OF *THE APPRENTICE WRITER*, FROM THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE IN 1992

featured in the magazine have an automatic readership larger than most writers ever will.

This past winter inquiries were sent out to some of the best writers from eighteen (the addresses for Volume 1 were lost) of the nineteen issues. As expected, for those that replied, their locations are scattered throughout the United States, from California to Texas, to Pennsylvania.

Since being published in the magazine, those writers have gone on to win prestigious awards like the Ruth Lilly National Poetry Fellowship and the Elias Lieberman Award from the National Poetry Society of America.

Many writers have attended esteemed universities like Harvard, Yale, Brown, Princeton, Columbia, Bryn Mawr, NYU, Virginia, Sarah Lawrence, and Susquehanna.

Their careers have been just as diverse. Nurses, biologists, engineers, architects, physicists, environmental educators, translators, actors, a feature film director, and, of course, writers, have had their creative work printed in *The Apprentice Writer*. Yet, in nearly all of the responses, their passion for the written word has not burnt out over time.

Twenty years is a long time for any periodical to last. Yet *The Apprentice Writer* has endured, filling a venue that only a handful of other publications acknowledge: the high school writer. The magazine lets their voices be heard. What distinct voices they are, each flavored and inspired with different heritages, families, friends, and experiences.

Most remarkable, *The Apprentice Writer* has encouraged thousands to flex their creative muscles. Every year, young authors just like I once was stuff a poem or story into an envelope and know that they are writers. Never mind that my work was never printed. For a brief moment the excitement for the written word radiated through me. *The Apprentice Writer* sparked that fire that burns within me still. But I am just one of thousands who have had the same experience.

THREE MEMORIES OF SUMMER

by Adita Gupta

Clarkstown High School North
New York City, NY
Volume 19

I remember visiting Suni, India when I was five, going to go see my grandparents. Other than their farm, all I remember is that miserable bridge, delicately spanning a drop that seemed so steep that it was immeasurable. The bridge swayed back and forth, like a giant elephant, nodding its head in submission. A thread of river wound through the cleft in the ground, a vicious serpent that had already swallowed two foolish boys. I heard my uncle speak about them as if they were from some land far away, something that he could not regret to mourn, two thoughtless boys who had tried to travel that river on a raft.

* * *

I remember visiting Kasauli, India five years ago. It felt so different, having lived there and coming back. The mountains had gotten bigger, the trees were no longer simple the background of my childhood memories, and the town – village – clusters of scattered houses – I don't know what to call it anymore, had shrunk. The marketplace had shriveled up and dried into a tiny little winding road and hunched buildings.

The mountains, tall, pine covered, and solitary gave me a feeling of being free. It was as if the world were mine alone, because there was no else. World domination by default. The houses, so far part, seemed abandoned and empty. And I was the only one left, the clouds were climbing down, slowly making the ground into a misty blur, erasing the scar of the road on the mountain side. The full moon rose in a sky undisturbed by lights, glinting through a fishnet of trees, a gold coin – yellow orange, India gold, 22 karats that asked to be picked out of the sky and into a pocket.

* * *

And this summer, I was a gardener at the Historical Society of Rockland. I remember a sudden thunderstorm that broke from nowhere. My floppy star hat that had been keeping out the sun, turned into an unlikely umbrella. Rain streamed warm and alive down my arms, my back, finding me, redefining me in a world of water and gasps of air. In a flurry of lettuce seed we scurried, dirt and little brown flecks of seeds sticking to wet fingers. Sunscreen streaks melted down Julie's shoulders and we laughed, hastily sheltering bags and CDs and notebooks under the awning of the museum. We squished barefoot through mud, playing in the rain and it felt like a memory that should have belonged to me at five years old.

ADITI GUPTA WILL BEGIN HER FRESHMAN YEAR OF COLLEGE IN FALL OF 2002 AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY.

IN SLEEP

by Alexander Dworkowitz

The Calhoun School
New York City, NY

Volume 14

In sleep's charade are two moments wanting
As curtain rises anxious eyes to fallen cause,
It mirrored later by alarm's applause,
To each the task to do does loom daunting.
Yet moment third abides between these two;
Existence refuting small nature's aim
Like headlights amidst dark and within rain.
And sleep surrounds, but sure as island it is true!
Then: difference not tween animal and man.
Philosophies, noticing, worries, gone.
To breathe, to move, to close the eyes, to don
The cloak of warmth.
But awake, then sights so simple seen are
Poured with meaning; happiness is the dream.

SINCE BEING PUBLISHED IN AW, ALEXANDER DWORKOWITZ GRADUATED FROM YALE UNIVERSITY WITH A B.A. IN HISTORY AND IS CURRENTLY WORKING FOR TIMESLEDGER NEWSPAPERS, COVERING FLUSHING, QUEENS FOR A SERIES OF WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS.

SCENES FROM A PIANO

by Andrea Walker

Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Chambersburg, PA
Volume 16

"Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me."

D. H. Lawrence

"Das Dunklen war wie Reichtum in dem Raume."

R. M. Rilke

Consider the idea that poems, like developments in science, are not the flaring up of individual genius but originate in the accumulated energy of the poems that precede them. So that is not surprising that a man in Germany and a man in England

write the same way about their childhood: boys on piano benches beside their mothers, a glass shaking in the cupboard, the room heavy with the darkness of winter nights in country houses. Reading these poems make it possible for me to tell you how

my mother and brother played duets on evenings when blackness blizzarded our windows and only firelight illuminated our faces. My mother's hands are his hands as a boy; they stroke keys like the hair of the lovers he doesn't know yet.

My mother's fingers are skaters on the icebound canals of Amsterdam, a day when the sun set like a bonfire across her cold cheeks. I am only an onlooker, and yet all the years of my life gather for this moment, when the poems I have read

become the poem that I write, deciphering the memory of music, and a childhood apprehension of mysteries for which I had no name.

ANDREA WALKER IS CURRENTLY STUDYING TO GET A DOCTORATE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.

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WOMAN STUNG TO DEATH BY BEES

by Bonnie Minick

Voorhees High School
 Glen Gardner, NJ
 Volume 12

This was no accident. The bees were attracted to the brightness of her eyes that day, or maybe it was the smell of lilac on her wrists,

a perfume given to her by her new lover, and yes, some yellow jackets sting repeatedly. Repeatedly, as in the number of times we can hurt each other

or the number of times we do not say we are sorry. The smell of dandelions is the smell of my childhood: barefoot, I followed the boys around the lawn

with their bug catchers and magnifying glasses. I watched them try to refract light into the glass so that the caterpillars that twisted

under their fingers could catch fire. Maybe I wanted them to burn a slow death, too, maybe I wanted this because I wanted to know what it was like

to be a boy. But now I know: the smell of dandelions is the smell of someone else's death.

The clothes she was going to hang on the line were left damp in the clothesbasket. When they found her the clothes were wrinkled

like soft still hands. Wrinkled, with the caterpillars left in the sun. I remember how I wanted to touch them, to let them go.

IN 1998 BONNIE MINICK GRADUATED FROM WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY WITH A B.A. IN LITERATURE. SHE CONTINUED PURSUING HER PASSION FOR WRITING AND GRADUATED FROM THE M.F.A. PROGRAM AT WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY. SHE CURRENTLY TEACHES ENGLISH AT A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

OUR MONKEES, OURSELVES

by Rachel Carpenter

Philadelphia, PA
 Volume 9

Davy

If you like Davy Jones you're likely to marry for looks, and, to a lesser degree, money. Short men do not bother you. You have a weak spot for accents. In high school you wanted to be on the cheerleading squad, even if your school didn't have one. Often you are an under-achiever who gets your sense of identity and self-esteem from your husband, children, and house. If you're smart you either don't realize it or try to hide it. As a prepubescent you went through the standard horse phase—Davy Jones was a jockey, so that would make some amount of sense. Perhaps. It's also likely that you lead a small game that tormented the quiet girls who liked Peter Tork. *Look at her shoes*, you whispered loudly to each other, *Look at that HAT*. In general you did not like hats, but you forgave Davy the cap he wore during the closing credits. Basically what I am saying here is that you were a fascist. You have probably grown out of this phase, or think that you have, but

whenever the radio plays "Daydream Believer," you regress.

Peter

If you liked Peter Tork - or even if you only pretended to like him because you felt sorry for him - you were timid and fearful. Though you could only see yourself as the quiet girl who steals the heart of the quiet boy, the other three Monkees played no small part in any fantasy of being Peter's girl: You hung out with Peter, but the other three were always there. In fact, one or more of them grew to secretly love you, and this was a dilemma that could only be resolved in tears and a treacly slow song. *I love her, man*, Mike, Davy or Micky would say while Peter and you were off in your montage, *I can't BELIEVE she's dating Peter, he's such a dork. God, she's beautiful. And such a great dresser*. When you (and Peter) entered the room, conversation would abruptly cease. You would know that something was up but pretend not to have a clue; you would just stand there and be beautiful. Women were trained to do this then, especially those who lived on television.

You could never believe a real Monkee would like you, were he to appear mysteriously at your school one day, as Davy did on his guest appearance on the Brady Bunch. A real Monkee in your school would only ask you where the men's room was, or where he could find his correspondent, Marcia Brady. Peter is the plain boy who stays with his first girlfriend for years even though he's miserable, because he knows he'll never fool anyone else. He is the nerdy mascot of the cool group in high school; he sits in the back seat of the convertible while Davy drives waving to the girls and setting their hearts aflutter. Aflutter is the only word for it.

For Davy, behind the wheel, speed is everything, he has to win the race. Micky or Mike, taking turns in the passenger seat, fiddle with the radio, wonder what they are doing with their lives, and not everything ironically. Peter is happy just to be in the car. You hate Peter.

Mike

You have never really gotten over Michael Nesmith. In the sixth grade, you would have run off with him, but unfortunately the space-time continuum was against you. *How can you like MIKE?* the Davy girls asked you in the slow moments of health class, pausing in their latest enumeration of the dreamy qualities of Davy Jones. You never dignified their question with an answer.

You are sensitive but judgmental, with unplumbed depths and a wide range of interests. Like Mike, you are difficult to categorize: part nerd, part grouch, part hippie. You are very engaged in the present, and wear hardly any makeup. You will never marry just for looks or money or both; you will not marry out of pity. After one or two early boyfriends, you know to stay away from chemically dependent men.

You enjoy traveling, though you do not talk about it much, unlike the Micky girls, who, when they indulged in fantasies of dating Micky, imagined going to India with him, Donovan, several Beatles, and the

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Maharishi Yogi, who would fondle them and make them famous. Mike girls are more likely to actually travel, not just talk about it. If you go through a religious or spiritual phase, you don't advertise the fact. All of this makes sense because, after all, Mike was the practical, talented, proactive Monkee, with a family history of talent and proactivity. His mother invented Liquid Paper. He made films after the series ended, he wrote "Different Drum" and Linda Ronstadt recorded it. You excel at handicrafts, and your friendship bracelets are widely admired.

Micky

You experimented with drugs and perms at a dangerously young age. Though you were probably seriously depressed for a few years in your adolescence, eventually you got over it and put away all your Leonard Cohen albums. You wore beads around your neck and ankles; you thought about getting tattooed and may have even gone through with it; you looked old for your age when you were young, but as you grow older you look young for it. This pleases you.

In junior high, you were nicer than the Davy girls, though that's not saying much. By high school it was clear that you didn't care much about who was in and who was out; you were just passing through on your way to better, more exciting things. You only dated older men whom you met at your after-school job. You were seen in the hallways, but you were not really there, then, in several senses. Most likely you had just gotten stoned.

Mature for your age, you didn't spend too much time imagining yourself transported into a fictional world of an earlier decade, there to bat your eyes and flip your hair coquettishly at Monkees—which is not to say that you didn't, just that you did so in moderation. Early on, your loyalties were divided between Micky Dolenz and John Lennon. You did not fear real men, and aside from Micky, men who were contractually required to dress in funky clothes did not impress you.

You were the first to realize that the Monkees were not a real band. "Well, so what?" a Peter girl verging on hysteria would finally shriek at five a.m., her face rabid with slumber party indignation, "I LIKE their music!" Near dawn, yawning, you would whisper to another Micky girl, or perhaps a Mike girl, "I like them all but Davy — he's so...scrawny." You were also the first to lose your virginity.

It is sad, but chances are that you've become lost in academia, after almost a decade of graduate school in anthropology, sociology, or cultural history, and that you will spend the rest of your life researching but never actually writing your dissertation.

Each fall, you teach introductory classes in your subject area to inattentive freshman, some of whom dress in striped shirts and purple pants and wide belts, as if to mock your youthful self. Was it all the acid/pot/speed/all of the above I took in high school? you sometimes wonder, late at night, staring at the enormous pile of color-coordinated index cards in front of you. Life is not what any of us thought it would be. We have to get over it.

A FREELANCE COPYEDITOR AND WRITING, RACHEL CARPENTER CURRENTLY RESIDES IN NEW YORK CITY. AFTER ATTENDING JOHNS HOPKINS TO MAJOR IN WRITING, SHE EARNED AN M.F.A. IN FICTION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND. HER WORK HAS APPEARED IN ALASKA QUARTERLY REVIEW, CONFRONTATION, AND THE ONLINE VERSIONS OF THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY AND MCSWEENEYS.

I SEE YOU STILL

by Maria Dizzia

Kent Place School
Crenford, NJ
Volume 11

In robes and bright lights, the best shade of blonde hair
in florals and taloned
You are standing, sitting
walking to meet me, turning away.

Last night my parents died, unseen.

First one
then the other,
but not both at once.

Then you appeared—
wise and consoling
your hand was warm

Everything is you—big sky when it's blue
and pink or
sprayed black with flocks of starlings
unimaginable starlings
that would make you laugh and you could sound like them:
loud
owning everything
you could eat up the sky like their silhouettes
add menace to empty trees and wink
command rooftops and wires
make everything what it is not and is, of course, then disappear
quick:
give back the sky, roof and trees
Your warm hand patting ruffled feathers back in place
You know how to live
in both worlds
and smile and
sleep

The sky is too vibrant, the ground too fertile.
Sometimes you close your eyes in my thoughts
but you're thinking

still

MARIA DIZZIA GRADUATED FROM CORNELL UNIVERSITY WITH A THEATRE MAJOR AND ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-SAN DIEGO TO EARN AN M.F.A. IN ACTING.

ANWR, AT WHAT COST?

by Johanna Greenberg

Colonia, NJ
Volume 13

Who does the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge belong to? This region of the Arctic Circle sweeping toward the North Pole, which our nation has deemed a wildlife refuge, seems self defined. This space

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belongs to living things neither human nor domesticated—birds, insects, mammals, fish. I am not sure how the definition of this place became confused with the ownership, the who gets what and for how much. The question should be, at what cost?

I have a picture in my mind of the shelter from danger in the Refuge as a wide sweep of green in the summertime, lush, wind driven, and teeming with activity. I see the Porcupine heard of Caribou spread across the land in a blanket of russet. This is what they own—a promise of space without the luxury of time. The summer season passes quickly and moves from bud and blossom to brown and brittle in a short stretch of long days.

In winter, I see moonlight reflecting off of ice. In the distance I see a single Polar Bear. She is enormous, lumbering beneath her protective layer of fat, yet agile and graceful upon the frozen landscape. She exists only here, at the edge of the earth. I see the Polar Bear as the lone shape which fills the frozen expanse, a long shadow cast by the dim light of deep winter. Her refuge, her only recourse in the face of the weather which pummels this land, is the vastness of the place.

Mosquitoes, small singing sentinels from the insect world, an essential link in the Arctic chain of life. Protein. Short lived in large numbers, Mosquitoes thrive almost solely in the wet expanse of Muskeg here. Mosquitoes live in the component of this ecosystem most immediately changed by development. Water.

What will be displaced if we drill for petroleum here? Caribou, Polar Bears, Mosquitoes, along with hundreds of other animal and plant species which live here. We will destroy their home. It is not a battle with the elements of the Arctic which endangers them, but human intrusion. In Alaska, in the Arctic, ice meets soil and bends and changes the landscape in a delicate turn of seasons while the wildlife skate upon the edges. Thin ice becomes thinner when development comes unnaturally to a place which has changed so slowly. Wilderness suffers and wildlife is extinguished. We know this place does not belong to us. We know the cost is too high.

LIVING IN SOUTHWEST COLORADO AS A FREELANCE WRITER, JOHANNA GREENBERG GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON WITH A MAJOR IN CREATIVE WRITING AND A MINOR IN FORESTRY.

EXCERPT FROM UNTIL OCTOBER

by Jen Hawbaker

Chambersburg Area Senior High School
Chambersburg, PA
Volume 18

I was in this off-campus frat house, listening to the live band play a cover of Phish's *First Tube* while I danced and rubbed against my boyfriend; two things I can do in the same fluid motion. It was only 11:30 and most college students were out and about, but it was also a Saturday night. Tomorrow was Sunday. Tomorrow was the Sabbath. And I knew my friends back home were praying before they went to sleep, asking God to take control and show them the way, asking Jesus to help them be who he wants them to be. Some of them might

have even set their alarms to go off at 6:00 a.m. so they could get up and have some time for praise and worship. Just because it's Sunday doesn't mean you stop getting up early to put in that extra hour for the Prince of Princes. I didn't even know if I'd be in bed by 6 in the morning.

"The next one is John 6:53," my Sunday school teachers, husband and wife, at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran church would say. My teachers in second grade were the only ones I remember. I think it's because they were nice people, and my sister babysat their two kids in the summer. My friend Matt, the only other kid my age who regularly came to Trinity, and I both flipped open our Good News Bibles, given to us by the church, to the table of contents to look for John. We always had to start there because we didn't know the books of the Bible. No one had made us memorize them like they had our parents and grandparents who recited them with a song and smiled. We would raise our hand when we found the verse.

"You both found it in under 30 seconds. That's a home run for each." Then a homerun would be added beneath our names on the chalkboard.

In fourth grade you got to be trained to take communion. In fifth grade you could be trained as an acolyte. As acolyte, you'd take communion behind the altar with the Pastor, the Reader, and the other person helping with the service. The pastor would break bread for everyone, and then he'd pass around a big chalice of wine for us to share. The acolyte was the last one to be served, and I always hoped no one had back washed in the wine. Then it was the acolyte's job to collect the communion cups from everyone when they were done. The people, kneeling, would always hold the cup up by its bottom so you'd have to take it from them by grabbing the top. The cup tops were always sticky.

Defiance of religion is in my blood. My paternal side of the family is Old Order River Brethren.

"Family reunions on the Hawbaker side are fun," I always tell people. It seems to happen a lot because when I meet people from out of state the first thing they ask is if I'm Amish. They laugh then and I tell them I almost could be. "They don't believe in deodorant so we hold reunions in an air-conditioned Ruritan building or outside in a breezy pavilion. But the food is great. But it bothers me that all the females aren't allowed to wear pants." Most people don't know how to respond.

My dad doesn't believe in Christianity at all. I don't know what he believes but I know he never goes to church. He did once and I sat with him near the back. He tried to sing along with the hymns and it was awful; he couldn't match a pitch.

The first time I ever hung out with Joe, he told me about his strong beliefs in Jesus Christ. He also told me how religion was stupid. Religion was man and not God. It made sense and he was cute, so the next Sunday I went with him to church.

When Joe picked me up he asked, "Where's your Bible?"

"Why would I need a Bible? We're going to church."

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Joe's church, World Harvest Outreach, was a non-denominational church that danced and sang like we were at a concert. At Trinity I felt disruptive if I coughed during the service. It was fun and aerobic so I took to it quickly. I learned all the fundamentalist jargon. The songs we sang were songs of praise and worship. We were supposed to sing them whenever we felt in the Spirit; whenever we felt in direct communion with God. The small Bible study groups we held at people's homes on Wednesday nights were Home Groups. The pastor, who looked like a talk show host with his shiny black hair and gray wisps on the sides, was an Elder. So was his stylish wife. The young couple who I babysat for a few times, the Durniaks, were the associate elders. The man who led my Home Group was my touch pastor. If I had a problem I was supposed to go to my touch pastor who would then seek advice from the associate elder and from there to the Elder. There was a strict chain of command, but it was because nothing went up a level unless the two people involved couldn't get it to God themselves.

We didn't use hymnals or anything else. Just overhead projectors and transparent sheets. Mark Durniak was also the leader of the Worship team. They were the ones who stood on the stage and sang, played guitars, drums. Mark was the one who told us what to do if he felt Jesus was telling him so. He was the one who told us when he felt the Spirit so close that we had to speak in tongues. It should come upon us because Jesus was there. So I opened my mouth and it just came. But softly.

There was no set format for the service. It started at ten and at times would last till after one. We worshiped for at least over an hour and then we did whatever Jesus told the Elders we should while they were in the Spirit during worship. I loved the whole idea of it all.

"I feel so awful Jen," my friend Rosie Lidard said to me one night after a special home group for youth at her house one night. Her stepfather gave sermons occasionally at church. Her mom also went to WHO, but Rosie was the first one to find salvation and take her parents there. "I know I need to take my medicine and I do." Rosie has a tumor in her brain right behind her eyes. They can't operate. Not many people know this but I do. The tumor pushes on her pituitary gland and causes her to lactate. I always seem to be the one my girlfriends talk to about female problems. "But I was told twice that I was healed." She couldn't even look me in the eyes when the tears started. We were sitting, Indian style, on one of the Victorian couches in her living room. Wilmer, the youth pastor, had just been telling us how to test and make sure we were faithful.

"Get up an hour earlier every morning. That's nothing compared to what He's done for you," Wilmer had said.

"So if I really believe I'll stop taking it, but if I don't then I might die." She put her hands over her face. "I don't know what to do." I did. I hugged her.

For two years, WHO met in the auditorium of the middle school where my mother taught. She heard stories during that time about what we both deemed the scary group that met there. My mother

doesn't like out of the norm religions. A bunch of her relatives live on welfare because as Jehovah's Witnesses they gave away all their possessions when the world was going to end some time in the late 80's.

"I have to work so my aunt can decide which housing project has better cable so she can move to that one," my mom says sometimes.

By the time I started attending WHO, there were only two months left till they moved into their new facility. Pastor Gene owned a large company that made El Dorado stone. It's this fake stone you can put on your house for decoration. His company is the world's largest producer of this fabricated stone and lots of money from the business gets funneled into the church. A huge warehouse was bought and redone on the inside. To go in it now, you would never think it was a warehouse from the inside. I helped paint and set the place up. I felt like I was in a family, helping to paint pipes to run the audio cords through and picking up trash the construction workers left behind. It was fun. Everything about church was now fun.

My touch pastor was Tommy Strawbridge. He drove an hour to WHO twice a week. He used to be one of the biggest drug dealers in Harrisburg and was now saved and knew Jesus with his heart. The church was comprised of mostly white people, many of them young couples from the strict sects of Christianity in the area such as Old Order Mennonite or Brethren, and this loud black man made an impact. He taught me how to aim for God's plan. I'd do this by hearing God talk to me. Part of our worship in Home Group was to meditate and listen for God as we got into the Spirit. The lady who frequently stood next to me in her "Jesus is Lord" sweatshirt always squirmed and made me lose my concentration. But with Tommy's rhythmic saying of "Thank ya Jesus. Thank ya Jesus. Thank ya Jesus. Yes Lord, thank ya Jesus," I could usually get to a deep place where I felt peaceful. It also helped when we recited over and over again a verse to a song such as;

Jesus, Conqueror
Mighty God, Prince of Peace.
Master, My lover
Who can compare with you.
Lord I stand in awe of you
There's no words that describe
All I want to do is worship you
Let me come to you.

Before I left in the summer to come to college, my mom and I were talking about our family with my dad in the room. When we started on family religion, my dad told us his grandfather had in fact converted to Old Order River Brethren from Lutheran while on his sick bed with Rheumatic fever. I used this to try and sooth my anxieties about my own conversion.

I also tried to think of all the good I was doing for people through the service WHO did in the local and global community. I ignored the fact that while I was giving out free pantyhose and playing games with needy children, others with me were trying to bring salvation to the

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ignorant. I even tried to convince myself that my conversion was good because it happened slowly and not like those people who came and fell down at the touch of oiled hands on Sunday. None of it worked. And when Joe broke up with me because one of the elders told him dating, since it wasn't in the Bible, was a modern invention and shouldn't be practiced, they tried to steer me toward a healthy walk with God.

Then I came to school. I tried for the first week to find time for praise and worship. But the little things started to bother me. Why couldn't I desire? Why couldn't I live? Why didn't angels come down and take him from the cross? Why couldn't I throw my head up, close my eyes, and out stretch my arms when I worshiped in the religious and lame groups on campus? Why did I lay my head on the beige carpet during Home Group once and ask God to forgive me for searching? Why did I feel funny saying the word "Jesus" out loud?

