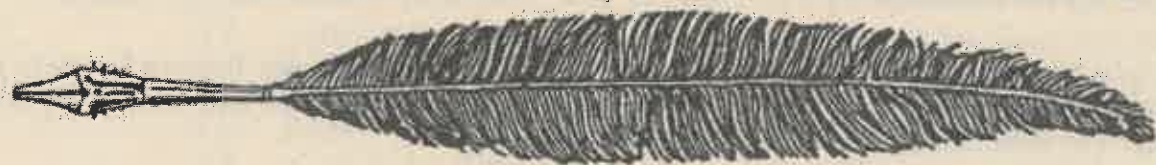


Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Michelle Patterson \ Washington DC

Volume 22

\$3

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the twenty-second issue of *The Apprentice Writer*, which annually features 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 *The Daily Item* in Sunbury, PA to over 3,500 schools.

Anyone who has seen previous issues should recognize that this year's edition marks a major shift in format style and production quality. Our growing program in Editing and Production is now giving our Writing Majors an opportunity to showcase what they have learned by working on one or more of the four magazines the Susquehanna University Writers Institute publishes each year.

If you are interested in learning more about the Writing Major and programs related to writing sponsored by the Writers Institute, see the back page for a summary or go to www.susqu.edu/writers for details.

Send material to be considered for next year's *Apprentice Writer* to Gary Fincke, Writers Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870. Please include your name and address on each page of your submission. The deadline is March 15, 2005.

Susquehanna University's **Writers Institute** provides students with the opportunity to receive nationally-recognized undergraduate training in all forms of creative writing through its **Writing Major**. Students work closely in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, writing for children, editing and the technology of publishing with faculty who are widely-published authors. Small workshops and one-on-one instruction are central to the Writing Major, which is enriched by a variety of programs described on the back page.

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Associate Editors: Bryan White, Isabelle Brock, Emily Seibert

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THE APPRENTICE WRITER is published by Susquehanna University
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3 Prayers \

jesse vanburen

Arlington, MA
Walnut Hill School
Daniel Bosch

1.

at Giant Supermarket

Oh my butcher,
bring your knife.

Oh father,
I am prepared
for your sweet slaughter.

I am slit through—
halleluiah — my bowl flows
over.

Let your knife speak yet again
Six-winged angels sing it in
and out
amen.

2.

at the National Cathedral

Maker, make me ax,
I will cut the timber.

Maker, make me saw,
I will shape the timber.

Maker, make me hammer,
I will drive the nails.

Father, calm the waters,
I will hold the sails.

3.

in a strange house, after dark

Wolf, devour me,
your teeth enter me,
your spit infuse me.

In to me, come again
and again;
not just for this dark,
but for all darks, forever.

Rhythm your teeth
with the rise and settle of the sun.
Up and down, in and out, forever
amen.

SIXTY BLACK

WINGS \

jesse vanburen

What a din! I thought I had woken up
on the median of a highway, a circle of ants
dancing around my nose.

Everything was yellow;
the sun shone through the rain
and the air was filled with schools of fish.
The wet grass shivered,
rippled as if a stone had fallen.

My Thursday wore blueness like a cheap suit, an old one he
had worn for sixteen years.
'Get Out!' I said, reminding him
it was Friday.

My Thursday seemed drunk,
he swayed and wobbled and grinned
and played a windblown blue scarecrow.

'I'm no poet,' my Thursday sighed.
The mute sun sank in the sky
and the yellow light crept in like ivy
in to a deserted house.
That night, a thousand crickets
landed their airplane
in my front yard.

My Thursday sticks around,
eats my food, sleeps on my couch,
and leaves his blue footprints everywhere.
The bathroom is blue from his touch.

Blue pubic hair clogs
the drain, staining the tiles.
My Thursday is a slob.

'I'm like a little river,' Thursday says,
smirking, 'I take the laziest path
between the rocks and the earth.'

His blue corrodes my house,
it eats through the drywall
and stone. Everything
stinks of yellow:
urine and oranges.

Sometimes he eats pink popsicles
on his back in the back yard.
Bees come and lick his sticky skin.
My house is rotten fruit.
Thanks to Thursday I am an insect.
All day I plod the pulp and decay,
Occasionally slipping on green slicks of poetry.

Packing Grapefruits\

lilly deng

Collegeville, PA
Perkiomen Valley HS
Gary Heidt

He tore the rind every evening,
Juice spurted through the cracks of his
Knuckles into the bowl, a soup
Of acid, his symphony of love.
We ate without sugar, bringing
The fruit to our mouths,
The pulp stinging my hands
Like alcohol. He buried his knuckles deep
In the meat, a greedy pirate digging
Sand for treasure.
On yard sale Sundays,
He went to the market by
The library where Jaworski's music shop
Radiated hurtin' love blues. I learned
Tambourine by tapping my palms
Against citric peels for a thump.
If they were sour or limp,
They would thwack like a basketball
Airing out on asphalt.
I wanted plums, or cherries, or kiwis,
But he bought the firm ones with a faint red
Blush, sometimes ten for a dollar,
But never without talking
Down the owner first. My father grinned
When a worker put his prize in
The interior of his car. It's leather,
He would tell him.
We drove past ballerina
Shoes and Babysitter Club
Books, but all I needed, he reminded,
Were the fruits resting in my lap. In the trunk,
He directed me, they might bake,
Shrivel and prune. Under the seat,
They would surely gather dust.
I dug my nails in their tough
Skin, their scaly surface engraved
By crescent lines. Burning tears left my
Eyes and pooled onto my shirt.
Damp hair writhed from barrettes
Like fish on a hook.
It's only sweat, I told him.
Nodding he handed me
The produce, the ruby reds for himself.
Only the seeds remained.

Lost in Des Moines\

a. catherine clarke

Mercersburg, PA

The doctor came
And he said there were
Only two months left.
"Shame," he said.
"We're gonna lose 'em in the spring of
His life."
Put his stethoscope back in his
Leather bag
Left through the kitchen door
After patting Mama on the shoulder

I have a cold,"
My brother said, "and
I've had one all my life."
He wore the striped pajamas
I gave him last Christmas,
Sipped some lemon tea-
Smiled, his gums were bloody.

I sat on the porch that evening
Sucking nicotine into my lungs,
Watching trucks speed past
With clouds of dust and
Frantic pebbles

Mama's cries were drowned out
By my own private mourning of
Cigarettes and sullen
Rocking chairs

Lord, get me out of Iowa.

The Minute My Mother Became An Orphan\

abigail bowen wright

Medford, MA
Lisa Baker

She lets the phone click into place,
I can see the whiteness of her knuckles,
Am reminded of the bones beneath her skin.
We will bury her mother in an oak box
In the Catholic cemetery that needs the iron bars
As if it feels the graves of Protestants press in.
Her father died when she was eight years old,
And I learned early not to ask her to remember.
Though when I did,
Her desert stories always left me thirsty,
Her inconsistent memories
Keeping everything in balance.
I know he had a heart attack,
And that he took my mother to Niagara Falls.
I pretend sometimes that I remember him,
My grandfather named Roger,
When I think of him, I see him standing at the edge,
A roaring in the background,
Balancing beside the great Niagara Falls.
As his heart begins to shiver
He has never before
Seen anything to clearly crashing,
I see him there, a carpenter in a three piece suit
And dark New York eyes, dying,
Palms together praying
As my mother wishes she still could.
My mother raps her knuckles against the kitchen table,
I hear her bones, and see them like an X-ray,
Waiting for their own oak box.

Double Haven \ *salley pei*

Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Mr. David Weber

I could barely see past my hand. Anything more than a meter away simply faded as it was surrounded by the endless murky green.

We could only rely on memory and the occasional glance out of the water to navigate to the best snorkeling spot. We finned towards the other side of the bay, passing a few rickety fishing boats that rocked and swayed gently in the waves. Sometimes, something white and translucent would drift eerily by, at first glance perhaps a jellyfish, its thread-like tentacles trailing behind, but more likely a scrap of an old plastic bag or another bit of disintegrating flotsam. Tiny brown flecks in the faintly oily water clung to our skin, forming a slimy film. Still, by Hong Kong standards, where fluorescent-colored chemicals are not uncommonly seen spewing into the heavily polluted harbor, the waters of Double Haven, part of a marine reserve about ninety minutes from the city by boat, were positively sparkling.

As we approached shallower water, I could begin to make out dark shapes silhouetted against the sea bed – a cluster of rocks; gray coral waving listlessly in the current; an ominous-looking sea urchin, with its long black spikes reminiscent of a medieval weapon; a clump of sea cucumbers, ensconced on the same like black, overfed caterpillars.

Uncle Winston quickly pulled into a skin dive into the cloudy depths, reappearing at the surface a moment later spouting water from his snorkel, with the fattest of the lot clenched in his hand. He held the sea cucumber in the center of its body. The ends drooped lifelessly. He stroked its underside. As he held it towards me, I imitated him, but the animal suddenly went rigid and spewed long silvery threads. I withdrew quickly. Uncle Winston promptly dropped it. It sank gracelessly to the bottom where it lay curled in a soft heap, the white strands still fluttering like streamers.

"Don't touch the white stuff," said Uncle Winston as we popped out of the water. "It'll take all the hairs off your skin." I was slightly curious, but decided that Uncle Winston had probably learned this detail from personal experience and hence restrained myself.

We swam on towards the rocks. At first, the area seemed barren. But as my eyes adjusted and focused in the underwater light,

I could see pale fish, barely visible as they darted across the bottom, gobies poking shyly out of holes in the sand, retreating at the passing of a shadow, then, after a few moments, peeking out again.

As I watched a nearly transparent shrimp digging in a goby hole, Uncle Winston tapped me on the arm, pointing excitedly just ahead of us. A huge school of tiny silver fish streamed through the water in perfect synchrony, a cloud of silver darts blinking past our eyes. They vanished and Uncle Winston motioned for us to continue.

We approached the barnacle-encrusted rocks where the water deepened slightly again. Uncle Winston amused himself by turning over sunken bottles and cans.

"There might be an octopus inside," he explained. Excited by this prospect, I joined him in his inspections, but this time we were out of luck. My disappointment was soon forgotten, however, when Uncle Winston discovered a seahorse hiding among the coral. He gently clasped the seahorse between his thumb and forefinger. "Don't squeeze its stomach – it might be pregnant." I was only half listening to him as the seahorse coiled its tail around the end of my finger and rested there, frail and delicate, before wobbling away to settle again, completely and perfectly camouflaged against the rocks.

We spent most of the afternoon carefully combing each section of the bay peeking into each crack and hole. Sometimes we were rewarded for our efforts by a special discovery – a fiddler crab brandishing an oversized claw; a nudibranch no longer than my thumb, black with thin white stripes and a startling orange trim, steadily inching its way along the rock. Other times, we found only traces of creatures that must have been watching us as we peered through our masks at their world – the occasional dusty swirl as something dug itself into the sand; smoky strands of squid ink suspended in the water but their maker nowhere to be seen. Below us, oddly shaped fish weaved their way about the coral. For each discovery Uncle Winston had a pertinent remark; occasionally he would tell of similar creatures he had spotted while diving in the tropical water of the world.

Equally diverse but less uplifting was the variety of rubbish that was scattered about the bay – a forgotten fishing net, tangled like a nest around the rocks; bottles and aluminum cans now colonized by barnacles; shredded bits of supermarket bags; a shoe; a full assortment of plastic cutlery; a moldy toothbrush. Uncle Winston was just prodding at one of the old bottles with the tip of his fin when something unusually colorful caught my eye. I grabbed

Some Years Ago And This Week \ *anne sando*

Milton, MA
Lisa Baker

I once heard the story
Of how death like an incubus, came
And infected the mind of a young girl,
And made her a woman,
So that for eleven days,
She lived into the shadows of her house,
Disbelieving recovery.

In an interview
She told me how, in that time,
She imagined herself
A small girl
Who spun the cylinder
And watched the black slats
Of an old-fashioned zoetrope
Slick by,
A stenciled stallion galloping, but always,
Always,
Caught in the stutter of the machine.

In waking dreams, I see
The old art room where,
As a girl,
I bent to peer through slits
In a sheath of spinning black,
Wondering if
This time
The world whirls fast enough
To blend movements
Into sustained animation

his arm and pointed towards what I had seen. It was a pair of large grouper, scarlet-orange and mottled with white, gilding regally around the coral. Mesmerized, (Uncle Winston would later remark that they were the biggest he had ever seen in Double Haven), we followed them as they circled below us until they disappeared into the shadow of an underwater cave.

We decided to rest for a while on the narrow strip of beach. We left our masks and fins on the sand at the edge of the retreating tide and amused ourselves by wading among a vast colony of starfish. Soft bodies squished underfoot as we waded in the shallows along the

beach, looking into tide pools and under rocks. A motorboat droned faintly in the distance.

Suddenly, raucous clapping and shouting erupted from one of the fishing boats.

We shouldn't have looked up from the tiny hermit crab we were trying to coax out of its shell. Some distance away, on the end of a twisting line, I could just see one of the magnificent red grouper that we had earlier admired, writhing and thrashing in the afternoon sun, its scales glistening in the waning light of the afternoon. The fisherman hauled in his trophy. Still, the fish struggled, its tail slapping dully against the side of the boat. He finally man-

aged to heave the huge fish aboard. The rest of the fishermen cheered and joked in coarse Cantonese. Uncle Winston kicked bitterly at the sand.

They cranked up their motor and sputtered away noisily towards open water, a cloud of exhaust billowing behind them, as the sun set over the inky hills of Double Haven. We could only look on.

Striped Bass \ *claire whipple*

Convent Station, NJ
Oak Knoll
Harriet Marcus

I caught that striped bass
On the G. Willy Make It
Off the coast of Block Island,
Rocking on the windy water
Leaning far over to feel the spray
And trying to cool off.

That night,
Mom sliced it into thick, white slabs
Spilling chunky blood into the sink
And bluish silvery scales
On the edge of the wooden cutting board.
She basted the top with hazel butter
And baked it in tin foil shells
While Matt and I cleaned up the guts.

We ate it at dusk
With yellow rice
And blackberries picked
From the driveway,
Made into a pie
And we washed it down with beer,
Even me.

I saved an eye.

Once, While You Chalked a Line \

madeleine goldstein

Weston, CT
Brad Czepiel

Over cracked pavement
And onto my palm,
You asked whether I knew
The shortest distance
Between two souls.

I found you
On the shoulder of the road,
A tumbleweed
tossed by the wind
and coated with dusts.

With wings of sand
You had become
A powdery shadow,
Mothlike
Against the parched earth.

I covered my eyes
With the stars
And prayed for you
A stream of constellations.

With palpable wonder,
You asked, "Does God believe in us?"

The Need To Walk Fast\

kimberly reimer

Claremont, NH
J. Tobias Moore.

Standing one step away from falling, Carmen breathes again and lets her eyes wander. The world seems to shimmer, bending in the day's heat, and Carmen bends with it, wanting to connect, to feel like she is here. Her head begins to drop and the concrete channel reveals itself to her.

It is a long way to the ground, and the height has made her dizzy.

Fresh air hits her face as a pair of wings beat the sky, and Carmen steadies her feet on the bricks. Sun screams into her eyes and the wings are being swallowed in light.

The city rests beneath her, breathing, moving, alive with the heartbeat of all its people.

And she can feel her body breaking, everything freeing itself. Blood and bone and bile leaking onto the pavement. Bits of teeth crushed into the ground. Her hair, damp strands of auburn, sneaking back into her skull.

Standing one step away from falling Carmen pulls it all back into her and moves back to the roof's safety.

Mike is waiting on the sidewalk. He wears the brace today, mostly because he hates the cane. He was watching Carmen die again, then suddenly she stepped away. Mike frowns and leans against the building. She could be up there for hours.

Carmen lies down on the roof, cringing as the hot tar touches her skin.

Mike hates waiting. He scratches his arm and watches cars go by. A hound in a blue collar is sitting two feet in front of him, its head cocked to one side. Three years ago Miles would've growled at it, but that, impossible now, doesn't happen. Instead he kicks it with his good leg and smiles inwardly as it creeps away, its warrior instinct wounded, not unlike his own.

Carmen stays still, and remembers being born. Being something before she was anything. She dreams of the nothing to come, still tempted to leap from her former perch. The drop calls to her, its voices the melody of all her disappointments, all her triumphs. All her joys and all her pain. And she thinks of Miles, waiting for her, and remembers how he hates waiting. She thinks of all his pain, and how he's never tried to end it, or never mentioned wanting to. He must hurt so much.

8

And now they're going to see Bailey, because she always has the answers. Carmen has left the roof to join Miles, and together they beat the pavement. Footsteps echoing on a narrow road, the metallic clang of Miles' brace betrays their movement. He no longer tries to disguise the limp.

Some time ago all of his parts worked, but then the car came, and now his leg is dead, and his vocal chords are paralyzed. Miles doesn't back or chase the other puppies anymore.

It's a long way to go to Bailey's and she's certain to be high when they get there. Bailey is always high, which is ironic because Miles is always so low. Carmen floats. She is above ecstasy, she is below depression.

Miles stumbles and sparks fly as his leg drags. It makes Carmen laugh, showing her teeth, and Miles is tempted to do it again, just to see her laugh. He wants to talk to her, but he can't. He taps her lightly on the shoulder, and she turns to see his hands dance in rapid sentences. YOU SHOULD LAUGH MORE. YOU KNOW I LOVE IT WHEN YOU LAUGH. But Carmen doesn't laugh, or respond. She smiles, and suddenly Miles is furious because she takes her speech in vain. He decides not to sign until they reach Bailey's, completely forgetting that Carmen won't notice.

An old Chinese woman walks by quickly, her arms piled high with groceries. So high her face is hidden behind the bags. She trips over Miles' dead leg, and loses two of her bags. Something liquid and dark oozes onto the pavement. When Miles doesn't apologize, she swears bitterly and hurries away. Carmen snickers and pulls Miles along. A lone egg disappears into the gutter.

"You've gotten awfully fat," Carmen says suddenly to Miles, who has lost thirteen pounds in the last month. "It must be the inactivity," she says to Miles, who walks five miles a day despite the dead leg. She watches all the tall buildings, silently marking their addresses on her calendar.

She points to a glass-walled giant on the corner and shields her eyes against the reflection. "Tomorrow." Miles frowns and shakes his head, but he's seen that freedom in her eyes, and he knows tomorrow he'll be leaning against that wall, smearing the glass with his handprints.

And now they're reaching Bailey's. She'll be home, because she's always home, and has nowhere to go. She just waits for people to come to her, and she can afford to, because they always do. Like now, as Miles and Carmen see a twitchy little man slink out the front door. There's a tic in his left eye and it seems as though he's winking compulsively. His hands constantly knead into one another,

Rented House\

julia alter

Ft. Washington, PA
Dr. Peter Drewniansky

I haven't slept in a five year old girl's room
Since I was a five year old girl.

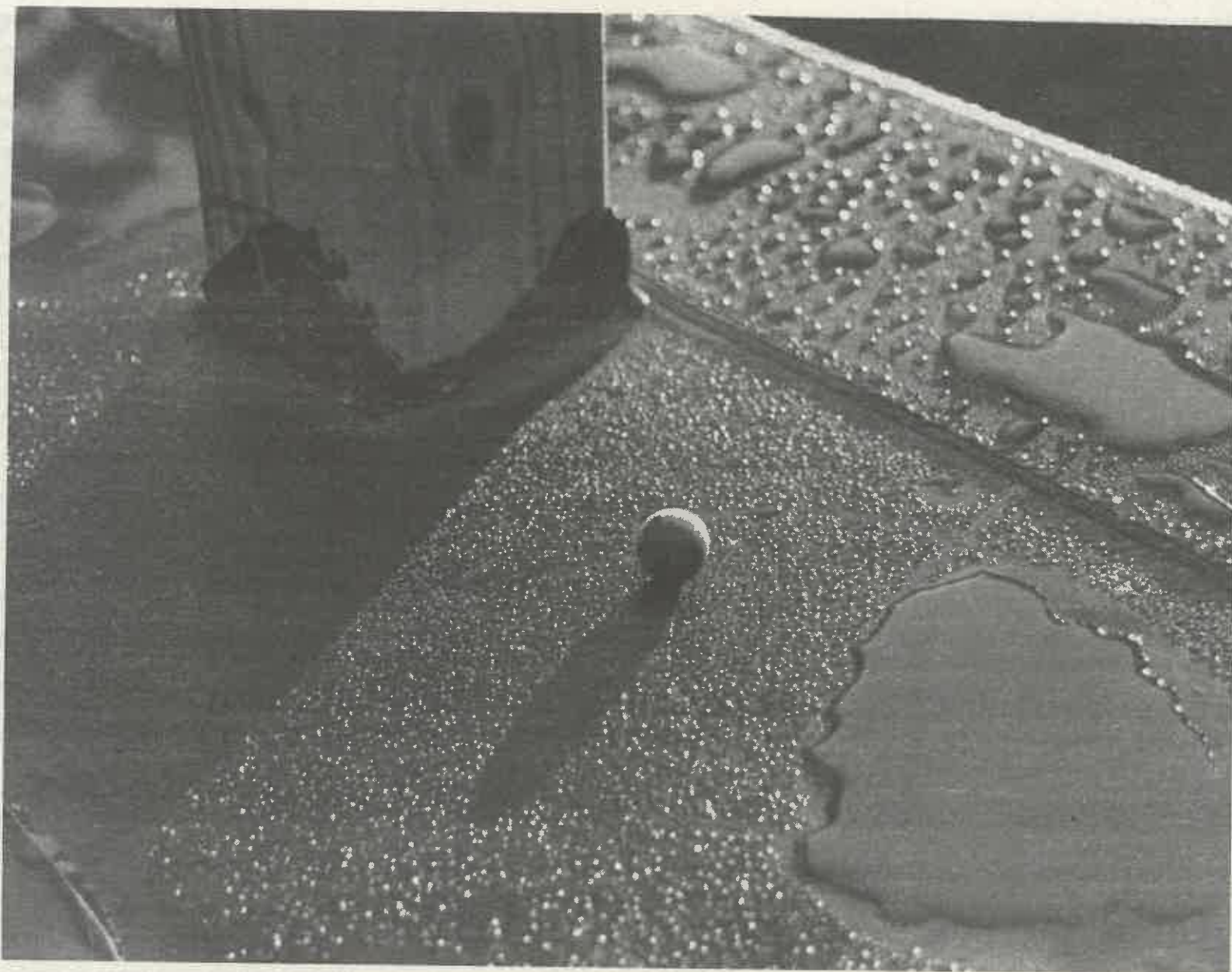
I am a tenant in her parents' house,
A stranger.

We share a love for lavender and butterflies.
They cover the curtains, the bedspread and the walls

But I have a distrust for her baby dolls.
I put them under the bed when I got here.
I don't need their glass eyes, soulless windows.
They are too much like the eyes
Of too many people I know.

I cut my leg shaving in her bath tub
And bled into her purple and white towel.
My eyelashes fell out into her sink
And down the drain
Before I could make a wish.
A carousel rocking horse by the bed
Has a bit in its mouth.
Outside the window, the glitter of the waterfront city
Competes with the glitter of the stars.

A white butterfly has fallen in the corner.
One of its wings, dust
The maid will sweep tomorrow.
I won't sleep tonight.
I cannot match my dreams to hers.
A siren starts up in the distance,
And rises, cutting the night.
I keep turning her pillow
To find the cool side.
Her bed is too warm and too soft.



Lauren Harlett

and melt into the air like rain into the puddle. So many beautiful hands. Carmen likes all hands, except her own.

And Miles is holding open the door, and Carmen is busy checking the skyline. So occupied with dying. Miles kicks the door jam hard, and the noise catches her attention. The door is open, and Miles is disappearing inside.

"Patience is a virtue," Carmen says and follows him in.

The hallway smells of disappointment. Starkly. Vomit and urine and alcohol, and all the other nasty little liquids the human body ingests and secretes. They pretend not to notice until Miles starts to gag, and then Carmen snickers again, and everything is suddenly funny.

The lights here are all broken, bits of glass crunching underfoot. Dead bulbs lay strewn throughout the hallway, skittering down the rug as Carmen kicks them. Miles wants to tell

her to knock it off, but in the darkness she'd never see him. There is a sharp pop as a bulb shatters against the far wall, and suddenly Carmen is finished with her game.

Bailey is home, and soon they are in the light again. A red sheet hangs over the window, blotting out the natural light, but various lamps keep every corner bright. Bailey's hair glows here, like fire, and for a moment Carmen fears she is combusting. Most of the lamps have no shade, and it takes some time for their eyes to adjust.

"What're ya here for?" Bailey asks slowly. Her eyes aren't open all the way. She is tired all the time. Miles and Carmen have no answer, so they sit on the floor and start sniffing open bottles. "Vodka," Carmen says, and Miles steals the bottle. He drinks it greedily and grins once he has drained it. "Mean," Carmen says, and starts sniffing bottles again.

Bailey shifts uncomfortably and watches

this performance.

Miles takes off his brace and puts it gently on a chair. He pats it reverently, then quickly turns away, spurning the instrument of his livelihood. Carmen is finished sniffing bottles, and having found nothing to her liking wanders into the kitchen. Miles follows her, and not remembering where the bathroom is urinates into the sink. He ignores both Carmen and the dishes. His dead leg thumps against the ground as he stumbles back and forth, using the weight for balance in lieu of the brace.

Carmen wants a banana. Bailey doesn't eat fruit. Hence, no bananas. Angry, she starts breaking glasses.

Bailey cries and tries to pick up the pieces, but only succeeds in cutting her hands. The blood mingles with the glass, holding it as though desperate to continue with their purpose. Miles, signing, catches Carmen's eye. I'M

BORED. CAN WE LEAVE NOW?

But Carmen isn't ready to go. She dislikes misbehaving, and crouches to help Bailey. She is far more coordinated, and manages to clean up all the largest pieces. Then Miles makes tea and they have a proper party on the kitchen floor, staining all their lovely clothes with Bailey's blood.

After the tea party Bailey falls asleep. Miles wants to move her, but can't. Carmen simply doesn't care. So they put a pillow under her head and let her sleep in the kitchen, and hope she doesn't wake up cold.

Darkness is falling, and the heart is beating faster.

Outside, and moving slowly because Miles left his brace at Bailey's, and neither of them want to go back and get it. Miles is making Carmen help him walk. "What if I were attacked? How could you possibly protect me?" They stop under a streetlight so Carmen can read his response. I'D HELP THE ATTACKERS. Carmen shoves him against a wall, forgetting that he can't get himself back up.

She stands by the road and watches, uncertain what to do. Then she sighs and helps him to his feet. LET'S GO GET MY CANE. Carmen nods and they change directions. It's dark now, very dark, and she can no longer see her buildings.

Miles lives on the second floor, and has to crawl like a dog up the stairs without his

Staring Game\

selin gunduc

Califon, NJ
Lois Harrod

The sky spreads its wings
From blue to pallid gold

It is November
And the road is thirsty
For the wet touch of snow
That is aching to be
Milked from the clouds.

Headlights from highway cars
Play the staring game with me
Adamant in their consecutive wins

Which makes me question
Why my momma didn't birth me
With high beams

10

brace. Carmen is laughing with alacrity, and Miles stops to rest. SINCE WHEN DID YOU LAUGH SO MUCH? She just continues to laugh, and Miles curses her silently, losing more dignity with each step.

But now they're off the stairs and moving to where Miles lives. Inside, a red leather couch mocks Carmen's sanity. Tempting her to guess where red cows come from. She won't fall for that, though. Carmen prides herself on being hardened.

Now Miles is gone again, off looking for the cane. He mostly uses it to hit things. So Carmen turns on his TV and starts flipping channels. Cartoon Network is showing Speed Racer. So she sits to watch, because Speed Racer is a childhood god to the cereal breakfast latchkey kid. Miles was pancakes and adoration. He didn't turn out so well.

Miles hits the TV with his cane, but not hard enough to break it. WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU WATCHING? "Speed Racer." I HATE YOU SOMETIMES. She nods knowingly, and Miles sits down to watch it with her.

It is two hours later, and they are both sleeping in front of the TV. And then the phone rings, so Miles is awake. He keeps it so others can tell him something is wrong. He picks up the phone and presses a button, so they will know he is listening. Bailey. She starts talking, but he didn't bother listening. Instead he yanks the jack out and throws the phone out the window. He peers out after it, and watches the little spot of white spiral down. It crashes into the sidewalk beside a pregnant woman. She looks up and shakes her head. Miles waves broadly and ducks back inside.

When Carmen wakes up Miles is gone. A knife pins a note fast to the wall. GONE TO GET MY BRACE. BE BACK SOON. DON'T TRY CALLING.

Miles comes back in record time and finds Carmen beside the broken window. She turns to him. "Do the world a favor and drink a bullet, stupid." WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM? She shrugs and starts moving her fingers over the glass. Contact, release.

They've been in silence for some time, and Miles grows weary of it. His world has enough silence. He substitutes motion and walks out. A door slams behind him and suddenly Carmen is hitting him in the head. It doesn't hurt much, but he pretends it does. He wants to arouse some false sympathy, since he can never get any that's real.

Back down the stairs, faster this time as the leg brace lends speed. But the noise ricochets in the empty stairwell and Carmen can barely contain her laughter. Retaining his dignity, Miles laughs as well.

WHERE ARE WE GOING? Carmen smiles knowingly, smug in her knowledge. It drives Miles crazy. They walk back towards Bailey's, and for a moment Miles believes he will see his sister a third time tonight, but no, instead they stop before Carmen's building. The giant mirror. HERE? She nods and tries the door.

Now Carmen is gone, and Miles stands on the sidewalk alone. He'd like to be with her, but the climb is too taxing for him. Around corners he sees the sun rising. All around him the building glows red and orange, illuminating its silent companion.

Arteries being severed. Chambers flooding. A lung, cleanly truncated, slides through her chest, lubricated in blood. The bone works further down, or up, rather, pushing into her lower organs. Stomach pierced, bile dripping down, the pancreas speared. Liver split. The intestines minced by fragments. It lodges itself finally in soft outer flesh, nestled snugly between the pelvis and femur joint of Carmen's left leg. She's landed on her head this time, and her spinal column has forced parts of her sternum and clavicle loose, reeking havoc on her innards. Skin rips away. Evisceration is imminent. When Carmen opens her eyes the sun has risen, and her death feels truer than ever before.

"Miles!" She screams from her perch. He looks up slowly. And she spits.

On the sidewalk Miles narrowly misses being slapped by saliva. He is not insulted. Instead he goes inside to wait. Already there is a young man behind a reception desk, looking alert and intelligent. He looks at Miles with interest, which soon turns to confusion when Miles begins to sign. Frustrated, Miles scratches the word MUTE on a piece of paper and hands it to him. The man nods, but obviously expects him to speak.

This roof is very flat. There is no rail, no lift, no wall built to protect adventurers. She's never seen a roof like this before. Carmen lies down on her stomach and hangs her head and arms over the sides, and wonders if anyone is behind that top window, wondering whose hands are blocking their view. This thought brings her peace, and suddenly Carmen feels like sleeping.

She can't though, and instead rolls onto her back, pushing herself farther over the edge. The sky is pale and soft, welcome. Beneath her the roof is beginning to warm. Preparing for its day in the sun. She rolls again, and is now barely balanced.

She tips slightly, suddenly at an angle. And this has all become too real.

Miles sits by the desk, tracing figure-eights on the floor. The young man has said nothing,

and Miles likes it this way. A clock points apathetically to a 6 and a 4. He wonders if it's 6:20 or 4:30. Life is full of mysteries.

Carmen is sitting now, her head a pool of blood and thought. Everything is bursting this time. Her brain is bleeding out her nose, burning out her ears. Her eyes ache with spice and history. Lips crack from heat and pressure. Her skin dries and slides away, crackling like ash. Bone gleaming under the sun, washed red with remnants of her heartbeat. Her hair pulling out and flying free like Charlotte's children, off to live without her. She waves goodbye and rests her head in her hands. It's hard to be sane.

She's coming back now.

Miles stands with some effort, careful not to strain himself. He has to work today. Carmen looks like she's been crying. Eyes shot with bits of blood, skin dark from insomnia's touch. Looking at her makes Miles want to cry.

