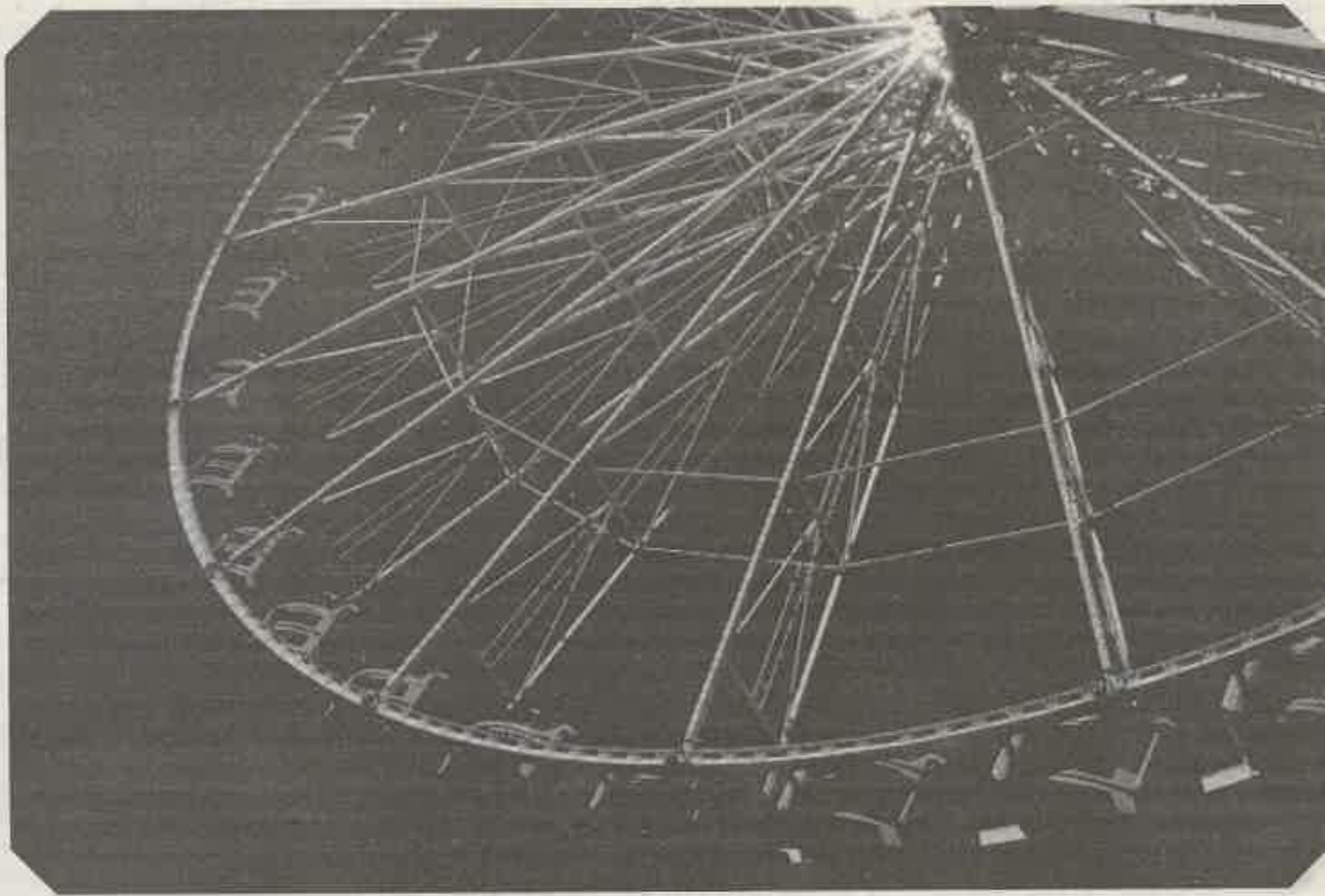
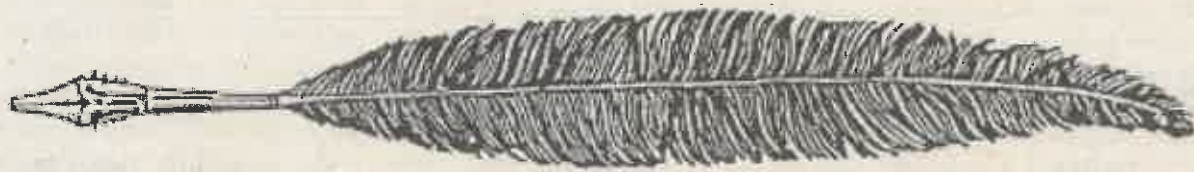


Susquehanna
UNIVERSITY

THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Volume 28

\$3

Introduction

Welcome to the twenty-eighth issue of *The Apprentice Writer*, which annually features the best writing and illustrations from more than 4,000 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 nearly 3,500 schools.

Our growing program in Editing and Publishing is now giving our Creative Writing Majors an opportunity to showcase what they have learned by working on one or more of the four magazines the Susquehanna Uni-

versity Writers Institute publishes each year. Susquehanna's Creative Writing Major now enrolls 165 undergraduate students, who are taught primarily by six widely-published writers. If you are interested in learning more about the Creative 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 17870-1164. Please include your name and address on each page of your submission. The deadline is March 1, 2011.

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Chaos

Hanna Yangilmau
GLENN DALE, MD

IT WASN'T ONE of Janise's good days. Her genetics test had been a low C, which brought her overall grade down to a B, which peaked her anxiety for the rest of the period. She'd been constantly tapping and wiggling and bending over, repeating the whole routine over again on the other side of her desk, until Heather reached over and firmly grabbed her hand. Then Janise had to slide her hands into her lap, take out her sanitizer, and rub it in thoroughly several times. She'd missed the entire lesson on X-inactivation.

Even after the sanitizer, she felt the touch. It was like Heather had never let go. Janise could feel the pressure of her fingers and imagine the teeming colonies of bacteria. She bit her chapped lips and a scabbed-over crack erupted. She licked it away nervously, wondering if she should ask to go to the bathroom. She could wash her hands there. Once the idea took hold it wouldn't let go; it gnawed away at her, the touch, the germs, the sanitizer, the bathroom, the blood filling in her lips like water running into the cracks of a desert. She tried to keep her hands in her lap. She went to the bathroom at least four times every day, and her teachers were starting to complain. That was why she brought the hand sanitizer, but it wasn't the same. It didn't help.

Her foot accidentally shot out and kicked against the leg of her chair. She banged the leg on the other side. Balance.

The teacher's voice was a monotone in the background. Janise was feeling tight inside herself, as if her outer layer was a size too small and all the organs and bones under her skin were being ground together in a fine sauce. She had an all-over tingling awareness of her physical boundaries; she could feel the thin invisible layers that separated her soul from her body, her tight-knit body from the rest of the casual, critical world. She began to rap her knuckles softly against her desk: five with one hand, five with the other. Ten, the number that usually calmed her down. It

didn't work this time, so she devoted her concentration to drumming out ten sets of ten. She did it very, very lightly, but even so, after a few minutes heads began to turn toward her. She felt heat building in her cheeks and neck but kept at it.

*Tap tap tap tap tap, tap tap tap tap tap—
tap tap tap tap tap, tap tap tap tap tap . . .*

"Janise," Heather hissed.

"Is there a problem?" the teacher asked, turned halfway around with her hand up to the chalkboard.

"No," said Heather.

"Yes," corrected Janise, softly. "May I go to the bathroom?" She kept her voice low. She didn't like when people looked at her.

The woman at the front of the room—blue-gray hair, sturdy hips and legs, arm fat that hung on the bone like sheets on a line, plough lines running up and down her weathered cheeks—turned and frowned, employing the folds that were already there, barely even deepening them. Her lips were nearly gone; only two thread-thin red lines remained, like withered slices of tomato skin. Janise felt cold inside every time those gray eyes looked at her. She felt the desperate urge to grasp her ankles. A few months before she'd thought that maybe if she did, she'd never end up looking like that woman, small and pale and shriveled against the chalkboard. She'd age gracefully. She knew this wasn't true, but once the idea entered her head, she couldn't not do it. Even as the blue-covered head nodded, Janise rolled her pencil off the desk and briefly wrapped her fingers around the top of her boots before picking it up.

She was careful not to scrape the floor as she pushed her chair back. She hated the sound of the green-gray tiles shrieking metallicly at the touch of the chair legs. She usually just shifted her weight and lifted the chair the tiniest bit before pushing it backwards with her knees. Once she was up, she wiped the desk carefully with her hand five times, then repeated the process on the seat of the chair. Ten. A safe number. She was dreadfully, sickeningly aware of the entire class' eyes on her, but she still pushed in the chair carefully, making sure both edges of the arched plastic back touched the desk at the same time. Sometimes they didn't, and she had to keep on trying until they did.

She walked out, holding her hands far in front of her, the girls' bathroom pass dangling from its leather thong off her arm. She had to touch her ankles and wipe the desk and chair

meticulously clean, but she was also aware of all the dirt and muck that dwelled on such surfaces. She always washed her hands after such rituals. She touched each locker and cinderblock in the fifth row from the ground on the wall on her way. The hall seemed endless and stifling, a looping tunnel of gray walls and lockers and ceilings. It made her dizzy and disoriented, and all the while she was thinking of the C and the crushing weight of everyone's amused gaze. Once she missed a block, and she had to walk back to the door of her classroom and start over again. Seven minutes had already passed, and she still hadn't reached the bathroom.

Janise came to the door of the black tiled girls' room and slowly walked in. She wasn't paying much attention to what she was doing; her eyes were filled with red ink and all the imagined whispers and thoughts of her classmates blocked her ears. Crazy—insane—obsessive—weird—crazy—crazy—crazy. Future bag lady. Future card-carrying member of the Ulcers of America Society. She lethargically twisted the knob for hot water, waited until steam started rising from the silver jet of liquid, then pumped some soap into her palm and stuck her hands in the stream, holding her breath. It felt like fire-lit metal molding around her skin, but if she could tolerate the heat for ten seconds before turning on cold, everything would be okay.

She eventually cooled the water, barely thinking about what she was doing. She cringed with every memory of the period: the test, the touch, Heather's accusing pond-black eyes. The subtle noises of irritation at her knuckles rapping. Her teacher's pursed lips. Everything rammed at her, a million instances of a million people passing judgment. Her mouth filled with a sour, sticky taste, and her stomach drew itself tight with embarrassment. Her breathing came faster and faster as she replayed everything in her head. Her classmates' faces turned into clownish caricatures. Their minds were all bent towards Janise and her insanity, her OCD weirdness.

She washed her hands for the fourth time, soap and lather frothing up in the sink like ice or a foamy pile of lace. The silky network was destroyed, though, as tears slid down her cheeks and chin and dripped down, carving their way through the froth. Her mouth pulled back in a grotesque grin, and her eyes cinched shut with tears; her face looked like a carnival mask in the mirror. She took her foamed hand and hit the image, then had to

wash again.

She spread the foam up her arms and kept sobbing. She scrubbed until her skin turned red and her fingernails dragged on the surface, raising flower-pink welts against the blue and silver bubbles. She beat the edge of the sink with her palm, once, twice, then did the same with the left one, listening to the bones of her hands creak and the muffled thumps of the porcelain.

Her mouth was full of saliva, and she wanted to rinse it with acid. Her ribs wrapped around her lungs like chains, and she wanted to rip them out. She wanted to stay in this bathroom forever, wasting water, killing dolphins, washing, washing, washing, washing until her skin shriveled back and her muscles fell off in saturated ropes, and her bones crumbled away and she didn't have to deal anymore. She wanted to lift the lid off the toilet and vomit out this sickness, but all she could think of were germs, disease, balance, control.

Someone was staring at Janise, a girl with gold eyelids and heels three inches high. Her face was furrowed in a look of mingled pity and disgust.

"Oh my god, are you all right?" she asked, her voice overly loud, her acrylic nails clutched around the purse she held up to her chest as if to shield her from the crying girl's insane deluge of tears. Her wide painted eyes gaped at the sink, full to the brim with suds. "Do you want me to like, get the nurse or something?"

Janise shook her head. She had to stop now. She had to. She hated the disbelieving scrutiny strangers always gave her. She hated feeling that this normal, stable girl was peering at her with the same emotions she'd feel if she was inspecting a bug. She willed her arms out of the filmy cake of bubbles; she directed her hands to come out, to take the paper towels, turn the spigot off, wipe herself down, take her bag, walk out; she demanded them to, ordered them to. They stayed immersed in the water, and she cried all the harder.

Eventually the girl left, clearly too disturbed to go to the bathroom or touch up her makeup or whatever she was planning to do. Janise stayed behind, crying and shaking and washing for the—seventh? eighth?—time. It bothered her that she couldn't remember which. She might have been able to stop at ten; now she had to start over again.

As she lifted her hands and dipped them back in, she noticed patches covering her

arms and palms, pinkish-red welts where the living skin was scraping away under the abrasive soap and her own fingernails. She concentrated on those areas, rubbing at them with a soaked paper towel, lifting more flakes from the surface and leaving livid crimson tinges, like spattering of paint. She could imagine working away at them till they gave way to sinewy muscle and bone. She could imagine disappearing into chaos.

The skin washed through her fingers like snow. She bit her already bloody lip and kept on scrubbing.

The Insult

Elizabeth Bennett
MILTON, MA

"MAY I TAKE YOUR ORDER?" The question escaped the child like breath, repeated over and over like a well known song wedged into her memory. Grandma's apron, red with gold accents, wound around the child's waist and her toes slid to the front of Mum's stilettos as she wheeled about the apartment, fingers clutching pen and pad. Her chicken scratch cluttered pages and pages of the glitter-crusted notebook, recording weeks of imaginary BLT's, tomato soups and pumpkin pies. When she was satisfied that everyone had chosen the best of the menu, she stumbled back to her kitchen, a line of waist-high bookshelves set into the wall, to fix lunch for her customers.

When her tray swayed, stacked high with paper plates, she served lunch: colorful wooden blocks, two crackers and if the customers were lucky, a Hershey Kiss. She knew her customers were pleased when she felt a shiny new quarter drop into the palm of her hand . . . a future unborn. That was when she realized she wanted to be a waitress. What could be more glamorous?

"May I take your order?" The question flaked off her lips like dead skin. Hunched over the counter in the numb of *Dave's 24 hour Diner*, the young woman stared at the face before her. His marble eyes drilled the televi-

sion screen flashing silent reruns above their heads. Heart crushing like a kicked Coke can, the woman slinked to the kitchen where the cook slumped over the cold stove. The young woman murmured that she would be taking off early. It was two a.m. Trading her greasy black apron for her winter coat, she flicked off the back lights; oily yellow light seeped under the kitchen door from the front.

Outside, the weather was turning. The sharp March night had warmed unseasonably, causing the woman to peel the coat from her clammy arms. Moving quickly under night's brow, she hastened down the road. The dark pressed in around her, panting hot unnatural breath down her collar. She averted her gaze, as a car crept to a stop just ahead of her. Panic swelled her throat. A man slowly rolled down the window, his eyes silently groping the windshield. Hair clung to his gritty forehead. Hands heavy with dishwasher stink sunk against the wheel. Hands like hers—cracked, swollen. The forgotten apron bunched across his hips. Her hands trembled with the last of her fear as she let out a rush of embarrassment and relief. Gesturing to the passenger seat, the man asked if she needed a ride. The image of her basement-apartment, empty and cold, leaked into her head. Though doubt clawed at the hollows of her stomach, loneliness chewed at her heart. The woman crawled into the passenger seat, knowing that her apartment was not a place she wanted. It was a place where she hoisted laundry upon her sharp hips, scrubbed counters until they were as grey as the fraying washcloth, and gaped at the hole in the wall next to her bed. The darkness sealed her into the car, her thighs suctioning to the plastic seat covers.

As they slipped down vacant streets, their shallow breath smeared the hush. His eyes never strayed from the road. He never spoke. She did not try to make him. It was better that way, she thought, safer.

As the night began to crumble toward the road, the man pulled up beside a curb where a bus stop sign loitered like a broken old woman. He slowly turned to face the young woman. His eyes, questioning, caused her to slither toward the door. She stepped out, wavering small and sheer, like a memory on the side of the road. As the car rolled away, the man fumbled around in his pocket. Fingers emerging with a quarter, the man braced the coin against his thumb and forefinger. It glinted through the air to land at the woman's feet, heavy and gaping.

Come Down Now

Layla Treuhaft-Ali
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY

WHAT CAN I SAY? I was probably in over my head. But it was summer, and I was utterly intoxicated with sweat and grass. Those two wonderful smells. Whenever I smell them I feel inexplicably joyous, and at the same time hopelessly bitter because I know that the very thing that makes me so happy is out of my reach. The memory of sweat and grass and sun and guitars washes over me and makes me want to cry every time I go to Central Park on a Sunday in May.

The summer of oh-eight lasted for four weeks of July, and eighteen months later I am still not out of its grasp. That was the second year I went to Na'aleh, a small, Jewish, socialist sleepaway camp. If the word camp can even describe it, which it can't. The Hebrew word is *machaneh*. *Machaneh*—the foggy cocoon of solitude, the blunt sunshine of family. *Machaneh*—the painstakingly beautiful stars at night, the earthy comfort of moist, brown soil. Tucked away in the obscure town of Bainbridge, New York, we interspersed our daily conversations with Hebrew words, songs, and inside jokes. This was my real education, not in any classroom, but here plucking blades of grass from the ground.

There were five other girls in my *tzrif* (cabin): my sister May, Juliana, Jackie, Shoshana, and Simmonne. For the first week we laughed late at night and eased into a friendship. Juliana, Jackie, Shoshana, May, and me—why were we such passionate friends by the end of the summer? Well, it was Simmonne. She bragged about all the eighteen-year-olds that had flirted with her, screamed loudly and obnoxiously—first thing in the morning, might I add—if she got water on herself, and wore shirts that said, “I’m not perfect, but some parts of me are pretty awesome.” Eventually we found out that we all completely despised her. During *Zman Sport* (sports time) we chose the “Jogging” option, which Simmonne would never deign to do, so that we could amble around the perimeter

of the field venting about how much we hated her. Once, we went to the *tzrif* when Simmonne wasn't there and pranced around in her push-up bras. And this is how we became passionately close. Understand, I had never had friends like these in my life. I felt I had learned so much from them: a few talents I hadn't known I had, *all* of my faults . . . and then there was *that*. I became more “mature” that summer. “Mature” as in, I couldn't get through camp without asking the *Tzofot* (this was what the female part of my age group, or all the girls in my *tzrif*, were called) what the meaning of “that's what she said” was. So I found out. My *education* happened so fast that by the end I caught all of the innuendos I heard and memorized the lyrics to “The Bad Touch.” Everything I know, I learned at summer camp. Everything.

Music buzzed through the air like the gnats themselves. We sang constantly. We sang at *Hitkansut* (flag-raising and flag-lowering), during *Shira* (there was an actual period on the schedule where we learned songs), before meals, after meals, and every night right before bed, swaying in a circle and passing pulses and kisses around. And when we weren't singing, we were screaming chants like “We're from Na'aleh, we're from Na'aleh, other people think we're shit, they don't know the half of it.” We had speakers in our *tzrif*, and someone's iPod was always playing. All of my current favourite singers are ones that I discovered at camp, as are all of my favorite songs: “I'm Yours,” “White Houses,” “99 Red Balloons.”

And Shabbat! The Jewish Sabbath lasts from Friday night to Saturday night, and actually felt like a Day of Rest. For lunch on Friday we had a picnic outside, and then at night we travelled up to an almost holy place called Shabbat Hill and sang songs in Hebrew. Then we headed outside for *Rikud* (Israeli folk dancing)—learning the dances by watching people's feet and remembering. Now I folkdance every Monday night, and the complex rhythms, steps (yemenite, *czerkezia*, *mayim*, *chacha*, sway like a palm tree!), and melodies are truly a part of my soul. Each Shabbat, one age group got to present a skit riddled with inside jokes and a song to the whole camp. The song that the *Tzofim*, my age group, sang became our favorite song—“They will see us waving from such great heights, come down now, they'll say. But everything looks perfect from far away, come down now, but we'll stay.”

I felt so loved there. There was the love of

my three new friends, to whom I felt I could empty my heart's garbage can. There was the love for my *madrichim*, my counselors whom I considered older siblings. Especially Josh Marantz. He was twenty, with curly black hair and a scruffy almost-beard and a guitar. He was *the rikud-man*. I still refer to him as my big brother, because he took care of us like a parent but was as crazy as any kid, and loved us every bit as much as we (or at least, I) loved him. And my *madricha*, Lee-el, who looked like she could have been my older sister—same hair, same skin color, same body shape—and who was absolutely beautiful. And there was the summer-crush on Jonah Reider, the boy all my friends tried to convince me was a jerk, who had been the first boy to give me a hug the previous summer, as well as the first boy I had ever partner danced with. I guess you could say that he had captured my little bird of a heart and, although it had migrated for the winter, it flew straight back with warm weather. On Saturday nights, to mark the end of Shabbat, we had *Havdalah*—we would lie on the ground, our stomachs serving as our friends' pillows, and stargaze, while music played in the background. Then we went to *Medurah*—the campfire—where we ate ice cream and watched non-serious talent acts (Musical, where people sang songs and read poems, came beforehand). For warmth, the *Tzofot* bundled together on a blanket. Lee-el and a few other *madrichim* joined us. Josh Marantz cooed at how cute we were. We called it our *Tzofot Blob*. After there were no more skits, we sang late into the night. Songs like “That Good Ol' Mountain Dew,” “If I Had a Hammer,” and “Country Roads” with a special chorus at the end that had been adapted to fit the road. . . . I separated us from the rest of the world. . . . I'd take me home, to the place. . . . *Machaneh Na'aleh*, take me home, to the place. . . . “Country Road.” This was my . . . was sky and stars and . . . very dirt was a part . . . forceful to ever . . . drawn to all . . . birth, my true . . . wanted—to . . . utterly, full . . .

Yet the . . . terly, f . . . to su . . . m . . . years . . . law. Now

The Spoon Chronicles

Jenn Supp
BALTIMORE, MD

The potatoes wither and rot,
and my clothes are no longer folded.
You wave your hands and water will not come,
for it is afraid of your skin.

The singing of birds reaches this house no longer,
for they sit on the clothes line with the cat
and sing their together-woes
late into the night.

The ground has been especially hard
since the walls are now painted blue,
your chair at dinner is left cold—
you find more comfort on the table.

One day, we will look for a spoon,
and it will not surface,
but sink to the bottom of the ocean
with its fallen brethren.

I will walk a thousand times
to the place in the tree
where you recline
and call you to supper,
so smile, dearie, for the sun has missed you.

only one who felt this magnetic pull? Was I the only one who thought of herself as a socialist, who liked the discussions about things like stereotypes and what effect the media has on us, who was there for a reason besides the jokes and games and friendships? Because I don't think I was ever really a part of those jokes. Thinking back on the Tzofot, I remember loving each of them individually. But when it was all five of us, somehow I was the one who never heard the joke (was it my ears or that they were whispering too softly?) and was left asking what was so funny while Jackie and Juliana rolled on the floor laughing; I was the one who didn't want to whisper when we were supposed to be silently gazing at the stars; I was the one whose jokes got responses like, "Was that supposed to be funny? It wasn't." And who

did I have besides them? At *machaneh*, there is an age hierarchy that Tzofim get the worst of: you're too cool for the younger kids but not cool enough for the older kids. I loved most of the *madrachim*, but I couldn't just follow them around. So did I really feel like I was one with every single person here? Wanted and appreciated? Part of the whole? Yes. Yes. Yes. No.

My dad, who wasn't Jewish, couldn't see what I liked about Na'aleh. "It's not like it's one of your interests, or something. You don't get anything out of it. Take a class instead." When I tried to explain that it would be like leaving my family, he said, "So you made friends. They'll still be your friends if you don't go, right?" What could I tell him? That I was at such great heights, and that I would not come down? The first person to find out was Josh Marantz, my big brother. He sent an email to my mom asking if we were really leaving, and begging us not to. My mom didn't know how to respond, and I don't know if she ever did. The dad of one of the *Tzofim* emailed to say that his son would be really upset if we didn't come. The Tzofot said they didn't know what they would do without us. The camp director even called us "the most popular kids in camp." It was a terrible fight. All these people I loved playing tug-o-war over me.

Well, in July 2009 I took a creative writing class at Columbia University that was . . . nice. Except that I cried a lot, so my family thought I was depressed, and probably still does. I'm not sure how much of it had to do with Na'aleh and how much was just me. I do know I wrote to the Tzofot (now, having moved up one age level, they were *Bonot*) once a week. They wrote to say that everyone missed us. I sent them a poem I had written in the class, and they read it at Musicale. Although we'd thought we wouldn't be able to come up for Visitors' Day, at the last second there was a change of plans, and we got a ride with Juliana's parents. It was such a magical—and such a sad—day for me. Josh Marantz was the first to see us, and practically knocked us over. Apart from the inevitably awkward "So why didn't you come to camp?" it was wonderful to see everyone again. And when we walked into the Bonot *tzrif* and heard the girls scream, I wondered for the eight-hundred-billionth time that summer whether I had made the right decision listening to my dad. People begged us to stay for the second session. One *madrach*, who we nicknamed Moose, offered to buy

us clothes, toothbrushes, and sleeping bags. And when we laughed, he said, "No, I'm serious." Jonah Reider danced with me twice and the second time he talked to me. It was dancing and hugs and a messy attempt to drink everything in. And at the end of the night I felt so heavy and tired and nostalgic and empty that I was downright miserable.

And then we went to Fall Seminar—a reunion where campers from Na'aleh and one of its sister camps, Galil, all stayed at Galil for a weekend. It was us and Shoshana and Juliana. May made a joke from oh-eight, to which Shoshana replied, "Yeah, that got replaced." So that she could have something to say back, May snapped, "You know what, Shoshana? Fuck you." Which apparently hurt Juliana's feelings. And then Shoshana and Juliana took a long walk, talking, and completely ignored us. So we had a fight, and it wasn't the first, and it ended the same way all the others did: with all of us tearfully promising to be better friends. But I had lost faith in the friendship that I had thought would see me through college and marriage and old age and death. And with that I lost faith in everyone at *machaneh*. They all had their new inside jokes. They had their oh-nine. I was not a permanent fixture. I had not even been replaced. Just forgotten. They didn't love me the way I loved them. I realize that for me, *machaneh* was like a fairytale. Something false that I desperately wanted to believe was true. Echoes and wishes and sweat and grass, stitched tightly and painfully into my stomach, torment me every time my mind wanders toward the throbbing bliss that I was almost a part of. So I am left with this tenacious longing, this complete belief in the concept of *machaneh* and this utter lack of trust for anything that has to do with it fighting each other in my mind.

I think it's because they're all so much more carefree, or thoughtless, or bad-ass, or happy than I am. I've spent eighteen months wondering why I couldn't be as happy as them. I've realized now that I was not meant for the same kind of happiness that they were. Theirs does not go beyond a laugh. My happiness lies at much greater heights than does theirs. It is the passionate, comfortable, terrible, awe-inspiring love that will never be returned. It pricks my eyes with needles of almost-tears. It is incomplete and impossible and beautiful and out of my reach. I am on my Kiphill Road. I am probably going to crash into something, because I am looking backwards.

Anywhere You Are

Victoria Elliot
INTERLOCHEN, MI

US:

If the needlepoint tacked up above the microwave at my parents' house is right, home is where the heart is. Maybe home is where you're most comfortable with yourself. Whatever. I guess my home is here in your backyard, twisting dandelions between my fingers while smoke drifts from your mouth.

To anyone besides us, this might sound like the picture perfect description of young love. But it's not; only one of us is young and neither use that word.

Sometimes, when you're on top of me, I count the wrinkles around your face. I imagine there's one for each year you were alive and I wasn't. You've got five around each eye.

My friends warn me about you constantly. You're too old for me, and I'm too young to be messing around with men close to thirty. They're probably right, but now we're on our backs in your yard and the sun is drawing the shadows of leaves across our skin. It's the hottest week so far this summer, and bits of dead grass dig into my legs.

"I really just want to be warm white light that pours all over everyone I love."

I laugh, sit up, and take the joint from your hand. "You're high."

You smile, run your hands through your hair. It needs a cut and so does the scruff on your face. "You'd be soaked in light until your hair glowed and your teeth were bleached."

Sometimes, when we're wasted and you're on top of me, you recite my poetry about you and think I don't notice. Sometimes you try to write lines about me. I try not to listen.

I take a slow hit off the joint and blow smoke into your face.

You wave it away and laugh at me. "Sometimes, baby girl, *I don't know what to do about this dream and you.*"

Most comfortable place or not, I wish your backyard weren't so sunny. I can't stand this heat.

THEM:

I'm a winter baby; my parents got me in the middle of the biggest blizzard ever to hit this boring Midwest town. It was a white-out with an episode of Oprah playing in the background. They were drinking their tea and watching Oppy and then suddenly—uh oh, babytime. I guess lots of things in utero stay with you; my addiction to chai, my repulsion of warm weather, my TiVo-ed collection of daytime talk shows.

The episode my parents were watching right before I was born is the only show Oprah taped that I don't want to see. It's about teenage girls and their parents, how the daughters disappoint and lose the trust of the adults.

Occasionally, my parents tell this story of my birth, laughing at the subject matter of my wintertime Oprah. It's ironic; I'm a perfect daughter. They know less than half of my real life. I'm seventeen and they think I've done nothing worse than get drunk that once. It was the only time I wasn't careful enough.

US:

You bring me stuffed animals from time to time, like to have them on the bed when we sleep together, tell me to call you Daddy. I leave the animals around my room, already pink enough as it is; a plush congregation outlining the mattress when I'm under the blankets. When I'm mostly buzzed and we're in my room, I'm sure their plastic eyes watch me as we move together.

THEM:

A short list of other reasons I should have never, ever started dating Billy, according to my friends:

He's too old. He pays taxes, he was born a whole decade before me, he's a DJ, DJ's are players, he has a DUI, he didn't go to college, his job isn't steady, he shows me off like some kind trophy, he's a stoner, he's a partier. He treats me like a little girl, he likes for me to be a little girl. I am a little girl, though, comparatively, and I try to play that up for him because he likes it. But it's not like he acts as though I'm seven years old. He treats me like I'm in high school, and I am. And maybe I am a little bit of a trophy, but what older man wouldn't brag that he could still get a young girl to have him?

THEM:

I spent the night at Michelle's house in a tent in her backyard with her boyfriend and another one of our friends, Julia. We sat

around a campfire and drank until I couldn't lift a bottle to my mouth without banging it against my teeth. We could barely control our laughter each time. I can only put together bits and pieces of the night, but I remember that I had the white plastic chair with a broken arm. Someone put gas into the fire, and I freaked out and fell back. The yard was large and full of pine trees and bushes, twigs that stuck to our clothes. Somehow we ended up making it into the tent, Michelle throwing up all over outside. I woke up at five in the morning in the early light and sat on the grass, watching birds.

Julia and I left, not bothering to get anything to eat or to fix appearances. She had to go to work; I had to get home. After stopping by the carwash her boyfriend worked at for a quick kiss, she dropped me off at my house, and I didn't make it through the front door before my mother stopped me and asked, "Are you drunk?"

US:

You've taken to texting me the lyrics of what you've declared our song whenever you miss me. I'm almost always waking up in the early morning to you writing "*last night, i had this dream about you,*" or "*why don't you play the game?*" wanting to hear some sort of reassurance that I'm still in love with you. I never know how to reply anymore, but I usually go along with it, send back the rest of whatever line I get. Lately, though, I've been thinking that it's your way of burrowing into my mind. I can't listen to music without thinking of you.

THEM:

When you still can't control your body or emotions, there is nothing left to do but cry and tell your mother yes, you are drunk, and you are very, very sorry.

She'll stuff you into her car, ask you to ride with her while she goes to the most alarming place she can think of, the ghetto of Detroit. You'll agree, still feeling guilty, still wiping at your eyes that just won't stop.

I'd gone with my mom into the bowels of the city before, but this time she didn't watch street signs or directions, this time she drove around aimlessly, telling me that I was getting to that age where everyone does something, just to be careful, she wasn't going to tell my father, and I was getting to be a young woman, I could make choices.

And that's how it started, pretty simple. No one would have predicted or imagined even,

I assume, that I'd work as hard as I could to mess myself up. It's not a conscious effort, but it's in everything I do.

US:

I laugh when you roll and lean over me for the joint. I'm not smoking it, just letting the sweet scent mix into my hair, my clothes. I've told probably everyone I know that I think people who smoke after 25 are losers, but here I am, giggling at a loser as you throw handfuls of stiff, tan grass at me.

"Give me a kiss," you tell me, palm clutch-

ing another clump.

"Why would I do that?"

You pull me closer to you so that our noses almost touch, bloodshot blue eyes boring right into mine. "Come on, who's Daddy's little girl?"

And I don't really want to, but I kiss you.

THEN:

After the tent occurrence at the end of junior high, there was a period of partying and then a constant parade of men. I might still be in high school, but I don't get involved with anyone else who is. There was Nathan and Tom and Pete and Matthew and Kevin and Zac and now Billy.

Kevin and Zac were the first two, in the backseat of Julia's car. It was parked in the lot of the local university, towards the end of a long line. A large snow mound mostly hid us from sight, but the fogged windows were probably pretty telling. Julia sat in the front, bored. She read a book and smoked and played music off her iPod.

Kevin and Zac were direct opposites of each other. Kevin was a bear of a man, long shaggy hair covering slate eyes, fingers that felt like hard work. Zac was more slender, thoughtful, the kind of guy who'd call at three in the morning to ask you to whisper his name.

US:

Occasionally, I swear you can tap into my thoughts, especially now as you ask, "Did you like them as much as me?"

"No, babe," I say, lifting my head to peck you on the cheek. "You're special."

And you are special. Important, at least. None of the others were important. Now that you're beginning to be a prominent DJ in the area, the kind of guy who shows up on party pic sites, it's good to be on your arm, people like me, want to be me. Usually we lie and say I'm nineteen. An eight-year difference is a lot better than a ten year one; it makes it legal too.

Maybe I like that you're slightly dependent on me. You know that I like feeling desired, but you call to see if I'm okay when I go to the doctor and want to talk for hours when you're feeling slightly off. I like being needed, and you like having someone to care for you. Sometimes you get a little clingy, but I guess that's okay. When we're at your place, only a few blocks from my house, and your friends are around, it's like you're stuck to me. Your arm stays around my waist, and you want to come with me everywhere, even just to get

a sweater from my bag in your room. And then you ask me over and over, "Do you love me?" I say yes constantly, but you're never convinced. For an older man, you're kind of fragile.

TODAY:

When I come home smelling like his shampoo, my mother tells me she has two years to live. Her liver is failing; her skin is turning orange like she's Dora the Explorer. We've never been religious, but now there is a sacristy worth of tall glass-jar candles with prints of Jesus on them. Our pine tree green kitchen is a makeshift church now, shadows of pots and pans flicker on the patterned walls. My father filters in and out of our conversation, but he is an accessory today, a decoration we don't necessarily need.

We sit at the kitchen table and I look anywhere but at my mom. The floor tiles are suddenly vastly entertaining; I count and recount the colors, patterns. There's the brown line on a white tile where I dropped a match the first time I ever tried to cook, scratch marks from our dogs' nails, faint stains from when I was six and thought it would be fun to step in the paint trays in the living room and run around. The tiles curl up in front of the back door like they're desperate to leave, trying to crawl out. I stare at the floor and my mom continues talking.

US:

You only ever want to visit your mother when you've gotten really high. She's forgotten exactly what you're like straight; slow movements and slurred speech have become the norm for her.

It took me a while, but I've decided that I like your mom. She's nice to me, always tries to make me eat a slice of pie and drink a glass of milk. She's sort of like the grandma I've always wanted to have: plump and kind and mostly ignorant. She deserves better than you.

The last time we went, we sat at the kitchen table, your hand on my knee, creeping its way up towards the frilly underwear I know you like, just like I wore when I was seven. I have drawers full of them at home, they're what I buy at the mall when I'm trying to clear my head of everything else. I continually pushed the hand back down, tried to keep from making any obvious movements. Your mom asked me how school was going. I told her it was fine, I was carrying on well enough, it was just a couple more months of classes and then

A Thousand Laughs

Katie Golden
BALTIMORE, MD

They say laughter is silver
in color and sound,
but yours was like pebbles,
smooth and gray,
falling from my hand into water.

When you laughed, other mothers
listened, and I knew they wished
they were like my mother, whose laughter
rippled from green tree to rooftop,
from children to old men.

Then, you started asking
for quiet, for closed doors,
for the stillness that comes
after emptying a bottle
rattling with pills.

But even when your voice hushed
under the weight of sadness,
I could remember the noisy power of your
joy,
the fullness of a thousand laughs unused,
hear them falter, orphaned, in the dark room.

Your last day, I found you calm,
serene in knowing it was over.
With your departure, amnesia set in,
your laugh, a recollection lost.
Whatever you chose to leave me for,

I hope it finds you laughing.

I'd be out for the summer. She told me that was great, asked, "What university did you say you went to again?" and "What exactly are you studying?"

She thinks I'm in college, twenty-three years old. You've never bothered to correct her, just laughed a little and continued to look through old video games under the TV.

ME:

If I were to have to describe my family with something that isn't food I don't know what I'd do. We are the perfect personification of Superman ice cream, each with our own distinct personalities, that turn a sludgy brown color when stirred together. I'm a little white sheep, my oldest brother the utter slacker, our middle sibling the dedicated army man, my mother a crazy Latina, and my father complete with mob cred. It's a jumbled mess, and makes us odd to have over for dinner parties. If it were something that had been chosen for me, I would liken it to slips of paper in hats. All the parts are there, just a little disjointed. But no one gets to choose the family they get, and no one chose this for me. The odds of ending up where I am were pretty slim, but it happened and I try not to dwell. If I'd chosen,

I'd probably have picked something easy. A guaranteed hassle-free family, yours for two payments of \$19.95, with a ninety-day trial period, or your money back. Instead, I got two older brothers and a future of noogies and teasing. No returns.

TODAY:

My mother tells me she doesn't know me as well as she'd like, wants the next 24 months to spend as much time together as possible. I can't help it, but the first thing I think is about how many days that is. Seven hundred thirty days. That's over a million minutes of potential quality time.

I used to be really close to my mom. We had the type of parent-child relationship that people would marvel at. We'd go shopping together, watch television and share a bag of popcorn together, and generally coexist in peace. Now, though, I've taken to lying to my parents and scampering past my mom whenever I can so she won't be able to get a good look at me and know. I'm sure it's pretty obvious what I've been doing, but I won't mention it until they do. One day, I swear I'll tell my mom about my real life. Really.

I'm avoiding it because the second thing

she'll tell me to do is dump my boyfriend, right after I'm confined to my room for a year or two. And she'd be right too. He's too old, it won't last, it's just a fling anyway. Once the summer is over, I'll be busy with school again, and he'll be nothing more than a few lines of text in notes I've sent to friends and a number I don't call anymore.

US:

The first time we actually hung out was at your house. It was back before I could drive, when there was a red Neon sitting in the garage waiting for a certain test to be passed.

I'd pretended to stay the night at Julia's, had you pick me up at her house. You drove an old hoopty and leaned over to open the door from the inside. Julia had dressed me up in her clothes and I sauntered down the walk to the street in a skirt that was riding up in the back and heels that were maybe a size too big. You didn't care too much, I doubt you even noticed. You gave me a peck on the cheek, reached over to buckle my seatbelt, and asked what my radio station was. It was an awkward drive, but that was easily remedied when we pulled up to your apartment, stumbled up the stairs, and you produced a bottle of vodka.

Sunday

Grace Covill-Grennan
BLOOMSBURG, PA

"Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," Dylan, rolls and calls as we pass a tree trunk the color of eggs: stark, (twisting, reaching for the sun.

The stop sign's letters match the bleached tree.

Pulling from the corner of my mouth a stray hair,

I think that a stop sign would make a poor wheel.

Hand over hand you turn the black steering wheel

while I think of names for sons: Owen, Dylan.

At the stop sign something rolls in the trunk

like a son in a belly basking in the hot, hard sun—

like a cool, cloudy marble in my pocket.

The next tree looks brittle, an icicle as thin as a hair.

The sun rolls (blond on blonde) through your hair

like a golden halo, a golden wheel: curly hair that rolls like the hair on Dylan.

I would that we were a broad trunk, too blind to blink at the golden sun (or squirrel tails rolling down a ridged, gray tree).

Your foot on the pedal sinks like the root of a tree

as I lift from your shoulder a helix hair which I imagine woven in a nest of birds

that wheel and call and rest on smooth, golden eggs.

Dylan words roll like eggs from the speakers in the trunk:

"With your silhouette when the sun—

light dims into your eyes." Who did his golden sun

rise on? On seeing a nest in a twisting tree.

I let flow into the streaming current of your hair.

It shines golden then waits on the road for a wheel

to roll it up into the heat of the lowlands that Dylan.

given an E harmonica, could pack into a trunk

or carve, given a knife, into a lichen-frosted trunk.

The rearview mirror is filled with a blazing, golden sun

as your profile flies past private trees that rave like hands and write like hair.

While I look at you the world rolls like an egg, a wheel,

like a rolling stone, only to be stopped by Atlas, or Dylan.

The door hits a street trunk wreathed in sun.

I see you say, window rolled up, hand in golden hair,

wheels still rolling. "Thanks for the Dylan."

Sitting on your kitchen counter, I took shots while you played some of your remixes off an old iPod you had tucked away in a corner. The next thing I remember is playing video games on your ratty old couch, then the game pausing and us moving into your bedroom, you telling me that you were going to punish me "for being a naughty little girl."

My mother called me at eight in the morning to tell me I needed to be home by nine so we could go to my driving test. I was hung over or maybe still drunk and you were passed out on the bed. Julia picked me up and drove me home. I had quite the walk of shame up to my house, where my mother declared me a hussy and made me shower off all my makeup before she'd let me leave.

I hit almost every cone and failed, didn't make it out of the parking lot. The test was in the back of a church and the course was cramped and challenging. My mother drove my car home and you called and picked me up, we went to the movies and finished the bottle of vodka. I guess the alcohol sealed the deal, and still keeps me around. We've been together since, even if it's not the romance I'd like it to be. I get what I want and you get me. It's functional.

TODAY:

My mother cries and my father pats her on the back awkwardly. This is all I know about liver failure: the symptoms include jaundice, mental disorientation and confusion, sometimes coma, and eventually death. It can sometimes be treated and reversed, or the patient will have to get a liver transplant, or they'll die. It's the fourth most common cause of death for Americans 20-70 years old. All I'm sure of right now is that there is a slice of my own liver that she's got her eye on.

In biology class when I was fourteen, we had to dissect a fetal pig. Each part had to be identified, and I remember the faces I made when we got to the abdomen. Everything was a gory shade of red, and the liver looked like chunks of raw meat that crumbled when the teacher poked at them with his probe. I imagine my mom's liver crumbling like that, except stained yellow with alcoholism.

I shake my head to clear the picture and return to the wet eyes in front of me, trying as best I can to smile comfortingly.

THEN:

I left my number on your night table that morning, not really expecting you to call. We'd met once before New Year's and after

everything had been online, and I wasn't sure this would make a difference. It'd been fun, in an odd sort of way, but I was okay with that being it. Or at least I convinced myself I was. When you called, I asked who it was, you said Billy, and I dramatically pumped my fist and spun a little around my room. I guess I wasn't really okay with it, but I was after you called. We set a time to meet and hung up.

When you picked me up a second time, I was ready for the broken down car and the fake glasses and the played out lingo. You surprised me by driving to a movie theatre and letting the car run while we listened to Daft Punk's "Digital Love" twice. At least three minutes of that song are instrumental.

I knew I had you then. A friend who worked at the car wash knew you and told me that music was your way of flirting. I expected mixed tapes with scribbled play lists, but I got an old overheating car and an iPod adapter.