One day over Christmas Break a man from Marvin's Repair came to fix our dishwasher. I had gotten up late and went into the kitchen. I saw he had left behind a little present. It was a full size calendar with a hologram on the front. A comet was shooting around "2001." Happy New Year. I opened it up and each month had a photograph taken from a portfolio of postcard perfect pictures. The bluest blue wave, with a white curling top, about to crash. The most orange sunset overlooking a desert about to fall asleep. Each picture left room in the upper right hand of the page for a scriptural passage. I don't remember any particular message, but I'm sure they wanted me to confess with my mouth, lift up the cup of salvation, and fill myself with the light of Jesus Christ. I'm sure if I had read them instead of making myself a sandwich of Lebanon sweet bologna, my life might have changed. At least I guess that's what they think will happen, and I guess it does. Some regular guy, who just paid 34 dollars to have the door of his dishwasher fixed after his dog stood on it licking plates one too many times, sits down and looks at the calendar. Flipping through month after month, with the white powder from a donut falling onto the pages, he reads and his life is changed. How many pages does he flip until he finds salvation? Would just January do it for him? Maybe it wouldn't happen until October.

JEN HAWBAKER IS A JUNIOR WRITING MAJOR AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY. THIS ESSAY APPEARED IN THE 2001 EDITION OF ESSAY, SUSQUEHANNA'S ON-CAMPUS MAGAZINE FEATURING NONFICTION WRITING.

UNTITLED

by Sarah Hsu
The Chapin School
New York City, NY
Volume 19

Here eyes are tired. The skin folds over them slightly like fabric. I'll never know everything her eyes have seen.

We don't speak the same language, my aunt and I. She is from a place and a time and a culture that seems so far away from everything that I know, that to look into her eyes is like looking into the night sky and realizing that understanding is nearly unfathomable.

My father is the youngest of six children. During the Chinese Communist Revolution he fled his homeland with his father and his brother and sister. His three oldest brothers stayed behind in

Shanghai to close some business deals. They did not make it out of the country in time.

More than fifty years later, my father's oldest brother, Julian, and his wife, Yingxiu, have finally been granted visas to leave China and visit the United States.

We don't know each other, my aunt and I, but she holds my hand anyway and looks at me with her round, watery eyes as if to say, "This is what it might have been." It was because of her that she and Julian did not leave China in time. It was her fault. She had wanted to stay in her homeland, where her family was, and they became prisoners of something that was not the China that they had grown up in.

I have memorized some Mandarin for this occasion and I slowly form the words, "Ni hao ma?" Yingziu looks delighted and immediately begins to speak very fast in Chinese. My father quickly tells her that I don't speak Mandarin. She looks disappointed.

My uncle, Julian, was sent to Fiji to work in a factory during the Cultural Revolution. There was a horrible explosion and now he has burns on his back and his arms, burns that will never heal. His education was wasted in factories and his children were part of the lost generation of Chinese who were prevented from going to school.

I wish that I could just erase this all from my family. I wish to erase the "might have been's" and "should have's," but I can't. all I can do is attempt to understand and to be grateful to only have inherited a small legacy of pain rather than to actually have to feel it.

I think that all of us have wounds inside that will never heal, we just learn to live with the suffering. And as I watch my father embrace his oldest brother for the first time in fifty years, I feel as if something is beginning to heal. My family is beginning to heal. And while we do not speak the same language, my aunt and I tell each other with our eyes that things are beginning to be as they should.

SARAH HSU PLANS TO ENROLL IN THE CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY WHERE SHE WILL BEGIN HER FRESHMAN YEAR IN 2003.

FLICKER

by Douglas Jennerich
Rutherford, NJ
Volume 10

Before fire

man could never bend the good metals,
bring to a point or curve
anything that would last,
the days of scraping chipped almost entirely away
until no other creature stood a chance.

We began to cook them,
give a break finally
to a tired digestive system
forcing our front molars into a retirement
that enables me
after so many years later

to seem more attractive
to you.

And the Night-Life.

For the first time ever
we could see each other
after the sun went down,
gather,
Community.

No more freezing to death as epidemic,
Life stretched twice on both sides
from the day before
when we couldn't trap or frighten as effectively,
locate on another,
boil water.

Eventually, a farm could go up at anytime,
anywhere woods could be disposed of
and we could control it. Oxygen and water
suddenly more popular than ever.
Then medicine, cauterization,
eviction of demons to rise up
with the steam of sweat
to where they were God's problem,
along with enemies burned.

All of this recorded in the singed rock
of cave, mountain,
leaving the indelible markings
of technology's raw beginnings.
Heat, energy, channeled at last
to catapult us through evolution in a spark
and bring me
in time
to you, warm teeth now sharp in front,
organs well adjusted.

Every expletive
hollered at the sun when burned, zapped
by the rubber-on-carpet electricity
of fingers on those molded metals
or another human's skin
is nothing but ironic reminder,
stunned realization
branding the smirk
or someone who's discovered something Hot,
that it was that first flicker,
the purposeful creation of tongues of flame
snuffed out as quickly as too much or not enough air
could smite it,
then created again
and again
hungrier,
that has even spread

from me to you.

A GRADUATE OF SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY, DOUGLAS JENNERICH IS PERFORMING A CAREER IN ACTING, EVER SEARCHING FOR GREAT STORIES, AND OFFERING DIFFERENT WAYS TO TELL THEM.

98.6 DEGREES

by Victoria Joyce
West Morris Mendham High School
Chester, NJ
Volume 19

If Hell is a pit
of boiling vices,
and Heaven its antagonist,
then the good Lord must be
on the ice glazed sphere of Pluto.

When I was thirteen I saw
a movie with a boy
who was sloppy and untimely
in sneaking his hand up my shirt.
To my widened eyes he whined,
"I'm a red-blooded boy!"

I remember this when I spy
a grandpa, hunched and hiding
between lingerie racks,
rubbing the thin fabrics of crotches
over his brown, translucent skin.
And I remember this at parties,
where drunken teenagers hump
and drench each other
in front of HBO porn.

My eyes are deferred with rolls,
but always return to the amusement.
We are all exactly 98.6 degrees.

The frozen ghosts of Pluto,
like captured breath,
are preserved and benign;
left with superfluous wings
and antique harps.

But babies are born of blood,
and immediately wrapped warmly
at 98.6 degrees.
Whine for milk,
whine for love.

I admire such shamelessness

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and ask not to be buried
 beneath frosted dirt,
 but rather, let me remain
 at 98.6 degrees.

IN SUMMER OF 2001 VICTORIA JOYCE ATTENDED THE YOUNG WRITERS' CONFERENCE AT SEWANEE. SHE WILL BE ATTENDING ITHACA COLLEGE IN FALL 2003 TO MAJOR IN CREATIVE WRITING.

I WANT TO BE AN OLD WOMAN

by Andrea Kresge

Moravian Academy
 Stroudsburg, PA
 Volume 10

comfortable with the way
 my body hangs, settled
 and concerned.

I want to be seven,
 blonde ponytails following me through pine branches,
 painting with Dad in purple clogs,
 my world contained in wooded acres
 no battles to fight except stomping my foot
 to the frowns of two adoring adults,
 nothing to do but lay on my back
 on itchy grass
 watching clouds.

Suddenly I am here -
 arrived at this moment in a fog,
 in a skirt, hard to walk in, scurrying
 in blazing early August heat,
 lunch hour quickly passing, traffic frantic,
 men gawk from passing cars.

I'll take anything but being twenty-five,
 so young and ready, so ready to be finished.
 It took twenty-five years to get here
 to the place where I pay bills with 40 hours of my week
 and think "maybe."
 Maybe soon this will be over,
 once my vacant womb has produced,
 once my debts are gone,
 once the idea of a husband
 is no longer a raw sore,
 THEN I can relax.

ANDREA KRESGE IS AN ALUMNUS OF MORAVIAN ACADEMY, SMITH COLLEGE, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO. SHE HAS RECENTLY COMPLETED HER FIRST NOVEL.

IMAGINARY OUTLOOK

by Ahree Lee

The Baldwin School
 New York City, NY
 Volume 7

In an imaginary outlook at the top of the house
 a cardboard of a room
 becomes a camera to the mind.
 Cinematic images in reverse
 projected through the window of the skull
 flicker on its canvas lining.

To you left a major artery, smooth and dark,
 cuts through the Amazonian lushness of June.
 Tires hush like water. For a moment there is silence.
 Straight ahead lies their destination,
 plunging deeper into the distance,
 as imagined from behind this cardboard blind.
 To our right are the tracks:

Slat after slat pressed to the ground
 banded by steel rails. In the backs of our minds
 the sound of the oncoming freight train
 gathers momentum, magnetizes
 as a cloud of filings around a pole.
 A recurring dream with no conclusion,
 its low rumble grows by stealth as hours do
 until the bared sound tears through the walls
 and we remember what it is to stand
 on the tracks, seeing for miles
 in the searching eye of its light.

AHREE LEE GRADUATED FROM YALE UNIVERSITY WITH A MAJOR IN ENGLISH. SHE CURRENTLY IN THE M.F.A. PROGRAM AT THE YALE SCHOOL OF ART AND IS TRYING TO USE HER BACKGROUND IN CREATIVE WRITING TO CREATE VISUAL ART IN WHICH WRITING PLAYS AN INTRICAL PART.

A POET

by Marina Severinovsky

Island Trees High School
 Levittown, NY
 Volume 16

A poet is one who hears
 The chatter of ants who crawl
 Through winding passages of earth.
 Who hears the songs of winds
 That whistle through the trees
 And rustle rusty leaves.

Who hears the truth in people's words.
 Who hears the howls of angels' flight.
 Who hears the balmy croak of death,
 And the tinkling bell of life.

A poet is one who sees
 The swords of yellow light, the searing spears of sun,
 Which breaks the earth to shreds.
 Who sees expressions on the flowers
 That grow in white-painted wooden window boxes

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On ledges of seventeen story buildings
 Deprived of fresh, clean mountain air
 And suffocated by city fumes.
 Who sees how sad these flowers grow.
 Who sees through the mirror of the human eye,
 Himself, his soul, his life.

A poet is one who feels
 The change of seasons and the
 Cycle of the moon.
 Who bathes in misty autumn rain
 To clean his soul and
 Wraps his arms around the trunks of trees
 To feel their life.
 Who feels the breath of light and wit
 Upon his brow.
 Who has the power to command his mind and heart.
 A poet I am not.

MARINA SEVERINOVSKY GRADUATED AS VALEDICTORIAN OF ISLAND TREES HIGH SCHOOL AND IS CURRENTLY A JUNIOR AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, DOUBLE MAJORING IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ECONOMICS. SHE SPENT THE SUMMER OF 2001 INTERNING FOR U.S. SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER.

NOVEMBER WIDE

by Courtney Maum

Greenwich Academy
 Greenwich, CT
 Volume 15

This is a mirage: trembling
 screaming in the whisper
 of each tremulous touch,
 we are going to kill ourselves with this,
 our granite love.

A morning will come, in front of some mirror-
 in times many measurements,
 my hair will have grown long.

An impossible birth, this sad and heavy fondness,
 cloistered in my womb-
 this love,
 love like haunting
 Cutting my hair and growing it out,
 how many doors will I come to stand in front of?
 Silver keys and gold ones,
 the keys I'll come to own.
 You, I will remember for the rest of my whole life.

Mattresses and addresses,
 an elevator, closing

Time has many measurements,
 A love,
 love like a shadow.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM BROWN UNIVERSITY WITH A MAJOR IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE (FRENCH AND ENGLISH), COURTNEY MAUM MOVED TO PARIS, FRANCE WHERE SHE IS CURRENTLY A FREELANCE TRANSLATOR.

ADOLESCENCE

by Megan Shevenock

Camp Hill, PA
 Volume 16

"Take your shirt off"
 my sister said, camera heavy
 in her small hands. It looked
 almost dangerous. The way it make my heart
 quicken, to bare myself like that before
 the lens, my wrists heavy
 with uncensored blood that surged
 through my half-starved veins.

My mother would kill me
 if she knew I was undressing plain and open
 in the backyard: it made me feel wild,
 like I was a girl, with a body, that had the power
 to do things – and the boy I loved
 was standing right there, wearing only
 his boxer-shorts, willing participant
 of the dramas my sister and I were so famous
 for creating. He had the most tragic gaze, stepped
 and spoke with such obvious softness,
 the other kids laughed – I hadn't the strength to admit
 he couldn't ever love a girl.

Late afternoons, parents gone until dark,
 a little sister inside somewhere, hollering trouble.
 What yearning in those years, what power
 of our own; I remember it in our bodies,
 without fear, and in the grass growing up
 around our ankles, uncut for weeks.
 It seemed that I could feel my life
 in the yellow forsythia that heaved
 over the rotted-wood fence. That fluorescent
 explosions, not a care was spent

on the suspicious eyes burning
 through cracks of the border of our own.

I was so thirty, it seemed
 a necessity, for my sister to fill
 my palms heavy with the mud I would smear
 across his smooth, young chest.
 "What the neighbors would say—"
 was what I needed, to touch;
 what my sister needed, to create art
 out of feeling; and the boy needed it too,

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to feel his own strangeness melt
into what we made ordinary.

I wanted the jaws to drop, to open up
feelings I felt to controversy.

To give my voice a shape they could try to absorb,
or disgustingly turn over.

My sister said, "Put your lips against him,
close your eyes," and he held me, half-naked
against the dried mud of his body.

The shutter released. The next day
my sister would make the prints in class
and rouse anger from the administration.

Whispers so harsh

I had to learn to let them go.

SINCE GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL, MEGAN SHREVENOCK ATTENDED BARD COLLEGE BEFORE TRANSFERRING TO SARAH LAWRENCE. CURRENTLY A SENIOR, HER MAIN EMPHASIS OF STUDY IS CREATIVE WRITING.

RULES

by Jill Sisson Quinn

Westminster High School

Finksburg, MD

Volume 10

For years, my mother ironed in a doorway. We tried to reduce the traffic as much as possible during these times, but it was difficult to subdue our play, and she would continually pause, look down, and war "Watch the cord!" while we slipped through the sleeve of space from the hallway to the kitchen for a pair of scissors, or a drink, and back again.

It would have been a disaster if the iron had fallen, if the cord had tripped one of us and the hot metal hit our backs. But it never happened. It was a risky situation: one end of the board firmly anchored on the kitchen tile, the other teetering, on the living room carpet, half an inch higher. But there were no disasters in my house. Or in my childhood. My mother made sure of that.

Still, there were ways we broke the order with which my mother provided us. When it would snow in the evening, my sisters and I would close the bedroom door. We would kneel on my sister's bed before an open window, fearful as the cold air poured into the room and the electric heat clicked on: in our hands we held a special, home-made kind of toy: a key tied to a long string. Taking turns we would throw the key out the open window, careful not to let go of the string. *Phht*. The key would hit the snow. *Thht*. We would draw it back again. over and over we tossed the key and drew it in.

We did not talk. We did not plan to play this, only caught each other and were caught until we began performing the ritual in three. In the morning, these strange tracks and their thick tails were always left unopenable, locked by late snowfall. And so we did not know the meaning of the game. At the time, its mixture of innocence and deceit seemed confusingly equal. Now the message is more clear. It was a form of travel, of meeting with a different time and place than what the order in our house contained. When the key came back it carried with it something just fallen, something that might have become old by

morning. Touching it before our mother announced "School's closed!" was a sensation which we allowed ourselves, and for which we broke the rules.

We are all changelings. Or, at least, something other than what our parents suspect us to be. If not from anything else, this is from the mere fact that our expectations of our parents are incongruent with their expectations of us. We must survive; they must die. It's not that children are ungrateful, it's just that all they must do to be loved is eat, drink, grow, and later, learn. But the parent must feed, clothe, hold, and for a lifetime, worry.

It wasn't until after its extinction in 1979 that scientists realized that Britain's Large Blue Butterfly was a changeling with very specific parental needs. The pregnant female Large Blue would lay a single egg on a flower bud of Wild Thyme. But the flower and seeds of the Wild Thyme would serve as food for the hatched larva for just two or three weeks. For on the evening of its final molt, the larva would fall to the ground and wait to be discovered by a red ant, who would unwittingly provide the rest of the Large Blue caterpillar's nourishment.

As the Large Blue lay in wait beneath the Wild Thyme, it would produce a special secretion and exhibit behavior that would convince a passing ant that it was really an escaped ant larva. The mistaken worker ant would then carry the caterpillar into the ant nest. Here over the span of eleven months, the caterpillar would feed on ant eggs and grubs, hibernate, resume feeding, and pupate. Then, after nearly a year in the ant nest, the large blue would crawl to the surface and spread its wings.

How could the ant not perceive the changeling baby, changing for all those months, and at the expense of its feigned sisters and brothers? And when do our parents perceive this of us? For from the time we are born, we are growing away from them.

I remember cutting my knee in an old barn where we were not supposed to play, and my older sister fashioning a lie for me that I carried home with pride and certainty. I remember how coming home from the creek wet eventually became our domain. It was what our mother would expect, despite the gentle threats she delivered to us as we left. and there was one sacred bet: to swing naked from a vine off a platform our father had made us. For this, I received a fistful of coins—my own money, unlike the change I was given to buy specific things: a penny for the gumball machine. But I drew even from this some sort of independence; in the supermarket, I made my first swap, trading one of those pennies to a girl I did not know for a few peanuts. All of this done under cover, with a strange mixture of fear and self-righteousness, feeling, *I shouldn't* but also *I must*.

Sadly, our love for our parents can never be as strong as their love for us. In the animal world, the energy parents expend on childrearing, even in something as inhuman as a fish, sometimes seems extraordinary. In South America, there are fish that actually lay their eggs out of water. Glued to leaves on low overhanging branches that the fish have jumped from the water to spawn upon, their eggs are safe from predators. But the effort does not end there; regularly, the fish splash water up at the eggs to prevent them from drying out. sometimes the transfer of energy from parent to child is so direct, fatalities

occur. During egg laying and incubation in Eider Ducks, females can lose up to 45% of their body weight. What's more, there are as many adult female deaths during the two-month breeding season as in the entire rest of the year. Fecundity and adult survival are negatively correlated in a variety of species. Female House Martins who raise two consecutive broods in one summer are more likely to die the following winter than females who raise just one. In fruit flies, males and females denied mating both live longer. Although not all studies concur, the law of natural selection *would* predict competition within the individual between reproduction and survival, since what it selects for is fitness—which science defines as “reproductive success”—and not necessarily longevity of life.

One scientist, William Clark, believes that the phenomena of death is itself a consequence of the evolution of sexual reproduction, without which, of course, there would be no such thing as “parents.” In other words, once parents came along, so did death. By loading resources into reproductive cells, somatic cells are subject to senescence, rather than repair, and are, ultimately, sacrificed when the individual dies. Although Clark's theory is built on cells, the sacrifices parents make are often all too evident: in some species of mites, the young develop all the way to sexual maturity inside the body of the mother. Brothers and sisters mate, the males die, and the daughters devour their mother and emerge pregnant.

Whatever the origin of death, whatever the parental expenditure, this is the bottom line: the relationship between mother and child is distinctly different than the relationship between child and mother. Mother names the child; for the child, mother has no other name.

In the 1920's, five years after it was discovered that the red ant, *Myrmica sabuletti*, was a host to the Large Blue, scientists made an attempt to preserve the butterfly and its host by fencing in a nature reserve. Fencing in the reserve, however, excluded grazing animals. Without grazing animals, vegetation in the reserve grew unchecked. Unbeknownst at the time to the scientists, *M. sabuletti* would not build nest beneath plants over five centimeters high. With their host parents absent from the reserve, the Large Blue had no one to care for its young. Although other species of worker ants were sometimes convinced by the Large Blue caterpillar's red ant larva act, these caterpillars always died or were killed when taken back to the ant nests of these false foster parents.

We are all changelings. In Grimm's fairy tale, if a changeling laughs, it will be replaced by the original infant. A mother is told to boil water in egg shells over the fire; when she does, her changeling laughs and many tiny goblins arrive. They take it away, and replace it with her original child. Is this why parents take such great pains to make their children smile?

Perhaps if we understood laughter, the Large Blue would still be fluttering over the warm, dry grasslands of Great Britain today. How could we have imagined that to confine her would save her? Instead, it belittled her, turned her polished act into a death sentence, our actions like a key thrown toward some unfamiliar door, only with no way to get it back, as if there were no strings attached.

Perhaps we should have treated the Large Blue with the same patience we give to our own children when we allow them to step over cords, ford creeks, close doors. For their ridiculous rituals and games will eventually turn to determined choices of lover, and vocation. We must promise to protect them, but never to enclose, we must allow things to continually open and move, or we may find them going farther from us than we ever imagined they could.

JILL SISSON QUINN IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR AT THE NEW JERSEY SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION. SHE RECEIVED A B.A. IN ENGLISH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND BEFORE EARNING AN M.F.A. IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY FROM MONTCLAIRE UNIVERSITY.

HEARTS IN HOLLYWOOD

by Allegra Johnson

The Chapin School
New York City, NY
Volume 19

ACT I

gold burns the windows that face west
and the blacktop stretches its four corners
to laminate the night.

sunset boulevard is your equator
and palm fronds the needles of your compass.
the concrete is seamless because
it never snows in hollywood.

Act II

when the wind blows,
the street signs swing on their preaches.
watch le brea wobble in rhythm
with your own unsteady step.

the gold is gone,
only a brief flash in traffic lights
as they turn from green to red.
by the curb there are ominous shapes in
ink blot lakes of oil spills.
the days make you sweat
and the nights make you shake.

Act III

you dream in black and white and gold.
you pack up your posters and glitter clothes,
everything except the comet of gold dust
that you rode in on.
it burned through your butterfly net
and is now forever falling
on some longitude and latitude over the pacific.
you will always be able to feel the physical pain

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of a fantasy that blackens your heart.
wish is a four-letter word
when you're leaving California.

ALLEGRA JOHNSON WILL BEGIN COLLEGE IN THE FALL OF 2003. AS OF PRESS TIME, HER PLANS WERE TO MAJOR IN CREATIVE WRITING.

SUIT COATS AND BLOODY NOSES

by Rebecca Connolly

The Derryfield School
Windham, NH
Volume 19

I never cried as a child. Most children would cry as their supple fresh met cement for the first time as they toppled off their shiny new bike, or when their mother wouldn't buy them the newest toy they so desperately needed. I didn't. Maybe it was because my younger brother always seemed to have something more urgent to cry about, and I never felt like competing. More than likely it was because my dad's patented remedy for any childhood injury was "walk it off," and I never questioned the good medicine.

Katie Karalis was my best friend when I was in grade school. We went to school together through high school but by that time we had forgotten what our friendship had been when we were young. She got bloody noses easily and I helped her discreetly get to the bathroom in third grade avoiding a run-in with Chad Gouette, the sixth grader she had a crush on. I think that's how we became best friends. I think that's why Katie liked me, because she saw in me that strength she lacked. She always teases me about being the class bully, but there was always a truthful reserve to our laughter. In those endless walks down the corridor, avoiding the other children, Katie knew that as I held the tissues to her nose that I was protecting her. She knew in the firm press of my hand that no one would say anything to us and that she would shed no tears because I was there.

Katie and I sat in the parking lot staring at the large wooden sign elaborately pronouncing Windham Middle School. I was seven; it was June and five days before my eighth birthday. Mrs. Karalis had talked to my parents and they had unanimously decided that since Katie and I were inseparable that we should go to camp together. They worked out the logistics, and settled on Camp Winahuppe, a Girl Scout Camp. We were outsiders before we even arrived at camp. Katie restlessly attended "brownie" events and consistently complained of how boring it was. I had never been a "girl scout type," and always chose softball and soccer over earning merit badges in cooking.

The sky seemed to be a painfully bright blue that morning and it was the perfect temperature out, though it never seems too outside when you're seven. My dad had brought us to the parking lot in which we sat, eagerly glancing around to make sure the other cars held little girls with knapsacks as well. Katie and I giggled and spoke about the things that seven-year-olds talk about, while my dad chided me about my new shoes and made sure that I had remembered to tie them. As the bus pulled into the parking lot my excitement manifested into energy and I jumped out of the car with Katie trailing behind me.

As I ran to the steps of the bus I eagerly leaped up two steps and turned to wave goodbye. And that is the first time I cried. I vivid-

ly remember the moment in slow motion, turning as children pushed their way on behind me, and looking at my dad in his business suit waving back. Tears instantly burst from my small ducts, big lush droplets beginning to stream down the smooth rosiness of my cheeks. I think I was more surprised than anything and I became awash with a wave of sadness that I had never felt before. The shock of crying frightened me and I began to sob as I stood on the second step of the big yellow school bus with Camp Winahuppe smeared across the side.

In that one moment all of the visions of my dad walking out the door congealed into one true to life example. It never seemed like he was gone a lot, just always leaving. He was a businessman who was trying to make enough money for his growing family, but for me he was the silky hug of his suit and the lingering smell of his cigar in the breast pocket of his jacket. Each time he got ready to leave, I would sit on his bed, and help him place a few shirts and his toiletries into a small black bag. Before he left I always handed him my lucky unicorn pin. As I stood on the steps of the bus looking at him in his dark suit I wasn't upset because I was leaving him but instead because I didn't know if he would be there when I got back.