"I'll walk you home," Carmen says, "We have to change our clothes."

At Miles' apartment the window is still broken, and Speed Racer long ago crossed the finish line. His cane hangs crooked from the broken glass, warm to the touch. His window takes in the morning sun, and they no longer feel like leaving.

Frying eggs. They don't much care for eggs.

Eggs in the garbage can, toast in their hands. Miles makes the tea, and everything feels good now.

ARE WE GOING NOW? Miles asks. His shoes are already tied. Carmen is worried because she doesn't have her smock, and the time to get it has long passed. YOU CAN BORROW ONE. WE HAVE TO GO. Carmen waves him off and bites her nails.

But they're walking to the bus stop, off to the paycheck. Miles' eyes are blue and Carmen's hair is tied behind her. Ready to spend a day ringing up cigarettes and candy. Counting dimes and carding kids. Everyday feels the same.

At lunchtime Carmen eats a hotdog on a crate behind the store. The meat is overcooked and feels like rubber in her mouth. Miles eats a candy bar, the chocolate coagulates between his teeth. He tries to pick it out with his tongue, but eventually yields and lets his nails do the job.

A girl is furious when Miles won't sell her beer. He sighs and points to a WE CARD sign. She knocks the case to the floor and charges out. The manager is there in a second, telling Miles to expect a reduction. And then Carmen is there, and a mop is in her hand. Like magic, it's as if it never happened. Like magic, they die a little more inside.

There are three minutes left in their shifts, and Miles is currently being fired. The manager says he can't have a cashier who can't speak. He is rude and cold, and he no longer can be employed at the store. Miles punches him in the eye and leaves the store. His righteous anger is only slightly impaired by the clanging of his leg brace.

Painfully aware of what just happened, Carmen rides out her shift and assures the manager she'll get Miles' smock and bring it back tomorrow.

Miles is waiting outside, and he is furious. He sees Carmen and starts signing so fast she cannot read it. How did he learn so quickly? She learned sign language for him. They took the classes together. Miles realizes that Carmen can't follow and, frustrated, punches the wall.

Now his knuckles are black and red, and they burn like the sun fell into them. He licks the blood and howls silently, his mouth gaping, no sound coming out. Carmen winces.

Pantomime is hard to watch.

She leads him into oncoming traffic, cars swerve angrily, horns blaring. Miles can't see anymore. Cars move in a blur, and the world has become terrifying. He gropes for purchase, and settles his eyes on the yellow line. It stands, clear and well defined, the only direct object in his vision. He reaches forward, tries to grab it. Failing, he drops to his knees and tries to pick it up.

His fingernails crack, his flesh tears on the pavement. He is in hysterics now, tears pouring from his eyes, matched by the blood pouring from his fingers. Carmen doesn't know what to do. In a panic she kicks him in the back, causes him to sprawl. A truck races over his left hand, and Miles flips onto his back, cradling the hand. Carmen cannot tell which blood came from where.

Carmen pulls him to his feet and leads him from the street. A streak of blood stands parallel to the yellow line. A streak of blood runs straightly down his smock.

At the hospital they refuse to help Miles, because he doesn't have health insurance. Carmen takes him home to fix the hand herself.

Afterwards they are happy, and eating sandwiches beside the window. Miles squeezes his hand and mayonnaise hits a little boy on the head. Carmen laughs raucously, and Miles smirks in contentment. His hand doesn't hurt anymore.

The sun will set soon, and they're off to find a building.

This time Miles comes with her. He doesn't die though, he's dead enough already. Carmen

stands beside the ledge, arms akimbo, her head tilted back. Miles can see inside her nostrils and suddenly this all seems very stupid.

He chews some gum and tries to remember why there is a bandage on his hand.

Too sudden this time. She lands on a car. The windshield disappears beneath her, cracking first, then shattering. A steering wheel, hard against her back. A fleeting glance of the building above her. A scream rises beside her, and then it's over.

Carmen raises her head and frowns. Wrong, wrong. Very wrong. Her sense of motion and heat isn't here.

She turns to Miles. "It's never been this way before." Miles shrugs. He has ceased to care.

It's been two days, and Carmen hasn't talked to Miles. She has gone to work, having forgotten about his smock, and he's read the want ads in a bathrobe. She hasn't gone to any buildings, and he hasn't seen Bailey. A Girl Scout sold Carmen a box of thin mints, and she went to Miles' so they could eat them together, but he refused to answer the door. He never locks it, but she refused to enter unless he let her in.

Now Carmen is angry. She misses Miles. She misses the silence and leg brace, and wandering in sober stupors. She misses dying and sandwiches, and having tea before the sun comes up. Carmen is no good at making tea. While she thinks this Miles drinks tea and watches Speed Racer, his mind occupied enough to keep his hand from burning.

It looks like raw hamburger now. He went back to the hospital, his arms filled with forms, and they put thread through his skin, and taped pieces of wood to his bones, and then they wrapped it all in plaster and made him promise not to break it open. He broke his promise so he could look. It looked like raw hamburger, so he glues it back together and makes a hamburger, because suddenly he's hungry.

Carmen arrives three minutes before seven. Miles opens the door and they eat hamburgers without a word. As Miles holds the door so she can leave, Carmen hugs him and asks to see his hand. He breaks the cast again, and she pokes the skin gently. Then she smiles and leaves, and suddenly everything is good again.

At midnight they're at Bailey's, and things have gone very wrong.

There is a cat on her stomach, sleeping quite content. The needle stands erect in her arm. Her face is frozen. A mask of perverse pleasure. "Masochistic to the end," Carmen declares with a sigh, and calls the police. Miles

is crouched beside his sister, still trying to take her pulse. And then the cat stretches, and he can't remember her having one. He punches the floor, and Carmen turns. WHAT IS THAT CAT'S NAME?

"Peter," Carmen says, and turns back towards the wall.

Miles closes Bailey's eyes and crosses her arms over her chest. But that looks wrong, so he places them in mock sleep against her check. And then Carmen is behind him, one hand on his shoulder. "She looks sweet." LIKE A CHILD. They smile, and Miles grips Carmen's hand. Both fail to see that the needle is still in her arm.

The funeral is foolish. Someone wears a kilt, and Miles smirks because they aren't Scottish. The priest speaks kind words, all lies, and the tombstone reads Beloved Daughter. Their parents are not here. Bailey's ex-husband paid for everything, and leaves after five minutes. A crowd of lost drug addicts stands behind Miles, trying to remain connected. Carmen arrives late and wears a red dress, and calls Bailey an adorable addict. She pops the lid open and puts a rose in Bailey's mouth, then stands beside Miles, solemn throughout the ceremony.

Ty slaps Carmen across the face, and swears at Miles. "You never should have brought her here!" Miles tries to sign something, but his little brother never learned how to read it. Carmen translates and Ty spits on her, then stalks away to a waiting cab. HE NEVER LIKED BAILEY. Carmen nods knowingly, and they go to have tea.

They are on the glass giant, sitting Indian style, tea cups between them. They took the elevator, which Miles never does. The young man at the front desk, infatuated with Carmen, waved them through.

"I like him," she says thoughtfully, and takes a sip loudly. Miles grins like a child.

They sit until the sun goes down, having brought plenty of tea. Miles' hand is better now, but not good enough to hold the cup. He is learning to use his right hand, and hates every second of it.

W-H-Y D-O-E-S E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G H-A-V-E T-O B-E S-O H-A-R-D F-O-R M-E? (With the use of only one hand, he has to say everything with letters) "Maybe because you don't feel any of it," Carmen says thoughtfully, and walks to the edge. I D-O T-O-O, Miles signs, but Carmen isn't looking anymore. I F-E-E-L I-T A-L-L, he signs, very maudlin. I F-E-E-L M-Y D-E-A-D L-E-G, A-N-D D-E-A-D S-I-S-T-E-R, A-N-D D-E-A-D V-O-I-C-E A-N-D C-O-M-A-T-O-S-E H-A-N-D. He cries just a little, because his hand is cramping. He's losing his

second voice. He went to sign language courses because writing everything left his hand too sore. Trading one pain for another.

Carmen drops her teacup, and watches as it spirals and disappears. She can see stars in the distance, very few, hidden by ambient light. Design, design. Lit windows take their places, forming unique constellations. An apartment complex three blocks away forms a swastika, around the corner stands a synagogue. Carmen giggles at this.

Miles cannot finish his tea. Feeling very depressed, he lays his head down and is shocked by how cold it is. Like touching ice. He shivers, and thinks a tear is freezing to his face.

"Does it really make a difference?" Carmen calls back. "The silence? That piece of metal strapped around your leg?" She doesn't turn to read his answer.

T-H-A-T-S W-H-Y I W-A-L-K, A-N-D T-A-K-E T-H-E S-T-A-I-R-S, A-N-D D-O E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G T-H-E H-A-R-D W-A-Y. He's started crying harder now. I N-E-E-D T-O B-E M-O-R-E T-H-A-N T-H-E S-U-M O-F M-Y P-A-R-T-S, I N-E-E-D T-O S-P-E-A-K I-N N-E-W W-A-Y-S, A-N-D I N-E-E-D T-O W-A-L-K F-A-S-T.

"I don't think it would matter to me," she kicks off her shoe and doesn't bother watching it. The other follows suit. "There are ways around everything." She closes her eyes and feels the stars crashing, falling, filling her. She feels them burning through her eyes and out her nose, leaving the bone charred in their wake. "I don't need to be in the ground to die." Her heart bursts and the feeling is back, and everything is better than it was.

Miles stops crying, and raises his head. I D-O-N-T N-E-E-D T-O B-E W-H-O-L-E T-O W-A-L-K F-A-S-T.

The star burned the hole wide, and now the sky is falling into her. The cold space freezes her lungs, and steroids shatter them, as though coated in liquid nitrogen. Saturn's rings cut her stomach, and liters of tea warm Pluto, because it's been cold far too long.

Miles turns the cup upside down and rests his chin on it. The surface still throbs with the tea's heat. He thinks about sandwiches, and decides he needs a new job. He cannot afford lunchmeat anymore.

Neptune enters the old-fashioned way, traveling peacefully down her throat. Neptune, Roman God of the Sea. The dime store version of Poseidon. The sun sets in the west

Miles glows now, with the knowledge of new beginnings.

Carmen is finished with her glass giant, and she and Miles retreat, leaving their tea set

on the roof. And she tells him it is time to move on. How she wants to see the ocean, and try the buildings on another coast. She grows more excited, gaining greater speed as she moves. She grips Miles' hand, pulling him, straining him. He drags behind, his dead leg is suddenly a thousand pounds.

"It'll be different there," Carmen assures him, "No more darkness. And we'll find you a better job, and a home without broken windows."

She is running now, moving faster than Miles could ever hope to. Her hand breaks from his, and she is running away, so far that she begins to disappear, to be swallowed by the night, and all its empty promises.

Miles sets his face in grim determination, and starts to run. He glows now, needing to do more than walk fast. Carmen is visible again, still running, her back to him. Her legs pump faster and faster. His brace scrapes the ground, sparks flying. But he is losing speed, falling behind.

He stops now, knowing he will never catch Carmen. Knowing he will never walk fast.

Vow \ *mariel boyarsky*

New City, NY
Clarkstown High School North
Mrs. Potter

I promise never to raise the silky
Cloud-keg of moonlight's run to my
Lips again. Nighttime will no longer
Seep through my ears, wiggle its
Way past pale eyelids to my
Dream-drugged brain

I will bandage ever opening
On my body-it cannot

Come in. I am going to leave
Planets, stars, and glossy
Skies outside my front door, queued
Up in the cold and begging for
Entry, brass knocker forever swinging

Against an almost-hollow home.

Grand Central \ *emma perry*

Newfields, NH
Pingree School
Ailsa Stienert

1.
How indeed
Like flowers in February
Are the faces of men

As they open.

2.
How exactly like vivid petals
On this wet, black bough
Are the faces of the happy.

3.
But how can I be sure
That the face pulled shut
And tight as a tree
Sealed in on itself
Against the wind of the world

Is not
Protecting
A joy?

Can anyone
Begin to guess
The flavor of the sap-blood
Running in the heartwood?

4.
I passed a man on the street today
And immediately thought him
Beautiful and sad.

Whatever there is in me
With wings and a soul
Cried out to his back

I hope you are going home.
I hope someone has made you dinner.
I hope you know the power
Of fingertips on your shoulder.

Eating Hamas \ *ardon shorr*

Highland Park, NJ
Mrs. Freeman

I heard the Incans ate the hearts of their enemies.
What an idea.
They ate to humiliate, to dominate
And it made them stronger
Ate their brains to make them smarter
So I ate Hamas
Sat him down in a cold steel chair and ate
Plucked out his eyes and split skin
They slide down my throat and pop like grapes between my teeth
His lip splits and blood flows forth
It is exquisite
I wipe the blood from my lip and twist off the skull
Like a childproof bottle of pills
And overdose on brainwashed brain wax wet froth forth
I feel faint
I killed so he wouldn't kill, I was
Fighting for peace
I ate to consume, but he,
In my eating,
He consumed me.

August 1970\

michelle chen

Milton, MA
Ms. Baker

Father swings the scythe, swiping
At the revolution, at the golden kernels
That dangle on each stalk, heads
Teetering on straw torsos, tipping
Towards the thinning river.
Row upon row of rice like the lines
Of a page, waiting for words.

They were cattle, herded up the mountains,
Across the country. Those who could not sleep
To the roar of the engine, counted the haystacks

Mercy\ *beatrice mao*

Lancaster, PA
Mrs. Marianne Sullivan

He's waiting for an answer. Wonder:
again? All of your lovers have been the same
person: not matter what he wore (always some-
thing 'in'), how he smelled (always some
designer fragrance), or what his mother's
maiden name was (always something Anglo-
Saxon), he was just another warm body with a
willing mouth (from which promises he had no
intention of keeping poured). Now you're losing
him again, just when you thought you were
getting somewhere. Perhaps both of you are
just beyond the point of growth: the limb has
been truncated, but you're immune to regener-
ation.

Which reminds you of your grandma.
When she was young, she had been accepted to
a prestigious opera school, but Hitler got in her
way. After the liberation of the Jews, she and
your grandfather had married and fled from
Europe, leaving the ruins and broken spirits
behind. The Nazis had been not just unspeak-
ably inhumane, but had driven the Jews,
starved and shaky, with whips to shovel earth
and chisel stone; had performed grotesque
experiments on them, locking them in decom-
pression chambers to approximate the altitude
at which blood begins to boil; had burned
countless bodies in their crematoriums, using

That leaned against the sky, crisping
Under the sun. They labored,
Sweating out their education
In the name of practicality.

At night, his hands unfurl
From the scythe's handle. Fingers
Thickened from work, struggling
To turn the page. He burrows
Into pages of monkey kings
And science formulas. Books
Salvaged from the school library,
The reason for his father's exile.

Late night rebellions,
Until the candle melts down.

the ashes together with the leftover teeth and
backbones to insulate walls and pave paths;
had reduced the Jews and other prisoners of
war to being somewhat less-than-human:
slaves, guinea pigs, gravel.

Your grandfather had endured everything
by your grandmother's side, being the stub-
bornly masculine man that he was. But once
they were released, he had turned to alcohol.
In America, he'd found plenty of it, which led
ultimately to many nights of uneasy sleep for
his wife and children. You grandma had raised
her kids with a hard-nosed vigor, ignoring her
husband's blows which left marks as conspicu-
ous as the tattooed number on the insides of
her left arm. Both the scars and tattoo were
gifts from the Nazis.

Sometimes she'd bathe you the way her
mother used to do. Combing your damp hair
afterwards, she'd talk about how close she'd
been to realizing her dream of becoming an
opera singer. Her eyes would unfocus; the
comb would slip through her gnarled fingers
and she'd startle with fright at the hard sound
it made when it hit the floor, sounding to her
"like a Japanese kamikaze pilot." Looking
back now, you wonder why you didn't pick up
on that jump of hers: it was too sudden, too

The Blind Leading the Blind\ *robin myers*

Maplewood, NJ
Sophia Giacomazzi

They have poles to pull them,
Because hands are no longer enough.
Caped and bent, they angle against
their sticks,
The pits of dirt.
A chain of spaces
Keeps each in his own breath and misstep.

They have passed the bone
Of the church steeple in the distance,
Shuffled beside shoddy grass,
Tripped on tented stones.
They have knobbed shoulders, bowed knees,
Faces blank and lifted.
Some have globed, white eyes;
Others, just sockets,
Gaping as their mouths.

They fall like it is needed,
Like that are lifting chafed lips to water,
Like they would reach for anything
and hold it
And give it a name if it would stand them
upright.

As they fall
The rock becomes the pail in their
darkness,
The dust becomes the shoe,
The shin becomes another pole.
They have hands that reach
And grasp only earth or dark
Or cloth or root or flesh,
A thousand brushstrokes
Edged and dull as tin,
A sharpening of light
Within their lids.

Circus Clowns Are Water- Repellent\

amanda luh

Baltimore, MD
Ms. Yanson

Slipping into
Cool water and
Swimming where
Suction-cup mud
Might suck
Unsuspecting
Feet
Into frenzy
Or your worst
Fear
Might slip in
To float beside you.
The sun
Might turn to
Blood
And it would still
Smile.
The sky
Might flutter down
In pieces
Like fast-food wrappers
From
Car windows
And it would still
Make animals
Out of
Screaming
Balloons.
It would still
Swim there
In the cool
Water
And it would still
Never be
Wet
When it drifts
Out of the
Lake and
Walks out of
The reverie
Wearing a
Rainbow wig.

out-of-character.

She'd been so proud of you when you got the solo in "The Christmas Song," even though you were singing "that horrible Christian music." Both your grandparents had criticized the exclusively Christian song selections, the poinsettias with crosses spray-painted on their leaves, the numerous Biblical references made in all the "peace on earth" speeches, as if their creed were the only one with that goal in mind. You'd watched your grandma from the risers on the stage, her face like a Cajun-fried catfish, blackened on one side from bruises. Sometimes your grandfather would glance at her, and under his strict stare she seemed to shrink, to press herself into the realm of the invisible. She'd been so severely injured that when your little brother had climbed onto her lap for his usual bouncing game, she'd grimaced and put him back on the ground.

Your doctor said she'd been the healthiest 76-year-old woman he's ever had as a patient. He couldn't understand why her blood vessels had been so damaged. She'd never had circulation problems, but was diagnosed with some obscure, under-researched disease. You'd been 19 years old when it happened, and was visiting her for Christmas on the day she died. When the alarm next to her room went off, you'd panicked and rushed back down the hallway, but the nurses and doctor had kept you out. Just before the door closed, you saw your grandmother gesticulating violently to the attendants, ordering them to lock you out. She'd known it was her time: there could be no mistake.

"There's a time and place for everything to end," she'd shouted through the door.

"Let me in, grandma!" you'd begged, tears already streaming down your face. "I love you!"

"Leave!"

You left and she had died. God, you'd hated your grandfather.

After the starvation and suffering in WWII and her husband's beatings, all she had to show was her granddaughter's name in a program for a condescendingly Christian winter concert and the inability to hold her grandson. That, as you have learned, is what all "life experience" comes to: unhealable bruises and snuffed aspirations. Disney leads you on. But here you are: jaded, cynical, but rarely disappointed and never devastated. What hopes are there to crush?

Ironic that you should be a psychologist.

You snap back into reality, your cat having run across your dresser, displacing combs and knocking a picture frame over. You carefully set the combs aright again and realize you're just a collector: a collector of failed dreams, of wounds, of ashen remains.

Since your grandmother died, you've collected old combs: tortoise shell, oyster shell, ivory, stone, ebony, bone. You rarely use any of them, preserving each as best you can with daily inspections and cleaning. Rubbing their teeth with fleece and oil gives you comfort, but when you happen to drop one accidentally, you always see your grandmother's reaction, her tired body contorted in its adrenaline rush.

Looking at them now, you marvel at how many you've acquired through trading, scouring antique shops, and attending estate auctions. You've paid a pretty penny for each. None of them, however, looks like your grandmother's comb: hers had been special, with something dusty and ancient in the wood that couldn't be rubbed away, couldn't be replaced or faked.

Likewise, your lovers are all failed attempts. "True" love eludes you, teases you like a sadistic god. Putting the picture frame back against the wall, you glance at the pictures inside: five lovers stare back at you from five different photo slots in that euphoric, silly kind of way, all five wearing their trendy, brand-name clothing. Marry me, they whisper. I will always make you happy. You'd laugh, but your diaphragm is out of practice.

Each face looks the same to you now: the memories associated with each one are nearly identical. Hello, you greet apathetically. You have all made me miserable. They grin back at you like tourists who have no idea how to say "Just a glass of water, please, thank you." Again, in chorus, they entreat: Marry me. I will always -

Glare at the faces. Note the sixth, empty photo slot. Turn the frame face-down again.

This morning you'd run into the coffee table and had cursed wickedly when you felt the jagged metal corner ripping the skin, the blood pouring steadily forward like beer from a keg. It had been nice for an instant to feel some kind of emotion...and you wondered, while pressing down on the towel, how long it had been since you'd been roused to feeling. Four patients had made attempts on their lives in the past year and a half; one of them succeeded. A young teen you'd been counsel-

ing for five months had strangled her baby. You would've found the trend depressing and might have quit the profession, but you needed to pay the rent. You fold the memory up and put it back in the closet, your stomach demanding breakfast. Turn, look at yourself in the mirror; shrug like you mean it.

You're going down 283 when you spot a half-frozen deer on the side of the road, its stiff carcass like a tumbleweed frozen in time, its eyes reflective and bulging like eight balls. Something strange is going on: cars are practically piled on top of one another around what looks like an accident nearby. The traffic has come to a complete stop and people have gathered in a circle to watch whatever's going on. You get out of the car and walk toward the activity. There is a bellow, hoarse and desperate, and before you can take another step, the circle of onlookers has parted, revealing a stumbling, three-legged stag, his fourth leg almost completely severed and dragging along behind him. There are a few reddish stains on his belly, which is as pristinely white as coconut meat, and his muzzle is crusted with frozen blood.

"He's mad, don't go near him! He's lost his mate."

"Poor thing. Someone needs to put him out of his misery."

There is a general consensus, and the people huddle closer around the dying deer, complaining about the cold, rubbing their gloved hands together. You pick up from the conversations around you that the deer has tried to go back out into the traffic, that he must be a stupid brute, that it's okay for him to be dumb because he's only an animal. He has stopped prancing toward you, fixed and determined, like a committed postal worker in hell delivering The Last Message before the fires consume him.

Several children squeal in excitement and terror as the beast struggles closer, his right hind leg attached by only a few strings of flesh. The closer he gets, the less frightened you become: you can see even more clearly now that his beauty is astonishing. He's a magnificent animal, his muscles sleek and toned beneath his fur; his "injury" seems paradoxical, like a thorn under Zeus's nail.

Calm and deliberate, he stops directly in front of you and begins to breathe heavily. His diaphragm convulses so forcefully that you feel the reverberations in your chest cavity. The



Taylor Hebden\Baltimore, MD\Mr. Lantro\Towson High School

leg, shaken from the deer's seemingly epileptic seizure, falls to the ground, the last ligament long and lingering like an umbilical cord. A young boy and his brothers poke curiously at the leg, then are reprimanded by their parents. The rest of the adults give each other sly looks and chuckle nervously, as if to say collectively, Kids. Always doing crazy things.

A dark, quiet man approaches the circle, a Bowie knife in his left hand. Solemnly, with the air of a formal executioner, he pulls the deer's head back by the horns and wields the blade easily, slitting all the vital arteries and veins in the neck of the stag. The onlookers hold their breaths, watching as he repeats the motion quickly, mercifully, their eyes following the glimmering blade. The creature has never taken its eyes off you. As it sinks to the ground, someone says, "Hey, the traffic has lifted." Everyone looks around. The cars have started to move. The scene is over. Before you know it, you're the last one there, watching the back of the man who had put the deer out of its misery. He's walking away weightily, heavily, as if his shoes had absorbed the sins of the world. You're alone now, your car sitting in the middle of the highway, car horns sounding in your ears and two dead deer staring at you blankly, their wild blood frozen together.

Running across two lanes of traffic to get to your car, you shake your head, dazed. You can think of nothing else for the next several minutes; you panic when you almost miss your exit. Once you're at the diner, you wrap your coat around you and hurry to the entrance. A nice old lady in an unflattering, shapeless dress seats you at your normal spot. You nod with gratitude, sit down, and order some stale coffee. Pinching the bridge of your nose, you rummage through your purse for a painkiller.

When Adam had decided to move out without telling you, when John had backed out of that cruise vacation you'd been planning for months, when Brian had cheated on you with his secretary, you hadn't been at all affected. Where was your devotion, your love, your anger? Why hadn't you stumbled and pranced toward the nearest moving car, to be rid of the torture and pain and injustice? Oh, that's right, you remember now: one less man for whom to clean, cook, sacrifice. One less "life companion" to take your heart and ravage it. You didn't miss the obnoxiously loud football nights or the forgotten anniversaries. You were glad to be rid of the male-ego yoke.

Your spine suddenly jerks: the body knows a lie when it hears one. Is there someone out there who can re-awaken you, whose death will

mean the highway or a Bowie knife to you? Every so often it's like this: you'll actually fall out of your machine-like routine, analyzing how cold and uneventful your life has become. Recently you've begun to falter, but for the longest time you took pride in your apathy, your distance, your disengagement from the world, isolated and hard like the spore of a hardy bacterium.

You wish you could be like that now. You groan inwardly as you make your order, a cheese omelet and a bowl of fruit. The waitress doesn't bother to smile. She brushes against you on her way to the kitchen, showering you in makeup flakes and pungent perfume. Pleasant, just like everything else in this cheap make-up-cover-up whore-me-now world.

That evening after dinner, you realize how strange it is that the waitress didn't know your name: you go at least three times a month, but you've never said a word to any of the workers there. You tend to keep as much of your self to yourself as possible, removing your soul from the world through a narrow siphon. Even your name has been sucked up: it's the black hole

Now That You're Gone\

emily white

Baltimore, MD
William Jones

Autumn comes
Without warning or sign.
In the morning
I wake up shivering,
Fog on my windows,
Cold and dark outside.
I open my trunk and
Pull out sweaters.
No more
Sundresses for Emily,
Just dark turtlenecks
And jeans.
The thin, bony branches
On the trees sway.

effect.

"I don't know you," he is saying, his frustration spilling out in ungraceful lumps. "I thought that this-that you"

You sigh and watch his eyes start to turn that brilliant green color, rimmed with red like a Christmas ornament. He's a wonderful man, but nothing special: he works from 9 to 5, colors within the lines, buys many Starbucks lattes. He never tried to understand you when you attempted to explain the philosophies behind open marriage, sexual curiosity, the relativity of everything. You could never shake his foundation; you couldn't even touch it. He'd stick a toe in just to please you, but wiped his Nikes when you were through. Such white-bread sub\urbanite commercialism-consumerism case-study 101 bull.

But what do you expect? He wears ties only with dress shirts, thinks furniture and wallpaper should always match, puts his eyes on the same hook each night when he returns home, asks for directions, follows the instructions that come in the box. He was never outgoing enough to engage in your pranks, which was a shame because one of the only things that made you happy was to break molds, push limits, and dis-compose faces. With him, as with any socially acceptable man, there were certain indelible lines which could never be crossed.

He's gathering his thoughts as a reality T.V. show plays in the background. It's one thing to shatter social boundaries; destroying human decency was a completely different matter. You could never comprehend why those shows were so popular and cringed every time they came on. He, by contrast, watched them religiously.

He does everything religiously.

Still you haven't said a word, though your mind has been busy with a checklist of why you won't be sad to be rid of this "romantic" obligation. You can think of nothing to say, though you've been here countless times before; the script will go on without you, anyhow.

He picks up his suitcase and looks to you as he leaves the apartment. You glance back, passive.

"I tried to 'swallow you whole,' like you said you wanted. I shoved you down my throat, and now I realize that I can't just love you and admire your mind and everything else that's wonderful about you. I need to be loved, too. I

need something-anything-from you."

He sets his gaze steadily on you with all the shaky determination of an exhausted warrior on the edge of a great victory. The red rims of his eyes grow to a scarlet color; you imagine they must be somewhat like the deer's were right before the dark man killed him, his muzzle heavy with acceptance, resignation. You're reminded of the tales your grandma told about work expected of the Nazi's female prisoners: they were placed in dry areas and were directed to move the sand from their hills to other women's hills. It was useless, solely humiliating work, the sand traveling from woman to woman like a smoking pipe in an Apache circle. They were given so little food that many would nearly faint but would continue working, knowing that the overseers would prevent anyone from attempting to revive them and that they would be buried alive if they didn't keep shoveling. The women were famished and half-crazed from the labor asked of them: their breasts seemed to suck themselves into their bodies, withdrawing from the harshness of starvation.

And here you are, just as grossly disfigured (though emotionally), your lover demanding what you cannot possibly deliver with only your limited resources. Poor fool, you think, he expects me to regurgitate on an empty stomach.

His eyes are quivering with exhaustion and hope.

"Please just say something...I love you."

You feel the bleached bones of the six million who perished in the Nazis' camps like stubborn acupuncture needles. The struggle has been great, the rewards non-existent. It's just too bad that the man before you doesn't understand and never will. You want to make him come back to you, to love him as the stag loved his does.

But this needs to end here: this is the time and place. Not hesitating, you pull his head back and deliver mercy with one quick motion, releasing him from bondage.

"Leave."

His eyes are blank; his blood is wild on the floor.

A Visit to Donore \ paul cummins

South Kent, Ct
South Kent School
Mr. Arthur Brown

I'm excited when I near my grandparents' house. The car wheels scrape along the stone avenue leading to the small thatched cottage. To the right of the house is a whitewashed wall that my granddad built. The wall is capped in even places with round balls of white plaster. He imaginatively molded these perfect spheres using old leather soccer balls; he then cut the leather off, leaving the smooth round shapes sitting proudly along the wall. Behind this wall is a small neat courtyard that holds a tool shed, a coal shed, and my nana's shed. Each shed has its own distinctive smell and feel to it. I spent many hours seeking enemy soldiers around these hide-outs when I was a child. The tool shed always fascinated me. It had sharp, blunt, and jagged assortments of knives, axes and hammers surrounding the centerpiece, an angle grinder. I always thought of it as the torture room, where I could squeeze some valuable information from my imaginary prisoner. These dangerous weapons wouldn't have been much use to me, however, as they were well out of my reach! My nana's shed was full of different materials. Cloth, towels, blankets, bed sheets, types of cotton, silk and old clothes. The smell was a luxurious one compared to that in the cold, dark coal shed. No matter how often I tried, I never made a clean journey from the shed to the house with a bucket of coal. Some part of my body or clothes would shine sooty black, seemingly a hard stain to remove! The same courtyard has a statue of Our Lady hiding behind a steel frame that is wrapped in different colors of ivy. The ivy overhangs the clandestine corner where my grandparents pray at times. She (Our Lady) is at one with nature in this place. She looks peaceful and happy to share the area with the creepy crawlers and animals that cross her path. I love just climbing under the ivy and kneeling down to think. That's all, just to think. It seems my mind clears itself of the unimportant clutter and I get back to my true self, my roots.