YOU:

We met at a party. It was New Year's, and I was with some older friends, looking to get drunk and ring in the New Year with champagne. You entered during the third game of beer pong and the second time someone tried to let Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" play through the house. It was a small enough place that I could turn my head just a little to check you out, the kitchen was the first room after the door, and the living room and dining room sort of melted together. A pseudo bored head propped on an elbow, and I was ready to watch.

There was something special about you. Maybe it was how you worked the room. I guess it could have been your looks, but by then I was pretty drunk and the beer goggles had set in, and the three hundred pound behemoth who went by Dank was starting to seem pretty good looking too. You had on this ridiculous hat, a rainbow striped beanie that could have been from those stores in the mall with the fake jewelry. Run DMC glasses—*Cazals*, you tell me every time I make fun of them, *are the original cool*—covered your clear blue eyes, and a knock off Adidas track jacket finished the ensemble. You weren't hot, you aren't hot, but you're somehow interesting. A mutual friend introduced us, and I couldn't help but want to get inside your head.

TODAY:

Hoping my parents can't see me, I text him

can't come out tonight, talk to you later. The phone is on silent, and my mom is wiping away her tears again. She asks me what I'm doing tonight, and I tell her that I'd planned on having a quiet evening at home. She wants to jumpstart our bonding and offers to rent some movies and pop a bag of popcorn or two. I agree. There are three messages in my phone when I check it again, *text me back baby* and *where are you?* and *are you mad at me?* All I tell him is that I've got a family thing going on, and will talk to him later. He's got no place in my family life.

NOW:

We're watching *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Mom hums along with some vaguely religious looking figure. We've been sitting here for a couple hours, and I think we've sufficiently grown closer, or at least come to some sort of understanding. It'll work out, and we'll be close enough by the time things start looking grimmer.

My phone beeps and I see what's become an expected message from you. *The time is right to put my arms around you. You're feeling right, you wrap your arms around too.*

I slide shut my phone and go back to a singing Pontius Pilate as he makes the arrest.

ME:

There's nothing to do but finish the stanza. *But suddenly I feel the shining sun. Before I knew it this dream was all gone.*

Cloud Gazing

Grace Beggins
GUILFORD, CT

Shadows, light, maple trees—clouds arranged by kaleidoscopes
Aeolus tortures me with endless vertigo as he inhales
one and pants out another, gasping and wheezing
to revamp the heavens. With a fathomless gust the shape-shifter expels his melody.
The clouds dance above as he blows one closer, like a saint dying upside down.

New Year's Days

Juwon Kim
MILTON, MA

REMEMBER TO KISS the old rice strainers before you watch them die in the furnace. At midnight you must throw them away. After two you must buy new ones made of bamboo cores and hang them up onto the walls. *How do I get them?* The strainer vendors walk around every corner of the neighborhood. Strainers, they will shout. *What if they stare at my eyes? Or what if they run away from me? I mean, they probably have never seen blue eyes before.* Their young backs are hunched like an old woman, they've always carried on their backs more than they could bear. They will smile if you will bow to them. When you enter the house, you must bring your shoes inside your bed. *Well, wouldn't I dirty the bed, then?* They've carried you until their soles were gone! Let them sleep like you for one night. *Sorry, dear mother-in-law, it's just that I'd never done this when I lived with my parents.*

At dawn set the table for our ancestors in the morning, now you're the woman of the family, now you're the mother of this family: peel off the top of apples, pears, and persimmon, wash them with lightly salted water to keep the color of the fruit fresh after you peel the skin off, pile dates and chestnuts into pyramids that brace themselves, shift those pyramids around the table, fry the rice cakes and the fish pancakes and the meat pancakes flat, inflate them back again, season the vegetables, boil a bowl of meat soup and fish soup with their bones inside, take them out right before setting the bowls on the table, place glasses and a bottle of rice wine at the front, light a candle on each side, put out the fires when you have to replace the candles, burn the incense, ventilate the air if people start getting headaches, clean the portraits of our ancestors and look through their eyes. See another world from this end.

How have you been doing all this by yourself, dear mother-in-law, all this time, since

you'd moved into this house? What if the food ends up tasting really bad? Every food must come from last year's harvest. It is rather your labor our ancestors eat. Watch your manner toward our ancestors. Why can't I just buy everything from a grocery? At least I won't fail. My son did not marry a thief who covets others' toil. Watch your words toward our ancestors, you cannot pour them back in your mind once they spill from your mouth. You will succeed, you will do as exactly as I did, I will teach you as exactly as I was taught by my mother-in-law. When you begin is when you finish half. This spring you will walk up hills and grub up vegetables. When my son gives you fish, you will salt them, rope them, hang them under the sun. This fall when my son harvests the crops, you will wash dates and chestnuts, pick out the biggest fruits and put them aside. You must learn and remember each elder and ancestor's taste and eating habits, so that you will know the exact amount for salt oil, water, chili paste, and miso, it is an obligation and an honor for us to serve savory food to our ancestors upon their annual visit. In five years, your mind will have learned to draw a new outline every year depending on the harvest, in eight years, your motions will no longer need any thought, in twelve years, you will discipline your daughter to join you during preparation. When she becomes twenty, ripe in age, she will not miss a single chance to marry a man due to her lack of ability. A good marriage will not only please us, but also our ancestors who are watching us from the other world.

Welcome our ancestors when you light the incense, put it out when they finish their meal. *How would you know when to do that?* The food does not smell when they finish. Like a drizzle that soaks your clothes, the smell of food and incense mingle in the air until you remember neither of the scent. Unlike you our ancestors watered the crops until their tongues cracked like the dry, dead land, unlike you they gathered the crops until their mouths rotted underneath. Three times you will pour the wine into the glasses, first to wet their lips, second their tongues, third their throats. Bow before they leave, this is how you honor our ancestors. *What should I do with the food afterward?* Bow to the elders in the house after clearing the table. Your children will bow to you, with my son you will bow to us, and we will bow to your son's

If You're Listening

Tara Wilson
GREENDALE, MD

Violin is amused
like sneakers in June
and the taste of water
from the summer hose
and a vibrant purple splash
that resists capture
with hilarity and mirth

Russet is understanding
not lost, just wandering
stepping on the crisp leaves
hands held together
inhaling that intoxicating
smoke smell
with drunk delicate whispers

Turquoise is wise
a mesmerizing circle
of inner turmoil
when the white snow
reflects the colors
and the cold
and your breath makes
beautiful patterns
of youthful mischief

Crimson is alive
with stripped gazes
and bare feet
and if you listen closely
adrenaline running
through veins of red

grandparents. You will bless your children and we will bless you, this is how they will honor you. No, we must all eat the food that our ancestors have eaten for breakfast. They left their blessings within the food, this is how we honor our ancestors. Walk to our ancestors' tomb after everyone has finished the meal. You must clean the place around there, bow before you leave. This is how you honor our ancestors. Forty years ago I was the new daughter-in-law. Now find the pattern.

Su:

I'm Beginning to Understand that Humans Are Beautiful

May Treuhaft-Ali
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY

I
A SMOOTH, MILKY sphere amidst the thick juice of darkness. Smooth like a small stone at the bottom of a creek. Her name is probably *planet*, a planet that does not glow or glimmer. She sleeps. Nothing can touch her. The darkness that surrounds her is all-encompassing, an impenetrable being. All is silent, except for a faint humming in the background. A few bright, doughy stars are scattered in the distance, floating in the vast ocean of night. The source of the humming is a comet. The comet blindly *zings* back and forth through the darkness. Restless, blazing comet—its breath is audible as it flies. (What is the difference between a comet and a meteorite?) The comet doesn't come from anywhere, except from the heartbreaking silence of the foggy dark. Comets do not have minds. They just materialize, shoot forward, shoot even more forward until they come into contact with a surface, and then all the dinosaurs die. The planet is isolated in her slumber, isolated by that darkness, in the middle of a dream maybe. Does she have any concept of the future? Does she expect—or want—anything for herself? The glowing, breathing comet *zings* and instantaneously sets the sphere on fire.

II
I have three best friends at school. In chronological order, they are Anya-Isis, Viva and Ella (short for Umbrella). Once, Ella (short for Umbrella) gave me a hisaki cake. They have all, at some point, had boyfriends. I didn't know Anya-Isis' boyfriend or Ella's, and I liked Viva's until one day it was decided that he was a jerk. After that, the four of us unanimously ex-communicated him. I met Anya-Isis first, half a year before Viva and almost a whole school year before my first conversation with Ella (short for Umbrella), whom I have technically been acquainted with for a whole year from some of the classes we had together last year, but had never actually talked to until the beginning of this year. Anya-Isis has a younger brother and a younger sister. I've

always loved how she says, "I'm a sister to my sister and a brother to my brother," because she's both to me.

III

Some days I wake up in the morning and get the sensation that that day will be a cursed day. And not cursed in the joking sense, like, as in a joke or hyperbole or however people normally and thoughtlessly use the term "cursed." I mean, I expect something severe and seriously horrible to happen. These are usually the mornings when I am in bed, warm and snuggly, and then I hear something. But I can't decide whether the sound of my mom's voice waking me up is real, or is the fuzzy, fearful product of my subconscious. In situations such as this, the rationale I go by is that, if I were to rouse myself from my bed, stumble over to my parents' room, or wherever she was in the house at that moment, and ask her whether or not she had really just told me to get up, there was a chance that the reply could be, "Well, actually, I didn't say anything, but, you know, now that you're up, you might as well get ready. There's no point in going back to bed, just to have to get back up again in a couple of minutes. It would be nice to get out of the house a little early for once, wouldn't it?" That would really, really piss me off, because I need every drop of sleep I can get. No matter what I do, or when I fall asleep, I am always tired—I think most people are the same way these days. So I think, unless I heard her in my dreams, she'll come into my room and herald the morning once again. And when that she does, usually it is in the form of, "*OH MY GOD WHY ARE YOU NOT UP YET! I WOKE YOU UP THIRTY MINUTES AGO! I THOUGHT YOU WERE IN THE SHOWER BY NOW! WE HAVE TO LEAVE IN FIVE MINUTES!*" I now try to explain to her that I thought that I had heard her voice in my dreams, but she doesn't exactly see that as proper justification. So now I have to choose between taking a thirty-minute shower and being embarrassingly late to class, or showing up to class bright and early, with my hair looking like a piece of crap perched on my head. And I'm so *tired*. My whole body is the hour glass, imploding and flowing and standing heavily still, letting my interior move rather than my exterior body. Any normal morning, my daily routine is as follows: do Listerine, brush my teeth with a two-minute hour glass (which actually takes two minutes and thirty seconds for all the sand to descend), floss, do my braces swishy mouthwash rinse thing (after which I can't eat or drink for thirty minutes), wash my face,

Instead of Homework

Rebecca Sokol
YARDLEY, PA

i want to sip a song
feel it warm on my lips
let it curl up in the little spaces between my bones
and settle there
color will be my language
soft coral on sunday afternoons
and a smooth negro for Spanish
violet is a well-deserved hug
i will chat with number 6.
ask her to tell me the truth
about calculus, and we will
rock-climb over addition problems
go sledding down y^2-y^1/x^2-x^1
my skin will be a desert plain,
my hair a warm southern wind
i will float into the night sky
soar above reality
be the impossible

so that maybe, when i come back down,
i will know what is possible

take a shower, get dressed, eat breakfast, *get out*. On cursed mornings, my proceedings are usually as follows: do Listerine, brush my teeth, do Listerine, do my braces swishy thing, wash my face, brush my teeth (thus negating my braces mouthwash), re-do my braces rinse stuff, shower, get dressed, eat breakfast in the car and inevitably spill something. Now I realize that I forgot to floss. I'm really tired; still, I'm never that stupid, unless it's an omen or something. Occasionally, I will be washing my face or spitting out my toothpaste, and my head will involuntarily bump itself against the bathroom mirror facing me. Of course, then, my head is obliged to voluntarily bump itself against the bathroom wall, because it's kind of cool. No head does that. Especially not on this kind of morning. In the shower, I meditate on what doom awaits me in the next hours. I'm scared. Overwhelmed with the feeling that life is about to crap really hard on me. In order to save time at breakfast, I then turn to pondering my choice of cereal for this morning.

She really loves Lulu. I hear them talking on the phone. My mom whispers, "My life is falling apart. I don't know how I am going to manage . . ." And then, she's laughing loudly and hysterically. I feel like one of Lulu's jokes totally revives her. Is that really what all college friendships are like? I wish I were eighteen, and I were setting out to climb on top of the world, and then sit up there and stare at my kingdom. I want the freedom. And, just for the record, it turned out that I didn't have that disease, so it doesn't matter anyway.

IX

I am continually discovering us, and we are very simple. There is nothing elaborate in a human being. We are all one function, and we do not go beyond its boundaries. And now

Sunflower Baby

Chris Symonds
NORWICH, NY

I bring my machine around
A 6.0 horsepower, red Husqvarna push mower
Twelve sunflowers coming into sight
Yellow petals curling for the sun
They nudge under the guard
And babies scream
As the teacher said they would
When we read Williams' "The Young
Housewife" for the first time
How the noiseless wheels of his car
crackled over dried leaves
And suddenly, I am not the protestant giving
back to the Earth
Flooding God's gates with weary souls I've
sent to be refurbished
Nutritious bits to be absorbed by the lowest
worms
In darkest dirt
I cannot just pass by and nod
I want to behave like Gerry Stern's Jew
I wish to know you
And wipe the pulpy green residue from my
boot soles
And place you somewhere safe
Sunflower baby, I will take care of you
With this patience, I do not wash my
hands of blood
In tallest grass

I know the function of the formula. According to this formula, the function IX(human) consists of:

Human skin = Papyrus leaves

Human heart = Tomato

Human organs = Solution of milk (solvent) and salt (solute)

Water

Stars = Pancake batter

Do I like food too much? Well, even if I do, that's not the basis of the formula. It is that tomatoes are round, red, juicy, and have four chambers. Tomatoes are the sweet music of summer. It's that papyrus leaves are thin, and they were the first to give us paper. I love paper—it's so delicate and elegant. Milk is a colloid, and salt is an invisible, sharp flavor that makes it easy to ignore the milk's sweetness (which, of course, is not natural—they put sugar and chemicals in the milk—but it is natural to us because it is what we know, what we were raised on). *Water*. That gorgeous, spilling purity. Sometimes, when I eat too much, and I have a weird, gross kind of stomachache, I drink water, and I can actually feel the water cleansing my insides, settling everything. And then there is pancake batter. Well, one morning, when I was on vacation with my family, we went out somewhere for brunch, and we ordered pancakes. On the front cover of the menu was the history of the restaurant. According to the menu, legend has it that there was this huge lumberjack who made pancakes, and he would flip the round pieces of batter so high that they would become lodged in the sky, and that's why the stars were so large and bright in that region. I don't know, I guess that legend stuck with me, because, if my mind were Google Images and you typed in "stars", the first image that would pop up would be some kind of cartoon of that lumberjack in the hushed summer of the countryside, casting his batter off into the thick black soup of the night. Every time I am in a rural area where you can actually see the stars, I think of the little doughy disks floating around up there. And then I really want pancakes, except, it's nighttime, so I don't get any.

I am satisfied with thinking about myself in terms of this formula. I mean, I have to take Biology next year. I am praying that Anya-Isis will be in my class, because, I am obviously not going to be able to handle it unless she is my lab partner. I am content with the sweet simplicity of the human. I don't need anything more. Well, there is the electricity. That, I am told, is what allows our brains to work, consequently enabling us to function. If the

electricity exists, we just contract it from each other. That's why we all need each other like nothing else in the world. Well, maybe there is no electricity. We *don't* function. Nobody's brain works. We're all just crazy and we are completely at the disposal of our tomatoes—so I'm beginning to understand that humans are beautiful.

I believe that it's both. Electricity does and doesn't exist, everything is true, and it all just *works* somehow.

X

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
HHHH!!!AHHHHHAHAHHHHHHHH
HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH.
AHH.VVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVVV
VVVVVZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ
VVZVZZZZZZZZV VVVVVVZZZV
VZZVZVZVZVZVZZVZVZVZVZV
VZVZVZVZVVA AAAAAAAAAAAAH.
VZVZVZZZ AHHHHHHHHV
VVVVVVVVVVZZZZ!

(Power-out. Sorry.)

XI

I'm still waiting. Yes, I dearly love Anya-Isis, Viva, and Ella (short for Umbrella), but sometimes I feel like I need something more. I have fun every day, but it sucks because every day I know that I will have fun, and I know with whom I'll have fun, how I'll have fun, and where I'll have fun. So what more do I need? I need my life to change drastically. I need every day to be a quest, an adventure with a goal that I have to—and *will*—achieve. I do not want a horrible quest that I fail at. I do not want to be miserable. I want a challenge. I want the unknown, but I want it to be in control. I want something to think about, because, these days, I am pretty bored. Someone needs to tell me something amazing that will change my life, and they need to pluck up the courage to do it soon.

Yeah, I know. I'm waiting for someone: I am waiting for the Phantom of the Opera to sweep me off my feet.

It's my wild midnight waiting. It bothers me that everything I feel, learn and think about is part of the routine. I am a cycle. I am strictly bound to a timetable.

And so I check both of my e-mails, my AIM, my text messages, and my Facebook ac-

count every single day, at least once, to make sure that I did not miss any life-changing messages. Then someone IMs me, and a few hours disintegrate before my eyes, but, come what may tomorrow morning, it would be worth it if I got an amazing, wonderful message somehow. This is not procrastination. This is waiting. After all, it would be truly dreadful if I got a message with a time limit, and I missed the time limit. I don't know if I can specify or provide examples of a message with a time limit offhand, but I am sure such messages do exist, and I need to be prepared.

I need to stop looking for people in places where they shouldn't be. Every time I leave the house, it's like I am *expecting* to coincidentally and unexpectedly run into someone I know, even if there is no logical reason why he or she would be in that place. Hey, you never know. And, even if I did run into someone, who's to say it would be at a particularly opportune moment? Who's to say that we would have a lengthy conversation and really get to know each other? I mean, who's to say I wouldn't just awkwardly say hi and walk away? That is probably what I would do. Regardless, in my mind, I am to say. And my mind is Google Images, which is a reliable source. If you searched me on Google Images, your computer would almost certainly break down and combust. At any given second, every atom in my body is prepared to spring. I am ready for whatever is about to happen; I just wish it would go along and *happen* already. The air around me vibrates with trembling sound waves, and I can feel how it is about to burst into song.

A Song of Myself

Heather Holmes
MADISON, CT

"A poem must sing," she says.
"If it's beautiful, it whispers in
sleepsong to its reader. The worst
poems shout across the street to whichever
bedragged soul passes first.
Make yours sing."

With this, we shuffle in our seats,
we try to find writerly insight from
some divine place, we clear our throats

once or twice. My name is called: I read aloud.
The chubby Asian girl in an orange headscarf
pulls
at her knotted thumbs and maybe sighs—
I can't remember.

"I have never crumbled pita chips in a lightless
corner of the Mediterranean or scaled the salty
streets of Jerusalem on horseback, or
tasted the leather tongue of Jesus, but I know
the inside of your mouth
better than my own," I say.

They gaze expectantly and *That's all I have for
now*
is all I have for now. Brian in the wobbly chair
thinks it's obvious I've never traveled.

I tell him that my lack of travel experience is
sort of the point of the poem, and then I'm
reminded that authors can't interject
in the critiquing process . . . Asian headscarf girl
thinks I'm making it up—the part about the boy
and
the mouth, his mouth, presumably—but she
misuses the word
"solipsism" at least three times in the next three
minutes,
so I feel a little bit vindicated.

Now the February air is slightly less stifling
than June's classroom-breath, but I'm still wor-
ried
my song reads more like a *you* than a *me*.

I cried in your sweater. I drive by your house
on the weekends to see your mother reading
a magazine in the living room, your father curs-
ing,
and your bedroom door. It looks lonely.

I bought you red Marlboros once, fingering a
sweaty twenty-
dollar bill in my pocket as the cashier chuckled,
called me
Sweetie, took my money.
I've never told that to anyone before.

Does this have to be about me?
I write about you with such ease.

I remember this morning back in the summer
because I was far more impressed
with the whitewashed sky than with any
pinkpeachapricotraspberry sunrise I'd come
across.

No one up there felt creative that
morning in that
whitewashed sky.

I sat beneath a gingko tree that morning. G.
Biloba,
and I'm not trying to make myself out to be
a living fossil or anything, but
maybe I'm covering myself in a layer of wax so
thick
that it bubbles and burns and I can't help but
leave
my imprint on something else. Do I fan out and
engulf?
I exist in millions. It's only a matter of time
before I take over.
They will study me in another million years, sit-
ting
beneath the same gingko tree, deciphering my
fossils.

Before we carved our pumpkins as children,
I watched in awe as my father swiftly cut through
the top
and dug into the stewy center with a slotted
spoon.
I washed my hands in it, the orange, stringy
mess,
and next summer we ran outside barely wearing
anything at all and collected as many baby
grape tomatoes from the garden as could fit in
our dirty
hands and threw them at each other, and we
were wild and
without purpose.

Am I self-absorbed?
No. I'm not quite absorbed in all of myself yet.

I am your popcorn ceilings, your extra ninety
miles,
your baby, your piece of ass, your transport
and transportation. I am fading between fren-
zied
and almost unconscious.

When we walk, you're there,
but your mind is with the split-end branches
on the tallest tree. Your fingers don't
curl around mine the way they used to.

We pretend to be laundry baskets,
to be candles, warm and blue,
we silently flicker forth. We pretended to be in
love,
less warm and more blue than before.

I can't keep going on like this for very long,
so glaze me and open the kiln
and let me burn.

Falls

Kevin Barbary
ACITUATE, MA

"HERE IT IS, KIDS. Take it in," George said in a misty voice. Two and a half days away from their home in Virginia, Mary felt that she wasn't appreciating Niagara Falls as she ought to be. She kept quiet about it, for George and for the kids. "It's lovely."

Helen was like her father. She always had been. They were tall, fair-skinned, and spectacled. More importantly, they were deep. Even at the age of thirteen, Helen was a thinker. Sometimes, it got under Mary's skin. She never understood people who were concerned with the intangible. *Bumper sticker people*, she called them, *people who cared about stuff*. George hadn't always been that way. *We used to have fun*, Mary reminisced, *real fun. Not Niagara Falls fun.*

Tommy was not like Helen. He ran around like a dog chasing a squirrel. Mary had a soft spot for her son, who at eight years old clung

to his childish speech impediment. "Ith thith the othean, mommy?" Mary explained that they were not at the ocean, as she had already done four times during the car ride, but her voice was neither warm nor understanding, as a mother's should be. She needed a cigarette.

Mary walked a little ways along the cliff, taking a pack of Newports out of her front pocket. George didn't like for her to smoke near the children. "Secondhand smoke is a killer," he preached, "and it doesn't exactly set a good example." Mary lit a cigarette, closing her eyes like she used to when smoking gave her real pleasure. She didn't need or love to smoke anymore, it was just an excuse to get away for a few minutes. To get away from condescending George, inquisitive Helen, and her incessant Tommy. With each deep breath of smoke, Mary tried to force them from her mind, but they simply burrowed deeper into her thoughts. Just as she was starting to clear her head, Mary reached the end of her cigarette. She flicked it away and stepped on it. Her hand grazed the pack in her pocket as she flirted with having another, but she decided against it, sighing deeply before returning to her family.

George and Helen were standing silently, entranced by Niagara Falls. They were so entranced, in fact, that they didn't hear Mary the first two times she said it. When she raised her voice, though, they snapped their heads around in unison. "Where is Tommy?"

"He was just here a moment ago," George

insisted. Helen offered that Tommy was probably exploring back by the car. Mary did not respond. She looked to her right, by the parking lot, and to the left, where she had gone to smoke. *Maybe he followed me*, she thought, as she began to jog in that direction. Tommy wasn't there. Mary couldn't feel her legs. Finally, she gave in and looked. She looked down, down over the cliff, down into the frothy white below.

She knew he hadn't fallen. Tommy had not fallen into Niagara Falls. Impossible. But, if he had, would George and Helen have noticed? Would they have heard him shout? The numbness crept up to Mary's stomach.

She was sick with fear. For a moment, Mary saw a flash of red, red like Tommy's coat, pop out of the foam. Of course, there was no red. But, for an instant, she saw it. In that same instant, Mary saw an empty bedroom. A dresser full of folded tee shirts and little khaki pants. Dust collecting on every inch of the small bedroom across the hall from her own. And Mary saw her calm self, smiling as she chopped green beans for her casserole, the one she hadn't made in months. She also saw herself taking a drag of a Newport as Tommy plunged toward white just yards away.

"Mom, we found him. He was throwing rocks by the car. Mom, what's wrong?"

She stood, staring blankly at Niagara Falls. Mary didn't answer her daughter, because she didn't know what was wrong. Mary began to cry.



Photo by
Andrew Wagner
MONTCLAIR, NJ

Barricade

Kimberly Sheridan
BRISTOW, VA

WE BEAT HIM HARD.

There was blood on his face, clogging his eyes, flowing from his nostrils downward over brilliantly defragmented lips from which the incomprehensible gurgled forth. Each of his points was rounded by the fresh swelling, the gently weighted bruises already slipping under his fleshy layers and raising like submarines. His insides had depressurized and opened, his vomit dribbled over open wounds. I could tell that Hewitt was disappointed with how dirty he'd gotten by the way she wiped her hands on the black sweater they'd stolen.

His gasping pulsing attempts to regain dignity would only inspire loathing in her; he had lost his right to human distinction. A beating such as this rendered him a beast.

The others branched out from Hewitt and I in a semi-circle that mobbed it, herding it against the alley-brick. One of the men came in close, leaned forward to stare mockingly into the gaping hole of the victimized; the pathetic thing gasped and spat a spray of dirty blood smearing it across his eyes, infiltrating his nose and mouth.

He charged, kicking and screaming vulgarities.

"Mudda fuckah, I donno wut yer infectid with."

Quick panic made me step up and wrestle his arms behind him with a show of marvelous effort.

"Don't kill 'im, we don't need that."

"Get off him Micky; don't want you getting that shit on you."

I cowed to the forceful authority of Hewitt's ordinance as she drew a balled newspaper from her pocket. It had been rolled and wrapped about itself into a makeshift weapon that she held at one end with a relaxed, experimental grip. The man went about his beating and the beast snorted pathetically with every fresh connection. I watched Hewitt draw her shirt up over her mouth as a precaution before she took the

newspaper to the back of his skull.

I watched her surrender to frightful rage, hand flying back and forth in a continuous arc, a marvelous blur of motion; she closed her eyes and swung.

Together the bloody bodies seemed to mix, both twitched and sobbed and gushed themselves forward. The sight of it made me want to wretch, disgusting amorphous husks disjoined by Hewitt's divine will.

"Diseased fucker."

She pulled her shirt up over her head to get the bloodied bit off and cast it to one of the others; it flopped about in the air like a clumsy bird before failing. I slipped out of my sweatshirt and offered it up to her, not wanting anyone to walk by and see her top-bare, she disregarded it for a few seconds before realizing again that I existed.

As she slipped it on I heard the soft rub of the fabric.

"And that's a rule for all of ya that think to endanger yourselves with murder and get yourselves infected with shit."

She spat on them and our congregation disbanded in the understanding that today's entertainment was over and we were free to go back and continue our daily sameness.

Hewitt started walking out the left side of the alley which led up towards Cricket Ground while the mere mortals descended the right stairs down towards the Denten flats and residential sector.

"Where are you planning on goin'?"

Cricket Ground never meant much good news for anybody; it was closer to the Barricade and overrun with the Masks. Gangkids were afraid to go there and even the citizens, avoided it. The City Transport Service had begun running trains that especially skipped the Cricket stop.

"What? Think I'm gonna go mess with some Maskie? Don't be stupid, I have a head on me you know."

Her steps continued despite our conversation and I had to sprint after her to catch myself up.

"I'm gonna go take a look at the Barricade."

"Why?"

"Hell knows why, maybe to keep sure that its still there."

She shrugged and the wide collar of my sweatshirt pooled around her bony shoulders, I watched the ridge of her clavicle with the focus of a prayer.

We turned onto Lime Grande, one of the one-way streets that had gone out of

Past the Borders: Three Perspectives

Juwon Kim
MILTON, MA

Under the frigid moon, next to the pebbles
blue
swallowed by the river, we walk to reach
Mongolia, light that
roused us from sleep. Like a stubborn child,
it lingered in our dreams until
we opened our eyes in darkness. It dazzles
my
daughter hides next to my waist, her hands
above
my womb. I listen to the dying heartbeat
inside.

Days ago when he dropped
against the concrete road, Brother's mouth
spilled
clear water like when a canned porridge
leaked. His eyes
dreamed he wasn't hungry. Take his jacket,
Father told me, or
someone else will. Brother's eyes dreamed he
wasn't
cold. December wind merrily glued his
bare skin to the ice on the road. Scratches
on his
checks pressed against their juice, but we've
reached the border.

I should have kept its pieces. My son's birth
certificate was the only
token left. I wish I didn't tear it. Patrols walk,
walk, walk. Wife cramming her belly inside
her coat. I wish it wasn't here. Patrols walk.

Daughter's legs
glued onto the ground. Patrols walk and
stop. They grab daughter's wrists. I wish she
wasn't here. The gate isn't far.

Father breaks
open the gate. He flees.
They drag Mother like
a Christmas tree on the asphalt.
I shut my eyes,
blinded by dreams of light.

use when the Masks had overrun Cricket; it wasn't wide enough for their tanks despite its name and had fallen to dusty misuse. The pair of us walked purposefully down the middle in a kind of rebellion, even though I knew the Masks couldn't use it I still glanced behind with every tremor, fearing a rundown. By the end of Lime Grande we could see down to the edge of the city.

The Barricade gleamed bright gray from the sun sinking on its opposite, above it the Masks glass eyes reflected the light, the snouts of the gasmasks for which they were named seemed to sniff the air as they're rifles flashed and clicked.

"It's still there, you happy?"

Hewitt was stuck there, eyes surveying it like a challenger. The low rumble of a crawling tank shook the surrounding brick, the metallic clicking of rattling guns sounded like cicada's wings.

"Come on Hewitt, they're gonna take a shot at ya."

I tugged at the bits of her that I dare take a hold of, trying to pull her back.

"They wouldn't. They don't wanna start up a riot."

"You think yer important enough ta start a riot over?"

"Hell, it could be you that got done off, all this city needs is a body."

One more body to summarize the dead,

the angry dead, the mass dead, one more body to spill the corpses over into outrage.

We stared together at this revolution-death, this martyrdom and in seconds we had both lost our breath to the majesty of such choice, the potential of it.

We bolted back to Lime, Hewitt chuckling like a madman, nervous with ability.

Quiet held us as we left Cricket for the residential, listening to the ambulance sirens as they took away the things we'd broken. We parted on Potter Avenue with the fingers of my left hand tugging at a thread inside my pocket.

"I'll see you tomorrow right Hew?"

"Same time and place, don't think I care enough ta kill myself for this shit."

Having not the discerning depth of emotion she possessed nor the bravery to follow it, I hadn't even considered my personal opinions in the course of action I was imagining.

"Well, it'd be noble wouldn't it?"

She gave a snort-laugh, like what I'd said was funny.

"Leave the noble shit ta the nobility."

The next day we fed a man glass behind a shop on Harmony Street, I was holding my breath as he spat up the miniscule glitter-pieces, they sparkled and in the light it

looked like he was choking on stars. Hewitt sorted the strands of her hair with a hand white like a bird and it struck me that she was a pretty girl, bare-faced and skinny, and I don't think that it had ever come to me like that before but it did then and times after that.

Some of the others drew their syringes like pistols and went to poison themselves, but a few of us lived clean so we mugged a vendor and picked up some booze at a place by the residential and set up in Copper Park to watch the sun go down behind the barricade. The siren went off for curfew but we'd built a fire to dance around and some boys had started brawling in the soft dirt. It smelled like wood and nighttime with the faint oily scent of lubricated machines lying tame beneath. The sweat of the brawlers shimmered.

When a patrol showed up we knocked him in the back with a burning plank, it was all charcoal and smolder and it looked like hellfire. When it hit him it released flitting orange moths into the night air, Hewitt stamped out the embers on his chest. She joked loudly about going up to Cricket Ground and starting a riot; no one was drunk enough or courageous enough to dare agree. They were not to be the furious dead, only the vengeful living.

They had not the courage for death.

Depth

Jaclyn Porfilio
WEST ROXBURY, MA

How innocent the ocean is, you say,
and I see the cove where your arms went up
in surrender and my feet got sucked
into the sand. I see a worn-out dock,
a gray turtle, I'm going to call him Manny,
two overturned kayaks, one red,
and a taste of salt that has taunted my
tongue
ever since. I hear that someone was calling
to me,
asking where I was, and I exhaled sunlight,
describing the two kayaks, the red one and
the other one,
and the rock that's stained with my toes

blood.
Maybe it was Manny who asked because, as
soon as I started
talking, I realized I didn't understand the
question.
I can see the water, that it was scared of
you,
that it left a block of air around your whisk-
ing legs,
splotched red from the day you didn't apply
sun block
as I told you to, clearing the way for the
most important
character's entrance so I could detect every
blue freckle
on the whip-tail stingray and admire every
millisecond
of fear it drew from you. Even though the
water was clear
and the light was perfect and the world did
a damn good job
setting the scene, my eyes followed Manny.
I see how he played with bubbles, batted
minnows
until they waded back, and flattened him-

self against the floor
as stubbornly motionless as I am when I'm
afraid.
He had me ducking my head and flexing
my fingers
in time with his decisions, feeling the cove
as if I were made for it, too, until my toe
twitched
and that old whip-tail did its tail whipping
straight to your ankle and I looked to
Manny.
Now, don't you worry. You're still with me,
fifty long years later of working and joking
and hair braiding, and we're still friends,
but you want answers, you want to know
what happened to us, why
no one bothered to write down our story,
where Manny was when you needed him.
You talk, and all I can see is those useless
kayaks,
the bubbles, the shore, the dock, and all I
can do
is try to calculate how deep you would have
drowned.

One at a time they broke off to explore the woods, to venture the ground wet from sin and fornicate beyond the fireside.

Hewitt sat with me, she stuck her cigarette into the blaze and I nudged the coals with the toe of my boot. Moans echoed from where the topsoil had been disturbed by the men fighting and the small grunts of now-strangers sounded like forest noises, they sounded like the birds and small beasts. We sat casually, the fire casting a flashlight glow on us and catching us in oranges.

The two of us not talking.

"Hey Hewitt, you were talking 'bout how you didn't want to die for this."

My intention reached about us and further beyond only to be halted at the barricade.

"Yeah?"

"And I get that part, but then why do you got to see it?"

We looked to the behemoth that had eaten the sun.

She thought on this until her cigarette matched the fire and the ashes made a falling horizon.

"I gotta think up the things that'd make me do it."

"Did ya think up anything?"

"Anger."

She looked sad, like she'd hoped to find something more, hoped to find the chest of gold and was only left to the urn of ashes.

"Figure that's as good a reason as any to bite it."

"Wish it'd been somethin better."

"Like what?"

"Love. Some shit like that."

I laughed a little at that.

"Love?"

I gestured towards the pleasure-sounds, "That's what loves gotten too."

"Then what would you do it for?"

"Somethin that changes stuff, love doesn't change a thing."

"That's dumb, just givi' it up fer some shit cause, how's that doin it fer yourself?"

"Why'ze it gotta be fer yourself?"

"It's your death, you doin anything more personal?"

"That doesn't make sense Hewitt, if you wanna die fer yourself and fer love then you only seem to be loving yourself."

Hewitt was quiet for a long time, long enough for me to hear the Earth move and to watch the stars a good bit.

"I just mean," she was whispering and I leaned in, "I wanna go when I wanna go."

That's when I thought that Hewitt might've hated everything.

We went on in that simple way for two months; we broke all of the windows on Peter Avenue and burglarized nightly in the Residential. In Denten flats Hewitt broke a guys nose in a brawl, she'd emerged dirt-covered and bloody, smile wide.

We went to Cricket Ground once a week and stood looking up at the Masks while they looked down at us, they took warning shots if we came too close or stood too long and I started to get disappointed when they didn't.

They were like prophets of steel lightning, they were like emperors built on false divinity, their counterfeit throne rose above us but could not shadow us, could not shadow Hewitt who had her own light. You could see it after a fight, the way she glowed like a fire; if you touched her she would burn you up.

Through our visits Hewitt shifted her eyes from them to me, weighing between us.

We dared them but they were cowards.

Cowards like the vengeful living and everyone we knew and me. We were all cowards except for Hewitt.

It was hot the last time we went, a blazing day in the spring and the tar and rubber became so delirious with heat that they thought to be one another causing my shoes to stick. Ahead of me Hewitt walked, stepping lightly across the hot black, unaffected; sweat less, dancing as if everything was cool breezy autumn.

I think about her like that, her lack of concern like a violent promise. That is how I loved her, her feet never touching the ground.

We arrived at Cricket Ground the same way we always had and she looked straight at me as I looked at them, like I was a mirror to reflect them. They're glass eyes reflected nothing.

Her fingers took a hold on my wrist like the hold on the newspaper when she'd killed the beast. She couldn't wield me as a weapon.

I felt her through my hand, her thoughts like stones and her fear like cold electricity, her grand rationalizations.

I felt the muscles in her thighs and calves move.

I felt her begin to let go.

Now with my feet unstuck I would not let her, we sprinted forward.

Some Serious Advice

Lauren Del Turco
LIVINGSTON, NJ

Ignore everything other than these words, shove them down the garbage disposal and flick on the switch. Leave the stench that dwells in the bottom of the sink: ink and old potatoes and something you wish to forget. Let it become stale and dry and dusty like the box rammed against the wall under your bed. Throw that out too. Shake it free of all its residue and grime and toss it from a second story window. Now the ring, the memories, the photographs: especially that black and white with its classic smiles and too-white teeth. Break its very frame, crack the glass into violent shards and leave them stranded between the vines and limbs of the dark shag rug. But when the thunder rolls and the shutters fly open, leave them. The thick ivory drapes will flutter wildly, like a mad horse being strangled by cruel reins, but let them fight. Just stand quiet and still with your hand pressed to your chest. Feel the rapid notes of the snare beneath your skin and wait. Before the sun rises, the storm will die, and you—like that tarnished pocket watch—will continue on.

I wanted to touch the Barricade if nothing else, set my palm on that forbidden horizon, the cool shaded cement but I was nowhere near as fast as Hewitt and the bullets dropped me in seconds.

She challenged their idolatry, saw their false effigy and meant to demolish it. She was effortless in ceaseless forward motion, she flew beneath their violent baptism and when she was finally there she was still in a moment of vicious movement, in a second without time, her hand pressed there and I felt that mine might have been there as well.

The world I knew ended with her.

Dead at the base of it, the soles of her feet walking the vertical of our horizon, she had torn it down with a single touch and now her mirror eyes wide as worlds, looking up along the barricade, she was the only one who knew for whom she'd done it.

Absolute Zero

Jodi Jiso Balfe
MADISON, NJ

ABSOLUTE ZERO is defined as the temperature at which molecules cease to move and motion terminates. This phenomenon has always been regarded as purely theoretical; absolute zero has never been reached experimentally. The extremely frozen circumstances would require almost complete detachment from the familiar universe.

Throwing open the door and dumping my obese high school backpack on the ground, I charged into the house after school. I exhale and extend my arms towards the ceiling, a wave of relief washed over me as I stretched and walked upstairs to my room with headphones in my ears. I met my father in the stairwell—his eyes are sunk into and brimmed with red, and he clutches a bottle of wine in his left hand and his tie in his right. I reeled backwards in surprise; my father is never home before six in the evening. My father, the epitome of the nine-to-five business executive, was always composed, punctual, and calm; I stood shocked at the person before me.

I staggered to my bed and sat at the edge, tremulously clenching the sheets. Everything felt foreign to my hands, and as an overwhelming fear rushed into my head I fell back onto the mattress. I felt for the blanket with my hands, and pulled it up over my face so all I could see was darkness.

My father had been laid off in a mass firing spree at his company. There is a certain sense of invincibility one experiences when reading about the recession, as if it was a distant issue, far away from one's own immediacy. Within the span of a single day, an anonymous corporate hand had decided to take away our entire lives. I wanted to see the face of the person who would later send a curt, impersonal email to hundreds of employees to professionally inform them that everything had been stripped away from them. I wanted to reach over and shake the shoulders of the faceless,

far away decision maker, and ask why, and how, over and over again, as if that would make a difference.

Cold is viewed relatively trivially nowadays, and at most, is an inconvenience for many. In reality, something like temperature can have devastating effects: people freeze to death every year, or suffer in extremely low temperatures.

When we envision the global suffering at temperatures around freezing, and multiply that hundreds of times to reach absolute zero—the pain is too much to put into words.

Absolute zero has the power to strip matter of all essence of warmth, movement, and life.

My father changed completely. His hair started to grow gray and even white; he always seemed tired and rarely smiled, and would disappear during the day to come back at night. He started to drink more, and lines started to etch into his skin, which crinkled not from laughter anymore but worry.

My mother looked for work, and struggled to learn English. Painstakingly combing through literacy textbooks and grammar handbooks, she studied her "who's" and "whom's" and her "there" and "their," but she was never even offered an interview. Sometimes she would spend all day in her room in the dark, sleeping and crying.

When I left my house a few weeks later, the air was frigid and the town is still dark, except for the occasional blinking streetlight. I could hear the sound of my shoes pressing against the pavement since everything is so softly quiet. In a couple of hours, the tranquility would be shattered; the streets will be filled with cars blasting their horns down Main Street in the rush hour traffic, businessmen and women intently fixated on their Bluetooth-equipped Blackberrys as they briskly stride into Quick Chek to demand their coffee and bagel, and the wheezing garbage truck as it trudges down the street, stubbornly ignoring the impatiently tailgating drivers behind it. I breathe in the silence. The wind was cool but never harsh, and I inhaled the clean air, filling up my entire entity, and exhaled. Soon after I left, purple and orange clouds slowly smeared the sky and the sun gently rises, warming my shoulders, which had started to ache under the weight of my backpack, and the sidewalk beneath

my feet as the distant horizon is silhouetted against the painted sky. As light tenderly fell over the town, the tree boughs and the outlines of houses were delineated by an ethereal glow, as if the town, and myself, was in a half-asleep, half-awake reverie. I walked to school, not just because gas was now too expensive but I was too afraid to ask my father, in fear of encountering his sorrowful face. From the mansions up on top of the hill, to the affordable housing—a little closer to where I lived, I walked across my town.

One day, the sidewalks iced over, the snow banks haloed with the rising sun, I stopped at the iron gates of one of the biggest houses. I stood outside, my hands chapped red from the wind and clasping the curved pieces of metal from the gate, feeling the indentations in my palm, shifting my backpack from shoulder to shoulder. One, two, three, four; I counted a four car garage silently in my head. Even from the end of the expansive driveway I could see the crystal chandelier hanging in the entrance, framed by icicles.

Unwanted tears leaked from my eyes, and I hit my fist against the gate in desperate frustration.

Muslim Women Swimming

Rebecca Sokol
YARDLEY, PA

in all that blackness
we pity them
they're
trapped
abused
hidden
enslaved

behind the thick folds of
god and men and ancient stone
and wily prayers
ringing from the lips of a dark stranger
or mega phones

but the water doesn't seep through my bikini
like it does with a burqa
swirling the cotton into silk
twisting around

When I arrived at school that same day, I was numb with cold and filled with a melancholy panging ache. Walking down the driveway, I saw a blue BMW with a red ribbon proudly adorned over it—someone must have received it for their birthday. There was a crowd of students in awe surrounding it, and the owner occasionally interjecting with a smirk a warning not to touch. I saw some friends by the car, but instead, I entered the school directly and went to the bathroom. Grabbing paper towels, I closed the stall door and started to wipe the mud and slush off my shoes. It is not that I really cared about my sneakers. I just did not want my classmates to realize I walked to school.

A couple of years ago, researchers came within a billionth of a degree of absolute zero, but the actual condition of zero energy was declared unreachable. If absolute zero temperature were to manifest in reality, the results would be indescribable. Our universe would be forever altered—with the cessation of the motion of molecules which is a corollary effect of absolute zero, matter would completely collapse. Our universe would almost instantaneously fold in on itself—all physical entities would cease to exist and be replaced by a vacuous state of complete nothingness.