Once I began to cry on the steps of the bus, I didn't stop. I didn't stop when I ran back down the stairs to be scooped into my father's arms. I didn't stop crying when I let go of him, or when I ran to the back of the bus to stick my tiny arm, still plump with the remnants of baby fat through the tiny slit in the window to grasp my father's hand as the bus rolled away. I didn't stop crying for the next five minutes that I remained glued to the window watching my dad wave fiercely at the bus. It was not until we approached the gates of Camp Winahuppe that I slowly stopped crying, and by the time I got off the bus I had completely stopped and did not once revisit that morning incident.

The year I cried on the bus was the same year that I went to all the funerals. My grandfather died first, and then my other grandfather, and then my great-grandfather. My mom tells me now that it was in the period of three months that it all happened, and all I can remember is that we always seemed to be leaving. I remember packing my bright new dress that was covered in orange and pink flowers because my mom said "Pop Pop wouldn't want us to all wear black. It's supposed to be a celebration of his life." I remember the sound of metal upon metal and the heavy oak of our front door swinging shut. I used to always glance back at the four-leaf clover adorning the door as we walked down the sidewalk to the car. My mom gave us tic-tacs as special treats when we left, because of the long car ride ahead of us. During those three months we were always leaving. My family would pile into a car and I would dream of the sanctity of the pink run in the room. My brother and I would play tic-tac-toe as my parents silently wept, hoping we wouldn't see them. As I looked out the car window to the rapidly passing highway all I could ever think about was playing softball with my dad in the lush summer grass of our backyard.

I cried everyday of that week going to Camp Winahuppe. Every time I got onto the bus I cried until I got to camp and then let the heavy sadness wash off. Each morning I leapt from the bus to join into another game of kickball and easily passed the dew-covered ball through the briskness of the summer morning. The dull ache of saying goodbye manifested in me that summer when I was seven, on the steps of the Camp Winahuppe bus. I still don't know if it was the long

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car rides or the flash of my dad's dark blue suit as he closed the front door, but something inside me broke as I clung to the railing of the bus. The tears that I shed were little pieces of my strength deteriorating into bloody noses and bullies and childhood crushes. And it was resolved every day of that week at Winahuppe as I played kickball in the fields with my friends, while the morning sun glinted off of the heavy metallic school bus silently resting in the field next to us.

REBECCA CONNOLLY IS CURRENTLY ATTENDING BOSTON COLLEGE. THOUGH STILL UNDECIDED, SHE IS LOOKING TOWARDS A DEGREE IN BUSINESS.

THE MEMORY OF GYPSY MOTHS

by Nancy O'Dea Reddy

Pittsburgh, PA
Volume 18

The larvae choked the trees that year,
the ridges in the bark
were stuffed with silken foam. The air
grew thick that year, the shock

of gypsy moths that swarmed in oaks
like the approach of gray
that lined my father's eyes. They sank
to hollows when the sky

those summer nights was bright with fireflies.
He stared at lesson plans
for most of June. The raspberries
grew wild, as if by chance

they had been planted, watching over
my mother, gagging down
her sobs. And while she cried, the hovered,
the gypsy moths like long

and unpaved roads away from - what?
I did not know, amazed
that they could look so delicate,
white bodies like well-phrased

requests for bread, yet bring about
such damage. Gulping down,
it seemed, entire trees overnight,
they shredded leaves to ribbon.

Then fall came, finally. Cool air coaxed
the color from the leaves.
My father mourned the loss of oaks.
My mother rolled her sleeves

and dove into a greater sorrow:
a skeletal forest,
a man who loved in silence, the slow
and tender grip of memories.

NANCY O'DEA REDDY IS A WRITING MAJOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH. SHE HELPS ORGANIZE THE CAMPUS WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION'S READING SERIES AND IS STARTING A WRITING WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN.

EXCERPT FROM BEAST BLOOD: MONOLOGUE

by Victoria Reichman

Lexington High School
Lexington, MA
Volume 19

"Tonight I ate something. Tonight I ate pomegranate seeds. My husband was out, he lied and told me he was with his friends, and I was alone. The kitchen tile was cool under my feet and I stepped to the fridge; secreted away inside I had my one blood pomegranate. When I cut it the seeds split and burst and the juice slapped onto the walls. It ran in small streams and then it stopped. There are red drops, teardroplets, hanging over my kitchen table. I screwed up. I'd wanted to eat every seed, one by one, tucking them carefully in my mouth. I'd thought I would count them out like glassy jewels, red and fragile. But when I cut it open the fleshy meat shone like it had eyes glistening at me, I couldn't stand it, I scooped them all out, I stuffed them all inside of me ferociously, like some beast, crushing each one inside my cheek, the red juice running down my chin and my fingers brown and crusted with it, mangling and bursting the sweet seeds until nothing was left but some shreds of the torn white membrane, no longer delicate and soft but ripped every which way and twisted into clumps and then, then, all I wanted was to fall to my knees and spread it all out onto the cold floor, smooth and clean and patch it together until it was all one sheet, a clean white shroud thin as lace, and wrap it all around me, white like snow, enfold myself inside of it, and sleep for days inside the white of it while the pomegranate blood shone on my walls. I threw it out. Crumpled the dug-out remains of the fruit into a fist and quietly got rid of it. I scrubbed at my hands until the lines started to come off and melt down the drain in slow streams. Then I went and lay very near the edge of my bed until Chris, my husband, came home. When he came, faint traces of brown from the pomegranate still stained my fingers. But Chris did not notice. He did not touch my hands when he put himself inside of me."

VICTORIA REICHMAN IS CURRENTLY ENROLLED AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY.

NOCTURNAL MUSE

by Stacy French Roosa

Mount Greylock Regional High School
Lanesboro, MA
Volume 10

I wake in the morning lost and miserable
like a baby being born in the cold air,
yearning for the warmth of the womb.
The world is stomping for their breakfast
and for their day to begin.
I hear my dream world calling to me.

Everything is new, the world so unfamiliar.
The taste of food shocks my taste buds,
the noise of the day's going-ons hurts my ears.
I try to sit and take the sleep back
but the afternoon takes me and devours me
in its teeth.

I wake slowly as the day goes on,
finally recognizing my surroundings
and soon myself.

When nighttime finally chases away the sun

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and the shadows move together to make a blanket
 of dark
 that is when my muse awakens
 and I am finally alive.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 1992, STACEY FRENCH ROOSA ATTENDED BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO STUDY HUMAN SERVICES. SHE TOOK A YEAR OFF FROM CLASSROOM EDUCATION THAT HAS TURNED INTO AN EXTENDED LEAVE. NOW, A STAY AT HOME MOM, ROOSA WILL RETURN TO COLLEGE WHEN HER TWO CHILDREN BEGIN THEIR OWN EDUCATION.

ACCEPTANCE

Lauren Stensland
 Portland, OR
 Volume 17

perhaps it was my will
 to be nothing more than a
 gentle breeze,
 or drop of rain upon the sandy shore.
 to know my place
 find contentment in my path
 lie between seasons or stars.
 but the world gave me instead
 two thick strong legs to stand upon
 arms to flail and wave
 womb to bear children, new ones, new moons,
 I have these
 so I accept chaos
 as human order
 and find contentment
 deep in my roots.

LAUREN STENSLAND WILL BEGIN HER FRESHMAN YEAR OF COLLEGE IN THE FALL. SHE INTENDS ON STUDYING WRITING.

RUBY FLO

by Yolanda Wisner
 North Penn High School
 North Wales, PA
 Volume 12

some folks like to plug her up
 but she's the only woman I wait for
 the only thing I can count on
 my girl
 Ruby Flo

queen of solitude
 repose
 tranquility
 assurance

she do that stuff alone
 & perfect
 complete
 a deep red velvet carpet
 plush with my insides
 leadin her way

some folks like to plug her up
 but you gotta let her be & love her

what a comedian when she late
 what a trickster when she early
 what an actress when she heavy & dramatic
 what a child when she light & free

my girl
 crimson layers
 honeyed with fruitfulness
 scented with prebirth musk

one after the other
 unfoldin out of this delta called
 Girl
 & then Woman
 then Mama

she be fertility
 she be scared
 she be La Baker sweet
 Shug Avery pee
 granma's raspberry moon tea
 independency

make me blessed
 my woman
 hooded & cloaked
 in red
 reminiscent of
 the dawn after an eclipse
 Chaka Khan's laden carmine lips
 singin—
 "STAY"

some folks like to plug her up
 but I like it when she come
 like Red Ridin in the night
 quick on her feet & just-a-stealin
 other times she ease right out of me
 real slow like a juke joint song
 a Tony Brown tune
 hummed even & low
 so you know she there

but folks like to plug her up
 won't let her speak
 or take air from 'round their thighs
 i said, some folks like to plug her up
 but i sing her praises
 Ruby Flo...
 she do this stuff alone & perfect

brazen &
 sassy smellin
 funky & fresh
 my baby makin stew
 only secret lips get to taste

she answer all my questions
 hush all my doubts
 i ask her—
 "Ruby Flo, how come my man done left me?"

& she say,
 "cuz i ain't come 'round this month"

"& Ruby Flo
 how come my man ain't sweet wit me this month?"

& she say,

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"cuz i'ze fillin his space, chile"

"& Ruby Flo
how comes i git so low sometimes?"

& she say,
"cuz i makes you still &
you gots to be still to hear
what you doing good
& not so"

"hear me, girl,"
she say
"i makes you interact
wit all the stuff you don't need
& then i helps you get rid of it
no need for cryin or agitatin or fussin
girl, don't fret these waters
cuz they'll never drown you

donchaknow
i be that magic called Creativity
i be daddy's twinkles
mixed wit granma's wrinkles
the potion that made you
the fluid named Passion in your pen
i'm the only ink been 'round since the Beginnin

i be the Ruby Flo
i be the Ruby Flo
i be the Ruby Flowin

that jewel
anciently aggravatin undulatin
explodin like a sunburst
inside you
and fallin out of you like
weary petals droppin to the Earth

seekin
Rebirth

YOLANDA WISHER ATTENDED LAFAYETTE COLLEGE AND GRADUATED WITH A B.A. IN ENGLISH AND BLACK STUDIES IN 1998. IN 2000 SHE RECEIVED AN M.F.A. IN CREATIVE WRITING/POETRY FROM TEMPLE UNIVERSITY. WISHER IS CURRENTLY A PRACTICING POET, VOCALIST, MUSICIAN, AND HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHER NEAR PHILADELPHIA.

WRITERS, ETC.

Other writers who have appeared in The Apprentice Writer.

Darren Aronofsky
Edward R. Murrow High School
Brooklyn, NY
Volume 3

AFTER GRADUATING FROM A PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN NEW YORK, ARONOFSKY ATTENDED HARVARD UNIVERSITY. HE HAS DIRECTED TWO CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED FILMS, PI AND REQUIEM FOR A DREAM.

Jenn Crowell
Dallastown Area High School
Jacobus, PA
Volume 13

JENN CROWELL SKIPPED HER SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL AND ATTENDED GOUCHER COLLEGE IN BALTIMORE. SHE GRADUATED WITH A DUAL DEGREE IN ENGLISH/WRITING AND WOMEN'S STUDIES. WHILE AT GOUCHER, CROWELL'S FIRST NOVEL, NECESSARY MADNESS, WAS PUBLISHED BY PUTNAM IN 1997, TO WIDE ACCLAIM. A SECOND NOVEL, LETTING THE BODY LEAD, WAS PUBLISHED IN MAY, 2002. SHE IS CURRENTLY AT WORK ON HER THIRD.

Evan Hughes
Milton Academy
Milton, MA
Volume 11

EVAN HUGHES RECIEVED A B.A. IN PHILOSOPHY FROM YALE. HE IS CURRENTLY THE ASSISTANT EDITOR OF THE NEW LEADER, A POLITICAL AND LITERARY BIMONTHLY MAGAZINE IN NEW YORK CITY.

Susquehanna University
THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



MODERN BEEKEEPING

"And so you know," Brian chuckled in an attempt to recover from the fact that he had just choked on his own quiche Lorraine, "I'm like a God to them." The quiche wasn't very good, anyway. In fact, it was the worst quiche Marina had ever tasted—runny, but at the same time some sort of treaty between elastic and gritty, like he had undercooked it before and decided that leaving it out on the stove all night would properly compensate. But the truth was Brian didn't know how to cook quiche. He had barely even tried, following along with an ancient recipe book he had borrowed from his high school's library. He is an eleventh grade English teacher.

However, in light of the seemingly disastrousness of his third blind date in two months, he didn't feel too bad about the quiche. It was after a glorious two bites that she actually dismissed it, claiming herself to be on an annual low-fat "diet" as she dug a fork into a thick breast of baked chicken. She would dismiss the chicken too. It shone with grease. He had offered to fix her something else, but she refused.

"No, no, it's all right," she had said. "But thank you. That's really sweet." Her refusal dripped with a clever glaze of nervous patience, a glaze that would fade as the night progressed. This was before the aforementioned choke, and before the spilling of wine, and before the nosebleed. But, more importantly, before the aforementioned choke.

"Is that so," a now-uninterested Marina replied, raking through her undercooked peas with a plastic fork for another undercooked carrot. The carrots would be the only things she would consume that evening without protest. She wasn't interested in his conversation anymore. She had stopped trying to listen.

"So..." she started, feeling sorry for the both of them. She would start a conversation about something generic like the sticky summer heat wave they were living through, or the Redskins, or how bad this whole thing was going.

"I've never been stung before," Brian chimed. He was proud of this fact, even though it was partially, no, fully a lie. He had been stung once—actually three times, but because they were all on the same day, he counted them all as one. It had happened when he was being macho and had attempted to check the honey crop without a suit. However, it didn't hurt too much, because he had smoked them out first. Most of the bees were so full of the honey that they had attempted to salvage—under the assumption that their hive was on fire—that they couldn't find the strength to sting him. And the few stings he did receive didn't sting *that* much. They felt like the pricking of a needle, or tiny, poison-tipped pinches. He made away with some of the honey in the end, anyway.

He had read somewhere that even the best beekeepers had survived some two, three hundred attacks in their lifetime. The day when he had been stung only once had been the day when he decided that he wasn't just a beekeeper, he was a bee *god*, Brian Grayson, *bee god*. Of course, he never attempted that feat again.

"Really?" Marina feigned interest, putting her fork down and placing her hands on her lap. Brian nodded confidently and jumped into a series of stories he had either heard through his beekeeping "friends" or made up on the spot, while she took this time to count the reasons why this wasn't going to work.

One. They were seated in his "dining" room, which was really his living room but he just wheeled his television into the kitchen and set up a card table.

She checked her watch for what must have been the twentieth time in the past few minutes. It was 9:24 p.m. For the last hour, she had been trying to decide on when would be a polite time to leave, a polite time to stand up, yawn, and say, "Well, I have to work tomorrow, and I live all the way across town, and so I'd better get going. It was nice meeting you, Brendan."

"It's Brian," he would say.

"Brian." And then she would grab her coat, and her purse, and just leave with him standing in the doorway until she pulled away

in her Dodge with its dying transmission. He wouldn't try to kiss her or anything, oh no, he wouldn't be that naïve. This blind date was going terribly, and they both knew it.

So Marina decided that 9:30 would be a nice time to stand up and leave. It wasn't too early, and it wasn't too late. She would be able to get home in time for the evening news, maybe read some of that book everyone was talking about and get enough sleep to wake up and forget about this whole night.

It was 9:25.

"Wait a minute, God to *whom*?" She looked up from her plate and raised an eyebrow in his direction. He inched back a little, startled by her sudden movement, and then settled back into his chair. He flashed his best idea of a playboy smile and angled his head.

"The bees."

"Oh," Marina said, a little rudely and mostly to herself. "Right." *He's a beekeeper*, she remembered. "A beekeeper," she said out loud.

"Apiculturist," he corrected her in a way that was as far from accusatory as it was from informative. "I prefer apiculturist. But, whatever."

"Right."

She kept forgetting about this man's ludicrous lifestyle, as if the constant droning behind the house wasn't enough of a giveaway, along with the nineteen thousand bee attacks she had endured, first walking then sprinting up his walkway and into his house. It was like she was literally some stranger off of the street, shouting and crying and swatting like a girl with a bat in her hair.

But she had justification.

She was *allergic*, after all. If and when she was stung, she could swell up like a melon, red and round, and maybe even pass out depending upon the heat and whether or not she had eaten earlier. Maybe.

"Yes," Brian nodded, a little embarrassed, and quietly recalling her entrance as well.

"Oh God, oh God, bees!" she had cried, slapping her arms. "Oh God!" At first he was puzzled, then confused, and then a little amused. She was afraid of bees, no, *allergic*. The thought had passed between the both of them—like a flying insect—that *maybe* this date wasn't going to work; that *maybe* he shouldn't have volunteered to fix her dinner at his place; that *maybe* he should have just told her to go home then and there and save the both of them—but mostly him—the trouble that would ensue. But, unfortunately, he closed the door, and she stayed. He explained that he was an English teacher by day and a beekeeper by night—*Some sort of superhero*, Marina had thought. *A-Bee-C Man*.—so there was really nothing to worry about, and they were more afraid of her than she was of them. Marina had felt like a tiny, bee-stung girl.

And now this gigantic, heaping spoonful of silence sat between the two of them as they attempted to shy away from the subject—*apiculture, beekeeping*. Marina checked her watch, again. 9:26.

Two. There was an ugly, old moose-head situated on the wall directly behind him, probably purchased at someone's garage sale, staring past Marina and out the window as if it didn't want to be here either.

Three. His entire home looked as though it had been decorated by a blind chipmunk.

Four. He used *plastic* utensils.

Five. His left eye twitched when he was lying.

"Did you know that until about the 1870s, queen bees were called kings? People wouldn't believe that something so well organized could be run by females."

Six. He was nervous.

"And my one friend calls his bees 'his women.'"

Seven. He couldn't cook.

"And so every time I talk to him he's always talking about how 'his women' won't do this, and how 'his women' won't do that."

Eight. He was taking too long to finish his story.

"He's a real trip."

Nine. And would those bees please shut up?

"Hah," Marina nodded, having not heard a thing he had just said. Years ago she had perfected the art of zoning out. She just had to train her mind and put her mouth on autopilot, letting loose with a cleverly placed and wholly indifferent "Yeah," or "Hah," or "Uh huh" every other moment. This gave her room to form opinions and assess her situations.

It was 9:27.

And it wasn't that he was ugly, oh no. In fact he was rather handsome. But he was just overly boring. He hadn't said one thing that night which caught her attention, he was decked out in a boring mélange of grays, his eyes were boring, his hair was boring, and his bees were boring. She was beginning to wonder why Anna had even set them up. What could Anna have possibly thought that they had in common? Marina was allergic to bees. Marina lived on the other side of town. Marina was happy where she was. Was Anna calling her *boring*?

"Look," Marina stood up, interrupting one of Brian's anecdotes. "I've got to go." She carefully laced her napkin on her plate as non-aggressively as she could and edged her chair back to form her escape. It was 9:28. Two minutes wasn't *too* impolite.

Her announcement caught Brian by surprise, again. "Huh? You don't want to stay for dessert?" He stood up as well, pushing his chair back and coming around to help Marina out of hers. By the time he got around to her, she was already up and reaching for her coat and purse. "It's cheesecake," which it really wasn't because he knew that she wasn't going to sit back down and he figured he'd better have her leave with the impression that something better than dinner was coming afterwards.

"Oh no," she said, working her arms into her coat without his help. "I've got work tomorrow and..."



Jessica Clauser
Grade 11

"Isn't tomorrow Sunday?" He eyed her suspiciously.

She was caught in a lie. "I know, I work at a retail..."

"I thought you worked with Anna?"

"Part-time," she lied, again, too tired to keep going with this interrogation. She turned around to sling her purse over her shoulder and started making her way towards the door. Brian hurried in front of her, to be polite and open the door for her to leave, which he succeeded in doing. But he surprised her by stepping outdoors with her. He wasn't following the plan worked out in her head beforehand. He was outdoors *with* her, not in the doorway.

Hey, what's the big idea?

"I'm sorry about dinner," he murmured, sheepishly, picking at something in the concrete with his foot.

"Oh. What are you sorry for?" She began walking towards her car, and he began to follow her. She was beginning to feel afraid, stories of weak women rushing towards their cars in the middle of the night and the brutish men who follow them seeping into her head from every direction.

"Just...for everything. I hope you had a good time, minus the quiche." He forced out a chuckle.

"I did," Marina answered, trying to sound distracted and tired. "I had a wonderful time."

"Well, that's great."

They were standing by her car now, on the driver's side door, the cold dusty country road under their feet. There was silence as he looked into the distance behind her, hands in his pockets, nervous. She began searching through her purse, pretending to look for her keys but really for her pepper spray, just in case.

"Well," she finally said, her hand in her purse, having located the thin yellow aerosol can. "I have to go now." She gave him a little nod, expecting him to back away and see that she was safely to her car and that it was okay for him to go back inside now, back into his ugly house with his ugly bees.

"Well," he sighed, not backing away, but instead looking around nervously, slightly rocking on his heels. "I really had a great time." He was expecting something or someone. Marina glanced around and clutched her spray tighter. She tried to convince herself that he was only enjoying the evening, a beautiful evening, with a nice bright moon and a nice cool breeze. She didn't want to blind him until the last minute, then she would make her get-away. In this story, she wasn't going to be some weak woman, and he wasn't going to be the brutish man.

"Yeah, me, too."

They appeared to be avoiding eye contact for the longest time, and then finally they found it. Brian worked his eyebrows suggestively, and she returned with a look of confusion. He closed his eyes quietly. *He's only enjoying the night, yes, the night,* she said to herself. Then he started moving. She was moments from whipping out the can and dousing his face until kingdom come. She had never used it before, but she had read the directions that came with it. It wouldn't be hard. Whip out. Spray. Run. She would press the tab, and it would spray. There would be no complications, no faulty cans, no explosions. She would survive.

He was leaning forward, his hands still in his pockets, eyes still closed. It was obvious he wasn't enjoying anything. She fumbled for a bit, pulled out the can, and held it to his face. He didn't open his eyes, but he stood there, leaning forward, lips puckered. He wasn't taking advantage of her, and he wasn't about to wrestle her to the floor, screaming. He wanted a kiss. He *wanted a kiss*. And instead of pressing the little red tab atop the bottle she jumped back a bit, startled, disgusted.

He *wanted a kiss*.

She looked at his face. He looked like he was falling, peaceful, sleeping, innocent. He was a child, waiting for a surprise that she wasn't about to give to him. What kind of a floozy did he think she was, kissing on the first date, a *blind* date?

And she didn't wait, and she didn't have the heart to spray, so she left him there waiting, as she jumped into her car and sped away

without even bothering to let it heat up first or to put on her seatbelt.

When Brian opened his eyes it was because she had slammed her door. He watched as she sped off and let his eyes follow her fire-engine-red taillights into the distance. He was embarrassed at first, as always, because he was never really a magnet for women. He was alone, he was a bachelor, and he couldn't cook. But he was okay.

After a few minutes of eyeing the moon, listening to his bees, and watching for satellites, which slipped across the sky like shooting stars in suspension, he chalked it up to experience. He was thirty-three years young; he still had his whole life ahead of him. He was independent, on his own. Monday morning he'd walk into a classroom of twenty-five high school juniors and teach them about literary mimeticism in the works of Robert Frost. He'd be home by four o'clock, where he'd take a shower, read the paper, fix a sandwich, and check on the bees one last time.

He remembered that even the best beekeepers had survived two or three hundred attacks in their lifetimes. He had only been stung once, no three times, and already he was a bee *god*. There was nothing wrong with who he was.

And it was something about the faint droning hum of the bees; something about the crispness of the night sky—kissed with the glitter of something bright, something far away, something better, something new—that convinced Brian to move on. In a whispering voice not unlike the one he sometimes heard in his dreams or when he read, it said to him, Clean up in the morning, Brian. It told him the night was over.

Branden K. Jacobs-Jenkins
Washington, DC
Mr. Joseph Patterson

PLANETARIUM

watching Polaris. Concrete and stationary as everything spun in a vortex.

I want to throw up. Dan asks. Why is everyone mad at you.
Mr. Cobb interrupts. Polaris will change to a new star soon.
No! The only concrete thing in a churning sea of nightmares.
In the dark. Dan touches my lips. Spun.
I close my eyes. Squeeze my knee. Nauseous.
Stars are girls. Stars are fights.
I am solitary. Girls are star clusters. Galaxies.
Maybe I'm Polaris. Maybe I'm a black hole.
Clusters pass. Can't close my eyes.
Vortex, suck me in.

Lauren Hilger
Allendale, NJ
Ms. Barrett-Tarleton

AN UNTITLED STORY ABOUT COUSINS

When the baby was born I told Auntie Kay that she ought to name it Carolina. "She's a baby, Anna," Auntie told me. "We don't call her 'it.'" Then she named the baby Laura. "We've never even *been* to Carolina," she added.

I spent every afternoon of that sweltering summer in the cool nursery with flowered wallpaper, staring through the bars of the white wooden crib. "Baby Carrie," I used to whisper to her, until she would wake up and blow spit bubbles from her tiny lips. "Anna," Auntie would say sternly if she ever caught me, "you must let Laura sleep." After a while she stopped catching me though, because Carrie learned better than to cry when I was around. Sometimes Auntie Kay would come into the nursery to find me sitting in the big rocking chair, my legs not yet long enough to reach the ground, Carrie asleep in my ten-year-old arms. She would take the baby from me, rousing her harshly out of sleep, and when Carrie would cry Auntie Kay

would mumble, "Now look what she's done; she's woken Laura again."