The small courtyard has a path that leads to the back of the thatched cottage. The walls

of the house are painted white. There are two windows on either side of the old wooden door. The windows are framed by wood, and the door contains two glass panels that are tinted sea blue. The thatch is bunched with stacks of dirty blonde straw, packed and sealed with wire. Every few years it will be re-thatched for better shelter and a fresher look. I love the authentic scene that is my grandparents' house. It is a place steeped in history, dating back to when my nana's grandma lived there. Four generations later it stands strong, thanks to my granddad. The back of the house is a newer extension standing only since the nineties. It is less beautiful, but more efficient than its thatched half. The two halves complement each other, and represent both old and new Irish structural designs. Nana's clothesline leads from the back garden up towards my granddad's personal garden. The clothesline runs parallel to a line of evergreens that hide my granddad's pride and joy. He grows tomatoes in a greenhouse; thyme, sage and rosemary share a small plot beside the walkway, while overhanging apple trees provide shade for the blackberry bushes. Patches of soil seasonally sprout rhubarb, potatoes, turnips, onions, carrots, spinach and cabbage. Trees at the back of his enclosure birth pears, plums and strawberries. To cap off his self-made grocery store, he has two beehive beside the greenhouse, full of the most diligent and obedient bees that churn out the sweetest honey on earth. This garden is a bird's heaven. There is shelter in the diverse trees along the path. The birds can choose either deciduous or coniferous, depending, of course, on their housing taste. There is an eclectic collection of food for them, from the many scurrying insects to the seeds my granddad leaves out for them. One special, cheeky robin lands on my granddad's palm to eat the birdseed for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I stand behind him so that the robin won't panic. The picture of the tiny, blood-breasted robin sitting comfortably in my granddad's rough but gentle hands always

reminds me how he is one with nature.

Once inside the front door, I can already taste the salty aroma coming from a fry-up in the kitchen. To get there I pass through the living room where a grandfather clock chimes on every hour. A clock ticks in every room of the house. The ticking represents time well spent to me. I am more aware of passing time because I can hear it, but there is no panic, no sense of wasting time, because I'm relaxed and at peace with myself. A fireplace is beneath the clock and it represents Christmas Eve to me, when we all gather in front of the heat and open our gifts with a drink in hand and all sort of sweets dotted around the room in my nana's wicker baskets. I walk to the small kitchen where Nana is cracking shells for two toasted egg sandwiches (my favorite) and Granddad is hidden behind the *Daily Mirror* newspaper. The kitchen is small and neat, analogous to the rest of the house. It is painted blue, and terracotta brick outlines the stove. An ash table with matching chairs occupies the center of the room. The old black stove is to the left and a tacky dresser full of cups and bowls is to the right. The dresser drawers have different contents, like sweets, board games, old books, packets of King Crisps, rosary beads and a measuring tape. A rings board hangs on the back door. This is another excellent Irish festive game where the object is to hang, from tossing, as many rings as possible onto a board that scores from one to thirteen. Six black rings hang from the wooden board my granddad carved. The sink, washing machine, and oven are all behind the table. This is where my nana spends most of her time. She adores cooking and baking but not as much as giving the finished products away to her family. Her favorite plates hang from the walls as decorations, and a black-rimmed mirror is lined over a two-person couch strategically placed next to the hot stove. To the right of the stove, and somewhat out of place in this warm kitchen, stand two of my granddad's weapons. A battered World War One sword, handed down to him from his uncle, rests alongside his huge double-barrel shotgun that strikes fear into the heart of scavenging magpies and unsuspecting rats. Rashers and sausages sizzle on a greasy pan and eggs hiss on the scorching sandwich maker as they ooze over the side. The combined smell adds to my excitement, and my stomach churns in hungry anticipation. Nana turns carefully, almost robotically because her

arthritis stiffens her movements. She's like a classic car needing oil to get going. She is proud of the food she has prepared, thoroughly enjoying the role of the provider. She smiles as I walk over and kiss her on the cheek. Her hands are old and awkward, but soft.

"Sit down Paul, sit; the food is just ready now."

She has a gentle, womanly voice that doesn't fit her seventy-seven-year-old frame. As she carries my plate of delicious, greasy fry across to the table, she groans a little. This is common. She lets out intermittent moans to remind us she isn't as young as she was, and she too needs some love. I always sit right next to my granddad while eating. He folds the paper away with a smile.

"Ah, how are we, Paul?" he asks, as he takes my hand and brings it up to his mouth to kiss. This is his traditional greeting that he has given me ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper. When younger, I felt uncomfort-

able when he did it, but I now see both the humor and the care in this gesture. He is a man with great love and feeling, but he keeps it inside because it is important for him to be strong. That's why I cherish how I'm greeted; it's for me and me alone. Wild bushy brows are a mantle piece to the fire in his eyes. His thick reading glasses are low on his nose, and he peers out over them while smiling at me, revealing his false teeth in all their glory. He is lucky to have a full head of gray hair; it radiates in all directions if not brushed. His large hunched shoulders fail to shelter his potbelly (which was shaped into a pot from years of Nana's cooking!) He has huge, brown, hairy forearms that hide his smooth, white underarms. His hands are welted tough from years of handling a spade, artistically digging tterns of soil in which to begin life. He doesn't like to write much, but he is just as creative with a spade in hand.

Gerry Cummins married Cathleen Cahill in

1962. They had two children, Ger and Louise. I enter the family tree as Ger's son and my grandparent's first grandchild. It is a luxury to be the first grandchild. The perks include extra food (especially dessert), a twenty pound note slipped into my pocket every time I visit them, masses of Christmas presents delivered with care the night before Christmas, and freedom to watch what I want on T.V. at any time. Both my grandparents spoil my sister and me; however, the morals they learned while growing up fill every nook and cranny in their house. I see them in the yellow straw, I hear them every hour when their ancient clock dongs to tell the time, and I feel them hanging in the air from every room. The old way of life shines through their way, like a sacred tradition, and I have come to respect it. They didn't have it as easy as I do today. They had to survive on the little they had, so they learned to cherish the small things in life, appreciate the beauty in nature, save for the future, and decline to take any-

Winter 1633 \ *hanna howard*

Princeton, NJ
Princeton Day School
Judy Michaels

i.

It's that time of year again, we say,
Sounding a bit too much like a broken record.
It is not the naked trees we love,
Not the slate sky-a color we want to
Bottle and sell at the mac counter for \$14.99.
We would name it something erotic
And wear it like war paint.

In November we dream of snow
Whistling tornado avalanches,
Knocking at our door.

ii.

For two thousand years it was winter,
Season of secrets.

Aristotle said we were at the center of it all,
That the fierce stars and the elegant planets
Were held in arms
Of perfect spheres,
Spun like tops by angels with paper wings.

For two thousand years we looked back
And saw only ourselves,
Beautiful and hungry,
Standing secluded and still.

And then: Galileo, armed with his telescope.
He saw pimples on the sun,
He saw mountains on the moon,
He saw moons following Jupiter.

We were dizzy,
The crystals shattered and drew blood.
We understand why they had to lock him up.
Things do not get easier ahead.

iii.

93 million miles
From the center of our solar system,
The seasons change
Like clockwork.

thing for granted. These are very noble qualities that have been forgotten in modern times.

Cathleen Cahill was born in 1927. She grew up in a tiny house on an acre of land, residing near the ancient chapel on the downward slope of Donore, Caragh, County Kildare. She was part of a family of eleven. Her closest siblings, both in age and companionship, were Francis and Jim. Maggie, Molly, Liz, Rosy, Dolly, Jack, Matty, and Paddy completed the family. Only Rosy, Jim and Nana are alive today. Nana currently lives in the same house she grew up in, which dates back two hundred and fifty years, to the times of her great grandfather. The old house had three bedrooms, one for the parents, one for the four boys, and the other for the seven girls.

"It was a tight squeeze with all of us and only one bed, but we managed all the same," says Nana while smiling at the memory.

The roof was 'golden thatch', and cast iron spires decorated each gable end. The walls were whitewashed, like today, to give it a 'quaint look.' The door was green, and small windows protected the 'white laced curtains that blew in the wind' whenever fresh air ran through the house. Nana and her large family woke every morning to 'chirping swallows' that lived in tightly sealed nests dotted along the eaves of the house. These neighborly birds formed a symbiotic relationship with the Cahill family, in which the birds got shelter and the odd sprinkling of seed, while providing the Cahills with sweet morning music. A Suibin was extended to the right of the house, where either a pony or donkey was always sheltered. A Suibin is a small shed on the side of a house used in the olden days to store a barrel of beer in 'light of special occasions.' This particular Suibin dated back to Nana's grandfather, who was known to crack open a barrel of beer for wakes and marriages in the area. Over the years, a donkey became a more profitable possession than a barrel of beer, so the ancient Suibin had its contents changed dramatically. In addition to the donkey, the Cahills kept two cows, three pigs and a clutch of hens. As soon as the pigs were big enough, they were traded for groceries at the town market, which was held every Thursday in Newbridge, roughly eight miles away.

With such a large family, the chores were shared, and Nana had the responsibility of cleaning out the ashes from the open fire, then dumping them in the compost heap at the far

end of the garden. She would do this every morning before school, whether it 'bucketed rain' or 'pelted hail stones.' After school, she had many duties that needed to be done before pen hit paper and homework was attempted, even though she would be beaten if her schoolwork was incomplete. When she walked the two miles home from Caragh primary school, she helped Jim and Francis collect soggy cuts of turf used as fuel for the fire. Sometimes she helped the older boys pick potatoes, which took backbreaking effort to stay in a hunched position for three or four hours, clawing her hands through rich soil riddled with worms and black beetles, in search of the potato stalk to pull it from the earth, root and all. After dinner, Nana was in charge of feeding the pigs with scraps and a special mealy substance designed to build the fattest swine. Nana regularly got clouded from the day's hard work, and in her confused state, would dump the pig's meal into the compost, mistaking the scraps for ashes.

"The pigs squealed all night, and Mammy knew they weren't fed, so I'd get it the next morning all right!"

School was a nightmare for Nana. Nuns ran her school, and she had a snobby old sister who patrolled the classroom as if it were a prison dock. This sister grasped a hard wooden cane in hand, ready to crash down on knuckles if lucky, or any part of a hand otherwise. Nana had a habit of biting the end of her pencil while concentrating, which was seemingly not allowed in the Irish school system during the thirties. The sister would wait until Nana had pen to paper, before whipping her cane down on Nana's hand with a wallop. Ink from the surprised pen flew over Nana's paper, ruining her effort, and her hand was left stinging red and raw.

"I had nice long fair hair as a child, and that sister loved to gather it up and try to jerk the hair from my head. I hated school, hated it, but I never cried when she beat me, I never let her see that."

The less Nana showed hurt, the more that sister would inflict pain. It's no wonder Nana would wander mindlessly into her wide imagination. She pictured herself 'in a big house', married to 'a handsome man.' Nana's daydreaming carried over to home, too. She always 'wanted out.' She learned to read by piecing together the bits she learned in school with the 'Mills and Boon' novels and obsolete newspapers that she found in the house. Her

fantasies probably stemmed from the romantic scenes in the 'Mills and Boon' books, where women wore pretty dresses, ate with stainless silverware, and married rich, handsome entrepreneurs.

"We had no television sets, or radios, but we had our imaginations."

Similar to Granddad's house, the Cahills' house often hosted the neighbors to a night of music, storytelling, and drinking around their open fire. Nana was a nervous child, and the ghost stories she heard around the fire didn't help. Jim wasn't the most sensitive to her gullible mind either and would poke fun by leaping out from dark corners, almost stopping Nana's heart dead.

"Jim never let me forget those skeletons," mutters Nan glaring at me while she recalled the time the Kildare County Council dug up the front of the Cahills' house to join two main roads, and in the process revealed the bones of a family of four literally on the doorstep of Nana's house. The bones lay there under investigation for a week, and Jim's taunting about their resurrection and how they would seek immediate revenge on the closest house cause Nana's nervousness to rise to new heights. But these occasional nightly sessions had more than ghost stories. Traditional Irish music was heard throughout the house. Nana's father played the button accordion, and her sister Maggie was a champion Irish dancer. Maggie would leap on the spot, kicking her leg high, then into a stutter step while careening sideways into a double twirl with a kick or two thrown in for effect. Her style was graceful and her movements always kept a steady beat in perfect rhythm to the set dances played on the accordion.

The three most common and celebrated Irish set dances are the jig, the reel, and the hornpipe. The jig is the oldest form of Irish dance, and it is closely related to the 'Irish Hey', a sixteenth century beat that dates back to Queen Elizabeth's reign in Ireland, and is the rhythmic foundation to the hugely popular Irish tunes today. The jig is a lively dance that is played in 6/8 time. The reel originated from Scotland, and it has its connections with the ancient Irish 'Trenchmore' dance. It has a fast, fluid rhythm and it is played in 2/4 or 4/4 time. The hornpipe is an energetic dance like the reel; however, it is played in a slower tempo than a reel, and has a strong accent on the first and last notes in every bar. The hornpipe is of

English origin, and it has no real comparison to the ancient Irish dances, but today it is one of the most commonly played tunes. The hornpipe is always played in 4/4 time. Maggie changed her dancing style, her steps, and her timing to suit these three dances. She won many Feis, which are traditional Irish dancing competitions, and eventually taught Irish dancing for a living. The neighbors crowded around Maggie and her father as he accompanied her.

Nana's father was a 'beautiful man' in her eyes. He was gentle with her, kind to the whole family, and he was the patient one when trouble arose. He was a cobbler by trade. As children, Nana, Jim and Francis knelt around him in a circle on the cold linoleum floor, while he sat straddled upon a stool. He held a customer's brown, broken shoe in one hand, and his hammer in the other, while artistically mending the cracked sole by gently solidifying the iron brads used to hold the sole of the shoe to the body. As he mended the shoe, Nana, Jim and Francis added to the gentle taps of his hammer with smaller hammers he had given them. The contact between their little hammers and the brads they banged on chimed high-pitched sounds over the louder taps from 'Dado's hammer.' Brads are small nails that can be twisted under the weight of a hammer. Nana made designs from the bendable brads, and then compared hers with Jim's and Francis's creations.

"If a row ever broke out, which was more often than not, Dado told us to try and pull together and don't be fighting."

Nana's mother was less patient than her husband and was swift to dish out hurtful slaps as punishment to her children when they misbehaved. She was a 'tough woman who had too much to do with too little money.' A typical Irish housewife, she ran the family from its foundations. Cooking was her specialty. Roast duck was Nana's favorite meal, a rare feast prepared completely by her mother. Nana remembers the tender duck meat mixed with delicious gravy beside crispy roasted potatoes all on one large plate; however, Nana also recalls twisting their fattest duck's neck in to position, while her mother sawed through feather, skin, muscle and sinew with a carving knife.

"She was a simple woman who worked hard her whole life."

Nana recalls the first time her mother saw

a television set, just after Granddad bought one for the house. The three of them had finished their meal and Granddad flicked on the set to catch the news at six. Each of them sat around the small table with their tea steaming from the cup while waiting for a signal.

"Mamo's eyes were fixed on the fuzzy screen," somewhat confused until Charles Mitchell blinked on suddenly and began to relay the evening news. Mamo jumped up from shame and made her way to the dirty dinner delph cluttered on the kitchen sink.

"For God's sake," she muttered, "What will he think of us?" not realizing that she could see Charles, but poor Charles couldn't see her or the dirty dishes!

Mamo passed her arthritic joints and her wonderful cooking skills down to Nana, who famously baked and sold wedding cakes, soda breads, pavlovas, tarts, sponges, Christmas puddings and other tasty confection to the general public for years. She still busies herself baking delicious cakes and scones today, of which my undisputed favorite is soda bread.

Nana first met Granddad through her brother Jim, who was, ironically, married to Granddad's sister, also named Cathleen. Nana accepted Granddad's invitation to a local dance, and their relationship has blossomed ever since. Granddad lived six miles from Nana's house, and for two years he would escort Nana to her house on his bicycle and travel home again, a full journey of twelve miles. He did this until he politely asked her if she knew the way home one evening, to which Nana valiantly replied 'of course,' then dangled her rosary beads around the handlebars of her bicycle, and proceeded along the dark path home alone. She still holds her rosary beads responsible for warding off any evil that lurked in the bushes on that lonely ride to Donore.

Gerry Cummins was born in the year 1925. He lived in a small house on the edge of a farm in Blackberry Lane, County Kildare. He was part of a family of seven, which included Michael (Mickey), Cathleen, Theresa, Mary and Bernie. Peter and Paul were two other boys who were unfortunately born dead. Granddad's father worked his uncle's farm, and his mother worked at the General's house for the British Army, until she got married and was forced by law to quit work. Married women stayed home then. The British Army at that time still controlled Ireland; however by 1918, they were removed from office and the

Republic was formed. This was a huge step for Irish independence, but many jobs the British Army had supplied were lost, and County Kildare's small population suffered as a result. To make matters worse; a civil war broke out in Ireland. Food and shelter were scarce while the country was divided in battle between political leaders Eamonn DeValera and Michael Collins.

"We had nothing, so we used to share," explains Granddad casually. "We were all for one and one for all, Paul. We'd leave the empty house and look to eat anything and everything; we were always hungry. The best yields of turnips were south of us, and we often ran away from the farmer with bagfuls, and, as for apples," Granddad's grin widens as he bows his head in memory, "sure we robbed every orchard in our area, but it was accepted in a way, and we always shared amongst ourselves."

Apples and turnips went just so far, but meat was essential. If the rabbit population was low, and the wood crests had migrated, then extra measures were taken. Granddad and his closest sister, Cathleen, secured their mother's knitting needles onto the ends of wooden poles and used these creative inventions as weapons. The knitting needles were sharp enough to 'stab blackbirds' that were close enough to reach. After the kill they burned the bird, feathers and all, in the open fire in their unusually large kitchen. He walked to school with a green soldier bag and soldier boots three sizes too big for him. The blistering cold winds and frosted air cut through his frail pre-teen frame along that two mile walk; however, this wasn't the reason Granddad and most of his friends didn't attend school much. It wasn't the fear of the extreme winter weather, it was the brothers at the Catholic school that struck terror in the heart of children who wanted to learn. The brothers believed in corporal punishment. The only way to learn was through discipline, and the only way to get discipline was through fear. They beat students with "rusty metal rule sticks, buckled belts, and their own fists".

"I was scared to learn, because I didn't want to get it wrong. There was no point to school. I saw my friends bleed from their hands while the brother remained cracking down on them," says Granddad with a look of disgust.

He spent most of his time working with his father on the farm. He would do the simple but

mundane job of cutting the corn, while the older lads tied and stuck it. For his labor, he got two shillings a week, the equivalent to twenty-four cents at the time. With this he gave six pence to his mother, and the rest he spent on the 'pictures' and 'packets of Woodbines'.

"A good week was if you got to the pictures twice, often three times, with a fag left for after," grins Granddad.

His father got a common cold that was soon elevated, due to the lack of warmth and food, to pneumonia. When Granddad was eleven, he lost his father, whom he remembers as a caring man.

"He would always give me a sweet, and if I asked for two, he never said no. I was being cheeky of course, but he didn't mind."

Granddad's father, my great-granddad, had a saying that I will someday pass on to my grandchildren.

"Love many, trust few, and always paddle your own canoe".

When Granddad was thirteen, he quit school and began work at a British owned company named 'The Irish Rope Factory'. It was based locally in the town of Newbridge, County Kildare. He worked two different shifts each week, one from 8am to 3pm, and the other from 3pm to 8pm. He was given the smaller jobs at first, like sorting and packing the steel twine and thread that the machines produced. He earned seven shillings a week, which was the lowest pay allowed by law. He sorted twine until he reached seventeen, when the factory recognized his maturity and made him the boiler man. This was a very responsible job and a huge step up from his previous packing duties. He deserved higher pay, but the factory wanted to make money, not give it, so they didn't pay him man's pay of 2 pounds and 7 shillings until he turned twenty-one. The boiler

er was the first machine to be turned on and the last to be retired. It provided the heat energy to power all the production machines in the factory. Granddad burned 'waste from turf and flax from Tanzania' to keep the boiler running. He was the young man with the key to all the power, but he still wasn't rewarded with appropriate pay. Around this time Granddad was socializing and eyeing up prospective women at the weekends, so he needed all the money he could get. To subsidize his weekly earnings, he would also hunt with his older brother Mickey, and their friend named Cornaly.

"It was four shillings a rabbit and four and six pence for a pigeon", he recalls excitedly. "We often shot twenty-five pigeons a week!"

With this extra income, he bought a cow and a calf with his brother Mickey, so 'Mama' would have livestock. They had some money left over, with which they bought wood, and



Alexandra L. Will \ Rockville, MD

extended a shed to their 'Mama's' house for storage and shelter for the animals. The dating game back then was quite different to now. These days, men tend to pick up girls in their car, go eat, maybe catch a movie, and have her back at a reasonable time. Granddad used to meet Cathleen at the end of her lane, gently lift her on to his rusty handlebars, and continue to meander quietly along the barren road to make the dance on time. The only traffic they met were other couples, giggling while trying to steer their way to the music.

"Sure we could sleep on our bicycles; there was no cars like today."

If it were a dark winter evening, the girl would hold an oil lamp above her head so they could see the road ahead. These bike rides were personal affairs, and my bet is they were very romantic. The dances were 'gas crack' (great fun). Couples danced to live traditional music, moving to the lively beat and twirling around in joy. Dances were a welcome break from the week's labor, and Irish people in general, including Granddad, made the most of their time there.

"Slow dances were the highlight of the night, waltzing and fox-trotting with the girl of your fancy," says Granddad while winking at me.

Other forms of entertainment were regular music and story-telling sessions that took place in the bigger kitchens in the area. Granddad's house was basically only a big kitchen, with smaller rooms attached. So the Cummins' house was a place of cheer once every two months when friends and family would gather in the kitchen, warmed by a welcoming open fire. Food and drink were in abundance, and the characters in the room took turns to tell their stories or play their instruments. Television hadn't made it across the sea to Ireland yet, and radio was in its early stages, so the original form of personal entertainment took center stage. Granddad learned to play the button accordion from picking up different tunes at the monthly music sessions at his house. It is a percussion instrument that mixes sounds squeezed from the squeezebox, with notes from the keys on the side. Other distinctive Irish instruments on display at the sessions were the feadan (tin whistle), the bodhran, and the 'bones and spoons'. The Feadan dates back to the ancient times of Fionn Mac Cumhail, an Irish legend. The bodhran is a type of drum, made of calf's

skin stretched over wood and played with a two-headed stick or with the back of the hand. It omits a deep, hollow, percussion sound that provides a constant theme throughout traditional Irish music. The bones and spoons are

simply two ordinary soup spoons, straight from the cutlery drawer in the kitchen, played by knocking the two backs of the spoons against each other as your hand flicks up and down to the beat.

Memories Of A Childhood in Pakistan \ *shahida hussain*

Rochester, NY

Here in my adopted home,
The smell of the hot oily chapattis, filled with potato paste,
Carries me across oceans and seas
To the city of my birth-Gujarat.

Early in the morning,
The house is picture-perfect, and my garden,
Filled with the odor of roses of all colors and many scents,
Is a feast of taste and color.
I pick among the brightest;
When these are gone, there are always more.

Early in the morning,
I hear the voices of my sisters and brother
Getting ready for school.
"Mom! Where are my sock?"
"Mom! Where is my bag?"
"Mom! Is my lunch-box ready?"
My mom's footsteps echo in my ears
As she scurries to help.

You'd think we were luckier than most,
The school being right next-door.
But, I remember, too, six a.m.,
Pulled from a warm bed for morning prayers.
But first the shower;
One must be clean to pray.

Here in my new home,
The only flowers rest in flower-print vases,
Pulled from someone else's garden,
Uprooted from the soil like me.
They still breathe and live,
Settled in their watery home as
I have settled in my new home across many waters.

Nana and Granddad courted for three years before they married. Granddad continued to man the boiler at the Irish Rope Factory. After he married, he moved into Nana's house while her mother still lived there and single-handedly worked the land until the soil became fertile. He then constructed his own productive and beautiful garden on this fertile soil, from what was once a wild mass of land, infested with weeds growing from poor earth. He built this new home during the time he had between shifts at the factory. He would eat dinner after driving home from work and immediately head for his work clothes to his second job, where he stayed until the light faded. Granddad worked at the Rope Factory for fifty-one years. He was always punctual, and forever reliable. During the freezing winter conditions, he always checked the car the night before work to make sure it started. On the nights the old Volkswagen Beetle stubbornly refused to move, he set his alarm for four-thirty so he could walk the frosty seven miles to be in work at eight. He worked hard to provide a lovely home for his wife and two children, and he never once complained. He remembers the tough times and the great times, the times he shares with us after Nana's plentiful dinner, when the whole family gathers around the ash table in my grandparents' cozy kitchen.

Granddad ways of telling stories change with the severity of them. When he is looking back to the tough times, he reaches out when he speaks, grabbing my hand and holding me in his green gaze. His eyes only drift when he recalls certain hazy details; otherwise they are locked intensely to mine, so that I understand the truth to his rearing. His funny stories loosen his demeanor, and his face is a continuous smile that could break to laughter at any second. His arm is still stretched across the ash table, and just as he comes to the punch line, he folds himself over in laughter, his face reddens and new wrinkles appear around his eyes. Like a child learning how to tell a funny story, he rocks his bowed head to and fro and his shoulders shake from jolting happiness, until he finally cries out the punch line and slumps immediately back into laughing so hard that he struggles to catch his breath. There could be a room full of strangers around him, and although they wouldn't know why, they would join in laughter with this jolly character. He finishes every funny story with "Oh, it was gas," or "It was a 'pantomime,'" while

tears soothe his red cheeks.

My favorite story involves granddad's late brother Michael, who is fondly remembered as Mickey. Granddad describes him as 'the real character in our family.' Before he died, he lived alone with two old Jack Russells; he was a beekeeper who never wore protective clothes, but only had a handful of stings to his name; he had a variety of noisy birds in a birdhouse, ate onions like apples, and climbed trees for fun. This was at the tender age of eighty-four! Granddad takes his glasses off and stares into space with a smile as he collects the memory of Mickey and the cow.

"Mickey was a ladies' man when he was twenty-one, Paul, so he regularly took women to dances." Granddad lowers his head and chuckles to himself, his face getting brighter.

"He came home one night, merry from the beer, in his finest gray suit and his best brown shoes."

Granddad reaches across and gently lays his tough palm on my wrist while nudging closer, his eyes intent on mine. I instinctively slide towards him.

"At that time we had no bathrooms Paul, we had to find a spot in the field to go about your business."

He eases back, assured that I know times weren't easy then.

"So Mickey found a quiet patch in the farmer's field next door, dropped his gray trousers, and went to the bathroom." Granddad's hand still rests on my wrist, a grin back on his face.

"But he forgot to check for the one-horned cow, Paul, she had one horn broke, and the other one turned in a bit. She had an awful temper, Paul, Oh awful."

"Well, Mickey was half-way through when she made for him." Granddad's head lowers and his shoulders begin to shake. I'm laughing as Granddad's red face rises up, and he catches his breath. He grasps my arm more firmly.

"She pucked him all around the field, while he hung on for life," his voice getting higher.

"Mickey came in, hair all over the place, muck covering his best suit." Granddad is a volcano about to erupt.

"I'm gonna kill that goddamned cow," he yelled, and he ran for his shotgun." Granddad explodes into laughter while his head slumps to the table. He laughs and laughs and finally catches his breath.

"It took me, my sisters, Mama and Papa to

hold Mickey back from his gun because we knew he would kill her, and the farmer would have him thrown in jail, where they would beat the lard out of him."

"All the while the cow was outside: moo, moo," Granddad puts his hand to his mouth to imitate the one-horned cow mocking Mickey, who was inside struggling for his gun while covered in tattered gray suit, wet muck, and his own shit.

"Oh, it was a pantomime," gasps Granddad with tears of joy in his eyes.

Breadcrumbs are sprinkled on tablemats, and a pot of cold tea sits alone on the ash table. The grandfather clock in the living room strikes six times, signaling it's time to leave. I'm full from the delicious lunch prepared by Nana, and giddy from Granddad's stories. Nana and Granddad walk me to their low front door. Nana hands me a Dove-ice-cream bar for the road, with a twenty-euro note secretly hidden between the bar and her shaky palm. I stoop down and kiss her while complimenting her food and her generous donation. I also stoop to hug Granddad and he responds, "All the bloody best."

Soon the car wheels scrape along the stones as I look back to two small figures, waving in unison, as they drift slowly from view. I miss their company already. I miss the feeling I get when I walk through Granddad's garden, when I sit by the warm stove, and when I hear the old clock chime. I'm lucky to be a nineteen-year old grandchild. I can see past the money, food and materials they spoil me with. I see their way of life. Their stories teach me to work hard in order to achieve. I respect their morals, their traditional forms of entertainment, and their personal sacrifices when survival of the family was more important. I'm blessed in understanding these invaluable qualities, and I will pass them on to my grandchildren in years to come. I turn around to catch one more glimpse of the yellow thatch before I turn onto the main road that leaves Donore.

Tenafly, NJ
Mrs. Maloney

The sky hangs like a purple bruise above the heads of diligent commuters.

"I'll race you to the top!" Kane says and his feet bounce off the sidewalk in loping strides.

"Huh?"

I turn to gawk at Kane, too late, he's already halfway there.

"Loser buys drinks!"

Great. I'm now officially slow and poor.

I run along the sidewalk, trying to catch a glimpse of Kane through the angry swarm of business suits. He is always just beyond the sight of vision, the back of his head slowly becoming a black fluctuating dot. On the top of the hill, Kane is sitting by the side of the street, breathing a bit loudly but otherwise showing no sign of strain.

"I win, Ace."

I hate it when he calls me Ace.

Kane jumps up, mock-punching me on the shoulder. Two schoolgirls gawk openly from the other side of the street. This is hardly unusual; with his lean muscular arms and combat boots, Kane is practically a living materialization of pre-adolescent lust.

I'm out of breath and just may have sprained my ankle in that impressive show of athleticism. I want to get this day over with, but Kane has already crossed the street and is talking animatedly to the girls, making them blush. I consider walking - make that limping - over to them, but it will be too painful to watch as Kane chooses one girl, leaving the other to roll her eyes and feign interest in me.

Regrettably, I limp on for a block or two, sometimes pretending to check traffic so I can look back at Kane to see if he has noticed I'm no longer there. He never does. At least I've got my dignity. I don't need a beautiful long-legged girl hanging her pale, perfumed arms around my neck to tell me what I'm worth.

"Kiyō! Where you goin' man?"

Thank God. I limp back, feeling myself being scrutinized by two pairs of Kohl-lined eyes. Kane flicks out his lighter. I stare enviously at the tarnished silver, the outlines of a voluptuous woman faintly embossed on the cover.

"Camel?" Kane offers me.

"I'll take one," the girl with shoulder-

length hair rasps. She ogles Kane with her darkened eyes, brushing his hand with hers while extracting the cigarette.

"I'm cutting back," I lie, although I'm not sure why. I've been smoking since I was twelve.

"Me too," the other girl says, a little too fast, flickering her eyes at her older friend as if making sure this is acceptable.

"Those are some nice skirts you girls are wearing," Kane says in his most charming voice, slipping me a knowing smile out the side of his mouth as they practically melt in front of us.

Kane exhales smoke and glances up. The sky has turned into an inkblot gray.

"Damn, it's gonna rain."

Kane throws down the cigarette and stamps on it with his angry boots.

"See you girls around. Kiyō, lets go."

Kane takes off, his strong, tall limbs hitting the ground long before the first raindrop.

"Um...bye."

The girls look disappointed. I'm disappointed. The lack of witty banter and phone numbers written on tiny scraps of paper to be stuffed into back pockets and eventually lost, the thrill of wondering if you've finally found someone who will tolerate you long enough to love you, everything I desire in my life. I follow Kane, but the rain beats down before I reach the sheltered sanctum of the bus stop. As the rain soaks through my very expensive "Rosario's Pizza Pub" T-shirt, dyed to an exquisite shade of rat-gray, I feel strangely exhilarated, the thump of my chest warm against the water.

After work we are getting wasted in the usual disreputable bar. Kane is explaining his extensive theory on women to me. I stare into my muggy glass and mouth the words, shoot me.

"Girls are crazy, man. Yeah, they all say they're modern women, but they're not. Of course they want the sex, but they also want commitment, so they call three days later, all casual so it doesn't seem like they've been waiting by the phone for the last three days."

Kane chuckles, amused by his own wit.

"Maybe they wouldn't be so crazy if you

weren't such an asshole," is not what I say to my only friend.

"I'm going home."

I finish my last mug of cheap beer and lurch off the stool. The voices in the bar are cutting, disturbing the little bits of machinery in my head. Somehow I am walking out of the bar. I am telling myself, I am not drunk; the ground is only blurry because it is far away. I stumble forward towards the glass paned door. The annoying squeak of the door's hinge tells me that I am now outside. It begins to rain. I am walking home now. It is not very far, but the rain is clouding my vision.