In January, I was walking home from school when I received a call from my little sister asking me to stop by the elementary school and pick her up. I was surprised, since she normally walked home by herself; nonetheless, I detoured towards my old grammar school. I smiled at how I could take four stair steps to the door at a time, while as a second grader I struggled to take two. My little sister was standing forlornly outside the office, all alone since all the others had left right after school ended. She looked so small next to the secretary, that I resolved internally that we would stop and I would use my allowance and buy her a cookie on the way home, and the secretary indicated that I had to sign my sister out of the discipline list. I was shocked—my sister was quiet, shy, and it never would have occurred to me that she received a detention. As we walked outside, I took her tiny gloved hand, and wrapped a scarf around her and buttoned her coat. When I got to the third button, I realized it had fallen off, and the

coat itself was worn on the edges. I asked her if she was cold, and she fervently shook her head no, but I could see that her lips were purple and numb. Hand in hand down the sidewalk, I asked her how she had gotten in trouble—she said that in class, the teacher was talking about different jobs, and the teacher went around the room and each student had to stand up and announce to the class what their parents did for a living. When it was my sister's turn, she refused to stand up and kept shaking her head in silence as the teacher grew impatient. Finally, the teacher threatened to call my mother, and my sister stood up, trembling, and whispered that her parents did not work. A boy next to her then asked loudly if my father had gotten in trouble and then fired, and my sister lunged at him and knocked him out of his chair, yelling and crying, "My daddy didn't do anything wrong, nothing wrong, nothing wrong!" The teacher had sent my little sister to detention, and she had called me because she did not want one of my parents to come pick her up and find out what happened.

That Christmas, I had to keep explaining to my little sister that she was not going to be getting any Santa gifts, but that was not because she was bad that year, but because Santa and the elves were sick so they were going to bring her the gifts next Christmas. She was still so worried and anxious, thinking she had misbehaved and Santa's wrath was being incurred. On Christmas morning, I could not look into her eyes.

We arrived at the supermarket, where my little sister carefully picked out a snicker-doodle cookie about the size of her face, and I paid eighty-five cents at the cash register, then we sat together on the bench in the desolate gray parking lot.

She never let go of my hand.

Absolute zero is approximately -459.67° Fahrenheit; the range that which this phenomenon transpires is so beyond the familiar that we created an entirely new temperature system, the Kelvin system, to adapt. Absolute zero occurs at exactly zero Kelvin. Sometimes when an event is so far beyond the ordinary or expected, we rush to explain or ameliorate; to cover up and to feign normalcy.

For every morning that I can remember, my father sat at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee in the mug I painted him in kindergar-

*Sitting in a tree
at my old house
on Cherry Lane
on a Saturday Morning*

Tyler A. Davis
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

I see the new family at their dining room table,
fireplace destroyed, red tiles burned,
enjoying dinner like we used to on the week-ends.

A dog sits on the floor, stares at me,
a cat licks its white paw right next to him,
the blood where I once broke my tooth
is under her white tipped tail.

Down the walkway, the massive gray rocks
were taken away,
the green flower garden replaced with soft
stones.
the towering woods at the end all turned to
ash.

I watch the door. The red paint melted,
the golden knob turned to soot and then
silver handles,
the two windows exploded to make a peep-
hole—
even the tree I sit in is charred.

ten, and reads through the *New York Times*. One cold winter morning, I pulled on a sweatshirt and went downstairs, expecting to see my father placidly reviewing the events of the world; however, he was gone. I assumed he went out for a walk, so I sat down and started reading the newspaper. On the fourth page I saw an article entitled, "Laid Off Struggle to Find Jobs: Rising Bankruptcies Signal Unemployment Crisis"; the article then discussed a Wall Street executive now earning minimum wage as a janitor, a former banker now in bankruptcy himself, and the rising unemployment rate all over the country. I rushed to the desk for a scissor, thinking to myself that I would explain to my father that I needed the article for a school current events assignment. As I started cutting the edges of the article carefully around the black borders, I stopped when I saw a small coffee stain in the corner.

My father had already read the article. He did not come back home until late that night.

Unemployment insurance came as a little check every month, and it is dissected and carefully allocated by my mother into food, clothes, rent, gas money. . . My mother always saved a little money to put in the church collection Sunday mornings. Every Saturday night, she would take a little white envelope out of the drawer and put a couple bills in it and carefully seal it, and while the four of us sat in the pew, she would give the envelope to my little sister to place in the golden plate.

One Saturday night, I saw my mother deliberating over how much money she could possibly squeeze for the next morning, and I grew angry with frustration. I argued and yelled, saying that our family needed the money, that we could not afford to be giving any away, and that she should think of her own daughters first. My mother remained silent, but her face was sorrowful, as she quietly told me that I should remember others that were under much more dire circumstances than we were.

I immediately felt the surging burn of guilt, but desperation. The next week, I took the

money I received teaching piano lessons, and placed it in my mother's wallet. If I had offered it to her directly, she would have never accepted it.

I hope at least some of it ended up in the church collection plate.

The architecture of the universe is such that absolute zero is nothing but a technicality; as long as there exists heat, such a level of total arctic can never be reached. Even if the source is comparatively minute or physically insignificant, such as the flame of a small candle, the radiation is enough so that molecules will continue to move. We may get infinitesimally close, but as long as there is that single ray of warmth, we will be okay.

I would often end up going to Quick Chek late at night, the perpetually open convenience store with Extreme Caffeine Coffee (thirty percent more caffeine than regular coffee) always ready to appease the high school student faced with looming finals and paper deadlines. Next to the cash register, there is a screen which shows the results of lottery tickets when they are scanned underneath. So as we wait in line, we watch the screen flash "SORRY, NOT A WINNER" whenever a hopeful customer carefully slides the ticket into the machine.

My father would always warn us against buying lottery tickets, arguing and demonstrating mathematically the miniscule probability of victory and presenting his careful calculations until we laughed at his steadfast logic and rationality. However, after he had lost his job, he would buy lottery tickets occasionally. Sometimes I saw him with a nickel in his hand, scraping away at the ticket nervously to see the numbers underneath the ink.

My heart broke at the idea of him standing by the machine, with the words "SORRY, NOT A WINNER" flashing before him.

As I paid for my coffee one night in late February, I turned my head away from the pixelated screen because I did not need to be told I was not a winner.

I opened the door as slowly as I could when I got home that night, to try and stop the door from creaking too much and waking up someone, then sat down in front of the television, shivering while removing my coat. We kept the heat on very low this past winter, and

*I stand on the curb,
leaning back on my
heels, tipping my chin
towards the sky my eyes
averted from the road,
squinting suspiciously
at the cream colored
colonial house that used
to belong to me*

Sarah DiPasquale
ALLENDALE, NJ

A tickly, skinny dogwood tree sticks out of the middle of the lawn; a white spotted bird house hooked onto the weakest of the three branches swings and balances in the wind. To my right there is a tall, brawny oak tree surrounded by Maine beach rocks. If you cup your hands together the stones will fit snugly inside your palms, round, speckled, and soft from sea salt erosion.

The Rest

Deborah Gravina
ALLENDALE, NJ

*"Night fell clean and cold in Dublin,
and wind moaned beyond my room as
if a million pipes played the air."*

—Patricia Cornwell

It'll be too dark
for you to see us on the
screened porch, but you can

hear taps of
our dented fingers
against applesauce cans, and
claps of our new shoes on
cold cement.

Bel canto
slips through each tiny
screen cube, landing in
our pockets,
among other things.

normally walked around in multiple sweaters and gloves. My little sister liked to wear this soft red sweater that was so big it made her look like a little marshmallow, and the sight of her waddling around even brought a despondent smile to my father's face. I sank into the sofa and flicked on the news channel, while I started to proofread my term paper.

President Obama appeared, and announced that the economy was improving, while I thought, "Well Mr. President, that's wonderful, but what about us?"

The two news anchors returned on screen to discuss the recession, and my correcting pen burst, spreading red ink all over my hands and paper.

"Hope for the unemployed is dwindling," said the female anchor,

I cursed to myself and starting to search for paper towels to clean up the pool of red accumulating on the floor.

"That's right," said the male anchor. I sighed and watched the red ink set into the carpet. "For the children of the recession," he continued, "they've reached absolute zero."

Maybe It's Santa's Fault

Tess Zaretsky
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

THE DAY I DISCOVERED that Santa wasn't real, my dad left us.

It wasn't his fault.

He looked at me and said "I think it would be best" and I slapped him right across the face. I guess I didn't have much force because he barely flinched, but a small dollop of salty water came from his left eye and he walked away.

He's a small man, only about 5'6", but he tells people he's six feet to see if they'll believe him—no one does. He and my mom fight, a lot—it made me hate my sister.

My dog sat still in my room as I quietly sobbed. I don't like crying to my black dog, only to my white one. I've had her ever since I was a little girl, before we moved to this Republican town where my parents live in isolation.

Maybe that's what pushed them over the edge.

I don't know how it started, but they had this continuous fight. My dad was "turning into his mother." Whenever my mom would say that, I didn't understand how it was an insult. I love my grandma, but yeah, I guess she doesn't have much common sense.

One time, when I was staying with her during February break of seventh grade, she insisted that tennis was played on the beach. My grandpa learned not to engage her anymore, so for 4 years now, she's believed that the tennis ball somehow bounces on the beach.

I talked to my so-called "best friend" at that time; it seems to change with the seasons. That's something I'm not really proud of, but she was surprisingly comforting.

I felt bad talking to her about my problems. She has a lot of shit to deal with. Her dad died in a plane crash—something that doesn't happen too often. She's sort of a closed bottle, as my mom would say. Her emotions

don't pour out.

We were in a video chat, and I was crying so hard that the pixels froze from my constant activity. I didn't know how to explain it to her. Truthfully, I didn't even know how to explain it to myself. It's really all my sister's fault, if I think of it logically.

"Just shut up already, I don't think you're working in this house. I want to take them and leave." He froze when she said this. While I was eavesdropping from my room (it's an old house, I can hear everything), I prayed for my dad—just answer with something comforting.

I wanted to take over his body and approach my mom, not even a hug, just touch her to see if she still felt it. I rocked back and forth in my cold metal chair. It's not comfortable at all, but it was the warmest thing I felt all day.

For some reason, for the first time, I really thought he was going to leave.

The Beatles played in the background—the instrumental version of "Don't Let Me Down" I nodded along to it, trying to escape from the pain, or what seemed like pain.

I couldn't tell if I was hurting or not.

I forgot I was still in the video chat and she was watching everything I was doing. I couldn't decide whether it was embarrassing or not. "Can you just tell me what's going on? Just type it to me or something." I lied to her.

When we first became friends, we promised we wouldn't lie to each other, but even that promise was a lie. We pretended we were destined to be with each other, because we had both lost friendships, and all of the sudden found each other. I blatantly lied to her, because I didn't want her knowing about my sister—I told her I did something wrong.

"Then why'd you slap him?"

I remember him singing to me in my old house, lying with me on my flowered bed that was so small that his feet hung over the bars. He held my body so tight. He was my daddy, my favorite person in the whole world.

I lied.

"I slapped him because he's an asshole. I hate him. I don't care if he comes back."

I never slapped my dad. If I did that, he would've flinched. My dad never works out, and he's pretty weak. I added that for dramatic

effect, and because in my favorite *Friends* episode, Rachel slaps Ross when she's mad.

My friends don't change by the seasons. I mean, maybe that season in particular, but not usually. That girl and I were best friends for freshman year, but she wasn't best friends with the real me. I was somebody else that year, someone I never want to talk to again. We seemed like best friends, but she was just an excuse—a distraction.

My dad almost left, but didn't follow through with it, but he did tell me that he was going to. That's the first time he's ever said it to me personally, and that's the first time I've ever fully believed it.

I didn't lie about my sister; my mom thinks I do though. Maybe it's my dad's fault or my mom's fault or even the dog's fault.

I want to let it be my fault. I hate what I believe in; that I hold my life in someone else's hands. In the moment, it's so much easier. Blame is the simplest way to reach personal perfection. So, when I trip in the hallway and someone sees me, forget my English essay at home, and my parents break up, for a minute, it's gotta be someone else's fault.

By the way, I still believe in Santa, but can't figure out how he gets around the whole world in twelve hours.

Diving Bell Romance

Dena Greenstreet
PIPERVILLE, PA

It seemed that life had
Become something akin to a Buster Keaton film
Each conversation a game of charades
She did her crossword
As he shouted underwater
He knew the word
Pulchritudinous.
It meant beautiful.
She would care, if she could listen.
But there he would remain.
Four walls, no exit.
Waiting for the day she would
Tap on the glass.

Counting Geese

Jade Woodridge
ACCOKEEK, MD

TRUE LOVE. I had never given much thought as to what it meant, but when I think of it, gagging geese come flying into my mind. Strange creatures to associate love with, but they are together for life. When they find each other, it's as if all distractions fall away. When one of them dies, the other spend the rest of its time remembering its partner, never to fall in love again . . .

I had never met another woman like her. She was grimy with grease and smelled of jet fuel. Her hair was always done up in a messy knot under her bandanna. She knew how to fit a propeller on an axle to make it fan and she knew how to jump start an engine to make those planes roar. The other fellows in the factory and soldiers coming in looked down upon her and the other woman. What she was doing wasn't exactly liked in suburbia, but it was necessary.

Too many a times I'd see husbands storming in like bullets were at their backs, yelling fiercely at a disobedient wife, sometimes even hitting them. It was too manly for feminine little things like them to be building killing machines. She was my first real love. My only love.

I had been sent to check on production of the crafts and collect the finished products that we needed on hand: guns, grenades and the such. I had a deadline to get these necessities back to Base. We were behind one bomber and thirty-two M2 Brownings, and I had just lost my temper with a man one rank lower than me cat calling the woman workers. I had him push a hand cart of Mk. 2 Fragments out to the truck while I checked the next available bomber.

It was *her* bomber. She slid out from under it, grease smeared across her cheek and thick, bulky gloves covering her thin hands. "Lucy," her name tag read.

"The bomber will be completely finished by

the end of this week, Sir." I barely heard the words she spoke, but took in the slight lilt of her hard voice, used to yelling over the scream of the drills and chinks of electric hammers on steel. I nodded dumbly, regaining my composure and casting my eyes up to the hulking metal winged bird.

That was the first time I had ever laid my eyes on someone like her. She was unwed and fresh out of school. She lived with her aunt who had been widowed by war and spent almost all of her time breathing in the fumes of the factory. Half deaf by the noise while her aunt nursed the wounded.

I'd have to admit that the three days I spent in Roanoke weren't all spent on duty. I spent my time in the factory talking to Lucy. She was strong mentally and physically. She was determined to make a difference, not being held up in some pie-smelling kitchen baking for a man who treated her like his mother. I wouldn't treat her like that. I liked a woman with a mind of her own. It made them harder to get, but she was well worth it. She didn't have a man waiting to marry her either. She told me with a chuckle that men didn't like woman who where stronger than they were. I didn't mind that she could work a wrench for hours in the same continuous muscle building movement. It made her all the more beautiful.

When the third day was up, I made a promise to her that I would be back. Lucy was tough, she didn't look saddened at all that I was leaving, going back to Base. She lifted her narrow chin and said "Good bye, Mr. Winslow."

I knew I was coming back, even if she didn't. I wouldn't let her think that all those things got to me. They didn't. I would come back.

I was in the Forty-Fifth Regiment packing to be shipped off to Japan. My heart wasn't in it like it used to be. I use to anticipate the rough journey across the grey sea to the place that took my brother from me. I use to love the feel of the revolver in my skilled hands in training. Each rank I climbed for the sheer thrill of war. But now, I found myself staring blankly the duffle bag at my feet, the helmet in my hands and the revolver I had loved on my hip. I hadn't been back to Roanoke in weeks. Those long weeks taught me more than my few years in the army ever had. That revolver meant nothing. I hadn't loved it; I husted the pain it caused. I didn't need it because it needed nothing from me. I needed Lucy. I wanted to hear her loud voice again and hold her strong hands in mine.

When You Go

Alexis Jaycox
NORWICH, NY

This summer
I won't remember the image of you
In the yard
The yellow dog
At your feet
I won't remember
The string of the sidewalk
Pulling me forward
To the black shutters
And the heavy door
I won't know
That person
Behind the rusty gate
Anymore
I won't know you
When you finally drive away
The window down
The yellow dog
Already missing your shadow
The weeks drift away
Like forgotten papers
Claimed by the wind
But you are already gone.

Those few years of building my ranks were gone the moment I met her. I'd told the Admiral that I'd go check on supplies this time and not Chuck. I was itching to see her again but I didn't let the Admiral know, or he would have declared me soft and shipped me off anyways.

I sauntered into the noisy factory, boots shined, mustache trimmed, and a daffodil behind my back. My eyes automatically scanned the section Lucy was assigned to. I didn't see her. I ignored the fleeting glances the women on break gave me and continued looking for her.

"Mr. Winslow?" I would never forget the astonishment in her voice as I turned. Had she lost all faith in a man's promise? I smiled and presented my daffodil nervously. I could shoot a man point blank but I couldn't talk to this woman without stammering. She didn't mind. Her smile all but took the fears away and her voice soothed my rising panic of re-

jection.

But of course, I didn't leave without the supplies. I promised I would come back before I left, and I did.

All those years of training were eaten away by her dark eyes and clever smile. I was putty under her skilled hands. I stayed more and more in Roanoke before I requested a transfer. I had all but abandoned my active duty to be a test pilot. Testing the newborn metal birds that came from behind the factory walls. Lucy was afraid for me. Who knew if a new plane would short out, or if a cog was misplaced. The plane would come flaming back to earth. But I trusted Lucy. I trusted her sure hands and love that I would safely land any plane that she built. She was my one and only.

Almost a year had passed before I gathered the courage to slip the silver and gold woven ring around her slim finger. But only circumstance had me give her my mother's ring so hastily. The war had gotten bad. Rumor said that it was to be the worse yet before it could become better. I had to leave her. I had to go. I had never seen her cry, but the tears slid down her pinched face as she tried to hold it in. I promised her I would come back and she would be my wife. I poured all my love into that promise and gave her my life in those words.

I turned my back and didn't look back at her tear and grease stained face for fear that I would run back into her arms. I was afraid I would let a tear or two slip, because what were the odds that I would come back alive?

My childhood friend Bucky was shipped to Japan in good spirits and hopes of bringing back one of those painted "Jap-gals." I was sad to say he came back with an American flag draped over his coffin.

Lucy promised to be there for me always. She would be waiting when I returned. Waiting for my name to become hers and we would start a family.

That long year was the worse I had ever endured. I had been shot at. I almost had my feet blown off. I had witnessed the horrible tear gas and had been drenched to the bone by gallons upon gallons of rainwater, but I knew it was all worth it. I took every daring, dangerous and grueling job the Admiral would throw at me in hope that it would send me home sooner. What sent me home was the abrupt amputation of my right hand. The God dammed revolver blew sky high along with my fingers.

I dreamt of Lucy in that hospital ward, passing the time with images of her in a flow-

ing white gown, or our house on the corner. Of how her face would light up when I came into the factory. Or how her face would crumple after seeing the stub of my missing hand.

She wasn't there. Lucy, my *Lucy* wasn't there waiting. I know what you must be thinking: she ran off with some other guy while I was in Vietnam fighting to get back to her. I wish it was that easy. I wish she had run off with that phantom guy, because then, I would have known that she was still living. Those dark pretty eyes and clever smile. The hands that were skilled in every aspect be it touch or delicately piecing together a dangerous explosive. I wish I had the knowledge that that phantom guy was taking care of her, that she was happy. Those thoughts barely got me through the days as I clung to the memory of my Lucy holding my hands or wrapping her arms around my neck. The smell of jet fuel and lavender as I leaned down to kiss her. I wish I had looked back at her that day.

She was dead. She wasn't waiting when I

got back, only the charred remains of the factory where she worked.

I kept the newspaper article, the one that mentioned her indirectly. It was an accident, the paper said, how the grenade detonated in one of the workers hands, and the chain reaction that followed.

Now you see how I wished that that phantom guy had taken her away. But Lucy was dead and I never found another like her.

Now I find myself counting the geese that fly overhead. Counting which had *their* Lucy—someone to love and spend the rest of their days with—and counting which would remain alone. I would remain alone. I had never found another woman as headstrong and sure of herself as Lucy since, and I never will. What I do have are fond memories of the times we had together and an ageing heart to carry her love.

And what I do know is that she'll keep her promise to wait for me, as I live the rest of my life missing her.

we would dream

Mariah Xu
BRIDGEWATER, NJ

we would cartwheel
down chalk-smothered sidewalks,
bearing many a hopscotch box
and thousands of turbulent tic-tac-toe tattoos,
her rampant tubercular cuts flew everywhere,
as we landed in a preposterous pile on the
grass.

we would wrap ourselves in warm winter gear,
waddle around in wreaths of scarves,
and jump jubilantly into chest-deep snow,
squeaking,
floundering like fish out of water,
only to shed our layers of wool and cotton and
polyester,
to let our tomato-numb thumbs find feeling
again,
pressed against hot cocoa mugs.

we would swim through sweltering summer
nights,
hovering in the wind like paper airplanes
as we chased fluttering, flickering fireflies,

disappearing-reappearing, as if to tease us,
the ice cream truck, tooting its mirthful melo-
dies,
would bring popicles that tasted like rain-
bows,
and slid down our fingers as if they cried tears
of blue and red.

we would scale slippery mountain slopes,
our lifelines tied around bellies
as we became top-secret doctor-astronaut-spies,
we would barrel through playground king-
doms,
me a scorching sorceress of fire,
she a wild witch wielding wind,
and instead of singers and dancers,
we were save-the-world-ers and i-can-do-any-
thing-ers,
on our very own homemade stage.

we would giggle and shriek over foldout lunch
tables
in elementary school cafeterias,
swap my potato chips for your peanut butter
and jelly sandwich,
blow bubbles into our cardboard cartons of
milk through our straws.

but now we slip silently past each other in the
hallways,
and her marched, straightened hair slides stiff-
ly down her back
as i watch her walk wistfully away.

Iris Wyoming

Hannah Domeier
MEDWAY, MA

Enter house look around ignore my parents' friends look look look oh missed him maybe go back five steps not there shoot outside perhaps but I thought he was always inside how would you know I don't know I'm guessing then I went outside and the sky was burning. The big blue sky was burning from a fire boy was it big it felt like drowning I've only been swimming once and that was when I was little so I don't remember if I drowned or not but I'm just guessing what it feels like and I assume it feels like this but this time I was drowning in the fire of the sky.

The fire was from the fireworks it was the Fourth of July the American happy firework holiday as seen in movies and suburbia but they were everywhere these fireworks I had this strange feeling something was wrong is something wrong no are you sure I think so oh well okay but how does she know anything she's a waitress stop it that's a nasty thought I debated this with myself for a while then I saw him. He is gorgeous more than anything even movie stars believe me him gorgeous gorgeous I walked slowly by I was only getting a drink it was all clearly devised because I usually plan everything very strategically even guys especially guys him.

Originally I met him at a barbeque white people love stuff like this Fourth of July and BBQs. So I met him said hi and fell in love with him and now he is the cause of all my misery it's awful but I love him love at first sight and it's not even infatuation like Romeo and Juliet. I love Shakespeare. My mind is very chaotic. This you should know about me.

I walked carefully by the soda table the one with all the soda I poured myself a glass hey do I know you yes yes yes are you Iris yes you're Gabe right of course he is I knew that I'm just pretending I'm not a stalker oh well hi hi awkward pause look at sky cue exit now imagine you don't care but I do I know you do but pretend you don't okay I'll see you later then yeah bye. Oh my God he recognized me beautiful this is great oh calm down

yes it was all very exciting fantastic brilliant as the Brits say 'ello gov'nah! Perfect! Perfection! Yes! Yay! Heroic! And so then I watched him out of the corner of my eye for the rest of the night his face looked excruciatingly beautiful in the fireworks boom BOOM oh God it was all very overwhelming so I went to the bathroom and pretended I needed to pee oh you've grown how are you Iris fine thanks you good good bathroom no somebody's in it so I went to find my parents ah there they are! Are we going soon you're so tall now hi okay let's go alright I guess I'm leaving bye I'll talk to you later boom BOOM BOOM BOOM finale yeah is Monday good yeah yeah bye honey kiss kiss alrighty let's leave thank you I look around for him but I can't see him whisked away suddenly by my dad who hates these things. In the car: God, I couldn't get out of there fast enough you like these people yes really YES wow my mom gets defensive by looking out the window. My sister used to keep me company during these things but she went off to college and now she's living in New York she doesn't want to get married or at least until she's thirty-five I said then your kids will be retarded she told me I shouldn't say stuff like that why because it's not politically correct who cares she said liberals did.

But now she's gone and I have to suffer through BBQs without her it's torture but worse than the actual party is driving home with my parents they are insane it's crazy we turn into the driveway after too long in the car it's about a five-minute drive we could walk but my mom's too fat I'm scared I'll look like her one day so I throw up everything I eat. Cue run into room it's decorated with posters and postcards I'm going to move to Wyoming one day it's nice and quiet there only cows dirt and road we took a family vacation last year and I fell in love with it Wyoming I mean so as soon as I'm old enough to run away that's where I'm going it'll be a blast just me and hopefully Gabe and our little farmhouse in the middle of nowhere no people around and the best part will be that I'll be away from here and everybody here. I might come visit every once and a while but probably not only if I have to like for funerals or something but definitely not for birthdays they come every year death only comes once unless you're a Hindu or something. To be perfectly honest I do believe in God but I don't believe in government I hate government and politics I think it's a disgusting business with two-faced liars doing the talking and politics permeating their ranks so this is why I will never vote for president

and part of the reason I want to move to Wyoming they don't seem to have political problems out there plus I guess I'm a Republican if I had to choose.

In my room I change quickly close my shades then I brush my teeth and then I jump into bed pull the covers over me but leave my eyes wide open so wide open that I begin to see funny things like insects floating in the middle of the room right by my dresser oh look there they go up up up the wall down down down to the floor then I don't remember it but I fell asleep sometime

Homesick

Robert Bedetti
BEVERLY, MA

It's a rainy Saturday night in April.
You decide to go to sleep, let your mind rest.

Portland, Boston, New York, Montreal—
so many places you could run.
Lying in bed, you think of Polly locked in
her rusty cage chirping away despite
the rain seeping through the pantry,
the rain you loathe, the chirping you love.

Like The Factory's broken lunch whistle the
cracked
tea kettle's whines fill the spacious house,
mixing with Polly's singing.
You could be anywhere but here, drowning in
the rain.
The lyrics from a favorite song of yours
play in your head, erased
by the dogs barking on the street, bathing in
the rain.

It has been raining for weeks—
So many places you could run.
Like the dogs, you want to cry out, leave
your home behind, but you remember the
flowers
awaking in the soil, drinking in the rain.
You decide to go to sleep, let your
mind rest.
It's just a rainy Saturday night in April.
Polly, cracked kettle, no
other home.

later after I got bored of thinking of things like insects and weight issues. When I woke up the sun was filtering through the shades and I sat there and enjoyed the beauty of it for a while until I got too hungry to ignore my stomach so I went downstairs and found cereal and milk my parents still weren't up it was nearly 10 o'clock or they were up but they just left without leaving me a note that had happened before and it was rather annoying but it would be nice if they weren't here because then I could do whatever I wanted to do if they were sleeping I could still do whatever I wanted to but I would have to be quiet about it which was never as fun. I watched TV for about an hour and then the phone rang hello hi it's Mom oh hi I'm at work oh I forget to tell you oh how are you fine what time did you wake up I don't know ten or so okay well just letting you know where I am where's Dad at work he works yeah what did you think I don't know well I gotta go-but I'll talk to you later okay bye bye. I put the phone back and continued watching television. Finally I decided I felt disgusting and decided to take a shower but first I turned the stereo up really loud so I could hear it over the shower I left the bathroom door open it didn't matter nobody was home then I took off all my clothes examined my face really close in the mirror stepped away and tried to see if I was losing weight then I went into the shower and sang along with all of the good songs that I knew the words to these songs were limited so I mostly hummed even in the shower I was trying to impress people it was really sickening and sad I have this firm belief that models are ruining teenage girls' self-esteem all across the country and world I am definitely one of these girls even though I pretend I am too confident and pretty to ever be sucked up in this plot by the government that tries to breed only pretty babies for the next generation I mean what do they care what the population looks like is what I want to know.

I got out of the shower put on some clothing decided to go for a bike ride left a note saying where I was then I jumped on my bike and casually rode around the neighborhood. The house right next to ours was the O'Connors' they were from Ireland therefore they were Irish Catholics too they had two little boys named something that was hard to pronounce very Irish-sounding and they all had these funny accents that you really had to pay attention to otherwise you couldn't understand a word they were saying they were actually so hard to understand your ear practically had to

be in their mouths to really comprehend what they were saying and usually whatever they were saying wasn't very interesting my dad enjoyed them very much because they owned a bar and Mr. O'Connor would sometimes give my dad discounts on the beer. Next to the O'Connors was the Fishes yes their name was Fish they were very old and not very nice so we did not associate with them and I ignored them in every way possible and next to them was a young couple that was going to get married I didn't know them because they had just moved in and our neighborhood really isn't that friendly. Our other next-door neighbors were the Muellers the parents were Joanne and Frank and they had three kids who were all older than me I think two of them were in college the youngest was Becky I really didn't like her she was always mean to me for some unknown reason I've never done anything to her she's just jealous I guess but I don't know what of. And across the street lived Mr. Beckett and Mrs. Sherwood-Beckett, a very mysterious and scandalous couple who looked like hippies and drove cars that ran on vegetable oil they were nice but I didn't ever see them he worked somewhere in the city and she was a preschool teacher.

All in all it was a nice but boring place to live much better than the slums of India or the slow hot South or the jungles of Africa or the fakeness of Los Angeles but still worse than the emptiness of Wyoming and the vast boundless expanse of space in the sky but it was a fine place to grow up because there was no gangs or drugs or bad school systems or drive-bys. So I rode around this town and neighborhood for a good amount of time and I prayed the whole time not to see anybody I knew and luckily I only saw Patty Polack who is a loser and I quickly maneuvered my way clear of her I was very fortunate that I didn't see anybody else I probably have a psychological problem but it's fine by me as long as I don't have to talk to anyone I know or anyone I don't know about it then I rode home and made myself a tuna fish sandwich and I thought about Mrs. Fish as I was eating and I half-imagined I was eating her or her cousin I mean what type of fish is she exactly a tuna fish or an angel fish or just a fish fish maybe she's just fish I would never ask her this of course but I pictured myself going up to her house one day and she was getting the mail how are you Mrs. Fish I'm doing well Iris how about you fine thanks so what kind of fish are you I am a [insert fish name here] fish why thanks Mrs. Fish you're welcome have

Summer Baby

May Treuhaft-Ali
JACKSON HEIGHTS, NY

Summer baby
The crickets were always there
Their voices filled the dark yard
The silvery air splashing across your shoulders
Trees lean over to kiss the tops of our heads
A mother who tells me I am a flower,
For with sunshine and water, I shoot up
Each year I do
In the garden, one can stumble into a ditch
When they are too drunken with sunlight
Surveying the golden and deep blue puddles
that lie
Scattered across the soil, I know
I am a flower, and
When I think of furious December falls
I see a cricket locked up in a glass jar
I was born in the afternoon
When the sun is strongest
Even though my mother sang to me
I was a baby who never slept

a good day now thank you I will you too. It was all very idyllic and impossible but nice to think about and I thought about it for so long that I began to think it was real and that it was going to happen so much so that I almost went up to the Fishes' house as if casually walking by but I didn't and I thought about calling my friends but of course I didn't because I always wait for them to call me first it's this set rule in my head do not call anybody first they must always call you I figure that if they call me they must want to talk to me and therefore they must like me somewhat and so it's not at all awkward where if I call them first they might not really want to talk to me and I might be intruding in on something they are doing or they might be with other people and that is never ever good it is never ever ever good to call people when they are with other people it just turns into a very very awkward situation and awkward is never good.

It is July 5 and I have nothing to do this is pathetic I am a very pathetic person but I am the only one who thinks this a lot of people think I am great which is great I am very smart



Photo by Kristina Velkova; SECAUCUS, NJ

I am number one in my class and I love being smart it's one of the few things I love about myself but sometimes I feel ostracized because I am smart and I am also very very very VERY observant I know things about people that I don't think they even know about themselves but I'm not as observant with myself it is very hard to be observant with yourself I think this is mostly because we don't want to observe ourselves unless perhaps we are beautiful but in that case observant takes on the same meaning as looking and they are two extremely different things. My tuna fish sandwich is done so I decide to force it up gag gag gag then I run upstairs and brush my

teeth and then take out a piece of my priceless enormously valuable gum I wonder what Gabe would think if he knew I threw up my food but I can't think about that I cannot get fat no matter what otherwise I will have to kill myself my nightmares consist of me so fat I cannot breathe and I have a breathing tube down my throat and oxygen pipes up my nose I really can't take this because my grandpa had oxygen tubes and tanks and I always see him from my three-year-old viewpoint and I see him sitting in a chair with the machine next to him chugging chugging chugging and I push the button but only when he says to all of this is embedded perhaps even scarred into

my brain in the memory section the section that nobody knows how it works this is where everything is hidden my memory is fantastic.

There are a few disadvantages of being smart like people always cheat off of you and you have this weird feeling that the only reason they are friends with you or sit next to you is so they can cheat off of you but then again sometimes the person sitting next to you is really hot and then I don't care so much if they cheat as long as sometimes I lead them astray is this right NO yes okay thanks it's bad but it's good it's a dirty guilty pleasure like ice cream and cake but much much worse I always know people are cheating off me but I let them do it because part of me doesn't care and part of me knows they don't care and eventually everything will definitely work itself out for example during the driving test or during the SAT test or in college and most infinitely in life. In one year I can drive and then I will go west I will chase the sun down and it will be fantastic I cannot wait the clock in my room says tick tick, tick tick it's counting down with me every second every minute every hour is one second or minute or hour closer and then finally I'll be gone I'll be out of here BOOM BOOM like a firework my dust leaving red streaks in the sky maybe out west I'll see someone I know and it will be very much like On the Road I'll be hoboing across America everything very picturesque. I'm not sure what I'll do when I get to Wyoming or the Grand Wild Wild West that's the one thing about me I don't know what I want in life I mean I want to get married one day and have kids but I don't know what I want my job to be or my career to be I'm told it'll work itself out but I don't believe this because I'm not just suddenly going to have an epiphany when I wake up one day and see the future and my dream job is not going to light itself up in my room so everyone who says it will work itself out is pretty much a fool.

Since there is nothing to do I decide to go tanning since it is a very noncommittal activity I grab a towel from the linen closet find a sunny spot on the green lawn the grass is slightly itchy but it's fine the sun nearly burns my eyes so I turn over onto my stomach when I realize I'm not even in my bathing suit okay maybe this was a bad idea how could you do that I don't know you're losing your mind I know maybe you shouldn't change because somebody might see you yeah but it's hot well fine I'll go inside. But I don't go inside I just leave the towel splayed out on the grass I sit on the front steps and watch the world go by my neighbors walking their dogs the sun

slowly setting the wind slowly picking up the night slowly coming overhead clouds start to form and I decide to sit out here until it rains or until I see someone I know. Nobody I see comes but at around six my mom pulls in the driveway I stand up brush myself off I am actually tan now my back and neck are stiff from sitting she never parks in the garage only my dad does that she gets out breathing hard and holding a bag hi honey hi how was your day okay what did you do nothing alright well I was thinking that maybe we can do something together tomorrow because I don't have work okay do you know what you want to do no okay well let me know here's dinner she hands me the bag and I look inside it's a rotisserie chicken the dry ones you get from the store and a bag of French fries they don't go together looks good I say.

I set the table cut the chicken bake the fries and pour myself a glass of lemonade all before my mom makes it into the house I don't know what takes her so long she always takes forever to get into the house sometimes I see her looking at her flowers or I'll see her chatting with the neighbors but never for a long time and it doesn't take her too long to climb up the front steps she must do something or she does nothing which takes time of course. Dad's gonna be home late is the first thing she says when she walks in the door okay he is always late just like she is always fat and slow my dad is not fat but he is not skinny I don't talk to him much I barely ever see him he is okay though he mostly drinks beer and reads weird books in their wedding picture my mom is pretty but not beautiful and my dad looks nice I don't know what happened to them.

My mom and I sit down to dinner and it is so quiet I can hear the clock ticking and I swear I can hear electricity running down the lines swoosh swoosh buzz buzz the electrons bumping and bizzing so maybe we can go to the mall tomorrow she says she hates the mall I know that and she knows I hate it too okay I say unless you can think of something better no well what about the zoo the zoo okay maybe not I laugh quietly I haven't gone to the zoo in such a long time not since I was in kindergarten what about the museum I think about it it sounds bad at first but I've always secretly liked museums yeah sounds good really yeah okay well I'll see what time it opens okay she smiles to herself she likes doing things with me. My sister calls after my dad comes home Iris she says when I pick up yes hi hi how is everyone good really I don't know do you want to talk to Mom sure I hand my mom the phone Daphne she says they talk

and I leave when I was little I used to like listening in on the phone conversations on the other line but now I don't care enough to listen and I got tired of being caught Iris my mom would say and I would quickly hang up it was all very fun.

My mom comes up to my room after she finishes talking and says your sister wants to move back home what I'm not sure this is a good thing and I'm not sure this is something I want she's been here forever make her leave make her leave it's quiet and peaceful without her why can't she stay gone why does she want to come back I'm leaving in one year that's one more year with her she's nice but I don't want her here. Is she for sure she doesn't know yet are you going to let her yes why because she's my daughter but shouldn't she be on her own by now she was on her own then why is she coming back because she's out of money doesn't she have a job she lost it why people sometimes lose their jobs you know I know you should be happy stop being a brat what I'm not being a brat Mom she's insane everybody in this family is insane. She stands there breathing hard and I can see where her stomach drops down into her pants and her rolls of fat like big long Tootsie Rolls it's disgusting her hands are on her hips and in this moment I am scared of her I don't know what she could do to me besides threaten me but I'm so scared of her okay I say you'll be nice maybe you will yes she turns as if she is going to back out of the room but she suddenly speaks do you still want to go to the museum tomorrow okay huff huff her lungs say hmph leave please leave Iris yeah she opens her mouth closes it and leaves.

I lay my head on my bed and I want to cry yes my life is a sob story but it isn't so I get up and I want to run I wish I could run to Wyoming but it's way too far from here it would take days just to drive there let alone run there but Forrest Gump did it it was a movie of course the movies are never real wasn't it a book first books are more real but still false of course. My sister is going to come back she is eight years older than me and smaller and louder she is everything I am not really when we go somewhere people notice me first partly because I am taller and partly because people think I am pretty but they quickly forget about me because my sister is just so there and in-your-face but everyone likes her although I am not totally sure why. Cue walk out of room and find Mom she is standing on the porch and I think she is going to cry like me but not like me because she actually has a reason to cry when I was nine she got really

depressed and had to be hospitalized this is somewhat of a family secret she is now on medication but I know she is still sad everything about her is sad her eyes her body her face her lungs and heart her brain I feel that if I were to crawl around inside of her there would be only emptiness she is so empty it is terrible. Sometimes I want to her to be me and me to be her because I just want her to be happy and even though I am rather depressed

Wish I Could Go Out to JFK

Julian Ricardo
BROOKLYN, NY

Watching girders reach,
stretching ligaments
indefinitely upward and downwards,
though neither direction offers salvation.
Blustery, whipping winds offering a hand,
a slow dance, and a hand slipped around the
small of the back
an unfortunate dip
a small mishap
an unsteady trip.
Burgundy bubbles frothing out of rusted lips.
Soldiers never felt a vacancy so hopeless,
desert sand is eternally warm, ever radiant,
weather is fickle, a sign
of the times, this time
condescending, money for a beggar,
a nagging hunger, a welcome pain,
too little to fold on poker night,
throw a tantrum, flailing hats,
fee fi fo fum pounding,
and too great to ignore altogether.
The promise of no promises is comforting,
calling each night
through paper-thin, wafer-thin walls
would any wooden ceiling dare put
a hand over an infant's midnight shriek?
a boy seeing snakes in the folds of his sheets,
and rafter in the insulating plastic,
dreaming, realizing,
pajamas too tight,
searching for company to keep him alone,
to tumble up
down,
watching cars behind, not fading,
not disappearing, but dissipating,
rippling into boiling air.

Familiar House

Michaela Hoffman
HAMPDEN, ME

I retreat into our universe
reluctantly—
the one we created with
saltwater and painted metal
and dusk, rain showers spent
huddled underneath the porch.

In early afternoons
the water hose sprayed rainbows.
Your eyes lit up like bicycle wheels
on footless descents
down the hill.

Open palmed and big-eyed,
I leaned into three-faced mirrors
trying to fix the pigtails
you'd tied in my hair.
Somehow
they never stayed in.

through those late August nights;
the rain came down in frayed ribbons,

blurring the world
like tears on newspaper ink.

Maybe my pigtails would've held longer
had I not waited up for hours
for mom to come home,
had I not seen your name in the newspaper
for crimes
from which we built sandcastles.

You slipped away
like colors from the hose,
sandcastles in the tide.
I slept fitfully
while you broke the lock
on mom's jewelry box.

I still hear the choking of waves
when you visit now,
your baby in your arms.

Big-eyed, she stretches a palm
for the tie in your hair.

I know the tide
you two will take;
I know the mirrors
in which she'll fix her pigtails.

Though you will offer her a universe
filled with stanning, indefinite fires,
she will lock herself up
in a familiar house
to which you have lost the key.

myself I am less depressed than her and this would be better for her if I were her I would try to make everything in her world perfect well maybe not perfect but better and then we could trade our bodies back this might change things in a good way if I did this.

It was nine o'clock and still light outside so I went outside our house was relatively small it was a split level all the houses in my neighborhood are if you go past our neighborhood and a couple of streets down that's where Gabe lives and where all the big houses are but I don't just like him because he's rich he's actually nice not a jerk like most guys. I sat on the front steps like I had this afternoon and I didn't really think about much but just sat there mesmerized by everything the fading of the light and the bugs chirping I loved everything about it except the mosquitoes who bit me and sucked the blood out of me but other than that it was fine and nice and quiet the occasional car would pass by but that was it nobody but residents ever came down this street there was nothing here

and nothing to want here unless you were buying a house but even the houses weren't great. Everything seemed very slow and hot and miserable like rain I was bored so I went inside and fell asleep on the couch watching TV I woke up that way in the morning but there was a blanket over me and I was lying supine instead of slumped over like I usually am when I wake up in weird places like cars and planes and trains and other people's houses it wasn't very romantic. I walked into the kitchen and there she was eating pancakes she doesn't eat in front of people like in food courts and she always orders salads in restaurants but at home boy does she eat slow down woman I want to say shut your mouth but keep talking she stuffs it she stuffs it all down her throat it's gross it's disgusting do you still want to go to the museum today I think we both like museums because they are quiet and peaceful and everybody is nice and they don't really care what you look like there museums are nerdy but I like them anyway.

Sure I say okay want to leave soon sure I

eat an apple take a shower I look the same weight and get dressed it's hot but I wear a long sleeved shirt because museums are always cold there are some places that are always cold supermarkets and malls and movie theaters we take her car to the museum the art museum and I hope that they buy me a car when I'm sixteen because I really don't want to have to steal theirs but I will if I have to if it's my only way to Wyoming then I will. Sometimes I feel very useless and I don't know what to do with my arms or face so I just stand there awkwardly chewing on the inside of my cheeks and playing with my arms this was how I felt in the museum I tried to find interest in the paintings but I couldn't everything was too distracting like that really cute boy over there drawing on his sketchpad or by God this fascinating map slash brochure slash advertisement slash pamphlet I was holding they give them to everyone after they pay thank you come again here's some random paper please enjoy because we're chopping down the rainforest for your enjoyment tip nobody enjoys it mostly because nobody reads it. After a while we left and she decided to take me to get a treat ice cream no thanks I said I really wanted some though are you sure yeah well okay she bought a caramel flavored ice cream gross I never liked caramel or as some people say carmel Carmen San Diego where in the world is Carmen San Diego or Carmen that play that my mom sometimes plays on the stereo it's a tragedy in Shakespeare's time a comedy only meant that no one died it didn't have to be funny at all that's why A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy even though it's not funny and my least favorite Shakespeare play.