Mother was afraid I would become sickly, staying inside all day as I was doing. Even my exposed forearms were as pasty-white as the parts of my flat chest that were covered by my outgrown (and, this particular summer, unworn) bikini. She would send me to town on errands, handing me a few coins and a shopping list. I would buy myself penny candies with the leftover money and when I returned Mother would always ask, "Did you get yourself a treat too?" I would nod and tell her how enjoyable my root beer barrel had been, knowing that she hoped the candy was an incentive for me to leave the house more often. It wasn't. I nearly died of loneliness and boredom on the long walks into town, and I often sang myself lullabies to keep occupied. On the return home I would hear the songs in my head, but I was unable to sing comprehensibly because of the candies sweetening my mouth and dancing on top of my tongue.

Back to the nursery I went, after helping Mother put away the groceries I'd lugged home. I would rub a saliva-moist candy on my index finger and put it out towards Carrie. She would lick it, like a puppy, and I would laugh quietly for fear of making Auntie think I was bothering her precious little Laura again. "Carrie, that's root beer. Isn't it good?" She would blow spit bubbles and was even learning to laugh a little bit. "Wait until you taste chocolate," I told her.

I was there the first time she did taste chocolate, the following summer. It was her first birthday, and Auntie Kay threw a big party. Mother insisted that I wear my new jean jumper, so I did. I slipped and said to Mother, "I can't believe Carrie is one already!" Mother looked at me with mild contempt and reminded me her name was not Carrie. "It's Laura; her name is Laura. For Heaven's sake, should we all start calling you Jessica?"

I sulked, my favorite prepubescent rebellion. "Come on, Anna, could you put on a smile for your Auntie?" she asked. I scowled. "Anna Banana?" she tried. It too was met with a scowl. "My name is Jessica," I told her sourly, and she did not speak to me until it was time to leave the party.

This didn't stop me from enjoying myself, however. I stole into Carrie's nursery, sticking my tongue out at the pink "Laura's Room" sign on the door. Carrie was awake in her crib, but silent. Her eyes were bright and I guessed that she had been awake for some time. She hadn't cried, though, as if she had known to wait for me. I took Carrie from her crib and cradled her in my arms, loving how she smelled of powder and shampoo. I saw a pink dress hanging on the closet's doorknob, and I guessed that this was what Auntie had wanted her precious little "Laura" to wear for her party. I quickly dressed Carrie in the hideous outfit and sat in the rocking chair with her in my arms. This year, my toes just barely reached the floor.

Auntie Kay came in, saw me sitting with dressed-up "Laura," and jumped. "Anna!" she hissed, and I couldn't even find it inside me to tell her that today my name was Jessica. Auntie Kay snatched Carrie from me, Carrie started to whimper, Auntie mumbled. I wandered out to the backyard.

It was hot out, hot like a frying pan or like something else that gets very hot. I hid in the bushes to take off my stiff new sandals and my thick white tights. I emerged a moment later feeling freer: holding sandals, tights, and headband; feeling dirt on my toes, grass on my ankles, and wind through my hair.

I walked across the large lawn, wondering where to go. I didn't want to walk through the cornfields, so I started down the road I had walked so many times before, the road to town. I didn't have even a penny for candy, but it was something to do. A boy was walking down the road in the opposite direction, heading straight toward me. His feet were dusty and callused from walking the town's dirt roads. His arms were thin and brown from the sun. Hair fell into his eyes in gold curls, like an angel's hair. I stopped walking, left my shoes and tights by the side of the road, and put the headband back in my hair, hoping it looked pretty. I started walking again. "Hi," I said when our paths crossed. "I'm Anna. I'm eleven."

He was skinny, and shirtless under his overalls. "I'm Andrew. I'm twelve." A whole year older than me! "I'm going to town," I told him matter-of-factly, "but I haven't got any money." I looked at him, batting my eyebrows like the ladies in the movies do when they want someone to do something for them.

Andrew reached into his overall pocket and pulled out a half-dollar. "Here," he said. I smiled and thanked him, and walked on. I turned back once, and saw him staring curiously at the abandoned shoes and tights by the roadside. I was embarrassed.

A whole half-dollar! I went straight to the candy store where I bought the best-looking chocolate bar I could find. I filled my pocket with penny candies I bought with the leftover change. I went back to Auntie Kay's humming old songs Mother liked to listen to on the radio.

Nobody at Auntie's house was even paying attention to little Carrie, who lay on the floor next to a black teddy bear. I scooped her up in my arms and Auntie didn't notice because she was so busily fetching another beer for my soon-to-be Uncle Larry, for whom Laura had been named. Mother saw, but only scowled at my bare legs and dirty feet.

Upstairs, I sat Carrie in her crib and I plopped on the floor to eat my chocolate bar. "Isn't it awful, Carrie, that there are no other cousins? No one to play with," I mused. Carrie sat upright in her crib, staring down at me through the smooth wooden bars. She licked her lips and watched me more intently than most infants can. I rubbed a finger on the slightly melty chocolate and lifted it to her lips. She licked, tickling my finger, and did not stop licking even when I laughed so hard that my finger was moving violently back and forth as my body shook. Finally she allowed my finger out of her mouth and laughed along with me, in hiccupping, cough-like giggles—what had always been my signature laugh. I smiled up at Carrie's chubby face; she stared back down at me. "Anna," Mother called, and I forgot to be angry at her long enough to call back, "I'll be right there!"

Mother chastised me for running off to town, for leaving my sandals and tights on the roadside, and for taking Laura from the party downstairs. Apparently Auntie Kay had had a fit when Laura disappeared from the dusty family room carpet. Mother had spoken up for me though, and only because of that did I avoid a heavy scolding from Auntie. Meanwhile, Mother scolded me herself as we went out of our way to retrieve my sandals ("Brand new, for goodness sake, Anna," she said) and to leave the tights where they were (probably full of ants by now). I had to tell Mother that I had found the half-dollar along the roadside; otherwise, she would have thought I had stolen it. She even accused me of this. "Who would leave a whole half-dollar on the road?" she pondered.

The year after that, Carrie's second birthday, Mother was sick and I did not leave her side. She was not seriously ill, but it was better for me to stay with her, making tea and putting washcloths on her forehead and such.

We did not see Carrie the following year either. Mother got a job in the city and we moved away. We were still invited to the parties, of course, but I could not go again until I was seventeen years old. (I drove in from the city just for the party.) So it was Carrie's seventh birthday, and the small house was overrun with giddy grade-schoolers.

I rang the doorbell and Auntie opened it with a surprised, "Anna! Oh, Anna, I'm so glad you could come!" I smiled politely, feeling distant from a relative who had never been a favorite of mine but who had always been close by. "Larry!" she called. "Larry, look who's here!"

Larry, who had been my uncle for nearly six years now, kissed my cheek. I cringed. His beer belly had only grown since I had last seen him. Auntie Kay led me to the kitchen, where she sat me on a wooden chair and asked how school was. I told her school was good and I was looking for a college. "In a city," I told her.

"Everyone's in the cities these days," she mumbled. I noticed that the other women gathered in the kitchen were not relatives.

Auntie noticed at about the same time. "Ladies," she announced, louder than she had to, "this is my niece Anna. Anna, some of our friends and neighbors."

I ducked my head, but managed to make it look like I was nodding a polite hello. "Where is the birthday girl?" I asked. Auntie Kay pointed me towards the living room, where I saw a tiny girl with ribbons in her still-baby-curly hair sitting on an old couch surrounded by more tiny girls with ribbons in their baby-curly hair. Denim shorts and pastel tee shirts seemed to be the uniform; Laura's tee shirt had a unicorn on it and was still shiny white—probably a birthday present. I bet Auntie won't let her eat in it. Heaven forbid a kid should ever spill something.

I entered the room with a confident stride; I was met with curious stares that slowed my pace. I handed Laura her present and all her friends started to twitter, "Ooh! What is it? Open it, open it!"

Auntie Kay appeared behind me saying, "Laura dear, this is your cousin Anna. She came all the way from the city for your birthday. Thank her for the present."

I blushed red. "Happy birthday," I said.

"Thank you," Laura mumbled. She'd been saying it a lot lately, I'm sure.

I watched the delight on Laura's face as she opened the package. She tore through the yellow paper and white ribbon; she arrived at the pink box and held it up for everyone to see. "A doll from the city!" one freckle-faced girl exclaimed. I hoped Laura liked it. After staring at it for a moment, she began to play Miss Mary Mack with the brown-haired girl beside her.

I felt tired and out of place. I couldn't find Auntie Kay, so I began to leave. I was on my way out when a tan, muscled young man came in the door. Golden brown curls tumbled across his forehead. "Is your car the red one?" he asked.

I nodded.

"You had a flat. I fixed it."

"Thanks," I said. "I've gotta get going."

"I'm Andrew," he said quickly, "and I'm eighteen."

I laughed and turned around. Nodding, I said, "I'm Anna. I'm seventeen."

"I know," he answered. "I've been waiting six years for you to come back."

I just stared.

"Do you still have to go?" he asked.

"No, I'm—sorry, I'm a little tired. I can stay a little longer." I smiled a flirty smile, thinking that it works every time.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't stay too. I have to run off to do some errands. I'll see you sometime...maybe in another six years or so." He leaned forward slightly, then put his hand awkwardly out. I shook it. "I can't wait," I whispered.

Laura was behind me; I saw Auntie watching us from a distance. "Thank you for the doll. It's beautiful. And thank you for, um, driving such a very long way for my party." Like lines from a script, acted without emotion.

"Goodbye, Carrie," I said to her.

"My name is Laura," she said, her indignant young eyes burning with anger or confusion.

So, "Happy birthday, Laura," I said, to her fresh young face that was lost in thought about pigtails or cookies or something else that seven-year-olds think about. I opened the screen door, waving goodbye to Auntie across the room.

Climbing into my car, I looked nostalgically at the squat house and to my surprise Laura was running out of it, the screen door clattering shut behind her as her feet sank into the earth with each step. "Wait!" she was calling. I assumed Auntie wanted Laura to tell me something more before I left, so I stopped the car and waited. Laura came right up close to my car door and gestured for me to put my hand out. "Close your eyes," she said mischievously. I did. "I remember," she whispered, as something light and crinkly fell into my sweaty, outstretched palm. I reveled in the sound of her voice for a moment, musing over the mysteriousness she'd achieved even at

her young age. She must be smart, I thought. When I opened my eyes the screen door was already closing behind Laura. In my hand was a single root beer barrel.

Amanda Strogoff
Worcester, MA

NO LINE BETWEEN

Why does she want me to go with her? For moral support? That's laughable. It's doesn't make any sense. I don't agree with it. It's the most horrible sin a woman could commit, and she wants me to go with her as if to say, "Yeah, it's okay since she's my friend." Why is she doing this to me, making me choose between friendship and faith?

Eleven o'clock. That's when she has to be there tomorrow. Twelve hours from now. It's going to happen tomorrow. What if I don't show up? Will she still do it?

Maybe she won't go through with it, changed her mind last night, realized it was wrong, realized she was too scared to carry out the whole thing. I hear someone stumbling around in the dorm room. I've been standing outside the door for almost half an hour, unsure of whether I want to knock or wait or run away as fast as possible. In truth, I've been longing for her to swing open the door before I could turn and walk away, for her to just make the decision for me. Come on Izzy. You had to be there ten minutes ago. Are you doing this or not? Mumbling from behind the familiar door, I feel guilty, inexplicably guilty because I have not come wholeheartedly and because I came in the first place. I can't even have it make sense to myself. But I do know that this isn't right, not right at all. "This isn't right!"

"Molly?"

I clap my hands over my mouth. Had I really said it out loud?

"Molls?" The door swings inward; Izzy's face is a blend of shock and relief. "I didn't think you'd show."

"Yeah, well, I'm here." The moment freezes. Neither one of us speaks or moves. "Breathe," I remind myself. The deep inhale comes rushing back out in a mess of harshness and spite: "So are you doing this or what?" Her eyes give me the signal to say sorry. I really am sorry (but I don't tell her that).

"I'll get my coat and purse. Thanks again for coming. I know it doesn't make much sense to you. I'd probably be wasting my time trying to make you understand why I asked you to come. It's just that I can't go by myself. And besides, who else would I ask? We're practically sisters, you and I. And—"

I'm not listening to her. I just hear that high-pitched voice, a voice most would think of as belonging to a child, a small, innocent child. Izzy was so cute as a kid. We really were like sisters. Memories of inflatable pools and fancy tea parties make me smile. I look up at her now and that smile disappears, swallowed whole by disappointment. Happiness surfaces on her face—a delayed reaction to my few brief moments of nostalgia. I've seen her smile a lot lately, but she's not happy. I've been her "sister" for far too long to buy into her perky façade. She's scared. I could probably talk her out of it, tell her all the reasons for keeping the baby, all the reasons why...

"I've heard it all before, Molls."

"What are you talking about?" I snap back.

"Don't think I don't know what's going through your head. I do! And I don't want to hear it. I don't need or want your approval." She steps towards me, ironically with a maternal look to her. "I just need those cool, unwavering hands of yours to hold onto before I walk into that room."

I sigh, needing to release my sadness, unwilling to do it through tears. She extends her small chubby hand. Its tan complexion contrasts against the paleness of my thin fingers, which she affectionately squeezes.

I manage a faint "Come on," and we descend down the hall

into a dim stairwell.

We walk into the waiting room. It is blinding. From the white tiling and Designer White paint to the fluorescent ceiling lights, it's hard to tell where floor ends and wall begins. Our heels clack against the shiny surface beneath us. Suspended at an indeterminate distance is a closed door.

"May I help you?"

"Yes, my name is Izzy Blakewood. My appointment was actually for 11:00. Sorry, I'm running a little late because..."

I almost hear Izzy talking but not quite. I think the white is having an effect on me. There's a faint buzzing sound. Maybe it's the lights. Yes, the lights are buzzing. I look up and quickly return to staring at the wall (or at least where a wall appears to be). A purple spot passes by my head. There goes another and another and...

"Take a seat, Hon. Someone will be with you in a moment."

"Thanks, come on Molls. Molly? Hello? Anyone home? Molly? Abortion clinic to Molly! God, I feel like I'm the one holding your hand."

"What's that? What did you say?"

"I said, 'Get off cloud nine!' This is it, Molls. This is when I need you. This is when you have to be strong for me, and say everything'll be all right. Pray for me or something. Can you do that?"

"Please Izzy, don't talk so loudly." I feel the blood pulsating in my head as the early stages of a migraine set in. The buzzing lights make it worse.

Why is she yelling at me? I'm here aren't I? I'm holding her hand and everything. She should be happy I came in the first place. As I sit on this hard plastic chair, this very minute, I'm going against everything I've ever been taught and everything I believe in. I'm giving up parts of me so that she can commit murder.

I turn to face the chair next to me. "Izzy, please don't—"

The chair is empty. The room is empty. I tap on the sliding glass that shields the receptionist. "Yes, she's not there anymore."

"She's with the doctor right now, Hon. You're just gonna have to sit and wait for her."

"But—" I searched the white for words. "But the chairs are cold and hard." The pane of glass slides across my face, banging next to my left ear. "They're uncomfortable!" I yell. Stepping back, I reluctantly sit down again. So, she's gone then. I wonder, "Did I squeeze her hand when she left?" I can't remember. Suddenly, I rush to the receptionist. "Excuse me, Missus, but I need to see my friend. I have to tell her something. It's very important." I pound the glass with every word that exits my mouth. "She needs me. Please, I—I have to hold her hand. Missus?" The woman behind the desk casually places a set of headphones over her ears, not once looking up at me. "Missus?"

I hopelessly look up at the ceiling, forgetting the blinding effect of the lights. Stunned, I look back at the wall, now seeing streaks of red.

I can't take this room anymore. I have to get out of here, go outside, and get away from the white and the red and the glass and the woman that sits behind it.

I walk as quickly as I can without running and throw myself at the doors.

I have failed miserably. I know it when I see Izzy step out from the clinic doorway. Hunched over, her arms wrapped around her belly, she is the epitome of pathetic. Any anger left in me dwindles to nothingness. I grab her by the hands, not thinking of the pain she is enduring. "I'm so sorry, Izzy. I'm so so sorry." Over and over again I say it. She gives my hand a small squeeze that lets me know everything will be all right. She had forgiven me, completely and utterly forgiven me, and I realize that this whole ordeal was not a test. There was no line to be drawn between friend and faith.

We make it back up the flights of stairs and down the vacant

hallway, a pitiful image of innocence lost. Silently, we walk through the last doorway of our day, and as Izzy slips between her disheveled sheets, I pull up a chair. For hours I sit on that hard oak desk chair, submitting to the hum of a ceiling light, and occasionally squeezing Izzy's hand.

Alex Melotti
Chambersburg, PA
Mrs. Anne K. Branham

VIRGINIA

Yes Virginia

I will fling it all away!
at the edge of the East River
the wind whistled off the lip of my soda bottle
I am in love with a flame-haired girl!
I wish she were here
sharing a coca-cola, desiring my company
(our mouths might meet over two striped straws)
Oh yes flames and
wind and water!
the river shifts and the wind sings and her hair burns; I will fling it all
away!
she will know somehow, my body floating in the water
the ecstasy, the song
it will all be hers
a present—all wrapped up—she will open it when I die
like unwinding a child on a swing, it will be free!
on a swing on her belly
squeaking chains twisted up top
let it go!
There is too much to see,
too much to love
I will toss this life over the railing—
I will let it go.

Alexandra Atiya
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Mrs. Jane L. Rinden

WORLD OF GLASS

"Remove your shoes at the door,"
Says the sign at the gate.
It is a white carpet, you know,
And on the clear glass table,
A clock made of crystal,
Hands of pure gold,
Streamlining the hours it purges away,
Like catharsis, sans the tears.
I do not heed the warning.
Every time I step I blacken the fibers
With footprints—they refuse to turn white;
They forget they are not glass—
Blue and red and yellow glass,
A glassblower's dream:
Glass that lets the sun through,
Porous, devouring the light, eating
The air (glass has jaws?),
Quietly observing their god the chandelier,
Gently swaying in the vanished atmosphere.

Taylor Altman
Baldwin, NY
Mrs. Bohbot

BRASS TREE

There is this brass tree outside my window
I am hungry for its cymballic swings
I want to climb it barefoot
Will my feet upon the bark
Sound like rain drops upon metal roofs?
Lie under the bronzed tree
Listen to these torrents of my vertical steps
It is a symphony alive in motion
Become drenched with fallen beads of mercury
That the golden leaves once held
The cup of a leaf is the conquering of night through day
It is water savored within this tree,
It is mercury
As you lie there on the ground,
I see you through the mosaic of sunwrapped branches
Here and there
You are veiled in this foil
But I see that you too, like the tree

Are living in this spherical velocity of light...

Katie McNally
Pittstown, NJ
Mrs. Linda Flindt

DON'T THROW GRASS AT THE PIGEONS

These teenage boys. They
catch them and tie up their webbed feet.
Don't throw grass at the pigeons—
They suffered adequately in these yards.
Get it through your skull—They think it's food
and their little necks flutter from a bit of hope
as your hand mimics the gesture of the
kind elderly, who sometimes throw them bread—
or expired cookies (But not a lot, anyway.
I think they'd rather eat it themselves, you know...
Lines here, in stores...can't buy milk, really.)
...And they realize you're fooling them—
Throwing green, sharp grass under their feet—
Some feet already sliced up. Damaged. They can't walk,
some of them.
Damn it. Stop throwing grass at the pigeons.
That's it. Pangs my heart. Chest pains.
I told you not to jump on the curb...
You were walking along the curb
like a goddamn ballerina...or a gymnast on a beam
and I told you to come down lest you fall...
and you fell. Fell and scraped your pink knee.
Scraped off two layers of pink skin.
And then, those wound-up teenage boys—
They were sweeping like rockets past us, on bikes,
Like lit dynamite with a glowing, cracking tail, dropping sparks.
They do that daily. It turns me inside-out, I swear—when I see
them—
they don't even sit down...they stand on the pedals
and they don't care to discern their surroundings, you know—
Just swoosh like someone injected them with adrenaline
in their buttocks. Crazy young boys. Fourteen, sixteen maybe.
Sweating like caged hogs.
So peacefully...you were swaying on those rings,
those bagel-shaped rings and you
must have felt a bit of vertigo there when we got ready
to cross that damn road. And before your little,
sandaled, dirt-grey foot even slid off the curb,

Some adrenaline hog knocked you to your side...
 like a bowling pin and didn't even brake—just left a
 salty garland hovering in the air, of this teenage hog sweat.
 I'd run after him if I could, but my heart contracted full of pines
 and hedgehogs—like some novice surgeon
 left scissors in me during my first post-heart-attack operation.
 And that's likely too, you know. They don't give them enough
 heavy coins where we live. And I read med-school students often
 have
 stomach ulcers because they eat wrong—no time.
 So, could have been an intern, the assistant—
 one of those nervous, sleep-deprived ulcer students.
 Actually, your father told me—I don't read that scientific propaganda,
 Only finished six grades...
 I was amazed to threads when you got up and leaped—
 clicking your previously immaculate sandals like horseshoes
 I wanted to murder that unicycle trickster...
 And then, you jumped up on the beige curb around the flowerbeds
 and I warned you that my heart was already scrubbed with a sponge
 from that bear-on-a-unicycle incident. But, you just skipped
 and what do you know—you fell. Little sandal slipped, like a novice
 figure-skater. And oh I felt it coming. That second heart attack.
 Inna Goldberg
 New York, NY
 Mrs. Lustbader



Sharon Chadi
 Great Neck North High School
 Great Neck, NY

OH BONDAGE.

When Susan told me
 the human body was ugly,
 I wondered whether she had had
 too much of reality, or too little.

An excess of acid raining through her bloodstream,
 an excess of scissors
 to separate hands from wrists?

Or, was it a matter of a mirror image:
 not enough gutter dreams
 to see what bars over manholes were hiding—
 not enough disappointment
 and truth, to scrub on
 and dirty oneself with.
 I wondered whether she was
 seaglass
 made beautiful by fights
 with rough seas;
 or
 too sharp for practical use,
 an inexperienced youth with too many scissors
 for her own good.

Sara Wintz
 Morristown, NJ
 Ms. Nancy Gorrell

THE ROMANTICIZED

he who sings for the sad Sargasso
 I waltz for you
 and your disfigurement.

I might be a bit like you
 or rather I wish I was
 for dramatic purposes only.
 enjoying those quarter till 3:00 a.m.'s
 with friends, the three-legged stool, and her tuned-down guitar you
 borrowed
 for the long term.

the house's lights die out at the gig
 your falsetto and hurt eyes pierce through the clear darkness
 and I want to hug your cinema self
 in a Hank Williams Jr. t-shirt.

listening to your demo tapes again
 4-track recordings, made downstairs, alone.
 fueled by the man, a jilter's disdain, and your barbiturates.
 you are a walking anachronism, an offering to Shiva.

following in your boot prints
 in and out of punk-houses, bars, and other existential lost n' founds
 the scenesters provide little help in finding you.
 I just hope you're not back in Dallas on the rag coach with your
 mamma.
 Staring like her doll face at meaningless.

Nick Sokolow
 Towson High School
 Towson, MD
 Mr. William Jones

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

FOR EMILY

We were pretending,
 To be old-fashioned teachers,
 Ones who taught in the country.
 We held our baskets and books,
 Acting all grown-up,
 And while you had the pointer,

I carried the wooden parasol.
With matching straw hats
And itchy dresses,
Paired off with white aprons,
All cold and scented by the attic,
We stood ready, both smiling,
With me on tip toes,
Trying to be tall like you.

Claire Edwards
Towson High School
Towson, MD
Mr. William Jones

BASK

you remind me of eating summertime
crackerjacks,
with a cool ring inside so I'm with you
I don't care I didn't see the
double play. of
dancing barefoot
through potholed side streets so I'm with you
and not caring when I stub or bleed. sleeping
sticky in my favorite bathing suit
running to the beach
when I wake,
with you and not noticing much else.

pencil and paper always in
my pocket
so I'm writing you down
for later, when
I'll not want to notice much else.

Amanda Strogoff
Worcester, MA

HEAT WAVE

Now that it's hot, the girls wear pastel tank tops and bend from the waist, their breasts hanging from them like small globs of Jello from an upside down spoon. Meaty boys in baseball hats smirk, and send scribbled notes across the humid classroom. Their handwriting is loose, messy and hurried, like their novice shaving in the early morning light. Red-cheeked smiles, a combination of embarrassment and pleasure, spread over the girls' faces, and red faces—dirty thoughts—are everywhere on the boys. Everyone looks red in the summertime

Heat Waves

"...sweeping the country like fires," the meteorologist states, deadpan, to the camera, his face a mask of detachment. But even he, handsome face of Channel 3, feels the draining effect of the weather. Inside his gray suit and red tie, which make him look authoritative and dashing, he desperately wishes he were at home, watching some other clown on T.V., himself gloriously slovenly in plaid boxers, stained undershirt, and, to amuse the pizza delivery chick, egregiously mismatched socks. Instead, it is time for the five-day forecast, then back to you, John and Mindy, who ask, "How about this

Heat Wave?"