Coffee. I grope at the estranged jars in the kitchen, finally grasping a deep blue cup, filled with liquid dirt.

"Good morning," I grunt to my trusty mug.

I rub my eyes and take a sip. Swishing the cold coffee grounds in my mouth, I take in my surroundings. The apartment is a wreck, and any moment now it will collapse in its own shit. I sit on the kitchen floor and try to focus on not thinking, but they come anyway. 'How did I end up here?' and 'Where the hell am I going?' and worst of all, 'How stupid can a person be before he spontaneously implodes?' High school had been so easy, but I don't see what the point is anymore. Four years of grubbing after grades and worrying about college, and this is the result. This world is filled with Kanes and the pathetic weaker beings sucking on them, like myself. Hey, the truth hurts. The scant hair on my legs stand up, and I can feel myself falling back onto the kitchen floor, greasy matted hair and all, scrawny arms too weak to hold on to the mug of coffee. Attractive, isn't it?

By 10 o'clock I am ready and joyously awaiting my first class of the day. And by ready, I mean hung-over, and by joyous, I mean unconscious.

By 10:30 I am lost. This "small campus where professors know you by name" is really a huge mass of moving, kicking, talking people, and not one of them knows your name.

By 10:45 I am fifteen minutes late.

By 10:47 I am beating my head against a locker softly. Her, I can't afford to lose anymore brain cells.

By 10:52 I am in love.

Either that or lust, whatever, like I can tell the difference. I am gracefully moping by the wall, reflecting on my failing status in college, when I realize that the backpack I left on the ground is no longer there. I frantically turn around and knock into a guy who seems to have spawned from Big Macs and steroids - you know, the kind they use on horses. Maybe

he's one of those big guys with a heart.

"Watch where you're going, idiot," Big Mac on-steroids spits into my face, so close I can smell his stale breath.

I don't respond, because just over his shoulder I capture my first glimpse of her. She has slick brown hair that falls to her shoulders, like some Japanese doll. And she's wearing one of those dresses...um, it's brown. It looks good on her.

"What the hell, man!"

Oh. Big Mac is still here.

"Sorry! Sorry!" I dodge him so I can chase after the girl in the brown dress.

Wait a minute. She's going through a backpack so hideous and brown, it can only be mine. Is she a thief? This will seriously hinder my plans to...to what? Sweep her off her feet? Yeah right. By now I've walked close enough to say something.

"K...urg," I say.

"What?"

She gives me The Look. You know, the one girls reserve especially for these occasions.

"Mybackpackislost," I sort of mumble, except it could've also been "I pack his moss," or "I lack rack boss".

"Look, does this belong to you?" She shakes the backpack in my face.

Not only is she beautiful but psychic as well.

I nod eagerly.

"Some idiot left it in front of the school," she says, shoving the backpack into my chest. "I was looking inside for a name."

"Oh good, you're not a thief."

I did not just say that out loud.

"What?"

"I said, um, it's good I'm not a creep. Because, you know, I would be a real creep if I didn't...thank you. Thank you."

The girl starts to back away, but something makes me cling on.

"Wait, can I have your name?"

It's one of those moments where you know you're slipping, but you try to grab as much as you can to drag down with you.

"Um, I don't think so."

She won't even give me that much.

Without even a backwards glance she's walking away, and all that's left is me with a hangover and a stupid brown backpack.

"Bye," I say to myself.

After class Kane is hanging out by some kids in front of the unimpressive

university, smoking and laughing with them like he's known them his entire life. Kane doesn't even go to this school. I have no idea what Kane does during the day, but somehow he still manages to get by better than me. I sit down by the trashcan and light a cigarette. It's been a few months now and nobody here has bothered to say anything to me. Well, anything civil. Sitting here alone, I start to have some deep meaningful thoughts. Wow, I really suck.

I feel someone tap me on the shoulder. I turn around, expecting Kane's cocky grin. Instead I see a brown dress and my heart stops. Instinctively I reach out and touch my backpack.

She laughs. "Sorry about before. I was late." She smiles and rubs her fingers. "My

name is Emi. I can be a real bitch sometimes."

I'm so relieved I don't notice Kane.

"That's Kiyoshi. He's an idiot most times."

Kane flashes his perfect smile.

"It's Kiyoshi," I say. My voice is drowned out by Emi's laughter.

Kane offers her a cigarette.

"No thanks."

Kane smiles. He's surprised. Most everyone smokes nowadays, and it wasn't too often somebody refuses a free drag. Somehow this doesn't surprise me at all; she smells like sugar and laundry, too good for something as common as cigarettes.

"We're going for pizza. Wanna come?"

Part of me knows it's over. It isn't as much the question as the way he said it.



Amanda Coburn \ Henry E. Lackey H.S. \ Indian Head, Md



Alexandra L. Will \ Rockville, MD

It's hard walking down a two-person sidewalk with three people. I trail behind them, frown lines appearing on my face every time Emi laughs. They say you're supposed to be happy for the one you love. I guess it doesn't apply when she doesn't even want to know you.

It's one of those rare clear days, where it isn't raining but it's not sunny, either. It is the perfect day for a walk alone. Too bad I'm not.

Emi giggles. I hate that laugh - the one that girls think is cute and attractive but really just annoys the hell out of me. It's so high pitched I want to scratch out my eardrums.

How could this girl fall for that? Kane's

stupid bravado and crude jokes; all these things had been enough in high school to make him charming and wanted, but how can she of all people believe it to last longer than that?

"Seats for three," I hear Kane's voice order.

We get seats by the corner in a little booth, Emi sliding herself between us. Kane gets some kind of vodka and a mushroom pizza for all of us.

While we wait, I stare at the blue wallpaper. I can distantly hear Kane's voice telling a story, but it's one of those moments when your eyes are fixated on something straight ahead, and you don't want to ruin the moment by

thinking. What I want to say is, Emi stop laughing. Stop acting like you believe in this act, and tell me what the hell you want. All I want is somebody to be sincere with me. Perhaps because I have difficulty being sincere myself.

"Gotta take a whiz," Kane says, sliding out between the table and leather.

Emi laughs. That wasn't funny.

"I gotta go too," I mumble after a few uncomfortable seconds.

"I thought only girls go to the bathroom together," Emi says.

I smile weakly. If Kane were here he would laugh.

I maneuver through the aisles to the ugly brown door in the back. There is a handwritten sign on the door saying, "Men", and next to it somebody had scribbled a little picture of a stick man. I push open the door and see Kane singing as he takes a whiz. I walk up to him as he zips up his pants.

I shove him onto the wall next to the urinal. The only way I am able to do this is because his hands are still on his crotch. He takes one look at my face and laughs. Kane laughs so hard he spits on my cheek. I want him to disappear. I want to hit him so hard he never laughs like this again. I slam him into the wall again, and he easily throws me off. His muscles bulging, he shoves me hard and I land on the floor.

"I wish I could say I didn't know why you did that man, but I do," Kane spits. "It's about that stupid bitch, probably the first girl who's talked to you in months without me being there."

I have a staring contest with the damp gray tiles, anything not to hear the words Kane spits out next.

"You're pathetic, you know that? You never even say what you mean. All you do is make up these little lies for yourself so you seem a little less sad. And when things don't turn out like you want them to, you just pretend it's everybody else's fault. That's why girls don't like you! That's why nobody likes you!"

Kane pauses, his chest heaving up and down. I stare at the blue vein beneath his neck, praying it will burst.

"I'm leaving. Go back to the girl. You're going to screw it up anyway. I don't need to steal her from you; you never even had her!"

I hear Kane's boots stomp out, the squeak of the hinges as he slams the door shut behind him. It's really quiet now except for the rush of blood in my head. My chest hurts where Kane had shoved me. I imagine my body blending into the gray tiles, my form slowly being

devoured by green moss and eventually paved over. But maybe Emi was still outside, waiting for me. I force my body upright and brush off my pants. I wash my hands in the sink, attacking the soap dispenser, but there is no soap.

"Why?" I ask the uncaring plastic container.

It doesn't answer. In a spurt of rage, I rip it off the wall. Ok, maybe I just kind of slammed my hand into it and said, ow. I walk out the squeaky door, being hit with the full stench of Parmesan cheese. Emi has half a leg stretched out of the booster, as if she is just about to leave. The pizza Kane ordered lies untouched on out table, looking greasy and lonely.

"Don't leave," I say, except it comes out almost crying instead of a request.

I sit down and, just so it seems I have a reason to be here, I pick up a slice and start shoving it down my throat. By the time I stop gagging my eyes are no longer dangerously moist. I look up and Emi is still standing there, an unreadable expression on her face. She sits down.

"I never knew you felt so strongly," she says, eyes averted. "Well alright, I sort of knew. But I've already told you, I'm kind of a bitch anyway."

I feel comfortable when she talks to me like this; this is the way most girls are when they don't really care what you think about them anymore, beautiful and so blunt it's cruel. It's better than those girls who always describe themselves as nice and cute. Yes, I guess I am cute, hehe. And I'm really nice. I love puppies and all I really want is world peace. God, I hate those people.

"Do you hate me?" Somehow these stupid words come out of my mouth. I forgot. I'm still an idiot.

"I'm not saying you'll never have a chance. You just haven't said one intelligible word to me since we've met," she says. "You're cute, really. I'm glad you're here."

It feels like my high school guidance counselor all over again, telling me college is overrated. I stare at her, my mouth tasting of greasy pizza. If there were ever a time to lean in and clasp her hand, or to peck her on the lips, this is probably it. But I have pizza grease on my hands, too.

"I have things to do. See you tomorrow," Emi gets up and smoothes her skirt in an organized, automatic motion.

I can tell by her tone of voice that what she means is, I just gave you a chance and you blew it. See you never. So I do the only thing I can do. I pick up another slice and fold it up so

that it's easier to cram into my mouth. As Emi walks out the door, I whisper to the pizza, "At least I'm here for you."

Then it hits me how pathetic this is. This is exactly what Kane wants me to do. This is what Kiyo or Ace would do. Finish the god damned pizza, get wasted, and wake up tomorrow feeling sorry for themselves.

What would Kiyoshi do?

I grab my ugly backpack and dash out the

front, hitting my arm on the doorframe. Emi's dark brown hair has just whipped around a corner. I take a deep breath, and take off at a run.

En-Dessous De Zero \ *jenna bass*

Glen Gardner, NJ
Lois Harrod

i have been the one to hold my breath
i have been the one to sit in silence and watch the satellite drift by
i have been the one to finally stab the egg yolk
and let the yellow come seeping out

i have been the wisp of hair
that refuses to stay behind your ear during a windy day at the beach,
i have been the ribbons taken from the discarded wrappings of a sweet sixteen gift
and carefully tied in a lopsided bow

i have been the soles of bare feet itching for the tickle of springy summer grass
i have been the irresistible velvet of a horse's muzzle
i have been that section of windshield that the wipers always miss.

would you paint me with desire once again?,
allow me to smuggle my happiness back over the border
amongst the crammed suitcases and melting snow?

you are the shrunken creature in the corner
you are the starched jeans that no one wants to wear
you are November's
inescapable frost

on better days you are the brilliant, indescribable blue of the depths of the sea,
on worse you are the cracks in an old, dehydrated apricot
you are the dull ache of hunger that cannot be stemmed

you are the shoulders that sag after a poor lesson
you are the bottle that has been drifting for too long,
the message expired and meaningless

what do you do,
when it fades with the sun on the horizon?

i see myself, the lone peace rose in the tall, fluted vase,
the faded, browning yellow that comes in time
and takes the scent of the imperial robin's egg blue with it.

Loving Laughter\ *savannah sachs*

Exeter, NH
Mr. Rogers

It was a night of noises - the buzzing fan, the barking dogs, the shuffling footsteps, the snoring, the squealing pigs, the immense silence of the endless evening - which finally subsided into the revealing light of dawn: and escape.

We had arrived in a tiny town in the depths of Cuba, just as the sun slipped away, to reveal a dismal gray. As darkness invaded, masses of decrepit buildings huddled together. The night did bring a sip of relief - a cool breeze which danced through the dark and slid into the car windows, whispering in my ears.

The only hotel was full; we had nowhere to stay. As we drove throughout the maze of streets, searching for shelter from the dark, the corners of my mother's mouth slowly sank. Her eyes narrowed, her fingers tapping time away on the top of her knees.

A young boy on a bicycle flagged us down, waving frantically for us to follow and shouting "Hemingway!" (Any large white man with a bushy beard, such as Dad, qualifies for this title in Cuba.) Reluctantly, my father turned after the boy, a slight hope leading us along. I sighed. Most of these bicycle boys promised luxury and delivered you instead to a distant shack, a place where the culture of Cuba overwhelms: dirt invades every crevice, and bugs stroll across the floor as if they have a right to inhabit the home. My brother and I are accustomed to staying in dingy rooms, sharing beds and sleeping with our mouths shut (just in case). Cuba presented a new twist. On this trip, we struggled to accept a completely new level of accommodations, which plunged below even our adventurous family standards.

The bicycle boy led us to a door in a long line of sordid houses, a row of rusting gates guarding walls with only memories of paint. The sidewalk, crumbling into the street, fused with the ancient pavement into a mess of cement. As the boy disappeared within a faded green door, my mother rolled her eyes.

Half an hour later, my brother and I are unloading the car, lugging our bags into the house, checking our beds. Actually, bed is an overstatement. I am sleeping on a long green

couch in the living room, while my brother has his own cot in a back room, complete with aggressive metal springs. My parents are sharing a spacious, sparsely furnished room with an ancient wooden bed and a lone stool. The house usually holds at least eight people, but they have vanished into the night in exchange for a rental of twenty dollars.

Placing my suitcase on the floor next to my couch, I glance around. The living room is connected to my parents' room, leading into the kitchen. Red tiles, which march across the kitchen floor, meander into the only bathroom - a curious affiliation of two mismatched rooms. The house encloses an open area filled with trees and plants, dogs and debris: a bizarre jungle, contained.

I cautiously enter the bathroom and turn to close the door, but there is no door. Chuckling, I face the toilet. No toilet seat, no toilet paper. Hmmmmm.

"Mom, can I have some toilet paper?" I shout into the bedroom where my mother is slipping into her crisp, white nightgown. Her gold bangles chime as she rummages through her bag, exaggerating her efforts to illustrate the inconvenience, until she uncovers a zip lock with a small roll - a travel must in our family. Paper in hand, I carefully approach the toilet and shake my head as I balance over the dirty bowl. This is my vacation.

Relieved, I press the silver lever on the side of the toilet. Silence. I try again, violently thrusting the handle down and holding it hostage in the "flush" position. The toilet refuses to reply. Rushing over to the sink, I frantically twist the rusted knobs. Nothing - no running water.

But, that there is "running" water. Whenever we use the bathroom, the mysterious man, who showed us around the house, rushes in from the domestic jungle, with a bucket of water from a spigot in the garden, to manually flush out the toilet. My father insists that this service is an added luxury: we do not even have to flush for ourselves. Have you ever stayed in a hotel with water that runs, literally.

We decide to skip dinner: finding an overpriced, barely edible meal at this hour is not worth the effort. Instead, I struggle to settle in. The long green sofa curves like a wave, so that I must sleep on my side, wrapping myself around the body of the couch, straining to balance on the narrow piece of furniture and trying not to touch the stained fabric. I listen to the buzzing fan, the hum of the heat battling to suppress the cool breeze. Slowly, sleep seduces my eyelids.

An appalling noise slices through the darkness, wrenching me awake.

"Is someone being murdered?" I yell into the night.

"I think they're killing pigs next door!" My brother shouts from his cot.

"What the hell?"

"Yeah, there's like a hog farm right outside my window, I've been listening to them all night. But they're really going crazy now." The unnatural shrieking of pigs fills the air. A rooster cries back in sympathy. I have none. Leaping out of bed - actually, couch - I stuff my sleeping bag into my suitcase, throw on a pair of pants and turn off the fan. I can hear my brother struggling to hoist himself out of his creaking cot, without angering the metal springs. My mother, already dressed, sits in bed, studying the shadows and listening to the noises of dawn. Five minutes later, my mother, Clayton and I are waiting in the garage, our seat belts securely fastened. My father appears in the car window, his blue eyes beaming behind his oversized glasses.

"Ready for an early start?"

This description of a family is simply a slightly modified personal essay which I wrote during upper year. I will graduate from Exeter having learned innumerable lessons, but I assure you that I will never forget two things: show, not tell and write about what you know best. That narrative represents all that I know and love.

Over the summer, my laptop crashed. My brother insisted that it was a joyous occasion - I could get a pretty, new iBook. He didn't use the word pretty; his description involved more technical terms. Clayton, the computer guy in our family, is invariably stopped by airport security to ensure that his various electronic devices are secure. Regardless, I was disappointed. My old laptop had served me well, guiding me through my first years at Exeter. I loved the slightly battered case covered with miscellaneous stickers; my computer was an old treasured friend. Upon returning to my

room, I always switch on my lights, drop my bag, and open my laptop. It's routine.

So, letting go was scary, but I survived. In the end, I retrieved most of the files I had saved and transferred the worthy ones to my new, pretty white ibook. As I was rifling through my old English papers, I came to a realization: at Exeter, I have written countless personal essays and a significant portion - okay, all of them - concern the same thing: my family. Specifically, traveling with my family. And I realized, in just eighteen years, my life has been defined by those closest to me: my parents and my brother, Clayton.

In my house, we categorize each year by our vacations. My dad has infused his love of travel into my life; my most prized possessions include thick albums with photographs from myriad destinations. Whenever I see a Lonely Planet travel guide, I think of my dad. He has led me through amazing covered bazaars, exposing me to the wonderful mysteries of other cultures - sparkling silver, singing birds, simmering meatballs. Always pushing me to explore, he insisted that I have a Turkish Bath for my sixteenth birthday. I will admit (after much protest) I now know that there is nothing more fabulous than stripping off all of your clothes and lying on a slab of marble as a three-hundred pound woman scrubs you down until your skin glows.

My English papers reflect the diversity of countries to which we have traveled together. I have vivid stories from Cuba, Italy, the Galapagos Islands, Germany, Turkey, and France. However varied the setting may be, there is a common thread: humor.

Mom always says that Dad's best quality is his ability to laugh at himself. As a result, I have tried to discover the hilarity in any and all situations, no matter how dire. My papers illustrate the slightly dysfunctional sides of my family, which, surprisingly enough, I have come to accept as normal and even integral. But, in the end, every single story reduces our relationships and traveling predicaments to laughter.

Snippets of memories become defining moments. On Christmas Eve, we have been chastised for causing an entire ship to reek of cheese. I have sunbathed on a Cuban highway while my brother toiled away, replacing two flat tires with the help of a boy and his pet pig. My father has even offered to sell me to a Turkish rug salesman in exchange for his business and a couple of camels.

My selection of anecdotes and lighthearted English papers may be an effort to sugarcoat memories -- to glorify our family vacations. But I view my perspective as the glue which holds us together. I cannot deny that my dad is frugal to the point of insanity, and his spending complex often tests our sense of humor. (Once,

Sundays \ *megan dockery*

Danville, VA
George Washington High School

Sundays were the days when Mom
Would put on the faded blue dress
She had bought two Easters ago,
The one with yellow flowers
That reminded me of upside
Down smile faces.
She would smell the house up with
The \$10, drug-store perfume
Daddy had bought her for Christmas,
The last one we spent
Together before he left.
She made us spend the morning
Reading the Bible, while she
Took gulps of vodka and the past.
She always seemed to think
She could find what she lost
(my dad, her marriage, her youth),
all the thing she said I had cost her,
floating face first in that colorless liquid.
But she never seemed to swallow that.
She made us believe
We were worshipping God,
But to us He was a murky liquid
Mom consoled herself with.
She blamed it on Daddy,
Said he was the jagged little pill,
That made her worse.
By afternoon she was passed out
In her bed, with the house in a mess,
And God's word rattling
In my 5-year-old head.

he collapsed during lunch in an Italian ski lodge due to a heart condition, twitching and even slipping into unconsciousness. However, he still managed to stuff down the meal, which he had paid good money for, and proceed to

squeeze every drop of value from his lift ticket by skiing for the remainder of the day.) In certain ways, my dad has ruined me: I smuggle my own headset onto airplanes and steal complimentary hotel shampoo; I tip low and always haggle. Actually, I had an epiphany the other day as I completed my macroeconomics assignment. Dad never holds cash; he only uses credit cards. This peculiar practice baffles me, but it makes perfect sense in his obsessed mind, because you incur an opportunity cost if you take money out of the bank - you forgo interest on that sum.

My mother, on the other hand, demands that we stay in a Holiday Inn Express as opposed to a Motel 6, fueling many a late-night argument - her loud character tends to excite situations. That's what I love; I admire my mother's resilience. Who else would marry a man who proposed in Macy's next to a sign advertising engagement rings at fifty percent off? However, Christmas eve is always an issue, because Mom's birthday is the twenty-fifth. She does not consider schlepping around Germany, looking for the best deal on Christmas lunch, a wonderful birthday gift. My mom's affable wit can easily transform into an arctic glare. Looking at photographs from past journeys often evokes painful memories as well as laughter. Each family trip is defined not only by our destination, but by the bitter battles which we wage while abroad; there has never been a vacation without tears.

Nevertheless, my English papers strive to convey the essence of my home. Tales of travel laced with comedy define my life experiences as well as my Exeter writing career. Living away from home has compelled me to clarify my personal priorities; I now long for short bursts of adventure in the back seat of a battered rental car.

Oddly, while at Exeter, my relationships with my mom and dad and, to an even greater extent, my brother, have intensified. Over New Years, we went to Las Vegas and then drove around the desert, visiting the Grand Canyon and other incredible national parks out West. Clayton and I were forced by my father's frugality to share a double bed for the entire vacation. Now, I must add that my brother is six feet four inches, with a massive mop of red hair; needless to say, he takes up a lot of room. But it doesn't end there - we had to sneak into the various motels through the fire escape in order to avoid an extra charge for two additional people. Through such absurd family rituals, my brother and I are propelled towards intima-

cy. Clayton is the only other person who has hid in a sleeping bag during a sweltering heat wave to avoid a wildlife reserve entrance fee in Costa Rica. I can attest to the fact that traveling on an unnecessarily tight budget can cultivate close relationships.

Separation from my family has coerced me into cherishing sleepless nights on a psychedelic green sofa - if nothing else, I know that I am defined by such moments. After four years at Exeter, I can skillfully illustrate that my family's sense of humor is fundamental. However, I

will take this opportunity to just plain tell:
I will always equate laughter with love.

The Waleas *bill welsh*

Exeter, NH
Mr. Rogers

My name is Bill Welsh.

When I was still a waterlogged bundle of joy crammed into my mother's uterus, she argued with my father over what my name was to be. She wanted to call me Jimmy, and to this day I think I look more like a Jimmy than a Bill, a weird testament to my mother's superior intuition, but she settled on James for a middle name, and my father wrote William on the birth certificate. I like to think I'm named after the philosopher, but it's not true. For the better part of my life, which immediately followed my birth, I was Billy and all the countless permutations that the young friends of Billys worldwide seem to come up with. I don't know when it was that I decided Billy was a creature of the past, but one day he died and a new beast emerged, one called by a name that was sleeker, more efficient, more grown-up, and he stands here today - Bill Welsh. So although my name wasn't going to be Bill, and it hasn't always been Bill, and it actually isn't Bill, that's not the important part. What's important is the Welsh, spelled like the language. Or the people.

Welsh is not a Welsh word; it is Irish. It comes from waleas, old Irish for 'foreigner,' which was also the word used for 'one from Wales.' It is a name that was used to denote the foreign origin of the person who bore it. The 'Welsh' in my name, then, implies that I am from another land, and I've often felt that way. Allow me, though, to begin my story in the land where I was indisputably born and raised: the desert metropolis of Phoenix, Arizona.

When I say "desert," I do not mean shifting sand dunes. I mean vast expanses of dry, scraggly sagebrush and creosote, low bushes that thrive in the heat. I mean tall, regal sahuaro cacti; who always resembled soldiers or palace guards, with their straight-as-an-arrow backs and perfectly arranged armor

made of rows and rows of spines. I mean basin and range, the most beautiful geologic phenomenon in the world, which consists of huge, perfectly flat stretches of land punctuated by high, abrasive mountains, like volcanic rock trying to poke through a taut film of goo. This is the desert I've seen through countless car windows, and hiked through in the withering heat, and slept in during nights that were cool and bright.

Phoenix is a city like any other in the middle of all this: office buildings; sprawling, opulent suburbs; run-down houses in the poor parts of town. Mexican day laborers wait on corners for contractors to pick them up. The sky is white and blue and sunny, and people who can afford it drive big cars and live in big houses and irrigate green, thirsty lawns that Mexican gardeners take care of. Also there are palm trees.

I have known, for as long as I can remember, that growing up in Phoenix was different. It was a feeling I got when I read cartoons about shoveling snow, or when I saw misrepresentation and ignorance of the desert and when I saw caricatures of Indians that looked far different from the ones I knew. Lots of small bits of information, coming to me from all directions, gave me a clear impression that most of the people in the country lived lives fundamentally different from mine.

So I never really felt as if I was a part of America. The United States was a country that was very present in my mind, but I wasn't exactly a member. I've never known the feelings associated with being a citizen. It's always struck me as weird that the American casualties are announced separately on the news; I almost felt as though they were people from another country just like people from Mexico were from another country. I have always felt uneasy about American hubris, but for a long time it was not because I knew it was wrong,

but because I felt like an outside observer witnessing some braggart ruffle his plumage. Only recently have I begun to comprehend the swell of pride one feels upon hearing of some national success, or the loyalty felt by those who are willing to risk their lives to help defend the country.

But back to Phoenix, where there are two seasons: hot and really hot. The nights are also hot, hot so that you ride in the car with the windows down and the air flows past you at 45 miles an hour and it's still hot. Tonight I am riding shotgun with this girl who's clearly older than I am, even though we were born in the same year. She's a tiny person; she looks out of place sitting in the driver's seat, like a child king in the throne. I've known her for a couple of years, but this summer we've been spending more time together. Tonight she doesn't want to be at her friend's party because a girl she hates is attending, so she's taken a break from the drinking and the debauchery to go for a quiet drive with me. The yellow streetlights streak by. She shifts to third gear, her short arm shoving the stick forward with absentminded determination.

Older than I am. I can barely shift into first without stalling. When I drive, and try to pull away smooth on a green light, she laughs so hard her eyes shut: at my hesitance, at the grinning, spacey face I put on when I focus all my concentration on two pedals, at the sudden silence or piercing shriek that comes out from under the car, at the honking behind me and my anxious yelp and my giggly confusion in the face of so many events at once.

But now she's driving, violently as always, and she's incredulous. She struggles to understand what I've just said. I don't ever want to get drunk or party or get high or hit on strange girls, and her shifting has gotten a little slower, and the bright eyes that bring her tiny body to life have narrowed a bit. We sit in silence for a moment, and in that silence I know she is into those things which I am not and I also know she is imagining how boring my life must be. After the silence, she wants to know: what, then, was the most fun I ever had?

I said:

"Well I guess the most fun ever was some-

thing that's stuck in my head for a long time. It was back in third grade. What I remember most is the flowery dress of the little black girl who was running along beside me. It was me and a bunch of other kids, too, all dressed up nice and running through the elementary school someplace. I don't remember where, but I think we knew we were late to be on stage for the third-grade singing concert or something." And I thought and didn't say:

It was a hot night just like this one, and the school lights were harsh and yellow, just like here. In that yellow light I saw the janitor, shadows dripping all over his body and clothes and face and mop, look up from his loneliness at a bunch of frantic third-graders running their asses off, laughing and screaming, thrilled to be together and running, and ecstatic to be at school this late, after the yellow then the red then the purple of the sun had gone beyond the palm trees and the stars had not yet come out because of all the yellow lights. But I did say:

"And I was so happy to be there with my buddies, running like a maniac. I don't even remember the arrival, where we got to. But I do remember regretting that we had to arrive, because I would have preferred to just keep running till I collapsed. Do you want to know a fun fact?"

"What's that?" she asked.

I said, "College Avenue is the most-used bike path in the state of Arizona."

We've just turned onto College, which is a pretty sleepy little street for such bike-path prestige, and she laughs as we go down it. She laughs shallowly and narrows her eyes at me and shakes her head in that way she does when I try to be funny but she think I'm all mixed up. I sit back with a stupid grin on my face and stare at the car's ceiling. The hot night whips past my face.

These days, I still don't know why she couldn't have just laughed normally at the fun fact and taken it for what it was, a fun fact, instead of looking at me like I was a little kid in the body of a sixteen-year-old. But what I do know is that the reason I had so much fun that night back in third grade, and the reason it's stuck in my brain for so long, is that I felt then that I was a part of something. As long as I just kept on running, I would be a member of this happy, ridiculous community and that janitor would be the outsider. And I've never had so much fun since.

Especially not riding in the car with this girl, who, despite her size, I perceive to be vastly older than I am. She's part of a group of young people that have weighed on my mind my whole life, people who I know (or I think I know) are more experienced in matters of

school, of travel, of thought, of drugs, of artistry, of people, and (most unsettling) of sex. They are young people whose parties I have attended and felt more alone at than ever, whose band practices I have observed jealously, whose camaraderie I have always envied.

Back in fourth grade, my best friends were the sixth-grade girls, I suppose because they treated me like a little brother, but their jokes would be beyond me and I would feel like every little brother does around his older sibling's friends. An outsider. A waleas.

Back in junior high, I lived in a different neighborhood from most of the kids at my school, and I could never go over to someone's house without feeling like a guest of honor at best or an intruder at worst. I couldn't just be a normal kid, hanging out like any other kid would.

Back in tenth grade, I slouched around with seniors and struggled to keep up with what the hell they were talking about. They were smarter and wittier and more perceptive than I was, and I laughed at their jokes and rarely made any of my own, and I felt like a little brother again.

Back in eleventh grade, I was with Robin.

Robin. We were fellow Americans in School Year Abroad Spain. She was a year older than I, but it felt like much more than that. She was thickly built and pretty, and she would dance with me till the sweat ran down our faces and laugh heartily like she was trying to get something off her mind. After three weeks we were so affectionate that we didn't think it could be anything but love. It was weird for both of us to accept that someone else might have as great a desire to see me as I have to see them. But it was a feeling as enjoyable as it was foreign, and I finally felt like part of a group, a two-person team filled with trust and care. We didn't talk about how she was older, how she had gone through torments I could hardly imagine and through lonelinesses I'd been avoiding my whole life. And after I had learned more about her than what was necessary, I was horrified, not because of what had happened to her, but because it was impossible for me to understand, and I felt then that although we loved each other, she was beyond my reach.

Of course the setup was too good to be true, and it was her own misdeed that ended it. She didn't mean any harm, and she didn't do any harm. In School Year Abroad, there is a rather stressful and expensive system of acquiring permission if you want to travel independently. Like many SYAers before and after her, she had forged her parents' signature on a permission form to avoid the cost and time of faxing the form to her parents. This set off a chain of events that ended with her being dismissed

from the school.

It was a blow, probably the biggest blow I've ever felt, and even though I was in such a state, I never cried. There was no one to cry with, nobody I could take aside and explain my feelings to, so instead of talking with the people Robin left behind, I called her. Every day. Being back home stirred up lots of old memories for her, and as we talked, I learned more than I expected. I learned about her terrible home life, her unstable, abusive mother, her unpredictable father. I learned about her drug abuse, her sex abuse, her eating disorders. I learned more and more, and I learned that she had come to Spain only to get away from what she had at home.

My heart sank deeper and deeper into my gut as I learned it all, because I knew I could never understand. Once again I slowly became an outsider, this time not on my own but with all the others who couldn't understand Robin and her complex life. I was being pushed out of the first truly connected relationship I had ever had, and when I turned around, I found that again, there was no one to cry with. And so I wandered the streets that weekend with my pals, and stared up silently at the starless night, and went home and didn't say anything to my host family, and collapsed face down into bed, and fell asleep, and there I was, back at the beginning. A real waleas.