We got home sometime in the late afternoon I ran to the bathroom but nothing came up and then she made dinner which was ravioli how could she still be hungry enough after eating car-mel ice cream to have two helpings of cheese stuffed ravioli slow down slow down woman your life is passing you by it was as tragic as Carmen and any other depressing thing that ever existed or happened. We watched a movie on the couch after that and it was good but not memorable that's how it is with a lot of movies sometimes I don't even remember the name of a movie I've seen even though I barely forget anything just because it was good but forgettable then I went to bed and slept thoroughly and deeply peacefully. One annoying thing that a lot of people do is they tell you they had a dream about you and then you ask them if this is a good or bad thing and they just say I don't know and give you a strange look and then you are left stand-

ing there puzzled but also sort of angry as if you didn't know what they thought of you before now you really don't it's just awful so in this case I don't tell anyone I dream about them because it's also sort of embarrassing as in why were you thinking of me I barely know you but the majority of the time I dream about myself.

At noon I saw Gabe drive by my house not in a drive by of course because we don't live in anything close to a bad neighborhood this is a good and bad thing but he was in his dad's car and they were talking I don't know what about of course but I'm guessing it was uninteresting because Gabe was staring out the window I mean I do this a lot too so that's another thing we have in common. Most of the time I'm not paying attention or I hear what someone is saying but I am so involved in something else that I don't even respond it's as if I can't because this thing I'm doing is just so consuming all my concentration is concentrated into this one thing and it's not that I'm being rude I'll respond but it may just be a little while later as in five minutes or fifteen minutes or in some cases five seconds. I didn't know where he was going but maybe football practice camp he plays football my town loves football and sports they are sickeningly obsessed with it I don't get it they care more about football and everything like that like baseball and basketball and hockey than school and education I don't like it and I cannot make myself justify it or comprehend it because what a lot of people especially kids my age don't realize is that if you're cool and slack off in high school by the time you're thirty you'll regret it you'll be a slob living with your grandmother in her basement with no job smoking cigarettes and watching porn and you'll have no college education and you'll be a hobo bum with no money and nobody will want to be friends with you then and girls won't want to go out with you then. Of course I have nothing against sports themselves they're fun and give you exercise but it's this religion with them that I don't understand pray pray pray to the college football hero the traded Yankee player the Hail Mary pass come come come to me in my five year old dream of becoming an athlete not a doctor or judge or engineer but a football player the ultimate hero hint buddy hint they don't advance the world they don't do anything for it but distract its citizens it's all just a giant plan the government sets up so the normal person is too busy watching television and sports to care about what they're doing in and to the world but he did look pretty good in that car who cares if he

plays football it's cute.

My sister called again later that night it was final she was coming back home wow what notice she was always like that always undecided always changing her mind and assuming you'll be okay with all her plans once she tells you them and she always tells you her plans shortly before her plans go into effect. Mom picked up but she gave the phone to me Iris hi she's so perky and happy how can some people always be perky and happy so I was thinking that Mom and Dad's anniversary is coming up yeah well I was thinking that maybe we could throw a party for them okay do you think that would be good sure do you think they would like that I don't know okay great what do you want to do I don't know aren't you in charge hmm I'll need to think about it we don't have enough money to rent out a place it could just be at the house right yeah okay this is so good already I need to get out of here Wyoming Wyoming Wyoming my Hail Mary pass my Hail Mary pass come come come closer I can practically taste the ball I can practically touch it just one more year just one more year. I do realize that leaving for Wyoming means I'll be dropping out of school and I'll probably become a stereotype and a number by doing this but it's necessary well maybe not necessary nothing is really necessary but food and water but I can find a job there and I can always finish school there and I'll find someplace to live I've been saving up and I have that bank account I just need to learn how to drive and then I am out of here rocket bomb.

I think if anything I am scared of becoming my mom or dad or sister they're fine people but I just can't be like them because they seem to me like failures well maybe not my sister but my mom and dad maybe failures is too strong a word but I see so many people just stop they have these big dreams when they're young and they're cool and everything but then something happens I don't know they have kids or something and then their lives just halt and I don't want this to happen to me I don't want to stop unless of course I die. A lot of people are scared of death but not me it's part of life you're born and then you live and you can't be afraid of death when you are alive otherwise it will be as if you were dead your whole life you would never have truly lived and this is why I don't like a lot of religions because all they talk about is how awful life is and how death is so great heaven and such but it's not it's not life is the miracle not death and you're not reborn you just die and this is why you should not be afraid of death death is not a bad thing it is just something. And what I really don't

like is when people justify the monstrosities of life with the afterlife and resurrection oh it's okay we're killing you and torturing you and it's okay if you don't improve anything in life because you're a good person and you'll go to heaven no no NO this is not how it works you should not live to die you should just live because death will come do not worry this is a fact surer than perhaps anything else but the important thing to remember is that being a good person is not the best thing in the world being a person who changes the world in a positive way is the best thing that can happen to you and you will have dented the earth and it will not forget you but if you don't dent the earth you just rot in the earth and nobody will remember you even your name will go away eventually. Perhaps the thing I am most scared of is not denting the earth changing it somehow I am scared I will be forgotten because I have seen people die and I know that nobody will remember them fifty years from now and I am so so scared that this will happen to me and I see this happening to my mom and dad and my sister and I want to break this habit in my family I don't need to be famous like Jesus or something but remembered that's all I really want I just want to be remembered and I know this is something I myself am capable of doing. So maybe one day I will do something to be remembered by because I am oh so scared of just rotting in the earth I am not scared of dying but of not being remembered and not doing something important and great while I am alive and maybe I think moving will help me do this but I can't tell you for sure.

A lot of people think that science proves there is no god but I don't think this is true at all I think people just believe there is no god and they try to invade this idea into other people's brains by science but if anything science proves there is a god. For example the big bang theory may be true and this may show that creation is not real but if the big bang started off as many gases floating around in space then what created the gases the gases did not create themselves and one time in science class I read that it is no exaggeration to say that light is life and the writers obviously thought they were very smart and intuitive by saying this but people had this right a long time ago because the first thing God said to create the world is Let There Be Light magnificent. People think they are so smart now but really everything said now was said before including everything I have said am saying or will say unless of course I invent words but I will just be saying the same things in a dif-

ferent language William Shakespeare invented thousands of words and sayings incredible there are few geniuses in the world and I know I'm not one but I truly believe that William Shakespeare was a genius like Albert Einstein but the anti-physics version well maybe not anti but the opposite the literature version.

For example I really love J. D. Salinger and *The Catcher in the Rye* was great one of my favorites but in *Franny and Zooey* I felt like I disagreed with so much of the religion stuff and Jesus stuff that I still don't know how I feel about it still it's not so much confusing as hard and maybe not incomprehensible but maybe like a sixth dimension wow that would be really great to write in a sixth dimension and maybe it's not truly a sixth dimension because I'm not sure how many dimensions there really are but I don't think anyone does. And I don't know a lot of things but I know what I believe and it's really great if you know what you believe because then you are your own person and not a flake or a suck up or something disgusting like that and I may be strong and I may be opinionated but I think in the long run this will greatly benefit me because everything ever done has been opinion not fact. Opinions like Crusades and war and Holocausts and popularity and that's another thing popularity comes around from telling people you are popular and after a while if you force feed something to somebody for so long they come to accept it and maybe even believe it if you're lucky then you are popular it is not the person that makes himself or herself popular it is everyone else the pedestal.

When my mom came into my room that night she said she had a good day yeah me too. I said then we sort of sat there awkwardly I wanted to tell her so much but I couldn't not just yet I promised myself one day I would if I wasn't careful I would tell her everything now and I didn't think I wanted that not yet anyway. Well good night good night sweet dreams cue silence.

I'm sorry Mom but I don't think I love you there was an unbelievably sad truth in this and as I lay there on my bed thinking and thinking and not sleeping that I don't know if I can truthfully say I love my sister or dad or mom and it's not that they are mean or cruel or bad it's just I don't think I love them is this bad? Maybe the truth is nothing bad maybe it is just the truth sometimes I think that being smart means taking facts and having an opinion about them but of course these facts are generated by opinions everything's opinion it's very complicated the world and people and maybe 1 2 3 4 hmm.

The next few days were boring and un-

exciting but on Saturday Daphne came my sister she came on the train from New York we met her at the station and then took her home in the car it was my mom and I who picked her up my dad was working she was wearing shorts these horrendously ugly gladiator sandals and an expensive looking shirt I thought she was broke. She talked the whole way home hi Mom hi Iris my mom was so happy to see her I smiled politely how is everybody oh that's just great then she whipped out her phone yeah so I'm only planning on staying here until I get my life back together she did something on her phone oh it's okay honey don't worry about it I don't want to be a burden to anyone sure sure butting back in on something you've already left sure sure. How's dad he's good how's his work it seems like everything is still good oh that's great yeah I was thinking that we could go out to dinner tonight where I said well I read in this magazine about this place called they talked and they talked and I thought my eardrums were going to burst that's the one thing I hate about car rides with my sister she is so loud and she never stops talking it is so awful and the things she talks about guess what what.

We got home and my sister and I brought her bags up to her room while our mom stayed outside how is she she asked Mom yeah the same are you sure yes Iris look if something's wrong you have to tell me she took my shoulders and looked at me seriously cue say I'm sure I'm sure I left her there and went down to the kitchen I opened all of the cabinets didn't take anything and then shut them all where does she go I wondered. After my dad came home we went out to the restaurant Mom had been talking about it was slightly fancier than our usual norm and it was good Daphne talked and talked the whole time and during the drive back home I stared out the window and I saw a fox red and small and running I wondered where to my mom and me and the fox always running I never know where anyone is going except where I'm going that's easy but nobody else knows I don't want anyone else to know because I subconsciously feel bad for what I'm going to do. Running away isn't exactly the best thing to do and it isn't exactly moral but most of the things that happen aren't moral or ethical everyone knows that so I'm sorry Mom and Dad and Daphne maybe I might leave a note but I don't want it to seem like a suicide I don't want to kill myself I think killing yourself is a selfish thing to do a desperate fix a permanent solution and nothing is really permanent except for death so I would never kill myself.

Sometimes I think about where I'm going

to be in twenty years from now I'll be thirty-five-years-old wow I want to get married unlike my sister who is weird and wants to wait for a long time until she gets married but anyway I'm still not sure what I want my job to be if I live in Wyoming I'm not sure I'll even be able to get a good job I mean there's really nothing out there but cows and land land land there are a couple of cities but they are more like large towns so unless I want to become a cow farmer I'm thinking that maybe I shouldn't move to Wyoming wait what since when have I ever thought this but I want to move to Wyoming but don't you want money and a job yes there's nothing there this was a new thought I've never thought of it until now see often you surprise yourself when you think. I've realized that I've been taught to think a certain way like in school they teach you how to think but a lot of the time when I think really think to myself I realize I don't think this way or I should say believe you surprise yourself you really do for example let's say you think you believe in abortion because that's what everyone else says is right and what you've come to believe sometimes when you don't ignore yourself you realize wait I don't believe in abortion it is wrong this is just an example because I really do believe in abortion. Or other things like you think that everyone is equal and that you are perfectly racist and prejudice free sometimes when you think to yourself you discover these nasty pushed back prejudices you've been trying to ignore for a long time and it's okay that you have these I mean discrimination is an awful thing and unbelievably dreadful things come from bigotry but I also think that nobody is completely prejudice free in their true mind even if they believe they are I think we are born with natural hate well maybe not hate but bias towards people who are different from us.

This is a bad thing and it may not necessarily be true and I'm sorry but I shouldn't be it's not really good to be sorry well maybe that's a generalization I'm very good at generalizing I am sorry I read a book later that night and I felt like crying and I did I woke up at 12:30 in the middle of the night and I was crying my pillow was soaked and tears were streaming down my face. When I was younger my mom had this sixth sense sort of thing where she could always tell when I was crying or when I needed her in the middle of the night but I'm not really sure what happened and now she doesn't know or she does but she doesn't help me maybe it's tough love maybe I'm overanalyzing everything as usual.

In the morning Daphne said she wanted to go to the mall again I thought she was

broke hence the moving back in part but no so we went to the mall it was an unspoken agreement that our mother never went to the mall and we never asked her to go to the mall except for that one time but we went to the museum instead so everything was okay. We left at noon and my sister drove obviously because I can't not yet but I will soon one year one more year I took out a piece of my precious gum and chewed a piece the whole way there for some reason my sister loves saying my name Iris she always says Iris Iris yes yes what it's a flower she says yeah I know I know a lot of things including that iris is a flower. At the mall we buy clothes and pretzels and pizza but I don't eat anything neither of us really do I think she is scared of Mom too we don't talk about it though it is a secret an unspoken agreement but Daphne talks about her more than I do I don't really talk about her I only think about her like most things especially people who have died like my grandparents this is probably unhealthy but it's okay I am generally fine by a lot of people's standards. We drive home and I chew another piece of gum Daphne I say yeah cue let the radio play louder I want to ask her things and talk to her about things but I can't well I can but I don't so I don't say anything and she doesn't

push-me I think secretly she is worried about me and I don't think this is me exaggerating and wanting attention I think she really does sometimes she'll just watch me or she'll just watch Mom but she won't say anything but I know she's worried about us I think she's worried we don't take care of each other Mom and I. Daphne I say are you okay this is new this is not Wyoming this is nothing really yeah she says why because pause I was just wondering she turns the radio up again okay I look out the window and maybe this is enough do you remember Wyoming I say this is strange I usually don't start conversations especially with my sister yeah she says did you like it yeah really she thinks for a minute turns to look at me quickly and then says hmm no not really why because it's empty oh but isn't that a reason to like it no I like New York City then why'd you move back because because why you know Iris stop it why why why I say mockingly God why am I doing this why am I mad at her why am I being so mean I do it one more time. WHY DAPHNE STOP IT IRIS STOP IT I smile slightly why why why am I doing this why I whisper GOD STOP IT IRIS YOU'RE A JERK IRIS I HOPE YOU KNOW THAT IRIS I am really now YES why BECAUSE YOU TREAT EVERY-

BODY LIKE like what JUST SHUT UP OKAY I've never seen her this angry and for some reason I enjoy it I don't want her here Daphne you are my sister but you're so so different from me everything is different it is so sad so peculiar she was never that smart she was never that pretty she was just so just so she blasts the radio now and I don't talk to her again for a while.

She must have told my parents though because later that night my dad comes into my room my mom must have sent him in he wouldn't come in here voluntarily he is quiet and doesn't do much he stands awkwardly in front of me and then says Iris what just try to be nicer okay I am nice I know then why are you telling me to be nicer because your mother told me to tell you we laugh slightly together and it's nice he comes and sits on the edge of my bed and that's nice too I want to kiss him but I don't he's never said it but I know he loves me and I know he's worried about my mom too we're all worried about each other and we don't give each other reasons to stop worrying. Sometimes I wonder what it's like in other people's houses are they like us are they scared nervous loved hurt angry troubled trapped or are they sad or are they happy content at least and in every home

Non-custodial parents, Supervisors, and the Group that understands

Sarah DiPasquale
ALLENDALE, NJ

We who had supervised visits on Sunday afternoons; we who identify with the meaning of supervised visitations, we were dropped off by our mothers who had sole custody and we were told "I love you; I'll see you in an hour." We climbed creaky stairs of a once half way house now a converted YMCA building meant for parents to see their children only an hour at a time. We stood awkwardly in doorframes waiting for the supervisor to usher us into a large walk in closet, an excuse for a playroom.

We hugged fathers we hadn't seen in one week and mumbled an "I love you too" into their overpowering arms. We sat on dull beige carpets and tried to ignore eye contact with an

old woman hunched over a clipboard in the corner of the room. We drank warm orange soda and recounted our week to our father. He fed us strange Italian cookies and encouraged us to play Chutes and Ladders.

We ran our fingers over the waxy board game and snapped the red game pieces in our fists; we hid them in our jacket pockets and never finished a game. We watched the clock on the blue wall only to find out it was broken; we wanted to buy a watch, but we were only in elementary school and we weren't really sure if we knew how to tell time anyways.

We forced a smile when our dad asked the supervisor to take some pictures and we told him it was a good idea to make a photo album "to remember the good times." We remember when the YMCA building closed down and we were allowed to have visits out in public; we remember we were embarrassed. We didn't want anyone to know that the young man in the long black trench coat shadowing our father was legally obligated to be there; we'd rather have had people mistake them for being lovers.

We didn't want to eat dinner at McDonalds

or the dingy steak and rib restaurant down the street; we didn't want to eat anything. We who had supervised visits on Sunday were happy they were only an hour long. We were relieved when we realized we could escape bonding with dad if he took us bowling. We could ask for quarters and go to the claw machine for the entire hour testing our luck for winning stuffed animals. We told dad we'd be right back and that he could bowl for us. We were disappointed when dad caught on and when the supervisor confronted us about it; we felt guilty, we didn't want to explain.

We met a lot of supervisors- Marie, Ryan, Brian, Rolland, and Demetrius. Rolland lasted the longest. We had visits on Sunday with him and our father for a year, until Rolland couldn't take it, until he said things were too weird. We missed Rolland when he left; we wished we could have gone with him. We knew people gave up on our father, we knew because we already had, we knew because so had our mother.

We who had supervised visits on Sunday afternoons lived with single moms and saw dads once a week. We who had supervised visitation every Sunday want our wasted hours back.

If I Cooked a Flower

Christine Richin
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

I feel under their petals;
they're like molten gardenias
sewn together by egg whites and sugar.

Through increased temperatures
their pollen whispers smoke
as they delight breathing air,
intoxicating their home with sugar breaths.

Give me a word that means: escape.
The Golden Showers
leave their leaves on the sides of ovens.

I serve meringues on flower plates,
slightly burned at the tips.
If I baked a Laelia it would simmer into the
walls.

If I scorched a bleeding heart into the sun,
the sun would ask for more.
It would lick its lips and drool from brooks.

I'm cooking the blooms from your last visit.
If you don't show,
the sugar coated leaves
and love-licked petals
will wait here for you, forever.

Tonight, I am packing my bags.
Tomorrow I will be there,
in the skies, away from gardens
where you lay beneath bouquets.
I keep your rose in my pocket
as I cook your favorite sweets.

there is a secret and in every human there is
a deep dark secret place that is not touched
or spoken about like the deep dark corners of
this house or my mom or my mind or perhaps
my heart troubling awfully troubling sad very
sad. Initiate initial initiation initially sorry but
I've always wanted to say that yes yes.

Two days later Daphne my sister finally
speaks to me she is trying to find a job some-
where I don't what for she has a college educa-
tion I don't know what she went to college
for she could have been could be so much but

I feel she doesn't want to be anything I feel
like she wants to stay here forever I think she
is more than I think she is everyone is really.
I'm sorry I say I'm being nice okay she says
yes apology accepted that's wonderful really
great just really great! Now she probably will
stay here but she has to I know but now she
might stay longer because she thinks you want
her here but I don't I know so then why did
you say that I don't know I don't know just
shut up! Occasionally well often times I yell at
myself inside my head I'm sure everyone does
it right I hope I'm not crazy can you imag-
ine that wow I'd be famous then well no not
really but I'd be like famous people crazy and
insane and beautiful and mysterious and epic
like Homer and his Odyssey but I guess Hol-
lywood is a bad example it's not good to be
crazy it's tragic yes that's what I'd be I'd be a
tragedy a beautiful tragedy like Sylvia Plath or
someone like that I love Sylvia Plath but can
you imagine that sticking your head in the
oven with the kids in the apartment no I don't
think a tragedy is what I want to be it's just a
very romantic idea I would destroy everything
like Allen Ginsberg's mother in "Kaddish" no
not good at all not at all. My sister nods her
head and then leaves the room I forgot she
was still here I don't know what I was doing
I guess I was in a daze or something like that
I might have been staring out the window or
something I don't know and I don't remem-
ber that's fine but I still try to look everywhere
around the room to see if something looks fam-
iliar oh yes I believe I was staring at [fill in
object here] but I didn't find what I was look-
ing for hey that's like that song U2.

When I was younger I used to take French
in school but now I don't take anything well
first I took Latin but then I decided that was
pointless no point in learning something dead
right so anyway everyone was trying to tell
me to take Spanish and everything because
it's important to know and all I could think
was I live in America and the only language I
should ever have to know is English because
I live in an English-speaking country and my
God these people are so adamant about learn-
ing Spanish hence my taking everything but
Spanish no offense to Spanish people they
tend to be good looking. When I was younger
too before my mother went semi-crazy and
wholly depressed my grandparents died not all
of them but the ones that mattered wow that's
awful but I guess it is sort of true the ones that
may have affected me in some way the ones I
may have seen the ones I miss now suddenly
sometimes. They're the ones that died.

Pause pause pause. My grandma my mom's
mom died when I was five and I can still sort

of remember her more than anyone realizes.
I remember her and I think about her a lot
more than anyone realizes perhaps more than
even I realize we don't realize many things
about ourselves I realize this anyway so she
died when I was five in a car accident and my
mom wouldn't go in a car for two years after
this then when I was eight just as my mom was
starting to ride in cars again my grandpa my
mom's dad died from a heart attack and then
my mom wouldn't go inside her heart for well
she still doesn't and when I was nine she was
hospitalized. It was sort of like in the olden
days when they sent pregnant girls away out
west or to secret places or like they sent JFK's
sister to that insane asylum or did they tuck
her into a corner of their house I don't remem-
ber and in the end I guess it doesn't matter she
didn't exist to them anyway and this is what
happened to my mom. She was slowly going
crazy from the beginning I guess Daphne
remembers it much better than I do and I
wonder how that has shaped us I was eight
years younger than her so I remember every-
thing in a strange vague way a childish naïve
way whereas her memories are sharper clearer
perhaps fresher but she knew everything that
happened well most of it I guess we don't talk
about it ever it is forbidden territory like Area
51 but my childhood was disturbed and my
teenage years empty unlike hers her childhood
was rather bright and cheerful and her teenage
years were the ones that were plagued trauma-
tized disturbed I'm sure they've done studies
on things like this. Well anyway my grandma
died in a car accident as she was coming home
from I believe the supermarket and some idiot
some man who is now in jail I hope anyway
crashes into her he was drinking and driving
drunk at three o'clock in the afternoon the de-
spicable _____ the idiot we don't forgive him
we are not saints or God we haven't forgiven
him I don't think we ever will and then there
was the funeral I did not go I was too young
but Daphne my dad and my mom went and
Daphne was thirteen then. And I didn't real-
ize it then I barely knew what happened but
my mom became sad oh so very sad but the
sadness didn't ease and she was so frightened
so scared of cars she could barely look at them
and my dad had to drive us everywhere for
two years and my mom stayed in the house
and got fat.

Then when I was eight things started to get
better I guess better is what you call progress
she was progressing becoming a new woman
a different sadder woman but she was pro-
gressing transforming from the thing she had
become and she would now go into cars a
miracle my dad I don't know how he did it

we didn't do anything for those two years and two years is a long time especially if one of them is a leap year. But then when I was nine my grandpa was I don't know he was doing something and he had a heart attack I went to this funeral it was very very very sad I remember that and I remember it was raining it was very symbolic and all and that was when everything changed my mom the sadness overflowed it couldn't maintain itself in her lumbering body anymore it had to escape it had to go somewhere and so went into her hands and one day it must have been in the anger stage of grieving but she hit me and I started to cry and then she went away she was ill that was what they called her. She was gone for so long three and a half years I barely knew her when she came home so many crucial years

Remember Everything Average

Melanie Harrison
LIVINGSTON, NJ

Know the feeling of orzo slipping on your tongue.
Know the headache you get from political repartee at the dinner table,
the smell of lemon pepper collecting as you adorn your green beans and how Dad always says "too much."
Remember Mom's effulgent smile when you say something witty,
the rattle of the Boggle letters.
Remember Steven's shy strumming streaming from his room,
the background music to your homework,
and how, after digging for the right shirt,
your clothes fold into each other in the drawer, sinking at the seams.
Remember the careful creases in Mom's sweaters.
Remember how she skins and chops and seasons and roasts potatoes (especially for you)
on the coldest days.
Remember this kind of warmth,
the kind that slips through your fingers.
Remember these sweet shards of nothing
that pass through the lives of the hands you hold.

of my life she wasn't there and Daphne's life my sister's graduation no not there my dance recitals and my dad's promotion and my fish giving birth and our dog dying it was good she wasn't here for that and my obsession with books and Daphne's first boyfriend and my dad's empty half-filled bed nope not there for that either. We visited her sometimes but she was somebody I didn't know she was not my mom and she was not a mom I wanted and she had changed everything and everything had changed her and everything had changed altogether it was sad. Very sad.

In August my sister threw my parents the surprise anniversary party she had been planning it was somewhat fun I tried to have fun but there weren't any kids my age and so I mostly stared at the food the whole night and wondered what to do I laughed at the weird jokes my parents' friends made and I tried to relate to them but I couldn't really they were nice people but they were much older than me and there was something lost in the years understanding and sense of humor perhaps. My mom and dad had a good time though which I was happy about and Daphne raced around the house the entire night just to make sure everything was okay all the time and it always was but it was as if she had developed OCD in the past day and couldn't stop fretting about anything slow down woman slow down woman I wanted to tell her like my mom they were both hurrying through life my dad though he was calm and relaxed I couldn't really tell if he enjoyed it wholeheartedly but I don't worry about him much he's fine. The next day was like the past month boring slow and hot I stayed inside most of the time except for when I went for my occasional bike ride past the O'Connors' house and the Fishes' house I had seen the Fishes once this entire summer and they had looked older than I remembered and they were slow and wrinkled and saggy and slightly freckled and yellow and I was scared of them I think I was scared of their oldness of their deathliness even though I don't mind death I mind dying people I don't like it how you can smell death on them death permeates around them in their teeth in their hair in their body and lungs that's what they were like the Fishes death surrounded them death walked with them.

But I smiled politely anyway and they stopped and stared at me who is she they must have thought I don't know if they really know me or if I just know them one of those weird

things a one-sided conversation or in this case a relationship a neighborhoodship I feel like neighbors are weird things you live next to someone but you never really know them you just know their grass and house color I guess that's enough information to get to know someone at least for a while anyway hello Jack hello Jan how are you good you okay thanks grass looks good thanks your house color looks good did you get it redone yeah I did nice job thank you can you give me the painter's number yeah sure. I also saw Gabe a couple of times my friend called me and we went for ice cream and we saw him there and we sort of said hi but that was it he was with his friends and my friend doesn't know I like him I never tell anyone who I like because I'm afraid they'll tell everyone and that would be so embarrassing especially because he probably doesn't like me I mean I'm not that popular or anything and school is very hierarchical and you need to be so called popular to have a boyfriend or otherwise whoever likes you will probably be an extreme loser and I don't mean this in a mean way but a strange creepy perverted kid will probably end up asking you to prom if you're not even close to being popular that's pretty much why any kid that has ever asked me out has been weird and I've always said no because I'm not that desperate well I hope not anyway. There are a lot of little things that determine a person's popularity but most of the time a person is popular because everyone thinks they're popular I think I've mentioned this before but I used to spend a lot of time thinking about things like this when I really wanted to be popular I mean I still do I'm not going to lie about it I can try and be perfect and say I don't care where my social standing is but honestly anyone who says they don't care does care everyone cares unless you really are perfect or just honestly don't care and there aren't many people like that if I ever meet a guy who honestly doesn't care then I'm going to marry him and the thing that annoys me most about popular people is they pretend they don't know they're popular they always say things like oh I'm such a loser or I don't know if I'm popular when obviously they do come on that's like a celebrity saying I don't think I'm that famous while being stalked by paparazzi. Oh and the other thing these popular people always do is they always laugh at dumb obnoxious things and they don't ever stop laughing about it when in reality it was never even funny I used to think to be popular you just had to laugh at stupid things and one time on a vocab test the word was popular and there were options like nice favored and something else maybe C all of the above

Searching

Tristan Munchel
BALTIMORE, MD

I was out all night, searching in the street for clues you might have left. It was cold and clear, and the sidewalks were empty; the street was empty. It was so clear my breath was the only thing in the air, and so cold the dirt was pulling back in tiny gaps from the sidewalk.

The only lights were left on in kitchens and doorways, to keep people wandering at night away from the homes. I walked past your house, with no lights on. Down the road two people were sitting in a Mustang with its

parking lights on. I thought you were in it, but I didn't think I was supposed to see. I put down my head and turned onto Register.

Register was mostly quiet and clear. A half-block away, a young man was passing beneath a streetlight. I moved closer to watch as he swayed drunkenly along the sidewalk away from me. Every few steps he would slow down, then stop and look at his hands, as if he were holding a treasure map. Then he would start forward again, fast at first, then slower, then he would stop. He only seemed to know his destination when he stopped. I realized this, and quickly turned back.

The Mustang had left, the air was getting damp and thick, and in the dark the glass door looked warm. As I stepped onto your porch I slowed, reached your door with my hands held out, and stopped. A light came on in the kitchen, and I got out, back into the street.

Spotlights were spinning on the snow clouds overhead, like that first night when it snowed on you and me.

and I reasoned to myself that you don't have to be nice to be popular so I put B favored even though it may not really have said that or been option B but that was what I put and I got it wrong because the answer was A nice and I was shocked because I never thought you had to be nice to be popular because most of the popular people I know aren't nice but. Anyway.

I like a lot of kinds of music I listen to music a lot that and books and the outside wow I love those things perfection really and when I get to Wyoming I'm still not sure what I'm going to do I'm either going to move to Cheyenne or Cody because they're really the only cities well large towns small towns if you're from the East Coast but I can't just live on a huge farm in the middle of nowhere because I would fail miserably and not know what to do unless I meet a cute cowboy so I think I'm going to move either there or there and then I'll figure it out. Daphne finally found a job as a something or other in a place that sells something I really don't know I don't really have any interest in it that's why but anyway she's gone for most of the day now and when she gets home she redecorates her room and sometimes she sulks around I think something happened with a guy at work I'm not sure if they were dating or not or if he just doesn't like her but anyway I feel sort of bad for her she's not as happy as she usually is so I was actually nice to her one time and I bought her a new shirt and she really liked it just so she would feel a little bit better because I don't

like it when people are sad. She said thank you and sort of smiled at me and then we went out to dinner that night because my parents could see that she wasn't that happy either and she ordered salad and a dessert which sort of defeated the purpose of eating something healthy but whatever she's really skinny and I'm still throwing up my food.

I woke up August 11 and I was still tired so I slept in more and when I went downstairs it was like every other morning of my summer no one was there so I walked around the house for a while then I went outside and read and my friend called me again and I went over her house and I slept over there and it was okay fun I mean she's okay sometimes she's annoying but whatever it gave me something to do and that way I didn't seem so pathetic or loserish which made me feel slightly better about myself I mostly thought about Wyoming and Gabe she my friend likes this kid named Dan I think he's a jerk but whatever if she likes him she likes him. My friend her name is Aubrey and she lives near me in one of the split levels except her dad added this addition a couple of years ago and now their house is bigger than it used to be obviously but it's still pretty modest and everything she has two younger twin brothers and they're always running around and getting in trouble it's actually sort of funny but yeah we had a good time we watched the *Titanic* the movie and it was sad it always is but we always seem to watch it anyway mostly because it always seems to be on TV. Aubrey and I we mostly

gushed over Leonardo DiCaprio God he is gorgeous but he's not my favorite actor slash celebrity slash famous person but wow Jack Jack Jack! I was really tired when I got home the next day though because we stayed up really late until four in the morning and that was only because we drank too much caffeine and because after we watched the *Titanic* we watched *The Wizard of Oz* mostly because it was on TV and it's good and easy to make fun of I mean the best part of movies is laughing at them especially the old ones but I love the old ones they are so fantastic everything about them is so different but it's sort of better that way the acting is just so different it's so acted and dramatic and the actors are always so good looking and it makes you sad to think that now they're either really old and wrinkly or dead.

I actually talked to my mom later that night she came into my room with my laundry and after she put it down on my dresser she started to leave and for some reason I said hey Mom yeah she said cue pause are you okay she laughed slightly a fake uncomfortable laugh and then said yeah why I shrugged my shoulders and I wanted to hug her her great roles of blubbery fat rolling beneath my arms for once I actually wanted to do that for once I actually wanted to touch her. I don't know I said just wondering well okay she looked at me quizzically you okay I nodded yeah for some reason I could feel tears welling up in my eyes don't cry, don't cry I pleaded I couldn't even remember the last time I cried don't do it don't do it please please please she didn't move and she was wearing shorts so I could see her legs she usually doesn't show her legs and she looked as strong and sturdy as a tree trunk yet vulnerable my mother is the elephant in the room both physically and figuratively why can't I acknowledge her but she is so huge her body her presence her past. I started to cry and she came over and said shh Iris what's wrong what's wrong are you okay everything's going to be okay and I couldn't stop crying what's wrong with me I cried and I cried and cried and cried Mom I said yes what is it Mom what honey what's wrong I couldn't say what was wrong because nothing truly was wrong but it felt as if everything was wrong Mom she hugged me and her fat pressed up against me and she started to rub my back I hugged her back Mom what is it honey oh what is it I cried some more.

And then suddenly it was like a waterfall from my mouth Niagara Falls came out of me the rushing of water was loud and my room was soaked my pillow and ceiling were dripping wet and it didn't stop it was everything

now everything why I said I coughed loudly shh she said shh Iris tell me what's wrong I don't know I don't know and then finally I said it I'm scared oh Iris there's nothing to be scared of what are you scared of and I wanted to say you I'm scared of you Mom but I couldn't I didn't not yet anyway Mom. I wanted to ask her everything about those three and a half years and I had never really thought about it before but I guess I blamed her I blamed her not for leaving me or for getting sick but for getting fat and failing and not doing anything with her life and sitting here still in this dumb little split level house and I wanted to tell her I was scared of her of ending up like her and I was mad at her for being sad and I just wanted her to be happy but she never was she was always so sad and I was so frustrated by it I wanted to yell at her but I couldn't so I just cried. Iris Iris and I felt like a failure to her we sat there failures on my bed and we were sopping wet my whole room was wet it was as tragic as Carmen and then finally I started to calm down and I wasn't shaking or being obnoxious with my crying anymore and she said oh Iris I am so worried about you I'm worried you'll end up like me me too me too I thought how did we both worry about the same thing but not know it or maybe she did know it and that's why she said it and for once I felt really really bad about wanting to go to Wyoming maybe I wouldn't go maybe I would just stay here and then go to college and really make something of myself but all I did was I sort of laughed it was all I could think to do it's awful I know.

I'm scared you'll go crazy like me you're so sad Iris I can see it I shook my head I didn't want her to think I was sad I'm not sad she didn't say anything I don't want you to go through what I did we were worried about different things then she didn't want me to go crazy and I didn't want to live like her I'm sorry she said I shook my head I'm sorry for what for crying and everything she laughed no don't be sorry Mom yeah I love you she smiled I love you too honey I did love her then and I felt for once that we were really mother and daughter and not just strangers living in a house it was really nice I wish it was always like that. I once read this poem called "Dusting" and at the end the girl says how she doesn't want to be like her mother who is anonymous and I felt so connected to that poem because that was exactly how I felt I cannot be anonymous I am so scared I will be but I just can't seem to articulate this one simple thought this one simple thing I want to be different from her but isn't that what she said she wanted too yes but in a different way.

Maybe one day when I am more mature I will realize my mother was never anonymous she was somebody vibrant colorful full full of life perhaps but I can't see this now I look at my mother and all I can seem to see is a sad fat woman living in a split level house and I am scared of her and the way she turned out to be but in this one second with her in my room in this hot humid heat I felt we were together we were everything for once and we were not anonymous and we were happy.

And that sort of made me cry more but I did it silently to myself because I thought my mom was scarred enough from sadness and she didn't need somebody else's sadness too so I said good night hugged her and went to bed and she sat on my bed for a while she was like a dead weight. She left eventually and I fell asleep.

The next morning I looked at her differently and I stared at her when she was not looking and I imagined her as a Jigsaw puzzle her heart was one piece and oh look! it connects to this vein and that and her spinal chord wound up her back into her brain and then once I had finished that I added fat and blubber and sadness and she was good to go. Why couldn't I fix her why couldn't I save her why couldn't I be something different from her could I ever be something different from her and this I wondered about and I almost cried again and I was a baby again my eyes large my head big my body small and she loved loved loved me and my big sister Daphne look look look and my daddy when he was still daddy and things were just oh so grand so wonderful so magnificent but then had she been sad back then was she sad after I was born the symptoms brought on by me by my umbilical chord and did she give some of her sadness to me as if it was food or water? Is sadness contagious? Is it hereditary? Is it just a figment of the imagination the brain thinking and thinking too much the trick of memory imagination sounds and waves electricity ruining us our feelings what we want them to be do I want to be sad is that why I'm sad does she want to be sad is that why she is sad are we a cycle?

I of course couldn't talk to anybody about this who could I talk to not my friends not my mom or dad or sister it would be too weird awkward I hate awkwardness my arms dead hanging limbs I become a dead man walking so who was there I thought of Mrs. Fish but I couldn't in books they would they would form some sort of friendship with their long lost neighbor and they would tell them everything and be cured but this stuff doesn't really happen I knew if I bottled things up for too

Nana's House

Elizabeth Bennett
MILTON, MA

The woods hemmed her yard
Swallowing waffle balls, their bald heads
burned
Autumn bronze. Petals spilled
Like tea in a cup as delicate as her blue knuckles
Drumming the window.
Cradling sunflowers like circus pinwheels, the
children.

Next to the hissing kettle,
Bottom stained black on the stove,
Up to elbows in red potatoes shaved thin like
skin
And stewing memories
Nana watched while the children transformed
Wheeling, through the grass.

Kitchen tile molded to feet
Like bare-foot imprints left in wet grass.
She beckoned us inside as only a woman
Knows how to summon children.
As night dipped, the moon stained
The back steps white.

Wound around the table, palms skinned
Hands dyed red with popsicle juice
The children snatched at puzzle pieces
But the last piece is windblown sand.
Now cardboard crams corners
Her house gapes hollow, soaked in weeds.

Dust sifts over stairs
Left to clutch the stale air.
Through windows pasted shut
Sunlight traces walls.
The stove lies cold, still
In the house's chest.

Each time nana steals past in her car, peers up
at her house,
Always her house,
She watches the memories slip out of win-
dows.
She tucks them into her pocket and drives
away
Each time a little stronger
A little stronger.

long I would explode at some point I would be like a white dwarf star there burned out useless. I thought of grapes then so I went to eat one and I didn't throw up after lunch and this was different and I wasn't sure how I felt about this did I want to become like her I told myself no but I couldn't put off the thought I mean how well do we really know ourselves anyway so I sat there on the couch for a long time staring into space until something happened and I came to my senses. I was imagining that my grandparents were alive things would be much better then we could have family parties we could go on vacation with them we could visit them we could celebrate holidays and things would not be like they are now I would talk to them about things but not about my mom's sadness because she wouldn't be sad and we would be friends and grandparent and grandchild in love and everything would just be so oh I cannot even imagine it!

Later I had lunch and then later after my sister got home she told me she was going to teach me how to drive and I had never been so happy before driving wow Wyoming it was actually attainable now the vast vastness of this country I could just drive across it back and forth back and forth like a pendulum across it one more time across it one more time back back and forth forth we go we go to Wyoming! I was okay at it it was my first time driving and even though I couldn't even park yet and my sister was there right next to me in the passenger's seat I felt so free I could taste it smell it feel it the sky big and blue above me and the road stretching forever just going and going and going I could drive to Hawaii I could drive to France or Africa I could drive across the ocean and sea I could do everything for once in this car in this magnificent freedom in my hands the wheel and key to escape and I would be done with sadness forever.

Right then in that car I remembered that poem "Howl" and I said it to myself "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" and I imagined that was me I was with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs and there we were in Mexico and California and Louisiana enjoying ourselves getting high and smoking and it was just freedom everything about it liberty and America and freedom. "I'm with you in Rockland in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea—journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night."

She taught me again the next day and the

next and she was a good teacher I told her that you should become a teacher really why you're good at it she smiled thanks I could tell she was happy because she kept smiling and I don't know if we had connected or something but she was really happy and I felt happy that I had made her happy it was nice to be happy. I don't really have a passion for anything my passion is getting away. Driving helped that passion so I did it and I practiced and I began to get pretty good day after day after day after night and that's all I could think about driving well not really driving itself but where driving could take me to Wyoming to California to the Arctic Pole and I could drive just drive I would be practically swimming in the land I would be everywhere and I would touch everything and I would be everything and everything would be me something like that like one of those songs or one of those quotable quotes nonsense really Zen-like.

One day in the middle of August I had to take a shower and I realized I didn't look any skinnier it was the summer I was supposed to lose weight in the summer goddammit how was I not losing weight this was the summer well that's because you sat on your butt all summer no I went for bike rides and and what what else did you do I don't know you're fat cue deep breath in and out meditation Zen-like in and out no I'm not yes you are look at that and I looked at my stomach and maybe if I had been someone else I would have seen it as flat and fine but I wasn't someone else so I went over to the toilet and I shoved my finger far far far down my throat as far away as Wyoming I was digging for Wyoming in my throat and I gagged and I gagged but I didn't throw up. This was a sign of something not good I had always been able to throw up I wouldn't really call myself a bulimic though because I didn't binge or starve myself I just threw up and I thought about Gabe then does he date girls like bulimics what about anorexics does he date anorexics at least I'm not skin and bones right boys like some curves right but still I was too fat so I tried again but nothing came up air I was coughing up air. I was scared then so I stopped and I got in the shower and I beat myself up about it you're fat you're fat like a broken record in my head and I was freaking myself out about it you're fat you're fat and I imagined myself like one of those people on TV who can't even get out of bed and are weighed on elephant scales I made my index finger and thumb into an L and I pushed it up under my chin to make sure I didn't have a double chin good good I didn't but what if I did it was a little flabby under there what if it's growing can double

Packed

Olga Botea
LIVINGSTON, NJ

*What if he was parked right here,
next to us, in this parking lot? I am
in response when Vicky's giggles spill*

into the dark. Sweaters slip from shoulders
and lose
themselves in the soft hands of the night. We
talk of lips
lost to first lovers, rough hands parked right
here

on our thighs. They came and went, that's
clear,
but we stayed together, united, behind. They
fled
in response to our giggling demands and
spilled

tears. Days spent on pockets of loose
change are revisited. Memories hurled
outside the car. *What is his was parked here,
in this lot, in the middle of nowhere,
on the north side of the Milburn train? I grumble
while Vicky's giggles spill*

out from cracked windows in the green SUV.
My dear,
dear friend laughs. I look around the car
Jump
as he knocks on the window, opens the door,
parks

his body in front of mine, right now, and in
one ear
whispers exactly what I never wanted to leave
his lips.
They curl up at the edges as he climbs
in the car and together we spill into the past.

chins grow are they grown on trees can they
be stopped by herbicides oh God oh God. I
thought of my mom oh God Iris what are you
doing to yourself you'll look like her you'll be
like her I was forty something then and living
in a split level house with a fat man with a
moustache and I had two kids who I never

saw because they only talked to their friends not me or my ugly fat husband and I was lonely oh boy was I lonely like a librarian was I a librarian or did I collect tolls at a tollbooth I was bored I was sad my life was repetitive monotonous and then I died and no one remembered me it was like I never even existed and I was fat. So I stuck my thumb up under my chin again and I pushed on my chest and I pushed on my stomach and I looked at my thighs they were great rolling things mountains deserts endless but yet I felt cozy in that shower and I didn't want to get out because I would be cold when I got out and there would be people there and problems there and the shower curtain was like a safety blanket like my mother's fat it was a shield from the world it was like a yellow blanket.