The children ask from within the kitchen freezer, feet dangling outside the cold confines of the icebox. What heat wave? They hear the sputtering motor, glance dubiously at the equipment, then shovel more rich and gooey chocolate ice cream into their mouths, ignoring the sugar-and-fat-free lemon sorbet Mom keeps in the back. The

chicken for tomorrow's dinner is slowly defrosting, they suspect coming back to life like a man from a cryogenic freezer in a science fiction movie they've recently seen. They know when the chicken emerges from the icebox, newly awakened, it will thank the children in antiquated English and suggest that they be best friends forever. And they will accept, telling him his rebirth was possible only because of this marvelous

Heat Wave.

Sarah Goff
Tenafly, NJ
Mr. Stanley Flood

SIX-POINTED STAR

"In another age, she might have been a poet. Instead, Hannah Senesh was a victim of the Nazis, murdered before her twenty-third birthday."

—In *Kindling Flame*

You went unrestrained
to Palestine, our Promised Land.

March 13th 1944, you
jumped back, off an airplane
into Hungary. To help.

50 years later,
in bitter print of
Holocaust stories—a realization.

I've never been where Hitler fired the hidden shot
that killed 12 million, Jews, half of them.

You wouldn't like how our religion
only remembers "our" 6 million. I don't.
Waxy syllables of Hebrew are foreign.
Flickering frozen on my tongue.

I don't know you,
untouched sprinter one step ahead.
No one can catch you.

Why not?

You. Possibly a poet,
a star still visible,
were you writing of
yourself?

I've never been a yellow star.
You—Hannah,
whose parachute formed
a detailed trail after the jump.
To define you—Nazi victim.
A statistic. No—
A Poet.

Huddled in the US,
in another age, I might
have been a victim of
the Nazis. Instead, I
write some words.

Meredith Weber
Boston, MA
Lisa Baker

IT DOESN'T RAIN HERE ANYMORE

it doesn't rain here anymore.
parched and grasping,

the people have left.
 they have gathered themselves up,
 teacups and textbooks and tensions,
 and gone away.
 they have all gone out with their
 unwieldy angles and unneeded tears,
 and i am left, not leaving.
 i am the dust that settles on their
 unused buildings, the rot
 that creeps into their old souls,
 the ones they abandoned in the midst
 of a life. i am the rock that broke
 the windowpane, the rust that has corroded
 their metal hearts. i spin the cobwebs
 that hang in the minds of their senile
 grandmothers and serial killers, i am
 the cold hand that touches
 the spot that no one else
 sees. i am the flame that engulfs
 the cracks and sends the people fleeing,
 carrying their hope in
 their throats,
 their voices echoing
 through empty corridors,
 trapped in locked boxes,
 their incessant cries of
 'forget.'

Carrie Murphy
 Towson High School
 Baltimore, MD
 Mr. William Jones

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE BAPTISM OF DYLAN ROBBINS

She was broad-hipped and young, face straining
 for familiarity; her hands clutched at husband, at
 baby, at the hymnal thrust into her lap, lips torn
 around the edges of strange songs rising from her
 throat. He was blue-jeaned and beaming; jawline
 tracing smiles up to his neck, his sideburns, the
 vague smear of beard running down his cheeks.
 Sitting, their backs ran together, shoulders and
 elbows melting into the pew, a glimpse of altar
 appearing between the gap where collarbones left
 off.

Between them, a newborn kicked silently, hands
 raking the air, grasping for parents in the closeness
 of the sanctuary. Father poked back at son, wondering
 why they were holding so tight to one another, father
 still fresh in his title, this pronunciation of responsibility,
 this of job and family and house and wife. He, as I, peered
 stoic-eyed, trying to grin away the youth still clinging
 wet to his twenty-three years of hairline. To stare into
 that mirror, to see his face resemble and twist my own,
 to feel the fear of wisdom ringing inside my head; to
 walk out of church trembling, hardly able to breathe
 for all the air.

Will Holman
 Towson High School
 Towson, MD
 Mr. Matthew Hohner

THE BLACK PORSCHE

A midnight blur, a bullet,
 Sunroof and leather seats.
 Streetlights flashed the outlines of its slender curves,
 Pure waxy black without a scratch.

You loved that car,
 Because you knew everyone wanted it.
 The constant rise and fall of its deafening roar
 Became your blood's pulse;
 The gear, molded to your powerful grasp,
 Became your confidence.

You knew you looked cool
 In your streamlined rocket on wheels,
 Windows down,
 Long hair whipped back by effortless speed,
 Fuel and adrenaline streaming.

I felt cool too,
 Occupying the passenger seat,
 Absorbing that car's intensity.
 I wonder how many miles we drove
 Down familiar suburban streets,
 Not having anywhere to go but always going,
 Always moving, watching
 The telescoping view on a ribbon of asphalt
 Come into focus and then fly by.

Your odometer counted through a year
 Of us together; dials scrolled through
 Numerous trips from my driveway to yours—
 Probably a thousand miles added
 In a highway span of only three or four.

That car overheard many of my secrets,
 Heard the best and worst
 Of our exchanged conversation,
 Navigated the curves of many weekends.
 That car was put to the test
 Of several nearly broken curfews.

I guess we both felt cool,
 Rushing across scorching blacktop
 In that razor-sharp machine that was perfection and envy.
 You liked it because it was fast.
 I liked it because it was yours.

We probably turned a few heads.

Ashley Owens
 Paducah Tilghman High School
 Paducah, KY

CHARLES IULIO

I think this:
 Charlie
 Chuckie
 Chuck he
 Chuck he I ooo li oh
 Chuck he I ooh let mi oh
 c, ch, c, ck, along along along
 he let me
 it was slow

but oh
no oooooh
Chuck, he and I oooh
let me
oh

Charles Iulio.

And then I find out it's lulo
and that's too sudden
and doesn't work.
Chuck and I are no more.

Charles Iulo.

Sophie Ketabchi
Ramapo High School
Wyckoff, NJ
Mr. William D. Manzo

DROWNING IN YOU

I surround myself
in soapy water
for the third time this week
in hopes that the bubbles
will wash you away.
My fingers and toes
wrinkly,
my hair
wrapped in a messy bun
on top of my head
somehow still manages
to soak up more water
than the entire tub can hold.
I close my eyes
and submerge my face
into its liquid warmth.
I still haven't escaped
how much you hate me.
When my lungs begin to ache
I press my lips to the surface
and find myself
gasping for air
at the thought of you
but I would rather breathe the water
bubble and soap,
than inhale another breath
because
if I rely on this oxygen,
the same that you are sucking in,
I know
I'll choke.

Sarah Bregel
Towson High School
Baltimore, MD
Mr. William Jones

WINTER IN THE FRONT YARD

The tire swing at my Dad's house
always had a little puddle of dirt
inside of it, which became a mound
of mud during a wintertime drizzle.
When it was just dirt, I'd slip
my legs through the opening
and grasp the frayed rope tied

to a bough 80 feet above.
The frozen rubber bit through
my light-denim, middle school jeans,
Converse All-Stars dragging
on the hard ground beneath.
Nick would twirl the tire
around and around
and images of the brick house
and the gray-green grass
would blur as I'd spin, spin,
carefully lifting my feet
against a centripetal tug.
The figures of my little sister
and older step-brother melted
into a swirling iridescence
and when I was released,
the house and grass and crabtrees
whirled too fast, too fast around me
and I clung desperately to the rope,
knowing it was not possible
to spin any faster,
the February cold stealing
through my parka, smell of firewood
leaking from inside the brick house.

Emily Bregel
Towson High School
Baltimore, MD
Ms. Jennifer Kemmery

COUNTRY ROADS

Slicing scissors—
her hair falls down,
a path straight to the ground.

Blow dryers buzz all around,
a stream gushes from the sinks,
and noses burn from the smell of nail polish.

I wish time would move faster.
Bringing me into this world sooner.
But for now,
I just watch, wait.

A man stands there holding a pair of scissors.
He will be my father.
The sharp blades cut through her beautiful blonde hair.
She will be my mother.

Conversation trims,
as he takes his time.
She wants to leave.
He wants her to stay.

I braid the two of them together.

Lindsay Sabatino
Tenafly, NJ
Mr. Whitehead

IN PRAISE

*"Now in its immortality, it plays
On the clear viol of her memory,
And makes a constant sacrament of praise."
-Wallace Stevens*

And so we sprung, from my grandparents' stodgy upper east-side apartment, my father and I, into the grayed city. On this late December morning, the bloodied reality of downtown was a stilled, drunken quality in the air where we walked. Muted like a man unable to pronounce what ails him, The City was writhing, so quietly. Aside from occasional flourishes, a flag hung in a Madison Avenue storefront, a gold flag pinned to the lapel of a passing pedestrian, there was a dulled, unspeakable sadness glimmering in that moment before the sun showed noontime.

"There's one somewhere near here," said my father, as we rounded 71st Street.

My feet moved over the cracks in the pavement, tentatively searching for cleaner pastures of concrete. "Oh, you don't mean that one right around Sharper Image do you? The," I paused for recollection, "the Soup Burg?"

"Uh, yes," my father said with weary recognition.

"Let's go somewhere else. I'm not crazy about that one."

"We could go over to Third. I'm pretty sure there are some diners there."

"Let's stick it out here," I said, resolute. "I think there's something up a ways."

After walking several blocks, my father and I strolled briefly into a small bookstore. He thumbed through European art books and my gaze passed over the glossy covers of thick, coffee-table bibles: *The Beauty of Women, Images of Arizona, Skylines of the City*.

Again outside, moving through pages of brisk air and snowless Decembers, we spoke of colleges and of my newly completed small book of applications.

"And so what comes next?" my father inquired, as he had frequently in the past month regarding this subject.

I cruised through my answer, toned like a well-written speech. "...and I still have to do those two supplementary essays and then I'm done. Just a lot of waiting." I pulled my scarf upwards with my teeth, and burrowed my lips into its folds. My hands remained pushed into my jacket pockets, tucked from the biting midday cold. Legs moving swiftly, grateful for the heat of friction, I paused as I noticed that my father was no longer at my side.

He was several yards back, staring with curious fixation into the window of an electronics store. "Lifeline Audio" was written on the glass in decorative cursive. I walked back towards him.

Behind the glass was a sleek, wide screen television, framing, in crystal clear definition, a soundless football game.

"This technology has really gotten so incredible," said my father scanning the screen.

"It's like watching a movie." I freed my naked hand quickly to pull my hat a little further down over my ears.

"You know, I wonder if you actually see more image with this thing, since it's wider."

"Let's get inside," I said, moving around my father to a door on the right of the window.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah." A bell chimed from inside and I could feel the forgiving heat touch my nose as I swung the door open.

A young dark-haired man was sitting at a desk to the left of the entrance. Wearing glasses of thick black plastic and a navy suit, he stood as my father and I entered.

"Hi there," my father said, wearing a big sociable grin. "We were just admiring those TVs you have in the window."

A pianist's slow and jazzy *White Christmas* was ringing through the small shop from behind a yellow velvety curtain draped at the back of the store. The music was clear and warm; I could hear muffled voices from behind the curtain.

"We had a question though," he continued. "On those wide screen TVs, do you actually see more image?"

The Suit smiled knowingly as he moved around his desk and approached my father with a comfortable stare. "Well actually, the image is just slightly stretched, although you'd never notice it, so that it fits the screen. It's just a small adjustment. The image is almost

twice as clear on that screen out there than on a normal television."

"Huh," said my father, engaged, nodding his head slightly. He casually broke the Suit's stare and panned his eyes about the room, noticing for the first time its sparse fittings: On the left, the oak desk, topped with a stack of business cards, a few papers, and an arched desk lamp. On the right, where we stood, adjacent to the glass door, were several mahogany bookshelves which reached the ceiling. On each shelf stood a separate and somewhat misplaced item: nearest to me, a compact stereo. On the shelf above it, a flat-screened television with a few old looking books to either side. The two shelves closest to me supported strange-looking metal boxes with glass tubes rising out from their surface. The shelves were few, in all. My father and I stood on a swirling Persian rug of a deep red hue that covered most of the wooden floorboards in the small room. At the back of the room was the pale yellow curtain.

"Television isn't really our specialty," said the Suit coyly. "We actually make our own audio equipment." I eyed the curious metallic boxes resting on the nearby shelves.

The Suit looked back to the curtain then to my father and me. "Do you have a few minutes?"

The pianist in the back was no longer playing Christmas carols, but instead a wild fugue. The music was sweeping the room, slightly louder than before.

"We do our own recordings," he said. "Here, come on." He moved to the back of the room, gesturing for my father and me to follow him.

"We really don't want to interrupt," said my father as we



Jed Weeks
Glencoe, MD

moved, with poorly veiled curiosity.

The Suit only grinned as he reached the curtain, and pulled open an entrance in its middle.

He revealed another room of equal size, before retreating to the front entrance of the store. In the new room's center was a long backless sofa upholstered in maroon fabric. A man wearing a thick beige turban was seated in the middle, his back towards us. Ahead were several large speakers, from which wires ran to little metallic boxes sprawled throughout the room.

A lanky man with shiny, well-kept silver hair stood to our left. He wore a cleanly primed white oxford shirt and pleated khakis. One

hand was stroking several switches on the wall next to him. Placid brown eyes turned towards my father and me. With his spare hand, he gestured towards the sofa in the middle of the room. "Please."

My father squinted his eyes, hunched his shoulders, and raised his hand as if to suggest that we were fine where we were.

"Please," said the silver-haired man once more.

We hesitantly moved to the plush sofa and took a seat on either side of the turbaned man.

The fugue ended. "This next piece is a recording I made of my mother-in-law," he said. "What you will hear in the background are bells from Thailand." He flipped a switch on the wall and a gong shook the room. It rang as if pressed against my eardrum. A woman's frail voice then rose from beneath the gong, as if whispering against my face. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

A higher bell sounded, faintly, as if miles away. *He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.* She closed her mouth and I could hear the saliva on her lips as she began to speak again.

He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me. The gong sounded again and I felt it in my stomach. I glanced at the silver-haired man and his head was bowed, his eyes pressed tightly shut. His mouth was downturned, although not quite frowning.

Your rod and staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. A final bell rang, higher this time, as if only an undeveloped thought, not yet departed from the head. *And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.* As she exhaled, the reverberations of the final bell grew too faint, and then there was silence.

The silver-haired man touched the switch again with his index finger and looked towards the center of the room, his eyes almost moist, but his face utterly composed. He moved towards the front of the sofa, and extended his hand to my father.

"Mark Levinson."

"Derek Stern," said my father as he stood, grasping the man's hand. "And that was astounding. I mean I've never heard anything so realistic."

Again we ventured into the December afternoon. Standing on the corner of 78th, my father looked pensively ahead as we waited for the lights to turn. I looked to my left and saw a bulky man in a navy down coat. He had a thick red nose planted above a forest of swelling dark stubble. Pressed inside his ears were tiny headphones releasing only a muffled dance to the outside world. His head was bobbing contentedly, and only for a moment did he turn his large silver eyes to mine before quickly averting his gaze. And the pulse of the city, as if suddenly alive, came crashing against my heart like the waves of an ocean taken by storm. A herd of bright yellow taxis bearing the names of the newest Broadway hits swept by us, as the lights on that corner turned ruby to emerald. Swelling blue, the sky seemed primed for rain as we made our way across the road. I locked my knees, just slightly, so as not to drop to that pavement in praise.

Joshua Stern
Phillips Exeter Academy
Exeter, NH
Mr. David Weber

INSOMNIA

My mother is one of those people
who spend a lot of their time
doing a lot of nothing

which is not a lifestyle I resent
I am perhaps envious of it
yet I often wonder if her
dreams have been properly boxed into an attic,
and now lie covered in cobwebs, forgotten about. Most people
chase after their dreams, or at least pretend to.
My mother does not live a life of illusion.
I am from a family where "most people"
are simply not us.

In my DNA Fenway Park is the holy land
where we entreat our Red Sox to move beyond baseball's promontory
and blossom, our Red Sox,
our love for them embedded in our thick skulls,
a stubborn obsession with defeat, passed down like a war medal,
tales whispered from a grandfather to a grandson,
of the baseball of doom, tiptoeing under the legs of an idle first baseman,
as an infant I witnessed the tragedy,
one of many lives fastened together like the knot on a noose
fated to die like that night must have died in Boston,
as cruel as possible, my family one of many that suffered.

An absinthe began to brew over my life when
I visited my grandfather one last time.
He lacked the strength to even squint
his green-blue eyes, same as my green-blue eyes
and therefore he could not recognize me, he could not acknowledge me,
surrounded by a platoon of well-paid nurses and doctors,
heavy disinfectant spray and my grandmother's brisket, masking the
smell of
rotting flesh and organs.

I desperately tried to memorize that image of him,
starch-white undershirt, bald head, machines trying to revive him
place it in a frame and hang it upon my mind for future dreams,
poems, sadness.

I can think of no other image tonight
Tonight is the night I cannot sleep
Vainly I place my head on a pillow
my mother put her head down on the pillow
on a bed and cried salty rivulets onto the sheets,
my father embraced her,
grasping how sad this was,
my mother learning her father was going to die.

A parade! Innumerable scores of black funeral limousines
tributizing my grandfather—
what dreams he still must have had,
this a funeral for people and dreams—
from my window I stared at the bare trees of winter
and remembered the image I had consciously determined to remember,
of my grandfather,
who died 10 miles away from Fenway Park.

Ethan Porter
Teaneck, NJ
Mr. Sosland

UNTITLED

Morgan dances to drink
and drinks to forget about falling
off the stairless ivory tower that is narrower than her hips,

narrower than her smooth legs stretched out in a handstand split
 stroked with singles and painted fingernails
 like her long braids fall across her shoulders,
 shiny in the lights.
 "Everyone wants to go home with the dancer,"
 so Morgan dances and drinks.
 And it's gold for you, tonight, Morgan,
 gold lamé and gold eyelashes
 for batting at the women who abandon their heterosexuality for your
 golden skin
 and for Shandell who screams
 slut!
 and
 why she keep letting you use her car?
 as she covers her fourteen-year-old's ears.
 But it's gold, tonight, Morgan, gold the color of a tequila sunrise
 and of the ring you find's been placed inside the pocket of your worn
 coat
 as you slip inside the doorway of your mother's house on a quiet
 street
 because you couldn't dance at your own bedroom tonight.

Emma Reborn
 South Orange, NJ
 Ms. Wessel

THE OFF SEASON

There's something strange about a baseball diamond in
 November, when it's covered with dead leaves and fallen tree
 branches, casualties of autumn. Jess tried to imagine the field when
 the summer sun beat down on the dirt, marred by cleat marks, and
 the park was filled with the sound of aluminum bats cracking against
 the ball like a soda can opening; and the smells of summer: dirt,
 sweat, and pinstripe uniforms, freshly starched. But she couldn't
 help seeing the heavy blanket of leaves covering the field, or hearing
 the distant cries of crows in the naked trees, or smelling the strong
 odor of the knish vendor. Knish only smelled good in summer, and
 summer was as dead as the field.

Central Park: the baseball diamonds near Columbus Circle.
 Central Park was home to the adult recreational baseball league,
 where men like Jimmy Lightning and Wham-Bam Baker stepped up
 to the plate every Sunday afternoon. The league included every bor-
 ough, from The Staten Island Steamers to the Riverdale Raiders.
 They played with more zeal than any professional team, and the
 fans, usually players' wives, were far more rabid than any Jess had
 ever seen. The wives sported shirts with team names on the front
 and cheers on the back. They kept scorecards, batting averages,
 and statistics on every man in the league. Jess and her father were
 probably the only people in the stands not related to the players, but
 they were equally caught up in the bustle of the NYC Men.

She had been to many professional baseball games before,
 but there was no way that Shea or Yankee stadiums could equal the
 excitement that the Central Park fields provided. It was a "secret
 gem" of New York, as Jess's father put it, as if he had designed and
 built the diamonds himself. That was all before Jess's father decided
 to move out of their midtown apartment and into an Upper West Side
 flat with another woman. Jess dug her foot into the dirt of the field as
 she remembered again that her father had taken this woman to the
 Yankee's pennant game instead of her. *Kathy had never even seen
 the Men's League. How did she deserve the ticket?*

Jess trudged off the field towards the Columbus Circle subway
 station, in order to beat the Friday five o'clock crowd. She squirmed
 at the thought of having to stand with all those people, especially
 since she always ended up squished between the sliding doors and
 an obese man, or an old lady with BO.

As soon as Jess opened their apartment door, her mother

accosted her.

"Do you know what today is?" She pulled Jess into the
 kitchen from the entrance hall.

"I know, I know, but I had to finish up a project at the library."
 She knew if she told her mother she had been at the baseball fields
 thinking about her father, she'd have a fit.

"Look at these." Marie shoved a shoebox into Jess's face. It
 used to contain a pair of size seven black flats, but now it held all the
 cards Jess's father had ever sent Marie. All the Valentine's Days,
 Christmases, and birthdays squeezed into a little box.

"They're cards, Mom," Jess groaned, handing the box back to
 her mother.

"Jessica, darling, they're not just cards, they're my entire adult
 life." Marie held the cards above her head as if she were a priest
 serving Holy Communion.

Sometimes when Marie was being too much "Marie" Jess
 could almost understand how her father might have felt when he left
 her. Her mother watched the Home Shopping Network every single
 day while drinking cheap, pre-made alcoholic punch coolers. She
 wore bright orange lipstick and heels that clicked too much when she
 walked. Every word out of her mouth was an exclamation; nothing
 was ever simply stated. She was a compulsive bargain shopper with
 a near obsession with Pick-n-Save. Even if they desperately needed
 toilet paper, she wouldn't buy it unless the price was knocked down.
 But Jess insisted that you should never leave a woman just for being
 tacky.

Jess's nineteen-year-old brother, Mike, thought his father's
 new girlfriend looked like Rita Hayworth, but what did he know? Ever
 since he'd started taking tickets at Loew's Multiplex he thought every-
 one looked like one movie star or another. Jess still thought Kathy
 had no personality. She needed to hire a professional decorator to
 design her living room, for God's sake. She bought designer socks
 from Bloomingdale's on a regular basis. Even with all her money
 and fashionable clothes she still didn't look all *that* great.

Marie put the card box down on the kitchen table and picked
 up her Hawaiian Sunset punch cooler (they tasted like Froot Loops
 and were a neon shade of orange. Jess had sneaked a taste once).

"Today was supposed to be our twentieth anniversary," Marie
 said. She raised the cooler as if she were toasting this fact.

"Right, Mom."

"Here's to deception, divorce, and depression!" Marie took a
 slug of her punch.

*Could I be wrong about the merits of divorcing someone for
 being theatrical?*, Jess thought.

"Maybe we should go out to eat or...hey, let's order in from
 that new Thai place down the street." Jess dug her Adidas sneaker
 into the Inferno Red shag carpet.

Marie's eyes narrowed. "No, indeed! I'm going to make roast-
 ed lamb. This deserves commemoration."

*And I have to suffer through a night of overcooked lamb and
 listening to a "Smooth Moods" compilation in the background.*

Later that night, Marie asked Jess if she wanted to sleep in
 her bed. It was a habit they had started when Roger first left. Marie
 was so lonely that the second night after the separation she'd
 crawled into bed with Jess. The twin bed was far too small for both
 of them, so the next time Marie wanted company, Jess had slept in
 her bedroom. Marie was an awful sleeper; she kicked, thrashed, and
 occasionally moaned in her sleep, but Jess couldn't resist the temp-
 tation of the king-size bed with the real feather pillows and satin
 sheets. There was something comforting about hearing her mother
 beside her breathing in and out as rhythmically as the waves wash-
 ing up on Coney Island, even though her Mom's mouth formed a
 wide-open O, still smeared with lipstick. Jess wished the outside
 sounds—the ambulance sirens, the occasional shout—could all be
 blocked out so that the only thing she heard was their breathing
 together.

She buried her head beneath the comforter. When she was
 little, Jess had pretended that the comforter's reverse side was a

happy pink sky filled with white daisies flaunting enormous red centers. In reality, the happy pink was a solid bubble-gum pink, which seemed gauche to Jess now. As a child she'd have been wedged between her mother and her father, all their legs intertwined. Now her mother's legs often kicked hard against her.

Trying to ignore Marie's flailing, Jess talked silently to her father. *You were supposed to play in the summer league, the Mid-Town White Sox. Was she the reason you didn't? Was she the real reason you were always so busy last summer?*

In the morning when she woke, Jess didn't feel up to facing the usual kitchen scene. Marie would be smoking, flicking her ashes into her half-filled coffee mug, and filling out the New York Times crossword puzzle. Mike would still be buzzed on No Doze, half hung over, eating Lucky Charms in orange juice. *It would be different if you were here.* Roger used to cook breakfast every Saturday morning—potato pancakes with homemade applesauce, sour cream on the side, and perfectly fried bacon. Now, at best, Jess would be eating whatever cold cereal was on sale.