Coming back to Exeter was supposed to be a fresh start. I had finished my year in Spain wishing more than anything that I could have stayed longer, but I came home, moped around a bit, got a job, read back issues of Harper's magazine, moped around some more, slept, neglected college applications, learned to drive, and topped it all off with a hearty extra round of moping. I was ready to get the hell out of Arizona.

And in a lot of ways, coming back to Exeter was a fresh start. I discarded old parts of my life, carved out new niches for myself, made new friends indiscriminately, and came to terms with the idea of being a senior. I took up new instruments, scavenged some new furniture, even sported some wild facial hair.

But I discovered that in a sense, very little had change about my Exeter experience. I had returned thinking I would step onto campus with some great weight thrown off my shoulders, or with some blinding growth removed from my eyes, able to perceive everything in Context, through my new, superior Frame of Reference. In some ways this was partly true, but in other very crucial ways it was not. People had changed in ways I hadn't. Whether I believed it or not, growth had occurred here in Exeter, made no less important by its domestic setting.

I still felt the chill of the outsider. My dorm was full of strangers who laughed with

the ease of the settled-in. And I felt quite clearly that the dormmates I did hang out with were friends in the dorm only. I felt too clumsy in philosophy class, too advanced in Spanish class, too enthusiastic in physics class, too old in history class, and too slow in cross-country, even among the slow kids. I walked around alone a lot and read *The American Historical Review* in the library. I got involved in clubs and groups whose members were already bonded together, and here I was, the late senior, trying to get in on the action before my time was up. All of which is not to say I was unhappy. I was actually quite content. I had simply realized my place.

Whether I've known it or not, I've felt like an outsider my whole life. It has not been a unique experience, nor has brought me misery and loneliness. It means primarily that I feel my relationships with the people around me, whether I know them intimately or see them for a split second in a crowd and never again, often lack the emotions that characteristically come with such relationships: hatred, enjoyment, admiration, love. Instead, I have an almost anthropological view of the people around me. I evaluate them and try to know their ways, and smile at centuries-old poetry that confirms my suspicions. I often see my fellow men and women as machines whose circumstances dictate their actions rather than free-willed beings who make good and bad choices.

I often see myself the same way. I am used to judging a country or group without the bias that comes from being a part of it, and the same thing happens when I look at myself. Some people find the way I talk about myself vain, but the truth is that I simply consider myself a person like any other, and I examine my personality as if I were someone else, most often without thinking. I have few regrets, because I treat my past self like other people - a machine.

So being an outsider is absolutely not a disadvantage or a problem; it is rather a different (and sometimes, more complete) way to look at things. It is knowing yourself, regardless of what other people think. It is understanding your place in the world without the haze of patriotism and loyalty. It is intending to be consciously present for all your thoughts and actions.

College Avenue is the street she uses to get me home. I know a shorter way, but not that much shorter, and I've never had the courage or the opportunity to challenge her geography. Plus, I kind of like to prolong the moment of

driving around before she pulls up to my curb and drops me off and I tell her I'll give her a call soon and walk to my door and she speeds away and I step into the darkness of the house to do God knows what. Probably reread a back issue of Harper's and collapse facedown into bed.

But that time does come, and she pulls up and I hop out and lean in the open car window. The hot night ruffles my shirt and tickles my belly.

"Bill," she says, "I've really got to take you out some more."

"Okay," I try to be noncommittal.

"Me and my friend are going to go see her boyfriend and his roommate tomorrow. It's not a big bad party, just us four. Do you want to come?"

I know exactly what this will lead to. Based on what I've heard about these characters, I know I will sit around forcing laughter and unconvincingly complaining about the curfew at my boarding school. But, I think, what the hell. At least it's an opportunity to add some

specimens to my Field Guide to the North American Youth.

"Sure," I say, "That sounds cool."

"Great," she says, "I'll call you."

All I do is grin stupidly at her, and her eyes narrow and she breaks into that same laugh that was her response to my fun fact. "Cool," I say, and she drives away. I'm still grinning as the hot night rustles the eucalyptus tree behind me.

The gravel crunches louder than usual as I walk to the door. I feel my outsiderdom like a string wrapped around my heart, not tight, but enough to constrict me a little. I figure I'll play the role of outsider for a while yet. But tonight I have revisited the third grade, where, for a brief moment, I had been a part of something. And somewhere beyond conscious thought, I know that being an outsider, though not wholly painful, is not a chronic condition. Somewhere, I know that my life can change, even if my name is Bill Welsh.



Michelle Patterson \ Washington, DC

Taking Flight\ *paige boncher*

Paige Boncher
West Newbury, MA
Harvard Knowles

This summer, I will travel to Long Beach California to watch my twenty-one-year old sister swim at Olympic trials. My oldest sister is the strongest, most determined person I know. Eight years ago, she was the most fragile and insecure. At Long Beach, I imagine that every swimmer there will have a story behind her own success. My sister's will be the most original in so far as one can resemble a com-

plete metamorphosis of character.

In late middle school, Brooke was a skinny, awkward and miserable child with more enemies at school than friends, little talent in the way of academics, and a temper hot enough to shake the walls of our old creaking house on afternoons when someone had the regretful misfortune of ticking her off. No particular tantrum stands out in my memory today, only the utter futility and pointlessness that they all shared. You would never have guessed it - that the rows my sister picked daily with my mother were over such shallow matters as clothing and how little of it she could get away with wearing out of the house - because Brooke fought with an animal aggression that made you believe her very existence depended on whether or not she won the argument. I never grew accustomed to it: the screaming, the swearing, how her face turned livid, how that one vein protruded from her forehead, how her chin shone with saliva as she struggled to mold her blubbered words into cohesive statements that might have expressed the nature of her turmoil.

Only now as I reflect upon that tumultuous period of my sister's life - those years of seventh and eighth grade - do I realize that, as pointless as those cutthroat arguments have always seemed to me, they did serve Brooke a purpose. They made her feel strong and in control when everything in her own cruel world made her feel like a failure. For if you can recall the social scene at your middle school, you might remember those last few years when the girls absolutely could not wait to escape from their male counterparts of dwarfish stature who, at the mercy of their escalating hormones, would dare each

other to shout vulgarities across the cafeteria with the hope of getting the bustiest girls attention. Ah, yes, the glamour of puberty! When the mothers reluctantly watch their daughters leave the house with their faces painted in glittery make up and their breakfast still stuck in their braces. When the fathers teach their sons how to gently slide the razor over their acne-plagued cheeks. These are the years of ultimate anxiety for the pressure is on to impress because the opposite sex has begun to take notice of you. So you had better look hip and have something cool to say.

Well, my sister had no one there to give her this advice, though it probably wouldn't have done much good considering how truly fated she was to be the lost cause of our small middle school. She just had too many things working against her. For starters, she had the metal mouth that more boys in her class shared with her than girls. Thus she grew ashamed of her smile and posed for the camera with her lips smacked tightly together, a solution she later regretted for it only made her feel worse about her appearance when she and I flipped excitedly through the new photographs of ourselves. I say, "made her feel worse" because her teeth were not the only crooked part of her body that my parents were paying the doctors to tether and force back into place. With a thirty-four degree curve in her spine, Brooke was ordered to wear a plastic back brace that made her look unnaturally stiff, for twenty two hours a day. The physical feature she deplored most, however, were her ears, for they stuck out as if she were holding them that way to hear better. But she also hated her nose, whose crooked silhouette she analyzed almost every night before bed by pressing her face up against the large bathroom mirror and holding another one to the other side of her head. And her chest, well, suffice it to say she stuck with the undershirts well into her freshman year of high school.

Aside from her physical problems, Brooke had one more drawback that probably played the biggest part in keeping her out of the cool crowd. She struggled in school because of a learning disability, which made it hard for her to spell, to read anything of moderate length, or even to begin to understand the first thing about writing papers. For these reasons, my parents ultimately felt obliged to hire a tutor to keep up with how far she fell behind. I remember peering into the dining room and seeing textbooks splayed across the table with my sister trying to slump in a chair, (but failing because of the back brace,) her head hung in frustration, as she listened to the tutors irritatingly steady voice, "Now, try it again. The math won't do itself, Brooke. Try it again."

Jimi Thing\ *emma perry*

Newfields, NH
Pingree School
Ailsa Stienert

when my bones slip Just
like so many stones
below the honey-dark surface,
when i sink away from the sun, into colder depths,
and i stubborn slam my eyelids shut,

i am left with the play
of my mind's own colors

and a trembling.

but the second purple chord
rises like a brother's hand under my spine.

the guitar, screaMing dirty-sweet
you are an anger
that answers me
the voice, comforting mellow-high
you are a passion
that lifts me.

and when the dark slides down my way,
you light a gypsy's warming fire,
floating this sad traveler
back up to the living air
until my mouth breaks the skin of the water and

oH!

i kiss the sky.

At the end of every school day, I slid into the backseat of the car with my sister and braced myself for the imminent feud ahead. For it would certainly happen. It always did. The sequence would go something like this: an insensitive classmate might have called her stupid, and she would relate the incident to my mother in tears. Then my mother would maintain that, on the contrary, Brooke was not stupid - that she only learned differently - and then Brooke would contradict her, possibly blaming my mother for having given her such a body, such a brain, such a life. But I indulge you with an example of an argument that actually had substance because, for the most part, I would sit staring out the back window in an effort to escape my mother and sister's belligerent voices arguing over something as petty as my parent policy of no eating in the car.

But when my mother sat behind the wheel, she was occupied, and thus disadvantaged for she was incapable of giving her undivided attention to the argument at hand. Meanwhile, Brooke would scream that she hated her, regurgitate all of the curses she'd heard at school, and threaten to quit the swim team, an activity my mother was bent on both of us continuing. Indeed, in the car, Brooke was in control and nothing short of my mother pulling off to the side of the road until my sister had apologized, could take that feeling of power away.

I think if I were to use just one word to describe my sister at that point in her life, which was undoubtedly at its nadir, dependent would be it. The reality of Brooke's life vexed us all, as we came to accept that she couldn't get through her homework successfully without the tutor right there beside her to underline the main points or to remind her to carry the five. What never did seem to cross my mind, however, was the possibility that Brooke's extreme academic dependence might have been the chief deflator of her confidence. For dependence and confidence, I realize now, are inversely related. The greater my sister's awareness of her dependency became, the less she believed in herself. My quick assumption that Brooke's problems were as divisible as the chapters of a car manual was completely inaccurate. For everything I resented about Brooke - the fights she picked for the mere prospect of winning, the constant need to be reassured that her ears really didn't protrude that much, the way she drowned in self-pity after deciding that she was the unluckiest person in the world - all of it stemmed back to her early conviction that she was a weakling, incapable of

achieving anything on her own.

The problem was not that Brooke had nothing of which to be proud. She had plenty of talents, and I may have done her a great injustice today by having portrayed her up until now as a sad failure of a child. But I run that risk not only because that was honestly how I viewed Brooke at the time but also because that was how Brooke saw herself. She refused to acknowledge that having won the part of "Maria" in our middle-schools production of *The Sound of Music* was a big deal, especially when my mother tried to make it one. "She has a beautiful voice," my mother would say to her friends. "I don't know why she won't take private lessons." And Brooke would humbly murmur that she really wasn't all that good. She did agree to take art lessons after school, when the art teacher enthusiastically offered up her own home as a place where she could teach Brooke. But even then, art was for my sister, just what it was to every kid: a fun and messy activity that eluded the objective rules of right and wrong. She didn't see it as something that could make her unique, something that could make her stand out from the crowd. After all, she only wanted to fit in.

I think it both frightened and frustrated my mother to see Brooke discount her own talent as if it meant nothing. In fact, I know it frustrated my mother because she never could get through a day without reminding Brooke of how good she could be at something - especially at swimming. Always, always the swimming. The thing was, my mother wasn't just your typical stage parent who wanted the world to see something in her child that just wasn't there. In the first place, she wasn't alone in believing that Brooke had great potential. Her coaches and the parents of other swimmers reinforced the fact to my mother at every swim meet where my scrawny little sister would surprise the crowd by blowing all of her bigger competitors out of the water. Secondly, my mother's greatest concern has always been her children's well being, so when she threatened to return Brooke's Christmas presents if she skipped another swim practice, I have to believe that her forcefulness stemmed out of genuine love. And love for her daughter translated into making her daughter happy. And making her daughter happy translated into boosting her daughter's confidence. In my mom's head, the means to the end were all very simple: the faster Brooke swam, the higher her self-esteem would climb.

The theory was all well and good except for

one slight complication. My sister didn't exactly enjoy swimming. You couldn't blame her, really. It's a difficult sport to love. Your skin constantly reeks of chlorine and the hairballs at the bottom of the pool don't lessen much in their grotesqueness with every monotonous lap you complete. There's no ball to follow and not much time to breathe. But I suspect that the real reason Brooke didn't enjoy it was that my mother wanted her to. Despite my mother's good intentions, it took her several years to realize that no matter how hard she might work to dedicate her daughter to the sport, she simply couldn't make her love it. In the meantime, however, she tried everything from inciting her with updates on her opponents' recent successes, to inspiring her by pinning up poster of toned and decorated Olympians on her walls. She would even reward her for her fast swims or broken records with a new towel or pair of deck sandals. I still believe that those gifts served as much to bribe Brooke to stick with the one activity that could guarantee her stardom, as they did to reward her for accomplishment.

At the same time, Brooke didn't really despise swimming either. Not at first anyway. She had a few friends on the team - several fun, hyper kids who weren't afraid to sing Ace of Base's "It's a Beautiful Life" at the top of their lungs in the locker room, the kind of girls who left their hair unconditioned after practice and who wouldn't hold it against Brooke for getting the set intervals wrong because of the simple math involved. For a little while, the pool even served as Brooke's haven, primarily because these kids created an environment where she could finally let her guard down, where at least she could try to be herself, even if she wasn't sure who that self was. But at a certain point, the head coach made it quite clear that he expected much less talking from that group of friends and much faster swims. It just so happened that Brooke's greatest fear at the time was of throwing up, and, as nausea is not an uncommon feeling among hard-working athletes, Brooke only felt further discouraged when the coach brought in a sports psychologist to lecture the team on how to work through the most grueling pain. Most of her friends rolled with the sudden elevation in the coach's expectations, and were even satisfied with the mere half an hour in the locker room after practice when they finally felt free to talk and sing as much and as loudly as they pleased. Almost all of them had entered high school and were ready to be treated like young

adults. So they set their goals high and followed the orders of their parents and coaches blindly, for that was what seemed to promise success.

But Brooke never equated true happiness with success, nor did she think of swim practice as anything more than a pain-relieving drug that provided a few hours away from home and schoolwork to relax with friends. Consequently, she tried to hold on even when the going got tough. She swam double practices, one before and one after school. She wrote down ambitious goals in a logbook. Ever the hard worker, she even stopped eating in order to eliminate the possibility of vomiting during practice. And at every step of the way, someone was at her heels, telling her that she was either not doing enough, or doing it all wrong, until the pool that had once been for Brooke a haven from the tempests of school and home, had transformed into a kind of boot camp where she virtually lost all of the control that she had ever possessed. She couldn't even go to the bathroom until the coach had announced the time for bathroom break. And so, the more my mother encouraged her to appreciate her talent and the harder the coach pushed her to fulfill it, the further away Brooke shrank from the one activity that, like everything else in her life, was no longer her own. Until one weekday afternoon, when, as a result of the screaming, my mother was once again forced to pull into the breakdown lane on the way to swim practice. Except this time, Brooke won the argument for good. With tears streaming down her face, she expressed her deepest and most heartfelt desire, which was to quit the sport that she used to love, but that now made her miserable - and to quit for a good, long time, if not forever. Then she demanded to be taken home. I was not in the car on that day, but my sister tells me that she remembers being surprised at how quickly our mother capitulated to her request. Perhaps she had finally come to realize that her plan of elevating Brooke's confidence through swimming could never be executed, so long as Brooke wasn't swimming for herself.

Though, out of habit, I remained quite indifferent to every problem, disaster, and change in my sister's life, I do remember how real the possibility that Brooke might never again place a foot into a pool, suddenly became to us after she had let a year go by doing just that. Perhaps Brooke's decision to quit really was a tragedy, we all quietly suspected. Perhaps she will always regret giving up such an enormous

amount of talent. Yet in hindsight, I am completely confident in isolating Brooke's one decision to quit, just as it appeared as though she might achieve something great, as the single most important step towards gaining her independence, and control of her life.

Nevertheless, this conclusion was in every way impossible to draw during the year in question - her freshman year in high school - for it seemed quite apparent to all of us that Brooke was worse off than ever. I distinctly remember making the observation that my sister was the epitome of the problem teenager - the kind of kid who acts as the inspiration for one of those self-help books for parents that my mother had begun to collect so earnestly. My sister tells me now that she wanted to use that year away from swimming to find out "what was important." She also admits that she never even came close to making such a discovery though she was convinced otherwise at the time. For the only thing Brooke had discovered was the world of mini skirts, make up, and push-up bras, the world in which one's sole purpose in going to school every morning is to look attractive and to capture a few boys' glances. Needless to say, my mother had a tremendous problem with this theory, and the arguments only grew louder, the insults more vicious, and the curses more eclectic. At the end of the day, it didn't seem like Brooke's character, confidence, or life had improved in the slightest. My family had reason to believe that the absence of swimming hadn't changed anything for the better, with the exception of having exposed her to a season of cross-country running. But, come to think of it, she didn't really enjoy that either.

Only in retrospect can I truly maintain that Brooke's decision to quit swimming was the most critical step towards turning her life around, for it provided her with the opportunity to return a year later, entirely on her own accord. To the great relief of my mother, and to the absolute thrill of the coach whose team Brooke decided to join, my sister admitted that she actually did miss the swimming, though she made it very clear to everyone that she would be the sole authority of her own involvement. She controlled everything from how hard she worked, to which events she swam at meets. She showed up to practice when she wanted, and when she did go, she would invariably arrive fifteen minutes late. If my mother made even the slightest hint that Brooke might try to arrive on time "just for today", my sister simply refused to go at all.

She swam if and when she pleased and her constant tardiness served to remind the coach that it was a blessing that she was back in the pool, and a miracle that she could make it to practice at all. Such an individual and self-serving schedule was to Brooke, my mother, and her coach, the symbol of a newfound power.

Brooke now laughs at how afraid her new coach was of scaring her off. "He treated me like a wounded bird," she reflects. Yet despite her chronic and deliberate lateness to practice, Brooke improved so significantly over the course of the next three years, that rumors began to spread though the school that she was good enough to make it to the Olympics. Humble by nature, my sister hated having to answer questions like, "So how good are you, really?" But such queries also made her realize that she had finally found something within herself that won the respect of others. It didn't seem to matter any longer that she needed three tutors in her senior year at school, when she could accomplish so much more elsewhere. Nor was she so concerned with finding ways of blending in when she had found a way in which she was proud to stand out. So when the time came to decide between a Division III and Division I college, she brushed my parents' inhibitions aside, and chose the latter, understanding and loving the idea that her life and the sport of swimming were soon to become synonymous.

And so there she is down in Richmond, Virginia, hundreds of miles away from the family that used to reassure her on a daily basis that she was more than a crooked back and a metal mouth. There she is in sculpture class after morning swim practice, her hair unconditioned, the skin on her face without make up and as dry as the clay in her hand. There she is on Saturday night breathing life into a party, despite the fact that she is the only one there filling her shot glass with water, convinced that drinking will only hinder her from reaching her near goal of making the Olympic trials. And on Sunday morning, there she is rising at dawn to run three miles on her own before swim practice, and as she passes the drunk and stumbling girl on the stairs who is just now returning from a party, she hears the slurred words say, "I am so sorry for you, Brooke. You never get a rest." And Brooke thinks to herself, "Please, don't be sorry for me. I love my life. You are the one with the headache tomorrow." And then my sister calls to relay all of this to me and to say that there

isn't a day when she doesn't wake up and think to herself, "Here is another day for me to improve."

And I wonder whether or not I am talking to the same sister who, eight years ago, would profess to hate her life because she was ugly and stupid. For, the sister then - dependent and afraid - bears hardly any resemblance in character and attitude to the confident and proud sister I have now. She bloomed late, and some days I feel cheated out of being able to watch her really grow up, and I pity myself for being stuck instead with the memories of a sad, screaming child who took a long while to find her place in the world. I suppose it is like watching a caterpillar mull about for a few days only to miss the moment when the butterfly emerges. For most days, I envy Brooke's coach and teammates for being able to watch my sister flutter through life, knowing what she can and will accomplish. Still, there is great satisfaction for me in knowing how that butterfly got its wings. For the journey out of the chrysalis was a long and arduous one - and in my eyes, that journey was victory enough.

Probably Best Not To Dwell On It

alexandra brostoff

Belmont, MA
Martha Bloom

I am observing the brown locks of an antique chair,
with my checkered converses dozing in their wake,
shadows mobile and swaying, like reeds in the rain.

The bathroom door has been left open a crack.
If my father were here, he'd ask why
that was necessary to state in a poem.

I would explain that I was merely describing my surroundings,
(and that the doorknob looks like a glass breast on a wooden chest).
He would be disappointed at my sexual innuendo.

"Probably best not to dwell on it,"
my mother would whisper,
and he would slink from the room.

The Window *scott fisken*

Highland Park, NJ
Ms. Christine Dawson

Ms. Wilson clapped her hands twice sharply. "Students, I want your listening faces. Eyes front and mouths quiet, please."

After the chattering subsided, she announced in her teacher voice, "Today, we will draw the feelings we have when we think of different colors."

Her high heels clicked down the aisles as she handed out construction paper. "Now, I want each of you to fold your paper in half like this." Swiveling, she demonstrated, her searchlight eyes sweeping the classroom.

"Time," Ms. Wilson's voice rang out. "Please watch and do what I do."

Above all else, Ms. Wilson prized order in her first grade class. She surveyed the room. The miniature desks, organized into equidistant quadrilaterals of four, faced each other, two by two. On the rectangular supply table off to the side, her crayons were stacked in separate canisters according to color, and her

white construction paper was piled with all four corners aligned.

Satisfied, Ms. Wilson resumed her instructions. "And now, fold again to make four windows on your page. I want you to imagine you are looking out of each of these four windows. I will be giving you four crayons, red, yellow, green, and blue. For each window, draw a picture in just one color to show the feeling you get inside when you think of that color."

She traversed the aisles, passing out over-size crayons to eager chubby hands. At the final group near the back window, Ms. Wilson paused. Tim Riordan sat slumped, his elbows resting on his desk, his head in his hands. He stared at the reflection on his desktop from the pale yellow bars of February sunshine that filtered through the beige vinyl blinds.

"Tim," Ms. Wilson cautioned. Tim raised his head sideways, his glacier eyes gazing out the slats of the window blinds to the left of his

teacher's shoulder.

"Do you understand what you have to draw?" Ms. Wilson slid the four crayons onto Tim's desk next to his left hand. Ducking his head, Tim grabbed the yellow one in his left fist.

Ms. Wilson observed while Tim scribbled a yellow swatch. Then she turned away to patrol the aisles, stopping briefly at various points to bend and whisper encouragement.

A few minutes later, a shrill parrot voice sliced through the classroom buzz. "Tim, you drew your picture all wrong!"

Ms. Wilson marched to the back of the room. Amanda, whose desk faced Tim's, pointed. One geometric abstraction sprawled across the intersecting fold of Tim's paper. In the center was a wide horizontal rectangle of yellow. A blue frame surrounded the yellow. A ribbon of red ran diagonally to the left from the blue frame. The green crayon lay unused where Ms. Wilson had placed it on Tim's desk. The other three crayons were arranged in a vertical line on the paper underneath the red ribbon.

"Tim, you were supposed to do four drawings, one for each color in each window," said Ms. Wilson in her most patient voice. "Why did you make only one drawing with three colors?"

Tim watched Ms. Wilson's mouth move as if he were reading her lips. "I saw the same



Hannah Dinevant\ Baltimore, MD\Towson High School\Ms. Strall

thing for red, yellow, and blue. I didn't see anything for green."

"And what is it that you saw?" asked Ms. Wilson.

Tim hunched his shoulders, mumbling, "I don't know."

Ms. Wilson summoned her sternest voice. "I asked you to draw what each color made you feel." She tapped the yellow section with one pointed rose-colored fingernail. "What does the yellow feel like?"

Tim squinted with suspicion. He knew a trick question when he heard one. "The yellow feels like outside."

Ms. Wilson persisted, her voice ascending a half-tone. "And what does the blue feel like?"

"Like inside," Tim replied quickly. After all, that should have been obvious.

Her voice sank to a near-whisper, "And the red?"

Tim whispered back, "Like blood."

Ms. Wilson shuddered slightly as if a spider had landed unexpectedly on her forehead. She stood still for a long moment. Then pivoting suddenly, she returned to the front of her class. "Students, would anyone like to share what they drew for their yellow window?"

The next day, Tim drew the same image when asked to draw a picture of his family. And he drew it again two days later when asked to draw a picture of how he thought he would look when he was older.

After this third incident, Ms. Wilson led Tim to the child-size chair placed next to her enormous desk at the front of the class. Across the top of the white board that occupied the entire front wall behind the desk, a sentence scrolled in bold block letters: **YOU ARE SPECIAL TO EVERYONE AND EVERYONE IS SPECIAL TO YOU.**

"Tim," Ms. Wilson began, her forehead creasing. "I need to ask you some questions

about the picture you keep drawing."

Time fixed his eyes on the checkerboard black and white floor tiles.

Ms. Wilson lifted his chin with the tip of her index finger, her manicured nail gracefully curved downward. "Is this a picture of something that happened that scared or upset you? Is this picture part of a dream that worries you?"

Tim shook his head "no." "I draw what I see inside my eyes." He hugged his shoulders and returned his gaze to the floor.

The following day, immediately after school, Tim's parent hurried into the classroom. Ms. Wilson and Tim were already seated at one of the quadrilaterals. Laid out across the desktops were the three pictures. Ms. Wilson waved Tim's parents to the two empty seats. Tim's father folded his lanky body to fit the micro-chair, his knees raised to the level of his chest.

Ms. Wilson cleared her throat. "For the past week, Tim has drawn these three pictures in response to very different questions about his feelings about colors, his family, and his future."

Tim's parents stared in silence at the drawings.

Ms. Wilson locked eyes with Tim's mother. "I am not worried so much by the drawings as I am by Tim's inability, or unwillingness, to express his feelings about them. When asked to talk about what the pictures mean to him, he says the yellow feels like inside and the blue like outside."

Ms. Wilson paused.

"In addition to Tim drawing the same picture over and over, I am concerned by his behavior in general. He seems to be day-dreaming a lot in school. It is difficult to focus his attention. He is finding it hard to listen to directions."

The corners of Mrs. Riordan's mouth sagged. Mr. Riordan squirmed and eyed his knees.

"Has there been any kind of major change in Tim's life? Is there any problem the school should be aware of?"

Tim's father waved off the questions like gnats. "There aren't any problems. Everything is fine."

Ms. Wilson persevered. "Even more disturbing, Tim identified the red element in his

drawings as blood."

Tim's parents winced.

"Has there been any kind of incident that might have upset Tim?"

Tim's mother mumbled, "No." Tim's father said nothing.

Ms. Wilson raised her voice. "How has Tim been sleeping? Has his appetite changed?"

Inhaling deeply, Tim's mother said, "He has been waking up early. When I come downstairs at 6:30, I find him watching cartoons with the volume turned down."

Glancing uncertainly at her husband, she continued, "I have been having a hard time lately getting him to eat any breakfast, but by dinner his appetite seems to be back to normal."

Ms. Wilson leaned forward. "I would like your permission to have Tim meet with our school psychologist. I am concerned that we may be seeing signs of depression or excessive anxiety."

Tim's father snapped, "If you think that is necessary."

Tim's mother trembled. "Yes, please."

"Come and get your coat, Tim." Mr. Riordan stood abruptly, his long body looming over the other three. Mrs. Riordan and Tim rose, Tim's mother taking him by the hand to the back of the room to retrieve his coat. Above his coat hook, Tim's name was printed in sparkling green glitter under a snapshot taken

on the first day of school. In the photograph, Tim's mouth stretched in a delighted grin.

Fifteen minutes late, the Riordan's car idled on the twisting two-lane country road, waiting for the school bus to unload a gaggle of high school students. Tim's father grumbled, "Now we're stuck. We'll be stopping like this every two minutes. All because of that meeting."

He scowled at Tim's mother. "You women always have to make such a production out of everything."

She shook her head slowly. "I've been so worried. Tim never seems to hear me any more. He seems lost in his own world."

"Hey Tim-boy, there's nothing bothering you, right? You're just sick of all these women riding your case, right son?"

Tim picked at the navy blue vinyl around the door handle.

The stop sign on the driver's side of the school bus descended. Tim's father floored the accelerator and swung out sharply to pass. The punctured right front tire cracked like a rifle shot.

Before the spurt of blood, Tim's eyes squeezed shut. Before he no longer knew what he had known - in the narrow slit of vision remaining just before his eyelids closed - Tim saw the side of the school bus rush to fill his window, a broad band of yellow framed by the car's dark blue interior.

A Mustard Odyssey *lisa mondelli*

Berkeley Heights, NJ

It's funny, the strange twists of Fate that come your way. Late one afternoon on the last Monday of the month I was readying to leave my computer behind, straightening the haphazard stacks of papers, and about to head out to the gym for two hours of exercise, when that fateful phone call came. You, she said. I need you. Only ninety minutes from that call, I was to become a judge in a preliminary round of a world championship mustard tasting contest. This could only happen to me.

All I knew was that the contest was to be held at the home of Barry Levinson, Mustard Extraordinaire, proprietor and curator of the Mount Herbal Mustard Museum, the only one in existence and home to over 3500 mustards. Thirty five hundred! Nearly enough unique mustards for every man, woman, and child living within the city limits. My qualifications? I

love mustard, and I had a car.

The friend who invited me was originally supposed to get a ride from Jack Nicholson; not the actor, but the editor in chief of the Herbal County Times and columnist for The Reform Partic's official magazine. Nicholson ended up canceling to interview a prospective Presidential candidate. For an instant I was flattered, thinking, hey, that's kinda cool. When Herbal's top intellectual political freak cancels out, they turn to me; a moderately successful writer whose tastes tend to be bizarre. A good choice for a judge substitute in a mustard-tasting contest, I thought.

But just as suddenly, reality reared its cold-sober head. Desperation. She needed a ride. Desperation always makes strange bed-fellows, especially on a fluke January day, where we had been pounded by freezing rain

and the side streets were iced and slippery. Okay, then. A judge through fateful intervention.

Muttering to myself about the horrible conditions while skating through freezing rain to the outer fringes of Herbal, I was anxiously trying to recall everything I knew about Levinson. I knew he founded the museum in 1984, following a sleepless night after watching his beloved Yankees choke in one of their many big games. That the store started small, appealing at first to Dean County customers, but as word spread, Levinson was able to leave a thriving career as a successful lawyer and philanthropist to plow the fertile mustard field. That he's always been a bit funny about mustard, once arguing a case before the United States Supreme Court with a jar of Dijon mustard in his pocket: *Griffin v. New Jersey*, (1981). That you can get a diploma to his mustard university, Poupon U. Complete with school fight songs. That he sponsored a mustard haiku contest, one of which I couldn't get out of my head: You look wondrous, on my

sandwich cut in half, yellow suits you fine.

My companion and I were the first two people to arrive. Neither of us knew Levinson and therefore had no idea what to expect. He greeted my friend Andrea as if he had known her for years. "Welcome, welcome!" was all he said. His demeanor was quite comfortable and his mustard persona shone through. He stated only that he had a degree in mustardology and that we had missed an extraordinary first night of competition.

This was the second of two nights of judging. Of fourteen categories, we were down to the final six, with fruit mustards, herb mustards, horseradish mustards, and hot pepper mustards among them. My mind was boggled; there were that many categories! We would be tallied with a second group of judges in California, then the top qualifying mustards would move to a second round of judging in Chicago, before the best three would return for a final round later this spring in Herbal.