But then again what was wrong with being fat ridicule that's what was wrong with it that and health problems and possibly high medical bills I'll stick to breaking bones sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me yeah okay who ever thought of that had obviously never been called names before it hurt my mom's feelings it hurt me. I got out of the shower and I put on sweatpants even though it was hot outside I couldn't look at myself all I could see was fat and ugliness how could anybody think I was pretty and I looked like a stranger to myself was that me in the mirror I couldn't even tell my eyes just looked so sad I looked sad everything looked sad even my thighs and feet looked sad they were empty and lonely did my blood look sad too was that possible anything's possible that's what they always said teachers and motivational speakers give me a break I never even liked motivational speakers. They were always too happy and they always rose above the odds too much and they were too well they were just a certain type that I never liked they were the type that never left their hometown to me there is nothing worse than staying in the same place your whole life whenever I meet someone who grew up two towns over or in that town I cannot stand it it's just a certain type the type that's not me conflicting personalities I guess but if it works for them that's good I guess.

I had a banana for lunch and it was okay I've never been a big banana fan that probably sounds weird a lot of times I'm afraid to say things in school because people always twist your words around or just take it to mean something perverted it's really embarrassing when this happens then I went outside and I decided to call Aubrey because I was extremely bored and this was different for me because I usually never call people I don't like talking

on the phone I'm probably antisocial and this is probably bad. She wasn't home so I decided to call my friend Lisa wow two phone calls in a row God what was wrong with me I was losing my old self I wanted to cry but I went to get ice cream with Lisa anyway oh no oh no I really was losing my old self going out to ice cream what was wrong what was wrong with me who am I anymore then I went home and my mom came home and we had dinner but I only ate a little and I felt like my old self again sort of. I was sad when I went to bed that night but I don't know why I don't ever know why I'm sad I don't have any reason to be sad which makes me so mad maybe that's why I don't like motivational speakers because they actually have a reason to be sad but they're not and I have no reason to be sad yet I am and I fell asleep picturing myself living in Wyoming in a trailer park smoking cigarettes and working as a waitress.

I woke up in the middle of the night at 2:32 and I fell back asleep quickly and then when I really woke up this time at 9:15 in the morning I remembered waking up and I thought about how in books or movies they would have just walked outside and played basketball in their driveway and they would have seen their boyfriend there who would have just happened to be awake at 2:32 in the morning and walking by their house and they would have had a nice long chat and they would talk about their deepest darkest secrets and everything would be solved and then the next scene would probably be the climax or the anticlimax. But anyway I was starving so I had a small breakfast and my whole family was in the kitchen reading the paper because it was Sunday and they didn't have to work and I thought it was really nice I've always sort of liked Sundays but never Mondays I don't think anybody likes Mondays.

After breakfast my sister told me she wanted to go to the beach and I could come if I wanted to since I had nothing else to do I said okay and I changed into my bathing suit and a summer dress and sunglasses and a towel and Daphne brought the sunscreen and stuff like that. I hadn't been to the beach in years mostly because of my mom we used to go more when I was little but I was always scared of the water so I never learned how to swim and after I was seven we never went swimming I remember going once with someone or someone else but I tanned the whole time and only put my feet in the water it was cold ice cubes for toes after that. We drove two and a half hours to the ocean and it was windier here but the sand and sun were hot so it somewhat balanced out there weren't many people there because we

went to the free public beach also known as the crappy beach full of seaweed but it felt so good to be out of that stinking town and that split level house and the scenery was different here it was so nice. The ocean was stunningly beautiful I loved it I wasn't scared of it this time but I was too embarrassed to ask Daphne to teach me how to swim especially since I was over five and there were guys my age here and they were pretty cute I imagined that Gabe was here playing football on the beach and he saw me and thought I looked so wonderful and he would come over and say hi and we would immediately fall in love and start going out and in ten years we would get married. But that didn't happen obviously but I thought about it so much that I began to look for him around every turn and I thought I saw him once and I almost said hi to him thankfully I remembered I mostly stayed on the sand and I read a book that was full of bad writing but it was light and happy so it was okay and then I went for a walk on the beach because I began to get bored and Daphne was swimming in the ocean with her boyfriend or friend that was a boy from work he had come later I think his name was Tony.

They eventually came out of the ocean and he was good looking he was tall and had dark hair he looked very Italian he had dark skin of course Daphne could have any guy she wanted so this guy must be okay if she decided to bring him here I wasn't sure if he was the same guy she had been upset about a while ago I hope he wasn't because otherwise I would have a hard time liking him. He said hi to me hi I said and then Daphne said they were going to get lunch at that little stand over there okay do you want something sure well do you want to come with us no thanks what do you want then whatever there is that looks good Tony sort of laughed at this and I smiled because I guessed that meant he liked me okay she said and then they left. They came back with three Diet Cokes and three hot dogs thanks yep so we sat there and ate and then they went for a walk on the beach and I put my feet in the ocean and I wasn't lonely I was just so so happy I was so fulfilled it felt like me and expanse and we were together and it was wonderful I smiled to myself and I wanted to die in that ocean and I wanted it to cradle me like a baby forever I wished I was a fish Mrs. Fish.

Suddenly Daphne came running back because she said she just remembered she had to work that night and she had to get there quickly and she hoped they had showers here so she could rinse off and then she asked Tony if he could drive me home and he said yes and

that just made my day even better wow this was such a good day! She ran off in a frenzy she was so discombobulated and I laughed and he looked at me and I stole quick glances at him when we were walking back to his car after he had changed I wasn't even wet I was probably the only person who could go to a beach and not get wet that's not really how it's supposed to work you're supposed to come dripping from the sea like Allen Ginsberg's friend in that poem. His car was white and small and ugly and had trash in the backseat but I didn't mind I actually sort of liked it I imagined him as James Dean wow James Dean he was a movie star he was such a rebel he was so beautiful too and he put on the radio and I liked the station this was a good sign but then I remembered he was Daphne's friend or was he her boyfriend why couldn't I remember because you never cared until now you were too selfish sorry sorry so with all my courage I asked him are you Daphne's boyfriend? He chuckled shook his head and said no we're just friends do you like her where was this coming from who was this it wasn't me yeah sure he said we work together I didn't even know where Daphne worked yeah we drove for a long time in silence and I almost fell asleep which would have been bad what is it about the beach that makes you tired and then he said how old are you should I tell him but I did fifteen I said what about you eighteen Daphne I thought younger men maybe she was desperate oh I said he nodded his head this was more uncomfortable than I thought it was going to be in my head we would fall in love and get married.

Then we began to talk awkwardly at first but it got better and eventually we had a regular conversation going I kept looking at that clock and suddenly it seemed like there was too little time left only two and a half hours it should be more what about hours and days and months and years I really liked him and I didn't even think about Gabe I didn't even remember him it was Tony just Tony he was so cute and he was nice too. Then we got off the highway at our exit number 13B and he dropped me off at my house because Daphne couldn't because she had to go straight to work and I had to give him the directions thanks I said no problem he smiled I shut the door and he drove off my parents were there watching TV when I got back into the house and they asked me how the beach was good I said were there many people there yeah a few there's leftover pizza if you want some okay thanks. I ate a piece of pizza and then I watched TV with my parents and we all laughed together and we all made comments about whatever it

was that we were watching and we all agreed that it was a very bad movie but it was good enough to watch and when I went to bed I thought about just how great this day was and how I wished it could always be like this and I was so happy just so happy it was wonderful.

Tomorrow: I got my class schedule for September and that was when I realized that school started soon and I was really upset and there was so much stuff I needed pens pencils notebooks folders binders but I called Aubrey and Lisa and they were in some of my classes which was good it really sucks when none of your friends are in your classes then it's just weird and bad you end up sitting the whole entire time in some stupid room at an old desk with stupid people who don't care about anything except getting high my friend Norah called me and we weren't in any classes together which was too bad because I really liked her even if we didn't hang out much. My mom took me shopping for school supplies in the afternoon and it was fine I had never realized before that pens and pencils were so expensive when the total rang up wow I felt bad I wasn't really sure how much money we had it wasn't a ton but we weren't poor either.

Then we got home I stayed outside with her and I walked in the grass barefoot it felt wonderful the grass was prickly and tickly and it felt like summer real summer I wanted to lie down in the yard and bathe in the sun I wanted to be in the sun I saw myself I was floating up up up towards the sun it was getting hotter and hotter and I was passing planets Venus then Mercury and I could practically touch the sun I was in it then and the yellow almost blinded me but I swam in the sun I was swimming in a star and I felt tiny and magnificent. I don't know what she did but she walked around for a while looking at her flowers and then I didn't see her anymore and I gave up trying to look for her because part of me didn't want to know about her know all her secrets I didn't want to know her entirely she was a mystery to me but I wasn't sure if I wanted to solve her yet anyway maybe when I was older or maybe when I actually cared more she was my mother not my friend. I stayed outside for a while but then it got too buggy when you think about it it's really gross how mosquitoes suck your blood they're little vampires they bite they bite watch out and I swatted them away but they bit me still so I went inside and I made pasta for dinner pasta with sauce Daphne and my dad were there at dinner.

My dad works in a skyscraper in the city I went there once when I was little he works in a cubicle I don't know what he does I think he

sits at his desk in a chair doing stuff on a computer all day this is not the life for me let me tell you that when my mom was in the hospital when she was mad crazy mad he took care of us of me and Daphne I had to stay most of the time at those after school programs daycare centers really and sometimes I would go over to the Muellers' and I would have to play with that nasty girl Becky she was evil a bully. He did a good job I guess Daphne and I turned out okay as good as my mom could have done I guess maybe better but she was far gone then I can still remember it fresh in my mind it's funny the things you remember you can't remember what you wore yesterday but you can remember things from five years ago I guess your brain just remembers the things it cares about the important things the things that shape you like mothers in mental hospital facilities. We visited her sometimes and I can remember one time I went there and she suddenly looked so different from the mother who had been my mother this mother was fat and sad and she sat in a chair and she stared out a window and she said she loved me but I didn't know her who was she did I know her did I want to know her did I want to love her but I gave her a hug and my dad and Daphne would talk to her and I would sit there and stare she was not the same and I didn't like it. I think that was when I first became scared of her and that was when I first became scared of being like her of becoming her I didn't want to end up there I didn't want to end up her in that place the place that was too bright and cold and an hour and a half away without traffic. My dad and Daphne visited a lot more than I did I can't remember if this was because I was forced to stay home or I just didn't want to go I guess now it doesn't matter it happened and it's one of those things that just happened but it didn't really happen to me it happened to my mom well I guess it happened to all of us but mostly her I don't know what it was like for her we don't talk about it I know people know what happened and I'm sure that this makes them think of me differently but I don't care much because it's part of me and it's my past they must have a past too so at some point I stopped caring. Honestly when I was younger I used to blame her for everything I blamed her for being teased at school your mom's crazy I hated her she was the reason everyone whispered not so quietly behind my back fatso but with blame disappeared guilt and regret and self-pity and it was wonderful it wasn't me it was her SHE WAS THE REASON FOR EVERYTHING and it was great she scarred me she damaged me she hurt me that's why I was the way I

was I wasn't different SHE MADE ME DIFFERENT I wasn't crazy SHE MADE ME CRAZY! But then I forgave her and I stopped blaming her for everything even though now I sometimes look at her and I hate her I hate her for going away for not coming back entirely she is not one piece she is physically here oh God is she physically here but she is not mentally here but mostly I blame her for letting herself become who she is she is such a broken heavy person I want to punch her and scream WAKE UP WAKE UP the world is calling to you! WAKE UP! WAKE UP! Mother, the world is calling to you.

That night I dreamt of school I was late for every class and I wasn't friends with anyone anymore a typical before-school-starts dream it's weird how even though I've been going to school for so long and it's not even a new school and I know everybody and I know that nothing bad ever really happens there I still get nervous antsy. I wish I didn't have to go to school it's boring and it's a lot of work and I always just think to myself what is the point of this when am I ever going to need to know this when am I ever going to need to know about volcanic formation or the battles of the Revolutionary War it is so pointless I just want to get out of here I just want to leave I just want to go to Wyoming that's all one year one more year and then it's me and the road and America. I will be able to taste liberty it will be in my mouth and hair and teeth and toes freedom I imagine myself driving in an old red convertible with the top down across an empty highway in the middle of America with nothing around but this great country and my hands will be in the air and my hair will be long and curly and blowing out behind me it will be spectacular see it's not America that's bad America is magnificent there is land beyond land and mountains over mountains and trees and forests and everything I love this place there is nothing wrong with America or anyplace else it is just a select few (politicians) that make it bad well not bad but they create an establishment and I was never able to understand why anyone should listen to anyone else. It's like that song "America the Beautiful" America is beautiful and I think people tend to forget that sometimes they only point out the bad and they condemn America and they make it a bad place and they say it's racist or hateful or supremacist but it's better than any other place in the world and it's not perfect but it's beautiful and glorious and all these people that rally for freedom seem to forget that the only reason they can protest in the first place is because they live in the U.S. and they have more freedom than most people in the world

and they don't seem to be that grateful but I love this country more than anything.

My last few weeks of summer were good I guess I didn't do much but I didn't do much my whole summer I was thinking the other night that this is very sad am I really that pathetic am I really that antisocial did I really just waste my whole summer riding my bike and sitting on a couch God I didn't even do anything and this made me so damn frustrated and I wanted to hit something because I hate just wasting life I want to live God do I want to live! So I tried to make the most out of the rest of my summer I called people and we hung out and talked and went to the movies and it was pretty good and I didn't feel like such a loser anymore and I didn't feel like I had wasted so much of my summer which was good but then all of a sudden it was August 25 and school was starting soon and I wanted to cry. But I didn't.

I had seen Tony one other time that summer when he drove Daphne home from work he didn't see me so we didn't talk sometimes I imagined that we started going out and he thought I was just the greatest girl ever but of course this didn't happen I didn't even talk to him Daphne took me places sometimes like to the mall or to the store and we started to get closer not close we didn't tell each other secrets and we still didn't talk about Mom or anything but I actually started to like her more which was good it's much better if you like your family members. We went out to lunch a few times and I would always examine myself really closely before I got in the shower to see if I might be gaining weight but it looked like I was staying the same which was okay I would have preferred losing weight but whatever it's okay I guess and every once in a while I would try to figure out if I was truly pretty like people said but it depended on the day and my mood and maybe the weather sometimes I would be pretty but most of the time I wasn't I was ugly I was sad about this why couldn't I love myself for once why couldn't I think I was pretty maybe I didn't want to that's why. Maybe I wanted to be troubled.

I found out what Daphne did the last few weeks of summer she worked as a waitress at an Italian restaurant a couple of towns over we ate there one night it was good I didn't see Tony and Daphne gave us a discount on the meal I had a salad I was really trying to slim down I looked down at my legs that night and God were they fat cue go to the bathroom so I did and I sat on the toilet and I tried to calm myself down you're not fat you're not fat I closed my eyes and I saw my mother. Once last summer when we were on our summer

Eight Self-Portraits

Olaitan Oladipo
CANTON, MA

"You do anything long enough to escape the habit of living until the escape becomes the habit."
—David Ryan

1. My mother laces me with golden stripes, frills around the edges.
The buttons press against my skin.
My glass slippers pinch.
2. Listen to me.
Please, listen.
3. I bring my binoculars on our trip to the lighthouse.
Mother packed finger sandwiches.
4. When the wind shoved the leaves to windrow,
I painted clouds and branches.
5. I am beautiful, right?
Tell me I am beautiful.
6. My dress will rip beneath the hem.
Father will buy another.
My dress has ripped beneath the hem.
Father bought another.
7. Listen. I am telling the truth.
8. What if I don't come back?
"You always come back," she says.
- 9.
10. I've never been to the coast before, never this far east.
They've told me the robins hum louder in the warmth. I believe them.
11. I am unhappy.
12. When the candle's light dipped low enough and swooped the hollow of wax and liquid,
I could taste the smoke. We'll try again tomorrow.

road trip I accidentally walked in on her while she was changing and I wanted to throw up her body was humongous I imagined I could eat her her Tootsie Rolls of fat hanging from my mouth she didn't see me so I walked quickly out of the room and I wanted to hide under the blankets why couldn't she love her-

Space is Big. Really Big

Emma V. Ginader
BLOOMSBURG, PA

The universe is a cardboard box
Filled with miscellaneous knickknacks and
trinkets.

Starry spoons fall into black hole bins
As the box shifts in my hands
While opening a neat-by-door.

Dozens of carring people displaced
By a sudden asteroid of a left-over bouncy ball
From childhood that rolls over them.

The box is black on the inside
With a few stray planets
Trapped inside.

The universe ended as
Everything condensed
Into my one box.

The box shuffles across
Seemingly empty spaces
Until it reaches my new apartment.

The box waits on the couch
Hoping for
The big bang to occur.

In the hushed space of the box
Nothing rattles or quakes in fear
Of breaking that one golden rule: "No one
can hear you scream."

I open the box
And the Big Bang erupts.

The universe is reborn
As I spread the celestial objects across the
room.

self? And I realized then in that bathroom with weird Italian music playing quietly loud that I was her I was born her she was me and I was her half of my DNA was hers but it felt like more we were so connected did she know this too her everything must have been passed through me onto me since I was in her when her stomach was fat from me not sadness did I make her fat? I walked back to the table and didn't say much for the rest of the night Daphne got home late that night and I put myself to bed even though I wished I hadn't I wished my mom had.

The day before school started I woke up early mostly from nerves not much excitement I walked into my parents' room I was wearing pajama shorts and a big T-shirt and she was getting ready to go to work she was in the master bathroom it wasn't that master really it was pretty small actually but the door was open so I stood there and I watched her I was so intrigued by her I can't quite describe it it was like free entertainment. She was wearing a long black skirt and a billowy white top her hair was clipped back in a twist there were bottles of pills in front of her and she was putting on red lipstick she wasn't that old really but she was old enough Mom oh she jumped back Iris you scared me sorry no it's okay she laughed she started putting on eye makeup are you ready for school no you're not excited no jeez Iris you should try to have some fun for once I shrugged yeah what are you doing today I don't know well let me know if you want to do something it's your last day of summer okay we can order pizza or something tonight okay. I started walking around her room there wasn't much in it a bed two dressers books lamps a rug and a few pictures it was a little cramped our house was on the small side it was just a split level Daphne and I used to share a room when we were little but then she moved out when she realized I was embarrassing and annoying and younger than her I didn't mind having my own room in fact I really liked it it was cozy it was enough.

A couple of nights ago she mentioned that she was going to try to find her own place again hopefully she would keep her promise not like last time when she said she wasn't going to move back in after college yeah okay nice idea Daphne I don't know why I'm so hostile towards her some days more than others cue leave the room I went outside on the porch and took a deep breath and I closed my eyes and I imagined I was my mom I tried to remember what it was like to be inside of her to be physically connected to her that wet slimy bloody cord feeding me her but I could

not remember and this was perfectly natural I wondered why we couldn't remember what it was like to be a baby because that's probably the most important stage of our lives. I saw Mr. Beckett walking his dog across the street he was tall and thin and had long hair and tattoos he played the guitar and I know that his parents lived in Delaware because when they first moved in my mom invited them over for dinner and he said how they were going to drive down to Delaware to visit his parents during Thanksgiving Day Weekend his wife Mrs. Sherwood-Beckett didn't say much I think they had problems getting pregnant this was supposed to be a very secretive thing but of course half the town knew but she was nice too. I walked down into the front lawn and I wanted to make a snow angel what about a grass angel a grass angle a 95° angle an obtuse angle beautiful perfect and a circle would fit snugly around it let's add a sun and stars and moon and oh jumping jacks jumping jacks in the circle! Jumping jacks in her hair! Jumping jacks in my stomach! Jumping jacks would be everywhere! Laughing and crying and that wonderful ocean Tony and Daphne and Wyoming oh God Wyoming! WYOMING! WYOMING!!!! It will be spectacular—deer and buffalo and air forever! FREEDOM! Freedom.

The grass was wet and cold but the sun was hot and the trees gave shade so everything somewhat balanced out I noticed my mom's car pulling out of the driveway and I rolled my body so that I was lying facedown in the grass I opened my eyes and I could smell dirt I mostly saw black but I could see some light the sun pouring in from the sides of my vision it was very peaceful down there in the Earth I thought I could see moles digging homes in the dirt the flowers pushing their roots deeper and deeper sunlight soaking up everything. I didn't want to go to school that was for sure and it started tomorrow I know I would sleep in so late school would be over by the time I woke up or I would make myself throw up tomorrow morning I hadn't made myself throw up in two weeks I was declining but I could still do it and my mom she would get nervous about it so I might not have to go to school and the day after that and the day after that and the day after that always throwing up then I would have to go to the doctor's which would suck because then they would probably say I was "bulimic" and make me go to a psychiatrist or one of those places anorexics go

to so maybe not I would have to suck it up which just sucked.

I rolled around so this time I was looking up at the sky what to do what to do on my last day of summer then I started to get worried I had wasted my summer and I had a not so little fight in my head about this but eventually I just got up and I walked into the middle of the street and I was becoming very frustrated and angry I could feel it in me an awakening and I wanted to pound the Earth and the street and I wanted to stamp around like a child but I didn't but I got this sudden urge to run so I ran up to my room changed quickly and while I was still in the mood because you can really only run when you're in the mood or inspired or motivated or awakened or have just watched a sneaker commercial I ran. I was out of shape boy was I out of shape but I didn't really care because I'm not that into sports and I'm healthy for the most part and I was huffing and puffing like that wolf from that story but again I didn't really care I thought mostly about Tony Gabe was sort of gone from my like list but he would probably be on it again once I saw him at school. I could see Mrs. Fish watering her plants and I wanted to wave but I didn't I went down the main road which was probably a stupid dangerous and bad idea but I was suddenly in this mood for adventure and excitement and God I felt so alive I was alive! BOOM! BOOM! I wanted to see the sky on fire again I wanted to be anywhere I wanted to be the air I wanted to be in the air I wished I was in the sky and clouds rainbows rain everything my eyes were open wide and there was life in them and it just felt really good I was happy for once and happiness is magical it's all in our heads it's all in my head it's all in my mother's head but I pushed her out of my mind because I thought about her too much and I didn't care about her now I mean I loved her but I didn't care about her I didn't care what she was doing or who she was with and if she was okay it didn't matter right now for once it was only me and it was brilliant! Wyoming seemed so tangible the whole world was tangible I could see it I could touch it it was at my fingertips it was like I was a new person how could this be I was my name then I was an iris budding growing living beautiful I was everything and I didn't want it to end I wanted to live. BOOM! BOOM!

I am probably going to be in for a culture shock when I move to Wyoming but that's okay a culture shock is better than an electric shock I mean an electric shock can kill you but a culture shock will only disturb you it's amazing how long a year can feel truly amaz-

ing I wish I had a fast forward button press it press it and be.

That night during dinner I was really jumpy and antsy and I wished I wasn't here but doesn't everybody probably if nobody ever wants to be here then why don't they just call everything there what's so bad about here anyway nothing but there was nothing really great about it either but then once you move somewhere else and that place becomes here instead of there do you want to move away from it too I don't know. Daphne announced that she had saved a bunch of money over the summer and that if she worked for a few more months she might be able to move we're going to miss you my mom said we are yeah my dad said if you ever need a place to stay we're here don't rush to move out Daphne it's no big deal for you to be here it isn't are you sure you have enough money yeah are you going to move back to New York probably not I was thinking somewhere cheaper and quieter oh yeah like where like one of those towns out in I was probably going to miss her whether I liked it or not. Have you started applying for jobs anywhere yeah well that's good has anyone responded no not yet well that's okay they will have you decided what you want to go into yeah I was thinking I ate the rest of my dinner without saying a word if she was gone well there was always somebody gone my grandparents then my mom then Daphne and soon me my poor dad what we were doing to him what if he left if he just decided he was sick of all this stuff here and left just got up and left one day then what would we do what would my mom do he never would though I knew that he wasn't like that he was a quiet loyal honest man and he would never leave his family he had too much pride and respect I think anyway. But what about me then who was I to leave my family what was I doing what was I thinking I could never really do that could I hadn't I always realized that it would never happen that I worried about them too much to leave that I cared too much about my reputation to leave but what if I actually did what if I actually did leave what if I actually did?

I couldn't fall asleep that night I really didn't want to go to school why do I have to anyway what if I didn't what if I left for Wyoming tonight but you don't even have a license but did I even need one I was a good driver and if I never got pulled over who would know it would never even matter I could hitchhike no isn't that illegal now anyways yeah I think so so I couldn't hitchhike and I probably shouldn't take the risk of getting pulled

over it's like you don't want to go of course I want to go I do I do I do! You could wait wait until when until after high school or college no that's too long from now what's the rush the rush is I don't like it here why I don't know are you supposed to like where you are yes if it's a good place and this is a good place so then why can't I like it because your mother's here no that's not it yes it is was that it I didn't want that to be it. But there was always possibilities and sometimes possibilities become answers but no I love my mom really yes why are you questioning me I'm not I'm you you're questioning yourself why why everything why I don't know ask God but He doesn't know stuff just happens things occur OK good good outlook who am I talking to oh no oh no I'm crazy I'm fucking crazy yes perhaps you are I'm fucking crazy yes maybe but I don't want to be her no of course not but I don't want to be her I don't want to be her! I DON'T WANT TO BE HER! Of course not.

It was dark outside and the trees cast uncomfortable shadows onto my shades I watched them for a while I felt insane I wanted to run a race I felt like I had just run one my breathing was slow and heavy and labored and I was exhausted I was sweating I wanted nothing more than to calm down I didn't want to be like this. I could change you know. Nothing. There was silence. It was the calm before the storm, or was it the awkward normalcy after chaos?

In the morning, everything was different. I was different. When I walked into the bathroom, my eyes were sadder, but my stomach was flatter and my hair was straighter. I brushed my teeth and washed my hands and I walked into the kitchen to find my mother eating cereal. "Good morning," she said. I yawned in response. I made myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch and stuffed it into a paper bag. What had happened last night? I could remember it vividly, yet everything seemed vague. I felt like I was looking through a window—nothing seemed tangible, but I saw it and I knew it was there. Everything was five feet away.

I took the bus to school and my heart was beating out of my chest. God, why was I so nervous? I watched myself walk into the building; I watched myself go to my locker; I watched as I said hi to Aubrey and Lisa and everyone else. I didn't know where I was. I didn't know what had happened to me. I didn't know if I liked this. I dreamt of Wyoming. "Iris Sister?"

"Here."

My Mother and I

Emilie Bair
WOODRIDGE, VA

SHE WAS SCREAMING in the shower . . . moaning. I heard her cries from my make-shift bedroom where I was sleeping.

"Mom?"

I rolled off my mattress and stumbled toward the bathroom. The door was open and the shower curtain lay in a heap on the cheap laminate floor. The water was still running. She was naked on the floor of the shower sobbing. She was so wasted. I didn't consider her condition as "wasted" back then, but high school later taught me how to explain her condition in that simple phrase. "Mom is so scary right now" is probably what ran through my head at age eight. I wasn't dumb. I was mature for my age, and I was pretty good at grasping the concept that mommy drinking—bad. However, it would take years for me to allow Mom's problem to feel as normal as a high school party, rather than terrifying.

"What are you doing?" I asked her, although it was obvious that in her drunken state she had fallen in the shower and torn the curtain down along the way.

"You don't love me," she mumbled. "You don't love me!" she screamed. "I'm a bad mom. I'm sorry. You hate me."

She was sitting like a child in front of me, staring up as if I had all the answers, a first grader. My only expertise was in *The Henry and Mudge Series*, and she looked up to me for some sort of guidance. "No, mamma, I don't hate you." But I couldn't push out those three words of assurance. "You aren't a bad mom," I managed.

She smiled and then looked around and then sobbed again. "You're so mean to me!"

Her burst of rage shocked me, and I backed away. "Why are you so mean?" I looked behind me to ensure that the doorway hadn't disappeared. I closed the door, grabbed NiNi, and hid.

Alcohol changes people. It morphs individuals into completely different characters. Sometimes into fun, outgoing, friendly people, other times into sweet, gentle people. Or like my mother, into depressed, aggressive children. Children.

Dad has always told me to call him if mom ever did anything unusual while I was at her apartment during her half of the week. I was supposed to tell him if mom ever "acted funny." He knows she drinks too much, and that is all. I keep her out of trouble even though all she does is put me in it.

My grandparents never believed me. I was a troubled child because I acted up around my mother. I was a troubled child for being disrespectful. They live across the Atlantic Ocean in Sweden, and yet somehow feel as though they could tell me what went on in Woodbridge, Virginia. When my mom got away from her psycho boy friend and back to her home country, she was that gentle woman again. She expected me to treat her as if I actually knew her. I didn't know her, and, therefore, wouldn't treat her as if I did. I threw a tantrum one evening at the summer house in Sweden. My mom had bought me the wrong sized shoes. Not a size too big; they fell off my feet. "What a spoiled brat," they probably whispered, but they didn't understand. The size of my shoes was just another thing that my mother couldn't keep up with. It just added to the list of things she didn't know about her own daughter. My favorite food. My favorite color. What I wanted to be when I grew up. They didn't know.

I don't have a brother. I don't have a sister. Being an only child has its perks, but I'd trade having to wear hand-me-downs and share to have a friend to go through my life with. A little part of me hates my mother for not giving me a lifelong friend. Being an only child has helped me though. I'm friendly. I can remember getting an award for offering to let the new kid sit by me in Pre-School. I'm more sensitive. I cry while watching *The Lion King*, *Dumbo*, and any

Letter to my daughter on her sixteenth birthday

Patricia McNeil
NORWICH, NY

I planted you in my uterus blindly;
reaching into the barrel of seeds at the
supply store—
you were my sunflower.

At night I would rub cocoa butter on the
layer of skin
separating my hands from your body;
like baking soda on tarnished silver, I
wanted you to glisten metallic—
which seemed like a good idea at the time.

You were born February 20, 1994
and considering the pope's declaration that
day this wasn't a day of joyousness.
The tether that held us together was
broken.
Your father was the moth larvae that con-
sumed anything we had in common
but I try not to blame him.

Baby, you had a voice like rhubarb
and it didn't matter if we were in parked
traffic or church.
I couldn't do anything but laugh at you
slapping my leg even during eulogies.

I threw your body back to the stars where
you came from
trying to comprehend your face in Pavo,
but finding you in Ursa Minor
as you bit my breast sucking for honey.

Grow old baby girl, smile when you are
ready to cry like I do.
Grow old and tell me what it was like to be
16 when your 30
because it will be more convenient and I'm
not ready to know.

Grow old and keep using hate to illustrate
me.

Measure it by the marks you make in your
fists with pennies you find on side-
walks—

I'll take them from your bedside; plant
them in the garden and hope for sun-
flowers.

other movie that makes me feel like a terrible person for considering my "problems" problems. When I was a toddler, my dad would hold a stuffed animal that I hadn't played with in a while and play puppeteer, making the teddy bear cry. "Why don't you love me?" the teddy bear would say, and I'd bawl and hug my forgotten friend until he wasn't mad at me anymore. In reality, I'd loved him all along. I've learned to treat my mother the same way; I hug her until she shuts up.

"So, are you going to college?" my mother asks me.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Wherever I get in, I guess."

"That's going to be a lot of money. Has Dad saved up anything?"

I don't think she has the slightest bit of guilt. "I don't think so."

"You need to come over and take care of your dog."

"Ok. Come pick me up."

"No, it's past my bed time."

It's seven thirty. She doesn't think I'm smart enough to know that she's drunk a bottle of wine. She doesn't think I know that she's too afraid to put herself on the road again. I think she's a selfish bitch for that. She had no problem letting me get in the car with her when she wanted to go out rather than take me to gymnastics. We crashed. I hate her for that.

I have one scar, but it's not from her accident. It's from my normal side of life, that she has no part of. I only had bruises and redness from when she crashed into an oncoming car. That was my breaking point, at age nine. I forgave her and forgave her. She could have killed me that time though.

"Come back here!" she yelled as I ran from her car. The woman in the SUV had absolutely no sympathy for me, a scared child, running away from my monster of a mother. "Get back in the car!" she yelled. I was too smart to listen. She was too dumb to be rational. She got back in her Mustang and drove back to the apartment. I walked.

I walked in, and Dave handed mom a toothbrush. "Wash your mouth out," he said. And she removed the evidence from

her breath. Then she tossed the empty wine bottles into the trash can.

Before she was arrested, she tucked me in at a neighbor's house. The cops felt bad for me and let her stay and chat for a little. "Tell anyone who asks that you slept wrong." I still don't exactly understand what she meant by that, or how any method of sleeping could have ballooned my face as it was. "Tell dad that too."

My stomach had never, ever felt so sick. Helpless and guilty. I didn't sleep. I rolled around until it was morning. The neighbor drove me to my babysitter's house, and I knocked on the door. I was scared. I was mad. How dare she leave me to face my babysitter, my friends, and my father all alone? How dare she expect me to lie for her? Did she honestly expect people to believe such a story?

I can't remember if I lied to the parents at my babysitter's when they surrounded me.

"Poor baby." Chelsea's mom rubbed my cheekbone, and I flinched. It was sore. I remember being so happy that, unlike my mother, she felt badly about what happened. She had sympathy.

I can't remember if I lied to my friends at school. Some teachers had to have questioned it.

I didn't lie to dad. I came home from school, sat in the kitchen, and as hard as I tried to keep calm, I just couldn't. I bawled out the entire story and dad took pictures of my face. Tons and tons of pictures of my face. Evidence. My dad now hated my mother. This was the only time I ratted her out.

When I get sad, I buy things. Clothes and shoes, specifically. My addiction is somewhat like a drug. I am unhappy, then I sniff a line of shopping and the sensation of feeling prettier washes away my sadness. I am stronger and better now. When my mom gets sad, she drinks. For a while I questioned myself: "How am I to hate her for her addiction? I am just like her." That was prior to me realizing that my method of feeling better didn't hurt anybody except my wallet, and her addiction put others through pain.

Learning to be Ancient

Filipa Ioannou
New York, NY

One hundred years ago she forgot how to age. Forgot even the things we know without knowing, and don't forget: the sound that babies make when trying to laugh, the feel of rough and crackling elbow skin, the taste of arid dirt. Things I thought were swallowed by her mind, gifts that couldn't be given back. Each year I grow sharper—soon I will be all edges, as she loses the shine of her surfaces, dully consumes the light. I want to file myself to a point of dizzying sharpness so her mind might wield me like a spear. She is too busy remembering how to breathe, forgetting and being reminded how the earth pushes back against her feet with a soft regularity so constant it makes her sick.

My mom used to be beautiful. I have countless pictures. She used to be a great mom, too. I have memories of summer days at the beach in Sweden, her putting sunscreen on my cheeks and spinning me around through the shallow water, me laughing and laughing. She drank water. She must have weighed 100 pounds. Beer makes you fat, especially if you drink it like she does.

"How do you get such a flat tummy?" she always asks me.

She has skinny arms and chicken legs, but an inner tube around her midsection. Her face isn't smooth and tan anymore either, as it is in the pictures and as I remember. It looks torn, and I can see every popped blood vessel around her eyes. The skin is sensitive and red, and I can't understand how she manages to apply makeup without ripping her under eye bags in half. She's permanently damaged.

In the past four years she has had close to ten black eyes. That may be normal for a hardcore wrestler, but not for a housewife. I'm used to them now. I'm no longer embarrassed to walk around stores with her as I used to be. I've realized that if anyone should be, it's her. Her bruises tell the world that she has no self respect, that she believes she's worthless.

She used to make up stories. Once she got in the face with a tennis ball. My mother has never used her apartment complex's tennis courts. Another time she said she was moving furniture and a book fell off a shelf and hit her in the eye. And one day she and Dave were tossing the remote back and forth and she was a bad catcher. She can't lie to me anymore though. In a struggle against "the love of her life," she called my dad because that boy friend tried to strangle her. He went to jail. She can't lie to me anymore.

Do not allow her to open the door.

"Mom! The operator says you can't let him in!" and she backed away.

"Petra! Open the motherfucking door!"

I screamed as he kicked in the window and the glass went flying. "He broke the window. He's trying to crawl through!"

His face and hands were getting sliced open, but he was determined to get inside. *Stay calm. Police are on the way.*

Too late. Dad was there. Before I knew it, they were rolling around on the concrete out front. I cried from inside, "Get him, daddy, get him!"

The police arrived. They threw Dave in the police car, and I rode home with Dad to try and have somewhat of a normal Easter. We drove to the police station the next day so that Dad could turn himself in for assault and battery. Dave had pressed charges. After two hours, the charges were dropped.

I don't have boyfriends. Never. I can't claim that it's in any way related to her sad excuses for relationships, but I think there has to be a connection somewhere linked in the back of my brain. I talk to boys. I flirt with boys. I kiss boys. But the idea of having a boy friend scares me. My mother has had more boyfriends, or sugar daddies, than I

can count. There is a four letter word that I'd like to describe her as, but I won't. I hated all of them, because they were all drunks like her, and I'd plot against them with my friends, cracking eggs in their shoes, putting food coloring in their shaving cream, staining their clothes. Since dad and I couldn't keep up with their names, we referred to them as "Mama's boy friend." I think the term boy friend has been forever tainted.

I woke up crying. Another nightmare. I wobbled towards the bedroom door and yelled for my mom. No answer. I walked down the hall and turned the knob on her bedroom door. Locked. "Mom! I had a scary dream! Can I sleep with you, please?"

She didn't respond.

My fear from the nightmare added to the fear of my mother's absence left me crying on the floor. I waited. And waited. And cried. At last I heard the knob shake. Her head peeked through the sliver of opening. "What?"

"Let me in," I whined and pushed at the door.

She pushed on the opposite side of the door until I couldn't resist it anymore, and it slammed shut. A few moments later the knob jiggled again and mom opened the door wider. "Okay, come in."

I walked toward what used to be my side of the bed and looked toward the floor. She didn't think I could see him wedged under the bed. Too bad she stows everything under there, and there's only so much room for a grown man to fit. She hopped into her side, and I took a moment to figure out what my next move would be. I was too afraid to say a word. I dug my toe nails deep into his peeking shoulder. I scratched to let him know I wasn't stupid. I had to have made him bleed. I went to sleep. I never found out who he was. I never knew his name.

Currently, I see my mom whenever she's not too lazy. We do nothing. She'll invite me to lunch, and I pay for myself because I feel too guilty. She isn't a mother to me, and taking her money just makes me think of how she'll use it against me later. We don't go shopping; we don't talk about anything with any value; and she generally uses our

time together to make phone calls to family members in Sweden to let them know what a great day we're having, as if it happens often. She puts me on the line, and I speak to them in the most proper Swedish I can manage. I tell them how great I'm doing and how my mother is on the verge of finding a job. They tell me how mature I've become and how they can't wait to see us in Sweden again. "Me, too!" I squeal. But we both know that in six months they'll hate me again, because I'm a troubled child, and I don't give my soccer mom any credit.

Remember Our Old Love in Jerusalem?

Mikayla Kravetz
PITTSFORD, NY

Remember when the light of God bore us a
Grandson? A baby boy, Uriah,
A daughter and a daughter and when the
son came,
It wasn't ours. Uriah Jacob Marchman,
The Marchman boy.

Dirty city.
Remember how inside teh Ottoman walls,
everything
Smells like *pishke!* The Broken stone, streets
Pristine two thousand years with that
Steady teek you can't blame on the Muslim
quarter.

Eight days in, the Mohel bends
Over the drunken body. Uriah
Screams and screams.

Before Abraham.
Before sun and time and all of Eden.
The Sprawling earth was built upon a
stone.
And we shall never live to see,
We shall tremble at the bones, gaze up to
our foundation.

Remember how I touched your shoulder,
sweet Rivkah, my firstborn,
As the child turned, and Abba left the
ground.

(wear the wool skirt, darling, I think
we'll have Havdillah by the wall)

Some Smell like Calamari

Lauren Del Turco
LIVINGSTON, NJ

ALL ITALIANS ARE FAT. It might not show in our bodies, but our minds are plump with prosciutto and our dreams are lined with olive oil.

My family's kitchen is strewn with old cookbooks with yellowing pages and margins consumed by my grandmother's neat cursive. Some of the pages are dotted with misplaced grains of flour, some smell like calamari. My favorite recipe, "Gnocchi al Pomodoro, Basilico, ed Olive," has an ancient basil leaf pressed between its pages, the smell rising every time we make it. Sometimes when it's cold out, I wrap myself in an old plaid wool blanket and sit in the camel-colored armchair in our living room for hours just reading through our cookbooks. My father has accumulated so many that they take up an entire cabinet, the one that used to house the spices.

Some of them are in better shape than others; our regional book that covers the food from Friuli to Sicily to Sardinia is the first place we look when we are tired of pasta ceci in the winter. Its pages smell old. The cover is frayed, the ink is faded, but it's the closest I've ever been to the culture that raised me. My grandpa brought it back from a trip to Rome in the 1970s, and it's been used and used since. Many of our other cookbooks are newer, more contemporary—like my father's favorite by Lidia Matticchio Bastianich—that we use every day for dinner. I demand that we avoid the rabbit and the whole-roasted striped bass, but insist on stirring polenta until my arm is tired and my grandma's wooden spoon is digging into my palms.

I love these books. I love the Teglia di Calamari con Patate and the ricotta pancakes. I love the faces of the large Italian women on the covers, holding a huge bowl of Maccheroni, the way their full cheeks are raised in a smile. I love the way my father's New Jersey accent slides into perfect Italian as he reads the recipes before we head to the food store.

But even more than I love the recipes from these books, I love the dishes for which we need no recipe. Every Christmas Eve my house is full and loud with the sound of wine glasses clinking and nonstop talking of the homeland. We all sit around the dining room table, talking and talking. My aunt and uncle fight over the mischief they did or did not get into that summer in Rome, and my cousins and I sit with our elbows on the tablecloth, soaking in our heritage like day-old pasta soaks in herb pesto. At the head of the table, my grandfather sits back, one hand resting across his stomach, the other holding his half-empty wine glass in the air.

From the kitchen wafts the odor of frying fish. During Vigilia di Natale, we fry seven different kinds of smelly fish in olive oil. We avoid meat and dairy, and we eat more seafood than I care to see in one place. The kitchen reeks for days, but my father hums for hours as he prepares the fish, seasons them, fries them, the same way he does every year. He cooks the calamari perfectly, with no guidelines to follow, and pours his tomato sauce on top of it. That pot of sauce has been on the stove all day, slowly brewing as he added herbs and spices and the brightest vegetables we had. It takes five trips back and forth to carry out the meal, but as my father sits down, the entire table falls silent.

Our nostrils flare as we close our eyes and breathe in the most tangible form of our family tradition. Slowly, as the meal goes on, we find ourselves able to speak again. Our stomachs become full and happy, our faces flush. When my uncle's wine is almost gone, we slice the panettone, breathe in the sweet raisins, and go to midnight mass. On the ride there my parents already talk of seared lamb chops with rosemary and rice and potato soup for Christmas dinner.

All of these meals we cook from the heart. My aunt blasts Andrea Bocelli when she cooks fennel on Thanksgiving. My uncle makes wine for special occasions—"Vino di Amici"—and bases his entire meal on it. My father pens his mother's recipes from when he was growing up so that they will never be lost. He plays his music, and he sings as he wraps prosciutto around pear slices or as he cuts fresh mozzarella from the local Italian deli. Sometimes when I help him knead fresh pasta dough before he rolls it, or when I flour the kitchen table before we make potato gnocchii, or even when I look at my grandfather, with his bushy eyebrows, the same song rises in my head. "When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore. When the world seems to shine when you've had too much wine, that's amore." God, I love that song.

I Ask My Mother to Help Me with My Homework

Charlene Francois
LIVINGSTON, NJ

A child does not know the scent of misery.
The smell invades my home.
Battles with the smell of tomato sauce boiling
in a pot.
I batter the red carpeted steps
That have become victim to my frustrated
feet.
I kick my way into the room and enter-choking
on the smell.
She is too thin, a man's shirt billowing around
her.
I yank on the sleeve.
And the collar almost strangles her slender
neck.