The thought of breakfast with the two of them made Jess shudder, so she got dressed, made the bed, and shouted to Marie that she'd be at Tom's apartment.

Tom lived one floor down in 8B. He was a year older than Jess, a junior, high honor roll student at Stuyvesant, and he shared Jess's passion for baseball and any book by John Irving. It was these facts, plus convenience, that won Jess over, despite the fact that Tom always wore shorts and Texas even in the dead of winter and talked incessantly about science concepts Jess didn't understand.

When she came in, Tom kissed Jess so hard, their teeth clanked together.

"Do we have to do this so early in the morning?" she said.

He smiled sheepishly. "Sorry. You okay?"

Her stomach gave an audible rumble.

"Want something to eat?"

"No, that's all right. Get dressed, I need to get out."

While she waited for Tom, Jess sat in the kitchen chatting with Tom's parents while they prepared their homemade breakfast. They looked like the perfect couple—they owned matching terrycloth bathrobes, they exchanged smiles all the time, and they doted on Tom. Even before the divorce, Jess's parents had never looked like this. She watched Tom's father in his blue pinstripe pajamas flipping pancakes and wondered if he had his own Rita Hayworth. *No, that would be impossible.*

Tom suggested that they go out to the Cloisters, and Jess agreed because she always loved the gardens and French arcades.

They brought their supplies with them, and took turns using charcoal and colored pencils to sketch the gardens and tapestries.

"Do you know those baseball fields in the Park near Columbus Circle?"

Tom scrunched up his nose like a small accordion folding. "That's kind of a weird question to ask now," he said. They had both been sketching a tapestry from the Netherlands, but Jess had long ago dropped her colored pencils.

"You've never seen a game there?"

Tom didn't look up from the charcoal. "My father has season tickets to the Mets. Who plays in Central Park anyway? Little league teams?"

"No, the New York Men's League. My father and I used to watch them all the time."

Tom's wide, flat face was suddenly serious. Jess always thought it was the type of face that belonged in Iowa, not Manhattan. "Don't you go there with him anymore?"

"You know I've only seen him like twice since August." She paused for a moment. "Mike is going to see him on Wednesday. They're going to dinner a movie."

Tom's bony fingers intertwined with Jess's. His palms were constantly clammy, though this wasn't unpleasant at all. If anything,

Jess found a certain amount of comfort in tracing her fingertips along his familiar palm lines. They always made her think of a subway map, with their sudden turns and crossovers.

"Why don't you go with him anymore?"

"Tom." It was all Jess normally needed to say to shut him up.

"Jess. You're always talking about him, he doesn't seem like a monster."

"No, he's worse than a monster. He's like those fish who look harmless, but will bite your hand off if you get too close."

"Piranhas?"

Jess sighed. "It doesn't matter, Tom. That's not the point."

"I just don't think you're giving him a fair chance. I mean, here's this guy you were really close to for fifteen years and just because..."

"...just because he cheats on my mother with his secretary and ruins her whole life, that doesn't seem very forgivable to me."

Tom smoothed his corn-blond hair and sighed. "I never said you had to forgive him, Jess. I just thought it'd be a good idea for the two of you to talk."

"You don't understand." Jess folded her arms across her chest as if to say, 'no more discussion.' "Let's go over to the stained glass exhibit."

It wasn't until Marie told Jess that she had the night planned out for them (sautéed chicken with *Romantic Melodies* in the background this time), that Jess decided that maybe it might be a good idea to join Mike and her father after all.

"Don't worry Jess, Kathy isn't going to be there," Mike told her as they left the apartment together.

"What? Is she picking out new carpet swatches again?"

"Hey, give her a chance, Jess. She's not that bad."

Jess didn't even bother mentioning to Mike that Kathy's smile was so fake, it made Jess want to hurl. She didn't tell him how Kathy kept on calling Jess "Jessie," a name she'd despised ever since second grade, when Matt McCain screamed out to the whole class that Jessie was a boy's name.

Roger pulled up in a cab and Jess saw he had on one of his nicest suits, the kind he normally reserved for big court cases. His auburn hair was combed to the left side and shone under layers of hairspray. Jess couldn't help leaning over to Mike to whisper that *she* must be making him do his hair differently, and what was with the hairspray? But Roger smiled, he looked like a talk show host, poised and handsome as always. Jess had secretly hoped he'd look terrible, the way her mother had looked, ever since Roger left. She wished he had big purple circles under his eyes and sagging skin, but he looked better than he had before.

"Climb in kids," Roger said.

They went to Serendipity 3, a restaurant Roger had always brought Jess and Mike to when they were younger, because it was famous for its frozen hot chocolate and celebrity patrons. The last time Jess and Roger had gone to Serendipity was after the first Men's League Game of the year in May.

Now Roger said, "How about those Jets? Whew! They've been on fire lately." He shook his head in amazement. Jess hated the way Roger's head shone like a disco ball under the restaurant's fluorescent lights.

"I hate football," Jess said. "Not that you'd remember," she muttered to herself.

Mike nudged Jess's foot under the table. "Yeah, they've been really great, Dad. Hey, have you seen that new movie about space aliens yet? You should really catch it."

"How were the Yankees," Jess asked, "at the last World Series game?"

Roger's gray eyes sparkled. Jess used to love the fact that people told her she had her father's eyes, but now she realized she couldn't even look into his eyes without feeling that had somehow changed too.

"Oh man, weren't they great?" Roger said. "It was a gorgeous

day too, sixty degrees and the sun shining away."

Jess felt as if she could barely swallow and didn't reply. *You don't even realize I wanted to go to that game. You didn't even ask me.* After a few moments of silence she managed to say, "I wouldn't know. I watched the game on TV."

Roger fumbled his spoon into the frozen hot chocolate the three of them were sharing. His brow wrinkled and he tightened his lips. Jess could tell that he hadn't been aware of his mistake until now.

"Next year I'll try to get three tickets," he said, addressing the hot chocolate rather than her.

Mike coughed. "Did you guys see that new Michael Douglas movie?"

Jess and Roger both gave Mike a blank stare.

Roger made an awkward effort to move on, himself. "Have you ever heard the one about the CIA agent and the astronaut?"

Jess and Mike mumbled "no," but in the end, Roger couldn't remember the punch line. Thankfully, the waitress came over with the check just as he was trying to get the joke out right for the third time. Roger didn't wait for her to come back for the check; he just said, "Let's go," and brought it to the counter, muttering that they'd be late for the movie even though they had plenty of time.

It was no better at the cinema. In the end, Jess ended up in Theater 12 watching one movie while Mike and Roger watched another in Theater 8.

On the train home Mike said, "Well, at least we bought our concessions together. It's a start."

"Why can't he just apologize? That's all I want him to do; it's not asking much." Jess twirled a strand of her hair around her finger. "He just doesn't get it."

Jess didn't want to have to talk about her night with anyone, but Marie never asked; she was too upset that Jess had chosen to see her father rather than spend the night with her, instead of keeping her company. But it was the first thing Tom asked about the next day.

"It sucked," Jess said, slumping down in the plastic seat.

"That's descriptive." Their stop was coming up and Tom got up from his seat.

Jess yanked his arm toward her. "Let's go one more stop to Columbus Circle."

"Why? 50th is a lot closer to the apartment, Jess. You know I've timed this before; it takes eight minutes and thirty seconds to get home from this stop, and at least fifteen from Columbus Circle."

"We're not going home yet," Jess said. "I want to take you somewhere. It'll be quick, I promise."

Tom sighed, but sat down anyway. "This better be important."

When they got off the subway, Jess grabbed Tom's hand and they raced past the statue of Christopher Columbus into the park, and cut through the woods to the baseball field.

"This is what you wanted to show me?" Tom cleared leaves from the third base plate with his sandal.

"Don't you remember what I told you about the Cloisters?" Jess asked.

Tom stared at Jess for a moment, trying to remember. Finally, his eyes lit up. "Your father. You two used to come here."

Jess stared up into the sky. It was bleak and empty like a sheet of paper with no words written on it yet. "It's going to snow soon. I wanted you to see it before it did."

She tried to picture the field covered with snow and with icicles shimmering from the nearby trees. It would be as if the baseball diamond wasn't even there; you wouldn't be able to see the pitcher's mound or any of the bases. Now she remembered why she used to come to the fields only in spring.

"Jess? Look, isn't that your father?"

Jess looked towards the playground and saw her father striding toward them. Tom slightly raised his hand up, and Roger waved back, smiling at Jess. This time he didn't look like a talk show host.

His hair was back to normal, with the part down the middle, and he was wearing his old leather bomber jacket.

"Well, you're just about the last person I expected to see here," Roger said as he reached them. He moved to give Jess a hug, but she backed away awkwardly, so he shook Tom's hand instead. "Roger Tuly, I'm Jess's father. You look familiar. Do you two go to school together?"

Tom shook his head. "I live in 8B at your old building."

Roger looked back and forth between Jess and Tom. Jess could see him trying to determine what their relationship was, but she wasn't going to help him out.

"Why are you here?" She stuffed her hands into her blue parka pockets.

Roger laughed. "You won't believe this, but I saw Jimmy Lightning up at Papaya King and it reminded me of the fields. I haven't been here in a long time, so I figured I'd come and have a look. What about you?"

"I wanted to show Tom the fields before it snowed," Jess mumbled.

"I'm going to get a Coke or something," Tom said.

"Not right now, okay?" Jess grabbed Tom's hand and held it.

Roger reached into his pocket and retrieved some loose quarters and a crumpled bill. He jangled it around in his hand trying to see how much money he had, then asked Jess if she wanted something to drink.

"I'll share a Coke with Tom."

"We should leave now," Jess said, once Roger had headed up the embankment towards the vendor. "I feel like I have a fever or something."

Tom touched the back of his hand to her forehead. "Nope."

Jess traced her thumb around Tom's palms. This was the 1/9, this is where the A line intersected it. She couldn't believe how familiar these lines had become.

In a minute, Roger returned with two Cokes in hand and gave one of them to Tom and the other to Jess. "I had enough for two."



Erica Schulte
Courtland High School
Spotsylvania, VA

How long have you two been dating?"

"Not long," she said, shrugging.

"Almost three months," Tom said at the same time. Tom turned to Jess, looking hurt, and he dropped her hand like an ice cube.

"I see." Roger's cheeks flushed. He held up his watch, but never bothered looking at the time. "You know, I should be going. I'm meeting a client at 5:00."

Everyone said quick good-byes. Roger shook Tom's hand, but didn't attempt a hug again. He just gave a salute and walked off.

Jess had to beg Tom to take the train home.

"C'mon, Tom, it's too cold to walk."

He shook his head. "We've been standing out here for twenty minutes, and you know it hasn't been that cold."

"I don't want to take the train home alone. People are really sketchy this time of day."

It was a lie, the 4:30 downtown subway was full of business-people and families, but Jess knew Tom would come with her if she used that excuse. Tom said a reluctant okay then, and scraped the leaves off of home plate with his foot.

"A baseball field shouldn't be covered up," he teased, as they left the field.

When they came back to the apartment, Marie was trying to unpack groceries and watch Suzanne Sommer's jewelry collection on Home Shopping Network at the same time.

"I got eight rolls of Super Soft paper towels for a dollar-ten at the Pick-n-Save today," Marie said.

"Hi to you too," Jess answered.

Marie was drinking a sun-yellow cooler at the moment, a drink she and Mike had dubbed "Death by OJ."

"Where's the Pick-n-Save? I've never heard of it," Tom said.

"Hoboken," Jess said. "Everything is cheaper in New Jersey."

"There's a real nice one up in Peekskill too," Marie said.

"Remember when we went there, Jess? They were having a super-saver's sale, and if you shopped between eight and nine in the morning, you saved an extra twenty percent." She turned up the volume on the TV.

"Isn't that over an hour away?" Tom asked.

"Your father..." Marie paused for a moment as she sloshed back the last of her drink. "He used to go to all those upscale 'food boutiques' and buy bottled water."

"Right, Mom. Can I talk to Tom in my room for awhile—it's hard to think with the TV on so loud."

Marie plopped down on the couch. "Fine with me. I need to see this."

As soon as they were in Jess's room, Tom started talking. "Are you embarrassed to be my girlfriend or something?" He had that "someone-just-ran-over-my-puppy" look again.

"Of course I'm not embarrassed. We've made out at the Bethesda Fountain in front of half of New York City. It was just about him, not you."

After a few more minutes of talking Jess could see Tom felt okay again.

Roger didn't call for two weeks, but she knew with Christmas coming he would eventually. She hated to admit it, but she waited for him to call every day.

"I thought you didn't want him to call," Mike said.

"I don't want to talk to him. I just want to know he called."

"Jess, ease up. You and Dad used to be so close. Give the guy a chance." Mike shook his head. "I remember when you two used to watch every single baseball game together on TV."

Not this summer, Jess thought. *You never watched baseball this summer.* Jess recalled all the times she'd had to watch baseball alone. She remembered watching one game in particular by herself, Boston-Yankees.

"Bottom of the eighth. Two outs, three-three, Clemens steps up to the plate...here comes the pitch...he slams it. It's headin' straight for the Green Monster. Four-three, New York!"

Jess had done a victory dance on her makeshift pitcher's mound of pillows. When no one else was home besides her father, she'd often act out entire games in her living room when she was little. She was fifteen now, but no one else was home, and she figured she should have some fun.

Jess imitated Ramiro Mendoza at the pitcher's mound during the ninth inning. She loosened up her arm, shook her shoulders, did a little windmill, and then lowered her imaginary cap over her eyes.

She scowled at the Red Sox facing her. Mendoza made the strike. He threw a screamer and Jess nearly pulled her arm out of the socket doing the same. She fell on her back in glory, holding the ball up in her imaginary glove. The crowd went wild.

Jess had looked up from her position on the floor to see her father smiling down at her.

"Good game?" he asked.

Embarrassed, she got up and pulled her sweaty brown hair up to the nape of her neck. "Almost as good as Central Park. You want to watch?"

Roger shook his head and held up his briefcase. "I have a hell of a case here, Jess."

Thinking back on it now, Jess knew it hadn't been a big case he was working on, unless you considered Kathy, his secretary, a big case.

"Jessica, you're father's on the phone," Marie called from the kitchen. Ever since the divorce, Marie had referred to Roger as "your father" in a tone of total disdain. Jess couldn't help laughing at the melodramatic way Marie's chin always quivered when she said this.

"I don't want to talk to him," Jess said.

"Too bad. Get in here. I already told him you were home."

Jess rolled her eyes. The thought of talking to her father was about as pleasant as getting stuck in traffic. "I'm not going to." Jess closed her bedroom door.

Marie barged in a moment later, covering the cordless phone with her hand. Now she had the trembling chin and the narrow eyes, a bad sign for anyone who got in her way. "Get on the phone or you're grounded," she hissed, before thrusting the phone in Jess's face.

Jess reluctantly took the phone from Marie. "Hello!"

Roger asked her if she wanted to go to the Knicks game with him on Saturday. "I bought three tickets this time," he said in an overly cheery voice.

Jess felt her stomach lurch. *Three tickets. He still doesn't get the point.* She lied, and said she was going out with Tom. Roger bumbled his words and stuttered, trying to convince her to go, but Jess still refused. *Maybe I could go to Tom's science fair; at least then I wouldn't be lying,* she thought.

"Tom has this really big science fair. It means a lot to him and he'd be so upset if I didn't go."

"Well...okay. I mean if Tom really needs you there..."

She said goodbye and hung up the phone before Roger had the chance to say anything else.

In the kitchen, Marie was drinking her daily after-dinner cup of Super Saver Coffee Blend and watching a Lifetime TV movie. She motioned for Jess to come sit with her on the couch.

"This is a great movie. See that woman? She's this guy's ex-wife and his current wife, well, she's not on the screen, but she's teaming up with her to kill the husband..." She paused for a moment, a little bit confused about her own story. "Just watch, you'll see."

"All Lifetime movies suck," Jess said.

"Watch your language." A commercial came on and Marie muted the TV. "Why won't you talk to your father?"

Jess looked up, startled by her mother's question. She played with the laces on her shoe.

"Would you answer me, please?"

"I just don't want to, I guess."

"Would you not talk to me, if I did the same thing?"

Jess didn't think she would.

Winter started early in December and didn't end until St. Patrick's Day. Jess hated snow in the city. It always turned slushy and a hideous shade of brown as soon as it hit the ground. Once over Christmas break Jess had visited relatives on Long Island; the snow there fell in fat flakes, and walking through it there was like walking through a cloud. She wondered if the snow at the fields was

slushy, or like snow in the country, but she never went down to the Park to find out.

Roger called on a schedule throughout the winter—every week at 4:30 on a Wednesday from his office. She would usually let him talk until about 4:35, and he'd invite her to dinner or to weekends upstate, but Jess always had an excuse. There were killer geometry tests (she used that one at least three times), events with Tom, shopping at Pick-n-Save with Marie. Once, she even made up an elaborate story about a weekend field trip to the Liberty Bell. After a while, he didn't even bother asking; he'd just tell her about the case he was working on, and ask how she was doing in school before saying he had to get off the phone.

One day in early March, he called to say the Men's League was starting practices that weekend.

"If you're not busy, I'd love it if we could go together," he said. Jess could tell he was nervous by the frantic shuffling of papers she heard in the background.

"I don't know. I might be busy." For a moment, she seriously thought about going.

"C'mon Jess. I've wanted to show Kathy the field forever. She's a big baseball fan, herself."

Jess felt her faced grow hot and flushed. She ground her teeth. "Tom's taking me out to dinner; it's our anniversary. And besides, don't you have that big divorce settlement to work on?"

Roger was silent.

"Really, Dad, I'd love to go and everything, but it's our anniversary. I can't skip out on that."

The paper shuffling stopped. "That's okay, Jess. You're right, I still have to do a lot of work on that case. We'll just have to make plans to go to a game later this year."

She couldn't help feeling a little bit guilty as she hung up. Roger was thinking of her; he was still remembering the Men's League. If only Kathy hadn't been invited, Jess thought she might have accepted. Might have.

When Jess woke up Saturday morning, she had the familiar feeling of not wanting to see her mother and brother first thing in the morning. In the kitchen, Marie was grinding coffee and yelling at Mike about how he shouldn't stay out all night because of his school-work. He had just started taking classes at Hunter College, but still had his job at the Multiplex, and after getting off work at midnight he'd frequently go clubbing with his friends from school.

Jess heard Mike accidentally knock over his mug of coffee, and then Marie yelling that he was wasting paper towels.

"You just bought a dozen rolls last time you went shopping," Mike shouted back. "All you ever do is complain about me wasting this or wasting that. I should just get my own apartment; at least then I wouldn't have to deal with the price police!"

Jess fell back into bed. She couldn't escape to Tom's—he was on vacation with his family. She ran down the list of all her friends, but they were all at practice, sleeping over at someone else's house, or on vacation.

She shouted to Marie that she was going to the library to work on a project, but Marie didn't even hear her over the yelling and the coffee grinding.

Jess got on the subway, not knowing where she was going, but relieved to be out of the apartment. The first stop was Columbus Circle. She hesitated for a moment before getting off, but saw that a big crowd of people was getting on.

When she got to the field, Fuzz Malloy, named for his occupation as a cop, was pitching to a new guy Jess didn't recognize. The field had been cleared of leaves and twigs and the dirt still looked fresh and untouched. The trees surrounding the field were still bare, but they were beginning to bud, and Jess could smell the scents of spring: a combination of freshly mowed grass and damp ground. There was nothing like seeing a baseball field in spring.

She sat in the stands with the players' wives and children, who even at the practices cheered whenever a strike was thrown, or

someone made a home run.

Wham-Bam Baker's wife asked her where Roger was and how he was doing, as her husband stepped up to bat. "Oh, never mind, here he comes." She waved to him, and all the bracelets on her arm jangled and glittered in the mid-morning sun.

Jess turned around and watched Roger heading towards them, and instantly knew he was the only person happier than her to be at the fields. His mouth dropped open, seeing her, and turned into a little grin. Jess didn't know whether to run, smile, or scowl. It had been so long since she last saw him, but at the same time, she felt angry that he had come to the fields without her.

She looked around for Kathy, but she was nowhere to be found.

"Jess! I can't believe you came." Roger threw his arms around her, and for the first time in months, Jess let him hug her.

"Tom and I decided to go to dinner tonight," she said. She paused for a moment, too nervous to speak, but then she asked, "Where's Kathy?"

Roger shook his head. "She didn't really want to come. Didn't see the point in watching a team practice."

"That's crazy."

"That's what I said. Fuzz is pitching? Where's Windmill?" Roger asked.

"Mandy Rouke, you know, Luis's wife? She said he broke his arm skiing in the Adirondacks."

"Jeez! How are they going to win anything without Windmill? I remember when he used to play college ball up at Binghamton."

"The Fuzz is actually pretty good, Dad. He struck out Jimmy Lightning." For the first time in over a year, Jess actually felt good calling Roger *Dad*. Now it sounded like a true statement, rather than something she'd just said to be respectful.

"Really? He must have an incredible arm to strike out Lightning." Roger jumped up and clapped for Luis Rouke who just hit a home run. Jess felt her stomach quake as she watched her father. He had on his old navy blue jacket with the faded stitching on the back that spelled out "Yankees," and a pair of Levi's. It was the unofficial uniform he wore to all the NYML games.

"Way to hit it, Lou! Way to hit it!" He sat down. "Wasn't that amazing?"

"I'm still upset with you." The words rushed out of Jess's mouth before she had a chance to think about them. "I can't help it. No matter what, I'm still angry about what you did. The way you left Mom. And I don't think I'm ever going to like Kathy. I've been trying to say all this to you forever."

Roger was silent. He popped his cheek out with his tongue and kept his eyes focused on the field.

Jess felt as if she might throw up. All her breath caught in her chest. Waiting for Roger's answer. His face was expressionless, and Jess suddenly wished she could take everything back. *This was too hard, and he couldn't understand.*

Finally, after what seemed like an endless time, Roger nodded his head, then turned to her. "We'll talk, whenever you're ready," he said.

Heather Greene
Wilbraham, MA
Jessie Schell

WORK

It is the city.

With businessmen bustling to
Work, and thinking of their wives and children,
And the shuffling of papers and the slurping of coffee.
There is traffic and the curious ring of a phone and
Work of the chopping and dicing of the cats' meat mans' knife.
There are high, monstrous buildings with their little eyes and lights
and there

Are no trees.
 There is the clanking of glasses and silverware in the
 Restaurants while they get ready for the breakfast rush.
 And there is the flicker of the bright, golden streetlights
 Fading away in the early morning as the crimson red sun lurches
 Over the monster skyscrapers.
 There is the work of the taxi drivers starting their small yellow cars
 and their meters.
 But there is a park, peacefully silent in the red early morning sun.
 The gray benches are sadly empty and the pigeons with
 Their brown jackets, snooze upon the large blue gray statue
 Of a famous man.
 The still, large blue pond with its water fountain shining bright in the
 early morning
 Sunlight, while a small coracle
 Sits on its shore waiting, like a dog, waiting to be unleashed.

And there is work.

Spencer Reynolds
 San Diego, CA
 Deborah Bright

ROMANCING THE RAZOR

It's 2:30 AM and I've just finished watching the *Tonight Show* for the second time because NBC is too lethargic and insensitive to provide its insomniac devotees with fresh entertainment and simply re-air their late-night lineup. That's okay though, because my family all should have gotten their visit from the Sandman by now, which means I can finally attend to my own business. As I set up for my nightly dance, P. J. Harvey melodically pours her heart out in the background.

I coil my fingers around my weapon of choice and smoothly pick it up. Inside my head I snicker at the irony: I'm cutting myself with a pink Lady Bic patterned with daisies.

The blade can't get to my skin fast enough. Do I feel angry? Do I feel sad? Do I feel worthless? I do not know. I don't have the instincts to decipher such profound feeling. I just know I need to be numb. I crave the anesthesia like a starving man would crave bread. I'm sickened by my weakness, but my myopic eyes see no alternative salvation, no other escape route. I have a strange interpretation of adequacy: I must catch myself before anyone realizes I've fallen.

The neon black blade catches the light and turns it silver. It serenades me with its cross-stitch, woos me with its bite. I'm captivated, obsessed, mesmerized by the razor's spell. The blade licks me; leaving a trail of tainted saliva. My vein wriggling like a worm underneath the blade, careful, not too deep, just enough to carve up an imperfect soul.

My eyes glaze over as I try to focus, the blood garish against my pale skin. Rubies dance before my eyes and the drizzle turns to rain. The metallic-scented juice pollutes and yet delights my nose. My hand cries with crimson tears as my own plum kaleidoscope is formed. It trickles, oozes, and swirls, like a visual Doors song. I trace the lines in which I color, my lines of sadness. The red embroidery turns feathered, as my equilibrium becomes more stable.

Dropping the razor, I observe my sketch. *No, not good enough. Must try again.* As I have no eraser, I move on to one of the few remaining blank canvases and create another labyrinth of scabs.