I love hot and strong mustards, so immediately I volunteered to judge the hot pepper category. As the other judges straggled in from the cold rain, and after Barry's wife, Patty (Mrs. Mustard), made Barry go comb his hair, I soon found myself seated at a round table with four other men and a lone woman. We were given a giant bowl of plastic tasting spoons, a basket of pretzels, a bottle of water ("You're gonna need it," said Barry), a napkin, a score sheet, a pen, a tray with unmarked containers of seventeen hot pepper mustards, AND, the piece de resistance: beer. None of the other wimpy groups, the herb mustard tasters and the fruit mustard tasters, were allowed beer. ("You're gonna need it," said Barry.) I looked around, beaming. Does it get any better than this?

Barry gave us instructions. Each mustard was to be scored on a scale of zero to ten, with ten being the highest, in three categories. The first was Mustard Quality. Can you taste the mustard; is it non-existent? The second was Category Fidelity. Is the mustard both hot and mustardy? The third category was the Yummy Factor, which needed no explanation. Do you love it, do you hate it, what? Then, room for general comments, which we were encouraged to give, since the manufacturers would receive our comments as feedback. Barry also asked each judge to rate each mustard for Hotness. It was an unofficial category, but he was curious as to what we thought.

So we all dug in. By the fourth mustard, I felt the top of my skull lift, expanding through my epidermis until the endorphins kicked in. It was like a pleasant out-of-body experience;

only sometimes my tongue was on fire. We judges took turns comparing notes, swishing various mustards around our mouths like fine wine connoisseurs, and cleansing our palates between mustards with pretzels and beer.

We tried to identify ingredients. Whether this mustard would be better with Brie or Swiss cheese. Tried to determine why the manufacturer bothered mixing mayo with mild spices and calling it hot. Colors ranged from a ghastly, runny, fevered yellow to rich cranberry, with heat across a wide-ranging scale. Some mustards were thickly seeded with unground mustard, resembling caviar; in others, we found no trace. To some mustards, we were indifferent. Others generated lots of comments.

Those around me were tasting with evident delight. Everyone looked happy. The guy seated next to me, a professional photographer, either through excitement or euphoria at one point spilled an entire bottle of beer on the mustard tray. But as it was Corona, no one felt bad for the spillage; our only concern was that the mustard wasn't contaminated. Luckily, it wasn't. We tasted on.

After we all tried the first seventeen, we went back to re-evaluate several, as our baselines changed as we encountered new flavors and textures. We finally waved off the tray, and a second tray of eighteen mustards was brought to our table. Yeah: thirty-five hot pepper mustards. And some were real doozies.

We were still midway through our second tray when most of the other groups had finished. I could see them looking our way in awe, as if beholding prodigies or nine-day wonders, expectant of witnessing small curlicues of smoke drifting from our nostrils. Or ears.

At last we finished the second tray, with congratulatory grins for each other, and broke for dinner with the other tasters. It was a fabulous spread, relishes and potato salad, cold cuts, cheese and fresh bakery bread, and, of course, several mustards, along with cheesecake, fruit, and assorted desserts.



Danielle Hass\ Bethesda, MD

And then it was time for Round Two.

By then, not many seemed interested in having a go at more mustard. One of the remaining categories was horseradish mustards. Potentially powerful mustards. I felt bad because so few were sitting at the table. I decided to suck it up. After all, I had come in as a virgin mustard judge. I grabbed a handful of little plastic spoons.

"What you're looking for here," said Barry, "is a good nose hit. Strong horseradish mustards give you a good nose hit." I eyed my little white plastic spoon.

A quick word about hot mustards. Pepper mustards you feel in your throat and on your tongue. They work downward. Strong mustards, on the other hand, contain horseradish. You feel them in your nose. They work up. A classic example is the Chinese mustard you have with egg rolls. This second group was the sinus cleansers, like bomb blasts up your nose. This wasn't skullcap lifting; it was skullcap blowing. I dug in.

Two of my earlier comrades from the hot

pepper wars were already seated. These mustards ran a similar scale of taste, flavor, texture, and color as the first group. Some were terrible, some sublime. Surprisingly, some were bland, and we dismissed them as poor man's Dijon or Kraft Italian dressing masquerading as mustard. The beer-spilling photographer wrote in his comments that a company should go out of business for producing such

an execrable product. (It was disgusting.) Other mustards were like a blast of WD-40 up the snout, clearing out any rusty buildup, and bringing about tears. "I like it because it tastes like horseradish," said one man. I had to agree. Squirting tears. Simultaneously salivating while gasping for air. Great stuff.

There were only sixteen in this category. So I was up to fifty-one mustards, plus the few I had sampled on my cheese sandwich. However, there was one more mustard. The Final Mustard.

Earlier Barry had told us about his appearance on the David Letterman show four or five years earlier. Dave was being his usual self. He challenged Barry to feed him his strongest mustard. Barry pulled out the Royal Bohemian XXX, and cautioned Dave to take only a tiny dab. Dave, of course, ignored him, and took an entire teaspoon and stuffed it in his mouth. Letterman immediately fell to the floor, contorting and unable to breathe, on national tel-

evision. Concerned crewmembers rushed to the stage, asking Barry if they should call an ambulance. Barry said, "No. Either he'll die or he'll get better." Letterman evidently didn't die, but I'm sure he found a healthy new respect for the power of mustard. Of course, after hearing this story, we hot mustard eater were clamoring for a sample. But Barry wouldn't let us try any until AFTER we had tried all the other mustards, for fear of ruining our tastebuds.

Barry pulled out the Royal Bohemian XXX. Gives us each a tiny sample. It was like napalm going off in the back of my mouth. A fireball hurled up my sinus passages, consuming all oxygen. For two astonishing seconds, I could neither inhale, exhale, nor talk. A flush consumed my face. Mouth gaping.

Gradually, my ability to respire returned. I gained new insight into the horrors soldiers experienced during mustard gas attacks during the muddy trench fights in World War I. This was potent stuff, the hydrogen bomb of mustards. A week later and I looked at myself in the mirror. I had a suntan, and I haven't been outside. Do you think...?

I had a wonderful time, and am hoping I get asked back for the final championship. Barry and Patty were marvelous hosts, and both gaga for mustard. What more could you ask for? Free food, hot mustard, cold beer. Heaven on earth. I'm wondering: is there a mustard judging circuit out there?

Each Bleak Moment\ *david anderson*

Riverdale, NY
Dr. Neil Scharff

I don't really have to go to the bathroom, but I try anyway. After standing for a minute staring at the pale monotonous tiles surrounding me, I finally zip up my pants and exit the stall. When I leave the tiny yellow bathroom, I walk around the lobby a bit. It isn't very interesting, so I go back into the room where the party is stationed. I amble over to a table where a few of my relatives are engaged in some sort of discussion. I listen a bit, but I am bored. Then my brother Michael says he is going to outside to have a cigarette. As he starts to walk off, I leave the table and catch up to him, taking a few candies from the bowl in the center of the tablecloth. I unwrap one as we walk outside. It is green. Green is usually a

good flavor. It most likely turns out to be sour apple or lime, two flavors that I like very much. I try the candy; it is spearmint flavored. Oh well, maybe next time.

We pass through the double doors that make the comforting swish noise, and out into the parking lot. There is a stone wall with trees next to it, and my cousin Marcy is leaning on it, smoking her own cigarette. After saying hello to her, Michael immediately begins to chat with her about something particularly boring. I climb on to the stone wall, and walk all along it. Then I start a jumping contest with myself, seeing how high and how far I can jump off of it. Finally, Marcy finishes her cigarette and goes inside. Michael stays outside, so

I stay too. I jump off the stone wall.

"Hey Mikey." I say exuberantly, trying to make conversation.

"Hi, Davey."

"What's up? Wait, where are you working now?"

"Merrill Lynch."

"How do you like it?"

"Fine."

"You aren't very talkative today, Mikey."

"No."

We start to wander down to a pond at the edge of the parking lot. It is a very pretty pond. There are bushes around the edge of the whole thing, except for the section facing the parking lot. There is a fence at the edge of the parking lot, and we lean on it, watching the ducks swim around in the pond. There is a mother duck and three ducklings swimming on the side, and a few other random ones wandering aimlessly in the murky brown water. There is a little unpaved road leading off the parking lot into the woods around the lake. We start to walk down it. Michael is still smoking his cigarette.

"When are you going to stop smoking, Michael?" He doesn't answer me. He has a weird look on his face, very intense. "Seriously, it's bad for you!"

He keeps looking straight ahead. He lifts his hand to bring the cigarette to his mouth, but I hang on to it, trying to stop him. He shakes me off, and smokes the cigarette anyway.

"Michael, stop it!" I'm whining now.

This time when he tries to lift his hand, I grab on to it, and ram the cigarette into a nearby telephone pole that seems out of place on the side of this little dirt road.

"David! Stop it! Why did you do that!"

He doesn't say anything else.

"Sorry." I mumble. I'm not sorry, I'm really not. I hate it when Michael smokes. He doesn't smoke a lot, but he does smoke. He just started recently, a few weeks ago. It might have only been a week or two. I really hate it when he smokes.

I have two uncles that have emphysema. One of them is worse than the other, but they both regret the fact they smoked so much, because that's what caused their disease. My Uncle Richard, the worse case of the two, can't even walk short distances without having to stop and catch his breath. He can't go to buildings that have stairs but no elevators, and he has to visit all kinds of doctors, and take all kinds of pills. He has an oxygen tank up in his bedroom just in case.

I'm scared that Michael will end up like that. I don't want that to happen, so when he

lights up another cigarette, I try to ram it into the telephone pole again.

"DAVID! Stop! I'm going to smoke this cigarette, whether you like it or not. Now just stop it!"

I grow very quiet. I want to pout openly, but I don't want to be on Michael's bad side. It isn't that he gets mean; it's just that I don't like him being mad at me. So I stay silent, with a small frown on my face. I unwrap another one of my candies from before and stick it defiantly in my mouth without noticing the color. After a second, I realize that it's another green spearmint one, which only adds to my bad mood. We keep walking down the road, and Michael seems to lighten up a bit. I think he feels bad that he yelled at me. All of a sudden he points to a turn in the road up ahead.

"Look, David, it's the ducklings we saw earlier in the pond! Look, they're going down the road!"

"Oh."

We follow them, a little more quickly than before. As we go around the turn in the road, I see that it leads to another parking lot. This one is smaller than the first lot, and only has a solitary pickup truck parked in the middle of it. The ducklings are heading straight for the truck. We keep following them until they are directly underneath the truck, huddled together in a tiny puddle that had collected from a little rain shower earlier this morning.

"Look at them!" Michael says, staring



Talia Abadie \ New York

at the little fluffy faces.

"They're cute." I offer, deciding to stop being completely silent.

After watching them for a while, we slowly return to the building. It is very peaceful. I look over at Michael, and he looks more energetic than before. That is good. Maybe he won't be so silent then.

We go back into the restaurant, but remain in the lobby. I notice that someone has placed a bowl with candies in it on a little table in the lobby. They are the same candies as the ones in the party room. I take one, and Michael takes one. We both unwrap ours, and they are both green. All of a sudden I realize that all the candies are green, and they are all spearmint flavored. Disgusted, I throw both the wrapper and the candy into the nearby garbage can and sulk back into the party room.

Bonnie \ *alice bryson*

Bethesda, MD
Walt Whitman High School
Susan Buckingham

Bonnie stared. The ceiling was white, no texture, too far away to touch but too near to forget. So many things were too far yet not far enough. Things like Mother. Things like the past, the Past that tickled her memory.

She wriggled her fingers and her toes, full knowing that she ought to be working, that William Blake's "Tyger" was calling from the table with a hungry voice. It almost pounded her head open to ignore. Instead, she turned

towards the Past and wondered at the fingers that moved so freely, so naturally. How? Her mind slipped away.

What would be the child of your devising?

"What would be the child of your devising, Mr. Collack?"

A three year old girl sat on his lap, sucking her thumb. She was thin, though her belly bulged bulbous under her purple frock. Her

eyes seemed to overpower everything - her whole face was swallowed by the two holes, dark and sunken and painfully knowing. Around those eyes, her dull hair and pale face and body and vaguely tinted dress fell away, and you had the feeling that you looked simply at a pair of eyes. They never quite seemed to focus, but wandered slowly to and fro.

The girl-child was no beauty; she was pretty only in the way of small children, fresh and new.

The Doctor had heavy mustaches that weighed his whole orange face down. As he stroked his square chin, the rolls of fat on his neck shook. The girl looked at him bemusedly, though she never really quite saw him.

The girl lay in a white room, cold and naked and the kind hand holding lady had gone away. A panic started up in the little dark

haired head. So alone. Where was the woman who had strapped her down, merged her with the white table? Where was the Doctor with the mustache that had eaten his face? Where was the man who she ought to call Father now? Where was the dark woman who hung back and patted her head awkwardly, where was Mother?

Gone, gone, all were gone.

Only around her clustered tall men with white face masks and cold gloved hands. She stared up at them with terror in her meandering dark eyes, shaking though the white straps held her completely still. There were shining, sharp, cruel things all around her and as she shook harder one plunged into her arm. And then the tall masked men and the white room and the sharp moment of pain fell away into a great blur.

Before that time, Bonnie could remember only flashes. A tall tree, a sad young woman with heavy dark hair, a long ride in a stuffy train. After she awoke and lay in the hospital bed with her head muddied and spinning, every second of the past was stored perfectly in her head. She had been three years, six months and eleven days old when the operation had been performed. She had stayed in room 1911 in the hospital for three days, before being moved out to the children's ward. Room 63, with a great green curtain that separated her bed from the other little boy. He had been in to get his appendix out.

All this she could recite at a moment's notice.

It was nine years ago that she changed, and packed into her head were the last nine years in complete cinematic perfection.

But those little moments before the operation were like nothing else. They were not the quick erased senses and tiny details of her first years, nor were they crisp and perfect images of faces and names and numbers and facts.

Faces and names and numbers and facts had been poured into Bonnie from an early age. Ever since Mother and Father had learned exactly how much she could remember, that when Father had asked for a genius child he had gotten his wish.

She walked to the table and opened up her book of poetry. Analyze "Tyger" and write five hundred words on it, Father had said when he went back to work after lunch. An easy afternoon's work.

She picked up the book and read quickly, eyes scrolling down the lines. Her eyes were fixed, no longer could they wander. The tall man in the business suit had asked for that to be fixed, too. The peculiar sort of disconnect

that the little girl's eyesight suffered was no hard task for the surgeons to correct, compared to the rest of her procedure.

She finished, and read once again, although normally one reading would commit anything completely to her memory.

"Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? And what dread feet?

What the hammer? What the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

Bonnie blinked, and her eyes blurred, perhaps for the first time since her memory failed her. Father wasn't overly fond of poetry, but the home schooling curriculum mandated the study of six poems a year. So Bonnie took time off from calculus and geography and fine art to read poetry. She couldn't say whether or not she liked it. Liked was a strong word, a word that didn't seem to make sense when she read it. Neither loved, nor hated.

They were not in her wiring, she supposed. In place of like and hate a surgeon's careful hand had laid metal and circuitry, and given her know and think and remember.

Of course, she had opinions. They just happened to be Father's opinions, or the better opinions of critics that he approved of.

Her pen was off and writing before she even had understood what it was that she was to write. The mechanical bits of her brain fired to one another and words poured forth and if Bonnie could distance herself a little she bare-

ly even knew what she was writing.

Instead, as her hand worked, she looked across the room. Her brain, the parts of it that worked and focused and were installed software were occupied, and the other mind wandered on its leash. Standing in one of her bookcases was a photograph, old and a bit grainy. It was her younger self, the self she no longer recalled being, at play. A huge-eyed, bug like child whose face was stained with tears and dirt. Nothing special, nothing aesthetically pleasing.

That was another of the things that Father had listed for her; beauty. That her limp hair might be transformed and her pale and sickly transparent skin stripped away and replaced. And so it had been done, and the Bonnie of today was nothing like the Bonnie of three in the badly taken snapshot.

This Bonnie, the present Bonnie, had shining black curls and skin like cream. Was it her real skin, she wondered, remembering the pale and sickly self.

In the picture, in between the two bars of gilt frame, young Past-Bonnie was laughing and running and playing. But no, Bonnie couldn't ever recall running when she wasn't doing fitness exercises, nor laughing when she wasn't watching a movie. Playing was foreign completely. Bonnie felt no resentment, but a faint sort of half-recalled sadness, for resentment was not built in her either.

The photograph in its turn put her in mind of the tall woman, with her long dark hair and sharp nose who would hug her rigidly and speak in whispers when she entered the room. Bonnie recalled now that Mother had never like the silent, studying child she had found herself parent to. There was only one day that Bonnie had ever heard Mother shout. It was in the heat of the summer when the roses had begun to wilt, a week after Father had taken her and Mother out to the garden show. Bonnie had walked into the Living Room to find Mother's hair frizzed and her hands clenched.

"You're being suspicious, she's nothing more than a child!" Father shouted. Bonnie was behind him, and he did not see her. He probably assumed that she had gone to paint or take a nap in the Nursery. Mother though, across the room in an armchair, saw.

"Hush, she's here." She said with fear in her voice.

"You've not got any reason to fear Bonnie!" Father roared, and Mother stood angrily.

"You aren't around that child every day! You don't see the way she sits for hours and doesn't move a muscle! All you see is your bloody perfect daughter!" Mother screamed,

tears welling up in her eyes. Crying, Mother?

Bonnie didn't know if her repaired eyes were capable of crying. Or her hand-wrought heart, for that matter.

Mother stared at her for days after, suspicious looks when she thought that Bonnie was occupied. Mother cried often too, and walked through the house with bruises turning green and yellow as they healed.

Bonnie knew Mother had never liked her. Never loved her, the strange child not of her own bearing that appeared, her husband's fancy. Mother knew that so many children were perfected, but to have a stranger enter her house had apparently been too much.

Bonnie was ten and it was two and a quarter weeks after the fight where Mother had yelled when she walked into the bathroom.

Father found his daughter there when he came home from work, still as death and staring into the dark room, at the blood on the floor and the water tinted pink and in the tub the tall, dark woman motionless in the silence, life spent.

Bonnie had not felt lost, nor sad, nor lonely after the tall dark woman had been laid to rest, into cold earth and hot, bloodless sleep. Emotions were never in the blueprint when the hammer had been laid to the stone and her being wrought. Only beauty, intelligence and

obedience seemed to be prized by Father, and it was his hand that made the list. Perhaps that was why Mother could not bear her, Bonnie thought. For Mother had no hand in the creation. What Mother would have wished for, Bonnie couldn't imagine.

Of any glimmer of emotion Bonnie found after Mother was gone, or in the two years since, it was an approval. For Mother had acted according to her design, Bonnie knew. We all do, in the end. We follow out the blueprint. Mother realized some unknown design of her silent God, and Bonnie realized the design of man with the wire cutter.

A Widow's Dream\

jason klepfisz

New City, NY
Clarkstown High School North
Ms. C. Potter

One late Thursday night
Long after the scalding black coffee
Of a lonely backyard picnic
In the misting rain,

Just after a silky glass
Of lukewarm milk
That doesn't replace you
On my lonesome lips,

Unselfishly you visit me
In my late-night dreams.
Embracing me,
In muscular arms

But selfishly, creep away
Before the sun hangs itself
High in the cloud-smear'd sky.

I awake, tangled alone
In summer orange sheets.

Untitled\ *jason brander*

South Yarmouth, MA
Ms. Ackerman

My Mother,

My mother chases clouds on the calm days
Where the windmills sit unconscious
And dead in the middle of musty fields
Where her hair lies
In long strands of uncooked spaghetti on her back
Where she absorbs, assured, seeping in the smells,
Of crisp bread and gooey strawberry filling
Coiling back
And sipping tea with soft pink lips and a delicate tongue
Painting mountains with blueberry eyes
Darting back and forth between landmines
Discovering and sailing the curdling seas.

Spraying salt, cleaning my scrapes,
Helping dad with the planting for the spring harvesting
While she melts soil and crimson onto rough grooves of
hard black coppice
Where frail bones and skin lay resting,
Where a soft little face slops slowly off a cranium,
Slowly dripping away, A thick milkshake,
A soft vanilla milk shake,
Loose teeth floating in its mouth like rock candy.

And every Sunday,
When the wind whips through the clouds
Sweat glistening against the sun
Short hairs prickling against glazed rubber skin
My mother stops to shake this backwards little town
Waning spirits and masturbating lives;
The others, they blame it on the trees

But alas, I stand alone, yelling my foreign language,
Recognizing their self-destruction
While my mother feeds them glass shards to taste-iron
without sacrifice,
All the while whispering gently in my ear
"It's our little secret."

Priorities: Straightened \ Address To Iron \ *alice bryson*

paul capobianco

Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Ms. Jane Cadwell

A man sits across from a woman
Spider lilies between them
dust the air with cinnamon
Her finger trails around the rim of her water glass

He's ordered stuffed mushrooms
The woman's nose passes over
the man's only mediocre cologne
in order to acquaint itself with the
essences of tarragon rising from his plate

mixing with a lone candle's smoke
The woman lifts an oyster
from shaved ice
with a fork
as dainty as her nose
The meat escapes from the shell
and slips into her mouth
with a silken saltiness
Her fingers tingle
with a scent of lemon

The amber glow of dim lights
filters through a gauze of rising steam
from fresh baked bread

She takes up the fork
feeling the curve
with her thumb and forefinger
allowing the prongs to press her fingertips
as she places it by her plate

A pool of olive-oil slithers onto
her bread-plate then his
Their hands brush
as they reach for some bread

The woman bows her head slightly
and lifts eyelash-veiled eyes

I'm so hungry she whispers
The man smiles
The woman smiles
at her entrée

Bethesda, MD
Walt Whitman High School
Susan Buckingham

Iron, what do you intend?
You were born of the earth,
You were birthed of her, same as I.
Formed in fire-
Am I formed so too?
Tempering heat
Kissed by rain and sun and wind,
And how you find yourself again

Half back to your birth?
Sinking year by weathered year
Into the dirt.
I think I feel myself sinking too.

Eldest child,
Falling into your mother's festering wound.
Will you be sinking still,
Do you know,

When the sun and the rain
And the wind and the trees, and
My bones and my blood and my brain
My words, my intents and my immortality

Have all preceded you
Into the dirt?

Broken \ *leah caprio*

Pompton Plains, NJ
Pequannock Valley School
Ms. G. Freebody

Hate is the moist wall
Of a dark cave
Dripping red.
You're too warm in that sweatshirt.
I can hear your heart
Pounding as someone's would
While splitting logs in the yard,
Stronger than a few clouds, while pacing outside
A thunderstorm
With long, earth shaking booms.

My big heart
Shattered into the tiniest pieces.
I'm not sure if it will ever grow back together.
I look for your arm to grab because I'm nervous,
But then realize you're not here.
The chair rocks alone on the porch.
What you feel about me is not even fathomable.
I need you, but you have
No need.

I'm traveling with a dark cloud above
The straight-faced dolls in the damp store window.

A skinny flower,
Mostly shriveled
In a pot on the street corner,
The traffic light still red.

The massive black and white bus pulls up,
Splashing the bottoms of my pant legs
With dirty mud.
The ride is bumpy,
Stomachs going up and down,
A cracked rear-view.
I realize my seat belt is broken.
I look out the window
To see everyone wearing faces of horror
Or maybe that's just me.

Sardines\ *abby padien-havens*

Medway, MA
Lisa Baker

The last time he played sardines with us,
The summer I was nine,
He dressed in fatigues and army boots,
Black stripes underlining his blue eyes
Like the linebackers his dad watched on TV with a beer.
Somehow, he managed to get 30 feet up the old beech in my front yard,
Eye level with my older sister's room,
In case she glanced from seventeen to see him, like me
In all his prepubescent glory.
At seventeen he hid behind the hood of his '69 black Mustang
As I walked to buy mascara and cigarettes
With a girl who said "he's cute"
Loud enough for him to hear, straighten his dirty-denimed legs, and look up.
Under a crew-cut topped head that turned
Quickly down, and to the left,
When its gaze crashed on the nose that he'd kissed before my mouth
Under mistletoe and Heineken on new year's eve,
Forgetting that I wasn't her,
That I was only 12.
Later, when his dad hid like him,
Under a Philly's cap instead of chrome laced steel,
When he coughed and told me that he'd fallen
10,000 feet from a singing chopper headed for the trees,
I remembered thinking that he must have superhuman climbing powers
Rubbed off from 13 years on Spiderman sheets
Cause when I found him, second of five,
He was too high.
So I sat on the grass, back against the pregnant cracked gray trunk
And stared three stories up at the intersection of rough back and pink flesh
Suspended in the leaves.

The Pink Rabbit\

emily winch

Glen Gardner, NJ
Voorhees High School
Mrs. Lois Harrod

1
The downy rabbit
had a cream-puff of a body
and long sugared-carnation ears
He had tiny bunny feet
sprouting from his sides
like knobs o

2
I have a surprise,
she told me
shut you eyes
I could still see the sunlight
through closed lids
and feel it, sifting
through the trees, on my cheek
She pulled it out of the trunk,
matte and plush next to the shining car

3
Where is he when the light snaps out
and I lie down under my blanket
to hope the shadows on my walls
are dead and still?
Why can't he follow
to the dark theater
and the black seats swallowing people
during the show?

4
Lying quiet
tracing rainbows on the wall
from the prism shining afternoon light
Lifting a velvet ear
to whisper under it,
and playing tiny horses and princess
across his broad back
tip-toeing, because I should be asleep

5
Long flat back with the padding squashed
sprouting fur, muffled and soft
like expanses of wheat,
white and pink, filled with quiet

Drummer Boy \ *martha sareva*

New York, NY
The Chapin School
Ms. Rinden

We'll need no taxi; we're taking our time walking home,
Because he's hoping I could try romance tonight, twine fingers
Together to symbolize something more significant, through
A simple handshake; as in let's make believe that by
Walking side by side, we're onto something.
Later on,
I've made him cry, soft tears that I want to lick off his face,
but all I do is dream
Of wrapping myself in cellophane.
He was back the next day,
And I told him to love that other girl.
But I know I'll need to clean up my act because
I'm taking my pants off now,
And for a second there I looked like a million dollars.
He's found a way to kiss me anyway.
Everything returned, as I undressed myself,
And lay pale on the kitchen tile.
Mama's tube of lip-stick has been left on the coffee table,
And all her daughters are out kissing little boys.
And there's this song, which is always playing, about the two of us,
By the Beatles. Two of us riding nowhere, you and me
burning matches,
Two of us wearing raincoats.
I've lost it, watching your lips hang thick.
There's an ugly emphasis on love
These days.
And to say the least I'm scared.

Night Swimming \

liza gardner

New York, NY
The Chapin School
Mr. Schott

I like the risk of it, the hesitation before peeling off
Bundling outer layers and sprinting from the slicing wind
as far as I can into the warm water, insulated from the night air,
and its blanket of foam, the pause to let my eyes
follow the path on water stretching to
the white moon ahead, clear crater patterns and
stars surrounding, the feeling
that I just might die, just might be pulled out to sea quick
by an invisible undertow lassoing my feet and reeling them
into distant waters before I know there's no air to breathe,
silently sweeping the sand at the bottom with
graceful grasping fingertips and weightless hair filled with
salt water pillows, the laughing exhaustion after being smacked
by each wave that comes in and the breathless scamper
to the shore, the rest on a sand ledge before creaky biking back
home with wet clothes, the sleep with ocean hair
that coils my straight hair to a wave,
leaving salt on the pillow, my secret souvenir

Of Pigeons \ *joel mittleman*

Allentown, PA
Candace Brobst

Pigeons are peculiar
In that as they walk,
They bob their heads
To the beat of their steps,
As if perfectly in time
With some universal rhythm
Beeboping beyond the ears
Of all except
Those who forever peck the ground,
For reasons we'll never understand.

It is because of this
That I assume pigeons are fine poets
And even better rappers,
The latter explaining their predilection toward urban areas
And the fact that they are always found
In large, concentrated groups.

Soon as I watch the closest group
Skittishly bob across my path,
I imagine their flawless freestyles
And rolling rhymes,
Poignantly commenting
On the harsh realities of street life
While announcing their lyrical skills
To the other pigeons,
Respectfully pecking the ground
To a beat we'll never hear.

The Snowman \

clarie whipple

Convent Station, NJ
Oak Knoll
Harriet Marcus

For Hannah Long
6/23/87 - 1/28/00

In the cold month of January
My lips went numb.
A snowman stood outside a church
Holding a cardboard sign that said For Hannah
I wanted my hands around its throat, to choke it,
But when I tried it was only slush.

Days later I drove by again
All that remained was a short, white stump
Steaming and dripping in the February rain.
But I know it was there, time passed
And the hump became a puddle.
Something remained there
Not seen or heard, but felt.

Guns' n Roses \ *kristen mcclurken*

Glen Gardner, NJ
Voorhees High School
Mrs. Lois Harrod

It's times like these when I wish I had never met you.
Windows down, clutching my illegal cigarette.
Burning cancer heals my thoughts tonight, and I don't remember
November trees smelling any sweeter.
Branches hung over from exhaustion, and woozy from the liquor hidden in your back
Seat.
Dead Leaves try to live for just a glimpse of our silence as we pass by in slow motion.
They gossip through the wind- "They're love is like a soap opera."
And I call out the window after them- "Our love is like soap...
Slippery, and hard to hold."
Their conversation dances along my hair, and for a moment I am happy again:
Twiddling my thumbs against my thighs, and listening to the words of a dead singer.
And, suddenly, your fingers brush against my spine,
And I am reminded of all I have missed these past couple weeks.
I am tired of knowing that once you bring me home,
You leave again.
The deer, too, must be depressed tonight, for they are throwing themselves at us.
And for the first time in my life, I want them to die- and to bring us with them.
What could be more romantic than that?
I sigh,
It's times like these I wish I had never met you.

The Fair \ *danielle smith*

Norwich, NY
Mr. Bernstein

Grilled Italian sausage and onions
Mingled with gasoline
And freshly pulled taffy
Cotton candy
Candy apples
And french fries
And the sound of my sneakers
Ripping fresh rocks out from under
The saw dust drop floor
As I pull you from stand to stand

My hand stuck to yours
Bound with sweat and powdered sugar
And my lips stuck to yours
While my hair whipped round my head
I was so dizzy I was sick
Screaming and laughing and wondering

How your eyes turned so blue in the dark

The dark of the fun house
Where you kissed me
Because I was scared
The soft chimes of the merry-go-round
The soft light bouncing off the mirrors and the plastic
frames
Of the horses we rode

It was only you and me
And the horses
Under the main tent
You and me
And the artificial stars
Glued to my memory
Like a midnight chill
Spinning in my mind like the ferris wheel



Julie Fleischman \ Roslyn High School \ Roslyn Hts, NY

Six Minute Doses \ *paige wilson*

Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Mr. David Weber

Transparent bags hung over my head. I hadn't put it all together yet - but they took away some of the pain. And where did the pain go? I searched with my eyes, finding nothing but stale darkness and the inanimateness of breathing machines.

A curtain had been drawn around my bed, and there was little to see. However, there was much to feel: the cramp in my shoulder, the crisp sheets and the impersonal pilling gown, my chapped lips and the

heavy coat of recycled air on my skin. I closed my eyes, and something, maybe the morphine, brought back the memories: speeding cars and laughing teenagers, backseat kisses and the evanescence of a late Saturday Night. But where was I now? And what time was it? I looked to where my watch might have been finding a network of tubes and bloody tape instead: a mixture of horror and wonder, pain and escape.

Anxiety formed on my body before catch-

ing in my throat; I couldn't breathe. The impetuous beat of the machine measuring my heartbeat violently throbbed; highway tunnels and pounding rain flashed in front of my eyes. I ripped the tape and sensor off my index finger and I heard my pulse go flat; it was over. I was no longer scared.

I felt a warm rush channeled into my arm and surge through my body. An invisible finger pressed against my lips: a quieting hush and the euphony of being put to sleep.

The screeching of metal wheels on the hard-tiled floor and the flickering of fluorescent lights rebounding off the white walls woke me from my sedated sleep. The sickening smell of medication and breakfast permeated my nose as a nurse forcibly retaped the sensor to my finger and spooned applesauce

down my throat. I choked on the spoon and my meal dribbled out of my mouth and down my chin, staining my gown.