My legs jump back, frightened at my power.
She leans on one arm, and weakly faces my
tyranny.

I shove a worksheet into her basin.
As waves of nausea shake her chest.
I force eyes tempted to close, to see
And try to strangle answers out of a mouth
too tired to speak.
The enemy and I are identical.
My foot begins to stomp, rattling the win-
dowpanes.
Unsteady on the bureau.
She tries to answer through the convulsions.

The face of cancer is beautiful.
A smooth milk chocolate with a tiny explo-
sion
Of dark freckles scattered over sunken cheeks.
A rounded nose, one landmark before a set
of dry lips.
Cracked like crevices in the ground.
The bottom lip fuller than the top.
Cancer has curly hair cropped close to the
head.
Beautiful, but it will not grow.

Free Your Mind

Rachel Silverstein
HUNTINGTON, NY

IT WAS 12:37 A.M. The streetlights in the neighborhood cast a blue light, leaving me with a sinking feeling about the past few weeks. Heavy rain beat down on my car so rhythmically and passionately that I felt a sort of pinching feeling throughout my entire body. Oh wait, maybe that's from the fact that I haven't peed since five o'clock this morning. That'll be mission number one when I get home. But mission number one right now, however, is to get Tim out of my car. If he doesn't kiss me in the next thirty seconds, I'm running into his house and relieving myself.

But of course, he's right on cue. For a moment I gripped the steering wheel tightly and then released it as his face came close to mine. All right, Kate, don't screw this up. Just close your eyes—check. Look nervous so you don't seem like a slut seeking some action—check. Keep tongue on a tight leash . . . ew, but—check. Part lips slightly—check. I drew in a sharp breath and our lips melted together, sending a spine-tingling thrill through my veins. Fireworks exploded in the dark void behind my eyelids, and a satisfied dizziness made my head feel complacently heavy.

Wait, can I clarify something for you? I'm lying completely. Maybe that sequence of emotions is what Tim is feeling right now, but this kiss is doing nothing for me. No sudden feeling of euphoria, no "Hallelujah" music playing in my mind. Just the sound of a particular overplayed Katy Perry song that makes me want to kill myself quietly emitting from the radio. This isn't even my first kiss. Sorry if I gave you that impression.

Tim pulled away from my lips and looked at me with the goofiest smile frozen on his face. Boys are so typical. I smiled back sweetly, or at least as sweetly as possible without seeming too fake. I whispered a goodnight to him. He went in for one

more kiss on my lips (let's not get carried away here, buddy) and got out of my car. He casually walked toward his house, one hand in the pocket of his dark, baggy jeans, the other swinging his key ring around his finger. His shoulders swayed back and forth as if he were the coolest guy on the face of the planet. Yep, pretty casual for him.

Tim Western Jr., sophomore. But he's not just any ordinary sophomore. His family has been running our high school, Timothy Western High, for generations. Tim's great, great grandfather was the first person to establish an official school in our small town in New Jersey. Great great great grandpa Western was the first principal of Timothy Western High, which was taken over by his son, and his son, and then his son, which leaves Tim next in line. Tim is pretty much the prince of Timothy Western High School.

Not that any of that matter to me. He's still just a sophomore. One who somehow ended up on a date with me, Kate Daniels, senior. Is he really the best I can do? Well, I guess when you spontaneously choose a boy to go out with they aren't always going to be everything your heart desires, right? He doesn't even realize he's my decoy, my get-out-of-jail-free card. Although—what really is free in life? No one's free from anything. Not from death or from tax collectors, or from the pressure of controlling parents, or from what everyone really feels inside. We're constantly trapped with these emotions and thoughts and longings that no matter how many times you hit the delete button in your brain, they always seem to appear right back into your virtual recycling bin. Well, at least that's how I feel.

Anyway, as soon as Tim stepped into his house, I bolted back home, nearly peeing my pants. Luckily, mom and dad were asleep, making my stealthy entrance irrelevant. I flopped onto my bed, exhausted, and pulled the flowery covers over my body. There was a moment of serenity. My eyelids became heavy, and I drifted off to sleep for approximately 10.7 seconds.

And then she called.

Her picture brightly displayed on my phone, haunting me as I angrily threw it onto the floor. Deep breaths, Kate. In and out. How many times has she called today? Three? And how many times did I ignore her calls? Three? Apparently someone can't take a hint very well.

You're probably wondering who this mys-

terious girl is invading my sleep at one in the morning. I'll tell you. I'll tell you everything.

It was as clear as ice. It had been a cold December night about three months ago when I officially met her. I say officially because I already knew who she was. Everyone did. I was at the ice rink with my two best friends, a typical Saturday night tradition we'd been going for a few weekends. I loved ice-skating. Everything about it. Gliding on the ice made me feel as free as a bird. I always had a knack for skating, immediately possessing the ability to dodge oncoming skaters not paying attention and to go as fast as I can while maintaining total control over my surroundings. Over time I began to feel invincible, as if no one could cage this soaring dove.

Well, until I crashed into Jordan Blake, a junior. The moment we fell over each other was the moment my entire peaceful force field collapsed around me, melting into the ice beneath my feet. The blade of her skate went right through my jeans, slicing my leg to the point where blood seeped out of my pants and onto the ice. I grabbed my leg, too afraid to cry or even moan the slightest bit. Jordan was hovering over me, placing her arms around my upper back and thighs. I looked into her eyes. They were the most beautiful light, arctic blue I'd ever seen. They sparkled with such intricacy in the light it was as if I was gazing into frozen tundra blessed with different shades of blue snowflakes. Jordan ignored my stare and lifted me up without showing any signs of exhaustion from picking up a 115-pound girl. She carried me across the rink, skating past the workers telling her to put me down.

Now let me tell you a little something about Jordan. Like Tim, Jordan is different. Not in the way you'd expect, though. Although Jordan is sometimes treated like royalty, she's also handled sometimes as if she's an exhibit at a petting zoo—fun to poke and tease until the anger builds up and a rampage begins. Surprisingly she takes it all in and doesn't let anyone get to her too much. Jordan is a lesbian, one of the few out in our school. Before I met her, I always thought lesbians were, you know, kind of fat and living in the dugout on the softball field. Was I sure proved wrong.

Jordan was beautiful, even with her short boyish haircut and lack of tight-fitting clothes. I think all she needs is a few girli-

er outfits and the number for a modeling agency and she could have people swooning all over her five-foot-nine glory in a hurry.

Before I knew it I was in the first aid room with a nurse cleaning up the wound. Jordan sat in a chair opposite me with a look of disgust as the nurse threw out a gauze pad with my blood smeared over it. I kept my eyes set on hers, still mesmerized. An oversized Band-Aid was stuck to my leg, and I was told to go home to prevent the cut from opening again and getting infected. Jordan escorted me out of the room keeping one hand on my back as a brace in case I happened to fall over from limping. I felt my face turn a deep red. It was so sweet of her to be helping me, but why was I feeling so nervous?

She sat down next to me on a bench in the main lobby. "I'm so sorry about all this," she said while placing her hand on my shoulder. Note to self: Jordan is a touchy one.

"Don't worry about it," I replied, wincing from the pain. Jordan reached into my pocket and grabbed my cell phone. Instantly, I assumed she was going to take it and run, causing me to interject "What Are You Doing?!"

She punched a few buttons and put it back in my pocket with eyes showing worry. "I know we hardly know each other, but please, call me later and tell me how you're doing. I feel horrible about what

happened to your leg." I nodded and smiled and waited for her to walk away to call my friends and tell them what happened. As I pulled out my phone, I found her "new contact entry." She'd put her name as Jordan with one of those "less than three" hearts next to it. I was awestruck. Either she actually was worried about my well-being or pretty damn good at smoothly giving out her number—or both.

I sent a text message to one of my friends telling her to meet me in the lobby ASAP. I rested my head on the pillar behind me and took deep breaths to help channel the pulsing pain out of my leg. When my friends arrived, snow covered and a little pink in the face, they gasped at the sight of my ripped, blood-stained jeans. In the midst of their "what happened?" and "oh my Gods," I called my mom and arranged for her to pick us up and take everyone home. MY friends sat down next to me, inching closer like moths attracted to light as I began my story.

Ten minutes later mom pulled up outside and was just as eager to find out about my grotesque night. I told her I fell on top of my own skate and quickly shot a glance back at my friends before they could interject with the real story. Mom hurried to take them home. We reached our house and she cautiously helped me up the stairs. She grabbed a few pillows and tucked me into bed with a cup of hot chocolate, telling me

to keep my leg raised to prevent swelling.

I lay there, uneasy, grasping my cell phone. Jordan's words replayed in my head. I sat for minutes—hours, indecisive. I thought about what people in school say about her. I had never heard a negative rumor. She was said to be sweet, pretty, a gym addict, and surprisingly not a slut. What if she really did just want to know if I was feeling ok? I ripped the wings off my butterflies and scrolled down to her number. The phone rang twice on the other end, and my heartbeat accelerated when Jordan picked up.

"Um, hey, Jordan. It's Kate Daniels."

"Kate! Hey, I'm glad you called. How's your leg? Feeling any better?"

"Yeah, it's fine. I think I'll survive. Mom has me trapped in my room, though," I sighed. "Guess it's going to be a lonely weekend."

There was a pause, one of those awkward silences. You know what that's like, when no one says anything and even though you can't see the other person you subconsciously shift your eyes side to side waiting for them to say something. Then you clear your throat to let them know you're still alive and even though it doesn't spark conversation, for some reason it makes up for the lack of words and you feel satisfied for the moment. That's what I was feeling until Jordan broke the silence.

"If you want, text me your address later,



Photo by
Allysa Brandt
HAGERSTOWN, MD

and I'll bring some movies over tomorrow. I mean, it's the least I can do after hurting you. Plus I'm sure staring at an oversized screen with flashing lights that over time destroy your brain cells will make your leg feel a whole lot better!"

I couldn't help but laugh. I was glad she couldn't see me because the biggest smirk began stretching across my face. "I would love that."

"Cool," Jordan said. "See you tomorrow then."

We hung up simultaneously. I fell backwards onto my pillow and sighed. Why was I filled with such excitement for tomorrow? I wanted to dance around my room and sing . . . oh wait, my leg is still screwed up. I thought back to our conversation. Her voice still reverberated in my head. Something hit me as I imagined her speaking the same words to me all over again: she's coming over tomorrow. And we're watching movies. Is it just me or should I be worried that first she gives me her number and now we're watching movies? Either way, I didn't let it get to me. I was calm on the outside, yet excited on the inside, like a puppy getting its morning snack. I didn't want that feeling to go away.

The next morning I awoke to the sun bleeding through my wooden blinds. I checked the clock, 10:23. Rubbing my eyes, I sat on my bed with my legs dangling over the side and grabbed my phone. The status light blinked on and off. I had four missed text messages. Two from my best friends checking in on my leg, and the other two

from Jordan. I scrolled down to hers first.

I hate the feeling I got when I saw she texted me. Everyone gets like that one way or another, where your heart starts beating faster and faster and you can feel your blood circulating throughout each vein in your entire body. Your vision gets blurred for a few moments, but not enough that you can't see your surroundings. You start to become aware of your own apprehensions. Your hands get all clammy and gross and you hold onto your phone nervously. Then you start to feel anxious and you can't breathe until you finally read what the person says and you remember to take in that huge gulp of air as you feel your heartbeat return to its usual metronomic pattern. It makes you feel . . . vulnerable.

Her two messages left me as happy as a paparazzi snapping pictures of Angelina Jolie, naked, through her bathroom window. I felt my toes subconsciously curl with joy. The first message read "Good morning, sunshine" and the second, "We need to discuss movie options! Text me when you wake up!" My cheeks turned red as I texted her back. I told her to get a sci-fi movie, my favorite kind, and get her ass over here at one o'clock.

With a sudden burst of energy I ran downstairs, only to find mom and dad preparing to go on their routine Saturday morning shopping spree. Seriously, someone needs to inform my father that the grocery store workers don't wanna see his shining face every Saturday and don't consider him a good buddy as well as a valued customer. I

pushed past them, zealously on a mission to find the vacuum and clean the entire house before Jordan got here. Dad picked up his keys and, typically, swung them around his finger and whistled as he made his way into the garage. Mom came over to me, gave me a kiss on the forehead and a hug, and said good morning. I smiled half-assed. I needed to get that cleaning started.

"What are you up to today, Kate?" Mom asked, hand gripped on the doorknob, ready to enter the garage.

"I have a friend coming over in a few hours. Try not to bother us."

"Bother you? What kind of friend is this?" Mom inquired intently.

"I don't know, Mom, a new one?" I was losing patience. I held onto the vacuum handle angrily.

"Do you mean—a boy?"

"No, Mom, a girl. And she's a lesbian," I said drily. Mom gave me that typical "Mom-ish" expression: one eyebrow raised, eyes squinted, lips pursed. I rolled my eyes. "You don't have a problem with me being friends with a lesbian, do you?"

Suddenly aware of her own suspicious facial expression, she let go of the doorknob and threw her hands up in defense. "No, of course I don't care, Hun. There's nothing wrong with that." I smiled a complacently annoyed tight-lipped smile as mom silently fled out the door. With a relieved sigh I lugged the vacuum up to my room and began cleaning savagely. In an hour and a half I managed to vacuum, "Swift" the kitchen, Windex all of the mirrors and

Ridiculous

Cynthia Chan
BAYSIDE, NY

Ridiculous.

It's you in your bright red shirt

Trying to juggle my papier-mâché planets.

It's you picking the olives from your salad

And throwing them at my overflowing trash

bin.

To watch them bounce out

For me to clean up.

It's you prank-calling me.

Telling me some jerk posted my diary on the web.

It's you on Halloween.

Covered in fake blood.

And trying to bite me with your plastic fangs.

Ridiculous.

It's you growing up

And getting a haircut

So your hazel eyes aren't covered anymore.

It's you asking me.

"Stripped or plain?"

For your date with Nelly.

And me recommending the puke-green tie.

It's you laughing in the mall

When I thought you hated to shop.

It's Nelly laughing beside you

And buying you jeans.

It's me being bored on Friday nights

When the gang and we used to hang out

And play truth or dare.

Remember the time I dared you to drink the concoction

Of ketchup, diet coke, soy sauce, and beer?

And you did it with a wild grin?

It probably doesn't compare to the cocktail

Nelly had yesterday at her birthday party.

And nothing was better than that goodbye kiss

That she gave you.

While I was sitting in the passenger seat

Of your Honda Civic.

Waiting for you to drive me home.

Ridiculous.

It's Nelly, my BFFL, telling me over the phone

What a charming man you always seem to be.

It's the nails I've bitten to dust.

The pictures I've photoshopped.

Because I was being stupid.

Filled with dreams and hopes.

Ridiculous is you

With me.

countertops, dust, and straighten up every pillow on every couch. Then quickly, but with precision, I straightened my hair. Ripping through my closet, then neatly refolding everything, I picked out my outfit: light jeans, ripped at the knees, the red Virginia Tech sweatshirt my cousin got me for Christmas, and red Converse. A little makeup here, a spray of perfume there, and I was looking hot.

1:07 p.m. The doorbell rang. I checked myself out in the mirror one last time before opening the door. I stared at her for a moment. Only a moment. The sun gleamed from behind her, tracing the outline of her body. Her hair was spiked into a fo-hawk, very Ellen-esque. Baggy jeans and a men's shirt from Lucky. But out of everything at that moment I looked at her; her eyes caught my attention the most. They were even more breathtaking than last night, the snow on the ground behind her contrasting against them, making them an even more brilliant blue. I showed her into the house. She held two movies, *The Matrix* and *Imagine Me and You*. Small chit-chat, "how's your leg," blah blah blah. Being the nervous klutz I am, I stumbled over my own feet as we walked through my house. She smirked and squeezed my arm.

We sat in the den and she held out the movie choices. "What's *Imagine Me and You*?" I asked.

"Only the best lesbian movie ever." She seemed embarrassed by her own enthusiasm. "But, uh, we can watch *The Matrix* if you're not into that. . ."

I shook my head. "I wanna watch the best lesbian movie ever," I said mockingly with a smile.

She smirked her trademark smirk and placed the disc into the DVD player. She sat back down on the couch a good two feet away from me. Halfway through the movie that two feet became ten inches. Near the end our knees were touching.

As the girls are professing their love for one another and realize they can finally be together, I felt Jordan place her hand on my knee. I turned my head toward her nervously. She leaned in, her lips dangerously close to mine. My stomach flipped inside out as my lips met hers. She kissed me slowly at first, then turned up the heat a notch. She moved on top of me and sat on my lap, her hand running up and down my arm. This was by far the hottest hook up ever. But as hot as it was, something didn't feel right. I

felt guilty kissing her. The nervous butterflies started up again, but not in a good way. This was just wrong.

I heard the sound of someone clearing their throat behind us. I ripped away from her lips and spun around. Dad was standing behind the couch, grocery bags in hand, gaping at us. Gotta love Dad in awkward moments, though. "Anyone care to help me with the bags?" he joked. I was overcome with embarrassment. I pushed Jordan off my lap and sprinted into my room, leaving a trail of tears dripping behind me as I ran. No one came to check on me for hours. I wasn't even sure if Jordan was still in the house. I skipped dinner. Mom and dad didn't even offer it to me. I fell asleep at 1:30 after a tiresome battle of stress and denial. At 2:47 Jordan called. I didn't answer. She called again. I picked up but didn't say a word. "Hell? Kate? Are you there?" she said. Her once thrilling voice now left me with an empty feeling inside. She hung up.

I didn't talk to anyone on Sunday. I stayed in my room and did my homework and studied. IN school the next day Jordan found me at lunch. I felt as if every head in the cafeteria turned towards us as she sat next to me. She put a hand on my shoulder. I shrugged it off and took a bite into my peanut butter sandwich. Maybe if I ignore her, pretend she doesn't exist, she'll go away. She said my name. I made the mistake of looking into her eyes. Shivers ran up and down my spine. That beautiful icy blue. I couldn't look away. She put her hand on my shoulder again. I didn't move.

"Kate, what happened on Saturday? She asked, not bothering to hide the hurt and confusion in her voice.

I stood up and she followed me into the hallway. I stared at the floor. She faced me when we were outside. I've learned now; this war has made me wise. I stared at my feet. There was silence. A long, thought provoking silence. I rubbed my hands together nervously.

"I'm not gay," I said. I looked at her shoes; they were blue Nike Airs.

"I know," she responded. Silence. Nervous fidgeting. "I was afraid when I gave you my number the other day that you'd think I was just trying to score some one night stand or whatever. I wanted to be polite and make sure you were okay since it was my fault your leg is screwed up." She paused. "You sent me signs . . . and when I kissed you it just . . . it just felt so right." I

could feel her eyes burning through me. "I know you felt it, too, Kate. If you didn't, you wouldn't have kissed me back. And you now I'm right." My eyes were frozen staring at the floor. My mind was blank. No wheels in my head were turning. I wasn't sure how much time had passed when she said my name again. I finally looked up at her. Her beauty was gone.

"I can't do this, Jordan." I started crying again. "Yes, I did feel something, and I t was amazing. But you're a girl. What would people say if they found out?"

"No one will find out. I promise you."

"How can you promise me that? We're in high school, Jordan. Everyone knows everything. Nothing is secret." She sighed, defeated. "We can't do this again. I'm sorry."

"So am I," she whispered, and then walked past me back toward her class. I stood in the middle of the hallway watching her walk away, my eyes filling with tears. I heard footsteps behind me and sniffled. It was a boy a little taller than me looking at me sympathetically. He asked what was wrong. I didn't answer. Invading my personal bubble, he caught a tear as it ran down my face and wiped it away. I turned red and shyly smiled. He was cute. He was popular. He was Tim Western.

My phone buzzed again as I received a new voicemail. Somehow I managed to drag myself out of bed and check it. It was Jordan's third voicemail. She heard I went to the ice rink with Tim tonight. She said she hoped no dykes flew at me at ungodly speeds and gashed my leg. She told me that even though I refuse to converse with her, she still knows I'm listening to her voicemails and reading her texts and won't give up until we're in my den again watching movie number two, *The Matrix*. She yawned a good night, and I was asked if I would like to delete the voicemail.

I felt as if the pre-recorded robot voice inside my phone was Morpheus: "This is your last chance. After this there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends; you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." The blue pill mocked me in my mind, and I slapped it out of Morpheus's hand. I saved Jordan's message, and the red pill slipped down my throat like a fireball, melting away the ice encasing the uneasiness around my heart.

On Mutant Origami

Deziree Arnaiz
WOODRIDGE, VA

NOWADAYS, PEOPLE KNOW ME as the "origami lady" or "that one girl who makes those paper bird things all the time." While I may not make itchy-bitsy paper cranes from two inch squares all the time, I certainly do so quite often. The funny part is that almost five years ago I had no idea how to make a crane. I tried. I picked up mom's old origami book, with the brownish pages and the weird spacing that I now know tends to be a side-effect of books translated from Japanese, and I tried. Unfortunately, I could only go so far before little pictographs and choppy English failed me. I found myself stumped by the petal fold; which, to anyone who has folded the crane before, says that I barely got anywhere at all.

Disheartened by this frustrating defeat, I let origami slide to the back of my mind for a couple years, and the solemn book I considered to be the authority on all things paper drifted to the very ickiest of nooks on my bookshelf. I was embarrassed by my inability to master something on the first try. However, I eventually resurrected the old book when moving and decided to try the crane again. This time around I had no trouble. The crane I produced wasn't as crisp and beautiful as others I had seen, but I had managed to finish it and was proud.

I have experienced similar setbacks in my recent folding ventures, but would like to think that this first brush with imperfection has hardened my resolve. About a month ago, I found myself inexplicably drawn to the paper crafts section in a nearby Borders. There were some eye-catching tomes on paper sculpture, altered books, and art journals lining the shelves, but then I saw the spine of an oddly-sized origami book. The title was fairly lame (*Genuine Origami*), but the subtitle drew my attention. Crammed into about two or three inches of space and in bright yellow were the words, "43 Mathematically-Based Models, From Simple to Complex." By this point in my life I was quite fed up with the slew of beginner's origami books friends and relatives

seemed fond of bequeathing to me for Christmas, all of which had similar and unaesthetic models. Also, I had recently looked into how math related to origami, and found the subject positively fascinating. (In my opinion, it's one of the best practical applications of math).

The book compelled me to crouch down to floor level and pluck it from the shelves. I flipped through and almost began to drool. This book, unlike another I had seen with mathematical explanations, used all the proper origami book symbols. It also had little green boxes explaining the math and—well, it was just gorgeous. The front had pictures of all the models as they looked when folded, it was printed in color, and the author men-

tioned in the introduction that they meant it as a sort of "textbook of origami." How could I resist? I parted with the twenty-four dollars demanded by the price tag, despite my previous penny pinching plans.

I set about attempting some of what the book termed "fundamental models" that week. I had mixed success (the transformed crane, giraffe, squirrel, and conch went extremely well, but the elephant still perplexed me, and the partitioned box was positively vexing). Then I spotted the three-headed crane. Yes, the three-headed crane. It was nestled in the pages of the intermediate chapter. I knew I couldn't do it. It was in chapter four (out of five), and I was having trouble with

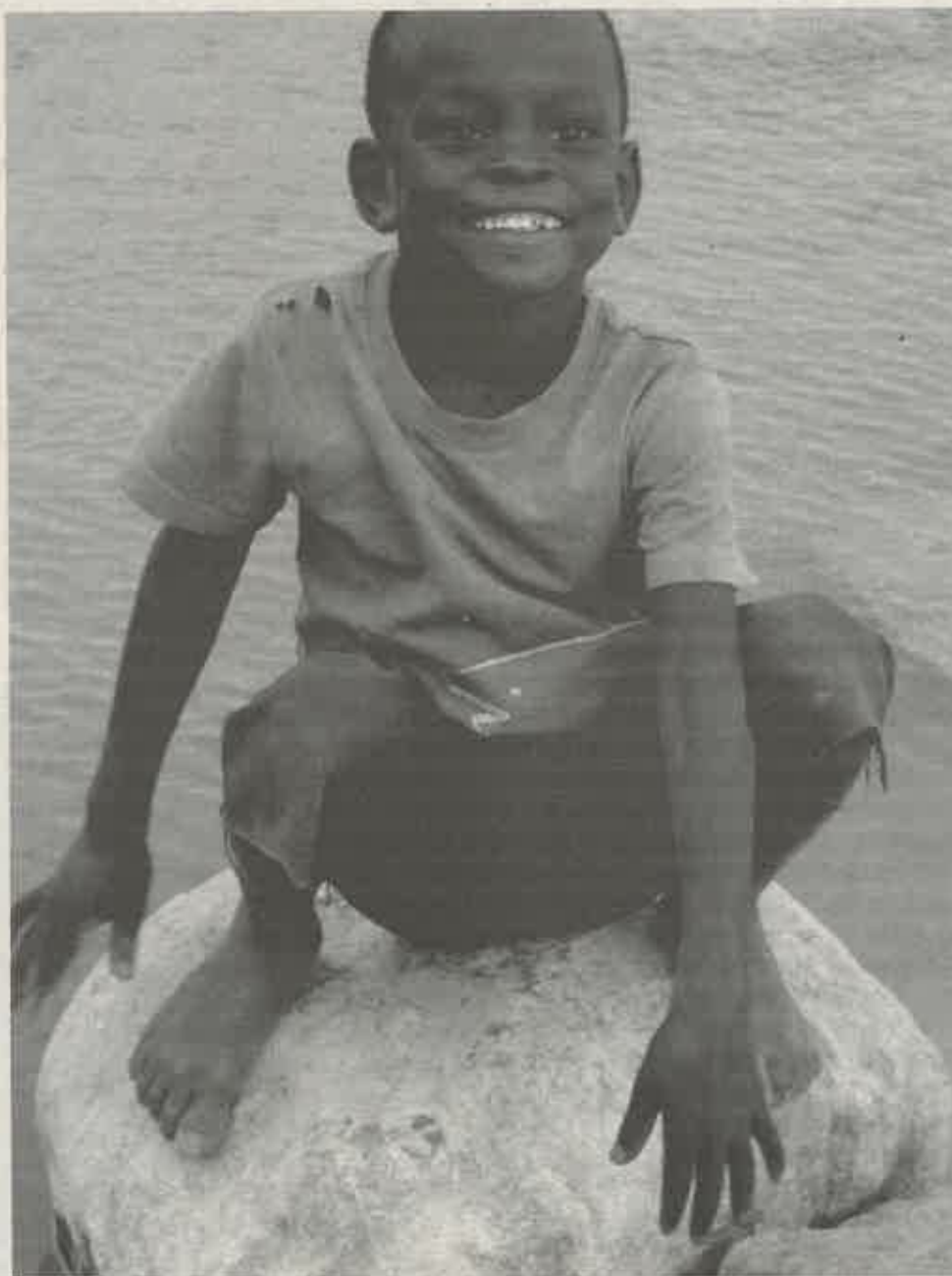


Photo by Alyssa Brandt; HAGERSTOWN, MD

chapter one. But I loved cranes, and couldn't tear my eyes from what was, admittedly, a very unnerving vision.

It took me a whole day to gather the resolve necessary to tackle something so far beyond my skill, but that evening I sat down at the dining room table prepared to make a valiant attempt. I chose a six by six inch square of cheap brown paper with a grass print, and began. I reached step twenty before anything truly stumping came along. The next three diagrams made absolutely no sense, and the only accompanying text said, "push in the rhombuses." I couldn't see any rhombuses! Frustrated, I flipped the page and managed to make the paper look similar enough to the next diagram. I moved on and managed to complete it almost two hours after I had started.

Looking at the finished product, I knew that something was wrong. Regular cranes didn't have strange flaps near the head, nor did the picture in the front of the book. I knew it had to be the result of my mishap with the rhombus-step. I sighed and poked at my mutant crane's back. It was also developing a nasty rip in the center because of the poor quality paper. That problem would be easy to solve; next time I would simply use proper Japanese rice paper. However, the issue of the odd flaps could not be solved by switching material.

Over the next week I pondered the instructions, and even began a new crane using eye-blinding yellow rice paper. However the secret still eluded me, and I felt a sadness that infected my appearance with a pout, a slouch, and watery eyes. Friday found me and my book carefully sizing each other up in my first period class before the bell. I poked the hazard yellow crane-in-progress, and suddenly a fumble of the fingers revealed the rhombus! It all made sense now! I only had to tug on the lower flap and lift the top just so . . . Ah, the benefits of patience and dumb luck. I quickly finished the crane and beamed at it as if it were my newborn child. Its three heads looked back, and I suddenly wondered if I had gone too far in my creating-frenzy. Was this the sentient machine of science fiction movies that enslaved the human race—except in the world of paper crafts imbued with artificial intelligence? Then a maternal sort of protectiveness overcame me, and I shoved all thoughts of unnaturalness and old traditions of tossing deformed babies off cliffs out of my head. I had created something precious against the odds, and I would cherish it.

Wise Blood, Sacred Heart

Collin McCarthy
HARRISBURG, PA

Mama, coming from the kitchen with a mound of cookies steaming warm into the already steaming air of Tennessee and sliding words of soft smiling sweetness onto my head like a cool caress, cooing, "I baked these cookies for you, dear" as she settles on the steps of the stoop and slips me a piled plate of oatmeal rounds that sparkle with gritty grains of sugar stuck within the wrinkles of plump raisins is mostly a story that frilly apple-faced teachers read you up east in cities where water flows chlorine-clean from spigots, and parents give their children bright scripture books with colored cardboard covers and magnifying glasses for exploring bugs and rocks—
not black-backed bibles with well-cracked spines made from the steel-scraped skin of animals butchered and bled by calloused hands and read with someone else's old spectacles that make your temples throb.

Mama in the steamy haze of Eastrod, that Eastrod that ain't there no more, where God don't spare the rod and neither does his people, that Mama, my mama, thumped and thundered into the grassless yard where a grimy-grinned boy just dropped a chipped china plate, brown-veined beneath its stains, and with bone protruding fingers pointed hellward to the cracked clay at the mix of shard and crumb that shrieked my guilt while she lashed me with her thorny tongue and said, "I baked those cookies for you." Sneered it, as if she meant, "I slaved over for those cookies for you." Hissed it, as if she meant, "I gave up my days, my hours,

my minutes, my life for you, for what?"

That mama spoke the heart and hard back of the hand of the papa who looked down at me when I fell and tore the knees of my new dungarees, looked down at the blood seeping through the crisscrossed threads and down at the skin flap, flapping atop the gaping hole of flesh and said, "I sweated to buy those jeans for you."

That mama spoke for the grandpa who spoke for God, his wiry white beard whipping in the wind while he stood on the hood of his car, preaching hell with his bible held heaven high as he cried out and decried my sins. "Jesus died for you," he accused me. "Jesus had to bleed because of sinners like you."

Down south where the haze is as thick as cotton I can feel the wrenching, but I can't see the hands of mama and papa and grandpapa, standing in for God and Jesus, all pulling at my arms and legs, all expecting and demanding all that love and fear for all that sacrifice that I never asked for. And even though I turn my back on Eastrod and withhold my heart and hand from the One I deny, I can never rest my eyes or sleep without feeling His eyes burning through the haze, haunting me, seeking something I surely cannot give or ever understand.

Still, once, as I journeyed rail-bound, strangely lulled by the back and forth of locomotion that I hoped would take me somewhere else but instead brought me just this side of Eastrod, I caught sight of a mother cradling a child just this side of sleep. They rocked to the rhythm of the train, or perhaps the train rolled to the rhythm of her silk-toned voice. "Yes, Jesus loves you," she whispered. "Yes, Jesus loves you," she crooned. And for a moment I could not quite hold onto I imagined a heart softly beating, not just bleeding, the grace of God.

I Was on the Bridge

Megan Gallucci
NEW PALTZ, NY

DEAR _____

I'm glad you're gone, and I'd like to ask you to never come back. In fact, I'm trying to find my own way out of here. For now I'm stuck, and I can't even manage decent sleep at night, despite taking the strong chamomile from Mrs. Hock down the road. I lie awake and I remember things, mostly things about us. And I've got to write to you, because you're my best friend and you always know how to make my life better. I'm hoping that distance won't restrict your power. I'm hoping that it's the kind of power that can't end.

The shadows on my wall are crooked like arthritic fingers, and the cold is setting in with the frost and the horse blankets and the bare trees and my aching arm. It makes me think of the time my mom had the surgery on her back and Auntie came to stay to take care of the house. Do you remember how cruel she was? How she'd always pick on me? In her long, plaid skirt and vibrant tulip-red blouse that poofed around her short, wide stomach, she'd crow ("Like a fat hen," you'd say, and I'd hide my fist in my mouth to stop the laughter) about my raggy hair, my too-small eyes, my even tone of voice . . .

"You'll never get married with an arm like that," she'd say. "No man wants a broken girl." I hear her voice and almost believe her, but then I remember how quickly you countered her, with your chest out and your eyes strong and unblinking.

"Oh, Auntie! She doesn't have to worry! My eldest brother has already promised that if no one else will marry her, he will—as a favor to the family, of course."

Auntie looked at you with her raisin eyes, then nodded slowly. You—an only child—stared back with your head cocked slightly to the side, bearing a placid grin. I bit down so hard on my fist that I thought I'd break the skin.

Then we ran to my room and laughed

and laughed, dashing out of the pristine kitchen (remember how Auntie would scrub it? She always seemed to be cleaning the counters. "Does she do anything else?" you'd ask. "Is she really your aunt, or is she just a counter-cleaner?") and up the carpeted stairs, our feet thumping and clomping, skidding as we slid across the wood paneled hallway, past the uniformly lined photos of my family that my mother had my father bolt down so Auntie couldn't move them like she wanted. Remember, we ran, laughing through the hall, and you shut my bedroom door with your foot, and we heard my mom call our names and laugh to herself because she knew it was us and she knew we were just having a good time, like we always did.

You making me happy always made my mom happy. You still make me smile, even from wherever you are now.

That night my mom asked why we were laughing so hard. I couldn't answer because I started laughing again, thinking about how fearlessly you countered Auntie, and how quiet she had been at dinner that night with nothing to criticize me about.

"Don't tell me she spoke in Latin in front of Auntie. That would just confuse the poor thing!" my mom said.

I shook my head, "No, no Latin." And I grinned.

Comforting me in Latin—that is one of the things I miss most, hearing you speak in those archaic syllables and knowing that you are unaware that you're doing it. I used to love going with you to your dad's study, entering the yellow-lighted room filled with books. He'd be sitting behind his desk quietly, then start talking to you in Latin or one of the other languages he knew. There were nine of them, right? The two of you would go back and forth, lost in vowels and consonants and sounds.

You were the best at comforting me. Do you remember your reply when I asked about the Latin? It plays in my head, your voice and the meter and sound of your words. You said it was best to be comforted in Latin, because Latin was the language of all languages and when you were comforted by it, it was like being comforted by all of history.

When you comforted me, I did feel like I was comforted by all of history, by all the world, or at least all the world that mattered to me.

I tell you this because I need you to

know how important you are. And I need to tell you that the real thing that is keeping me up at night is the bridge. I need to tell you this because I need you to know what I know and you know, but you might not remember right now.

I had no idea what you were doing. I didn't know where you were going, I just knew that one minute we were in the park, and the next you were walking and I was following.

To the bridge, the bridge that we crossed each day. The long bridge that we crossed by car. The suspension bridge with the hundreds of arms that spread up on each side, up up cold metal to the sky, crossed with wires and bolts wide enough for my fingers to fit in. It was late at night and the lights lining the beams looked like their own lighthouses, pulsing red signals, signaling safety in the sea. My legs felt unstable on the walkway, and with my good arm I clutched at the railing, which was wet and cold. I wanted to step off that bridge more than anything. You know how I hate bridges. But you kept going, and I had to follow. I wasn't going to leave you (I never would).

I took small steps, dragging my legs and trying not to look down. The strange thing was, I wasn't even scared for myself. I wasn't concerned that I was on a slippery bridge with a railing that only came up to my waist and a shaky walkway grid below my feet, with a raging current beneath and I had never learned how to swim. The water was so dark, I remember that. It was black and almost looked like asphalt, except for the dancing sparks of light riding the crest of the current, alight like stars or fairies.

I saw you up ahead, attached to the railing tightly. I walked as quickly as I could, but still timidly enough to not frighten you. I was scared because I knew you were independent. I was scared because I knew I only had one good arm and I couldn't hold you back. And I was scared because I knew you were scared.

I called your name, quietly, gently, and you didn't reply, but I was close enough that I could hear you mumbling. Your tone was urgent and emotional, but I wasn't sure who you were talking to.

"Et tu?" you said. "Vita brevis. Exeunt omnes . . ."

Life is short. They all leave.

I kept all my words soft.

I extended my disfigured arm out to-

wards you, my good right hand glued to the railing. I could hear the water rolling over itself below us, and the wings of a big bird above us, settling in its nest in the crossbeams.

My fingers touched your shoulder and you came to attention. I watched as the bones popped out of your hands as you gripped the railing tighter, and glued your eyes to something out past the water, past the hills, past the sky.

"I lied to you. My dad isn't taking care of his sick mother."

The words you spoke were facts, and you recited them the way we learned multiplication, monotonous and continuous.

"She's dead, and he's dead. He was crazy, did you know that? You had to know. He was always hiding, losing himself, losing his identity in his languages. He wasn't himself, hadn't been. He jumped off here, you know? He jumped off this bridge, right here."

My hand had fallen to my side, and I lifted it up to your shoulder again, but you twitched like a scared bird and I pulled away, placed my palm delicately over my lips. You turned to me, and the lights of the bridge cast strange pocked shadows across your face, your cheekbones spotted with red dots, your jaw and eyes in deep shadow.

"De mortuis nil nisi bonum. Do not speak ill of the dead. But my father was crazy. He was sick. And I'm his daughter, and it's in my blood, and I'm crazy too, you know. Do you know, I've wanted to jump off too? I want to jump off."

I'd never been so scared in my whole life. Not because I was on the bridge. Not because it was late at night and dark. Not because you were gripping the wet rail so tightly. I was only scared that I wouldn't be able to get through to you. That's why I started yelling. And that's why I started weeping.

"Why? Why didn't you tell me that you were so sad?"

You looked down at your feet. You kicked a pebble with your dirty canvas sneaker with the shoelaces so soiled that they had turned black. The pebble tumbled between the railing and down to the water, down with the fishes, down with the bubbles and sand.

You looked at it longingly.

"Please?" I shouted. "Please don't! You don't have to do it! Just because he did,

doesn't mean you have to! You don't have to grow up to be like your parents! You can change! You can stay with me!"

I took a step towards you and stumbled, I was weeping so hard.

Your stare moved from the water to my face, and I saw that your eyes, for only the third time in all the years we've known each other, were wet. You were weeping too.

"How do you think he did it?" you inquired. "I want to do it, so badly, but I can't. How did he?"

I held your hand and raised the embrace to your eye level. "In hoc signo vinces," I said, the only Latin phrase I knew. In this sign, you will conquer.

We were wet and we were crying, but in the bridge light, we walked back home.

It was only a week later when your mom got the call about that girl from her high school. "I thought she was dead the whole time!" your mom had exclaimed into the telephone receiver. "I had no idea she had been alive . . . or at least that she was until now!"

She'd just discovered that a high school friend had passed away, but for years, your mother had thought her friend was already dead. A few days later you recounted this to me on our favorite park bench. You said that if you didn't leave town, you would become that girl, the girl who dies and no one would know because they all thought she'd been dead for years. No one would know if you were alive or dead and they didn't care enough to check. You needed to leave because you couldn't let that be you.

I understood. I understood when you left, too. And I still understand now.

Do you remember the year that your mom lost her job at the clinic and money was tight for Christmas? So instead of buying me something, you gave me your golden heart necklace? And as soon as I removed it from the beautiful glossy silver paper, I put it around my neck and I never took it off? Even though you aren't here to see me wear it, it's still around my neck. Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean I stopped wearing it. Just because you can't see me, doesn't mean I don't love you. Just because we are separated doesn't mean we still aren't best friends.

Six months without each other. But I graduate in another six and then I'll find you, I promise.

I needed to write this because I needed to remind you. I needed to let you know

that wherever you are, I still love you. And as always, I'm proud of you.

I also need you to remember that I was on the bridge with you. There were reasons you didn't do that night what your dad did. You are strong. You can fight. You can keep going.

I love you and I'm proud of you. Keep that in your heart and keep me in your heart until I get out of here and back to you.

I'm with you. In everything. In every town, for every morning, every night and on every bridge.

Always and forever yours, _____

What She Whispered

Katie Golden
BALTIMORE, MD

It doesn't take much to keep me happy, she whispered to him at the beginning, just time to get to know me, your hand on my hip, fingers resting over the cliff of my pelvis when we lie back to front.

He was obliging, of course, because of her wild auburn hair and the band of freckles on her chin. He kissed them every time, even when she didn't ask.

Sadly, it took much more than that, which is why, after he left her for the last time, she was still angry at the tiny Vietnamese woman who had smiled at him on the bus, and the blue-haired receptionist at the dentist, who winked and let her fingers feather the back of his hand.

She was sorry it had to end this way, she whispered. She almost tripped over him as she made her way to the laundry room for bleach and a black plastic bag.

Winter Sonata

Jordana Cepelwicz
Cos Cob, CT

A-MINOR

I.

It was a miserable day, wet and cold—the sort of day when bones ache and joints crack and eyes itch. It was raining, raining hard, the water pounding its damp fists into the asphalt, raging at the sullen land that would not smile. This land had not smiled in years. A damp cloud of gray fog curtained everything, a great eyelid, closed over the bright blue iris of sky. An eye filled with tears, cascading tears, hot, angry tears. They fell and slapped the ground. Hissing. The earth's cheek smarted red.

II.

The piano was playing, harmonizing with the rain. Raining, raining music, cold winds painting brushstrokes of rain and music across the closed eyelid of sky. The boy whose fingers flowed across the river of ivory and ebony had no face. His mouth was an empty black cavern. There were gaping holes where his eyes should have been.

III.

Lots of notes called flats that were not flat—cutting edges, knives piercing air, sharpened blades. But every flat is a sharp, too.

A shift to F-major. Staccato at a quick tempo.

IV.

The beat was difficult to keep, so lively and colorful. Drab shades always absorb the vibrant hues that sometimes streak across the mind. Every artist knows the rules. To capture reality the brilliant oranges and reds and yellows must be subdued until their dancing flames smolder blue and green and brown. Every sunset is swallowed by the night.

Return to minor scale, key of C.

V.

Cold again. But there is comfort in cold, comfort in the rain. Pain means existence, you are here,

living, breathing, being. The boy with no face playing the piano feels nothing. He is a ghost. He is living but dead, dead but living, caught at the threshold where humans become spirits and spirits become human. Where it is so cold it burns.

VI.

The fingers are still, gnarled leaves torn from their branches, curling into themselves. He cannot play anymore but the music still whispers where his ears should be, rustling against the dry corners of his mind. The world reeks of diesel. He thinks of a fruit rotting from within, a husk without a core, empty, empty, on the surface perfect, unblemished, but only a cavern beneath, empty, empty, melting away into nothingness. Soon the green skin will collapse, a tired heap, silky folds without shape. Never able to stand again. All that remains is ash—ash and the stench of diesel.

VII.

She bid farewell to the moon and flew through the sky, wings spreading across the night, sheets of ice sliding like green silk to the ground below. Shattering, fragments of the sea, tinkling like tiny wind chimes, dancing through the darkness. Goodbye.

VIII.

A shadow against a light background, a dark silhouette etched onto that golden canvas—a door. A portal into the unknown. But to leave everything behind, to step through that door, meant he would have to remove his mask. It was too late to grow his eyes and ears and mouth back. How easy it was for her, to throw away the costume and break away, her raven hair cascading down her back, soft, gentle, mocking his outstretched hand.

IX.

Goodbye, goodbye. Your own farewell to arms.

X.

The stuffing was ripped away. His insides poured out from the tear in his side that the doctors couldn't seem to stitch back up. He should have been bleeding, but only tufts of white cotton peeped out from the hole in his chest. A cloud with a human skin. He wanted to fly, but his legs were made of iron, rusted to the ground.