While I treat my body like a pincushion, I start feeling numb, like a piece of burnt black toast. My feelings are somewhat like my blood: when faced with pressure they run away, and yet fall flat on their face. I worry that perhaps my feelings are also like my blood and that under extreme pressure they'll overflow, erupt and spill over in an uncontrollable rush (will my arteries buckle under stress?). This, I find terrifying, and must return to the cutting.

Although in my own private dementia I never achieve a lasting

peace, a permanent solace, I always return. The doctors say I'm showing people my feelings since I don't know how to verbally express them. Well, I'm not showing anything to anyone. Except for maybe myself, and even I don't know what I'm saying.

Applying the masquerade of bandages I worry that someone will see. I panic; I go into mania, *What if they ask?* But this fear is routine and I comfort myself. Nobody will know; no one will notice; no one would ever suspect.

A few hours later I meet my nameless friend in the hallway before the bell rings, signaling the start of school.

"Hey, how'd you get that?" she probes, pointing to a Band-Aid peeking out from behind the sleeve of my red sweater.

I'm feeling rather hopeful this morning so I confidently answer, in a shaky voice. "I cut myself."

"Oh, you do that too?" she asks, in a my-isn't-it-cold-for-this-time-of-year tone of voice, before taking a sip of coffee, black and eerily resembling the consistency of sludge.

This is the response I loathe most after confessing the true source of my scars. They say "that" like it's some sort of underground counterculture trend. Yes, come on kids, jump on the nobody-loves-me-everybody-hates-me-guess-I'll-go-self-destruct bandwagon in which you're obligated to cut yourself. Or gag yourself. Or starve, or exploit, or intoxicate yourself. As if it's some twisted rite of passage into Wonderland. I hate myself, but I guess most fifteen-year-olds do. It's really sad, actually. Self-hatred is the norm and self-mutilation doesn't raise an eyebrow.

She waits for a reply but I can only stare at the floor as her words echo in my head. After a moment she walks away, disappearing into the faceless, indifferent crowd, leaving me, once again, alone. As I lean back against the wall I mutter to myself, "Yeah, I do that too."

Lauren Patterson
 Chadds Ford, PA
 Mrs. Coburn

SMILING HOME

I get home from school at around 5:00 every day. I drive down I-95 in my red Volvo station wagon with the music playing too loud and my friends making too much noise and it starts to feel like I'm in a big aquarium that's moving at seventy-five miles an hour. It's full of bubbles and beautiful, colorful fish that are swimming and bumping into each other and yelling swears at passing aquariums.

It takes me forty-five minutes to get home and thirty of those minutes are filled up with other people: with their voices and stories and the easy distraction they create. And then suddenly, as I drop off my last friend in front of her driveway, I am completely alone in my red Volvo. The change feels very abrupt and the stillness that I borrow from their absence makes me feel calm and prepared, like a poet or a grown-up. I don't think that the quiet would be so surprising if it weren't surrounded all day long by so much noise. It only lasts for fifteen minutes, twenty if I drive slowly. For those fifteen minutes though, I don't worry about anything, not hunger or a bad grade or even boys.

I stay mostly on the back roads; I like the way my car bounces along them, over their bumps and potholes. I like how secluded they feel. They are protected by ceilings of interwoven branches. In the summer, it's hard even to imagine there's enough room in all that green for a road. Once it gets cold, the canopy turns soft gray and when most of the leaves have fallen, the sun shines puzzle pieces of light through the branches onto the road.

A couple of miles before my house there is a graveyard that rolls over shallow dips and hills of grass. The headstones have no real order; they're just scattered over the uneven ground. Some are clumped together and some stand alone like statues in a museum. There are always flowers on the ground. Most of them have been planted and grow in the same spot every year. Some have been

placed over graves. They make tiny mountains of color with layers of wilting petals on the bottom and firm, fresh blooms on the top.

When I drive past, I take my eyes off the road and look until I'd have to turn my head back over my shoulder to keep it in sight. I like to squint my eyes as I look so that all I can see is the outlines of ragged gravestones, and the shadows cast over them, and the mixtures of bright petals across the dirt.

As I passed on my way home from school once, I slowed down to look at two men digging a hole in the gray dirt. They'd cut out a rectangle of grass and laid it aside like a rug that had been hiding a trap door into the earth. I imagined that the hole had always been there, ready for these men to come uncover it. I stared at them out of the passenger side window until one noticed me looking at him and blew a kiss. I'd never seen anyone inside the graveyard before. I thought that the gravestones had always been there with fresh flowers by them; they'd all just grown up out of the ground long before I was born.

I passed the graveyard the next morning at seven, while there was still pink in the clouds. The grave looked like a dark wound in the grass. Its green Band-Aid had been laid by its side. It looked like a shadow spread there by something in the sky. I wondered what they had done with all the dirt; I thought about pulling over to look for it.

On my way home that day, I passed a group of people standing by the grave. They made a circle around a priest in a long black dress; there was so much fabric on him, I couldn't tell if he had arms and legs. The people had parked their cars on the side of the road with their rear lights flashing. Someone had also found the dirt and put the grass sheet back in its place. It wouldn't have looked like a grave at all, except for the new blanket of white lilies over it.

For the next week, there was always a person in the graveyard, standing over that grave as I passed. Usually it was the same man and woman. They both wore green coats and had brown hair. They seemed like a single unit; I don't think I would have been able to recognize either one without their arms around each other. They drove a white Dodge minivan that they parked half on the road so that you had to cross into the other lane to get around it.

It was cold that week. It took my car ten minutes to warm up in the morning. The snow that fell froze and stayed for days even after it had warmed up. One day, I saw the man and woman on their knees, carefully picking the icy snow off the grave so that you could see the flowers underneath.

For that moment I pass that graveyard everyday, I feel like I am being let into those people's mourning. I am in a life completely separate from theirs but as I pass, they let me see them, remind me that my drive home goes right past their family.

My mom told me she stopped there one day. She said she really couldn't help it; after seeing that man and woman every day and swerving around their van, she felt like she had become more than just a witness. She felt like she had a right to know whom she was praying for now. She stood and watched the grave the way the couple did. My mom said that it was their daughter; they had left a picture of her there wrapped up in cellophane. She had short brown hair and long eyelashes and a tiny birthmark on her cheek. My mom said that she was very beautiful.

I listen to the radio on my way home from school now. I don't like it to be too quiet while I'm alone in my car. When I see her parents standing over her grave, I try not to stare. I try not to think of them as a short story I keep meaning to write. I'm trying to stay just their witness.

Lily Bower
Guilford, CT
Mr. Thomas Kelly

CHILDHOOD MARKET

the first crescent- and disc-shaped moons that

she saw were stenciled ink printed on chunky, white paper and digital images of Technicolor

she learned about apples and doctors before her front teeth started to peek out of her small, pink gums and before her fingers started to go into her mouth

she recited humpty dumpty like a jerky old filmstrip and swatted at a balloon with her playmates to keep it from landing on the ground and learned about politics five years later, MAD ten years later

on late nights she tries to save one sheet of paper, to make a difference by printing on both sides and then she sticks the paper in crookedly and jams the printer and gets a paper cut and wastes ten more; she sucks her finger and thinks about shooting her foot and curses all the paper wrappers, wrapping paper in the world for doing this to her

some days she hears her stomach telling her—
these days, I tell you,
insights are like
apples and oranges,
it's a growing market,
all about the brand;

supply and demand are unpredictable
sometimes you have to
sell two insights for
the price of one

her writing dresses high-style, pines to be 17,
sampling big-word buffets, whose courses she
never reads out loud and if she has to, the stenciled
ink feels like scrambled eggs against her tongue,
sunny side up

and what I mean to say is that, at the risk of over-simplifying or over-generalizing, I might suggest that I think that it is possible to say that one might suppose that it is true that there is a probability that

she opens her closet and looks at the
10% spandex 5% nylon 20% polyester 50% acrylic 15% cotton
4/5 sleeve, low-V neck, exposed seam, big cuff, cropped at the waist,
ribbed,
with ribbon streamers and the ruffles and the zipper
that's machine wash, cold rinse, tumble dry, low temperature, hang
dry,
and wishes that it
were a 100%
cotton t-
shirt

in a halo of jalapeño-flavored sunflower
seeds, car horns, and screen glare, a dream soars:
a poignant, insightful, deep, subtle masterpiece
rich with enigmas, ambiguities, and symbolic
resonance that compel attention by the power of
their unique vision of the world and their empowering
sense of the truths of human experience as discerned
in a complex world

why, she then thinks, she should write the critique first

for her daily orthodontic regimen, she brushes her teeth, flosses, brushes again (but with a different type of toothpaste, the multi-featured one, it's good to rotate), rinses with Listerine, and then gargles with saltwater, and then puts on her plastic retainer, and the dentist, in monthly cycles pokes at all the brown stains in the nooks and crannies of her molars, and warns that they will probably develop into cavities, she blames the preventative-deficient-composition of the salivary amylase gene for ruining her life

in the center of a pooling square, she kicks at pigeons on sunburned cement with a shine in her eyes to get them to soar, up, up into the air, but their ballooned little bodies ignore her, like pink and white forms, and plod on like carried horses, while bread givers nearby yell at her

the little girl might grow up to be the kind of person who cannot pee without looking, to be made of violin fibers wound like spools; or the little girl might be a sponge that mops up spilled milk and rhyming dictionaries

but of course, without a doubt, later, she will spin, she will wring out cheese, not soured milk, music, not knots, poetry, not clichés

Tina Wang
Fresh Meadows, NY
Ms. D'Amico

DREAM

Last night
I dreamt
My mother and I were sitting down at a table
and she was telling me
that I was to meet my stalker that day
and befriend him;
as part of a community outreach program I was doing.
I was supposed to make friends with a needy member of my community through
This program
And it so happened that this man who had been stalking me
Was my "to-be friend"
I was quite confused
But I accepted the strange, terrifying prospect
Of sitting at a coffee table
Or a table by the window at Pizza Factory
Talking to my stalker.
He's the hypochondriac that is always on Greenwich Avenue
wearing the orange reflector vest.
He is always on the avenue when I am.
Coincidence, pure coincidence
I hope.
But he sees me every time that I see him
As if he can read me
In a creepy way
And he stares at me as if he can see exactly into me.
It is a thoroughly violating experience
Although he does little but turn his head as I walk by to look at my butt.
But that's enough for me
To cringe as he stares into my car as it rounds the corner on which
he is standing

Talking to someone
About something
And yet in my dream I accept my mother's orders
And plan on giving him my address and phone number
As directed
And listening to him tell me about the disease he believes is taking
over his body
As we speak.

Perrin Ireland
Greenwich Academy
Greenwich, CT
Mr. Jeffrey Schwartz

CANDYASSED

I don't like anything sugar coated
sometimes candy
tastes nicer bittersweet
with a little surprise
encased within each red stripe
I never wanted to know the truth
from you
don't think I ever wanted it
because already I could feel my eyelashes start to close
in fear of sick reality
don't think I never wanted to hear those words
come out of your mouth,
because at one time I did,
but they were too sweet for me,
I had to ruin everything by taking a gulp of that goddamned fresh air
the lethal reality
lethal reality, it made my eyes flood over,
sitting on the way home
looking at the type of hands
I want to touch my body—not yours
I feel bad because I don't listen
bubble gum fills the spot between my ears
and I never know what I want
because in a moment something new will drift along
and I'm hot again
strange things scare me, like
when it gets too hot,
hot like enough to melt my candy mask, my
sweet face
and then
all the real people—ones immune to the sickness, of course—call
upon me
and refuse to let go until I scream beg for mercy
I am not a real person.
you'd think I like to cry,
or something salty like that—
but all I am is a candyass daydream
floating farther away towards you

Maya Grinberg

SUMMER IS A GIRL

"THE CLOUDS MIRROR MY LONELINESS...WANDERING...WANDERING..."

It was that strange time of day where the sun is wavering
between living and dying and the shadows splashed across the wall
mock the shapes that caused them. I was sitting. Unaware.
Forgetting to cross my legs and brush the hair out of my face. My
mom was trembling like a warning of the trouble she just might
cause. All she needed was a reason. Maybe all she needed was
my messy hair and my way of sitting. I felt disconnected from every-
thing. The summer. My family and the fact that I can never be

friends with my mom. And that certain something I knew I was missing in my life but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. All I knew is that it had something to do with love. A fly buzzed and the phone rang. I was suddenly very disturbed, almost afraid. So my mom stood up and felt proud of herself because she was important at least for a split second of her life. All because the phone rang and that gave her something to do. And a boy named Geon made himself known over the lines and poles that keep everyone apart; our ears the only place that matters. My mom is suspicious, but when is she not? The crackle and spice of her voice floats around the sunburnt kitchen like all that dust that will never go away because "we believe in a well-lived-in house" around here. And then there was the phone call...

"Who are you?...Where are you from?...Is that your real name?...I don't like Phillipsburg...I think you're lying...discard this number and never call here again!...Yes, I mean it!...Who do you think you are, you fresh little boy?!...Yes, and how do you know my daughter??...From the movies?...Right. Shouldn't you be working, not picking up girls??...You're gay?...Right. Nice try. I mean it. Don't call her...NO, you cannot talk to her!! DISCARD THIS NUMBER! Goodbye."

(click.)

I think that might have been the last straw. Something simply burnt out inside me and I just couldn't take it anymore. Why did she have to be like this? Why can't she just be a NORMAL mom with NORMAL things to do with her life besides sit in the dining room chair, poised for action, waiting for a little hope that something might actually happen in her life. That maybe she will wake up and come unnumb. So I left. I simply strode out the door and down the mildewed deck, across the uncut lawn and hopped on the only transportation I will probably ever have. My bike. And I rode and rode, legs pumping to survive, looking back every once in a while to see if a shitty gray car was looming over the horizon. But I had nothing to worry about, really. She was still frozen in the dining room, waiting to live again. The wind felt good in my hair and I thought maybe it has fingers combing and unknitting all that I have been through. And it all shows up in my hair because no one has time to use a brush when their life is falling apart. I ended up in Frenchtown because that is where all the girls with escape bikes go when they want to get out of the house. Yes, Frenchtown, the land of antique shops and overpriced coffee and all those youthful faces that just wander up and down the alleys looking for the best way to get trashed. And all these alleys just lead to one place in the end—Frenchtown Park.

So that is where I fell 'cause all I really wanted to do was stare at the sky and breathe, maybe walk on water for a bit. The swings caught my attention for a slice of a second, but they just didn't feel right at the moment. I wandered down the dirty hill towards the stream and just jumped in, not even caring about sandals and clothing and getting wet. I just walked and walked, followed the path of the stream, wanted to get away from people and stupidity and the sound of my mother's voice. The trees were a blur around me and all I saw were browns and blues and walls of greens. Birds flitted by and I flung my arms in their direction, hoping to capture their secrets—to maybe fly away with them into the clouds warmed over from an unforgiving sun. But flying was not granted so I moved on. The walk wasn't that long, really, but the thoughts that accompanied me could be stretched out across a lifetime. I was decomposed and frantic and unsure of my state of mind. I thought by running away I would feel enlightened by some miraculous thought that would change my life, but, instead, all I felt was uncalm. Slowly, though, my brain wavered and subsided and the one word that stayed strong and unbroken was this—FREE. Then I realized that was what I wanted all along—to just be free. Freedom is a fickle thing and most just think they have it or even understand it, but I know how hard it is to be tied down by a family and obligations and all those things you don't really want to do. But I am not alone because everyone has these binds in their life. The only difference that can be found is that some do not even realize they are prisoners. The more I thought, the more scared I got. Would I be forever blocked off by black metal

bars, invisible, yes, but still there to hold me in from everything I wanted in life? And my knees started to shake and my mind began to sweat and all I could think of was what an awful world this is if I have to even think about not being happy and in motion.

Then I heard voices. Frozen in my misery, I hadn't even noticed that I had come upon a group of defeated Frenchtown youth who had just taken out their aggression towards life on a helpless yellow water snake, its head decapitated from the body, its tail hanging from a forlorn tree. Yes, what a wonderful thing to pull me out of my regression—death in its saddest and cruelest form: in the hands of dirty little boys.

So I did what everyone does when they are in an awkward situation—I smiled; a strange sort of smile that had nothing to do with happiness, yes, but a smile just the same. And I stood there—confused—and pretended to fit in, but all I accomplished was that strange smile. I suddenly didn't feel like standing anymore and I looked up at the rocky ledge that walled this stream of lost hope and I felt nothing. Yes, nothing—nothing for these little boys. The snake. Everything that had brought me to this point in my life. I looked up at the sky and wondered how such beauty could exist in NOTHING. But, you see, nothing is also everything. The mere presence of it is suffocating and visible and it washed over the skin like a cold rain. And I was raining inside. I was getting washed away. But I was still clinging to a branch, a tear...a chance to be unbroken. I looked up and I saw him. He was looking down the road, unaware of my presence and I was wondering how to show my face or if I should stay hidden. I just gazed in his general direction, feeling stupid and tranquilized. His face caught mine and he smiled a strange smile that rather mimicked mine and I suddenly found myself climbing up the hill to get closer to him. My mouth felt parched and sewn up and I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into, or why. But I kept on climbing because there is no turning back in situations like this. Up on the ledge, the youth were inhaling nitrous and wallowing in the emptiness that a twenty-second high can give. They seemed to think that the buzz and pop of brain cells dying was funny and it rather was, in a pathetic sort of way. Cars sloped by every now and then and they stood—shaky—like five-year-olds who had just stolen a pack of gum from the pharmacy. I found myself walking down the dusty road and he followed. Our footsteps were offbeat, singing a crazy song, and we just smiled at each other with our eyes and breathed. We reached his car and found that *something* had to be said. He asked if I wanted to hang out the next day and I said sure, that I'd call him and we touched fingers and waved as he drove away with a look of expectation in his eyes. I walked across the green and turned to the swings for solace. The tree hair glistened as my feet strained to kiss each lock and I felt like the wind, pushing the clouds along. I just wanted something to look forward to again. And I found it in an unstable park where the wind went to die and the boys turned to smoke. Where his car drove off like a gray cloud and his words still warmed my face. And where the swing set glistened like fabricated dreams while I swung to stay alive. But, still, I was suddenly FREE. With feathers and sun drops, somewhat ready to fly.

Emily DiGiovanni
Frenchtown, NJ
Mrs. Linda Flindt

THREE HALVES

"...like this ongoing struggle I've had with the window shade, I mean...I pull I pull I take I take, but it never takes back, a really bad relationship, you know? Ananand...it's at the end, stretched out, pulled by the rack, and at once it snaps and coils back, back into the innate state that it so long denied itself of, and I can't but help to think that this...you know?...this, THIS is some kind of analogy, a metaphor even, for my entire existence, and I almost want the shade to win sometimes, even though I'm trying to pull it down because the damn sun shines right in my eyes when I'm trying to

sleep...you know?...I mean...you see what I'm saying?...I keep being pulled and pulled, and one day I'm going to snap like the shade, I *have* to, I have nothing left to give...there's nothing...NOTHING...you got a light?" He talked making gestures with his hands. I watched the unlit cigarette that he held being waved around, concentric circles, zigzagging lines, etc.

"Sure." I reached into my pants pocket and pulled the cold Zippo lighter from the mass of car keys and coins and lint and balled-up pieces of bubble gum wrappers. I propped my right elbow on the center of the wooden table, held the lighter, hinged lid ajar, upright with my right hand and smiled.

"What are you waiting for? Are you gonna just sit there and stare at me or light it or what?"

I broadened my grin, let out a breath, narrowed my eyes, snapped the thumb and ring finger of my left hand next to the steel grooved wheel of the Zippo. The soaked wick caught the flame, and Nick, cigarette in mouth, leaned over the table and shoved his face in the flame.

"Thanks. Nice trick." The cigarette bounced on his lips. He was sincerely amused.

"It's not a trick; I only snapped my fingers." I snapped them again.

"Still, it looked cool. Gimme that; I want to try." He grabbed the lighter and, in between ashing his cigarette, tried to reproduce my actions. "Can't do it," he said. "It's like all my life these little things, and then one day...SNAP! The fucking shade man, ananand the sun shines through and burns out someone's retinas. Case closed man. How am I supposed to keep living like this? Pulled and pulled...you know? Like I said, SNAP, and fuck, there it is right in your eyes. I don't know man. I don't know, and that's the thing right there...they'll lock me up...you know?...just another junkie they'll say and I'll get some shitty mandatory minimum. Look at them, locking up everyone who lights up a joint, who drops a tab of acid. *They* are the problem. I'm not. Look! I'm fine...you know?... and I am still functioning in society, or whatever the hell they say. I fucking *drove* here. Sure, sure, the people on the sidewalk may have looked like god-damned caped squirrels or some crazy shit like that, bubut...I know the difference...I mean...I know and you know that I know I'm tripping, and they don't neeeeed to be spending 25 G's on me a year...in some prison...you know? I mean...they could be sending kids to college or something. I never went to college, but 25 G's...I mean that's a lot of money! Hell, they could buy like a hundred computers or something...crayons...you know?...but education, man...that's the key...not prohibition...fuck prohibition." He chuckled to himself, took a long drag from his cigarette, exhaled through his nose. Coughed. Took a sip from the Styrofoam cup on the table. He was a politician.

"You should stop smoking menthols. That stuff is nasty. You know what they put in that?"

"Ammonia, dog shit, whatever...it's my after-dinner mint."

"After-dinner mint? What was dinner?"

"You know, I had my fix." He smiled and lowered his eyes to the table. "...and a sugar cube...for dessert." We laughed. If he was bluffing, he was doing it well. He took another long drag from his cigarette, crossed his legs, looked around the room: the grim walls, the single, rectangular window, the dull light. He changed the subject abruptly.

"I can't paint anymore. It's people, fucking bastards; they rip me apart. Sure, I don't really care what they think, at least I don't want to...you know?...This is mine...mine...my vision...my whatever...but they have no respect...and that...THAT...is what makes me want to do *it*. The unspeakable *it*...you know? I can live with nothing...right?...bubut...I need some respect...you know?...I mean...I guess I just can't deal with criticism...snap...you know?...SNAP!...not from those people. So stupid. What the hell do they even know? Spit out of private schools, out of the Ivies...they want to put me in their box...their damn scientific method, shit like that. But they don't realize...you know?...sometimes I just paint to

paint, I don't feel, I can't feel sometimes. But I don't tell them that! It's my secret...you get it...maybe...I don't know...but regardless, they are all bastards, people are bastards, you're a bastard, I'm a bastard...and that's why I like to paint."

"Yeah," I said, nodded twice, watched him shaking—hand trembling, ashing his cigarette, moving the Styrofoam cup around the table—pushing it at the base...watching...listening to it drag over the tabletop.

"Like this other day. I painted, all day, right? Ananand I showed it to the girl who lives next door, and she said she didn't see what I was painting? See, what the fuck...right?...said it looked like I just covered the canvas in paint...but you know...I didn't even want to explain to her...that's exactly what I did! Because she...she...that little blonde with a different guy every night fucking SO LOUD I can hear them through the god-damned walls...SHE...she wouldn't get it. So I said thank you, and get out, and shut the door and that was that, and now I keep everything to myself...you know?...I mean...I don't let anyone see anything anymore, at least not anyone that close."

I remained silent. He had reached the end of his speech, a little self-righteous, but I didn't mind. Nick rose from his chair, put on his coat, and flicked the butt of his cigarette in the general direction of the ashtray. He missed, probably intentionally, he grinned.

"I'm out," he said.

"Later, take care of yourself, remember to diet once in a while." I mirrored his grin.

He chuckled, "Yeah...alright, diet, ha...later." He left through the heavy wooden door, up the stairs, out the front door, across the street to his car.

I was alone: sitting in the cellar of my row house, memories of the conversation with Nick fresh in my head, watching the feet of people on the sidewalk above pass in front of the window—brown shoes, black shoes, white shoes, occasionally no shoes. I sat at the table in the center of the room, finished off the half-empty cup of coffee that Nick had left behind. The coffee was cold and there were grounds in the bottom of the Styrofoam cup.

Upstairs, out of the embrace of the cold walls, the cold floors, into my living room alive in the glow of the evening sun. The furniture looked warm and inviting. Dust was suspended in the air, sparkling in the sun. One of Nick's paintings that he had given me hung on the wall opposite the front door. It still looked new and fresh in the room, even after two months.

The evening was my favorite time to walk, to see the faces of the people, to be inspired. Every step I took on the sidewalk reminded me of my love for the city: constant motion, constant energy, constant excitement. The trees were still bare, but the air was light, and hope for an enjoyable evening grew with every breath. The weekend...the weekend...I had nearly escaped when...

"Excuse me, sir."

I turned to see a man dressed poorly, smelling poorly, standing at my side.

"Do you have any change?" Another beggar.

I reached into my pants pocket. He stood anxiously; hand open, arm extended.

"Uhhh...here," I handed him a five, "Is that enough?" I was feeling generous.

"Yes, yes, thank you." He half-walked, half-ran away...excited, for a hot meal? No. A bottle of booze? Yes. Of course. I watched him enter a state store a block down and exit with a brown bag. I laughed out loud at my own naivete. Whatever makes you happy, right? Right.