"What? You're not hungry?" she said in a dance of busy hands and short steps. "And why did you take off your sensor?"

I was too slow for a response, my wide eyes staring, misunderstanding and focused on her as she hurried out of my curtained section in a rush of spinning wheels and clicking heels. Left to myself, I wiped the applesauce off my chin with the back of my hand. In the light, I could see my flowered gown contrast against my pale skin and diluted sunshine polish the petals of flowers someone had left me.

The vestiges of my consciousness faded from a sharp confusion to a hazy acceptance, and warmth overtook me once again; liquid medication glassed my eyes and relaxed my muscles. In a sigh of breath and a heave of chest I capitulated to the overwhelming foreign heat that beckoned me to a world without dreams; a world of clouded sleep without memories.

A plastic tube had been fed through my leg and into my lungs, but my fear was worse than the pain. Stainless steel stung my back and doctors mumbled amongst themselves; esoteric medical terms only further alienated me. I heard fragments of intelligible sentences: my lungs were damaged from the accident, my spleen was lacerated, something about my kidney and a blood transfusion. What accident? I thought. No one had told me about an accident.

The thought began as a distraction as I tried to recall what had happened, and ended with me trying to convince myself it was over. But I couldn't remember anything, and I was still here. I tried to describe it to myself: the bloody pavement and then the stinging needles and the choked restraint, but no explanation could get at its essence.

Fumbling hands interrupted me, mashing my lips. My eyes rolled back into my head as my chin was tilted upwards and a pill was shoved down my throat, traces of bitter white powder scratching at the roof of my mouth. I knew they were moving my body, which was no longer mine at all, and the last grasp I had on reality was my intent observation of the repetitive scritch-scratch-scratch of a rolling gurney supporting my weight.

Opening my eyes, I saw my aunt sitting to my right, reading a magazine. I closed my eyes, half-fearing and half-hoping my world would disappear again. They blinked open, and to both my dismay and my delight she was still sitting there, bouncing her foot like she does when she's nervous. It'd been a long time since she last contacted me. She knew my phone number, but she never called. She thought it was awful that we never talked.

"Oh, hello! And how are you feeling today, my dear?" she rhetorically asked in that particularly nasal tone that she had adopted from her British husband.

Wonderful, I thought. I couldn't talk with the oxygen mask covering half of my face, but with a few more breaths I exhaled the hatred I had for her. She had brought me a vase of petunias and the ability to remember small moments of my past: noisy Christmases and dinosaur pajamas. It's amazing whom you love when you need to.

A nurse shooed her out when it was time for medication. My world caved in on me again, ushering in a magnified dread of the plastic plunger that injected morphine and quiescence into my IV tube. I struggled to hold on to what I had: the stench of my aunt's perfume as she had walked past me, the familiar wrinkles on her black leather purse. But they, too, escaped my reach as I drifted away and into a dark illusion of slurred speech, veiled expressions and obscured shadows.

Warm lips pressed against my scaly cheek and his brown eyes, hidden behind thick lashes, stared at me. I wondered how long he'd watched me sleep before he kissed me. "Kevin?" I asked, and he nodded. Saturday Night came flooding back: a sick animation of twisted metal, screeching tires and gasping breaths coupled with the smell of alcohol.

I saw the neck brace that squeezed his spinal cord into place. "What happened?" I asked him, and he shrugged his shoulders, uncharacteristically hunching over and looking at his feet. This was not the boy I knew.

He leaned over and cradled me delicately, as if my bones would shatter, and the words "I love you" escaped my lips without a second thought or regret.

"I have to go," he said. "I love you too, doll." He shivered, and I wished I could have saved him the way he had just saved me. He walked away and my love and my memories and everything in me that I had ever saved for him fluttered in my heart, wanting to lurch out and bring him back.

I lay in my bed, wanting, urging, imploring either him or the warm rush to return and sweep me away to some other place, anywhere but here. Neither came, and I clutched the creased sheets between my desperate fingers, wrinkling them. I became aware of the girl next to me, behind my curtain, whom I couldn't see. She sang a Russian lullaby to herself that both comforted me and made me feel out of place at the same time. Like a siren of the dream world, she lured me into a state of half-consciousness where everything became timeless, yet happened all at once. While the clock's hands stubbornly stayed put, I yearned for my boundaries, defined by

curtains, to drop away. I waited to be home again.

The next place I found myself was a ceramic bowl too small to be a tub. My body was encased by an aluminum back brace, and pale afternoon light shone into the room. A large Jamaican woman wooed me, "There, there honey-child, don't you worry 'bout a thing now," and so I didn't. She scrubbed at the IV scars on both my arms with a large soapy sponge, and kept mentioning, under her breath, how pale I was. I couldn't remember the last time I'd been exposed to direct sunlight.

My muscles had atrophied and I found it hard to sit up, despite the brace. My stomach protruded from my rib cage; she told me the doctors had said that I lost half of my blood internally. I didn't think about it, and focused on my legs instead, stick-thin and hairy. This couldn't be my body, I thought, before her cringing interrupted me.

"Now what this be?" she asked herself aloud, referring to a continental yellow bruise dominating the left side of my body and centered at my left ilium. She began picking at the focus of it, and it was so painful that I couldn't allow her to continue.

"What's wrong with it?" I demanded, angry at the pain, angry that I didn't know my own body anymore, and angry that a fractured spine wouldn't allow me to turn and look for myself.

"Looks like you got some asphalt udder-neath your skin," she informed me, placating me with her sweet Caribbean tone.

"Guess so," I said, frustrated that I couldn't see the backside of my scarred hip.

When she finished bathing me, she carefully removed my brace, wiped the water off it, and wrapped a towel around me. She helped me back into the familiar gown that now draped over my emaciated structure, and replaced my brace. After assisting me back into my bed, she poured the water out of my miniature tub and waved good-bye to me with her smooth chocolate hand.

I waited until I heard her footsteps far down the hall before I lifted up the sheet to look at myself: I was nothing like I had once remembered. My thighs wouldn't touch at all, and the muscles I could once flex no longer existed. I ran my finger over my face, feeling the valleys of my sunken cheeks and the peaks of my pronounced jawbone. I wanted nothing but to go home, to be home, to be full and well in Kevin's arms. But I couldn't change a thing that had happened, and as I touched the rough asphalt buried in my back, I was reminded of how alive and breathing and here and now the past seemed to be.

Whatever That

Is\

alison coplan

New York, NY
Ms. Taylor

Thanks a lot, Sheila. That's all that I need on my sister's wedding day. Another person telling me that they can set me up with a nice boy. Sheila is my Grandma's cousin's wife, and as we sit here, listening to the drunken best man's everlasting toast, her bright orange organza dress - a truly heinous color - reveals too much OLC for my liking. OLC being Old Lady Cleavage. There happens to be a lot of OLC at this party; there is actually a lot of everything at this party. If there is one thing I know about my sister is that anything she does must be as over the top as possible. The whole nine yards. She goes all out in a big way. The biggest cake, dress, and husband. That man is so fat but that's for another time. The most flowers, food and people. So many people.

"And in ssssixth grade...man...we had a great time in sixth grade. You remember sixth grade, right?" Man....what a great time."

This toast is never going to end. I tune out my side discussion - if you can call it that - with Sheila and start to glance around the room, seeing everyone become restless of the best man and his babble. Even my sister looks a little bored. God, maybe Sheila should set me up with a "nice boy", everyone else here seems to have one. I notice all the couples and how they don't have to talk to anyone they don't want because as soon as they get in a conversation with someone annoying their significant other walks up and becomes a buffer, eventually pulling them out of the chat. So maybe, no wait, yea, I want a boyfriend not because I need someone to depend on and give me attention and be loving and caring. I want a boy friend because I need a buffer from old fogies like Miss Pumpkin Dress over here.

"Oh man...sixth grade was great but ya know what was even better than sixth grade?...SEVENTH GRADE...don't you think seventh grade was better than sixth grade?"

This speech is droning on. One couple in particular, about two tables down, catches

my eye. Well, actually, the woman catches my eye. She is wearing those fabulous earrings that I wanted to get last week at Kleimans, the most shiny, rich and beautiful earrings possible that I could wish to afford. The rest of her appearance did not do justice to the earrings but she wasn't too harsh on the eyes. Her black dress was a little tight but had a nice designer look to it and the shoes and bag were cute choices, I have to admit. Her hair was nothing great, straight but obviously ironed at home and an unhighlighted shade of brown. The man she was with was another story. This guy was nowhere close to the blahness of his girlfriend. He probably bought her the earrings because he was just about as shiny, rich and beautiful as they were. Why he was with her was beyond me.

"All right, High School was boring...same old, same old...let's skip straight to college...wow...remember college? We had some crazy times in college...wait you didn't go to my college did you?...oh well, I had good times in college...I don't know any of your college stories because we didn't go to college together...haha...wanna hear my college stories?"

No, no one wants to hear your college stories. Everyone in the room is thinking the same thing. No one has the nerve to say it to the best man who is taking the longest trip down memory lane known to mankind. How did this guy get so drunk anyway, we've been here for a half an hour maximum. Mr. Earrings, as I have affectionately named him, excuses himself from the table and gets up. He walks right by me but seems to look through me. I notice his expensive blue pinstriped suit, black Italian leather shoes and chiseled features almost cartoonish in their perfection. People begin to heckle the best man and finally my father ushers him to his seat - both of them tripping about 20 times on the 10 foot journey. The band begins to play, one of those cheesy songs that you only ever hear at a wedding or bar mitzvah but still know all the words too. My sister and newly appointed brother-in-law have their first dance.

Mr. Earrings returns to the table and in a Old Hollywood/Fred Astaire was ask Blah to dance. They approach the dance floor along with many other couples, who start to form a clique of the romantically involved. I am not in the clique. Mr. Earrings moves so gracefully, swinging, twirling and dipping Blah at the right moments. The pattern of their feet write a message to me, "You are alone."

Woah, depressing message. Why would Mr. Earrings want someone like Blah who is so, well...blah?

The song changes to one of my favorites: "When I'm Sixty-Four" by the Beatles. I don't think Blah will be loyal to Mr. Earrings when he's old and starts to lose his hair as the song says. He picks up the pace of the dancing to match that of the song.

The ridiculous wedding goes on and on for hours - Oh, why yes, Mr. Robertson, I'm so glad you could make it...No, don't worry, Mrs. Alshul, I'll make sure to get your son's number before you leave...Yes, work is great...No, I don't have a boyfriend...Yes...No - it's so odd that a million different people can find a way to ask the same questions over and over again. The same cheesy songs play and the wedding goes on.

I manage to keep Mr. Earrings in my sight for the majority of the wedding, only letting my grip on fantasy slip for a few short moments. Then, as Sheila comes to say goodbye to me - that dress is really awful - her giant OLC gets in the way and I lose sight of Mr. Earrings for the last time. Oh well, no point wasting any more time dreaming. I guess its ok that I return to reality. Whatever that is.

Prince Charming\

abby padien-havens

Medway, MA
Lisa Baker

The August before his freshman year of high school, Michael's mother sat him down on the living room couch to warn him of the dangers of alcohol. It kills your brain cells she said. The younger you start the more likely you are to get hooked. Liver damage requires a transplant. Drunk driving kills.

He didn't get invited to a lot of parties at first. He'd always been small, like his dad. He wasn't on the football team. Or the soccer team. His sport was baseball, so he was assumed unathletic until the spring. His voice cracked more often than not so he kept quiet in class. But he did have friends. They were even moderately cool. At least, they weren't losers. No one refused to talk to them

and from time to time, a girl even developed a crush on one of them. But they were functional friends. Michael didn't really care about them any more than he did anyone else at school.

It was difficult to say what Michael did care about. Even he wasn't quite sure. He knew he loved his mother but she was growing more distant, more irrelevant, just a cheerful voice reminding him to wear his hat when it was cold.

It was simpler when he was younger. Ask him what was important at nine and he could tell you in a second: beating Jason Biggs at four square, twirling his sheriff's pistol like John Wayne, his autographed Ken Griffey Jr. baseball, and playing the Prince in Susie Ryan's backyard performances of Cinderella. In the play's closing scene the prince got to kiss Cinderella played by Susie in her mother's pink taffeta prom dress. Now Susie went to boarding school three hours away, and John Wayne movies were lame.

Michael wasn't sure what was important anymore. What he did know was this: Every day he went to school. He liked history and math but disliked science and English. He got B's. After school he ate a peanut butter sandwich and drank a can of Pepsi. If they were out of peanut butter he had a bag of potato chips. He listened to Led Zeppelin or Bush while doing the little homework he had as quickly as possible. When he was free from homework he flipped through the TV for a while. Sometimes a music video caught his eye and he stopped to watch a few moments.

He had dinner every night at seven o'clock. Information about his day was forced out of him for a few moments until his father and mother felt they had parented enough for one night and began to discuss books, or college friends, or how to redecorate the kitchen. After dinner he was aimless. He couldn't return to the TV because his mother thought that too much television made people dull and obese. Sometimes he picked a book off his shelf and read from a randomly selected page. He knew all the endings. Sometimes he lay on the floor, turned the radio up all the way and counted to his father's shout up the stairs. One Mississippi, two Mississippi... Sometimes he did pushups. Afterwards he examined his arms in the mirror. He counted the pimples on his face. Seven, not bad. Usually, he just paced around his room for an hour or so, brushing his teeth and thinking of interesting things other people might be doing, drugs, or sex, or laundry. He was in bed by eleven thirty but he never fell asleep

before one. He discovered that if you really relaxed your eyes you could see things in the cracks on his ceiling, a dog and a girl in a taffeta wedding dress.

In early May, after seven weeks on the bench, he got to play in his first high school baseball game. A rogue bat hit the starting pitcher. The other starting pitcher was all dried up from nine innings the day before. The closing pitcher was home with mono. Michael pitched for exactly one and a third innings. He threw one fly out, two walks, a double play grounder, one double, and finally, a strikeout. After the game the starting pitcher, the one injured by the flying bat, invited Michael to a victory party at his house. Michael's parents let him go because they were glad to see him making friends, glad to see him play. Besides, they had dinner reservations.

Michael rode with the pitcher. He'd never been in a senior's car before. He'd never been in any kid's car before. At a red light the pitcher dug around in his pocket, pulled out a lighter and lit a joint. Michael thought about buckling his seatbelt but then he was holding the joint and trying not to cough at the taste gripping the back of his throat.

The party was not what Michael expected. No cars parked on the lawn. No sex in the bathroom. No cracked eggs. The left fielder handed him a beer. The bottle was green, Rolling Rock. Then Coors Light. Then two Heinekens sandwiching some little drinks with salt. By quarter of eleven Michael was sleepy and surprised he hadn't thrown up. Everyone was being so nice to him. Catcher said he knew twins, sophomores, who like baseball players. Pitcher told him the funniest joke he'd ever heard. Designated hitter invited him to his summerhouse in Maine. At 11:23 they sang a rousing rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." They sang it four times with increasing volume. On the big finale pitcher and catcher threw fistfuls of peanuts into the air. One landed on Michael's knee and he swallowed it whole.

He met his dad out front. He was five minutes late but his dad didn't seem to notice. He asked about the party. Michael murmured something with his eyes closed and slumped against the window. He was asleep in less than a minute.

He dreamed he was at a ball. He was wearing his uniform and everyone wanted to dance with him, 23, because he'd just pitched the perfect game to win the state championship. The girls were all pretty, large breasts, skinny legs. But he couldn't see their

FALL *julia alter*

Ft. Washington, PA
Dr. Peter Drowniany

By the time summer left me,
There was constant pain.

Four boys drowned in a river,
Each one after the first.
Climbing out of warm covers
After both my parents said
Sweet dreams
I heard their mother tell the story,
My ear to the cold wood floor,
Wishing I'd never started listening
To grownup voices downstairs.

A man who belonged to the world.
A wife and son
Spent forty-three nights in the waiting room.
A tube in his throat.
His hands tied down.
She wore huge dark glasses
Concealing tears.
Past the handmade sign,
No Visitors Except Wife and Son,
My sister and I stood by the bed,
Each holding a hand.
I saw my tears on the face
Of a girl who never cries.
I stared at a painting
Of sunset and sand,
Aching to pull the smell of seashore from the
canvas.
While she told us what the doctor said,
Salt water
Stung my cheeks.

My father's friend,
Whose daughter was three months
Into a disease she couldn't survive,
In our kitchen
Leaning into the arms of my mother
Who kept saying
She looks good
While I faced a plate of pancakes
I could not eat.
A journal she'd given me
(she knew I liked to write)
On my right, by the glass
Of orange juice, full
Like my whole body was
Full of a certain sadness.
The last leaf taking life from the tree
Before winter,
Knowing it will fall.

faces. They were wearing satin dresses. He was having a catch with 3rd base when he heard leaves rustling behind him. The rustling continued and suddenly he realized it was taffeta. When he turned around she wasn't there. He couldn't find her shoe anywhere.

The next day Michael woke up at 2:30, later than usual, but his parents didn't notice. He toasted a bagel and did seven out of his ten science problems. He watched a televangelist and an infomercial for acne cream on TV. He paced a circle in his room, seven cycles. He lay down on the floor and stared at the ceiling. He was looking at the cracks upside down and he couldn't see the dog or the bride. He looked harder but all he saw was a tangled web of peeling plaster.

TO MON CHOU, WITH LOVE AND SQUALOR\

jo jimenez

Germantown, MD
Ms. Jessica Neely

The boy on the television was born in the same hospital she was born in, two weeks before her world debut. He attends the rival high school. His five-foot-seven, one-hundred and thirty-five pound body consists of dark brown hair that turns gold in the summer, blue eyes that disappear when he smiles, a chocolate brown beauty mark underneath his right eye, and a perfect movie star smile. He missed soccer tryouts last week but the coach says that he's guaranteed a spot on Varsity and that his letter will be waiting for him when he comes back. He will be fifteen in three days, and exactly three weeks missing in four.

She's been tracking him on the television over her two-percent milk and Fruit loops every morning, and then again over a Cherry Coke on the six-o'clock news. They've been showing his pictures every ten minutes on all four of the major network stations, and she cannot help the way she sighs. They show his

freshman yearbook picture a majority of the time, but on occasion they will whip out one where he's smiling crookedly against a Mexican sunset, and then another where he's playing soccer. Then here's her personal favorite, a picture of him teaching six-year-olds how to swim at the community pool. He is such a handsome boy.

They have been describing him as a good-looking teenage boy with several distinguishing characteristics, from that mole on his cheek whose exact position she's memorized to a birthmark she's only dreamed of seeing, a lopsided California on the small of his back. These are the things that make a mere boy a heartbreaker.

His mother cries on the television.

She imagines meeting this woman one day, over dinner. He'll introduce them and the mother will smile at her and then back at him, as if to say she approves. She will only meet his mother, because his father died when he was a child. She likes this about him, she likes his tragedy. He is different from her pop star honey and her celluloid dreamboat; his tragedy isn't the work of some jaded Hollywood screenwriter. He's a real boy.

She knows he hasn't been kidnapped like the other boys have been, she knows he hasn't been shoved into the backseat of the late-model red Toyota that's been all over the television. He's run away in anticipation of his fifteenth birthday in fulfillment of a promise of sorts he made to his father while the elder lay dying, gazing upon his future. Or perhaps he's instead set out on his own modern-day odyssey, her Telemakhos of late, so beautiful with his youth and his orphaned kingdom. She can just see him, speeding through towns at all hours of the night, quickening girls' heartbeats all over the tri-county area.

She's forgotten all about the blonde boy in homeroom who Frenchkissed the new girl during "Fresas y Chocolate" in Spanish Two, the skater punk who drives all the girls crazy with his poetry and emotional coldness and repressed homosexuality. She's forgotten all about last summer's tennis professional and the waiter at the Mexican place who always gave her virgin Pina Coladas for free so she thought he was in love with her but was really trying to get her older sister's number.

She thinks sometimes that she's never had such a crush on any boy. She thinks that she's never wanted the ability to melt into anyone so bad before.

She is in English class, second period, on his fifteenth birthday when two off-duty police officers three counties over spy the red Toyota with duct-tape over the license plate standing in a Seven-Eleven parking lot. They pull over and follow the deserted bicycle, the spilled cherry Slurpee, the weeping. They

find the man and they find the child, the child is crying and torn and dirty and ten years old. The man is in his late forties, balding with a comb-over, heavyset with dull gray eyes that remind the younger cop of his Little League coach. The man begins to cry, moans, says that it's all a mistake, a misunderstanding, if you will. Says that he never meant to hurt anyone. The younger cop says 'sure' and handcuffs the man and leads him to the car. The older cop, the Catholic one with the twin alter boys, he helps the boy back into his clothes and then leans against the Dumpster behind the building and vomits.

The man leads them back to the apartment in the city with the sticky floors and dirty bathroom, leads them back to the boys. The man won't, can't say how they all died. He hiccups into his hands, blubbers, confesses his undying love for each and every one of them. They are all in various positions all over the apartment, fully dressed in whatever they happened to be wearing when their collective childhood ended - baseball caps, baggy soccer shorts, too-big basketball shoes that emphasize the delicacy of their ankles. The Catholic cop cannot bear to look at the boys, so handsome in their deaths with their youth and their stolen innocence, their tragedy. He wants to crawl out of his skin. Instead he goes outside to meet the other squad cars, watches the man get in the backseat of another car and drive off to the end of his life. The younger cop gives the living boy a piece of gum, vaguely remembering the stranger at the end of the playground with his hands deep in his pockets. He asks the boy if he minds if he smokes and the boy says no, wanting his mother.

She is eating lunch, sixth period, when they are gathered in the auditorium and told that her boy has been found. They are all silent, scared out of their minds with the threat of their mortality hanging in the air with the fluorescent light bulbs and stray blue balloon from last spring's Prom. He was the oldest victim. She cries so hard she can't breathe and the crowd epically parts so the school nurse can escort her back to the health room. She cannot believe that he has died, how can he have died? He still needs to give her his kiss, father her children, make her the happiest girl in the world.

Her mother picks her up from school early and she lies on the living room couch in her pajama pants with the piggies on them and looks at but doesn't watch the television. They are showing all of the boys' pictures on the news. They all look the same - pretty with their eyelashes and their salad days. She cries and refuses food, accepting only arbitrary glasses of milk and a brownie or two.

She takes a little comfort in the fact that he was the eldest victim. She hopes that he

lived long enough to take care of the other boys for a little while, she hopes he had time to make them feel better. She hopes he made the best of his situation. She hopes he fought back. She hopes it didn't hurt.

His mother is on the television with spider-web mascara. She cries much harder and much louder now.

The tri-county area is invited to all seven wakes. People file past each coffin with a torn look on their faces, wasted and on the verge of tears. They see the mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and see themselves reflected in their tears. They look at the pretty boys' faces and see their Boy Scout and their Safety Patrol. She looks at their faces and sees the loves of her life.

His wake is on her birthday. They hang the aforementioned soccer jersey next to the altar. The Catholic cop's sons assist. She goes and stares at him, so handsome in a tie with his hair combed back. She doesn't know what to do, what to say. She feels as if she owes him something; a goodbye of sorts - Oh, honey, we've had a time, haven't we? We've had a time.

Her affections for her pop star and her movie dreamboat and her blonde boy in homeroom wane eventually but this desire for the real boy on the television, her soccer-playing Telemakhos, this inappropriately imagined love affair haunts her. She takes on the air of the undead Juliet, her life like those final moments of Act Five, Scene Three, right after Romeo's died and Juliet has just sent Friar Lawrence away. She walks around like that undead Juliet, hovering between life and death, her youth and her disillusion. She takes on the air of a girl in love with a dead man; she sighs more and never goes anywhere by herself, in the back of her mind for always: that birthmark and those chlorine days.

PROGRESS\

jason brander

South Yarmouth, MA
Ms. Ackerman

He said he didn't know what to write about. He said he couldn't get his thoughts straight, with all the clutter in his head. She told him, "Write what you know," so he did. He wrote what he knew. He turned up the volume in the small cubicle of crazy screaming authors in his head, and he wrote.

He wrote about nothing.

...She loved the way you twanged the

strings between your pointer and thumb. Sound resonating out of the amp, it turned her insides to mush. It made her feel like someone special. She goes to your shows, every one of them. She packs lip-gloss and extra makeup. She takes an hour to get ready. She loves to show you to everyone. She loves it when you point to people in the crowd...

..."Where are the Americano's?" she says. A little girl outside, in a white dress with fading red flowers asks her mother in a small town called Caierabo in Mexico. She always makes sure to dress her finest. She uses manners when she's at the dinner table. She plays with Barbie's, she likes to dress and undress them. She likes their clothes. Bright blues and blood reds, and whites, and shades of grey and black. She loves the colors. She uses colors on the streets of Caierabo. She walks along the macadam roads, cascaded with loose pebbles, and she sees the big boats next to the docks. She waits for you with her mother. She always dresses her finest...

...Sam lights a cigarette and blows smoke in your face. The smoke curls up around your eyes and forces them to secrete. Where you are is the Noah's shelter. What you feel like, is crap. Wells is a quaint little decorated street somewhere off in the great myth of suburbia. 78% of the households are currently occupied with middleclass business working families, with 2.5 children and 1.5 pets. This is the street you're on. The shelter sits at the end of the street.

The windows are always kept shut.

They keep out the sun that condescends you.

Everyone here is a shade under the age of adult hood and looking at a not so promising future. Everyone's eyes are dilated; pills like marbles tumbling loosely in their pockets, victims tumbling loosely in their conscious. You sit down on your comforter for the night. You think about why you're here. You don't know what went wrong. Sam blows smoke in your face from across the room and he says,

"25"

"Ok," you say.

He gives you a pill and you slip him a quarter...

...So you're sitting in a room, and it's dark, and the lights are out, but it's not like it matters. You can't feel much, anyhow.

Your wife was promoted earlier today to chairwoman of the board. You congratulated her last night. You accidentally said, "chairman," and she got mad. You said you were sorry, and she said it wasn't good enough.

She talked of women's rights, and other things of sort. You said you were sorry. She hasn't forgiven you yet, but you still made love tonight. When you were finished, she moved out to the couch in the living room.

She didn't talk.

You didn't either.

You go into the bathroom and remove the pills. You take two gulps of Poland springs and the lights dim low...

...When you come to visit, she'll be ready. She practices in front of her mirror in her room. She puts her plastic bracelets on her arm, smiles with the grandest smile she can muster, her eyes twinkling, her teeth emerge between half open lips, light along her arms, she practices with full fledged confidence. When she's secure with her presentation she shows her mother. Her mother smiles with gaping fulfillment. Sometimes she stays up till 2 am, playing with old Barbie dolls, waiting to give one last presentation. She waits and then goes to the door. She waits, and when her father opens it, she pretends he is you. She smiles and he laughs, and takes a blue bracelet, always blue, and pays her two quarters. He works late at night. Sometimes it's hard for her to stay awake...

...The Proctor says begin and you open the first page. Your palms are sweating. Your face is red. Your heart beats faster than you knew it could. You can't believe this is it. You've studied for months and now it's here. You need to do well. You memorized as many words as you could. First is the verbal. Second is the math. Third, you get your scores back, and fourth, you get to pick any school in the country. This is what needs to be done. You need to focus, come on don't blow this. This is how things work. This is what you need to do...

...It's opening night and she is there all starry and bright eyed. She is gleaming. You get up on the stage, and the crowd screams.

Everybody loves you.

But it doesn't matter what they think, because at the end of the show she's the only one for you. You know it, when you look into her eyes. With that hop skip in her step like her passion pushes her off her feet momentarily. And you love her too.

You think.

But...all the fans! Look at all these fans! My, my, my. You could have anyone you want...

...At night her mother reads to her. Her mother reads her books in English, stuttering through annunciations, while letting her daughter switch off. She really learns a lot,

"all sorts of things," she would say. She learns how to count in English. She really loves the language. She wants to be a doctor. She thinks that by selling enough bracelets, she can do it. She strives for the promise land...

...Your heart flutters. Your chest aches. People are looking at you. You can't concentrate. They call this an anxiety attack. You try to read the questions but you can't. Tiny butterflies dance around inside you. Your brain slips into a coma. 6 months of practicing, studying, and for this. A summer given away. Friends left beyond and forgotten.

Your heart races. Nausea sweeps over you like an Armageddon of the soul. Your face feels like volcanic acid smashed into crimson. The tips of your toes feel the way slippery wet ice feels, after water freezes but before it's safe enough to skate upon. All around you, the room tips and curves, dips and slants. When the Proctor finally notices, it's too late. You're on the ground and all around you fades to black, like the end of a sappy love film; funny, you can hear sappy love trumpets bellowing in the background, and now it's time for the credits...

...You stare with neutrality that speaks to years of conditioning.

You don't like feelings.

Most people don't. This is normal, don't worry, what you're doing is normal.

The pill turns to powder somewhere down your esophagus. Fifteen minutes later, and you don't want to move. You don't know what moving is. You think,

"This is good, I like this, I don't know what it is, but I like it."

The pill renders the same nostalgia it has since you first started taking it.

Right around when you married your wife.

You're reminded of when you were young. When you broke your arm playing hockey. You turned the wrong way and were checked into the boards, twisting ligaments, popping bones and churning muscles. You were put on painkillers for two weeks. A few more series of flashing mental renderings and you're back to your childhood. You're new again. You're the proud owner of a new life.

This is why it always feels similar. In fact that's the only thought that crosses your mind,

This all feels so similar...

...Whisks of her hair fall down onto the incandescent ground and die. Tiny clippings of chocolate fudge flutter slowly, running back and forth, like roses unraveling in a



Sarah Campbell \Townson High School \Ms. Strall

wide-open field. She is moving quickly, gasping for air. You move with her in unison. You don't even think of those passionate hop skips, that whining guitar, those gleaming eyes. You're a rock star; you can do whatever you want.

This is totally normal.

This is totally fucking normal...

...You awaken to a warden kicking your bed with his Doc Martins. The posts of the bunk bed rattle.

"Gather your things, we're closing, you need to leave."

This is the only place you know of that closes in the morning. That gather your things comment, that's a fun joke wardens like to play on their "guests." Wardens know that you don't have any "things."

Sam's already up and taking a piss outside in the parking lot. One time you asked why he doesn't just use the bathroom.

"cus...screw em' that's why," he says.

But this is so normal for you.

This happens all the time...

...You wake up to, "what you had was an ANG-ZI-ETY attack." Your eyes open and you're peering at a small woman with short blonde hair and a white coat on. She has a thermometer in her hand. She puts it up to your mouth, and then sticks her tongue out as if a pictorial display were really needed. As if passing out during the SAT means you're stupid. She doesn't flinch when she places the thermometer in your mouth. It's totally normal for her. Speaking of normal, you forfeited your test scores indirectly by passing out. It even says that's a possibility in the handbook. The next test date is in three months.

And the nurse says, "This is totally normal, don't worry about it. These things happen all the time."

How quaint...

...She wouldn't know what anxiety disorder is. She has no idea what to take if that happens. She doesn't know about magical pills. She has never heard of attention deficit disorder. She doesn't know what a learning disability is. She has no idea how to cure acne. She doesn't know what the new Abercrombie models look like. She doesn't understand anything about fashion. She has never seen "Who wants to be a millionaire." She has never watched a presidential election. She has never been exposed to AIDS. She doesn't know war. She doesn't know, "cool." She doesn't know what it's like to be high. She doesn't know how it feels to fail an exam. She doesn't know what an exam feels like. She doesn't understand rock n' roll. She doesn't know what it feels like to be left out. She only has one bathroom. She only has two parents. She only has one pet. She only has one family. She knows who her father is. She speaks with her mother frequently. She has never taken Dimetapp. She doesn't know anyone with dyslexia. She has one dream.

She has one goal.

She wants to go out, and she wants to sell tiny plastic bracelets that she handmade just for you. She wants to make money. She wants to provide for her family. She wants to go to a real school.

But what she really wants, is to be normal, just like you...