XI.

But she flew. Far, far away into the winter evening, a twinkling star on the horizon.

XII.

To put his hand on the doorknob, feel the cold metal against his fingertips. It burned like fire,

and the boy sees a glimmer of a face in the distorted reflection. Then gone, a mere blur. Everything is frozen once more.

XIII.

So close to that portal to the outside—beyond this room, this building, this town, this country. The key to freedom with just a turn of that doorknob. But he feared the sting of the heat, the sizzling metal. There was something comforting about this blanket of cold, snow falling about him, cooling the hands so hot with regret.

The notes flow, cascading upwards, scaling the precipitous cliffs of the piano's melody. A discordant ending—not really an ending at all. He had long forgotten how to finish the song.

XIV.

And one day, he thought, this snow will melt. And then it will be spring.

New Year's Eve

Olivia Briffault
New York, NY

THE RADIATORS WERE HISSING AND BANGING, and not producing enough heat. The sun had set, although I wasn't sure it had ever risen. The house was damp and melancholy. My father worked in the living room, drawing red lines on an endless stack of freshly printed paper. My mother worked in the office — endlessly checking her email. My brother was in his "ship," muttering to himself about slaughtered giants. Everyone's eyes were glassy and tired after staring at computer and television screens all day long. The whole house just hung and stretched and waited. The silence got drearier and the watch-checking grew more frequent, as if that would make midnight come sooner. What were we going to do at midnight, anyway? Just say, "Happy New Year," crank noise makers for a good ten minutes longer than was appropriate or necessary, and then go to bed.

That's not what I wanted to do at midnight. I hoped to be at a party downtown with all my friends, drinking and screaming and hugging and acting like crazed teenagers. I knew that's what everybody else was going to be doing, or so they said. I switched chat windows, again. I asked

Anna where she was going for New Year's, but she was away. So were Ariel, Eve and Josh. Jessica and Caitlin had family plans. I was running out of people to ask. Who was going to get me into a party? I was in high school now. I had to go to a New Year's Eve party. The number of chat windows open on my desktop was dwindling and I was running out of options. Only Emily was still on chat.

We had been close friends in seventh grade, although I hadn't had lunch with her in weeks. Emily was going to a party on Fourteenth Street. She said she could definitely get me in. I just had to text her when I was leaving the house. She said she would be there. She promised that everyone was going to be there.

I ran to the office, coaxed my mom's eyes away from her computer screen and I told her my plans.

"Emily's going to a party on Fourteenth Street, can I please go? I practiced oboe and washed the dishes already," I begged.

After a long sigh and a lot of unnecessary blinking, she replied, "Zi, I already told the Dows that we would go to their New Year's party."

"But it won't matter if I don't go. Hardly anyone there even knows me," I countered. My mom stared at me.

"When was the last time you saw Emily, anyway? Do you know whose house the party is at? How are you going to get there?"

"I'll take the subway. I don't know the people, but I have the address."

"You really think I am going to let you go to some random person's party in Chelsea?" My mom stared at me incredulously.

"I've never gone to a party before, I was kind of hoping . . . It is New Year's Eve. I mean, a lot of people go to parties on New Year's Eve."

"Come on, Zi, don't be silly. You are coming to the Dows with the rest of us. We'll have a nice New Year's Eve together. Now, I have to work." With that, the email checking recommenced.

I was mad. Not temper tantrum mad, not even "I'm not going to talk to you" mad—just mad. Wasting time, ignoring everything my mom said kind of mad. Now that my hopes for New Year's were crushed, I threw my watch in my desk drawer and resolved to sulk for the rest of the afternoon. The worst part was that I knew my mom was right. How could she let a fourteen-year-old girl go downtown alone to some sketchy party on New Year's? I wished she thought I was more grown-up. I wished I was more grown-up. If my mom was going to treat me like a loserish little kid, I would treat myself like one. I signed

off chat. I didn't want to hear anymore about this party. I made myself a cup of Chai tea, with three spoonfuls of sugar. I sat on my radiator in a cocoon of ski jackets and blankets with my computer and watched endless episodes of a TV show from the 90s where characters carry baseball bat size cell phones and have all the teenager problems they tell us about in health class. I tried not to think about how much I wished I was choosing between my new skinny jeans and a mini dress and secretly brushing my eyelids with glitter and eyeshadow to go downtown for a party. I just gulped my tea and stared at the computer screen until I got a headache and my eyes began to tear.

At about ten o'clock, my dad rounded us up to leave for the Dows. I pulled on yesterday's sweater and my rain-boots and we began our slow trudge down Broadway to 108th street where the Dows live. I dragged my feet, making sure not to miss any puddles. The street lamps put out dim, fuzzy light. My dad was off on a long spiel about how the weather in London had been like this when he was there. The moment he finished, my brother picked up with questions—what is the exact shape of the raindrops in London? How frequently does it rain? Are there higher umbrella sales in England? With each question, my rain-boots got heavier, and my pace slower. I wished I was at a party or at least at home sitting on my radiator—just about anywhere but walking down Broadway with my family to the Dow's.

Broadway was dark but full of people—women in short skirts and high heels anxiously hailing cabs, couples smiling and kissing as they entered the subway. They were all going to real New Year's parties. They were going downtown to get drunk and enjoy themselves. I was going to an Upper West Side professor's apartment where only boredom awaited me. We passed storefronts, the usual beggar outside of the supermarket, and the still-open Starbucks. There was a guy asking for money to buy a lottery ticket outside the Presbyterian Church and I noticed that the old Chinese restaurant had gone out of business. Eventually, we reached the Dow's apartment. I added my bright purple raincoat to the rack that held thirty-five versions of the same, grey overcoat. You could hear the faint buzz of people attempting to make conversation. After stumbling through the endless sea of plain black rain-boots, I read and ignored the hand-lettered sign on the door that read "Please Take Off Your Shoes", with pairs of shoes drawn around it.

I walked inside in my polka-dot rain-boots and was met by Mrs. Dow, who awkwardly attempted to give me a convincing hug while holding onto her huge glass of red wine. I carefully navigated the maze of people drinking wine and faking

laughs at tacky puns. I said hi to some of the girls I'd seen at this same party for years. I thought if I saw another pair of last-year's jeans and or another logo sweatshirt I would shoot myself. One of the girls spent ages recounting her two-day ski trip in upstate New York. I decided that if it were up to me, I'd spend every winter break in Mexico.

I walked towards the hors-d'oeuvres and overheard a middle-age woman in a frumpy skirt telling a bald man, "I got stuck on three-across this morning—a four letter word for a siege site in the third crusade."

I smiled to myself. Acre.

I approached the food table, still feeling a little smug. Our hostess specialized in smelly cheese. I reached behind the cheese knives and stacks of crackers and found some guacamole. I tried it. It was delicious—just the right amount of lime. I squeezed past the Acre woman to get some more. Then, across the room, I saw Emma, a friend from third grade. She was wearing a gorgeous sweater that I had been trying to convince my mom to buy me. I swallowed my guacamole and went over to say hi. We chatted about New York high school gossip, exchanged cell numbers and enthusiastically made a plan to meet the next day for cupcakes, coffee and more gossip.

Before I knew it, my Mom came over and told me it was three minutes to midnight. My watch was still in my desk drawer. We ran to find some noise-makers and join everyone else by the Dows' television. With sixty seconds to go, a hush spread over the room as if we were watching some holy ritual. The anchormen droned on about all the people waiting out in the cold. Sixty seconds crawled by. The ball dropped, people kissed, rang noise-makers, popped the corks of champagne bottles. Everyone yelled "Happy New Year." Then it was 12:01. My mom and dad gave me a kiss and I had a sip of champagne. It wasn't my first shot, but at least it was something. Everyone said their goodbyes and the house quickly emptied out.

We began to head home. The rain had stopped and the mist seemed less like London fog. My brother was too tired to ask lots of questions—so I talked about the guacamole and I told my Mom about seeing Emma. Just as we reached 110th Street, I saw a familiar face at the far end of the block. I stopped and stared—there was Emily. She was nowhere near Fourteenth Street and she was with her older brother and parents, not with a crowd of freshmen. I ran to catch up with my parents, their hands tucked deep into the pockets of their grey coats. Starbucks was closed now and all the kissing couples and girls in high heels were off at parties. As we passed by, I saw that the beggar was still standing outside Broadway Presbyterian Church. He still hadn't gotten his lottery ticket.

The River

Kate Moran
ST. MICHAELS, MD

I AM A SIMPLE MAN of quiet disposition. You won't find my name within the pages of a book or engraved on the front of a building. You couldn't distinguish my face from a thousand others or pinpoint me as someone extraordinary or worthy of remembering. I enjoy the common, everyday pleasures of life; the familiar, the routine. I take comfort in listening to the sound of a summer rain dripping from the eaves, in the warm laughter of an old friend; and in the steady glow of a solitary light illuminating my path home. But the rains are few and far between these days, and most of my friends long gone. So recently I've taken a liking to the river; skimming the crests of the waves with the worn wood of the oars, getting lost in its ripples. Sometimes, I stop paddling for a moment to reflect on my life; who I've become and what I've experienced. I drift for hours in this way, looking up to see the sun disappearing over the edge of the horizon, its orange glow fading into cool, blanketing darkness. And as the summer fades and the days grow shorter, still I feel the undeniable call of the river. On Sundays in particular, after church and a visit to the cemetery, I carry the oars belonging to the rowboat, with their wood warped to fit the contours of my hands, down to the river. I untie the frayed rope which tethers the rowboat to the dock, push off, and allow my mind to drift with the tide.

Helen was beautiful. But more than that, she was extraordinary, an earthly angel. Helen was stubborn. She was also kind. She was motherly, yet childish. Graceful but clumsy. Simple and at the same time, complicated. She was an enigma, a true contradiction. In her short twenty years of living, she accomplished more as a person than would be thought possible. She never traveled more than 200 miles from the town where she was born, nor did she garner fame and fortune. She had an eighth grade education and never made more than minimum wage. When her mother died giving birth to Helen's youngest sibling, the task of raising thirteen children fell to the young, bright-eyed teenager. She never had time to be a teenager, to fall in love or see the world. Her simple country dress and generally

straightforward manner were looked upon with scorn, by the big-city folk who frequented the tourist attractions in her small town.

But in the greatness of her worth, none of these things mattered much. She became to me, an everlasting symbol of all that is good and right, all that is fair and beautiful and loving in the world.

I met her in September, while I was searching for a seasonal job position to pay off my university loans. As I drove through a maze of rugged, backcountry roads, the red dust rose in swirls all around me. I was late for an interview with a farmer who needed help with his autumn harvest, but still I took my time, hanging my arm out the window of my rusted Chevrolet to feel the warmth of the September sun, mindlessly tracing the outline of a house in the distance. Soon, the dust began to settle and a modest farmhouse came into clearer view. Barren country roads gave way to a crooked driveway, where on each side, haphazardly spaced, patches of wild flowers pushed their way through the cracked, thirsty dirt. A flash of red crossed my line of vision. I slowed my truck, looking to catch a glimpse of the elusive shape that had only moments ago passed before me. And then I saw it in full: A girl—so stunning that I at first thought her to be an apparition—in a green gingham sundress, her unmistakably red hair catching in the wind, whipping about her face in a frenzied sort of way. She must have had at least three children clinging to her skirts and pulling on her arms, but wore nothing but a smile of the greatest delight upon her face. She laughed and teased with them, chasing one after the other with soap suds from a wash basin where it appeared she had been doing laundry. Looking up at the sound of my truck, she lazily brushed the hair from her eyes and squinted into the sun. Instead of going back to what she had been doing before my noisy arrival, she placed a hand on her hip—the other still covered in soap suds—and stared expectantly at me as I continued slowly up the driveway. The girl, who looked completely comfortable in her surroundings—almost as if she was a natural extension of the earth and air and sky—smiled at me, then, slowly raising a hand to point my way to the house.

Lord only knows what I would have done had I not gotten the job. Luckily, the farmer was badly in need of field-hands, and overlooked my lack of hands-on experience. After that first look, I was instantly filled with a sudden and powerful need to be around the girl in the gingham dress, to protect her, to know her. I returned the next day to begin my work on the farm, my heart aching for the mysterious girl I would never forget.

All night, I sat up, awaiting my chance to catch

another glimpse of her dreamlike reality. I needed to answer the expectation that had been in her eyes with a look of my own; I needed to calm to voice inside my head, begging me to not let this creature escape from me, like so many grains of sand through the spaces between my fingers. But when I returned to the farm the next day, the girl was nowhere in sight. I worked all morning, carefully and deliberately placing apples in their specified crates, arranging them in patterns to occupy my mind. Why was I acting all crazy-like? I mean, what did I really know about her? Eventually, I convinced myself, you will meet her and she'll fail to live up to the illusion in your head. The dream will be shattered, and you can finish the job and never look back.

As I was in the middle of reasoning with myself, a voice floated over my shoulder: "You look thirsty". Indeed, I was thirsty—contrary to popular belief, harvesting apples is not a simple task—but I would have said anything to hear that voice again. And yet, I didn't say anything. I simply nodded my head, and an impossibly lovely girl with the voice of an angel, handed me a glass of ice-cold lemonade.

"I'm Helen", she said. I managed to stammer out a hello, all-the-while my heart thudding so loudly in my ears that I found it nearly impossible to think.

"Would you like to eat lunch with me?" She asked. Of course, I said yes.

And so, each day around noon, this became our ritual: Helen brought me a glass of lemonade. She never left me alone to finish the glass; rather, she chattered incessantly about anything that came to her mind, while I simply smiled and laughed at her utter lack of inhibition. And then, taking back the empty glass, smeared with fingerprints and the fog of my breath, she would lead me to a small picnic table at the back of the farmhouse, where we would eat our lunches of turkey sandwiches and cherry tomatoes atop a worn, blue tablecloth. Over the course of a week, I learned that Helen was the daughter of my employer, that she had thirteen brothers and sisters, and that she had lived in the farmhouse her entire life. She told me the story of how she had managed to obtain the heart-shaped scar below her right knee, and how she had learned to whistle from a one-eyed war veteran on a trip to visit her aunt in the city. I learned that she had an inexplicable fear of mice, couldn't stand the taste of squash, and had dreams of becoming a writer one day. I told her of my plans to become a doctor, the reason I hadn't lived at home since the age of fifteen, and how terrible I was at badminton. I recounted hundreds of fantastic tales of my travels through India and the Middle East, and she told

me of her days growing up on the farm, looking after her siblings. She laughed at my stories of riding ostriches and falling off a riverboat in the Amazon, and I cried when she told me the heart-breaking account of her mother's unexpected passing. When, at the end of the day my work was done, Helen and I would play endless games of marbles and jacks with her youngest siblings. We often swam at a beach located a few miles from the farm, and made up elaborate dramas to act out in front of the children. She taught me to play piano, and I taught her to play the sitar. And together, we taught each other to love. It was a glorious, unforgettable autumn. When my tenure at the farm ended, my visits did not. Her father had taken a liking to me, seeing the joy it put on his eldest daughter's face, and frequently invited me over for supper. Slowly, I felt that the loneliness I had felt for so long that it had become a part of me, begin to fade. When Christmas came around, Helen's father extended an invitation to me to join in the festivities at the farm—knowing I had no family of my own, and that Helen would expect nothing less; she laughed at the hat of peacock feathers I gave to Ninny, her precocious younger sister; she delighted in the leather-bound journal I gave to her, and I, in the pleasure of her company. The time passed delightfully in this way; I put off attending my last semester of university, in order to spend more time with Helen. And then, one day, sitting amongst trunks of winter clothing, surrounded on all sides by weathered volumes of Hawthorne and Emerson in the cramped quarters of the farmhouse attic, Helen, with a simple, unassuming phrase, ceased the tireless aching of my heart.

"I love you," she whispered. Words could not express how I felt in that moment, or how I feel even now, almost seventy years after our first meeting. I promised, after I attended university, to take Helen to see the places we often daydreamed of together; to see the black-sanded beaches of the South Pacific, the mysterious isles of Ireland—shrouded in mist—and the ancient coliseum in Rome. We talked of our lives together, of the places we would go, the people we would be, and the love we would create. I found myself completely enraptured with her presence, and bemoaned the time we spent apart. In sealing my fate with Helen, I realized that all of my life prior, and the things I had seen and experienced, had only been the prelude to the greatest chapter of my life. I had been born to love Helen, and nothing could tear us apart.

The Spanish Influenza reached our small community on the Atlantic Seaboard in September of 1918, around the time a year earlier, that I had first met Helen. In the beginning, it seemed that

the influenza was only attacking those predisposed to susceptibility; the elderly and the young. Helen and her father kept a fierce watch over the children, who often had to stay home from school to reduce the risk of being infected, and soon enough, were not permitted to leave the property at all. In October, Helen's father died, and the emotional and economic strain on the family became undeniable and apparent. The children were sent away, some to live with an aunt in the Midwest, and the rest, with a second-cousin in the remote countryside. The truth is, no one—and nowhere—was safe. Sadly, we failed to realize it at the time. Meanwhile, Helen arranged for the burial of her father, which was quick and without pomp and circumstance; few attended the funeral, for the risk of catching the Influenza had grown too great. The farm became a burden, as it was too large to be taken care of by just the two of us. So in the spring, we sold it, and Helen moved into my city apartment. She found a job working as a hotel receptionist, struggling to make ends meet as I worked toward my medical degree. But city life was an adjustment, and Helen found it hard to come to terms with, after nineteen years of country life. The air in the city was heavier, dirtier—the people, less concerned with pleasantries, and increasingly, with barely surviving. Life in the country had been carefree and predictable. The new life we so desperately sought to begin was anything-but. Soon after our arrival, Helen fell ill. Daily, she struggled through prolonged periods of delirium, her body betraying her with high fevers and intense joint pain. I raced to find something—anything—that could drive out this terrible monster relentlessly plaguing her. I spent hours each day working in the university lab, fiddling with vials of elixirs and test tubes containing mysterious mixtures; I was determined, at risk of my own life, to save Helen's. Each night, I sat anxiously by her bedside, awaiting those moments when her memory didn't fail her and she recognized my face. In these moments, I tenderly stroked her damp, fevered forehead, whispering to her my deepest secrets and creating for her, strange and fantastic tales inspired by my extensive travels abroad. From below her tangled mess of blazing hair, Helen would smile weakly and reach out to me, with a skeletal hand of deathly pallor. I wanted nothing more than I wanted Helen to be well, to survive this disease that was plaguing her. But try as I might, I never found a cure. I like to think it was my stories and our unbreakable bond of love that kept her alive, but in my heart, I know that it was Helen's own will that sustained her.

The doctors said that Helen lasted longer than anyone they had seen before. A month passed

before the Influenza claimed her as victim; ultimately, one of over 20 million. In the quiet hours of the morning, on the day that she died, Helen's fever died down and she was able to sit up in bed. I took these as definite signs of her improving health, but she knew that that day would be her last. When I saw this calm acceptance of fate in her eyes, I sank to my knees with grief. The bond of love between us was being torn apart. The aching came back to my heart; this time, it was not one of want, but of loss. I was losing the most vital part of me, the greatest piece of my soul. Reaching out to touch my face, Helen said, "It was more than enough". It was enough for her to know that she had found her place in the world, had begun to discover the rich and boundless secrets two lovers come to share. She had found in me, a person so in-sync with her mind and soul, her wants and needs, that we were virtually one heart, beating without ceasing. She had never gotten the chance to travel the world, to see the wondrous sights and breathtaking cultures so different from her own, but she died with the knowledge that the bond we had was unbreakable, and not even death stood a chance against us.

I look up, and notice that I have once again let the afternoon slip through my fingers. The sun has almost completely sunk below the horizon, and only the thinnest sliver of orange light is visible at the periphery of the river. I have abandoned my oars, which are strewn across the bottom of the boat, and have allowed my small vessel to drift to shore. I sit for a few moments, feeling the boat rocking gently with the tide. I hear the muffled sound of reeds rustling against the side of the boat, and far off, I make out the warm glow of a light on the front porch of a house. As I sit there, watching the intermittent flickering of the lamp, I see the silhouette of a woman appear in the doorway. She catches sight of the boat, and turns, placing one hand on her hip as she looks in my direction. I smile yet feel a dull, aching pain in my heart; these unexpected reminders of the love I lost fill me with conflicting feelings of delight and sorrow. I grieve for Helen's unfulfilled dreams; for her loss, and for my losing her. But as I squint into the growing darkness and observe the woman turn and enter her house, I remember the years that Helen and I spent together, living out the greatest adventure of all—love. Helen and I didn't get everything we asked for. But upon looking back after my ninety five years of living, I have come to believe that maybe our unfulfilled dreams were just making room for something greater, something as yet unseen. I believe this, and am filled with the quiet satisfaction of a man who lived and lost, but never forgot to love.

Season to Season

Julia May
ALEXANDRIA, VA

Fall

In Timberville, Virginia, the first frost means apple butter. It's an old family tradition, something like jelly but made with apples and cinnamon. We have jars and jars of it in the basement; we give it as a Christmas present. The apple butter lasts all year.

We arrive the night before, after the long drive across the mountains. Maymont Farm. My grandfather has raised purebred Angus cattle here all his life, and my father and uncle have joined him in his old age. Maymont, as I remember it, is a rambling, hilly place. A small ranch house sits at the top of the hill, looking out across the valley to the mountains in the west. Then the fields stretch out and drop away—to the left, a huge sinkhole, a depression in the crust of the earth. The entire farm rests uneasily on a network of caves, radiating out from the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Now and then, a cave collapses, taking with it a few cows, a few acres of sod, a few tons of shale and soil. "Always happens in the fall," my grandfather says, looking at the most recent sinkhole. "The ground's freezing up and going back to sleep for the winter."

All of the grandchildren wake up early to bottle-feed the orphaned calves. Our path across the frosty grass leaves an inverse snail trail from the house to the barn. The calves suck greedily on the bottle; the cats descend from the hayloft to lick the bucket where we've mixed the formula. Thin rinds of ice cover every water trough, like something out of a Frost poem. Behind the barn, the fire under the black apple butter pot burns brightly.

The pot is a relic of our family, unearthed by my grandmother from the old barn in the far field, where my great-grandfather kept all the bones from the steers he slaughtered. Horned skulls peer down from the rafters, through swirling motes of dust, to the floor strewn with legs and ribs and hooves. The pot is too heavy to carry—we load it in the back of my grandfather's aging pickup truck, or the big New Holland tractor. The heavy cast iron is cold to the touch, against the icy grass. But when the fire heats up, it takes a day and a

night to cool down.

We stand outside with an old-fashioned apple peeler, the kind where you skewer the apple and crank a handle. The apple spins on its skewer, against the blade, and the peel comes off in long, unbroken loops. Green skin and red skin. The naked apples, white and cold in the morning air, soak in a bath of ice water, before my aunt throws them into the pot.

Every year, we throw in seven pennies, one for each of the grandchildren. If you find a penny in your sandwich during the year, you'll have good luck for a week. That's what my grandfather says.

Winter

I'm wearing a purple ski jacket and a purple hat, made to look like an eggplant with a little green stem at the top. My cousin is in a bright green coat and blue rain boots. At our feet, a sea of yellow fluff with little black eyes and orange feet. The entire row of poultry barns is full of little yellow puffs. I pick up one of the little birds: it tries to flap its wings, but I hold them pinned against its body, like my grandfather showed me. The chick's beady eyes look up at me. The snow slides off the roof with a thump.

In Timberville, Virginia, the first snow means the big poultry truck, driving up the lane with a new supply of baby turkeys. We're at the farm for Christmas when the truck shows up, winding a yellow boa of feathers down the gravel driveway. My grandfather comes out of the house in his khaki work shirt and winter boots. He's the only person I've ever known to wear hobnailed boots. He sees how excited we are about the chicks and laughs. "An early Christmas present," he says. Nathan and I dress hurriedly, struggling with heavy socks and sorting through piles of ugly, unmatched mittens, presents from some distant cousin somewhere in the Valley. Fully dressed, our arms stick out awkwardly from the thick coats and sweaters. We waddle out into the snow, stopping to check on our snowman from the night before. We must be the only kids in America who still have real coal for buttons.

The ice on the cattle troughs is thick and solid now. My grandfather goes around in the morning with an ax, chopping through so the cows can stick their noses into the icy water. I always feel sorry for the cows, huddled together with snow up to their knees, but they have a warm run-in at the bottom of the hill. We play in the field while he chops the ice; I see tracks from the cows, and from the foxes that have a den nearby. A small spot of blood, red on the pure white background. My grandfather shows me the little mouse footprints etched in the snow.

And before I know where the day has gone,

it's time for the Christmas Eve midnight service. Rader's Church sits right at the top of a hill, looking down to Maymont on one side and a Mennonite farm on the other. The Shenandoah Valley is full of Mennonites, and I peer through the frosty windows to watch their beautiful matched pairs of bays trotting through the light snow to the Christmas Eve service. Rader's is Church of the Brethren, a descendant of some unpronounceable German order. Our family has been Brethren since they came over, generations ago, from Hesse, to fight for the British in the Revolution. The church is plain—varnished wood pews, a wooden cross above the altar, an old silver chalice. The Christmas Eve service is candle-lit. I stand between my grandfather and my father, having been moved away from my cousin Nathan to prevent "disruption." My father smells like his chest of drawers; my grandfather smells like pipe tobacco. We sing "Silent Night." Quietly, because no one can see to read the hymnal in the dim, guttering candlelight.

Spring

In Timberville, Virginia, the ice melting on the pond means "mud walking." It's a late Easter and, though it's still chilly outside, it feels good to peel off my coat and pull on my muck boots. I love these boots, because they're a miniature version of the ones my grandfather wears, and because they're one of the few things I'm allowed to get absolutely, completely, disgustingly dirty. Nathan and I run down to the bank of the little pond, fed by the same spring that feeds the pump-house across the road. The last thin layer of ice is so brittle that my toe breaks it as I test the water. It's cold, and the pressure of the water pushes my boots in toward my legs. I take a step and sink into the mud. My grandfather told me that the snapping turtle who lives in the pond has buried himself to stay warm for the winter. I'm scared that I might step on him.

We spend a glorious afternoon splashing in the mud. Of course, the water gets in and fills our boots. Once we're already soaked, it can't hurt to walk out further into the pond... Before long, we're up to our waists in the frigid water. We stand and feel ourselves sinking, twisting our legs to drill deeper and deeper into the mud. By the time my mother comes out to bring us in to get warm, we're up to our ankles in mud, and up to our chests in water. To this day, two little pairs of muck boots sit on the bottom of the pond. New homes for the snapping turtle.

I miss my boots especially the next day, when we go to the Border collie trials to watch my grandfather's neighbor work his dogs. It has rained overnight and the fields are a slippery mess.

Two collies herd the group of cowering sheep into a pen and the handler swings the door shut. Applause. Over and over again, for each pair of dogs. But Nathan and I are more interested in the llamas in the backfield, kept to protect the sheep from coyotes. My grandfather says that llamas and coyotes are natural enemies, and sheep need guarding. We've all heard his story, of him and my father saving the sheep from the big coyote that lives over the hill. Driving across the field, in the middle of the night, guns blazing.

Kai-yo-tee, I say. No, he says. Kai-oat. He laughs and calls me his city-girl granddaughter.

Summer

After Easter, we usually don't return to the Valley until the Fourth of July. In Timberville, Virginia, the ice in the big blue cooler means fireworks. Nathan drives me to the nearest gas station, a Quarles, making me duck down because he's driving me illegally. He's borrowed my grandfather's little red pickup truck and he stalls every time we have to stop. But I'm still jealous that he can drive. We buy three big bags of ice and throw them into the bed of the truck. He lets me drive home, but makes me stop before I wreck the transmission.

But this time, the ice we're buying isn't for the Fourth of July. It's for the reception after my grandfather's funeral, in the big back yard of the church. He died in May, so we're back in the Valley just as summer begins. All around the farm, little green sprigs of things stretch to the sun. The apple butter pot is back in the skeleton barn, the turkeys have grown and grown ugly, and the snapping turtle has awoken and is eating the geese chicks that swim in the pond. But this year, we're not here for the Fourth of July—there will be no fireworks from the back of a tractor, out across the back fields, to send the cows racing away. Instead, we dress in formal clothes; my littlest cousin puts on his "funeral shoes," the black dress shoes he's only ever worn to funerals. We climb into my aunt's minivan and drive to Rader's once again. I watch out the window as the Mennonites go by with their matched pairs of bays. Like the lullaby my grandfather used to sing to us. All the pretty little horses.

The funeral is a blur. It's a very Brethren service, simple but for a few eulogies from farmers nearby, who grew up with my grandfather. They talk as much about his cows as they do about him. I think he would have liked that. The graveyard is across the road and to the left. We all walk over to where a little tent has been set up next to the grave. Someone gives each grandchild a flower, and we place them on the black lacquered coffin. I think my flower was a carnation. I notice my

father needs his handkerchief back. I wish I had my grandfather's red bandana, the one he always had in his pocket.

After the funeral, the grandchildren escape to the little playground by the church. We look down the hill, out onto our farm. His farm. Maymont. It's a perfect summer day. White clouds puff over the mountains, a darker shade of blue etched across the blue sky. I swing on an undersized swing, next to Nathan, and we talk about the end of our first year of high school and the farm. He's just gotten his heifer, the one he'll train and show in the 4-H county fair at the end of the summer. "Granddad showed me how to train them," he says. "The first year, he helped me the whole time. It's going to be different without him."

Fall

I haven't been back to Maymont since the funeral. We haven't made apple butter since my grandfather died. I opened the last jar while I was home this summer. There was a penny in it. I still believed I'd have luck for a week. When I broke my ankle two days later, I realized he wasn't always right.

The seasons at Timberville are different without my grandfather. No more hayrides in the big blue New Holland. No more snowmen with real coal from the basement. No more marching muck boots, or collie trials, or fireworks that scare the cows. My littlest cousin has grown out of his funeral shoes.

I visited my aunt this summer, and she gave me a box of things she saved for me when cleaning out his house. I have it in my closet at home: some letters and photos of him and my grandmother, who I don't remember. The Christmas ornaments he collected when he travelled. And a khaki work shirt, still smelling like pipe tobacco.

I called my cousin last week, to check how much he earned for his heifer at the fair. His best year ever, he told me. I told him about school, summer, our last jar of apple butter. They had their first frost in the middle of October this year. We talked about the farm. We made plans to go back at Christmas.

I wonder how it's going to feel, to drive up the driveway legally, my cousin in his own little red pickup, not stalling every time we stop. No turkey chicks in the big poultry barns. A new sinkhole in the big west field. The pond rimmed with fragile ice. The cows are still there, of course, with my uncle carrying on the Maymont bloodlines. My grandfather always said that bloodlines are the most important thing in the business. "It's that one thing that's constant, generation to generation. Can't change the blood." Season to season, generation to generation. Can't change the blood.

The Buildings are Painted in the Background of a Portrait

Samantha Callahan
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ

A smiling young man stands in front of them.
The artist got his ivory teeth just right.

My apartment window howls in disgust
at the sound of the traffic below.
The breeze chills my bones,
leaves a bitter taste on my tongue
as the radiator screams in protest
and the thawing meat on the counter
ambushes my unsuspecting nostrils.
I watch as condensation pools beneath the dark
pink heap.

The icy floor feels the way a screeching violin
sounds before a recital.
The clock radio in the corner sings sad words of loss
and desolation,
and the sound of the traffic becomes a haunting silence.

We used to be in the sand and listen to the waves
crashing just inches from us,
feeling like martians on some distant unknown planet.
I couldn't swim because I dreamt of vague forests
the night before.
Do you realize the sun never went down?

The dark windows of love are smashed by falling
tree branches,
the angry bouquet sitting on the table stares tauntingly
at me.
I stare back. Each sneering flower wilts at the mercy
of my gaze.

I walk away to sit on the frozen tiles near the refrigerator.
It will be ripped from its socket and thrown in a
junk yard
next to an old washing machine and a rusted car door.

I refuse to look at the smiling urn across the room;
he has been everywhere, but gone nowhere.
Bon appetit, sarcasm drips from the foreign words
as I say them to the pungent meat on the counter.
My shoes walk away to join the tired coats in the closet.
Sketches of empty beaches hang peacefully on the
gray wall.

The Rabbit in the Moon

Catherine Wong
MORRISTOWN, NJ

ONCE UPON A TIME, long ago, there lived a monkey, otter, fox and rabbit, who were friends in a quiet forest. They played together every day, and told stories, and were happy. One day, a beggar approached them, and the animals could see from his ragged clothes and gaunt face that he was very hungry. The monkey leapt up, and told the beggar to join them for a meal, and at once the kind animals set out gathering food for the man. The monkey swung into the trees, and brought down the lushest mangoes he could find. Meanwhile, the otter dove into the water, catching as many of the biggest fish as he could, and the fox stole some bread and milk from the cabin of the nearby farmer. The rabbit was very sad, for he had nothing to offer but grass, and he knew that the beggar would not want to eat grass. So, he set about gathering dry twigs, and when his friends returned with the food they had found, he lit a fire. The fox, otter, and monkey presented the beggar, with their food, and, after thanking them, the beggar turned to the rabbit to see what he had brought.

"I have nothing to offer you, sir," said the rabbit, "so I will give you myself. After I am roasted, perhaps I will make a tasty meal." With that, the rabbit prepared to leap into the flame. Before he could jump, however, the man caught the rabbit in his arms, and lifted him up. The animals gasped, for the beggar had revealed his true form, and now they saw that he was not a beggar at all, but a god who had come to visit the earth in disguise. To reward the rabbit for his selflessness, the god placed the rabbit in the moon, where he could live happily forever. And, if you look closely, the rabbit is still in the moon to this day.

—Ancient Chinese legend

The house seems almost two-dimensional, silhouetted against the starless sky, its edges blurred in the transition between roof and darkness. A few, sparse trees litter the unkempt yard, their dying branches moaning softly in the wind. The cobblestone path lies in disrepair, a broken snake writhing on the hill, and I finger the crumbling stones, letting them trickle slowly through my fingers. The moon looms

over the side of the hill, gaunt and pale, bathing the cracked chimney in its soft glow. I search its white face, looking for the mythical rabbit resting peacefully, Baba's rough voice echoing in my mind. The moon seems to stare blankly back, the honored rabbit Baba shaped with his words lost on its distant surface. The dim light of a cheap light bulb flickers through the drafty window, and I squint in apprehensively, tracing the dark outlines of the people on the window with my eyes.

Lightning tears through the clouds, a blinding gash in the angry sky, and the deep bass grumble of thunder slips easily in through the thin walls of the shack. The sputtering gas lamp casts shaky puddles of light on my pale face, drawn taut with fear, and I huddle under my shabby blanket, twisting it around my toes and inhaling the musky scent of the storm. Strong hands sneak under the cover, holding me tight, and I nestle in Baba's arms, watching his ragged beard bounce in time to the rhythm of his gruff voice.

"Mouh jo pa. Don't be afraid. I'll tell you the story of the rabbit in the moon."

I linger for a few more minutes near the house, surveying it under the gentle cover of night. A dilapidated mailbox rests resignedly on its whitewashed post, the pole driven determinedly into the rocky ground. I glance at its sun-bleached side, touching the spot where "Tsun" has been painted over, replaced sloppily with "Moore". The house has an aura of foreboding that I do not remember, and I feel distant, awkward, a man who has returned home to find himself a stranger, old friends dead and gone and everything changed. Inside the house, the silhouette of a man stretches and stands, joining the woman and child and accompanying them to bed. I linger awkwardly on the curb, not daring to approach the house any further, and watch the shadows thrown strangely onto the window. My eyes flicker to the empty spot where a tall, ornate chair once stood, and I close my eyes, remembering.

Baba slumps in the lacquered wooden chair, a faded relic he often reminds me once belonged to my grandfather, its intricately carved legs and delicate paint job an absurd contrast to the dull, shoddy interior of our house. Baba's exhausted frame is too big for the little chair, a king squeezed

onto a tiny throne, and his legs spill awkwardly over the sides. I hold his huge hands in my own, feeling the leathery calluses and rough palms, and tracing the deep lines with my finger, rivulets criss-crossing his skin. A similar examination of my own hands reveals a marked contrast, baby-soft skin and tender palms. I bring this to his attention.

"Baba, why are your hands so rough?"

His tired eyes look solemnly into mine.

"My hands are rough so yours don't have to be."

The sky is now soft and cheerful, streaked with the orange and red of twilight, and clouds drift lazily by, wispy bits of cotton scattered in an ocean of blue. A few birds soar overhead, riding by on outstretched wings, and I pause to watch them, admiring their streamlined profiles silhouetted against the sky. The scene is delicate, beautiful, and, standing there with my head thrown back, I realize I have not watched the birds for many years.

I have returned to the house with new resolve. Apprehensively, I place a foot on the deteriorating stone path, feeling the gravel roll under my feet and lodge in the rubber soles of my shoes. The air is crisp and dry, and I hike slowly up the weaving path towards the house. At the top, I dawdle a moment, counting the new cracks on the familiar door, and then my hand finds the rusted knocker, and I rap twice. Muffled footsteps echo within, and the door swings open with a sigh.

I am six years old. I burst in through the flimsy door, brandishing the crisp envelope in my dirty hands. As usual, the shack is still and silent, the lacquered chair a proud sentry by the door, standing guard over the empty house. There is a hidden pile of matches stashed behind the gas stove, and I retrieve one, allowing myself the luxury of an unused match. I strike its crimson head on the drafty windowsill, pausing briefly to admire the dancing flame before touching it to the rusty kerosene lamp. I blow out the match quickly, dusting off some of the char, and then return it to our cache of partially used matches, hoarded for use another day. The lamp sputters to life, its warm, dim glow casting an illuminated circle on the concrete floor. The flame is alive, a jumping, breathing figure trapped behind a wall of glass, and I smile at it while stowing my precious envelope carefully under a threadbare blanket, and then pull out the day's homework, filling in the answers with a careful, deliberate hand.

A velvety curtain of darkness has been drawn across the sky, and stars peek out from behind it, a handful of twinkling confetti tossed onto the night. I stand on tiptoe, peering out the cracked window worriedly, searching the disheveled hill for any sign of Baba. The windowsill begins to cut into my chin, and I strain to see through the darkness, standing on tiptoe to get a better view. Finally, just as panic begins to mount in my small throat, I see him, his familiar gait soothing as I watch him scale the pebble covered path. He reaches the top of the hill, nudges open the shaky door, and smiles tiredly at me through a dirt-streaked face as I fall into his arms. I retrieve my envelope from its hiding place, and pull out the report card with a flourish, reading Baba the names of subjects and rows of perfect grades while watching his bearded face expectantly for the coveted smile. He looks at it a long moment, and then breaks into a grin.

"Siu hai ji, child, I am so proud of you. So proud."

I beam, and out of the corner of my eye, I swear I can see the rabbit in the moon smile.

The woman is confused. She stands, uncertain, in the doorway, fingers toying with the strings of a stained apron, eyeing my cheap suit and scuffed shoes.

"My husband don't come home 'til nine," she tells me in a rough voice I recognize from my phone call, and I smile, because that is when my father used to return from the factory.

I step forward, and explain who I am, watching an expression of mixed pity and bewilderment flit across her tired face.

"Your father died five years ago, and you're coming back here?" she demands incredulously, and I nod.

"Why?" she asks.

I do not answer, because I do not know.

It is January. Papers are strewn across the stained table, a blizzard of unfinished work and unfiled forms. I squeeze my fingers to my temples, rifling the papers with my other hand, the gurgle of boiling water and cacophony of speeding cars and voices from the sidewalk below blurring into a sort of background white noise. My legs are sore and cramped from being forced under a too-low table, a shabby relic snagged from the curb beside a foreclosed home, tossed unceremoniously out of an ending chapter of someone's life. The harsh clacking of my aged calculator echoes around the cramped apartment, and I sigh dully as my fingers tap the numbers, a dance they have honed and

perfected, and one I have stopped watching long ago. Tottering, sloppy piles of half-heartedly filed folders spill over the scratched desk, and I reach methodically for another, shuffling a deck of hastily scribbled phone numbers and addresses as I search for the necessary card. A bent, coffee stained slip of green paper flutters out of stack, and I kneel to retrieve it, grateful for any excuse to leave the confines of my desk and chair. Out of habit, I skim over the faded phone number, and then I stop, hesitating in recognition. Instinctively, I want to toss the card away, lose it again among the mess and oblivion of other papers and untouched piles, but my hand inches involuntarily towards the phone, and I begin to dial the number.

I clutch the phone, pressing it into my ear, and with each ring, I realize how much I want to hear my father's voice. And then the phone picks up.

I gulp. "Baba?"

The voice on the phone is harsh and unfamiliar, and I listen dazedly, apologizing to the stranger on the other end, and when I hang up the phone, mid-sentence, I have registered only one thing.

Baba is dead, he had said, found dead and alone five years ago of a heart attack among the pieces of a broken chair.

I am acutely, painfully aware of how much I miss my father, how much I have always missed my father. The apartment has no window, and as I sink the ground, I can only wonder if the rabbit in the moon is weeping along with me.

The woman ushers me in warily, watching my reaction defiantly as I enter the shabby room, daring me to comment on the meager furnishings and barren floor. A dented pot bubbles quietly on the gas stove, the faintly meaty smell of beef and vegetable stew wafting over to the entrance where I stand. In the corner, a small boy in worn overalls plays with a broken train set and a toy car, smashing them together in his small fists while providing the appropriate sound effects.

"That's Gavin," she tells me, following my gaze, and I smile at him absently, watching his mother reach over to tousle his hair. By the sink, a dog-shaped soap with blurred features rests precariously on its dish, and I recognize it as a cheap token saved from one of the church's Christmas charity baskets. The woman introduces herself as Linda, and I shake her hand.

I am sixteen. The envelope is foreign in my hands. I trudge up the familiar stone path, my legs leaden, and the envelope is thick and strange, a hundred-

ton weight shackled to my wrists. My shoulders wear Baba's exhausted stoop, a sagging slump reminiscent of a thousand days of stress. Humiliation and guilt is painted across my face, the single C scrawled in red ink on the report card in the envelope a glaring hallmark of shame. It had been easy to maintain a façade of regularity, convince myself I knew the material, and I had loved the sudden excess of time I had found. I had even squeezed in a job as a cashier, determined to impress Baba with my capability. Then the weight of the final test had tumbled down in a crushing barrage, and my imagined safety net had vanished.

Mentally, I rehearse apologies and a feeble defense, a new wave of guilt washing in as I envision Baba's crestfallen, disbelieving eyes. A shiver wracks my body, and I prepare to prostrate myself in a plea for forgiveness when I nudge open the door.

A slice of light breaks on my face, and I glance inside to find a mess of gray-haired men clutching gourmet cigarettes laughing next to the bones of a roast duck strewn across our faded table, and Baba beams at me from the lacquered chair.

"This is my son," Baba cries, an adoring smile creasing his face. "I am so proud of him!"

Baba's invited friends wring my hand, grinning up through yellowed teeth, and I contort my face into a pained attempt at a smile before hurrying away.

That midnight, I forge Baba's illegible signature on my report card while the rabbit in the moon looks on with a disapproving glare.

Somewhere in the distance, a bell tower chimes dolefully, and I sneak a glance at my watch. Nine o'clock. Linda looks out the familiar, drafty window expectantly, scanning the disheveled hill for her husband, and orders Gavin to put away the cars. He shoots a reproachful glare in her direction, and then complies reluctantly, shoveling the secondhand toys into a corner of the house. I stand awkwardly near the door, searching for some meaning in this visit, wondering why I have come. Linda bustles about the kitchen, setting bowls on the faded dining table, and she pauses now and then to peek out the window. I can see the crumbling stone path from my post by the door, but I shift my gaze to the dining table, remembering when another table stood in its place.

I have searched the house. The house is unsettlingly quiet, blanketed in the silence of the hour before Baba returns, and I canvass the room, the dining

table resolutely empty. I have since quit the job as cashier, the weeks behind the cash register scanning cartons and jars, but now the wages are missing. Baba had smiled last week when I brought home the money, touched the crisply folded bills as he counted one hundred dollars, winked as he sewed the money into the lining of his coat, a secret only we shared.