I had enough walking. I turned around and returned home, feeling half exploited, half full of melancholy, half empty.

I saw Nick's painting in the light of the setting sun as I entered my house that Friday evening. I couldn't help but look around for the movie cameras...the light was just too perfect...how melodramatic? Was I reading a bad book? I stared at the painting, expecting something to happen. Nothing happened. I waited for an epiphany, a rev-

elation, anything. I was tired of waiting.

Hundreds of pairs of feet passed my window that night as I sat in the cellar. That table had a magnetism, the table itself. I sat for hours watching the shoes, black, brown, white, etc. I saw of pair of shoeless feet, the only pair of shoeless feet that evening. They staggered in front of the window amongst the others, slapped against the sidewalk, rocked back and forth, drug over the concrete. They



Joe Madres
Cherry Hill West High School
Mrs. Savidge

turned round and round, faster and faster, and at once they disappeared.

Ian M. Thompson

UNTITLED

she was the goddess of soap bubbles
the former second smartest girl in delaware
and one of the most unique bipolar minds in north america.
she stirred her black coffee
and played with her hair
(even though it had yet to touch the floor)

she had dropped her ring.
we knelt, raking through the grass
in the artificial glow of the street lamps
("i don't know whether it is cloudy
or merely too smoggy to see the stars," she said.
she still spotted a few.)
it was a ring that she had come upon at random.

and therefore reserved the right
to leave her in a similar manner.
i retried it, regardless.

her hands shook.
"it's the pills," she said.

i knew.

she balanced the coffee cup on top of her head.
"you'll break it that way," they said.
"if my cup was filled,"
she rationalized,
"it wouldn't be on my head."
the abundance of our coffee
was then carefully monitored.

she knew the baroness of our land,
she explained with a wink,
who lived in the village,
but walked naked through washington square park.
she would have, too,
had it not been for the vibes.

our land—
a land from which our accents originate.
somewhere in europe, we're told.
a land, we compromised, full of castles.
of ducks—one of which, the reincarnation of elvis
of black cats, named after stars in the southern hemisphere
who refuse to speak to her,
other than to assure her they know far more
than they'll ever be willing to share.
a land to which we'll retreat, someday—
a day on which the shaking will cease,
whether or not she's grown accustomed to it,
and she'll re-master the art of calligraphy.

the beep was excruciating,
and she was eternally afraid that the machine
would eat her ATM card.

it wasn't a date.

i?
i was the goddess of something undefined
perhaps things gone unnoticed
and those unnecessarily loved.
i was a pope, worthy of imperial treatment,
as so authorized by the HOUSE of APOSTLES of ERIS,
the greek goddess of chaos.

and in the roar of tires on a road, unpaved,
under the car, with the alarm, and california plates,
she spoke of the occasion others had informed her of
when she took a knife to her own wrist
and, upon interference, turned it upon he who intervened.
she was arrested and institutionalized;
thorazined and released, rather zombie-like,
back into the real world.

she asked me, "when was the last time you weren't down?"
it depended, i supposed,
on how long of a stretch constituted "up."
for days.
four days, the book said.
any less, and it's written off as a hypo-manic state.

she asked me if i had many faces.

i do.

i was viewing her sylvia plath-poet face,
she told me.
for what it was worth, it was her most honest one.

"plenty," i told her.
it was worth plenty.

Jaime Frost
Aston, PA
Mrs. Arters

WINTER'S INJUSTICE

Last week, the magnolia branches flexed toward the sun, indulgently fluctuating buttercream and ginger blossoms, boasting hubris on every branch. Hiss hiss, a quiet secret rustled and shushed through the trees: the icy tongue of winter never died, only held its breath. As soon as the sun winces out, winter prowls rigidly through the ground.

A vulturous wind swarms around the gauze butterflies. The round blushing cheeks of every petal drained white as bone. Today, the blossoms lay on the concrete, heaps of broken promises, shrouded in the ivory and pistachio ashes of the calorie pear tree, an embroidered graveyard which trembles as it winnows away into the gutter.

Winter, you think your ruse can freeze my blood and steal my soul, but your own demise approaches mutely, and I will keep my vigil until the morning when the dawn reflects its charm in my window pane. For you, spring, I would faithfully wait an eternity.

Grace Wilentz
New York, NY
Ms. Isabelle Upham

SOMETHING SO SIMPLE

He leads the way up the stairs, into his room. I hang back to read the bumper sticker on his door. Its message is important, but only in that it matches his personality. I reach to touch the gold shiny handle, my image glaring back, distorted. As I enter I notice the gray-blue carpet and walls, which match but not quite. Jeremy leans against the curve of a black guitar case labeled with stickers that say things like "I *still* love New York" or Blink182, his eyes closed in quiet contemplation. I sink into a gray desk chair, dragging my fingernails along the mottled wood of the desk. My leg dangles from the armrest, my head leans back, facing the window. The sun filters in through the blinds, making fleeting patterns on the floor. Unseen behind me, he reaches out and spins my chair around, laughing at my surprise. I fake outrage; we joke around.

The phone rings twice before we hear it over our laughter. Jeremy flops on his bed and picks up the receiver. "H'lo?" He mumbles something into the phone, then a pause, then, "Uh-huh. Where? Oh yeah." I sit on the floor waiting for him to finish. He covers the phone with his hand. "It's Ben. You wanna go for food?" I nod, smiling. He hangs up and motions at the door. I rise and follow him out into the muggy summer afternoon. The sprinklers on the dead, brown lawns make whirring noises that seem like whispers, and the only other sound is our footsteps on the black steamy asphalt. He opens the door for me, something I've noticed only he does. I flick the radio on; a punk rock band with a message they think is new blares out from Jeremy's speakers. Dark gray clouds obscure the horizon as we drive towards town.

The faded green door with glass panes and a sign that looks too clean for the smell of garlic and tomatoes is my signal that we are having pizza today. "Surprise, surprise," I murmur as I greet Ben with a wave. We do this a lot. A woman with a briefcase sits at our usual table in the left-hand window. She must have just come from the train that stops across the street; the only place those trains go is Manhattan, known only as "the city" to us. She represents everything I don't want to think about now, growing up, settling down, and deciding what to do with my life. I glare at her, though the restaurant is filled with empty chairs, as if my contempt would somehow make her leave. I sit by the other window, watching raindrops glide and race down the glass. Jeremy comes over and sets down his slice. "Betcha that one wins," he murmurs, pointing aimlessly at the windowpane. I laugh, thinking about how fast rain comes in the summer, and how something so simple as the smell of pizza and friends and rain can bring so much joy.

The clouds have disappeared now, and we're sitting on a gray wooden bench in the park. The three of us have nothing to say, but we aren't unhappy. Jeremy stares at the brother and sister fighting over the swings, her blond curls matted against rosy cheeks. I don't know why I know they are brother and sister, but I do somehow. Ben leans over as if to tell me something, but just yawns, and I realize how long we've been here. Not just this bench, either: this town, this place, this life. "It still doesn't feel like it's over," Ben mentions, and the smell of chalk and the teachers' voices come back to me. "Are we doing something?" Jeremy asks, his sneakers tapping intrusively on the bricks. My reverie interrupted, I look up, startled. "Any ideas?" I ask, staring at him. Cars passing by honk in the glaring heat, and several people run on the paths in the park, glistening with sweat. We sit in the shade and ponder, each of us thinking our separate thoughts, mine of our summer to come and where it will take us. That's what it is, really, our summer. Our last one at home, our last one together. The pieces of our lives, played out here, in this place, are finished. Not dramatically as we expect all things to be, but rather like the denouement of a mediocre novel. It's hard to distinguish from the rest.

Ben and Jeremy get up, smoothing down khaki shorts and T-shirts, looking at me expectantly. I feel like I must have missed something. It isn't a new feeling. Being with each other so often makes conversations dreamlike: I'm never sure if I actually said something or just thought about saying it. Jeremy twirls his keys around his fingers, and sings something softly: I've never heard it before. "My cousin is having a thing at his apartment tonight." Ben says in his usual imitation of an invitation. Last summer I might have said no, thinking only of who was going to be there and how much fun I would have. Now it seems, I don't really care. "OK, I'll go. What is everyone doing? I mean, who's going?" They don't respond, and I raise my eyebrows in question. Ben looks off into the hazy afternoon. The sun is starting to set and the distant clouds make strange patterns in the sky. "Yeah," he says. "They're going." This doesn't answer my question, but it does. All our friends are around: we stopped going to camp, and work hasn't started for the summer yet. They'll all go, they're not awake yet, and I haven't gone to sleep.

Later, the doors slam, all four, and we set off into the hot steamy night. Two girls and three guys, laughing as our hands glide over the air rushing past the window. I look at them, wondering how they will change the world, and how it will change them. I think how I'm leaving for California in the fall, and how Ben will be in Massachusetts and Jeremy will be in Texas. The other two in the car will be in New York still, but it won't be the same. It isn't even now; there is an awkward feeling about our informality, a little more forced than it was. The others feel it too, I can see, but we are going somewhere and are expectant of the night to come. Jeremy's headlights reveal yellow painted lines on the road in front of us; the thermometer on the dash reads 75 though the sun set what seems like moments ago.

"...so then he was like, 'yeah next year we're staying together

right?' and I was like, um, ok?" laments Amanda, her brown hair whipping her face in the breeze. I glance back at her, trying to remember which boy she is whining about. "So you're going to try the long distance thing with Dave?" I say, the name coming to me suddenly. She nods, her lips pressed together tightly.

The lights of the bridge are getting closer, the line of rush hour traffic stretches the other way; we smile, glad to not have to sit behind red brake lights forever. Suddenly, a large shape looms up in front of us, I close my eyes and grip the door handle, but it's just a shadow. Is this a metaphor for our lives? Are we streaking along the highway of life, imagining some travesty around every turn in the road? I sigh audibly; my thoughts are too heavy and old for such a joyous occasion.

We've reached the city and Jeremy's large hands maneuver his car along the narrow streets, searching for a spot. I point out an opening in the line of parked cars, two blocks from our destination. Jeremy nods, it's all I can expect by way of thanks. We pile out onto the sidewalk spattered by old gum and a large pile of black garbage bags. I smooth my dress back into place. I hate dress clothes. We do look good, but I wonder why we bothered, Ben's cousin will be wearing jeans. But the temperature is dropping and we're happy to be young and alive, wandering towards a party of the summer.

As the gray door labeled "3B" swings open, music blasts out into the bleak hallway. "Hey! Benny, you made it!" Ben's cousin exclaims. "Hey Sam," Ben replies, his eyes searching the room for Riley, his latest. I step inside, glaring reproachfully at Sam's mangy apartment. Dave saunters over to greet Amanda; she glances back at me with an unsure look on her tanned face. I nod and smile, trying to tell her that she's right, that this little world of hers is going to work. I don't really know, but she wants me to say it. I hold in the laughter as it bubbles up in me, wanting to ask her why she keeps trying. He's hopeless, but Amanda claims she can't help who she loves. The laughter tries to burst out again: love in high school? I look around, thinking it's just as realistic as love anywhere.

I turn away into the smoky room. Jeremy slips his hand into mine, a complicated but comforting gesture. I've never thought of him as more than a friend, and I don't want to lose him. I avoid his eyes, but don't jerk away. I can feel his glance on my face. He leans down and whispers in my ear, "Who are you looking for?" I realize I've been peering around the room. "I don't know. No one, I guess." I say. It's the truth though; I'm not looking for anyone in particular, just drinking in the faces, the laughter. I may miss it here, I think, no matter how much I complain. He slides his arm around my waist and this time I step away. "Not now, Jeremy, please." He looks frustrated, but complies, and pretends that nothing happened. Someone cracks his gum nearby, and our first awkward silence is broken.

I wander off to find a friend of mine; Jeremy wanders over to where Ben is perched on the gray-brown couch with Riley. Jeremy looks back at me; I catch his glance and hold it for a moment. "You okay?" Dane asks, dragging me out of the confrontation. I nod. "So you were saying Sam and Jen are back together again?" I ask as he starts to talk again, his red-brown hair glinting in the poor lighting.

The night goes on like this, the same conversation with everyone there: about school, about the fall, about themselves. My blue plastic cup, still cold in my hand, is full again. I can't remember who filled it, or when, but the liquid is there, and the taste is in my mouth. I notice that the window in the back is open, and I climb out onto the fire escape, watching the lights of the city wax and wane. I hear someone climbing out behind me, a dark shape standing and gripping the railing. The light from inside bounces off his face, revealing Jeremy's shining gray-green eyes. "Hm. I'm gonna miss this place, ya know. Texas has all that country and cows." I don't answer, he knows I agree. "Are you going to miss me?" he asks, his tone teasing, but playful. I turn my head slowly, drawing my eyes away from the street below. I look up at him, not smiling.

"Do you care?" I ask.

"Of course." He replies solemnly. I forget that I didn't answer

his first question until he has already gone back inside. It's windy out here, and starting to get cool. A car alarm blares in the distance.

Ben pokes his head out the window and mentions that the fireworks are starting and everyone is heading up to the roof. "Thanks, Benny." I say as he ducks back in. I follow him in, and ask Sam to borrow a jacket or something. He hands me a worn UCLA sweatshirt that I slide on over my dress.

A burst of color interrupts our respectful silence as strands of the national anthem float among the couples and friends standing around potted plants and blue construction tarp. The loud waves of cracking, blossoming color are beautiful in the midnight sky, stars shining through the fireworks. I sit on a worn lounge chair, the cracked cement making patterns in my bare feet. Jeremy is flirting with some random girl near the other side of the roof, but his eyes seem to be wandering around the skyline. I lean back into the chair, still staring up into the sky, and searching for some kind of answer. What am I doing? Where am I going? What's the point? I sigh again. A dark shadow covers the sky above me, my vision adjusts, and I see that it's Jeremy. "What's with all these sighs today, huh?" He smiles. "You again?" I groan, but our joking manner has come back, and I'm happy. Even in these few moments, I have made that shift. Sometimes, I can feel so removed from my own life, it seems as if I am watching myself in a fish bowl with no attachment to my actions. And then sometimes, I know exactly who I am, and I am completely and utterly conscious of what I'm doing. He sees it too. I move forward on the chair as he climbs over and sits behind me. I lean back and feel his breathing, my own patterns change to match his, his arms wrapped around my waist. "So I guess this means you're gonna miss me?" Jeremy murmurs, and my laughter echoes through the streets.

Erica Burden
Paul D. Schreiber High School
Port Washington, NY
Ms. Evans

HIS LOVE POEM IN DISGUISE

ONE - BREEZE

She whistles without sound into the cave of my ear.
In the tunnel
of breathy wind,
she invites goosebumps
to feast on my skin.
Her breasts are pressed
to my chest,
and I wonder if she feels my chills
crawling up her arms and back,
like spiders.

Her body is draped over mine, like stale
dusty curtains hanging in a hotel, somewhere—
dry.
Dry
is my mouth.

I am motionless,
cold like marble.

TWO - MY MOTHER

I
don't think you
count.

as a kid
anymore.
THREE – TREES

The black highway I follow
sliced
your home in two.

The untouched trees lean over,
hunched, as if to breathe in my ear
secrets.
For me?

I notice their mummied branches,
wrapped by sticky spider webs.

Spiders, why must you suffocate my limbs?

Almost untouched.
Even if you stand still long enough
something
someone
will find you
and rupture your existence.

I should be watching
the road.

FOUR – RUNAWAY

It is
my foot patting the pedal,
driving nowhere.
But
it feels right.
Driving somewhere
that looks like a place
I haven't seen,
yet.

She leans over and holds her two
chapped, half moon lips
to the corner of my lips,
and slowly pulls away.
I grin to the white dashes—
I know she saw.

Fuzz,
fuzzy noise fills my head,
I can feel it speeding through
the tunnels, of my ears,
circling through the neurological highways,
around
and around.

It doesn't exit
and neither do I.

FIVE – REST STOP

Someone threw a handful
of white glitter into the
darkness,
who reluctantly caught it;
good arm.

The fuzz now
escapes from my head.
I feel like
I just stepped off a warped
loopy roller coaster.

We lay down
together,

*You know
there are supposed to be a ton of shooting stars
tonight.*

She places her head on my chest
and we watch
the exploding sky.

Leora Nesson
Morristown, NJ
Nancy Gorrell

RUSHING WATERS

sleep with you
I never have
not the romantic way

only you lying next to me
sleeping sweetly, in the heat
on top the salty sand

I watch your face,
content and still,
I drift away in the presence of you

the rhythm of your breathing
a soft, flowing stream
quickens its currents

falls to deeps waters,
into rivers
like a peaceful rain

close my eyes
in comfort
and I dream

I want to be
want to sail
on the river that is you.

Alison Worley
Chambersburg, PA
Mrs. Anne Branham

FALL AND SPRING

It's red and brick, all one level except for the giant room on the second floor which my Daddy shared first with his older brother, then his younger. We never use the white front door, just the "back door" where you can hide from the rain under a piece of roof that sticks out over the brick pathway. That door is white too, but it's less formal and gives you that certain feeling whenever you walk through it. Southern hospitality.

"I remember my mother coming home from Sessel's after work, her arms piled with bags of groceries," he says. My Dad, he's standing on the podium. I've never seen anything like this, and I'm scared.

Marnie runs to her doghouse that looks like Snoopy's. She is so alive that first visit, so alive.

We play in the piles of leaves in the back yard, jumping and flying. We ruin them so that the leaves are scattered all over the yard. Then my sister Charlotte and I, we're hyper, little, and gullible, we go inside and eat turkey sandwiches. We run through the black real back door and past the bad sign about Republicans and the chalkboard next to the phone, through the door, and fly into our seats at the table. Turkey! Grandma smiles gloriously over to me.

"She had us march after Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot. I was a teenager then, sixteen." He's composed. I can't feel pain anymore, but it feels me. It travels from my heart to my hands. They shake. It's a month later.

We tie red ribbons on Marnie's ears and walk her around the block on the little cement squares that make up the sidewalks. Daddy stays back with Grandma and Grandpa. The walk is cool and slow because Auntie Em knows we aren't tall enough to go faster.

We return through the "back door" under the roof. Daddy? He's in the den talking to them.

I like to look at the pictures. They're of when the four of them were little. A picture of Auntie Em in high heels and a boa. My Daddy played football when he was little like me, but I don't. And a family picture. Long hair!?! Daddy, what were you thinking? And he grabs me and gives me a hug. Smile.

We take pictures and I'm so cool because I do a peace sign. Charlotte is still little, and her hair is short and makes her face rounder. My hair is long and I wear my necklace from P.S. I Love You. I've got an old sweater and this blue checked dress of mine and Dr. Martens. Auntie Em, Daddy's little sister, a phrase which sounds so foreign to me that it might as well be in Russian because my Daddy

and Em are big, is wearing her old college sweatshirt. But they used to be little too and once they broke a vase. That makes me laugh.

Other people spoke, but Dad was the most composed. Some women who were friends with her started crying. I just looked out the giant window in front of the giant slanted seating area. An arena watching Dad speak and the Mississippi flow. It was outside the window, just going and not stopping. It didn't see the service for her. No, didn't see that. But I could see it. Dad is still talking, probably going to be long, but that's okay because that sort of thing is okay in this situation. I watch the river flow. That water, it came from up north, and it was passing this place. This little place. God, I was wearing her pearls. It was gray, the Mississippi, and the sky. It was gray and she didn't like gray.

The best part of Thanksgiving when I'm nine is all the food. I eat too much so I just have to run to one of the couches and lie there with my hands over my earthquake of a stomach. I stare at the white ceiling for a while, thinking about how happy I am. Then Charlotte comes in and says we should call Mommy. I wonder how her Thanksgiving is. I can barely stand up to go to the phone. I'm so tired, do we hafta call her? But she says we do and even though she's two-and-a-half years younger than me, I do it. So we call and Mommy's voice is sweet, and I miss her. Click.

We decide to play charades. Charlotte and I love to play charades. My group did all sorts of titles and I just know Charlotte is eagerly suggesting little cartoon shows because that's what she does. But I suggest titles of real TV shows, like *Full House* and *Saved by the Bell*. She gets some movie where she needs to do "pit." She stretches out on the floor on her full tummy and lifts up her legs and arms and looks at all of us with so much hope you could just die. It's funny so we all laugh.

It kept on flowing.

"There was something she wrote when she was fourteen.

Chloe—could you come read it?" My Dad, he looks at me, but I don't see him at first because I'm watching the Mighty Mississippi. I take big steps down the stairs to the podium where my dad stands. And I read. I do everything my public speaking class said. But the pain is

in my hands, they're shaking and I'm tingling all over and I'm sure that I'm turning red and I get hot and nervous and I still have one more sentence. Breath. Finished.

I run down the lilac-carpeted spiral stairs from the giant room and into the kitchen to draw silly faces on the chalkboard. Mr. Silly-Billy-Goo-Goo is waving to you saying Hi. Wave back! Smile. Turn around, and there's that big black box that holds the...soda!!! Oh, and the puppy picture that Daddy drew of Blackie. Then I fly out the door again. Skip the steps, jump, skip five times, and fly again into another pile of leaves. I lie there looking up at the sky, the white clouds floating on the blue sky like whipping cream and blue punch. Yup. And then I see the green moss on the crevasses of the brick porch and how the brick has been broken in by those four and others. Inside now, I run and warm up. Where to go? I go into Grandpa's office and climb onto the bed. Tons of pictures are framed on the wall, pictures of Daddy and Company and all in black and white. And gray.

It's over. We go outside and it's finally sunny. Everyone is crying but not me. My hands are and no one knows. I'm in a daze walking around, doing nothing. I'm excluded because I'm not crying.

"You were great. Good job. You're so brave." Someone I don't even know is congratulating me on the hardest thing I've ever done. Great.

"Oh. Um, thanks." I'm flabbergasted.

Chloe Yellin
New York, NY
Ms. Taylor



Kasia Kalka

"Yes, well...I knew your grandmother back when..." and Grandma's friend drones on. Like I actually listen—sure. Think what you want, but I'm almost fourteen and quite frankly, enough is enough. Nod.

"Well, thanks, um...Mr...Oh! My Dad is calling me. Nice to meet you." Shake hands and smile. But I don't shake hands because my hands are shaking without his help.

They're all crying, except me...and my Dad. And Charlotte thinks I don't feel anything, but I do.

THE WRITERS' INSTITUTE

The subject of a feature-length article in the March 15th issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Susquehanna University's Writers' Institute provides students with the opportunity to receive nationally-recognized undergraduate training in all forms of creative writing through the **Writing Major**. Students work closely with widely-published authors in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, screenwriting, web-based writing, and playwriting. Small workshops and one-on-one instruction are central to the Writing Major, which is enriched by the following programs:

The Visiting Writers Series: Six writers visit campus each year for short-term or long-term residencies. Recent visitors have been Andre Dubus III, Edward Hirsch, Tobias Wolff, Sharon Olds, Esmeralda Santiago, Ha Jin, Russell Banks, Charles Baxter, Antonya Nelson, Li-Young Lee, Richard Bausch, Dagoberto Gilb, Madison Smartt Bell, Robert Boswell, and Eavan Boland.

The Susquehanna Review and Essay Magazine: Two distinct literary magazines are written, edited, and produced by students. *The Susquehanna Review* features fiction and poetry, while *Essay* is exclusively nonfiction, showcasing student-written memoir, personal essays, first-hand research, interviews, and photo-essays. Endowed awards are made each year for the best writing that appears in both magazines.

The Student Reading and Chapbook Series: Senior writing majors present public readings of their work followed by publication in individually produced chapbooks. Group readings to celebrate the publication of student magazines as well as open-mike nights provide younger students with opportunities to present their work in public.

Internships: Susquehanna's writing majors have had recent internships with national magazines, advertising agencies, professional writing organizations, radio stations, nonprofit foundations, businesses, and public relations firms.



Susquehanna University

Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania 17870-1001

Graduate Program Success: Within the past four years, Writing Majors have been accepted (in nearly all cases with fellowships or assistantships) to such outstanding graduate writing programs as Iowa, Temple, Arizona, Columbia, Ohio State, Mills, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Boston University, The New School, Emerson, and UNC-Greensboro.

In addition, the **Writers' Institute** sponsors **Writing-in-Action Day**, which brings more than 200 high school seniors to campus each October for workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction, screenwriting, journalism, playwriting, and other such specialties. Each summer, the **Writers' Institute** offers the one-week **Advanced Writers' Workshops for High School Students**. Students live on campus and concentrate on fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction, working with published writers.

The writing faculty have published seventeen books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, many of which have been used in classrooms throughout the United States. They have won National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships, Pushcart Prizes, book publication prizes, and a number of prizes for writing sponsored by such prestigious magazines as *Poetry*. They regularly publish their work in such widely-known periodicals as *Harper's*, *Newsday*, *DoubleTake*, *The Paris Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *American Scholar*, and *The Georgia Review*. Their work has been syndicated in newspapers throughout the United States and heard on National Public Radio.

If you would like to know more about any of the programs for high school students or receive information about the **Writing Major**, see our web site at www.susqu.edu/writers or contact Dr. Gary Fincke, Director, by e-mail at gfincke@susqu.edu or by telephone at 570-372-4164.

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