...He said he didn't know what to write about. He said he couldn't get his thoughts straight, with all the clutter in his head. She told him, "Write what you know." So he did. He wrote what he knew. He turned up the volume in the small cubicle of crazy screaming authors in his head, and he wrote.

He wrote about nothing.

He wrote about everything he didn't know, everything he had never felt, and everything he had never understood. He wrote what he saw on TV, scribbling down thoughts without the literacy to interpret them, like a baby coloring yellow suns without recognition. His brain dribbled out thoughts like fizz out of an asphyxiating throat, his hand translating letters into words, words into sentences, fragments strung across the page. He couldn't do it. So many emotions, with such a large barrier. He just wanted to complete his assignment. His teacher told him to write what he knew, so he did, and nothing came out. So he tried, and he couldn't, and that's that. So he'll go into the other room, pop Ritalin tablets, and turn on the television.

Totally normal, everyday behavior.

You'd do the same thing.

Natural Splendor\

mike kinney

Piscataway NJ
Mrs. McVeigh-Berzok

He was hit in the head with a rock and began screaming obscenities into the trees. Some kids had been throwing rocks at our camp from the woods all day. One of our leaders had forced us to sleep far out there under a blue tarpaulin for our camping merit badge.

The truth about the rock-throwing incident was yes; people had been throwing rocks at us. However, my friend, who was trying to stone my tent to get my attention, had thrown (only tossed, I'd swear) that particular rock at the root of the controversy that followed.

Spending a night in a make shift tent was no longer a requirement but our leader's son had done it years ago when he got the same badge, so we had to. Boy scouts was more learning how to put up with pointless bureaucracy and officious adults who no one listened to when they were our age than it was about knots and bushes. This particular leader had a hearing problem, was a jerk, and his son was a fat demon with a bad haircut, so we never had any problems making fun of his voice behind his back (where he couldn't read our lips). He usually gave us decent material.

His son reminded me of so many 'special children,' or 'cases' or whatever they call them now, emotionally disturbed and whatever else, who were placed in normal classrooms because their mothers decided that they had "a right to be there." Fair enough, but they spent every recess terrorizing the class, biting girls' necks, and flipping over in progress games of Battleship. Whenever a fed up individual dared to call them stupid, they'd bawl and the whole class would have to give the brat letters of apology and pitch in for a stuffed toy.

Whenever the opportunity for a trip that would take us away from our leaders and all their sons arose, we nearly cried for happiness.

"It's a bike ride."

"Okay."

"About ten miles."

"Okay."

"We have to carry everything we bring."

"That's cool."

"The trail to the campsite hugs a cliff and the ride back is almost vertical."

"Fine."

"It's going to pour tonight."

"I'm game."

The assembled group of 14-year-olds left after dinner. I think that going any considerable distance with strangers and without asking my mom was one of the earliest spontaneous decisions I'd made. It triggered years of my parents rarely being quite sure where I was except for a trail of rushed notes and phone messages.

We rode on 21+speed bikes that were said to be "worth more than our lives." One particular part of the trail hugged, practically humped, a sharp drop off. It was about one hundred feet down with rocks at the bottom. Here, we were told, one kid on a similar trip had stopped short and sailed down this hill "breakin both legs and crackin his head."

Summer camp was always filled with such horror stories, some of which actually happened. It simply wouldn't be camp without it. There was one particularly horrifying story in which something like seven boys were burned alive in a cabin on a winter trip thirty-some-odd-years before. The black rubble still laid at the bottom of a hill, for some morbid reason, on the trail to the camping merit badge station, I assumed, blackened skeletons and all.

Most of these boys had probably said that they were going on vacation for that week. The scariest and most tragic part of these stories: boys had to go back to school in the fall disfigured and on crutches having to explain that they received their wounds at Boy Scout Camp.

Clowns might as well have killed the ones who died. "Remember that kid? What was his name...I heard he was decapitated while wearing olive polyester pants and matching socks."

"Bahaha."

I don't want people to say "Bahaha." When they hear how I died. I also don't want polyester pants to come up, even in passing. I don't think it's so much to ask to die cool deaths like a motorcycle accident or a drive-by shooting, or maybe rolling your turbo-charged Pontiac GTO hitting an off-ramp too fast.

We made our humble camp that evening and ate oranges. Already having eaten dinner, oranges were supposed to be enough.

Very bored, we went looking for a Girl

Scout troop that was reportedly in the area (there were always reports of Girl Scout troops. Whether there was ever an advanced Girl Scout tracking system used I can't be sure of, but someone had always heard news of their movements). Hoping they'd be skinny-dipping when we found them, and usually screaming and alerting rangers wearing Smokey the Bear hats, they would invite us to join them.

What we found instead were four fresh high school graduates on a weekend camping trip. They were cooking meat and beans (no citrus) and became our dearest friends.

They seemed to be a somewhat mismatched group. One was a very Guido boy with slicked black hair and with the collar of his shirt open (to show more, un-slicked, black hair). There was a longhaired boy in suspenders and a red shirt that said, "Hug a Bear," and had a small cartoon depicting the suggestion. There were two girls. The longhaired boy and one of the chicks put on a shadow show of themselves pretending to have sex while they were in their tent changing into dry clothes.

We watched, amused, and ate cheeseburgers. When it started to rain, they bade us farewell and disappeared into a Dodge (their foul weather shelter). Outdoorsy intentions seem to falter in nasty weather, but not ours; we were in for the whole ride. We thanked them for their hospitality and strolled back under the drumming treetops.

We stopped in a mosquito and beetle infested restroom to wash up. Washing up was never an option in Boy Scout camp. There was a time to wash up and a time to go to the bathroom so you weren't goofing around the latrine at three in the morning. But if our toilet was a hole in the ground with a plastic seat I saw it as being not too much to ask that we sat on it whenever we damn well pleased.

When I go camping, I want to grow a beard and only brush my teeth when the film growing on them chafes my tongue. I'm going to hold my urine till the pressure is strong enough to hit moderately high branches. Boy Scouts took nearly all of the rough things you couldn't do in civilization and out of the woods. We could spit on the ground and pee on trees and rocks and anything, but that was about it. We wanted to tow abandoned junkers into the campsite and take turns shooting the windows out with air rifles. If this wasn't happening, the woods were being wasted.

That night, someone produced a Nerf football and we played in a thunderstorm in bare

feet in a swampy field between high-tension towers. At some point in the game I nailed a kid who was shorter than me, but much wider. I took him down. He didn't get up and so he cried on the ground. He's been a tough guy the whole trip, but now I had apparently re-cracked his rib. After a bit he stood and gasped out "Who hit me? You broke my chest. I'm not going to do anything to 'em, just tell me who he is." It was dark and he hadn't seen me hit him. Both soggy teams stood around him in silence. The game was over.

It was time for leftover oranges and bed.

We slept that night very much in puddles. Everything that existed, our whole world, was wet. I slept for increments of five minutes, interrupted by whole hours of staring at mud and pulling sticky clothes away from my skin. I would fall asleep and a whole new part of the canopy would collapse and pour water on my head. I loved it. I felt like a commando laying low in a rice patty. I expected to wake up with leeches, but those were just memories of a different summer.

The next morning we rode back, uphill, like promised. We came just in time to be late for breakfast. Nothing is worse than being rushed by camp counselors. They're of the breed that believes there is some personality flaw attached to not being able to fill an empty stomach in less than four minutes.

I spent the rest of the morning drying and sleeping. I missed a class. I think it was leatherworking or first aid, something useless. Somewhere in the afternoon I was awakened to have a "leader-scout conference" with a few other witnesses about the event of the other night, and how this scout named Chris had gotten pelted in the face with a rock.

I shrugged a lot in that conference, "I dunno, couldn't say. It's really dark out there in the woods."

Short Guy\

sarah karlin

Livingston, NJ
Livingston High School
Mr. Mark Stern

"Short Guy," -that's what we call him, my little brother. The tallest Karlin in history and he's still growing.

"Go wake the Short Guy," my older brother Ian says. I roll my eyes, a smile slowly

spreading across my face. Maybe it is true - some things never change. But I know better. Sitting here at "The Sandbox," number Thirteen Sea Isle Road on Fire Island.

I walk to the beach. As I swim in the ocean I watch little girls playing by the shore. Brothers and sisters digging holes to China, just like the Short Guy and myself many years ago. Children of all ages: two, three, seven, ten; laughing, playing, bright-eyed - free. I wonder if they realize what the future holds. I gaze longingly at their innocence - I am not a little kid anymore.

I stare intently at the sand. It tells many stories. It speaks of my father. He roams this beach. Or so I imagine. Running with the wind -to The Pines and back, a lap around the nature trail. Later he'll come back to The Sandbox, all sweaty, with that distinct smell I'd like to believe belongs only to him. He'll take a shower and then my family will walk up to Watch Hill for ice cream. The Short Guy will get vanilla; I'll get chocolate. It will be dark when we return from our walk. We'll eat dinner with the Blackstones, whose house we have invaded for the weekend. Lynn will cook her famous rice and the small rooms will be filled with noise as we play cards and monopoly for old times sake. The Blackstones and the Karlins. The Short Guy goes first -he's the youngest.

"Short Guy," -yeah - that's what we call my little brother.

I return from the beach. The Short Guy walks into the kitchen. It is after twelve and he just woke up. It seems he grew another inch overnight. He doesn't look like my little brother anymore. I turn my head and glance at my mother. She looks tired; the events of the past three years have left their marks.

My older brother Ian is twenty now, I'm sixteen, and the Short Guy will soon be making his high school debut. The Blackstones left early this weekend; their sons Ian and Davey no longer join us for summers at Fire Island. And there will be no afternoon run, or walk for ice cream. No late night dinner or card game. I fell asleep crying last night, "Livin' on a Prayer" was playing in the distance.

Years ago we dug a hole in the sand -scattered the last physical remains. But I refuse to say goodbye. I like to think my father is swimming in the ocean now. He's smiling as he gets a glimpse of his youngest son -the "Short Guy."

You Make Me Yawn\

amanda luh

Baltimore, MD
Ms. Yanson

The first night we met, you yawned- and we laughed. We rode uneasily through an old haunted house, and I knew that you were scared, not of the house, but of me. It was dark, cramped, and dusty. Plastic painted fluorescence idly terrorized its victims. I don't think that we talked at all the entire time we bumped through that ride in our creaking, coffin-cart, so I'm sure that you yawned then, too; I just didn't notice.

When we wheeled back out and stepped into the false night, there were garish shop lights illuminating what was the ancient beauty of wooden boards and funnel cake in place of the flesh-melting sun- I really got a look at you. And I tried to concentrate, to get a first impression, but I was coerced into really listening, not really looking. When I really listened I heard crashes and sighs of water in place of the intrusion of humanity's roaring sonar dominance. Besides, if I looked straight at you I smiled and it was way too soon for smiling, so I snuck sidelong glances, and I saw blond, and quiet, understated athleticism -not much taller than myself.

I felt cute and feminine in my pink tank top and khaki skirt, but I didn't think anyone would notice. And when it started to rain I just felt stupid because we all played golf, and I was self-conscious of my barely skirted legs. You paid my way - and smiled - so I figured it was all right to look now, but I didn't feel like it anymore. Then on the way home I sat in the back seat of a white, industrial pick-up truck with you, and you were tired you said, so you yawned. Back at my place I hopped out of the pick-up, impressed by my timely gracefulness, and almost asked Can I see you again? But that was ridiculous; I said Thanks a lot! G'nite!

But I did see you again. I went on that boat one night and was afraid of the lightning I said, but I was really afraid of what might happen. We all sat in your friend's million-dollar sailboat with cherry-colored wood and white leather interior, huddling inside, safe from the storm rocking the hull, but then the rain stopped and they all left so you said Is it

ok if I kiss you? And my disbelief said yes, oh, yes for me. I threw my personal and routine zodiac into fraudulence then, took your phone calls slyly and listened to you yawn, saying I never yawn when I'm not with you; it must be your fault. That made me uneasy because you didn't make me yawn; you made me laugh, and the two extremes didn't compliment each other.

It was still summer next time I saw you, and you were still blond; we both wore black shirts in the blazing white sun. I laughed and smiled and talked while you laughed and smiled and listened, and I felt like we could do that forever. You drove a blue pick-up truck with hunting rifles and a bow and arrow in the back seat; I almost cried, so you turned my head away and kissed me. Short and sweet in the dusk - I was happy for just a minute. We wasted the rest of the day on a Ferris wheel, looking out over nothing but country, and then lay under a behemoth oak tree sprinkling grass on each other as you yawned - falling asleep to sweet, soulful country music and gnats.

One night we went out to dinner and you ordered shrimp and I loved the way you said it with you slightly southern accent like Forrest Gump. You would pull me up against your side and say shrimp, with a smooth sexy drawl through the last three letters, right in my ear just because you knew it would make me laugh even though it embarrassed you.

But after a while when we were all alone you wore crazy blue PJ pants with baseballs and bats and a bare chest that you must have shaved, it was smooth. And I wore pink plaid pants and a mustard shirt; I was as mismatched as we were together. No one was home except us, so we didn't care; we just listened to music and you fell asleep in my bed. When you left the morning was almost gone, and you were late for work, so I gave you chocolate donuts and told you to leave as you yawned conspicuously and drew me in close to you. I felt like I needed to ask Can I see you again? But instead I asked Was it what you expected? And you just yawned in reply as we sat hip to hip on the steps- your own laid back, lazily- lucid rendition of yes, oh, yes.

STRANGE AWAKENING\

keri kiewra

Irwin, PA
Mr. Fiorina

You're sitting in the dark. The sun set a little while ago, but you didn't turn on the light, because it seems like you haven't moved in hours, and you don't want to ruin a good thing.

You hear two footsteps on the linoleum. You don't see your mother hesitate at the doorway, you don't look. You stare at the same spot on the wall, next to the chair, below the television, where you've been staring all afternoon.

You suddenly feel very hot all over, you start to sweat. You wonder if you bothered to put deodorant on this morning, you try to remember this morning at all.

Oh, you think. This morning.

She turns on the light.

Your mother comes in and stands next to you. Sweetie, she says. Honey.

She puts her cold hand on your forehead and tells you you're sweating. Her hand feels like a breeze. You cheeks burn and turn red. You don't look at her. You can't.

She takes her hand off your forehead and drops it to her side. She stands there. You want her to go away but she doesn't get the hint. (She never gets the hints.) If you were looking at her, you would see the tears in her eyes, but you're not looking at her. You're looking at the wall, beside the chair, underneath the television.

She slips her hand into yours and you resent her for invading your stillness. You're pretty sure that you've never sat still this long in your entire life, even when you were sleeping, and she just ruined it.

Her hand in yours feels foreign. You brush it away. Without looking, you know this hurts her, and you don't care. You're glad. You want her to go away, but she doesn't get the hint

You wake up at seven o'clock. Mom is at office, dad is at office, brother is at friend's. You don't eat breakfast, you couldn't eat dinner yesterday. You make yourself a cup of coffee, pour it into your favorite cup. Take it downstairs, out onto the patio, in the sun. You sit, coffee in front of you, un-drunken.

You barely move. It's not very warm yet, it's a beautiful day. You hear birds chirping, and you resent them for breaking your silence. You sit, arms crossed over your chest (you are wearing long sleeves), legs getting marks on the backs of your thighs from the chair (you are wearing shorts). It's the last week of June, and you've been in the same mood since school ended. Longer than that probably, longer than you can care to remember. You should get your sunglasses, you think. You're going to ruin your retinas. You're going blind, you know it.

She sits down and you feel a bit better. She is sitting in the chair, close to the spot in the wall, not directly under the television. You have looked at her, but not her eyes. You have not yet seen her tears, although you are fairly certain they are there. She doesn't say anything, and neither do you.

A nurse comes in with a little paper cup with a little pill inside. Her hands are soft, and she smells like vanilla. You are pretty sure that if you were anybody else, you would like her. She smiles, big red lipstick on big red lips. Here you go, honey, she says, gives you the pill.

You don't know what the pill is, and you don't ask. You swallow it, no water. She says she'll be in with dinner in a little bit, and your mouth doesn't work to tell her that you can't eat. It's not that you aren't hungry, you (don't) explain to her, but you just can't move. She leaves before you (don't) say any of this.

Your mother says that Edward called and wanted to visit, but she told him you didn't want any visitors. (She never gets the hint.) You are grateful that she turned away the boy who is in love with you, although maybe he would have been good for you. He might have brought you flowers (you love flowers), maybe lilacs (your favorite). He knows all of your favorites, better than you do. You realize lilacs haven't been in season for weeks, and you didn't pick any when they were. You hate yourself for this missed opportunity. You do want Edward to come, you aren't very kind to him. You ought to apologize.

You would tell your mother to have him come, but your mouth is set. Your lips are heavy as boulders. They can't be moved, you're not strong enough today.

You put on your bathing suit, a pink and purple bikini that looks especially nice on you, especially since you just lost ten pounds. You stand in front of the mirror, though, hating your arms, and then you go and get a towel, wrap it around yourself. Cover yourself up. You go outside, wearing your movie

starlet sunglasses, and realize you don't want to get wet. You're so soft, so dry. You can't ruin that. You sit in the sun, wrapped in your towel, looking at your toes through your big black glasses. You stare at them until they are no longer your own. Some stranger's, sitting here on the patio, with carefully painted pink toenails.

The nurse brings your dinner. She puts the table over your lap, the tray on the table, smiling with giant cherry lips. Chicken, green beans, potatoes. Red jello is staring at you. You look the nurse in the eyes (are they the first eyes you've ever seen?) and tell her that you can't eat. Her big soft vanilla hand on top of yours, she tells you to try. She looks over her shoulder at your mother, sitting in the chair, close to the spot, wearing a beige pantsuit, with her legs crossed at the knee, looking at her hands. She winks at you, and then goes to your mother. Quietly asking her to come out into the hall, please.

The red-lipped vanilla nurse is your favorite person in the world.

You eat the jello. You don't like jello, and you've never liked it before, but you eat it. You are careful not to touch anything else on the plate, not wanting to ruin the untouched scene. It is very important to you that it looks like it did when you got it.

You go inside, eyes dazed from the sunlight. It's about eight, but you're not sure. You call Edward, even though you never call Edward. You never have, you don't want to lead him on. (But you do.) It rings several times. His mother answers, eventually, and in slurred speech asks you what the heel you want. You waiver for a moment and hang up. You shouldn't have called. You shouldn't lead him on.

Still wrapped in towel, you go to your parents' room and sit on their bed, feeling foreign and outside on their pristine bedspread, afraid you'll stain the white linens with your grassy feet. The Today Show is on, and you watch it. You are still wearing your bathing suit, still feeling warm and dry, still wrapped in a towel. They are talking about the big blockbusters of the summer. You won't see any of them. You sit on their bed for a half an hour, watching the Today Show, thinking about how you will not see any of them.

You can once again move. Maybe it was the red-lipped nurse, maybe it was the jello. You get out of the bed and go stand by the window. You have a perfect view of the parking lot. It's got an orange cast to it at this time of night, and all the cars look like they are sleeping. You don't see anyone coming or

going. You were hoping to see some guy with his thumb cut off running into the building or some new parents with a baby all bundled up walking to the car, but you don't.

The nurse comes back in. She says in a girl-talk sort of way that she out your mother out of the room and convinced her to go get some dinner herself. You wonder why she has taken such a liking to you, how anyone could, especially today. She talks to your back as you look out the window, hands on the ledge, looking for something that isn't there. She doesn't say that you have to finish your dinner, and somehow you know that she is supposed to. With a smile that you don't see, she says that you'd better eat your breakfast tomorrow, or else. At the doorway, she turns back, and tells you the pill you took will make you sleepy. You are looking forward to this.

You lay your towel down on the grass behind the pool. You come here often, no one can see you from the houses on top of the hill. You come here to be alone.

You take your hair out of your ponytail. It's long, brown, wavy. Comes down to the middle of your back. Everyone likes it but you. You put your sunglasses on. The world dims out a bit.

You climb back into bed and fall asleep rather quickly. It's warm in the room, and you sleep fitfully. But you will sleep through your mother not coming in to kiss your forehead goodnight, and you will sleep through the nurse coming in and standing by your bed. You will not hear her whisper Sleep Well, and you will not hear the short, silent prayer for you. You are sleeping, with no dreams.

An hour later, your neighbor Tim is mowing his lawn. You have never really liked him or his wife, Amanda. Some well-meaning yuppies that moved in next door. He wears suits to work and mows his lawn in athletic shorts advertising Penn State. They don't have children, but they're at least twice your age, so you have no idea what to call them. Mr. and Mrs. Morris. Tim and Amanda. Timmy and Mandy. The simple solution is never to speak to them, therefore never having to address them, therefore never feeling that awkward sensation in your stomach of having called someone the wrong name.

But Tim is mowing his lawn at this hour on this day. Because of this, you'll never speak to him again. You won't be able to bear it, never mind not knowing what name to call him, but what do you say to the man, twice your age, who has no children, but has a green jeep, what do you say to the man who

carried you up the hill wrapped in your towel and drove you to the emergency room because he didn't want to wait for the ambulance?

There's a blood stain in the back of his car because of you. He saved your life and in return you ruined his entire car. He'll try to trade it in, and the dealer will ask where that stain came from. Oh, he'll say, laughing, his hand on the back of his neck, my neighbors' kid slit her wrists last summer in her backyard, and I drove her to the hospital. The dealer will ask if you are okay, but will be thinking Who the hell slits their wrists in their backyard?

You wake up to the smell of lilacs. It is at first a vague sensation, a memory almost, of something you can't put your mind on. But with each breath it comes back to you, and with each breath you become more acutely aware of where you are and what has happened and what you have done, and who you are. You wonder, for a moment, if you are in a dream, because this strange awakening is too pleasant for reality. You open your eyes, first seeing Edward, his head in his hands, with his long black hair falling over his fingers. You wonder if he is asleep, but he looks up at you and tentatively smiles.

"Morning, sunshine."

"How long have you been here?"

He gets up, comes to you. "Not that long," he says, his hand lingering next to yours. You look at his hands, and they seem very beautiful to you. Everything looks very beautiful this morning.

You're pretty sure that he's been here all night.

You want to apologize but can't find the words. They don't make words for occasions like this, you think. You look at the lilacs next to your bed.

You want to lie there all day holding Edward's fingers, listening to him talk, hearing that quivering in his voice, that tightening in his throat, all the while feeling the rough edges on his long, bony fingers where he bit his nails for you.

"I'm glad you're here," is all you can manage to say.

Product Placement for Lonely People

emily o'leary

Franklin, MA
Franklin High School
Mrs. Dorothy Vosburgh

Days and weeks

Stalking you from the opposite street corner (always 30 feet away).

Traffic lights change, I lose you to a blinking "Walk" sign.

The day forgets you, moves forward, slowly.

That I'll-always-wish-I-had-done-it though

Pushes through my brain like a blood clot, and sticks.

I think I may do something crazy.

Closing in on my quarry.

The supermarket's neon sign glows electric,

A beacon for a technologically advanced heaven.

Watch you walk through the threshold,

And a few seconds later let myself be swallowed by the humming doors;

My feet are moving ahead of my brain.

Granny Smith apples! Jiffy peanut butter! Maxwell house coffee!

The Cheerios box in your hands like a rectangular sun!

Colombo yogurts in your grasp like whipped righteousness!

Light radiating from your fingertips!

I move closer, my back practically against yours, studying the soup cans,

The continue walking, holding one can, anticipating your next move.

I step out into the open aisle.

I feel you behind me like I'm one big fat magnet and you're an obedient paperclip.

Wait. A miscalculated step, a streak of steel motion.

One errant cart driven by a six-year-old hoodlum flies with the impossible speed of chargers from Hell

And catches my hip, brings me down,

Hard.

Down on the floor I grab your extended hand,

My fingers rove past the muscle of your fingers,

And onto that cushion right above your palm.

It's cold and functional, pulls me up like heavy machinery.

Am I all right?

I bleed, sir, but not killed.

Tears For Ink Soliders\

hannah howard

Princeton, NJ
Princeton Day School
Judy Michaels

You are talking to a girl who cries during history class.
I had never heard of the Crimean war until yesterday.
Can you imagine how the rivers ran
One hundred fifty years ago
Without Allen Ginsburg, without pinball machines?
And when the fight was over, the world has lost
300,000 people to dig graves,
To write battle marches. But what bothered me
Was that I had never heard of the Crimean war,
And didn't know that cavour
Had sent off 10,000 men to die
Somewhere in turkey or Russia, without their
Mothers and without Oprah, without
A Morrison record, because Morrison and record players
Would not come along for an eternity,
(and as far as the dying troops were concerned, they never came along at all).
And unlike in Russia, which one hundred and fifty years ago
Had cold that pierced like sword tips, and in turkey,
The Italian politicians did not want land-a piece of Romania,
Which I'm sure smelled of a million plums,
They did not want, as Russia wanted, control of the
Holy land, which I'm sure was as red as the plums were fragrant.
They sought instead a voice in Europe (which meant the world)
For their nation, which at this time was not yet a nation,
Just a peninsula where everyone spoke Italian and ate gnocci,
But there were no godfather movies. And no frank Sinatra.
And they got their voice, which still sounds like it did one hundred
And fifty years ago, or two hundred thousand, the voice of a nation
Who lives by the ocean,
And sends out 10,000 boys on a death march,
Which is cruel without Morrison,
These boys had no one to sing their death cries, or no one to put
It on a record, so maybe it did not hurt the same way,
Maybe there were ripe plums in their dreams,
They did not have Xerox machines, they did not know
That their deaths would lead to world war one,
They did not know that I would not know of the Crimean war,
And these boys were not heroes, I'm sure of it,
They were sexist and had to bear the weight of their own hatred,
They had to die without ever seeing a disco ball,
Without knowing they would lose the war, because a war can only be lost.
After my tears I see it is no great tragedy that they were born and lived and
died,
Rather that they marched to their death on page 784.

The Trail\ *hannah howard*

Princeton, NJ
Princeton Day School
Judy Michaels

I am fifteen, I can't drive yet, but you can,
You can do anything, you are going to Brown next year,
You are singing along with the radio,
You are a superhero with a trunk full of
Brian Hughes for Mercer County Exec lawn signs.
They are green like your eyes

Must be under your sunglasses and the glare from
The road, the race, the reason.
We pull over where route one loops into
A Netherlands of Walmarts and Hooters,
The perfect place to plant a glossy sign,
Spongy dirt sucking up the posts, digging its teeth in,
The whirl of traffic gripping the cardboard, our flag.
A cop car pulls over behind us, the man who gets out
Is fat and friendly, you roll down you window.
You are in your element. You take
Off your sunglasses, (a woman in a minivan zips by
With a dog in her lap, a target cashier
Smokes his fourth cigarette of the morning in the parking lot),

And there is a smile in your eyes, broad because
You live for this, because I can talk to cops, too,
But you love being older and wiser and turning down the radio
And telling the man with the badge what we are up to,
And winking at me and rolling the window back up

And turning the radio back on, blasting it this time,
Calling campaign headquarters, giving them the 411,
Being the messenger, being the warrior.

Today we canvas in Ewing, New Jersey,
And I know what to say and how to say it
But you tell me anyway before giving me the map.
I do the even house numbers, you do the odd,
And we go separately door to suburban door,
Meeting barking dogs with bandanas and kids in pjs,

There is a man with a shirt that says "world's best
Dad," but he looks so immensely sad, sadder than
The highway and the republicans and the songs on the radio.
I wish I had more to give him than a sales pitch,

And here I am finding
You soil and sky, your eyelids and fairytales,
Rallies and glossy brochures,
We are like evangelicals, selling our candidate or selling god,
What is the difference-what matters
Is the crunch of leaves under our feet.

It is fall, campaign season is the season of dying,
Or at least of the sun getting tired, drooping
Under the weight of the sky,

And when Brian Hughes wins there are
Late night parties and hugs and twinkling eyes,
But winter is coming, we have no one left to fight for,
We go home, we buy batteries at target, we talk only on the
phone.

A Birth\ *robin myers*

Maplewood, NJ
Sophia Giamazzi

We ran to the barn in the dark
bearing flashlights, beams
skimming over mud
Alert with cold
and the smells of dirt and grain and peat,
we circled the first stall.

We were a row of rubber boots along
the rafters and the chicken coops.
We didn't know what to do with our lights,
with our feet we hadn't seen
such a season of birth before,
of tender, counted deaths,
and we met eyes across the hay.

The ewe crouched before us,
her back buckled against the baby
slung too low in her womb.
There was not a noise,
but a tail forcing out first
and if this seared her,
she was silent.
One among us knew
what it meant, what was wrong
with the organs, the tissue,
and told us, "Her uterus
is turning inside out."

Someone ran for the farmer.
It took another hour
in the textures of the dark,
the fleece, straw, rubber, blood,
for him to pull the backwards baby to the
front
An hour, for him to reach into the channels
of tense wet skin
and pull her flooded,
into the must of the barn

He took her by the feet
and swung her in an arc of greased limbs and
pinked flesh.
He spun her into breath.

We were awed and sick:
this first act of saving,
the shock of the sac crumpled on the ground,
the strange, spindly creature
who had come out of it.
We look at each other again,
and at the newest among us,
unaware of our marvel
and learning her lungs
in the hush.

THEY BURNED LIKE TWISTED HEARTS\

dan corkum

Canton, MA
Mrs. Baker

He emptied the shoebox over the table
Pouring out four by five windows,
Five by seven doors, black canister husks
And six-frame sets of negatives
Two years of caustics, slow corrosion
Reduced to memories etched in cellulose

Her, sucking down cowboy killers,
Staring at the lens like she would
Eat him alive if he pressed the shutter

Them, silent in a Dallas-bound
Train, passing time with a deck of
Cards and a bottle of Goldschlager

Her again, with an acrid gaze
Looking up from a yellowed
Dog-eared copy of Nietzsche

And one by one, yellow fingers
Licked the glossy prints, pushing
A band of sepia before them, dragging
A black charcoal train in their wake.
The dying ashes smoldered for hours
Leeching oxygen from the room.



Sara Doskow\New York, NY



WRITERS INSTITUTE

AT SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY

The Visiting Writers Series: Seven writers visit campus each year (One of them for a week-long residency). Recent visitors have been Tobias Wolff, Andre Dubus III, Li-Young Lee, Billy Collins, Sharon Olds, Robert Boswell, Jayne Anne Phillips, Louise Gluck, Eavan Boland, Richard Bausch, Dagoberto Gilb, Ted Conover, and Tom Perrotta.

The Susquehanna Review, Essay, and RiverCraft: Three distinct magazines are edited and produced by students—a national magazine featuring work from undergraduate writers from across the country, a nonfiction magazine, and a magazine of fiction and poetry from Susquehanna student writers.

Endowed Writing Prizes and Scholarships: Writing scholarships are available to incoming writing majors based on the quality of their writing portfolios. Prizes of as much as \$1000 are awarded to students chosen each year on the basis of work published in our student magazines.

The Student Reading and Chapbook Series: Seven student readings are presented each year. Senior writing majors edit and produce chapbooks that showcase their best work.

Internships: Susquehanna's Writing Majors have had recent internships with national magazines, advertising agencies, professional writing organizations, nonprofit foundations, newspapers, public relations firms, radio stations, churches, businesses, and schools.

Graduate Programs: Within the past five years, Writing Majors have been accepted with fellowships or assistantships to such outstanding

graduate writing programs as Iowa, Columbia, Hollins, Indiana, Washington, Arizona, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Boston University, Ohio State, Mills, UNC-Greensboro, UNC-Wilmington, George Mason, Rutgers, and The New School.

In addition, the Writers Institute sponsors **Writing-in-Action Day**, which brings 200 high school seniors to campus for workshops in all genres of writing. Each summer, the Institute offers the one-week **Advanced Writers Workshops for High School Students**. Participants live on campus and concentrate on fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction, working closely with published writers.

The Writing Faculty have published twenty-four books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, many of which have been used in classrooms throughout the United States. They have won major book prizes such as the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction, National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowships, Pushcart Prizes, and magazine prizes. They regularly publish their work in such periodicals as Harper's, Newsday, DoubleTake, The Paris Review, American Scholar, The Georgia Review, and Poetry. 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 at Susquehanna, 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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