Lost in guilt over the report card, the forged signature, I had forgotten about the money, and now it is gone. Baba's coat is draped over the lacquered chair, a hole snipped in the fabric that guarded the secret I entrusted to my father.

I remember the men, the duck we could never afford, the expensive cigarettes. And everything Baba stood for became null.

The stew has been ladled into bowls, and Linda is tasting it a final time when the door whimpers open. The man who walks in is tall, imposing, and he carries himself with a dignity that belies his tired eyes and patched jacket. He notices me with a start, and I shrink back, but Linda pulls him aside, standing on tiptoe to whisper into his ear. When he turns back to face me, there is an emotion I cannot fathom in his face, but he welcomes me with a rough, genial voice and seats me on a stool at the table. Linda has found a bowl, and, despite my protests, I am given a helping of stew, thick with tomatoes and carrots and a few scattered bits of meat.

"Why are you here?" asks the husband, who has introduced himself as John. Linda looks at him strangely, but Gavin burns his tongue on his stew, and she occupies herself with cooling it. I am not sure what to say, but I tell him my story.

I am eighteen. Baba stands above me, fury contorting his face, my report card covered in failing grades clutched in his shaking fist. I have presented it to him defiantly, smirked with satisfaction at his shock, and now anger. Baba had always warned me against becoming a nothing.

"Like a bum," he would say.

So when the money disappeared, I had kept silent, worked hard at becoming a nothing, relished betraying his trust in me as he had betrayed mine in him. And now the proof was in his hand. Baba glowers at me, and in one fluid motion, he tears the report card, and flings the shreds at my feet.

"All my life I have sacrificed everything for you, worked until the skin peeled off my hands, and this is what you will become? Where is the son I

nurtured? Where is the son who made me proud? Where is my son?"

I savor his rage with a kind of perverse delight. I spit at him.

Something burns my cheek, and I stagger back, away from Baba's hand. He has never hit me before. I am on my feet, shouting.

"I know who you are! You are a thief! You are worse than a thief, you are a nothing!"

Baba raises his hand to strike me again, but I dart away, over to the window. The lacquered chair is surprisingly light in my hands, easy to hoist over my head, and I watch Baba's eyes widen as I hurl it down. He seems to deflate, and he falls to his knees.

I run out the door, my father weeping over the chair's broken pieces, and as I sprint down the hill, the rabbit leers at me from the moon.

When I finish speaking, the little table is silent. Linda and John exchange inscrutable glances, and she nods. John looks over at me, and clears his throat hesitantly, his voice husky when he speaks.

"When we moved here, I had just lost my job at a canning factory. There was little food, no money, and nothing to support our son. The furniture of this house's previous owner, your father, was discarded on the curb, and we were forced to use it because we could not buy our own. We were about to throw away the pieces of that lacquered chair, when Linda found an envelope hidden inside the leg of the chair. It was an ingenious hiding spot, really. Probably better than in the lining of a coat." He pauses, tries to meet my eyes. "There was one hundred dollars inside. We had to use it, for the family, for Gavin. You understand, don't you?" He is pleading, now. I look away. He continues. "And this paper was also in the envelope. I have it, here. I'm sorry."

He hands me a yellowed slip of paper, printed with painstaking letters: *Hidden Money for College. For My Son.*

A crack of thunder cuts into the stony silence, and I look up, not sure of what to say and not sure of what I am supposed to feel. Gavin is startled by the storm, and he begins to wail. I untangle myself from my chair, walk over to him, and Linda and John watch me carefully, tense. The slip of paper is precious, held tenderly in my hand, and out of the window, I can see a full moon. Something stirs inside me, and Baba's voice echoes lovingly, one more time, in my head. I lift Gavin into my lap.

"Don't be afraid. I'll tell you the story of the rabbit in the moon."

Letters to Somewhere in New York

Nur-al-Din Harper
NORWICH, NY

Dear Poetry,

I wish I could remember the first time I met you. All I know is I get a sense of déjà vu every time I take a walk in the park past the stumps and leaves at 9 o'clock sunset cloudless sky. I see children in the rusty swings laughing, getting told to come home. I'm sitting on a cool bench admiring the old sidewalks covered with soft moss. Where are you?

Dear Poetry,

I have written all these letters to you and not one has reached you. You torment me again and again leaving me standing in my doorway watching rainfall and lightning break ground somewhere in New York. Waiting for words scrawled on tissues and ragged pieces of paper.

Dear Poetry,

I think I'm being delusional but I really do think that the birds have come back not for food or to mate but so that we can hear them every bright, cold morning. If only we could hear. It's a blizzard out there and you were out there too dancing, naked and smiling, your hair wet with snow.

Dear Poetry,

I remember you telling me there were muddy hoofed donkeys with their ears perked down in the subway. All I saw were the commuters and bums in their sleeping both trying to eat bread and smile. So I told you there is a rusty bent nail stuck in a worn shoe sole by the lavender bushes and you went looking.

Dear Poetry,

I am going back to the park to laugh and jump over stumps and sleep by the lavender bushes and swing with the children and find blackberries. Look for me.

Only Tears of Joy in Heaven

Brittany Webster
WOODBRIDGE, VA

A Happy Ever After Beginning

He wrapped me in that light pink blanket cuddling me against his upper torso. I would smell the Folgers coffee on his breath as he whispered to me. I was always a momma's girl wailing when put in the arms of another. Except for my Pappy. His stiff arms were my security blanket keeping away all the bad things. His name was Donald Lee Scott. My Momma named me Brittany Lee Webster. I guess you could say we were always connected in a way. I was his princess and he was my everything. I could pick out his voice at the drop of a hat, that voice of pure kindness and sarcasm. I loved listening to that voice, hear his raspy laugh. I was the youngest grandchild, the curious and stubborn little girl, and my Pappy would spoil me. To me I was his favorite, and he was always mine.

My Home Away From Home

The six hour distance was inconvenient but made the trip all the more worth it. I remember walking in to see him in his blue jeans, black sneakers, t-shirt, and that tattoo of my Grandmother's name spelled wrong on his left arm. There would always be a new jar of salted peanuts for the two of us to share once I got there. It was our favorite treat, our special thing. I'd make him spend hours playing "hide-and-seek", and perform his infamous magic tricks. Close your eyes, he'd say, and then he'd hide his ring. Pure magic. I'd spend nights sleeping between Grandma and him in their water bed and talk to him until I'd hear his light snoring, only to nudge him awake to talk some more. I'd wake to his coffee maker rumbling in the kitchen. He was an early bird so I'd climb out of the bed and go find my seat on his lap. He'd set chocolate donuts in front of me and let me dunk them in his warm mug. It never had a satisfying taste, but I loved it anyways just because it was his. I don't remember what he'd talk to me about, but I remember laughing, laughing at his quirks and plain silliness.

The Beginning of the End

Second grade came and so did his sickness. At

first I saw no difference. But as the leaves began to fall so did his hair. It was different but not abnormal. He was a grandfather and it was not so strange to be bald. But then his round belly disappeared. His big figure thinned to skin and bone. It was scary. They treated him as if he was a fragile porcelain doll, not allowed to play with just stare at from a distance. I wasn't allowed to sit upon his lap and even had to leave the room at times when he'd get sick. Second grade was also the year of chicken pox. It was a domino effect taking out child after child. My Pappy got worse and we needed to make a trip back home. I wasn't allowed in the house, not allowed to see him or touch him. I was said to be contagious even though I didn't even have the chicken pox. The living room of their house became congested with hospital supplies. It wasn't Grandma and Pappy's house anymore, it was just a more convenient hospital room. Season's passed and soon it felt like I didn't live in Virginia anymore. From hotels in Pittsburgh, to my Dad's parent's house, to the hospital, there was always a new place to sleep. I actually thought it was fun for a while not grasping the larger concept, just looking at it as an adventure. My brother and I would spend most of our time in the waiting room. We'd watch Mr. Rogers in his knitted sweaters and try to put together the puzzles on the tables. We actually became really good friends with a boy whose father was sick. His name was Ben. His father would sit and put together puzzles with us, but I never did see his whole face. It was always covered with a surgical mask. I didn't want to get near him, didn't want to become ill. I didn't know why he wasn't in his room. But Ben would sit on his lap and laugh with him all the same. That's when that sick at the pit of your stomach feeling started to become normal.

"Do you know where this piece goes?" he'd say, totally avoiding the big picture. We weren't around a coffee table at a house, we were in a hospital waiting room that smelled of cleaning supplies. I hated that they called it a waiting room. What were we supposed to be waiting for, our loved ones to die? So many times I'd want to ask Ben about his Daddy, if he was sad. But I never found the courage to do it.

"Maybe here," I'd say.

My last home on the adventure was my Dad's parents. It was just my brother and I. My parents were still running back and forth. But one morning everything was different. I remember being woken by my parents sitting on the bed I was resting in. They were calm but their voices shaky. I knew something was wrong with Pappy, but I didn't know what. Their words just didn't seem to be able to come out. My mom stared into my eyes, hers getting ready to burst. "Honey . . . Pappy . . . is going to have a fu-

neral" I didn't understand at first. I knew Pappy was sick but he was supposed to get better. I knew what funeral meant, but I didn't know why she said it. It didn't make sense. I sat up trying to form words.

"Pappy's . . . dead?"

"Yes Brittany," her cries less controlled. I couldn't cry at first. I understood the seriousness of the situation but it was like I was watching myself in a movie, but the rewind button was broken.

Fairy Tales Don't Have Happy Endings

I'd never seen my mother's eyes so lost, so dazed. The car was filled with sadness. No one talked. Not even an "are we there yet?" or "I have to go to the bathroom", just nothing. I felt as if I should be crying, but I couldn't. I couldn't get the emotion out of my body, or come to the realization of what was happening. I didn't want to make it to where we were going . . . but we did. I didn't unbuckle my seat belt, I just laid against the upholstery. I watched as my grandmother got out of the car, heard her sob and heave her anger and depression from her chest, thinking she wouldn't be able to breathe again. We were the first ones there, besides my Pappy. He was already inside. We walked in and my mother grabbed my shoulder to stop me. My grandmother walked ahead of us into the room, and her heaves turned into moans. I wanted to cover my ears, but I forced myself to listen. We gave her some time and then it was our turn to go in. There was a beautiful dark polished casket with colorful flowers surrounding it. And then I saw him, my best friend, my Pappy. Then all of the emotions I had tried forcing out streamed down my frozen face. I stared at him forever. He was dressed in a formal suit, tie, and dockers. I didn't know why he wasn't in his t-shirt and jeans, that was what he was comfortable in. I wanted him to talk to me so bad, wanted him to say anything at all. But he just laid there, unmoving. He had made me feel so special, I was his little girl. But he had cancer and couldn't fight it anymore. So we watched as friends and family and complete strangers came to say goodbye. It was amazing to see how many people loved my Pappy besides me. The smell of the air began to sicken me. The smell of death. I cried out all my tears until my eyes throbbed squinting through a veil of red. We were the last ones to leave besides my Pappy. We knelt beside his beautiful body and said our last goodbyes and walked out to the car. I buckled my seat belt and laid back against the upholstery. I gazed out the frosted window and up into the sky hoping my best friend had made it up there. I saw specks of rain hit the window and I knew that he was up there smiling because there are only tears of joy in heaven.

Blood Over Water

Lauren Del Turco
LIVINGSTON, NJ

I GREW UP IN THE EPITOME of well-to-do suburbia. All of the fathers carried leather briefcases into the city for fancy nine to five office jobs; the mothers rattled through town in oversized SUVs that got eight miles to the gallon and got manicures every Wednesday. The families ate dinner in their separate bedrooms. I just didn't get it.

Everyone conformed to the same Pleasantville lifestyle: a two car garage, 2.3 children, a vacation home in St. Maarten, a trampoline in the backyard, and a dog—probably a yellow Labrador retriever. I, however, was one of three children accompanied by three dogs—a collie, a great Dane, and a Jack Russell terrier.

We were different. Every February when we were off from school, we drove north instead of flying south to the tropical isle to which the rest of the town migrated. Our vacation home was a cabin surrounded by 54 acres of woods in the middle of nowhere, New York. My dad built that cabin with his brothers back in the eighties. We only installed electricity in '94; the walls remained unpainted; a rifle rack hung on the wall. Sometimes the roof leaked; the alien television from 1974 had tinfoil antennae; and we were quite often awakened in the middle of the night by some variety of wild animal. And while most of my peers were complaining about the heat somewhere close to the equator, I learned how to scare off a bear, how to heat frozen water pipes with a high-wattage light bulb, and how to turn the quarter mile-long driveway into a black diamond ski slope.

Every morning we got up with the sun. The monstrous windows of the little house funneled light from the sunrise into every crevice of every room. We drank the mountain spring water in selfish gulps, laughing at each other when it spilled from the corners of our mouths. My parents sat on the open front porch in contented silence watching the trees sway. They gave us the room to run around, to climb trees, to splash through the creek, and to hike up to the top of the mountain. We had

room to breathe in the clean air. We buzzed like fruit flies all over the land that belonged to us only on paper as they just sat, looking at each other and drinking tea. I was so used to this that I didn't understand why all my friends stared when they saw my parents together. In school I learned that many families were in halves: a summer and a winter. My friends had "Dad's Weekends" and "Dinner with Mom Nights" that erased the definition of marriage from their mental dictionaries. They chatted like noisy chickens about the TV. They talked about *that show* where the mother and father loved other people and spent everything down to the money from their first summer jobs on divorce. The lunch tables marveled at such a fantasy, but it was their lives. I stopped watching TV.

I stayed home on weekends to play checkers with my little brother. I always insisted on a rematch; he beat me every time. I skipped parties to watch home videos with my grandmother, to help my dad make fresh pasta. Last winter vacation I was invited to my friend's second home in Boca, one her mother bought with her divorce money. To accept would have been treason. I had a pair of unflattering snow pants, a couple of beaten up sleds, and three slobbery mutts waiting for me at a little wooden cabin that no one knew existed. My dad carved "The Del Turco's" into the front door three years ago, and to me, that knotted wood and sloppy hand is a blessing. It is where the ink of our individuality bleeds into one another; it is where we are each other's blood and life; it is where everything but those 54 acres is irrelevant. There, I learned what family means.

First Love

Caitlin Frain
CONWAY, PA

YOU KNOW THAT FEELING you get upon first meeting someone, or seeing someone, and you know you're going to have *something* with that person? Maybe she's the person with whom you'll end up going skydiving in five years, or maybe she'll become your worst enemy. Whatever the case, you can just *feel* that you are going to acquire some direct rela-

tionship with that one person, and that she'll have some kind of impact on you no matter how small.

I had that feeling when I first saw you, dazzling blue eyes and dark hair cascading down your back as you wore that red embellished blouse that you wear every other Tuesday. *Or is it Wednesday? No, that's your ripped jeans. Ripped jeans Wednesday.* Anyway, it was the first day of school, and I was in stats.

"Karla Dimarco?" said Mrs. Davis. Now this was a name that I had never heard before. I looked frantically around to spot the newbie, and finally my eyes feasted upon the goddess of a woman that you are. I wanted to give the impression as the mysterious bad-boy type, so I didn't answer the teacher when she called on me.

"Randy Phillips?" Mrs. Davis said, "Mr. Phillips, are you here?"

"I don't know, am I?" I said, smoothly. I squinted around, catching a glimpse of you out of the corner of my eye. You were whispering to someone next to you. *Jackpot! Already had you asking about me!*

The months progressed and so did my feelings for you. In class debates I would contradict you, providing the most intriguing points. In one instance, the class was discussing aliens entering our country.

"This is our country, aliens should not be welcome here," you said.

On the defending side, I said, "Although they are not welcome here, think about all of the things the aliens could tell us about their home planet. And what if they come in peace?" I remember your face exactly: dumbfounded. *Victory was mine, leaving your stubborn heart thwarted by my genius.*

It wasn't until our first one-on-one that I knew what direct relationship we were going to have. I knew that you would be the love of my life and that I'd marry you and we'd have children and grow old together. I couldn't believe I hadn't known all this love existed before—didn't even know I *could* love this much.

You were standing at your locker, fumbling around for your trig text book that you need for fifth period. (I memorized your schedule so as to perfectly time our meetings in the hall.) Nervously about to pee my pants, I walked up to you as you grabbed your things.

"Hi," I said about three times before you finally glared at me in response. Knowing that you didn't want to seem too eager, I kept calm.

"Mr. Foster, what a prick, right," I said,

pointing to your trig book.

"Uh, yeah . . . who are you again?" you said. *Who am I? Boy, what a sense of humor. You acted like you didn't know the name of the guy who followed you in admiration to your classes every day, trying to walk close enough so I could smell your sweet rosy perfume or your apple pineapple shampoo and conditioner duo.*

I laughed on cue at the joke, and you squirmed away. *Our first meeting! If that successful encounter was not a sign that we should be together, I don't know what is!*

As I got to know you more and more, I realized how perfect we were together. The saying, "Opposites attract" definitely applied to us. You had tons of friends. I didn't have any. You were even a new student and you attracted all the people who I had repelled. You were smart and athletic at the same time. (You would always beat me in gym relay races and get me out in dodge ball and such.) But my favorite facet of you by far was your ability to play hard-to-get. It worked so well on a relentless guy like me. Whenever I asked you out on dates, you would always make some lame excuse which I did not mistake for a lie. For instance, whenever I asked you to the movies, you once said that you had to watch your baby sister. *Lie! Nice try, though.* You didn't even have a baby sister—once I was taking a walk coincidentally near your house and I peeked inside the two cars in your driveway only to find the backseats car seat-less!

Although I longed to go on a date with you and show you my most charming features, like my mint-condition collection of all things Star Trek (Fellow Trekkies have once called me "Captain Kirk" of my generation!), your gifts to me made up for your incessant refusals. For example, your hairbrush. Long story short, I was walking through the halls and just happened to unlock your locker (after extensive attempts at memorizing your four-digit code from afar). After searching through your gym bag, I finally felt the bristles of your large pink hairbrush. Kudos to you for hiding it in such a discrete place where only I could find it! Now I currently collect your hair samples and follicles as a memento to our love.

Gift number two was my favorite though—our first kiss. I had been watching you chomp your gum throughout all of stats class. *You looked so cute chewing gum!* The bell rang, and you did something you knew that only my eye would catch. After all of the students had dispersed, I went over to your seat and reached under your desk as planned. Success—it was still moist! I can taste it now—raspberry rap-

ture bubblegum. I know that this was only the substitute for our first kiss, and that you would repay me with the real pleasure of a kiss later. *Oh, how impatient I was and still am to taste your lips!*

While our affection seemed to be at its peak, I received drastic news. Before the end of the school year I caught word that your parents had split yet again, and that you were moving to Iowa or Idaho—one of the two—with your mom. Upon hearing word of this move, I acted quickly. I had to know the exact address of your future residency in order to continue our relationship. I asked you time and time again during the last week of school just where you might live, and all those times I received the same answer with your same disturbed facial expression: "Um, I don't know."

I can't blame you for this dull response; I mean, perhaps you were so forlorn about leaving me to address my inquiry, or maybe you truly didn't know the answer. Maybe you were to temporarily live in an apartment near some relatives until you found a permanent settlement. I told myself not to worry, that you'd call as soon as you arrived at your new house.

I never got a call. For the first few days, I figured, *she'll call, she'll busy unpacking, she'll call.* But after July, and soon August had passed, I realized there would be no call, no ring or buzz, not even a postcard. And now all I have of you are the memories with you of the most amazing school year ever with my first love, and your hairbrush. From time to time I'll take out the brush from my shrine of you, and just sit and brush my own hair with it, picturing your face in the mirror, imagining how you might have felt while brushing your hair. Or in my most enthusiastic moods, I'll put on an all-girl rock band song and dance around my room, singing into the brush. Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, I feel like I *am* you, channeling your lightheartedness and your sweet aura. I wonder if you feel this too. After all, I think that anything is possible in the name of love.

After a while, I tried telling myself that maybe you didn't find the paper with my number on it that I slipped into your purse on the last day of school. Maybe this was so, but it's hard to think that you didn't memorize my number as I did yours. Another possibility is that you really weren't there when I called you every day for the first two weeks of August. But really, I think that it is for the best. Long distance relationships never work,

says my psychiatrist, and whoever disagrees is a lying son of a witch. Plus, this break is beneficial for us, I think. I mean, I want to get in some experience with other girls before we meet again and get married—I can't win you back by being a rookie at romance. Call me hard-headed, delusional, or a dreamer, but I meant what I said about you being the love of my life and that I'd marry you and that we'd have children and grow old together. Yeah, I think we'd need time apart before all of those commitments. Until then, I guess I'll just have to wait for your call, or maybe I'll just power up the GPS tracking system that I duct-taped underneath your mom's car.

Something New in the Woods

Taylor Bickford
IVORYTON, CT

when the trail loses its appeal as
it always does
and the forest unfolds silently
in orange and red
we float aimlessly
over a thatching of pine needles
drunk on the sun's dappled wine.

after a while we rest near a stone wall
and I lean on its ancient humped back, and
carve nine notches into a branch,
one for each year
and I do not notice his leaving until
a shout from the ridge stirs the trees.

I find him standing inches away
from the dainty hooves
looking down at
the fur short and soft
and flawless but for the jagged crimson
line that yawns wide from its breast,
and the shining, moist organs

that huddle like jaundiced slugs on
the crisp dead leaves
the eye that remains dances with horseticks
and follows us as we walk to the road
back home
along the cracked asphalt
silent as the forest.

Filling in the Blanks

Scott Chiusano
BROOKLYN, NY

"HOW'RE YOU DOING with those SAT flash cards I gave you?"

My Dad gulps down the last of the spaghetti in his dish—the new wheat kind, because he suddenly decided he wants to lose weight, and, of course, it was normal pasta he decided to give up, not the ten Oreos he ate after dinner—and grabs the red ladle to pile another helping on his plate. I haven't lifted my head from my dinner, twirling the tasteless wheat pasta with my fork.

"Well?" he says in between bites, not taking the hint.

"I'm working on them, Dad." He turns his attention back to his spaghetti, and for the moment I am relieved.

And then, "And the math problem you didn't get yesterday, did you ask Mr. Ku about it?" It's my Mom's voice this time. She glares at me as she wipes her plate clean of the last piece of meatball with the vinegar left over from her salad. I never understood how she could do that, mix vinegar with meatballs; as an Italian it always astounded me that a meatball could be in a two foot radius of anything but marinara sauce.

Ha. Who was I kidding? "Those math teachers at Stuyvesant, it's amazing that at a math and science school they can't even . . ."

I'm not really sure why I was surprised this was happening again. We could have been talking about the four minutes I had played in my first varsity basketball game, and my Dad would have spun it around to a conversation about college, about SATs, about school, and then my Mom would have countered that with something about math. It's never been easy to have two parents who are teachers, who teach two subjects that are such polar opposites. I always wonder how they managed to find anything in common and then had the guts to marry, but finally, at sixteen, I've somehow learned how to deal with it.

Ever since I can remember, my Mom shoved books like "Even Steven and Odd Todd," "The Math Curse," and "Monster

Math" down my throat. While other six year-olds were watching "Barney" and "Dragon Tales," I was watching "Cyberchase," a math adventure show for nerdy elementary school kids on PBS, one of the three channels on our television that broadcasts something besides static. (Only when I was a sophomore and everything was going digital did cable make its way into our house. Even now, after a year of trying, my Dad can't turn it on.) I didn't play Mario games on GameBoy or wrestle with GI-Joes; I played with tangrams, base ten blocks, and any other math manipulatives that my Mom could pull out of her blue math bag. Though it sounds torturous, my Mom and I enjoyed many nights at the coffee table in our living room, solving puzzles with tangrams and learning how to multiply and divide with base ten blocks. Though my mind never captured the concepts as fast as my Harvard-bound brother's, she was always patient with me. I learned from her and her math puzzles what no book could ever have taught me: the skills of deduction, problem solving, and a love of being challenged.

To my mother's obvious dismay, the influence of my Dad and his books wooed me. My poor mother—when my brother declared his major as English with a minor in math, it almost broke her heart—is 0 for 2. Though my brother is brilliant in math, he too was always more interested in books. When the first Harry Potter book came out, we fought over who would read it first. My parents made the hierarchical decision that because he was the eldest, it was all his. "This isn't China," I would plead. "Primogeniture is unfair." But the next six times it happened, the book was put in his hands, and I was forced to jealously watch him read it under the light in our living room as I sat on the couch opposite him with a lousy, pathetic, soft cover copy of the *Hardy Boys* in my lap.

Though he probably doesn't know it (and hopeful never will), I have always been jealous of him. Whether it was something as trivial as the epic lightsaber battles we had in the backyard with wiffle ball bats, to our games of Stratego, in which I always cheated or lost, to his distinct and flawless writing style, he was always better than me at most things. He would never let anyone know this, though, because he has never been the type to flaunt his abilities. I, on the other hand, constantly remind him that I can beat him one-on-one in basketball, most likely because it is the only leg up I have on him, and I need some compensation for all the things he has ever defeated me in. Our lightsaber battles, though,

were always closely matched, and I took the utmost pride whenever I won, which was rare. He had quickness and agility on me, but I carried the bulk and power—at ten years old I already weighed twenty pounds more than him—to give him a tough fight. We would start from opposite corners of our small backyard and gradually advance on each other, circling slowly. He would take quick jabs at me, and I would jump backwards, or rather trip clumsily over my feet, but either way avoid his touch. My strategy was simple. After a few of his jabs I would take him by surprise by running forward, hacking wildly at his body. My strokes were usually off the mark, but I always emulated the commanding moves of the great Obi Wan Kenobi. I always imagined we were

Untitled

Mary Pettengill
MANASSAS, VA

Finally I've learned that
overcast days with bleeding skies
are fragile segments in time
I've tampered with far too often.
It never crossed my mind
until a man from my mother's hemisphere
met me while we worked so hard
and my sweat washed away
All the colors from my flesh
through my veins, so only pale
petals of my remains were found
and I was un-revivable.
Even with a full view of sunlight
my pores could no longer open
to accept the nourishment which
I so longingly needed to
find a firm grip upon.
A mind and a half is not a place
but a sense in being
for those who are always hunting,
for desperation deluded with mourning
when the skies are so pink.
A sailor's warning, little did he recall
ashes to ashes, dust to dust
on the open sea
the captain goes mad, mad
searching for the laurel branch
brought upon him by a dove.
The one without collapsed wings
but still has a broken spirit.

fighting aboard the Death Star, he wielding his red lightsaber because, of course, he was a Sith, and I, impersonating Obi-Wan, prepared to risk my life in order to bring the good side of the force to the rest of the galaxy. Usually this all culminated in me getting a devastating blow to the fingers which caused me to fall to the ground in tears. My Dad would then come out of the house berating my brother for hurting his weak little sibling. My brother always took the brunt of the yelling without protest. Often I paid for it later when I begged to sleep in the pull out bed in his room because I was too afraid of sleeping alone. Eventually, though, he would give in and I would push my bed all the way up against his, with one foot resting on his side, just to reassure me that he was there all through the night.

Though my interest in words and books obviously came from my father, I have never really attributed much else to him. We are very different. He spends his Saturdays with an ever-faithful copy of the *New York Times*, while I bounce a basketball in the yard, working on my jump shot. He watches PBS while I watch ESPN. I have never been able to say, "Dad, have a catch with me" or "Dad, can you rebound for me?" because I either throw too hard for him to catch, or I shoot for too long for him to have the patience to rebound. Instead, I have to rely on my mother to pitch to me, to catch for me, and to shoot with me. Even now I often ask her to come into the backyard to put a hand in my face while I shoot. My Dad's lack of interest in sports, though, has never stopped him from being interested in watching me. I know it kills him to sit through the games that must cause him such boredom (My baseball coach once had to bang on the bleachers to wake him), but he does it regardless. He didn't miss one game during my JV basketball season, and he was at every one of my varsity baseball games. And as my skills in both games have progressed, so has his knowledge. For the first time in my life, he complimented me on my hitting abilities, saying, "Wow, I can really hear the crack of the bat when you hit." Though this may seem elementary, I was never prouder of my Dad. Seeing him go from not understanding that playing second base does not mean you stand on the base, to this, was astounding. I ridicule my Dad for his deficiencies in athleticism all the time. Like me, he has a round belly and tree trunk legs that don't move too fast, but this doesn't stop him from running every day and biking for miles on weekends. Despite this, I know that his true talents lie elsewhere, in writing, in reading. His friend

once bought him a hardcover book with five hundred blank pages inside. On the cover it read "The Great American Novel" by Ken Chiusano. I often look through this book. The pages are still blank, not so much white anymore, but yellowed with age. I wonder when that book will be filled with my father's words, words that I would love to read but have not yet because he has never shared them with me. I now that someday, though, I will read those words, that someday those pages will be filled.

I usually hear my parents' footsteps coming up the stairs when I write behind my closed door. I can tell by the short quick footsteps if it is my Mom, and the longer, dragging ones if it is my Dad. Either way, I minimize my work when they come in, pretending I am working on homework. I don't know why I hide what I write from my parents. There is nothing, really, to hide. I was not born an orphan; my parents did not abandon me; I have never dealt with palpable tragedy. I have never been away from my parents for more than a week or two at a time. My feelings, though not tragic or devastating, are just as real, yet I struggle to share them. I have not always been able to talk to my parents, to let them know what I am feeling, but when I need a laugh or cry, my mother might toss me a math magazine to cheer me up, and my father a good book. They both understand me, even though I can't always reveal myself. Someday, maybe, my parents will see what I've written, will know what I feel. Someday they'll read my Great American Novel, if I can ever fill my own blank pages.

"Let's see those SAT cards, Scott. We'll do them together."

I drop my fork, the wheat spaghetti still stuck to it, my head in the palm of my hands. Some things, though, never change.

Parallels

Victoria Elliott
INTERLOCHEN, MI

bilocation—existence or the ability to exist simultaneously in two places

FRIDAY THE 17TH OF AUGUST, 11:13PM

Breaking up a fight isn't Cadee's favorite

type of Friday night, but it's about as regular as the after hour game show reruns she watches most evenings. Sweaty hands, broken nails, fingers clawing at faces. She tries to think she's better than this, the usual vices that get her and her friends through night after night and push them into countless arguments.

Tonight the fight isn't among her friends and enemies. When she reaches the living room of the torn apartment and drops her keys in the plate, she sees her mother and father, words flying up in color around them like some cartoon with overemphasized onomatopoeia. They are television, simply manufactured words. She can see her parents' thought bubbles, curses covered up with asterisks and dollar signs. Cadee wonders how this episode will end. Where will be the reconciliation? When does the superhero swoop in and defend one or the other of the crude portrayals of her parents?

This episode doesn't finish like she wants, no superhero. It ends with Cadee screaming as loud as her parents, trying to move between them when the argument shifts to a more physical discussion, one that her father is winning, his hands like words pushing his wife into the floor, the wall, the three-legged coffee table. And her mother is crying, the cliché picture of spousal abuse. Cadee knows that her mother won't do anything about it, how she'll just forgive him when he comes back with vodka sliding from his eyes, a cheaply made imitation of her pain, begging for forgiveness, promising it won't happen again.

Cadee has the script memorized. She knows where to enter and exit, her characters' mannerisms. Over the months, the reruns have become less passionate. Now it's more like a PSA, badly written and full of fake smiles and empty warnings.

The door slams and her father, Doug, stomps out, making his exit memorable, as his next scene will be hours from now.

Cadee steps over Peg. She goes into the kitchen, shuffling over the peeling linoleum, and pulls a bottle of beer out of the fridge, twists off the cap. Returning to the living room, Cadee sits on the couch. She digs in between the cushions with her fingers to find a pack of cigarettes, mostly empty, with a red lighter tucked inside. Setting both the cigarettes and the bottle on the floor next to the couch, she grabs the remote and turns on the cable box.

"You need anything else, Peg?" Cadee asks, paying more attention to commercials.

Peg mutters a little and reaches for the bottle her daughter brought her. "No."

FRIDAY THE 17TH OF AUGUST, 11:13PM

Two minutes after she makes the wish, Cadee regrets it. She decides that she doesn't want her parents to stay together; it's an idea better left in novels with brave, beautiful heroines.

Outside her door a noise grows a bit louder until she can identify the voices as her parents and hear what they're saying. Their arguments have grown more frequent recently, something strange for them. Cadee is used to her family as a bottle-it-up type unit, arguments are new and foreign.

Their words get closer to her room. Once she'd just like to go outside and see them, try to make them shut up, but she only gets to the doorknob, her hand hovering over it.

Her mother has mentioned filing divorce papers and that is what they're fighting over tonight. It's all *he-can't-let-her-go* and *why-doesn't-she-love-him-anymore* versus *you-spend-all-our-money-on-pointless-things*.

Cadee finds things to occupy herself with, her computer and a movie the only things that hold her attention more than the hushed sounds of angry voices in the living room. A whole film is over before her parents are. Their argument pauses at her creaking door, silences itself while she goes to the bathroom, gets a bottle of water from the fridge. She walks past them, but they're pretending nothing happened. Her mom's eyes are red and so is her dad's face.

Cadee wishes her life weren't so mundane, writes it in her diary. She tells everyone she is under inspired where she is, lets them know that as soon as she can she's going to jump on a plane and drag herself to some sort of city where she is anything she wants to be. Sometimes she thinks of what she will tell people of her past, reads through books to find a plot-line suitable for her imagined life. Something nothing like the life she has now. Here she is too soccer-mom's-kid, with a teacher for a dad and a sleepy little Podunk town.

Apologetic voices die down, and her mom, dabbling at her face with a cold rag, says goodnight.

Cadee's parents go to bed on different sides of the house, leaving their daughter dreaming them away.

doppelgänger—the ghostly double of a living person, a sinister form of bilocation

SUNDAY THE 19TH OF AUGUST, 3:42PM

Cadee wakes up late just to be in the apart-

ment alone.

The coffee table has been set back in its proper position, teetering nervously in front of the couch. A yellow sticky clings to the scarred veneer surface, covered in clever excuses, explaining away the past nights. Cadee picks it up, crinkles it with her fingers, and drops it in front of the front door.

A dog barks behind a door with a loose knob as Cadee pads down the worn hallway. It's a creased pug with the personality of one of the Disney Princess's wicked stepmothers. Peeling paint, faded carpet, and crooked numbers over eyeholes fill the hall. The handle to the stairwell is grimy like it hasn't ever seen a clean rag.

Idling at the curb is a car full of Cadee's friends, the exhaust belching black. She squeezes in, slams the door closed. They laugh; tell her the day's plans. There is a box in the middle of the back seat with a flap open, and inside are countless glow sticks.

They reach the gas station; Cadee and the driver go inside. The rolling papers are left of the counter, behind a display of constantly rolling wrinkled sausages. Cadee grabs a bag of chips, and her friend takes them and a bag of Oreos to the counter, asks for a couple rolling papers, tosses a ten at the lazy eyed man in a red vest. Cadee is used to stealing them, always forgets that all of her friends have turned eighteen but her. She's younger than them by a year; they tease her about being so young.

They get to someone's house, file downstairs. Cadee and her friends work on opening all the packages of glow sticks, someone rolls a blunt or two. There's an orange bottle full of pills passed around, and Cadee takes a few.

Hundreds of plastic wrappers later, Cadee turns up the music and her boyfriend Aiden starts to dance around with the glow sticks. The rest join in, and begin to laugh and holler, turning the lights on and off, dancing like they usually do only when not watched. Someone pulls out a camera and they take turns filming the mess of fluorescents.

Aiden breaks one of the glow sticks and smears the liquid inside over his shirt. Cadee and the rest do the same, their curving bodies illuminated in an eerie neon light.

SUNDAY THE 19TH OF AUGUST, 3:42PM

Cadee sits on the squasy couch of the therapist, stares at a framed picture on the wall with an image for every letter in the alphabet. It makes her think of the phonetic alphabet, something her dad showed her when she still

thought things like that were cool, along with *Hey Arnold* and Shel Silverstein books.

"Cadee?"

She slowly drags her focus from the frame to the frumpy woman her parents are paying eighty an hour for. "Hmm?"

"Would you share with me how your day has been, love, what you've done today?" The therapist pushes her barely-there glasses frames higher up on her nose, crosses and uncrosses her legs in an effort to look less robotic.

Cadee sighs, considers her morning. She has to tell the woman the truth now, the earlier stories were much too unrealistic and the old bat had conferred with Cadee's mother. Now she checks with Peg and knows when Cadee tells a story. Breathing again, Cadee thinks so much for client confidentiality. "I woke up, got ready, ate, stayed in my room for awhile, came here. Good?"

Her therapist makes a few notes on her pad, purses her lips. "I do wish you would open yourself up more during our little visits. Perhaps I should bring your mother in here to spur on a little conversation."

"No." The last time her mother had come in during a session, all she'd done was talk about herself and cry. Cadee had pulled her knees to her chest and fallen asleep. She refused to let it happen again. "No, that's ok. Did I tell you about the other day when my friends and I had a party?"

syndrome of subjective doubles—a rare delusional misidentification syndrome in which a person suffers from the delusion that he or she has a double or doppelgänger with the same appearance, but usually with different character traits and leading a life of its own. The syndrome is usually the result of a neurological disorder, mental disorder or some form of brain damage, particularly to the right cerebral hemisphere

TUESDAY THE 21ST OF AUGUST, 11:27AM

Aiden and Cadee are lying on their backs in the grass, ignoring the brittle under their bare arms. The clouds are a jet tail haze of erased white, stumbling over the stretch of blue.

"There's a fair starting tomorrow," says Aiden, crossing his arms behind his head, the trademarked image of the boys of summer.

Cadee has a giant pair of sunglasses covering her eyes and most of her face, which will give her, she knows, a tan in a figure eight pattern. She has become infamous for this, but

Aiden tells her it's cute, so she keeps letting it happen.

"We're going, yeah?" she asks, gesturing with a grass spike. "Our last summer hurrah."

He laughs, sits up. "Yeah. Hey, what's that bum doing?"

A homeless man walks from the far end of the park towards them with a pack of cigarettes and lighter in one hand and the other a fistful of American flags on toothpicks, leaning towards different teens lounging in the park, trying to sell them one.

TUESDAY THE 21ST OF AUGUST, 11:27AM

Cadee leans against her favorite tree in the park near her house, plucking at the prickly grass with a lazy hand. The sun has bleached the leaves of their color, and now she's left with only lingering dead blades. Her purse sits on the ground next to her, full with little rolls of a game she's never tried before. The therapist told her parents that she needs to pick up new hobbies so she'll stop telling stories. They probably imagined her doing something like skiing or running or maybe crocheting blankets for old people, smoking likely wasn't on their list. Cadee pictures herself with a slim white line in her fingers, gesturing and looking so adult. In order to pick up the habit, however, she has to be able to bring herself to open the pack.

Cadee watches a group of boys schlep past her tree, laughing in their cloud of black clothing. She sees her neighbor, Aiden, in the center of the pack, surrounded by his friends as always. She hasn't talked to him since the fifth grade when he gave her a drawing of a parrot. It was a good drawing; she's got it in a scrapbook somewhere.

A homeless man stumbles through the hole in the fence, grunting and drawing Cadee's attention. He catches his shirt on the broken wires, stops himself, tries to not rip the fabric. Cadee didn't know bums existed outside of winter, where was his coat? He comes and asks her for change, she gives him the pack of cigarettes, fishes around for her lighter. She hands him one with the New York skyline across it, a souvenir from a school trip. He walks off, thankless.

Cadee sits on the swing set, draws her name in the dirt.

THURSDAY THE 23RD OF AUGUST, 9:17PM

Cadee stands between the kitchen and living room, idling there in indecision. Her

friends want her to go to a party, where they will enjoy themselves like usual, bottles and baggies. Some of her wants to stay home, watch reruns, laugh so hard she hurts. Little flecks of her want to cry, try to, enough to put drops of dew on her lashes.

The social wins; she cakes her makeup to be ready to sweat it all off. She steals a couple rolling papers from the porcelain plate on her mother's nightstand and drops them in her purse, paws through the drawer for anything to make the night better. Where are the pills from the weekend? A few cling to the corners of the drawer. Cadee sweeps them into her palm, pickpockets them.

Doug and Peg are both out; Doug hasn't been home since Saturday, Peg is gone looking for him at all their favorite bars. Cadee leaves the door unlocked for them, knowing it's useless to steal from the apartment, there's nothing worth taking, it's a garbage heap.

Her friends are arranged like crayons in the car, they tell her hurry up, make the box complete. There's no use in a box of crayons without a cerulean.

The party is nothing more than a scribble, the same again, hazy rooms of smoke, crying and shouting and laughter all mixed into one sound, the hum of fluorescents on all day. It's the same scene from every party episode of *Degrassi*, underage drunks hanging over each other, music blaring louder than people are thinking.

Cadee is on the couch, a bottle of alcohol in her hand, mostly empty. The bottle is plastic like the ones sold at fairs; she crunches the sides in her hand. She is on her second, second guessing herself and what she's doing.

There are shouts in the next room, more urgent than party cries, but the sounds of an argument, slurs and insults. Everyone runs to the doorway, Cadee follows. Cadee's ex-boyfriend and Aiden are fighting. They shove each other in the shoulders; tear at each other's shirts.

Cadee sighs, knows how to end this, hates having to break up fights.

She drops the bottle onto the floor, waiting for the satisfying crash, but only achieves the hollow sound of empty plastic.

THURSDAY THE 23RD OF AUGUST, 9:17PM

It takes six months for a couple with a child to get divorced, and Cadee is wallowing in month one. The waiting is just provoking the arguments. Her therapist says that having some time to let it all sink in is essential to moving on, but Cadee would rather just up

and move right now. Today Cadee sat through the long arguments on custody, and who was the more reliable parent, the one more fit to raise a child. Cadee sat there with her arms crossed throughout the whole thing and made sure to not raise her head for more than a few seconds in the direction of either parent. She is seventeen, practically all grown up; she doesn't need her parents to help anymore. She isn't sure the exact amount of help they've already been. The therapist says this is all natural, to hate your parents, but now let's talk more about those stories you tell.

Why You Aren't Here

Kathleen Harm
Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ

If I didn't know better, I'd say she plays classical piano with long fingers and you fell in love with the way she drifts over the ivory, feeling her way around with closed eyes.

No. Maybe not.

She's tall and thin with limp hair: a middle-school teacher (maybe high school) and she plays acoustic guitar in a band on the side.

Yes. That's it.

Her hair is dirty blonde and when she teaches she wears dresses with bright colors (horizontal lines or flowers) and faux-leather heels in black.

She's crazy but her students like her.

And smart— maybe smarter than me.

You share an apartment in a small city (somewhere near New York) and when she's home she wears loose, light-wash jeans, a t-shirt from the concert you took her to last week and one of your sweaters.

She doesn't wear makeup; she doesn't need it.

And when you're home you go on walks and watch foreign films (probably French) and on weekends you go to art museums.

When you open the apartment door, she's there on the couch in your sweater eating vegan food.

And if I didn't know better, I'd say you're happy, which is why you rush home every day to her.

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

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 Glück, Eavan Boland, Richard Bausch, Dagoberto Gilb, Ted Conover, Tom Perrotta, Carolyn Forché, Sue Miller, and Richard Rodriguez.

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: Ten writing scholarships of \$15,000 per year (\$60,000

total) 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 and in senior portfolios.

The Student Reading and Chapbook Series: Nine student readings are presented each year. Senior writing majors edit and produce chapbooks that showcase their best work.

Internships: Susquehanna's Creative Writing Majors have had recent internships with national magazines, advertising agencies, professional writing organizations, nonprofit foundations, newspapers, public relations firms, film producers, radio stations, churches, businesses, and schools.

Graduate Programs: Within the past six years, Writing Majors have been accepted with fellowships or assistantships to such outstanding graduate writing programs as Iowa, Columbia, Hollins, Indiana, Washington, Houston, Arizona, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Boston University, Ohio State, UNC-Greensboro, UNC-Wilmington, George Mason, Rutgers, Mississippi, and The New School.

In addition, the Writers Institute sponsors **Writing 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 thirty-one 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*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *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 the programs for high school students or receive information about the **Creative 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.